

# the **tutor**

Summer 2007

## **A Great Fit** Recruiting volunteers to work with youth

By Erich Stiefvater, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory

“Henry was such a good listener. I was very withdrawn [and] angry at the world ... But here was someone who voluntarily listened to me vent about what I didn’t like. I hated school, but Henry never lectured. He offered me advice and encouragement without being an authority figure. He was more of a friend, which is what I really needed then. Henry was instrumental in showing me I had a future.”

—Dennis, mentee<sup>1</sup>

Working with children and youth calls for a different temperament and skills than other types of service. A personal, strong connection is as—if not more—important to the young person’s success as any activity. Successful volunteers bring a high level of patience and relationship-building skills.

“Mentoring is so much more personal than other types of volunteering. Mentoring forces you to confront your own values, communication styles, habituated responses and patterns in a way that other volunteering doesn’t.

Working closely with other people, particularly young people, is unpredictable. It shakes you up!”

—Nancy, mentor

Finding the right volunteers is a key concern of all programs, but is of particular interest to those working with children and youth. This is especially true as tutoring and mentoring programs seek to serve greater numbers of young people—including more from disadvantaged circumstances—who need or want their help.

This issue of the *Tutor* offers discussion, tips, and resources to help you find and place high-quality individuals to make your youth-focused program a success.

### **A Call to Action for Youth**

With education and youth issues of continuing concern to the public, interest in offering tutoring and mentoring services to young people is increasing. The Corporation for National and Community Service recognizes this interest and the need to serve the growing numbers of youth who can benefit from these services.

**LEARNS** provides training and technical assistance to Corporation-funded programs focused on education. LEARNS is a partnership of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory and the Bank Street College of Education. For literacy, tutoring, and mentoring projects, LEARNS provides training and technical assistance. Call or e-mail to find out how we can help you:

- Locate resources
- Connect with peers
- Brainstorm solutions
- Design and deliver training

<sup>1</sup> As quoted in *Little Moments Big Magic* (Barrett, Annis, & Riffey, 2004).

In its strategic plan, the Corporation aims to increase the number of Americans who volunteer each year by 10 million in five years, to reach 75 million by 2010. The plan also focuses on increasing the level of service both to and by youth in disadvantaged circumstances. Goals include providing mentoring services to 3 million such youth—including 200,000 children of incarcerated parents—while engaging 3 million as volunteers.

### The Opportunity

Through thoughtful and well-planned recruitment and screening, programs can increase the numbers of caring individuals ready and able to work with young people. The circumstances of each program are different, and there is no one set of activities that ensures success for all. However, experience demonstrates that putting more time and thought into designing and running recruitment campaigns ultimately pays off.

Successful recruitment efforts feature:

- A solid understanding of the types of people who thrive as volunteers with youth
- Marketing messages that speak to the motivations of volunteers
- Selective use of recruiting events, venues, and media to ensure marketing messages are seen or heard by the greatest number of potential volunteers
- Robust screening processes that not only identify potential problems but also uncover the particular strengths and abilities volunteers offer

### Defining “Disadvantaged”

“It was challenging to see my mentee in a climate that made it difficult for her to achieve her dreams. [She] was facing many difficult circumstances including violence and gang involvement in her school and community, as well as pressure from peers to engage in drug and alcohol abuse.”

—Amelia, mentor

Who exactly are disadvantaged youth and how many of them are there? These questions are open to debate. Generally speaking, “disadvantaged” can be associated with a wide array of circumstances that can keep a child or youth from reaching her fullest potential. Risk factors and the estimated numbers of young people affected by them include:

- ◆ **Neighborhoods with high poverty rates.** In 2004, the number of children living in families with incomes below the poverty threshold was 12.5 million, or 17 percent of all children (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2006).
- ◆ **Below-grade-level performance in school.** In 2005, 36 percent of fourth-graders and 27 percent of eighth-graders were not reading at grade level (Helping America’s Youth, n.d.).
- ◆ **Teen pregnancy.** In 2004, there were 22 births among every 1,000 adolescent girls aged 15 to 17, a rate that has been declining since 1991 (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2006).
- ◆ **Time spent in the juvenile justice system or in foster care.** In 2003, law enforcement agencies made 2.2 million arrests of persons under age 18 (Snyder & Sickmund, 2006). In September 2005, there were an estimated 513,000 children in foster care (Administration for Children and Families, 2007).
- ◆ **Mental and/or physical difficulties.** In 2004, 8 percent of children age 5 to 17 could not participate fully in activities due to one or more chronic health conditions, and 5 percent of children age 4 to 17 were reported by a parent to have definite or severe difficulties with emotions, concentration, behavior, or getting along with people (Federal Interagency Forum on Child and Family Statistics, 2006).
- ◆ **Incarcerated parent(s).** An estimated 1.5 million minor children have a parent in the criminal justice system (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2004).

Working with youth from disadvantaged circumstances requires extra care and planning. See “Working with Vulnerable Youth” for additional discussion.

## Who Volunteers With Youth?

The first step in recruitment is to understand as much as you can about the people you are trying to reach. This analysis helps you look in the right places and say the right things to attract volunteers.

Current volunteers are your best source of information for building a profile of the ideal volunteer. They are already sold on your program and meet its standards for quality and safety. Interviews—either one-on-one or through focus groups and surveys—will provide valuable insights. This is especially true when you are seeking a specific subgroup of volunteers, such as men (see “Men and Mentoring”) or people of color.

You may also seek out research and data on volunteerism made available by volunteer centers, civic groups, and colleges and universities in your area. Such information can highlight local trends in demographics and volunteering that you can factor into your recruitment planning.

Understanding who volunteers with youth in your community and your program allows you to flesh out a picture of the typical candidate and suggests where to look and what to say and offer as incentives. For example, understanding that a sizable number of your volunteers are young professionals might suggest highlighting the social and networking benefits of your program in recruitment materials distributed to local employers, gyms, and clubs. Conversely, knowing that many long-serving volunteers are retirees might suggest presentations to civic groups serving older adults, highlighting the opportunity to stay active and help the next generation.

## Working With Vulnerable Youth

“We are trying to get my mentee into college. That takes financial and other resources but we are working on it. It is hard to be independent and stable when the odds are sometimes against you. I am often frustrated because I want this to move faster and make sure that my mentee is on the way. I need to be patient.”

—Susan, mentor

Even established programs and veteran volunteers struggle working with youth living in particularly challenging circumstances. Challenges include:

- ◆ **Difficulty identifying and reaching children in need.** Lives in disorder and/or feelings of shame may cause young people to “hide.” Privacy and confidentiality issues may make teachers and caseworkers reluctant to share information on children or youth in their care.
- ◆ **High dropout rates.** Unpredictability in the lives of many children makes consistent participation in a program difficult. For example, a foster-care youth may change placement abruptly and discontinue meeting with a mentor or tutor.
- ◆ **Higher likelihood of volunteer burnout.** All volunteers working with youth are susceptible to frustration if they feel they are not making a difference, feel unsupported, or tire of the testing behaviors used by some children as a defense mechanism. These feelings can emerge quickly and strongly among volunteers working with children from especially troubled backgrounds.

If your program is considering serving high-needs youth, it is important for you to address these challenges in your action plan. Some key questions to ask include:

- ◆ How are the targeted youth different from the young people we normally serve?
- ◆ Who can we reach out to for expertise in working with this group? Which individuals and service agencies working with these groups can we partner with?
- ◆ How will we find and gain the trust of children and their families?
- ◆ How can we structure our program to make services accessible?
- ◆ In what ways will our volunteers have to be trained differently, and who will do the training?

## What To Say

Understanding the backgrounds, needs, and motivations of volunteers who work with youth helps you create messages that resonate with like-minded individuals and interest them in your work. These messages in turn can be sharpened into taglines, slogans, and testimonials for use in marketing materials and media.

Particular motivations you can speak to and possible taglines that might emerge from them include:

### ■ **Chance to pass on what you know.**

- “They need what you know.”
- “What is your passion? Share it with a child.”
- “Been there? Done that? Pass it on and become a mentor.”

### ■ **Ability to help change a young person’s life.**

- “Helping kids rise to their full potential in literacy, learning, and life.”
- “Mentoring: When just being yourself can change the future.”
- “To the world you may be just one person, but to one person you just may be the world.”
- “Unleash potential—Tutor a child.”

### ■ **Chance to expand one’s horizons.**

- “Mentor one child, change two lives.”

### ■ **Opportunity to change a community and/or society.**

- “Mentors improve learning, lives, and communities.”

### ■ **Benefits of service to the volunteer (what’s in it for me?).**

- “Stay healthy longer—volunteer.”
- “Give a little, gain a lot—Become a mentor.”

### ■ **Volunteering can fit into busy schedules.**

- “The power of an hour.”
- “It only takes an hour a week but the results can last a lifetime.”

When designing materials utilizing your slogans, the higher the quality and professional appearance of the materials, the more likely they are to attract volunteers. Of course, achieving high production values can be expensive for programs on limited budgets. Some creative solutions include:

- Seek donations of staff time and/or resources from firms, freelancers, and professional associations working in graphic design, public relations, video production, and Web design.
- Recruit people with marketing or creative skills to volunteer or serve on your advisory board.
- Offer marketing, creative design, or public relations internships for credit and/or modest compensation to students of local high schools, colleges, and universities.

High-quality marketing materials can be adapted for many uses. Lauren Hazewski, Community Relations Specialist for AmeriCorps\* NCCC Western Region, offered the following creative locations for placing recruitment inserts:

- In grocery bags or on receipts
- On restaurant placemats
- With employee paychecks
- On free bookmarks at a book store or library
- With (or on) event tickets
- In programs for sporting events or theatre performances

Hazewski also recommends adapting electronic versions of recruitment materials for delivery in different settings, especially online. Images, graphics, and videos can be incorporated into:

- Slides for pre-movie viewing at movie and IMAX theaters
- Volunteer and job-search Web sites such as Idealist and Volunteer Solutions
- Social-networking sites and blogs such as MySpace and Facebook

## Men and Mentoring

Though cross-gender mentoring matches can work quite well, programs often want to provide positive male role models for boys and young men. Historically, however, men volunteer in social services less often than women, so recruiting male mentors is a challenge.

Finding and attracting male mentors requires flexibility and extra effort. Begin with a survey of men in your program on what brought them to you and why they stay. They will provide advice and guidance for a campaign aimed at recruiting more men.

Some specific recommendations for recruiting male mentors collected from programs across the country include:

- ◆ **Allow men to volunteer in groups.** This may help men ease into the relationship-building aspects of one-on-one mentoring, which can be daunting to some.
- ◆ **Create a menu of volunteer activities with mentoring as the maximum commitment.** This allows men to participate in other ways, observe mentoring, and get comfortable with it before committing.
- ◆ **Use other men to recruit.** This is especially effective when the recruiter is also a mentor and can describe the experience firsthand.
- ◆ **Recruit at college fraternities.** Many fraternity pledges and members are tasked with completing community service hours.
- ◆ **Get the women in their lives to do the asking.** Many men are talked into volunteering by wives, mothers, girlfriends, sisters, or daughters. Consider asking all prospective female volunteers to give an application to at least one male friend.
- ◆ **Approach national and local associations and groups that have a high concentration of male members.** Veterans groups, faith communities, professional and civic associations are all good sources.
- ◆ **Make sure marketing materials get to men.** Consider outreach at sporting events and auto shows.
- ◆ **Describe the benefits of mentoring in your marketing materials.** Help potential male mentors understand how they will be able to use skills they already have in mentoring. Do not focus exclusively on the “warm fuzzies” of mentoring.
- ◆ **Make sure prospective volunteers (both male and female) know about orientation and receive ongoing training and support.** People are more willing to participate when they know that mentoring is not a sink-or-swim proposition.



## Where To Find Volunteers

Once you understand who your potential volunteers are and the types of messages they respond to, think about where you can find large numbers of them.

Some specific venues for finding and recruiting volunteers to work with children or youth include:

■ **Colleges and universities.** Students (and to a lesser extent, faculty) of higher education institutions can be especially motivated volunteers. See “Recruiting College Students” for further discussion.

■ **Faith-based organizations.** Pastors, rabbis, and imams—concerned with the welfare of their congregants—support and sponsor social-justice and community-improvement efforts for youth. The faith community is often a key source of social and material support for many families, especially in disadvantaged areas, and can open doors to reach the children and youth you are trying to serve, provide volunteers, and identify potential partners for your program.

■ Organizations of youth-serving professionals. People and groups to seek out include:

- Teachers
- School counselors
- Counselors and caseworkers of social-service and youth-corrections agencies
- Prison-ministry organizations
- Shelters for homeless and runaway youths
- Court-appointed special-advocate organizations
- Police athletic leagues
- Faith-based organizations

Julie Linn of Central South Dakota RSVP points out that many retired teachers miss working with children and are good candidates for mentoring and tutoring programs (especially school-based ones). She has

## Recruiting Boomers

The next two decades will see large-scale social and economic changes in the United States as the 77 million Americans born between 1946 and 1964 leave the workforce. Baby boomers are likely to remain on-the-go, seeking out activities that keep them physically, mentally, and socially engaged. The Corporation expects the number of volunteers age 65 and over to increase from about nine million in 2007 to more than 13 million in 2020.

Just because there will be many boomers available to volunteer does not mean they will be beating down your doors. Their motivations must be understood for marketing efforts.

One useful approach is to examine roles they have taken on. As described in research by the Points of Light Foundation, these include:

- ◆ *Parent (and grandparent).* Many older boomers are now grandparents, while younger ones have school-aged children or young adults away at college. Parent-teacher and college-alumni associations represent opportunities to reach boomers through their affinity for the schools that serve their families. This may especially be true of boomers feeling “empty nest syndrome.”
- ◆ *Activist.* While not all boomers participated in the activism of the 1960s, many share a desire to make a difference. Help volunteers imagine how serving as a role model will bring about social change.
- ◆ *Consumer.* Born and raised in the age of advertising and market research, boomers are sophisticated consumers who are used to having many options. They often have a sharply defined sense of their own preferences, value, and budget. Defining a consumer-oriented menu of volunteering choices with variations in commitment and responsibility allows volunteers to select what best fits their interests and time available.
- ◆ *Worker.* As boomers retire, they will be interested in ways to put their skills and experiences to use. Tutoring and mentoring are opportunities to feature accomplishments and share expertise with the next generation.

Temple University’s Center for Intergenerational Learning can help you better understand and recruit baby boomer volunteers. See “Resources.”

found success recruiting from associations of retired teachers. These organizations will gain new members in the years ahead as tens of thousands of baby boomer teachers leave the education workforce (see “Recruiting Boomers”).

The RSVP of Montgomery County in Pennsylvania has had success recruiting school bus drivers. Lynne Shepsman, the coordinator of the Protégé program, notes that bus drivers are used to working with children, have already passed background checks, and often have flexible schedules that allow them to incorporate volunteer work into their days.

Enlist the help of current volunteers and children and youth in your program. Ask volunteers to spread the word about your program and available opportunities. Look to the young people you serve as potential volunteers, as well as advocates for your recruitment efforts. Both volunteers and clients can be offered incentives if they refer a friend to volunteer.

An example of engaging youth served as volunteers comes from Pittsfield, New Hampshire. New Hampshire Reads AmeriCorps members set up a literacy program that connects struggling high school readers with elementary school children. Some of the student volunteers read one-on-one with children during a Self-Selected Reading time at the elementary school. Other student volunteers carry out Lunchtime Read-Alouds in the cafeteria for small groups of students. The self-esteem that comes from helping younger students as tutors and role models has helped the high school students improve their own reading abilities, attendance, and interest in their studies.

RSVP of the Flint Hills in Manhattan, Kansas, provides an example of using volunteers in recruitment. Executive Director Lori Bishop created an RSVP Ambassadors program to promote the project among seniors. She trained two active volunteers on the background of the program and had them attend speaking engagements with her at civic and community groups. The volunteers then ventured out on their own equipped with nametags and materials to deliver presentations. The

Ambassadors are particularly visible at coffee clubs at malls where more and more seniors are gathering. They have been successful in generating interest and recruits for the program’s various services.

### Recruiting College Students

Undergraduate enrollments at U.S. colleges and universities are around 15 million and growing, and many institutions are expanding volunteer and service-learning programs. Colleges and universities can be especially fertile volunteer recruiting grounds.

Tips for recruiting college students to serve as mentors and tutors include:

- ◆ Consult with departments and financial aid offices to see if volunteering will qualify students for academic, work-study, and work-experience credits.
- ◆ Get to know staff of campus volunteer and student activities offices and keep them informed of the good work their students are doing for your program.
- ◆ Target departments with a child or youth focus, such as education, psychology, and social work.
- ◆ Work with professors and department chairs to create service-learning opportunities through your program. Some colleges have service-learning coordinators you can work with.
- ◆ With permission from student affairs, residential life, and other offices, reach out to student organizations, including fraternities and sororities. Many encourage or require their members to participate in community service and civic-engagement projects.

## Finding the Right Fit

A key step for any recruitment campaign is the screening and matching process. Screening involves checking the background of candidates not only for red flags (which is essential), but also for the particular skills and experiences they bring. Just as we do not click with every person we meet, not all matches succeed or get off to the right start. Using

### Recruiting in Rural Areas

Recruiting tutors and mentors in rural areas poses a unique set of challenges, including limited public transportation, fewer youth-serving organizations, unpublicized or restricted community resources, and a smaller pool of potential volunteers. Strong ethnic, language, or cultural ties among community residents can make it difficult to break into networks and gain trust.

Recruiting in this context requires an intensive, long-term approach focused on relationship-building that includes a consideration of cultural and historical values. Effective practices for rural recruitment derived from the work of Mark LoMurray of the North Dakota Tribal/Rural Mentoring Project include:

- ◆ Spend more time in the community than in your office, creating crucial one-on-one contacts and relationships
- ◆ Recruit program staff from the community when possible, for they have deep knowledge of members, kinship networks, and cultural and political dynamics
- ◆ Assemble an advisory council of community members
- ◆ Identify and enlist the support of an influential community champion who can talk up your program
- ◆ Enlist current volunteers to help recruit friends and family members
- ◆ Target multiple generations of volunteers, casting as wide a net as possible
- ◆ Use a range of local media for recruitment, as time and budget allow (advertising in rural media is often cheaper than in cities)
- ◆ Partner with other organizations to address transportation and other logistical challenges

the screening process to tease out nuances of a volunteer's temperament and interests can help you make matches that are more likely to succeed. The section on Resources contains links to help you structure and run your screening and placement process.

## Bringing It All Together

Now you have an in-depth understanding of your ideal volunteers, leads on where to find them and what to say to them, and a process to screen and place them—everything you need to develop a recruitment plan. The plan can be as formal and detailed as you want, but should address the following elements:

- Goals that describe the number of volunteers you would like to recruit
- A timeline that lays out the general and specific tasks with deadlines for completion
- Assignment chart that identifies people responsible for tasks described in the timeline
- A budget specifying the resources available

Your plan should also identify how and where your recruitment messages will be disseminated, and which of your marketing materials will be used. The main approaches to outreach include:

- **Word of mouth.** This is often the most effective, as satisfied volunteers, clients, national service members, and employees can influence family, friends, and colleagues to work with your program. Board members can talk up your program and volunteer opportunities with their professional and social contacts. Make civic, religious, and youth-serving leaders aware of your services.
- **Tabling and information sessions.** With permission, staff information tables at libraries, senior centers, workplaces, high schools, colleges and universities, career fairs, community events, and other locations where you are likely to find volunteers. Tabling can be complemented with information sessions that describe your volunteer opportunities in detail.

■ **Posting.** Place brochures, flyers, posters, inserts, and table tents in high-traffic areas. Where you can post is limited only by your imagination, the space owner's permission, and the need to post in areas visited by prospective volunteers. Information in electronic format can be posted on Web sites, discussion boards, and general-interest and volunteering job bulletin boards such as Idealist.org, craigslist.org, and Volunteer Solutions.

■ **Media.** Work with the media through paid advertisements or public-service coverage. Advertising in newspapers, magazines, television and radio stations, and the Internet is often expensive, but can be effective if advertisements are targeted and placed well. A media outlet may also run an advertisement on a free or reduced-cost basis as part of their public-service program. You can also partner with other youth organizations to share the cost. Send press releases, video and audio public service announcements, and story pitches to media outlets in hopes that they will create a story and generate free publicity. Media organizations may use your materials because they consider it newsworthy, because they have a shortage of stories for the next edition, or to fulfill their public-service obligations. With both paid advertising and public relations, success is greater with smaller media organizations serving specific geographical areas or demographics. Your advertising dollars go farther and small organizations lack the reporting resources of mainstream media.

The Resource Center and EnCorps offer information, tips, and downloadable documents to help you design a recruitment and placement plan. Links to both can be found in "Resources."

### Conclusion

The passion and commitment you and your volunteers bring to the work of tutoring and mentoring young people is your greatest strength. Building on this energy through a detailed recruitment and placement plan can yield more high-quality individuals to continue your program's success. We hope the information provided here and the additional materials listed below will help you and the children and youth you serve succeed.



## Resources

Following is a list of selected organizations and online materials you may find helpful in recruiting and selecting volunteers to serve with youth.

### Online Resources

**EnCorps.** One section of this collection of field-tested program-management materials and sample forms submitted by national service programs is devoted to recruitment and placement. Access the EnCorps collection at <http://encorps.nationalserviceresources.org/>.

**Mentoryouth.com.** Offered by the National Network of Youth Ministries, this Web site provides a searchable database of volunteer opportunities and tools and materials to help with mentor recruitment. The URL is [www.mentoryouth.com](http://www.mentoryouth.com).

**National Mentoring Partnership Database.** MENTOR/The National Mentoring Partnership offers a free online database programs can use to recruit and manage new mentors. Find the database and instructions for registering at [http://apps.mentoring.org/register\\_your\\_organization/logon.adp](http://apps.mentoring.org/register_your_organization/logon.adp).

**Putting the “Men” Back Into Mentoring.** This bulletin from the National Mentoring Center provides approaches and tips to help you recruit more male volunteers. Access from [www.nwrel.org/mentoring/bulletins.html](http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/bulletins.html).

**Recruiting Mentors: A Guide to Finding Volunteers To Work With Youth.** This document from the National Mentoring Center provides instructions for creating and implementing a recruitment plan. Find the guide at [www.nwrel.org/mentoring/pdf/packthree.pdf](http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/pdf/packthree.pdf).

**SafetyNET.** MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership partners with the FBI to offer this fingerprint-based background check service to mentoring programs. Each check costs \$18, and results are delivered in three to five business days. For more details, see <http://apps.mentoring.org/safetynet/index.adp>.

**The U.S. Department of Education Mentoring Program’s Guide to Screening and Background Checks.** This 2005 guidebook can help you develop a comprehensive screening process for volunteers. It can be downloaded from <http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/screening.pdf>.

**When Stakes Are High: Research-Based Mentoring for Youth With Multiple Risk Factors.** This document from EMT Associates provides information on mentoring high-needs youth and materials to train volunteers. Download the document from <http://emt.org/userfiles/WhenStakesAreHigh.pdf>.

### CNCS Training and Technical Assistance Providers

**LEARNS.** LEARNS is a partnership of the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory and the Bank Street College of Education that provides training and technical assistance to projects focused on tutoring, mentoring, literacy, and out-of-school time. Access the LEARNS pages at the Resource Center ([www.nationalservice.gov/resources/sites/learns](http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources/sites/learns)) to view products and services available.

**Temple University Center for Intergenerational Learning.** The Center for Intergenerational Learning at Temple University provides training and technical assistance to build and strengthen the skills of national service programs in marketing/recruiting, training, and supervising baby boomers. Read more about these services at [www.nationalserviceresources.org/resources/tta/temple.php](http://www.nationalserviceresources.org/resources/tta/temple.php).

**The Resource Center.** A clearinghouse of information, resources, and downloadable forms available to national service programs and other nonprofit organizations, including materials you can use and adapt to put together recruitment plans. Visit the Resource Center online at [www.nationalservice.gov/resources](http://www.nationalservice.gov/resources).

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