

## Western Youth Network uses Mentoring Central's innovative training programs to engage each mentor with a comprehensive education

### SUCCESS STORY

#### The Challenge

Western Youth Network (WYN) knows the importance of properly training adult mentors. To ensure that each mentor is fully trained, WYN has always provided a comprehensive mentoring education course to every participant. However, while WYN's mentoring coordinators were committed to using modern mentoring education techniques, the online training program that they relied on felt dated; its interface was awkward and its activities were monotonous. Moreover, the pace of the program was time-consuming for many of the mentors whose work schedules and family lives are busy. As a result, some of the participants backed out of volunteering in the mentoring program – feeling nervous, overwhelmed, and underprepared to serve as a mentor.

The WYN team needed a training program for mentors that matched the values of their organization: a software that was accessible, comprehensive, modern, resourceful, and versatile.



"It's just been perfect for us," she said, "It reminded me of things we want to emphasize."

– Sabena Maiden  
Avery Mentoring Coordinator  
Western Youth Network

#### The Context

Western Youth Network has served the High Country of North Carolina for over 30 years. The youth-focused non-profit organization now offers many services – including summer camps, afterschool programs, and even High School success coaching. From the very beginning though, WYN understood the power of mentoring.

"We've been saying it for years," reflected Sabena Maiden, Mentoring Coordinator for Avery County, "the best strategy [for youth] to deal with a difficult history is having a caring adult in their life."

WYN takes great care in matching mentors with mentees. Coordinators take a prospective mentor's interests, specialties, and experiences into account when matching them with a mentee. Undeniably, the process works; WYN's history is filled with moving stories of mentor/mentee relationships, like one pair who have been matched and learning from each other for over eight years. To continue providing connections like these, WYN coordinators strive to stay current on the field's best practices – and that's where they found the solution that they needed.

*"It looks fresher, it felt newer, and it very much aligned with what we were doing."*

*– Sabena Maiden, Avery Mentoring Coordinator*

## The Outcome

When WYN needed to update its mentor training, it turned to the evidence-based solutions that are provided by Mentoring Central. After hearing about Mentoring Central at a mentoring conference, the coordinators at WYN decided to test out the three *Preparing for Mentoring* courses: *Building the Foundation*, *Ethics and Safety*, and *Building and Maintaining the Relationship* courses. They were delighted with what they found. The courses were engaging, convenient, and research-driven. Most importantly, the programs matched WYN's goal of providing comprehensive and effective mentor training. Maiden was especially impressed with how well Mentoring Central's courses meshed with their own training.

## The Solution

A year later, the mentoring coordinators continue to utilize Mentoring Central training in conjunction with their face-to-face training. Mentoring Central's user-friendly interface, interactive lessons, and modern research made it a hit for both WYN and its mentors.

Maiden enthused, "It's been amazing to see that the science matches up...I knew that it wasn't just fluff, but it was real. It's not just a good fuzzy feeling."

Mentors like the convenience and accessibility of the new training, particularly the fact that they can take it at their own pace. And, once they've completed the courses, many choose to print their certificate of completion as a permanent reminder of their mentoring education.

The WYN team loves that mentors connect with the program, and the coordinators even use it themselves. They've filled binders with Mentoring Central's "Tip Sheets," which serve as a ready resource of techniques and strategies to advise when mentors face obstacles with their mentees. Most importantly, the Mentoring Central training have let WYN focus on the core of their mission: providing children in need with supportive and compassionate role models who make them feel safe, nurtured, and challenged to become the best version of themselves.

A year ago, soon after WYN incorporated the new programs, Sabena Maiden met a man from Avery County who wanted to become a mentor. He was passionate about helping others avoid some of the speedbumps that he'd overcome in his own past. But, he was nervous. He wasn't a parent himself and he didn't have much experience working with youth. "Sometimes we have mentors that need an extra boost," Maiden explained, "I do feel good that we had those resources available to him...He felt ready to go." While he completed the Mentoring Central training courses, Maiden found him the perfect match: a high school-age teen on the brink of a long engagement with juvenile detention. Fast-forward to the present, and detention is a distant memory. The young teen's life has been totally turned around by the relationship with his mentor.



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