

## Mentoring Programs and You

There are a wide variety of organizations that provide education, mentoring and community-building opportunities to young people. This particular combination is very powerful as young people learn life skills, are mentored by someone who takes a personal interest in them, and are held accountable in their group activities, whether the group activity is putting up a tent in the wilderness or putting on a play in a community theater.

What sorts of programs do I have in mind that provide mentoring, education and community building? Consider Rob Levit's programs. Rob Levit is a multi-award winning creative artist and musician and a nonprofit director and speaker on creativity who lives in Annapolis, Maryland. He is a 2013 Innovator of the Year recipient from the Maryland Daily Record and a 2011 Martin Luther King Peace Maker Award recipient for his work with youth and adults. His programs, which connect creative pursuits and community building, do the three things I mentioned above: they provide information, they offer mentoring, and they teach youth about how to hold themselves accountable in groups. Rob explained to me:

“Think about what all successful creative people need to do – design, collaborate, communicate intent, persist, visualize and overcome blocks for starters. Each of our Creating Communities programs gently offers participants the opportunities to discover and engage in their own creative work.

“For example, during our summer Arts Mentorship Academy, sixty youth of all ages gather for five days of intensive dance, visual art, creative writing, world drumming and singing along with mentoring and cultural enrichment activities. Here they are challenged to sit with kids they wouldn't normally choose to sit with, clean up messes they didn't make and start and finish several projects in a week that a couple of hundred family and community members will watch on closing day.

“In my mind those are some good life skills to acquire! There is so much emphasis on individual achievement but when you are truly ‘creating communities’ the life skills acquired are about trusting each other, depending on each other and pushing each other in ways that we didn’t know we were capable of. In many ways, it’s an uncommon message in our current ‘there’s an app for that’ world. We ask our kids to look past ‘likes’ and ‘dislikes’ and find the meaning on the other side of their limits.

“What kinds of outcomes and successes do we have? To take one example, last summer we had an autistic youth at the Arts Mentorship Academy. At the end of the week one of our mentors told me that the youth’s guardians approached her at the final reception and asked, ‘What did you all do to our child?’ The mentor asked, ‘What do you mean?’ They replied, ‘He’s actually talking to us!’ They were absolutely delighted and had no idea that their own child could sing, dance and speak on stage.”

Your child might benefit from a mentoring relationship. Here is a sampling of mentoring programs and services from around the country. Some mentoring programs and services specialize in working with a particular population or issue, for example, Girls Education and Mentoring Services, which focuses on sexually exploited girls. Others see their mission as helping and empowering all children. This sampling will give you a good sense of what’s available—and what might be needed in your community. Do a little exploring:

Creating Communities: Harnessing the Power of the Arts

<http://www.creatingcommunities.net/>

Kids at Hope

<http://kidsathope.org/>

Seeds 4 Success

<http://s4sannapolis.org/en/>

Girls Educational & Mentoring Services

<http://www.gems-girls.org/>

Children's Friend and Family Services

<http://childrensfriend.net/services/youth-mentoring/>

Youth Mentoring Services of Niagara County, New York

<http://youthmentoringservicesniagara.org/>

Jacksonville Children's Commission Mentoring Programs & Services

<http://jaxkids.org/mentoring-programs/mentoring-programs-services/>

Center for Family Services

<https://www.centerffs.org/mentoring/welcome>

The Guidance Center Mentoring

<https://www.guidance-center.org/mentoring/>

Achievers for Life

<http://www.unitedwaynefl.org/achievers-for-life/>

If your child is in distress or difficulty he or she might benefit from a mentoring relationship. Even if your child isn't in distress or difficulty, he or she might still benefit from such a relationship. If this idea interests you, look into mentoring possibilities in your community and see if what's offered meets your needs and the needs of your child. And if you learn about a wonderful mentoring service or organization, please let us know about it!

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Eric Maisel is the author of more than fifty books, among them *Overcoming Your Difficult Family*, *The Future of Mental Health*, *Rethinking Depression*, *The Van Gogh Blues* and *Mastering Creative Anxiety*. He writes the “Rethinking Mental Health” blog for *Psychology Today* and lectures nationally and internationally. To learn more about Eric Maisel and his books, services, keynotes, trainings and workshops please visit <http://www.ericmaisel.com>