

Spectrum Skillshare Training and Policy Packet for Mentors

17 December 2015

Introduction

Welcome to Spectrum Skillshare! We're pleased to have you serve as one of our mentors. As a mentor, you will be helping another autistic adult for six months by offering peer support and encouragement to move toward specific goals they have identified in their 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 mentees once a month, and following up with them weekly, to help them work toward specific goals the mentee has set.
- **Focus on both personal and professional learning and development.** Connecting with a mentee will help them learn important professional and life skills, and will also help them build relationships.
- **An experienced person providing guidance and support to less experienced people.** As a mentor, you will share your experiences with post-high school education, employment, navigating government services and other life skills with your mentees. This will be valuable because it comes from somebody who has gone through the same things they are encountering, and will feel relevant to them.
- **Goals are directed by the mentee.** You're there to help them achieve those goals, but it's your 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 their mentees' concerns, but this is different from what a trained therapist offers. Please refer your mentee to trained staff or ask Spectrum Skillshare staff to point them in the right direction.
- **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 people with their goals, but they cannot replace the work of trained and licensed social workers.
- **Accounting, financial advising or tax preparation** - you can help your mentees by sharing your own experiences with things like budgeting, but this is different from being an accountant, financial advisor or tax preparer. If your mentee needs something more involved than simple guidance, please point them to accountants, tax preparers, social workers, or financial advisors.
- **Only a social outlet.** We'd like you to get to know your mentees, 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 publicly funded. Apart from the legal issue, part of being a good mentor also means respecting others' belief systems.

Guidance for mentors

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 mentoring experiences. These can include what you and your mentee 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 mentor.

If you can't make it to a mentoring session, please let your mentee 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 attend a training session 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:

The second month - mentors and mentees will start working toward 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 out of 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.

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 mentors

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

1. **Be respectful of your mentee's personal boundaries.** We do want you to build a healthy relationship and communicate with each other often, but you should remember that your mentee has other life responsibilities to take care of.
2. **Be aware of your own boundaries.** Think before saying "yes" to something.
3. **Respect each other's beliefs and emotions.** Don't try to dictate what others' feelings are if they've told you they're feeling a certain way. For example, if someone says they're sad, don't tell them that they're not, or try to perform psychoanalysis on them. Also, mentoring is not a way to try to convert someone else to your religious or political belief system.
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 you give your mentee your phone number, Skype username, or Google Hangouts contact information, please try to **establish limits for when they can contact you.** 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.

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*.