
Friends For Youth Mentoring Institute

CONNECTIONS

Winter 2008

January IS National Mentoring Month

If you are reading this, you are most likely already involved in a formal mentoring program, either as staff or as a volunteer, and most likely already know that January is National Mentoring Month. This year marks the 7th Annual National Mentoring Month campaign. The campaign's goal is to recruit volunteer mentors for programs across the country to help young people achieve their full potential. This year's theme is "Share What You Know. Mentor a Child." National Mentoring Month is spearheaded by the Harvard Mentoring Project of the Harvard School of Public Health, MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership, and the Corporation for National and Community Service. See more details about National Mentoring Month at www.WhoMentoredYou.org.

Celebrities and "ReelPeople" are being featured in this year's National Mentoring Month public service announcements; check them out at <http://www.youtube.com/mentoringmonth2008>. We hope you'll take a second look at "Jennifer and Iliana" – they are from Friends for Youth's Mentoring Services program! See more information about their experience on page two.



Jennifer and Iliana featured in the "ReelPeople" PSA for National Mentoring Month at www.youtube.com/mentoringmonth2008

Through public services announcements, press releases, and other marketing materials, National Mentoring Month campaigns help local programs attract media attention for what is at once an incredible and yet ordinary story: adults taking the time to get to know and support youth in their communities. We know our mentors are heroes (though not superheroes). We know the effort needed to be a consistent, responsible role model for children who may not have much adult support, and we know the little amount of thanks and recognition they receive for their efforts. This growing national campaign can help more people learn about the rewards in sharing what they know by mentoring a child.

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SUPPORT FOR MENTORING

Mentoring seems to be gaining momentum again on many fronts. There is increased national political attention and support from federal dollars, thanks in large part to the lobbying efforts of MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership. There are more national media campaigns, including Harvard Mentoring Project's public service announcements, MENTOR's "GO There!" campaign with HBO, and national network spots for National Mentoring Month. And we are experiencing a general buzz about the importance of mentoring in all levels of government and social policy.

"With vigorous grassroots and MENTOR-led advocacy on Capitol Hill, Congress has allocated \$100 million in funding to benefit mentoring organizations throughout the country in fiscal year 2008. The appropriations bill provides nearly \$50 million for the Mentoring Children of Prisoners program at the Department of Labor's Health and Human Services and restores almost \$50 million for Department of Education's mentoring programs grants. These grant programs are a critical source of federal funds that continue to contribute to the growth of high-quality mentoring nationwide." MENTOR. (2007, December 28). *MENTOR Minutes – Federal Government Rings in the New Year with Strong Support of Mentoring*. Retrieved January 19, 2008, from http://www.mentoring.org/about_mentor/news_press/mentor_minutes/federal_support/

These campaigns support one of the field's biggest needs: recruitment of more mentors. MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership reports that "15 million more young people who need mentors are awaiting their turn."¹ I personally know of only one program that has more mentors than mentees, and this situation is new, thanks to some great media coverage and a niche focus. Many other programs are now expanding to add peer or cross-age mentoring to meet the need of unmatched children, drawing on the numbers of older youth who are looking for ways to give back.

So, does the campaign work? Are more adults making a commitment during January to volunteer as mentors? This answer is not easy to gauge. From research done on the motivations to become mentors, many adults say they had been thinking about volunteering for several years but waited until the right time – right program, right location, or right level of stability in their personal and professional lives.² Sometimes hearing the plea on national television from Usher or Colin Powell may be the tipping point; sometimes it is because someone they know heard the message and urged them to do it.

Is the message correct? Is it as easy as sharing what you know to mentor a child? Many of us in the field would argue with this marketing concept. Sharing what you know is one piece of successful mentoring. However, it takes many more steps to reach the point when a mentee is open to a mentor's experience: first, being responsible and appropriate enough to be accepted into a program; next, receiving training on many concepts of mentoring, including what to do when a mentee doesn't call back, isn't at home or school at the scheduled (and confirmed) time, doesn't "warm up" to the volunteer for at least the first several months, if not longer; always responding appropriately to the mentee's continued testing of the mentor's limits; all the while making the time to just show up and be the best they can be. Only then, when the mentoring relationship has reached a certain level of trust and comfort, do you get to share what you know.

And not every potential volunteer is appropriate to be a mentor. Volunteer candidates must show evidence and promise of continued responsibility, consistency, and the ability to form a relationship. Outside of eliminating a candidate because of safety concerns, programs need to know that they can and should not accept everyone who expresses interest just to meet goals. Let's not forget that it is equally as important to screen out an applicant if you believe he or she will not be effective.

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THE RIGHT VOLUNTEER

Programs will likely get a certain number of volunteers because they are passionate about wanting to mentor. Indeed, these are the individuals who seek out programs and are not dissuaded by lengthy application processes, inconsistent contact from program staff, and complicated situations experienced by their mentees. These are the "superstar" mentors who persevere and are, more often than not, very successful in forming a bond with their mentees.

1 MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership. *Agenda for Action - The National Agenda for Action: How to Close America's Mentoring Gap*. Retrieved January 15, 2008, from http://www.mentoring.org/about_mentor/agenda/.
2 Center for Applied Research Solutions (2006). *Recruitment: A Strength-Based Approach*. Retrieved January 9, 2008, from http://www.carsmentoring.org/publications/listing.php?publication_id=195

**FRIENDS FOR YOUTH
PAIR FEATURED IN
NATIONAL MENTORING
MONTH PUBLIC SERVICE
ANNOUNCEMENT**

Iliana, a 17-year old from Redwood City, has been matched with her mentor, Jennifer, for nearly five years in Friends for Youth's Mentoring Services program. Mentors and mentees make a commitment of at least one year to each other, spending about three hours every week together. Jennifer and Iliana have continued past the initial year and have, as they both say, a "real" friendship. Iliana says the changes for her have been significant: she has been to "places I had never gone before. I met new people and I got into sports. My bad grades turned into A's and B's; I was on the honor roll for the first time ever in the fall. I NEVER thought I could have done this. I am pretty sure that if I would not have met her I could have gone to jail, dropped out of school and been involved in gangs."

Jennifer now works at Friends for Youth as a



Usher and Quincy Jones PSA for National Mentoring Month at www.youtube.com/mentoringmonth2008



Mark and Nigel featured in the "ReelPeople" PSA for National Mentoring Month at www.youtube.com/mentoringmonth2008

Program Coordinator. She has been able to use her time with Iliana as experiential research into what makes a successful mentoring relationship work. So, what does work? Consistency, focusing on the positive aspects of her mentee, and genuinely having fun with her. Based on an audition tape, Jennifer and Iliana were selected as a "real-life" mentoring pair for the 2008 National Mentoring Month public service announcements produced by the Harvard Mentoring Project. During the filming, Jennifer was puzzled by her interviewer's question as to what she gets out of her efforts to support Iliana. While her response is that her relationship has "truly revolutionized my life," she also knows that she is a mentor for Iliana, not for herself.

To see Jennifer and Iliana's national television debut, you can view both their audition tape and the professionally-produced clip at www.youtube.com/mentoringmonth2008 or www.WhoMentoredYou.org.

With lots of media attention, programs may attract the attention of some who wish to do harm to the children served. Like the dedicated appropriate volunteers, they often seek programs, but they do so to meet their own needs. "A percentage of predators will target child-service groups because they provide access to samples of highly vulnerable children and often there are opportunities for isolated access. Many of these children have already been molested, making them more vulnerable to the predator."³ Hopefully, these are small numbers in the overall recruitment pipeline.

What's left between the dedicated volunteers who find you and the inappropriate volunteers whom you wish never did? They are the challenge. They are the large number of potential mentors who, with good training and support, could be "good enough" mentors. They are the individuals we strive to attract as we convince them that (1) they could do this and (2) they are needed to do this. We hope that the National Mentoring Month campaigns will help with this effort.

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MORE YOUTH/ADULT PARTNERSHIPS

It's not always easy to think beyond your program's goals and mission, but there are many, many more children and youth who are not in formal mentoring programs. Coincidentally, not all adults want to be a part of formal programs, either. According to "Mentoring in America: A Snapshot of the Current State of Mentoring," the majority of mentors polled (71%) are doing so informally, and only 29% work within a structured program.⁴ "Kids need more support – in today's world as much as they can get. Mentoring is the headline on what needs to be done in every institution that deals with young people."⁵

Most of us have had natural mentors in our lives; formal programs often serve a very limited slice of the youth population, so unless you were identified as being "at-risk" for something, you very likely did not have a formal mentor. Maybe it was a teacher, a coach, an aunt or uncle, or a neighbor. They were all mentors: someone who, without formal support, created a deliberate relationship with a younger person who was not their child and who focused the relationship or interactions on ongoing guidance, instruction, and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of that younger person.⁶ You can read about my mentor, an artist, at <http://forum.lpfch.org/webx?50@21.WWAZcQgKbfJ.1@.eefe05b>.

All adults have the potential to act in a mentoring role to the young people they know in their own communities. The 40 Assets Model, developed by the Search Institute, emphasizes the need for this kind of support in order for children and youth to grow up to be healthy and successful adults. "In a survey of American adults, more than 70% agreed that children and youth needed to learn from adults such core shared values as equality, honesty, and responsibility."⁷

3 Friends for Youth (2006). *SAFE (Screening Applicants for Effectiveness): Guidelines to Prevent Child Molestation in Mentoring and Youth-Serving Organizations*. Redwood City, CA. P. 34.
4 Corporation for National and Community Services & MENTOR. Mentoring in America: A Snapshot of the Current State of Mentoring. Retrieved January 9, 2008, from http://www.mentoring.org/downloads/mentoring_403.pdf
5 Walker, G. (2007). *PIP Brief: Mentoring, Policy, and Politics*. Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures.
6 Rhodes, J.E. (2002). *Stand By Me: The risks and rewards of mentoring today's youth*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
7 Scales, P.C., Benson, P.L., & Roehlkepartain, E.C. (2001). *Grading grown-ups: American adults report on their real relationships with kids*. Minneapolis, MN: Lutheran Brotherhood and Search Institute. P. 11.

Encourage the people you know to make a connection to young people in your community: “The majority of adolescents don’t use drugs, fail in school, or engage in patterns of high-risk behaviors although media coverage might lead many adults to believe the myths of ‘rotten kids and troubled adolescence.’”⁸ There are many children and adolescents who could use a little extra guidance and support from caring adults. For this National Mentoring Month, I urge you to ask yourself each day what you are doing to contribute to ways of influencing more people to be mentors, in either natural, informal settings or formal, structured programs.

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25 OF 150 WAYS TO SHOW KIDS YOU CARE⁹

- 3. ACKNOWLEDGE THEM.**
- 9. Listen to them.
- 18. Be yourself.
- 21. Forget your worries sometimes and concentrate only on them.
- 31. SHARE THEIR EXCITEMENT.**
- 37. Give them space when they need it.**
- 40. Laugh at their jokes.
- 44. Tell them how terrific they are.
- 48. Make yourself available.**
- 61. Catch them doing something right.
- 65. Have fun together.**
- 69. Let them solve most of their own problems.
- 73. Help them become an expert at something.
- 78. BE CONSISTENT.**
- 87. Ask them to help you.**
- 94. Nurture them with good food, good words, and good fun.
- 105. HELP THEM LEARN SOMETHING NEW.
- 106. Be understanding when they have a difficult day.**
- 112. Inspire their creativity.
- 113. Accept them as they are.
- 122. Be available.**
- 133. Encourage them to think big.
- 139. Help them learn from mistakes.
- 148. Expect their best; don't expect perfection.
- 149. Empower them to help and be themselves.**

⁸ Scales, P.C. (2001). The public image of adolescents. *Society* 38(4), 65.
⁹ Roehlkepartain, J. (2005). *150 Ways to Show Kids You Care*. Minneapolis, MN: Search Institute.



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The Mentoring Institute continues to be your source for:

- Products designed for a range of mentoring programs
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