



# Volunteers to receive a lesson in mentoring

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Dr. Michael Karcher believes in youths teaching youths.

Karcher, an expert in peer mentoring, spent three years developing a program that inspired him to pursue a career in mentoring.

While attending graduate school at the University of Texas at Austin, he worked with a priest, matching high school students with elementary students in the city.

Karcher noticed that the teens became more responsible in their studies and lives.

Now mentoring organizations across San Antonio include similar peer mentoring methods with school-based and community-based programs.

Karcher will join the San Antonio: Making Mentoring a Partnership coalition today to present a two-day training seminar to help volunteers become better mentors.

His presentation, "How Mentoring Works: When, Why, for Whom," will run from noon to 1 p.m. today and noon to 1:30 p.m. Saturday at the University of Texas at San Antonio Downtown Campus, inside the Frio Street building, room 1.402.

The seminar is open to volunteer who work with mentoring programs.

Karcher, 39, an associate professor of psychology at UTSA, co-edited "The Handbook of Youth Mentoring," which examines the gap between the current thinking and programs that promote youth mentoring. The book offers experts' ideas of how organizations such as Big Brothers Big Sisters and Communities in Schools should recruit, teach and support mentors.

Karcher's goal is teaching how to improve the quality of mentoring by providing

resources to those who train mentors.

"Mentors are always asking for training on different topics," said Denise Barkhurst, executive vice president for Big Brothers Big Sisters of South Texas. "It's hard to coordinate schedules and times citywide. So we thought, why not have a large training (session) and help them become better mentors?"

Karcher defines mentoring as helping youths develop skills to bring important people into their lives. The key to success, he said, is initial and ongoing training.

Karcher believes mentors are relationship coaches, who need to make at least a one-year commitment to a child. Studies show a rise in self-esteem and decline in drug use and violence among youth involved in a long-term match.

According to a 2002 study, half of all youth mentoring relationships end after a few months. The report cited volunteers feeling "overwhelmed, burned out or unappreciated."

A big part of mentoring is terminating the relationship.

He said mentors should tell matches that all matches end. Adults should help youngsters say goodbye, Karcher said, and understand that ending the match isn't their fault.

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Online at:

<http://www.mysanantonio.com/news/education/stories/MYSA102006.03B.MentorTraining.2bd5d51.html>