

MENTORING PROGRAM FOR JUVENILE OFFENDERS STUDY

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MENTORING PROGRAM FOR JUVENILE OFFENDERS STUDY

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Abstract

The problem presented in this paper was to identify whether mentoring programs in the Juvenile Justice System at the National, State, and local levels reduce recidivism. Another objective was to examine specifically whether Juvenile Offenders in Outagamie County, Wisconsin, who complete the Clean Break Mentoring Program, have lower recidivism rates than Juvenile Offenders that do not participate in the program. A review of literature on the history of mentoring programs in the United States was conducted. A second review of literature was conducted relating to research and studies on the efficacy of mentoring programs compiled by the U.S. Department of Justice, the University of Wisconsin and Outagamie County, WI. Through a review of the literature it was apparent that mentoring programs have proven to be a well tested and effective strategy for the prevention of juvenile delinquency. The anecdotal evidence available relating specifically to the Outagamie, WI Clean Break Mentoring Program shows an effective and promising impact on the problem of juvenile delinquency within the community. However, a scientific research study is needed to confirm its efficacy.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Major studies have shown that early intervention, especially Mentoring programs for troubled youth, has a positive influence on major areas of their development, i.e.; antisocial activities, academic performance, attitudes and behaviors, relationships with family and friends, self concept, and social/cultural enrichment (Grossman & Garry, 1997). The Outagamie County Wisconsin Family Court system developed and implemented an early intervention initiative for Juvenile Offenders called “Clean Break.” This program has been operating in Outagamie County, WI, for 12 years.

Statement of the Problem

Due to the high recidivism rates of Juvenile Criminal Offenders, many Family Court systems have instituted Early Intervention Programs to try and reverse this trend. In 1994, Outagamie County Family Court System began such a program. To what extent has this program impacted the recidivism rates among Juvenile Offenders in Outagamie County, WI? If no improvement, how can this program be improved? Additionally, are there specific components of current programs that are more successful than others?

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research paper was to determine the success of Outagamie Wisconsin's Clean Break Mentoring Program in the context of National and State mentoring program models.

Delimitation of the Research

The research was conducted through the Wisconsin Public Library System and the Karmann library (University of Wisconsin-Platteville) over a period of 30 days. Primary searches were conducted through the Outagamie County, WI Department of Human Services, Juvenile Division and via Internet through Google Scholar and ERIC. Key search topics include: "Clean Break", "Mentoring Juvenile Offenders", "Wisconsin Council on Children and Families", and "Juvenile Delinquency Prevention".

Method of Approach

A review of the data from the Outagamie County Juvenile Justice System (1994-2007), of Juvenile Offenders that participated in the 'Clean Break Mentoring Program' was conducted. Research studies, a review of literature, and anecdotal evidence of the history of Mentoring Programs for Juvenile Offenders in the United States. Another method of approach entails communication with the Wisconsin Public Defenders Office, Social Workers, and Program Administrators. Conclusions and Recommendations offered.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

History of Mentoring

Mentoring is generally defined as a one-to-one relationship between a pair of unrelated individuals, usually of different ages. The mentor supports, teaches, counsels, and assists the mentee on a regular basis over an extended period of time (Saito, 1994). Early examples of mentoring date back to the late 19th century. The Friendly Visiting campaign, supported by charitable societies, recruited hundreds of middle-class women to serve as role models for poor immigrant communities (Freedman, 1993).

In 1904 Big Brothers/Sisters (BB/BS) of America, a better known successor to the Friendly Visiting campaigns was founded, connecting middle-class adults with disadvantaged youth. It is the largest mentoring operation of its kind, a federation of 500 agencies, providing committed volunteers assisting young people in order to help them reach their highest potential (Grossman & Garry, 1997).

The idea of one individual providing guidance and support to another individual is practiced in a variety of fields. Whether referred to as “bonding” as in the mental health field, tutoring in schools, “advocacy” in the legal process, or “sponsorship” in the substance abuse field, the idea of

“mentoring” is used throughout the working world. Mentoring programs to address the problem of juvenile delinquency supported by National, State and local government entities have been in place for several years (JUMP, 1998).

Juvenile Mentoring Program

The 1974 Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) was amended by Congress in 1992 to include the Juvenile Mentoring Program (JUMP). Through this legislation, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) awarded three year grants on a competitive basis to community based not-for-profit organizations to implement and expand collaborative mentoring projects. These projects were designed to provide one-to-one mentoring for youth to reduce delinquency, gang involvement, educational failure, or dropping out of school (JUMP, 1998).

In its 1998 report to Congress, the Juvenile Mentoring Program established seven risk factor domains, including community, family, school, and personal/peer (Hawkins, Catalano, & Miller, 1992; Catalano & Hawkins, 1995; Howell, 1995). Risk factors include poverty, drug availability, family conflict, academic failure, delinquent peer influence, and lack of positive attention and healthy relationships.

Influences cited that contributed to these risk factors included:

- Family isolation due to family members moving outside the community
- Unsupervised youth due to working family members and lack of childcare
- One parent families due to divorce and single teen pregnancy rates
- Community resources being diverted to increasing violent criminal activity
- Alcohol and drug abuse within the family and community
- Increasingly lethal activity due to the prevalence of guns (JUMP, 1998)

These influences increase the risks youths face in attempting to become successful adults. One researcher indicates that the presence of two or three risk factors compound the negative impact to even greater than double or triple the original risk (Rutter, 1979).

In response to these risk factors, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) initiated a wide range of coordinated programs to address juvenile crime and violence. OJJDP's *Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders* (Wilson and Howell, 1993) and its *Guide to Implementing the Comprehensive Strategy for Serious, Violent, and Chronic Juvenile Offenders* (Howell, ED., 1995) established a framework for care – from prevention to intervention to increasing sanctions for youth involved with the juvenile justice system.

The OJJDP developed the *Juvenile Justice System for the 21st Century* (Bilchik, 1998) in order to reduce factors that increase risk and enhance factors that protect children from risk. These “risk-focused prevention” strategies identify risk factors and introduce interventions early on to reduce and counter those risks (Hawkins & Catalano, 1992). One of these intervention strategies is the use of a mentor. Mentors are intended to provide a protective factor to counter the risks faced by children as outlined above. The mentor intervention is evidenced by reductions in juvenile delinquency and gang participation, improved academic performance, and a decrease in school dropout rates (JUMP, 1998).

A report on juvenile arrests at the time of the Juvenile Mentoring Program report (Snyder, 1997) indicated a decrease in several indicators of juvenile crime between 1995 and 1996, including;

- a 9% decrease in juvenile violent arrest rate;
- a 14% reduction in the number of juveniles arrested for murder;
- 9% and 10% reductions respectively in weapons related arrests and motor vehicle theft;
- an 8% reduction in the number of juveniles arrested for robbery.

These numbers reflect an overall decline in juvenile violent crime.

Still, much work remains to be accomplished to reduce youth involvement in criminal behaviors at all levels of community. Juvenile crime remains high, fueled by gang related activities, drug and alcohol abuse and high school dropout rates (Kids Count, 1998) which prevent too many children in our nation from succeeding as productive adults.

Mentoring – A Proven Delinquency Prevention Strategy

In 1997 the U.S. Department of Justice assessed the efficacy of the mentoring strategy through Big Brothers/Big Sisters of America (BB/BS) and the JUMP program. These programs were reported to be a highly effective use of volunteers to address the problems created by poverty (Freedman, 1992).

Public/Private Ventures (P/PV) conducted an eighteen month experimental evaluation of eight BB/BS mentoring programs in order to determine whether one-to-one mentoring made a measurable difference in the lives of the young people involved (Tierney & Grossman, 1995).

The findings were positive as evidenced by the following results:

- Program participants were 46 percent less likely to use drugs, with an even stronger effect in minority youth with 70% less likely to initiate drug use compared to their minority peers.
- Program participants were 27% less likely to use alcohol during the study with minority female participants 50% less likely to use alcohol.

- Program participants were 33% less likely than controls to hit someone.
- Program participants skipped school 50% fewer days than controls and showed gains in grade point averages.
- Program participants had improved relationships with their parents and their peers.

The P/PV study concluded that mentoring programs succeed in creating supportive and helpful relationships between adults and youth. Another conclusion of the study was the need for caseworker support in building these relationships. The researchers also reported some limitations to the effectiveness of mentoring programs, finding that lack of organizational resources and the relatively small number of volunteers available (about 75,000) was not enough to serve the millions of children who could benefit from the programs (Grossman & Gary, 1997).

To evaluate the JUMP program, Caliber Associates collected data and prepared an overview of the Juvenile Mentoring program initiative, providing the following evaluation:

- Big Brothers/Big Sisters of SW Idaho made 41 matches in their JUMP project. Over 30 % of participating youth showed improvement in school attendance, academics, general behavior and frequency of appropriate peer interactions.

- Project Caring Connections in New York City provided 30 youth with mentors from corporations and community. Through the program at-risk youth gain exposure to publishing, law, art, government and business.
- Big Sisters of Colorado matched 59 mostly Hispanic girls with mentors in an OJJDP funded program to develop decision-making and academic skills.
- Big Brothers/Big Sister of Pensacola, FL is a JUMP initiative pairs 26 single parent family youth with legal professionals, members of the military and corporate employees exposing them to athletic, recreational and cultural activities.

The U.S. Department of Justice assessment concluded that these mentoring programs provide positive nurturing and support needed by youth living in high risk neighborhoods.

What Works in Wisconsin

More recent studies conducted in Wisconsin indicate that some juvenile delinquency prevention programs are more effective than others in preventing crime and reducing recidivism. Research has shown that implementing evidence based programs produces better results in reducing delinquency and thus benefitting the greater community. At the University of Wisconsin-Madison, researchers Small, Reynolds, O'Connor and Cooney (2005) studied intervention strategies including primary prevention with children and families and community-based programs for

juvenile offenders. It is noted that most strategies are based on a risk-protection model in which certain risk factors are identified contributing to anti-social behavior and negative outcomes, and other protective factors or traits contribute to more positive outcomes, using human resources to enhance social, emotional and educational skills of children and their families. Within a given community both protective and risk factors co-exist and are subject to change through intervention or neglect. And factors that put youth at risk for delinquency also put them at risk for other negative outcomes such as failure in school or teen pregnancy. Positive youth development is a favored approach in the form of after school programs and community organizations.

Many Wisconsin programs use the non-profit Search Institute of Minnesota's Developmental Assets model which looks at forty external and internal assets that build health and well-being for youth. The more developmental assets a young person has, the fewer problems they will have. Many of these assets in the areas of support, empowerment, boundaries and expectations center on relationships and interactions, using human resources to enhance a child's positive skills (Search Institute). Evidence suggests that the most cost effective juvenile offender programs are diversion programs and long term therapeutic interventions providing

a range of intensive services (Small, et al., 2005). Among the researchers' recommendations is support for local delinquency prevention programs.

Outagamie Project Clean Break

In 1993 Outagamie County WI, in partnership with the local Bar Association and the Juvenile Intake Office designed the Clean Break Juvenile Diversion Mentoring Program in order to provide juvenile offenders with a positive alternative to disposition in the Juvenile Justice System. The program has had over 72 committed mentors who have volunteered their time and talents to participating youth, many returning year after year due to their own positive experience.

The program is a demanding five month program which focuses on rehabilitation and includes participation in five components:

- Each youth and a parent may participate in the Initiative and Low Rope Course offered by the Appleton Area School District Adventure
- Education Program, teaching cooperation, communication and problem-solving through mutual respect and trust within a group.
- Each juvenile and parent is required to participate in a cognitive intervention group for 15 weekly sessions, designed to help understand and challenge the thinking that leads to illegal or harmful behavior.
- Each youth is required to participate in a ten week session of Tae Kwon Do, focusing on self-esteem, self-discipline and self-control.

- Each youth mentors a kindergarten through third grade at-risk youth once a month, supervised by site coordinators.
- Each juvenile is required to complete eight hours of community service, supervised by site coordinators and done as a group.

Additional requirements include attending school and maintaining passing grades as well as refraining from further violation of the law.

The goals of the program were to reduce by 50% court referrals of program graduates; improved academic performance measured by increased attendance and maintaining grades; increase in confidence and self-esteem evidenced by better life choices and a decrease in negative behaviors; increased positive youth/parent communication; pro-social behaviors and increased awareness of opportunities.

Outcomes of the program were:

- Eleven of twenty youth successfully graduated from the program, 100% of whom remained in their own home with no out of home placements. Ten of the eleven had no new court system referral.
- All eleven graduates remained in the public school system, five maintained grades at passing level and one increased grades. Two students improved attendance while seven maintained attendance.
- 100% of the graduates reported feeling better about themselves. Ten parents reported a notable improvement in self-esteem. Ten reported increased self-control in high risk situations. Ten parents reported

improvements in responsibility at home and school.

- All eleven families reported improvement in family communication.
 - Three youth who were not employed at the time the program began obtained and maintained employment during the course of the program.
- Nine reported learning to do new things and all eleven reported that Tae Kwon Do gave them a more positive mindset.

The Clean Break program addresses twenty of forty developmental assets deemed needed for teens to succeed. Each family participating receives approximately 130 hours of face to face contact in the five months of the program. Statistics show that teens who have at least one committed parent or guardian involved in their treatment/early intervention are more likely to continue progress once formalized treatment has ceased (Clean Break, 2008).

Community programs involved in mentoring youth include the YMCA, juvenile court intake offices, Wisconsin National Guard, Volunteer Center of East Central Wisconsin, Outagamie County District Attorney's Office, local police departments, local school districts and private industries. In December 2005 the Clean Break Program became an official program of the Boys and Girls Club of the Fox Valley (Clean Break, 2008).

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The history of dealing with “Juvenile Delinquency” has been challenging to society and to the Court System. Modeling and showing sincere interest in youth at risk is a powerful intervention. Research into what can make a difference in a troubled teen’s life shows that a well-funded mentoring program works to reduce recidivism among teens. In its Report to Congress in 1998, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention identified risk factors that are common among juvenile offenders. The report concludes that mentoring interventions impact positively many crucial areas of a young life in trouble. This is consistent with the historical data and with local and statewide program studies.

The unfortunate result of absentee parents, drugs of abuse and ease of underage alcohol purchases, violence and the easy access of guns has devastated generations of youth. Communities that are addressing the problem of Juvenile Offenders by tapping into mentoring programs are to be commended. Outagamie County, WI is such a community. Their “Clean Break” program, though small, is working and should be expanded to greater numbers of Juvenile Offenders. Unfortunately, due to the nature of confidentiality, lack of access to Juvenile court records impeded more

complete scientific research into the Clean Break program. A longitudinal study would provide access to records and would provide further data on mentoring programs. Though there is strong anecdotal evidence of the success of the Outagamie County program, further study is recommended to show empirical evidence of positive outcomes.

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