

# The DREAM Program

## Mentor Screening Procedures

Approximately 50% of a child's participation in The DREAM Program (DREAM) is in a one-on-one setting with a caring college student mentor. DREAM is committed to ensuring children's safety by preventing the negligent acceptance of mentors with harmful tendencies. Thus, DREAM has adopted a rigorous screening policy that is standard for all applicants.

In order to ensure that the screening policy is used consistently and appropriately, and that the confidentiality of employee/volunteer records is maintained, DREAM's Programs Staff is responsible for enacting the screening procedures detailed below.

While the screening procedures are being conducted new volunteer applicants will be able to participate in DREAM program only while under the direct supervision of mentors or staff who have been trained and whose Mentor Screening Procedures have been completed.

### **Stage 1: Initial Screening**

In established Local Programs, mentors are in charge of recruiting new volunteers. For the first round of screening, an application and interview process is often employed when selecting volunteers. Once a Local Program decides it would like to accept any volunteers, DREAM's Programs Staff will undergo the screening procedures outlined in the following stages.

### **Stage 2: Mentor Pledge**

In addition to investigating mentors' histories, the DREAM Office ensures that each applicant understands the commitment that he or she is making. Each mentor is asked to sign The DREAM Program, Inc.'s Mentor Pledge, which binds the applicant to the rules set forth in DREAM's Mentor Boundaries, Transportation Guidelines, and Child Abuse Information & Reporting Procedures.

### **Stage 3: Background Checks**

The DREAM Office conducts at minimum an in-state criminal background check, two character reference checks, a mentor background statement, and National Sex Offender Registry check on each potential volunteer DREAM mentor. Details on these checks can be found in the Appendix.

### **Stage 4: Continued Screening**

DREAM recognizes that protecting its vulnerable population includes continued screening of its mentors throughout their participation in the program. DREAM's ongoing support of its mentors is an important safeguard against safety issues. If at any time the state criminal registry or other information source suggests that a mentor is harmful or potentially harmful to DREAM's child participants, DREAM will reevaluate the implicated mentor's involvement with DREAM through the aforementioned criminal background check procedures and consider

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the mentor for potential disqualification. In addition, by signing the Mentor Background Statement and Mentor Pledge mentors agree to immediately inform the DREAM Office that supports them if there is a change to any of the information they provided to DREAM.

## *Appendix*

### *Criminal Background Checks*

If a Local Program is prepared to offer an applicant participation in DREAM, a conditional offer may be made pending qualification through The DREAM Program, Inc.'s screening procedures. DREAM has adopted a thorough and consistent system to manage and monitor mentor background checks, which will help deter predators from applying and promote a safe and positive environment for children, mentors, and families.

A Local Program's acceptance of an applicant to serve as a mentor is entirely within the discretion of their Regional DREAM Office. DREAM is not required to inform an applicant of its reasons for denial of his/her application to serve as a mentor. An applicant, pending completion of the screening process, may participate in DREAM but will be restricted to supervised situations or situations in which at least one other screened and trained volunteer is immediately present. An applicant will never be alone with DREAM children. DREAM retains the right to terminate the application if the screening yields adverse information or reveals that incorrect information was provided by the applicant.

Only after a Local Program has given a conditional offer of participation in DREAM will an applicant's criminal background check release be forwarded to the state registry.

#### *For mentors at colleges in Vermont:*

DREAM's Programs Staff will conduct all criminal background checks online via the Vermont Criminal Information Center. Applicants will be asked to fill out a Vermont Criminal Information Center Vulnerable Populations Program Release Form to provide the necessary information needed for the online criminal background check.

Programs Staff will print the results of the criminal background check on the completed Vermont Criminal Information Center Vulnerable Populations Program Release Form, document the results in the Programs Database, and put the document in the applicant's file held at the DREAM office that supports that mentor.

#### *For mentors at colleges in New Hampshire:*

Applicants will fill out a New Hampshire Criminal Record Release Authorization Form. DREAM's Programs Director will notarize and submit the Criminal Record Release Authorization Forms and associated fees.

Responses to requests for criminal record checks will be opened only by the DREAM Programs Director or Executive Director. The member who opens the mail will immediately

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enter the information in the Programs Database and file the returned criminal background check form in the applicant's file held at the DREAM office that supports that mentor.

*For mentors at colleges in Massachusetts:*

Applicants will fill out a 172H CORI Request Form. DREAM's Programs Staff will then conduct a 172H CORI check online via the Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board's website. CORI results will be kept in the Boston DREAM Office separate from the applicant's file, secured in a locked file cabinet when not being inspected.

*For all DREAM Mentors:*

If a state criminal record check indicates an applicant has a record with the state criminal record agency or the applicant has provided information of past criminal charges in their mentor paperwork, DREAM's Programs Staff will conduct a review to determine whether the criminal background check includes any convictions that require the mandatory disqualification of the applicant. Following a check for mandatory disqualification, the application must be approved using the review process described below under "Discretionary Disqualification."

Mandatory Disqualification:

Any conviction for homicide, sexual assault (of a minor or adult), incest, sexual activity as a caretaker, sexual exploitation of children, child abuse, cruelty to children, displaying obscene materials to minors, or drug sales or delivery to a minor will disqualify the applicant from serving as a DREAM mentor.

- 1.) Any conviction of a felony of any kind (defined as any crime punishable by 1 year or more in jail, even if the individual was actually sentenced to lesser time).
- 2.) Any lesser crime (i.e. misdemeanor or citation) in which sexual relations is an element. This also includes so-called "victimless crimes" like pornography and prostitution.
- 3.) Any lesser crime involving controlled substances (i.e. drugs). This also includes any DUI where drugs were involved, but does not include strictly alcohol-related offenses.
- 4.) Any lesser crime involving force or threat of force against a person.
- 5.) Any lesser crime involving cruelty or abuse to animals.
- 6.) Any arrest for a crime against a minor.

The following criminal convictions received in the previous five years shall also disqualify the applicant from serving as a DREAM mentor: aggravated assault, careless and negligent driving resulting in a fatality, burglary, or grand larceny.

If an applicant's criminal record includes one or more such convictions, DREAM's Programs Staff will suspend the conditional offer to the applicant to serve as a DREAM mentor and seek to verify from the applicant that the report is not in error. DREAM's Programs Director or Programs Staff will inform the prospective volunteer of the result of the record check and discuss any discrepancies between what the applicant reported and what is contained in the report. DREAM's Programs Director or Programs Staff will also inform the applicant that s/he has a right to appeal the results of the record check to the criminal records agency.

If the applicant chooses not to appeal the record check, DREAM's Programs Director will

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withdraw the conditional offer to the applicant to serve as a DREAM mentor. This will be documented in writing and kept in the applicant's file, held at the DREAM Office that supports that mentor.

Discretionary Disqualification:

If an applicant has provided information of past criminal charges in their mentor paperwork or if the criminal record information received from the state criminal records agency indicates that an applicant has a criminal record for an offense other than those listed under "Mandatory Disqualification," DREAM's Programs Staff will initiate a conversation with the applicant. During this conversation the DREAM's Programs Staff will discuss the charges for which the applicant provided information or the result of the record check. If there are any discrepancies between what was reported by the applicant and what is contained in the report, this too will be discussed. DREAM's Programs Director or Programs Staff will also inform the applicant that s/he has a right to appeal the results of the record check to the state criminal records agency. If the applicant chooses not to appeal or the applicant's appeal does not expunge all criminal records, DREAM's Programs Staff will meet to review the applicant's file, including the criminal record check, and will determine whether the conditional offer to the applicant to serve as a DREAM mentor will be withdrawn. In making this decision, the applicant's role as a model for mentees will be among the factors considered. The decision whether to withdraw the conditional offer and the reasons for the decision will be documented in the applicant's file held at the DREAM Office that supports that mentor.

Record Check Appeal Procedure:

*For mentors at colleges in Vermont:*

An applicant may appeal a criminal record check by submitting a letter to the director of the Vermont Criminal Information Center (103 S. Main St., Waterbury, VT 05671-2101), stating that the record is incorrect, detailing what the discrepancy is, and including his/her name, date of birth, social security number, address, and telephone number. The letter to the director must also state that DREAM (and also the applicant if s/he so chooses) is to be informed of the response to the applicant's appeal.

*For mentors at colleges in New Hampshire:*

An applicant may appeal a criminal record check by calling the New Hampshire Department of Safety at 603-271-2538. They will advise the applicant in the necessary steps to file an appeal.

*For mentors at colleges in Massachusetts:*

Applicants with a criminal record will receive a copy of their CORI, DREAM's Mentor Screening Procedures, and the Massachusetts Criminal History Systems Board's *Information Concerning the Process in Correcting a Criminal Record*. Applicants that wish to appeal the results of their CORI should follow their steps mapped out in the *Information Concerning the Process in Correcting a Criminal Record* document.

Notice to Applicant:

If in person conversations regarding a criminal record check or DREAM's decision to deny a mentor participation is not possible, notices and correspondence to applicants which make any

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reference to a criminal record check or to DREAM's decision to deny a mentor application will be mailed in envelopes addressed solely to the applicant and marked on the outside "Personal and Confidential: For Addressee Only." Copies of all letters mailed to potential applicants in regards to criminal reference checks will be kept in the applicant's file at the central DREAM Office that supports that mentor.

### ***Background Statement***

All applicants fill out a Background Statement, in which they will provide the following information:

- How long they have had a drivers license and in which state
- Any moving violations they have had in the past 5 years
- If they have ever been convicted of a DWI or a DUI
- If they have ever been convicted of a crime (misdemeanor, felony)
  - For mentors supported by the Boston DREAM office, this information is provided by mentors on the SafetyNET volunteer application.

By signing the Background Statement, mentors agree to inform the DREAM Office if any of the information they provide changes while they are a mentor with DREAM. In addition, to ensure that DREAM children are transported safely during program activities, all mentors that will be driving are asked to provide proof of insurance and/or registration for the vehicles that will be used for transporting DREAM children.

### **Disqualification Procedures:**

If the applicant has any moving violations, DREAM's Programs Staff will meet to decide if the applicant should be allowed to transport DREAM children. If it is decided that the applicant will not be allowed to transport children, a DREAM Programs Staff member will have a conversation with the applicant that will be documented and kept in their personal file held at the DREAM Office that supports that mentor. Moving violations will be handled on a case by case basis to determine allowance to transport DREAM children. Applicants with a DWI or DUI will never be allowed to transport DREAM children.

### ***Reference Checks***

Applicants will provide two references to DREAM:

1. A professional, non-familial reference, preferably a past employer of not less than six months.
2. A current, non-familial personal reference who has had significant and mature contact with the individual for more than 2 years.

References will be contacted by DREAM Staff, and all conversations will be confidential. The applicant's references provide DREAM's Programs Staff with additional confidence in the

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applicant. Once reference checks are made, they will be noted in the Programs Database, maintained by the DREAM Office that supports that mentor.

Disqualification Procedure:

If the information received from the reference checks indicates a concern regarding the applicant's ability to be a positive role model for mentees, DREAM's Programs Staff will discuss concerns with the prospective volunteer. DREAM's Programs Staff will also inform the applicant that s/he has a right to appeal the results of the reference check.

If the concern is not resolved, DREAM's Programs Staff will meet to review the applicant's file and determine whether to proceed with the rest of the screening process. In making this decision, the applicant's ability to serve as a positive role model for mentees will be among the factors considered. The decision whether to reject the applicant and the reasons for the decision will be documented in the applicant's file held at the DREAM Office that supports that mentor.

***National Sex Offender Registry check***

DREAM's Programs Director or Programs Staff will run each applicant through the National Sex Offender Registry (<http://www.nsopw.gov>). In regards to receiving, filing, making mentor fitness determination, and potential record appeals, the same process as documented in the Criminal Background Check section will be followed by DREAM's Programs Staff.

***Additional Screening Procedures for the Boston DREAM office***

Sex Offender Registry Information (SORI)

DREAM's Programs Staff will submit a SORI Request form for all applicants. The same steps mapped out in the Criminal Background Check section will be followed when receiving, filing, making mentor fitness determination, and potential record appeals.

SafetyNET

Applicants will fill out a SafetyNET volunteer application, provide a copy of a government-issued ID, and will be fingerprinted by DREAM's Programs Staff. This information will be submitted to SafetyNET along with the necessary fees and an FBI background check will be conducted on the applicant.

In regards to receiving, filing, making mentor fitness determination, and potential record appeals, the same process as documented in the Criminal Background Check section will be followed by DREAM's Programs Staff.