



Mentorship *for* autistic youth *by* autistic adults

Newsletter #1: February 2019

Hello AMP Friends!

Welcome to the first Autism Mentorship Program (AMP) newsletter. We will send these out periodically to keep you informed about AMP's progress. For this first edition, we have lots of exciting news to report!

We've launched!

After over two years of hard work by the AMP steering committee, the pilot run of our program began on January 15th. Seven autistic mentor/mentee pairs from our partners at Minnesota Independence College and Community (MICC), Bloomington's Kennedy High School, and the autism community at large were recruited, interviewed, vetted, trained, and matched. They now meet for an hour every Tuesday afternoon after school at Kennedy High School and will continue to do so until mid-May. It's really wonderful to see relationships develop between mentors and mentees as they get to know one another through conversation, games, and shared interests like drawing. (Thank you to everyone who generously donated the veritable mountain of games, fidgets, puzzles and art supplies to AMP!) We're receiving very positive feedback from participants, families, and teachers. One mentee's mom, who was a bit nervous about having her son participate in a brand new program reports, "My son comes home so happy after the sessions!"

Evaluation is underway

AMP's academic team from the University of Minnesota conducted pre-pilot baseline interviews with participants and their families. They will continue to collect data throughout the course of the pilot to determine how well AMP is meeting its goal of achieving improved social connectedness among the AMP participants and to assess the program's overall promise of success for the autistic population it is intended to serve.

AMP in the spotlight

AMP was honored to be featured on the website of MENTOR, the National Mentoring Partnership organization, in December:

<https://www.mentoring.org/2018/12/program-feature-autism-mentorship-program-amp/>

Funding trifecta plus!

AMP received not one, not two, but three grants from the University of Minnesota to support program operation and evaluation:

- Community Health Collaborative pilot grant
Office of Community Engagement to Advance Research and Community Health (CEARCH), Clinical and Translational Science Institute (CTSI)
- Jump Start grant
Office of Research and Policy, College of Education and Human Development (CEHD)
- Seed grant
Institute for Translational Research in Children's Mental Health (ITR)

Our U. of M. partners tell us a grant application track record of "3 for 3" is unheard of -- maybe the academic equivalent of landing three cherries on a slot machine? We'll take it! The administrator of the Community Health Collaborative grant let us know that our application stood out among the 30 applications they received, rising quickly to the top. The Jumpstart grant would never have happened without so many of you rallying on GoFundMe to meet (and exceed!) the \$5,000 match required to apply. Thank you so much for demonstrating the community enthusiasm behind AMP!

We have also received two grants from the Headwaters Foundation for Justice. We really appreciate this wonderful organization's support; it has come at just the right times: when we were first beginning our research and planning for AMP, and when we were launching our pilot. Panels comprised of community members make the decisions about where Headwaters funding goes; we are honored that they chose to fund AMP at two critical stages in the program's development.

In addition, over the past two years of AMP's development, we have applied for and have been grateful to receive four rounds of free technical assistance training from MENTOR Minnesota through the U.S. Department of Justice's National Training and Technical Assistance program. This has allowed us to create policies, procedures, and trainings that align with national mentorship best practices.

Being awarded recognition, support and funding from sources with a variety of focus areas including health, mentorship, community, and justice tells us that Minnesotans and others recognize the need for a program like AMP, and gives us hope that we will be able to secure additional funding to keep AMP going and growing. We're always working on finding new sources of funding; if you know any

person or organization that you think might be interested in helping to support AMP financially, please let us know.

Special thanks

AMP would not be happening without the hard work and dedication of our friends at the following organizations:

- The Autism Society of Minnesota
- Minnesota Independence College and Community
- Bloomington Public Schools
- The University of Minnesota
- MENTOR Minnesota

Nor would the program be possible without the many passionate individuals from within the autism community and without who have volunteered their time and energy to turn the idea of AMP into a reality. Thank you all!

Moving forward

In the spring, we will assess the success of the pilot program and AMP's financial health to determine our next steps. We hope to continue to expand AMP's outreach in the 2019-20 school year and beyond. If you're an autistic adult interested in being a mentor or you work with a high school that would be interested in implementing AMP in the future, please contact us. (We're focusing on high school students for now, but plan to expand to lower grades eventually.) Meanwhile, stay tuned for updates!

Thank you for your continued interest in AMP. (If you'd like to be removed from our mailing list, please let us know.)

All the best from the AMP team,

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AMP logo original design by Johnny Jimenez Lezama, 10th grader in the center-based autism program at Bloomington's Kennedy High School and 2019 AMP pilot mentee.