

Mentoring makes a difference

by Sue Schumann Warner –

Thanks to an innovative mentoring program—and a dedicated group of “seasoned” mentor officers—newly commissioned captains in the West enjoy support and encouragement as they navigate their first five years of ministry as Salvation Army officers.

Historically, the highest number of officers resign during those first five years; this program was developed to help reduce that number.

“The investment that some of our experienced officers have made in those with less than five years service has significantly reduced the loss of officers in the first five years after commissioning,” stated Secretary for Personnel Major Ralph Hood. “No one can possibly measure the long-term benefit that will have for the officers and the Army.”

In the mentoring program, a seasoned officer is aligned with a newly commissioned officer with the hope of providing guidance through personal goals, innovative solutions in ministry, and walking together along unfamiliar roads.

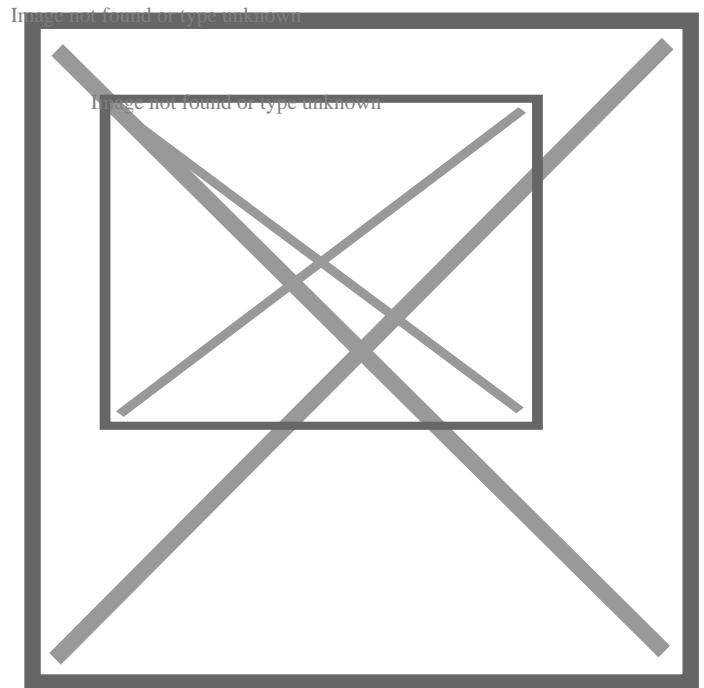
“We hope that the program is used to facilitate officers to become spiritually confident ministers who follow Christ as their best example of how to reach out and love those in greatest need,” said Pastoral Care Officer Major Peggy Helms. Helms and her late husband, Major Gordon Helms, initiated the mentoring program.

Helms credits Dr. Jack Anderson, clinical psychologist and consultant for Officer Development, with proposing the concept for the program. “He thought that if new officers had someone to talk to—a connection—it might help stop the loss.”

Other staff members are Major Bill Nottle, Officer Care and Development secretary; Stacie Brown, M.S., M.F.T., and Maria Moon.

How it works

In the mentoring program, divisional commanders recommend seasoned officers to the secretary for Personnel, who approves them and presents them to cadets who are approaching commissioning.



The cadets then make their preferences known for the individual or couple they think would best help them through their first five years of officership.

Mentors are expected to work with their mentees in four main areas: spiritual partnership (providing guidance, encouragement, support, and instruction); accountability (establishing written goals and expectations about specific areas of growth including personal, professional, and spiritual issues); connection (keeping in touch through phone calls, e-mail, and snail mail), with direct contact occurring at least once a month throughout the five years; and visit: visiting the mentee once every year, when mentors can observe, answer questions, and make suggestions regarding the appointment.

Expenses incurred are covered in the territorial headquarters budget.

Participants respond

This year marks the sixth year the program has been in effect. During this time, more than 100 officers—married couples, single officers, and retired officers— have mentored newly commissioned captains.

Majors Ray and Robin Yant, Chico, Calif., corps officers, are mentors for Captains Rio and Rachel Ray, Fountain Valley, Colo. corps officers . The experience has proven beneficial for both couples.

“Majors Ray and Robin Yant have been an amazing source of encouragement for us,” said Captain Ray. “They have always been willing to listen to our many problems and struggles and give good advice. The most valuable component, however, is just having someone to talk to who has been in similar situations and overcome them. They know the difficulties that we are going through, because they have dealt with many of the same situations. They know how hard officership is and they know how rewarding it is.

“As our mentors, they have been a real source of encouragement. Whenever we leave a meeting with them or end a phone call, our ministry and calling seems refreshed. Without the mentoring program, I doubt that we would have survived two years of officership. A Salvation Army officer has a hard job to do; there are obstacles and challenges that seem insurmountable. The mentoring program offers advice, encouragement, and hope to overcome these daunting tasks.”

The Yants also view the experience positively. “Mentoring makes a big difference,” said Major Robin Yant. “There are things in the Salvation Army world that frustrate us; we need a ‘safe person’ to talk with and bounce things off of...someone to point out the good things in the Army!”

In the two years the Yants have mentored the Rays, they have had two personal visits. The first year, Ray and Robin went to Fountain Valley, and the second year the Rays went to Chico. “They have encouraged us tremendously,” stated Robin. “ It’s not like we *just* mentor them.”

She notes that without THQ support, the in-person visits would be difficult to afford. “Because of the funding, we could go and see what a wonderful job the Rays are doing. This kind of [THQ] support

demonstrates the value they place on officers.”

From a ‘veteran’ mentor

“Throughout our 20 plus years of ministry, Cindy and I have served as mentors for numerous officers in an unofficial capacity,” stated Major Tim Foley. “It was wonderful to be asked to be a part of this program. The training we received helped to confirm what we have done in the past in regards to mentoring. It also helped us to hone our skills with our official mentorees.

“We have personally sought out other officers, both active and retired, soldiers and employees, to mentor us. We believe that to remain effective in 21st century ministry, we need to remain teachable. Cindy and I are becoming richer in our spirits because of our openness to receive from the people God has placed in our lives as mentors.

“The days of the Lone Ranger minister are over. In this high tech age there is a greater need for high touch. Those involved in ministry will need to continue to foster personal relationships that will allow them to be planted on the ground and energized for God’s higher purposes in their lives.”

For more information on the mentoring program, contact Major Peggy Helms at: 661-587-2476 or e-mail: Peggy_Helms@usw.salvationarmy.org

reflections

by Capt. Roy Wild, Leeward, Hawaii
(From a mentor training seminar in 2004)

“The best thing was to know I wasn’t by myself. It was comforting to know that I was not the only one who experienced the insecurities, the doubts, the frustrations, the wondering if this is what God has called me to. It was good to know that there was someone else out there who has experienced all that as well.”

“Reality hits the road when you find yourself in a place where you don’t know what to do with the budget, with difficult people, with sermons and everything else. There are so many experiences that training school does not prepare you for. It is good to know that you have somebody there who has experience to help guide you, be a sounding board and listen to your frustration.”

“The mentoring program for me personally, has been a blessing. We have a relationship that will far exceed any ‘official program.’ I think it is a relationship that will last forever. My mentor will be one of the guys that will always be in my inner circle of support.”

—Captains Roy and Paula Wild were mentored by Majors Tim and Cindy Foley.

10 tips for effective mentoring

one

Maintain regular contact—Mentors should assume they are the givers in the relationship. Consistent contact models dependability and builds trust. At least monthly contact is recommended.

two

Always be honest— Trust and respect are the foundations on which mentorships are built.

three

Avoid being judgmental of a protégé's life situation— Acceptance without conditions communicates that your concern comes without strings attached.

four

Avoid excessive gift giving—And don't do for a protégé what s/he can do for him/herself. Your greatest gift is to help a person discover his/her own solutions to problems.

five

Don't expect to have all the answers—Sometimes just listening attentively is all people need.

six

Help your protégé access resources and expand support networks—Discuss the importance of maintaining positive relationships.

seven

Be clear about your expectations and your boundaries—Set up ground rules and communicate them.

eight

Avoid being overwhelmed by your protégé's program— Remain calm and dispassionate to help protégés solve problems.

nine

Respect confidentiality—Good friends do.

ten

If the relationship seems to stall, hang in there and call Major Peggy Helms.