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## **MENTORING PROGRAMS IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS**

### **Livorno Unit School**

#### **Livorno, Italy**

A district-wide mentoring symposium motivated several American elementary schools in the Department of Defense Dependent School system in Italy to develop mentoring programs. The following narrative exemplifies how one of the elementary schools formed partnerships to establish a mentoring program.

#### **Livorno Unit School Mentoring Program**

In September 1998, key communicators returned from the Mentoring Symposium to Livorno armed with a vision of student success and the essential timeline. Was it possible to ask an already involved, small community to give even more of their precious time? We thought so. The timeline is an essential tool. It has aided us in keeping focused and on track. The implementation date of January 1999 was just around the corner.

Recruitment of volunteers began full force with the support of Army Community Services, which conducted the background checks of volunteers. Units and Organizations were briefed and questions answered. We distributed applications to individuals indicating an interest in our program. We left applications at various locations on post as well, making them easy to fill out.

Word of mouth in a small community can be very powerful. At every opportunity we stressed the benefits of mentoring and its rewards for both the adult and student involved. Choosing a variety of forums for dispensing information proved to be very successful.

We met challenges during the recruitment phase. We realized early that follow-up after a briefing was very important to reemphasize the program. Conducting a briefing at a convenient time and with maximum participation proved to be difficult. We adopted the philosophy of “catch them when we could.” Abundant exposure facilitated recruitment when initiating this new program.

The goal of community participation must be both realistic and attainable. Due to the small size of our community, we felt that starting small would contribute to our success. Therefore, if five people consented to participate, we would begin the program. To our great surprise and pleasure,

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we began our mentor program, on time and with twenty matches. In the year and a half since our mentor program began, we have maintained our percentage of participation, even with transfers of both mentors and students.

The mentoring program has had success because of several factors:

- Flexibility to adapt the program to meet unique needs;
- Open and consistent communication with the mentor and mentee;
- Maintaining a realistic and attainable goal for participation;
- Persistence;
- Dedication and commitment.

Our community has a shared commitment to our youth. The teachers, parents, students, and community have worked together to make this a successful program.

Other elementary Department of Defense Dependent Schools submitted promising partnership practices similar to Livorno's. Gaeta American School described their particular need for mentors. The school key contact reported that most of the students in their school are with a single parent for the majority of the time due to the ship's deployment. In that school's experience, when one parent was deployed off the base, the data showed that some children experienced some academic and social problems. The School Home Partnership Committee felt that a mentor program was needed to lend support to students and parents.

Other interesting information provided by these schools included selecting students for the mentoring program based on standardized test scores. Some programs paid the coordinator of their program because of the large time requirement. Gaeta American School plans to increase communication with parents so that they understand the short- and long-term benefits to their children of participating in the mentoring program.

Aviano Elementary, Gaeta American School, Vicenza Elementary, and Vista Mare School all reported their mentoring program a success in reaching school improvement goals and developing partnerships with families and the community. Pordenone Elementary and Verona Elementary reported successful volunteer programs based on the mentoring training provided by the Italy District.

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