



*Lincoln Youth
Mentoring Coalition*

State of Mentoring Report

MAY 2021
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Background

The 2021 State of Mentoring Report is the first of its kind for Lincoln and Lancaster County. Made possible by a grant from Community Health Endowment, the report was generated by the newly formed Lincoln Youth Mentoring Coalition. Over the past year, the Coalition has conducted surveys, collected data and acquired feedback from stakeholders to “map” the mentoring happening in Lincoln and Lancaster County and to produce this report.



About the Lincoln Youth Mentoring Coalition

Formed in June, 2020, the Lincoln Youth Mentoring Coalition includes organizations that conduct or are considering conducting mentoring programs for youth as well as organizations that support mentoring programs. Thirty-four individuals representing 26 organizations in Lancaster County are members of the Coalition, which meets monthly.

Purpose Statement: *Through collaboration and coordinated effort between Lincoln’s diverse mentoring programs, the Lincoln Youth Mentoring Coalition will enhance the lives of youth by improving the quality of mentoring and increasing the number of youth with mentors. Additionally, the coalition will learn together and from each other, coordinate recruitment and advocate the value of mentors and funding mentoring programs.*

“School has been a huge struggle for my son. He needed a male positive role model in his life that could help steer him in the right direction. He has spent most of his years without his father’s presence so I knew that a positive male influence would only benefit him.”

– Mom of a Little Brother (Big Brothers Big Sisters Lincoln)

Testimonial



Introduction

“Mentoring, at its core, guarantees young people that there is someone who cares about them, assures them they are not alone in dealing with day-to-day challenges, and makes them feel like they matter. Research confirms that quality mentoring relationships have powerful positive effects on young people in a variety of personal, academic, and professional situations. Ultimately, mentoring connects a young person to personal growth and development, and social and economic opportunity. Yet one in three young people will grow up without this critical asset.”

-MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership

Mayors for Mentoring

Lincoln’s Mayor Leirion Gaylor Baird joined the Mayors for Mentoring movement to elevate mentoring as a vital form of community service.



In Lincoln and Lancaster County, youth mentoring is happening in many shapes and forms. When the Lincoln Youth Mentoring Coalition originally formed with five mentoring agencies, it cast a wide net to invite other agencies that serve youth in a variety of ways.

They discovered:

- Mentoring happens in schools, in community centers, in churches and faith-based organizations and in the community. In 2020, 42% of mentoring also happened online.
- While traditional one-on-one mentoring is common, some programs mentor in a group setting with one mentor working with several youth.
- Usually mentors are volunteers but in many programs, mentors are trained, paid staff. Some programs include peer-to-peer mentoring where mentors and youth are of a similar age.
- Mentoring happens during the school day, in after school programs, evenings and weekends.
- Some programs are year-round while others are available during the school year.
- Most mentoring happens once per week (56%) but some happens more or less frequently.
- 29% of mentoring relationships last one school or calendar year though the vast majority last even longer, many for more than three years.
- About 70% of programs are developmental, meaning their activities are organic and the priority is building the positive relationship. The remainder of programs follow a curriculum where the relationship builds over time.

- Over 90% of programs meet certain national standards set out by MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership:
 - Recruitment of mentors and youth participants portrays realistic benefits, practices, supports and challenges.
 - Mentor applicants undergo background checks.
 - The program considers the characteristics (interests, age, gender, race, personality, etc.) of the mentor and mentee when making matches.
- A variety of programs exist for specific cultures. For example, Asian Community and Cultural Center, El Centro de las Americas and Malone Center cater to youth of certain races/ethnicities in a culturally-appropriate manner.

Simply put, the Coalition discovered that more mentoring is happening than they expected and that mentoring is defined in many different ways.

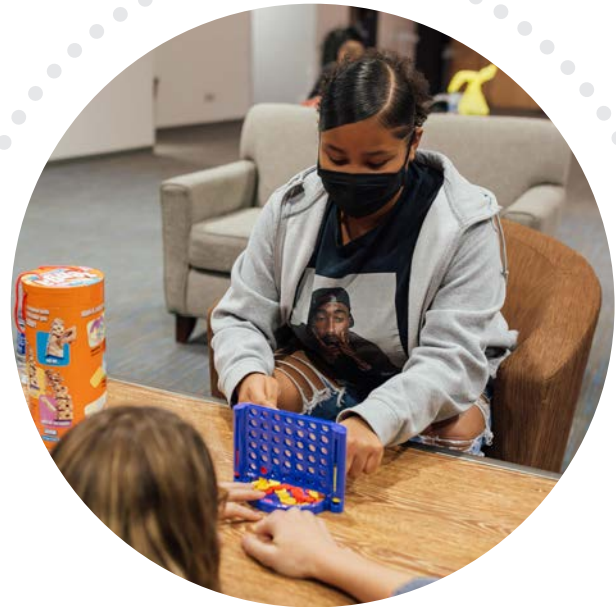
Most mentoring agencies are actively trying to achieve two things for youth:

- Develop a caring relationship with an adult
- Support a youth's development in terms of behavior, confidence, and outlook, etc.



Additionally, some mentoring agencies are specifically working toward the following outcomes for youth:

- Graduation from high school
- Removing barriers that impede success
- Creating strategies that foster success
- Attending/graduating from post-secondary education
- Avoiding the criminal justice system
- Development of leadership skills/critical thinking/decision-making skills
- Improved cultural awareness and engagement
- Involvement in positive extracurricular activity/community engagement



“Mentoring could improve the lives of more youth if there was more money to provide programs for free and that are easily accessible to all youth.”

**–The Arc of Lincoln
(Partner organization serving individuals and families who experience intellectual/physical/developmental disabilities.)**

Testimonial

Mentoring Dashboard

Total # of Lancaster County youth with a mentor – 2,370

“Youth” is defined as age 24 or younger.

2,370

Mentored youth

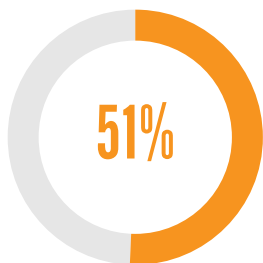
Poverty is typically measured by tracking students who receive free or reduced lunches. To receive free or reduced priced lunches, families must be at or near the Federal Poverty Line. That said, it is important to understand that poverty is more than just a lack of financial resources but often means a lack in other resources – including connections – as well.



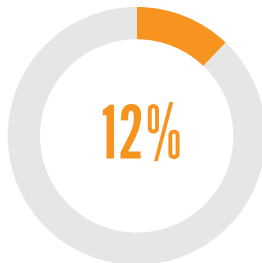
Many youth are able to get connected to a mentor right away while others wait for a year or longer.

926 mentors are needed to mentor students currently waiting

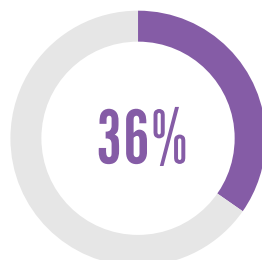
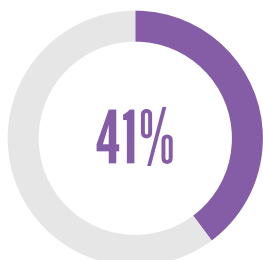
Mentored Youth



Mentors



Diverse mentors are needed. Currently, 51% of mentored youth identify as a person of color vs 12% of mentors.



The vast majority of youth waiting for a mentor are male. Currently, 41% of youth mentored are male while only 36% of mentors are male.

** Data represents 95-99% of all youth mentoring in Lincoln*

State of Youth Mentoring in Lincoln and Lancaster County, Nebraska

Mentored Youth Demographics:

1. 2,370 youth mentored

2. Ages of youth mentored

- a. Older than 19 = 3%
- b. 16-19 = 29%
- c. 12 and under = 29%
- d. 13-15 = 39%

3. Gender of youth mentored

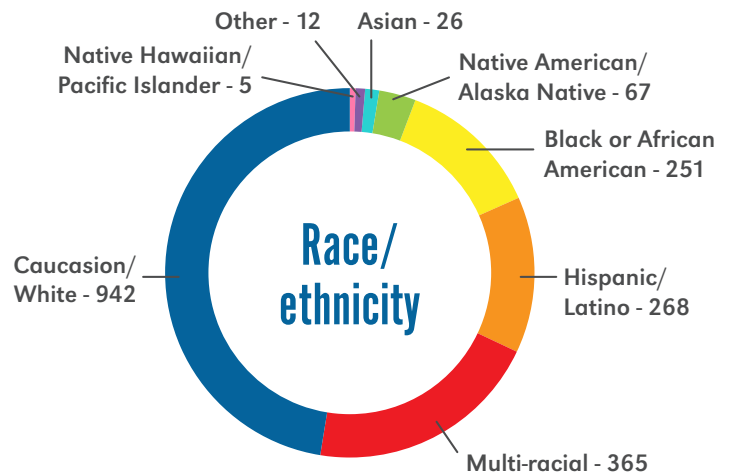
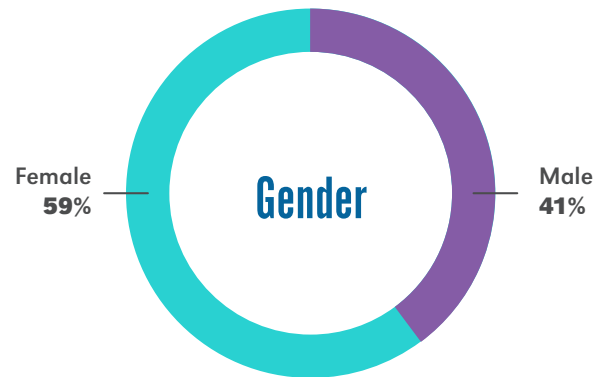
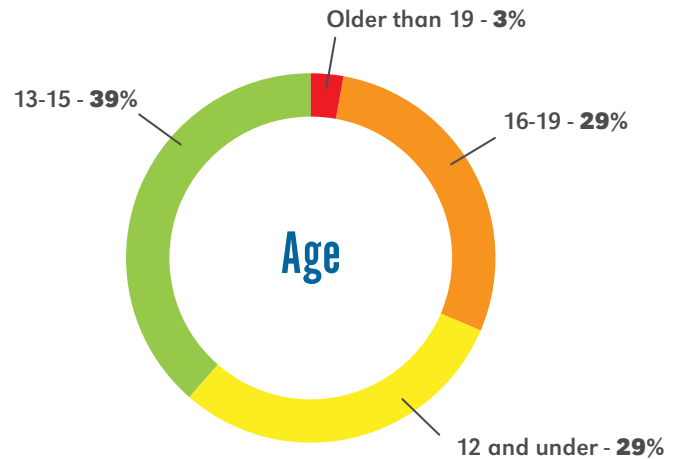
- a. Male = 41%
- b. Female = 59%

4. Race/ethnicity of youth mentored

(51% non-white)

- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander = 5
- Other = 12
- Asian = 26
- Native American/Alaska Native = 67
- Black or African American = 251
- Hispanic/Latino = 268
- Multi-racial = 365
- Caucasian/White = 942

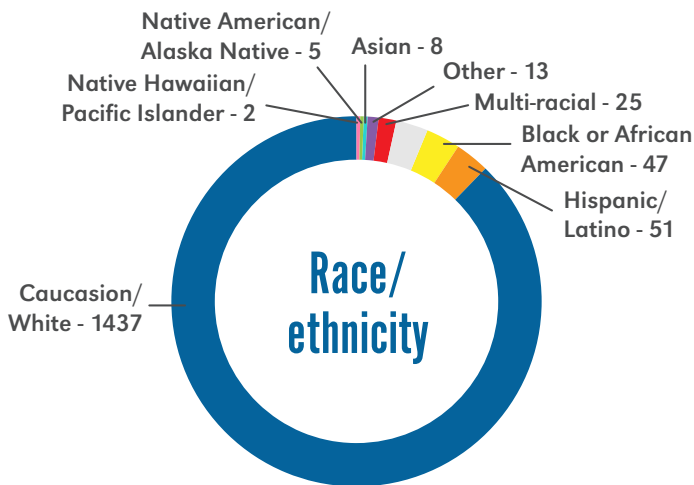
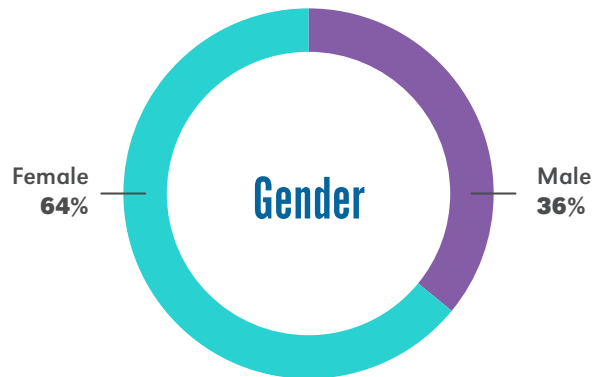
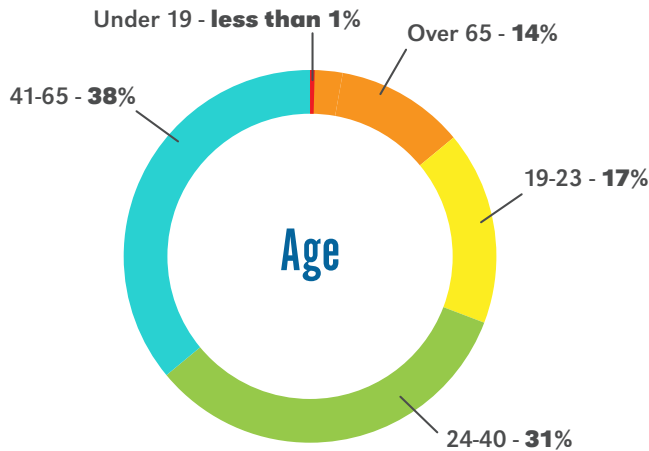
**Data represents six mentoring agencies accounting for 95-99% of all youth mentorship in Lincoln between June 2019 and July 2020*



“Every child who needs extra support should have a ‘personal coach’ - an advocate or mentor - to walk by their side until they’re an adult.”

– Donor to CASA for Lancaster County

Testimonial



Mentor Demographics:

1. 1,635 mentors

2. Ages of mentors

- Under 19 = less than 1%
- Over 65 = 14%
- 19-23 = 17%
- 24-40 = 31%
- 41-65 = 38%

3. Gender of mentors

- Male = 36%
- Female = 64%

4. Race/ethnicity mentors

(12% non-white)

- Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander = 2
- Native American/Alaska Native = 5
- Asian = 8
- Other = 13
- Multi-racial = 25
- Participant did not identify = 47
- Black or African American = 47
- Hispanic/Latino = 51
- Caucasian/White = 1437

**Data represents six mentoring agencies accounting for 95-99% of all youth mentorship in Lincoln between June 2019 and July 2020*

Testimonial

“He has someone to have great discussions with about his future and plans.”

– Parent

Mentors

In the vast majority of programs in Lincoln, new mentors are background checked for criminal and abuse offenses, and receive at least one hour of training before they meet with youth. The average mentor receives four hours of initial training.

Most mentor training covers general youth development, safety/mandatory reporting, boundaries/self-disclosure, what activities are appropriate, confidentiality and building relationships.



LGBTQ+ refers to the community of people identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning as well as other sexual orientations or gender identities. It is respectful to use the terms that people use for themselves.

Trauma-informed care seeks to recognize the signs and symptoms of trauma in youth served and to actively avoid re-traumatization.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) have a tremendous impact on lifelong health and opportunity. Examples of ACEs include experiencing or witnessing violence, abuse, neglect, having a family member attempt or die by suicide, instability due to parental separation or incarceration, substance use or mental health problems in the family.

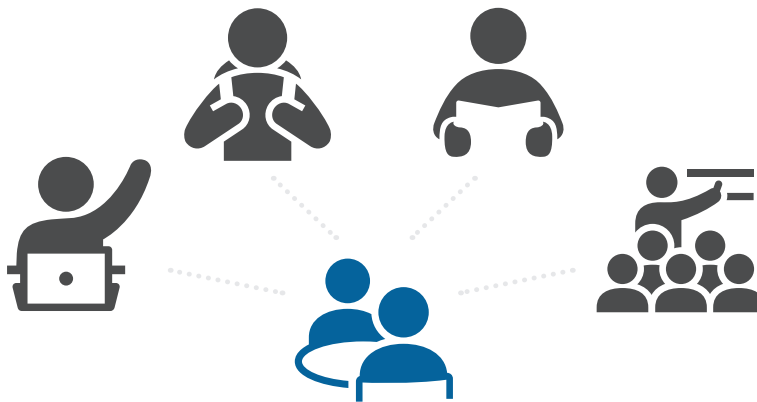
“Research shows that just one supportive adult can make a tremendous difference for youth - anywhere from improving school performance to decreasing suicide.”

– OutNebraska (Partner organization serving LGBTQ+ people)

Testimonial

Some programs go farther with training, covering topics such as cultural understanding, trauma and trauma-informed care, suicide prevention/mental health, working with students in the LGBTQ+ community, working with students with disabilities, ACEs (Adverse Childhood Experiences) and how to handle sex education questions.

Each mentoring program recruits mentors in a variety of ways. Common sources of mentors are colleges, retirees, businesses, churches, service clubs and the community at large.



Partners in Mentoring

One of the goals of the Lincoln Youth Mentoring Coalition is to facilitate partnerships. Prior to the Coalition forming, this was happening organically. The most frequent partnership is organizations sharing mentor volunteer referrals who might be a better fit for another agency. One agency may refer a youth to another agency when they've completed a program or for better fit.

Lincoln mentoring agencies partner with many other nonprofits, businesses, government offices, and community groups for volunteer recruitment, training, speakers and services.

Several mentoring agencies would like to form partnerships that would help youth learn about career choices as well as career development/readiness after high school.

A note about “matches”

In some programs, much thought and care is put into matching one youth with one mentor. Gender, interests, personality and other factors are considered in order to make the best match. This intentionality results in improved longevity of the match.

That said, many programs have one mentor (often paid staff) working with several youth that self-select into groups. Both models are valid, necessary and produce positive outcomes.

Service Gaps

There are several group-style mentoring programs available to youth in Lincoln. This isn't an overlap of service but rather a way to meet youth where they are, with their interests in mind.

That said, 926 youth are waiting for a one-on-one mentor match. There is a definite need for more mentors. Based on data, the number of male youth is disproportionate to the number of male mentors available. Additionally, the number of BIPOC youth is far greater than the number of BIPOC mentors currently available. BIPOC stands for Black, Indigenous and People Of Color.

While most agencies are dedicated to quality mentoring using shared standards (mentor training, one-year commitment and background checks), efforts need to be made to get all programs up to these standards.

Based on the membership and reporting of the Lincoln Youth Mentoring Coalition, we believe that broad, diverse mentoring is happening in our community. As the Coalition continues, we will learn if we are serving the whole community and what other gaps in service exist.

More intentionality is needed around matching based on a youth's identity. Right now, few mentoring agencies are asking about race/ethnicity, disability/ability, and sexual orientation/gender identity. Even fewer are able to match based on these identifiers.





Testimonials

“We understand that many types of organizations can facilitate mentoring relationships as a side benefit to their main mission, or offer smaller mentoring programs in addition to their primary missions. Culturally specific mentoring offered through cultural centers is a good example.”

– Woods Charitable Fund

“I’ve seen the child I mentor become more open with issues they are having both educationally and socially. They are a lot more vocal about their accomplishments and look to me for feedback on certain topics that peak their interests.”

– Mentor of a Little Brother (Big Brothers Big Sisters)

Mentoring During COVID

When the COVID-19 pandemic shut down normal operations, mentoring agencies pivoted like most other operations.

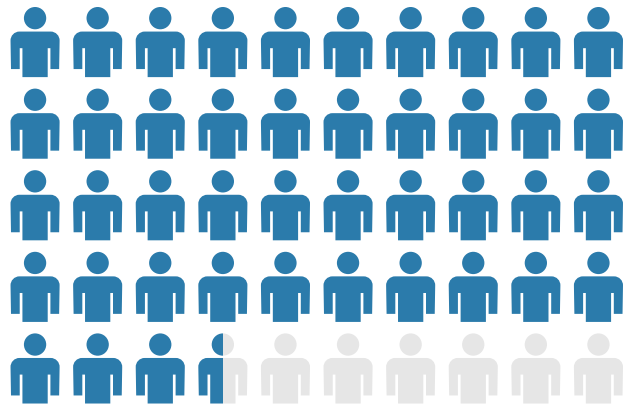
Thanks to much effort and innovation by staff, the pandemic did not stop mentoring agencies from delivering their programming. In spring 2020, many mentors and mentees switched to online meetings. When school started in August 2020, programs had figured out how to conduct mentoring safely and effectively, in-person with safety precautions and remotely.

Other creative responses from mentoring agencies included:

- Mentors/mentees playing online games or talking via phone call, text or online chat.
- Mentor visiting outside the mentee's home, keeping a safe distance.
- Providing basic needs items (food, toiletries, etc.) to most at-risk families that they serve.
- Offering personal protective equipment, hand sanitizer, etc.
- Connecting families with resources to receive free internet, food, etc.
- Technical support to help mentors and/or families use Zoom and other platforms.
- Volunteer training became virtual.

**Data compares the fall 2020 semester with the previous school year.*

13% fewer youth had a mentor during COVID
13% fewer mentors volunteered during COVID



“My son is a remote learner. He looks forward to meeting with his mentor. I’m sure if he could, he would do it every day!”

– **Mom of Enrique**

Testimonial

Some of the biggest challenges from the pandemic included:

- Some programs were allowed in schools (Community Learning Centers, TeamMates) while others were not. Those programs that could no longer conduct mentoring in schools saw an increased need for transportation and a decline in participation.
- Recruiting youth to group programs became difficult for programs that couldn't be in schools.
- Engagement with youth during the 2020-2021 school year is difficult, especially for programs that must be conducted online. Many students are experiencing "Zoom fatigue."
- Some programs saw an increase in the number of students requesting a mentor while other students are not finding the merit in having a mentor this year.
- The number of mentors volunteering is down. As a matter of fact, some regular mentors backed away from mentoring temporarily or permanently due to general uncertainty about health, employment status, etc. Recruiting new mentors has been harder than usual also, due to decreased in-person recruiting opportunities.



As of February, 2021, most mentoring programs had 40% to 100% mentor/mentee meetings being held in person, while some remain fully online.

Mentoring agencies report a mixed effect on funding due to COVID. Some saw no change. Others that relied on fundraising events saw a marked decrease in funding. Some programs were able to receive COVID response grants or take advantage of PPP (Paycheck Protection Program) loans and CARES Act (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act) funding to help fill funding gaps.

Much was learned about delivery service during the past year. Looking ahead, post-pandemic mentoring may include:

- The option for virtual mentoring
- Virtual trainings and presentations for mentors
- Virtual family meetings
- Virtual potential mentor screening meetings
- Connecting vulnerable families with other community resources
- Adaptability!

A resilient community is one that mentors. As Lincoln and Lancaster County moves past the pandemic into recovery, youth will need more support.



“Mentoring could improve the lives of more youth if there were more adults willing to participate, and program supports to assist adults and youth with making the first steps. Also, if more businesses supported employees with an hour or two a week/pay period to participate.”

– Sändra Washington, City Council

Testimonial

Future of Youth Mentoring

So much good is happening in Lincoln, thanks to our numerous and varied mentoring programs. But not all needs are being met. In order for Lincoln to truly be a city that ensures all youth who want a mentor can have one, the Lincoln Youth Mentoring Coalition has identified the following needs:

1 Funding:

- Additional, consistent funding is needed to pay existing staff (administrative or program) **a living wage that offers benefits**. Several programs noted that with additional funding, they could hire additional staff to help meet the demand.
- Funds are also needed to recruit volunteers, train volunteers and staff and financially support activities for youth.
- **General operating support** is best. Some funders are very specific about only funding mentoring for youth meeting certain criteria. This can be problematic because in the vast majority of cases, youth participate in the program voluntarily. Forced mentoring can be counter-productive. Also, some measurement asked by funders is above and beyond existing measurement that is burdensome for the agency.

2 Mentors:

- With **926 youth currently waiting** for a one-on-one mentor match, the Lincoln Youth Mentoring Coalition sees a need for a **media campaign** to recruit volunteers. The campaign would recruit volunteers appropriate for any of the programs available through the Coalition.

3 Quality:

- Through the Coalition, mentoring agencies can **improve quality** by ensuring all programs meet minimum standards (background checks, one-year commitment and mentor training.)
- **Specific training** is needed for staff and volunteers around cultural competency, race/ethnicity, LGBTQ+ awareness, disability and different ability awareness.
- Efforts should be made to **match intentionally** keeping in mind the youth's culture, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation or gender identity, disability or different ability.



“I wanted to be a positive influence in a child’s life who wouldn’t otherwise get that opportunity. I had multiple adults I looked up to as a child and I wanted to be that adult for another child.”

– Mentor

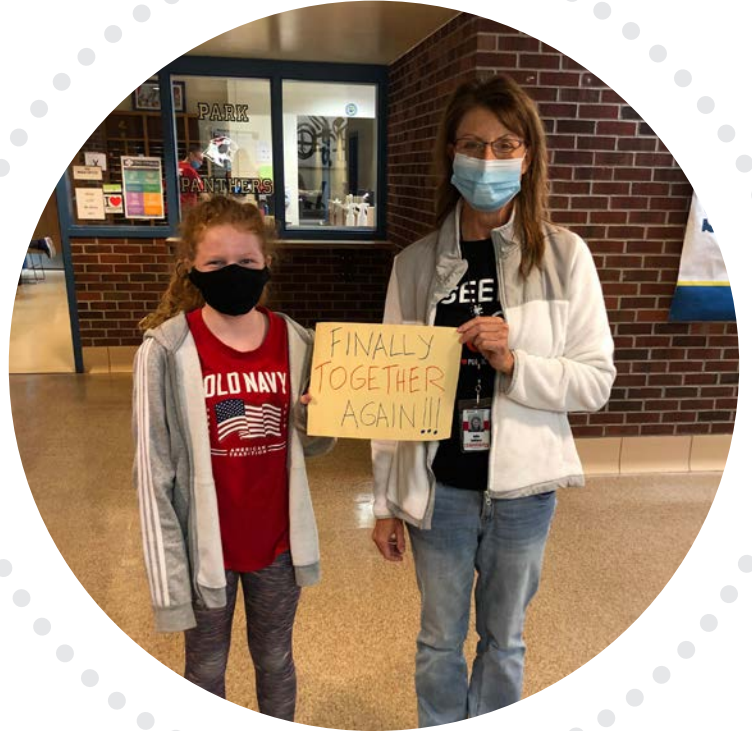
“Prevention and upstream approaches are more successful and cost-effective.”

– Community Health Endowment

What's Next?

One of the charges of the Coalition will be to continue to look for answers to questions that weren't answered through this project. For instance:

- What are potential mentors identifying as barriers to committing to being a mentor?
- What are the long-term results of mentoring in Lincoln? Where are mentees in 5 years? What are their successes?
- Do referral sources know how to tell youth about the journey of mentorship?
- What other gaps in service exist?
- Is there a way to help youth find the right mentoring program for them, even if they first approach another mentoring program?



With a community of support, the Lincoln Youth Mentoring Coalition is dedicated to working toward the goal of **every youth in Lincoln who wants or needs a mentor, has a mentor!**

Testimonial

“We know the value that positive, caring, and stable adults have on young adults facing challenging circumstances. We know that mentoring relationships can help youth do better in school, make it more likely youth will graduate, and increase the chances that a mentee will go on to pursue additional education and/or have a plan for post-graduation job or career.”

– Funder

Lincoln Youth Mentoring Coalition Agencies:

Asian Community & Cultural Center
Athlete2Athlete
Atlas Lincoln
Belmont Community Center
Big Brothers Big Sisters
Boys & Girls Club
CASA for Lancaster County
City Impact
City of Guards Basketball
Civic Nebraska
Dreamers Football Program
El Centro de Las Americas
Federal Programs/Lincoln Public Schools
Girls Inc
LeadUp
Lighthouse
Lux Center for the Arts
Malone Center
Mentor Plus
OutNebraska
TeamMates
The Bay
The Hub: Central Access Point for Young Adults
Tipping Point
YMCA of Lincoln
YWCA of Lincoln

“To have my mentor there to encourage me and help me with the obstacles in school helped me overcome any anxiety or worries I had.”

-TeamMates Mentee



Community Health



Endowment of Lincoln