

Parent Mentor Program

A Parent Mentor Handbook for Parents and Caregivers of Youth and Young Adults with Developmental Disabilities and, or at risk for, Mental Health Disorders

Welcome Parent Mentor Graduates,

You are now a part of a growing group of parents that want to support parents of youth and young adults who use both developmental disabilities and mental health services and live in Los Angeles County. Your experiences and openness to learning have brought you to this point. You are now more prepared to assist parents in finding supports and services for their children.

This handbook is a reminder of the roles and expectations of mentors in the Parent Mentor Program at Westside Family Resource and Empowerment Center (WFREC) and how referrals will be made. Remember you are now a part of a network of support, and although you may meet individually with families, there is always support available to you. Please feel free to call or email any of us for guidance or assistance.

Good luck with your dreams and thank you for all your hard work!

Sincerely,

Patricia Ball
Parent Mentor Program Coordinator
Westside Family Resource and Empowerment Center
310-458-4198
MHSA_parentprogram@westsiderc.org

Elizabeth Spencer
Director of WFREC
310-258-4099

ls Spencer@WestsideRC.org

Aga Spatzier
Wellness Manager
310-258- 4254

agas@WestsideRC.org

Ronnie Wong
Project Coordinator
310-258-4047

ronniew@WestsideRC.org

Guidelines for Providing Parent to Parent Support

1. Listen to what the parent has to say. Allow them to express their feelings and ask questions. Do not overwhelm them with your experience, suggestions, or general information. Let them vent their emotions and tell their story. Remember to use your active listening skills.
2. Do not be critical or judgmental. The role of the mentor is to be concerned with the family's adjustment to their child's need and to link them with services and supports. Assist them in identifying their concerns, priorities and resources.
3. Do not give advice. You can provide parents with information about their options, but do not give specific instructions. Leave final decisions to the individuals.
4. Be careful of being too positive in your attitudes when a family is struggling with a new situation or crisis. When talking to a new family, be reassuring, but "Pollyanna". It may be some time before they will be able to come to terms with their situation and regain their equilibrium. Remember your training on coaching.
5. Provide appropriate information and referrals that can be accessed in a timely manner.
6. If a personal visit is arranged, be sure to relate to all that are present, including the youth or young adult with a disability.
7. Identify some resources that are appropriate for a referral.
8. Link new families to the services, if need be, through the Parent Mentor Coordinator.
9. Be a support to your new family. A mentor parent can provide support for the new family until they feel competent and capable. Care should be taken, however, to prevent the family from becoming dependent. The goal of the mentor is to assist families in assisting themselves.
10. Mentors help families/young adults with disabilities make new friends in their community and access educational opportunities and support groups.
11. There may be many contacts with the new family in the beginning; however, encounters should decrease as the family becomes connected with more information, services and supports.

Your Role as a Parent Mentor

1. Do not allow the new referral to drain you. Mentoring is a support services, it is not meant to take the place of therapy or to become an ongoing relationship. Report immediately to the Parent Coordinator/WFREC staff if a family needs a higher level of service and/or becomes too dependent and demands too much from you.
2. Commit yourselves to The Parent Mentor Program for 9 months. We understand that the Parent Mentor Program can be very time consuming and emotionally demanding, and that some people can only do this for a limited time. We ask that you commit to be available for 9 months. You are welcome to continue afterwards. We suggest that you review and renew that commitment every 6 months.
3. You can contact the Parent Mentor Coordinator to let us know if you will not be available for a longer period of time (e.g. vacations, family emergencies, etc.). We will change your status to inactive while you are out and reactivate your status once you return.
4. Do not worry about delay in obtaining referrals. Mentors are matched with new families. Occasionally this process results in some mentors receiving several referrals while others have none. You will be matched with a family as soon as we find you a good fit.
5. Active Mentors are expected to attend monthly supervision/continuing education meetings. We will notify you about the dates and times of these meetings. If you are unable to attend, please let the Parent Mentor Coordinator know.

Referrals

1. When you receive a referral, make contact with the parent/caregiver within 48 business hours (Monday thru Friday). When someone indicates they want to talk to another person, they are hoping for a quick connection.
2. If you cannot take the referral, contact the Parent Mentor Coordinator/ WFREC staff at the time of referral, or at least, within 24 hours of receiving the referral.
3. If you know in advance that you cannot take the referrals (vacation, ill child, etc.), contact the Parent Mentor Coordinator/WFREC staff immediately.
4. Call or email the Parent Mentor Coordinator and let them know the new referral has been contacted within 24 hours of the initial contact.
5. If you cannot reach the family and are unable to leave a message (e.g. disconnected phone, wrong number), contact the Parent Mentor Coordinator/WFREC staff within 24 hours.
6. Do not be afraid to ask for a change in match, if after contacting the new referral, you feel you cannot relate to them. It is better to change mentors than to fail to give the support needed due to conflict of personalities.
7. Occasionally two sets of mentors may be assigned. You will be notified if this is the case.

