

My City Mentoring Program

Participant & Field Trip Impact Report Reporting Period: July 2022 – April 2025

Prepared on: April 15, 2025



***** Executive Summary

Since its inception in July 2022, the My City Mentoring Program has empowered 44 youth through nature-based education, mentorship, and hands-on field experiences. The program emphasizes inclusion, community, and access to outdoor spaces, introducing participants to conservation careers, environmental stewardship, and public lands through immersive learning.

Over 30 field trips and a consistent mentoring structure have helped maintain a high program completion rate (84%), with 91% of participants engaging in at least one field experience. Through a partnership with RAFT (Recovery Assistance for Teens), the program also provided critical support through education or treatment.

The program continues to demonstrate a strong return on investment, not only through its metrics but through the personal growth, career exposure, and academic curiosity it inspires in participants.

Background & Funding

Awarded: \$885,546 from BSCC (April 8, 2021)

Pilot Duration: 3 years

Lead Agency: City of Merced

 Partners: Merced County Probation, BHRS, RAFT, local agencies, nonprofits, schools, and community groups

• Target Population: Youth ages 12–18, identified as at-risk for cannabis use

Key Data Points

- 46% of high schoolers have tried cannabis at least once (national stat via youth.gov)
- In Merced:
 - 30% of 9th graders believe cannabis use is harmless (↑ from 23% in 2013)
 - o 33% say it is "very easy" to access cannabis
 - o 10% used cannabis in the last 30 days
 - 5% used cannabis at school

Program Structure

- Cohorts: Two tracks Jr. High and High School
- Participants: 10 per 3-month cycle → 40 annually → Up to 120 over 3 years
- Services Include:
 - RAFT counseling (education + treatment)
 - Individualized job training and mentorship
 - Recreational and civic engagement activities

GOALS & OBJECTIVES (with Data-Driven Success Criteria)

Goal 1: Engage Youth in Their Community

• **Objective**: 80% participate in job training, 5+ community service events, and at least one recreational outing

Goal 2: Create a Community Where Youth Feel Adults Care About Them

• **Objective**: 80% complete 4 weeks of job training, 3+ mentor activities, and become mentors for new youth

Goal 3: Reduce the Number of Youth Using Cannabis

• **Objective**: 80% reduce cannabis use to ≤5 times during program; no cannabis violations at school

Goal 4: Create Strong Peer Groups Around Healthy Behaviors

• **Objective**: 80% attend 2+ group outings, connect with peers, and return for post-program activities

Goal 5: Build Youth Competencies for Adulthood

• **Objective**: 80% report improved employable skills, desire for healthy choices, and job training engagement

Goal 6: Increase Perception of Harm of Cannabis Use

• Objective: 80% report understanding the harms of cannabis use

Evaluation and Tracking

- **Oversight**: Was not able to secure UC Merced as a data collector. All data interpretations were done internally (Qualitative and Quantitative).
- Data Collection: Surveys (pre/post), RAFT counseling notes, mentorship logs, service tracking sheets
- Success Criteria:
 - Regular counseling and activity participation
 - Documented progress in job skills, social bonding, and knowledge shifts
 - o Achievement of 80% thresholds for each goal
- Reporting Timeline: Ongoing internal quarterly reports; final evaluation by October
 31, 2024

Participant Overview

Metric	Total
Total Participants	44
Completed Program	37

Completed Program with Vocational Training (VT) 33

Metric	Total
Attended Field Trips	40
RAFT Referrals	25
Received Stipends	33
Dropped Out	3

• Program Completion Rate: 84%

• VT Completion Rate (among completers): 89%

• Field Trip Participation Rate: 91%

Cohort Breakdown

Cohort	Quarter	Participants	Completed	VT Completed	Dropped
Cohort 1	Q6 (Jul–Sep 2022)	2	2	2	0
Cohort 2	Q7 (Oct-Dec 2022)	2	2	1	0
Cohort 3	Q8 (Jan–Mar 2023)	11	9	6	2
Cohort 4	Q9 (Apr–Jun 2023)	6	5	4	1
Cohort 5	Q10 (Jul-Sep 2023)	4	3	3	1
Cohort 6	Q11 (Oct-Dec 2023)	8	6	4	2
Cohort 7	Q12 (Jan–Mar 2024)	8	8	7	0
Cohort 8	Q13 (Apr–Jun 2024)	4	4	4	0
Cohort 9	Q14 (Jul-Dec 2024)	1	0	0	1

Field Trip Engagement

• Total Field Trips Held: 30+

• Participants Attending Field Trips: 40 of 44 (91%)

Most Frequented Locations:

Location	Trips Held
Yosemite National Park	17
San Luis National Wildlife Refuge	3
Fossil Discovery Center	2
Merced Wildlife Refuge (Crane Day)	2
UC Merced Vernal Pools & Grasslands	1
Outdoor Youth Connection Camping	1
3-Day / 2-Night Camping Trips	4

These trips delivered powerful experiential learning, expanding access to public lands and careers in conservation, biology, outdoor recreation, and natural resource management.

RAFT & Stipend Participation

Metric	Total	
RAFT-Referred Participants	25	

Participants Receiving Stipends 33

Note: Several non-RAFT youth also received stipends based on eligibility and engagement.

Nogram Attrition

• **Total Dropouts:** 3 (6.8%)

• **Primary Causes:** Disengagement during onboarding or lack of sustained interest.

Despite minor attrition, the program has maintained solid participant engagement and support, especially after onboarding phases.

- Reflection of Milestones
 - Summer 2024 Camping Trip: July 18–20
 - Continued Growth of Q13 & Q14 Cohorts
 - My City Mentoring featured in Mariposa Gazette (Mariposa Newspaper)

♦ GOAL #1: Increase Youth Knowledge and Understanding of the Impact of Cannabis Use

Objective A – 80% of youth demonstrate increased awareness of cannabis effects Indicators: Q34, Q35, Q36

- Q34 ("I have knowledge about how cannabis affects my life")
 - "A lot" increased from 16.7% to 73.3%
- Q35 ("Understanding of the harm of cannabis use")
 - "A lot" increased from 40% to 86.7%
- Q36 ("Shared knowledge with people outside of the program")
 - "A lot" increased from 20% to 33.3%
- **Goal met.** Youth showed a substantial increase in personal knowledge and harm awareness, though sharing that knowledge remained moderate.

Summary for Goal 1:

This goal was clearly achieved with marked growth in cannabis-related knowledge. While most participants internalized the harms, external communication (advocacy) was less prevalent, showing a potential area for more public speaking or peer education activities.

GOAL #2: Improve Youth's Self-Efficacy and Healthy Identity Development

Objective A – 80% of youth report increased confidence and self-awareness

Indicators: Q1, Q2, Q5, Q6

- Q1 ("I am confident in myself")
 - "A lot" increased from 26.7% to 60%
- Q2 ("I like who I am")
 - "A lot" rose from 40% to 76.7%
- Q5 ("I am proud of myself")
 - "A lot" increased from 33.3% to 70%
- Q6 ("I am aware of how my choices affect my future")
 - "A lot" jumped from 36.7% to 76.7%
- **☑ Goal exceeded.** High improvement in confidence, self-esteem, and future-minded awareness.

Summary for Goal 2:

Participants made major gains in their self-concept and confidence. This is foundational progress that will support healthy behavior and life decisions. The programming clearly made a personal impact on identity development.

GOAL #3: Increase Youth Engagement in Pro-Social Activities

Objective A – 80% of youth will engage in community or pro-social activities

Indicators: Q3, Q24, Q25

- Q3 ("I am engaged in positive activities")
 - "A lot" increased from 16.7% to 60%.
- Q24 ("Committed to staying involved in my community")
 - o "A lot" rose from 6.7% to **60%**
- Q25 ("Learned about expanded opportunities for things to do")
 - "A lot" rose sharply from 3.3% to 80%
- Goal mostly met. Interest and awareness increased dramatically, but actual commitment to community engagement (Q24) was slower to develop.

Summary for Goal 3:

There was a big rise in awareness of available positive activities and increased engagement. However, sustained or deeper community involvement (like volunteering or civic action) might need further reinforcement in future programming.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT:

Goal	Met?	Key Strengths	Needs Work
Goal 1	Yes	Cannabis knowledge, harm awareness	Confidence in advocacy
Goal 2	Yes	Self-confidence, identity growth	N/A
Goal 3	Mostly	Positive activity engagement, increased opportunity awareness	Community follow-through & long-term engagement

 GOAL #4: Create Strong Peer Groups Oriented Around Health Behaviors and Decision Making

Objective A – 80% will attend 2+ recreational outings

Indicator: Q4 - "I attended one or more recreational outings"

- Before: Only 13.3% reported attending outings "a lot"
- After: 63.3% reported "a lot" a +50% increase
 - Goal likely met. Significant increase in recreational participation.

Objective B – 80% will report learning about expanded opportunities

Indicator: Q25 - "I learned about expanded opportunities for 'things to do"

- Before: Only 3.3% said "a lot"
- After: 80% now report "a lot"
 - Goal clearly met. Massive gain in awareness.

Objective C - 80% will report connecting with another youth

Indicators: Q21, Q22, Q27

- Q27 ("I connected with other youth"):
 - Before: 10% "a lot"
 - o After: 46.7% "a lot", 50% "somewhat" 96.7% positive connection
- Q21 & Q22 show consistent increases in confidence and socializing
 - Goal exceeded. Clear peer bonding.

Objective D - 80% return post-program for a recreational outing

- Data not yet available (post-program follow-up required)
 - Pending assessment

Summary for Goal 4:

There was strong engagement in group activities and significant growth in peer relationships and awareness of healthy social opportunities. All measurable objectives were either met or exceeded.

GOAL #5: Build Up Youth Competencies for Adulthood

Objective A – 80% report increased employable skills

Indicators: Q11 & Q28

- Q28 ("Increased employable skills"):
 - o "A lot" grew from 3.3% to 80% dramatic improvement
 - Goal met. Strong increase in skills confidence.

Objective B - 80% report a desire to make healthy choices

Indicators: Q31, Q32, Q33

- Q31 ("Desire to make healthier lifestyle choices"):
 - "A lot" rose from 13.3% to 73.3%
- Q32 and Q33 also show positive trends (up to 70%+ reporting "a lot")
 - Goal likely met. Behavioral shift toward positive choices evident.

Objective C - 80% engage in job training activities

Indicators: Q29, Q10

- Q10 ("Received job training"):
 - "A lot" rose from 6.7% to 70%
- Q29 ("Applied for a job/resume built"):
 - Lower engagement; only 23.3% report "a lot"
 - Mixed results. While training was strong, actual application of jobseeking skills was lower.

Summary for Goal 5:

There were significant gains in employability skills and personal development. However, hands-on application like job seeking or resume building lags behind. Additional support may help youth transition these skills into action.

GOAL #6: Increase Perception of Harm of Cannabis Use

Objective A - 80% will understand the harm of cannabis use

Indicators: Q35-Q38

- Q35 ("Understanding of harm"):
 - "A lot" rose from 40% to 86.7%
- Q36–Q38 (sharing knowledge, discouraging use) show moderate gains:
 - Q36: "A lot" up to 33.3%
 - o Q37: "A lot" up to 46.7%

- o Q38: "A lot" only 23.3%
- Understanding improved significantly
- But influence on others (sharing/discouraging use) is more modest

Summary for Goal 6:

Youth gained strong awareness of cannabis harm, but outward advocacy (sharing with family/friends) remains an area for further growth. Future programming may benefit from roleplay or peer-led campaigns to increase advocacy comfort.

OVERALL ASSESSMENT:

Goal number	Met?	Goal Description
Goal 1	✓ Yes	Increase Youth Knowledge and Understanding of the Impact of Cannabis Use
Goal 2	✓ Exceeded	Improve Youth's Self-Efficacy and Healthy Identity Development
Goal 3	Mostly	Increases Youth Engagement in Pro Social Activities
Goal 4	✓ Yes	Create Strong Peer Groups Oriented Around Health Behaviors and Decision Making
Goal 5	Yes	Building Up Youth Competence for Adulthood
Goal 6	Yes	Increase Perception of Harm of Cannabis Use

Appendix

Summaries of Mentees & Midpoints Reviews

Summary of Mentee Mid-Point Review – A.V.

Adrian shared that his experience in the My City Mentoring program has been very positive, especially enjoying new opportunities and outdoor adventures like rock climbing in Yosemite. He's learned valuable lessons about caring for the environment, being responsible, and opening up more personally.

Adrian feels comfortable with his mentor, Sophia, who offers supportive and practical advice—such as hiking tips—and helps guide him through personal decisions. One impactful moment was when she discussed the dangers of THC use, which left a strong impression on him.

He praised the program's activities and recommended keeping the Yosemite trip and Movies in the Park events as part of the experience, calling them both fun and meaningful.

Summary of Mentee Mid-Point Review – J.B.

Jose has had a positive experience with the My City Mentoring program so far, noting that the staff has been friendly and supportive. Throughout the program, he has gained awareness of community events, such as Earth Day, and has learned more about people from different parts of the city.

Jose shares that he has built a strong and comfortable relationship with his mentor, Sophia, who regularly checks in on him and ensures he feels supported. He has also learned valuable skills from his mentor, including time management, planning, communication, and logistics.

Overall, Jose appreciates the support offered by the program and finds the environment helpful and encouraging for asking questions and receiving assistance.

Summary of Mentee Mid-Point Review – J.A.

Jaymar has had a positive experience with the My City Mentoring program. He enjoyed activities such as learning about wildlife, exploring parks, and visiting Yosemite National Park also local refuges. He appreciates the chance to learn more about his city and engage with nature.

Through the program, Jaymar has learned about city projects, sports complexes, museums, and rock climbing. He values the exposure to new experiences and knowledge of the city's resources.

Jaymar describes his mentor as welcoming and hospitable, creating a comfortable environment. He mentions feeling more confident and open to learning and expressing himself.

He has also learned problem-solving skills from his mentor, specifically how to break down struggles to help others and find solutions.

In additional comments, Jaymar highlights a memorable trip to Yosemite with his group and expresses excitement about experiences involving nature and community.

Summary of Mentee Mid-Point Review – I.V.

Isabella described her experience in the My City Mentoring program as positive and enriching. She highlighted learning a lot about nature—especially birds—and gaining more knowledge about her community.

She's learned about different species of birds, their habitats, and how to observe and identify them. The program also deepened her understanding of the environment and the importance of protecting natural spaces.

Bella feels comfortable with her mentor, Sophia, who she describes as helpful, engaged, and always working hard. She appreciates how Sophia encourages her and helps her feel more open and confident.

From her mentor's experience, Bella has gained skills in birdwatching and nature studies. She also learned about bird migration and how to use tools like binoculars to better explore wildlife.

In her additional comments, Bella shared that she feels empowered to be herself, values how the program helps the community, and sees it as a great opportunity for young teens to grow and learn.

My City Mentoring Midpoint Review: K. S.

How has your overall experience with the My City Mentoring program been so far?

I've truly loved and enjoyed my experience with the My City Mentoring program. It pushed me to try something new, and I especially loved the nature-focused activities. I've built a deeper appreciation for the outdoors and for learning more about my own community. Exploring Yosemite was definitely the highlight! I got to climb boulders, which gave me an incredible sense of freedom. Seeing parts of Yosemite that I'd only seen in pictures or read about in books felt surreal. Everything about those trips was amazing.

Do you feel the resources/training provided by the My City Mentoring Coordinator prepared you for your role as a mentee?

Yes, definitely. The meetings in Merced helped me learn more about my community, including parks I hadn't been to before and even the new sports complex. It gave me a better understanding of what's available around me and helped me feel more connected.

Have you and your mentor been able to build a comfortable working relationship? Give some examples of how your mentor makes you comfortable.

Yes, the relationship with my mentor has been beneficial. Sophia and I share a lot of interests, and she's genuinely kind and easy to talk to. She gives great advice, and I'd really like to keep in touch with her even after the program ends.

Are you able to learn from your mentor's experiences and background? Give some examples of skills you have gained from your mentor.

I've learned so much from Sophia just by listening to her share her personal experiences and successes. She taught me how to use a credit card responsibly and how to fill up gas in a car. I also learned how to use binoculars and monocular to spot and identify birds in parks like Applegate. We would draw the birds we saw from memory and then look up their species in books. It was a fun and educational experience that I'll never forget.

Midpoint Review Summary - K. S.

Karina has had a very positive experience with the My City Mentoring program. She enjoyed exploring nature, especially the trip to Yosemite, which gave her a new appreciation for the outdoors and her community. The program's meetings in Merced helped her learn more about local resources, including parks and new facilities. Karina developed a strong and supportive relationship with her mentor, Sophia, who shares similar interests and offers helpful advice. Through their time together, Karina learned practical life skills like using a credit card, pumping gas, and using binoculars to observe and identify birds. The experience has been meaningful, educational, and fun.

My City Mentoring Midpoint Review: D.F.

How has your overall experience with the My City Mentoring program been so far? My experience has been fun and interesting. The program keeps me active and has helped me develop valuable social skills, like how to greet and help others. I've also gained useful skills

develop valuable social skills, like how to greet and help others. I've also gained useful skills through internships that build confidence and prepare me for future employment.

Do you feel the resources/training provided by the My City Mentoring Coordinator prepared you for your role as a mentee?

Yes, for sure. I'm more willing to help others when needed, and I feel more confident in giving advice, which shows how much I've grown.

Have you and your mentor been able to build a comfortable working relationship? Give some examples of how your mentor makes you comfortable.

Yes, definitely. We've had meaningful conversations about our pasts and found similarities, which helped me open up. My mentor taught me different ways to handle situations, which made me feel supported and understood.

Are you able to learn from your mentor's experiences and background? Give some examples of skills you have gained from your mentor.

I've mainly learned the importance of communication and maintaining a friendly attitude. That kind of positive energy helps people feel more appreciated and comfortable—it breaks down barriers and makes relationships easier.

Additional Comments:

The Yosemite trips really opened my mind. They gave me a sense of peace I didn't know I was missing. Sometimes, even my own thoughts can feel overwhelming, but this program taught me that nature is a simple and powerful way to find peace and realign myself.

Midpoint Review Summary – D.F.

Dylan describes his experience with the My City Mentoring program as fun, interesting, and valuable for personal growth. He's developed social skills, learned how to support others, and built confidence through internships. His relationship with his mentor is strong and has helped him learn new ways to handle challenges and communicate effectively. The Yosemite trips had a deep impact on him, offering peace and clarity. The program has helped Dylan find personal alignment and new ways to approach life.

My City Mentoring Midpoint Review: A.R.

How has your overall experience with the My City Mentoring program been so far?

It's been pretty fun! We've gone to parks, helped clean up, and attended cool events like Movies in the Park, baseball games, and trips to Yosemite. This was actually my first time visiting Yosemite during the summer. The trips with Ron and Sacred Rok were really nice—I even learned how water is naturally filtered in the wild.

What are some things you've learned about while being in the program?

I've learned that there are way more activities happening in parks than most people realize. It really encouraged me to spend more time outdoors instead of staying inside. Helping set up events in the parks made me want to get more involved and even volunteer in my community.

Have you and your mentor been able to build a comfortable working relationship? Give some examples of how your mentor makes you comfortable.

Yes, we've built a comfortable connection. We talk about things she likes, like sports, and also about my interests in nature. Those casual conversations make it easier to connect, and having in-person talks feels more real and meaningful.

Additional Comments:

The program is perfect as it is. No changes needed!

Midpoint Review Summary – A. R.

Aden has had a fun and engaging experience with the My City Mentoring program. He's participated in various park activities and events, including his first summer trip to Yosemite with Sacred Rok, where he learned about natural water filtration. The program helped him discover how many activities are happening in local parks and motivated him to spend more time outdoors. His mentor has created a comfortable space through conversations about shared interests. Aden feels the program is running well and doesn't suggest any changes.

My City Mentoring Midpoint Review: A. Ag.

How has your overall experience with the My City Mentoring program been so far?

It's been pretty good! I looked forward to it every week. I liked getting to explore the parks around Merced and helping—it felt good. I also really like my mentor, Sophia.

What are some things you've learned about while being in the program?

I've learned a lot about the parks and the hiking trails in Yosemite. I was also shown how to help run sports activities and learned about events and programs run by the Department of Parks and Community Services.

Have you and your mentor been able to build a comfortable working relationship? Give some examples of how your mentor makes you comfortable.

Yes. Sophia made me feel comfortable by showing me future community projects, like CP42. I think it's cool that the community is getting a new park.

Additional Comments:

Everyone in the program is nice—it's a cool group to be around.

Midpoint Review Summary - A. Ag.

Angel has had a positive experience with the My City Mentoring program, looking forward to it each week. He enjoyed learning about local parks, participating in hikes in Yosemite, and gaining insight into sports and events through the Department of Parks and Community Services. His mentor, Sophia, has helped him feel connected by showing him upcoming projects like CP42, which sparked his interest in community development. Angel appreciates the friendly and supportive environment of the program.

My City Mentoring Midpoint Review: M. B.-A.

How has your overall experience with the My City Mentoring program been so far?

It's been a great program—I've learned a lot. I got to help in community services and explore different places, including learning about animals and their environments. The Wildlife Refuge was one of my favorite experiences. I was surprised it was so close by, and I loved that it's a safe space for animals. I also really enjoyed my time with my mentor—we got along well and even joked around. Meeting Ron from Sacred Rok during our Yosemite trip was amazing. I loved the sense of adventure throughout the program.

What are some things you've learned about while being in the program?

I've gained new skills and learned about community and volunteer opportunities that I didn't know about before. I also learned more about the environment and how nature functions differently, especially with bird migration and different bird species. Personally, I discovered that I wasn't as social as I wanted to be at the beginning—but now, I'm much more comfortable around others.

Have you and your mentor been able to build a comfortable working relationship? Give some examples of how your mentor makes you comfortable.

Yes, absolutely. When I first joined, I was shy, but my relationship with Sophia grew over time. Our weekly meetings helped me feel more comfortable, and the reminder texts she sent helped me stay engaged and consistent. Ron also made me feel comfortable by sharing his past experiences, which encouraged me to open up about mine too.

Are you able to learn from your mentor's experiences and background? Give some examples of skills you have gained from your mentor.

Yes, Sophia shared her experiences and gave helpful suggestions for dealing with different situations. I've learned how to be a better listener and to open up more without fear. These skills have helped me become a better communicator and friend.

Additional Comments:

I've learned so much about community opportunities through this program. I think it would be even better if there were more chances to get to know the other participants more closely so that everyone feels more comfortable together.

Midpoint Review Summary - M.B-A.

Mariana has had a great experience with the My City Mentoring program. She's gained environmental knowledge, learned about local community services, and discovered new volunteer opportunities. Highlights include visiting the Wildlife Refuge and going on adventures in Yosemite, especially with Ron from Sacred Rok. Her mentor, Sophia, helped her grow out of her initial shyness and become more open and confident. Mariana has developed strong listening and social skills, and she recommends more activities focused on connecting participants with one another.

My City Mentoring Midpoint Review: G.G.

How has your overall experience with the My City Mentoring program been so far?

It's been good—I love it! This program has given me so many opportunities, like traveling, helping in the community, and making new friends. Everyone in the program now feels like a friend. One of my favorite memories was going to Yosemite and playing in the snow. I love being out in nature. Seeing the animals and the openness of the park makes me feel at home. It's so vast—you don't even know where the park ends. I've always loved the outdoors, and this program gave me a real chance to enjoy it.

What are some things you've learned about while being in the program?

I've learned about different animals, how their eating and hydration habits compare to ours, and about human water usage and recycling efforts. I also learned about community events like Movies in the Park, and it made me want to help more. I'm even planning to try softball this year! I've gotten really interested in how community events are planned and put together.

Have you and your mentor been able to build a comfortable working relationship? Give some examples of how your mentor makes you comfortable.

Yes, my mentor Sophia and I have a very comfortable relationship. She really takes care of us

and makes sure we feel safe. She encourages me to explore the world around me and pushes me to grow. She feels like a mother figure to me.

Are you able to learn from your mentor's experiences and background? Give some examples of skills you have gained from your mentor.

Yes, I've learned a lot from Sophia's story. Her background and experiences are similar to mine, which makes her even more inspiring to me. She's motivated me to consider a future in recreation and working with children.

Additional Comments:

If I had to describe these trips in one word, it would be *peaceful*. And that kind of peace is hard to come by. Being in nature helped clear my mind—it made me feel calm and less confused about things. I was so relaxed during one of our Yosemite trips, I even fell asleep on a rock while listening to a waterfall. This is such a great program for helping youth experience nature and travel—it truly makes a difference.

Midpoint Review Summary - G. G.

Gracie describes her My City Mentoring experience as deeply meaningful and transformative. She cherishes the opportunities the program has provided, from traveling and connecting with nature to volunteering and making lasting friendships. Yosemite left a big impact on her, bringing a sense of peace and clarity. Through her mentor Sophia, Gracie found both guidance and inspiration, describing her as a nurturing figure who's helped her grow. The program has sparked Gracie's interest in recreation and youth work and strengthened her connection to the outdoors and her community.

My City Mentoring Midpoint Review: A. M.-S.

How has your overall experience with the My City Mentoring program been so far? It's been fun and a great way to spend my time. The program has been really good for socializing. I've found both the group meetings and the one-on-one mentoring sessions to be helpful and supportive.

What are some things you've learned about while being in the program?

One of the most important things I've learned is that it's okay to ask for help. At first, I found it a little embarrassing, but through the program, I've gained more confidence in reaching out when I need it. That's been a really big step for me.

Have you and your mentor been able to build a comfortable working relationship? Give some examples of how your mentor makes you comfortable.

Yes, our relationship is good. I feel comfortable talking and working with my mentor, and that helps me feel more supported in the program.

Additional Comments:

I think everyone should go on the trips. They offer endless opportunities for adventure and exploration. Being able to explore freely makes me feel free. I really admired Ron during our Yosemite trips—especially his bravery while rock climbing and his ability to make quick

decisions. I tend to take a long time to decide things, so I admire how quickly and confidently he acts. That really stuck with me.

Midpoint Review Summary – A.M-S

Anely has enjoyed her time in the My City Mentoring program, finding it both fun and valuable for personal growth. She appreciates the social aspect and found the group and one-on-one meetings helpful. One of her key takeaways has been learning the importance of asking for help and feeling more confident in doing so. She built a comfortable relationship with her mentor and found inspiration during the program's trips—especially admiring Ron's bravery and decisiveness during outdoor adventures. Anely encourages others to go on the trips, seeing them as a way to explore freely and build confidence.

My City Mentoring Midpoint Review: S.S.

How has your overall experience with the My City Mentoring program been so far? It's been good! I've enjoyed all the meetings I've attended and especially appreciated the park tours. Even though I'm a Merced native, the program helped me recognize and appreciate the actual names of the parks and their significance. It's given me a new perspective on my own community.

What are some things you've learned about while being in the program?

I was surprised to learn how big and active our community really is. I knew about some programs like basketball, softball, and Movies in the Park (MIP), but I didn't realize how many other programs the Department of Parks and Community Services offers. I really enjoyed the MIP events—especially the *Spiderman* movie—and loved the Movie at the Pool experience.

Have you and your mentor been able to build a comfortable working relationship? Give some examples of how your mentor makes you comfortable.

Yes, our relationship is very comfortable. One example that stands out is when we went hiking in Yosemite. During those long walks, we'd have conversations about all sorts of things—life, random topics—and it made me feel at ease and supported.

Are you able to learn from your mentor's experiences and background? Give some examples of skills you have gained from your mentor.

Absolutely. One moment that stuck with me was when I shared how walking in public can feel intimidating—especially when someone is walking behind you. Sophia gave me advice on how to cope by simply being kind and saying "hi" to people, rather than assuming the worst. It helped me see how kindness and confidence can change how you experience the world. Sophia's energy and positivity also really add to the overall experience—she's just a great person to be around.

Additional Comments:

I'm super excited to go to Yosemite again!

Midpoint Review Summary – S.S.

Sianna's experience with the My City Mentoring program has been very positive. As a Merced native, the program helped her rediscover her city through park tours and events. She's gained a

deeper appreciation for the variety of community programs available, and she especially enjoyed Movies in the Park and Movie at the Pool. Sianna has built a strong and comfortable relationship with her mentor Sophia and values their conversations, and the life advice shared during hikes. She's learned to face social situations with more kindness and confidence and is excited for upcoming adventures—especially returning to Yosemite.

My City Mentoring Midpoint Review: G. A.

How has your overall experience with the My City Mentoring program been so far?

It's been pretty good. I've met new people and have been talking more than I used to. I visited parks for the first time in years and even went to Yosemite for the first time. It was my first time hiking, seeing a waterfall, and just being in that kind of natural environment. The experience helped me become more open and less shy.

What are some things you've learned about while being in the program?

I've learned about water conservation, nature, animals, and Yosemite's natural beauty—including waterfalls and rock climbing. I also picked up new skills like drawing (I drew a hot dog stand and a tree). Most importantly, I've learned how to socialize better.

Have you and your mentor been able to build a comfortable working relationship? Give some examples of how your mentor makes you feel comfortable.

Yes, definitely. Sophia is really nice and open. She doesn't judge anyone, and she's never shied to talk to people. What I appreciate the most is that she never makes fun of you, even if you mess up. That makes it easy to feel comfortable and supported.

Are you able to learn from your mentor's experience and background? Please give examples of some skills you have gained from your mentor so far.

Yes. Sophia encourages us to stay away from drugs and alcohol, work hard in school, avoid hanging out with the wrong crowd, and just be kinder in general. These are lessons that have stuck with me.

Additional Comments:

This program has introduced me to so many new things—like rock climbing and seeing snow for the first time. I even had a snowball fight! Going to Yosemite has helped me become less afraid of heights. (I might still have a little PTSD from rides at Six Flags, though!) Overall, the program has made a big difference in how I see the world and how I connect with others.

Midpoint Review Summary – G. A.

Gerardo's experience in the My City Mentoring Program has been filled with firsts—from hiking and seeing waterfalls in Yosemite to participating in snowball fights and trying rock climbing. The program helped him become more social and less shy, while also teaching him about nature, water conservation, and creative expression through drawing. Gerardo appreciates the supportive relationship he has built with his mentor, Sophia, who has guided him with kindness and positive advice. He's learned valuable life lessons about staying on the right path and treating others with respect. Yosemite especially had a powerful impact on his confidence and comfort in nature.

My City Mentoring Midpoint Review: M. M.-M.

How has your overall experience with the My City Mentoring program been so far? It's been good and fun. I've enjoyed meeting new people, and I really like Sophia—she's cool and easy to be around.

What are some things you've learned about while being in the program?

I've learned how to be more responsible and aware of how my actions affect myself and others.

Have you and your mentor been able to build a comfortable working relationship? Give some examples of how your mentor makes you feel comfortable.

Yes. Sophia makes it easy to talk and be open. She lets us share how things are going, like our experiences with RAFT, and she relates to us. She always reminds us that we're not alone. Her positive energy and constant smile make her feel like a comforting presence.

Are you able to learn from your mentor's experience and background? Please give examples of some skills you have gained from your mentor so far.

Yes, I've learned a lot. Sophia taught me the importance of having a positive attitude, being respectful, and focusing on self-care—taking care of yourself instead of always worrying about others.

Additional Comments:

Better snacks would be appreciated!

Midpoint Review Summary - M.M.-M.

Mia describes her time in the My City Mentoring Program as fun and meaningful. She's grown more responsible and gained insight into self-care and maintaining a positive mindset. Mia shares a strong and supportive relationship with her mentor, Sophia, who makes participants feel heard, understood, and not alone. Her constant positivity has made a lasting impact on Mia. The only request Mia has is for better snacks!

My City Mentoring Midpoint Review: T.W.

How has your overall experience with the My City Mentoring program been so far?

"I like it." I really appreciate that the program only meets once a week—it makes it feel more relaxed and enjoyable. It's not like a class or a huge commitment, and I like that I can go at my own pace. Even with the flexibility, it still feels very productive.

What are some things you've learned about while being in the program?

I've learned about behind-the-scenes operations like the evacuation of animals from Applegate Park Zoo during the floods. It was interesting to hear how the bears were relocated and are still being transitioned back. I also learned about how the Civic Center functions and got to know the

different departments and how they support programs and events like sports and Movies in the Park.

Have you and your mentor been able to build a comfortable working relationship? Give some examples of how your mentor makes you feel comfortable.

Yes, it's been fun and enjoyable. I appreciate that Sophia asks thoughtful questions. She's easy to talk to, and I even felt comfortable enough to share some of my personal music during rides. Her openness and willingness to share her own life experiences make our conversations more natural and meaningful.

Are you able to learn from your mentor's experience and background? Please give examples of some skills you have gained from your mentor so far.

Yes, I see the potential to learn a lot, especially from her college experience. Watching how Sophia interacts with others—how personable and confident she is when talking to people and local businesses—has been really inspiring. I'm not naturally that outgoing, so it's great to observe and learn from her.

Additional Comments:

I would love to have some independent tasks or project-based work, like designing a flyer for a program. It would help me feel more included and involved with the department beyond just site visits or vocational training.

Midpoint Review Summary - T. W.

Tynique finds the My City Mentoring Program enjoyable and productive, especially appreciating its laid-back, once-a-week structure. She values learning about the inner workings of city departments and real-life examples like the Applegate Zoo evacuations. Her relationship with her mentor, Sophia, is comfortable and supportive enhanced by shared music and meaningful conversations. Tynique has been inspired by Sophia's social confidence and sees growth in her own communication skills. She also expressed interest in having more hands-on, creative responsibilities within the department.

My City Mentoring Midpoint review summary: A. A.

Overall Experience:

Angel describes their experience in the program as positive. Initially hesitant to try new things, they've come to enjoy learning about the Parks and Community Services Department—especially events like Movies in the Park, which they hadn't known existed in Merced. Angel also highlights forming a meaningful connection with their mentor, Sophia.

Program Learnings:

Angel has developed an interest in city-sponsored activities like Movies in the Park and discovered more about Merced's recreational offerings, including skate parks and local leagues.

Mentor Relationship:

Angel feels very comfortable with their mentor, describing her as "cool" and caring. Sophia

regularly checks in about Angel's Day and school life, making Angel feel supported—something they note only their mom does. This connection has made Angel feel seen and valued.

Skills and Inspiration from Mentor:

Through shared stories about family and sports, especially basketball, Angel has been inspired by their mentor's background. Learning about Sophia's experience as a player and coach has motivated Angel to consider becoming a coach themselves, possibly in hockey or football.

Additional Comments:

Angel expresses enthusiasm for the program and appreciation for discovering new opportunities and activities within the community. They've even encouraged their brother to get involved in local youth programs like teal top street hockey.

My City Mentoring Midpoint review summary: G. H.

Overall Experience:

Genessa describes the experience as adventurous and stimulating in a positive way. She enjoyed participating in activities like preparing for movie nights, organizing totes for concessions, and learning about the behind-the-scenes efforts of the Parks and Community Services Department.

Program Learnings:

She feels well-prepared and informed through the program and has gained a broader understanding of how city-run events are planned and executed.

Mentor Relationship:

Genessa has developed a strong and friendly relationship with her mentor, sharing daily life conversations and bonding over time. She appreciates her mentor's helpful and outgoing personality, noting that their connection feels more like a friendship.

Skills and Inspiration from Mentor:

Through her mentor, Genessa has learned about new park locations, the planning and logistics involved in community events and gained insight into the police department. Her awareness of community operations has grown significantly.

Additional Comments:

Genessa expresses gratitude for being part of the program and is happy to have taken this opportunity.

My City Mentoring Midpoint review summary: J.S.

Overall Experience:

Jane has found the program to be peaceful and enjoyable. She especially appreciated nature-focused outings like Crane Day and the visit to the San Luis Refuge, which offered calming experiences. Though she grew up on a ranch, these trips helped her gain a new appreciation for nature. Now living in town, she values these moments even more. Jane has also been involved in setting up events and decorating with lights, learning firsthand how much time and energy Parks

and Community Services staff invest in serving the community. Her experience has given her a greater respect for city workers and the challenges they face.

Program Learnings:

Jane discovered a passion for helping others and now wants to attend Stanislaus State to become a social worker focused on supporting less fortunate children. She's also learned about the importance of community service and the effort it takes to create public events.

Mentor Relationship:

Jane has built a trusting and comfortable relationship with both Alyssa from RAFT and her mentor Sophia. She values their confidentiality and understanding, especially since she finds it difficult to express herself. Alyssa has become someone Jane feels she can talk to about things she can't even share with her mom.

Skills and Inspiration from Mentor:

Through her mentor's example, Jane has learned that success takes hard work and that things won't simply be handed to her. She admires her mentor's strength, extroverted nature, and selflessness, which have served as an inspiration.

Additional Comments:

Jane feels the program has been well worth her time. She enjoyed helping with event setups and learning more about recreation work. A teacher once complimented her athletic ability, which sparked her interest in sports—an interest she hopes to explore further.

My City Mentoring Midpoint review summary: E.G.

Overall Experience:

Eduardo describes the program as a positive and meaningful experience, stating he prefers being in My City Mentoring over being at home. He appreciates the respectful and supportive staff and credits the program with helping him stay focused and think more seriously about his future. One of the standout experiences for him was visiting a museum for the first time—the Fossil Discovery Center—where he was especially fascinated by the short-faced bear exhibit. Eduardo believes this kind of program should be offered more often to youth as an alternative to juvenile hall, noting it encourages good decision-making.

Program Learnings:

Eduardo has gained real-world knowledge through hands-on experiences. For example, his mentor took him to Smart & Final and taught him about budgeting, explaining the importance of tracking spending and sticking to a set amount. This experience helped him understand financial responsibility.

Mentor Relationship:

Eduardo feels safe and supported in his relationship with his mentor Sophia. He appreciates being able to talk about difficult topics and values the sense of security and understanding his mentor provides.

Skills and Inspiration from Mentor:

Eduardo has learned from his mentor's Sophia openness about past mistakes and how she's grown from them. Her honesty has helped him reflect on his own path and stay motivated to make positive choices.

Additional Comments:

The program has inspired Eduardo to think about his long-term goals—he now wants to become an underwater welder and plans to pursue swimming to support that ambition.

My City Mentoring Program – Midpoint Review Summary

Focus: Mentor Relationships & Participant Highlights

Mentor Relationships: Participants consistently described strong, supportive, and meaningful connections with their mentors. These relationships have had a profound impact on their personal growth and sense of belonging:

- A. A. described their mentor, Sophia, as "cool" and caring. Her consistent check-ins and interest in Angel's day-to-day life made Angel feel truly seen and valued—something they said only their mom typically does.
- **G. H.** formed a friendship-like bond with her mentor, appreciating her outgoing nature and supportive presence. Their conversations span everyday topics and have built a sense of trust and camaraderie.
- J. S. emphasized the importance of confidentiality and emotional support from both her mentor and Alyssa from RAFT. For Jane, this relationship offered a rare safe space to open up—something she struggles to do, even with family.
- E. G. expressed deep gratitude for his mentor Sophia's understanding and honesty. Her willingness to share personal lessons helped Eduardo feel safe and motivated to make positive life choices.

These mentoring relationships have not only provided emotional support, but also served as sources of inspiration, guidance, and motivation for future aspirations.

What Participants Liked About the Program:

Participants praised several aspects of the My City Mentoring experience:

- Exposure to New Opportunities: Many participants discovered local events and recreational resources they were previously unaware of—like *Movies in the Park*, nature outings, and youth leagues.
- **Hands-On Learning**: Activities like event setup, budgeting, and preparing concessions provided valuable real-world experience.
- Personal Growth and Exploration:
 - Angel became more open to new experiences and was inspired to consider coaching in sports.

- Genessa gained a deeper understanding of how city events operate and appreciated learning about police and park systems.
- o Jane discovered a passion for social work and helping others.
- Eduardo began to consider his long-term future seriously and now aspires to become an underwater welder.
- **Safe and Supportive Environment**: Every participant highlighted how the program created a welcoming, respectful atmosphere where they felt heard, supported, and motivated.

My City Mentoring Program: Midpoint Review Summary

Focus Areas: Mentor Relationships & Key Learnings

A. A.

- Relationship with Mentor: Angel has built a strong connection with her mentor, Sophia. She feels genuinely cared for, noting that her mentor is the only person besides her mom who asks about her day. This relationship has helped Angel feel valued and supported.
- **Key Learnings:** Angel discovered community programs like Movies in the Park and developed an interest in sports coaching (hockey/football). She also encouraged her brother to join youth programs, reflecting her growing sense of community engagement.

G. H.

- **Relationship with Mentor:** Genessa enjoys a friendly and supportive bond with her mentor. They talk about daily life and have developed a relationship that feels more like a friendship. She appreciates her mentor's outgoing and helpful nature.
- **Key Learnings:** Genessa has gained insight into how Parks and Community Services operates. She learned about event preparation, park locations, and even increased her understanding of the police department's role in the community.

J. S.

- Relationship with Mentor: Jane has developed trust with both her mentor Sophia and Alyssa from RAFT. Confidentiality and emotional support are key components of their relationship. Jane values being able to speak with them about things she can't share at home.
- **Key Learnings:** Jane learned about the effort behind community events and realized her desire to become a social worker. She discovered a passion for helping others and gained appreciation for the hard work city employees do.

E. G.

• **Relationship with Mentor:** Eduardo feels safe and supported by his mentor. Their relationship allows him to talk about difficult subjects, giving him a sense of emotional security and understanding.

• **Key Learnings:** Eduardo learned practical life skills, such as budgeting during a trip to the grocery store. He also reflected on his future goals, including becoming an underwater welder, inspired by his mentor's honest sharing of past mistakes and personal growth.

Summary: Across all reviews, mentees report strong, trusting relationships with their mentors that provide emotional support and encouragement. Common themes in their learning include increased awareness of community services, hands-on life skills like budgeting and event preparation, and personal growth around setting goals and finding purpose through mentorship.

Mentor Relationships (Sophia & Others)

Common Themes:

- Comfort and Trust: All participants expressed feeling comfortable and supported by their mentors, especially Sophia. This trust allowed mentees to open up personally and grow.
- Consistent Support: Sophia and other mentors checked in regularly, provided practical advice, and shared personal experiences that made a meaningful impact (e.g., advice on THC, financial skills, dealing with life challenges).
- Skill-Building: Mentees learned a variety of life skills from their mentors, such as:
 - o Communication and listening (Mariana, Dylan)
 - o Time management and logistics (Jose)
 - o Financial responsibility and gas-pumping (Karina)
 - o Birdwatching and nature observation (Bella, Karina)
 - o Problem-solving and social skills (Jaymar, Dylan)