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The Hour

# Norwalk mentors to reconnect with students they had helped

**NORWALK**  
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Since 1986, thousands of students have passed through the Norwalk Mentor Program, boosting their grades, their attendance rates and their self-esteem from elementary school through high school. Then what? It's a frequently asked

question, said Jackie Effren, who coordinates the program for the Human Services Council. Until now, it's also been relatively difficult to answer, as no database has existed to track students in the long-run. On the verge of the program's 25th anniversary, Effren plans to spearhead that effort and, in turn, develop a networking platform for mentees and men-

tors to reconnect.

"We want to know what our mentees are doing, where they've gone and how they are," Effren said. "We lack that data right now, and when people ask, 'What are the long-term impacts,' we have some anecdotes, but we don't have the information itself."

Last year, students

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## Mentors to reconnect with former students

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involved in the mentor program reported a better sense of the future, more self-confidence and a stronger ability to express themselves, according to a survey by the Human Services Council. About 81 percent of those students showed improvements in their grades. Fifty-eight percent reversed their attendance problems.

The council wants to see how those effects translate into the future, Effren said.

Backtracking, Effren will sync her records with the Norwalk Mentor Scholarship Fund, which has maintained some information about college-bound mentees since 1995. Moving forward, she will use a database called CiviCore to document year-to-year evaluations, basic contact and demographic information and, through an exit-interview toward the end of high school, the direction in which graduates are headed.

That process could strengthen the program and help the council yield important information about the lifetime impact of mentoring, Effren said.

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**Monica Moises**  
Norwalk mentor

As of now, it's an assumed benefit that occasionally gives rise to newspaper articles or messages from former mentees, she said. Sometimes she receives positive feedback when alumni — like 25-year-old Monica Moises — return to Norwalk to become mentors themselves.

Moises joined the program the year after she transferred from Ponus Ridge to West Rocks Middle School. She was in the seventh grade and, at 12, had been badly bullied by a group of girls she used to call her friends, she said.

"I was always was the outcast," she said. "Even after I switched schools, I was scared. I didn't know anybody, I didn't want to go to school. There was a lot of anxiety every morning — I'd fight my mom to stay home."

Then she met her mentor,

Shirley.

"She gave me the confidence I needed," Moises said. She met with Shirley once a week until she graduated from Norwalk High School in 2003. "The social anxiety diminished."

Since then, Moises has earned her bachelor's degree from Western Connecticut State University and recently completed her master's degree in social work at Fordham University. As a community support specialist at Keystone House, Inc., Moises counsels mentally ill patients and soon, she'll meet her own mentee for the first time.

"Those," Effren said, "are the kinds of stories we want to hear."