

## **National Mentoring Month**

January is National Mentoring Month – a time to celebrate the transformative power of mentorship and its role in helping youth impacted by foster care achieve their goals and realize their potential. Meaningful connections with mentors provide the guidance, encouragement and opportunities that young people need to thrive.

Can you imagine being a young person with zero trusting, reliable adult relationships in your life? For many youth in foster care, this is a reality. The nature of foster care – especially for older kids, teens and young adults – means bouncing from home to home and school to school with little time to develop long-term relationships with peers, other foster youth and adults. Adult mentors and role models are necessary in the lives of all young people and make a significant difference as foster youth transition out of care into independent adulthood.

According to the U.S. Government Accountability Office, 95% of foster youth experience at least one unplanned school change during a single academic year. Each transition can chip away at academic growth. Reading levels, writing skills and math performance can slip, stall or regress. And it's not just about academics. Foster youth carry trauma, attachment disruptions and a constant sense of uncertainty. This makes learning difficult. Unfortunately, schools don't always respond with a trauma informed approach. They also often lack the resources needed to support students. Research shows that foster youth are twice as likely to be suspended and three times as likely to be expelled compared to their peers. But even against these odds, youth can find stability through long-term consistent mentorship.

Both natural and program-based mentoring are options for youth in foster care and can have a positive impact on youth mental health, educational functioning and attainment, peer relationships, placement outcomes and life satisfaction. Studies have shown that foster youth who have a mentor exhibit improved social-emotional functioning, reduced anxiety and depression symptoms and improved self-esteem. Research shows that consistent, trained mentors improve literacy outcomes for children and help them become more capable learners. Foster youth need compassionate accountability. Stability doesn't come from policies alone. It comes from people.

Erica Reid, Senior Director of Chapter Success at Friends of the Children stated, "When a child has one adult who shows up again and again despite everything else changing, that's when trust is built. That is when children believe that success is possible."

Mentor Kansas provides a network of support and resources, equipping Kansas programs to build thriving mentoring relationships. They have a data base of mentoring programs

within the state with locations and contact information to reach out and get started. Some organizations you might see on the list are [KC Kansas Angels](#)' Dare to Dream Program, [Youth Horizons](#), [Kansas Big Brothers Big Sisters](#) and many others. Many schools and local mental health centers also have mentoring programs for youth.

By supporting and investing in mentorship for foster youth, we can help promote positive outcomes and improve the well-being of some of the most vulnerable members of our society.