About our Organization:

SHELTON MENTOR PROGRAM
A POWERFUL INITIATIVE TO IMPROVE SELF-ESTEEM AND PREVENT DROPOUTS

Remember when you were young and it seemed as if the whole world was against you? Remember creating fictitious playmates who would cater to your every need? Remember hoping for just one special friend?

Recent studies have confirmed that mentoring, a new aspect of school-business partnerships, is a powerful initiative to provide adult contacts for youth who are isolated from adults in their schools, homes, communities and workplaces. According to Bernard Lefkowitz, who interviewed at-risk youth for the Ford and Clark Foundations, “the intervention of a concerned adult establishes a relationship based on sympathy and trust. The youngster has found someone who is willing to invest time and effort in his or her future. Now there is someone the young man or woman can be accountable to.”

The word “mentor” comes from the Greek language and has its roots in the terms steadfast and enduring. The story is told in the Odyssey by Homer who gave the name Mentor to the friend whom Odysseus entrusted with the guidance and education of Odysseus’ son. In retelling the story of the son, the seventeenth century writer, Fenelon, makes Mentor the main character. Since then, the term mentor has been synonymous in Western thought with one who is a wise teacher, a guide, or a friend.

The mentoring component of school-business partnerships developed out of mutual need. To compete nationally, American business has to prepare a skilled workforce – and American schools need to stem their alarming drop-out rate. By definition, mentoring programs are structured and can work toward improving self-esteem and attendance among younger children, preventing older students from becoming pregnant, going to jail or making a successful transition from high school to college. The mentoring effort is a one-to-one relationship between the mentor and mentee. The mentors offer support, guidance, and assistance as role model, buddy and friend. Mentees identify with the mentor during the experience and, as a result, become more able to do for themselves what their mentor has done for and with them.

The Shelton Mentor Program uses a six step process to begin and maintain the program and evaluate the success of the relationship between mentors and mentees:

STEP 1 – RECRUITMENT/SCREENING

Volunteers are recruited, interviewed and screened. Job performance, personal references, criminal checks and other evidence of character and reliability are required. In most businesses, personnel or human resources departments, know this information. A memo or flyer is disseminated within the organization inviting prospects to attend a presentation at the workplace.
STEP 2 – ORIENTATION/TRAINING

Individuals who show an interest in becoming mentors learn about a typical day in the life of a student. Before the end of the meeting, mentors complete a profile, which states their choice of days and times for their meeting, preferred grade level and gender of the mentee. Mentors indicate special interests, which are helpful in matching them with their protégé. Mentors also sign an agreement that indicates that they will attend a training session, be on time for scheduled meetings, and engage in the relationship with an open mind.

A one hour training session with tips and techniques on how to be a mentor is then given by the Mentor Program Coordinator. At the training session new mentors focus on such areas as: “Spending Time with Your Mentee,” “How to Read To and With Mentees,” and How to Instill Self-Esteem.”

STEP 3 – MATCHING/RESPONSIBILITIES

School staff and the Mentor Program Coordinator work as a team with this program. A Request Form is completed by school staff which includes the mentees personal interests and hobbies, reasons why each would benefit from the services of a mentor, relevant background and family information, and a list of strategies which mentors may use to assist their student. Mentors are notified when they will begin in the program after parents sign a permission form. Students are asked if they would like to spend “enrichment” time with a special person who wishes to help them each week.

STEP 4 – WEEKLY SESSIONS

Since this is a self-esteem building program, most mentors use the time with elementary students to read to their mentee, take them to the school library, play games, work out in the gymnasium, practice with musical instruments, walk outside on nice days and just talk. They become involved on the secondary level discussing career options, current events, getting a job, reading the newspaper, working on homework, book reports, and other classroom assignments. Mentors learn strategies from the mentor program coordinator on how to improve the mentee’s attitudes, behavior or self-esteem.

STEP 5 – EVALUATION

We are currently in the process of revising our program evaluation system and are working with the Connecticut Mentoring Partnership to make it more user-friendly and easier for us to obtain data about the students who are participating in this program. We hope to have something in place by the end of the school year.

STEP 6 – YEAR-END CELEBRATIONS AND RENEWAL

A city-wide celebration is held for all mentors where they are honored and thanked. Renewal for another year is pledged and Summer activities are suggested.