

# Mentor-Tutor Connection: A Program For Every Community

**M**any of the youths we see in our juvenile courts are struggling with their studies. There are many reasons for this, but one conclusion is clear – they need help. In 1996, two leaders in the Los Altos Community (Santa Clara County) decided to do something to support these youths. They created Mentor-Tutor Connection, a program designed to help youths struggling with their education and the many stressors in their lives.

The program is available in three school districts in the county. Teachers at all levels from elementary to high school identify students who are falling behind, have significant challenges to overcome, or may be at-risk of not graduating from high school. They contact the Mentor-Tutor program coordinator who will assign a mentor or a tutor to work with the youth. These community volunteers have regular contact with the student. Showing up consistently as caring, non-judgmental adults in their lives. They support students' academic, social, and emotional growth, always guided by the needs and interests of the individual student they support.

The program reminded me of CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates), where the court appoints trained volunteers on behalf of a child in juvenile proceedings. Both CASA and Mentor-Tutor volunteers are trained by staff and have supervisors to help answer any questions that may arise with their work. Of course, youths in the Mentor-Tutor Connection are not in the juvenile court system, but some of them could be.

Mentor-Tutor Connection has been very successful. Working with 20 schools in three school districts, a five-year evaluation found that 94% of the students graduated from high school (132 out of 141). In 2021 (when students and volunteers were dealing with the impact of the pandemic), 187 volunteers (85 tutors and 102 mentors) worked with 246 students a total of 8,197 hours.

The impact of these caring adults in the lives of the students during a difficult year was significant.

Students reported: Because of my mentor:

- I feel more positive about the person I am: 90%.
- I feel less alone during the COVID pandemic: 91%
- I feel less stressed: 80%
- And 99% of mentored students would recommend the program to a friend.

Tutors reported:

- The student made academic progress: 83%
- The student's confidence and self-esteem grew: 82%
- Student's attitude towards school and learning improved: 69%

You might ask whether this program has anything to do with our work in juvenile court - probably not directly. However, your role as a juvenile court judge goes further than what happens in your court. You are governed by Standard of Judicial Administration 5.40(e) and its mandate "to provide active leadership within the community in determining the needs of and obtaining and developing the resources and services for at-risk children and families."<sup>1</sup> You will be encouraging "the development of community services and resources to assist homeless, truant, runaway, and incorrigible children."<sup>2</sup>

Juvenile court judges are different. We have the added responsibilities outlined in Standard of Judicial Administration 5.40(e). It is worth the time to read over that standard and see what you can do to improve outcomes for at-risk children in your community. That is what many juvenile court judges in California have been doing for years.<sup>3</sup> Suggesting the creation of a program such as Mentor-Tutor Connection to a Rotary or other service club may have a significant positive impact on struggling students in your community.

## Endnotes:

- 1 Standards of Judicial Administration, Standard 5.40(e)(1).
- 2 *Id.*, 5.40(e)(9).
- 3 Edwards, L., "The Juvenile Court and the Role of the Juvenile Court Judge," *Juvenile and Family Court Journal*, Vol. 43, No. 2, 1992.



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