

Getting Relationships Right – Summary of Discussion with 55 Leaders

Search Institute interviewed 55 leaders in the fields of education and youth development as part of the Relationships for Outcomes Initiative (or ROI). ROI is focused on improving youth outcomes by building developmental relationships. The following is a summary of the report, *Getting Relationships Right – 55 Leaders Discuss What It Will Take to Create School and Youth Programs Where Developmental Relationships Thrive*, available for download by visiting www.search-institute.org

3 Preconditions for Creating Organizations in Which All Young People Experience Developmental Relationships

- **Relationships are Part of the Mission:** The organization is committed to build relationships through (rather than only apart from) its primary curriculum or program.
- **Adults are Eager:** The organization has staff members who are committed to building stronger relationships with and among young people.
- **Time is Available:** The organization dedicates meaningful time to building relationships with young people and also provides staff with time for training and support.

Barriers to Building Relationships

- **The Belief Gap:** The rhetoric about the power of relationships is not matched by how programs and institutions are structured.
- **Staff Who Don't Value Relationships:** It is a challenge for organizations to figure out how to hire staff members who are good at building relationships.
- **Dysfunctional Relationships Among the Adults:** The relationships among adults influence relationships with young people. Staff members need to show the elements of Developmental Relationships Framework with youth and with their fellow co-workers.
- **Adulthood:** A condition in which the purpose and quality of relationships is considered only from the adult perspective.
- **Burning Out the Adults:** Building a meaningful relationship with a young person requires significant personal and emotional investment from the adult.
- **Seeing the Call to Improve as a Cause for Shame:** Efforts to help educators build better relationships with students should avoid suggesting that they aren't doing a good job and should instead help them activate their "inner critics" to develop their own ideas for improvement.
- **Lack of Tools, Techniques, and Training:** Organizations need to provide adults who work with young people with practical resources for starting and strengthening relationships, but no matter how well-designed those resources are, they cannot replace the slow work of building strong interpersonal relationships.
- **The Challenge of Connecting Across Cultures:** An important part of relationship building is connecting with the identity of the child, but adults can lack the cultural competency to reach across race.
- **Measuring Relationships:** There is a need to measure the impact of investing in relationships but it is hard to quantify a relationship. Few organizations measure how young people experience relationships in their schools and programs. It is important to connect relationships to the outcomes that their organizations are working to achieve.
- **Finding Funding:** There is a direct relationship between the depth of impact and how much you want to invest in the relationship.

- **The Slow Start:** Funders, practitioners, parents and even young people themselves want to see quick returns on their investment in relationships. Just as building developmental relationships between young people and adults takes time, building the capacity of staff to strengthen relationships is also a slow process.
- **Sustainability:** Sustaining relationships with and among young people over time is a critical priority and a major challenge. There tends to be a very high turn-over of frontline staff and organizational leadership in youth work that directly effects sustainability.
- **Technology:** Best practices for building relationships utilizing social media have not been established.
- **A Unique Challenge for Family Serving Organizations:** The number one reason families want to participate in a program is to become the best parent for their child, but it is difficult to convince parents to participate in programs and activities that are designed to strengthen family relationships.

Ideas for Mature Teams

There are a number of promising practices that can be studied and potentially replicated.

- Integrating measures of developmental relationships into the metrics used to measure the service of young people and to improve organizational performance.
- Naming developmental relationships as an organizational priority.
- Revising organization's mission statement to explicitly articulate the commitment to relationships.
- Helping adults understand and act upon two simple but profound ideas: 1) at a moment in time you can make a difference in a child's life through the interactions you have; 2) every child should have five adults in their lives in a sustained relationship.
- Articulating a relationship-building process for teachers and mentors to move through.
- Create a relationship-rich environment through changes in school policies, structures, and protocols.
- Utilize technology to build relationships by taping and analysing responses to relationship-based questions connected to the organizational outcomes and acting on the feedback.
- Invest in staff having time to build relationships with youth.
- Have youth articulate what they want in their circles of care and commitment.
- Creating safe spaces for youth to engage in relationship building.
- Train staff on how to guide participants to answers without giving them the answers.
- Coaching adult interactions to help them interact with young people in ways that promote personal and social development.
- Staff performance reviews based on their ability to build relationships with young people.
- Hiring based on candidate's demonstrated ability to build relationships with young people.
- Applicants are asked to describe how personal experience with relationships helped them grow.
- Online learning that provides staff with an introduction to developmental relationships.
- Provide access to regional training opportunities within organizations.
- Develop culturally-responsive instructional strategies that help staff connect with young people from racial and cultural backgrounds that are different from their own.
- Adult staff practice relationship-building activities and approaches with peers before using with young people.
- Track time staff members spend with various types of groups (one-on-one, small group, larger groups) to evaluate the degree to which staff balances their time.
- Identify short-term measures of change in their capacity to build relationships with and among young people.
- Develop measures of the quality of relationships between mentors and mentees that are used to predict outcomes.

Source: Search Institute® (www.search-institute.org)



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