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viewpoint

The power of mentoring: Shaping lives, growing leaders

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January is National Mentoring Month, an opportunity to recognize the power of relationships between caring, trusted adults and youth. Mentors promote confidence, enable dreams and encourage growth.

The benefits of mentoring are well documented and can include better grades, improved relationships with family and peers, and higher engagement in one's community. Youth benefit from positive relationships with adults who encourage their potential and open their eyes to new possibilities for their futures. These experiences are even more critical for children and teens who come from difficult socio-economic backgrounds or face other challenging circumstances.

Young adults who were at risk of falling off track but had a mentor are:

- 55 percent more likely to enroll in college
- 78 percent more likely to volunteer regularly
- 90 percent are interested in becoming a mentor
- 130 percent more likely to hold leadership positions

Yet one in three young people will grow up without a mentor, missing out on this critical asset.

At Girls Inc., our mentors build lasting, trusting relationships and create safe spaces for girls to take risks and push themselves. Our mentors are there to support girls every step of the way, helping to provide them with the skills and knowledge they need to counter obstacles and achieve their goals.

Girls Inc. member Maria of Carpinteria is just one example of a young girl whose life was changed because she had people in her corner that believed in her, listened to her and showed her all she could achieve. The following is her testimonial:

"As the daughter of two Mexican immigrants, who never received a high school education, doing homework was hard since both my parents and I didn't

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know how to read or spell. College was a foreign concept to me. I never had an academic role model.

When I turned in my application for Girls Inc. of Carpinteria's Eureka! program, little did I know my whole future was going to change for the better. Eureka! to me is more than a program, but a family.

Looking back at my life these past few years, I have to contribute all of my success to the Eureka! program and my mentors at Girls Inc. because without it, I wouldn't be who I am today. I gained knowledge, confidence, friendships and experience, things that are necessary to become a successful person. I learned that college is not only an option for me but for anyone willing enough to sacrifice what they have for a better life. But most importantly, I learned that I don't have to live in the same financial status my parents brought me up in because it doesn't matter where you start but where you are willing to go."

- Maria

We need more caring adults whose presence tells youth that we can achieve no matter the obstacles. As we celebrate National Mentoring Month, consider the difference you can make in the life of a young person.