

AYPF Forum Brief

Referrals to Mentoring for Youth Involved in the Juvenile Justice System

September 21, 2012

Overview

The large number of youth involved in the juvenile justice system is a national concern. According to the National Center for Juvenile Justice, over 31 million youth were under juvenile court jurisdiction in 2009, a number that increased nearly 300% since 1960. A range of efforts are being made to mitigate the likelihood of repeated offenses among these youths and reduce the incidence of delinquency among high-risk youth. Research studies suggest that mentoring services are a particularly promising intervention. Mentoring services partner high-risk youth with non-parental adults who provide youth with supervision and guidance, skills training, and career and cultural enrichment. Mentoring services capitalize on local community resources and can be tailored to meet the needs of a particular youth population, through one-to-one, group, or peer-to-peer delivery models.

This forum provided an in-depth look at how youth are referred to mentoring across six juvenile justice settings: correction facilities, dependency court, delinquency court, juvenile detention, juvenile probation, and teen court/youth court diversion programs. Findings from a recent report from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, located within the U.S. Department of Justice, *Researching the Referral Stage of Youth Mentoring in Six Juvenile Justice Settings: An Exploratory Analysis*, were presented. The presenters highlighted examples of effective strategies and practices in the referral process, as well as current challenges to implementation.

Forum speakers included:

- Ms. Barbara Tatum Kelley, Juvenile Justice Program Specialist, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), US Department of Justice
- Dr. J. Mitchell Miller, Professor of Criminal Justice, University of Texas at San Antonio
- Ms. Pamela Clark, Program Associate, National Center for Youth in Custody
- Ms. Mary Midyette, Supervisor, Team Up Mentoring Program

Presentations

Presenters discussed findings from recent research and various strategies for effectively referring youth to mentoring services. Panelists shared findings from both their research efforts as well as their first-hand experience with effective local mentoring programs.

Barbara Tatum Kelley, Juvenile Justice Program Specialist in the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) at the U.S. Department of Justice, started the discussion by giving an overview of the new research study being released by her office. She noted that the study was a partnership among several organizations.<sup>1</sup>

Before sharing the key findings of OJJDP's exploratory study, Kelley described the critical functions of her agency. She noted that her office seeks to fund services for at-risk youth, and ensure protections for children who are exposed to violence or who are victimized. To meet these goals, OJJDP focuses its efforts on intervention and treatment, as well as on understanding what services work best for marginalized youth. According to Kelley, mentoring has proven to be an effective intervention, though one that is most effective when youth and mentors share interests; when youth and mentors have ample time together; and when mentors have adequate support and training.

According to Kelley, OJJDP examines not only the general effectiveness of mentoring as a strategy but also how it affects particular subgroups as well. For example, her office examines different kinds of mentoring approaches, such as group, individual, and hybrid models, and considers which approaches work best with different subgroups, such as Native American youth, adolescent girls, or students re-entering school from the juvenile justice system.

Kelley concluded by commending the researchers who worked on the OJJDP study and purposefully gathered data, conducted surveys, and held on-site interviews. She also acknowledged the various practitioners around the country who participated in the study. "Their contribution to our efforts is invaluable," she noted.

The next forum speaker was Dr. J. Mitchell Miller, Professor of Criminal Justice at the University of Texas at San Antonio and the OJJDP report's lead researcher. Miller began by acknowledging his fellow research team members and stating that although mentoring is a promising strategy for minimizing delinquency among at-risk youth, the research in this area has yielded mixed results. He pointed to a study by MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership that found that mentoring relationships have proliferated rapidly in the past twenty years, increasing ten-fold during that period. However, the empirical research on mentoring has not kept pace with the increase in quantity and innovation in programming, Miller noted.

Miller, who was charged with providing an overview of the quantitative results of the study, explained that the new report is unique because it sought to assess the effectiveness of mentoring services across six different juvenile justice settings. Moreover, the study utilized a mixed methods research design to address three key research questions:

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<sup>1</sup> Global Youth Justice, The National Partnership for Juvenile Justice, MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership, and researchers at the University of Texas at San Antonio

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- What are the best practices in identifying and referring youth to mentoring programs across six distinct juvenile justice settings?
- What is the capacity of the mentoring community to support youth identified for mentoring from these six juvenile justice settings?
- What intermediate outcomes are achieved by mentoring throughout the settings?

Next, Miller explained the study's research design, which featured a national survey administered in winter, 2012 to a range of mentoring programs and organizations. He noted the challenges the research team faced in sampling respondents within the mentoring community, which is an unknown population. As a result, the researchers relied on cluster sampling but could not report a response rate. They analyzed their results using multivariate analysis, with "Meeting Program Goals" as the dependent variable, and "Meeting Frequency," "Length of Relationship," and "Frequency of Mentor Training" as the independent variables. In addition, researchers controlled for the following variables: background, type of service (e.g., individual vs. group setting), maturation effects of programs, gender, and location. Miller added that it was important to note that the respondents' survey responses reflected their parent agencies or organizations, rather than their own experiences with mentoring.

As for the study's findings, Miller reported that respondents came from all 50 states, reflecting good national participation. The study, which found that no variation in effectiveness occurred across the six juvenile justice settings, yielded these important findings:

- Nearly 40% of mentoring programs serve youth involved in the juvenile justice system.
- More established programs (i.e., those that have been in existence longer) were generally more effective. Miller called this the "maturation effect."
- Mentoring programs with higher meeting frequency, longer meeting times, and those that implemented training for mentors were also more successful. He considered these a "professionalization effect."
- The vast majority of mentoring programs use individually-based strategies, which supports the notion that mentors are caring adults who volunteer their time to serve at-risk youth.

Miller concluded by highlighting areas for future research, including looking at the variables associated with successful mentor-mentee matches, considering mentors' use of individualized treatment plans, and better specifying the factors that lead to long-term matches. He suggested collecting data from actual mentors and mentees and supporting research that gleans data from live programs and practitioners. Finally, Miller emphasized the importance of examining the elements of social support that lead to successful outcomes among different target populations. "Social support theories are 'en vogue' in today's research. Mentoring is a natural fit for this kind of research," he said.

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Pamela Clark, Program Associate at the National Center for Youth in Custody, provided a summary of the OJJDP report's findings from its qualitative research. As she said "I got to do the fun stuff: site visits and interviews. We were able to provide a good cross-section of geography in making our site visits, though we faced limitations in going to all states."

Clark went on to identify the mentoring and community organizations with whom the researchers worked, including Big Brothers Big Sisters, Boys and Girls Clubs, Goodwill, community mental health programs, and Title I offices of public school systems. She described the limitations and challenges of each organization. For example, Big Brothers Big Sisters will not match mentors with students who are 17 years or older, nor will they work with youth who are sex offenders or have drug or mental health issues.

Clark described a mentoring program in Indiana called Bienvenido that targets youth from the Latino community. Run through a community mental health center, Bienvenido is a voluntary eight-week program for youth identified through the juvenile justice system. According to Clark, many of these youth are angry at their parents and have to deal with difficult immigration issues. She said the program has been extremely successful in creating communities of Hispanic youth but faces the challenges of maintaining mentoring relationships after the youth leave the system as well as sustainable funding.

According to Clark, her team's research identified two best practices that were key ingredients in successful programs. First, mentoring programs are most successful if they are embedded in the juvenile justice settings tasked with providing such services. If mentoring programs are embedded, the referral process is accelerated, relationships among juvenile justice and mentoring staff are enhanced, mentoring activities become part of the facility's schedule, and the likelihood of post-release mentoring is increased. "When programs are embedded, participation became the norm in the facility. Most young people chose to participate. We have a captive audience in juvenile justice facilities," explained Clark.

Second, programs are most successful if mentoring staff reach out to youth within 24 hours. Clark explained, "If we don't contact the youth immediately, we might lose them. We must develop a level of trust with the young people we serve. Establishing that bond is really critical."

Clark concluded by stating several referral considerations for organizations to note. Among these considerations include: voluntary vs. court-ordered mentoring, possible changes in placement, parental support, supplemental services, and waiting lists.

The final forum presenter was Mary Midyette, Supervisor of the Team Up Mentoring Program at the Up Center in the Hampton Roads area of Virginia. Offering a practitioner's perspective on mentoring, Midyette described how her program, which used a one-to-one mentoring strategy, changed after it was awarded an OJJDP Foster Care grant in October 2009. The grant allowed Team Up to hire a foster care youth mentoring case manager, who was responsible for increasing

public awareness about mentoring, establishing partnerships with foster care agencies and organizations, and increasing the program's on-line presence to make referrals easier. Team Up also promoted the initiative to local departments of social services and service organizations, which had a tremendous impact on their referral process. As a result, the Team Up program began assessing foster parents, whose level of cooperation and commitment was critical to a successful referral.

Midyette concluded her presentation by providing final results after three years of the OJJDP grant. During that time, Team Up received 135 referrals, made 93 matches, and maintained a 57% retention rate. In addition, 100% of the program's mentees demonstrated improvement in at least one of the three outcome areas of academic performance, behavior, and psychological & social functioning.

### Question & Answer Period

Forum attendees had an opportunity to ask the presenters a few questions. AYPF Executive Director Betsy Brand invited David Shapiro, director of MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership, to join the panel for the discussion. Shapiro said that the new research provides a huge opportunity to get the juvenile justice and mentoring communities to talk. He explained that practitioners and researchers have a tendency to work in silos. By disseminating materials, the different fields can coalesce, and youth can receive mentoring within the context of their juvenile justice setting. 'Grants ends, but the arms and legs of findings never end. Practitioners will embed this in their work from now on,' said Shapiro.

The first questioner asked panelists to identify tips for training mentors for incarcerated youth. Clark explained that it was especially important for mentors to understand the culture and rules of the correctional facility and the inner workings of the juvenile justice system. For example, for mentors working with youth on probation, Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) training was critical for understanding what youth will go through in court.

Shapiro added that screening is especially important for these mentors, and organizations should make expectations for mentors as real as possible. 'Otherwise, they may be getting into something different than they imagined,' he explained.

The next attendee asked how the new research relates to teen courts. Miller referred to the research of Scott Peterson, who looks at peer-to-peer models in youth court. Shapiro said that his organization will address this topic in upcoming webinars.

The next question concerned school-based mentoring. Clark clarified that Title I programs in school districts provided funding support, although most of the mentoring took place outside of the schools. Forum participant Michael Jones from the National Partnership for Juvenile Services pointed to a program in Wichita, Kansas, that used Title I funds to hire mentors as employees of school system who work in schools.

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Another participant asked panelists for advice regarding recruiting volunteers to work in juvenile correctional settings. Clark responded by noting that it is not the responsibility of correctional centers to recruit mentors. “It’s better to reach out to community organizations that have targeted recruitment efforts. Not every mentor is meant to work with this population. This is a specific population,” she explained.

Shapiro suggested that the use of stipends for mentors are a hotly debated topic but worthy of discussion. He also pointed to the use of intensive screening that might identify mentors for youth in certain juvenile justice settings. For example, although someone may have a small criminal event that would make him or her ineligible in the standard screening, he or she might make a good mentor. Noting that mentors need to feel comfortable in the setting in which they will work, Clark added that having the training done inside a facility is critical.

The final question addressed the research on paying stipends to mentors. Miller noted that while there is little research on the topic at present, there will be soon. Mentoring programs pay mentors in a variety of ways, ranging from full-time jobs to stipends to treat kids to fun events or to purchase school supplies.

Shapiro also pointed to a current National Institutes of Health longitudinal study, which is looking at 12 years of data on mentoring programs. The emphasis of the study is to discern the difference between paid and non-paid mentors. “If we listen to the voices of kids who talk about adults who make a difference in their lives, there are a variety of adults—some are paid and others are not,” he said.

Of the sites Clark’s team visited, none paid mentors a stipend, although mentors in one program were paid for mileage. “This can be an appropriate way to compensate mentors. It’s very important to keep mentors connected with youth in their communities after they have left juvenile justice facilities, and the mileage stipends helped do that,” she noted.

Midyette concluded, “We must look at the motivation of mentors. We can do other things to thank our mentors. A thank you can go a long way.”