



North American Association of Christians in Social Work (NACSW)

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"A Vital Christian Presence in Social Work"

**YOUNG ADULT ADVOCATES SUPPORTING EVERYDAY
YOUTH: DEVELOPING MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS
BETWEEN COLLEGE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS**

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Abstract

Across America teens struggle to fit in and be accepted. They struggle to find their identity by using drugs, alcohol, sex and making lasting commitments to gangs. The mentoring program discussed in this workshop is not about teens it is about impacting lives of individuals; high school students and college students. Our mentors' goal is to be one positive influence in the lives of those teens who may feel lost and hopeless. Not every teen in the program will be changed; we cannot save every child in Plainview, Texas. However we do know that if we change only one teen's life we have met our goal.

Introduction

The mentoring program began as an idea from Jennifer Phillips who aspires to become a professional social worker after receiving her master in social work degree. Her idea was to provide out reach services for at-risk teens in Plainview, Texas. The population of Plainview, Texas is 21,334, is classified as a remote town – 35 miles away from an urban cluster. There is one public high school that has a total of 1414 students. The ethnic breakdown at Plainview High School is: 65% Hispanic, 30% White, and 5% Black. The freshman population is 405, with a breakdown of 203 males and 202 females. Within the entire school population it was estimated at the end of the school year 2009 there were approximately 120 pregnancies, not counting teen mothers – those who were already parents. It has been estimated that more than 25% of those pregnant were freshman. The student population of Wayland Baptist University is 675; 75% of the ethnicity is White.

The Program

Mission statement: *the mentoring program is designed to impact academic and social well being of high school students deemed at-risk.*

Jennifer Phillips is the creator of the mentoring program at Wayland Baptist University. She saw a need to provide out reach to at-risk teens to help them make decisions regarding their future. Jennifer proposed a mentoring program using Wayland Baptist University students in a one on one relationship with at-risk teens. She believed that together they could explore solutions to the teens' issues, help with home work and provide much needed encouragement and understanding. University students as mentors never take the place of a parent or teacher, but simply provide a positive role model in the at-risk teens' life. The university student and high school student participating in activities such as reading together, playing games, shooting hoops, going to museums and doing homework could be the world to a young person eager for guidance. The potential benefits of the program could result in:

- Breaking destructive behavior patterns
- Improving academic achievement
- Developing new life skills
- Gaining companionship and guidance
- Teens would develop greater self esteem enabling them to make health choices that can move their lives in positive new directions

Wayland Baptist University students are good candidates as mentors for the following reasons:

- They are closer in age to the high school students and can relate to their problems
- Many of the university students have had experiences dealing with the issues the high students are facing
- The university students may have younger siblings, friends or relatives who are struggling with some of the same issues

The program is designed to provide mentoring services to at-risk youth to 9th graders in the Plainview High School. At-risk is defined as at-risk for drop out due to lack of significant progress in two or more foundation curriculum subjects, more than one grade level behind; pregnant or a parent; on parole, probation; has been expelled or laced in alternative education the preceding year (Tea, state of Texas, 2009). These at-risk youth struggle with complex issues regarding poor family environment, youth crime, gang membership, sex substance abuse, poor academic performance. Complex problems such as these need multiple solutions.

One solution is the mentoring program developed through the collaboration of Wayland Baptist University and Plainview High School Jennifer Phillips garnered the support of Dr. Richard Shaw, PhD, Assistant Professor of Religion and Mission; Director of Kenya Program and Wayland Mission Center, to provide the direction, guidance and support from Wayland Baptist University. The collaborative effort with Plainview High School is under the direction of Mrs. McMahan, administrator of the Freshman Learning Center at Plainview High School and Mrs. Owens, the freshman counselor. Since the inception of the program was student led Jennifer Phillips took the

lead in organizing discussions between Wayland Baptist University and Plainview High School.

The mentoring program uses college students as mentors to create one on one relationships with at risk 9th graders, they also provide tutoring. The goal is to help lead these high school students in a positive direction to keep them in school and out of trouble. However there were five issues that had to be addressed to make the program a reality.

The first issue regarded liability for Wayland and Plainview high school. WBU developed a relationship with the principal and freshman school counselor Mrs. Owens, who developed forms that were approved by Plainview Independent School District regarding liability issues. The major obstacles regarding liability related to having same sex mentors/ mentees; and the college students not providing transportation for the youth. Each college mentor had to undergo a criminal background check prior to being assigned a mentee.

The second concern was recruitment. From the college students were initially recruited from the Apostolos organization facilitated by Dr. Shaw. Word of mouth also led to some student recruitment. The Apostolos signifies “one who has had an encounter with Jesus Christ and who is sent out on a mission”, biblical reference Luke 10:1-7. The mentoring program transmits the Apostolos mission within in their current environment.

Mrs. Owens the 9th grade counselor recruited the high school students and obtained written permission for participation from their parents. Once a list of mentors and mentees was developed Mrs. Owens matched the high school students with their mentors.

The third issue involved training college students regarding topics of confidentiality, sexual harassment, and bullying. The training also provided the students with the ASSETS conceptual framework to help understand the principles of mentoring. This training was provided by a licensed clinical social worker who is a professor of sociology at Wayland. On going training is being developed.

The fourth concern was transportation. It was made clear to the college students that they could not transport their mentees to or from any activity. Transportation was the responsibility of the parents.

The last issue had to do with where and how to hold the program. There is approximately four blocks between Plainview high School and Wayland. The mentors once assigned to mentees were given permission to have lunch with their students at the high school. They could not take their student off campus. Once a week from 4:15 until 5:30p all the mentors and mentees meet together on Wayland Baptist University campus at "Pete's Place" that has various board games, pool tables, ping pong tables and places to just hang out and talk. During this time snacks are provided for the students. Dr. Shaw has been instrumental in getting donations from the faith community to provide snacks.

Framework/Model

Jennifer presented her idea of the mentoring program to Dr. Shaw and the Apostolos group. It was decided that a mentoring program fit within their mission "as one who had an encounter with Jesus Christ and is sent out on a mission". Mission involves intentionally crossing barriers to joyfully advance God's kingdom on earth. Cultural and socio economic barriers are crossed as most of the students at Wayland are white and the

majority of Plainview students are minority. Many of the Wayland students have led protective lives as the plainview students lives have been complex through family relationships, safety of community, etc. A key concept in missions is to lead by serving. Much of the literature on mentoring involves taking the lead as a role model to share one's expertise. Our college students are "experts" as they have completed the 9th grade and beyond and are successfully navigating the demands of university life. Integrating missions and mentoring as concepts and methods became the model for our mentoring program.

Concept: Mission – What can I do to improve my corner of the world

Method: mentoring – how to improve my corner of the world?

Concept: Mission

Method: mentoring

Priority to serve other

To share expertise/
be a role model

Help others grow
healthy, wise relationships

use of active listening/encourage/
support/ guide

Outcome

Through serving others as a mentor helps provide to at risk students protective factors such as a caring environment, positive expectations and participation that will increase resiliency. Resilient students possess social competency, problem solving skills, autonomy and a sense of purpose and future (Krovetz, 2008).

The model utilizes NASW Social work ethical principles

- **Value – Service. *Primary goal is to help people in need and address social problems.***

- Mentors utilize knowledge, values and skills (expertise) that comes from successfully passing ninth grade and beyond, being in college
- **Value – Social justice. *Challenge social injustice***
 - Mentors are willing to become aware and sensitive to knowledge about cultural diversity and issues that affect those who are oppressed due to prejudice, discrimination and racism.
- **Value – Dignity and Worth of the person. *Respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person.***
 - Mentors treat others how you want to be treated. Ask questions regarding differences – in taste, music, culture, ethnicity
 - Mentors discover with their mentee similarities and differences and acknowledge that differences are OK
- **Value – Importance of human relationships. *Recognize the central Importance of human relationships. Understand the relationships between and among people are important vehicle for change***
 - Mentors understand just like Jesus the most important thing you have to give is yourself. Open and honest relationship is the priority
- **Value – Integrity. *Behave in trustworthy manner; act honestly and responsibly.***
 - Mentors recognize that being open and honest paves the way to trustworthy relationships. Know and remember who you are representing
- **Value – Competence. *Strive to increase your knowledge base and skills***
 - Mentors are open with their mentees. If you don't know something be willing to find information/ appropriate resources they are seeking.

Chronicles

The mentoring program met weekly at Pete's Place which was the old student lounge at WBU. There are plenty of things to do at Pete's Place; ping pong tables, pool tables, racket court, board games, TV with PlayStation, plus places to just sit around and talk. At least once a week, the mentors met one on one with their mentees at the high school during lunch. The mentors also met with their mentees as a group at the high school on several occasions to provide tutoring. This worked out really well as the mentors were able to use one another's expertise in academia to help the students.

A banquet was held in the spring for mentees, their parents, the mentors and community supporters. The banquet was held at Wayland Baptist University. The mentees showcased their talent by providing a variety of entertainment such as playing guitar and piano that included original composition; art expression and dancing.

Evaluation

An evaluation was completed at the end of the program in the spring. It was found that 70% of the mentees met weekly with their mentor at school. Surveys were given to the high school students and their parents, the mentors and the community supporters that were involved as resources such as Compassionate Care, Worksource, Rural Children's Initiative, Whitaker (mental health services for adolescents).

One of the questions asked "what types of activities can mentors offer the students?" The responses from the mentees, parents, mentors and community supports included: substance abuse prevention; career guidance; role model healthy choices, how not to use violence; focus of school; be able to meet off campus; provide more tutoring

and provide more games that require conversation. Mentors and mentees reported they would like more meeting time. The mentors would like more training. One mentor found out that using complement and encouragement motivated their mentee and was interested in learning other techniques for motivation.

The major issue that we faced was the difficulty of engaging the high school girls with the mentoring program. They would meet once or twice with their mentor but then stop attending. One of the reasons was that the program was not significantly addressing their issues. Not understanding dissimilarity in lifestyles and ethnicity made it difficult to develop meaningful relationships. We found that many of the Wayland Baptist University female students in the program have lived protected lives and could not relate to the complexity of the high school female students. . As stated previously Plainview High School is 63% Hispanic and Wayland is 75% White The issue of cultural awareness was prevalent and some of the WBU students had difficulty understanding cultural aspects that affect the lives of the high school students. To remedy this situation we will do more training that will address culture diversity and becoming culturally proficient through awareness.

Future plans

Our goal is to expand the mentoring program to 50 matches. We are recruiting mentors from other disciplines on campus such as the School of Behavioral and Social Science, School of Education, and School of Fine Arts. High school students who were in the program last year can continue this year. We will develop several training that will be held throughout the semester. Training will cover issues of cultural awareness, ASSETS framework, active listening, etc. We are partnering with the High School to

reinforce their Character Building curriculum. This curriculum has monthly themes such as to be respectful, honest, committed, caring, noble, responsible, and prepared. We will have a Christmas party and spring banquet.

Conclusion

From one student's idea a mentoring program has been planted that is impacting the lives of high school and college students.

The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore to send workers into his harvest field. Luke 10:2

Resources

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