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Teens in Transition: Best Practices in Mentoring Adolescents

A Report to the Friends of the Children Program



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Purpose

This is a report to the Friends of the Children program summarizing the findings from an evaluation of the current status of the mentoring program as it affects youth transitioning into adolescents. The findings are intended to help Friends of the Children continue to meet the changing needs of program recipients as they grow into adolescence.



To help us understand the changing needs of youth as they get older, this report includes a brief literature summary of developmental psychology and mentoring techniques for adolescents as well as the findings from four focus groups with adolescent youth in the Friends of the Children program and one focus group with Friends of the Children mentors who work with adolescent youth. The report concludes with suggested recommendations although the intent of the report is for the Friends of the Children program staff, Program Committee, and Board of Directors to use the information to develop recommendations that can be included within the innovative program planning for their older youth.

Methodology

Multiple methods were used to answer the question, “How can we best mentor adolescents in the Friends of the Children program?” The Friends of the Children program was innovative and inclusive in approaching this question by asking that youth and staff voices and expert opinion form the basis of the study. The methods used in this study are described briefly here.

Brief literature review. NPC Research reviewed the literature in two areas that were most pertinent to this investigation: developmental psychology and mentoring adolescents. Information was gathered to better understand what is normal behavior for adolescents as well as to understand current ‘best practices’ when mentoring youth in this age group.

Focus group with mentors. On January 18, 2001, NPC Research conducted a focus group with the Friends of the Children mentors or “Friends” who currently work with teenagers. Ten mentors were invited to the group and nine attended the 90-minute focus group where they enthusiastically shared their expertise gained through education and first-hand experience working with youth who are or have transitioned into adolescents (please see Appendix A for the focus group protocol and guiding questions). In exchange for their participation, the facilitators of the group provided food and beverages. One of the two facilitators took detailed notes during the focus group, and the entire meeting was also audio taped and later transcribed. Information obtained in this group was helpful in shaping the protocol design for the focus groups with youth.

Focus group with teens in the Friends of the Children program. NPC Research and staff from the Friends of the Children program determined the sampling strategy for the focus groups with adolescents so that gender, age, and cultural/racial identity were well represented. To encourage participation and provide the most comfortable atmosphere for youth to share their

opinions, the team decided to conduct four separate focus groups organized according to gender and age group. Friends of the Children program staff were responsible for recruitment with the following guidelines: recruit 8–10 youth per group who are ‘representative’ of the youth in the Friends of the Children program (e.g., in terms of cultural/racial identity, education level, geographic location) and whose parents provide signed consent to participate. On February 3, 2001, four facilitators from NPC Research (two for each group) conducted two focus groups with the ‘older’ adolescents in the sample (8th and 9th graders), separating the young men from the young women. Seven young women participated in the focus group, and eight young men attended. On the following Saturday, February 10, 2001, four facilitators from NPC Research (two for each group) conducted two focus groups with the ‘pre-teens’ in the sample (6th and 7th graders), again separating the girls from the boys. Three girls participated in the focus group, and eight boys attended.

During the groups, one of the two facilitators took detailed notes of what the teens talked about in response to the questions in the protocol (see Appendix B). Each of the focus groups was also audio taped and later transcribed.

As reimbursement for their time and expert opinion, each youth received lunch and \$5.00. Mentors were also encouraged to share in lunch as thanks for transporting the youth to the groups.

Child Development: What the Literature Has to Say

“Adolescents need to develop autonomy and their own styles of thinking and behaving, and it is, in a real sense, necessary to have some ‘battles’ with parents in order for this to happen. Probably, it is appropriate to see this as a more grown-up version of the ‘terrible twos period’ in which a similar psychological growth is occurring. Most teenagers maintain close ties with their parents while simultaneously gaining greater independence; it is inappropriate to view this as detachment.” (Rutter and Rutter, 1993)

Adolescence is defined as the period of human development between the ages of 12 and 19. This time period marks one of life’s most important and dramatic developmental phases. The word “adolescence” refers to the transitional period between the beginning of physical and sexual maturity and the societal acknowledgement that one is an adult. Adolescents can be categorized into two age groups: pre-teens (approximately 11–14) and teens (14 and older). Three primary avenues can be used to better understand adolescent development: physical, cognitive, and social.

Physical development. Adolescence is marked by dramatic hormonal changes that begin with the onset of puberty. Puberty generally begins when girls are between 8 and 10 years old, and a bit later for boys, who generally enter puberty between the ages of 10 and 12. Before puberty, boys and girls have more or less the same amounts of male and female hormones, but with the onset of puberty girls begin producing larger amounts of estrogen, and boys start producing more androgens. These hormones have wide ranging effects on the body, but in adolescence, most obviously prompt the development of secondary sex characteristics, which are the hormone-based physical features that distinguish men from women (Uba & Huang, 1999).

Cognitive development. During adolescence, youth begin to make the transition between childish thinking patterns and adult thinking patterns. One common transitional cognitive trait is the imaginary audience. Adolescents become so intensely aware of their social world that they may carry an imaginary one around with them. This imaginary audience watches and judges everything they say and do, as well as how they look. Understandably, this can result in heightened feelings of insecurity and self-consciousness, while also instilling the desire to be as much like one's peers as possible—to fit in. Another example is development of the personal fable, which can be seen in adolescents who believe they are (or what they are experiencing is) quite literally special or unique. Teens who feel this way may feel that “nobody understands them” because nobody but them has ever faced this particular set of problems before (like feeling alone, or loving intensely, or being as out of place). Many adolescents also experience idealistic thinking, which is rooted in the growing ability to think logically and abstractly. This is a period when it becomes possible for teens to judge rightness or wrongness individually. Idealistic-thinking adolescents often become very sensitive to inconsistencies between people's words and actions, and may often label these inconsistencies as hypocrisy (Uba & Huang, 1999).

Social development. As teens grow into adulthood they become increasingly independent from their parents (Field et al., 1995), and sometimes go through several cycles of conflict and negotiation with parents, teachers and other authority figures (Chu & Powers, 1995).

In their struggle toward independence from parents, teens' peer relationships become steadily more important. This is also the period of social development when teens become interested in dating and sex.

Adolescents, responding to and interpreting the physical, mental and social transformations they are experiencing combine to bring about the development of their social identity—an understanding of who she or he is in relation to other people. Some of the factors that affect the formation of social identity include: self-esteem, ethnicity, socioeconomic status social involvement, and the adult influences in their lives.

Mentoring Adolescents: What the Literature Has to Say

“Adolescence is a period for loosening home ties, trying new roles, and learning to be independent. Traversing this difficult terrain successfully is facilitated by the presence of trusted adults to whom the youth can turn for guidance and support.” (Sipe, 1995)

Adolescent mentoring programs should be focused on instilling a healthy future through learned habits and positive experiences for the youth. In addition, encouraging youth participation and input in activity selection and planning is crucial. These two themes are particularly present throughout the literature (Benard, 1992; Saito, 1992; Sipe, 1996).

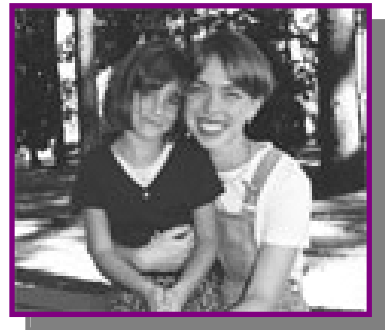
Understanding that adolescence is a life stage characterized by initiating independence while beginning to look toward the future, the mentor/mentee relationship transforms from more of a buddy type relationship to one of guidance and support. Practical and healthy activities conducted with caring adult mentors allow the youth to pursue life options that lead to a healthy future while avoiding risky behaviors. These activities help foster and reinforce the positive expectation that the youth will be successful and can achieve life satisfaction as modeled by the mentor.

Activities should be fun, worthwhile and meaningful to the youth. Beginning activities socially with food, music and recreation followed by intellectual interaction provides an opportunity for youth to be actively involved (selecting food, recreational activities, etc.), with their mentor, in tailoring relationship and skill-building opportunities that further instill ownership and value of the mentoring relationship for the youth. Overall, these activities should provide mentees with opportunities to see positively that they have a sense of purpose and possibilities for the future. Youth learn that they have value, and that they can make a difference in their world.

Adolescent mentoring programming should address the following areas: dropout prevention, creating smooth transitions (from elementary school to middle school to high school to work or college), job training (skill building), college preparation (investigate scholarships, attend college fairs and college open houses), literacy/tutoring, employment attainment (resume preparation, interview practicing, help attaining internships or apprenticeships, career planning), community development/youth service, and substance abuse, teen pregnancy, crime and violence prevention, and conflict resolution (social competence and problem solving).

Focus Group Findings

Overall, mentors and teens reported being very satisfied with the Friends of the Children program. Mentors saw their jobs as incredibly rewarding, challenging, and valuable. Youth overwhelmingly reported loving the program and consider it one of the most important things in their lives. Evidence of this can be seen in the summary from the Friends' discussion group and in the key points drawn from the discussions with youth (please see the charts in Appendix C).



These charts of summarized responses to the focus groups questions are separated according to gender and age group. There appear to be some overarching differences (as hypothesized prior to the study) between the needs and wants of males and females. Overall, males are more In addition, it also appears that there is no distinct group of 'adolescents.' As supported by the literature, it will be useful for program planners to differentiate between pre-teens (6th and 7th graders) and teenagers (8th grade and beyond).

The section that follows summarizes the key points of near-unanimous agreement that emerged from all five focus group discussions. The focus groups covered many topics and participants brought up different ideas and opinions about the challenges and issues Friends of the Children faces in the development of an adolescent program.

An increase in group-activity time. Friends and teens agree that peer relationships and activities are becoming increasingly important as the youth move into adolescence. This developmentally normal process is important to youth because maintaining high self-esteem and increasing positive interactions in group settings is a primary component of planful competence. Planful competence includes traits like dependability, productivity, self-esteem and the ability to interact positively with others. High planful competence in adolescence is strongly predictive of positive outcomes later in life, including higher educational attainment, fewer divorces, and increased stability of personality functioning through time (Clausen, 1991).

More teen-focused activities. The focus group participants agreed that many teens feel like they are in-between being kids and adults. They have different needs than younger kids and want the Friends of the Children program to grow to accommodate those needs. Respondents felt that Friends-sponsored, teen-focused activities can and should offer healthy and positive alternatives to the sometimes negative or risky opportunities available to them outside the program.

Outside friends. Peers are becoming more important to these youth as they grow into adolescence, and teens often feel they are being asked to choose between their lives as Friends' kids and their lives outside the program. They want the program to serve as sort of an umbrella into which their larger social lives can be integrated. Central to this is the inclusion of their outside friends into Friends' activities. Friends reported feeling a sense of competition between their role in their youth's life and the youth's peer group. The inclusion of outside friends will make Friends of the Children activities a more attractive choice to adolescents, promoting more positive activities between youth and their outside friends by offering alternatives that are healthy and fun.

Balancing Roles. Participants agreed that scheduling conflicts have become a major source of frustration for both youth and Friends. Friends report increased "no-shows" and cancellations by youth, while youth report feeling frustrated at not having more input into the planning and scheduling of activities. Youth report that they want to spend *more* time with their Friends, not less, but it's important to them to have more of a say in the relationship. Friends and teens alike feel a bit constrained by what they perceive as Friends' policies that lack the flexibility necessary to help them make the transition into a more mature relationship.

Temptation. The theme of increased and more serious temptation came up in all groups. Teens and Friends both report that youth are being faced with a host of new challenges including: drugs, sex, and criminal activity. The youth cite peer pressure as a major challenge for them, and think of the Friends of the Children program as a resource to help them navigate these new challenges.

Sexuality. Sex and romantic relationships came up in all groups. Girls, boys and Friends are all struggling to understand and deal with the pressures, responsibility, fear and confusion surrounding the youth's sexual development. Boys and girls appear to have somewhat different sets of concerns, with the boys being more concerned about "getting girls" and the girls being more concerned about unwanted pregnancy, while the Friends try to walk the line between the realities of their teens' lives and the Friends' policy of abstention.

Materialism. Friends and teens both discussed materialism and material gifts. The teens returned again and again to the importance of material gifts, ranging from functional gifts like basketball shoes to just-plain-fun gifts like video games and CD players. This was one of the subjects that youth talked about with great enthusiasm. During the Friends' group, it was suggested that many of the youth equate material things with self-worth and love.

Independence. It comes as no surprise that the theme of independence was a major one in these groups, perhaps *the* major theme. The Friends acknowledge the teens' need to exercise as much autonomy as possible, but worry that many of these teens do not have the life-skills or

maturity to use that autonomy wisely. Friends report that teens need autonomy in an environment where they will be supported in their successes and mistakes as they try out their new roles. Teens feel that increased independence is a fundamental right as they grow older and that having their autonomy denied or too sharply limited shows that they are not trusted or respected. Finding proactive ways to encourage adolescent autonomy within a safe, respectful framework can yield significant dividends for these youth later in life. Learning successful autonomy contributes to planful competence, which is an important predictor of life-stability through time (Clausen, 1995). The transition to independence does come with a certain amount of conflict, but it often happens without having any adverse effects on parent/child (mentor/child) relationships.

Friend Transitions. The sometimes difficult and often painful transition from one Friend to another was also brought up in every discussion group. The transition between Friends can be very upsetting and confusing for youth, at any age level. Teens report having trouble trusting and connecting with their new Friend, and feel a strong sense of loss at the departure of their previous Friend. Friends and teens both want Friends of the Children to develop strategies to make this process smoother, more natural and less jarring.

What Adolescents Have to Say

Friends of the Children adolescents report that they enjoy the new experiences that are available to them as they grow older. The 6th and 7th grade girls feel they are in between older and younger kids, as they have some new choices, but are also expected to follow some of the same rules that younger kids adhere to. They are beginning to experience some of the challenges facing youth today such as deciding whether or not to use alcohol and drugs and how to communicate to someone they are interested in romantically. Boys are interested in the music scene and being a part of clubs. Youth report that they are becoming role models to younger kids. Emerging challenges they are facing include: fighting, staying focused, fear of failure, peer pressure, more trouble with their families, body changes, adult consequences for their behavior, relationships with potential partners, and decisions around sexual activity, using alcohol and drugs, staying in school, and gangs.

Youth believe that the purpose of the Friends of the Children program is different for everyone, but for the most part it is to be a friend to them, to help them stay out of trouble and be successful and to meet their everyday needs. Teens are proud that they are members of the program and report that they like meeting new people, companionship, help with family problems and school and receiving gifts. They especially like activities and having someone who listens to them and is there for them in good times and bad times.

When asked what the perfect relationship with their Friends would be, teens reported that they would like to talk more, be listened to more and get help with decision-making. Youth would like to have their input considered more when deciding what activities to pursue and feel that outside friends should be included in group activities. Both girls and boys, at all age levels report that they would like to see their Friends more often, both alone and in group activities. Ideally, this time would be more flexible than it has been and some teens would like to see their Friend for full days and more times per week.

What the Friends Have to Say

Friends enjoy their jobs, while challenging, and feel they are making a difference, not just for their kids but the community around those youth and ultimately society. Mentoring adolescents is rewarding because the kids are able to comprehend more and the activities are interesting to the Friends, too.



Friends are working to build life skills with their kids, as well as healthy, productive and creative habits. They are trying to develop compassion in the youth, while fostering empathy and a sense of love without agreement with their parents' behaviors. Friends see promoting self-awareness and self-esteem as a vital part of their role. They do this by role modeling, setting goals with the kids and by offering rewards when those goals are met. Friends also need guidance, training, and resources to help them set firm and realistic educational goals for their kids and to help ensure that these goals are met.

The Friends see their 6th through 9th grade kids as stuck between childhood and adulthood. These youth are often emotionally younger than their years, but want to be “cool” and grown up. They need their Friends but are struggling to do things without help. They are “mini adults” but without the skills to solve their own problems or to be completely independent. The kids need them, but on their own terms, which Friends feel is developmentally appropriate for their age level.

To better plan activities and arrange volunteer opportunities, the Friends suggest that they would benefit from a full-time activities coordinator. Kids are interested in sports, going to the mall, movies, computers and video games, and outdoor activities, especially those that involve risk-taking, as well as cooking, quilting, choir, pool and many others. Youth are especially interested in hanging out with their outside friends, and the Friends want to encourage the program to include these friends as much as possible in activities. They want group time increased and one-on-one time decreased. Friends would like to take the kids on trips outside Portland and invite them to participate in more activities that involve physical exertion.

Race and gender stereotypes are a big issue at this age. Violence, sexual activity, short attention spans, too much disposable income and family situations encouraging negative behaviors are also challenges the Friends are facing in working with these kids.

Friends suggest that kids be more involved with the entire program, not just their mentor and the kids their age. The Friends believe their kids would be interested in participating in a “Junior Board” for the program, acting as mentors for younger kids. They also feel Friends of the Children would benefit from developing transition plans for youth who are finishing the program, which may include guidance for participants as they go to college, begin a career or start a serious relationship with a partner.

Suggested Recommendations

- ❖ Recommendations for use as a springboard for discussion are mentioned throughout this report. The following is a brief synopsis of these suggestions:
- ❖ Design programming with three age groups in mind. Young children who start the program at age 6 should receive a different program from pre-teens (11-13) and teens (14+).
- ❖ Continue to encourage teens' exploratory behavior while supporting their efforts to move towards independence. Friends should remain an important support system and measure of consistency in their lives.
- ❖ Reduce the amount of structure on the time Friends must spend with their adolescent youth. They suggest having a 16 hour/month plan with support and trust from the administration to develop a schedule with the kids themselves. Otherwise they deal with cancellations and no-shows with the kids.
- ❖ Offer developmental psychology and educational counseling workshops to Friends.
- ❖ Continue to increase youth participation in all areas of the program: planning, junior board, adolescent mentors for younger kids. Solicit teens opinions on the activities being planned for them—and get them involved in the planning. Friends should seek their youth's assistance in scheduling visits.
- ❖ Continue to explore the possibility of hiring an activities director to coordinate larger group activities, coordinate volunteer opportunities and work with the program to develop a strategy to include kids outside of the program in group activities.
- ❖ Strengthen the Friends transition process by creating ground rules for new and old Friends; offering some kind of counseling to youth as they transition; and checking in with youth and their families and Friends from the beginning to find out how the transition is going and how the new relationships are developing.

Appendix A: Adolescent Focus Group Notes Summarized

Friends of the Children Adolescent Focus Groups, February 2001		
Girls	6th & 7th Grade "Pre-teens"	8th & 9th Grade "Teens"
1. What kinds of things are really great about teenagers today; specifically, what things are positive about getting older and being in junior or senior high school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More Teen-focused opportunities/activities • Parties • Later curfew • More fun and challenge at school • Not a "kid" anymore 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treated with more respect • Don't have to take as much "bull" • More freedom • More responsibility • Relatives don't pressure as much as in the past
2. What are some of the challenges for youth today?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staying focused • Stating in school • Fighting temptation • Homework is harder • More trouble with family • Relationships with boys • Pregnancy • Body changes • "In between being a kid and a teen" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More fighting/conflict with people in our lives • Guys – "think they like you but really they just want sex" • Gossip • Peer pressure • School is harder • It's tempting to skip school • More problems with parents
3. What is the purpose of the Friends of the Children program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To take kids places and teach them skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's different for everyone • To be FRIENDS, not just mentors
3a. Is the purpose different for younger kids than for teens? How?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Younger kids – G-movies, Chuck E Cheese • Teens – PG-movies, more "grown up" activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose is the same, but older kids need different things than younger kids
4a. What do you like about the Friends of the Children program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting new people/friends • Relieves boredom • Know they care about us 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meeting new people • Material gifts • "It's like home" • Cool activities
4b. What do you like about your Friend?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Companionship • Doing activities together • Help with school • Help with family problems • We can trust them • They listen to us • They give us stuff 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We can be ourselves • Trust • Friends respect us • Help deal with family problems • They care about us • Friends relate to us • They help us stay positive • The share THEIR lives with us too, it's not just about us
5a. What kinds of things don't you like about your Friend?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not enough time together • When Friends discipline us 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Flaky" Friends • When Friends discipline us • Don't see Friends enough • Inflexible scheduling • Hard to adjust to a new Friend
5b. What kinds of things don't you like about Friends of the Children program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When people "talk bad" about the program • When new Friends are assigned to us 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Everything has to be "by the book" • Friends are not paid enough
6. Has your relationship with your Friend changed as you have gotten older? How?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The relationship has "grown up" as we have • More comfortable "speaking my mind" • More trust now • More confidence in myself and my Friend • Learning more now

7. What would a perfect relationship with your Friend look like?

- Talk more
- More help with decision making
- Spend more time together
- Time spent together should be more flexible
- Activities should be open to “outside” friends
- Better transitions when Friends leave the program
- Friends should have fewer kids

- More time with Friends
- Don't go “by the book” all the time
- Friends should listen more, comment less
- Do more of what “I” want to do (activities)
- R-rated movies
- Less discipline
- More group activities

Friends of the Children Adolescent Focus Groups, February 2001		
Boys	6th & 7th Grade "Pre-teens"	8th & 9th Grade "Teens"
1. What kinds of things are really great about teenagers today; specifically, what things are positive about getting older and being in junior or senior high school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased autonomy • New experiences and opportunities • New social experiences and opportunities • Physical/mental development 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased autonomy • "Teenage" activities (away from FOTC), like going to dance clubs etc. • Becoming a role-model for younger kids
2. What are some of the challenges for youth today?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social anxiety • Fear of academic failure • "Grown-up" consequences for their behavior 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "A bad reputation can follow you" • Peer pressure • Have to fight temptation (drinking, drugs, stealing) • Everyday life is challenging (school, sports, friends) • Police harassment • Race/culture issues • Being a "Young Black Male"
3. What is the purpose of the Friends of the Children program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "To help kids stay off the streets, off drugs and out of trouble." • To complement parents, friends and family – not to replace them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help kids be successful • Help kids be role models • Help kids "stay alive and out of trouble" until they turn 18 • Meet everyday needs • Offer unconditional support
3a. Is the purpose different for younger kids than for teens? How?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Purpose is the same, but "kids" need more structure and supervision than older kids. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The purpose is the same, but less is expected of "kids" than teens
4a. What do you like about the Friends of the Children program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "Feel at home there." • Material gifts • A place that's fun, but still keeps you out of trouble." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always something to do • Fun activities that wouldn't be possible otherwise • Rewards for good grades • FOTC remembers personal stuff, like birthdays • A positive place to hang out
4b. What do you like about your Friend?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Material gifts • Companionship • Emotional support • Consistency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Material gifts • Go to cool events together • "My Friend is a good friend." • Trust • "A second family" • There for me
5a. What kinds of things don't you like about your Friend?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mistaking Friends for Fathers • "Flaky" Friends • Lack of input in scheduling and activity planning 	
5b. What kinds of things don't you like about Friends of the Children program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of co-ed activities • Lack of "teen" centered activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No teen-focused program or events • No in-house sports teams • Not enough group activities
6. Has your relationship with your Friend changed as you have gotten older? How?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closer emotionally • More input in activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closer emotionally • Friend lets teens make own choices, even when they don't agree with them • Helps me see things differently • Not as much academic "tutoring" anymore • Friends have proven themselves many times through time

<p>7. What would a perfect relationship with your Friend look like?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time – A lot more of it, and co-scheduling • Activities – More Co-ed and teen-focused activities. Include “outside” friends • Material – Want more STUFF (unclear about difference between needs and wants) • Support – Feel Friends are “there for them” and that they can be trusted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time – A lot more of it, and co-scheduling • Activities – More Co-ed and teen-focused activities. Include “outside” friends. More group activities • Support – Feel Friends are “there for them” and that they can be trusted
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Other websites of interest:

National Mentoring Center at the NWREL: www.nwrel.org/mentoring

National Mentoring Partnership: www.mentoring.org

Western Center for the Application of Prevention Technologies: www.open.org/~westcapt

Appendix C: Friends' Focus Group Protocol

Friends of the Children Mentoring Adolescents Focus Group January 18, 2001

Introduction

[We invited you here today to learn about your experiences working with youth as they transition from childhood to adolescence. As you know this has been a great concern of yours as their mentors, the program staff and the program committee. Since you are the experts, and have been working with these youth, our first step in learning more about this process was to strategize with you on program planning for this age group. We will use your guidance to formulate questions to use when we talk with the kids. In the next two weeks, we will talk with four groups of kids (explain) and finish reviewing books and articles on mentoring adolescents. We will combine the results from all of these methods into one report to you.]

[We encourage you to have a bagel and some juice. Let's start with introductions around the room.]

Ground Rules

[There are a couple of things we want to do before we get started. First, to protect confidentiality we would like everyone to read and sign this form. It is an agreement between us that whatever is said here today is completely confidential and that none of us will share what any individual says with anyone outside the group. When we write up what we discuss and recommendations we will not identify anyone by name. After we complete the brief report we will destroy the audiotape.

Although we probably don't need to say this to this group, there are some general ground rules that will help facilitate our discussion. We will work together to let one person speak at a time, keep side conversations to a minimum, have everyone participate, and remember that there are no right or wrong answers.]

Collect Background Information

Please take a minute to fill out this background information without including your name.

Focus Group Guiding Questions

1. What are the short-term and long-term goals of the Friends of the Children program? (list in two separate columns on the board)
2. What activities did you use to meet these goals when the youth was in 1st through 5th grade (e.g., meet once a week, help with homework, etc.)? [PROMPT: What is the pace (or needs) of the relationship with a younger kid?]
3. What has changed since the youth has become an adolescent (6th – 9th grade)? How much space do these kids need? Have you noticed a shift?

- a. [PROMPT: What challenges face these youth today? (We will make a list of risk behaviors on the board)]
 - b. [PROMPT: Do you have a sense of urgency that the negative behaviors are just around the corner; does this urgency affect your relationships with your youth?]
4. What techniques do you use to connect with the adolescents that you work with? How much time do you spend with the youth in this age group that you mentor? What activities interest them? Do they prefer to be in groups or meet with you one on one?
 - a. [PROMPT: What do the kids want to be doing for fun with you as their mentor? What do you want to be doing with these kids?]
 5. What needs to happen to get kids to the end of the program – to high school graduation? How can we engage them fully in Friends of the Children as they grow older?
 6. What aspects of mentoring these kids do you find rewarding? What is challenging for you? Do you feel like you have the skills and background to assist them with these challenges? What would you like to know more about?

Conclusion

Thank you so much for coming here today—if there is anything else you would like to tell us, but have not had the opportunity or just thought of it now, even if it is an idea we have already discussed, please use one of these index cards to write it down. We would also like you to write down what you think the main problems or issues are for Friends working with adolescents and suggest solutions for these issues.

Appendix D: Youth Focus Group Protocol

Friends of the Children Mentoring Adolescents Focus Group - Youth February 10, 2001

Introduction

[We invited you here today to learn about your experiences spending time with your Friends and how your relationship has grown and changed over the years, especially since you started 6th grade or so. As you get older, sometimes the things that you need and want to do change. Everyone in the Friends of the Children program is really interested in your opinions about how things are going and what you need right now since you are the experts! Your opinions will help shape the program for teens!]

[Let's start with introductions around the room – please tell us your first name, what grade you are in, and your favorite _____ (tv show, singer/group, food).]

Ground Rules

[There are a couple of things we want to do before we get started with the questions. First, we want you to know that everything you say here today is private, just between us. No one at the program (including your Friend), within your family, or at school will ever know what you said here today unless you want to tell them. Your name will NEVER be connected when we write up a summary of your recommendations. It is important that you promise not to tell anyone outside of our group what anyone in the group says. We/I would like you to sign this paper that says that you would like to participate and that you will not tell anyone outside our group what anyone in the group says. This way, we can all be really honest about how we feel.]

[There are a couple more ground rules that we think will help if we keep them in mind while we talk together: 1) let one person speak at a time, 2) keep side conversations to a minimum, 3) have everyone participate, and 4) remember that there are no right or wrong answers.]

Focus Group Guiding Questions

[In our first set of focus groups, it worked really well to write their responses to each question on the paper in the flip chart and then hang them around the room on the wall. To encourage participation, we asked teens in the group to hang them up. Another idea is to have teens read some of the questions.]

7. Let's start out by talking about what kinds of things are really great about teenagers today; specifically, what things are positive about getting older and being in junior or senior high school?
8. Next, let's talk about what kinds of things are challenges for youth today. (for example, family, school, alcohol and drugs, sex, pregnancy, problems with friends)
9. Now let's talk about the Friends of the Children program. By talking about the program, we mean your Friend or Mentor as well as the whole program (this

- includes other activities in this building or with other Friends and teens). In your opinion, what is the purpose or goal of the program?
- a. Is the purpose different for younger kids, say in 1st through 5th grade, and for teens in 6th grade and higher? If yes, how is it different?
10. What do you like about the program and your Friend/mentor?
- a. What do you like about your Friend and the activities that you do such as school stuff or fun stuff?)
 - b. What is the most important thing your Friend has done for you?
11. What kinds of things don't you like about the program or your Friend? What kinds of things would you like to see changed?
12. Has your relationship with your Friend changed as you have gotten older? If so, how has it changed?
13. If you got to decide exactly what your relationship with your Friend could look like, what would it be like?
- a. How much time would you want to spend together?
 - b. Do you prefer to get together in groups of teens and Friends or meet one-on-one?
 - c. What would you want to do together? (for fun and for improvement/maintenance of school, daily living skills, etc.)
 - d. Do you feel like your Friend is "there for you?" How accessible is your Friend? Do they listen to you? Do they hear you?
 - e. Written Questions [Save 10 minutes for these at the end.]

Thank you so much for talking with us today and giving us all of this helpful feedback. We will summarize your ideas and present them to the program, without any names, so that they can use your expert advice to make changes in programming for teens. Please take 5 minutes to answer the three questions on this sheet of paper and then you are set to go. **HAND OUT QUESTIONS.** The first question asks: "Please list 3 things that you see yourself doing after high school or in the next 5 years (such as working, continuing school, relationships, or anything else you can think of)," and the second one asks "If you had to pick one thing to tell the Friends of the Children program so that it worked great for teenagers, what would it be?," and third "What was your favorite part of our group meeting today?"

Conclusion

[Thank you so much for coming here today! You have all been amazing and we/I have learned so much from you. You are the first teens in the Friends of the Children program to reach 6th grade and beyond and your opinions about what you most need and want will help to shape the program - both for you in the next few years and for all of the youth who are in the program in the future!]

Written Questions

1. Please list 3 things that you see yourself doing after high school or in the next 5 years (such as working, continuing school, relationships, or anything else you can think of).
2. If you had to pick 1 thing to tell the Friends of the Children program so that it worked great for teenagers, what would it be?
3. What was your favorite part of our group meeting today?