

## **Ideas for Mentoring-Related Foster Care Month Events/Activities 2011**

Pass it On & Change a Lifetime!

This May, join Mentor Michigan as we celebrate National Foster Care Month! National Foster Care Month provides the perfect opportunity for mentoring programs to promote public awareness about the needs of their foster care mentees, recognize and celebrate existing matches, recruit potential mentors, and build community support. If your mentoring program serves children and youth in foster care, Mentor Michigan encourages you to take advantage of this national event and get involved. By bringing attention to your program and the need for more caring, dedicated mentors, we can ensure brighter futures for these young people!

Check out the following ideas and resources for mentoring-related activities and events to implement during National Foster Care Month. If you have a great idea you want to share, or have questions/comments about the events/activities below, email [mentormichigan@michigan.gov](mailto:mentormichigan@michigan.gov).

### **National Foster Care Month Blue Ribbon Event/Activity**

*Goals: Promote awareness; build community support.*

For match activities or end-of-the-school-year events in May, ask staff, mentors, mentees, and any caregivers attending (foster families, social workers, etc.) to wear the official National Foster Care Month blue ribbon to highlight the fact that your program serves youth in foster care. Distribute blue ribbons and the **Five Easy Ways to Get Involved Flyer** to attendees at the event/activity.

*Resource:* Order up to 200 blue ribbons for **FREE** (<http://www.fostercaremonth.org/GetInvolved/Pages/OnlineStore.aspx>).

### **Foster Care Open House & Potluck**

*Goals: Recognize and celebrate matches; build community support.*

Host an open house with a potluck dinner for the foster care youth, mentors, foster families, and child welfare workers that your program works with and serves. Encourage matches to share what they've been doing together and include a Q&A session for staff to address any comments or concerns regarding your program.

### **For Faith-based Programs**

*Goals: Promote awareness; build community support.*

Spotlight the importance and need for foster care mentors during one day of worship in May. Feature information on the needs of youth in foster care during the sermon and ask members of the congregation who are mentors to share their personal experiences as part of the service. As part of the children's ministry or other community outreach programs, invite representatives from local foster care agencies to answer questions and provide informational materials after services. Hand out the **Five Easy Ways to Get Involved Flyer** in your church bulletin.

### **Community Service Day**

*Goals: Build community support.*

Sponsor a day of community service projects. Beforehand, have matches do a "project hunt" where they ask individuals or families in the community about things they need done that can be

accomplished in a day, e.g., spring cleaning project for a senior or a single parent. Compile these into a list from which your matches can choose. Distribute the **Five Easy Ways to Get Involved Flyer** to the people served.

### **Engaging the Media**

*Goals: Promote awareness; recognize and celebrate matches.*

Ask your local newspaper or radio station to do a feature on a mentor or mentors. Include testimonies from their matches and information on your program and upcoming National Foster Care Month Mentoring events/activities.

*Resource:* Use the **Guiding Questions for a “Match” Story** as a template.

### **Foster Care Movie Night**

*Goals: Promote awareness; recruitment.*

Host a movie and discussion night for your community. Recent movies with a foster care theme include “The Blind Side.” Discuss how different the story would have been without the presence of caring adults/mentors and share some of the opportunities for mentors in your program.

### **Mentor and Mentee Postcard Project**

*Goals: Promote awareness; recognize and celebrate matches; recruitment.*

Organize a postcard project that not only educates the public about the culture of foster care, but also the ways mentors benefit from sharing in those experiences. Have mentees create postcards that express their observations, insights and lessons from being in foster care and have their mentors create postcards that express how being a part their mentee’s experience has positively affected them. Display the postcards in their matching pairs in a public space in the community, with information on your program and how to become a mentor.

*Resource:* See **examples** of postcards ([http://www.fostercarealumni.org/postcard\\_project.htm](http://www.fostercarealumni.org/postcard_project.htm)).

### **Foster Care Blankets**

*Goals: Promote awareness; build community support; recruitment.*

Sponsor a blanket making day in your community for children entering the foster care system. As volunteers work on blankets, have mentors at each table give a quick overview of the foster care system, explain how these blankets are intended to comfort children separated from their homes, and share ways they can extend care and support to these youth as mentors.

*Resource:* **No-sew fleece blankets** are easy to make and require no special skills

(<http://familycrafts.about.com/od/nosewfleeceprojects/ss/fleecetieblank.htm>).

### **“Professional Youth Packages” (adapted from H.O.P.E. Mentoring Program)**

*Goals: Promote awareness; recognize and celebrate matches; build community support.*

Invite community members to help your program put together “professional youth packages.” These are packages for youth who are aging out of the foster care system that contain helpful tools for the job search: a planner, an USB drive with job-skill tips and templates already loaded, and a resume portfolio. They can be kept in the local DHS office for dissemination. During the activity, have mentors talk about what it means to age out of foster care, how they are helping their mentees prepare for that transition, and the continuing need for caring adults in the lives of foster care alumni.

*Resource:* Email [mentormichigan@michigan.gov](mailto:mentormichigan@michigan.gov) for ready-to-upload versions of H.O.P.E.'s job-skill documents.

### **“College Positive” Event/Activity**

*Goals: Promote awareness; build community support.*

Recruit local college students to help plan and execute a “college positive” event for matches, such as a tour of a nearby college or university, highlighting the resources available to youth aging out of foster care so that mentees understand both the importance and accessibility of post-secondary education.

*Resource:* Information on foster youth scholarship programs and financial aid can be found under Education: Financial Aid on the **Foster Youth in Transition website**

(<http://www.michigan.gov/fyit>).

### **Mock Interviews**

*Goals: Promote awareness; build community support; recruitment.*

Set up career-specific mock interviews for your mentees aging out of foster care. Ask your mentors to invite colleagues or friends from various professions to come share what they do and how they got there; youth should prepare some career-specific questions they want to ask these volunteers. Before the interviews, talk to the volunteers about the importance of preparing youth for the transition to independence and employment, the ongoing need for career mentors among older foster care youth, and information on how they can become mentors. Then have youth pair off with volunteers according to career interest. After the youth ask their questions, volunteers can conduct a mock interview that will give the youth a sense of what their profession expects and requires.