

Promising Practice in MCP Match Support: Monthly Activities



Effective Match Support with MCP mentoring relationships is more than rigorous case management. It also includes providing opportunities to observe, cultivate, and reinforce quality relationships through face-to-face interaction. One promising practice is offering monthly activities for your matches. These opportunities can be shared learning, fun outings, special events, or service projects. It assists mentors with the challenge of figuring out what to do during their time together while providing a chance to share experiences with other mentors and the staff.

Here are just a few ideas shared by MCP grantees:

Tap your internal resources. You may have heard about the University of Connecticut's talent in Basketball. "UConn's" community of Hartford certainly has and the MCP grantee, the **University of Connecticut Health Center** in Farmington, CT has turned this into a match support activity that also provided some great community outreach. Mentors and mentees had an opportunity to attend a game and be recognized on the court with the team's highly regarded coach. Having a beloved coach champion your team provides a special message of appreciation and a very memorable experience for the children and their mentors.

Tap your Community for Partners. Team up with organizations that are already doing outdoor activities and service projects. **Community Solutions of El Paso** in El Paso, TX was "adopted" by their local Sierra Club chapter for outdoor adventures far beyond the capacity of the program. Sierra Club's primary mission is to foster stewardship of our natural resources through experiencing the many opportunities offered by our natural spaces. The children learn about nature and responsible exploration while visiting places in their own backyard they may never have realized were there. The mentors have an opportunity to spend time with their mentee without having to figure out something to do. Besides, being outside is just plain fun.

Youth Focus in Greensboro, North Carolina has a partnership with the local Cultural Arts Center (CAC) which contains a hands-on art center for children called ArtQuest. By showing their BBBS membership card, matches get free access, thanks to a community outreach grant obtained by CAC. In addition, Youth Focus receives free passes for matches to visit the local Science Center.

Give back to your community. **Lutheran Episcopal Services in Mississippi (LESM)** in Jacksonville, Mississippi paired with Habitat for Humanity on a landscaping project. LESM contacted their local Habitat affiliate to set up

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the project which had mentors and mentees getting active in the dirt and having fun while planting bushes, laying straw, and digging out beds.

AmeriCorps programs are operating in communities throughout the nation and, as a primary focus, engage people in volunteering. Special holidays such as MLK Day in January, Earth Day in spring, and Make a Difference Day in fall are times when you can count on these programs to have something going on. An extra set of hands, or 30, is probably something they'd appreciate. Check to see who's operating in your community at http://www.nationalservice.gov/about/role_impact/state_profiles.asp

Keep in mind that you don't need a formal program connection to do service. Community service includes Trash Off events, 5K Walk/Run for Poverty, up keeping city property such as parks, nursing home visits, animal kindness, or food pantry.

Provide Opportunities for Shared learning. **Youth Connections** in Atlanta, GA does a program called "Step It Up" that involves several workshops that mentors and mentees can attend during the months of January through June. Topics for the workshops range from financial management, the prison system and its effect on the family, entrepreneurship, higher education, and other topics of interest. At the end of these workshops in June, we have a graduation ceremony for those that have attended for the past six months. All participants have agreed that it drew them much closer because they were involved together in a learning atmosphere. All guest speakers that deliver these topics are professionals in their own right and do this on a Saturday without any type of compensation. The graduation ceremony has become a very big highlight of these workshops!

Just Have Fun! Little Dixie Community Action Agency always has something going on and their monthly newsletter tells you what's coming and shows photos from what's past. Consider cooking demonstrations, recognition and appreciation events, contests such as essay or photos, and lots of fun outings like fishing, skating, cookouts, museums, plays, and community events. Keep it simple. It's still fun.

Hour Children in Long Island City, New York has found that square dancing is a huge hit with their matches. The organization held the inaugural Square Dance last year and brought it back again this year due to the enormous success of the event. See for yourself - the video is available on YouTube at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4H_Sz8LtNDY.

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**This is just a small bite of what's going on in the field.
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