

Successfully matching caring mentors with youth at risk can provide a significant resiliency factor to thwart school failure.

School Safety

UPDATE

Effective mentoring fosters self-esteem and staying power

Many of this nation's students leave the educational mainstream long before they reach their full potential as responsible citizens due to a combination of circumstances over which they have no control. Carefully designed and administered mentoring programs can enhance children's self-esteem, encourage their academic growth and reduce the likelihood of dropping out with all its attendant social costs.

Mentoring programs fall into several broad categories:

- personal development, in which the mentored youth receives emotional support that enhances personal/social growth, the formation of a healthy self-identity, and guidance in the development of decision-making skills;
- academic assistance, in which the mentored youth is tutored to improve his/her skill level in a specific area or in overall academic achievement; or
- career guidance, in which the mentored youth explores different career options or learns to develop the skills necessary for a specified career path.

Appropriate matching

Mentoring programs match an adult or perhaps an older youth with a younger person. Mentors may be recruited formally or informally from numerous sources — the neighborhood, corporations or local businesses, professional organizations, various faith communities, law enforcement personnel or college/university faculties or student bodies.

Central to each mentoring program is the concept of "the match." Whether done through separate interviews, comparing interest inventories or personal profiles, or introductory

sessions in which mentors and mentees "choose" each other, the goal is the formation of a relationship that will ultimately benefit the younger person. A Public/Private Ventures nationwide study conducted on the impact of a mentoring program shows that adult mentoring as a strategy for supporting at-risk youth does work. (See pages 6 and 7.) It should be noted that the matches formed by the evaluated program, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, are carefully supervised and supported by rigorous standards and trained personnel.

The mentoring process is a complex interaction. As with all human relationships, there are risks and potential trouble spots that must be acknowledged in order to keep the nature of the relationship in perspective. For example, young people can be reluctant to trust an unknown adult. Unless a mentor understands that the initial lack of trust is not "personal," hurt feelings on the mentor's part may lead to a negative attitude towards the mentee and undermine an otherwise promising relationship.

Overeager mentors can press too hard, to the point that they make emotional demands that overwhelm mentees. In contrast, some adults sign up for a mentoring project and fail to follow through after an initial session, thus reinforcing many youngsters' beliefs that adults are unreliable. Youngsters, too, can sabotage the mentoring process. Mentors must understand that they are but one among many factors that influence young people's lives and choices. The reality is, some mentoring relationships will "take," and some will not.

Wide popularity

What accounts for mentoring's widespread appeal with volunteers and acceptance within mainstream society? Mentoring is both *simple* and *direct* — one-to-one contact has the potential of enhancing the life of a young person. Mentoring carries a positive public perception as a *sympathetic* type of activity. Mentoring is a *legitimate* means by which unrelated adults may take part in the lives of children; further, mentoring is comfortable for many adults because the relationships formed are *bounded* in the sense that the emotional commitment to the mentee is far lower than that expected of a parent. Finally, mentoring is *plastic*, accommodating the personalities and styles of the individual participants.¹

Psychological literature contains evidence of resilient chil-

dren who emerge from childhoods devastated by poverty, abuse or neglect as emotionally whole, capable adults. One of the documented protective factors that contributes to resiliency is the presence of an extra-familial source of support.

Mentors frequently are the means by which young people learn of opportunities outside their daily existence. For children growing up poor, this may include an introduction to employment options in the business world, the consideration of a college education or post-secondary vocational training, exposure to varied cultural and social events, or an introduction to new recreational pursuits. Often mentors provide the nonjudgmental listening that so many young people need in the journey toward adulthood. A caring mentor who can appropriately reflect and validate feelings, help with problems and, at times, offer considered advice provides a nurturing security that a youngster may not otherwise have. Although it is not a mentor's function to make decisions for mentees, many mentors of adolescents play roles in important life decisions, such as career choice.

Stages of mentoring

Programs that recruit mentors hastily are doomed to failure. Volunteers need to be realistically prepared for the hard work of relationship building and the potential discouragement such efforts can bring. Growth-oriented mentoring relationships that produce empowered, capable mentees emerge after passing through a number of stages.

Trust/mistrust. The young person questions whether s/he is comfortable with the mentor. The new mentee may be very passive initially and not reveal much about him/herself. Positive feelings at this early stage lead to the young person's examination of the possibility of a relationship and perhaps testing the mentor for reactions.

Autonomy/doubt. Because the mentee seeks a predictable, supportive relationship, s/he may provoke the mentor in order to gauge his/her "real" feelings or capacity for understanding. This testing helps the mentee to understand the mentor's fundamental character and to decide whether the mentor is capable of both accepting and nurturing the mentee. Some direct questioning on the mentee's part may just be "tests," not honest curiosity.

Initiative/guilt. A young person may very well feel guilty — for spending time with the mentor (thus ignoring his/her friends or family) and for wanting something from the developing relationship. In this stage, the mentee may ask for help formulating goals and finding meaning in values and relationships with other people. The mentee needs help seeing the mentoring relationship in the context of a developmental experience, not as an abandonment of his/her past or family/cultural history.

Industry/inferiority. The young person uses the competency skills s/he has acquired through association with the mentor and begins to make plans for his/her future. At this stage, the mentee will begin to act independently and do things that were

formerly done only with the mentor. Attempts at independent actions may fail; the mentor needs to be very aware at this stage of the relationship and be prepared to support the mentee's emerging independence.

Identity/identity confusion. The mentee takes inventory of how s/he has changed, evaluating growth and deciding whether or not s/he likes the "new" person s/he has become.

Intimacy/isolation. The youth will "test" his/her identity with those people to whom s/he feels closest. If the mentee feels accepted, s/he will most likely experience a healthy outcome from the mentoring relationship.²

A mentor needs to be aware of parents', peers' and teachers' expectations of the mentee. Conflicting expectations will tend to undermine healthy identity development; the effective mentor pays close attention to the mentee's social and psychological environments and works with other adults in the young person's world to cooperatively foster, support and reinforce a resilient, healthy self-identity.³

The federal role

The Juvenile Mentoring Program (JUMP) was established in 1992 through an amendment to the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act of 1974. OJJDP awards grants under JUMP to local governments or nonprofit organizations that partner with local education agencies to pilot programs in which adults mentor high-risk youth. Forty-one funded JUMP sites are participating in a national evaluation designed to determine the success and effectiveness of the programs based on the following goals: to reduce juvenile delinquency and gang participation; to improve academic performance; and to reduce school dropout rates.

A Juvenile Justice Mentoring Program Evaluation Workbook has been developed to assist the sites in the collection and analyses of site data for the evaluation of each project. A national evaluator will be identified by this month to work with the JUMP projects in their collection of data. The national evaluator will also prepare an overall report on the implementation and outcome of JUMP projects.

Federal guidelines state that JUMP projects are to: provide general guidance to at-risk youth; promote personal/social responsibility among at-risk youth; increase at-risk youths' participation in elementary and secondary education and enhance their ability to benefit from such education; discourage at-risk youths' use of illegal drugs and firearms, involvement in violence and other delinquent activities; and encourage at-risk youths' participation in service and community activities.

Congress appropriated \$4 million for mentoring programs in federal fiscal year 1996 and \$7 million for 1997. Grants will be awarded in March 1997 for both years. OJJDP received 479 applications in response to the 1996 JUMP solicitation published last September. Approximately 50 new programs will

be funded by March 31, 1997. Also, OJJDP's bulletin *Mentoring — A Key Delinquency Prevention Strategy* will soon be available from the Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse. For a free copy, call 1/800 638-8736.

Numerous mentoring programs have been in existence for several years. The two nationally known projects below vary in methodology but demonstrate significant success.

Help One Student To Succeed. This structured language arts mentoring program is currently in use in over 500 schools and involves almost 40,000 students nationwide. HOSTS solicits commitment from community members to make the difference in one child's academic achievement. Mentor-tutors are trained in the program's instructional strategy. Although reading proficiency is one measure of the program's success, its "greatest value may well reside in the relationships that develop between the mentors and their students."⁴

Project RAISE. Ten years ago, sixth-graders from seven of Baltimore's most disadvantaged schools participated in a mentoring model that provided one-to-one mentors until high school graduation. The objective of this program was a 50 percent reduction in the students' dropout rate. A Johns Hopkins evaluation of Project RAISE found improvement in participants' school attendance and English grades,⁵ but even those improvements were insufficient to offset the risk factors with which participants entered the program. The program refocused on younger students in an attempt to keep them in school to the beginning of high school; RAISE has since explored several mentoring models to try to develop "those that are the most effective to help students become increasingly successful in school at a cost that makes the model replicable."⁶

No program can replace the lack of an extended and supportive family structure or make up for the deleterious effects of the poverty in which over 20 percent of this country's children exist. Mentoring programs and practices are not meant to be a cure-all for overwhelming social ills, but they are a strategy by which concerned citizens who choose to involve themselves will ultimately make a difference in the lives of children who might otherwise find themselves outside the mainstream of completed education and economic self-sufficiency.

Endnotes

- 1 Freedman, Marc, *The Kindness of Strangers: Adult Mentors, Urban Youth, and the New Voluntarism* (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass Inc., 1993), 56-58.
- 2 Ferguson, Ronald F. and Jason Snipes, "Outcomes of Mentoring: Healthy Identities for Youth," *Journal of Emotional and Behavioral Problems*, 3 (Summer 1994): 20-21.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 23.
- 4 Evans, Thomas W., *Mentors: Making a Difference in Our Public Schools* (Princeton, N.J., Peterson's Guides, 1992), 38-39.
- 5 McPartland, James and Sandra Nettles, "Using Community Adults as Advocates or Mentors for At-Risk Middle School Students: A Two-Year Evaluation of Project RAISE." In Marc Freedman, *The Kindness of Strangers*, 67.
- 6 *Annual Report of RAISE, Inc. 1995-1996*, (Baltimore, RAISE, Inc.), 3.

Kids hear plain truths from judge

Sometimes, while court is in recess for lunch, municipal court judge Rolf M. Treu doffs his judicial robes and meets with parents and their children, ages 10 to 15, who have begun "getting into trouble." These meetings come at the request of the parents who have heard about One-to-One, a unique program at Citrus Municipal Court in West Covina, Calif.

Later, Judge Treu meets with the youngsters for an individual, confidential talk, which he follows up by taking them to visit a bleak courthouse holding cell. The challenge is to reach each child in just one session. Before these youths reach the point of habitual wrongdoing and cynicism, Judge Treu tries to impress upon them that while bad choices equal bad consequences, past mistakes need not forever mar their lives.

To truant students who perhaps find school "boring," Judge Treu inquires whether a lifetime of digging ditches or flipping burgers would not prove boring. He asks those who do not do well in school about their television viewing habits — there is generally a correlation between tube time and poor grades. Judge Treu notes that boredom in school often results from a lack of challenging coursework.

Kids hear some plain, hard truths. Judge Treu tells his youthful visitors: "Nobody owes you a thing." He asserts that they can achieve whatever they set their minds to achieve. Citing his own college and law school educations, he assures youngsters that they can get the same for themselves the way he got his, through loans, scholarships and working.

If there is any commonality among the families he sees, it is that generally parents do not really *listen* to their children. Often Judge Treu finds himself giving parenting skills advice: it is the parents' responsibility to "raise" their children; parents must be prepared to let their children "grow"; parents should ask for help if they need it; problems often first start at home; and parents must exert loving but firm control. Some parents need guidance regarding setting limits, giving warnings and enforcing consequences. One parent needed to be guided to extend common courtesy to her child.

Judge Treu defines his function as helping parents and children reach common ground in a nonconfrontational atmosphere. Many times he sets up what is lacking in these parents' and children's lives — channels of communication. "Discussion," he says, "is the answer."

Putting the “community” in corrections

In 1959, Judge Keith J. Leenhouts was elected to the bench of the municipal court located in Royal Oak, Michigan, a community situated just north of Detroit. After just a few short years on the bench, Judge Leenhouts became very frustrated because he was beginning to see the same defendants over and over again, in spite of his court sanctions of fines, restitution and jail time.

As a result of his frustration, Judge Leenhouts gathered eight of his closest friends to discuss the situation and to seek possible solutions. The group came up with a simple but what was to prove very effective solution. In addition to traditional court sanctions, selected offenders would also be paired with an “inspirational personality,” someone who would be there to listen, encourage and guide.

With this solution in mind, Judge Leenhouts persuaded each of these eight to become the first “one-on-one” volunteers in the Royal Oak Municipal Court. As one-on-one volunteers, each would meet weekly with an assigned probationer. These weekly meetings would continue for the duration of the probationer’s one-year sentence.

As time went on, the effect which these volunteers were having on the behaviors of the probationers was so astounding that the program was opened up to the entire Royal Oak community. Ultimately, over 500 citizens became involved in the Royal Oak Municipal Court program, most as one-to-one volunteers who worked directly with probationers on a weekly basis.

In 1965, a five-year federal study was conducted on the Royal Oak program. The study showed that through the effective use of community volunteers, the Royal Oak court was able to maintain a recidivism rate of 7 percent — a comparison court that did not utilize volunteers had a recidivism rate of close to 70 percent.

Based on this study, *Reader’s Digest* published two articles about the program. These two articles stimulated thousands of requests for assistance and support from other courts and communities across the nation which sought help in replicating the Royal Oak court volunteer model. It was out of these circumstances in 1969 that Volunteers in Prevention, Probation and Prisons, Inc. (VIP) emerged whose principal mis-

sion was to encourage and support the efforts of those who wished to start volunteer programs in the juvenile and criminal justice field.

Since its birth in 1969, VIP has provided direct support in volunteer program development to over 2,000 juvenile and criminal justice agencies and institutions across the United States and Canada. Today, you can find these programs in almost every segment of the juvenile and criminal justice field. Most likely, though, you will find volunteer programs most prevalent in court, probation and parole operations.

Several excellent examples of volunteer programs exist which have developed over the past three decades. In New Jersey, four counties became involved in a collaborative effort with the family court involving mentors with juvenile delinquents. Recidivism was reduced by 50 percent in youth placed in the program. In Denver, a volunteer mentoring program called Partners was started by a group of juvenile court judges. The Partners program has undergone a total of six independent research studies which have consistently shown recidivism rates to be 42 percent lower in youth who are paired with volunteers.

In Detroit, a program called Partners Against Crime matches volunteers with youth and young adults (ages eight to 25) who have had a first encounter with the Detroit courts. A recent study completed on the program shows that those who received a mentor had recidivism rates 38 percent to 50 percent lower than those youth who were not paired with a volunteer. Consistently, the intelligent use of trained volunteers has helped courts and probation and parole departments to increase their effectiveness eleven times over for very little added cost.

VIP’s mission today is to help make our communities safer places to live, work and play by supporting the efforts of those who seek to begin new volunteer programs or of those who seek to strengthen existing volunteer programs in the justice field. VIP fulfills this mission through four general areas of service: promotion of justice volunteerism; support in program development; recognition and support of existing volunteer programs; and operation of the Detroit Partners Against Crime volunteer program.

VIP has developed three valuable resources which can assist in new volunteer program development or in strengthening or expanding an existing volunteer program. The resources include an international communications network of justice volunteer programs, quarterly publication of the *VIP Examiner* and the sponsoring of regional and networking institutes for volunteers and volunteer program managers and coordinators.

Excerpted with permission from Juvenile and Family Justice Today, Fall 1996. The author, F. Gerald Dash, may be contacted at Volunteers in Prevention, Probation and Prisons, Inc., 163 Madison Ave., Suite 120, Detroit, MI 48226.

Senior Tutors listen to, counsel, befriend at-risk youth

How many teen-agers do you know who have a grandmother or grandfather with whom they spend two full hours a week, rain or shine, one-to-one, talking, working on school assignments and playing games? For 14 years, the nonprofit organization Senior Tutors for Youth (STY) has demonstrated that its intergenerational model is a winning combination of committed sharing between elderly tutor-mentors and teenage youth completing adjudicated sentences.

Since March 6, 1983, when nine retired, upbeat seniors from Rossmoor retirement community in Walnut Creek, Calif., boarded a private bus to San Francisco's Juvenile Hall, more than 350 seniors have renewed their leases on life by providing more than 3,000 teen-agers with the nurturing guidance so often lacking in their lives.

Providing independent positive evaluations of Senior Tutors for Youth's effective service with youth and communities are the following examples of media, civic, state and corporate awards:

- KABL Citizen Profile award to Dr. Sondra Napell, founder of Senior Tutors for Youth, for her efforts on behalf of seniors and youth in the San Francisco Bay area, 1988;
- repeated citations and commendations from the Contra Costa County Board of Supervisors;
- California Educational Initiatives Fund award, 1990;
- Oakland School Volunteers award, 1991;
- City of Walnut Creek salute to Rossmoor volunteers, 1992;
- repeated finalist and winner of the J. C. Penney Golden Rule award, most recently as winner, 1993.

Serving Alameda and Contra Costa (Calif.) counties, STY has recently expanded its scope to include not only youth in detention, but also youth in inner-city junior and senior high schools who are falling behind in school and elementary school children at significant risk for truancy, substance abuse, illiteracy and school failure.

In addition, STY recently began collaborating with the Ann Martin Children's Center in Piedmont, Calif. Now the efforts of volunteer tutors will be augmented by the professional skills of staff trained to provide remediation and counseling to children and youth with learning disabilities.

"The 'jewel in the crown' among the four Senior Tutors programs is the one at Orin Allen Youth Rehabilitation Facility in Byron, Calif.," states Dr. Napell, founder and longtime director of the Senior Tutors for Youth program. "For 10 years every Thursday except for Thanksgiving, tutors from Rossmoor have boarded the private bus (jointly funded by the Contra Costa probation department and the Contra Costa board of supervisors) for a two-hour round trip that is a major part of the program. On the bus ride, the seniors meld themselves into a support group, exchange teaching approaches and materials, share tutoring problems as well as successes, learn how to speak so kids will listen, how to listen so kids will speak, and how to share their positive take on life with kids who are jaded by their life experiences to date."

Both tutors and volunteer tutees must commit to at least four weeks of shared sessions, though often both participate for much longer periods. Seniors typically spend one hour of the tutoring session listening to and talking with their assigned youth and focusing on academic assignments; the second hour may be spent on recreational activities.

Toward the end of each meeting, each tutor/tutee summarizes the session on an index card for his partner. A closing friendship circle of tutors and tutees ends the session, with each boy reporting briefly to the group and expressing thanks to his personal mentor. The boys escort their tutors to the bus, saying good-bye with hugs, smiles and promises to be there next week. On the return bus ride, tutors use the bus microphone to give their own session summaries and evaluations and to read aloud the boys' written comments.

Tutees report: "Everybody else tells me I won't amount to anything. But you are different. You show me the world and encourage me to reach high for what I can become."

"Dearest Dorothy, Thank you for your time and conversation. I really appreciate your knowledge and understand. Talking with you is more than a privilage it is an edjucational pleasure. Thankyou."

"I like plaing card game's with Barbara. I like the perogam. Hopfuley I will lern how to rede and spele."

Tutors report: "If you are a nonjudgmental friend to the boy, how you get over the point [of the assignment] to him is not really that important."

"I think my boy helps me as much as I help him. Being with him and listening to him, I get a lot out of the experience."

"Every other morning, I can barely get out of bed because of all my aches and pains. But amazingly, [on Thursdays] I don't even need an aspirin."

For information on starting a Senior Tutors for Youth program, please contact Dr. Sondra Napell at the Ann Martin Children's Center, 1250 Grand Ave., Piedmont, CA 94610, phone 510/655-7880; fax 510/655-3379.

A friend for today and hope for tomorrow

Since 1904, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BB/BSA) has promoted positive youth development by sponsoring relationships between adult volunteer mentors and children from single-parent homes. Over ninety years of service has influenced the lives of more than 1 million children in communities throughout the United States.

The mission of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America is “to make a positive difference in the lives of children and youth, primarily through a professionally supported One-To-One® relationship with a caring adult, and to assist them in achieving their highest potential as they grow to become confident, competent and caring individuals, by providing committed volunteers, national leadership and standards of excellence.”

More than 500 Big Brother/Big Sister agencies match adult volunteers with school-aged children based on each child’s specific needs and children’s and volunteers’ common interests. Big Brothers and Big Sisters (Bigs) serve as mentors and role models to their Little Brothers and Little Sisters (Littles).

Prospective Bigs go through an intensive screening process before being matched with a Little. Littles also receive information about their prospective matches. Volunteer mentors must commit to spending several hours per week for a minimum of one year with their Littles. During that time, Bigs and Littles establish a relationship in which they share experiences, accomplishments and confidences.

The relationship provides the Little with an increased sense of belonging. Often the relationship leads to the Little’s enhanced communication skills and improvement in home relationships and school performance. Bigs benefit too; many report that “giving something back” enriches their lives beyond measure. The Big/Little friendship is supported by the local agency and a professional caseworker, who maintains regular contact with the volunteer, the child and the child’s family.

Several other Big Brothers/Big Sisters programs further expand the scope of local agencies:

- The child sexual abuse education and prevention program trains all staff, volunteers, children and parents to recognize and respond to the signs of sexual abuse.
- Partners, a shared service experience program, encourages

adult volunteers to model the importance of community service by volunteering with their Littles for local projects.

- The school-based mentoring program uses adult volunteers to meet with children on school premises during the school day or after school to encourage students’ academic success. Twenty percent of Big Brother/Big Sister agencies provide some type of specialized, school-based program.

BB/BSA actively recruits volunteers, who represent a broad spectrum of ethnicities, ages and educational levels. Past targeted volunteer recruitment campaigns have resulted in: 17 Big Brother/Big Sister agencies serving deaf and hearing-impaired children; 75 Big Brother/Big Sister agencies using college students as role models/mentors who stress the value of education; and a 54 percent increase in the number of persons age 55 and older who volunteer to serve as mentors.

One of BB/BSA’s most successful targeted recruiting strategies has expanded the volunteer base in more than 80 Big Brother/Big Sister agencies. Called “High School Bigs,” the strategy was first used in Nassau County, New York, as a nontraditional approach to mentoring. Agency-screened high school students were recruited to serve as mentors to elementary and middle school students who needed a buddy to help with social, academic or other problems. High school students were supervised and supported by both school and agency staff.

From a beginning with 10 high school mentors, the High School Bigs program has grown to include over 4,000 high school students who volunteer their time to make the difference in the life of a Little. Some High School Bigs programs are strictly site-based on school property, while others are conducted in the same fashion as the traditional adult programs in which the carefully screened mentors can meet with their Littles in the community.

BB/BSA points out that not every child from a single-parent home is in need of a Big Brother or a Big Sister. Often the emotional support of relatives and/or family friends is sufficient to provide stability. However, not everyone has access to a personal support network.

When an adult friend is needed and requested, BB/BSA can provide someone willing to be that friend and committed to serve as a role model. BB/BSA’s work is “as elementary as putting a friend in a child’s life, and as essential as putting hope into a child’s future.”

For more information, to volunteer as a mentor or to establish a mentoring sponsorship, contact your local BB/BSA listed in the white pages of the telephone directory or call the national office of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, 230 North 13th Street, Philadelphia, PA 19107; phone 215/567-7000; fax 215/567-0394; e-mail bbbsa@aol.com

Big Brothers and Big Sisters can and do make a difference

Does careful attention to youths' hopes and problems result in observable changes in attitudes, perceptions and behaviors of at-risk young people?

Definitely yes, according to "Making A Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters." This study conducted by Public/Private Ventures measured the effect of having a Big Brother or a Big Sister on the life of a youth.

In 1992 and 1993, 959 boys and girls ages 10 to 16 who applied to the study's selected agencies were randomly assigned to one of two groups. Case managers matched half the children with a Big Brother or Big Sister as quickly as possible; the other half of the children were assigned to a waiting list for 18 months. The only difference between the treatment group and the control group youth was that the treatment group youth had the opportunity to be matched with a Big Brother or Big Sister. Those children matched with mentors met with their mentors, on average, about three times per month for at least one year.

Study participants included mentors and mentees from Big Brother/Big Sister agencies in Columbus, Ohio; Houston; Minneapolis; Philadelphia; Phoenix; Rochester, N.Y.; San Antonio; and Wichita, Kan. These agencies were selected to provide geographic diversity but otherwise were typical of Big Brother/Big Sister agencies.

At the end of the study period, when compared to the youth in the control group, Little Brothers and Little Sisters:

- were 45.8 percent less likely to begin using illegal drugs;
- were 27.4 percent less likely to begin using alcohol;
- skipped 52 percent fewer days of school;
- skipped 37 percent fewer classes;
- were one-third less likely to hit someone;
- felt more competent in their schoolwork;
- exhibited a higher level of trust in their parents; and
- showed improvements in relationships with their peers.

The authors caution that these findings "do not mean that the benefits of mentoring occur automatically." They point to the standards and supports of the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program as "critical in making the relationships work, and

thus in generating the strong impacts ... reported."

Rigorous guidelines govern volunteer screening to protect youth from applicants who are safety risks or who are unlikely to honor the time commitment or unlikely to form positive relationships with mentees. Of those who volunteered to be mentors in a specified three- to nine-month period, only 35 percent completed the stringent, time-consuming application process and were matched with a Little Brother or Little Sister. Further, Big Brother/Big Sister mentoring applicants who successfully complete the screening process receive agency orientation and training before meeting their assigned mentee.

Youth desiring matches must complete a written application and be interviewed with the parent. Parents must consent to the match and undergo a home assessment. Both parent and child must agree to follow agency rules.

Agency supervision requires contact with the parent, youth and mentor within two weeks of the match. During the first year of the match, the agency contacts the mentor and either the parent or the youth monthly. (Agency rules require that the youth be contacted at least four times during the first year, however.) Once the match has lasted for a year, the caseworker's contact with the participants is reduced to once per quarter. If problems arise in the mentor/mentee relationship, the agency provides professional guidance.

There was a high level of contact between mentors and mentees, an average of three meetings a month for four hours per meeting. Additionally, many participating in the program also spoke on the telephone, thus increasing their hours of interaction. The positive effects of the Big Brothers and Big Sisters came about because mentors supplied what mentees needed: consistent attention from adults who care.

The relationships that result from a Big Brother/Big Sister match are built around the agency concept of a mentor defined as a friend. The mentor's role is to support the youth in his/her endeavors, not to "change" the youth's behavior or character.

The careful screening and supervision promote the condition most likely to impact a youth's life: meetings between mentors/mentees that are long enough and are sufficiently consistent to establish a relationship.

This research supports the conclusion that "caring relationships between adults and youth can be created and supported by programs and can yield a wide range of tangible benefits," the most notable of which is the deterrent effect on initiation of drug and alcohol use.

"Making A Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters" by Joseph P. Tierney and Jean Baldwin with Nancy L. Resch, November 1995, 88 pages, is available for \$7.50 from the Communications Department, Public/Private Ventures, 2005 Market St., Suite 900, One Commerce Square, Philadelphia, PA 19103.

NSSC REPORT

Eight years' research on mentoring yields common-sense "truths"

School Safety Update's focus on mentoring is intended to spotlight still another way in which youth can be kept a part of and returned to the education mainstream. The following points have been excerpted from the fall/winter 1996 issue of *Public/Private Ventures News* in which that organization's 1988 to 1995 mentoring program research was featured. Gary Walker, president of Public/Private Ventures (P/PV), states, "Our best estimate is that there are now no more than 350,000 mentors, and at least several million youth who would accept and benefit from adult mentoring." He suggests that there seems to be a puzzling dichotomy among those working in youth-focused programs: Some feel that they already know what works well; others say that nothing works well for disadvantaged adolescents, that social programs for such a group are too little too late.

Among the common-sense "truths" related to effective mentoring ratified by the research are the following:

- It is possible to create between adults and youths who previously were strangers relationships capable of fostering the youths' development and deterring their negative behavior.

- Such relationships can be successful in widely varying localities without the presence of charisma or other special factors whose rarity is often cited as a barrier to expansion of effective intervention.
- The key to developing trust between two strangers differing in age and life experience is for the adult to provide support and friendship rather than prescriptives for behavior change.
- Careful screening, orientation, training, and support and supervision of volunteers by program staff are the most likely program structures to produce successful mentoring matches and lasting programs.

For P/PV's publications on mentoring (elders and college mentors/at-risk youth; in the juvenile justice system, etc.) contact: Public/Private Ventures Communications Dept., 2005 Market St., Suite 900, Philadelphia, PA 19103.

For more information on mentoring, contact: ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, Teachers College, Columbia University, Main Hall, Rm. 303, Box 40, 525 West 120th St., New York, NY 10027.

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