**What is The Viscardi Center’s Mentoring Initiative (VCMI)?**

VCMI is The Viscardi Center’s new mentorship program for students, ages 11-17, with a disability or considered “at-risk”.

The mission of this initiative is to help youth realize their potential and achieve their personal and educational goals. The Viscardi Center’s Mentoring Initiative is meant to help build strong and healthy brains, by connecting young people to mentors who will engage them in activities that support their development and well-being and better prepare them to deal with bullies and stressful situations. This program will be enhanced by structured activities focused on school career exploration and job readiness.

By creating a meaningful relationship, based on trust and open communication, mentors help young people gain a sense of belonging, build self-confidence and learn new skills and passions.

**What are the Mentee requirements?**

Mentees must be between the ages of 11-17, have a disability or be “at-risk”. The majority of the mentees have learning or physical disabilities, Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, Emotional Disturbance, Oppositional Defiant Disorder, Conduct Disorder, Traumatic Brain Injury, or disabilities resulting from criminal involvement/victimization. They may also have histories of involvement with the criminal justice system; truancy/absence in school; low achievement in school; or a family history of criminal involvement and other risk factors.

**Who are the Mentors?**

VCMI mentors are adults over the age of 18 who have applied to be a mentor for a child, and have agreed to commit for at least one year (although matches may last longer). Often, they are adults who have previous experience working with kids or mentoring and want to continue doing so. Each mentor is thoroughly screened (which includes a background check), interviewed in-person, and formally trained for the program.

**How will each pair be matched?**

Typically, matches are based on common interests and personality types, so mentors can plan activities that both parties will enjoy. When possible, we also try to match based on the anticipated years in the program, so that younger kids will be paired with mentors who express an interest in committing to more than one year. Transportation or proximity can also be a factor.

It is important to note that finding an appropriate match may take between a few weeks and several months. Once a match is made, we will arrange and facilitate the first meeting between the mentee/mentor pair and the parents/guardians. Following this initial meeting, the family will coordinate future meetings directly with the mentor.

**What do VCMI Mentor Matches do together?**

Our matches commit to having weekly contact by phone or email, and meeting in person for at least four to six hours a month over the course of a year.

Each relationship is unique and all activities depend on the interests of the participants. They may include visiting museums, attending sports games, going bowling or to a movie, meeting for lunch, etc. Matches can also work on goals during their time together, depending on the needs of the youth. Examples include: practicing social skills, researching career paths, and learning public transportation. Mentors are instructed to plan activities that are free or reasonably priced to accommodate various financial needs. The Viscardi Center will also plan occasional special events in which all participants will be able to spend time together and have fun.

We encourage the mentors and families to do their best to communicate as often as possible, and to notify each other of any change in plans at least 24 hours in advance.

**Who provides transportation?**

All of the mentors in our program may not have access to personal vehicles. Families may need to make arrangements for transportation to and from the meeting activity. However, when families are unable to provide transportation we will do our best to match a child with a mentor who has access to a vehicle and is comfortable transporting them.

**How can I sign a child up?**A child may be enrolled in the program by completing the VCMI Mentee Referral Form or contact Michelle Licata at 516)465-1415 or mlicata@viscardicenter.org.