

Touch Point Connection

Empowering Teens. Building Futures.

The average Arizona family has two children.

Odds are, one of them won't finish high school.

Arizona has the second-highest high school dropout rate in the nation, at 45%. The number is even higher for Hispanic, African-American and Native American teens.

And that's just the beginning. The child that doesn't finish school will—

- ★ **Earn 38% less than her sibling** with a high school diploma, and 61% less than her sibling with a college degree – if she is able to find a job at all. (U.S. Census Bureau) An estimated 85% of current jobs and almost 90% of the fastest-growing and best-paying jobs now require post-secondary education. (Wagner, 2008)
- ★ **Be more likely to go to prison:** 75% of state prison inmates and 59% of federal inmates are high school dropouts. (American Youth Policy Forum)
- ★ **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. (National Women's Law Center, 2007)
- ★ **Cost American taxpayers \$260,000** over her lifetime. More than half of all high school dropouts don't ever work at all, costing the U.S. an estimated \$260 billion in lost wages, lost taxes and lost productivity each year, according to former Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings.
- ★ **Raise children who are three times more likely to drop out** of high school themselves. (National Women's Law Center, 2007)

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.

(U.S. Census Bureau) That's not just a better standard of living. That's a completely different life, furnished with hope instead of poverty, struggle, and despair.

The individual and societal cost of this wasted human potential is too high to ignore.

From Homelessness to Independence: One Teen's Experience

Stephanie was only 15 years old when she left home because of her mother's abuse. 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.

“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, last year she made the UA Dean's List.

Touch Point Connection exists to ensure that every teen who wants to succeed in school has a coach.

A coach helps the student think critically, solve her own problems, set achievable goals, and find solutions to problems that seem insurmountable.

A student's coach may be the only person in her life who will listen without judgment, ask questions without interrupting or interjecting solutions, and who earns her trust and confidence.

The root definition of coaching is from a Hungarian word “cocs”, meaning **“a vehicle that gets you from one place to another.”**

The coach provides support and information for managing time, setting goals, creating an action plan, and handling emotions.

The coach provides just the right amount of support a teen needs, 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.

Our Coaches are Exceptional Volunteers who participate in eight hours of formal training provided by certified professional coaches. They are tired of the same-old volunteer opportunities: filing, answering phones, and licking envelopes. These are incredible, committed adults who want to make a difference in the lives of teens and the future of our society.

Each of our volunteers is screened, trained, and assigned to a professional Coach Manager, who provides the volunteer with ongoing supervision, feedback, and support. All of our volunteers must complete an application process, be fingerprinted and pass background checks.

And they get just as much out of it as the teens do.

*“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

***“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

Real Results

Touch Point Connection achieves real results, and we're out to prove it. We are conducting an evaluation of our program to show how we can achieve results for the teens we coach—

- ★ Improved school attendance;
- ★ Better grades;
- ★ Fewer discipline referrals;
- ★ Change in attitudes toward school and the future;
- ★ Completion of high school;
- ★ Pursuit of education beyond high school.

But beyond these tangible results, coaching provides teens with so much more, like the ability to think critically, to solve problems, and find solutions even in the face of incredible odds.

During a 2-year pilot program in Edmonds, Washington, many teens that had been 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;
- ★ Had fewer behavior and discipline referrals.

“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 in Edmonds, Washington

We are now piloting this program in cooperation with Amphitheater High School in Tucson, Arizona, with the hope of replicating it as a national model of dropout prevention.

We can't do it without you.

Although Touch Point Connection is a volunteer program, we still need your support. Recruiting, screening, training, placing, managing, and supporting a team of quality volunteer coaches demands a full-time professional infrastructure.

We work hard to keep costs down. We are a virtual organization with no physical office space, minimal staff, and many dedicated volunteers. But to establish and maintain a quality program costs money. **Money we believe is well spent, considering the human and financial costs of doing nothing about the dropout epidemic.**

The success or failure of this effort is dependent upon the support of private individuals who care enough to support our work with their dollars.

Will you join us? With your help, there is no limit to what we can do.

What will your dollars support?

- ★ \$15,000 underwrites the cost of one Coach Manager, who can support the work of up to 10 Volunteer Coaches.
- ★ \$2,500 pays for coaching for one teen for one year.
- ★ \$1,500 underwrites volunteer orientation and training for twenty new volunteers.
- ★ \$1000 sponsors a year-end celebration event for teens and volunteers.
- ★ \$450 pays for one monthly skill-building workshop for coach volunteers.
- ★ \$100 pays for one volunteer screening (fingerprinting and background check).
- ★ \$80 buys a "Welcome to Coaching" kit for 10 teens.
- ★ \$25 purchases one book for our lending library.

Is a lifetime of self-sufficiency worth \$208 a month for one year?

For only \$208, automatically charged to your credit card each month, you can sponsor one teen's coaching for one year. Compare that to the lifetime of poverty that teen will face if she drops out of high school. We think that's well worth it!

Every gift matters! Your gifts help teens transform their lives and their futures, allowing them to graduate, continue their education, and build successful futures.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Aren't these just bad kids who can't succeed in school anyway?

A: No. Many dropouts are academically capable of completing high school, but drop out because they are living in unstable environments: parents on drugs, unplanned pregnancy, 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 teens we serve 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. Touch Point Connection provides the extra support teens need to finish school.

Q: Isn't the problem just our failing school system?

A: No. Our 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; 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. (Barton, 2005)

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. (Barton, 2005)

Q: Aren't there already many programs like this? This seems like a duplication of service to me.

A: This is a one-of-a-kind, unique program. No other program provides one-on-one trained 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've 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 clients find their own wisdom and guidance from within.**

Coaches focus on helping teens –

- ★ Build self-awareness and clarity of mind;
- ★ Make choices that are right for them;
- ★ Find independence and become self-sufficient;
- ★ Create an action plan to build their desired future.

Q: Do kids really want to do this? I can't imagine my teenager wanting a coach.

A: Yes! Teens love this program. We have no difficulty finding teens who want to participate.

Many volunteer coaches report not being able to get a word in edgewise during their sessions. These teens are literally dying for someone to talk to. Just listen to what some of our teens have to say about coaching:

"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."

"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."