Building Lasting Matches Through Quality Training and Support
Powerhouse Mentoring Program for Foster Youth

In this June 2009 case study, the U.S. Department of Education looks at the Powerhouse Mentoring Program in Portland, Oregon (www.powerhouse.org), a mentoring program for older foster youth that offers ideas for in-depth training and support for mentors working with youth facing significant challenges to success in nurturing deep and lasting relationships with their mentees. Mentoring is an increasingly popular strategy for supporting foster youth in overcoming the distrust and hesitation over forming close bonds that often stem from difficult family and environmental circumstances. Because youth in foster care commonly experience several changes in living placements, staff workers, and caregivers, they frequently lack a consistent, caring adult in their journey towards adulthood. Volunteer mentors can offer the kind of ongoing, reliable support these youth are missing from their lives; however, in order to develop positive mentoring relationships, mentors require "specialized and thorough training and support," without which they can become discouraged when relationships falter or fail (Rhodes et. al, 1999; Rhodes, 2005).

The Powerhouse Mentoring Program is primarily funded by the Oregon Department of Human Services and focuses on supporting foster teens in their transition to independent living. A community-based program, two part-time staff members sustain 25 matches annually, with an average match length of 28 months. Powerhouse employs a "multiphase approach" to the training and support of their mentors. This can be broken down into four major areas:

1. **Recruitment and screening** – prospective mentors get a realistic picture of mentoring and learn about the foster care system as well as how the program goals, commitments, and requirements will benefit them in this challenging, yet rewarding experience.
2. **Initial training on foster youth and mentoring** – provides mentors with a clear understanding of the youth served, the culture of foster care, how to successfully mentor foster youth, mentoring research, and programmatic information; mentors are each given a training manual that includes information on local, state, and national resources.
3. **Individual training meetings –** a personal interview with the match case manager after the initial training gives the mentor a chance to ask and answer questions; when the match is ready to be made, the mentor meets with the youth's caseworker and match case manager to learn how he/she fits into the system of care for that particular child.
4. **Ongoing training and individual support –** each year, Powerhouse hosts three formal "classroom" training sessions on relevant topics (required) as well as three informal "pub nights" (optional) where mentors can meet, share ideas, and receive individual guidance from the program's counselor; staff also keep in touch with mentors on a monthly basis.

Additionally, Powerhouse is developing a "master mentor" role for successful, experienced mentors to provide new recruits with further advice and support.

In terms of replication, Powerhouse offers eight lessons to mentoring programs serving foster and other at-risk youth:

1. **Be honest from the beginning.**
2. **Advertise your training as a key benefit of mentoring.**
3. **Provide ongoing training and expect mentors to attend.**
4. **Customize training to reflect the populations you serve.**

5. **Draw from many sources to build a quality training program.**
6. **Develop positive relationships with other agencies working with the youth you serve.**
7. **Find ways for mentors to learn from each other.**
8. **Continuously review and improve your training program.**

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