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FEBRUARY 8

### Embracing Our Youth: One-Year Commitment Becomes Four-Year Friendship

*A personal Account by Tangela, mentor to Brenda.*

“Mentoring is one of the most rewarding experiences in life and one of the best ways you can share yourself.”

**Los Angeles, California (February 8, 2011)** It's amazing how one small decision can significantly impact one's life. It was one such decision that resulted in my becoming a mentor with INMED Partnerships for Children's Embracing Our Youth program. One summer day in 2006, after hearing about it from a friend, I attended a mentorship training program in Compton, California. At the training, I learned about INMED and its mission, and watched a video about mentoring relationships and how one person can make a difference by sharing only one hour a week with a young person.

I knew I wanted to make a difference and this appeared to be just the type of opportunity I was looking for. I was impressed with what I heard and believed I was up for the challenge. I could hardly wait to meet the 13-year-old girl with whom the program planned to match me. I was asked to make a one-year commitment, and now, four and a half years later, we're still together. What started out as a mentoring relationship has grown into a strong friendship, and more like family. I can't imagine my life without my “match,” Brenda, who is now a senior in high school.



Special friends spend a fun day on the beach

Each mentoring relationship is unique, and it takes time to learn about each other and to build trust. When we met, Brenda and I took our time figuring each other out. I knew that because I worked long hours and liked to travel, I would have to make a conscious effort to communicate with Brenda when I couldn't see her—I wanted her to understand my personal level of commitment to our friendship. I also had to realize that there would be times that Brenda would have prior commitments with her family and friends, and I would not always get to see her as scheduled. I

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At the Embassy of Brazil Polo Cup in Poolesville, MD. It's a beautiful afternoon to be raising money for the children!

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wanted to let her know that she could count on me being there, even if it was just to talk. We don't get together every week, but when we do meet, we usually spend several hours sharing experiences we both enjoy.

I have been there for Brenda through the ups and downs of her teenage years, and it hasn't always been easy. Early in the relationship, I realized that Brenda had challenges with anger management. For example, if someone cut me off in traffic, Brenda would become angry and ready to curse. I used this as an opportunity to talk to her about choosing how to react when someone does something we don't like.

Once when Brenda ran away from home for several weeks, I helped her mother search for her. Actually, I took it a bit personally because I felt as though it was reflection on my not having been a good mentor. When she finally came home, I didn't pressure her to talk about it because I have learned that she talks about things in her own time. She knows that if she hurts, I hurt, too, because I care so much for her. Likewise, I have learned that I can't "save" Brenda from all the hurtful experiences she will likely face, but I can help prepare her with tools to get through those experiences, while maintaining a positive perspective.

When she has problems at home, I share examples with her from my own experiences growing up and the lessons I have learned. I try to show her that you can't run away from your problems, but that it's okay to speak up, in a respectful way, about how you feel when certain things happen. I don't always know how much of our conversations she's actually taking to heart, but I have observed a lot of positive growth in her. And I always let Brenda know that I am tremendously proud of her. She tries to maintain good school attendance and good grades, she's got a job at school, she is a role model for her friends, she helps take care of her little brother at home and she has already passed both portions of the California High School Exit Exam. That's a lot to be proud of!

One of the challenges we have faced is that I don't speak Spanish and Brenda's mother doesn't speak English. Brenda has done a great job translating for us and now, her mother and I are so comfortable with each other that it is no longer a challenge. I have always told Brenda that I will never do anything to jeopardize her mother's trust in me, and her mother knows that I will take good care of Brenda when she's with me.



A positive role model can mean the difference between hope and despair.

When we talk about topics such as saving money and college education, I encourage Brenda to think about her options and make choices that are good for her future. When she talks to me about her past (the reasons she used to fight, the things that made her angry), I know that socially, emotionally and behaviorally, she has come a long way. Despite being let down in the past, she decided to trust one more person. I'm thankful it was me. Last year she told me I would have to stop telling people she was my mentee. I said, "You're right." Our relationship is so much more than that. We're friends, we're family, we're confidantes, and we're blessed to have each other.

Brenda has a good support system in place and I am just a small part of the team. She has so much going for her. She is smart, respectful, funny, polite, thoughtful, helpful and caring. We have a lot in common: we love movies, chocolate, ice cream and finding new places by "getting lost on purpose." It's hard to believe how fast the time has flown by, and the good times definitely outnumber the hard times.

If you have ever prayed about wanting to have a positive impact on someone's life, then God heard you. He gives us opportunities to share our time and our heart. Mentoring is one of the most rewarding experiences in life and one of the best ways you can share yourself. Young people encounter many negative messages in their environment throughout the course of a week. A mentor can be the person who tells them the truth, the one who relays the many positive messages. Brenda is a part of my family now, and this mentoring relationship has become a lifetime commitment



about a day ago



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because that's what we want. I am so happy that the Embracing Our Youth program is still making matches for young people. The work INMED does is invaluable.

Tangela has a Ph.D. in education and is a principal at a middle school. She lives in Inglewood, CA and has been a mentor for four and a half years. She plans to continue in the Embracing Our Youth program and looks forward to being a positive role model for a new mentee once Brenda graduates from high school. This is not to say that she will end contact with Brenda—she plans to continue being part of Brenda's life, but she is excited about the chance to help somebody else.

**January was National Mentoring Month. Now is a perfect time to commit to helping a child by being a friend and positive role model. If you live in Los Angeles County and are you interested in becoming a mentor, please call Laura Moller-Leon at 310-764-0955 ext. 103 or e-mail her at [lmoller-leon@inmed.org](mailto:lmoller-leon@inmed.org).**

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*About INMED Partnerships for Children—Since 1986, INMED Partnerships for Children has built alliances with public- and private-sector partners in more than 100 countries to rescue children from the immediate and irreversible harm of disease, hunger, abuse, neglect or violence, and to prepare them to shape a brighter future for themselves and the next generation. Through a broad range of health, social, education, violence prevention and community development programs, INMED is helping to create opportunities that inspire hope, build self-reliance and encourage community collaboration to sustain positive change. For more information, visit [www.inmed.org](http://www.inmed.org).*

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