

Youth Mentoring Impact

Take a moment to reflect on how you got to where you are today. Hard work, determination, and grit undoubtedly played a part. Some people might think about parents or guardians who encouraged them every step of the way. Many folks will also think about mentors they had throughout their lives—all of the teachers, coaches, bosses, and other supportive adults who provided opportunities and advice.

The fact is, those who have been lucky enough to have a mentor know just how critical it is to have someone in your corner as you figure out your teen years, decide on your postsecondary plans, define your career goals, and navigate your first professional job. Yet, the numbers show that roughly [one-third](#) of young people in the United States grow up without a mentor.

As a society, we can't afford to let this trend continue. Our youth deserve every opportunity in life, and our communities need the next generation prepared to take up the torch. Mentoring provides the building blocks for people to continue making innovative, worthwhile contributions to the world.

That's exactly why we launched [Starfish Initiative](#). Starfish Initiative offers a unique mentoring program for high school students in Marion County, Indiana. We work exclusively with students enrolled in Indiana's [21st Century Scholars](#) program—a financial aid program designed to help low-income Hoosier students access higher education. By drawing on evidence-based research, including Ruby Payne's [Bridges Out of Poverty framework](#), Starfish mentors help Starfish mentees effectively prepare for personal and academic success.

But are youth mentoring programs effective? Absolutely! The positive outcomes of mentoring programs like Starfish Initiative speak for themselves. 100% of the students who complete our program graduate high school, and 98% of them go on to enroll in colleges or universities across Indiana and beyond. Both numbers are well above our state average for not only low-income youth but for all Hoosier students. These numbers, and other youth mentoring statistics we'll share later in this article, illustrate just how crucial mentoring is for today's youth and for our community at large.

In addition to youth mentoring facts and statistics, this article will explore questions like:

- What exactly is mentoring, and how does it work?
- What are the benefits of effective mentoring?
- What is the impact of mentoring on youth, mentors, employers, and communities?
- How can you get involved with supporting community-based mentoring organizations?

What Is Mentoring?

A simple mentor definition is an experienced person who guides, supports, and encourages another person—typically someone who is younger or less experienced than them. While short-term mentoring exists, and can be successful in certain situations, the most effective mentoring provides mentees with a mentor for an extended period of time. This allows for the development of a supportive, trusting relationship. Mentors serve mentees at various phases of their lives, with some of the most common being career mentoring and youth mentoring, which is the focus of this article.

Youth mentoring simply refers to the practice of a supportive adult building a relationship that focuses on support and guidance with a younger person. Effective youth mentoring offers mentees the opportunity for personal development and growth through various social, academic, and economic opportunities they might not have otherwise had access to. This is essential: [many mentoring programs](#) serve youth who are considered “at-risk” because they face poverty or other socio-economic challenges. Finally, it is important to note that

mentors are not parents or guardians of their mentees. Instead, they might be a relative, a family friend, or someone from the community.

What Is the Purpose of Youth Mentoring?

At its core, the purpose and goals of youth mentoring programs are fairly simple. Mentoring programs help ensure that the young people in our community have one more supportive adult who cares about them, guides them through day-to-day struggles, and connects them with personal growth and development opportunities.

Beyond this central tenet, each mentoring program defines its own purpose—often focused around one or more of the following areas.

Education

Throughout our lives, education provides us with myriad benefits. Those with at least a high school diploma are more likely to have increased stability and financial security. In fact, according to the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](#), those who lack a high school diploma have the highest unemployment rate and the lowest median weekly earnings, and median earnings increase with every level of education obtained.

Yet, in Indiana alone, our [high school graduation](#) rates are disparate. Minority and low-income students graduate at significantly lower rates than their peers. While roughly 86% of Hoosier students graduated high school in 2021, only 77.05% of Black students, 82.66% of Hispanic students, and 82.84% of low-income students graduated. Mentoring can improve these outcomes for students. At Starfish Initiative, 72% of our Scholars are minorities and 100% of them come from low-income families. Yet, with our program's backing and their mentors' support, 100% of students who complete our program graduate high school.

Daily Life

Most people would agree that life is challenging—especially during the teen years. Temptations are everywhere, and making good decisions isn't always easy. Through life's ups and downs, mentors offer advice, insight, and encouragement—all of which can help youth develop the self-confidence and resilience they need to make good choices in their daily lives, now and in the future.

According to MENTOR's report, [The Mentoring Effect](#), at-risk youth who have a mentor are far more likely to participate in positive activities. The numbers show that:

- 76% of at-risk youth with a mentor plan to enroll and graduate from college, compared to 56% of at-risk youth without a mentor.
- 67% of at-risk youth with a mentor participate in sports, clubs, and other extracurricular activities at school, compared to only 37% of at-risk youth without a mentor.
- 51% of at-risk youth with a mentor held a leadership position at school, compared to only 22% of at-risk youth without a mentor.
- 48% of at-risk youth with a mentor volunteer in their community, compared to 27% of at-risk youth without a mentor.

Career

Finally, many mentoring programs have goals attached to career aspirations—including defining a plan for education after high school. Of course, not every high school graduate wants or needs to attend a traditional four-year university. In fact, apprenticeships, community college programs, and the military all offer excellent career paths. The critical component here is that mentoring can help young people find a career path they're passionate about—and define the steps needed to get there.

Yet, in the United States, nearly [6 million young people](#), ages 16 - 24, are disconnected from school and work. Mentors can help their mentees find and develop a pathway to their future with activities like:

- Discovering and setting future-focused goals.
- Setting up experiences to learn more about different career paths.
- Connecting with networking opportunities, job shadowing experiences, or internships.
- Building and developing employability skills needed for interviews and jobs.

What Is the Impact of Mentoring?

When youth mentoring programs focus on some or all of the goals above, they have a ripple effect, and positive change can be seen throughout the community. Of course, these programs improve outcomes for the young people who participate, but they also provide benefits for mentors, employers, and the community at large. In the following sections, we'll walk through the benefits of mentoring youth that can be seen in each of these groups.

How Does Mentoring Impact Students?

There are many ways that mentoring provides positive outcomes for young people. As discussed in previous sections, youth with mentors are more likely to graduate high school and enroll in a postsecondary program. Additionally, according to MENTOR, [young people with a mentor are](#):

- 55% less likely to skip a day of school than their peers. This can reflect that students with mentors are more engaged in their education and are more likely to graduate high school.
- 78% more likely to participate in civic engagement and volunteer opportunities regularly. Not only do these activities greatly improve young people's employability skills, but it positively impacts our communities.
- 90% more likely to give back by being interested in becoming a mentor. This illustrates that not only do mentees appreciate their mentors and the relationship they have, but they recognize just how important being a mentor is.
- 130% more likely to hold leadership positions. These leadership positions help youth build critical soft skills that will be useful throughout their professional lives.

These mentoring statistics alone illustrate the importance of mentoring, but it doesn't stop there. Other benefits include:

- **Improved Consistency:** Mentoring provides a consistent, supportive adult in the life of the mentee. For young people who lack support, having a mentor means having a trusted adult they can turn to when they need it.
- **Decreased Risky Behaviors:** A [Big Brothers, Big Sisters study](#) shows that youth who have mentors are less likely to begin using drugs or alcohol than their peers without mentors. The study showed youth with mentors are 46% less likely to start using illegal drugs and 27% less likely to start drinking than their peers without mentors.
- **Decreased Depressive Symptoms:** According to [The Role of Risk](#), youth with mentors reported fewer depressive symptoms than their peers. This is particularly encouraging as personal, social, and academic achievement can benefit from increased mental health.

In summation, mentorship helps young people achieve academically, develop social and employability skills, and build interpersonal skills to use throughout their lives.

How Does Mentoring Impact Mentors?

Although the primary benefits of mentoring are often focused on growth and development for the mentees, being a mentor offers several great personal benefits, too. Some of the benefits of mentoring students include:

- **Connect with Like-Minded Peers:** Volunteering is an excellent way to connect with new, like-minded people in your community. When participating in a structured mentoring program, mentors often have the opportunity to connect with other mentors—whether it’s at a training specifically for mentors or at an event for mentors and mentees to connect and learn. This can help mentors form lasting connections they can lean on or leverage throughout their career.
- **Increase Self-Confidence:** Becoming a mentor means learning how to guide and support a young person. Watching a mentee develop and become a successful adult can help mentors feel confident in their abilities to help others and enact change.
- **Build Leadership Skills:** What better way to develop leadership and coaching skills than by helping a mentee? Often, formal mentoring programs provide mentors with resources to help them learn how to mentor and lead. Not only will these skills help your mentee, but they can be applied to leadership positions professionally.
- **Find a Sense of Accomplishment:** At the end of the day, one of the best feelings in the world is helping someone achieve their goals. Being a mentor provides the opportunity to do just that.

How Does Mentoring Impact Employers?

For employers, why is mentoring important? Statistics show that across the United States—and beyond—employers need more skilled employees to fill job openings. According to Georgetown University’s [Center on Education and the Workforce](#), over 95% of jobs created during the recovery from the Great Recession went to workers with at least some college education. Those with a high school diploma or less are being left behind.

On the state level, Indiana’s employers will need to fill more than one million new jobs over the next decade, according to the Indiana [Department of Workforce Development](#). Additionally around 30,000 job openings per year in the state will require some sort of education and training beyond high school. In short, employers need employees—now and in the future—who are prepared to fill these positions.

Yet, according to the Indiana Commission for Higher Education’s [Indiana College Readiness Report \(2022\)](#), the college-going rate is declining. According to the report, the “state’s college-going rate fell from 59 percent for the high school class of 2019 to 53 percent for the class of 2020. This is by far the lowest rate—and sharpest decline—in at least a generation.”

There are bright spots, however. Of note, Indiana’s 21st Century Scholars—the population of students Starfish Initiative mentors—go to college at a higher rate than the statewide average. [81% of 21st Century Scholars](#) throughout Indiana go to college. To add to this already impressive number, 98% of Scholars who complete the Starfish Initiative program go to college. Mentoring works, and it’s getting more Hoosier students to college to prepare them for the workforce of today and tomorrow.

On the flip side, encouraging current employees to become mentors—and providing time or incentives for them to do so—can provide benefits to companies as well. According to MENTOR’s [Mentoring: At the Crossroads of Education, Business and Community](#) report, companies who engage in mentoring state that:

- Mentoring volunteer opportunities help grow employee engagement and retention.
- Mentoring has a positive impact on recruiting efforts.
- Mentoring provides the opportunity to help the future of the workforce grow and develop.
- Mentoring supports the community—and in turn, clients or customers.

If your company is interested in getting involved with a mentoring program like Starfish Initiative, there are a couple of ways to get started. Look into our [mentorship opportunities](#) or consider [donating](#). Your tax-deductible donations helps Starfish Initiative carry out the mission of making a difference in the lives of each of our Scholars in the Indianapolis area.

How Does Mentoring Impact the Community?

All of the above statistics and reasons to mentor youth ripple out to positively impact our communities in countless ways. The fact is, we all benefit from positive outcomes for young people. Consider just the following two examples:

- Young people with mentors are more likely to volunteer in their communities and want to become mentors when they are older. All of this benefits the greater good. That means our community organizations and projects have more eager volunteers who want to make a difference—whether that’s working at a food bank, organizing community events, or mentoring someone in the future.
- Higher high school graduation rates and college-going rates mean more employees who are prepared for the workforce. In fact, according to the [Indiana Commission for Higher Education](#), more than three-fourths of financial aid recipients (this includes 21st Century Scholars and Starfish mentees) remain in Indiana after they graduate. They fill open job positions we have in our home state and contribute to a better, thriving local economy.

Mentoring matters, for these reasons and so many others.

What Are the Characteristics of an Effective Mentoring Program?

Quality mentoring programs that yield the kind of impact discussed above aren’t built overnight. They’re intentional initiatives that target certain activities, behaviors, and outcomes to truly affect change. In this next section, we’ll talk about the different types of mentoring programs and some key characteristics that effective mentoring programs have in common.

What Are the Types of Mentoring?

There are a number of types of mentoring, and mentoring programs may fall into one or more of the following categories.

- **Informal Mentoring:** Sometimes, mentors come about naturally via informal, unstructured, and short-term settings. With informal mentoring, the mentoring relationship develops organically. Although informal mentorships can be effective, they can be difficult to maintain over time without a formalized structure.
- **Formal Mentoring:** Formal mentoring comes about through an intentional, structured mentoring program. Such programs often cater to a specific group of mentees—sometimes based on geographic location, socioeconomic status, at-risk status, or some combination. These programs are often low-cost or free mentoring programs for youth, allowing anyone who qualifies to access their program without a financial barrier. Instead, they rely on grants and funding from donors to support their good work.
- **One-on-One Mentoring:** One-on-one mentoring is the most recognized form of mentoring. You’ll typically find it through structured mentoring programs like [Starfish Initiative](#) or other community-based initiatives. In one-on-one mentoring, a supportive adult is matched with a single young person, and that mentor serves as a role model and consistent source of support.
- **Group Mentoring:** Group mentoring involves a single mentor working with a group of mentees. Group mentoring is especially common in the workplace and in academic settings. For example, an intern coordinator may provide group mentoring services for their cohort of summer interns, supporting them as they build professional skills.
- **Peer Mentoring:** Peer mentoring, sometimes referred to as peer-to-peer mentoring, involves a person mentoring someone of approximately the same age. One of the many benefits of peer mentoring is that it can be easy for anyone—youth and adults—to relate to someone their own age. An example of peer mentoring might include an existing student helping a new student learn the ropes at school.

At Starfish Initiative, we offer formal, one-on-one peer mentoring for 21st Century Scholars in Indianapolis. Since 2013, our mission has been to inspire, encourage, and prepare academically-promising, high school students facing unearned adversity for college and career success. We accomplish this through our comprehensive [Starfish Experience](#), a statistically proven four-year pathway to economic mobility.

What Are the Key Aspects of Mentoring Youth?

While unique aspects or characteristics of mentoring programs vary based on the organization's mission and the population of young people they serve, the best mentoring programs for youth have several things in common. The following characteristics help ensure that mentoring programs attain high-level outcomes while also helping both mentors and mentees have a positive, enjoyable individual experience.

Training for Mentors

The majority of mentoring programs offer training and ongoing support for mentors. Building a relationship and guiding a young person—as rewarding as it is—can be challenging at times. Training areas may include:

- Appropriate discussion topics and activities
- Reporting requirements
- Confidentiality and anonymity
- Social media use
- Who to contact in the event of an emergency or crisis situation.

Assisting mentors as they begin their journey and throughout the process can help ensure a great experience for both mentor and mentee.

Matching Mentors and Mentees

Match specialists work for mentor programs—typically as full-time employees—to match up mentees with mentors. Match specialists often try to facilitate connections based on passions, interests, past life experiences, and more. These provide common ground to begin the mentor relationship. Most mentoring programs are in consistent need of new mentors to match with mentees! Learn more about mentoring with Starfish Initiative [on our website](#).

Time Commitment and Schedule

One of the most important aspects of a mentor relationship is ensuring that the mentor/mentee connection develops into something strong and consistent. Most mentoring programs require mentors to commit to a certain amount of time. At Starfish Initiative, for example, our mentors sign a two-year commitment to meet with their Scholar every other week—though many stick with it well after their two years.

For mentoring organizations that support high school students, one of the most important expected outcomes of a mentoring program is ensuring that mentees graduate high school with a plan for continued education or training. In our program, mentors serve as a “life or college coach” to keep Scholars working toward this goal. Meeting biweekly, checking in, and participating in growth opportunities regularly increases the likelihood of success.

Activities

Throughout the mentor relationship, mentors and mentees will participate in various activities. These activities help the pair develop a strong connection and provide development opportunities for the mentee.

What are some examples of mentoring activities? Here is a brief list of common activities.

- Recreational activities to help build a connection might include attending a sporting event or going out to a restaurant to try new kinds of food.
- Academic or career-focused activities could include developing and tracking goals, identifying job shadowing opportunities, or attending a college visit.
- Program sponsored events like a cook-out, networking event, or career fair.

These types of mentoring and programmatic characteristics have been shown time and time again to improve outcomes for young people—especially students who face barriers like poverty and other socio-economic risk factors. Organizations like Starfish Initiative ensure that the youth in our community have the opportunities and experiences they need to realize their potential.

Starfish Initiative: One of the Best Youth Mentoring Programs in Indiana

Ultimately, we can't afford to continue to let young people in our community grow up without a mentor. Mentoring programs offer at-risk young people the opportunity for growth, development, and success now and in the future.

But mentoring organizations like [Starfish Initiative](#) and so many others can't do it alone. We need future mentors, donors, and corporate allies to support our mission and our mentees. Interested in getting involved? Learn more about:

- Who our [Starfish scholars](#) are and how to apply.
- How to become a [mentor with Starfish Initiative](#).
- How to set up a [donation](#) or become a corporate ally.

Your support will enact positive change for our mentees and the Indianapolis community at large.