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Volunteer Spotlight: Mentor the next wave of business owners

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The Upper Valley branch of the Merrimack Valley chapter of SCORE is looking for volunteers to help new business owners.

SCORE is a nonprofit organization that pairs experienced businesses and professionals with those just starting out. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Upper Valley had its own chapter of SCORE. A couple years ago, the members combined the Upper Valley group with the one in Merrimack Valley to better share resources, said Heather Turner, a SCORE mentor and co-chair and event manager for the Merrimack Valley chapter.

There are around 15 mentors in the Upper Valley — each of whom mentors around 38 people — and Turner is recruiting more.

“I love it, particularly because you can really give as much time or as little time as you want to,” Turner said. Some volunteers contribute an hour or two a month running workshops, while others spend as much as 15 or 20 hours a week mentoring people. They answer questions and provide feedback about business plans, among other forms of support.

While the pandemic put in-person meetings to an end for a time, it also helped connect mentors and mentees who live farther away from each other.

“Zoom has opened up a lot of resources that we haven’t had before,” Turner said.

If a new business owner in the Upper Valley has an interest in a particular topic, but there is not a mentor in the area that can help, the branch can connect them to someone from outside the region.

Zoom has also made it easier for mentors and mentees to connect. A meeting for lunch during a busy workweek may be difficult; a call simply requires a few minutes with internet access.

“I would say probably more than 50% (of clients) I work with are people who are already in business that just need help with a particular thing,” said Turner, who is currently mentoring 29 people and devotes around three to five hours each week to the task. “The relationship is as long or as short as people need it to be.”

If clients are paired with a mentor who isn’t the right fit, that’s OK. They can request another one.

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“There’s very much a trust relationship with clients,” Turner said, adding that clients will often share financial and personal details. “We really want to make sure people feel comfortable with the relationship.”

Mentors do not need to have owned or started a business to volunteer. As long as they have business skills, they can help.

Turner, who owns a marketing and restaurant consulting business, was inspired to become a mentor after having help from a mentor herself.

“I think if I didn’t have a SCORE mentor my business would have failed miserably,” she said.

Turner started mentoring other business owners around four years ago.

“I have to say being involved in this association has been one of the more rewarding things I’ve ever done,” she said.

Editor’s note: For more information visit [score.org/volunteer-opportunities](https://www.score.org/volunteer-opportunities) (<https://www.score.org/volunteer-opportunities>), email info199@scorevolunteer.org or call 603-666-7561.

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