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Encouraging Foster Youth: A Grant Proposal

for a Peer Mentoring Program

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### Abstract

The purpose of this project was to write a grant to support a peer mentoring program, including locating a foundation that would fund a peer mentor program within San Diego County Child Welfare Services and designing the mentoring program. A review of literature was conducted to understand the needs of foster youth, as well as the elements that contribute to their self-efficacy and academic success. A peer mentoring program was developed that addresses the educational, social, and emotional needs of youth and depicts the collaboration between Promises2Kids and child welfare services. A search for potential funding sources via the Internet and grant databases resulted in the selection of the Rancho Santa Fe Foundation, Women's Fund, as the best funding source for this project. A grant proposal narrative was written to support a peer mentor program. The actual submission or funding of this grant was not a requirement for the successful completion of the project.

*Keywords:* San Diego County Child Welfare Services (CWS), peer mentoring program, foster youth, grant, Rancho Santa Fe Foundation, Promises2Kids (P2K)

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Thank you to Promises2Kids for giving me the opportunity to use my experience and knowledge to inform and guide some of the most vulnerable youth here in San Diego. Being a peer mentor has made me realize that I need to work in a field that allows me to be who I am and feel good about the work I do every day. To San Diego County Child Welfare Services for providing me with the professional opportunities and always acknowledging my skills. To all the mentors who came into my life wanting the very best for me, your time, advice and reassurance taught me to trust strangers and accept help when needed.

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in yourself, give yourself a chance to experience new opportunities and be open to new ways of thinking. Remember, if we don't speak up, nobody will hear us.

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## Encouraging Foster Youth: A Grant Proposal for a Peer Mentor Program

### Chapter 1

#### **Introduction**

Foster youth are at risk for a variety of negative developmental outcomes (Courtney & Dworsky, 2006; Keller, Salazar, & Courtney, 2010; Naccarato, Brophy, & Courtney, 2010). Foster care is not always a developmentally caring environment for the children (Edmond, 2003); in some cases youth report physical, verbal, and sexual abuse by both caregivers and children in the group home (Courtney & Hughes-Heuring, 2005). Foster youth are reaching adulthood with limited education, complex mental health needs, limited employment skills, unreliable housing options, lack of income, and criminal involvement (Burns et al., 2004). Many will face significant challenges through their childhood and as they age out of the foster care system.

In 2013, almost 24,000 youth exited foster care between the ages of 18-20 years (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2014). Research has identified many patterns of negative outcomes among foster youth, although there is also a growing body of literature that focuses on identifying the strengths of youth who have successfully transitioned out of the system to become productive and high functioning adults (Benard, 1991). Findings suggest that success can be attributed to resilience, self-efficacy, peer mentor support, and a strong educational foundation (Kirk & Day, 2011). These findings must be taken into consideration when making decisions for the well-being of foster youth. Recommendations to improve foster youth success in California begins with child welfare services, and involves families, schools, and the youth themselves, as they must all work together in new strategic ways to expand, accelerate, and unify efforts to achieve better results (Geenen et al., 2015).

With the development and implementation of innovative programs, youth in foster care can build their skills and reach a higher level of success (Allen & Vacca, 2010). It is important that foster youth engage and support each other as they discover their capabilities and find their identity. Therefore, having older foster youth who are in college serve as mentors for younger foster youth has dual purpose that can benefit the future of current youth and the sustaining of former youth. Being able to pass down valuable knowledge and insight that will lead to foster youth's own desired positive outcome is essential. A peer mentoring program for foster youth like this is needed because foster youth can use all the support they can get. The enhancement of foster youth resiliency and self-efficacy with a peer mentor connection and support can increase the academic. The result of not preparing foster youth not only costs financially, but more importantly, it costs the youth their childhood and burdens their future. It is imperative to implement and evaluate programs that might be effective in assisting at risk youth overcome these obstacles.

### **Definition of Terms**

**Child Welfare Services:** Child Welfare Services (CWS) in San Diego is:

Committed to excellence in the delivery of culturally competent, family-centered and child-focused protective services. CWS investigates reports of suspected child abuse and neglect and intervenes with families who do not meet the minimum community standards of health and safety as required by law. Investigations are conducted in a thorough and professional manner. Family interventions are completed in the least intrusive manner necessary for the protection of the child (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015, "mission," para. 1).

**At risk.** Foster youth are often referred to as at risk because they engage in risky behavior (e.g., early sexual behavior, truancy, tobacco/alcohol/drug use, running away from home/foster home, associating with delinquent peers (Resnick & Burt, 1996).

**Peer Mentorship.** The theory of planned mentoring is to systematically link an adult with a youth to provide guidance and knowledge to enable youth to grow into responsible adults, and fill the gap created by the diminished opportunity for natural mentoring (Freedman, 1993). The purpose of these programs is to provide at risk youth with assistance and guidance to enable them to grow into responsible adults, and to fill the gap created by the diminished opportunity for natural mentoring (Freedman, 1993).

**Resilience.** Richardson (2002) explains that resilience fortifies and enriches the protective factors of an individual. Noddings (2003) has shown that resilience has strong implications for practice and policy, in that it positively increases motivation, learning, and has an impact on the achievement gap. If we can improve this quality in our youth, the chance of success may improve. It is one's ability to spring back from adversity and be adaptable.

**Self-Efficacy.** Albert Bandura (1977) describes self-efficacy as the mechanism in human agency. Zimmerman (2000) wrote that self-efficacy has emerged as a highly effective predictor of student motivation and learning, having succeeded in verifying both its validity in predicting common motivational outcomes, such as students' activity choices, effort, persistence, and emotional reactions.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

#### Foster Youth

In 2013, more than 400,000 children were living in the foster care system in the United States (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services [USDHHS], 2013). Child abuse and neglect in the United States costs \$124 billion annually (Promises2Kids, 2015). About 70,000 calls of suspected abuse come into San Diego's Child Abuse Hotline every year (Promises2Kids, 2015). Almost 50% of foster youth have been identified as having mental health needs (Van Zy, 2008). The emotional and physical abuse can be damaging, leading to aggressive, withdrawn, and submissive behaviors, and even developmental delays (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2007). About 15% of the teen girls in foster care have been pregnant at least once (Dworsky & Courtney, 2010), and almost one in four youth have shown to be homeless within 12 to 18 months after turning 18 years old (Emmerson & Lovitt, 2003). These statistics emphasize the growing need of enhanced services for our most vulnerable youth.

Thirty percent of youth that exited foster care are between the ages of 14 and 20 years old (USDHHS, 2014). According to Erikson (1959), an important developmental stage is identity vs. confusion. At this age of adolescence, children explore their independence, develop a sense of self, and establish a feeling of control. Erikson asserts that those who remain unsure of their beliefs will feel insecure and confused about themselves. Many experts in the field agree that no single reason leads to school failure, drug use, delinquency, and other social problems. More so, "it is the accumulation of risk – the sheer number of adversities and traumas confronted by children and families-that seems to disrupt normal developmental trajectories" (Rutter, 2001). An increase in protective factors is known to buffer a child's reaction to adverse conditions,

adapting more successfully (Masten, 1994). In some cases, severe trauma can be counteracted by personal qualities or sources of support (Garmezy, Masten, & Tellegen, 1984). The task of understanding the risk factors should be an important topic of at risk youth and intervention programs.

### **At Risk Youth**

Foster youth are often referred to at-risk because they engage in risky behavior (e.g., early sexual behavior, truancy, tobacco/alcohol/drug use, running away from home/foster home, associating with delinquent peers (Resnick & Burt, 1996). Others have defined the term as applying to young people who are at risk for maturing into responsible adults (Dryfoos, 1990) and an “increased likelihood over base rate in the population that a particular outcome will occur” (Kazdin, 1993). “Students are placed 'at risk' when they experience a significant mismatch between their circumstances and needs, and the capacity or willingness of the school to accept, accommodate, and respond to them in a manner that supports and enables their maximum social, emotional, and intellectual growth and development” (Weigmann et al., 2014, p. 2).

The State of California recognized the need for the improving services for foster youth, by increasing the budget for independent living and development program, amongst other services (Bass, Shields, & Behrman, 2004). Youth in foster care have shown to have more behavioral difficulties due to their high levels of residential mobility and school transfers (Zetlin, Weinberg, & Luderer, 2004). The constant moving makes it hard for youth to reach their academic or personal goals. Foster youth often lack the support system needed to create a trustworthy environment, one that contributes to their self-esteem and beliefs about themselves and the world around them. In most cases, foster youth never get a chance to have a positive

adult in their lives. That is why it is so important to create a dynamic network of people and resources to fill that void (Friedman & Allen, 2014). By increasing protective factors and decreasing risk factors, youth in foster care can succeed at a higher level.

### **Improving Educational Opportunities for Youth**

Education plays a significant role and can be the determining factor for a successful future for foster youth. It serves as a stepping stone toward higher standards of living and better quality of life. As Horace Mann once said, “Education is a great equalizer” (Ross & VanWillegen, 1997, p. 4). McMillen (2003) conducted a study to better understand the educational experiences of foster youth, specifically about placement history, child abuse history, behavioral problems, drug and alcohol usage, and future orientation. The results indicated that even though foster youth had high rates of behavioral problems in many areas, the group still reported having high educational aspirations. McMillen (2003) reports that 70% of foster youth wanted to attend college and 20% planned to further their education even after a 4-year degree. Data from California indicates that by age 18 years, a foster youth attends an average of nine schools (Kelly, 2000). The inconsistency affects them in significant ways, such as losing credits for classes taken, entering or leaving in the middle of the year, and being unable to build healthy relationships (Zetlin et al., 2004). These inconsistencies have made it particularly difficult to finish high school, let alone being prepared for college.

Hass, Allen, and Amoah (2014) explored how academically successful youth in foster care describe the turning points that contributed to their academic success. The results suggest that a sense of autonomy, social and instrumental support, and access to “safe havens” interacted to enable them to reach such turning points in their lives. Such qualities buffer risk factors and contribute to resiliency, which has been theorized into two categories: personal strengths, and

environmental protective factors (Bernard, 2004). Understanding the dynamics behind foster youth success can help create more efficient services and long lasting effects.

### **Resilience**

Resilience research focuses on positive outcomes and healthy development. Resilience is one's ability to spring back from adversity and be adaptable. The concept of resilience has evolved from the concepts of "invincible" or "invulnerable" children (Masten, 2001) who have the capacity to self-correct. Masten (2001) refers to this concept as "ordinary magic" and suggests it is a universal and ordinary occurrence, less unique than we think. Capuzzi and Gross (2008) state that resilience has the ability to limit the effects of trauma while simultaneously improving self-esteem and self-confidence.

The most important idea is that resilience is based on beliefs (Lee et al., 2010). Beliefs are socially constructed judgments and evaluations that we create about ourselves, others, and the world. Richardson (2002) explains that resilience fortifies and enriches the protective factors of an individual. Noddings (2003) has shown that resilience has strong implications for practice and policy, in that it positively increases motivation, learning, and has an impact on the achievement gap. If we can improve this quality in our youth, the chance of success may improve.

Researchers have found that children exposed to stresses such as neonatal distress, poverty, neglect, and parental mental illness, the large majority grow up to be lead productive adult lives (Bernard, 2004). Hass et al. (2014) describes the resilience as a backdrop for various strength-based practices such as the strengths perspective in social work (Saleeby, 2008), solution-focused brief therapy (DeJong & Kim Berg, 2008), and positive psychology (Seligman, 2004).

Theoretical models and tools have been developed to operationalize the concept of resiliency. As revealed by Wagnild (2009), the conceptual foundations of the Resilience Scale operationalize the construct as: (a) perseverance or the act of persistence despite adversity or discouragement, connoting a willingness to continue the struggle to reconstruct one's life and remain involved in the midst of adversity (perseverance is the ability to keep going despite setbacks); (b) equanimity is a balanced perspective of life and experiences and might be viewed as sitting loose and taking what comes, thus moderating the extreme responses to adversity (those with equanimity often have a sense of humor); (c) meaningfulness is the realization that life has a purpose and recognition that there is something for which to live; (d) those who are self-reliant believe in themselves, they recognize and rely on their personal strengths and capabilities and draw upon past successes to support and perhaps guide their actions; and (e) existential aloneness is the realization that each person is unique and that while some experiences can be shared, others must be faced alone. Understanding how to model and nurture resilience in foster youth is key for the network of people involved to understand.

Hass and Graydon (2009) focused on the four overlapping domains of personal strengths: (a) social competence, (b) problem solving, (c) autonomy, (d) and sense of purpose. In addition, Hass and Graydon (2009) describe the environmental protective factors being active in the family, community, and/or schools, which include (a) caring relationships, (b) clear and positive expectations by family members, educators, and community members for achievement, and (c) opportunities to participate and give back in the areas of family, school, and community life. Identifying such turning points can serve as a helpful tool for professionals to learn and use in building the connection and influencing the change they wish to see (Hass, Allen, & Amoah, 2014).

The concept of resilience pertains to foster youth because not only they deal with abuse and neglect but they struggle with the inevitable challenges of daily life. Being able to build and encourage resilience is essential for people working with youth to understand because it strengthens their ability to problem solve and feel confident about their capabilities and future.

### **Self-Efficacy**

Albert Bandura (1977) asserts that self-efficacy is said to be the mechanism in human agency. Efficacy is based on thought patterns, actions, and emotional arousal. Bandura (1977) defined perceived self-efficacy as personal judgments of ones capabilities to organize and execute courses of action to attain designated goals. Zimmerman (2000) wrote that self-efficacy has emerged as a highly effective predictor of student motivation and learning, having succeeded in verifying both its validity in predicting common motivational outcomes, such as students' activity choices, effort, persistence, and emotional reactions.

The closest constructs to self-efficacy are self-concept, outcome expectancies, and perceived control. Bandura (1997) found evidence that “self-efficacious students participate more readily, work harder, persist longer and have fewer adverse emotional reactions when they encounter difficulties than those who doubt their capabilities.” A study documented the successes and motivators that contributed to their overall success and the inherent theme was the continual exposure to opportunities that led to even small levels of success (Hass & Graydon, 2009). The proposed peer mentoring program aims to provide foster youth the opportunity to experience what success feels like, even for a limited time.

## **Peer Mentorship**

Youth mentoring programs have been developing since the late 1980s. The purpose of these programs is to provide at risk youth with assistance and guidance to enable them to grow into responsible adults, and to fill the gap created by the diminished opportunity for natural mentoring (Freedman, 1993). Mentors can play a significant role in the life of a foster youth. Because of the lack of natural mentoring, planned mentoring programs have developed.

The theory of planned mentoring is to systematically link an adult with a youth to provide guidance and knowledge to enable youth to grow into responsible adults, and fill the gap created by the diminished opportunity for natural mentoring (Freedman, 1993). Mentors have the potential to buffer youth from poor outcomes. Rhodes (2002) described this as 1) providing a supportive and trusting relationship, 2) serving as a role model, and 3) assisting youth in acquiring independent living skills. Studies suggest that mentoring can increase a person's self-concept (Turner & Scherman, 1996) and educational attainment (Zippay, 1995).

Rhodes (2002) described how mutual trust and a sense that one is understood, liked, and respected are essential conditions for establishing the mentor-youth relationship. Furthermore, the mentee promotes positive identity development by serving as a role model and advocate (Rhodes, 2005). Although there is considerable theoretical work explaining the role of mentoring, there is little available research on older, aged out foster youth mentoring younger current foster youth. Current foster youth can benefit from the experience and knowledge of a former foster youth as they navigate their way through the system.

Torrance (1984) conducted a longitudinal study of 220 students and found that those with mentors completed more years of education than students who do not. Of the students with a mentor, women completed on average four more years of education than men. Furthermore,

Thompson and Kelly-Vance (2001) conducted a study that examined the impact of mentoring on academic achievement of at-risk youth, with the results indicating that over a period of 9 months, the treatment group (i.e., had a mentor) made significantly higher academic gains than those who were in the control group (i.e., were on the waiting list to receive a mentor).

Despite the limited research on peer mentoring, there is evidence that it produces positive outcomes for both mentee and mentor (Allen, Russell, & Maetzke, 1997; Karcher, 2005). The research indicates that adult-to-youth mentoring programs can change thoughts about school and peers (Karcher, 2005), increase academic achievement (Stoltz, 2005), and most importantly promote self-efficacy (Stoltz, 2005). There is great worth in programs that promote sub-cultural membership, just like with older foster youth and current foster youth (Parkin & McKegeeny, 2000). Furthermore, a study by Osterling and Hines (2006, p. 249) asked mentees about the nature of the relationship with mentors, and one student expressed, “She’s kind of like a mentor and a teacher. She works harder than my social worker to help me. She’s now helping me with my education. She pushes me hard, but I know it’s for my own good.” This proposed peer-mentoring program can be used as a prevention strategy for youth who will eventually age out. It can be seen as an opportunity to speak with by a peer with have valuable and informative information.

## Chapter 3

### Methods

#### Project Design

After having the opportunity to be a peer mentor for Promises2Kids for 2 years, I am able to understand what youth want and what social workers need. With that information, I thought of ways to improve on what was already going well and strategize new ways of being engaging and useful. Based on my experience, it was identified that current foster youth needed to speak to someone who had similar life experiences. Therefore, having a former foster youth as a peer mentor could have a significant impact. A peer mentorship could provide opportunities and benefits for both mentor and mentee. For the mentee, a peer mentor will be an available support and for a mentor, the position can provide a more rewarding source of income, professional experience, and sense of giving back to the community.

I contacted the Promises2Kids organization in San Diego, and spoke one of the program managers about their interest in sponsoring a more “advanced” peer mentoring program. I then met with a supervisor in Child Welfare Services to collaborate about what the department needed. Once the details were determined, I researched and found that several grantors who concentrated their efforts on improving the outcomes of at risk youth. A potential funder was identified and a grant application was developed. The process was challenging, since the best matching grantors had specific criteria, which made this projected project ineligible. The best fit for grantor was the Rancho Santa Fe Women’s Fund, a branch of the Rancho Santa Fe Foundation. Promises2Kids met the Foundation’s grantee requirements as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit agency; therefore, this grantor was pursued.

**Participants**

The participants of the program are current foster youth between the ages of 14-20 years, who are served by Child Welfare Services (CWS), a division of the Health and Human Services (HHSA) of the County of San Diego. The mentors will be former foster youth working towards their bachelor's degrees. Promises2Kids, a non-profit organization that helps current and former foster youth with a variety of programs will be the grantee and will sponsor both positions at San Diego's CWS office.

This program will serve a dual purpose of providing older foster youth with powerful employment while creating a comfortable place for foster youth to thrive and develop a valuable relationship that will enhance their overall well-being. The number of youth served is based on a combination of factors. For example, youth will be referred to the mentor via e-mail by the CWS social worker. The purpose of the referral can be for a variety of reasons, but mainly as a peer support in a wide capacity. This number will most likely increase with time as social workers become more aware of the mentor availability. Based on my experience as a peer mentor, the number of youth fluctuates, as the role is to be available as a resource for the youth. The estimated number of youth being served may range from 30 to 60 youth per month, per mentor. Some youth just need one "good talk," while others may want ongoing support. Both the mentor and mentee have that discretion.

In addition to the foster youth and mentors, the stakeholders of this project are department managers and social workers of San Diego County Child Welfare Services, and the managers of Guardian Scholar program. I wanted the contribution of the social workers since they work with the foster youth directly, and know what is needed to improve the "system." Both administration at Promises2Kids and the CWS were thrilled to hear that such a program may be

available to them as support. Some youth will be more willing to participate than others, but that is exactly what this program is set to do, to engage them to join.

### **Identification of Potential Funding Sources**

Several methods were used to identify potential funding sources for this grant. An extensive Internet search was conducted via Google scholar using the terms “at risk youth,” and “mentoring” to get the most relevant results. Potential funders varied from government entities, foundations, and private organizations. The initial search began with many high profile granting sources, but some foundations specified the proposed population and geographic location, which limited the options. Possible funding sources were identified, such as The California Wellness Foundation, the Rancho Santa Fe Foundation, AT&T, Qualcomm, and many more. Only one was selected as the potential funding source based on best fit and eligibility requirements. The San Diego Grant Makers website had the Common Grant Application (CGA), which is one application for multiple funders. Organizations that accept the San Diego Common Application are: The Boys and Girls Foundation, the McCarthy Family Foundation, the Rancho Santa Fe Foundation, and the San Diego County Bar Foundation. The CGA was designed to help make the grant seeking process simple and more efficient. The Rancho Santa Fe Foundation was selected for this project because the foundations Women’s fund had grants geared for at risk youth and the geographic guidelines fit our location.

### **The Rancho Santa Fe Foundation**

For over 30 years, the Rancho Santa Fe Foundation has provided stable, tax-advantaged financial structure for the stewardship of philanthropic funds with the mission to serve the community. The Rancho Santa Fe Foundation has a mission to connect donors with regional and global needs through visionary community leadership, personalized service, and effective grant

making. Their vision is to be a comprehensive center for impactful philanthropy that inspires the joy of purposeful giving. The Foundation values service to donors, stewardships, collaboration, and leadership. (Rancho Santa Fe Foundation [RSFF], 2014).

Specifically, the Foundation plans on building on the community with a Women's Fund. The RSFF Women's Fund has granted over \$2 million since its beginning in 2004. "Their mission is to educate, inspire and increase the number of women committed to philanthropy in order to strengthen the community and impact lives through informed, focused collective giving." The RSFF Women's Funds provides funding for North San Diego County and San Diego City projects that address at least one of the following criteria: responses to urgent and critical need; bold new ventures; and/or new approaches to time-worn problems (RSFF, 2014).

## Chapter 4

**Common Grant Application****Project Purpose**

This grant aims to reduce the prevalence of at-risk behaviors and increase social outcomes for current foster youth. This program will provide peer mentor support services, as needed, to foster youth, ages 14 to 20 years. Through a structured program and guidance, older foster youth who are enrolled in college and pursuing their bachelor's degrees can serve as guides and mentors to younger foster youth. The mentors can provide valuable insight and support that will help guide youth through the transition process of school and placements. The proposed program uses peer mentoring and youth engagement to advance the educational, social, and emotional needs of youth and help the collaboration between both the educational and child welfare systems.

These mentors will be a youth voice in department meetings, during placement changes, and help smooth the process. In addition, the mentors can also provide attendance at Team Decision Meeting (TDM) to Individualized Educational Program (IEP), and various CWS roundtable meetings. The peer mentors will serve as a liaisons between child welfare and the educational system with a referral by CWS staff. The peer mentor program will provide a special dual purpose by creating the opportunity to support former foster youth with a specialized employment opportunity that will give professional work experience and provide a meaningful opportunity for current foster youth to benefit from mentors who have lived a similar life experience and have been diligent in creating their own success.

**Organizational Information**

**Promises2Kids.** Promises2Kids (P2K) is a leading non-profit organization originally founded over 30 years ago as the Child Abuse Prevention Foundation of San Diego County. Since 1981, “Promises2Kids has provided over 3,300 current and former foster youth in San Diego County with the tools, opportunities, and guidance they need to address the circumstances that brought them into foster care, overcome difficulties of their past, and grow into healthy, happy, and successful adults”(Promises2Kids [P2K], 2015).

P2K is dedicated to creating a brighter future for foster children in San Diego County by providing programs and services that promote lifelong skills that will carry into adulthood. Promises2Kids support children with four core programs: Polinsky Children’s Center, Camp Connect, Guardian Scholars, and Foster Funds. Promises2Kids began raising money to build the A.B. and Jessie Polinsky Children’s Center, an emergency shelter for children in need of a loving and nurturing place to heal. The Polinsky Center provides shelter, protection, and support or more than 1,000 children every year (P2K, 2015). In total, Promises2Kids has distributed nearly \$25 million for the care and protection of abused and neglected children and provided services for more than 200,000 children in need.

The Guardian Scholar program specifically, will be essential in the selection of mentors. Each Guardian Scholar is enrolled in college and screened through Promises2Kids. The program manager has a very personal relationship with a scholars and will select certain scholars to be peer mentors. Those selected to apply for the positions will have demonstrated to be a responsible leaders and positive role models.

**San Diego Child Welfare Services (CWS).** Child Welfare Services (CWS) is committed to excellence in the delivery of culturally competent, family-centered and child-focused

protective services (HHSA, 2014). CWS investigates reports of suspected child abuse and neglect and intervenes with families who do not meet the minimum community standards of health and safety as required by law. Investigations are conducted in a thorough and professional manner. Family interventions are completed in the least intrusive manner necessary for the protection of the child (HHSA, 2014).

### **Needs, Problems, and Opportunities**

Foster youth need preventive support. At an early age, foster youth should talk to someone who has successfully transitioned through the aging out process and can educate them on what to do and how to do it the most efficient way. Foster youth are aging out of the system uninformed and unprepared. The few who make it to college know what it feels like and have valuable information and advice to share. The peer mentor program will create not only opportunities for the mentee but for the mentor. Mentors will have an opportunity to share their knowledge, experience, and emotional, social, and practical help, to support each youth and increase their chances of success. The mentors will gain professional experience working at a CWS and will provide a reliable source of income as they work towards their degrees. Being able to pay the mentors \$20 an hour increases the chances of them graduating college and being reliable in their peer mentor role.

This benefits of this program outweigh its challenges – but - at the same time, it encompasses many more benefits. There is the possibility that the mentor or mentee be unwilling, and/or the social worker could be unresponsive to the help. For example, not all foster youth may want to establish a relationship with a mentor, but they can at least have the opportunity to meet one time and have the resource for the future. Another challenge will be getting the social workers to use the mentors as a resources and make referrals for initial contact.

But with a formal introduction, office announcements and mentor presence, the available resources will soon be noticed and utilized.

After speaking with principals, teachers, social workers, foster parents, therapists, group home staff, and foster youth themselves, it was seeming that peer mentorship is needed. The project author was aware that foster youth can benefit from speaking to someone who has already been through a similar situation. Being able to have those conversations increased my level of information and substantiated my effort to develop a peer mentor program and its goals. Organizations in the community have career mentor programs, which are extremely helpful but serve a different purpose. They are meant to be longer-term and guide them through a career choice. Other programs provide financial assistance, scholarships, and development workshops, for mostly transitioned age youth, those who have already aged out of the foster care system.

**Target Population.** The target population for this grant is current foster youth between the ages of 14 to 20 years who are served through CWS, and former foster youth who are part of the Guardian Scholar program. The geographic location of both youth and mentors will be open to the County of San Diego. Both populations will benefit from the program: the youth will gain additional support and guidance, and mentors will gain professional work experience and a salary.

**Project's Contribution to the Community.** This project will contribute to the community in many ways. It will improve the "aging-out" process for both youth and CWS. The mentors leadership and guidance will give the youth a natural connection to trust and use as a resource during their transition. The community will benefit from gradual improvement in the future of at risk youth. This program aims to decrease youth's engagement in at risk behaviors, increase the likelihood to succeed in school, and strengthen youth's sense of self. The project

will be an opportunity to continue the support given to former foster youth which will contribute to their overall success and well-being. The community will notice both immediate and long term benefits. The immediate benefits could be a better attitude in school, enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence, and improved behavior. Long term benefits can be seen as increased high school graduation rates, and a decreased likelihood of initiating drug and alcohol use, all improving the community.

**Project Goals.** The goal of the peer mentor program is to (a) have young foster youth understand the importance of their education, (b) teach current foster youth how to properly navigate the available resources as they “age out,” (c) promote self-efficacy and resilience, and (d) develop a trustworthy partnership to aid the process between child welfare and foster youth educational liaisons within CWS. The program will benefit both mentor and mentee in the short-term and long-term. Some of the benefits for the mentee, may be increased high school graduation rates, healthier relationships and lifestyle choices, better attitude, enhanced self-esteem and self-confidence, higher educational aspirations, improved behavior and interpersonal skills, and a decreased likelihood of initiating drug and alcohol use (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). The mentor benefits may include increased self-esteem, a sense of accomplishment, professional experiences and contacts, stable employment and a sense of servitude (Colvin & Ashman, 2010).

**Key Staff Qualifications and Experience: Peer Mentors.** The peer mentor positions are for former foster youth who are a part of the Guardian Scholar program at P2K. The Guardian Scholar program is a scholarship program for foster youth attending college at least part-time. There are more than 50 Guardian Scholars, and of those, the P2K managers will select a handful to apply and interview for the two peer mentor positions. A peer mentor will need to have certain qualities and skills to ensure effective peer relationships and professional networks. Mentors do

not need a long work history or be an “A” student, but they need to feel invested in the cause and want to truly help. Each mentor will need to pass a background check and drug test, for which the county will accommodate. Each mentor will be supervised by a P2K manager and a CWS manager.

**Other Partners: Child Welfare Services and Its Role.** CWS will be the host agency and will provide the space and professional opportunity. The agency works toward improving services for youth and has found this program to be extremely helpful. Each mentor will be supervised by either a department manager and/or supervisor for one hour per week. They will be a contact while working in the field or in the office. They will help introduce the mentors and spread the word in department meetings. They will give advice and recommendations throughout the academic year. For the most part, mentors will work independently in setting up sessions, attending meetings, and making contact with youth independently. The CWS supervisor will be key in advertising the mentor’s role and abilities.

**Project Timetable.** The grant application timeline will be for the upcoming 2017 cycle based on the current deadlines. By August 2016, a Letter of Inquiry (LOI) will be available for submission and due by early September. If and when the LOI is accepted, an invitation will allow P2K to submit the grant proposal by January 2017. The process continues with a site visit and award ceremony into early May 2017. Once the funds are available, possibly early June 2017, P2K will notify Guardian scholars to apply for the positions. An e-mail will be sent out and interviews will be held by mid-July 2017. By early August 2017, the positions will be filled and the background process will be initiated. Given that the process may take several weeks, 30 days will be allowed to complete the process and complete a short training on being a peer mentor. By the end of August 2017, a start date will be selected, tentatively September 1, 2017.

The program manager at CWS will arrange a department meeting to introduce the mentors, their role, and how to request support. The mentors will work no more than 25 hours per week, and will have the option to work through the holiday break.

**Sustainability.** The grant was written as a starting point. The totality of the grant, if accepted, will be no more than \$50,000. The funds will be used to hire two former foster youth to work part-time for an academic year. To continue the program after May 2018, additional funds will be needed. The pure opportunity to provide such a unique resource is worth the effort. The future of the program will be dependent on additional funders and will be taken into consideration as the grant process moves forward. Time would be spent researching state and federal resources to obtain a larger amount of funding. The project author will research additional funding to continue the program. Such as the California Wellness Foundation and the Boys and Girls Club.

**Budget Narrative.** The total estimated budget is \$50,000, and accounts for both staffing and program costs. Two part-time peer mentor positions will be filled for one academic year, starting early September 2017 and ending late May 2018. See Appendix D for details.

**Peer Mentors.** The program will have two part-time positions that will pay \$20 an hour. Funds will be available for each mentor to work up to 25 hours per week for a total of 44 weeks of the year. A total of 8 weeks assume time off and school vacation. Transportation expenses are included in the hourly rate. Mentors will schedule their day based on need, being available for engagement sessions and meetings. They will be positive role models by being trustworthy and being a positive role model. The collaborative effort of service providers will ensure the best outcome for the youth.

**Educational Supplies.** A variety of supplies will be needed during youth sessions to engage the youth. A Laptop computer will be purchased for each peer mentor to use as a tool and resource when working with the youth in the community. Art supplies will be purchased to incorporate some creative space during sessions.

**Office Supplies.** To ensure the best quality of work and organization, office supplies will be bought for administrative purposes. For example, paper, pens, post-its, tape, calendars and other supplies.

**Snacks.** Snacks will be purchased to make sure the youth are comfortable and relaxed during sessions. The snacks will come in a wide variety and stored in a County cubicle, making them convenient and organized. The snacks are meant to be a friendly gesture and accommodation during each encounter.

### **Evaluation Plan**

The evaluation plan will be multifaceted. A pretest and posttest questionnaire will be administered at the first and last session to better understand the youth's perceived level of self-efficacy, resilience, and academic progress, based on self-report. The mentor's role is to build trustworthy rapport, be an informational guide, and be a role model. Not only will the mentor have an open conversation on a consistent basis, but every mentee will get a chance to fill out a short satisfaction survey on the quality and expectation of the relationship. This type of information will evaluate the effectiveness of the mentor relationship and intervention, while also making suggestions for future implications of this program. Other documents of evaluation, such as progress notes, activity logs, and sign-in sheets will be created for the use of data analysis and documenting the programs impact.

This is a pilot program and is intended to be informational and that is why small scale measures are being conducted. Hopefully, the program can be developed into something more extensive and formal, so that both mentee and mentor can have an additional form of support. Following all the research and investigation, it was concluded that peer mentor support would be an advantageous effort.

## Chapter 5

### **Discussion**

The pattern of unpredictability and lack of guidance and support becomes normal, and does not prepare foster youth for their future as adults. The constant changes in their foster care placement are common and create a rigid view on education, relationships, and success. For foster youth to feel connected and understood, the notion of speaking with someone who has already experienced similar events and feelings normalizes their experience and gives them hope that the future can be better than the past. As a former foster youth, I felt an inherent need to continue the peer mentor service because not only does it affect youth but mentors. Foster youth are dealing with very real distress and in some cases can be better consoled and engaged by their peers. Unfortunately, the combination of abuse and neglect before foster care and the instability and lack of support during care, has made it difficult for foster youth to trust people and think positively about the future

This grant proposal is to support a program that P2K was so thoughtful to pilot not too long ago. I was given the opportunity to be a role model and use my experience and education to form an effective approach and help them through their obstacles as they age-out of the foster care system and become independent.

### **Implications for Social Work Practice**

Social work practice encompasses values, methods, and techniques to help people as individuals, families, and groups improve their lives. The practice of social work entails the understanding of human behavior and development, the social and economic factors that contribute to decision making, cultural considerations, and how the internal and external processes function as a response (National Association of Social Workers [NASW], 2015).

Social workers connect communities with access to resources and services to create a network of support for some of the most vulnerable populations (NASW, 2015).

The child welfare system's objective is to improve the safety, permanency, and well-being of the children and families served (USDHHS, 2014). Research shows foster youth are the most at risk children in American society (Courtney et al., 2004). It is important for social workers to recognize creative strategies to serve this population. The literature supports that peer mentoring can substantially improve the quality of life for an at-risk youth. Therefore, this program will create an additional resource for both youth and social worker. Having peer mentors within CWS can provide an inside perspective on what foster youth need and want during difficult transitions. A social worker can learn firsthand from an adult foster youth the process by which the transition worked best. In order for the peer mentoring program to be most useful for both youth and social worker several components are necessary. These components include the following: standards and procedures for initial contact, clearly defined expectations for all those involved, weekly contact with the youth and supervisor, and collaboration in all directions to ensure the envisioned support is given.

### **Implications for Policy**

To ensure a successful transitioning out of care, the Increasing Adoption Adoptions Act of 2008 requires that child welfare create a transition plan that addresses a variety of topics, in lieu of preparing them for their future (McClay, 2013). The goal is to prepare youth with the tools to manage life outside of dependency, to become independent in thought and motivation. This described peer mentor program can help youth prepare for their transition in a more realistic and personable way. It can provide the needed skills and support to meet the goals outlined in policy.

Furthermore, the federal government has taken steps toward supporting older foster youth with resources maintain stability once they age-out. The Foster Care Independence Act (Pub. L. 106-169) and the John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program (CFCIO) amended the 1989 Title IV-E Independence Living Initiative (Pub. L. 99-272), which doubles funding to support housing, post-secondary education, health care, and therapy until the age of 21. Social workers are known to create and improve services for the community on a micro, mezzo, and macro level (Krinsky, 2007).

Resilience research has shown that supportive social networks and relationships can be seen as protective factors against negative outcomes for foster youth (Perry, 2006; Massigna & Pecora, 2004). In many cases, youth who have a connection with a supportive adult can have positive effects on psychological health, educational achievement, self-esteem, and social skills (Perry, 2006). With the acknowledgment of negative foster youth outcomes, it becomes important to understand the dynamics that inhibits or facilitates their connections and social networks. Thus, a peer mentor can provide the needed support and service connection needed to create a more efficient transition into adulthood.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Future research should examine the impact peer mentoring has on both current and former foster youth; as such mentoring is limited. Understanding the positive impact natural mentors have on youth relationships and outcomes. The research could then support the need for more peer mentor positions in other Counties and departments. As noted, peer mentoring programs are available for at-risk youth, but former foster youth working with CWS is very limited. Munson & McMillien (2009) suggest that the foster care system could benefit from

incorporating ‘mentor-type’ interventions, by using former youth as trustworthy role models and help educate them on the transition process. This peer mentoring program the beg

### **Strengths and Limitations**

There are challenges to implementing this type of program with this population. Many of those challenges may be the infrequent use of mentors by social workers, because of the novelty of the program and the referral process. The most critical limitation of the mentoring program is the relationship between mentor and mentee. Furthermore, relationship that hold longer than a year, commonly indicate positive outcomes. Since this program is unconventional. Rhodes (2002) studied the risks and benefits, and length of mentor relationship. It was found that significant harm can be done to both mentor and mentee when the relationship is terminated prematurely. Furthermore, relationships that last longer than a year, commonly indicate positive outcomes demonstrated by social acceptance, positive feelings of self-worth, and academic competence (Rhodes, 2002). Therefore, selecting the best mentors will be most important. These mentors will need to be confident, inspiring and committed to ensure the greatest benefit and least harm.

Colvin and Ashman (2010) describe how assumptions cannot be made about the roles, risks, and benefits that will transpire from a mentee and mentor relationship because there is a difference in perception. The study evaluate a peer mentor relationship in college setting and found that both men and women saw benefits in the relationship. In particular, women liked “having a friend and support system,” while men benefited from having “help from an equal or peer” (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). Although the most both mentors and mentees agreed that ‘having or being’ a mentor helped them do better in school, especially the students who “possess broader, well-connected networks” (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). Additionally, the pure existence

of having a former foster youth at CWS who can be a peer and a resource, is a valuable asset and potentially a future procedure.

This program has great potential because it is a novel approach and can give foster youth a meaningful work opportunity. CWS will gain valuable insight and an educated youth perspective on how to engage some of the youth in care. The youth will get a chance to build a relationship with a peer who has experienced a similar situation and can be a positive role model as they both transition in and out of care. The dynamics of the relationship will be dependent on the willingness of the mentee to accept the mentor's information and the gentle use of mentor power (Project author, 2016).

### **Conclusion**

The proposed mentoring program will benefit the futures of current foster youth and the development of former foster youth. Peer mentorship can have a significant effect on a person self-efficacy, by the promotion of resiliency, academic encouragement, and peer support. It is crucial for our community and service providers to understand the dynamics involved in building trust and believing in the future of our most vulnerable youth in San Diego County. The mentoring program can be a model for other CWS agencies, so that all foster youth get a chance to support and be supported. The future is dependent on the foundation of our youth.

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69.

Appendix A: Letter of Inquiry Form (LOI)



Letter of Inquiry Form for 2016 Pooled Fund Grant Cycle

Focus Areas: Economic Development and Education [ ]

Check only ONE focus area for which you wish to have this grant project considered

Youth Services [ ]

Geographic Focus: North San Diego County and San Diego city area

Important: All letters of inquiry (LOI) must be received by the deadline- 12:00 PM, Thursday, September 3rd, 2015.

Early submission is greatly appreciated.

Only selected agencies will be invited to submit full proposals in November 2015. LOI's are strictly for preliminary information-gathering purposes.

Submission of an LOI does not guarantee formal consideration for funding.

Organizations that discriminate on the basis of age, race, national origin, ethnicity, gender, physical ability, sexual orientation, political affiliation or religious belief and organizations that serve an exclusively sectarian purpose will not be considered for funding.

ORGANIZATION INFORMATION

Name of Organization:

Year Incorporated:

Tax ID #:

Executive Director:

Contact Person & Title: (If different):

Please indicate the location of your Head Office with a "star" (★) on the map on Page 3.

Address:

City, State, Zip:

Phone:

Fax

Email:

Website:

Mission:

Population & number of people served:

Agency budget:

Number of staff: Full time

Part Time

PROJECT INFORMATION

Please provide a single-sentence summary of your project (if need is for general operating support, please summarize your organization's program).

Total cost of this project:

Amount requested: (Up to \$50,000)

Population & estimated number of people served in North County and/or San Diego city area by this project:

Also, on Page 3, "circle" ( ) the exact area from which you anticipate that >50% of your project's population will be served.



**In the space provided**, please tell us about your project, its impact on the community, and how a pooled fund grant award not **to exceed** \$50,000 from the Rancho Santa Fe Women's Fund could be used. Although no attachments are necessary, agencies wishing to submit additional information may enclose a single annual report or agency brochure.

*(Please confine your response to the blank area on this page only)*

**Completed form and map on Page 3 should be sent electronically to [womensfund@rsffoundation.org](mailto:womensfund@rsffoundation.org)**

Please **also send two (2) hard copies** by mail to PO Box 811, Rancho Santa Fe, CA 92067

**NOTE:** You may need to PRINT this map in order to **"star" (★) your Head office location** and to

RANCHO SANTA FE  
*Women's Fund*

“circle” ( ) the entire area from which >50% of your project’s population is expected to be drawn.

Please use red or blue ink for each indication.

(The completed map may need to be re-scanned to a .pdf file for inclusion with your Letter of Inquiry submission via email.)



Thank you for your submission.

The Rancho Santa Fe Women's Fund appreciates the opportunity to learn about your organization and project.

If you have questions, please contact Nancy Hashim, Programs Administrator:

PH 858-756-0249 FAX 858-756-6561

[womensfund@rsffoundation.org](mailto:womensfund@rsffoundation.org)

## Appendix B: Common Grant Application

### Common Grant Application

The San Diego Common Grant Application was designed by San Diego Grantmakers' members and nonprofit community leaders to facilitate a simpler and more efficient grantseeking and grantmaking process. The intent is to help our nonprofit partners invest time on developing relationships with grantmakers and not on formatting. The intent is not to encourage mass submissions of proposals. It is important that each submission demonstrate the strategic link between your proposal and the mission of the grantmaker to whom you are applying.

Before you fill out the Common Grant Application, be sure to research the individual foundations you plan to submit a proposal to! While the foundations and corporations listed accept the San Diego Common Grant Application, each has different guidelines and priorities, many require a first step or "Letter of Intent" (LOI) prior to submitting a proposal. In addition, foundations have different deadlines and timetables. Any funder that has agreed to accept this form may request additional information at any stage in the proposal process.

1. **Application:** submit proposal directly to foundation and/or corporation.
2. **Additional information:** many of the participating foundations and corporations have additional steps or require additional information. Before submitting a proposal, please review the respective organization's grant requirements.

If you are interested in seeking additional information and/or resources, please visit [www.sdgrantmakers.org/grantseekers](http://www.sdgrantmakers.org/grantseekers). Here you will find articles, sample grant proposals, and other links to assist you in your grant seeking efforts.

**Proposal Checklist:**

- \_\_\_ Application
- \_\_\_ Additional information requested by the individual grantmakers (see step 2 above)
- \_\_\_ Copy of the current IRS determination letter indicating 501(c)3 tax-exempt status
- \_\_\_ List of Board of Directors including affiliations, tenure, and terms. What percentage of the Board of Directors financially supports the organization?
- \_\_\_ Annual Report (if available)
- \_\_\_ **Organizational financial statements:** financial statements from the last two fiscal years (audited if possible) and current operating budget for the organization (expenses and income)
- \_\_\_ **Project financial statements:** two-year project budget (expenses and income)
- \_\_\_ List of other funders and/or potential funders and amounts committed or requested for the specified project

See <http://www.sdgrantmakers.org/grantseekers/cga.asp> for a list of San Diego foundations that accept the Common Grant Application.

Common Grant Application

Date of Application: \_\_\_\_\_

Legal Name of Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

Executive Director: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Person/Title

(if different from Executive Director): \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Organization Website: \_\_\_\_\_ EIN: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax Number: \_\_\_\_\_

Project Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Purpose of Grant: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Beginning and Ending Project Dates: \_\_\_\_\_

Amount Requested: \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Total Project Cost: \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Is your organization an IRS 501(c)3 not-for-profit? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No

If no, check funder's guidelines to determine if the funder accepts fiscal sponsors or makes other arrangements as appropriate. Please explain:

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Applications must be sent directly to the organization(s) from which you are seeking funding and SHOULD NOT BE SENT TO SDG. SDG does not make grants or match grantseekers with funding sources.

### Common Grant Application

**Please structure your proposal to provide the following information in the order indicated. Use the headings, subheadings, and numbers provided in your own word processing format to address the questions and issues posed in the outline. The questions reflect the general interests and concerns of grantmakers, but are not intended to be conclusive. Additional information pertinent to your project should be included. Be thorough yet strive for brevity. Although tightly written proposals are preferred, take the space you need to make your case.**

1. Organization Information
  - Summarize your organization's history.
  - State the organization's mission and goals.
  - Outline current programs and activities.
  - Highlight organizational accomplishments.
2. Purpose of Grant
  - Describe the proposed program or project.
  - Identify the needs, problems, and/or opportunities to be addressed. What are the challenges to the project? Who else in the specified area is addressing this issue?
  - Identify the target population/geographic community served and how they will benefit. How will you reach this community?
  - Explain how the project contributes to and/or impacts the community.
  - What are the goals of the project? What methods will you use to achieve the objectives?
  - Outline the key staff and volunteers' qualifications and experience critical to the project
  - Identify other organizations and/or partners participating in the project and their roles.
  - Provide a timetable for the project.
  - Identify long-term funding resources for the project. How will the project be sustained?
3. Evaluation
  - Describe the plan for evaluation. For instance, how will evaluation results be used and/or disseminated? Who will be involved in the evaluation?
4. Attachments
  - Copy of the current IRS determination letter indicating 501(c)3 tax-exempt status.
  - List of Board of Directors including affiliations, tenures, and terms. What percentage of the Board of Directors financially supports the organization?

- Annual Report (if available).
- **Organizational financial statements:** financial statements from the last two (2) fiscal years (audited if possible) and current operating budget for the organization (expenses and income).
- **Project financial statements:** two-year project budget (expenses and income).
- List of other funders and/or potential funders and amounts committed or requested for the specified project.

**Appendix C: Timeline**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Activity</b>
<b>August 2016</b>	LOI will be available
<b>September 2016</b>	LOI due
<b>January 2017</b>	Submit grant proposal by deadline
<b>May 2017</b>	Award ceremony
<b>June 2017</b>	Acceptance notification and funds will be available Peer-mentor interviews will be conducted
<b>August 2017</b>	Peer-mentor positions will be filled
<b>By September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2017</b>	Peer-mentor start date

**Appendix D: Budget**

<b>Expense</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Mentor Position (2)  =\$20 x 25 hrs /wk x 44 wks	\$44,000
Laptop (2) and Educational Supplies	\$3,000
Office Supplies	\$500
Snacks	\$2,500
Total Program Expenses	\$50,000
<b>Total Amount Requested</b>	<b>\$50,000</b>