

Case Study: SUPPORTING A GOVERNMENT AGENCY

Mentoring Children of Prisoners



BACKGROUND

Nearly two million children in the U.S. have a parent in prison. Growing up with an absent parent, many have experienced social, emotional, and economic hardships that can lead to stress and destructive circumstances. Additionally, many are exposed to poverty, violence, substance abuse, and instability - all of which challenge their ability to thrive. Research has shown, however, that adult mentors can contribute positively to children's development and help lower rates of truancy, substance abuse, and aggression and to improve school grades and peer relationships.

In 2003, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) launched the Mentoring Children of Prisoners (MCP) grant program to help strengthen programs that provide mentors to children of incarcerated parents. The Presidential Signature Initiative held a lofty goal of establishing 100,000 mentor-mentee matches by 2008.

SITUATION

Alarmingly, within fifteen months, the program was struggling to achieve effective results. The White House's goal of 100,000 mentoring matches had yielded less than 10,000 matches despite program efforts. Grantees were sorely in need of additional assistance in learning how to market and to recruit mentors and mentees into the program.

Just as great mentoring relationships can have tremendous positive impact on a young person's life, poor mentoring relationships can have detrimental results. HHS needed to ensure that grantees could access the necessary ongoing technical assistance and support needed to provide outstanding programs to these youth.

Winning grantee organizations entered the MCP program with varied experience. Some had never managed a formal mentoring relationship. It was imperative that all grantees received key information about structuring their programs, screening mentors, managing risk, recruiting mentors and mentees, supervising those relationships, and addressing the special issues affecting children of incarcerated parents.

ENTER DARE MIGHTY THINGS

In January of 2006, Dare Mighty Things (DMT) became the Technical Assistance Center for MCP. DMT's impressive history of involvement in mentoring and supporting youth and families in need make the company the appropriate resource to address this overwhelming dilemma. Notable credentials included DMT's decade-long management of the mentoring component of the National Guard Youth ChalleNGe program. DMT President Dave Van Patten is a founding member of the Federal Mentoring Council Working Group and vice chair of MENTOR's Research and Policy Council.

DMT went to work to boost program results. Conducting a thorough national assessment, employing their expertise in the areas of web product development, instructional systems design, event management, strategic operations and planning and training and technical assistance. DMT designed, developed, and implemented assistance in six key areas:

- MCP toll-free TAC support line and email address
- National training and technical assistance conference
- Regional grantee workshops
- Technical assistance site visits
- Newsletters and AskMCP.net peer exchange network
- Provided resources to populate MCP clearinghouse

RESULTS

In less than twelve months, DMT was able to help HHS and the MCP grantees exponentially increase the number of successful mentoring relationships **from a meager base of less than 10,000 to approximately 57,000.**

Due to the national and regional interactive training workshops implemented by DMT, programming staff have been fortified. On a scale of 1-5, these events typically scored a 4.5 or higher, with grateful grantees describing the training as the best they had ever experienced.

...The particular reason for this message is to commend you and all the other relevant folk for the particularly high quality of the presentations, notebook materials and training methodology. EXEMPLARY!

KUDOS on this year's training!

Judith Wood, ACF

DMT's efforts completely altered the trajectory of the program. All indicators suggest that the 100,000 match goal will be reached ahead of schedule.