

Touch Point Connection

Coaching Underserved Teens to Graduation and Beyond

Touch Point Connection is a nonprofit, tax-exempt coaching organization dedicated to supporting underserved teens and young adults by providing them with free, on-going coaching support using volunteers trained in professional coaching techniques.

Our goal is for underserved teens to complete enough education and/or training, and to attain sufficient life and workplace competencies to earn a *livable* wage.

Touch Point Connection has created a one-of-a-kind program to address critical needs of this population of youth. We provide this vital program by:

- Recruiting, training, and supporting community volunteers who serve as the coaches
- Managing coaching programs within and for youth serving organizations, such as high schools and community colleges.

The Problem & The Business Case

The United States is experiencing a generation of teens dropping out of high school at alarming rates.

- On average, 30% of any US freshman class will not graduate from high school.
- In some minority populations, 42% - 47% drop out of high school.
- In some of our largest US cities, a full 65% -75% do not graduate.

Dropout data from: Cities in Crisis: A Special Analytical Report on High School Graduation, 4/1/08 by Christopher B. Swanson, Ph.D., Director Editorial Projects, Education Research Center

Touch Point Connection believes that if we do not find a way to reverse this trend, we are unwittingly ignoring a time bomb that can explode into a national crisis.

Today, a person needs *more than a high school education to earn a livable wage.*

(National Center for Education income data.) Many entry-level jobs are low paying dead end jobs. Most jobs with career paths require an applicant to have the job skills to get the job.

The financial and community safety implications are worrisome.

- People who lack a high school diploma will be far more likely to spend their lives periodically unemployed, on government assistance, or cycling in and out of the prison system. *(Alliance for Excellent Education, 2007)*
- 75% of state prison inmates and 59% of federal inmates are high school dropouts. *(American Youth Policy Forum, The Dropout Problem in Numbers)*
- If 33% of dropouts graduated, the federal government would save \$10.8 billion *each year* in food stamps, housing assistance, and temporary assistance for needy families. *(American Youth Policy Forum, The Dropout Problem in Numbers)*
- Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings testified to Congress that dropouts cost the U.S. more than \$260 billion ...in *lost wages, lost taxes and lost productivity* over their lifetime.
- *Each dropout costs the nation approximately \$260,000 over his or her lifetime. (Rouse 2005)*

We believe that many dropouts are *capable* kids who simply stop coming to school when life becomes overwhelming and school no longer makes sense to them.

Some hold schools solely accountable for the dropout epidemic. We disagree. Teachers cannot teach students who are not focused, motivated, nor even in school.

Many teens are living in unstable environments and encounter overwhelming situations daily. Many teens set no goals because they see no future. They fall behind and lose all hope of catching up. Many consider school irrelevant.

Most have no steady adult role model nor do they know anyone who graduated from high school or continued on to college. Many are living in poverty. Some already hold jobs to help pay the rent or feed the family.

Many live in environments filled with drugs or alcohol. Some leave the chaos at home and live friend-to-friend or couch-to-couch, wondering where their next meal will come from. Some are in the foster care system and worry about what will happen when they turn 18 and are cut off from the only support they have.

Many teens simply need:

- To see a future so they can have goals.
- To connect what they are doing in school with their future aspirations.
- To stay focused and balanced, when everything around them is not.
- To learn how to make good choices and think through challenges.
- To develop self-management, time management, and relationship skills.
- To understand what they need and how to ask for it.
- Someone to believe in them, so they can believe in themselves.
- Someone who is safe and who cares about them, yet does not judge them.
- Someone to encourage them to move forward, when giving up seems easier.
- Someone to hold them accountable to their own commitments and goals.
- Someone to help celebrate their successes—the big ones and the small.

This is exactly what a coach does. Within a trusting relationship, a coach serves as a sounding board, someone to talk to in confidence. A coach is someone who listens. A coach is honest in their feedback, while not judging. A coach is someone who supports your agenda, rather than imposing their own.

Additionally, a coach is a just-in-time teacher—someone who provides new or different insights to allow you to see a situation differently or to see additional choices. A coach supports you to practice and learn new habits, skills and competencies. A coach is someone who helps you *set and reach* your goals.

“It is truly remarkable what people are capable of doing once sufficiently motivated and invested in realistic goals.”

Prochaska & Diclemente, A User-Friendly Model of Change

Coaching Works for Teens!

This coaching approach is already tested. During a 2-year pilot program, we demonstrated that, with coaching, many teens that were at-risk of not graduating:

- Learned to deal with and manage unstable lives;
- Set goals;
- Realized the relevance of their schoolwork;
- Increased their attendance;
- Improved their academic performance;
- Experienced fewer behavior and discipline referrals.

During this pilot with the Edmonds School District in Edmonds, Washington, 40 community volunteers were successfully matched as coaches with more than 40 teens.

“Coaching is a strong dropout prevention program. Before we started the program many teens faded away from school through non-attendance. With coaches, our teens stay in school and are very academically successful. This is a wonderful support for our students.”

*Dawn Hart, Assistant Principal & Coaching Program Liaison
Scriber Lake Alternative High School, Edmonds, WA*

Comments from teens who had coaches:

- Before I had my coach I didn't have anyone in my life I could talk with and really trust.*
- My coach listened to my goals. She helped me see that what I am doing in school has a connection to what I want to do later. I didn't see that before.*
- I am more focused. The thoughts going around and around in my head are more clear.*
- I needed to talk to someone about my problems. I have my Mom, but I couldn't add my problems to all that my Mom is already dealing with.*
- I tell all my friends to sign up for a coach. It's neat!*

Touch Point Connection

Touch Point Connection (TPC) is a 501(c)(3) organization that mobilizes, screens, trains, and supports community volunteers to serve as Touch Point Volunteer Coaches to at-risk teens.

We support teens that need coaches the most:

- Teens who lack safe, stable homes and parental involvement in their lives;
- Teens in the foster care system;
- Teens living in poverty (the Federal free/reduced lunch guidelines);
- Teens who are capable, but not successful in the traditional high school setting; many may already be enrolled in alternative education.

Touch Point Connection supports these teens while they are in high school and continues the coaching relationship *after* high school graduation to help ensure the successful transition into continued education or job training.

Not a Duplication of Services

Touch Point Connection's coaching approach is very different from anything that currently exists.

- Community service and mentoring organizations predominantly serve elementary and pre-teen students, *not teenagers*;
- Mentors provide companionship, recreation, role modeling, or tutoring – *not skilled and focused coaching toward specific goals*;
- Mentors are *not trained as coaches*;
- High school counselors usually have a caseload of 200-400 students and are typically trained as *academic* counselors.

Coaching appeals to schools, teens and community volunteers.

- Through Touch Point Connection, schools are able to enlist skilled, consistent, and supervised coaching support for their students;
- During the pilot, most students enthusiastically signed up to have a coach, while other students signed up when invited to by their counselor;
- Volunteers make a valuable contribution by committing merely 1 hour per week.

The Touch Point Connection Process

We believe in investing in communities by building the skills of volunteers to enable them to become competent Touch Point Volunteer Coaches for underserved teens and by managing this volunteer program within and for youth serving organizations, such as schools.

- Touch Point Connection staff screen, train, and then match Touch Point Volunteer Coaches with teens identified by our collaborators, which are *youth serving organizations*, such as high schools, community colleges, and community service organizations;
- Each Touch Point Volunteer Coach is matched with *one* teen;
- Each Touch Point Volunteer Coach is assigned to a certified professional TPC Coach Manager who provides them on-going support and supervision;
- All TPC Coach Managers are paid staff members and are professionally trained coaches, certified either by the International Coach Federation (ICF) or are a graduate of an accredited ICF coach training school.

Profile: The Touch Point Connection Volunteer

Volunteer Coaches are typically 28-74 year old – Baby Boomers are most prevalent.

Volunteers tell us they want to “give back” and that before learning of Touch Point Connection, they found no way to volunteer in a meaningful and time efficient way.

Most are still working and hold positions that allow enough flexibility to meet with their teen on the way to work or during the workday. Some are stay-at-home moms who coach their teen when their own children are in school. Some are retired.

What appeals to these volunteers is:

- The structured coaching process;
- Professional training and support;
- The limited amount of time required of them.

What they also discover once involved:

- They begin to apply coaching successfully into their own work and personal lives;
- The strong link with their fellow volunteers;
- An understanding of the serious challenges facing today’s educators;
- Deep connection with the teens, along with an understanding of how different their lives are from ours when we were teens.

Comment from a community coach volunteer:

"I drove to the school thinking about my teen and how she likes coming to school this year – a big change for her!

Today when we sat down together she was sitting there glowing and full of herself in that wonderful way. She talked a lot about the progress she has made, and also thanked me for the role I have played. I told her that she had done it and that it is my joy to be part of her life.

Am I lucky? Can these relationships all be so profound? I am asking myself what it is about this that is so compelling for me. I want to feel this way about all that I do."

– Barbara Breckenfeld, Volunteer Coach

More Details About the Volunteer Process

Touch Point Connection screens community volunteers, who are required to complete an application process, be fingerprinted, and pass background checks.

Volunteers are trained to become Touch Point Volunteer Coaches. There is an initial full day of training followed by 2.5-hour monthly sessions to build coaching skills and knowledge on topics such as:

- Building trusting coaching relationships
- Communication and relationships skills
- Creating a coaching plan
- Setting and maintaining boundaries
- Goal setting
- Making good choices
- Time management
- Building a network of support
- Self-management

Each Touch Point Volunteer Coach is matched with a teen and meets their teen weekly for a 45 minute coaching session, during the school day, on the school site, during the months when school is in session.

Touch Point Connection also:

- Establishes and manages the collaboration agreements and operating procedures with youth serving organizations, such as school districts, community colleges, and organizations supporting underserved youth;
- Provides insurance coverage for the Touch Point Connection volunteers;
- Handles all volunteer management, including volunteer recruitment, data base management, support, coordination, communications, and recognition.

While Touch Point Volunteer Coaches commit to a minimum of 1 year of volunteer service, most choose to continue year-after-year, and with their same teen.

Tucson Program: Starts with an August Volunteer Training!

Touch Point Connection's co-founder, who led the pilot in Washington, now lives in Tucson. Along with fellow professionally trained and certified coaches and community volunteers, she will introduce this program into Tucson in August 2008 at Amphitheater High School, in association with Youth On Their Own.

This program is easily replicable. Touch Point Connection plans to expand throughout Tucson and Arizona, and eventually nationwide by tapping into the large network of trained and certified professional coaches.

What You Can Do To Help

You have the opportunity to make a difference in the life of a teen and for your community. There are four ways to support this important work:

- Become a Touch Point Founding Sponsor.
- Make a tax-deductible donation.
- Become a Touch Point Volunteer Coach.
- Help spread the word by telling others about this serious dropout crisis and the opportunity to support this innovative program.

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