

Reflections on the First Decade of Employee Mentoring in Stanislaus County

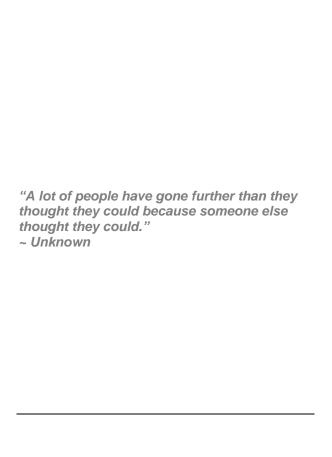
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# The Power of a Mentor Hour:

Reflections on the First Decade of Employee Mentoring in Stanislaus County

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# **Our Story**

This is a good news story...

Our Board of Supervisors unanimously approved the Stanislaus County Employee Mentor program in June of 1998.

As a first year pilot (implementation began January 1999), the program boasted over 50 employees mentoring primarily in one to one activities.

In year two, with the onset of the team-based programming (project AIM), the employee support skyrocketed to over 100 county employees. The program - both one on one and team based continues to grow each year and is a true testimonial to the corporate citizenship model that is embodied by Stanislaus County employees.

Today (2010) we are proud to declare that over 400 Stanislaus County employees have actively

participated, are currently mentoring or in the process of being matched with a protégé! The Stanislaus County Board of Supervisors has remained staunch supporters of this mentoring effort.

January is National Mentor Awareness Monththose several weeks when our governments National and State recognize the power and importance of this most valuable civic/social activity.

Here in Stanislaus County, this January (2010) marks an impressive milestone in our local flavor of youth mentoring as our County Employee Mentor program turns an impressive 11 years young....

That's right - eleven years.

No typo.

This is an undeniable testimony to the employees of our county - from all employment walks:

healthcare to public works, workforce assistance to the Chief Executive Office, simply put...our employees give back.

These mentor champions give back, not for some monetary reward or overt public display of heroism, rather, out of an overwhelming sense of community and community pride. This is volunteer time.

So what is in the water here in Stanislaus County that has allowed this uncanny sustainability to transpire?

Why here?
What defines this success culture?

After all, as a region we (continue) experience many of the same struggles and hardships that other locations grapple with and perhaps (in some instances) we may even have it a little tougher. Why do so many public employees find

the energy and the passion to give of their lunch times, after work or weekends to spend time with a struggling third grader or socially/academically lost fifth grader?

I believe that the reasons (there are several) are simple but noteworthy:

1. Our County leadership is committed to this cause. The County Board of Supervisors, the Stanislaus Office of Education, and local business and service groups understand the positive social and civic ramification of spending quality time with young people. There has NEVER been a hard sell, stealth marketing tactic, or political wrangle applied to reach these multiple leaderships - they simply care... very much.

In many instances senior leaders are themselves actively involved, a classic example of "walk the talk" leadership.

#### 2. Mentoring is addictive.

Over the years I have talked with dozens of fellow employees and affiliate participants and to the person they reflect a value to self more powerful than time or influence.

Bottom line: They get more out of the experience than the students and this wonderful epiphany fuels returning mentors and inspires a rich word of mouth infrastructure that helps the program thrive.

#### 3. The education community is on board.

We are very fortunate to have committed school sites and principals that recognize the fragility of this effort and they continuously monitor the ease and accessibility of the program so that employees experience a process that is effortless and rewarding.

In a time when governments are increasingly bashed and berated and public sector "servants"

stereotyped as indifferent, faceless and paper driven - we believe that we need to strike some fairness and balance against the typical machine rant. There is a movement afoot in Stanislaus County. A movement by, between and among employees, service clubs, education and businesses that is commendable, worthy, simple, inexpensive and proven.

I encourage you to read this simple testimonial and to consider emulating something similar in your own communities. Reaching out IS all about community and a very special synergy has been born through youth mentoring activities growing in the very fertile (social) soils of Stanislaus County.

Cordially,

Keith D. Boggs January 2010 "A blessing to see a child change from a moth to a butterfly."

# **METHODOLOGY**

Site Coordinators are selected to perform the task of coordinating mentors with our long standing partners: The Volunteer Center of the United Way, Stanislaus County Office of Education, service clubs and our Modesto City Schools school site administrators.

Mentors are volunteers that want to make a difference in giving time to help their community.

Time is a measurable, valuable, precious commodity given freely by people that care about humanity.

#### **ABOUT THE PROCESS**

A Survey of all Mentors, Student Protégés, School Administrators, County Site Coordinators, and Teachers was conducted online during November and December 2009.

In addition, personal interviews at school sites with administrators, school staff, mentors and proteges were performed.

Requests were made for student performance data and information in the form of e-mail correspondence and telephone interviews.

No names are associated with this content. It is not about whom, but rather, why and to what end this work provides.

"Mentoring has been a tremendous asset to our site. It has allowed us to provide an intervention to students that may otherwise not have received any."



# REFLECTIONS

Our partners - in their own words...

## Random Protégé Comments

Was it helpful having a mentor for reading?

"Yes. I improved my reading like getting to a higher grade level. Sometimes if I didn't understand things, they'd explain it to me."

"Yes, because anything I told her I needed help with she would show me."

How did you feel?

"It was good to learn from someone else."

"I feel good. It feels good."

What did you like about having a mentor?

"They act like friends-they are friends. They help you. It's nice having them around to read to and talk to."

"I liked having a mentor because they are always nice to me. They make me feel good."

Do you think it helped you to read and understand books or tests?

"It helped me understand test more because it helped me understand the harder words more."

"Yes, a lot. (She) would show me things and I'd remember."

### Anything else you would like to say?

"It's really fun. It feels good to get out of class and read to someone. I think mentors are really cool."

"Don't be afraid of being picked on for having reading classes."

#### **Mentor Reflections:**

"Students that are being mentored are showing more enthusiasm in regards to reading."

"You are the first person who sees me for me and not for what I have failed to do."

"When we open the door of hope for our children, they begin to see that anything is possible."

"We must continue to see children not only for who they are today, but also for who they can become in the future!"

"She blossomed with confidence and even assisted her classmate while we would work on class projects together. At the end of her 6<sup>th</sup> grade school year, her teacher approached my mentor partner and me to tell us what a difference we made in her life – academically and socially. Her State scores improved, as well as her self confidence and attitude towards school."

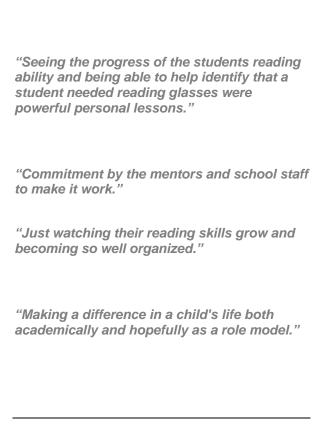
"My experience with the mentor program has been brief but powerful."

"I've also documented academic success that I believe was supported in part by having mentor"

"I know I speak for many when I say we are all grateful that there are people willing to give of themselves to help others, especially if we don't always see the results of our giving right away"

"It is the most precious gift that we can give someone."

"Our youth are in need of positive role models that can show them that there is hope and sometimes a different way of life is actually possible."



"Two years ago, I mentored the same child for 2 years. The first year, she was very shy, reserved, and lacked confidence in her academic skills. The second year I mentored her and a classmate. Wow! What a difference a year makes and even more so, what a difference a Mentor can make."

"Consistency and successful partnerships!"

"Being someone that a child can talk to about themselves. Being able to see the child's self esteem grow with each book."

"Being a part of the child's life. Knowing deep in my heart that this child will remember our time."

"Having to read non-fiction books. I learn to love books by reading fiction books because it allowed me to go somewhere else." "Yes every time I mention to someone that I did this, I throw in pitch for mentoring."

"The leaders of this program keep it alive and make it a wonderful thing to do."

"A wonderful opportunity to work with an elementary school student in improving his reading skills. To instill a love of reading in a young person and share the limitless possibilities of exploring other cultures, times, science, art, history, and any subject that of interest is very rewarding."

"Absolutely Amazing! What a joy to encourage a young person."

"Because it is a program where multiple agencies work together for a common goal. Volunteers get a better sense of satisfaction because they are volunteers; the recipients know we are there because we want to be."

"Watching a young man grow using reading."

"More regarding this year - the student doesn't have the knowledge of the subject matter in the books we are reading. I spend more time teaching vocabulary, geography, map reading, definitions and general education. I'd expect a 4th grader to already know."

"This program allowed me to give back to my community and help a struggling child with minimal effort. No matter how crummy my day is going, I feel so much better after mentoring and everything is put into perspective. It is such a rewarding cause and I'm grateful for the chance to participate."

"I really enjoy the connection you make with the students. It's great when you see them improving and feeling more confident. You truly get a sense that what you do is important and makes a difference in a child's life"

"I recommend mentoring to everyone. I really emphasize it's a small time commitment each week and you get so much out of the experience."

"I think this program continues to be successful due in no small part to everyone involved. It really requires so little out of the mentors that it's easy to recruit new participants. Almost everyone can carve an hour out of their week. The team approach helps to bridge gaps and allows the student to interact with more role models."

"I wanted to take the opportunity to be able to give back. I feel as though being a parent myself our lives are so busy and sometimes the children might feel or be a little left behind. Even though it is only a half an hour, it could make a world of difference to a child."

"Giving he or she that one on one time is so important. And it gives them someone to talk to. I hope in the little time that I spend with the child reading or just talking that it will make a huge impact in their life. A little goes a long way."

"I enjoy meeting a new child or hearing their stories. It is so funny to hear some of their opinions and views. I enjoy being a small part of their lives." "I hate to sound selfish, because it is the last thing I want to be. But sometimes getting over there on my lunchtime is a little hard. Sometimes I just don't feel like it or have something that I need to do. But once I'm there and when you know they were waiting for you to come, whatever I felt like or had to do doesn't even matter anymore."

"I would recommend mentoring to anyone."

"I feel like anyone can see the benefits to this program. Parents and teachers appreciate it, and the mentors can get a sense of giving back in some way. I think everyone understands how important the children are and giving those that little extra time is not only good for them, but also our community. A better childhood makes for a better adult."

"I enjoy seeing the progress the student makes throughout our time together. For example, improved vocabulary, comprehension and reading skills."

"I like the relationship that I have with the student. I wish we could meet for longer each week."

"I look forward to seeing my student every week. I very much feel we have a bond."

"It gives me an opportunity to volunteer and touch the life of a young person in our community. I don't know if I'll see them after the year is complete, but I feel that I'm making an impact. At the end of the 2008-2009 school year, my student's teacher did tell me that I'd made a difference and his skills had improved."

"I enjoy the regular contact with the student. I'm glad the school is located near my work place; this makes it easier to come and go during my lunchtime."

"I've had a few times in the last couple of years when I arrive and my student isn't there. This isn't much of a problem because it means I get to eat sooner then I planned and I don't have far to drive back to work."

"It does take commitment to mentor 1-2 times a week when we're busy, but it's worthwhile."

"Yes, I've told my co-workers about it. I'm not sure how many (if any) have started mentoring, but they respond favorably when I talk about my experiences."

"It seems there is a dedicated core of volunteers or departments that mentor."

"It was great to find that reading scores improved for the children I mentored."

"The bond that is created by simply sharing a story and seeing improvement from week to week is priceless."

"It is a way to give to the community without being overly time consuming. The fact that it can be done during the work/school day is a huge plus." "A chance to share the precious gift of time and to hopefully make a little bit of difference in a young person's life."

"I try to keep track of the students I have read with. It saddens me when I hear of one of my student's who has made poor life choices or is not doing well in school."

"I have recommended mentoring to others in the past. My current mentoring partner is one person I asked to mentor."

"It addresses a very identifiable need in a demographic that elicits our sympathy and support very easily. It also seems to be well organized and administered and receives the support from the County."

"Seeing that a child you have just barely met believes in me and shares with me things he/she doesn't normally share because there is no one there to listen. Seeing with my own eyes that my efforts are not in vain...magic."

"My first experience as a mentor two years ago was with a child that had diabetes, type one and later diagnosed with cancer. The worst part was her death. Also, I met her family and felt extremely sad to know the living conditions she had been living in during her short stay of 10 years on this earth."

"I have not recommended it, but I do know there's a great need. I have just begun mentoring again this year and am also going while my child is off track and I'm mentoring another child who also needs assistance in reading." "I don't know maybe its because our efforts are not going un-noticed. There must be a lot of positive feedback reinforced with proof of outstanding achievements in students."

"Being able to help a child succeed..."

"Feeling like I could possibly be making a positive difference in a child's life..."

"It meant giving back to the community as one day I received from others. It meant helping a child succeed and start him early on that success path. Impacting a child's life beyond yourself, long term.. But knowing that those 30 minutes were gold for that child's life."

"I liked the contact with the child, getting to know his/her dreams and encouraging him/her to work hard for them, reading together and building the trust to start asking those critical questions."

"It has lasted because it's coming out of employees' time and not county time."

"I started mentoring in the AIM program to help other people's children with their reading skills, and apparently it helped by what the Muir principal said in her letter, that the mentored students had significant gains for the most part. What I didn't expect is that it would help me help my own son bring his reading grades up 2 letter grades and increase his comprehension as well."

"Interacting with the kids and seeing them develop more confidence as the year went on is everything."

"Saying goodbye at the end of the year (is hard)."

"It works - both ways. For the kids and the mentors."

"Mentoring is a fantastic way to counter the ups and downs and endlessness of public sector process. When I mentor a young person - I see results that are refreshing and important."

"Making a difference with a young person and in my community makes me feel like I matter."

"The on-going challenges within our culture that make it somewhat difficult to win more employees into this process. There are some department heads that celebrate this outreach. Unfortunately, there are others who do not."

"Yes. Yes. Yes. Every time."

"Resilient coordination. Celebration of success. A strong focus on the young people that the program serves. A great group of County employees who act as champions to this initiative." "Attendance at school continues to go up when a young person who is struggling is paired with a mentor. Coming to school is half the battle. Providing one on one attention to a struggling young person sometimes is all that is required to inspire that youngster in the right direction!"

"It meant adding a different perspective on things to an individual's life. It was fun getting them out of their shell & feeling comfortable with me."

"Getting to know the student & having them interact with me." "Because we are directly dealing with children & they are all so special."

"Watching the child grow and be excited about reading/learning."

"A wonderful opportunity to make a difference in the life of a child. Its not only about helping them improve their reading skills; it's about making a connection and impression about the importance of learning."

"The one on one interaction is amazing..."

"The commitment from our leadership and the energy/passion of the organizer inspires me."

"Helping someone out by guidance of some sort."



"I've been a mentor for about four years now and I enjoy every minute of it. To be able to sit with a young child and be a positive influence on them is inspiring to me. I enjoy listening to them tell me about their hobbies, their favorite subject in school, and about their home life and in turn I share about my schooling, my family and my job. It's gratifying to see the glow in their eyes and the smile on their face when you greet them each week. It's only a short time that you get to be with them, but with the proven uprise in their grades and test scores, it makes it worthwhile using your lunchtime to read with them. I pass out flyers, hang up posters and even encourage my fellow coworkers to give mentoring a try because once they do, they'll he hooked!"

## Administrators/Teachers/Reading Specialist Reflections:

"It meant bringing an at risk student together with a Community Specialist volunteer to improve their reading comprehension by means of (simple) conversation."

"I liked watching the relationship develop from the beginning of the year to the end. The mentors care very deeply for their students and the feeling is mutual from the students. I enjoy watching their conversations about their text reading, classroom, and life in general."

"Starting the year can be challenging, matching mentors with students and getting them started with the correct materials. It is all worth it."

"A true commitment by all: school site, community members and the student."
"Confidence. I witnessed both academic and personal growth by the students. I know these students will remember their mentors for the rest of their lives."
"Mentoring is a great program and when I retire, I would love to mentor students and continue to impact them in a positive way."

"As an educator, having taught for the last six years, I have had one of my students enrolled in the mentor program. I teach third grade and mentors are usually not offered for third grade students at my site; however, this year there was one slot available, so I found the perfect candidate. A student who needs conversation about books and meaningful topics. This student has gained much confidence and self worth during the short time he has been mentored. He has learned many reading strategies and skills along with obtaining a rich and meaningful discussion with an adult whom he admires. In the classroom, this students thinks differently and his thoughts carry through into his writing and daily conversations. He has definitely gained a new love of reading and most importantly understanding what he is reading."

"Mentors give of themselves in such an unselfish manner and come to school with a great attitude and smile on their face. As we all know, work and home life can be quite demanding, yet they continue to strive to be a positive influence to their protégés lives."

"One of my students has been in the mentoring program this year. He has gained significant growth in his reading capabilities as well as his reading comprehension. His mentor is a very positive influence on his reading as well as improving his thinking and enriching his conversations."

"Thank you for your valuable time and effort."

"I recognize that when you volunteer you are giving up personal time, and we are grateful."

"Your commitment is vital to our success."

"I have seen students smile on days that may not have offered anything to smile about but because their mentor was coming it gave them a reason."

"The connection with the business sector has created a bond for our community and school. More than a couple of times we've had families that have benefited from the generosity of the mentors and their colleagues. There is no doubt that these acts of kindness have made an impact on the relationship between the communities and the business sector and was only made possible because of the mentor program."

"I still have students asking if they can have a mentor again, 2 yrs after they had one. Thank you to all that have had a part in creating such a great program."

"Although my experience through the county's mentor program has been as a coordinator, I have mentored most of my life and I continue to do so in my current position as a student advocate with the Stanislaus County Office of Education."

"In many cases there is just no more room for judgment in their worlds they need continual encouragement and positive reinforcement. If our children do not believe in themselves then there is no dream to achieve. We cannot afford to choose to look the other way."

"I have been blessed with the opportunity to see several of the children who I have mentored grow into wonderful and productive young men and women continuing to succeed in their education. They have not only learned how to dream and believe in themselves but they have gained the skills necessary to obtain their short and long-term educational goals."

"I have spoke with many individuals throughout the years who feel a sense of fear in becoming mentors. All you need is to have a heart for kids, want the very best for their future and a willingness to give a little time to a young person who needs someone to believe in them. It is people caring about people..."

"Mentoring is critical in this day and age."
"Students that are being mentored are showing more enthusiasm in regards to reading."
"It is one way of connecting the school sites with other businesses, and it unites everyone together for today's children who are tomorrow's (adult) citizens."
"Due to the positive impact of the program, it is difficult to state any real negatives. This works!"

"The dedication of those facilitating it at the county and of those at the school level is what keeps it going. Also, individuals who give their time to students' learning is most powerful."





## **RESULTS**

Time, attention, and sharing ideas, opportunities and dreams. These are the key ingredients of our successful partnerships.

John Muir Elementary School reports consistent testing data for mentored students (one still enrolled in the mentoring program) that reflects a significant 62% improvement on testing including an impressive 23% showing positive academic improvements beyond grade level expectation – combined a staggering 85% turn around in standardized benchmarks (Language and Arts testing) across the board.

Fairview Elementary School is one of our longest standing mentor affiliates. The program was established during the 2002-03 school year and has had some significant and sustained successes.

To date, all students (100%) are engaged in the program have shown a greater interest in reading and better participation in their classroom. This is the kind of confidence building that the act of mentoring inspires. Over 50% of all proteges have shown steady progress on other aspects of their learning.

While, several students have made great strides in reading and in improved classroom behavior – all are better for the guidance that our employee mentors provide. Teachers and Administration are committed to the partnership.

**Shackelford Elementary School** is our newest mentor site partner. The Shackelford administrative staff are very excited to have such a wonderful group of mentors at their School.

County mentors have meant a great deal to all of the student protégés. Students eagerly wait for their mentors to arrive each day when they are mentored. Teachers have mentioned that students that are being mentored always come back to class with big smiles. Student self esteem has increased tremendously through the powerful mentor interactions. Students that would hardly say a word at the beginning of the school year, now start interacting more with their peers and within classroom discussions.

Over 70% of the students mentored at Shackelford have increased at least two reading levels over the past two performance cycles.

100% of the students have increased their personal confidence and self esteem.

**Everett Elementary School** is our longest standing mentor affiliate. Like the other programs, Everett reports similar self-validating test improvement data, reflecting a consistent 80% of protégé participants either achieving





## CONCLUSIONS

Mentors create an environment that makes learning to read less laborious. When things are fun and are presented in a social, interactive, caring way, learning anything becomes fun, exciting, like a new adventure every day.

Sometimes it takes that simple interaction or caring person to bring that "learning excitement" or adventure in to focus in the mind of a child.

Take a moment...

Think back to your own childhood and recall the things that were fun to you, they were not the things that you had to do or had to learn. They were the things that were fun and are recalled fondly. Fun makes the time pass quickly and

makes learning easier. Medicine is hard to swallow when it tastes terrible, but when it is presented in a pretty package/color and is sweet it is so much easier to engage.

As is the case with most of life's challenges, this analogy can be used for many things.

As we embark on our second decade of youth mentoring in Stanislaus County one can't help but think fondly of all those who have assisted in making this a model program.

There is much work to do as we continue to grow and inspire our young people.

The Stanislaus County Employee Mentors are confident that all of us are up to this challenge and this investment and ultimately...our children will be the better for it.

## Din a mentor <mark>hour</mark>...

"We need to continue to plant the seeds of hope in their hearts and continue to nurture that seed so that in the future we can see that seed grow into a healthy and productive individual who will in return plant those seeds in others."