

NEWS

VOLUNTEER CENTER OF BERGEN COUNTY, INC.

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Volunteer Mentors Inspire by Example Training sessions planned during National Volunteer Month

North Jersey—April is National Volunteer Month, highlighted by National Volunteer Week, April 18 to 24. During the entire month, the Volunteer Center of Bergen County celebrates the efforts of people who help make their communities better places to live.

Becoming a mentor is a significant way to make a difference in the community and in people's lives. Men and women are needed to participate in two mentoring programs of the Volunteer Center of Bergen County.

Through the **Volunteers in Protective Services (VIPS)**, caring men and women provide guidance, friendship and support to abused and neglected children ages 2 to 18. Currently there are over 100 children waiting to be matched with caring, supportive mentors. **Mentoring Moms** are women who make a difference in the lives of isolated and overwhelmed mothers of all ages. The volunteers spend time with mothers who have difficulty in coping with parenting, managing households, providing for their children or overcoming other obstacles. At any given time, there can be up to a dozen mothers who are waiting for the support of mentors.

The mentors in both programs listen, share ideas and offer encouragement which empowers the person they are mentoring to make positive and healthy choices. A six-week, 15 hour training program is provided several times a year to mentors in both programs. During this time, the volunteers are taught to develop good listening and communication skills and discuss such issues as problem solving and values. Guest

speakers, including current mentors and social services case workers share their experiences so that new mentors have the background and knowledge to help support their mentees. All mentors undergo a comprehensive screening process which includes fingerprinting and other background checks. Currently, there is an especially critical need for bi-lingual Spanish speaking men and women to become mentors.

“The theme for National Volunteer Month is ‘Celebrating People in Action,’” says Janet Sharma, Executive Director of the Volunteer Center. “To be a mentor is to be a vital, important and positive influence on the life of someone who can use a guiding hand or a sympathetic ear. Mentors truly touch the lives of others for the better.”

Mentoring Moms begins its 6-week training session on Monday, April 12th ; **VIPS** will meet on 6 consecutive Wednesdays beginning on April 14th. Both trainings are from 7:00 pm to 9:30 pm at the Volunteer Center offices at 64 Passaic St. in Hackensack.

Deadline to register for mentor training for Mentoring Moms is April 9th; for VIPS, deadline is April 12th. Call the Volunteer Center of Bergen County at (201) 489-9454, or visit their website at www.bergenvolunteers.org and click on Mentoring Programs.

Founded by the Junior League in 1966, the Volunteer Center strengthens the community by connecting people with opportunities to serve, operating direct service volunteer programs, building capacity for effective volunteering, and participating in strategic partnerships that meet community needs.

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