

## **Mentoring through the Holidays**

Along with excitement and fun, the holidays can also bring added stress regarding money, sadness for absent parents or family members, and increased tension at home.

### **Understanding**

For the majority of children in the US, the holidays mean exciting events and trips. For families on a low income, they mean extra hardship – costs on essentials, like food, increase but income doesn't. School holidays create a break from the routine and structure of school, which for some kids is an important part of consistency, as well as a significant source of meals. Many of the children in the Partners program are living in poverty. For these reasons, our kids might act out or withdraw during this season.

### **How you can help**

- Understand that your JP will probably be experiencing stress. Anticipate this and plan “normal” or quiet activities into your partnership time. Be patient if he or she acts differently over the next few weeks.
- Focus more than ever on healthy and fun foods during your time together. While many of us will be eating too much sugar over the holidays, some children will also be lacking basic nutrition such as vegetables and protein.
- Help kids make or buy inexpensive gifts for family and friends. Teach the importance of giving, planning ahead, and creativity/resourcefulness.
- Make a “thankful for” tree with your JP, listing the things he or she is thankful for. You could include words, phrases or pictures. Ideas might include a home, vehicle, family members or friends, being able to run fast, draw well or do other things. This can be a great gift for parents to open on Christmas.

Children watch their role models and learn from their actions. By watching you, they can learn to become more empathic and understanding of others, and consequently, more prone to make good choices when they become adults.

### **It's Important to Remember**

- Respect the family's dignity. The desire to give expensive gifts at this time of year is understandable and common. However, providing material things does not resolve the underlying issues of poverty and can even perpetuate a feeling of inequality. Be sure that any gifts you give are in line with the wishes and comfort level of the family. If we take the focus off of expensive gifts at this time of year, we'll be able to help people in a more meaningful way: by strengthening community and caring for one another.
- Avoid highlighting the disparity between your and their family's income, which might be awkward or create expectations for more help than you want to offer.
- If you're unsure about what's appropriate for your situation, talk with your Program Coordinator about it!
- As much as we want to help, we can't “fix it”. As mentors and role models, our job is to teach the importance of respect, acceptance and responsibility.

- Be sure that your role stays focused on building the one to one relationship with your JP, and encouraging positive growth and development.

These tips are to help you foresee possible situations with your JP and his or her family and be proactive in your approach this holiday season. Please take what is relevant to your situation and adapt it to your own style. Above all, remember to have fun!