Researching the Referral Stage of Youth Mentoring in Six Juvenile Justice Settings

AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS
Executive Summary

Researching the Referral Stage of Youth Mentoring in Six Juvenile Justice Settings: An Exploratory Analysis, prepared for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, examines the referral stage of the mentoring process across six juvenile justice system settings (Juvenile Corrections, Juvenile Detention, Juvenile Probation, Delinquency Court, Youth/Teen Court, and Dependency Court). The current study reflects a commitment by the United States Department of Justice (USDOJ) to augment the empirical knowledge base on youth mentoring and move toward evidence-based best practices regarding the vital referral stage of the mentoring process.

As a low-cost delinquency prevention and intervention option that capitalizes on the resources of local communities and caring individuals, mentoring has emerged as a promising delinquency reduction strategy for at-risk or high-risk youth. In general, the terms at-risk and high-risk refer to any youth who has a higher-than-normal probability of becoming involved in the juvenile or adult criminal justice system (for national probability arrest statistics, see Brame et al., 2012). Mentoring programs are suitable for service delivery in multiple forms ranging from popular one-to-one and group/team approaches to peer-to-peer, cross-age and e-mentoring orientations and thus can be customized to a wide range of needs and situations. Mentoring relationships have dramatically increased in recent years for youth development, generally, and particularly for at-risk youth as an unprecedented amount of federal funding for mentoring initiatives has enabled wide scale implementation of mentoring programs. While mentoring services have substantially increased over the last few years, the empirical knowledge base on mentoring remains under-developed as too little empirical information exists to inform efforts to orient the mentoring community in evidence-based practices.

In an effort to fill the gap in the knowledge base regarding the referral stage of youth mentoring processes, this report considers the following research objective driven questions:

1. What are the best practices in identifying and referring youth to mentoring programs across distinct juvenile justice settings?
2. What is the capacity of the mentoring community to support the youth identified for mentoring from six juvenile justice settings?
3. What is the quality of mentoring programs, as defined by alignment with the Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring™, across the juvenile justice settings?
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continued

4. What intermediate outcomes are achieved by mentoring throughout the settings?

To examine these questions, a mixed-methods research design was employed that entailed the collection of original data obtained from instrument-driven, site visit stakeholder interviews and a national survey on mentoring referral practices and related program capacity issues. The report begins with an overview chapter on youth mentoring with focused attention to mentoring at-risk youth, the diversity of mentoring forms and strategies, and review of the extant scientific literature regarding referral specific issues and evidence-based outcomes for delinquency prevention and reduction. The second chapter details the methodology followed by Chapters 3 and 4, which present qualitative (site visits) and quantitative (survey) findings, respectively. The report concludes with a fifth chapter that synthesizes the information collected from multiple sites and sources before discussing related implications for the mentoring community.

Key findings include:

- Though not uniform, there are seven distinct steps in most referral processes from point of identification to mentoring relationship matching.
- Intake and assessment of youth should precede referral.
- More youth are deemed eligible for referral than are ultimately matched with a mentor.
- The most pressing obstacle to matching is a shortage of qualified mentors; the lack of mentors is more pronounced for certain demographics, particularly African-American males.
- The most common reasons youth are not referred for mentoring services include violence, substance abuse and mental health issues.
- Youth and family member demeanor often play a significant role in the decision to refer.
- Juvenile justice settings using embedded mentoring programs more readily facilitate matching.
- The majority of mentoring is delivered in one-on-one and community contexts.
- Very few juvenile justice settings follow up with youth after referral.

- Youth mentoring is overwhelmingly voluntary.

- Mentoring tends to be gender segregated with same gender mentor-mentee matches.

- The majority of mentoring is delivered by national level youth service organizations such as Boys & Girls Clubs and Big Brothers Big Sisters.

- The majority of mentoring settings examined utilize similar assessment criteria for determining suitability of referred youth for mentoring services.