



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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**Reclaiming Futures Anchorage launches campaign
to recruit mentors for juvenile court teens**

*Project launches "When You Were 15" campaign on Thank Your Mentor Day™,
part of National Mentoring Month*

ANCHORAGE, AK -- Reclaiming Futures Anchorage, the Anchorage Youth Development Coalition, and Anchorage Mentoring Alliance are launching a campaign to encourage adults to become mentors for teens, including those who are struggling with drugs, alcohol, and crime.

"When You Were 15" is being launched on Thank Your Mentor Day during National Mentoring Month. The campaign features adults and young people in Alaska who recall their own lives at 15 and the adults who helped them get through tough times. Community members are encouraged to log on to www.whenyouwere15alaska.org to read story entries, write their own story, and find out how they can help teens in their community.

Ultimately, When You Were 15 Campaign organizers hope to publish an anthology of stories. In conjunction with the web site, a public education campaign is being launched to raise community awareness about the need for more mentors, especially for teens in the justice system. The campaign includes bus signs, posters, and radio public service announcements (PSAs). Students from the Public Relations Student Society of America (PRSSA) chapter at the University of Alaska are collecting audio and video stories that will be used for the PSAs and posted on the web site.

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Alaskans who currently serve as a mentor or who would like to recognize a person for being a positive role model are invited to come to a celebration for Thank Your Mentor Day at the Cook Inlet Tribal Council, located at 3600 San Jeronimo Drive on Thursday, Jan. 25th from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. A short program is planned and refreshments will be provided. Mentoring agencies and programs will be there so individuals can inquire and find out about the various volunteering opportunities available. Agencies will be honoring their current mentors and matches as well as recruiting the new mentors.

“Invite a friend or bring your kids,” said co-chair Victoria Shaver. “Having youth mentor younger children or helping them with their homework, are great ways for youth to mentor each other. We will be collecting stories on site – and will have a place set-up to capture the stories similar to the very successful National Public Radio’s (NPR’s) Story Corp.”

“Most people can think back to a time in their teenage lives when they were having a tough time and recall one adult who had a particularly positive influence on them,” said Tom Begich, project director for Reclaiming Futures Anchorage. “With this campaign, we want to encourage people to become a mentor or natural helper, or to provide opportunities for teens to engage in healthy and positive community and social activities.”

Reclaiming Futures, an initiative of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, is committed to getting more help for teens in the justice system who have drug and alcohol problems. A key element of the Reclaiming Futures model is to involve more adults as positive role models in the lives of these teens.

“When You Were 15” was piloted at Reclaiming Future’s site in Multnomah County in Portland, Oregon, where it recently received the Oregon Governor’s Council on Alcohol & Drug Abuse Clark Campbell Media Award.

Other sites launching similar campaigns today in their communities are Southeastern Kentucky; Marquette, Mich.; the Lakota Reservation in Rosebud, South Dakota; and Seattle, Wash. Future launches are planned in Chicago, Ill. and Dayton, Ohio.

People interested in becoming a mentor or learning more about the campaign in their city can find more information at www.whenyouwere15alaska.org.

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About National Mentoring Month

National Mentoring Month is spearheaded by the Harvard Mentoring Project, MENTOR and the Corporation for National and Community-Service. The first NMM was held in January 2002. Jan. 25 is Thank Your Mentor Day™ and is being honored with a variety of activities, described at www.whomentoreyou.org.

About the Anchorage Mentoring Alliance

The Anchorage Mentoring Alliance is a group of agencies that have mentoring programs or needs for adult volunteers in their programs.

About Anchorage Youth Development Coalition

The Anchorage Youth Development Coalition is a group of over 40 youth-serving organizations and individuals that are committed to making sure all Anchorage youth are valued, involved and thriving members of the community. AYDC provides leadership, coordinates resources and conducts workgroups and collaborative projects to increase protective factors and reduce substance abuse and other risk factors through the Development Assets Framework. Learn more at www.aydc.org

About Reclaiming Futures

Reclaiming Futures is a \$21 million initiative of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation with locations in Anchorage, Alaska; Santa Cruz, Calif., Chicago, Ill; three counties in Eastern Kentucky; Marquette, Mich.; the state of New Hampshire; the Lakota Reservation in Rosebud, South Dakota; Dayton, Ohio; Portland, Ore.; and Seattle, Wash. In its fifth year an evaluation conducted by the Urban Institute and the University of Chicago indicates the program has significantly improved the quality of juvenile justice and substance abuse treatment services across the 10 communities. Reclaiming Futures is housed in the Graduate School of Social Work at Portland State University. To learn more, visit www.reclaimingfutures.org and www.rwjf.org.

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