

VISTA PROJECT NARRATIVE

Please do not write more than 1-3 paragraphs per question but only when needed. Concise is best. Do not redesign or reformat this form. Work in this form only!

A. Executive Summary

AmeriCorps*VISTA members will be working with the Y-FRIENDz Mentoring Program. Y-FRIENDz provides one-to-one mentoring opportunities for youth, ages 4-15, who have a parent currently incarcerated. The program is funded through FYSB's Mentoring Children of Prisoners initiative and operates as part of the YMCA of San Diego County, Youth & Family Services Department. YMCA Youth & Family Services is one of the leading social services agencies in San Diego and has been providing these specific mentoring services for the past 3 years. In addition to the mentoring program, Youth & Family Services offers counseling services, kinship support services, after-school programming, drug awareness and prevention education, shelter services and more reaching over 50,000 children, youth and families each year.

To further strengthen the Y-FRIENDz program and expand our ability to meet community needs, VISTA members will assist with recruiting and screening potential mentors. They will also assist with planning events and activities for mentor-mentee matches, further developing community resources and coordinating ongoing mentor training. Members will work side by side with program staff to facilitate a quality mentoring program with appropriate supports for both youth and volunteers.

B. Needs and Activities

1. State in measurable and quantifiable terms the *specific poverty-related need(s)* identified by the community(ies) that the AmeriCorps*VISTA project will address, including the number of low-income people directly affected by the problem(s).

Nationally over seven million children have a parent under some form of correctional supervision.¹ In 2000, an estimated 856,000 children- or nine percent of all children in the state- have a parent currently involved in California's adult criminal justice system.² Accordingly, in San Diego County, of the 735,745 children under the age of 18³, approximately 66,217 children have a parent involved in the adult criminal justice system. Over 15,000 of these children have at least one parent incarcerated in the prison system.

Within San Diego County there are approximately 5,236 adults incarcerated in two prison facilities and another 5,405 adults in seven detention facilities. While some children referred to our program have parents incarcerated locally, many have parents serving their time in other parts of the state. Without intervention, roughly seventy percent of these children will follow in their parents footsteps and become a part of the criminal justice system themselves.⁴

Additionally, over 90% of the children currently enrolled in the Y-FRIENDz Program are living below the poverty line, thus mentoring is a necessary intervention. Demonstrations of the effectiveness of the mentoring are tangible. They include increased academic performance and improved attitudes toward school, decreased truancy and dropout rates, a reduction in the number of school referrals, and a decrease in violence or delinquent behavior. Another important indicator of healthy functioning youth is community connections. Youth that are connected to

¹ Mumola, C.J. Incarcerated Parents and their Children, *Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report*, 2000

² California Research Bureau, *Children of Incarcerated Parents*, Charlene Wear Simmons, CRB Note, Vol.7 No.2, March 2000

³ U.S. Census Bureau, 2000

⁴ U.S. Senate. *Senate Report 106-404: Departments of Commerce, Justice, and State, the Judiciary, and Related Agencies Appropriation Bill*, 2001.

YMCA of San Diego County, February 2009

the community through active involvement are far less likely to disengage and demonstrate dangerous or destructive behaviors. The program will also impact the functioning of families with one or more incarcerated parents by having a child who has improved social and academic functioning. Our goal is to create quality, long-lasting mentoring relationships that will help these youth develop the relationships and social skills they need to grow into happy, healthy and productive adults. Y-FRIENDz will improve the likelihood of children overcoming poverty and building promising *futures* through reducing risk factors and increasing assets.

C. Strengthening Communities

1. Describe how the new infrastructure or organizational capacity created by your project will bring individuals and, ultimately, the community out of poverty.

The primary goal of Y-FRIENDz is to improve the lives and *futures* of children of prisoners. By working with children of prisoners early and by providing consistent and supportive adult connections, the Y-FRIENDz Program will prevent future criminal behavior and limit the impact of developmental effects on the child. The effects of incarceration on the child are often psychological and providing a mentor and positive role model has proven to be a successful method in avoiding or limiting these problems. Mentoring is an effective intervention for young children of prisoners. Y-FRIENDz makes a significant, long-term impact on children with a parent incarcerated in prison by providing character-building and engaging activities, aimed at preventing delinquent behavior, and supporting these children during the difficult time of parental incarceration. Empowering and changing these children will in turn increase the probability of them achieving triumphant futures and overcoming poverty. Accordingly, these children will become productive members of society which will affect the present and future health, safety, and economy of the community-at-large

2. How will you involve the community to ensure the sustainability of the proposed project?

Y-FRIENDz has been in existence since 2004 and has developed many strong partnerships. Y-FRIENDz is interconnected with many organizations that are also vital to the community.

The Y-FRIENDz Mentoring Program actively collaborates with the following agencies for mutual recruitment, referral, training, and support:

- Mentor Coalition of San Diego County*
- Reentry Roundtable*
- Southeast Coalition*
- YMCA Youth & Community Center*
- Mid-City Community Advocacy Network*
- Social Advocates for Youth (SAY) San Diego*
- Mid-City Police Advisory Board*
- Volunteer San Diego*
- Get on the Bus Program*
- STAR PAL/San Diego County Law Enforcement Agencies*
- Young Non-Profit Professionals Network San Diego*
- The Rock Mega- Church*
- Shadow Mountain Community Mega-Church*
- I-CAN- collaborative*
- R. J. Donovan State Prison*
- San Diego Unified School District*
- O'Farrell Community Schools Project Live Program*

The Y-FRIENDz Mentoring Program also has strong partnerships with several local colleges and universities who have consistently provided a dependable flow of volunteers over the past 4½ years and have committed to continue to do so in years to come:

San Diego State University
University of California, San Marcos
University of Southern California
University of California, San Diego
Cuyamaca Community College

3. How, if at all, will you collaborate with other national service programs (AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, RSVP, NCC) in order to support the proposed project?

The Y-FRIENDz Mentoring Program collaborates with RSVP in San Diego to recruit senior volunteers. Currently, the director of this program is also serving as a mentor with Y-FRIENDz . We do not have any RSVP volunteers serving as mentors but the opportunity is always listed and we are hoping for the collaboration to continue to grow over the next few years. We have also been a host site for AmeriCorps volunteers in the past and would willingly host future AmeriCorps volunteers as the opportunity arises.

D. VISTA Assignment Description

1. **List** the tasks and activities AmeriCorps*VISTA member(s) must perform to implement the strategies described in the project plan(s). These tasks and activities should logically relate to the overall project goals and activities you propose in your VISTA Assignment Description. This section will include more detail on the actual service activities.

Americorps*VISTA activities include:

1. soliciting donations and maintain donor relationships
2. building a mentor resource toolkit
3. researching and conduct innovative trainings
4. recruiting mentors
5. planning monthly events
6. creating and disseminating program literature

2. **List** the recommended skills and qualifications that an AmeriCorps*VISTA member should have to successfully complete the project plan.

Skills and qualifications include:

1. An interest in working with a Mentoring Children of Prisoners program;
2. Ability to work with diverse youth and their families;
3. Excellent writing and communication skills;
4. Experience coordinating a project or group of volunteers;
5. An educator, counselor, or individual who has experience with youth programs is desirable; and,
6. Bilingual (English/Spanish) strongly preferred.

E. Project Management

1. Describe plans for daily supervision of AmeriCorps*VISTA members. Specify who will supervisor and if supervision will be their full-time or part-time responsibility.

VISTA member will be supervised by the Y-FRIENDz Program Director. This position is currently held by Stacy Dertien and is a full-time position. Program Director will have weekly supervision meetings with each VISTA member and will be easily accessible for guidance and support.

2. Are 51 percent or more of the persons on your board of directors' members of the low-income community? If not, please describe how your agency has developed, or will develop, an advisory council for the AmeriCorps*VISTA project that consists of members or representatives of the low-income community served by the proposed project.

The Board of Directors of YMCA Youth & Family Services serves on behalf of all YFS programs. Y-FRIENDz Mentoring does not have a separate board of its own. While there are community members and former program participants currently sitting on the Board of Directors, they do not make up a majority. Our organization is constantly working to recruit additional board members and strongly encourage representatives of the communities we serve to get involved.

F. Organizational Capacity

1. What in-kind resources will you provide to ensure the success of the proposed project?

Our in-kind contributions include product donations from local businesses and organizations, staff and mentor training provided free of charge, recruiting and outreach opportunities in the community, and volunteer hours given to support the program in a variety of ways. In-kind contributions also include any monetary donations we receive. While donations are accepted year-round, money is raised primarily through our Annual Support Campaign in February/March and our To Honor Our Champions event in June.

2. Describe current activities your organization and other organizations are undertaking to address the problems identified in your need statement. Describe how the proposed project will complement this work.

The Y-FRIENDz Mentoring Children of Prisoners program is currently providing mentoring opportunities for youth, ages 4-15, who have a parent incarcerated. We actively work to recruit both youth and adults who are excited about the program and willing to get involved. The youth are identified by working closely with local schools, detention facilities, and other agencies. Mentors are recruited through community events, presentation, word of mouth, and online postings. Mentors complete an extensive screening process and are then matched in a one-to-one relationship with one of our youth. Each match commit to being together for one year and meet an average of 1-3 hours per week. Case managers provide ongoing match support to assist with communication and any challenges that may arise. The program also coordinates a monthly group event to bring all program participants together and provide ongoing training opportunities for the volunteers.

Through the one-to-one mentoring, mentees build a relationship of mutual trust and respect that can increase their capacity for attachment and enhance their social skills. This powerful intervention has proven to get youth more engaged in school and less likely to engage in risky behaviors. Ultimately, mentoring decreases the likelihood

that they will get involved in the criminal justice system and begins to break the cycle of incarceration and poverty.

3. Describe the accessibility of services provided to members of the community with disabilities. Is your organization able to accommodate AmeriCorps*VISTA members with disabilities?

Yes, members with disabilities will be given reasonable accommodations to work with our program. The bottom floor of our building is handicap accessible and we are working on installing an elevator to make the second floor accessible as well. Our offices are on the bottom floor and all duties can be performed in our current location. Members will be given a work space including a computer, phone, Internet access, fax, copier and other necessities to fulfill their job description. Housing and transportation are not provided but program staff will help to make appropriate connections to obtain both.

ATTACHMENTS

Please submit the following attachments with your project narrative or soon after.

- List of Board of Directors, or governing body (not applicable if public entity).
- List of Advisory Council Members if already selected. If not, the list must be submitted before the end of the first quarter of the project.
- Copy of Articles of Incorporation (not applicable to public entities).
- Organizational chart.
- Tax exempt status: either IRS determination or copy of application to IRS for exemption (not applicable to public entities).
- Copy of Supervisor's Resume and Job Description.
- One letter of commitment from the proposed board of directors. The letter should describe the type of support and/or resources the partner organization will contribute.