

USucceed

A Pivotal Time of Life

The time youth spend in high school includes many life-changing moments: learning to drive, starting a first job, preparing for college, becoming an adult. For most young people, these moments are guided with the emotional and social support of a parent. The story is much different for young adults who lack a consistent adult presence.

National studies show that youth in unstable living environments are likely to drop out of school, deal with a substance addiction or become a young parent. Over time this can lead to significant costs to the community in terms of law enforcement, treatment programs and more.

A survey of at-risk teenagers in Sioux Falls found that 51% were not living with a parent and/or guardian. The survey also found the following:

- 37% needed help finding a job.
- 28% needed help finding housing.
- 19% needed help learning how to budget money, pay rent, or deal with a landlord.

Mentoring Towards Independence

Currently in the Sioux Empire, there are few options for structured mentoring for students after the age of 14. Sioux Empire United Way's expanded partnership with Lutheran Social Services will form a new long-term mentoring program for students as they enter the pivotal time of high school.

- At-risk students will be the first priority of this program. These students who are motivated to graduate, but are without parental support will be identified by school counselors.
- Students will be matched with a mentor early in their high school career.
- Volunteer mentors will commit to a minimum of four years of mentoring a student. This will help build a relationship that lasts through the student's entire high school career.
- Mentor relationships will start through weekly meetings in the school and will gradually grow to allow time outside of school as well.
- An Independence Coordinator will operate the program, assisting both mentors and students.
- Mentors will assist students in setting and meeting goals in: money management, college and career exploration, social relationships, daily living, and more.
- Incentives will be available for student participants. This will provide for basic needs items such as clothing, as well as items to aid in their education, such as calculators, or college application fees.

Empowering Our Youth, Impacting Our Community

Beginning in January 2012, 30 at-risk students between the ages of 14-16 will begin meeting with volunteer mentors. Mentors will serve as role models, advocates, friends and advisors to students in need. Expected outcomes for the students include:

- Improved self-esteem, confidence, and attitudes about school.
- Fewer disciplinary referrals.
- Increased independent living skills.
- Pursuit of a high school diploma or GED.
- Securing full or part-time employment.
- Maintaining a safe and stable living environment during and after high school

A study completed by the University of Minnesota concluded that in the short-term, quality mentoring results in a return of \$2.72 for every \$1 invested. In short, mentoring works!