

2012

Open Minds

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OPEN MINDS

1. List of Participants

Trisha St-Fleur

Sophomore

Major: Biology & Sociology, Minor: Chemistry

Snow Nguyen

Sophomore

Major: Biology, Minor: Math

Genesis Reed

Sophomore

Major: Political Science & Human Rights

Kiara Benson

Sophomore

Major: Biology & Psychology

2. Faculty Cooperator

Mrs. Jennifer Jones

Executive Director of the Department of Student Development and Programs

3. Statement of the Problem

Young adults leaving the foster child care system often experience hardships that many of their peers do not have to address. Some of these former foster children become victims of homelessness, higher rates of unemployment, poverty, and disproportionate rates of incarceration. Nationally, only about 50 percent of these young people earn a high school diploma and less than two percent of this cohort pursues higher education in either the two-year or four-year sectors.

Due to a myriad of systematic problems and social conditions, the minds of these young adults become limited to the vast opportunities that could be available to them. They often receive narrow exposure to the skills they will need to explore opportunities and pursue a better quality of life. Thus, their aspirations are not being fully developed through a lack of proper guidance and or mentorship.

4. Addressing the Problem

Locally, in Dallas, approximately 3,194 children have been placed in the foster child care system since May 2011. About 25 percent or 773 of these children are between the ages of 14 – 17. This was indicated by the regional statistical information about children archive from the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. Our plan is to form partnerships with one or more foster care agencies (or centers) and to work with and mentor current participating sophomores and juniors in the local high schools. Our goal is to aid foster teens in preparing for postsecondary educational opportunities or trade through a two-year or four-year institution. Through these interactions, we hope to nurture and to encourage their aspirations. The model we elect to use will focus on matching them with a mentor representing their professional community of interest. Also, a SMU student who is currently pursuing a course of study leading to a career in that profession will also be assigned to them. All mentors in the community will meet with their foster mentees at least once a month. The intended purposes of these regular scheduled meetings are for the mentors to provide on-going advice and encouragement and to provide an opportunity for the mentee to shadow them for a day.

The SMU students will be the foster care mentee's main contact and will meet with them as a group three times a month. The SMU students will also be available to their mentees through email contact. Additionally, they will assist them through targeted workshops aimed to open their minds to new possibilities, opportunities and important skill sets. We want to provide the students with an environment that is fun, enthusiastic, caring and informative, so they can be encouraged to complete high school and pursue a higher learning institution.

We believe, through personal experiences and observations, young people who are not exposed to the world in a new light and who do not have a support system have a harder time achieving their goals. Young people who are not given opportunities feel as if their goals are not attainable. We believe in opening minds because with an open mind, the definition of an obstacle starts to lose its meaning. We believe in opening minds because children in foster care will be able to access resources they thought would not have been attainable due to their challenging living-family environment, which often times can be unstable. We want to change the way they think of themselves and what they can achieve. We want to aid them in becoming an asset to the community. We want to open their minds.

5. Proposed Sequence of Events

- I. Reach out to SMU alumni and members in the community and invite and encourage them to become mentors to young adults/teenagers in foster care in Dallas.
- II. Provide training and formal guidelines instructing mentors of their responsibilities and obligations as mentors.
- III. Formalize the arrangement with Rocio Lopez from the Buckner Foster Care Agency who has agreed to work with us on this project. The following details will be determined:
 - The number of teens available for the project
 - Contact information for each case worker
 - Location(s) where workshops and meetings can be convened for the mentees
 - Logistics associated with the transportation of the mentees
- IV. Work with the assigned social workers and facilitate the processing of any paper work or documents to support this project.
- V. Coordinate with the Hegi Family Career Development Center for assistance in developing and organizing the workshops. Workshop topics would include:
 - Identifying and Exploring Your Aspirations
 - Community Service and Leadership Skill Development
 - Resume Development
 - Understanding the College Application Process
 - How to Write the Personal Essay
 - How to Locate and Complete Applications for Scholarships
 - Understanding the Financial Aid Process
 - Developing Interview Skills
- VI. Contact local Dallas high schools who offer free SAT/ACT preparation classes and facilitate the enrollment of the foster teens into these classes. Also make arrangements for visitation by SMU student and professional mentors to the school to meet with their mentees.
- VII. Explore and promote community service event participation among the foster care teens.
- VIII. Create a master schedule of all activities; mentor meetings; community service events; and workshops.

6. Anticipated Benefit

Open minds is here to aid in the matriculation of foster teens in higher learning institutions, which will in turn allow them to give back to their communities.

Through our program we hope not only to influence the lives of foster care teenagers, but to also draw awareness to this growing issue in foster care systems. Awareness not just limited to the SMU community, but one that goes throughout the city of Dallas.

7. Budget

| Necessities | Cost |
|--|-----------------|
| Transportation/Gas | \$400 |
| Activities/Field Trips <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Museums, Bonding Activities, Workshops, Community Service Trips | \$1,000 |
| Supplies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Journals, Workshop materials, etc. | \$500 |
| Snacks/Meals | \$400 |
| Website <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Domain Name, Host, Security | \$300 |
| Miscellaneous | \$200 |
| Total | \$ 2,800 |