



Community transformation through youth empowerment

by Sarah Kreisman, Monday, January 13, 2020

Rogue Valley Mentoring is a small nonprofit that trains and supports adults to mentor youth throughout Jackson County, offering no-cost circle mentoring and one-to-one mentoring.

We are working to transform communities through the mentoring of youth. As we observe the increasing challenges for the youth in our valley during these turbulent times, we are rising to meet those challenges. While this information is not easy to take in, it is vital that those of us who are disconnected from this struggle are paying attention to what is happening and tending to the youth of our communities.

Nineteen percent of youth younger than 18 in Jackson County live in poverty and 14.3% suffer from child abuse. The majority of the youth in our programs have high social/emotional needs. Many experience "relational poverty." This brand of poverty, itself a prime social determinant of health, is often tied to living in households with single-parent or no-parent wage-earners who struggle with divorce, drug addiction, domestic violence or health concerns.

Many marginalized families in our county have suffered at the hands of historic economic shifts and changes that have left them struggling to make ends meet, leading to generational poverty as well. Health outcomes and life expectancy of the youth in these families are significantly compromised. Now take a breath, there is hope.

The presence of a caring, compassionate adult is proven to heal trauma and alter the course of a young person's life. The skills we teach our mentors are making major impacts on the mental health of the future adults of our community,

teaching youth to be resilient and to trust that they are the experts of their experience.

As a small organization, we have the ability to move and shift with the needs of our community. As a result, we have created a strong support structure for our mentors, which enables any safe, healthy adult who has the desire to offer a kind ear to a young person to become a confident, effective mentor.

Mentoring builds much-needed intergenerational bridges to the benefit of all involved. Mentors tell us that our training helps them to be better parents to their kids, better people in the world in general. Stepping into relationships with young people gives us the opportunity to do our own personal work. Learning to listen deeply, putting judgments aside, mentors are helping to create a culture of peace throughout our communities.

If you know a youth in the Rogue Valley who would benefit greatly from having a safe place to feel seen and heard in a circle of peers, get in touch with Rogue Valley Mentoring. If you are an adult who would like to contribute time, talent or money to an endeavor that has proven results, get in touch with Rogue Valley Mentoring.

Every dollar donated supports work with local youth and families. Every hour volunteered adds to the bucket of hope for the improved health and well-being of our community. We are cultivating new circles in Central Point and are looking for new, inspired mentors to help us expand our offerings. Our next mentor training is March 6-7, and we offer a \$50 per month stipend to those who desire it. For more information, see www.rvmentoring.org, call 541-326-6422 or email paula@rvmentoring.org.

Sarah Kreisman is executive director of Rogue Valley Mentoring. After serving in the Peace Corps in Panama, Sarah spent many years working with environmental and youth-focused nonprofits while completing a master's degree in leadership and organizational studies. She homesteads in the hills above Talent.