



MAXIMIZE
MENTORING

When youth feel like they matter, they thrive.



To: Senate Health and Welfare
Date: May 1, 2026
From: MENTOR Vermont
Re: H.817

Dear Chair Lyons and Senate Health and Welfare Committee,

I am writing on behalf of MENTOR Vermont, to provide support for **H.817** [MENTOR Vermont's](#) vision is to close the mentoring gap and drive equity through quality mentoring relationships so every young person in Vermont has the supportive mentoring relationships they need to grow and thrive.

MENTOR Vermont currently supports mentoring programs across the entire State, offering both traditional mentoring programs and school-based, peer-based mentoring programs. At this time, MENTOR Vermont supports 239 peer-to-peer matches within schools that opt for these programs, which results in 478 mentor/mentee youth being connected. Usually, this means a high school student is mentoring either an elementary or a middle school student. These relationships often last for several years. (MENTOR VT's 2024–2025 grant year also facilitated 1,714 funded mentor/mentee matches outside the schools, with a high retention rate of 92.7%.)

Although these programs happen in school, they are often run by separately-funded organizations, or they may get partial funding from a school. Some of these programs include [the DREAM program](#) which currently runs peer-based mentoring programs at 19 locations across the State.

Pam Quinn from the Twinfield Together Mentoring Program said the peer-based programming creates "*a culture of mentoring and sense of belonging for the entire school. Peer-based mentoring promotes high-schoolers into leadership roles, making them accountable to their community. What we are teaching our high school kids is you are not alone and you are a helper. We are developing an intergenerational team across our community.*"

Schools are the social network for kids and as our schools start to change, we need to think outside the box of how we support our youth. Peer-based mentoring is incredibly cost effective - providing prevention and intervention for both the mentor and mentee"

Understanding that currently there is no funding attached to H.817, this bill would allow MENTOR Vermont to make any future funding accessible for peer-based mentoring program not funded by the school or afterschool agencies like:

- King Street, in Burlington, that run peer-based mentoring programs at their Center

- The DREAM Program that runs peer-based mentoring program in school or afterschool settings but isn't a school or afterschool program

MENTOR Vermont also runs a mental health program for mentors to support their mentees. Since 2024, they have partnered with Jen Colman, a Burlington-based psychotherapist, to provide professional counseling and coaching to mentors in collaboration with program coordinators to better support the mental health needs of youth in mentoring programs. [Click here for the Youth Well-Being Program](#), which includes the development of a Youth Mental Health 101 Training Module. This resource is currently in development and will be available through MENTOR Vermont's learning management system.

There are strong reasons to consider youth mentoring services to be a meaningful tool in combating youth loneliness and isolation in Vermont. In fact, the Surgeon General's report in 2023 lists mentoring as a recommended strategy for supporting youth who are experiencing social disconnection and associated challenges.

Mentoring programs, by definition, are focused on connecting youth to additional adult or peer supports – building not only individual relationships, but deep engagement with program staff and other participants. There may be no more direct way to help reduce isolation and loneliness for a youth than, literally, providing them with a mentor and relationship that is tailored to their needs and circumstances. Additionally, when mentoring programs use volunteers as mentors, especially near-peer youths or potentially isolated older adults, they also have the potential to combat isolation in both participants.

Mentors can have a meaningful positive impact on mental health symptoms and other factors. Mentoring is an innovative, evidence-based practice and, uniquely, is both a prevention and intervention strategy that can support young people of all demographics and backgrounds in all aspects of their lives. Mentors can even, when trained properly, deliver effective light mental health interventions – which has important implications at a time when there is unprecedented need for mental health supports for youth.

Please support the objectives of H.817 to allow more peer-based mental health support systems to provide youth with the tools they need to build inner strength and resilience through relationship-based communities.

Documentation

Office of the Surgeon General (OSG). (2023).

14 Rogers, A., & Taylor, A. (1997). Intergenerational mentoring: A viable strategy for meeting the needs of vulnerable youth. *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 28(1–2), 125–140.