

Youth Mentoring Program History

The development of a mentoring program began in 1996 in Winneshiek County when individuals from agencies serving youth gathered to determine the interest in a mentoring program. Building Bridges Through Mentoring began operation in January 1998 beginning in one school district and later expanding to cover all of Winneshiek County. Allamakee County's program began in November 1998 using the name Mentoring Mania: Catch It. They later changed their name to the Allamakee Mentoring Program. Howard County began the program, MY Club (the M stands for Mentoring and the Y for Youth), in January 1999. As these three programs were being formed community leaders suggested three important concepts:

- The primary focus of the mentoring relationship shall be to form a relationship with a caring adult—not to be a tutor or career consultant.
- Funding shall always be available for mentors to use with their mentee so that no one will feel they cannot be a mentor because they can't afford it.
- Positive role models are very important to our youth.

Over the years the programs have had various funding sources and grew with different coordinators. The Winneshiek program began in December 1998 with no funding and no staff, but excited volunteers. Decat funds were granted to operate a program in May 1998 and Kathy Schwartzhoff was hired as the mentoring coordinator.

In 1998, the first McElroy Trust Fund grant was received to support mentors for youth in Allamakee and Winneshiek Counties. They also provided funds in 2001 specific to seeking male mentors. From 1999 until June 2001, a relationship with a local family counseling service, Alternative Treatment Associates in Postville, yielded grant funding to provide mentors to youth who attended parenting classes called Families and Schools Together (FAST). This funding came from Preserving Safe and Stable Funds. From 2001 - 2003, the Allamakee program received a \$1500 grant from the Arlin Falck Foundation, a local family trust fund, for mentor recruitment and events.

Mentoring Mania: Catch It! began in 1998 with Diane Engen as the first coordinator. The program's name changed to the Allamakee Mentoring Program in 2001. Coordinators over the years have been Engen, Barb Fay, Karen Tenneson, Kathy Schwartzhoff, Heidi Bohr, Carole Daughton, Dan Bellrichard, Rosa Grant, Jill Hollowell, Polly Miller, Marilyn Zweibahmer, Joelle Nielsen, and Colinne McCann. From 2006-2007, Brita Carbonell was the mentoring assistant.

MY Club, the Howard County program, began in January 1999 with Diane Engen as its coordinator. Coordinators working in Howard County included: Engen, Rhonda Powell, Karen Tenneson, Carole Daughton, Kathy Schwartzhoff, Rosa Grant, Jill Hollowell, Polly Miller, Marilyn Zweibahmer, Joelle Nielsen, and Colinne McCann.

In 2002, mentoring received its first Youth Mentoring grant from the Iowa Department of Public Health. This began a long history of holding this grant until 2015. From 2002 - 2013, the grant covered youth ages 5 -16 in Allamakee, Howard, and Winneshiek Counties. In 2013, Delaware County was added. These grants were substance abuse prevention-based, required programs to adhere to the Elements of Effective Practice, encouraged strong Advisory Councils, and suggested that sustainability was important.

In 2006, Helping Services assisted Fayette County to create, strengthen, and sustain already existing and new programs through a Prevention Through Mentoring grant from the Iowa Department of Public Health. From 2014 - 2015, we supported Clayton County to create a culture of support for mentoring and spreading resources to support mentoring in northeast Iowa.

In 2007, a local family trust titled the Marion Jerome Foundation gave \$5,000 to support activity reimbursements for mentors, group events for mentors and mentees to enjoy, postage, staff mileage, and staff development. This funding source had an annual history of giving for five years. The following year, a philanthropic group called Nightcrawlers Forever began an annual history of giving \$300-\$600 for mentors and mentees from Allamakee County to have new experiences while mentoring.

A surge of abundant funding took place with two federal grant awards in 2009. The Recovery Act Mentoring grant was named Kids of Promise by Helping Services and involved supporting mentors by offering specialized trainings and structured activities for mentors and mentees to do together. A hardy budget of \$500,000 for each three year period offered support for mentoring in Allamakee, Delaware, Fayette, Howard, and Winneshiek Counties. Staff expanded to a total of five mentoring coordinators and supported four county-wide programs and five small programs. Helping Services received one of the eight awards offered in the nation.

The Strategic Enhancement to Mentoring grant, named by Helping Services as Mentoring Plus had a budget equal to Kids of Promise. It's scope of work included supporting mentors by offering structured activities for mentors and mentees to do together, trainings, events, parenting classes, and support for families. It served the same geographical area and youth ages 5-16 like Kids of Promise. With this new funding from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, came new avenues of recordkeeping, accountability, and reporting. Mentoring Plus was one of 11 programs awarded in the nation. Mentoring participants and community resources grew rapidly in this four year period.

During this same year, the first Winneshiek County Community Foundation grant was given in the amount of \$5,816 to support mentors and mentees to attend a live community theatre performance, create visual art at an art studio, and to be inspired by Luther College athletes who taught skills about leadership, sportsmanship, and being healthy.

In June 2010, Mentoring Connection for Delaware County was added as a mentoring program at Helping Services. The program was led by Ellen Krogmann until February of 2020. Many mentors meet their mentees at West Delaware Schools and in later years at Maquoketa Valley and Ed-Co School Districts. Some matches are community-based.

In 2012, Mentoring Programs at Helping Services was nominated by the Iowa Department of Public Health and selected to receive a Service to Science grant award from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). This award provided funding to enhance evaluation methods in a substance abuse prevention program. The scope of work involved staff members attending a research boot camp where they explored the 'why' behind their work, learned the vital components of evaluation tools and created a work plan to refine current evaluation tools. Mentoring Coordinators received approximately 40 hours of technical support from SAMHSA staff to create tools that measured outcomes. Lessons learned during the Service to Science grant year are still adhered to today.

Beginning in 2013, two unique groups gave support to mentoring at Helping Services. The Luce Bergeson Fund is an endowment group that donated \$650 to support mentoring. The Resource, Conservation, and Development Employee Giving fund donated \$750 for mentors and mentees to have outdoor experiences. Kids of Promise and Mentoring Plus funding ended during 2013.

During 2014, the second Winneshiek County Community Foundation grant was given for \$1,948 to create a booklet for risk management including body safety. That same year, the Howard County Community Foundation supported the program with \$500 for trainings for mentors on domestic violence and suicide prevention and added funding for new experiences creating visual art for mentors and mentees to do together.

In 2015, the funding relationship with the Iowa Department of Public Health (IDPH) continued as mentoring received a four-year grant titled Youth Substance Abuse Prevention Services (YSAPS) grant for \$59,000. This grant focuses on connecting youth with mentors while adhering to the Elements of Effective Practice, distribution of substance abuse prevention materials, strong Advisory Councils, and program sustainability. During a desk review in 2019, the IDPH consultant praised mentoring coordinators for always being innovative in the field of mentoring and shared that many programs see Helping Services' Youth Mentoring as leaders in the mentoring field.

In 2016, Helping Services received an AmeriCorps grant to build capacity for mentoring. This funding allowed hiring another full-time mentoring coordinator for nearly three years. This funding brought increases in mentor recruitment, support for program participants, and the first mandated use of a sustainability plan. This same year a \$4,246 award was given to mentoring from the Winneshiek County Community Foundation and in 2017 the award was \$3,665. Both of these awards involved providing support for youth ages 5-16 to have a mentor.

From 2018 - 20, the Allamakee, Howard, and Winneshiek County Community Foundations have consistently awarded annual grants for Youth Mentoring. Over those years, Allamakee's support totaled \$5,394, Howard's was \$3,734, and Winneshiek's was \$12,534. Additionally, Delaware County community granting organizations such as the Foundation for the Future of Delaware County, McGee Barr Charitable Grant, McDonough Foundation, Delaware County Community Chest, and the Small Miracles Fund have provided annual funds to support the program in Delaware County. Last year alone those funding sources provided \$14,800 of support.

In 2019, the Iowa Mentoring Partnership awarded Youth Mentoring at Helping Services a grant called Mentoring For Youth Impacted by Opioids in Rural Iowa for \$50,377. Goals include building protective factors in both mentored youth and their families.

In 2020, the mentoring coordinator in Delaware County moved into another career after serving for over 10 years. The COVID-19 pandemic shut offices down in March. It was recommended that mentors and mentees not meet in-person and group events were canceled until further notice. A new coordinator for Delaware County began in May. In June, matches were given the option to meet in-person with many matches excited to do this and several other matches closed due to concerns related to COVID. The Decorah Community School District did not allow visitors into the building, thus a break from school-based mentoring happened in Winneshiek County. Group events, with COVID precautions, resumed in August. Youth Mentoring at Helping Services was one of 11 grantees in the state of Iowa to receive an Improving Tomorrow: Prevention Through Mentoring grant through the Iowa Department of Public Health.