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AN INTERVIEW WITH TEAH & LIZ

Bolder Impact Story



Liz (mom) & Teah (mentee)

Teah, now 17, is a junior in high school, graduated from Bolder Options four years ago, and remains well-connected with her mentor Martha.

Liz is Teah's proud, happy and grateful mom – happy to witness Teah's journey into confidence, and grateful for the program that made the perfect mentor match for her daughter.

The following is a curated remix of a recent coffee shop conversation on a warm May day in South Minneapolis.

Liz: First, can you describe what convinced you to stay in the mentor program, after your first mentor (who you liked) had to move away after just a few months?

Teah: (Laughs.) Well you wanted me to, and I agreed, but I wasn't convinced. Then I met Martha. We found out early that we a lot in common, she was nice but not pushy, I was surprised by how comfortable it felt talking with her. So, yeah, it was Martha.

Liz: How did you spend your first get-togethers and what were your first impressions?

Teah: The first day we met, Martha brought me to a museum. It was really fun! Later, she told me that the same day she also went to a museum on her first date with her now-husband. I felt so included that she shared this with me.

Liz: What are the things you felt you had in common with Martha?

Teah: Well our situations were different, but we both had siblings, divorced parents, a love of our pets, and for playing music. We both loved being outdoors, but Martha's outdoor activities were way more adventurous and challenging than mine!

Liz: And?

Teah: Martha pushed me, but gently. She could always seem to know my limits and focus on my strengths. She helped me train and ran with me on my first 5k! I never thought I would do that, and it made me feel really good about myself. When I said I wasn't ready to go along on a big Bolder Options camping trip – nearly a week-long, too long for me to be so far away from home – she invited me to go on a shorter camping trip, with just her. She planned everything, and again I felt like I'd done something amazing, something I never really thought I could do. We ended up doing so many other things new or challenging for me – snowshoeing, long bike rides – and other fun things I might never have done.

Liz: That Taylor Swift concert was a big deal, right?!? Did Martha enjoy it as much as you did?

Teah: I think so, she seemed to! It was so fun, I'd never been to a big concert like that. It's like she was finding exactly the experiences that would be great for both of us, which made me feel very connected with her.

Liz: Your "graduation" from the mentor program was really moving. How did you and Martha plan to continue to stay connected?

Teah: Well, we talked about whether we wanted to continue the relationship, and how, and both agreed we wanted to join the Alumni Program. We also just kept talking and being together when we could. I was her first mentee, and I feel like we have a really special relationship – I know I feel that way. She's had me over to her house and I've met Josh, her husband, before the pandemic. She still listens to me and cares about me, like an older sister I didn't have.

Liz: Can you describe an example of what kind of role Martha fills that is different from me, as your mom, or other friends and family?

Teah: Well, in addition to you, I like to call Martha when I have questions about some stuff, or decisions to make. I know she'll give me her honest opinions and will support my choices. She's also really easygoing and funny, she makes me laugh, even at myself.

Liz: Martha has been a perfect match for you, she really gets you! What else would you like people to know about what it's like to become a mentee and a part of the Bolder Options "community"?

Teah: At first I didn't know what I was getting myself into, and I was super nervous. Later I realized how much work they put into making matches between mentors and mentees that take so many things into account. I "graduated" a few years ago, but I can't imagine my life now without Martha and the Bolder Options staff and friends I've made. I never knew how many things I could do and would never have believed that I'd be asked to serve on a committee to interview candidates for a new employee at Bolder – that would have been WAY outside my comfort zone. I'm only 17, but I feel like I've really grown up and come out of my shell – that I didn't know I was even in – over the past four years. Also, a big part of the Bolder Options program for me has been their Schwann's Scholars program. Martha helped me better understand and join the Schwann's program, which has helped me gain even more confidence and life and employment skills.

Liz: I feel like I need to say what a gift Martha has been for you and for us, your family. I LOVE the confidence you've gained, and the bond you have made with such a genuine, caring mentor – and friend.

Teah: You're absolutely right. Thanks, Mom!



Martha (mentor) & Teah (mentee)

Editor's note: It was when Teah was making a transition from grade school to middle school that she and Liz were encouraged to consider Bolder Options by a school counselor/therapist, who then contacted Bolder Options to arrange the connection. The therapist felt Teah could really benefit from having a support system like Bolder Options mentoring as she transitioned to the right school to meet her learning needs. Teah had been diagnosed with dyslexia, ADHD, and was also dealing with a recent spate of personal challenges – the death of her beloved grandpa and then her dog, and her parents' divorce. The therapist was so right.

We really never know what others might be going through, and who needs each other more – the mentee or the mentor.