MENTORING
CENTRAL

Big Brothers Big Sisters of El Dorado County saves time and improves quality of training using online training

The Challenge

Big Brothers Big Sisters of El Dorado County (BBBS-EDC) had a small staff that was stretched thin. Training was a time consuming activity in terms of developing, providing, and especially, scheduling it. They also recognized the need to increase the quality of their training as BBBS of America (BBBSA) began to require affiliates to implement more comprehensive, high quality mentor training. In order to better prepare volunteers to be effective mentors and to meet BBBSA's rigorous standards of practice, BBBS-EDC needed a solution that would place a minimal time burden on staff while significantly increasing the quality of pre-match mentor training.

The Context

Located about 45 minutes northwest of Sacramento California, BBBS-EDC supports over 200 community-based and school-based matches annually with a staff of eight and a budget of slightly less than $500,000 per year. BBBSA began requiring local affiliates to meet more rigorous standards of practice in 2014.

"I'd absolutely recommend these courses to other BBBS affiliates! In fact, I'm always talking with my peers promoting it."

– Amber Henrichs
  Program Director
  BBBS-EDC

The Solution

BBBSA worked with Mentoring Central to develop and offer three evidence-based online courses to all affiliates for use with volunteers and early match mentors. In 2014, BBBS-EDC began to require all volunteers to complete the training program before the volunteer and mentee's first meeting. The online courses helped BBBS-EDC meet BBBSA's rigorous national standards.

BBBS-EDC also requires all of their Board members to complete the pre-match course prior to becoming an official Board member. Taking the course has improved their understanding of mentoring and their ability to guide the organization.

The Results, ROI, and Future Plans

As the Program Director at BBBS-EDC, Amber is ecstatic with the results of implementing the online training program. Volunteers love how interactive it is and report feeling far better prepared to be a mentor after training than before. Busy volunteers also really appreciate the convenience of being able to take the training online, as they can take the course when they want, as well as start, stop, and rejoin the training as they like. Amber notes that the courses help many volunteers have more realistic expectations, as many come in thinking they'll "be doing cartwheels from the start with their mentees". An unexpected side benefit of the training is that after taking the courses, a few volunteers choose not to be a mentor ("Big"), as they realize that their overly idealistic hopes aren't going to be met. This self-selection process to choose to not volunteer as a mentor helps reduce premature match closures which can be damaging to youth. BBBS-EDC continues to offer quarterly in-person post-match trainings in addition to the pre-match online courses, but finds that these in-person trainings are sparsely attended and are often attended by the same group of people each time. Thus, the in-person trainings do not universally reach all mentors.

Amber feels great knowing how much better the quality of her training is for her Bigs, and loves that it frees up her time to be able to devote herself to other critical activities.

There have been some challenges with implementing the online training protocol. For example, some volunteers don't have regular access to the internet and some older volunteers have reported not being comfortable with using technology. BBBS-EDC has found a simple work around to solve these challenges – they simply invite the volunteers to their office to take the courses there on a computer or tablet.

Big Brothers Big Sisters

For more information about BBBS-EDC:
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