

NEWS

VOLUNTEER CENTER OF BERGEN COUNTY, INC.

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For immediate release

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Local Children in Need of Mentors

North Jersey - Each year in Bergen County approximately 600 children are removed from their homes due to abuse, neglect or isolation. They are placed in foster homes, residential facilities, hospitals, shelters or in the care of other family members. The Volunteer Center of Bergen County's Mentoring Youth program is currently recruiting volunteer mentors for children ages 3-18 who are facing these difficult challenges.

For more than 30 years, Mentoring Youth has trained and supervised adult volunteers to serve as mentors to children who are confronting adverse challenges at home and in life and experiencing social, emotional and behavioral problems. Mentors serve as positive role models; they provide guidance, friendship and support, and advocate on behalf of children when necessary.

The next 3-week Mentoring Youth training program begins on Wednesday, March 18, 2015. Each Wednesday session is held from 7:00 pm to 9:30 pm at the Volunteer Center of Bergen County, 64 Passaic Street in Hackensack.

"Volunteers in the Mentoring Youth program improve the lives and experiences of children who need someone they can trust, someone to show them they are not alone," says Janet Sharma, Volunteer Center CEO. "There is an especially great need for men to mentor boys and for bi-lingual, Spanish-speaking mentors of both genders, and there are not nearly enough volunteers enrolled so far."

"These children are waiting for someone to step in and believe in them, to encourage them to laugh and succeed," says Dr. Faith Samples-Smart, Mentoring Youth Program Director. "We consider time spent with mentors as free time: free of the

challenges children confront in their daily environments at home and/or at school. What a gift to have this respite and safe zone with a caring adult.”

Mentors show children a different perspective, expose them to unexplored opportunities and help them to build trust. According to a study by Big Brothers/Big Sisters, youth who regularly meet with a mentor are 52% less likely than peers to skip school and 46% less likely to use drugs. Additionally, they are 33% less likely to hit someone or to start drinking. By sharing fun activities and exposing a youth to new experiences, mentors encourage positive choices, promote high self-esteem, support academic achievement and introduce young people to new ideas.

Mentoring Youth volunteer training is provided at no charge and covers such topics as the benefits of mentoring for volunteers and children; child and adolescent development; understanding child maltreatment; effective listening and communication skills; building rapport and developing strong mentoring relationships; the role of the mentor; and the matching and closure process. Applicants are required to undergo a comprehensive background check and must obtain written letters recommendation as part of the training course.

For more information about the Mentoring Youth program, contact Eva Tobias at (201) 489-9454 Ext. 121, or visit www.bergenvolunteers.org and click on mentoring programs.

The Volunteer Center of Bergen County strengthens the community by connecting people through service and developing civic leaders.

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