

Helping middle school children on the road to success

BE A MIDDLE SCHOOL MENTOR

An initiative of United Way of Allegheny County



The issue

Research indicates that 40-60% of students who drop out of high school become the “Forgotten Middle”. They disengage from their education during the critical middle school years, which has a destructive impact on their chance for future success. Although typically overlooked, providing additional support and encouragement to this group can result in students who stay engaged and graduate from high school on time.

The initiative

Over the past five years, 1,500+ people have responded to Be A Middle School Mentor (BAMSM), the region’s largest call for mentors EVER. The BAMSM partnership includes United Way of Allegheny County, Pittsburgh Public Schools (PPS), Mentoring Partnership of Southwestern Pennsylvania, Big Brothers Big Sisters, Communities In Schools, Mt. Ararat Community Activity Center and Urban League of Greater Pittsburgh.

Recognized as the region’s largest school-based mentoring initiative, BAMSM matches caring adults with middle school students for the duration of their middle school years (grades 6-8). Now operating in 14 Pittsburgh Public Schools, BAMSM encourages academic excellence and helps students develop career aspirations. The partnership will connect 400+ adults and students in the 2014-2015 school year.

Volunteer mentors are matched with a United Way partner/mentoring agency and a specific school. They are contacted, screened, trained and supervised by the mentoring agency and assigned a school and mentee. Mentors visit their mentee each week at school for approximately 45 minutes from October to May. Mentors also agree to maintain supervised contact over the summer months for a total commitment of at least 12 months.

The story

“When Taye started as a 6th grade mentee he didn’t want to go,” laughs his former guidance counselor. “By the time he got to 8th grade, he never missed.” Taye’s mentor was patient and accepting. An educator herself, she saw and gently encouraged Taye’s potential. Now, in 9th grade, he sees it too. “We’ve all noticed huge growth in Taye. He’s demonstrating responsible behaviors and a maturity that shows in his schoolwork.” Taye’s mentor helped him complete his application to a magnet high school where he hopes to pursue his interest in technology. “Taye’s mentor

was definitely instrumental in shifting his whole attitude toward school,” says his middle school guidance counselor. “That little boy who used to slip out of the building early has become a fine young man.”

The impact

BAMSM has proven to be an effective strategy in motivating middle school children to succeed in school. Data indicates:

- Youth’s attitudes towards school improve: 75% of youth say the program helps them see why school matters and inspires them to do well in class.

Students report greater awareness of careers and pathways to success: About 80% identify realistic interests; 50% are able to describe the educational pathway to get there.

- 84% of our mentees attend school 90% or more of the time.

- Between 6th and 7th Grade, the percentage of children participating in BAMSM - who became eligible for the Pittsburgh Promise based on GPA - increased by 23%.

The investment

BAMSM relies on the generous time commitment of volunteer mentors and gifts to United Way’s Impact Fund, which supports projects like BAMSM that motivate youth to succeed in school and life.



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