

Community Mentoring Fact Sheet – Wamego, Kansas

➤ Program Overview

- The Community Mentoring program evolved during the 1999-2000 school year through on-going conversations with the Wamego High School site council. Their focus was to provide all students the opportunity to develop relationships with community volunteers who are committed to the success of all students. Now in its fifth year of implementation, all 450 Wamego High School students have a community mentor who commits to following their group of 5-7 students throughout their four years of high school. Wamego, population 4246, is a small town in Northeast Kansas.

➤ Student Opportunities

- While the Community Mentoring Program does not transition into post-secondary education and training, it has been adapted to incorporate Wamego's Freshman Transition program. The entire Freshman Class meets prior to the first day of school and participates in a school rally conducted by a national speaker. Junior- and Senior-level students, who have applied for and been selected as Student Leaders, facilitate the freshmen students' introduction to high school. The Student Leaders then play an active part in the first days for the freshmen, especially during the lunch gathering when the Community Mentors are initially introduced to their mentees.
- Throughout the four years, mentees and their adult mentors talk about career plans and how to achieve them during high school and beyond. Since this is a four year program, mentoring groups have the opportunity to develop trust, friendship and respect which further allows deeper discussion of relevant topics concerning career selection and non-traditional training and employment.
- Seniors have the opportunity to select and visit local and area businesses, many of which are those owned or managed by Community Mentors.

➤ Curriculum

- Personal relationship development, community service, life skills and large doses of fun are integrated throughout the four-year program.
- Academic and CTE essential elements are the under-girding of this program; the Community Mentoring Program was to complement and underscore the rigor and relevance of all students' high school experience. Research developed by Search Institute, Inc. indicated that one of the 40 assets "*which are positive factors in young people . . . found to be important in promoting young people's development . . . is that a young person receives support from three or more non-parent adults.*" Many youth do not have those resources and the Community Mentoring Program provides support for those who may have the need. Youth can never have too many caring adults in their corner; this allows all youth to be served.
- Target topic areas and activities that mentors can incorporate into their mentoring time are identified. Ideas for processing the topic/s and highlighting the relevance in the students' lives are included in each month's activity sheet. A Class of 2005 mentor stated,
"ONE day a light bulb just went on: This is working! We are talking about:
 - *Part time jobs that you don't like but that you need, so you do your best.*
 - *Loving our grandmothers and what their love means to us.*
 - *Having failures does not mean we are failures. No one is perfect and we learn from our mistakes.*
 - *Showing up on time really is important.*
 - *Doing odd jobs for your neighbor just to help them out makes you feel good.**WE ARE TALKING ABOUT EVERYDAY REAL LIFE STUFF -- THAT IS MENTORING!"*
- Mentoring dates are now the second element (after assessment) included in the development of the high school calendar.

➤ Articulation

- While there is no formal academic articulation established, the network of relationships established between community members and students has strengthened the connections between youth and the community. As stated by a Class of 2005 mentor:
"I think the program is very worthwhile. It gives every student a chance to connect with adults from the community as well as other classmates that they may not have spent time with. It was great to listen to the change of talk between the students from their bashful freshman year to their boisterous senior year. Their timidness grew to confidence, impatience changed to relaxation, rudeness to polite respectfulness. I liked the activities that gave every student a chance to be a leader. The students also seemed to get a lot from the finance, work, and housing sessions."
- The collaborative efforts of this program are huge! Considering the fact that now ALL 450 9th – 12th grade students are randomly grouped by grade and assigned to a mentor who is recruited, trained and constantly supported for this one-hour-per-month-at-lunch-for-four-years program. There are currently 95 Community Mentors and 38 Mentoring alumnae due to student graduation or mentor life changes.

Professional Development

- Many hours of study went into the final decision to recruit community members as mentors rather than tapping the high school faculty for the Community Mentoring Program. Having adults unrelated to their mentees allowed the probability/possibility of universal statements made by parents, teachers, coaches, etc., to be additionally shared and supported by a mentor that had NO direct initial investment to the students in the group.
- A three-hour training session is mandatory for all mentors. USD 320 funds the Kansas Bureau of Investigation background required for all mentors. Training focuses on two components of mentoring: “why one person wants to make a difference” and “what do I need to do to build the relationship.”

➤ Innovation:

- Every December, all mentoring groups in each grade journey to senior centers and retirement homes to sing carols to the residents. While this may not be seemingly innovative in the strictest sense, having students participate in a community service project each year while in high school is not typical. As freshmen, many students expressed concern that they had never been caroling or been to a retirement facility or anticipation that they didn't know what to expect. Seniors now know how to “ham it up” for the residents!

➤ Results and Sustainability:

- When people ask to participate in a program that encompasses this time commitment only because it is good for kids, the program is working. The Community Mentoring Program demonstrates that people care. This program not only gives adults an opportunity to share their concern for youth, but it allows students an opportunity to learn that working together may result in unanticipated outcomes:
“Some have it ‘so together’ and know where they are going and that it is a delight to see, others are struggling with who they are and what they want to be and how they should act or react. I hope that in some small way I can help them see their own potential and realize that almost everyone makes a mistake or bad choice at some time or another. But, no matter what the circumstance, there is always a lesson to be learned and a way to redeem oneself. I went to medical school at 42 and I am living proof that you can do anything you put your mind to.” Mentor-Class of 2008
- Although there has been no quantifiable documentation of outcomes that were a direct result from the Community Mentoring Program, mentors consistently report positive anecdotal stories and changes that support the program's successes and connections.
- Mentors consistently reinforce the need for a high school diploma and post-secondary education and training.
- There is no formal marketing plan as this is a required activity for the students. Mentors are recruited from current mentors' recommendations. Local newspapers receive consistent information about upcoming activities that may provide interesting story lines.
- The USD 320 Board of Education, high school administration, food service, and custodians provide ongoing financial and related support for the Community Mentoring Program.