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Northwest Regional  
Educational Laboratory

# NATIONAL MENTORING CENTER BULLETIN

## Remembering Forgotten Kids

**W**e know that mentors can make all the difference for troubled and disadvantaged youth. But certain children are underrepresented in the mentoring movement. Foster kids, gay and lesbian youth, and children who have a mentally ill or imprisoned parent are among the often-forgotten groups. These youths have huge needs. They frequently endure isolation, shame, loneliness, and rejection and/or ridicule by peers and others in the community. Mentoring can help them find their way in the world, providing a steady source of caring and acceptance essential for healthy emotional development.

"A constant adult to see these children through a myriad of circumstances may well be one of the

resources they need to improve their quality of life," says Scott Peterson of OJJDP.

In this issue of the Bulletin, we give readers glimpses of mentoring programs around the United States that are addressing the needs of these special populations. We hope these stories will provide ideas and inspiration to you and your staff.

We'd like to hear about other programs that are reaching out to underserved youths. If you know of such programs, please e-mail us at [mentorcenter@nwrel.org](mailto:mentorcenter@nwrel.org) or write to: The Editors, National Mentoring Center Bulletin, Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, 101 S.W. Main Street, Suite 500, Portland, Oregon 97204.

## Bringing Stability To an uncertain world

**Kids with a mentally-ill parent find understanding and support in Toledo**

**T**OLEDO, Ohio—Leona Shannon recalls her own childhood as a time of isolation, shame, and fear.

"Nobody explained to me what was going on," she says. During Shannon's childhood and adolescence in the 1960s and 1970s, her mentally ill mother attempted suicide a number of times and was later hospitalized. "For the child of a mentally ill parent, there's a lot of shame and a lot of fear—fear of not being able to predict if the parent will be stable, for example."

It wasn't until her college years at the University of Toledo that Shannon began to unlock the mysteries

of her mother's mental illness and arrived at her first point of understanding.

"Growing up, I didn't understand that my mother's suicide attempts were related to an illness, and I sometimes thought that maybe I had done something to cause it," she recalls.

As coordinator of a new program for children with a mentally ill parent, Shannon is driven—personally and professionally—to make sure the kids are equipped with the best, most complete information. She wants them to realize that their lives are nothing to be ashamed of and to know that they are not alone.

See STABILITY, page 6

## conference targets program improvement

The Center's expert cadre and new curriculum are coming to San Diego

### TRAINING NOTES



**"Our new training curriculum and our cadre of experts will be sharing the latest, greatest information in the field of mentoring. With solid, research-based information, staff can build better programs—and better programs mean better matches. In the end, it's the kids who win."**

—Kay Davis  
Director

**F**or most of the country, January is marked by Arctic air, snowplows, and Seasonal Affective Disorder. But in San Diego, January is characterized by warm ocean breezes, convertibles, and occasional sunburns. When you combine January in San Diego with nationally renowned mentoring experts, the latest research-based training curriculum, and 300 of your mentoring colleagues, you get the National Mentoring Center's 2000 Training Conference.

Open to all programs, the conference will be held at the Hyatt Islandia overlooking San Diego's Mission Bay on January 5-7. Presentations by the Center's cadre of experts will share top billing with the unveiling of the Center's much-anticipated curriculum, Strengthening Mentoring Programs for Youth. Participants will be the first in the nation to receive training in the 10-session curriculum, developed cooperatively by Public/Private Ventures and the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory. Part 1 of the curriculum is designed to help JUMP sites and other mentoring programs beef up key aspects of their operations. Topics are:

- Recruiting
- Screening
- Making and supporting matches
- Forming partnerships
- Evaluating programs
- Marketing and fundraising

Part 2 is geared toward building skills in volunteer mentors. Designed to be used by program staff to train their volunteers, it provides guidance in:

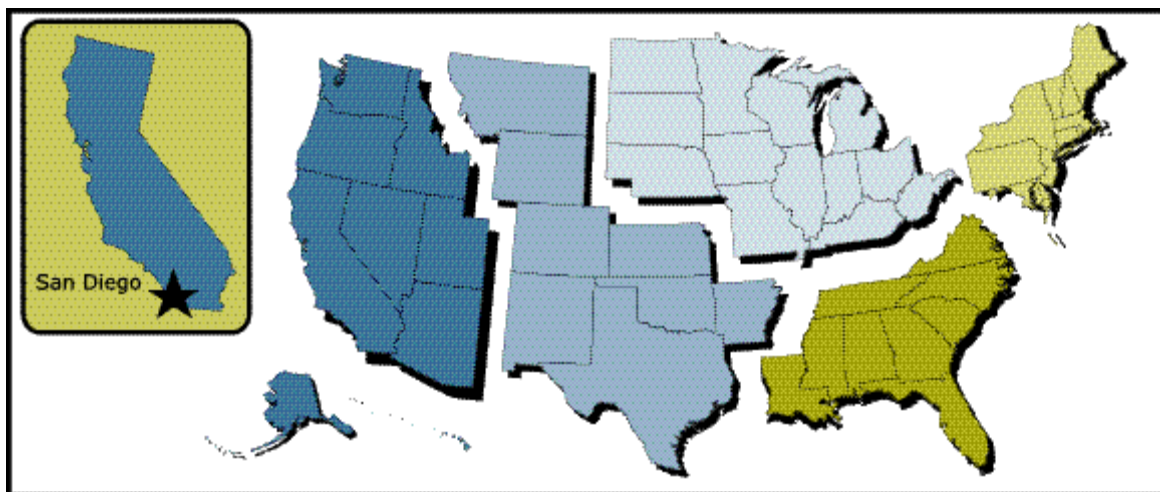
- Facilitation skills
- Introducing mentors to the needs of kids
- Connecting and communicating with kids
- Keeping the relationship going

"Our new training curriculum and our cadre of experts will be sharing the latest, greatest information in the field of mentoring," says Dr. Kay Davis, Director of the National Mentoring Center. "With solid, research-based information, staff can build better programs—and better programs mean better matches. In the end, it's the kids who win."

The 2000 Training Conference, made possible by funding and support from OJJDP, will also launch a series of training seminars that will be presented in five locations throughout the country starting in early spring. Each seminar will be a three-day, formal training on the new curriculum. These seminars are designed for training and administrative staff but would be valuable to any program personnel in the field of mentoring. Tentative seminar locations are Houston, Atlanta, Hartford, St. Louis, and Seattle.

Additional information about the 2000 Training Conference and the Training Seminars will be available soon. If you have any conference-related questions, please contact Cary Craig at (503) 275-0122 or e-mail at [craigc@nwrel.org](mailto:craigc@nwrel.org). Also, be sure to regularly check our Web site at [www.nwrel.org/mentoring](http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring) to get up-to-date information on conferences and seminars.

—Cary Craig



# often alone and afraid, foster kids need stable relationships

Children without permanent homes long for attachment to a trusted adult

**T**oo many foster kids are urban nomads, moving from house to house, family to family, as they wait for adoption. The typical child may have six or seven placements while in foster care. A dozen moves is not unusual.

“They’re bounced from foster home to foster home,” says Michael Knowles, who runs a Chicago-area mentoring project for foster children. “We had one boy who’d been in 13 different settings.”

For these children—wards of the state whose biological parents are unable or unfit to care for them—separation and loss are their most constant companions. Some older kids don’t bother to unpack when they move into a new foster home. Even their case-workers come and go as agency staff turns over.

“The lack of permanency and stability in their lives is very key,” Knowles says.

In a foster child’s changing landscape, a mentor can be like a prominent landmark—an ever-present mountain or river that keeps a traveler oriented and on-track. Growing numbers of child welfare workers and advocates view mentoring as a way to bring constancy to youngsters who have known only flux.

Around the country, mentor programs for foster children are catching on. Their emphasis varies. Some focus on little kids, others on teens. Some target certain populations or ethnic groups. Others stress life skills or the arts. But no matter what their focus, they share one overarching goal: to provide stability in an ocean of uncertainty.

“Our primary objective is to provide a point of continuity in their lives,” says Mary Frazier, founder of a fledgling program called Foster Friends in Huntsville, Alabama. “Mentoring does this by providing steady encouragement and reliable support throughout the changes that unfold in foster care.”

Frazier worries about the loss of “attachment ability” many foster kids experience. The Foster Friends Web site, [www.childmentoring.com](http://www.childmentoring.com) (donated by The Boeing Company) defines attachment as “the affectionate and emotional tie between people that continues indefinitely over time and lasts even when people are geographically apart.” Attachment issues

form the nucleus of the 15-hour mentor training program required at Foster Friends. Because attachment takes time, the duration of a match—a crucial factor in any mentoring program for at-risk youth—as added urgency in programs for foster kids.

“We demand that our mentors commit to no less than a year,” says Knowles, director of the Village Investment Project, which has matched 230 Chicago-area foster kids with mentors during its four-plus years of existence. “We school our mentors on the importance of permanency. They’re in it for the long haul.”

That permanency, however, can be tough to ensure. In many jurisdictions, kids are moved to a new town or even a new county when suitable homes can’t be found locally.

“Often kids are moved all over Illinois,” says Stephen Kehoe, program director of SOS Children’s Village, which launched a mentoring component this summer. “It’s hard to keep a mentor—unless,” he adds with a laugh, “the mentor likes to drive a lot or has a private plane.”

A study in the mid-1990s found that most mentor programs for foster kids have a life-skills focus. Characterizing mentoring programs for foster children as “relatively new and small in scope, with low visibility,” Dr. Edmund Mech and his colleagues at the University of Illinois identified five categories of mentor models:

- **Transitional life skills mentors**—Help teens make the transition from foster care to independent living
- **Cultural-empowerment mentors**—Provide a positive role model from the mentee’s minority group
- **Corporate/ business mentors**—Matches teens with mentors from the business community
- **Mentors for young parents**—Experienced mothers are matched with pregnant or parenting teens
- **Mentor homes**—Four to six foster adolescents live in a home with an adult mentor

“The main focus of the matches with foster youth

See FOSTER KIDS, Page 7

## FAST FACTS

- On any given day in America, 520,000 children are living in foster care.
- Of those, 110,000 have a permanent plan of adoption, 20,000 have been freed for adoption and are in adoptive placement, and 20,000 are free for adoption but still waiting to be placed in an adoptive home.
- As many as 60 percent of children who age out of foster care end up homeless at least once within the first year.

### Sources:

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services;  
National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges

—Scott Peterson

# a former gang member finds the mom she never had

**A caring mentor stops the downward spiral of a troubled girl**

**Editor's Note:** This article was reprinted with permission from The Columbian newspaper. It was originally published on September 7.

## SUCCESS STORY

**"I'm finding out that I'm smart, that I can do things. Before, I just figured I'd wind up in jail. Now I've got a plan for my life, and that feels good."**

**V**ANCOUVER, Washington—Carolyn Demme thought it was just another call about a troubled kid. As the community services officer for the Clark County Gang Task Force, calls about troubled kids are nothing new to Demme. But this call, two years ago, led Demme in a direction she didn't expect. She became a mentor to the girl, a girl who now calls Demme the closest thing to a real mother she's ever had.

"She needed some direction, and I have the time to help," Demme said. "It's good for both of us."

Demme, 50, is one of several people who will be honored at the September 16 mentor recognition event, dubbed "Helping Them Bloom." The event is designed to honor adult volunteers who serve as mentors to at-risk youth in Clark County. Another event focusing on mentoring, a two-day workshop featuring folklore expert Michael Mead, is scheduled for Tuesday and Wednesday, September 14-15.

Frances Drake had everything going against her. The 17-year-old grew up in Yakima, Washington, her father in prison, her mother caught up in a world of petty crime and serious drugs. By 13, Drake was immersed in the same culture: a gang member, a drug user, a habitual runaway.

"It was all I knew," she said. "But by about 15, I started wondering if there wasn't something better I could do with my life."

That's when the girl moved to Vancouver, taken in by her 28-year-old brother and sister-in-law, Torin and Rebecca Clinton. Rebecca Clinton is the person who called Demme, hoping to find a way for Drake to remove tattoos she'd obtained during her troubled times in Yakima.

"I thought (Demme) was just another cop, and I never trusted cops," Drake said. "But she's become like a mother to me. She cares. She's the mother I never had."

The tattoos are still there, on Drake's leg and hand, but her life is completely different. Drake has caught up in school, after missing two years, and expects to graduate from Hudson's Bay High School with the Class of 2000. She's a volunteer at the 9-1-1 center, where she hopes someday to work as a dispatcher. She belongs to the Explorers program at the Sheriff's Office and works part-time as a restaurant hostess.

Demme is happy to see the changes in Drake—and surprised at the changes she has found in herself during her two years of mentoring the girl.

"I'm divorced, never had any children, and I sure didn't expect to have my first at age 50," Demme said, laughing. "She gives me energy, makes me happy. We laugh a lot together. What I give her seems so little. What she gives me is a thousand times more."

Demme is not part of any formal mentoring program. She simply saw a kid who needed her, and stepped in to fill the void.

But mentoring programs abound in Clark County, with more than 50 agencies seeking adults to spend time and energy with at-risk youth. Those who coordinate such programs say the rewards are great, for children and adults.

"It's just that satisfaction of making a difference in a kid's life," said Mary Weber, youth program coordinator for Project Hope at the Vancouver Housing Authority. "It's seeing a kid come in after school, after working on a subject with the child, and having that child smile and burst through the door and say, 'Hey, I finally pulled an A out of it!'"

"With every volunteer who becomes a mentor in the program, they all want to come back and do it again," added Cristy Miller, program development director for Community Choices 2010, which operates a mentoring program for fifth-grade boys. "The mentors really enjoy the energy the boys provide for them, and the boys get a real sense of pride from the program."

Drake said a mentor has helped her find a new way to see the world.

"It's the other side of life, the side I never got to see," Drake said. "I'm finding out that I'm smart, that I can do things. Before, I just figured I'd wind up in jail. Now I've got a plan for my life, and that feels good."

—Brian Willoughby

# gay and lesbian youth need someone to talk to

An understanding mentor can break through walls of isolation

**W**ASHINGTON, D.C.—The gay and lesbian teens Craig Bowman meets at his youth service agency ask for one thing above all else: a one-to-one mentoring relationship with a caring adult.

“A lot of times, there just aren’t any adults they know that they can talk to,” says Bowman. “That’s a really scary, dangerous place to be.”

It’s scary because the passage to self-awareness and self-acceptance by sexual-minority teens is often steep and rocky. And it’s dangerous because rejection by peers and family can bring on loneliness and despair.

“That sense of isolation is probably the most dangerous thing this population faces,” says Bowman. “Isolation leads to desperation which often ultimately leads to a young person becoming a statistic—an HIV statistic or a homelessness statistic or a suicide statistic.”

About 900 kids got services last year at the Sexual Minority Youth Assistance League (SMYAL), where Bowman is Executive Director. Support and rap groups, an after-school drop-in center, a talk line, leadership training, and HIV/AIDS education are among the services the agency offers.

When SMYAL was founded 15 years ago, he reports, a lot of gay youth in the Washington area were sent to a local mental hospital for therapy to “fix” or “correct” their sexual orientation. Attitudes are more accepting these days. But many young people still face ostracism in school and condemnation at home.

In an often-hostile world, gay and lesbian kids need a trusted adult who listens without judging and guides without lecturing. “One of the things youths have consistently requested of us over the years is a healthy, adult-youth relationship,” says Bowman. “They want someone they can talk to, whether it’s about coming out to their parents or dealing with an intense family or school situation.”

A mentoring program is on the drawing board at SMYAL. But great care and caution are going into planning what may be the only one-on-one mentor-

## FAST FACTS

Gay, lesbian, and bisexual youths are:

- At much greater risk for suicide and suicide attempts than heterosexual youths.

One study reports that 37 percent of gay and lesbian high schoolers try to kill themselves each year. Another found that gay teens are two to six times more likely to kill themselves than their non-gay peers.

- Five times more likely to use cocaine than straight kids.

- Five times more likely than straight kids to skip school for fear of their safety.

Forty percent say their schoolwork suffers because of homophobia at school, and nearly 30 percent eventually drop out.

### Sources:

Massachusetts Department of Education; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services; Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Teacher's Network

—Scott Peterson

ing program for sexual-minority youth in the nation. The agency has spent two years designing a high-quality program that can withstand the “intense public scrutiny” that a mentoring program for gay youth will likely face, he says. He blames stereotypes and misconceptions—especially “the myth of pedophilia being more prevalent in the gay population than in the straight population”—for building a barrier to mentoring programs targeted at gay youth. Agencies that want to launch mentoring programs for gay youth have to make sure, he says, that “they are in a position to withstand any kind of public backlash” that might jeopardize the program.

That means intensive training and scrupulous screening to weed out anyone who might pose a threat to youth. All SMYAL volunteers already undergo 30 hours of training and an extensive criminal record check, which includes fingerprinting and meeting one-on-one with a licensed social worker, Bowman says.

Mentoring programs, though, don’t have to be geared specifically for gay and lesbian youth in order to serve them. Sexual-minority kids will be among the clients of any program. Bowman has been spreading the word to mentoring programs around the country through workshops and conferences.

“I think it’s important that programs recognize that there are young people in their programs currently who are struggling with sexuality and gender-identity issues,” he says. “Making sure their programs are safe for these young people is critical.”

How can programs create an environment where gay and lesbian kids feel safe and respected? First, says Bowman, they need to assess “what the landscape looks like” for sexual-minority youth in their programs. Next, they should “create guidelines that protect young people when they’re in the program,” Bowman advises. One place to start is SMYAL’s Web site at [www.smyal.org](http://www.smyal.org). There, programs will find guidelines for working with or counseling sexual-minority youth. Among the recommendations are:

- Don’t assume your clients are heterosexual
- Use inclusive language; be accepting and open
- Maintain confidentiality
- Be aware of your own attitudes and stereotypes

**stability: (continued from page 1)**

“The idea is to give the children some coping skills and educate them about mental health issues and give them a stabilizing presence through mentoring,” she explains. “Then perhaps they can avoid going through what their parents experienced.”

The program, Positive Connections, is funded by the Lovell Foundation, Toledo Community Foundation, the Stranahan Foundation, the Ohio Department of Mental Health’s Friends Initiative, St. Charles Mercy Hospital, and Mercy Children’s Hospital. It is divided into three components. First, children attend a five-week educational group providing them with the information they need to understand their parent’s illness. They also develop a plan to deal with a family crisis. The second five weeks are spent in a support group that creates an environment where the children learn to give and receive peer support; the goal of the group is to help the children understand that their family experiences are not unique.

The final phase is a mentoring program, which offers an opportunity for children to develop a positive relationship with an adult role model outside their family. The children are matched with specially trained mentors through Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northwestern Ohio.

“Since emphasis is usually placed on treating the parent, Positive Connections serves a population of children who would normally not receive services anywhere,” explains Barbie Harrison, Executive Director of BBBS of Northwestern Ohio. “I hope to see it become a model for collaborations between other BBBS agencies and mental health providers across the nation.”

Positive Connections, believed to be the first program in the nation to match children who have a mentally ill parent with a caring and trained mentor, is a truly collaborative effort. Unison Behavioral

Health Group, the Alliance for the Mentally Ill of Greater Toledo, and BBBS pool their resources. Shannon, who works for Unison, ties it all together.

Contributions to the well-being of the children, Shannon says, come from surprising sources. Local hospitals have donated transportation. A graphic designer donated the brochure. The University of Toledo is conducting research on the program. Even the van drivers have shown great commitment. They took it upon themselves to remind participating children to finish their homework, and they were among the featured speakers at the children’s “graduation” from the program. And a community group of mentally ill adults who talk to other consumers of mental health services distributes the Positive Connections brochure.

In June, Positive Connections won the National Organization on Disability Award from Big Brothers Big Sisters of America.

At the core of the program’s initial success, according to Shannon, is the collaborative spirit in which all three agencies work. While collaborations among community-based nonprofits often sour quickly, Shannon says the motivating spirit behind Positive Connections remains how to best serve the children for whom it was designed. Launched in February 1999, the program currently has 22 trained mentors, 29 children participating, and 15 on the waiting list.

From the beginning, Shannon says, the three collaborating agencies have been completely committed to the success of Positive Connections.

“There has been a real genuineness from all of the agencies,” she says. “There has been real support, which builds trust and allows us to start doing things. When we went to people for support, they were struck by what a novel approach we were taking. They also realized we were working with a forgotten population.”

—Patrick Collins

**gay youth: (continued from page 5)**

- Do not isolate sexual-minority youth
- Educate yourself and provide accurate information

One of the best ways for programs to create a safe and accepting environment for gay youth is to build relationships with local organizations that serve sexual-minority teens—organizations like SMYAL, for instance, or teen health clinics and shelters for homeless and runaway adolescents. “Oftentimes,” says Bowman, “it’s no more complicated than just having the reputation of being a safe place.”

SMYAL’s “Safe Zone” program offers posters, buttons, and stickers with the purple triangle that symbolizes acceptance of all sexual orientations. Explains SMYAL’s Web site: “A person displaying this symbol is one who will be understanding, supportive, and trustworthy if a gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender youth needs help, advice, or just someone with whom they can talk.” By such simple gestures as hanging “Safe Zone” posters in their offices or putting stickers on their walls, staff can send a signal that they are “not going to bash them or beat them up with a perspective that tells them they’re not OK, which is probably what they’re getting from most people,” Bowman says.

Among mentoring groups, interest in the special needs of gay and lesbian youth is picking up of late. Bowman has gotten lots of calls from mentoring programs that want to enlighten staff members with “just basic ‘Homosexuality and Homophobia 101’ stuff.” Ideally, mentors, mentees, and program staff—especially “the folks who are doing the matching”—should be trained on the issues facing sexual-minority people in America today, he says.

“As people who are committed to working with young people,” Bowman points out, “we have an obligation to meet those kids where they are, to help them understand the issues they’re going through, to keep them healthy and keep them safe.”

The National Mentoring Center can provide free training and assistance for JUMP sites wishing to better meet the needs of gay, lesbian, and bisexual youth. For details on workshops or onsite consulting, call 1-800-547-6339, ext. 121. For additional help or information, call SMYAL at (202) 546-5940. Many resources and publications are also available through the Bridges project of the National Youth Advocacy Coalition, which can be reached at (202) 319-7596 or [www.nyac.youth.org](http://www.nyac.youth.org).

—Lee Sherman

**foster kids: (continued from page 3)**

is to prepare them for adult living,” Mech concluded after surveying about 30 programs in 15 states. “The 18-to-21 age period represents a critical developmental phase. Having a mentor prior to leaving placement is important, but sustaining a mentor relationship after leaving placement may be vital to the well-being of many foster wards.”

Besides providing stability, friendship, and life skills, mentors can even help foster kids find permanent homes. Michael Knowles calls his mentors “voice pieces” for the youngsters they befriend. Mentors are in a perfect position, he notes, to “tell the story” of a child to caring families who might consider adopting.

Another role mentors play is helping foster kids cultivate interests. While typical American children have a mom or dad driving them to lessons in music, dance, art, or other enriching activities, foster children seldom have that chance, says Sidney Goldberg of the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services. So in 1995, his office launched Pathways to Development, which links foster children to community resources in the arts, humanities, sciences, and other fields. Kids are matched with mentors who share their interests.

People who’ve watched children’s progress in the program have remarked, “It’s the first time the foster child seems alive and confident,” he reports.

Adds Goldberg: “When foster children are given opportunities (to pursue interests) at a young age, and believe that these and future endeavors are within the realm of possibility for them, the probability is great that instead of floundering through life, they will develop a lifetime passion for their interests and find meaning in their lives.”

With a mentor—a trusted adult who’s there through the turmoil and transitions of foster care—kids can do more than just survive; they can thrive. At SOS Children’s Village, Stephen Kehoe puts mentoring right at the top of his list. “It might be a stretch to call it essential,” he says. “But it’s not a stretch to say it’s among the most important services we offer.”

Programs that would like to seek funding through the Juvenile Mentoring Program (JUMP) of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention should call the OJJDP Clearinghouse at 1-800-638-8736 to be placed on the mailing list for JUMP grant information.

—Lee Sherman

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NEWS  
BRIEFS

## ■ NEW RESOURCES IN OUR LENDING COLLECTION

Several excellent items have been added to the National Mentoring Center's collection of resources. One book, *The Heart Knows Something Different: Teenage Voices from the Foster Care System* by Youth Communication (1996), is a moving collection of more than three dozen personal narratives by young writers and provides an insider's account of growing up in "the system." Another item, *A Training Guide for Mentors* by Jay Smink (1999), is an excellent, hands-on guide developed by the National Dropout Prevention Center on training mentors for successful matches. A third resource, a video titled *Mentoring: Giving Kids a Model to Stay Drug-Free* (1999), is based on a discussion among mentoring experts hosted by the Community Anti-Drug Coalition of America. The discussion focuses on the use of mentoring as a prevention strategy.

## ■ HOW TO GET MATERIALS

JUMP sites may request library materials by telephone or e-mail, or via the "Resource Collection" link on the National Mentoring Center Web site ([www.nwrel.org/mentoring](http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring)). Other organizations and individuals may request materials by interlibrary loan through their local library. For further information, contact Ira Pollack or Michael Garringer at 1-800-547-6339, ext. 647, or [mentorcenter@nwrel.org](mailto:mentorcenter@nwrel.org).



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