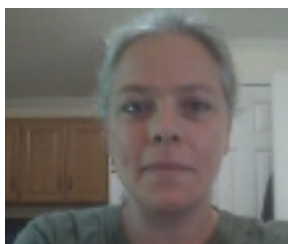


## Surry/Stokes Friends of Youth goes above and beyond basic mentor training for mentoring at-risk youth with Mentoring Central's training programs.



*The content within Mentoring Central's courses directly addresses questions that our mentors commonly ask.*

*Tammy Hopman  
Grants Administrator for Surry/Stokes Friends of Youth*

### The Challenge

As of April 2023, more than 391,000 American youth were in foster care, and recent data has shown that over 265,000 youth were arrested in the United States in 2021. In addition, at least 1 in 8 American teenagers report using an illicit substance in the last year. Youth-serving programs and organizations across the nation, like Mentoring Central, aim to address pressing issues facing youth and support youth who are in foster care, involved in the juvenile justice system, or impacted by substance use. Notably, youth mentoring programs have been shown to positively impact the academic, emotional, behavioral, and social development of at-risk youth; however, despite the many benefits of mentoring for youth, many small, rural American communities have difficulty finding or accessing resources to implement and maintain these types of prevention and intervention activities for at-risk youth. In fact, research has shown that mentoring programs in rural communities face greater barriers to funding, staffing, recruitment having to attract volunteers from a small population, sustaining matches due to greater distances resulting in longer travel times for mentors to meet with their mentees, and due to challenges offering or designing cultural activities for matches to do together in the local community.

### The Context



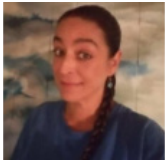
**Surry/Stokes Friends of Youth (SFOY)** knows the challenges and rewards of serving at-risk youth who live in a small, rural community all too well. The organization began providing programs

and services to youth residing in Surry County, North Carolina, in 1976 and expanded its service area to also serve youth in Stokes County, North Carolina, beginning in 1986. In addition to offering counseling, anger management classes, community service opportunities, parent training workshops, and substance use disorder screening and treatment services, SFOY provides mentoring opportunities for at-risk youth aged 6-17, as well as for youth aged 8-25 with a mental or physical disability.

SFOY's newest mentoring program, Enhanced Mentoring for Substance Abuse-Affected Youth (SEMSAY), matches youth who are impacted by substance use, and may or may not be involved with the local juvenile justice system and/or Child Protective Services, with a caring and responsible adult. SEMSAY gives mentees a context to receive care and support in dealing with daily challenges and gives mentors the opportunity to promote positive change in the lives of their mentees. However, administering and maintaining these services is not without challenges. Serving a high-risk population often poses challenges to recruiting and retaining volunteer mentors, particularly in rural areas that have a smaller pool of potential adult volunteers to draw from. Because mentors and mentees often have unclear expectations for mentoring relationships, adults may be reluctant to volunteer for programs that serve at-risk youth; mentees may be indifferent or apprehensive about participating in mentoring activities; and matches may end prematurely due to mentor and/or mentee dissatisfaction with the relationship.

## The Solution

In order to meet the unique needs of at-risk youth, SFOY needed tools to support their mentoring program that were proven to be effective. Upon founding the new SEMSAY program, SFOY sought guidance for meeting the Standards of MENTOR's Elements of Effective Practice™ (EPEP). Fortunately, Mentoring Central offers the resources SFOY needed to take their program to the next level.



**Tamara Veit, Executive Director for SFOY**, said that SFOY knew they must go the extra mile for their program to be successful and that Mentoring Central's training programs would help them meet the Benchmark and Enhancement practices described in the Training Standard in the EPEP.

As members of Mentoring Central's **Annual Membership Program**, SFOY receives access to all of Mentoring Central's evidence-based training courses for mentors, mentees, parents or guardians of mentees, and program staff members, which are informed by the EPEP and mentoring research, and proven effective through empirically conducted studies. **Tammy Hopman, Grants Administrator for SFOY**, said that the smooth integration of Mentoring Central's courses into SFOY's program and the flexibility of timing of enrollment in various courses across the life cycle of the mentoring relationship for programs serving at-risk youth made Mentoring Central's Membership option a perfect fit for the needs of their program. In addition, the many online training options offered through membership status provided easy implementation for mentors in a rural community. Through their Annual Membership, SFOY also receives access to Mentoring Central's program practices assessment tool, **EQUIP**, for use in assessing and improving their program's practices.

## The Results

SFOY values providing high quality, ongoing support and opportunities for learning and feedback to volunteer mentors. Veit and Hopman feel that Mentoring Central's training courses, coupled with regular check-ins with mentors, have helped their mentors feel more supported and prepared to participate in their mentoring relationships with at-risk youth. Hopman said that the content within Mentoring Central's courses provided answers to questions that their mentors commonly ask. Mentors volunteering in SFOY's mentoring program reported that Mentoring Central's *Building the Foundation* course was particularly impactful because it helped them set realistic expectations for their

mentoring relationships and clarified their role in the lives of at-risk youth as a mentor, rather than a parent, teacher, social worker, or peer.

Notably, SFOY's staff find it helpful to not only standardize core training requirements for pre-match mentors but also to offer specialized or advanced trainings to mentors on an individual basis, depending upon their skills, background, and needs. During the course of the mentoring relationship and based upon ongoing match support, staff sometimes decide to recommend that their mentors complete advanced training lessons or courses. For example, Veit and Hopman feel that the *Substance of Change* course has been particularly helpful for training their mentors who serve substance use-impacted youth because the course provides background and skills training for mentors to help their mentees build the assets that will prevent substance use, such as healthy and safe strategies for coping with stressors such as exposure to individuals using substances. These advanced skills and knowledge have helped mentors to more confidently approach their mentoring relationship. With the help of Mentoring Central, SFOY plans to continue striving to provide high quality training and mentoring practices to recruit, support, and retain mentors and positively impact the lives of at-risk youth.

*"I would highly recommend Mentoring Central's trainings to a new program. I believe that practicing the enhanced elements provides the best quality, and the training courses provide a simple-to-understand template for programs who are not sure where they're going yet."*

*Tamara Veit*  
Executive Director for Surry/Stokes Friends of Youth

## PREPARING FOR MENTORING PROGRAM OVERVIEW

THREE CORE COURSES SPAN THE LIFE OF A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP.



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