

## Linda Mornell on grooming teens for success

By: Sarah Haughey 12/12/10 8:00 AM

*Linda Mornell is the founder of Summer Search, a San Francisco-based nonprofit mentoring program for low-income and at-risk high school students. The organization, which recently celebrated its 20th anniversary, sees 100 percent of its students graduate from high school, almost all of whom go on to college.*

### Why did you create Summer Search?

My own children had so many resources, and during their challenging adolescent years they gained a lot of confidence from doing summer programs. I became interested in the transformative power of those experiences and saw they were almost exclusively available for affluent families. I wanted to provide diversity and make it a richer experience for everyone.

### Why do you find education to be such an important cause?

More and more educators are looking at summer experiential opportunities as effective ways of learning. I could have gotten involved in a number of different things as my children grew up and went off to college, but this was right in front me and really grabbed my heart.

### How has Summer Search grown since its beginning?

I started with 14 students in 1990 and this year we had 1,200 students from seven different cities. Summer Search has grabbed me by the throat and it's all I've thought about for the last 20 years. We focus on lower-income high school youths starting in their sophomore year and provide them guidance throughout high school, into college and, in some cases, even into [being a] professional. The results are pretty stunning — 100 percent graduate high school, 93 percent matriculate to college and, of that group, 85 percent graduate from college, compared to the about 18 percent nationwide in that same economic group.



### **Where do you seek inspiration in everyday life?**

I am a great believer in physical exercise and I bring that value into the Summer Search program. As for other sources of inspiration, I can't tell you how invigorating it is to see a student actually understand that they have a voice and that their voices matter, that they can take charge of their life and create a very different life than they expected.

### **Who do you turn to for support during tough times?**

I had a very successful marriage for 43 years. He was my husband, mentor and a very astute psychiatrist, so he was very supportive. He has since developed Alzheimer's, so the support I had for over 40 years is now gone. I'm currently developing support in other places, but it's a work in progress.

### **Do you have a life philosophy?**

Helping others is what makes for a happy and successful life.

### **Is there something that most people don't know about you?**

I grew up on a farm in Indiana with a lot of adversity and challenges. People who don't know me don't know that. I think it has given me a special appreciation for the underdog. When you experience adversity you gain a kind of sensitivity, and I think kids are surprised when I understand them instantly. Suddenly they find that I'm completely in their shoes.

Read more at the San Francisco Examiner: <http://www.sfexaminer.com/local/credo/2010/12/linda-mornell-grooming-teens-success#ixzz1CM8dHsHq>