

Case for Support:
Touch Point Connection
Coaching teens. Building futures.

Created December 2008 by:
Laura Alexander
Alexander Associates
www.alexanderassociates.info

Table of Contents

- I. Executive Summary
- II. Organization Description and History
- III. Problem Statement
- IV. Program Description
- V. Measurable Objectives and Evaluation
- VI. Qualifications of Key Staff
- VII. Budget

I. Executive Summary

The average Arizona family has two children; according to statistics, one of them won't finish high school. While the average dropout rate nationwide is 30%, Arizona has the second-highest dropout rate, at 45%. The young adult who does not finish high school will be more likely to earn less income and remain uninsured, spend time in prison, raise children who are less likely to graduate high school, and ultimately cost the U.S. an estimated \$260 billion each year in subsidies, lost wages and lost productivity.

The individual and societal cost of this wasted human potential cannot be ignored. Touch Point Connection strives to provide one solution to this catastrophic problem: One-on-one coaching with students who need extra support in order to finish school and enter a bright future.

Founded in 2007, **TPC exists to coach teens and young adults to embrace their education and build successful futures through professionally supported relationships with volunteers.** TPC strives to provide a trained volunteer coach for each teen that needs and wants one.

This one-of-a-kind, unique program provides expert coaching to teens who need it. Coaching is a professional skill and way of working with people that helps them see their own way out of difficulties, by supporting them to set and achieve their own goals. Coaching embodies the concept: **“Give a man a fish and he eats for a day. Teach a man to fish and he eats for a lifetime.”**

Already in its first year of program provision at Amphitheatre High School in Tucson, Arizona, TPC is conducting a rigorous program evaluation to prove that coaching is a powerful dropout prevention tool. **TPC's ultimate goal is to develop a proven model of high school dropout prevention that may be replicated nationwide.**

II. Organization Description and History

The mission of Touch Point Connection is to coach teens and young adults to embrace their education and build successful futures through professionally supported relationships with volunteers. **TPC does this by:**

- Providing a volunteer coach for each teen that needs and wants one.
- Collaborating with schools and youth-serving organizations in order to ensure program success and minimize duplication of effort.
- Cultivating a supportive environment for volunteers and teens that bridges generations and creates a strong learning community.
- Offering a meaningful volunteer experience that includes training and support from a certified professional coach.
- Maintaining an organization that is high-tech and high-touch, structurally sound, and financially sustainable.
- Developing a proven model of high school dropout prevention that may be replicated nationwide.

Teens participating in Touch Point Connection are just like other teens, they just need extra support in order to succeed. All teenagers are “at risk” – adolescence is a risky time of life. But some teens face the risk with supportive adults – and some face it with little or no support at all. Many dropouts are academically capable of completing high school, but drop out because they are living in unstable environments. Touch Point Connection provides the extra support these teens need to finish school.

Touch Point Connection mobilizes, screens, trains, and supports an army of volunteer coaches who go into collaborating high schools for one hour each week during the school year to work with teens needing extra support. **The results are amazing.**

- ★ After facing years of abuse from her drug-addicted mother, Danyell was homeless and sleeping on her boyfriends' family's couch when she started coaching. Her coach described her as “the most motivated young person I had ever met.” Despite her

Case for Support: Touch Point Connection, p. 3

motivation, Danyell was falling behind in school. With just the right amount of support from her coach, Danyell graduated high school and went on to nursing school with more than \$40,000 in scholarships.

- ★ Stephanie was only 15 years old when she left home because of her mother's emotional abuse and constant ridicule that she would never achieve anything. Though homeless and essentially parent-less, Stephanie knew she wanted more from life. She set her sights on medical school, and coaching helped her find her way. She is now a self-sufficient pre-med student at the University of Arizona. The first in her family to attend college, she has made the UA College of Social and Behavioral Sciences Dean's List twice.

This program model is successful because of the partnership that is created between the teen and the volunteer coach, and also because of the principles and practices of the profession of coaching: listening, setting goals, monitoring progress, and holding teens accountable to their own goals and action steps.

How Touch Point Connection Operates

TPC strives to be efficient and financially sustainable. TPC is a virtual organization with little overhead cost and minimal personnel. Much of the work of TPC is accomplished by volunteers, though the organization also recognizes the importance of paid staff and organizational infrastructure. The organization is governed by a board of directors of eight members, with the goal of increasing the board to fifteen members by December 2009.

Organization History

Touch Point Connection is a 501(c)3 nonprofit corporation founded in Tucson, Arizona in 2007. Prior to moving to Tucson, co-founder Joan Martin was the Executive Coach to the Assistant Principal at an alternative high school in Edmonds, WA. The principal experienced considerable success in her job, which she attributed directly to coaching. As a result, she began using coaching techniques with students referred to her for behavior issues, and was subsequently able

Case for Support: Touch Point Connection, p. 4

to decrease discipline referrals by nearly 70%. Based on her experience with coaching and her concerns about the devastating high school dropout rate, the principal told her coach, **“I wish all our students could have coaches.”** With that invitation, Joan Martin agreed to create and test a school-based coaching program for teens.

During the 2-year pilot in Edmonds, volunteer coaches were trained and matched with 40 high school students. Certified coaches trained the community volunteers in coaching techniques and provided them on-going support. During each of the two school years, volunteers met weekly on the school site with their teens for 45-minute coaching sessions.

The results of the pilot were excellent. First, school officials and teachers actively supported the program throughout the two-year period. Secondly, adult volunteers and teens enthusiastically volunteered and participated in the program. Most importantly, teens participating in the program –

- 1. Decreased their behavior referrals by 60%;**
- 2. Increased their school attendance; and,**
- 3. Improved their academic performance.**

After moving to Arizona, Joan Martin determined to replicate the program in Tucson with the ultimate goal of establishing a nationwide coaching-based teen dropout prevention program. She founded Touch Point Connection and launched the first program at Amphitheater High School in Fall 2008, pairing 22 volunteer coaches and teens.

III. Problem Statement

“When more than 1 million students a year drop out of high school, it's more than a problem, it's a catastrophe.”

-General Colin Powell, Former Secretary of State¹

The average Arizona family has two children; according to statistics, one of them won't finish high school.² While the average high school dropout rate nationwide is 30%, **Arizona has the second-highest dropout rate, at 45%.**³ The number is even higher for Hispanic, African-American and Native American teens.

Dropping out of high school is only the beginning for these young people. The young adult that doesn't finish high school will—

- ★ Earn 38% less than her counterpart with a high school diploma, and 61% less than someone with a college degree – if she is able to find a job at all.⁴ An estimated 85% of current jobs and almost 90% of the fastest-growing and best-paying jobs now require post-secondary education.⁵
- ★ Be more likely to go to prison: 75% of state prison inmates and 59% of federal inmates are high school dropouts.⁶
- ★ Experience more severe health problems coupled with a lack of health insurance coverage. Adults without a high school diploma are more likely to die prematurely from diseases such as cardiovascular disease and cancer.⁷
- ★ Cost American taxpayers \$260,000 over her lifetime.⁸ More than half of all high school dropouts don't ever work at all, **costing the U.S. an estimated \$260 billion** in lost

¹ *The Hutchinson News*, April 18, 2008.

² U.S Census Bureau

³ Barton, P. One-Third of a Nation: Rising Dropout Rates and Declining Opportunities. Educational Testing Service Policy Evaluation and Research Center. 2005. Princeton, NJ.

⁴ U.S Census Bureau

⁵ Wagner, T. The Global Achievement Gap: Why Even Our Best Schools Don't Teach The New Survival Skills Our Children Need and What We Can Do About It. 2008. New York: Basic Books.

⁶ American Youth Policy Forum: Every Nine Seconds in America a Student Becomes a Dropout: The Dropout Problem in Numbers.

⁷ National Women's Law Center. When Girls Don't Graduate, We All Fail. 2007.

⁸ Rouse, 2005.

wages, lost taxes and lost productivity each year, according to former Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings.⁹

- ★ Raise children who are three times more likely to drop out of high school themselves, leading to an intergenerational cycle of poverty.¹⁰

In a lifetime of work, a high school graduate earns nearly half a million dollars more than the average high school dropout. A college graduate earns nearly \$1.2 million more.¹¹

Many critics, lawmakers and parents blame the school system for this problem, but TPC believes that schools can't do it all. In addition to educating our nation's children, schools today are expected to deal with violence, drugs, and other social ills; and to pick up the slack for parents who cannot raise their own children because of the demands of work, all while trying to increase national test scores.

Schools used to have the extra support and safety of second-chance programs, offering opportunities for dropouts to resume education and training. However, the federal investment in such programs has dropped from \$15 billion in the late 1970's, at a time when school completion was peaking, to \$3 billion today.¹²

Teachers and counselors are overloaded. Class sizes are increasing, and the pressure to get kids to perform well on standardized tests is intense. Plus, teachers cannot teach students who are unfocused, unmotivated, or absent from school.

On average, only one certified guidance counselor is available for every 285 high school students. This ratio varies considerably in lower-resourced schools. Plus, guidance counselors are primarily trained as academic counselors, not social workers.¹³ They simply cannot provide

⁹ Reference

¹⁰ National Women's Law Center, 2007.

¹¹ U.S. Census Bureau.

¹² Barton, P. One-Third of a Nation: Rising Dropout Rates and Declining Opportunities. Educational Testing Service Policy Evaluation and Research Center. 2005. Princeton, NJ. www.ets.org/research/pic

¹³ Barton, 2005.

the individualized attention most high school students need to overcome the barriers they face that keep them from graduating.

Many dropouts are academically capable of completing high school, but drop out because they are living in unstable environments: parents on drugs, unplanned pregnancy, responsibility for younger siblings, the challenges of living in poverty, in foster homes, or on the street.

Most dropouts leave school because they are overwhelmed by life, struggling with their class work, and lacking the motivation and focus to remain interested in school. Many young people fall into a state of despair, unable to set and achieve goals, or see the choices and opportunities available to them.

The individual and societal cost of this wasted human potential cannot be ignored. Touch Point Connection seeks to partner with schools and other youth-serving organizations to provide one solution to this catastrophic problem: one-on-one coaching with students who need extra support in order to finish school and enter a bright future.

IV. Program Description

“I needed to talk to someone about my problems. I have my Mom, but I couldn’t add my problems to all my Mom is already dealing with.”

-TPC Teen Participant

Touch Point Connection empowers teens to stay in school and build a foundation for future success through a unique model using proven coaching methods. A student’s coach may be the only adult in her life who will listen without judgment, ask questions without interrupting or interjecting solutions, and who earns her trust and confidence. Coaches help students think critically, solve their own problems, set achievable goals, and find solutions to problems that seem insurmountable.

Coaching = Empowerment

“My coach didn’t feel sorry for me, or give me advice. With her questions I could see my choices and find solutions to my problems. That gave me more confidence to make decisions for myself.”

-TPC Teen Participant

The root definition of the word coaching is from the Hungarian word “*cocs*”, meaning “*a vehicle that gets you from one place to another.*” Coaching moves the teen from one place to another by providing just the right amount of support needed, without overwhelming him with solutions or creating dependency. The coach helps create a little breathing space in which the teen can articulate his dream and discover the path to achieving it.

Coaches focus on helping teens –

- ★ Set and achieve goals;
- ★ Build self-awareness and clarity of mind;
- ★ Make choices that are right for them;
- ★ Find independence and become self-sufficient;

Case for Support: Touch Point Connection, p. 9

- ★ Create an action plan to build their desired future;
- ★ Connect what they are doing in school with their future aspirations;
- ★ Develop self-management and time management;
- ★ Manage relationships;
- ★ Understand and meet their own needs;
- ★ Stay accountable to their commitments and goals.

This is a one-of-a-kind, unique program. No other program provides one-on-one expert coaching to teens. There are programs that provide companionship or mentoring, but coaching makes this program unique.

Coaching is a professional skill that must be learned. It is a way of working with people that helps them see their own way out of difficulties. You may have heard the old adage, “Give a man a fish and he eats for a day. Teach a man to fish and he eats for a lifetime.” Coaching embodies this concept.

Coaching differs considerably from mentoring. Mentoring is the act of providing guidance, wisdom, knowledge and support. **Coaching is an ongoing partnership designed to help people find their own wisdom and guidance from within.**

The most persuasive arguments in favor of coaching come from the teens themselves.

Teens are often selected for the program by guidance counselors or outreach workers, but many teens self-select into the program. Once they have experienced coaching, the teens become the strongest TPC advocates:

- ★ *“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 in my head are more clear.”*
- ★ *“If my friend was thinking about coaching, I would tell him that a coach is like a member of your family. Someone you can trust and tell anything. They’ll listen to you.”*
- ★ *“I tell all my friends to sign up for a coach.”*
- ★ *“Coaching is cool.”*

The Volunteers Make the Difference

*“I love my teen, love my coaching experience. I think so far it is going far better than I ever hoped. We are working through her challenges – not always getting answers or resolution, but I know she finds this valuable. She sends me a reminder message every night before our session, **BEFORE** I get a chance to call her. She is always there waiting for me, and always has something she ‘just has to tell me’. I am thrilled to be a part of this program.”*

- Jane Stash, Volunteer Coach

TPC Coaches are exceptional volunteers who commit to providing one hour of coaching to their teen each week, at school, for an entire academic year. These are active community members and business leaders who want to make a difference in the lives of teens and the future of our society. Volunteers are adults, working professionals and retirees, who come from all walks of life.

Volunteers participate in eight hours of formal training. They also attend monthly meetings, and are required to submit regular written reports. Monthly meetings include workshops to build the volunteers’ coaching skills. TPC volunteers have 24-hour on-call access to Coach Managers, who provide support and problem-solving throughout the volunteer experience. In compliance with school policies, all TPC volunteers are fingerprinted and screened to ensure student safety.

Each coach is matched with only one teen for the academic year, and is assigned to a professional Coach Manager. Coach Managers are TPC staff members with professional coaching certification from the International Coach Federation (ICF) or certification from an accredited ICF coaching school.

“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 want to feel this way about all that I do.”

-Barbara Breckenfeld, Volunteer Coach

Commitment to Collaboration

TPC is committed to formal and informal collaboration with schools and youth-serving organizations in order to ensure program success and minimize duplication of effort.

TPC’s key collaborative partners are the schools in which coaching programs are being implemented. The school serves as host to the program, providing physical space for group and individual meetings, staffing support, data collection, and assistance making the best matches between teens and their volunteer coaches. **At Amphitheatre High School, TPC has received full support and enthusiasm from both administration and staff**, and has even had a staff liaison assigned to support the implementation of the program.

TPC provides schools with coaching services for their students, which gives one-on-one attention to vulnerable students, something schools simply do not have the resources to provide. TPC invites teachers, guidance counselors and school staff to attend all on-campus TPC events, including skill-building workshops.

One of the goals of TPC is to develop similar collaborative arrangements with technical schools, community colleges and universities, so that coaching may continue into young adulthood and support higher education.

Case for Support: Touch Point Connection, p. 12

TPC also collaborates informally with nonprofit organizations serving youth who would benefit from coaching. These organizations may seek – and even purchase – coaching services for their clients because coaching is a specialized skill and resource these organizations do not have. TPC also offers training in coaching methods for the staff and volunteers of nonprofit organizations serving youth.

V. Measurable Objectives and Evaluation

“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, Scriber Lake Alternative High School, Edmonds, Washington

TPC is conducting a professional evaluation, in cooperation with Amphitheater School District, which measures the effectiveness of coaching as a dropout prevention model. The evaluation will also measure the teens’ and volunteer coaches’ experience and satisfaction with the program.

Key indicators to be measured include:

1. School attendance;
2. Grades;
3. Discipline referrals;
4. High school graduation;
5. Pursuit of higher education;
6. Student attitudes toward school and their own future possibilities;
7. Student satisfaction with coaching;
8. Volunteer satisfaction with the program.

Evaluation methodology includes collection of data regarding attendance, grades, discipline referrals and graduation for each student. Qualitative data will be collected through written

surveys and focus groups with teens and volunteer coaches throughout the school year. Long-term, TPC will collect data on achievement of goals and pursuit of higher education.

VI. Qualifications and Key Staff

VII. Budget

From Homelessness to Independence: One Teen's Experience

Stephanie was only 15 years old when she left home because of her mother's emotional abuse and constant ridicule that she would never achieve anything. Though homeless and essentially parent-less, Stephanie knew she wanted more from life. She set her sights on medical school, and coaching helped her find her way.

“Before I had my coach, it was hard for me to trust and share my feelings with other people. My mom always said that I wouldn't be able to do anything. I left home and I became homeless. I was angry. I was very stressed and felt like I was trapped and confused with no way out.

“When I started with my coach, it was so important for me to feel safe. I was very ashamed of my life, and really feeling unhappy. It was so hard to share some things.

“The good thing is when we talked, she didn't try to save me. If someone tried to save me I would hate it because it would make me feel more helpless. I hate that feeling. I want to feel strong.

“My coach didn't feel sorry for me, or give me advice. With her questions I could see my choices and find solutions to my problems. That gave me more confidence to make decisions for myself.

“She just listened and sometimes asked questions, but she wasn't pushy. The conversations made me think about the things that were important in my life. My trust came from her consistent caring and patience. She was always calm and would continue to listen and ask good questions. She didn't try to control me or tell me what to do. She treated me with respect. And she never judged or criticized me. I knew that anything I said to her was okay and would remain private.

“It was cool. It's someone who just listens to you about your life. She gave me the opportunity to talk to her about anything. Sometimes we just laughed and had fun. But if I needed to, I could cry and let go of all of the bad stuff from my body, too. I was so stressed and tired of trying to figure issues out by myself. It was good to say things out loud. It cleared my mind.

Case for Support: Touch Point Connection, p. 17

“I felt like I had someone who believed in me and with her encouragement I knew I would be okay. I didn’t have all the answers, but **I just felt better about my future.**”

Today, Stephanie is a bright, self-sufficient pre-med student at the University of Arizona. The first in her family to attend college, Stephanie has made the UA College of Social and Behavioral Sciences Dean’s List twice.