



Boys to Men Arizona

The mission of Boys to Men Arizona (mentoring program) is to guide boys aged 13–17 through their crucial teen years toward a healthy manhood. The nonprofit, nonsectarian organization accomplishes its mission through the provision of mentoring and modeling designed to help the boys and young men who participate learn integrity, accountability, compassion, and respect.¹ The Boys to Men Arizona community is part of a larger network of Boys to Men communities found nationally and internationally. Founded in 1996 in San Diego by Herb Sigurdson, Joe Sigurdson, and Craig McClain, Boys to Men affiliates can now be found in 13 communities across the United States and in 8 communities abroad.² As each new community has formed, it has chosen its own populations of focus or interest. Where some communities have chosen to serve young men with Asperger's syndrome, others have chosen to serve young men in or at risk for involvement in the juvenile justice system. It is this latter focus, young men in or at risk for involvement in the juvenile justice system among other populations that Boys to Men Arizona has chosen to serve.

The Boys to Men Arizona program model is based on Zimmerman and Coyle's (2009) publication, *The Way of Council*. Council is a method of communication that promotes compassionate listening, honest conversation, and connectedness.³ Further, the program draws upon Gestalt therapeutic approaches, positivist psychology, nonviolent communication (NVC), motivational interviewing techniques, and active pedagogy. There are several components of the Boys to Men Arizona community. These components include the Rites of Passage adventure weekend experience, bimonthly community-based mentoring activities and wilderness outings, and weekly site-based mentoring programs. Boys and young men served by the program can move seamlessly between the different components.

All components of Boys to Men Arizona employ group mentoring. Group rather than one-on-one mentoring is used to foster connection among the entire community of participating boys, young men, and mentors. Interacting with the community as a whole provides the young men with opportunities to exercise empathy and develop communication skills. All boys, young men, and mentors alike learn about and regularly apply the three critical program norms. These norms include (1) maintaining strict confidentiality with the exceptions required of mandatory court reporters (i.e., if a youth is a danger to himself or others, is experiencing suicidal ideation, or has experienced neglect or abuse); (2) refraining from cross talk so that everyone is truly heard; and (3) respecting the brotherhood by building and lifting each other up through the use of positive and encouraging dialogue.

Site-Based Mentoring at the Arizona Substance Treatment Education Program

A key feature of Boys to Men Arizona's site-based mentoring programs is that they are integrated into and seen as a part of the larger programming offered at the site. This integration requires the inclusion of current and/or retired staff members who represent the institutional norms of the school or facility. This requirement promotes buy in from the site as well as continuity for the boys and young men who participate. Among the site-based mentoring programs is the Arizona Substance Treatment Education Program (ASTEP) housed within Yavapai County Juvenile Detention Center. ASTEP is a 6-week inpatient treatment program for young men who are on probation and who have experienced challenges with substance abuse. The highly structured program is a collaboration between the West Yavapai and Spectrum Healthcare Clinics and the courts.⁴ For the duration of the ASTEP program, Boys to Men Arizona offers weekly 1-hour mentoring sessions. These mentoring sessions are led by the Boys to Men Arizona Executive Director; a highly trained Boys to Men Arizona mentor and board member; and a retired Yavapai County detention officer.

Consistent with the suggestions contained in the *Advice From the Field: Critical Elements for a Successful Mentoring Program for Incarcerated Youth* section of the NDTAC Mentoring Toolkit 2.0, Boys to Men Arizona matches young men in the ASTEP program with mentors while they are residing in inpatient treatment. Further, through a hierarchical structure of more seasoned staff and mentors who exhibit leadership skills and can provide critical feedback to newer mentors, supportive and constructive supervision and support is provided to program mentors. Finally, as shown in the program description that follows, Boys to Men Arizona embeds goal setting into the program and includes mentoring in the transition and reentry plans for the boys and young men they serve.

The 6-week site-based mentoring component at the ASTEP program follows a predictable rhythm.

1. During the initial session, the focus is on team building and getting to know one another.
 - The mentors begin by having all participants sit in circle, share their name, and engage in a check-in activity (e.g., what is your favorite superhero and why).
 - The purpose of the check-in activity is to break the ice and allow the mentors to gauge the overall state of the group.



- A second question is then introduced encouraging the young men to share at a deeper level.
 - At this time questions—such as what is your big dream, where do you see yourself in 10 years, what do you want your friends to say about you in the future, and what kind of family do you want to have when you are older—are posed.
 - The hope is that the young men can see beyond their current diagnoses, grades, charges, or other challenging life circumstances.
- 2. During the second and subsequent sessions, the focus widens to include the hurdles young men perceive to achieving their dreams and possible strategies for overcoming those hurdles.

As Executive Director Charles Matheus explains, the goal of these sessions is to create a space where the young men are attached to achieving their desired outcomes and realizing their dreams.

Although the ASTEP program serves young men on probation and is housed in a juvenile detention facility, the young men are given the opportunity to leave the facility to participate in community-based programming and engage in service activities. This includes the aforementioned Rites of Passage adventure weekend experience and bimonthly community-based mentoring activities and wilderness outings facilitated by Boys to Men Arizona. Mentoring is an essential part of each of these program components. In addition to the site-based mentoring, participating in these community-based components ensures that boys and young men in the ASTEP program receive mentoring and are supported during the preparation for and transition from the inpatient treatment program to the community.

Mentor Training: How to Be Better Young Men

Special attention has been paid to the development of their mentor training. As it continues to evolve, a unique structure has become their standard practice. Prospective mentors and interested community members (i.e., fathers, uncles, grandfathers, educators, businessmen, etc.) are invited to attend weekend experiences where they learn about engaging in effective mentoring practices, providing trauma-informed care, and developing multicultural awareness. They learn that the role of a mentor is to listen, accept, and encourage while refraining from trying to **fix**, **rescue**, **advise**, or **project**—a term Boys to Men Arizona has coined as “FRAPing.” Additionally, prospective mentors and interested community members are exposed to the previously referenced approaches of Gestalt therapy, positivist psychology, NVC, motivational interviewing, and active pedagogy upon which the program is based. Perhaps most importantly, participants learn the importance of continually becoming more self-aware, striving to be the best version of themselves, and modeling the behavior the participants hope to encourage. These training topics are in direct alignment with the elements of comprehensive mentor training recommendations found within the *Designing Effective Mentoring*

Programs for Neglected and Delinquent Youth section of the NDTAC Mentoring Toolkit 2.0.

Evaluation

At the onset of the very first Boys to Men activity 2 decades ago, the founders had the foresight to build in an evaluation component. Working with a consultant, they designed a plan to assess the long-term effects of the program on the boys and young men who participated. Twelve years after their involvement, the young men were asked to reflect upon how participation had affected their lives.

These alumni reported that Boys to Men made a difference in a number of ways:

- made it less likely they would engage in crime
 - better equipped them for handling stress
 - provided them with insight into the feelings of others
 - showed them how to be more accountable
 - improved their outlook on life
 - helped them to solve problems
 - improved their social values and skills
 - helped them feel good about themselves
- The alumni also reported because of Boys to Men they were:
- less likely to abuse drugs or alcohol
 - better fathers
 - more responsible, communicative, and compassionate
 - more honest with themselves
 - better at decision making
 - better able to cope with anger
 - better at respecting themselves and others
 - better prepared to develop greater trust and understanding of others, and having stronger relationships

Finally, all young men reported that participation in Boys to Men had helped them become better men.⁵

Contact Information:

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¹ Boys to Men Arizona. (2013). *About us*. Retrieved from <https://boystomenaz.org/about-us/>.

² Boys to Men Mentoring. (2016). *About us*. Retrieved from <http://boystomen.org/about-us/>

³ The Ojai Foundation. (2017). *Council 1: An introduction to The Way of Council*. Retrieved from <http://www.ojaifoundation.org/events/council-1-introduction-way-council>

⁴ Yavapai County Juvenile Probation. (2017). *Detention*. Retrieved from <http://www.yavapai.us/jpo/detention>

⁵ Boys to Men Arizona. (2013). *Program evaluation*. Retrieved from <https://boystomenaz.org/about-us/program-evaluation/>