



THE SPIRIT OF MENTORSHIP

The Holiday Gift that Brings Hope to
Texas Youth This Season

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As the holiday season unfolds, the true spirit of giving shines brightest through mentorship. Beyond the glittering lights and wrapped presents, it is the gift of guidance, encouragement, and hope that transforms young lives. Family Roots for Life, Inc. reminds us that the most lasting holiday treasures are not found under a tree, but in the bonds that inspire resilience and possibility.

“The child who is not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth.”

This African proverb is more than a warning—it is a call to action; and for Atasha M. Kelley-Harris, M.Ed., CFLE, LCPC, Founding President and CEO of Family Roots for Life, Inc., it serves as a personal motivation and a reminder that communities must step forward to embrace their youth.

For young people—especially those on the brink of adulthood, aging out of foster care, or living without permanent families—connection and support can change the course of a life. Family Roots for Life, Inc., a growing regional leader in youth mentoring, is deepening its commitment to youth and young adults through Roots & Wings, its flagship mentorship program that serves Greater Houston and 12 surrounding counties.

“Mentoring is about being steady, showing love in action, and building trust with young people who may never have had someone in their corner,” said Kelley-Harris. “We’re building a relational network where every youth and young adult can experience what it means to belong.”

Pictured: Lance Rogers, Family Roots S.A.F.E. Trained Mentor, enjoying time with his mentee.

THE POWER OF MENTORSHIP

Research consistently shows that mentorship is one of the most effective interventions for at-risk youth:

- **58%** of youth say their mentor helped support their mental health
- Mentored youth are **76%** more likely to aspire to college
- **67%** participate in extracurriculars and **51%** hold leadership roles
- Mentoring **reduces** delinquency and **promotes** resilience



THE RISKS OF GROWING UP WITHOUT A MENTOR

The absence of a mentor in a young person's life isn't just a missed opportunity—it's a potential turning point. Nearly 9 million at-risk youth in the U.S. will reach adulthood without ever having a mentor. That gap is more than emotional—it's structural. These youth often face:



Increased school dropout rates and lower academic achievement



Greater susceptibility to criminal activity, substance use, and early parenthood



Persistent mental health challenges, including anxiety, depression, and chronic loneliness



Limited professional exposure, social capital, and life skills development



Disconnection from civic life and community participation



HOW IT IMPACTS SYSTEMS IN TEXAS

"Mentorship is not just a personal investment—it's a cost-effective public solution," said Kelley-Harris. "When we surround young people with consistent, caring adults and mentors, they're more likely to thrive and we reduce strain on multiple systems that are already over-burdened and absorb the costs."

In Texas, research shows the consequences of youth growing up without mentors are felt across multiple systems:

- **Child Welfare:** In 2025, about 1,200–1,300 youth are expected to age out of foster care in Texas without a permanent support network, leaving them vulnerable to homelessness, trafficking, and poor life outcomes.
- **Juvenile Justice:** Youth without mentors are more likely to enter the justice system. Studies show that mentoring can reduce recidivism and improve outcomes for adjudicated youth.
- **Education:** Students lacking adult guidance are more likely to disengage from school, contributing to lower graduation rates and increased strain on dropout recovery programs.
- **Homelessness:** Youth aging out of foster care without mentors face one of the highest risks of housing instability, lacking guidance and networks to secure safe, stable futures.
- **Mental Health Services:** The absence of supportive relationships contributes to higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide among youth, increasing demand on already stretched behavioral health systems.
- **Economic Development:** Youth without mentors often lack access to career pathways, reducing workforce readiness and long-term economic mobility.

"I began mentoring late last year through the Roots & Wings Mentoring Program. I had participated in school-based mentoring programs growing up and wanted to continue offering that kind of support—especially with an organization I believed in," said Lance Rogers, a Family Roots S.A.F.E. Trained Mentor. "Volunteer Houston introduced me to Family Roots. After attending the introductory meetings and completing the training, I saw just how powerfully a mentor can influence a child's success. I was hooked."

HOW MENTORS INTERACT WITH MENTEES

Mentorship thrives on authentic connection. Adults can engage meaningfully with youth in a variety of ways:

- Set goals together and work toward achievements step-by-step
- Participate in activities the mentee enjoys such as creative arts or sports
- Explore new experiences together, such as campus visits or volunteer events
- Provide a safe space to discuss stress, challenges, and aspirations
- Stay connected regularly and celebrate accomplishments

"Depending on the needs and challenges your mentee may face, simply having someone consistent—someone who offers support and a welcoming space to share concerns, thoughts, or anything they're carrying—can bring a deep sense of comfort and security," said Rogers. "Even the smallest act of kindness can make all the difference—and I want to be that source."



Mentoring couple Atasha Kelley-Harris and Marc Harris with their mentee.

"My husband, Marc, and I serve as a Family Roots S.A.F.E. Trained Mentor couple. Getting to take part in activities such as chauffeuring our mentee, a young man, to his senior prom was both a treat and an honor," said Kelley-Harris. "To be part of such a special memory for him, and help him have the best time ever, is priceless."

"I'm willing to spend some of my free time pouring into a young person who needs a strong male presence – to encourage him to accomplish his goals, to teach him life lessons, including how to use his voice for good. I also enjoy motivating him to keep striving and to know he has someone in his corner to help provide guidance and cheer him on all the way," said mentor Marc Harris.

Kelley-Harris adds, "It doesn't take much, just a little of your time, to share a meal, engage in a fun activity here and there, impart a lesson or two, or provide an objective listening ear to help him or her solve a problem. Whatever it takes to help a youth feel worthy, 'important enough' to someone, and to let them know they matter is all it takes."



Mentor Marc Harris proudly chauffeurs his mentee to senior prom in style.



GIVE THE GIFT OF **MENTORSHIP** THIS HOLIDAY SEASON

Mentorship plants hope, and every connection sparks lasting change. This holiday season, Family Roots for Life, Inc.® invites you to give back by mentoring or by making a year-end gift.

Your support sustains programs like Roots & Wings, providing youth - especially those aging out of foster care - with trusted mentors and vital resources.

Every gift—whether time, talent, or treasure—extends hope to young people who need it most.

Many employers even offer paid volunteer time or match donations, expanding the impact of your tax-deductible gift—check with your HR department to see what's available.

Become a Mentor

familyrootsforlife.org/become-a-mentor

Make a Donation

familyrootsforlife.org/donation

Learn about Family Roots for Life, Inc.®, at familyrootsforlife.org. For questions, contact info@familyrootsforlife.org or 832.800.7989.



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