



Mentorship for autistic youth by autistic adults

Newsletter #2: June 2019

Hello AMP Friends,

I hope you are enjoying your summer! Even though school is out, things have been hopping at AMP HQ! Read on to find out more.

We're an MCN Nonprofit Mission Award finalist!

You can help: **VOTE FOR US BEFORE THE JULY 5 DEADLINE!**

AMP is extremely honored to have been notified recently that we were selected by the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits (MCN) as one of three finalists for their 2019 Nonprofit Mission Award in the Innovation category. These awards "honor the outstanding contributions nonprofit organizations make to Minnesota's high quality of life".

To determine the winner, MCN member organizations and their staff members will be invited to vote on the field of finalists. The finalist with the winning number of votes will be selected to receive the award. **If you, your family or friends work for a nonprofit organization that is a member of the Minnesota Council of Nonprofits, we urge you to go online between June 17th and July 5th and cast your vote for the Innovation finalist you think should be the winner.** (We have a suggestion if you can't decide.)

Here's the link and voting instructions:

<https://mailchi.mp/minnesotanonprofits/vote-for-the-2017-nonprofit-mission-award-winners-972853>

All MCN member organizations and their staff members are invited to vote on the winners from the field of finalists. Voters can vote once in each category and must have their MCN Individual Member ID Number in order to cast their votes. The recipients of the four awards will be decided by member votes and the organizations receiving the most votes will win. Finalist organizations and their staff members are not eligible to vote within their own category.

Winning would be a big boost for us, bringing us wider recognition, a video about AMP, and a cash prize. But whether we win or not, we're humbled to be a finalist.

AMP in the spotlight

April was a great month for building awareness of AMP. First, we were delighted to be featured on KARE-11's April 23rd 10:00 PM newscast. If you missed it, you can watch it here:

<https://www.kare11.com/article/news/local/unique-program-pairs-students-adults-with-autism/89-cd6c8742-b3bf-4f26-bf0e-22baf5a31868>

Thanks to reporter Kent Erdahl for pitching the story to the news team and making everyone feel comfortable on camera. (Turns out we had a lot more hams than we thought and not enough screen time to include them all!)

A few days later on April 27th, AMP Program Consultant Michael Etten and mentor/mentee pair Derek Boeshans and Yari Bishop were presenters at the 24th annual Minnesota Autism Conference. They spoke about AMP at a breakout session focusing on local initiatives created by autistic people to serve their community entitled "Community Building: Current Activities, Groups, and Initiatives in the Autism Community". Michael, Derek and Yari were terrific talking about their experiences with AMP and answering the many audience questions about the program. It was a privilege for AMP to be part of this inspiring panel. Thanks to hosts Tom Cox and Laura Dettloff for including us!

Successful pilot run completed

The AMP team is pleased to report that the initial four month pilot run of our program is complete. From January 15th to May 7th, our inaugural cohort of seven mentor/mentee pairs spent an hour together every Tuesday after school at Bloomington's Kennedy High School. We celebrated their accomplishments and this significant milestone in AMP's history at the last session with pizza, certificates, and lots of smiles and good wishes for the summer.

Although analysis of evaluation results from our academic team at the University of Minnesota is still in progress, we've already received enthusiastic feedback. Exit surveys show that *all* of the high school mentees felt their mentors made a positive difference in their lives. Comments from mentees included:

It was neat talking to another autistic person.

I was given a new perspective on life with autism (and) what the future could be like.

(My mentor) was a huge impact on my life.

Feedback from mentors was equally positive. Survey comments included:

(AMP) helped (my mentee) know that he's not alone.

(My mentee) is more confident in expressing issues/concerns he has to his parents.

I have an anxiety disorder also and I think it helped (my mentee) know that he's not alone.

(What I liked best about AMP is) just knowing that I made a difference in someone's life.

For those of you wondering about the negative comments we received, here's a representative sampling:

I didn't like one day I missed it.

(What I liked the least was) the paper(work) and end of AMP. Sessions weren't long enough, or else weren't often enough.

Need better snacks, have Lays chips.

We'll take it! :)

Evaluation continues

AMP's University of Minnesota academic partners have been collecting data from participants and staff throughout the course of the pilot. Now that pilot data collection is complete, they are busy compiling and analyzing that data to assess:

1. how well AMP is meeting its goal of achieving improved social connectedness among the AMP participants

2. the program's overall promise of success for the autistic population it is intended to serve

We should have results soon! We'll share them in the next newsletter.

Funding update

Can we tell you how much we love the folks at Hennepin South Services Collaborative (HSSC)? I'll give you a hint: A lot! HSSC "supports and provides resources to programs and initiatives that invest in the strengthening of children, youth, and families in the communities of Bloomington, Eden Prairie, and Richfield". Jennifer McIntyre, Bloomington Public Schools' (BPS) fabulous Executive Director of Special Education alerted us to their Seed Money for New Start-up Programs grant, which funds collaborative programs and community resources that align with their mission. Bingo! Within seconds of applying, okay maybe a couple of weeks, but certainly the fastest grant turn around we've experienced by a long shot, we had \$10,000 in hand to help pay our staff costs moving forward. Thank you so much, HSSC!

Though we *didn't* make the finals and win fame and fortune in the University of Minnesota Carlson School of Management's MN Cup competition for local entrepreneurs, we were encouraged by the feedback we got from their judges, including:

I like the early focus on the small group of people being served and keeping the emphasis on them.

Terrific early traction from all the right partners.

Breakthrough idea with clear value proposition to a defined customer that could scale to other areas.

So, we keep on keepin' on. We're always working on finding new sources of funding to keep AMP going and growing; if you know any person or organization that you think might be interested in helping to support AMP financially, please let us know, or direct them to www.autismmentorshipprogram.org

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

We are happy to announce that we are planning a full year pilot of AMP at Kennedy High School in the 2019-20 school year. Many of our mentors and mentees from this year will be returning for another year, and we'll be adding a few new ones as well.

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 autism program at Bloomington's Kennedy High School and 2019 AMP pilot mentee.