



## **The Difference of One People Incorporated's SMILES Mentoring Program Needs You**

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Many have heard the parable of the small boy tossing starfish back into the sea after a storm. When a passerby sees him, he remarks that there are "...miles of beach and hundreds of starfish. You can't make a difference!" The boy replies, "I made a difference for that one."

During the 2015-16 school year, 135 Fall River students dropped out of school which is estimated to cost society \$39,420,000 over their lifetimes, and 149 New Bedford students dropped out which is estimated to cost society \$43,508,000 over their lifetimes (Southcoast Urban Indicators Project, 2017). These statistics can be daunting, perhaps leading one to feel, "I am just one person. What can I do alone?"

We can toss a starfish.

Once a week throughout the school year, People Incorporated's SMILES Mentors meet with their assigned student for a group activity session within local schools, and it changes both of their lives.

"The single most important factor in vulnerable youths' lives is the presence and support of adults who can encourage them," states an Annie E. Casey Foundation report (Public Impact, 2008). Each time an adult agrees to act as a caring adult mentor for a child, they make a difference. Mentored youth skip only half as many days of school as their peers, are less likely to abuse substances like drugs and alcohol, feel more competent about doing schoolwork, and are 59% more likely to get better grades than their peers (Family Strengthening Policy Center, 2004).

Decades of research also indicates that mentoring relationships lead to positive academic outcomes for young people regardless of their background, that these caring relationships with adults help with social/emotional learning, and that mentoring relationships prepare youth for the future workforce (Bruce & Bridgeland, 2014).

Mentoring is easy.

The caring adult meets with their assigned child just once a week during the school year, providing an opportunity for the student to develop an emotional bond with their mentor who has more life experience and can provide support, guidance, and opportunities for the child to succeed in life.

Through guided lessons, these mentoring matches engage in activities designed to improve social-emotional skills (social skills, positive attitude, responsible decision-making, planning for the future, and attendance), improve test results and academic performance, improve attitude toward school, and reduce the rate of conduct incidents.

People Incorporated's SMILES Mentoring Program helps at-risk students realize their personal and educational potential through multiple mentoring models:

- Literacy-Based Mentoring – volunteers work with elementary students in a mentoring relationship that focuses on enhancing the student's literacy skills and inspiring a pure joy of reading in the children.
- Social and Emotional Learning-Based Mentoring – pairs elementary, middle, and high school students with volunteer mentors to form relationships that focus on instilling developmental assets, such as building social skills, establishing responsible decision-making, and planning for their future.
- Career Pathway Mentoring – strategically matches at-risk students who have specific career goals with a community leader within that industry to guide the student towards higher education and their chosen career pathways.
- Independent Mentoring – mentoring pairs who have been meeting together for at least one year will continue to meet in the student's school, at a scheduled time, for one hour without a staff person facilitating the meeting to support the ongoing mentoring bond.

The SMILES Mentoring Program is providing mentoring opportunities in 15 schools in Fall River, 4 in New Bedford, and 1 in Westport. School mentoring programs are located inside elementary, middle, and high schools, including People, Incorporated's Community Engagement Center within the Resiliency Preparatory Academy in Fall River. With so many locations from which to choose, there is probably a mentoring site near you.

It stands to reason that children want to succeed in life. For some, that might require a caring adult who will help that child feel special, feel listened to, feel empowered – by simply showing up each week.

Toss a starfish, and change a life.

You CAN make a difference!

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SMILES Mentoring, a program of People Incorporated  
<http://peopleinc-fr.org/programs/smiles/>

## Works Cited

- Bruce, M., & Bridgeland, J. (2014). *The Mentoring Effect: Young People's Perspectives on the Outcomes and Availability of Mentoring*. Washington, DC: Civic Enterprises with Hart Research Associates.
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