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THE NEWSLETTER OF THE MICHIGAN 4-H LEARN & SERVE TEEN MENTORS PROGRAM
& THE 4-H MENTOR MICHIGAN AMERICORPS INITIATIVE

Mentoring magic develops in Mackinac County

By Paula Ramelis, Mackinac County Mentoring Coordinator

There once was a teen named Eric who was looking for something to do in Mackinac County. In 2007 he discovered a program called the 4-H Teen Peer Mentor Program.

Eric attended the training for the program and at the first meeting looked around to see who was there to play. He saw James, a younger boy who needed extra attention and had trouble sitting still.

As Eric and James attended the mentoring program's weekly meetings, they learned how to get along and how to be patient with each other. Eventually their natural friendship developed into a formal mentoring match.

MATCH IMPACT

Stay positive, and watch impact grow

Positive reinforcement – smiles, encouraging comments, thank yous and hugs – add up to a big boost for the mentees, mentors and AmeriCorps members involved in any 4-H mentoring program. Just ask Christine Sisung, a second-year AmeriCorps member with the Clinton County Key Mentoring Program. “This has definitely been true during my AmeriCorps service,” Sisung said.

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James' parents say the mentoring program is one of the best things to happen to him. James has “problems with attachment and with having friends. He sees in Eric an unconditional love. This program has had a huge, huge impact on James.”

Since they formally became mentor and mentee, Eric and James' match has grown beyond all expectations.

His father continues, “This program gives James the ‘yes’ in his life. For one hour a week, James gets to hear positive words and that is a real uplift for him. When James comes home after meeting with Eric, he really feels good about himself.”

The benefits, of course, are not all one-way. Eric's mother reports that Eric has grown more socially conscious and more responsible since becoming a mentor.

Eric himself says he believes the program has helped him be a more caring person and “more than anything, I think that this experience will help when I become a parent.”

Eric graduated from high school this year and will leave to join the Air Force in August, so the young men's match will end soon. But they expect that their friendship will last forever.

When they close their match in July, Eric and James will celebrate all the

fun times they had and look forward to their new friendship. The bond between the two is so strong that they plan to correspond after Eric leaves for the military.

James will continue his involvement with the mentoring program as a mentee after Eric's departure. In fact, Eric has been actively involved in helping to choose James' next mentor, to ensure that he is left in good hands. James' next match will be with Hylan, an “Eric-Approved” mentor.



Giving James the “Yes” in his life

Though their match will close in July 2009 – just before mentor Eric leaves for the Air Force – that hasn't slowed down the fun and learning for Eric and his mentee, James. The pair have been matched since 2007.

PERSONAL IMPACT

Appreciation dinner yields advice, support and teamwork

A February 2009 appreciation dinner for mentors in a community-based mentoring program in Oscoda County had a full agenda. In addition to enjoying the meal – which was prepared by 4-H mentoring program coordinator Andy Wallace and his wife, Cynthia – the mentors:

- Talked about why they chose to become mentors.
- Compared notes on their mentees' progress.
- Shared successes and challenges.
- Offered each other advice.
- Learned about options for sharing match meeting information.

As a result of the discussion, Andy said, the newer mentors in the group felt more at ease with their mentoring relationships and all of the mentors seemed better prepared and more confident in their ability to make a positive impact in their mentees' lives.

Among the differences the longer-term mentors noted in their mentees were improved grades in school, better attendance at school, increased self-esteem and improved social skills.

Andy shared his plans for mentor support and collecting regular match

meet information. "I gave each mentor the choice of how they prefer to stay in touch with me," he said, including by e-mail or telephone, in face-to-face meetings or by submitting match meet forms. "I received requests for each method!" he noted.

The group decided that they want to gather monthly, alternating between a local restaurant and at the Oscoda County MSU Extension Office.

"The most prominent outcome I have noticed from the dinner meeting," Andy said, "was a renewed sense of teamwork between all of the mentors and this office. The mentors have responded well in reporting mentor match activity. They seem to be more motivated to make the most of their mentoring relationships and they believe that they can and are making differences in lives by their mentoring efforts."

Change for the better comes with persistence

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She pointed out the effect such positive reinforcement had on Joe, a program mentee who didn't like school at all, and even had trouble remembering to stay after school for mentoring sessions. When he did attend, Joe never seemed interested in the activities the mentors or coordinator had planned.

Weeks of positive reinforcement from Mary, Joe's group mentor, caused a big change. She worked to catch Joe with friendly reminders about mentoring sessions after school and stayed relentlessly positive with him.

Eventually, Joe's attitude started to improve. One day he told Mary that Tuesday had become "my favorite day at school because I get to come here." After that, Joe didn't miss a single meeting of the mentoring program.

Joe's change for the better has become a touchstone for the four group mentors and coordinator at the site. When they struggle to cope with mentees who quit the program, who don't want to participate in activities or who are just having a bad day, they remind themselves of Joe's improvement, and keep pushing forward in the hope of having the same positive influence on other mentees.

"Tons of fun!" – 2008 participant

2ND ANNUAL

4-H Mentoring Weekend

JULY 17–19, 2009

KETTUNEN CENTER, TUSTIN (NEAR CADILLAC)

Open to mentoring matches from mentoring programs across Michigan.

Strengthen mentoring matches with:

- Outdoor recreational activities!
- Crafts!
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- Fun!

Only \$30 a person – includes lodging for 2 nights, 6 meals, a T-shirt and all activities.

For details contact Jillian Tremonti at 517-353-9418 or tremont5@msu.edu

Made possible in part by a grant from the Ford Motor Company Fund.

Be flexible to meet challenges summer poses for mentoring and service learning programs

By Christopher Stickney, Associate Program Leader, Children, Youth, Families and Communities

As summer temperatures rise, many peoples' minds shift from work and school to lazy days at the beach, barbecues and family vacations.

While summer in Michigan can be an amazing time, it can also create challenges for mentoring and service learning programs. As young people leave school for summer vacation, they're often tempted to take a vacation from other activities, too, including from developing their relationships with their mentor or mentees and from commitments they've made to serve their communities.

Whether your program follows a community-based mentoring model or is a 4-H Learn and Serve Teen Mentors program, the expectation remains that youth participate year round, including through those challenging summer months. The following are suggestions on maintaining (and maybe even strengthening) young people's motivation and involvement during the summer months.

- **Embrace summer opportunities.** Warmer weather opens the door to a whole new range of service opportunities, match bonding activities and meeting locations. Instead of continuing to meet in the school gym to play basketball, take advantage of local parks, zoos and other outdoor sites. Look for new service opportunities, such as river or park cleanups, charity bike rides and runs, and helping older residents with yard maintenance.
- **Shake up the schedule.** During the school year, most students have fairly structured schedules, while summer schedules tend to be more

flexible. If a mentoring pair typically met right after school, encourage them to mix things up a bit by organizing a mentor/mentee breakfast. Summer's increased flexibility also opens the door to longer, more intensive activities that otherwise would have been impossible.

- **Get on the train(ing).** Summer can be an excellent time to increase the skill sets of your mentors and mentees. Because they are no longer besieged by homework and other school responsibilities, young people may be more willing and able to participate in advanced or in-depth training. Have you wanted to help your mentors or mentees improve their communication skills? Summer could be an ideal time to

hold an all-day workshop to focus on just that. For 4-H Learn and Serve programs, which require only a nine-month mentoring match, summer provides the perfect time to provide leadership and service learning training to teen mentors.

- **Be flexible.** Despite your best efforts, the reality is that summer vacations, family situations, camps and other summer interruptions will affect your best laid plans. Accept this, and find ways to help mentors and mentees continue building their relationships when these things do occur. One idea is to provide paper, pens, and stamped envelopes to mentors and mentees so that they can write letters to each other when they can't meet face-to-face.

Iosco County

Global Youth Service Day collection puts food on tables

It's no secret that many Michigan families and communities are struggling in the current economy.

Nowhere is this truer than in Iosco County, where unemployment con-

tinues to rise and many families are struggling to keep food on their tables.

Where others see problems, though, the Iosco County peer mentoring program saw an opportunity. Program organizers applied for and received a \$1000 grant to plan and carry out a Global Youth Service Day event, so they organized a community food drive. Participants decorated non-perishable food donation boxes and placed them in area businesses and organizations.

They were able to fill 100 eco-friendly, reusable shopping bags with the collected food, which was then distributed to 20 local families and community members in need.



4-H YOUTH DEVELOPMENT
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION
160 AGRICULTURE HALL
EAST LANSING MI 48824-1039

Important Upcoming Dates and Events

JULY		AUGUST	
2	Learn and Serve conference call	6	Learn and Serve conference call
17–19	Mentoring Weekend at Kettunen Center	24	Learn and Serve program celebration
		31	Learn and Serve funding ends
		31	Final Learn and Serve report and invoice due

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