TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PROFILE
Examining the Referral Stage for Mentoring High-Risk Youth
In Six Different Juvenile Justice Settings
Dependency Court, Delinquency Court, Juvenile Detention, Juvenile Corrections,
Juvenile Probation and Teen Court/Youth Court Diversion Programs

Juvenile Probation and Mentoring
THE REFERRAL STAGE

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Juvenile Probation and Mentoring

The function of Juvenile Probation is to provide supervision and monitoring to youth under the jurisdiction of the court and ensure that youth on probation comply with all court orders. Juvenile Probation officers have the ability, through the pre-dispositional investigation/interview process, to identify the services and supports a young person and his/her family may need. The probation officer is then in the unique position of being able to make whatever referrals are appropriate to meet these needs, including referrals for mentoring. In addition to serving as a sanction for adjudicated youth, Juvenile Probation may be used as a way of diverting status and first-time juvenile offenders from the court system. Direction, guidance and rehabilitation services are provided to youth on probation and their families in an effort to encourage and support behavior considered to be appropriate by the court and the community. Rehabilitative services are provided by the probation officer(s) and/or community-based providers.

Mentoring Program Description
Mentoring involves a non-parental adult who plays an important role in promoting healthy development for youth. There are many mentoring models and even more programmatic differences within the different mentoring models. The goal of mentoring programs is to provide youth with positive adult contact and, thereby, reduce risk factors (e.g., early antisocial behavior, alienation, lack of commitment to school) by enhancing protective factors (e.g., healthy beliefs, opportunities for involvement, and social and material reinforcement for appropriate behavior). Mentors provide youth with personal connectedness, supervision and guidance, skills training, career or cultural enrichment opportunities, a knowledge of spirituality and values and, perhaps most importantly, goals and hope for the future.

Geographic and Demographic Characteristics
Juvenile Probation is a community-based corrections program that exists in all 50 of the United States. The minimum and maximum ages offenders are considered to be “juveniles” are jurisdiction specific and guided by statute. Typical minimum and maximum ages are 10 and 18 years respectively. Youth placed on probation are often under-educated and may have limited access to information about opportunities available to them. Referrals of youth for probation tend to be more heavily male than female, as is true for the majority of juvenile justice services.
Possible Challenges Facing Youth Involved with Juvenile Probation

The overarching goal of mentoring youth in the juvenile justice system is to build and strengthen youth assets. When dealing with youth in this setting, one should be cognizant of potential challenges:

**Individual**
- Conduct disorders (authority conflict/rebellious/stubborn/disruptive/antisocial)
- General delinquency involvement
- Mental health issues (including substance abuse)
- Unmet medical and dental needs

**Family**
- Mental disorders/antisocial parents
- Family history of problem behavior/criminal involvement
- Family poverty/low family socioeconomic status
- Family violence (child maltreatment, partner violence, conflict)
- Family stress
- Parent criminality
- Parental use of physical punishment/harsh and/or erratic discipline practices
- Poor parental supervision (control, monitoring, and child management)
- Poor parent-child relations or communication

**School**
- Poor school attendance
- Poor school performance; academic failure
- Learning disorders
What makes a youth on probation appropriate for a referral for mentoring?
- Determinations about the appropriateness of a youth on probation for referral to mentoring are made on a case-by-case basis and include consideration of the following:
  - Needs of the youth and the family, in particular youth who need a parental figure or caring adult.
  - Offense with which the youth is charged.
  - Length of the youth’s probation.
  - Commitment of the youth and family to the mentoring process/program.
  - Youth charged with violent and/or sex offenses are often not considered appropriate for referrals for mentoring services.
  - Referrals for mentoring may be formal and part of the youth’s adjudication or informal with participation in mentoring encouraged by the probation officer.

Who is authorized to refer a youth on probation for mentoring services?
- Any Juvenile Probation officer may refer a youth on his/her caseload for mentoring services.
- In some jurisdictions, the Juvenile Court judge may refer a youth on probation to mentoring services.

What is the process probation officers use for referring a youth for mentoring?
- The process typically begins with the pre-disposition investigation/interview (PDI) through which the probation officer gathers information about the youth, the youth’s family and community connections, the offense, educational history, etc., and determines the specific needs of the youth and family.
- How referrals are made depends on whether the probation officer selects from a number of mentoring programs to which they may refer youth or one specific mentoring program that provides these services for probation youth.
- Referrals made to community-based mentoring programs require that youth and family members complete whatever paperwork and processes are required for intake into that program, and intake decisions are made at the discretion of mentoring program staff.
- Referrals of youth to a specific mentoring program that works directly with probation department staff may involve mentoring program staff attending probation department meetings where cases are staffed and the decision to refer for mentoring will be made jointly.

Were youth on probation willing to participate in mentoring programming?
- A requirement for the referral of a youth to mentoring program is willingness and a commitment to participate in mentoring by both the youth and his/her family.
- Formal referrals to mentoring programming become part of the court order for services.
- In cases where the youth and/or family’s commitment to mentoring is questionable, the probation officer may encourage or “strongly recommend” participation in a mentoring program.
What is the role of the probation officer once the referral to a mentoring program is made?

- Probation officers ensure that referred youth are complying with all the conditions of probation, including participation in court ordered mentoring.
- Mentoring program staff contact the probation officer as needed to share and discuss concerns about the individual needs of youth, as well as to provide the probation officer with information about the youth’s progress.

Are there any statutory requirements related to mentoring?

Related to the mentoring program and Juvenile Probation, there were no statutory requirements to be met.

WHAT’S WORKING: Examples of Effective Strategies

Probation Officer Relationships with Mentoring Program Staff

- Probation officers working in close partnership with mentoring program staff is key in terms of the youth’s successful referral for mentoring services and the youth and family’s willingness to participate in mentoring programming.
- Immediate contact by probation staff with mentoring program staff regarding the referral is significant.
- Regular contact between probation officers and mentoring program staff is important.

On-site Mentoring Program Staff Office

- In some jurisdictions, mentoring program staff had office space in the juvenile court or probation office.
- Sharing space supported the development and maintenance of collegial relationships between probation and mentoring staff.
- Sharing space supported the ability of court or probation staff to walk referred youth and families to the mentoring program staff office where the intake process could begin immediately.
CHALLENGES AND ACTION STEPS

**Challenge #1:** For many youth on probation, there are poor family relationships that may keep family members from supporting the youth’s participation in a mentoring program.

**Action Step** – When mentoring services would appear to be of benefit to a youth on probation, the Juvenile Probation officer should consider court ordering these. An investment by mentoring program staff in building relationships with the youth’s parent(s)/caregiver(s) may serve to provide a support system for encouraging the youth’s ongoing participation in mentoring. It may also be beneficial to order parenting education and other support services in conjunction with mentoring.

**Challenge #2:** The time it takes for a youth and his/her mentor to form a bond is variable. If the appropriate bond is not formed before the youth’s probation ends, it is unlikely the mentoring relationship will be sustained post-probation.

**Action Step** – Prior to making a referral for mentoring, consideration should be given to the term of the youth’s probation and whether this timeframe is conducive to the development of an effective bond between the youth and the mentor.

**Challenge #3:** Changes in the young person’s placement can negatively affect the ability of the mentoring program to continue to serve these youth, particularly if the placement is outside the community served by the mentoring program.

**Action Step** – A youth for whom a change in placement is imminent should not be referred for mentoring services. If the change in placement was not planned, there is likely little that may be done to mitigate the impact of this situation.

**Challenge #4:** Some mentoring programs are not able to recruit enough mentors to support referred youth and, therefore, have a waiting list.

**Action Step #4** – Referrals of youth on probation should be made only to mentoring programs with available mentors in order to avoid having these youth placed on what may be a lengthy and long-term waiting list.
TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

**Petition** — the document that specifies the violation of law and state statute number described in the affidavit that the youth is alleged to have committed. A probable cause statement or affidavit, usually filed by the police, accompanies the petition.

**Pre-Adjudication** — the period between arrest and a court ruling on guilt or innocence.

**Wrap-Around Services** — a method of service delivery highlighted by commitment to create services on a “one youth at a time” basis to support normalized and inclusive options for the youth with complex needs. Wrap-around interventions create a youth and family team composed of the people who know the youth best to design an individualized plan.

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**Adjudicated** — a court ruling of guilt or innocence.

**At-Risk and High-Risk Youth** — The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) defines “at-risk” youth as those with high levels of risk in their family, home, communities and social environments to such a degree that it could lead to educational failure, dropping out of school or involvement in juvenile delinquency and gang-related offenses. OJJDP defines “high-risk” youth as those with present or past juvenile justice involvement.

**Caretaker or Physical Custodian** — a person who has physical custody but not legal custody of a youth, such as a foster parent, placement facility or relative without legal custody.

**Juvenile** — a youth under the age of majority. The recommended age is usually eighteen (18) and younger.

**Legal Guardian** — an adult who is not the biological parent, or a state or licensed children and youth agency, who has been given legal authority by a court to provide care and custody of a child/youth.

**Needs Assessment** — one tool in the Structured Decision-Making process. It identifies the offender’s specific needs and provides part of the foundation for the case plan.
MENTOR’s Elements of Effective Practice
For Mentoring™, Third Edition, Checklist for Mentoring Programs

For free, downloadable versions of these resources, visit:
MENTOR at http://www.mentoring.org/program_resources/Researching_the_ReferralStage/;
Global Youth Justice at http://www.globalyouthjustice.org/Mentoring.htm; and

**TRAINING AND TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE RESOURCES**

OJJDP Research Report on Referring High Risk Youth for Mentoring Services – Full Report

OJJDP Research Report on Referring High Risk Youth for Mentoring Services – Executive Summary

Juvenile Justice Journal on Referring High Risk Youth for Mentoring Services – Special Edition

Memorandums of Understanding
Six Resource Guides for Developing MOUs for Juvenile Justice and Mentoring Services

PowerPoint Presentations for
Six Juvenile Justice Settings and Mentoring

Six Technical Assistance Profiles:
Examining the Referral Stage for Mentoring High-Risk Youth

MENTOR’s Elements of Effective Practice
For Mentoring™, Third Edition

MENTOR’s Elements of Effective Practice
For Mentoring™ Toolkit — Juvenile Justice Section
WEBSITES OF INTEREST

Boys and Girls Club of the Tennessee Valley
Knoxville, TN
http://ww.bgctnv.org

Global Youth Justice Website – Mentoring
High Risk Youth Resources
http://www.globalyouthjustice.org/Mentoring.html

National Partnership for Juvenile Services –
Mentoring High Risk Youth Resources
http://www.npjs.org/

MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership
http://www.mentoring.org/

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency
Prevention – Mentoring Resources
http://www.ojjdp.gov/programs/mentoring.html

Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency
Prevention – Model Program Guide/Mentoring
http://www.ojjdp.gov/mpg/progTypesMentoring.aspx

Administration for Children, Youth and Families,
U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services
http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/acyf/

State-by-State Listing of Legislation and Statutes
Regarding Juveniles
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