Middle School Moment at the National Mentoring Summit Connects Youth Mentoring with School Dropout Prevention

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The positive power of youth mentoring was embodied today in a teen girl named Omarina, who told the audience of 650 youth mentoring advocates here for the 2013 National Mentoring Summit, “I am not a statistic. I am a story.”

Omarina’s story was viewed by the Summit attendees through PBS’ groundbreaking documentary titled Middle School Moment, part of FRONTLINE’s Dropout Nation community engagement campaign supported by American Graduate: Let’s Make it Happen, a public media initiative funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting to help local communities across America identify and implement solutions to address the dropout crisis. Stephanie Aarons on of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting introduced the film and talked about the American Graduate effort.

Omarina was joined on stage by others in the documentary, including her teacher and mentor at New York’s Middle School 244 in the Bronx, Catherine Miller; the school’s Assistant Principal Eduardo Mora; Michael Selkis of fhi360; and Dr. Robert Balfanz, a Johns Hopkins University researcher who uncovered a series of indicators that he says can predict how likely a student is to drop out of high school: attendance, behavior and course performance, which he describes as the “ABCs.”
The panel discussion explored the data collected and the mentoring-based interventions used in Middle School 244 to help students at risk overcome obstacles to moving into high school and toward graduation. As Balfanz noted, “(These kids) are at risk of being cut off from the 21st century. We know where, we know who and we know a lot about what to do. It’s an engineering problem, and America is very good at engineering problems.” Having and using data is “hopeful because it makes us all insider traders for the social good,” he said.

Miller said that supporting teachers in forging the mentor/mentee relationship is critical. “Mentors hold up a dream for a child until they are strong enough to hold it up themselves.”

Mora added that sustaining an effort like the one at Middle School 244 requires leadership, a culture that empowers and inspires adults to build caring relationships with students and a creative approach to budgeting that includes identifying the non-negotiables, such as having counselors for students, that are truly important.

Selkis, whose organization helps school officials across the country understand how to connect components, such as core standards and teaching approaches, for student success noted that the early indicators Balfanz identified “can seem simplistic, but they’re nuanced. Going to scale is always hard. Collecting data and connecting it to the other pieces requires communications, relationships ....”

Also speaking during this Summit session were Congressman Chaka Fattah (D, MD), who challenged the audience to think about their missions, short term and long term, as well as today’s challenges, the global economy and U.S. competition economically. “We don’t have one young person we can afford to leave in the shadows of life,” he said. “It is vitally important for America’s future that we move them in a positive direction, and mentoring is the Number One pillar for building the future.”

Melodee Hanes, acting administrator for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), agreed with Fattah, saying, “(Mentoring) is not just morally right, it’s about our future and being competitive.” She shared that the cost of one young person involved in the criminal justice system over a lifetime is roughly $3 million. One OJJDP study done with the Centers for Disease Control found that 60 percent of America’s children are exposed to violence at home, school and/or in the community. Those children don’t perform as well in school, they
have more mental health issues and they have more physical problems, Hanes said, adding that exposure to violence is a national crisis, and one of the most critical mitigation tactics is mentoring.

This year’s Summit theme is “Mentoring Works: Inspire. Achieve. Advocate.” Bank of America, Ernst & Young, Viacom, BNY Mellon, Mustang Leadership Partners, LLC and State Street are among the corporate sponsors of this exciting event.

Summit Convener MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership is joined by the Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), the U.S. Department of Justice – Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, the Harvard School of Public Health and United Way USA as the Host Committee members.

The event also provides the culminating moment for the 12th anniversary of National Mentoring Month, which is the national media campaign to raise awareness about mentoring produced by the Harvard School of Public Health, MENTOR and CNCS. Thousands of programs in all 50 states participate in National Mentoring Month events, also recognized locally by many public officials and promoted by media and the private sector.

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About MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership
MENTOR is the unifying champion for expanding quality youth mentoring relationships in the United States. MENTOR’s goal is to help young people by driving investment of time and money in high impact mentoring and promoting quality mentoring through the development and delivery of standards, cutting-edge research and state-of-the-art tools.

MENTOR carries out this work in collaboration with a network of local Mentoring Partnerships nationwide and more than 5,000 mentoring programs and volunteer centers throughout the country, serving more than three million children in all 50 states. MENTOR works to ensure our youngest citizens have the support they need through mentoring relationships to succeed at home, school and, ultimately, work. For more information, visit www.mentoring.org.

About The Corporation and National Community Service
The Corporation for National and Community Service’s mission is to improve lives, strengthen communities, and foster civic engagement through service and volunteering. Last year, the agency engaged more than 5.5 million Americans in results-driven service through its Senior
Corps, AmeriCorps, and Learn and Serve America programs. For more information, visit [NationalService.gov](http://NationalService.gov).

**About The Harvard Mentoring Project**
The Harvard Mentoring Project (HMP) of the Harvard School of Public Health was launched in 1997 to mobilize the national media and leading Hollywood studios to promote the growth of mentoring as a public health intervention of proven effectiveness for positive youth development. HMP is an initiative of the School’s Center for Health Communication, which is dedicated to promoting the adoption of healthy behaviors through mass communication. The Harvard Mentoring Project and MENTOR created and spearheaded the first-ever National Mentoring Month in January 2002. For more information, visit [WhoMentoredYou.org](http://WhoMentoredYou.org).

**About the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention**
The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) provides national leadership, coordination, and resources to prevent and respond to juvenile delinquency and victimization. OJJDP supports states and communities in their efforts to develop and implement effective and coordinated prevention and intervention programs and to improve the juvenile justice system so that it protects public safety, holds offenders accountable, and provides treatment and rehabilitative services tailored to the needs of juveniles and their families. For more information about OJJDP, visit [www.ojjdp.gov](http://www.ojjdp.gov).

**About United Way**
United Way USA is comprised of more than 1,200 community-based United Ways in the U.S., and it is part of a worldwide network of nearly 1,800 United Ways in 40 countries and territories. It advances the common good, creating opportunities for a better life for all, by focusing on education, income and health – the building blocks for a good quality of life. United Way recruits the people and organizations from all across the community who bring the passion, expertise and resources needed to get things done. LIVE UNITED is a call to action for everyone to become part of the change. For more information, please visit: [LIVEUNITED.org](http://LIVEUNITED.org).

**About National Mentoring Month**
National Mentoring Month is a national campaign to recruit volunteer mentors, spearheaded by The Harvard Mentoring Project of the Harvard School of Public Health, MENTOR and the Corporation for National and Community Service. Held each January, the campaign highlights the crucial role played by mentors in helping young people achieve their potential. The campaign’s goals are to mobilize larger numbers of community volunteers to serve as mentors to young people and to promote awareness of the power of mentoring to enhance a young person’s prospects for leading a healthy and productive life. Research shows that mentoring programs have beneficial and long-term effects, increasing the rate of high school graduation and college attendance and decreasing the likelihood of substance abuse and other risky behaviors. For more information about National Mentoring Month, visit [www.nationalmentoringmonth.org](http://www.nationalmentoringmonth.org).