

Mentoring - Making A Difference



Steve Stucker has been a Weatherman on KOB Eye-witness News 4 for over 20 years. He has won many awards, and is well known for being a community volunteer & advocate. For a complete bio, log onto www.kob.com & click "Inside KOB."

I'll never forget the first time I asked the question and saw 12 of the 15 hands in my group go up, "How many of you grew up in a home without a father, or don't even know who your father is?" I looked at their serious faces, took a deep breath and continued... "And how many of you are angry about that?" I then watched those same hands go up even higher.

I was inside the Bernalillo County Juvenile Detention Center, where I've been a Mentor and Bible Study teacher for over 3 years now, working with young men, boys really, between the ages of 12-18. They are locked up for offenses ranging from running away, to shoplifting, to drug use, and even murder.

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I've asked those same questions many times since then, and the response never changes. Upwards of 80% of youthful offenders today are raised without any positive male role models. There are no older males to teach them how a young man is supposed to act, how to grow into someone who can make a difference in the lives of their sisters and brothers, grandparents and mothers. As young boys are left to learn how to become men by themselves, they naturally look to the world around them for leadership. All too often this need is filled by gang members, or others who take advantage of their inexperience. The results are devastating and often deadly.

Society's skyrocketing rates of divorce, out of wedlock births, and other factors are creating a huge group of youngsters whose cry to our community will be heard for decades to come... unless you step in to help now!

All that many of these young men need to turn things around is for a responsible older male to show them that they care. To show them how to handle the challenges, fears, and questions that all men face in growing

up. To prove to them they have a future and hope. Sound complicated? Not at all. Most of this can be accomplished by simply spending some time with them and being yourself. Mentoring "At-Risk Youth" is as easy as remembering what it was like to be a boy and sharing your understanding and experience with a young man on a regular basis, sometimes as little as an hour per week.

The only experience required is that you were once young yourself. It also helps if you are able to admit that you had doubts, worries, problems, or fears. It's even better if you weren't a perfect child and made mistakes or (Gasp!) got into trouble a time or two along the way!

For every kid already in lock up today, there are perhaps 50-100 more who will be soon if they don't get some help quickly. I recently heard a true story told by a young man with four other friends, who ran around together as teens and got into trouble with the law at an early age. Today, about 15 years later, two of them are in prison and two are dead. The successful businessman telling the story was the only one of the five to get a Mentor as soon as he got into trouble.

Most organizations will run a background check, provide you with basic guidelines, and match you up to a youngster in need in no time at all. And by the way, though this article focuses on the need for male mentors, the need is also huge for females. The number of young girls waiting for female mentors is just as staggering!

I volunteer through LifeQuest, a faith based organization that teaches how my Christian beliefs have helped me over the rough spots in life. Others prefer to mentor based on athletics, hobbies, or common interests like art, music, woodworking, etc. Most relationships are simply based on friendship and the willingness to listen and care. Regardless of your background, there are a good number of organizations that can use your basic experience in life to make a difference for these young men. Ask around at work, church, civic, or social organizations. Check with your neighborhood schools. Call Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Youth Development Inc (YDI), LifeQuest, or another group now and begin "Making a Better Tomorrow... Today!"

