

# **Spectrum Skillshare Training and Policy Packet for Mentees**

17 December 2015

## Introduction

Welcome to Spectrum Skillshare! We're pleased to be able to pair you with a mentor. As a mentee, you will work with another autistic adult for six months as they offer you peer support and encouragement to move toward specific goals you have identified in your application.

## What mentoring is (and isn't)

*(some text adapted from the Cygnet Project's training slides)*

### What is a mentoring relationship?

- **A time-limited, goal-oriented volunteer relationship.** You will be meeting with your mentor once a month, and following up with your mentor weekly, to help you work toward specific goals you've set.
- **Focus on both personal and professional learning and development.** Your mentor will help you learn important professional and life skills, and will also help you build relationships.
- **An experienced person providing guidance and support to less experienced people.** Your mentor will share experiences with post-high school education, employment, navigating government services and other life skills with you. This will be valuable because it comes from somebody who has gone through many of the same things you will be encountering.
- **You direct the goals.** Your mentor is there to help you achieve those goals, but it's their role to provide guidance, rather than to determine what those goals are.

### What *isn't* a mentoring relationship?

- **A therapeutic relationship** - mentors can listen to your concerns, but this is different from what a trained therapist offers. If you need professional help, ask Spectrum Skillshare to share resources with you.
- **Job coaching** - mentors can help their mentees with skills that will help them get a job, but that is different from the dedicated paid services job coaches provide.
- **Social work** - mentors can assist you with your goals, but they cannot replace the work of trained and licensed social workers.
- **Accounting, financial advising, or tax preparation** - your mentor can help you by sharing their own experiences with things like budgeting, but this is different from being an accountant, financial advisor or tax preparer. If you need something more involved than simple guidance, either your mentor or Spectrum Skillshare can point you to accountants, tax preparers, social workers, or financial advisors.
- **Only a social outlet.** We'd like you to get to know your mentors, but this is primarily a professional relationship that is designed to help you achieve specific goals.
- **A way to get a date.** We'd like mentors and mentees to be friendly with each other, but please keep the relationship professional.
- A means to **convert people to your religion.** Spectrum Skillshare is a project of a publicly funded fellowship. Apart from the legal issue, part of being a good mentor also means respecting others' belief systems.

## Guidance for mentees

Mentors and mentees should meet in person at least once a month for an hour to an hour and a half. These meetings should occur in a public place that is easily accessible to both the mentor and mentee. Examples include public parks, restaurants, coffee shops, or open meeting rooms in libraries. (We recommend against one-on-one meetings in people's own houses.) Mentors and mentees should also follow up with each other once a week for thirty minutes to an hour. The follow-ups can be over Skype, Google Hangouts, Facebook Chat, another video or audio chat application, phone, email, instant message, social networking, in person, or any other way of communication that works best for both the mentor and mentee.

After you've had your check-ins, write a journal entry about your experiences being mentored. These can include what you and your mentor have talked about, ideas for next meetings or issues that had come up when you were talking to each other and would like to resolve by the next meeting. The journal entries will be seen only by you and the Project Coordinators. Journal entries will help us find out what's working and what isn't, and will help us offer support if something comes up during your time as a mentee.

If you can't make it to a mentoring session, please let your mentor know 48 hours in advance if possible (emergencies are an exception), and reschedule to the nearest available date.

## Mentoring timeline

**Training Day** - after the matches have been made, mentors and mentees will be trained (either in person or long-distance) to learn more about Spectrum Skillshare, our policies and complete a series of activities to get to know each other better and identify some of the things they'd like to work on during the duration of their mentor/mentee relationship.

**The first few meetings** - mentors and mentees will use the first few meetings to get to know each other.

Suggestions of things to talk about during your first meeting:

- Personal background
- Interests and hobbies
- Potential mentoring goals

**The second month** - mentors and mentees will start working towards the goals mentees have identified on their applications.

**Workshops** (please read following section)

**Closure: saying our goodbyes** - we will have a farewell dinner where we talk about future plans. We will also distribute a final survey to see what people have taken away from the project.

## Workshops

After mentors and mentees have met for the first few months, they will start planning open skillshare workshops for members of the community to attend. These workshops will allow Spectrum Skillshare to reach more people than were chosen to become mentors and mentees, and they will also provide

participants a means to hone the skills they've gained through their work together. There will be three open workshops in February, March, and April.

Workshops will go on for about an hour to an hour and a half. Together, the team will decide on the structure of the workshop and a topic to discuss.

Sample workshop structure:

*Career Networking on the Spectrum*

10 minutes - Presenters introduce themselves by giving their name, their location, and some facts about themselves that are related to employment or networking

20 minutes - Main presentation (presenters talk about networking, how it works, how it has worked for them, and the strategies they use)

20 minutes - Interactive activity (for example, creating a LinkedIn profile, creating mind maps of how you can connect to people to build your network)

10 minutes - Q&A - wrap-up

## Ground rules for mentees

*(some rules adapted from the Cygnet Project's training slides and Partners for Youth with Disabilities' Best Practices Guide)*

1. **Be respectful of your mentor's personal boundaries.** We do want you to build a healthy relationship and communicate with each other often, but you should remember that your mentor has other life responsibilities to take care of.
2. **Be aware of your own boundaries.**
3. **Respect each other's beliefs and emotions.**
4. **Keep the relationship friendly, but professional.** Going out for lunch or hanging out in the park is OK, but overnight visits aren't.
5. **Meet in a public place,** not at the mentor's or mentee's house. This will help ensure safety for both mentors and mentees. If you're meeting in a restaurant, participants should pay for their own food and drinks.
6. **Mentors and mentees should not lend or give each other money.**
7. If your mentor gives you their phone number, Skype username, or Google Hangouts contact information, please try to **respect the limits they have set for when you can contact them.** For example, if you want to communicate by phone or video chat, try pre-arranging a set time when you can talk to each other. Being clear will help in making sure people's boundaries are respected.
8. **Respect each other's accessibility needs.** For example, you might want to take auditory processing issues into account when meeting in public places; sometimes restaurants can have a lot of background noise that makes it harder to distinguish what other people are saying in a conversation. Another issue that might come up is wearing heavy perfumes. Some people have strong sensory or allergic reactions to them, so it is a good idea to avoid or limit these products.

9. **Respect each other's confidentiality;** personal information discussed during meetings (for example, “I have \$30,000 in credit card debt” or “my son has cancer”) should not be shared with others except for Spectrum Skillshare staff.
10. **Keep your commitment.** Don't end the mentorship early or meet less frequently without arranging this with the project coordinator.

## **References and Bibliography**

1. Michael Garringer and Patti MacRae (2008). *Foundations of Successful Youth Mentoring*.
2. Nicola Martin, Damian Milton and Tara Sims (2015). *The Research Autism Cygnet Mentoring Pilot Project: Mentor Training Day* - Powerpoint slides.
3. Partners for Youth with Disabilities (2005). *Best Practices Guide in Mentoring Youth with Disabilities*.