



Resilience In a Time of Crisis

By Laura Pinney, Monday, October 19, 2020

On Friday the 13th of March, the youth of the Rogue Valley arrived at school to learn they would not be returning Monday. For many it meant an extra week of spring break. Sleepovers, hikes and parties were planned.

For others it meant a week of solitude while their parents worked and had to leave them home alone. For most it was a sigh of relief. No one imagined that it would be the last day they would attend school that year. When at last September came, so did the fires. Our valley is only beginning to grasp the enormity of the material destruction and emotional impact.

Our youth have been in a constant state of stress for months. This can affect neurological and physiological functioning and ongoing development. In other words, their nervous systems are in a constant state of fight or flight.

Schools provided youth with opportunities to discover who they are in a crowd, how they belong, and where they stand out. Research shows we heal from trauma by sharing our stories. We learn who we are through the messages we receive from the world around us. We knit this information together to form our sense of identity, purpose and belonging. When community is not available, trauma becomes an internalized shadow.

COVID has unveiled how isolated we were in our nuclear family construct. The value of other caring, consistent adults in the lives of our youth cannot be underestimated. When youth have the support of a trusted adult, it has a positive impact on their academic motivation, their self-confidence and their relationships with their caregivers. These positive experiences grow resilience and carry forward into adulthood.

Rogue Valley Mentoring is a local nonprofit that believes community happens one authentic, caring and consistent connection at a time. By bridging generations and growing the web of support for our youth, we begin to repair culture and become a community.

Rogue Valley Mentoring trains safe, caring adults in a resilience-building, trauma-informed and strength-based model. We remind people that listening is what matters most, and that youth are the experts in their own lives. We call these adults mentors, and the relationship mentoring. As mentor Jim Tully said, "Being a mentor means giving a child an opportunity to be heard and to be authentic without judgment."

In one-to-one mentoring, a youth is carefully matched with an adult with shared interests. Circles provide a safe place for young people to build a community of peer support through sharing, listening and practicing healthy communication skills. Our mentor support specialist, a retired therapist, coaches and supports our mentors as needed, giving them the tools to meet youth where they are while monthly gatherings provide a place for mentors to connect and share their own stories.

Through the many phases of life with COVID and fires, mentors have met youth to play chess online, read books, a bike was built, hikes on local trails became adventures in a faraway land, a mountain bike trail was mastered at last. Week after week mentors share feelings of awe and inspiration at the courage and resilience of the youth.

This fall schools did not reopen in person. In addition to school circles, Rogue Valley Mentoring has been working with community partners such as DHS, meeting at The Expo, and holding socially distanced community circles in the lush gardens of our new location at the Coyote Trails Nature Center in Medford's U.S. Cellular Community Park. We have been working with schools to offer circles virtually as well as onsite.

At Rogue Valley Mentoring, we believe that youth need caring adults willing to listen without judgment — adults who see their strengths in every moment and reflect those back to them.

Resilience grows from trust — in ourselves, in others, in the world. Youth need opportunities to learn how to build trust. The secret is that everything is an opportunity, accomplishments as well as questionable behavior. As adults we can be curious.

"In what ways can this situation help the youth to develop trust in themselves, others and/or the world?"

We all know it takes a village to raise a child. But what does it take to raise a village? At Rogue Valley Mentoring we believe it happens one relationship at a time. One caring, consistent adult, one blossoming youth. Together with community partners in school districts across the county and other organizations dedicated to building youth resilience, we are supporting youth in a holistic framework that is transforming communities.

To become a mentor, to find a mentor, or refer a youth, visit our website at www.rvmentoring.org

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