

Planning Guide

Youth
Sponsorship
Program

Planning Guide

INTRODUCTION

For military youth, moving from one installation to another is nothing new. It is a common occurrence that most families experience every one to three years. While these frequent relocations are something military youth become accustomed to, the transition to a new community and school is never easy. Leaving behind friends, neighbors, and supportive adults as well as familiar standards and environments can make kids more vulnerable to negative influences or risk factors. Youth may be more influenced by peer pressure to do things they would not normally do. Some youth may be uncomfortable meeting new kids and may be hesitant to seek out opportunities to get involved with their new school or community. This can lead to increased risk for isolation, depression, and loneliness. For these reasons, it is critical that incoming youth to any installation have access to positive peer groups and pro-social activities. Youth need to get connected to their community and have opportunities to bond with positive peers and adults even before arriving at an installation.

Helping youth successfully make the transition from one installation to another is the role of the Youth Sponsorship Program. According to the Department of Defense (DoD), the primary objectives of the Youth Sponsorship Program are to ensure communities identify and reach out to incoming youth and help them get adjusted to their new surroundings. It is the responsibility of those already at the installation to take the initiative by contacting incoming youth, helping them adjust and get connected with youth already at the installation, and providing them with information that will enable them to be productive members of the community. Secondly, the DoD recognizes that in order to be successful, the Youth Sponsorship Program needs to be created by and for youth with youth involvement in every aspect of program development and implementation. The program will not reach its potential without consistent youth involvement in planning and carrying out program activities. Additionally, feedback from incoming youth about their experiences in the program is imperative to ensure a sustainable program that meets the needs of incoming youth.

Purpose of the Guide

This guide is a basic step-by-step outline to assist in getting a successful Youth Sponsorship Program started. It will serve as a roadmap to planning and implementation. This guide contains practical information about what a Youth Sponsorship Program should aim to accomplish and the difficulties or challenges that may be encountered during development and implementation. What this guide does not do is dictate what your program should look like. Each installation is unique and the Youth Sponsorship Program at each installation should be designed and implemented to meet the specific needs of youth at that installation.

Organization of the Guide

The guide is organized into three sections: Planning a Youth Sponsorship Program; Implementing a Youth Sponsorship Program; and Sustaining a Youth Sponsorship Program. While it is important for a designated staff person to have primary responsibility and oversight of all stages of the program, it is critical to involve youth as much as

possible throughout the process. Within the sections of the guide are suggestions on how to involve youth from the start. Remember that youth at each installation have unique insight into what is most helpful to incoming youth because they were once the new kids in town. Throughout the planning and implementation of the Youth Sponsorship Program, be sure to share with youth the information in this guide and the rest of the toolkit.

**PLANNING
A YOUTH
SPONSORSHIP
PROGRAM**

This section of the guide is intended to provide practical advice and guidelines for getting your program started. It presents three primary tasks that will be important in establishing a successful program: obtaining collaboration and support, involving youth, and developing a realistic plan.

Obtaining Collaboration and Support

One of the first tasks in developing a Youth Sponsorship Program is to ensure that there is leadership support from the installation. Support from the top will make it much easier to foster support for the program from other agencies and the community. In the beginning, this will involve sharing information about the legal requirements and the purpose of the program. Because the Youth Sponsorship Program is one of the few programs required by law (Section 1785 of title 10, United States Code) and specified within the DoD Youth Instruction 6060.4, it should not be difficult obtaining leadership support once this information is shared with

the Command. As the planning of the program moves forward, keep leadership updated on the planning progress and any challenges or obstacles encountered.

In addition to leadership support, obtain support from other installation and community agencies. Generating buy-in and support of other agencies during the planning phase of the program will make implementation much easier. It might be helpful to have leadership distribute a letter explaining the purpose of the program and the importance of each agency's involvement in its development, implementation, and sustainability. This will ensure all agencies are aware of the installation's commitment to and support of the effort.

All agencies involved must understand the critical role that each agency plays and the necessity of each agency's involvement. Each agency should recognize the contribution that can be made and have representation on a collaborative working team that will plan and implement the Youth Sponsorship Program. For example, the housing office might

have critical information about the families arriving at the installation, including the number and ages of children in each household. Youth Programs and schools have access to youth at the installation who can serve as program volunteers and/or sponsors to incoming youth. All agencies might have access to facilities or resources that can be used for youth sponsorship activities. A template for a Collaborative Member List is included in the Sample Tools CD to help establish who should be represented on the collaborative team. Each agency should have a clear understanding of its role in the effort so there is no confusion or duplication of activity.

The following are some of the key agencies that should be involved in a collaboration focused on youth sponsorship:

- **Relocation** – Relocation often has expertise in transition and primary responsibility for assisting military members in adapting to new installations. This agency has the knowledge and experience to play a lead role in partnerships focused on youth development in a transitory environment.
- **Youth Programs** – Involvement from Youth Programs is integral to developing and implementing a successful Youth Sponsorship Program. Youth Programs may have ready access to volunteer youth, established relationships with schools and parents, a working knowledge of how to maximize youth involvement, expertise for working with youth, and lessons learned from implementing other youth programs. Youth Programs will serve as a crucial resource. On any installation, it should be easy to get buy-in to the program from Youth Programs as they should readily see how the Youth Sponsorship Program will assist in making it easier for youth to get involved, participate in positive activities, and successfully integrate into the community.
- **Schools** – The installation and local community school systems need to be key partners in the program. School systems have access to youth, community influence, an understanding of youth development, and a commitment to youth success within the community. Their collaboration can ease resource

burdens and assist especially with advertising the program and getting youth involved.

- **Housing** – The housing office should be able to provide important information about youth living on and off the installations that will help in identifying and contacting incoming youth. This office has a vested interest in helping youth develop into positive young adults, thereby avoiding youth involvement in negative behaviors in housing areas.
- **Family Assistance Centers** – This agency already helps service members, spouses, and families adjust to new situations and environments. Family Assistance Centers might have information, services that can be tailored for youth, and ideas for how to help youth cope with relocation. It is important that this agency is a partner in planning and implementation of the Youth Sponsorship Program so as not to duplicate resources for this effort.
- **Printing/Publishing** – The department that handles the installation printing and publishing

can vary but will play a role in the program marketing effort and development of program materials. It will be important for the Printing/Publishing department to be involved in the collaborative effort for program development and implementation.

- **Information Technology Services** – The department that handles information technology needs can play an important role in the Youth Sponsorship Program. Some of the activities that Information Technology can help with include designing Web pages for incoming youth to communicate with peers at the installation, setting up e-mail exchanges among youth, and assisting in electronic advertisement of the program.
- **Community Youth Centers and Boys & Girls Clubs** – These organizations have a considerable amount of general knowledge about youth, including information about how to get youth involved, what they like to do, where they hang out, and how to enlist the help of other community organizations. Working with these organizations will maximize

Tips for Getting Youth to Participate in Planning

Start by reaching out to youth in existing organizations and community service capacities. Instead of inviting all installation youth to a pizza social and planning meeting, thereby expecting youth to volunteer when they have no information about what they are getting themselves into, market program involvement to established groups of youth (e.g., key club, student government, torch club, school groups, yearbook clubs, sports teams). Talk with group members about the program to get individuals interested in volunteering or just have brainstorming sessions during club/team meetings so that you can elicit ideas from youth without them having to commit themselves. The objective is to jump start youth involvement with established groups and then solicit involvement of other youth through peer channels and networks. Below are some other ideas for involving youth:

- Once you get a few youth involved, ask them to bring a friend.
- Talk with schools about class involvement in the program.
- When involving youth, keep in mind potential barriers to their availability, such as when and where meetings are held, transportation needs, and conflicting schedules.
- Consider involving local community youth as well as military youth because they have a lot to offer, including a unique understanding of the area.
- Be clear about your expectations for youth involvement. Youth need to know what they are getting into before they will agree to participate.

involvement of youth, parents, and other service providers in the Youth Sponsorship Program.

Collaboration will be key to ongoing program planning, development and success. Maximizing the resources and knowledge of all community agencies will help the effort. Trying to create a program in isolation will produce undue burden on time, staff, and resources and likely will be ineffective.

To get organizations involved, generate buy-in to the objectives of the program and talk with each agency individually about why its involvement is important. Remember to enlist leadership to help open doors. Once contact has been established, frequent communication and updates will be critical to sustaining ongoing collaboration. Plan regular meetings of all involved agencies and volunteers (the collaborative team) to discuss current tasks, new ideas, resources available (time, talent, and money), and progress. A template for documenting meeting minutes is included on the Sample Tools CD.

Involving Youth

Youth are a positive force in the community who tend to be overlooked and underutilized. The Youth Sponsorship Program is intended to help youth get involved in the community and make a successful transition. Military youth have a unique understanding of what it feels like to be the new kid in the community and tend to be more willing to accept new youth into a circle of friends because they have been that new person multiple times. They understand the difficulties of moving around, the frustration of leaving their friends, and both the fun and fear of living somewhere new. They also have a desire to get to know people from different backgrounds. For these reasons, military youth must be a part of the planning and implementation of any Youth Sponsorship Program. Their involvement not only on the collaborative team but in all aspects of the program should be sought out, nurtured, and encouraged.

Many adults are hesitant to involve youth in any major capacity because they are afraid that the young person will not be able to contribute,

will lose interest, or will not be dependable. While youth do need structure and support throughout the process, they have a lot to offer and should not be ignored. They have been in the shoes of incoming youth, understand what youth need, understand what kinds of activities interest youth, and generally have a desire to help. In addition to being a vital resource for the program, their participation also benefits them and the community. Their participation may increase public awareness and appreciation for their capacity to contribute and be involved in positive community initiatives. Participating will provide them with new skills and knowledge as well as help them understand how they can have a positive impact. Involving youth should be a priority throughout planning and implementation as well as long-term sustainability of the program.

When asking youth to participate it is imperative that they get the support needed to be able to make significant contributions to planning. Youth do not have the life experiences of adults and this will be a learning opportunity for them, therefore expectations should reflect this. Before soliciting

youth involvement, adults should have some agreement about the expectations of youth participation, the resources/time available for training and supporting youth, and the roles/activities appropriate for youth. During certain times of program development and for some youth, it may be more appropriate to include them in brainstorming sessions or in implementing certain program activities (once developed). Adults also should recognize that over the course of several months, it may be necessary to work with several different groups of youth to accomplish program goals. It will not always be appropriate to assemble a group of youth and expect them to be involved in all stages of the program. When developing a structure for youth involvement, consider the installation and collaborative team's capacity to support youth, the interests of installation youth, and benefits of involving them. Brainstorm with youth about possible program structure and activities, youth roles in planning and development, and the benefits of being involved.

- **Have ideas for how youth can help and what roles they will be able to play. Many youth have varying interests and while they want to help, may not understand how they can contribute or believe that adults will listen.**
- **Tap into local community service requirements for high school graduation if they exist in your area or community service requirements for kids on probation. This may help you get unique perspectives and interesting ideas.**

Finally, challenge yourself to reach out beyond high achievers. Look beyond the inner circle of contacts to reach at-risk youth and youth who tend not to be involved in these types of activities. This will be difficult, but working with these youth in the beginning and having brainstorming sessions with them will yield a wealth of information that will help to develop a program that can reach diverse types of incoming youth. Look to community organizations and the installation substance abuse/delinquency counseling and prevention programs to find these youth. Base police/security also will be a good resource for finding and involving youth who will be helpful. While many of these youth engage in negative activities, they have a unique perspective and a lot to contribute. They will be instrumental in helping develop a successful program that reaches a wide range of audiences.

Tips extracted from the Family and Youth Services Bureau Exchange Newsletter (2002) and results from the DoD Community Assessment for Youth focus groups conducted at installations worldwide.

The key to successful youth involvement and a successful Youth Sponsorship Program is making sure young people are participants rather than merely spectators or recipients of services. When creating a structure and involving youth it will be important to remember the following:

- It is important to be realistic with youth about resources and materials. Brainstorming sessions will be more helpful if you are honest and up front with youth about the constraints under which the program will be working. Being clear with youth will help them develop realistic ideas.
- When involving youth in planning the program, start with a few brainstorming sessions, think about the activity ideas mentioned, which groups discussed those activities, and youth enthusiasm for each activity. Youth tend to be more willing to be involved with ideas that they were a part of developing and about which they are excited.
- Update youth about the results of brainstorming sessions. Youth will not want to be involved further if they believe that their time was wasted (even if it was not, perception is important). Being up front with them during the sessions and keeping them updated about what activities are realistic, progress made on their input, and how they can help put their ideas into place will be invaluable in getting their buy-in and active involvement.
- Do not expect all youth who seem interested to become enthusiastic and involved on an ongoing basis. While there will likely be a few youth who become core members and continually help with implementing the Youth Sponsorship Program, the majority of youth are likely to be involved in specific planning tasks (e.g., developing posters, recruiting youth) or specific activities (e.g., presenting at orientation, guiding tour of installation). Give young people roles in which they are interested and likely to succeed.
- Do not get discouraged if it is difficult to keep youth interested; they have lives too and get busy and easily distracted. There are many youth at your installation and they all have interests and talents.

It is a matter of matching interests and talents with the right activity (e.g., asking an art class to help with posters, handbook covers; asking an intercultural relations class to help with developing pages about cultural opportunities and language for the Youth Handbook). Making sure youth are involved will be difficult at times and you might have to get creative; however, the payoff will be worth it.

- Give youth responsibilities that help them build relationships with other members of the community. This project should not only be about getting their help but about helping them develop and become invaluable to their community. Learning how to work with different people and networking will be important skills that come in handy when applying for college or a summer job.

Youth involvement will not always be easy but it is an essential component to making the Youth Sponsorship Program a success. Look to other professionals in the community and schools who work with youth regularly to help with ideas for engaging youth in the process.

Developing a Realistic Plan

Once there is support and involvement from key stakeholders, including youth, the resulting collaborative team should develop a realistic plan for what the Youth Sponsorship Program will consist of and when it will be implemented. At a minimum, the plan developed by the collaborative team should include:

- Purpose/mission statement and program goals
- Identification of target population
- Specification of the parameters/ rules/regulations within which all will be working
- Available resources/budget
- Key activities
- Roles and responsibilities
- Recruitment and training
- Marketing
- Maintenance.

Additionally, the plan should include a timeline for the development of the program. Tools such as a meeting minutes documentation template and a planning summary template are provided in the Sample Tools CD included with the toolkit in order to help with the planning process.

Program purpose/mission/goals. The plan should begin with the overall purpose or mission of the Youth Sponsorship Program. It will be important to review the purpose outlined by DoD and create your own tailored purpose/mission. Next, identify the key goals of the program, making sure they are realistic, feasible, and measurable. These goals will showcase what the program should do and how it will be helpful to targeted youth.

Target population. Identify the target population or audience the program is intended to reach. The target population should include not only incoming youth but also youth currently living on and off the installation. Additionally, specify the age or grade level of both incoming and existing youth that the program will target. For example, it is unlikely the program will only

target elementary school children. Instead, the program might target youth entering middle school through high school.

Installation parameters/rules/regulations. One of the most important objectives of the program is to ensure the installation reaches out to incoming youth instead of expecting them and/or their parents to contact the installation. To do this, first find out how to obtain information legally about the ages and contact details for incoming youth. This way they can be contacted before or during their move. Identify who has the information you need as well as the regulations for using that information. It is important to determine how the information can be shared legally with the youth sponsors and program planners.

In addition to finding out who is coming to the installation, investigate the laws for contacting youth and how the contact information can be used. For example, does the law require all correspondence between incoming youth and current installation youth be monitored? Does every youth need parental

permission to participate and would that permission allow youth to correspond with peers via e-mail and instant messaging services without the need for adult monitoring/supervision? Explore these and other questions before moving forward with program activities.

Available resources/budget. A key task of program development is to assess the resources available for the program. The agency primarily responsible for the program should first determine the available budget, staff, and other resources. Consider contributions that other agencies can make, both monetary and otherwise, that will impact the total cost of the program. For example, one agency may already have equipment or staff expertise that can be used at no cost instead of having to purchase that equipment or hire staff that would put a strain on the budget. A brainstorming session about resources can uncover unique ideas to pursue. In considering resources, do not forget how youth can contribute. They could significantly contribute time and expertise to program development and implementation. Once you have thoroughly assessed

available resources for the program, you will be in a better position to determine the activities that the Youth Sponsorship Program will include.

Key activities. Identifying the activities that make up the installation's Youth Sponsorship Program is one of the most important tasks of planning and it is essential that the activities are designed to meet the unique needs of your installation's incoming youth. For this reason, involving youth in activity planning is critical. When deciding on program activities, ask yourself the following questions: What activities can best meet the needs of incoming youth? What activities will youth want to participate in? How often, when, and where will activities take place? Who will be responsible for each activity? More information on possible activities to include in the Youth Sponsorship Program is provided in the next section of this guide.

Roles and responsibilities. A critical part of successful planning is to clearly lay out the roles and responsibilities for all parties involved with the program. Include the roles and

responsibilities of each agency, individual staff members (if known), volunteers, and youth for each specific program task or activity. Additionally, include information about expectations and tasks to be accomplished (e.g., what needs to be accomplished, by whom, and when). All key stakeholders involved in the program should have an opportunity to offer input into the development of the roles and responsibilities, with review and comment before they are finalized.

Recruitment and training. Plan for the recruitment and training of youth sponsors from among existing youth at your installation. As part of the planning, ask the following questions related to recruitment: How many youth will need to be involved as youth sponsors? What other roles will need to be filled by youth? What criteria will we use for selecting and screening youth? What training and support can we provide to volunteer youth? What will be the benefit of participating for youth? What is the incentive for their involvement? Who will be responsible for recruiting youth? What recruitment strategies will need to be employed? Once youth

have been recruited, it will be important that they receive some information and training before getting involved and working with incoming youth. To help plan your training, you should ask yourself: How many hours of training will be provided? What will be the focus of the training? What information do youth volunteers need to do the tasks required? What skills do youth need help in developing? Who will conduct the training? Where will the training take place?

Marketing. When marketing the program, keep in mind the different audiences that the information will be geared toward. At a minimum, audiences should include incoming youth, existing youth targeted to be youth sponsors, youth and adult volunteers, and parents. Additionally, ask yourself what the best methods are for marketing the program (e.g., Internet, radio/television, billboards, flyers) and where marketing should take place (e.g., schools, Youth Center, recreation facilities, shopping centers). Keep in mind that this is a key component to program success and that youth can be extremely helpful. They know how to reach other youth their age and what

types of media that youth in the area pay attention to. For example, there may be a school bulletin or flyer that all students read but parents and service providers do not always hear about. Marketing materials (posters, pencils, buttons, stickers, a brochure template, and letterhead) have been included in the Youth Sponsorship Toolkit and/or are available on the Sample Tools CD to help you get started.

Maintenance. Critical to any plan is knowing how the program will be maintained or sustained. Include in the plan information on how the installation will know if the program is successful. To do this, determine how the program will be evaluated, specifically assessing whether the program was implemented the way it was originally intended, whether it achieved the desired goals, and what it cost to implement. More information on evaluating the program is provided in the section, Sustaining a Youth Sponsorship Program. In addition to evaluating the program, the plan should include information on how you will keep leadership and other supporters informed of progress and success. This is very important in order to ensure long-

term commitment, financial and otherwise, to the program.

Timeline. Finally, include in the plan a realistic timeline for developing the Youth Sponsorship Program. The timeline should consider the resources committed to program planning, including the availability of staff and volunteers to work on various tasks. Additionally, when developing the timeline, consider youth schedules, deployment schedules, and other local issues.

Once the plan is complete, share it with leadership and all key stakeholders involved with the Youth Sponsorship Program, solicit feedback, and make any necessary changes to the plan before moving forward. After the plan is approved by the collaborative team and leadership, it is time to begin implementation.

**IMPLEMENTING
A YOUTH
SPONSORSHIP
PROGRAM**

The key to successful implementation of the Youth Sponsorship Program is following the plan developed by the collaborative team—it is the roadmap to success. When implementing the program, make sure to follow the proposed timeline, stick to planned activities and the budget, maintain communication with all key stakeholders, and monitor progress. Be prepared to make midcourse corrections to the plan if situations change once implementation has begun (e.g., greater number of incoming youth than expected, fewer resources available for the program). While implementation may seem overwhelming at times, keep in mind that this is the fun and rewarding part of the program—getting youth connected!

There are a number of activities that the collaborative team can decide to implement as part of the Youth Sponsorship Program in order to get youth connected. This section of the guide provides ideas for activities that the team might consider. It is not necessary to implement all of these activities, and in fact, to get the most out of the program, only the activities

that youth at your installation are excited about and feel will be most beneficial to incoming youth should be implemented. Just as no two installations are exactly alike, the needs of incoming youth are not always identical. For example, the needs of youth moving to a small, isolated installation within the United States can be very different from those of youth moving overseas or to an installation in a large metropolitan area. One of the most important steps in deciding on activities is to brainstorm with youth about activities that would be most needed and valued. Brainstorming during planning makes implementation of activities much easier as it leads to greater interest, participation, and commitment.

When selecting activities, keep in mind that they should be designed to achieve the goals of the Youth Sponsorship Program. This will most likely require a combination of activities rather than simply one activity. For example, if one activity consists of having current installation youth communicate through e-mail with incoming youth, then another activity might be to have a newcomer orientation

where the pen pals could meet each other and learn about the area. No program should consist of only one activity. Combining activities will allow you to more effectively meet the diverse needs of incoming youth over a longer period of time.

The following activities are described in this guide:

- Pen pals/peer mentoring
- Youth “newcomer” orientation
- Parent orientation
- Social events for incoming youth
- Youth handbook/resource guide
- Community calendar of youth events/activities
- Newcomer Web page/site.

While this list is a good place to start, it is not meant to be exhaustive. A key factor in making the Youth Sponsorship Program successful will be to brainstorm with youth and community members about other program activity ideas. Look for other ideas by examining sponsorship activities in place

for young service members and exploring how they can be tailored to fit youth needs. Additionally, examining the Youth Sponsorship Programs at other installations that are in your area or that have similar characteristics can help generate ideas for the program.

Always keep in mind that the primary guideline for selecting activities should be to establish a program that meets DoD objectives, achieves the program mission and goals, and, most importantly, meets the needs of incoming youth at the installation.

Pen Pals/Peer Mentoring

One of the first things that comes to mind when one thinks of a Youth Sponsorship Program is a pen pal or peer mentor. Similar to a youth mentoring program, a young person already at an installation advises a young person coming to an installation by providing them with information and showing them around. This type of activity is similar to the service member sponsorship program at many installations.

A pen pal or peer mentoring type of activity usually involves a one-to-one match of an incoming youth with a youth mentor currently at the installation. The mentoring pair is put in contact with one another prior to the incoming youth arriving at the installation. The pair then engages in ongoing communication through mail, e-mail, or phone. Once the incoming youth arrives at the installation, the mentor helps the incoming young person make new friends, adjust to new homework requirements, and deal with feelings about the move.

Planning and implementing an activity of this type will require installation staff to provide some training to the youth mentors. Youth mentors will need information on recognizing depression, reporting requirements, and appropriate interactions with the incoming peers. It will be important to provide the youth mentors with standardized materials that describe the installation, area, and rules. They should know to send these materials to each incoming youth so that the installation can ensure that all incoming youth receive similar information about the installation before arrival. While this type of

program can be beneficial, it will require oversight of the mentoring pairs while also trying to help the pairs feel comfortable enough to speak freely.

A variation of this activity would be group mentoring. This would involve a group of youth mentoring several incoming youth together. This has several advantages over one-to-one mentoring, including:

- Incoming youth get to know multiple youth instead of one individual with whom they might not get along.
- Incoming youth are not reliant on one individual to receive information.
- Clubs, teams, classrooms, and youth groups could be involved in sponsorship.
- Groups of youth are more likely to attend social activities and be willing to provide input about program development and activities than are individuals.
- Installation youth are introduced to a variety of incoming youth, thereby expanding their network of friends.

Technology Tip

Staying in touch with friends and family by e-mail shortens the distance between home and abroad, allowing life events at either end to be shared on a regular basis – *expatica.com*

A group mentoring activity is exciting to implement but requires close monitoring to ensure that youth within the group do not “pass the buck” with the result that there is no one who communicates with the incoming youth. With appropriate assistance from others, one option will be to have the group create its own structure where each group member is responsible for some part of the mentoring relationship. This may help ensure ongoing communication and information delivery, with assistance from the others. This type of activity has the potential to be highly successful as part of a Youth Sponsorship Program.

When implementing any type of mentoring activity, it is important to have ongoing adult support, including training for mentors and adult supervisors to ensure safe and effective mentoring. Additionally, allowing e-mail and instant messaging for long-distance communication among youth is important for encouraging follow-through, regular communication, and ease of participation. Allowing communication in this manner will go a long way toward making mentoring relationships successful.

How can youth help? Not only can youth serve as mentors to incoming youth, with adult supervision they also can be part of organizing and recruiting. Have them help develop a system for pairing mentors with incoming youth, including their ideas about factors for successful matches. They also can give valuable input for organizing activities or deciding rules of the mentoring/pen pal relationship. This activity has the potential to allow communities to take advantage of the enthusiasm and ideas of youth who want to have pen pals or one-to-one relationships and also those who want to take a behind-the-scenes role.

Youth “Newcomer” Orientation

Inform youth about their new community and help them meet people by holding a youth “newcomer” orientation. Similar to the newcomer orientation for service members, this is a good option for installations that have youth who are interested in volunteering as sponsors for the program but who do not enjoy writing letters, being pen pals, or are uncomfortable with being someone’s mentor. An orientation can include a variety of information and activities but at a minimum should include the following:

- A brief presentation by installation youth of information they feel is key for incoming youth to know, which can include activities, phone numbers, fashion, culture, language, rules, laws, customs, social information, and anything else that youth at the installation think is important. This can be done interactively, as a group presentation, as a skit, or any format that installation youth will enjoy. A sample presentation template is included in the Sample Tools CD found in the toolkit.
- Distribution of a Youth Handbook/resource guide (or similar comprehensive packet of community information), brochures from installation agencies, calendars (community calendar if available), and phone numbers and/or e-mail addresses for youth sponsors (if they have parental permission).
- A tour of the installation and community that is focused on facilities of interest to youth, which could include the Youth/Teen Center, MWR facilities, community center, playgrounds, schools, Family Service Centers, Relocation Assistance Office, the chapel, and other appropriate facilities. Also include areas of the installation dedicated to active duty service members (e.g., flight line, docks, unit/department offices) which helps youth orient themselves to what is important to their parents and where their parents spend their days.
- “Meet and greet” between incoming and volunteer youth, which might include food and/or drinks if the budget allows but should be focused on increasing positive interaction among youth.

Activities might include pizza/ice cream/smoothie socials, games, dances, lock-ins, and/or ice breakers. While there are many ice breaker-type activities, some youth might be hesitant to participate. If installation youth like these types of activities, include them, otherwise talk with volunteer youth about resources available, possible activities they might be interested in doing with incoming youth, and how to ensure incoming youth will attend (e.g., all volunteer youth bring a “friend”). Brainstorming with youth to determine what they think will be fun, given the resources available, can go a long way toward ensuring success. Other social activities for incoming youth are described later in this section.

The youth orientation should provide valuable information in an environment in which incoming youth feel safe to ask questions, meet new people, and interact in discussions and activities. It may be helpful when scheduling this type of orientation to consider the times of sponsor/spouse newcomer orientations to make it easy for the whole family to attend.

How can youth help? Many youth want to be helpful and serve their community without committing themselves for long periods of time. Providing help and ideas for planning and organizing an orientation can be exciting for some but devoting several hours to conducting tours or helping youth get oriented may be just the right amount of commitment for others. With appropriate review by adults, youth can help with activities and determine the information that will be most helpful to present. They also can help with the orientation itself, developing creative ways to present the information. Having outgoing volunteer youth available to answer questions and help incoming youth feel comfortable also can be a valuable service that youth can offer very effectively.

Parent Orientation

While it is important for youth to learn about their new communities and the challenges they might encounter while moving, parents also should have an understanding of those challenges. Parents can get caught up in the stresses and multiple demands on their time during a move with the result being

that they might not realize how the move affects their children. Parents should be educated about how children can be affected by a move and the steps that can be taken to make the move easier for the whole family. As part of the active duty service member newcomer orientation, it can be helpful to include a short segment about what children might experience as the new kid in town. Parental understanding can help youth adjust during such a stressful time, especially teens who might not express their feelings in a constructive manner. Some important things to include in a presentation to parents would be:

- A discussion about the importance of peers in the lives of youth. Youth learn about life through trial and error with the support of their friends. The loss of these friendships can have dramatic effects such as prompting negative behaviors.
- A discussion about the difficulties for youth of moving from place to place, especially when there are limited opportunities in the new place to pursue activities of interest. For example, if a young

person who is very involved in gymnastics moves to an installation with few opportunities to pursue the sport, a poorer reaction to the move might be seen.

- A list of resources on the installation, especially for youth who do not express themselves well or who might experience anger or depression.
- A list of resources on and off the installation to support parents and help them understand what their child is experiencing.
- A description of youth-oriented activities and agencies on the installation and in the community.
- A discussion about the importance of getting youth involved with an organization or group activity. Research has shown that youth involved in school or group activities adjust better to new situations and are less likely to get involved in negative activities. Youth are more likely to talk to a trusted adult who is not a parent about what they are experiencing. Being involved with other positive youth and adults can help them adjust.

One goal of the parent orientation is to offer parents written information about installation and community agencies and services. More importantly, the parent orientation should provide a general understanding of what children are experiencing and tips for helping children adjust successfully to a new and stressful situation. A sample presentation for parents can be found on the Sample Tools CD provided in the toolkit.

How can youth help? The parent orientation is an activity that many would not think to involve youth with; however, parents might be able to better understand how their own children feel if they hear the information from youth volunteers. Youth would also be invaluable in helping determine the most appropriate information to present. It would also be great for youth to brainstorm and develop, with appropriate review, a practical guide for parents to help their children cope with transition. This brief guide could be handed out at the parent orientation.

Social Events for Incoming Youth

When moving to a place, youth look for activities and situations that will allow them to interact with other youth, such as school-sponsored activities for new youth, Youth Center activities, field trips, parties, or meet and greets. Including activities like these in the Youth Sponsorship Program for new youth can be a great way to help them get connected and learn about their new community. For example, every two months, a community could sponsor a field trip for all youth who have arrived during that period, with personal invitations sent to each young person. This would allow new youth to interact in a safe and fun environment.

Implementing these activities so they are well attended can be very difficult if done in isolation; therefore, plan them as just one part of an ongoing structured program. Once there is a well-established and institutionalized program this will be easier. To get started it might be helpful to try tying activities to established events or school activities. Identify new youth and send personalized

invitations to help increase participation. It will be important to prepare advertising carefully. While exciting trips for new students could be well-attended, an activity advertised as a “Newcomer Social” might not sound “cool” enough to attend.

How can youth help? Involve current installation youth in planning and advertising activities to help ensure success. You might ask each youth volunteer to bring a new friend to a scheduled activity or event such as a school dance, sporting event, movie night, or club meeting. Including social activities within your Youth Sponsorship Program provides flexibility to meet the diverse needs of different types of communities, and allows varying levels of youth involvement. For example, youth who want to help with just one task will have the opportunity, while those who want to take a more active, long-term role can also be involved.

Youth Handbook/ Resource Guide

Written by youth and for youth, this handbook/resource guide should be a comprehensive source

for what a young person needs to know while living in the community. Lists of things to do in the area, active organizations and clubs, information on how to get involved with volunteering, descriptions of laws pertinent to young people (e.g., curfew), information on employment, and other topics important to young people can be included. The most effective way to ensure this handbook or guide is useful and relevant to incoming youth is to have youth extensively involved in its development and marketing. Below are several hints for developing the handbook/guide:

- **Brainstorm topics** – Have youth remember what they wanted and needed to know when they arrived. Is there anything that frustrated them because the information was difficult to find? They might have wanted to know something simple like where everyone liked to hang out on Fridays, or what the laws were for obtaining a driver’s license. Anything they were interested in knowing might now be the same question someone else has. Gather information about activities, rules, regulations, laws, cultural differences,

everyday knowledge about the base, youth-to-youth tips, and interesting facts. Nothing is too obvious to put in the guide and any information, even seemingly trivial, can be extremely helpful to someone who does not know the area.

- **Collaborate with others** – Partner with some of the agencies on or off the installation to help you put the handbook/resource guide together. Other agencies could volunteer to help with printing, provide materials, keep copies in their office to give out, or help with writing about what might affect young people. For example, you might work with the Family Service Center. Family Service Center staff know how youth feel when new to the community and have left important friends and activities behind. They recognize that some young people do not adjust well and may be able to put tips in the resource guide for dealing with stress, coping strategies, conflict resolution, or handling depression. Another way on-base agencies could be helpful is in finding off-base resources to include in the handbook.

Most agencies are aware of resources in the community and could easily provide this information, though it should be checked thoroughly for accuracy and currency. Taking advantage of other agency resources can save time and effort while making the guide a better resource for youth. It will be important to review all material to ensure that only information useful to youth is included.

- **Partner with installations who have successful, well-developed Youth Sponsorship Programs** – Look to other installations that are similar or are in the area for lessons learned and tips for success. Take advantage of other installations trials and experiences. They might have great ideas and useful information. Do not copy another installation's program exactly as it may not be appropriate for what youth are experiencing at your installation. It is important to learn from others while keeping the primary focus on developing a program that will work for the targeted youth.

- **Make the handbook/resource guide noticeable** – Make the handbook/resource guide an attractive and fun publication to entice youth to read it. Provide information in short paragraphs with interesting layouts; running text is not an attractive and reader-friendly format for most youth. Involving youth in the design of the handbook is critical.
- **Ensure the handbook/resource guide stays current** – Many things will change throughout the years, including rules and regulations. Therefore, include items that do not change often and will remain helpful to incoming youth over time. Also, it is a good idea to create the handbook/resource guide in a format that can be edited easily and reprinted every year. Annual revisions help in taking advantage of bulk pricing while allowing for a regular update of information.

The handbook/resource guide will deliver valuable information to a large number of incoming youth efficiently and effectively. Having youth involved in the development and marketing of the handbook/resource guide will

ensure the information is relevant and of interest. A sample of table of contents and some sample pages for a Youth Handbook/resource guide are provided on the Sample Tools CD included in the toolkit.

While it is one component of a Youth Sponsorship Program that can maximize impact, the handbook/resource guide is not a substitute for direct sharing of information among youth who need opportunities to interact and get to know each other. The handbook/resource guide will be most effective as part of an ongoing Youth Sponsorship Program that encourages social interaction and involvement in the community.

How can youth help? Youth should have significant input into the information that gets included in the handbook. They can research the information and design its layout. Youth interested in art or graphic design might create an appealing cover. With adult supervision, almost every job that is necessary to create the handbook can be completed by youth.

Community Calendar of Youth Events/ Activities

While the Youth Sponsorship Program should reach out to incoming youth, youth also should have a place that they can rely on as a central resource for identifying what is going on in the community. At many installations, agencies have their own calendars and youth must contact the agency to find out what is happening throughout the week or month. The goal for this program activity is to consolidate all youth-related activities into a single calendar so youth can find in one place all the information about what is happening for the week or month. This calendar will be beneficial to incoming youth as well as to other community members, especially parents who have to coordinate schedules, transportation, etc.

Each agency would submit its youth activities for the week or month and the information would be posted on a Web site or published in a newspaper, bulletin, or flyer. The Sample Tools CD in the toolkit has a template for a weekly calendar that any installation using Microsoft Word can use and which can be

beneficial if you do not already have a community calendar in place. Each installation agency could submit schedules in a transferable format, making it easy to edit the template on the Sample Tools CD. For the community calendar to work, each agency must be willing to submit schedules in a timely manner. Contact each agency and discuss the value of the comprehensive community calendar, the calendar schedule, who will be in charge of the calendar, and what resources will be necessary to maintain it.

How can youth help? Youth can take on the primary role of developing a design template for the calendar, determining what information is important to include, gathering information from agencies on a regular basis, working with the newspaper or printing office to get the calendar printed, and distributing the calendar using the optimum method to reach installation youth.

Youth Web Page/Site

While it can be one of the most challenging activities of a Youth Sponsorship Program, an informative and interactive Web page or Web site can also be one of the more successful methods of getting youth involved and providing them with information about their new community. The Internet is one of the primary methods by which youth communicate and find information. A Web site that allows installation youth to communicate regularly through message boards or forums allows instant access to information and friends for incoming youth. While a Web site is a great tool for helping youth, it takes a lot of planning, understanding of installation rules/regulations, and commitment to implement successfully. For installations that have the capacity for an interactive and informative Web site with at least one section devoted to youth, there are several tips for content and development:

- Be sure to understand all installation rules and regulations for interactive Web sites before any effort is put into development. The installation should have an Information
- Reach out to community partners as they can be helpful in providing resources and Web hosting capabilities.
- Make sure to partner with youth regarding content and layout for the Web site to ensure it is youth-friendly, has the information that an incoming youth is eager to know, and reflects a wide range of current trends in youth interests and opinions. Be sure to consult youth with diverse interests to ensure content is appropriate for all.
- Look for Web site savvy youth in school computer science classes or computer clubs to help with development.
- Consider including message

Technology or Information Systems agency that handles the majority of computer-related issues. This agency might have most of the information needed to understand installation Web site capabilities and regulations. It will be important to consult the agency early in planning to discuss frankly what can and cannot be accomplished.

boards for a Web site as they are popular among youth and may be very appropriate. Investigate the cost and methods of ensuring the boards are moderated.

- Check with community youth organizations for time-saving ideas and resources. Partnering with the community, piggybacking on existing Web sites, and providing information about links to other area youth Web sites may be simpler and more feasible than creating your own. Perhaps a community organization would allow one page on its site to be devoted to information for military youth while allowing them access to other information and interactive features.
- Involve technology professionals from the Youth Center and/or on-base schools who would be willing to donate their time to working with youth on Web site development.
- Include information on the Web site that reflects information recommended for the Youth Handbook/resource guide discussed above. Examples include: important phone

numbers, general descriptions of the area, local customs and laws, interesting facts for youth and teens, descriptions of what youth like to do for fun in the area/where they hang out, current fashions/trends and likes/dislikes of area youth, current and updated schedules for organizations on and off the installation (e.g., Boys & Girls Clubs programs, skating rinks, skate parks, Youth Center, pools), information about where youth can go to investigate more about the area, important information about negative influences on youth (e.g., drugs/alcohol information embedded in other articles that will be of interest to incoming teens), and links to other relevant resources.

In addition to creating your own Web page or Web site, you should become familiar with and possibly link to the Military Teens on the Move Web site supported by the DoD (<http://dod.mil/mtom>). This user-friendly Web site is designed specifically to provide relocation and outreach support to military youth ages 6–18. This positive support system provides a wealth of resources and outreach assistance

related to the challenges facing today's military youth. In addition, Web pages are linked to military service Web sites dealing specifically with family separations, relocations, deployment, and readiness.

Technology is a key part of any initiative to get kids involved and connected. Because youth use the Internet regularly, it should be integrated into your Youth Sponsorship Program as much as possible.

How can youth help? Youth can be a part of researching how to create the Web site and what should be included, as well as designing and updating it. Youth also can be helpful in determining if a Web site should be used and for brainstorming ideas to ensure it will be helpful and installation youth will visit it.

**SUSTAINING
A YOUTH
SPONSORSHIP
PROGRAM**

A successful Youth Sponsorship Program should help youth adjust to a new community and ease the transition that inevitably occurs as youth move from installation to installation. The key to making the Youth Sponsorship Program successful is not only to involve youth in planning and implementing the program but also to ensure the program reflects ongoing youth feedback and the changing needs of incoming youth. Keeping accurate records of program planning, implementation processes, and ongoing feedback will help you describe and understand what is happening in your community, make informed decisions about where the program should go next, chart the course to get there, and look back on how the program did. This information will allow you to assess the program's success and determine how it can be improved by:

- Ensuring the program is making progress towards the goals and objectives developed by the collaborative team
- Helping identify what works to empower youth, get youth

connected, and prevent problems in your community

- Helping to identify what does not work so the program can be improved
- Helping to show others that the program is successful and makes a difference; this will help in garnering greater community support and obtaining future program resources.

This section of the guide provides ideas for gathering information to continually assess your installation's Youth Sponsorship Program and sustain it over time.

Documenting the Planning Process

During program planning, some decisions will be made that will help in determining the success of the program. As part of the planning process, the collaborative team (made up of multiple agencies and community members) will outline how the program will be organized, develop its goals, and decide how to know if the goals are being met. Keeping track of what happens and when, the decisions made (and the

reasons), and who was involved in those decisions will be crucial to understanding how to improve your program in the future. Documenting this process will help in determining whether the program is meeting the needs of youth and will allow you to compare what you did against what was planned, to guide decisions about necessary improvements and make adjustments to your plan.

Documentation of your program does not have to be a labor-intensive or formal process. Simply document anything you think will help you use feedback and present program successes and improvements to others. There are templates on the Sample Tools CD that will help in documenting meeting minutes and the overall program development plan.

Gathering Feedback

While documenting the planning process is an important part of working toward program improvement and sustainability (knowing what worked and did not so as to be successful), gathering feedback about the program from participants, staff, and volunteers is essential. Talking to those who

have experienced the program as participants will provide valuable insight into the program effects, strengths, and areas for improvement or change.

Before gathering feedback, consider a few key questions:

- **What are we trying to learn?** It is important to think about the exact information that is necessary for understanding if the program is meeting its goals and serving youth effectively. For example, it might be helpful to know how program participants benefited from the program, whether they enjoyed the program, and if a particular program activity should be changed or eliminated. You might also want to find out whether community members are aware of your program. The key is to think ahead about the information that will be necessary for improving the program and how exactly that information will be used.
- **What type of feedback are we looking for?** There are many methods for obtaining feedback and each method will give you a different type of information.

The next section will discuss in detail a few of the different types of feedback that might be helpful and the types of information that they will elicit. The type of feedback that will be useful for the Youth Sponsorship Program will depend on the details of the program and what it is that needs to be learned. For example, if it is important to know what should be improved about an activity, it might be helpful to ask participants to describe individually what they liked and did not like about the activity. However, if the goal of gathering feedback is to raise participation rates, then you might consider looking into community awareness of the program, marketing techniques used, their effectiveness in getting information out, youth opinion/awareness about the program, ease of involvement in the program, or other factors such as the connection between program activities and youth interests.

- **Who do we want feedback from?** Determining the people from whom you should gather feedback is dependent upon the information that is being sought.

Youth volunteers, involved parents, and staff members could have insight into why some things work well while others do not because they bring diverse knowledge and experience about serving youth effectively. Program participants will be helpful in learning about the program's impact and usefulness. Community members or those from other civilian organizations might be helpful if trying to understand how to market the program more effectively, how to increase collaboration and support, or how to generate outside funding.

- **What will we use the feedback for?** Feedback should be used to improve the program, generate support, or market the program effectively. When asking questions of participants, staff, volunteers, or community members, think about how the feedback might be useful for one of these purposes. For example, when trying to generate resources, program satisfaction ratings will be helpful while participant suggestions for improvement would be more informative when altering a program activity to meet youth

needs. Remember that both positive and negative feedback can strengthen a program and make it more effective in the future.

Methods for Obtaining Feedback

Once it is clear what information will be helpful to learn and how the information will be used, the next step will be determining how to collect that information. There are three primary methods for gathering feedback:

- **Feedback forms/Surveys –** This method is the most commonly used way to gain specific feedback from individual participants, especially if asking detailed questions, rating aspects of the program, or getting information that might be sensitive to staff and members. It allows for anonymous feedback from a large number of people with minimal investment of time and resources. A sample feedback form is provided on the Sample Tools CD included in the toolkit. This sample form includes generic questions that can be helpful for learning about

the program's effects and can be tailored to meet diverse needs. When gathering information with surveys or feedback forms, it is extremely important to secure permission from parents and participants.

Feedback Tip

When collecting feedback, remember that it is a legal requirement to obtain participant and parent permission and maintain confidentiality throughout the process. Sample consent forms are provided on the Sample Tools CD included in the toolkit.

- **Focus groups/Group interviews –** For minimal cost, this method can be valuable for obtaining feedback about people's experiences. This method of gathering information consists of having conversations with small groups of participants about the program's strengths and areas for improvement. When using this method, it will be important to obtain permission from participants and parents, ensure groups are of the same

age, use developmentally appropriate questions, and maintain confidentiality. For those participants uncomfortable with the group atmosphere, it will be important to provide an opportunity for participants to give feedback outside the group (in individual interviews). Additionally, it is prudent to refrain from discussing sensitive topics, such as experiences with particular staff members, due to confidentiality concerns. A sample focus group guide is provided on the Sample Tools CD included in the toolkit which can be tailored to meet the diverse needs of different programs.

- **Interviews** – This method can be more time-consuming for program staff and participants but is very useful in gathering detailed information about participants' experiences. Selecting a random group of participants to conduct interviews with may be helpful in getting detailed feedback about program effects and suggestions for improvement. This method allows a focus on very specific topics and the opportunity to probe in depth for details. This method also is

useful for obtaining information from program planners, collaborating agencies, or past participants.

Each of these methods for gathering feedback has some value and will generate different types of information. The method to use will depend upon what type of information is important to learn and how that information will be used. For example, when trying to get feedback from participants in a teen orientation, administering a feedback form that participants can complete before they leave can be very productive. Conducting focus groups might be a great method for eliciting suggestions for change from youth volunteers. Combining interviews or focus groups with a feedback survey can be very effective for learning about a program. Using a combination of methods will give broad information from a large number of people while allowing more in-depth information from a sample of those individuals. Before selecting which method or combination of methods to use, consider the amount of time and resources you have available, what information is important to learn, and how the information will be used.

Using Feedback

The primary uses of program feedback are to generate program change, garner program resources/support, and market the program—all critical for program longevity. As you gather feedback, the amount of information can be overwhelming. There are several ways to make sense of a large amount of information so it can be more useful:

- **Numbers** – When looking at ratings of program satisfaction, usefulness, or other types of numerical information (e.g., percentage of people who agree or disagree with something), getting an average respondent rating can give a good indication of what people, in general, think about your program. Creating bar graphs or pie charts can be particularly helpful for showing how different ratings compare. Do not be afraid to use graphs and tables to illustrate and make sense of information.
- **Descriptions** – When looking at descriptive answers to survey or interview/focus group questions, remember that it is not necessary

to use every piece of information that is given. Rather, examine all the input and find key points that tend to be mentioned by more than one person. For example, one youth might say a dance every weekend would be great, while many more of the students mention they would like field trips to local attractions in their host country. A better use of resources would be to plan several trips to local attractions rather than hold dances weekly since this was suggested by only one youth.

Additionally, it is important to consider where the information comes from and the context in which it will be used. For example, a parent or other adult might say that advertising in the newspaper will be well received while television ratings show that young people look to the local cable channel rather than the newspaper for information. The conclusion would be that a better use of resources is an advertisement on cable television despite the opinion of adults. Consider each piece of information within the context of the rest of the feedback and information obtained before making any decisions.

If the feedback received seems to contradict expectations, it will be important to keep an open mind and consider the value of the information to what it is that the program is trying to accomplish. Also recognize that there may be negative feedback that will not be constructive. Try not to dwell on it and focus instead on any constructive criticism and positive strategies to build on existing strengths. All feedback can be useful depending on what is done with the information.

Remember that the program should not stagnate. Attendance alone does not mean a program is successful and what worked well one year might not be as beneficial the next. Focus on meeting program goals, ensuring desired participant outcomes, and implementing activities that meet the needs of youth. At this point, it is important to go beyond being able to check a box that indicates you have met a DoD requirement or are operating in accordance with the law. Your goal is to ensure a sustainable Youth Sponsorship Program that makes moving to the installation a positive experience for youth.

Conclusion

No Youth Sponsorship Program is a success overnight for it takes time, dedication, and a commitment to go above and beyond to ensure a strong program. Do not be discouraged if everything is not as it was expected to be, or if your participation rate is low. With a transient population, program needs change all the time. A highly successful program may prove unsuccessful at times, while a program that once was struggling could become very popular with new incoming youth. Routinely assess the needs of incoming youth to ensure your Youth Sponsorship Program is flexible enough to meet evolving needs. Programs take time to become part of the culture of the installation and youth. As youth move from installation to installation and experience the

Youth Sponsorship Program and its benefits, word will spread of the program's importance to the military community and its youth. With time and commitment from all installations, youth and their parents will know to always look to the Youth Sponsorship Program for assistance as they move to a new installation. Remember that this program will take time and ongoing dedication to be successful but in the end will have an impact.

Utilizing the information in this guide and the materials in the toolkit are first steps in kicking off a Youth Sponsorship Program. As the program matures at each installation, planners must move beyond the basics and adopt plans that will work in a more formal way. It is this growth, maturity, and ongoing commitment that will make youth sponsorship successful.

