

Case Study: ASSISTING A GOVERNMENT ORGANIZATION

National Guard Youth ChalleNGe Program



BACKGROUND

Throughout history, the U.S. National Guard has repeatedly served as the first wave of response to our nation's worst crises. Likewise, in the early 1990s, in response to the disturbing rise in numbers of high school dropouts and juvenile delinquents, the National Guard reacted. Leveraging its strong community ties and excellent infrastructure, the National Guard created the ChalleNGe program to develop and enhance the life skills, educational levels, and employment potential of the nation's ten million at-risk youth. Ten pilot programs were launched in late 1993, and today there are thirty-four full-fledged programs across the country, in twenty-nine states and territories. Two more programs are forecasted to open their doors in 2007 and the National Guard Bureau hopes to have one program in each state by the year 2010.

The legislative mandate to the National Guard dictates that ChalleNGe programs serve drug-free, high school dropouts between the ages of sixteen and eighteen years old. To address these youth, the National Guard developed a five-month quasi-military residential program, followed by a twelve-month aftercare phase partnering each graduate with a specially trained mentor from the youth's community.

SITUATION

Following the first year of operation, less than five percent of ChalleNGe graduates left the residential phase with a screened and trained mentor. The importance of this second program phase had been gravely underestimated. The lack of an effective post-residential mentoring program jeopardized the effectiveness of the entire ChalleNGe model, particularly as congressional funding depended on the National Guard's ability to demonstrate that ChalleNGe produced positive long-term outcomes.

ENTER DARE MIGHTY THINGS

In 1994 the National Guard hired Dare Mighty Things, Inc. (DMT) to develop a mentor training curriculum for the post-residential phase, including the following improvements:

- A new mentoring model undergirded by industry standards identified by the National Mentoring Institute;
- A consistent set of nation-wide program standards;
- Operational materials; and
- Mentor and mentee training curricula.

In 2004, in response to ever increasing demands for training and technical assistance for ChalleNGe staff, DMT designed, developed, and now operates the fully IACET accredited National ChalleNGe Institute (NCI). NCI provides professional development through a rich, interactive learning environment facilitated by highly qualified instructors. NCI also plans and manages several national workshops and conferences each year to support and promote the goals of the ChalleNGe program.

Over the past several years, DMT has coordinated and carried out two successful overhauls of the ChalleNGe Program website (www.ngycp.org) to maximize usability and effectiveness and to promote national visibility for the program. NCI also maintains all thirty-two program websites. NCI Online was also conceived and executed by NCI and serves to increase communication and peer-to-peer learning for ChalleNGe staff.

RESULTS

Whereas in 1994, none of the ChalleNGe programs were able to meet program targets, today, ChalleNGe can boast the following statistics in 2005:

- More than 70,000 high-school dropouts have been served by thirty-four ChalleNGe programs, in twenty-nine states and territories since the program's inception.
- In 2005, ChalleNGe cadets performed 554,557 hours of service to community equaling \$2,896,167
- ChalleNGe's aftercare program is the recipient of two national awards and is recognized as the second largest mentoring program in the nation.