Mentoring Programs for Children of Incarcerated Parents

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About the Presenter:  
Dr. Susan G. Weinberger

- Pioneer in the creation of site-based mentoring in America.
- Model replicated throughout the United States and internationally.
- Works with specific populations including mentoring for Native American youth, incarcerated youth and youth of incarcerated parents.
Children of Incarcerated Parents

- Often face multiple challenges at home, in school and in the community.

- One study that reports these challenges explores the impact of parental incarceration on children from their own perspectives. Thirty-four (34) children shared how having a parent in prison affected their family and peer relationships, school and community experiences including social isolation and concern about their caregivers. The children spoke about resilience in locating venues for support. A key support system for youth of incarcerated parents is mentoring.

To counteract potential negative outcomes as a result of the experience of children of incarcerated parents, it is important that communities create a coordinated system of supports for these children.

This conference speaks to the many issues facing children with an incarcerated parent. In addition to the targeted and typical supports available, *children benefit greatly from having a mentor.*
Think back to the time when........................

- You were very young.
- Your first home or apartment.
- Involvement in your community.
- Faith-based engagement.
- Early and later (college) educational experiences.
- Jobs you have had before and now.

- Can you identify the mentors in your life?
A Mentor

- Nurturer
- Coach
- Cheerleader
- Confidant
- Friend
- Guide
- Supporter
- Listener
- + Role Model

**ADVOCATE**
“There is a destiny which makes us brothers. None goes on his way alone. All that we send into the lives of others comes back into our own!”

Edward Markham
Outcomes of Youth Mentoring

- The outcomes are two directional. The mentors get as much if not more out of the relationship as their mentees.
“We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It is easy to say, it is not MY child, not MY community, not MY world, not my problem.

Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider these people my heroes.”
“When I was a boy and I would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, ‘Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.’”

- Mr. Rogers
Youth Mentoring

- Powerful initiative that matches young people with mentors who offer help, guidance, advice, wisdom, caring and support. Today, throughout America and internationally, schools, communities, juvenile detention centers, foster care facilities, after school programs, Boys and Girls Clubs including those on Indian reservations, and programs for children of incarcerated parents are matching youth of all ages with mentors. Mentoring has become a movement.
School-based programs recruit mentors who spend a minimum of one hour/week at school or in after-school programs. All mentoring takes place at the site only. Youth can be all ages including in college. Volunteers are asked to mentor for a minimum of one year. Matches are 1:1 or small groups.

Community-based programs recruit mentors who often spend several hours each week with a youth. They are permitted to meet at public places in the community. Youth are all ages. Volunteers are asked to mentor for one year. Matches are typically 1:1.

Many matches last more than one year.
QUALITY ASSURANCE STANDARDS OF MENTORING

FOUR PROGRAM CATEGORIES

Regardless of client, type of mentoring or agency

- Design and Planning
- Management
- Operations
- Evaluation
Elements of Effective Practice established by experts
MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership
Website: www.mentoring.org

ELEVEN STEPS TO SUCCESS

- Long-range plan
- Formation of an Advisory Council
- Recruitment plan
- Screening of mentors
- Mentor/Mentee training
- Matching strategies
- Weekly sessions
- Support and supervision
- Recognition and retention
- Closure steps
- Evaluation
EFFECTIVE MENTORING

TWO KEY PROGRAM COMPONENTS:

- Strong infrastructure of organization.
- Reliable mentors who show up when they say they will.
ASSESSING THE NEED FOR MENTORING

- Demographics
- Interviews
- Focus groups
- Staff meetings
- Dropout rates
- Academic performance levels
- Ask teachers and agency staff
WHAT AGE SHOULD MENTORING BEGIN?

Consider the best age for a youth to be mentored:

- 80% of first graders feel good about who they are.
- 20% of sixth graders feel good about themselves.
- 5% feel good about themselves by the end of high school.

Source: Roland Barth: *Improving Schools From Within*
Can predict who will drop out emotionally and socially before the end of elementary school.

Who will drop out physically before the end of high school.

We should listen to them.
LONG RANGE PLANNING FOR MENTORING

- Understand the benefits, financial and emotional supports necessary and the challenges.

- Get everyone on board including agency Board members, Justice officials and volunteers.

- Identify the program’s mission, goals, objectives and realistic outcomes.
Members serve to assist with the program, open doors to recruit mentors, seek financial support and monitor efforts.

Board members, also known as the Advisory Council represent the famous three “T’s” .....Time, Talent and Treasure.
Members come from any of the following segments:

Mentor  
Foster Care Provider  
Clergy  
Business  
Educator  
Fundraiser  
Grant Writer  
Juvenile agency  
Civic/social organizations  
Accountant

Law Enforcement  
Pediatrician  
Public Relations  
Marketing  
Politician  
Banker  
Web Designer  
Lawyer  
Media  
Parent
GET THE COMMUNITY ON BOARD

Schools including:
- Superintendent; school board members
- Administrators, teachers, Counselors, social workers

Community including:
- All agencies that work with and support children of an incarcerated parent and their families
- Top officials of business
- Social and civic organizations
- Union officials
- Juvenile Justice
- Faith-based community
Good mentors are individuals who:

1) Present no physical, social or emotional threat to youth.

2) Have the personal characteristics to create a positive developmental relationship with youth.
QUALITIES OF GOOD MENTORS

- Stable
- Provide leadership
- Show up on time
- Committed
- Non judgmental
- Confidential
- Patient
- Listen well
QUALITIES, continued

- Like kids
- Good sense of humor
- Tolerant
- Reliable
- Outstanding record of employment
- Do not interfere with program policies & procedures
- Do not replace role of parent or guardian
- Willing to assume the key role as a youth’s ADVOCATE
DETERMINING THE SUITABILITY OF APPLICANTS AS MENTORS

- Ability to commit the necessary time and emotional resources.
- Commitment to youth development.
- Evidence of dependability.
- Positive attitudes toward youth, race, culture and economic status.
- Ability to adhere to rules.
- Evidence of ability to form and sustain a meaningful relationship.
RECRUITING MENTORS
WHERE WILL THEY COME FROM?

- Justice system
- Foster system
- Business and Chamber of Commerce
- Retirees
- Alumni Associations
- Faith community
- Fire and police
- Military
- Youth serving organizations
- Juvenile Justice system
- Municipal employees
- Health facilities
- Higher education
- Social service agencies
- FBI and IRS
MENTOR SCREENING

- Application and release statement
- Face-to-face interview
- Personal reference checks
- Employment history
- Last 5 residences
- Criminal background checks
- Child abuse registry
- Driving record
Why do you want to be a mentor?
Prior experiences working with youth? This population?
Have you ever been impacted by a mentor?
Personal interests and hobbies
Special transportation requirements
A word that describes you
Strengths and weaknesses
What you hope to get out of the experience

And ask a reference for the mentor:
Would you trust this applicant with your OWN child?
A parent or guardian of the youth must give written approvals to allow their child to be in the mentoring program if the youth is under 18 years of age. Parent must understand the program policies, role of the mentor and how the relationship might continue with the youth once the parent is released.

- Release form for media: interviewing, filming, and photographing must be discussed.
Matching

- Ask teachers/agency staff to recommend youth.
- Identify team (principal, counselor, teachers, program staff) to review recommendations and place them on priority list.
- Make sure you have a good “mix” when beginning a program.
Mentors and “mentees” are matched randomly or based on commonalities such as:

- Shared academic interests
- Shared social interests
- Compatible temperament
- Shared life experiences
- Gender, Race/ethnicity
YOUTH SELECTION PROCESS
GENERAL DESCRIPTION

- Not one economic status, race or from single or incarcerated parent. Major reasons for selection include:
  - Poor peer relations or social isolation.
  - Unmotivated and unchallenged.
  - Could benefit from a wide support system.
  - Needing an extra push.
  - Terminology: at the brink of success or on the road to success. Often identified as “not there yet!”
Program Overview.

Application form includes: information on perceptions of their personal and academic strengths and challenges, interests and abilities.

What they hope to get out of the mentoring relationship.
YOUTH AT SCHOOL

- Hurting academically
- Poor attendance
- Tend to give up
- Unprepared for class or rarely participates in class
- Unable to take risks
- Raise hands infrequently
- Hostile and angry; aggressive
- Poor peer relationships – difficulty making friends
- Eats lunch alone
- Gets into arguments
YOUTH PERSONALLY

- Needy
- Insecure
- Lack self esteem
- Isolates – is alone a lot
- Feel helpless
- No control over their lives
- Seek attention inappropriately
YOUTH SOCIALLY

- Don’t trust others
- Trouble relating to peers and adults
- Smile infrequently
- Unhappy
- Unenergetic
- Poor communication
- Involved in risky behavior
- Issues with law enforcement
MAKING THE MATCH

- Random VS Deliberate

- Matches between many youth and mentors know no racial or culture barriers.

- Research indicates cross ethnic match successes.
On-going training over the life of matches may increase the likelihood of longer lasting relationships.

It is essential that the mentor receives general but also specialized training for working with children of incarcerated parents, the challenges and youth concerns.

Parents must understand the role of the mentor.
MENTOR TRAINING TOPICS

- Policies and procedures
- Improving listening skills
- How to communicate with youth
- Gift giving
- Physical contact
- Mandated reporting of abuses
- Confidentiality
- Cultural sensitivity
- Instilling self esteem
- Goal setting
- Role of mentor with parents/families of mentees
- Traumatic experiences
- Exposure to violence, drugs and alcohol
- Involvement in the child welfare system
- Legal process the youth is experiencing
- Reentry activities
- Location of mentoring: site or community based
- Duration of program and time commitment
- Strategies for each session
MENTEE TRAINING

- Willingness to participate.
- Role of mentee.
- Role of mentee’s incarcerated parent.
- Program goals.
- Policies and procedures around gifts, location, time and program duration.
- Responsibility of mentee to be there.
AGE APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES

Younger Youth:

- Tell the youth why you decided to become a mentor
- Read a good book together and aloud; get to an exciting part and finish it later
- Computer
- Games: hangman, jacks, chess, checkers, monopoly, crossword puzzles
- Financial independence: checking, savings accounts, ATM
- Manners and etiquette: set a table
- Foreign language – teach a few words of one you or your mentee knows
- Arts and Crafts
- Sports
- Just talk and have fun
- Play cards
AGE APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES

Older Youth:
- Setting realistic and attainable goals
- Community Service
- Personal interests – yours and theirs
- Financial independence – budgeting; checking & savings accounts; personal credit cards; ATM machine – what does it stand for and how it operates
- Time management – how can you balance your time?
- Get organized – do you have a calendar and organizer?
- Heroes – who are the people you admire? Research them.
- Communication skills
- Workplace readiness skills
- Employability indicators – attendance, punctuality, appearance, initiative, maturity, courtesy, attitudes, quantity of work, quality of work, cooperation and flexibility
- Job opportunities – job shadowing, internships, apprenticeships
- Career interest inventory
- After school and community activities; school clubs
- Job exploration and mock applications for work and post-secondary education
- Applications for financial aid, scholarships and awards
- Create a resume
Age Appropriate Activities

- Older Youth:
  - Practice, practice, practice interviewing skills
  - Exercise and healthy eating habits
  - Write a personal mission statement
  - Obtaining the driver’s license
  - Review the report card and finding needed resources to help in weak areas
  - Manners and etiquette (cell phone, pager, hats, handshake, eye contact, etc.)
  - Visit a local college
  - Design a personal business card
  - Making good decisions: alcohol, drugs, sex, cigarette smoking, gang activity, peer pressure
  - Getting ready for the prom and high school graduation
  - Forms – filling out the Federal Express and UPS forms
  - Timeline for after high school – where will you want to be in 5 years, 10 years, 20 years?
  - Take the time to TALK!
If youth are unable to be there on day of mentoring,

*Staff calls mentor*  
or*  
*Mentor calls to check.*

If mentor is unable to make session

*Mentor notifies by phone, text or e-mail.*
KEYS TO PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

Foundations of Successful Mentoring Programs

1. Strong Agency Capacity
2. Proven Program Design
3. Effective Community Partnerships
4. Sustainable Resource Development
5. Useful Program Evaluation

A Guidebook for Program Development (National Mentoring Center, OR)
In order to ensure a successful mentoring program that lasts over time, program staff is one of the most – if not THE most important components. Staff:

- Interact daily with volunteers, youth, parents, teachers and community members.
- Recruit volunteers and mentees.
- Train and provide on-going support to mentors.
- Act as “face” of organization.
Across all types of mentoring programs, mentors who are offered continuing support and supervision are more likely to persist than those who are not contacted regularly by staff.

Unsupportive mentor/mentee matches fail and can do more harm than good. Supervising is a prime risk management tool. A systematic procedure for supervising matches assists in early identification and resolution of problems in relationships.
MATCH SUPERVISION

- Initial contact with mentor and mentee within first 2 weeks of the match. Many programs contact mentors after 2 weeks but not mentees.

- Then contact 2 weeks later.

- Finally monthly if all is well.
1. How often do mentor/mentee meet?
2. Is youth resistant to the match?
3. Are the mentors and mentees satisfied with activities in which they have been engaged?
4. How are pairs communicating?
5. Any special problems?
6. Is mentor able to meet commitment or overwhelmed?
7. Is mentee able to meet commitment or overwhelmed?
8. Any “red flags” that say there may be trouble?
9. How can the program help to improve the relationship?
10. What are the positives about the relationship?
11. Mediation and conflict resolution between the pairs?
INFORMATION COLLECTION

1. Activity form mailed or e-mailed.
2. Phone calls.
3. Face-to-face meetings.
4. Group meetings to share and network.
5. Mentor Support groups/brown bags.
6. Mentee Support groups.
7. E-mail discussion groups and listservs.
THREE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

1. How are you doing?
2. What can I do to help you?
3. What are your issues and concerns?
RECOGNITIONS

- Awards dinners, receptions and other events.
- Mentor/mentee match of the month.
- Profiling matches in newsletters, brochures, media and website.
- Gifts and awards.
- End of the year party.
- National Mentoring Month (January) Appreciation.
- Letters of Appreciation.
- Handwritten notes and birthday cards.
- Notes to and from staff.
- Brown bag lunches – 3/4 times/yr.
- Telephone calls.
BRINGING CLOSURE
THE EXIT INTERVIEW

- Talk to program coordinator first.
- Try different strategies.
- Decision to end relationship, set a specific date for a meeting in person; be honest and candid; talk about your feelings; encourage mentee to share feelings.
- Always be positive and supportive.
- Don’t ever make promises you cannot keep.

*Signed Closure and Termination Agreement*
Administer pre-post surveys to mentors, mentees, teachers/educators, program staff, parents and caregivers when appropriate.

OUTCOMES for youth include improved:
- School attendance and attitudes.
- Social and peer relationships.
- Academic performance and reduced isolation.
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