

CAREER PATHS

AMAZING MENTORS

This edition of The Urban News begins a new series on the power of mentors hosted by the Buncombe County Health and Human Services Department. Each month this page will feature a local person who will share his or her experience in working with a mentor and mentoring others as well as sponsors and advocates.

It is hoped that readers will increase their efforts to find a mentor as well as be mentors to others. Research says that mentored individuals, as compared to those who are not mentored, report greater career satisfaction, lower work alienation, more job retention and promotion, along with higher salaries (Noe, Greenberger, and Wang, 2002).

Rasheeda McDaniels

In this inaugural feature, we asked Rasheeda McDaniels to share the impact mentoring has had on her career and how she has mentored others. McDaniels grew up in Asheville and received two degrees from UNC Greensboro, first in biology and later in social work, and a Masters in Social Work from Temple University. Currently, she is the Social Work Supervisor and Community Service Navigator Coordinator.

What do you like about your job?

I like the community outreach and working with all types of people: different races, social economic status, ethnicity. I love that I can help the people where I grew up. I love that Buncombe County Health and Human Services is open to change and wants feedback from the community. I love hearing different families' stories and learning about the values and morals that sustain the families I work with. All of this creates positive change and helps people figure out how life can be better.

Who helped you to achieve success?

At my birthday a few years ago, I had a discussion with my sorority sister who challenged me to consider the question, "What can you do to make change in your community?" It was a big issue at that moment because a young child had died from abuse in Pisgah View Apartments. So a group of us—Kathryn Strachota, Amy Saunooke, Zakiya Bell-Rogers, Keynon Lake, and Tydarryl Bailey—formed a team.

We went out on our own time to interview 81 families in the middle of winter—so cold. We wanted to find out whether local residents consider contacting Buncombe County Health and Human Services when they hear of someone being hurt by another.

We realized that we could make a difference that would help improve the health, safety and wellbeing of people in our community.



Rasheeda McDaniels, Social Work Supervisor and Community Service Navigator Coordinator. Photo: Jackie Thompson

We heard the same thing over and over: folks just didn't trust the system. I saw this firsthand when I was going door-to-door: people would ask, "Did someone turn me in for something? I haven't done anything wrong." There was so much mistrust.

From this start, we realized that we could make a difference that would help improve the health, safety, and wellbeing of people in our community. We are now part of a community Navigator program where the goal is to build connections to Health and Human Services. The team and the community have worked together to achieve success.

Describe a time when a mentor helped you make an important professional decision.

After college, I was working in a group home for girls. My supervisor, Michelle Fritts-Wilson, saw my connection with them and offered these inspiring words: "Rasheeda, you really have a heart to change people's lives. You should really get your degree in social work." So I went back to UNCG for a major in social work. That is where my passion came from. When I graduated in 2002, I emailed Amanda Stone to say I really wanted to come home. She encouraged me to apply for a position, and here I am.

Mentoring is a two-way street. Whom have you mentored? My grandparents always said, "You don't just take, take, take. You give, give, give." So that is what I tell the youth that I mentor, along with "Go to college and graduate; see how much the world has to offer. Education is the key."

In Pisgah View, we have the Gems—an after-school group for girls started by Cindy and Nikita Smart. We tell them they can be professional, smart, and beautiful African American women, and we stress the importance of being able to love yourself. One young woman was struggling with her boyfriend who was pressuring her to have sex. So we went around the circle and the other girls gave her ideas of how to say no.

Making Proud Choices, a program dealing with pregnancy and STD prevention was implemented as well. We teach the girls how to protect themselves and learn to negotiate their relationships on their own terms.

For More Information:

Connecting Those at Risk to Care,
www.Innovations.ahrq.gov/guide/HUBManualTOC.aspx
 Pathways to a Healthy County,
www.hsc.unm.edu/community/pathways/index.html

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 Buncombe County Health & Human Services.

Visit buncombecounty.org/jobs or click on the link at
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Employment ads are posted on Thursday morning and updated at midnight on Wednesday, two weeks after the posting date.