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**Mentoring and Crime:
A Review of the Literature**

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MENTORING AND CRIME: A LITERATURE REVIEW

As the field of criminal justice expands and more research is conducted to acquire knowledge of effective criminal justice practices, a more contemporary view of crime and justice emerges. Incarceration is continually being evaluated, and seemingly broader topics for alternatives to incarceration are being considered. In Rochester, NY along with many other cities and municipalities around the United States and abroad, mentoring programs have been introduced to respond to crime. Particularly, Rochester is looking to employ a mentoring program for non-violent drug sellers as an alternative to long-term incarceration in prison.

However, mentoring programs are not traditionally used as a response to crime. Not only until recently has the US started evaluating mentoring programs as a technique to counter criminal activity. In most other countries such as Australia and New Zealand, mentoring programs have just emerged within the past couple years as a serious approach to rehabilitate criminal offenders and reduce rates of re-offending. Traditionally, mentoring programs have been used for individuals with problems in school, sports, interpersonal communication and behavioral problems not usually associated with felonious or violent activity.

When some of the failures of the prison, parole, and probation systems have been brought to the forefront of criminal justice research, one can see the shortcoming in these more punitive approaches as they relate to recidivism rates, individual rehabilitation and cost effectiveness. Mentoring programs, while still early in their evaluation, are seen to be more cost effective as they rely greatly on volunteers and non-profits and are seen as more rehabilitative in nature for those who report that they have had positive experiences throughout the programs. Because of these preliminary findings, this area of research deserves much more evaluation and attention.

What is Mentoring?

With many social programs and concepts, there comes a myriad of definitional issues to consider. When implementing and evaluating such programs as the ones put in place to counter criminal activity there must be an explicitly defined mission of the program and a series of operationalized goals to reach that final mission. With mentoring, many different institutions have differing visions as to what constitutes mentoring. The following are a couple definitions that will help guide this research and help to better understand the concept of mentoring, especially as it applies to crime and criminal activity.

Mentor: n. A wise and trusted counsellor (Macquarie Dictionary, Second edition, 1991)

Mentoring is “ a sustained, close, developmental relationship between an older, more experienced individual and a younger person, with a goal of building character, and competence on the part of the protege” (Freedman; Making Sense of Mentoring: Corporation for National Service, June 1996).

Responsible mentoring is a structured one-on-one relationship between an adult and a youth that focuses on the needs of the mentored participant. The relationship should foster caring and support, and encourage individuals to develop to their fullest potential. Mentoring can provide youth the opportunity to develop relationships with responsible adults. The voluntary nature of mentoring participation demonstrates to the youth a level of concern for their welfare that may not have been assumed with a caring “professional” (de Anda, 2001).

These definitional issues come into play as to how one program will administer its mentoring program as opposed to another and how a mentoring program will be evaluated. Goals and outcomes will differ depending on how one defines mentoring. For example, a mentoring program set in place to reduce drop out rates will have different goals than one put in place to help reduce delinquency and

criminal behavior. These two programs may have different definitions of what constitutes mentoring but both may seek to develop life building skills and educational tools to accomplish their defined goals of either reducing drop out rates or improving criminal behavior. It is important for mentoring programs to clearly define what mentoring means to them and keep that in mind when evaluating their progress in achieving their goals. While attempting to gather a comprehensive review on the extant literature, it is beneficial to review some meta-analysis that can compare different programs with similar goals across multiple locations.

Who Does Mentoring?

Many different individuals and organizations participate in mentoring. Generally there are four different groups that partake in mentoring: the community, schools, government and the faith-based community. While this list is not exhaustive, it is the four main groups that this paper will discuss.

Faith in their Futures is a mentoring program run out of the Kings County District Attorney's Office. In Faith in their Futures, an at-risk youth is matched with a faith-based leader in the community. The goal is to reduce criminal behavior, recidivism and self-destructive behavior. The stress is on cooperation between the criminal justice system and faith-based institutions in helping youth meet the goals of the mentor program. The program has been largely successful, especially in its endeavor to establish a connection between the criminal justice system and the faith-based community in a synergistic relationship to address youth crime and delinquency (Blank and Davie).

Rochester, NY is in the process of implementing a cooperative program between the district attorneys office and the faith-based community to mentor drug dealers who have been picked up in the formal criminal justice system. Other constituencies such as probation and parole are key players that will be part of this system and will aide in making choices. The importance is cooperation and communication between the agencies to develop a program that will meet its goals and simultaneously facilitate a superfluous transition from traditional methods of dealing with these offenders to the

mentoring program. Judges, DA's, mentors and the community at large can have the needed impact to promote and sustain mentoring programs.

As such, the government has taken a keen interest in promoting mentoring programs after favorable results have been reported in many studies. The biggest program and the most well known government sponsored programs is Big Sister Big Brother. The widely successful program has been the basis of many governmental grants and private funding. Studies, such as the one conducted by Grossman and Tierney, show that BSBB has had a positive effect on improving grades, improving familial and personal relationships, reducing amount of days of school missed and reducing aggressive behavior (Grossman and Tierney, 1997). These types of behaviors have been inextricably linked to criminal behavior in the past and are often the focal points of mentoring programs that attempt to reduce criminal behavior in youths. Because of this link, much of this paper will also address non-crime related outcome variables such as drop-out rates, familial/peer relationships, alcohol/drug abuse, etc.

Schools have been long time supporters of mentoring programs and have established programs that aide youth in successfully building real world skills and improving educational circumstances such as retention and grade point average. One example of the schools involvement in mentoring youth is the after school JUMP program. The JUMP program is comprised of over 16,000 kids and includes over 200 agencies nationwide. The legislative goals for the program include: improving academic performance, reducing drop-out rates, reducing rates of juvenile delinquency and reducing gang involvement (Mertinko, 2001).

The community in general is the fourth group that has commonly participated in mentoring youth. Most of these programs are somewhat informal and do not have much evaluation or quantitative data to show their effectiveness. Community mentoring can be done between teachers and students or influential community members and younger members. Non-profit community organizations have also been seen to participate in mentoring youth to address the same problems that face children in schools and in the neighborhood.

Types of Mentoring

All mentoring programs can be fit into one of two categories; informal mentoring and formal mentoring. Formal mentoring is carried out by organizations that have a mentoring program in place which has defined goals and a system of evaluation. Programs such as BSBB, JUMP programs, DEFY and Sponsor-a-Scholar are all examples of formal mentoring.

Informal mentoring occurs when there is no program set in place and the mentor/mentee relationship is not monitored in a formal evaluation or feedback loop. These relationships often times do not have specific goals and are not looking to address adverse behaviors. Examples of informal mentoring are relationships that exist between a professor and student, manager and employee, and parent and child. While informal and formal mentoring differ in many ways, the results of these relationships are often strikingly similar. Likewise, the skills and tools they seek to develop in their mentees are often consistent with each other.

Informal mentoring also takes place in the criminal milieu among an experienced criminal and a novice. A recent study examined the prevalence of mentoring among criminals in their criminal careers. This type of tutelage has been seen in American organized crime and to a lesser extent in those individuals involved in street level crime. The researchers administered a survey to 268 incarcerated prisoners in Quebec. Two minimum-security institutions, two medium-security institutions, and one multiple-security institution served as sites for the surveyed population. The results indicated that mentoring was a major factor in introducing street level criminals into the criminal environment and also in advancing those criminal careers. In these relationships an older criminal will mentor a younger aspiring criminal and often times they will be a relative or a close friend. As in formal mentoring that address the behaviors that exists in these very relationships, the stronger the mentor/mentee connection, the more positive the results. In this case, “positive” results refer to more crimes committed or the more serious the crimes (Morselli, et. al., 2006).

The research in this area showed that 95.2 percent were said to have had an individual that they would clearly identify as a mentor. 32.7 percent said that their mentor was a family member while

overall 81.7 percent reported that their mentor was someone who had a close or very close relationship with them. The study illustrates that mentorship in crime is very prevalent and that these mentor/mentee relationships usually involve individuals with a close relationship with one other (Morselli, et. al., 2006).

While this study shows the impacts of informal mentoring in criminal careers, the same relationships and implications of these relationships are shown in informal mentoring regarding legal careers. The strength of relationships and closeness of mentors and their mentees builds trust and dependence. These are the same qualities that are stressed in both criminal and non-criminal mentoring environments.

Another typology in mentoring programs is either one-to-one mentoring or group mentoring. One-to-one mentoring is the most studied and touted of all types of mentoring but is also the hardest to develop because of the serious lack of mentors willing and qualified to participate in the programs. Group mentoring, consisting of either one mentor for a group of more than one mentees, or a group of mentors for a larger group of mentees, is a second typology. Group mentoring is becoming more prevalent in an attempt to address the mentor to mentee ratio that often leaves many youths without mentors (Herrera, et. al.).

Often mentoring programs will be broken down further into two other groups that further define their target populations. School-based mentoring and community-based mentoring programs are both available to mentor youth in different areas. School-based mentoring usually takes place in a school setting and most often address problems dealing with school related problems. Truancy, grades and disciplinary problems are target problems that school-based programs seek to ameliorate. Community-based programs may attempt to address these same situations but are usually broader in the matters in which they address. These programs are often held in churches, community centers, recreation facilities and government buildings as opposed to schools.

A study conducted in 2000 illustrated some differences in school-based programs and community-based programs. The researchers concluded that school-based programs were ideal for communities with little financial income which intended to address youth needs in academia.

Community-based programs were more apt at meeting a wide range of youth issues that sometimes went unaddressed in school-based programs. However, much of the time these community mentoring programs cost more and require more resources. Despite the disparities, the most important relationship qualities between mentor and mentee were consistent for both types of programs which were closeness of relationships, instrumental support and emotional support (Herrera, et. al., 2000).

Mentoring Programs

Most mentoring programs are made up of similar elements consistent with their program goals. Elements are parts of the program that make up the structure of the mentoring program. Likewise, it can be seen throughout the literature that the goals of mentoring programs are very similar even when the mentoring programs seek to address different issues (i.e. mentoring for school truants or mentoring juvenile offenders.) Both the elements and goals combine to assemble the final structure of the program and influence how it will be evaluated.

Common elements can be seen in mentoring programs including the Juvenile Mentoring Program (JUMP), Big Sister Big Brother (BSBB), the Uncle Project, DEFY, and many others. One-to-one mentor to mentee ratio, voluntariness of the participants and strategic matching of relationships are among the most common and integral elements of these programs. However, there have been new developments in the area of group and on-line mentoring. Because of the rising number of at-risk youth and the lack of qualified mentors, some programs have been pushed to switch to these newer types of mentoring projects which allow multiple youths to be mentored by one mentor or small group of mentors (Herrera, et. al.).

Children with multiple problems in various different areas is not a new phenomenon. Mentoring programs have been developed to meet various different needs. However, the programs are very much similar in that they all seek to develop skills for youth that will help them meet goals in different areas which will serve them for a lifetime. Placing children with a complimentary mentor that will most likely

yield positive outcomes is a top priority of mentoring programs no matter what type of program the youth enters.

It has been illustrated through studies that the mentor/mentee relationship is the most important factor in the programs' outcomes. A positive mentor/mentee relationship often produces favorable outcomes for both parties. Studies also suggest that negative relationships do not produce any positive results and can quite often worsen a mentee's situation yielding unfavorable outcomes (Lucas and Liabo, 2003). A real problem exists when there are many at-risk youth who can benefit from mentoring but are unable to be matched with a mentor because of the mentors' lack of qualification.

To ensure positive matches to the best of the programs' ability, one must use strategic planning in pairing mentors and mentees. A pilot program in Australia aimed to strategically place mentees with appropriate mentors. The program offered a one-on-one relationship between a mentor and a mentee. The goal of the program was to create "performing matches." These are relationships that last over a year and provide ongoing support to the mentee. The evaluation was favorable towards the mentoring program especially when performing matches were made. In this study, 13 participants were seen to have been placed in "performing matches". These youths were reported to have reduced offending, increased community involvement, improved self esteem and communication skills and more motivation (Delaney and Milne, 2002).

Positive Effects of Mentoring

One of the reasons that mentoring has made an increasing impression on the criminal justice system is the amount of studies that have shown positive results of the youth who have participated in the programs. Many studies have been done to show the effectiveness of mentoring programs, most notably the BSBB study. It is important to analyze these finding not only to recognize these programs but to find areas that need improvement to maximize effectiveness.

First, we will look at the BSBB study that was conducted in 2001. This study has had the most impact on the criminal justice community in terms of providing quantitative data in support of

mentoring. A sample of 959 individuals was taken from 1139 youths who entered the BSBB program and additionally completed all the necessary baseline interviews. Participants were between the ages of 10 and 16. An evaluation was done after 18 months of completion of the program. The youth who completed this program were nearly 46% less likely to initiate drug use, 27% less likely to initiate alcohol use and almost 32% less likely to hit someone. Academically, their grades were improved by 3%, their academic competence increased 4%, were 36% less likely to skip class and over 50% less likely to skip a whole day of school (Tierney and Grossman, 2001).

Volunteers in Prevention, Probation, and Prisons (VIP) has evaluated its mentoring program and produced positive results, much like BSBB. Volunteers in Prevention, Probation, and Prisons (VIP) is a group that offers mentoring programs to youth with the goals of improving school performance, avoiding court appearances, and intervening when there is need for alcohol, tobacco and drug prevention. An evaluation completed in 2004 focused on six main areas of concern including: school performance and attendance, substance abuse, mental health, family and peer relationships, educational status and aggressive behavior/delinquency. Pre-tests were compared with post-tests which illustrated that youth had improved in all areas except educational status which had stayed the same (VIP, 2004).

A more comprehensive approach was taken in reviewing mentoring programs by Foster who collected material from 1995-2000. Foster found that mentor programs were largely successful in reaching their goals by positively effecting truancy, drug/alcohol abuse and delinquency. A major point that is made in the paper is the acceptance of the community when looking to implement mentoring programs. It is important to appeal to the community when public safety is in question (Foster, 2001).

There are about 2,300 mentoring program serving children in the State of California. 72 percent of over 1,000 Californians surveyed said that they are willing to pay more in taxes for the introduction of more mentoring programs in 1997. In 2000, 60 percent of over 1,600 adults surveyed believed that mentoring programs were wise investments in youth for a reduction in violence and other youth problems and would like to see an increase in mentoring programs (Forster, 2001). Mentoring programs often rely on volunteers for mentoring but also rely on public assistance when raising funds for facilities

and supplies. If the public backs programs that are shown to be successful, we will see a more widespread acceptance and implementation of mentoring programs.

While most mentoring programs rely on a one-to-one mentor to mentee ratio, a study has been completed that shows positive results from a group mentoring initiative. A survey was given to school staff, program staff, mentors and mentees of three different group mentoring programs. The majority of the group participants were shown to have improved educational and familial relationships. The study does not quantify these variables and does not provide to what extent these relationships were improved. Furthermore, it does not provide information on juvenile delinquency or offending rates after the completion of the program (Herrara, et. al.).

This study has also shown the importance of the mentor/mentee relationship. The better the group interacted with their mentors the more favorable their outcomes. This relationship was reported by both the mentors and the mentees. While group mentoring differs from one-to-one mentoring, both show positive results when the relationships of the participants are strong.

A progress report was put out by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention that outlines the JUMP programs in effect in 2000. The report suggested that if mentoring programs were successful in improving youth development, they would be successful in reaching their main objectives. As aforementioned in this paper, mentor programs may differ in who they intend to reach and what specific goals they want to improve, but it remains consistent that mentoring programs seek to build effective skills and improve the decision-making process (Novotney, 2000).

The JUMP progress review looked at school problems, social/family problems, delinquency, alcohol use, drug use, tobacco use and pregnancy/early parenting. Males (n=3,592) and females (n=3,807) were represented in the sample. Mentors and mentees were asked about their perceptions of the benefits of the program and reported that they experienced favorable outcome in the areas of academic performance, dropout rates, delinquency and gang involvement. However, mentor relationships that were bi-gender mostly reported mixed results. The mentors and mentees of both types of relationships reported that they liked and were understood by their mentors but boys matched with

male mentors reported a more positive relationship when it came to avoiding drugs and gangs (Novotney, et.al., 2000). This may have implications when developing a mentoring program which attempts to respond to these types of situations.

No Impact and Negative Impacts of Mentoring Programs

The literature and current studies have indicated that there are many positive effects of mentoring programs. However, some studies suggest that mentoring programs are either ineffective, too costly, hard to implement or any combination of these. Likewise, many studies that illustrate the benefits of mentoring also point out some of their drawbacks. It is very important to address these drawbacks in order to create and implement an effective mentoring program or revamp an existing one.

Research conducted by “What Works for Children” concluded that one-to-one mentoring programs had not been shown to improve offending or delinquent behavior. The authors conducted a meta-analysis of 55 studies that when combined into a single measure showed little improvement in study variables. However, another review took a more detailed look at ten studies evaluating mentoring programs which showed no significant evidence that the programs improved academic achievement, school attendance, school dropout rates, child misconduct or employment (Lucas and Liabo, 2003).

The researchers extended their research to review work that has been done in the UK. These studies have also shown that there is little measurable change in behavior of those who have completed mentoring programs. Project CHANCE, a London initiative, showed no statistically significant differences between those who entered the program and those who had not. Variables that were studied included school absences, special needs and test results in math, science and English. Similarly, the Dalston Youth Programme in Hackney, London, did not report significant improvements in children aged 11-14 in the areas of offending and school performance. In both of these programs, the mentoring experience as a whole was seen as a positive relationship as reported by the mentors and youth themselves (Lucas and Liabo, 2003).

Another study was conducted to evaluate the outcomes in 43 mentoring programs in Wales and England. Over an 18-month period, a total of 2,049 individuals were placed in a mentoring program. The outcome data reported that 58 percent of the mentor relationships were successful and that 42 percent ended prematurely. The researchers acknowledged this ratio looks unfavorable for the program yet suggest that given the extreme environments surrounding these at risk youth, even a short mentoring relationship can be seen as being useful. However, within one-year of joining the program, 55 percent of the youth had committed another offense dealt with by the police or by the courts. The researchers conclude that more research is needed to really determine the effectiveness of mentoring programs and it is unknown whether there is significant value to mentoring programs (Tarling, Davison and Clarke, 2004).

Overcoming Pitfalls of Mentoring Programs

As with any social program, funding opportunities are a key aspect in making mentoring programs run efficiently and continue to be sustainable over time. Many programs run the risk of being unable to continue their operation while youth are still enrolled. Then, not only are youth unable to benefit from the programs after they are shut down but it also sends the message that the at-risk youth are unimportant. Thus, these individuals are subject to negative mentoring experiences leading to negative outcomes of goals.

A survey administered by Public and Private Ventures looked at the cost of mentoring programs in the US. They selected 50 mentoring programs from a database of 720 who had responded to the survey. They found that costs ranged from 500 dollars to 6.5 million dollars per program. The average cost was 324,000 and the median cost was approximately 70,000 dollars. Finances for the mentoring programs included staffing, facilities, activities and transportation (Fountain and Arbreton).

While volunteers usually make up the bulk of mentors and staff, the costs to keep organizations running are usually quite significant. Finding funding sources is critical to keep programs running, especially in areas of low-income and limited resources. Examples of funding identified by Public and

Private Ventures included foundation grants, United Way, individual and corporate gifts, federal and state grants. As previously noted, public perception of mentoring programs can play a major role in obtaining grant funding and public support. The more effective a mentoring program is run and the more studies that show positive effects of mentoring, the more apt the community will be to support the programs both ideally and financially (Fountain and Arbreton).

Corporate support for programming expenses can be vastly beneficial. Corporations, employer groups, banks, insurance groups, real estate and law offices, hospitals and construction/land developers are all possible backers or targets for fundraising opportunities that can aide in supporting mentoring programs. Furthermore, these corporate organizations are likely to be found in most communities despite their location, size, or income (Garringer, 2005).

Developmental failures are also pitfalls that plague mentoring programs. Garringer, Fulop, and Rennick further outline strategies that are useful for organizations looking to implement mentoring programs. Key components of all mentoring programs are: 1) A written mission statement and a program development plan, 2) strong knowledge of mentoring and youth development, 3) a written policy and procedure manual, 4) access to training and technical assistance, 5) diversity of youth and community being served in the program, 6) qualified and trained staff, 7) parent agency support, and 8) community awareness of the program. Each facet listed will help direct members, increase support and explicitly inform all members of the inner workings of the program (Garringer, Fulop and Rennick, 2003).

A development plan is suggested throughout the literature and mentioned briefly in this piece. It is an important feature of mentoring programs that deserves a little more attention. While development plans will be different for every program depending on their circumstances, the basic elements of their plans will stay the same. First, a steering committee should be formed made up of community members, school officials, members of the criminal justice system, youth and parents. This helps to foster cooperation between different organizations and aide in the implementation process. Second, a clear plan to implement the program is needed. A program plan should include a self-assessment that defines

needs, resource allocation, develops a timeline for services, identifies key constituencies and outlines day-to-day operations. Lastly, a well designed plan will set goals and an evaluation process to see if those goals have been met. A continual feedback process and formal evaluations which are conducted regularly help to ensure that the program is effective and efficient. All these elements, briefly outlined, are integral for a sustainable mentoring program that will be less prone to developmental failures (Garringer, Fulop and Rennick, 2003).

Another pitfall of mentoring that is mentioned repeatedly throughout the literature is the lack of qualified mentors. A 2003 White House report stated that at risk-youth would benefit most from the introduction of a qualified mentor in their life. One way to attract qualified mentors is to offer paid compensation. Paid mentors and counselors have been shown to be a strengthening tool alongside volunteers and professionals. Furthermore, they have been shown to illustrate early promise and continued success at higher rates than non-paid mentors (Smith, 2004).

Paying mentors is not always possible. Given that most mentoring programs are not equipped financially to do so, another strategy to counter the dearth of qualified mentors is offering training. Training programs that help equip mentors with the necessary knowledge to improve the mentor/mentee relationship are shown to have great success. Activities that facilitate engagement and skills development are at the apex of any training program. Training must also stress the safety and emotional welfare of its participants and staff members. It is important for mentoring programs to acknowledge the importance of mentor training and have continual support for both mentors and mentees (Taylor, 2003).

Conclusion

There are many mentoring programs that exist today. Many have been well received and have reported positive results. Some have been dismissed or have reported insignificant results. Either way, mentoring has had a profound effect on the criminal justice system. While still in its early stages of being a serious crime prevention strategy, there are several things mentoring can bring to the criminal justice system.

The biggest importance is to create programs that are solidly based in research and empirical data. Studies such as the BSBB study and the JUMP evaluations must be carefully interpreted. When looking to implement programs one must take a “what works” approach. This may be different for different programs in disparate locations and demographics. With a program plan that sets a mission statement, states outcome goals, conducts the necessary needs assessment reports and creates a board that will oversee the program with the right people, there will exist a strong program.

Picking the most appropriate program for the needs of your community can be a critical choice. The program structure must be based on the specific target population and the needs of the community. Realistically, a mentoring program must be within the community’s resources and capabilities. With the necessary research and planning, a mentoring program can be developed for any community with any amount of resources.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention offers the JUMP programs as their staple approach in mentoring youth. They state that juvenile delinquency is unacceptably high and believe that mentoring is the key to success. Despite some shortcomings, they believe that mentoring shows great potential for addressing the issues youth face today. The office acknowledges research as a necessary component of developing effective programs. Looking at the studies addressed throughout this paper it is crucial to understand that positive features must be continually evaluated and sustained for as long as they yield positive results. Negatives must be quickly found and corrected. If mentoring programs can continue improving in the areas that they are ineffective through research and evaluation, there could be a marked improvement in juvenile crime and delinquency.

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