



CONNECTIONS

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF
FRIENDS FOR YOUTH'S MENTORING INSTITUTE

Successful Mentoring Standards

In response to the overwhelmingly positive comments we received from the October 2008 *Connections Conference Brief*, we are devoting this issue of *Connections* to a thorough discussion of Quality Assurance Standards and elements of safe and effective mentoring organizations. The *Conference Brief* detailed an overview of the *Mentoring 101: Core Principles and Practices* pre-conference course offered at the 2008 annual mentoring conference last January. Guest contributors Stephanie Inyama and Stacey Savelle neatly summarized key points in developing and sustaining a safe and effective mentoring program; here, we'll expand upon those ideas with lists of more components and considerations.

DEFINITIONS

There are many resources available in creating a sound program (see box below for some examples). However you formulate your program's standards, start with a detailed definition of mentoring as it pertains to your program. "Mentoring" has been applied to many different kinds of program structures, from once-a-year lunches and occasional homework help to career-based online advice. Be clear about what mentoring means to you. For our direct service program, we match "at-risk" youth with volunteer adults for a community-based one-to-one mentoring relationship. Since our emphasis is on building a social relationship, we use Jean Rhodes' definition from her book *Stand By Me* (2002):

"Mentoring describes a relationship between an older, more experienced adult and an unrelated, younger mentee, characterized by on-going guidance, instruction, and encouragement provided by the adult and aimed at developing the competence and character of the mentee."

An **"at-risk" youth** is a minor whose environment increases their chance of becoming involved in risky behavior that prevents him or her from achieving his or her full potential. Some of these risky behaviors include truancy and school dropout; involvement in violence and gang membership or affiliation; alcohol, tobacco, and other drug early experimentation, use, or abuse; sexual activity and teen parenting; or self-harm or other dangerous coping mechanisms.

Friends for Youth, Inc.

RESOURCES

Recommended Best Practices
Friends for Youth's Mentoring Institute
<http://www.friendsforyouth.org/BestPractices.html>

10 Quality Assurance Standards
California Governor's Mentoring Partnership
http://www.mentoring.ca.gov/pdf/Best_Practices.pdf

Starting a Mentoring Program
EMT/CARS
<http://emt.org/userfiles/StartMentWeb.pdf>

Foundations of Successful Youth Mentoring
National Mentoring Center
http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/nmc_pubs.php

Elements of Effective Practice
MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership
http://www.mentoring.org/find_resources/elements_of_effective_practice/

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MISSION & LONG-RANGE PLAN

Planning can often take up to six months if you're starting from scratch; this may seem like a long time but do not underestimate its importance! This component includes the following:

- *Mission Statement concisely states who you serve, why you are serving them, expected outcomes for them, and what services will be provided to achieve outcomes*
- *Long-range vision of the organization guides the planning process and includes shorter-term program goals and action plans detailing who, what, when, where, why, and how activities will be performed*
- *Input from originators, staff, funders, potential volunteers, and participants*
- *Assessment of community need*
- *Realistic, attainable, and easy-to-understand operational plan*
- *Funding and resources development plan*
- *Goals, objectives, and timelines for all aspects of the plan*

RECRUITMENT PLAN

Recruitment refers to both mentors and mentees - do not neglect outreach to or referral strategies for your most important clients, youth mentees.

For mentors:

- *Strategies that portray accurate expectations and benefits*
- *Year-round marketing and P.R. activities that target outreach based on participants' needs*
- *Volunteer opportunities beyond mentoring*
- *A basis in your statement of purpose and long-range plan*

For mentees:

- *Targeted outreach based on participants' needs*
- *Coordination with other agencies and institutions*
- *A basis in your statement of purpose and long-range plan*

CUSTOMIZED ORIENTATIONS

This is the first step for everyone, including parents/guardians, to hear about why they should participate. In this short presentation, be sure to include:

- *Program overview*
- *Description of eligibility, screening process, and suitability requirements*
- *Level of commitment expected (time, energy, and flexibility)*
- *Expectations and restrictions (accountability)*
- *Realistic benefits and rewards*
- *A summary of program policies, including written reports, interviews, evaluation, and reimbursement*

ELIGIBILITY/SCREENING PROCESS

There is much to say about the application process - see *SAFE (Screening Applicants for Effectiveness): Guidelines to Prevent Child Molestation in Mentoring and Youth-Serving Organizations* on our web site, www.mentoringinstitute.org - but briefly, start with a commitment to put the safety of the youth in your program first and to incorporate current research on child molester behaviors and characteristics into every facet of the screening process. Building on that foundation, you'll want to add:

For mentors:

- *Extensive face-to-face interview*
- *Home visit*
- *Reference checks from friends, family members and colleagues*
- *Child abuse registry and fingerprinting/criminal record check*
- *Driving record and proof of automobile insurance*
- *Suitability criteria that relates to the program's mission statement and needs of the mentees*
- *Assessment of traits proven by research to be conducive to successful mentoring relationships (e.g., flexible, non-judgmental, low expectations, low personal needs)*
- *Successful completion of pre-match training and orientation*

For mentees:

- *Application process for potential client and parent/guardian*
- *A face-to-face interview*
- *A home visit and parent orientation*
- *Suitability criteria that relate to your program's mission*
- *Emphasizing the voluntary aspect of the child's consent and participation*
- *Parental consent and support*

TRAINING CURRICULUM

Training begins during the application process and continues throughout the volunteer's time with your program. An effective training not only helps program staff identify applicants who may be inappropriate for your program for any number of reasons, but it also helps solidify the potential mentor's commitment and dedication to your program. Do it the right way with:

- *Trained staff trainers*
- *Orientation to program and resource network*
- *Skills development as appropriate*
- *Cultural/heritage sensitivity and appreciation training*
- *Guidelines on how to get the most out of the mentoring relationship*
- *Relationship building and management*
- *Job and role descriptions*
- *Confidentiality and liability information*

- *Crisis management/problem solving resources*
- *Communication skills development*
- *Frequent, ongoing contact by staff to support the relationship-building process*
- *Challenges to help mentors and staff assess their appropriateness for the program*

MATCHING STRATEGY

How you decide which mentor is matched with which mentee is dependent upon many factors. If everyone starts their mentoring relationship at the same time, you can employ a Meet-and-Greet strategy promoted by Michael Karcher, Ph.D. (see the *Summer 2007 Connections* for a full description). If you operate on an ongoing basis from waiting lists, you can have more time to find a sound match. Regardless of when you match mentors and mentees, remember to include:

- *A commitment to making high quality “compatible” matches*
- *Strict adherence to the program’s eligibility criteria and screening process*
- *Appropriate criteria for matches*
- *Signed statements of understanding that both parties agree to the conditions of the match and the mentoring relationship*
- *A structured first meeting that includes staff, parent/guardian, mentor, and mentee*

MONITORING PROCESS

Six of the 10 Quality Assurance Standards that are outlined here refer to work that happens prior to a mentor even meeting a mentee. The last four, including the monitoring process, may not seem to be time-intensive, but they apply to the work done during the school or calendar year. An ongoing commitment to monitor the relationships established by your organization to ensure the safety of each of your clients is primary. Staff should be trained on current research on child molester methodologies in order to identify any “red flags” during the match. Apply the same careful consideration to the following:

- *Frequent ongoing contact between staff and mentors, as well as between staff and mentees*
- *Consistent scheduled meetings with staff, mentors, and mentees*
- *Extensive written records on each match, including dates and times they met, activities they participated in and comments of the mentor and mentee about the relationship*
- *Input from family, community partners, and other significant youth professionals in each youth’s life*
- *A process for managing grievances, praise, re-matching, interpersonal problem-solving, and premature relationship closure*

SUPPORT, RECOGNITION, RETENTION

This is the bulk of the work provided by trained and experienced program coordinators who essentially mentor the mentor and intervene when necessary to ensure the best relationship is happening. These steps include:

- *Ongoing training and development, including support groups for volunteers and participants*
- *Social gatherings of different groups as needed*
- *An annual recognition and appreciation event*
- *Newsletters or other mailings/emails to mentors and mentees that recognizes their achievements, disseminates information on relevant issues, and communicates details on program and community activities, events, and resources*

RELATIONSHIP CLOSURE

How the mentoring relationship ends can have a dramatic impact on both participants’ experiences of being in your program. If left open without clear expectations, mentees and mentors may feel rejected or unsure about the future of the friendship. This, in turn, impacts how they view everything else, positive and negative, that may have happened up to that point. Avoid this situation by:

- *Holding private and confidential exit interviews with the mentor and mentee to debrief on the mentoring relationship*
- *Offering structure and future program support for the mentor and mentee if they have successfully fulfilled program requirements and time commitment*
- *Creating policies and procedures for determining the future roles of the mentor and mentee in the program if their relationship is terminated before they have fulfilled program requirements and time commitment*

EVALUATION STRATEGY

Did you do what you set out to do? Find out with an evaluation process that includes:

- *A Process Evaluation: to assess program quality as well as needs of program donors and supporters, conduct an extensive, ongoing tracking of program statistics relative to goals that includes data on numbers of participants, participation rates in support services and activities, amount of time spent together, number of contacts by program staff, and how program requirements are fulfilled*
- *Outcome Evaluation procedures measuring both short- and long-term outcomes for youth, e.g., academic achievement, school behavior and attendance, pre/post tests with validated measures of changes in self-esteem or self-efficacy*
- *A vehicle to use both process and outcome evaluation data for ongoing, self-renewing change that enriches the organization and its service capacities*

OTHER ELEMENTS OF SAFE & EFFECTIVE ORGANIZATIONS

Aside from following Recommended Best Practices from the mentoring field, be sure you have an understanding of what is needed to operate a successful and law-abiding non-profit. Connect with Board members, Advisory Committee members, or other volunteers in your community if you do not personally have skills to provide the following:

- A clear, concise vision
- Risk management and confidentiality policies
- Written administrative and program procedures
- An established organization for oversight
- Adherence to EEO requirements
- Inclusiveness of racial, economic, and gender representation as appropriate to the program
- Adequate financial and in-kind resources to attain maximum program quality and effectiveness
- Use of generally accepted accounting practices
- Prudent and reasonable rationale for staffing requirements
- Paid and/or volunteer staff with appropriate skills and qualifications
- Written job descriptions for all staff and volunteer positions
- Adherence to general principles of volunteerism
- Consent by and consistent contact with parents/guardians
- Additional community support services based on needs of mentors and mentees

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Don't miss the Mentoring Institute's 10th Anniversary Mentoring Conference January 29 - 30, 2009 and 10th Anniversary Event January 29, 2009

Join us as we celebrate the first decade of annual mentoring conferences, as well as resources, trainings, networking, and coalition-building provided by Friends for Youth's Mentoring Institute.

**Our success depends upon YOU!
Be here to renew, recharge, and
be re-inspired about the hope and change
youth mentoring brings.**



PROVIDING A FRAMEWORK



FOR SUCCESSFUL MENTORING

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