

# Mentoring

PARTNERSHIP OF CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA

## **Why Mentoring Matters**

Mentoring is a structured and trusting relationship that brings young people (mentees) together with caring individuals (mentors) who offer guidance, support and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of the mentee.

A mentor is an adult who, along with parents, provides a young person with support, counsel, friendship, reinforcement and constructive example. Mentors are good listeners, people who care, people who want to help young people bring out strengths that are already there. A mentor is not a foster parent, therapist, parole officer, or cool peer.

All young people have the potential to succeed in life and contribute to society. However, not all children get the support they need to thrive.

By all estimates, an astounding 17.6 million young people – nearly half the population of young people between 10 and 18 years of age – live in situations that put them at risk of not living up to their potential.

Without immediate intervention by caring adults, they could make choices that not only undermine their futures, but, ultimately, the economic and social well-being of our nation.

Through mentoring, youth can

- Improve their attitudes towards parents, peers and teachers.
- Stay motivated and focused on their education.
- Find a positive way to spend their free time.
- Face daily challenges.
- Be introduced to new career paths.

## **When it comes to mentoring, everyone benefits.**

### *Benefits to youth*

Young people with mentors learn how to lead successful, responsible lives. With a mentor's guidance, they learn how to resolve conflicts and how to understand and accept responsibility. They learn how to identify, set and achieve goals. Often, they are able to explore career options.

Research shows mentored youth have:

- Improved academic performance
- Higher graduation rates
- Increased communication skills
- Improved peer/family relationships
- Improved self-esteem

### *Benefits to mentors*

Do mentors derive any benefits from mentoring? The answer is overwhelmingly "YES!" Often, the potential rewards for mentors are overlooked. Sometimes mentors are portrayed as only participating in a one-sided relationship. But, it would be a mistake to assume that mentors have nothing to gain. When mentees see that admired adults find it personally rewarding to spend time with them, they feel a new surge of self-worth and empowerment. In fact, when mentors don't derive benefits, relationships are at greater risk for early termination.

The Commonwealth Fund surveyed a nationally representative sample of adult mentors of youth. Some of their findings include:

- Three-quarters of the 1,504 mentors surveyed reported that their experience had had a "very positive" effect on their lives. They felt that mentoring provided a break from their busy professional lives and a chance to give something back.
- 83 percent indicated that they learned or gained something personally from their mentoring experience, including feeling that they were a better person, increased patience, friendship, a feeling of effectiveness, and a chance to acquire skills.

Benefits to mentors include

- Improved health and self-esteem;
- Insight into one's own childhood or children;
- Public recognition; and
- Enriching mentors' family life, e.g., when mentees provide support and companionship to the mentors' children.

*Benefits to the community*

Youth mentoring gives many members of the community an opportunity to be a positive influence to the future leaders of the community. Support for a coordinated, public response to the out-of-school needs of school-aged youth, for example, is more likely to emerge when mentors see how their protégés' problems multiply during unsupervised hours. In this case, youth mentoring plays a role in garnering support for other youth-development initiatives.

When well-regarded organizations form youth mentoring partnerships, it sends a clear message and brings credibility for public support of youth mentors and youth mentoring organizations. In this sense, successful mentoring plays a role as a gateway toward the public's expanding commitment to youth policies, programs and institutions.

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