

# Find Me in the Club – Mentoring in Franklin, NH



## The Mentoring Program

In many ways, the City of Franklin (New Hampshire) Parks and Recreation Department exists to serve youth. This drive is one of the reasons they became involved with an NRPA-led youth mentoring grant. When determining how to best implement mentoring in their community, department staff looked to their strengths. They focused on building mentoring into an existing program. Staff saw how their Before & After School Program serving youth in grades K-8 and housed at the local recreation center already had strong participation from young people, was well-known in the community, and provided a built-in opportunity for group mentoring. They envisioned the program's special interest clubs as a perfect fit.

The clubs are geared toward topics that appeal to young people such as: Legos, outdoors/nature, hygiene/beauty, gardening, and tutoring. These clubs are led by adult volunteers who contribute their interests and talents to make the clubs a success. The clubs meet once or twice a week as part of the normal programming schedule. During meetings, the adult mentor leads activities around the club's topical area, while also building a deeper relationship with each young person. The mentoring approach focuses on providing organic opportunities for young people to have positive experiences with adults. For many youth participants, this kind of consistently positive relationship with adults does not exist outside of school and the recreation center. While the length of time a mentee is engaged with a club/mentor lasts around 2-3 months for the summer (and longer during the school year), it is very common for kids to run into their mentors out in the small, tight-knit community. But relationships are not only built between the adult mentor and the youth participant. Young people also benefit from being part of a group. Through the clubs, they are learning how to interact with each other and build relationships amongst themselves.

## Impacts and Successes

The program provides positive experiences to kids and adults. Many young people in the program have experienced some kind of upheaval in their home lives. The consistency of the program provides needed stability. For the adults, it has given them an outlet to lead clubs on topics that they care about while giving back to their community. They are also able to have the kind of adult to youth interaction they are looking for – especially for older mentors who do not have regular contact with young people.

*“It's been so good to feel like I've made a positive impact in the community” – Franklin, NH Mentor*

Integrating the mentoring program into the existing Before & After School Program was the department's single biggest success. This approach had many built-in advantages. Community members already knew about the existing program, and it was easy to engage youth/their families to participate and approach community members to serve as a mentor and lead a club.

## Mentoring within Parks and Recreation

The Parks and Recreation Department is a community institution. It enjoys broad-based support from community members and local government. Additionally, department staff are highly connected to partners who help make the mentoring program a success. One example is the connections with local schools. These partners are in close communication about how to best serve individual students. No other community institution offers such accessible, affordable and impactful opportunities for young people. Layering mentoring on top of these experiences provides an even deeper level of benefit to youth and the broader community.

## In Their Own Words

*“I don't think people give parks and rec departments enough credit for what they do. When it comes to prevention, the whole community approach [of parks and recreation] is so much more sustainable and successful in building connections and making sure people have access to resources.” – Stephanie Wolff, Program Director, Franklin Partners in Prevention*



Mentees enjoying a craft project.

Photo Credit: Franklin Parks and Recreation Department



Mentees in the garden club showing off their new terrariums.

Photo Credit: Franklin Parks and Recreation Department

## Advice for Professionals

Staff advise other professionals to lean into existing programming. To provide mentoring, you do not have to start from the ground up. The club-based mentoring program added greater depth to the existing afterschool programming through a connection to a caring adult.

Let the kids express their interests. Through their words and actions, kids are sharing a lot more information about their wants/interests than professionals normally give them credit for.

## The Future of the Program

The department will continue to offer the club-based mentoring experience as part of their Before & After School Program. The department has secured additional funding to keep the program running. Beyond working to provide new club experiences to mentees, the program will continue to operate in a similar way.