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Foster Youth Mentorship Program

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Title: Foster Youth Mentorship Program**Abstract**

The San Benito County Probation Department (SBCPD) collaborated with San Benito High School to create a pilot program for at-risk foster youth high school students, “Foster Youth mentorship program”. The importance of the mentorship program was to help prevent at-risk foster youth students from falling into the probation system. The purpose of this educational intervention program was to increase foster youth students’ knowledge, academic achievements, and to help them reach their career and educational goals. The students worked closely with their mentor to create long lasting relationships and to complete desired goals of their choice. The program was implemented through the completion of questionnaires, trainings, tracking and consistent support for foster youths’ academic success. The expected outcome of the program was for students to work closely with their mentors and to complete at least one goal. The expected outcome of the Foster Youth Mentorship was to be measured with conducting a survey to the school mentors that analyze the effectiveness of the program.

Keywords: Foster youth, Mentorship, post-secondary, education, goal, knowledge

Agency and Communities served:

The San Benito County Probation Department's goal was to protect the community, provide services to the court, and help clients change criminal behavior (San Benito County Probation Department, 2018.) While the goal of intensive monitoring is to protect the community, reduce going back to crime and help rehabilitate, as well to divert juvenile and adult probationers from further involvement in a crime. The agency offers programs to Juveniles such as Youth Alliance Program (JWSP), Billy King (Counselor) who seems to be a support system for youth, Teen Recovery Program, and School Attendance Review Boards (SARB). Programs offered to adults consist of Community service program, Family Preservation Program, Community Transition Center, which provides other services to individuals and Strengthening Families. In Addition, anyone who commits a crime in the San Benito County will be asked by the court or their probation officer to complete any of the mentioned services above or program depending on the severity of the crime or the individual's actions.

Problem, issue or need:

The importance of the mentorship program to be implemented in San Benito High school was for Foster Youth to avoid falling into the probation system and rather complete their education. Foster youth often fall through the cracks because they do not have a stable home and are continuously moving from one place to another. It can be difficult for foster youth to focus while in class when the only thing they can think of is their next placement. When continuously moving it can be hard for the individual to adapt to a new environment that they rather give up and avoid having to start over knowing that sooner than later they will be placed elsewhere.

There are times when people who live a stable life find themselves struggling daily. Now imagine how difficult it is for foster children to have unstable housing, lack of support from their

guardians, getting mistreated, feeling isolated, and the list goes on. As it is stated, “Indeed, those who are in foster care have significant difficulties in school performance and adjustment to developmental tasks of adolescence. These difficulties often lead to additional problems later in their lives” (DeGarmo, 2018). When adolescents find it hard to fit in school, or they feel out of place, they find ways to avoid being put in stressful situations. They don’t realize wrong choices often lead to severe consequences. Therefore, it is an excellent opportunity to help students grow and pursue them that giving up should never be an option. It is a way for foster kids to receive guidance, to keep them off the streets from interacting with criminal behavior. It is about helping foster youth academically, helping them apply to college, but most importantly it is about helping set future goals and pursuing them.

The primary risk factor that contributes to foster youth falling through the cracks is the fact that most foster children experience unstable housing, constantly moving from place to place. Situations like these make foster youth feel unwanted, lonely and isolated from their foster parents/family. It makes it hard for them to focus or attend school daily as it is stated, “... foster children typically have low attendance rates, as they are moved from one home to another” (DeGarmo, 2018). Imagine how frustrating it can be constantly bouncing from one place to another, having to adapt to a new family and learning to adapt to a new school, friends and build relationships with others. The only choice left in a child’s life is to avoid going to school, causing low attendance rates as stated and having to start over.

Foster youth constantly moving around lose sight of their school academics. As following these are the words of a foster youth “I bounced around a lot of schools and never got comfortable being there. Since I knew that I’d be at a school for just a little bit, I felt like I didn’t need to care about my studies” (Barrat & Berliner, 2013.) Kids often find it pointless to pay

attention in their studies. Instead, they might think dropping out or not attending school will save them the hassle of having to start all over. According to Barrat & Berliner, between 2009 and 2010 the dropout rate for foster care students was 8 percent, making it three times higher than the statewide dropout rate and higher than other at-risk student subgroups: English learners, students with disabilities, and low socioeconomic status students. It demonstrates that Foster youth students are more likely to drop out of school due to constant moving.

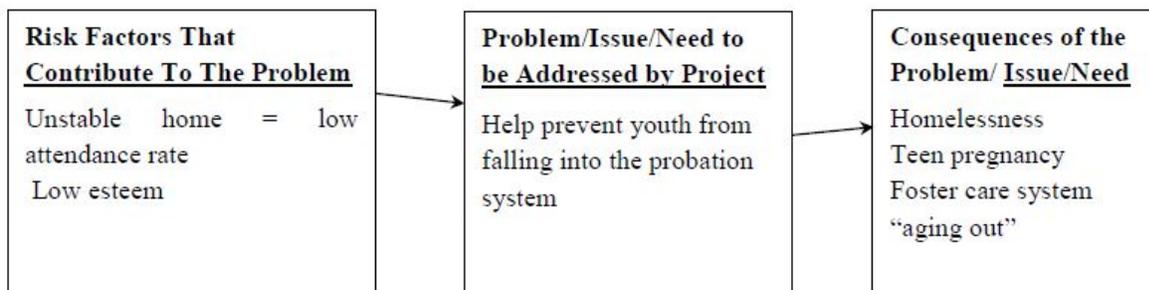
Low self-esteem is another risk factor to why foster youth fall through the cracks and are afraid to ask for help for that same reason. For instance, foster youth might experience different emotions and such as feeling less than other because they might be afraid to ask a teacher, their foster parents or any other adult for help. As DeGarmo (2018) states, "... academic, social, and emotional turmoil caused by placement disruptions and adjustment to a new school environment grief, anxiety, loss, confusion, anger, sadness, loneliness, and low self-worth are some of the emotions that foster teens may experience when encountering placement disruption." These kids live with the unknown. They find it hard to set their emotions straight when they have many thoughts and feelings running through their mind all at once. Differences of emotions youth experience daily is the cause of low self-esteem making it hard for them to speak up.

The foster care system can be helpful in some ways, but it can also bring implications to an individual at the time of aging out. It helps individuals find a home and family, helping them to be removed from abuse or neglect. What happens when a foster youth moves out of the foster care system? The process of "aging out" from the foster care system can be very difficult for youth, especially if the individual did not receive enough support and skills to confront life out of the foster care system. "At the age of 18 most foster youth are emancipated. "Many will simply "age out" of the system when they turn 18, without a family and without the skills to make it on

their own” (Children’s Rights). Situations like these can be very difficult on a youth and it might bring consequences to the youth like pregnancy, homelessness, jail, drug and substance abuse, and even health issues.

Being a foster youth is not a choice, it is a circumstance that people go through in their lives. Being in the foster care system puts individuals at high risk of homelessness. As it is mentioned, “Foster care is a risk factor for adult homelessness, an estimated 12% of all homeless adults were in the foster care system as a youth” (Kushel MB, Yen IH, Gee L, Courtney ME, 2007). Foster youth are at a high risk of homelessness. In addition, The foster care system can be useful to help individuals find a home and family, but it can also bring them difficulties in their life after emancipation.

The second consequence is pregnancy amongst foster youth in the foster care system. Like young men facing this issue, young women experience the misfortune of pregnancy at a young age. This issue can come from abuse or neglect. “Young women in foster care are more than twice as likely as their peers not in foster care to become pregnant by age 19” (Boonstra, 2011.) This shows that young women in the foster care system are at a higher risk of pregnancy



during adulthood. Despite the fact they are at high risk of pregnancy, but it can become a cycle were their kids can fall into the foster care system or become young parents as well.

Project Description and Justification:

The name of the proposed project is Foster Youth Mentorship Program. This project falls under the category of an educational intervention.

The project focused on one-on-one mentoring with San Benito High school foster youth students. The program's purpose was to help increase knowledge, help students academically, and help students reach their educational and career goals. The importance of the mentorship program to be implemented in San Benito High school was for Foster Youth to avoid falling into the probation system. Also, to create a long-lasting relationship with their mentors. In addition to this Claire Grissom, the San Benito high school vice principal believes the program would be beneficial to identified foster youth and significant support for the school.

The first component of the program implementation was to notify teachers and other school staff and identified students of the program such as foster youth. One important thing to point out was that identified students were not obligated to participate. Both mentor and mentee participants took a questionnaire (See Appendix A and B), that was created by the intern. The purpose of the questionnaire was so that the intern could match each mentor and mentee. Once the matching was set, each mentor would try and get a hold of their student via email where they could set up a time and day to meet. While the mentors continued their daily or monthly sessions with the students during their set time, the mentors also attended three pieces of training. The trainings covered different topics such as boundaries, motivational interviewing and trauma-informed care. Each topic was covered once a month by different facilitators provided by the Chamberlains. Every training had its unique informational plan that would help the participants become successful mentors.

As shown below is a scope of work of the activities that have already acted during Spring 2018 and the activities that continued in Fall 2018.

Activities	Timeline
Review project with mentors	December 2017
Notified school staff via email about the program	January 2018
Notified students about the program	
Develop and distribute questionnaire to all participants	January 2018
Matched mentors with mentee	January 2018
Contacted chamberlains to see if they could provide facilitators for the trainings.	February 2018
Trainings (Boundaries, Trauma-Informed Care, and Motivational Interviewing)	February 23, 2018 March 29, 2018 April 25, 2018
Check in with mentors (Change, refine, improve)	April 25, 2018
Met with mentor and talked about Fall semester	April 2018
Notify current and new staff/students about the program, and provide questionnaires to all participants	September 2018
Receive questionnaires and match participants	September 2018
Follow up with mentor and talk about the following steps	September 2018
Checked in with current and new mentors, talked about the program and what was expected when meeting with the student	October 2018
Developed a survey	November 2018
Distributed the survey to Spring 2018 mentors	November 2018

Some challenges presented throughout the program were mainly from some of the mentors who were having difficulty getting in contact with their student unable to set up a day and time to meet. This was discussed during the last training when some mentors were already beginning to meet with the student. Also, those who were able to get in contact with their student, mentioned that the student spent too much time in their classroom or would try to find an excuse to be around their mentor. Time and availability became an obstacle between the mentors and the intern to go over further presenting circumstances.

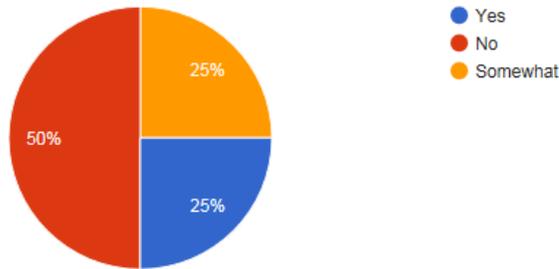
Project results:

The expected outcome of the project was to prevent youth from taking the wrong pathway, and rather help them focus on completing their current studies and increase knowledge about post-secondary education to achieve educational and career opportunities. It was visible

that the project in helping the students achieve their expected outcomes was more successful than bad since about 75% indicated that the program either benefited the students or somewhat benefited the students while 25% believed that it was not effective at all. At the beginning of the program, a tool that was utilized was a questionnaire, to match students with their mentor. To measure the identified outcome a survey was developed and distributed to last semesters participants, but only to staff, to receive feedback on both of the things that worked and didn't work as well as any accomplishments while working with their student.

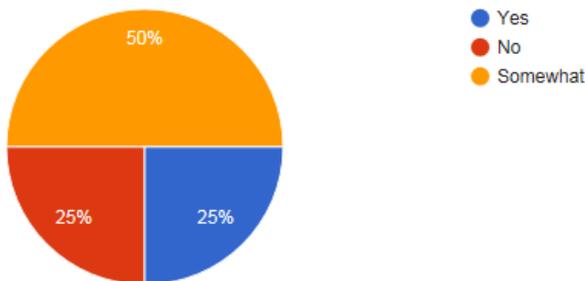
The surveys were distributed to the San Benito High School mentors via email. The surveys were distributed to twelve teachers (mentors), both male and female. The survey was constructed of eight questions, 7 being multiple choice and 1 being an open ended question (See Appendix C). The questions are as follows; Gender:, What level of difficulty did you face when attempting to contact your assigned student?, On a monthly basis how often did you meet with the student?, How much time did you spend with the student a day?, During your time with the student did you see any progress?, Do you continue to work with the student?, Do you think the program was beneficial to the student?, and Did the student accomplish a desired goal? (ex: college app, create a plan, etc.) If no leave blank. If yes, please specify. The purpose of the surveys was to receive feedback from the mentors in regard to the effectiveness of the program. The results from the teacher's surveys demonstrate that overall the project was good, but more could be done.

Figure 1. *Teacher survey, assess question number 5, which demonstrates “during your time with the student did you see any progress?”*



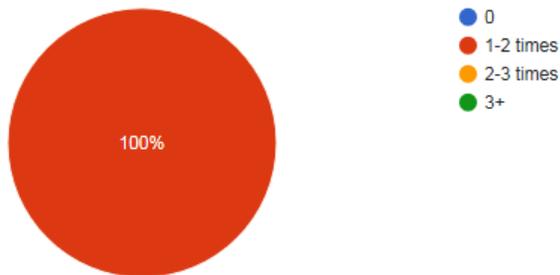
Analyzing the data, it revealed that 2 out of 4 respondents making it an equivalent to 50 percent saw no progress while working with their assigned student. Also, 1 of 4 respondents equivalent to 25 percent indicated that they did not see progress during their time with the student. On the other hand, 1 out of 4 respondents indicated “yes” seeing progress during their time with the student.

Figure 2. Teacher survey, assess question number 7, which demonstrates “Do you think the program was beneficial to the student?”



Analyzing the data, if the teachers believed the program was beneficial to their student 4 out of 12 participants answered the question. The results indicate that 2 out of 4 respondents equivalent to 50 percent indicated “somewhat” to the program being beneficial to the student. Furthermore, 1 out of 4 respondents indicated “yes” while 1 of 4 respondents indicated “no” stating that the program was not beneficial to the student

Figure 3: Teacher survey, assess question number 3, which demonstrates “on a monthly basis how often did you meet with the student?”



Analyzing the data all respondents indicated they met with the students 1-2 times on a monthly basis. This ties back to the previous two questions in the way that it helps demonstrate that 100 percent of respondents were meeting with their mentee at least 1 to 2 times per month which helps demonstrate as to why half of the respondents believe that the program was effective. It also helps demonstrate as to why half of the respondents responded “yes” to have seen progress with their students while working with them.

Strengths:

A strength of the project results was that all respondents indicated that they were meeting with their assigned student at least 1 to 2 times a month. This was a strength because it indicates that the mentor is dedicated to helping the student succeed. Although the number of surveys received was not greater than 50 percent some data was received. Therefore, that was another strength to the project because it allowed some data to be analyzed and helped determine the success of the project.

Limitations:

The limitation of the project was that when distributing the surveys, not all of them were received back. The Surveys were distributed to twelve participants, and only four were received back. Not receiving a majority of the surveys made it to where the intern did not have efficient data making it difficult to have a proper outcome. Another limitation of the project was not having sufficient time. Timing was a limitation because some teachers would not show up to the after-school meetings. Therefore, they would not receive the information given to them which determined how they answered the survey questions. Due to that, it helped influence on why many teachers (mentors) did not take the time to complete the survey.

Conclusion:

Based on the assessment of the teacher's survey responses it is seen that the program was 75 percent effective. The original goal was to be able to get 90 percent satisfaction with regards to the program from staff members. Although the goal was not met, it was very close. The projects was an educational intervention with the purpose of increasing knowledge, helping students academically, and help students reach their educational and career goals which were met with the overall project. Along the way, it also helped create the long-lasting relationship between students and their mentors.

Recommendations for the agency:

All in all, since the beginning of my time at the internship and all the way to the capstone project it was one rocky road. It all started from the beginning as an intern getting to know the agency the people around there and the tasks that were done on a daily basis. It later went on to developing and implementing the capstone project to which it was a challenge. However, having been given the opportunity to intern at the San Benito County Probation Department has been

one learning experience. Learning to do many things and be a part of other things such as jail visits, attend court, and sit-in family interviews have helped me get out of my comfort zone little by little. I learned to work in an environment with different people and different personalities. I received a good amount of support from my mentor, who unfortunately left the agency and from other people I met there.

I also, learned a lot from my secondary mentor who helped out a lot even if it meant giving me advice, and for always answering my questions. I am glad I met many people who I was able to connect with and who supported me even when I stressed out over the little things and were always there to give me words of wisdom. Many of the things I learned from being at the agency I know for a fact will help in the near future. One of the biggest things I learned is that things don't always turn out as we envision them, but even then the importance is to continue.

As far as the capstone project, that was a whole another learning experience. It had its good and it's bad. I know for a fact the project itself was not completely fulfilled, but even then I feel happy for being able to implement the program that would help students with real needs. Foster youth often struggle in life and having that one on one support can be a huge difference in someone's life. I truly hope the program continues to play a role at the high school where students can greatly benefit from. Beyond what my project was able to accomplish what should be done to help address the broader problem is by providing the student with more support to help prevent them from falling into the system. By doing so, it will help build strong independent individuals who will strive in society.

One recommendation for future interns is to always ask questions whether it is about the agency or the capstone project. Always make one's voice be heard and break out of one's comfort

zone since it will help us grow as professionals. While at the agency tasks will be given to the intern to complete, if something does not make sense it is important to ask for clarification. Don't be afraid of asking for clarification and saying no when needed. Also, it is recommended that before the intern begins the project that they first begin with a plan with the expected outcome, deadlines and goals. Lastly, I would advise any future intern to enjoy their time at the agency and make the best out of it because time goes by so fast and before they realize it they will be at the end of their internship experience.

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Appendix

Appendix A:

Questionnaire for students (Mentee)

San Benito High School Youth Mentorship Program

Name: _____ **Grade level:** 9th 10th 11th 12th

Phone #: _____ **Email:** _____

Gender: Male Female Prefer not to say

What is challenging for you?

What are your strengths?

What are your academic interests?

What do you like to do for fun?

Are you interested in going to college? If so, which one(s):

What careers are you interested in?

Extracurricular Activities:

Sports/ Clubs:

Volunteer:

Appendix B:

San Benito High School Youth Mentorship Program

MENTOR

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

ADDRESS: _____ EMAIL #: _____

PHONE#: _____ EDUCATION: 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, AA, BA, MA

Emergency Contact: _____ PHONE #: _____

Availability: Days: _____ Times: _____

Gender: Male Female Prefer not to say

What is challenging for you? _____

What are your strengths? _____

What are your academic interests? _____

What do you like to do for fun? _____

Please indicate how you like to spend your time in this volunteer placement:

Other information you would like to share: _____

Extracurricular Activities:

Sports/ Clubs:

Volunteer:

Appendix C:**Survey for teachers**

1. Gender: Female Male Prefer not say Other:
2. What level of difficulty did you face when attempting to contact your assigned student?
1 very easy 2 3 4 5 Extremely hard
3. On a monthly basis how often did you meet with the student?
0 1-2 times 2-3 times 3+
4. How much time did you spend with the student a day?
Less than 1 hour more than 1 hour
5. During your time with the student did you see any progress?
Yes No Somewhat
6. Do you continue to work with the student?
Yes No Sometimes
7. Do you think the program was beneficial to the student?
Yes No Somewhat
8. Did the student accomplish a desired goal? (ex: college app, create a plan, etc.) If no leave blank. If yes, please specify: