

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Wednesday, May 31, 2017

**CONTACT**

Melanie Fonder Kaye

[mkaye@friendsofthechildren.org](mailto:mkaye@friendsofthechildren.org)

503.281.6633

**New Study Shows Substantial Behavioral Improvements in Youth  
Participating in Professional Mentorship Program**

*During five-year study, Friends of the Children participants had less trouble in school,  
and parents and caregivers observed more positive behavior*

Washington, D.C.—A new study being presented today at the Society for Prevention Research’s 25th Annual Meeting shows critical behavioral improvements and less trouble in school for vulnerable youth who participated in the Friends of the Children’s long-term professional mentorship program, a relationship-based, child-focused intervention spanning kindergarten through high school graduation for high-risk children.

The panel discussion, titled, “[The Role of Professional Mentoring in Promoting Healthy Development](#),” will feature experts who will share the findings of the early years of the Friends of the Children first multi-site, randomized-control trial study.

Kevin P. Haggerty, M.S.W., Ph.D., director of the Social Development Research Group at the University of Washington, will chair the session presented by principal investigator J. Mark Eddy, Ph.D., senior research scientist with the Family Translational Research Group at New York University, along with Davielle LaKind, M.A. doctoral candidate of clinical psychology at the University of Illinois at Chicago, and Paul Sorenson, M.S.W. doctoral candidate of clinical psychology.

**Promising findings for at-risk youth**

The study, which is being published in the academic journal *Prevention Science*, looked at Friends of the Children’s unique mentoring model, which pairs at-risk kindergarten children with a trained, salaried, professional mentor for the entirety of the child's kindergarten through high school graduation years.

The study was conducted over a five-year period with 278 participants in New York City, Seattle, Boston and Portland, Oregon. During kindergarten, participants were identified as at risk for adjustment problems in adolescence. The study showed that:

- Nearly half way through the Friends of the Children paid professional mentoring program, researchers observed positive school behavior and less trouble in school, with a trend for higher child behavioral and emotional strengths.
- Unlike many other programs, the most promising effects were found in growth in positive parental and caregiver perceptions of a child.

- Participants built strong and positive relationships with their mentors, as well as multiple strong and positive relationships with other children who were also being mentored.
- During the study, more than 90 percent of the children randomized to receive a mentor actually met with their mentor, and most continued to do so over the course of the five years of observation.

New funding is being pursued in the hope of reaching the end of this story and of beginning to follow the next—the journey into adulthood. This is important because this particular study looked at children identified as high-risk for adjustment problems in kindergarten or first grade through approximately 11 years old. However, it isn't until adolescence that many behavioral and academic problems begin to surface.

“To date, the findings from this study suggest that the Friends of the Children model is quite promising. Having a strong and positive mentor-child relationship over the long run may be one important way to help youth who are facing many challenges stay on a positive pathway to adulthood,” Dr. Eddy said. “While the outcomes mid-way through the program are similar to volunteer mentoring programs, many of those programs only last about a year, whereas this program commits to provide mentoring to a child for over 12 years. The social relationships that are forged through Friends of the Children, not only with mentors, but also with peers and other adults involved in program activities, may be key to helping create a different future.”

“This study is the only one of its kind to measure the long-term implications of a relationship-based, child-focused intervention spanning from kindergarten through high school graduation with the highest-risk children,” Dr. Haggerty said.

### **A big commitment with big payoffs**

Friends' professional mentoring program makes a 12.5-year commitment to every child.

The three primary, and concrete, markers for program success are: avoidance of involvement in the juvenile justice system, graduation from high school or obtaining a GED, and delaying pregnancy and parenthood until adulthood. Historically, youth who have completed the program are likely to meet these outcomes, with 93 percent avoiding involvement in the juvenile justice system, 83 percent graduating from high school, and 98 percent avoiding early parenting, according to a study conducted by the Portland-based firm NPC Research.

“What we know is that our children have a lot stacked against them—they are at greater risk for dropping out of school, substance abuse, incarceration and teen parenting,” said Terri Sorensen, president of the national Friends of the Children, based in Portland, Ore. “But by moving mentorship out of the volunteer realm and creating a caring, lasting relationship between our most vulnerable youth and a professional mentor from kindergarten through grade twelve, we can empower them to change their stories.”

The Friends' model also addresses other challenges of volunteer programs, such as the recruitment and retention of a diverse mentor pool. Half of Friends of the Children's mentors are men and 58 percent are racially and ethnically diverse. Another important aspect of Friends of the Children is that a child in the program does not only spend time with their own mentor, but also with other mentors and children in the program.

“In Friends of the Children, children in at-risk situations are connected to each other very early in their social lives. From the beginning, they are closely supervised and guided by responsible and caring adults while in the presence of other children in similar situations,” said Susan Walsh Ph.D., Director of Research and Strategic Impact at Friends of the Children. “When they’re enrolled, these children enter a community that was intentionally fostered by adults for them. As they grow, most children stay a part of this community.”

The research was funded by grants from the Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (Grant No. 5R01HD54880-5), the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (Grant No. 68500), the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (Grant No. 2013-JU-FX0007), the National Institute of Mental Health (Grant No. P30 MH 46690), the Campbell Foundation, and the Silver Family Foundation.

###

**About Friends of the Children**

*Friends of the Children changes the story for our nation’s most vulnerable youth by providing them a salaried professional mentor (who we call a Friend) from kindergarten through high school graduation—for 12.5 years—no matter what. Our Friends support and guide our children in becoming healthy and contributing members in their communities. Today, Friends serves children in Harlem and the South Bronx, NY, Seattle, WA, Boston, MA, Portland, Gresham and Klamath Falls, OR, Tampa Bay, FL, San Francisco, CA and Cornwall, United Kingdom. Friends of the Children has been named the Most Admired Nonprofit in Oregon in 2016 and 2015 by the Portland Business Journal. Find us on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter!](#)*