



Mentoring Resource Center

# FACT SHEET

## *In This Issue . . .*

Keeping school-based matches connected during the school year is (relatively) easy. But how do you keep the match alive and healthy during the summer, when distractions are many and the consequences of not staying in touch can be severe? ***Keeping Matches in Touch Over the Summer Months*** suggests ways to keep the match engaged and ready to grow when the school year resumes.

***The Pub Hub*** takes a look at several resources that can be useful to your mentoring program, including evaluation tools and testimonials about the power of mentoring



## Keeping Matches in Touch Over the Summer Months

A key component of the U.S. Department of Education's mentoring grants is the requirement that matches be maintained, in some capacity, over the summer break. This requirement helps build longevity and consistency into school-based mentoring relationships, which often struggle to sustain momentum over the many breaks and varied schedule of a typical school year. Providing mentoring contact over the summer months is a critical element of successful school-based mentoring. This Fact Sheet offers suggestions for implementing a simple but effective form of summer contact: exchanging letters and e-mails.

### Why Summer Contact Is Important

Educators have long known about a phenomenon called "summer learning loss," the tendency for students of all ages to experience some regression in academic performance and retained knowledge due to the long period of time spent away from the classroom over the summer break. One study found that this loss equaled at least one month of instruction as measured by grade-appropriate standardized test scores (Cooper, Nye, Charlton, Lindsay, & Great-house, 1996). Other research indicates that lower achieving students, those frequently targeted by school-based mentoring programs, are more susceptible to this regression than higher achieving students (Allinder & Fuchs, 1991). Many educators also note that the summer break tends to disrupt students'

social interactions, daily schedules, and peer relationships and removes opportunities to form connections with positive adults and the school setting itself.

Given that school-based mentors do their work within the context of the school environment, it should come as no surprise that recent research has identified a similar type of “loss” for mentoring relationships over the summer months, when many school-based programs provide only limited activities or eliminate mentoring sessions altogether.

The 2007 report *Making a Difference in Schools: The Big Brothers Big Sisters School-Based Mentoring Impact Study* by Public/Private Ventures found many positive outcomes for youth in school-based mentoring relationships after one year: improvements in overall academic performance (with an emphasis on science and written and oral language skills), improved quality of classwork and completion of homework assignments, and reductions in disciplinary referrals and skipping school, just to name a few (Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, Feldman, & McMaken, 2007).

Unfortunately, when Herrera and colleagues followed up at the end of the first semester of the following year, they found that when looking at mentees as a group, almost none of the positive gains from the first year of mentoring were sustained into the second year. Some of this is attributable to the large number of youth who did not continue with the program into the second year, leading the researchers to conclude that “the academic benefits of SBM (school-based mentoring) decay after the first year without additional mentoring.” But even among youth who sustained their participation across both years of the study, gains relative to their non-mentored peers were greatly reduced after the summer break. Even a semester into the second year, the “summer mentoring loss” was being felt. The three-month break away from the program appeared to have negated a year’s worth of mentoring impacts.

The study did note, however, that participating programs that encouraged or provided opportunities for some contact between mentors and mentees over the summer months had much better outcomes in terms of continued relationship length and quality. “Matches that communicated at least monthly during the summer were over one-third more likely to carry over into the following school year and lasted significantly longer after the end of summer than those that did not communicate” (Herrera et al., 2007). Specifically, matches that had engaged in *at least bi-weekly contact*

over the summer showed significant improvement in the quality of their mentoring relationships. Given that relationship length and quality are critical factors in achieving mentoring outcomes, it appears that programs that encouraged summer contact were laying a better foundation for successful long-term relationships and program outcomes.

In fact, one program in the study provided weekly *in-person* mentoring meetings over the summer months for roughly half its students. These matches were associated with a number of improved outcomes, including better overall academic performance and more confidence about schoolwork. The researchers conclude that “when the mentoring relationship continues without major interruption, positive impacts seen after the first school year may be sustained” (Herrera et al., 2007).

## Building on the Research

These findings suggest the best way for school-based mentoring programs to maintain their impact over the summer months is to continue to provide face-to-face meeting time for their matches. However, this gold standard is often difficult for school-based mentoring programs to achieve. Site-based programs can struggle to provide meaningful opportunities for face-to-face summer interaction for a variety of reasons:

- School facilities and meeting sites are closed.
- School personnel and other program staff may not be available during the summer break.
- Mentors and youth often leave town for extended periods of time (vacations, camps, etc.).
- Arranging large-scale group activities can be time-consuming and logistically difficult.

In lieu of in-person meetings, some programs turn to telephone contact over the summer months. But for many school-based programs, telephone contact is prohibited, and even if allowed over the summer, there are concerns that this type of contact could create a number of problems:

- The potential for unsupervised or unauthorized in-person meetings between mentors and youth.
- Difficulties for mentors and mentees in maintaining boundaries and privacy.

- Changing the nature of the volunteer experience from a once-a-week activity to one that can happen any time the phone rings.
- Challenges for program staff in tracking interactions and performing due diligence in match supervision.

Because providing in-person meetings over the summer can be a challenge, and because telephone contact may be unfeasible, many programs explore less intensive strategies for keeping matches in touch and on each others' minds over the extended break. MRC Fact Sheet #2 (May 2005) discussed some general strategies for creating meaningful summer activities for participants. In this issue, we'll focus on a low-cost, fun, and interactive approach to keeping matches connected: a summer correspondence campaign.

## Mentors as Summer "Pen Pals"

One of the easiest summer contact strategies a program can offer is a "pen pal" arrangement, where mentors and youth exchange written messages over the course of the summer. This approach can keep matches engaged while minimizing risk. If done well, it can even help the relationship grow in meaningful ways by providing an opportunity for the match to discuss topics outside the scope of usual school-based activities and providing a safe place for mentees to discuss problems they might be reluctant to address during in-person meetings.

There are several free or low-cost options for conducting a summer correspondence campaign:

- **Postcards.** Print and prepay postage on custom postcards that mentors and mentees can

use throughout the summer months. Postcards are especially helpful for sending quick notes and updates while on vacation and are a great way for matches to share their summer adventures.

*Pros:* Low cost; limited amount of writing for youth; limited opportunities for boundary issues to arise or unauthorized meetings to occur.

*Cons:* Difficult for staff to monitor frequency or content of correspondence.

- **Traditional letters.** A more robust form of correspondence involves matches taking the time to write letters to each other throughout the summer. Your program can provide stationery, envelopes, stamps, pens and pencils, and even ideas for writing topics (see page 7 for examples).

*Pros:* Low cost; limited opportunities for boundary issues to arise or unauthorized meetings to occur.

*Cons:* Youth may be intimidated by lengthier writing "assignments"; prescribed topics may feel like "homework" to youth; difficult for staff to monitor frequency or content of correspondence.

- **E-mail.** Some programs are adopting an e-mentoring component over the summer months. For little or no cost, your program can set up e-mail accounts for your mentors and mentees, providing them with a unique username and password. This allows matches to have frequent, even daily, contact over the

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## Basic Principles of Effective Summer Contact

- Get permission from parents for any correspondence or contact that is outside the original scope of the program.
- Establish expectations for frequency of contact (ideally at least once every two weeks)
- Review policies on confidentiality, boundaries, handling crisis situations
- Set up a system for checking in with mentors, youth, and parents
- Encourage matches to discuss how much and what type of communication they are comfortable with over the summer
- Make participation easy by providing tools and ideas
- Provide a calendar of summer events and group activities you sponsor
- Evaluate your summer contact strategies for effectiveness and continuous improvement

# The Pub Hub

## A Look at Publications and Tools You Can Use!

In this edition of the Pub Hub we're going to take a look at several resources that can help your program with some of its most important tasks: recruiting mentors and conducting a program evaluation.

## New in the MRC Lending Library

When it comes to mentor recruitment, one of the best strategies is to use current and former mentors to speak with potential recruits about the experience. No one "sells" the concept of mentoring like someone who has walked the walk and can testify to the life-changing power of a mentoring relationship. But what if your program is brand new and does not have a pool of experienced participants to use in recruitment? Who can help convince potential mentors that the experience is rewarding, that mentors are true heroes? The answer may come from an unlikely source: celebrities.

There are two excellent books (both available through the MRC Lending Library) that provide heartwarming, personal stories of mentoring from some of America's most prominent individuals in the worlds of entertainment, politics, sports, and business. These stories of how a mentor helped many of our most successful citizens can be powerful ad-

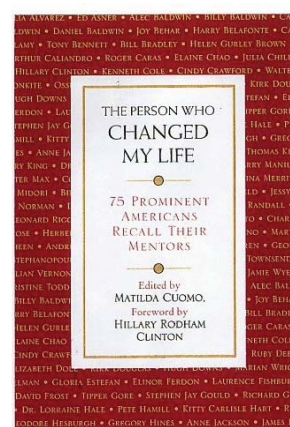
ditions to your recruitment presentations and can be particularly helpful in appealing to specific targeted groups of potential mentors, such as men or members of a particular ethnic or cultural group.

■ ***A Hand To Guide Me***, by Denzel Washington. 2006, Meredith Books.

This 2006 book, written to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the Boys and

Girls Clubs of America, features a compelling testimonial from the famous author about the role that many mentors played throughout his upbringing. The book also features chapters from a diverse and impressive list of prominent Americans, such as Muhammad Ali, Bill Clinton, John Mellencamp, Leonard Nimoy, Gen. Colin Powell, Dick Vitale, Cal Ripken Jr., Toni Morrison, Bonnie Raitt, and Bob Woodward, just to name a few.

Lending Library link: <http://www.nwrel.org/resource/singleresource.asp?id=17339&DB=res>

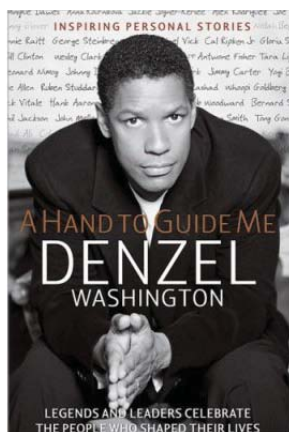


■ ***The Person Who Changed My Life: Prominent Americans Recall Their Mentors***, by Matilda Raffa Cuomo. 1999, Birch Lane Press.

This book, written by the former First Lady of New York and including a forward by Hillary Rodham Clinton, also provides heartfelt testimonials from many leaders in their respective fields. The star-

studded list of contributors here includes Alec Baldwin (all the Baldwin brothers, actually), Harry Belafonte, Julia Child, Walter Cronkite, Elizabeth Dole, Marian Wright Edelman, Steven Jay Gould, Larry King, Christopher Reeve, Martin Sheen, and Christine Todd Whitman, among many others.

Lending Library link: <http://www.nwrel.org/resource/singleresource.asp?id=11712&DB=res>







## Measurement and Evaluation Tools You Can Use

One of the challenges of conducting a meaningful program evaluation is finding validated surveys and other instruments that you can use to collect data. Often, a mentoring program will know what it wants to measure in terms of impact (youth self-esteem, substance use rates, quality of the mentoring relationship, etc.) but may not be aware of reliable tools for gathering this information from participants.

■ One new resource can help programs start measuring several areas of impact. Project STAR, the evaluation training and assistance provider for the Corporation for National and Community Service, recently released the ***Performance Measurement Packet for Youth Mentoring Programs***. This new evaluation tool, originally designed for programs serving children of prisoners but applicable to just about any youth mentoring program, provides a validated and reliable set of surveys for youth, mentors, and another adult who knows the child (such as a parent or teacher). It also provides detailed instructions for administering the survey and an Excel spreadsheet that helps score survey results. The surveys themselves are designed to measure perceptions about the quality of the mentoring relationship and youth attitudes about their own future. This is a great tool for measuring the health of your matches in the present and the impact your program is having in getting young people to feel positive about their future.

The survey packet and the scoring tool can both be downloaded at: [http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/resources/online\\_pubs/perf\\_meas/ac\\_home.php](http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/resources/online_pubs/perf_meas/ac_home.php)

If your program is looking for other types of validated instruments, there are a few places you can turn:

■ ***Evaluating Your Program: A Beginner's Self-Evaluation Workbook for Mentoring Programs***. This evaluation tool was originally designed for the Justice Department's JUMP mentoring initiative. While it offers many useful youth intake forms and other data collection tools, perhaps its most useful section is Appendix D, which offers a listing of dozens of stan-

dardized instruments that measure everything from youth career exploration to feelings of depression and anxiety. Appropriate age ranges and contact information for obtaining the instruments are also provided. Appendix D: [http://www.itiincorporated.com/includes/pdf/17-Append\\_D.pdf](http://www.itiincorporated.com/includes/pdf/17-Append_D.pdf)

Full workbook: <http://www.itiincorporated.com/includes/pdf/SEW-Full.pdf>

■ ***Hemingway Measure of Adolescent Connectedness***. This tool measures adolescent connectedness to school, family, peers, and community. Many prominent mentoring researchers feel that connectedness is perhaps the critical outcome of a mentoring relationship, and this tool can help programs measure improvements in these areas. The survey is designed for grades 6–12 and comes in English, Spanish, French, and Chinese. Scoring tools (including SPSS code) are also provided.

Online at: <http://www.adolescentconnectedness.com/>

■ ***Measurement Tools for Evaluating Out-of-School Time Programs***. This Web resource from Harvard University's Family Research Project provides several downloadable guides to validated instruments in a number of key evaluation areas, such as academic attitudes, life experiences, substance use, and self-esteem.

Online at: <http://www.gse.harvard.edu/hfrp/projects/afterschool/resources/snapshot6/>

■ ***CSPV Violence Evaluation Instruments Database (VioEval)***. The Center for the Study of Violence Prevention at the University of Colorado offers this online database of instruments that measure aspects related to violence, victimization, and crime. Search results include instructions on how to get the actual instruments.

Online at: <http://ibs.colorado.edu/cspv/infohouse/vioeval/>

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If there is a particular standardized instrument that your program has had success with, e-mail the Pub Hub at [garringm@nwrel.org](mailto:garringm@nwrel.org) and we'll include a mention in the next issue of the MRC Fact Sheet.

## Keeping Matches in Touch *continued from page 3*

summer months. It also enables your staff members, if they choose, to monitor the content of messages (make sure participants know that you may be checking in on their e-mails from time to time).

There are many free Web-based e-mail services that you can use, such as Yahoo! (<http://www.yahoo.com/r/m7>) and Gmail (<http://mail.google.com>). There are also Web-based e-mail systems specifically designed for use by schools and students, such as Gaggle (<http://www.gaggle.net>), that can easily be adopted by mentoring programs.

*Pros:* Low cost; easy for program staff to monitor correspondence for red flags; program can use e-mail accounts to notify participants about in-person group activities over the summer; accounts can also be used to supplement the relationship during the school year if both parties desire.

*Cons:* Participants (especially mentees) may not have home Internet access or much privacy when using a home computer; potential use of staff time to monitor correspondence.

Regardless of which approach you take to a summer correspondence campaign, the following tips can help make it successful:

**1. Have ground rules in place.** Make sure mentors, mentees, and parents of participating youth know the expectations and limitations of the summer correspondence campaign. You may want to create rules around frequency of contact, both in terms of a minimum amount (remember, bi-weekly contact seemed to be a threshold for success in the P/PV study) and limitations on frequency ("don't send your mentor 25 e-mails a day"). Reiterate policies that prohibit unauthorized off-site contact, and remind matches that all program guidelines about privacy, confidentiality, and mandatory reporting of potentially harmful situations apply equally to their written communications as they do face-to-face interactions throughout the school year.

If staff members are planning on monitoring messages (a common practice in e-mail-based mentoring), be sure that mentors, mentees, and parents are aware of this limitation on their confidentiality. Make sure participants are aware of their responsibilities for check-

ing in with program staff over the summer months and that staff is still there to support matches if any difficulties arise.

Mentors and mentees should have compatible expectations about the nature of their summer correspondence. They should understand that the campaign is designed to supplement their in-school mentoring relationship, not replace it in terms of intensity or frequency. Encourage matches to talk about how open they are to sharing their feelings in writing and how quickly and in what level of detail they typically respond to e-mail messages. The last thing you want is for youth to feel slighted because their mentor took a few days to respond to an e-mail message or for mentors to be disappointed that their five-page letter only got a two-paragraph response from a student who is uncomfortable doing a lot of writing. Matches that are on the same page before writing each other are far less likely to be disappointed by the experience.

**2. Make participation easy.** These campaigns work best if your program supplies the materials or sets up the e-mail accounts. If using an e-mail-based approach, create a simple set of instructions for logging into e-mail accounts and explain how to send, open, and delete messages (often the e-mail service itself will have this information readily available in a "frequently asked questions" document). If mentees do not have home e-mail access, tell them how they can access their account from computers at the public library. Designate a staff person who can help troubleshoot technical problems. If you are doing a traditional letter-writing campaign, make sure participants have supplied correct address information.

In addition to providing supplies, you may want to provide guidance about what matches should "discuss" over the summer. Some programs provide general conversation starters while others literally provide a weekly writing assignment that matches are required to complete. Choose a set of activities and writing topics that feels like a good fit for your participants and program goals (see sidebar on page 7 for examples of writing topics and activity ideas).

Most programs gather all these supplies, instructions, and ground rules into a summer packet that matches receive and go over during one of their last in-person meetings just before the break. These packets keep stationery and other materials organized and make it

easy for participants to correspond while on vacations or other out-of-town excursions. (See page 7.)

**3. Monitor matches over the break.** Even though matches will not be meeting in person, it is still important to check in with mentors, mentees, and parents to see if any issues have come up and to ensure that the match is writing to each other frequently. This can be done over the phone or by using the e-mail accounts you have set up for them. If you are using e-mail for summer communications, program staff can even access those accounts and look at messages, especially if there seem to be problems. Be sure to

look out for:

- Mentors or mentees neglecting to write frequently
- Attempts by either party to engage in disallowed in-person meetings
- Major changes in mentor's or mentee's lives that could impact their meeting again in the fall (such as moving or transferring schools)

**4. Evaluate the effectiveness of your summer activities.** Keep track of how often matches communicate

## Pen Pal Activities and Conversation Starters

Your program may want to give your matches some initial topics to get them writing over the summer. Examples of starter questions include:

- What is the best/worst thing about summer?
- What did you do on the 4th of July?
- Where have you been on vacation this summer?
- What is your ideal summer day?
- Have you seen any good movies/read any good books so far this summer?
- What are you most excited/worried about for school next year?
- What do you miss about school over the break?
- What is one thing about yourself you want to improve over the summer?
- What activities would you like to focus on when we start meeting in person again?

Matches can spice up their correspondence by including fun additions like:

- Pictures of each other on vacation or doing fun activities
- Poems or stories they have written
- Drawings or other art projects
- Mix CDs or other music that has "soundtracked" their summer

Matches can also engage in a joint activity that enhances and stimulates their correspondence and summer connection. For some matches, this may be as simple as setting a summer goal, such as learning a new skill or exercising more. If mentors and mentees have similar goals, they can compare progress and provide encouragement over the summer. Other examples of fun activities include:

- Create a summer "time capsule" that collects meaningful objects from their summer experiences (such as a pine cone from a hike in the woods) that can be discussed over the summer and shared with each other when the match meets in person at the beginning of the next school year.
- Grow plants together: your program can supply the seeds, pots, and other supplies, and matches can compare the progress of their plants as they grow.
- Try cooking the same recipe (a cake, for example) and talk about how the dish turned out.
- Seeing the same movies (or reading the same books) and discussing them together.
- Write a short story together, with mentors and mentees taking turns contributing paragraph at a time.

Encourage your matches to come up with their own creative activities that build on their common interests and summer plans.

and gather feedback on the correspondence campaign and any in-person group activities you've provided over the summer. A short survey just before school begins can gauge participants' feelings about the frequency, content, and usefulness of their summer contact. This information can help you improve the campaign the following year and might let you know which matches will need some extra support as the new school year begins.

Most school-based mentoring programs, through a combination of occasional in-person group outings and a summer correspondence campaign, should be able to create ample opportunities for matches to build on the previous year and set the stage for the next year's mentoring activities. Solicit fun and unique ideas for summer activities from your mentors and mentees and make sure they understand that the end of the school year simply marks the beginning of a new, vitally important phase of their school-based mentoring relationship.

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