

SCHOOL BASED TEEN MENTORING PROGRAMS  
FOR AT RISK YOUTH: BEST PRACTICES

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for at Risk Youth: Best Practices

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Abstract

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At-risk youth can pose problems for schools, their families and their community. These youth are at risk to become delinquent and could eventually end up contributing to our jail or prison populations. Our youth of today are tomorrow's future and hopefully they will become a contributing member of society. However, when they are at-risk of becoming a statistic rather than a positive asset to the community, corrective measures need to be taken. Mentoring for these at-risk youths has been a popular option for a few decades now. If it is done correctly, mentoring is effective. This paper will look at the components of school-based at risk youth mentoring programs within the literature. School-based mentoring programs are a relatively newer focus of youth mentoring programs and are typically shorter in duration due to the school year timeframe constraints. Therefore, which youth receive the maximum benefit from these mentoring services needs to be examined so that resources and time can be focused on these groups of students. This paper will examine the various components of mentoring programs such as program design and implementation, screening and matching, the mentor-mentee relationship, frequency and length of contact. Program outcomes will be detailed via an examination of case studies of three different mentoring programs. Finally, this paper will determine the most effective school-based mentoring programs, lessons learned and recommendations for future mentoring services. Best practices for school-based teen mentoring programs will be established and can be a framework for other programs to provide the best possible service to these at-risk youths.

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## Section 1: Introduction

At-risk youth can pose problems for schools, their families and their community. These youth are at risk to become delinquent and could eventually end up contributing to our jail or prison populations. Our youth of today are tomorrow's future and hopefully they will become a contributing member of society. However, when they are at-risk of becoming a statistic rather than a positive asset to the community, corrective measures need to be taken. Mentoring for these at-risk youths has been a popular option for a few decades now. If it is done correctly, mentoring is effective (Dubois, 2002; MENTOR, 2009). The results from evaluations of these mentoring programs are varied and are scattered throughout various databases. There has been no known "best practice" guidelines established for juvenile mentoring programs. This is unfortunate and it is something that needs to be done to effectively use the scarce resources that are available for these mentoring services.

"At-risk" generally refers to those youth that come from single-parent homes, lack supportive role models, and have frequent behavioral or emotional issues at home and school (Keating, et al., 2002). At-risk youths may skip classes or entire school days; they may create disturbances in the classrooms, and disrespect teachers. These negative behaviors make it difficult to stay in school and obtain an education. These youths can have problems with authority figures, often display aggression and may be dishonest in their interactions with others. At-risk youths lack proper guidance, parental supervision and basic direction in their lives (Corbitt, 2000).

The costs these at-risk youths present are numerous. They may require special tutoring and counseling to assist with their behavioral or emotional issues at school and home. These at-risk youths may need to attend alternative schooling after being suspended or expelled from their

current school. If the situation merits placement in a foster home or juvenile detention facility, the costs per juvenile can really add up. In the families of these at-risk teens we see costs for family counseling, court costs, attorney fees, treatment costs and so forth. There are non-measurable costs as well; these are the most difficult to gauge. How does society put a price on the cost of not completing high school or obtaining secondary education or training because the at-risk youth dropped out? What are the emotional costs of being separated from family and being housed in a foster home or juvenile facility?

As adults, these youths also may have many hurdles to overcome. These at-risk youth (as adults) tend to be chronically unemployed, have higher divorce rates, display violence, use alcohol or drugs, depend on welfare systems, and are habitually criminal (Keating, 2002; Corbitt, 2000). The costs to society can become quite excessive and continue throughout their lifetime. These at-risk youths that enter adulthood without changing their negative attitudes and behaviors tend to drain our resources for healthcare, criminal justice, and welfare systems. School based teen mentoring programs have shown great promise to effectively deal with these issues presented above (Keating, 2002). The literature must be examined to determine which facets of these programs do the greatest good for these youths and set them forefront to be a model for other mentoring programs.

Teen mentoring programs have been around for well over thirty years and it is time that we learn what is effective and what practices do more harm than good. Best practices for these mentoring programs need to be established to ensure positive outcomes for the mentees. Some mentoring programs feel that they need to quickly screen and match mentors and mentees. They feel that when the match is made, it is a measure of success. Unfortunately, matches that aren't compatible do more harm than good (DuBois, 2002; MENTOR, 2009). The successful programs

have an extensive screening and matching process. Other successful characteristics are programs that have a set schedule and a standardized curriculum and training process. The youths increase their level of trust and accountability in these stable programs. Some mentoring programs have better outcomes with increasing the level and amount of mentoring contacts within a given month (DuBois, 2002; MENTOR, 2009). While other programs seem to have success when the mentoring relationship is more of a long term commitment and stable throughout the youth's schooling.

This paper will look at the components of school-based at risk youth mentoring programs within the literature. School-based mentoring programs are a relatively newer focus of youth mentoring programs (Karcher, 2008). School-based youth mentoring programs are typically shorter in duration due to the school year timeframe constraints. Therefore, which youths receive the maximum benefit from these mentoring services needs to be examined so that resources and time can be focused on these groups of students. This paper will examine the various components of mentoring programs such as program design and implementation, screening and matching, the mentor-mentee relationship, frequency and length of contact. Program outcomes will be detailed via an examination of case studies of three different mentoring programs. Finally, this paper will determine the most effective school-based mentoring programs, lessons learned and recommendations for future mentoring services. Best practices for school-based teen mentoring programs will be established and can be a framework for other programs to provide the best possible service to these at-risk youths.

## Section II: Literature Review

This section will examine the various components of mentoring programs such as program design and implementation, screening and matching, the mentor-mentee relationship, frequency and length of contact as it relates to the literature. The term “at-risk” youths generally refers to youths who display behavior problems at home and school, often come from single parent households and do not attain the usual age appropriate coping and developmental skills (Keating, 2002). They display aggression, dishonesty, and have conflict with authority figures. These youths often have short attention spans, demonstrate risk-taking behaviors, and fail to show a sense of guilt or empathy (Corbitt, 2000). At risk youths are exposed to many risk factors during their early childhood. These risk factors can include living in distressed neighborhoods, divorced parents, single mothers, volatile home environments, lower standard of living, and sexual or physical abuse.

Even when at-risk youths become adults, they have higher divorce rates, are more prone to act aggressively towards their significant other, often have AODA issues and participate in criminal activity (Corbitt, 2000). They can be a consistent drain on their community’s welfare system and health care services. They are often unemployed or under employed in manual labor positions and have many physical and mental health problems. Because these at-risk youths lack the social support relationships in their home environments, they often find these relationships outside of the home (Corbitt, 2000; Herrera, 2004). Many times these networks they associate with outside of the home with are negative peer groups such as gangs. If these at-risk youths had an opportunity to have a mentor who would supply that positive role model and supportive relationship outside of their home, perhaps we could avert some of these youths from joining gangs. School-based mentoring programs can assist in this area because it is typically teachers

or other staff that refers the youths to the mentoring programs due to a lack of parental involvement and oversight at home (Herrera, 2004). Therefore, school based mentoring programs are reaching a large population of youths that benefit from mentoring matches but would not have been referred to the traditional community based mentoring programs due to the disorganized home environment in which many of these youths reside.

The idea that mentoring programs are able to divert some of these at-risk youths from juvenile detention centers or juvenile correctional programs is also a promising effort. Big Brothers Big Sisters now coordinates fifty percent of their matches in the schools (Karcher, 2008). Crime rates for adults have decreased across the United States in recent years while the juvenile crime rates have increased by 14.9 percent from 1989 to 1998 (Corbitt, 2000). Although the teenage population growth over recent years may account for some of the increase in juvenile crimes, it is troubling that more and more violent youths are entering the juvenile system with unaddressed childhood problems and issues.

According to Rainville et al. (2003), in 40 of the nation's largest urban counties, approximately 7,100 juveniles were charged with felonies in adult court during 1998 and two-thirds of these charges were violent felonies. Juvenile offenders are tending to become more serious offenders and more violent. Of the 7,100 juveniles charged with felonies, 52% did not receive pretrial release, 63% were charged with a felony and 64% of those convicted received a prison or jail sentence and the average length of the prison sentence was approximately 90 months (Rainville, 2003). These statistics are startling and show the need for intervention activities, such as mentoring to occur earlier in these youth's lives to hopefully deter this young group of men from entering the prison system.

The need for school based mentoring programs has risen in recent years due to the increasing pressures put on schools to improve youths' test scores and academic achievements in general across the country. The "No Child Left Behind" ideals have continuously pushed administrators to come up with creative solutions to improve academic achievements for all students. According to Herrera (2004), the number of Big Brother Big Sister school-based matches grew from 27,000 in 1999 to 90,000 in 2002 which is an increase of 233 percent, compared to an 8.7 percent increase in community based mentoring matches in the same time period. Therefore, this paper will look at current programs and establish best practices for school based mentor programs. Areas examined will be program design and implementation, screening and matching, mentee-mentor relationship, frequency of contact and length of contact.

## Components of At-Risk Mentoring Programs

### Program Design and Implementation

Generally, youths that are deemed "at risk" receive a referral for mentoring services from a family member, a teacher or other community member that believes the youth could benefit from the services. The youths are screened by the mentoring agency and the youth and their parent(s) must sign the required paperwork. A mentor must be over the age of 18 and be able to devote a few hours per week to the mentee relationship. Ideally, the mentor and mentee should reside in the same community. The mentor must attend training sessions prior to providing mentoring services and learn about the warning signs of child abuse, child development, problem solving skills, and effective interaction and communication skills (Keating, 2002; Karcher, 2008). Mentors also should check-in with the mentoring agency's mentor coordinator, or

referral source (school teacher or other staff) on a weekly to monthly basis to update on mentoring activities (MENTOR, 2009).

Ideally, the mentor and the mentee should spend a scheduled one to two hours together per week. This “scheduled” time is important to build trust and bring a supportive function to the youth’ chaotic life (Keating, 2002; MENTOR, 2009). Any type of activity for individual time on a weekly basis is acceptable. Individual time can be spent going over homework, attending a school function (play, music concert or sporting activity), reading a book together, watching a movie or just hanging out and talking about the week’s events. The important thing is to spend consistent and scheduled time together (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009). The evidence supports the push for the mentee-mentor relationship duration to be as long as possible (DuBois, 2002; Karcher, 2008; MENTOR, 2009). The better outcomes are seen in those relationships that last 12 months or longer versus the shorter relationships that are under 12 months (Herrera, 2004). Even more damaging is to end the mentoring relationship prematurely before the end of the program and school year dictate, this can have a negative effect of the youth’s sense of self-esteem and connectedness (MENTOR, 2009).

An excellent extra service idea for the mentoring agency to do on a monthly basis is a group activity for all mentors and mentees to participate in together (DuBois, 2002; Keating 2002). These events should be varied and on a rotating basis so that those with varied interests will have an opportunity to participate. These group activities could be guest speakers to come in and talk with the group of mentors and mentees at their school. If the budget allows and the group is fairly cohesive, some other group activities that have been successful are community service projects, sporting events, educational or artistic experiences (Keating, 2002). The idea is

to try to build the mentee's individual self-esteem as well as try to build on the sense of belonging and feeling part of the school community.

### Screening and Matching

Recruiting for mentors and mentees needs to be upfront and needs to be realistically portrayed for what mentees and mentors can expect from the relationship (MENTOR, 2009). The program needs to outline and have available the goals and expected outcomes for the mentoring match. When the mentors are being recruited they need to be informed of the potential challenges and best practices for mentoring. The youths need to be informed about what mentoring is and what the expectations are for the mentoring match. Although this seems like a basic thought, it is one that is often overlooked. If the expectations and potential outcomes are not explained and established at the beginning of the process, confusion for both the mentee and the mentor can result (MENTOR, 2009). If mentors are given written guidelines of expectations and guidelines prior to agreeing to the mentoring process, the expectation is that premature termination of the mentoring relationship will not occur due to their unrealized expectations. Ending the mentoring relationship prematurely can be detrimental to the youth's sense of self esteem and can have a negative effect on the youth's outcomes (Herrera, 2004, MENTOR, 2009).

Usually, the youth and the mentor are screened and matched according to the mentoring service agency's data sheets. Some of the usual fields that are matched are gender, ethnicity, age, geographical location, and common interests (DuBois, 2002; Keating, 2002). Both the mentee and the mentor will rate their preferences in the various screening areas and their file will

be kept on hand until a match can be made. Matches can be made in as little time as a month while some of the longer wait times can extend out to two years (Keating, 2002).

It is an important element of screening for the mentoring programs to also do reference and background checks for the mentors prior to meeting with a youth (Herrera, 2004; MENTOR, 2009). By utilizing reference and background checks for the potential mentors, programs can attempt to reassure the parents, guardians and the youths that the potential for any match with a potentially dangerous mentor is mitigated. According to MENTOR (2009), an additional best practice step is to run potential mentors through a national database system that employs a fingerprint based criminal background check. An individual who may be charged with crimes in one state against children will more likely be flagged in a national check, rather than a state check, if he or she moves to a different state and applies for a mentor match. Although the background and reference check process may slow down the match process, the evidence based best practices appear to agree that it is an important and necessary step for mentoring programs (Herrera, 2004; MENTOR, 2009).

In school based mentoring programs, the hours of availability may be a problem for many mentors. If they work full-time day jobs, the schools are usually closed when these individuals are available. However, some schools may have an afterschool club, a guidance counselor or a mentoring case manager who could stay on school grounds and keep the school open longer so that these important individual mentoring sessions can be held between the mentor and the mentee. According to Herrera (2004), school based mentors are more likely to be ethnic minorities, are older (50 plus), younger (under 21) and tend to like the fact that the mentoring is consistently at the one school site to limit any transportation problems.

Most quality mentoring programs do a fairly decent job of the initial training for mentors in order for them to start the relationship (DuBois, 2002). However, there should be push for continued ongoing training of these mentors by the mentor sponsoring agency. The idea that the mentors are busy and may not have time to attend an occasional ongoing training session should not preclude these from occurring. In fact, a good suggestion for the introduction materials regarding expectations for mentors is to include attendance at occasional training sessions by the mentoring agency is a must. According to MENTOR (2009), this is one of the best practice benchmarks where programs need to provide quality mentor training. Ideally, the mentoring program should provide minimally two hours of pre-mentoring training in the areas of program rules, goals/expectations, obligations/appropriate roles, development of the mentoring relationship, ethical issues, effective strategies and sources of assistance if necessary (MENTOR, 2009).

The majority of programs focus their energy and costs in the start up phase where background checks, references and orientation take up a lot of the agency's time (DuBois, 2002; Keating, 2002). However, in an effort to provide the best possible services, agencies should continue to offer ongoing training or refresher sessions. According to the meta-analysis by DuBois (2002), initial training and/or orientation has been provided to mentors on a routine basis in about seventy one percent of the studies, compared to ongoing training that occurred in about 23% of the studies.

MENTOR (2009), discusses the issue of training as a very important benchmark for best practices for mentoring programs. One special mentoring population that was mentioned was the children of incarcerated parent(s). Since the issue of trust is so fragile for these youths, the mentor needs training to understand that this group of children will need consistency and needs

the mentor to follow through with plans in order to build trust with the mentee (Britner et al., 2006; MENTOR, 2009). Also, it would be a good idea to train the mentors to be equipped to deal with any behaviors or feelings that stem from the mentee being a child of an incarcerated parent(s). The program needs to be aware of this special population and the special twists that the mentee brings to the mentoring relationship.

### Mentee-Mentor Relationship

#### Frequency and Length of Contact

The literature has shown that that the most effective relationships between mentee and mentor are those that maintain regular contact over a significant length of time (DuBois, 2002; Herrera, 2004; MENTOR, 2009). This can be difficult for the school based programs to maintain this contact over the summer months when school is out for summer break. When the program is beginning to match the youths at the start of the school year, they need to be timely and mindful that screening, matching and training need to be a priority. Any footwork such as locating mentors, doing the background checks and initial training that can be done prior to the school year starting is a plus. This time saved can then be put into matching the at-risk youths with an appropriate mentor at the start of the school year and can add a valuable month or two of weekly mentoring meetings. A suggestion for programs to consider when providing school based teen mentoring programs is to schedule regular monthly events at the school site so that mentors and mentees can keep in contact over the summer. These events could be a family picnic or carnival to get the youths there and maintain this relationship with their mentors. Also, other possible contacts that count as mentoring time could be weekly phone calls or e-mails to maintain that sense of connectedness over the summer months.

Mentoring is all about assisting the youth to establish healthy relationships. When selecting mentors, the agency overseeing the selection and screening process needs to ensure that the mentors are able to commit to this mentoring relationship for a minimum of a year and possibly a two year period of time. According to DuBois (2002), one of the best practice principles is to establish and hold firm on the expectations for frequency of contact between a mentor and the mentee.

The frequency of the contact between the mentee and mentor needs to be established at the onset of the mentoring relationship. It should occur at least weekly and for one to two hours in the school setting. The length of time of the mentoring relationship is extremely critical for these at risk youths. These youths are already having behavior problems that may have resulted in their initial referral for services so to have their mentor bail out on the relationship prematurely could be extremely damaging to their sense of self esteem and feeling of belonging to the school culture (Keating, 2002; MENTOR, 2009). These types of situations need to be minimized by all measures possible. Some of these measures could include having potential mentors on a wait list in case of a mentor having to suddenly end the mentoring relationship prematurely and then use the back-up mentor. The frequency and length of contact benchmarks are probably the most important best practice principles of effective mentoring services (Herrera, 2004; MENTOR, 2009). Also important benchmarks for successful school-based youth mentoring programs are screening, matching, training and program design and implementation. In the next section we will see how these best practice benchmarks are evident in the case studies presented.

### Section III: Case Studies

#### (SMILE) The Study of Mentoring in the Learning Environment

In a study by Karcher (2008), the effects of school based mentoring services provided to Latino students were examined across 19 different schools. The youths included in this study were elementary, middle and high school youths who received one hour of mentoring per week during the school year. The youths were randomly assigned to one of two groups. The first group received supportive services alone. The second group received supportive services in addition to school based mentoring. This study by Karcher (2008) assessed the main points that have been measured in the literature such as grades for reading and math, self-esteem, social skills, connectedness, hope, mattering and social skills. The effects of gender were also examined.

The youth were referred by their parents, teachers or by themselves to participate in this study. The parents had to complete consent forms and a survey and the youth completed a baseline survey as well. The researchers did a stratified random sampling by grade and gender through each of the 19 schools that participated in the study. The mentors and the youths to be mentored completed an interest survey and the intent was to match them based on similarities. However, according to Karcher (2008), 83% of the matches were made based on availability and schedules.

Training for the mentors included a one hour orientation prior to being matched with a youth. There was other ongoing and evening training sessions offered to the mentors but unfortunately only 29 of the 292 mentors attended one of these sessions and none of the mentors ever participated in two training sessions. Although there were case managers at the various school sites that were available for any consulting regarding the mentoring process or the youth,

the case managers were often busy with other school tasks and sometimes didn't even see the mentors when they were at the school (Karcher, 2008).

The SMILE mentoring project measured a vast amount of data both pre and post intervention. The surveys were usually taken in a group format with no more than 20 youths in a group. The pre-tests were taken in September and the post-tests were taken in April and May. The following data collection tools were used during this study: Hemingway: measure of adolescent connectedness, self-esteem questionnaire, perceived social support scale, social skills rating system, children's hope scale, perceived mattering survey, Conner's child rating scale: global index (CGI), and school grades (Karcher, 2008).

What this study discovered was that there are small but positive effects on two measures of self-reported self-esteem, on connectedness to peers, and on perceived social support from friends (Karcher, 2008). SMILE also discovered that the effects of mentoring differed by sex and by school type. What the data showed is that the elementary school boys reported more connectedness to school and to culturally different peers, social skills (such as empathy and cooperation) and hopefulness (Karcher, 2008). Also, the high school girls that were mentored reported greater self-esteem, support from friends and connectedness to culturally different peers. The high school boys actually declined in several areas. They reported a decline in connectedness to teachers, self-in-the future, cooperation and connectedness to school (Karcher, 2008). An improvement in grades would be a natural expectation for a program such as the SMILE program. However, the data showed no effect on the youth's grades.

Areas that this study highlighted were the need for ongoing support and training for these mentors. Ongoing training and monitoring for the mentors is one of the best practices that DuBois (2002) and Herrera (2004) mentioned as achieving better outcomes. Another area of

concern is that the mentoring sessions were fairly lax and didn't include a lot of structure. This was the result of the mentoring agency not providing a supportive framework or blueprints to hold these weekly mentoring sessions.

This study did not meet best practice guidelines for program design and implementation. The start up process took too long at the start of the school year and a couple of precious mentoring months were wasted at the beginning of the school year because matches had not yet been made. We can learn from this that the effort put into recruiting and screening mentors prior to the school year starting will assist in a quicker match once the school year begins and the youths that need mentors are established. This study also did not meet best practice guidelines in matching and screening. Although the mentoring agency took the time to give the mentees and mentors interest surveys, they were only utilized approximately 17% of the time. In the other 83% of the matches, the mentors and mentees were matched based on their schedules and availability. Lastly, this study also did not meet best practice guidelines in the area of frequency and length of contact for the mentoring relationship. The program had a slow start-up so that wasted a couple of month's worth of mentoring sessions. The program did not prepare for winter break or spring break missed mentoring time by potentially scheduling a larger mentoring group meeting, project or outing to continue to provide some sort of cohesive relationship building group time. The study by Karcher (2008) also reported that after spring break, many of the mentors did not return to their assigned mentoring relationship. This issue of ending the mentoring relationship prematurely has been discussed previously and is not an effective best practice method; in fact, it does more harm than good to the mentee (Herrera, 2004; Karcher, 2008; MENTOR, 2009).

## Village Model of Care

The Village Model of Care is an after-school prevention program targeting 6<sup>th</sup> grade African American youths who resided in high-risk urban areas. This program incorporated a group mentoring component into the program which also emphasized education/tutoring and cultural appreciation and awareness. The goals of the program were to improve school bonding, improve grades, alcohol and drug education/prevention efforts and social skills development. These youths lived in a very socially disorganized area with high poverty rates, high AODA usage, and high unemployment. The Village Model of Care was guided by the teachings of the ancient African proverb “It takes a whole village to raise a child” and focused on the community and other extended family members to assist with parenting these at risk youths (Hanlon, et al., 2009).

In the study by Hanlon, et al. (2009), the Village Model of Care recruited boys and girls from two middle schools as they were entering 6<sup>th</sup> grade to participate in the study. This recruitment occurred over four consecutive years. One school was the intervention site where the program services occurred and included 237 youths. The other school site was the control group and included 241 youths in the sample. The youth and their parents or guardians completed the necessary release forms and were told of the program expectations and requirements prior to participating in the study. Upon entry into the program, the youth and their parent(s) or caregivers were given several assessments to complete. These assessments included a youth questionnaire, a parent/caregiver questionnaire, school grades and other records, child behavior checklist, teachers report forms, a self-concept scale and a scale to measure conduct and emotional problems (Hanlon, et al., 2009).

At the intervention site, the program was administered after school but within the school building. The programming was four days per week throughout the entire school year. The programming consisted of a structured group mentoring session daily, parent/caregiver involvement and support and community linkages. The major component of the after school program was the mentoring process. The program recruited two strong African American role models from the community to come in four times per week and meet with the youth in groups of no more than 20 participants. During the structured mentoring sessions the youths worked on homework, received guidance and structure, career counseling, worked on study skills, received emotional support, education on self-control topics, African American culture awareness and appreciation, and finally social and recreation outlets and activities (Hanlon et al., 2009). Since the youths attended for 2 ½ to 3 hours per day, four days per week during the school year, there was plenty of time to work in topics on alcohol and drug abuse prevention, sexual education, healthy body image and eating practices, violence prevention and numerous other topics (Hanlon et al., 2009). The parents or caregivers were involved by weekly newsletters that were sent home as well as monthly meetings which were called “gatherings” to foster the feelings of inclusiveness (Hanlon et al., 2009). School staff attended, community members attended and it was more of a neighborhood gathering and a chance for everyone to bond and network.

What this study found was that the youths that were at the intervention school tended to have a better grade point average improvement percentage over the control group. The researchers also discovered that the improvement in grade point average increased relative to the number of after school mentoring sessions that the youths attended. Interestingly, the results for this four year study showed that besides the improvement in grade point average in the intervention group, the other measures were not significantly significant. A possible explanation

could be that because of the increased attention to academics, mentoring and specialized tutoring time the intervention youths received, the results on the other measurable scales may not be able to be measured at the one year mark (Harlon et al., 2009). Perhaps a better measure of school bonding, avoidance of alcohol and drugs, improved self esteem and so forth may be more apparent a few years later in the youth's schooling.

In regards to best practices for a mentoring program, the Village Model for Care followed several of the guidelines. The program design and implementation exceeded the guidelines for best practices. The duration of the program complied with expectations. The program started up right away at the beginning of the school year, there was no delay in regards to recruiting and locating mentors. Individuals from the community stepped up and volunteered to be mentors since they wanted to be a part of the project. The program also held mentoring sessions throughout the entire school year, winter break and spring break.

The screening and matching best practices were met as best as possible within the confines of the program. The youth, their parents/caretakers and the mentor were all well informed of the expectations and guidelines for the program and agreed to the various components and guidelines before being accepted into the program. The backgrounds of the mentors were similar to the youth that they mentored since they came from the same community and socially disorganized urban neighborhood (Hanlon et al., 2009). Both the mentees and the mentor were available for the two to three hours after school time period that the program operated within. The factor of matching based on commonalities was not addressed by this program due to the group mentoring aspect that occurred. The mentor never had more than 20 youths in their after school mentoring sessions; however, this did not lend itself to matching the mentor and the mentee on similar likes and dislikes. The study by Hanlon (2009) did not address

initial training nor ongoing training so this paper cannot address those aspects of the best practice guidelines.

In regards to frequency and length of contact the program exceeded the best practice guidelines. The youths received four times the recommended weekly dosage for school based mentoring programs. Rather than meet weekly for an hour or two, the Village Model of Care meet with the youths four afternoons per week for up to three hours per day. The program maximized the duration as long as possible until school let out for the summer. Even in the summer, all of the community outreach and networking that went on during the school year paid off and the youths were connected with resources over the summer months within their communities. Therefore, the Village Model of Care followed several of the best practice guidelines for mentoring.

### Big Brothers and Big Sisters

In a case study by Herrera (2004), youth and teachers were surveyed at the beginning and the end of the 1999-2000 school year in three Big Brother Big Sister school-based programs. One of the best practice aspects of school based youth mentoring is to continue to train and evaluate staff as the mentoring progresses. The mentors in the Big Brothers and Big Sisters evaluation tended to feel more close to school staff and their mentor if they participated in the initial training and follow up training (Herrera, 2004). Also notable suggestions from the Big brothers and Big Sisters study is to have a set, standard meeting location that is available to meet every week for mentoring sessions. It is a good practice to give the mentor access to a computer and the internet to assist the youth with school work or project work. Herrera (2004) found that by talking to teachers about once per month, the mentors discovered significant details about the

youth to utilize and discuss during mentoring sessions. This study by Herrera (2004) replicated previous studies that outlined that matching mentors and mentee on their race and gender do not improve the mentoring relationship. On the other hand, an important matching aspect for programs to utilize is the common interests. Programs have good success when the mentee and the mentor are able to have a quality relationship. Reports of closeness for the relationship were higher when the youth and the mentor were matched based on similar interests (Herrera, 2004).

What was discovered was that for the mentees that felt like their mentor took the time to get to know them, their preferences/likes/dislikes felt more connected to the mentee-mentor relationship (Herrera, 2004). Interestingly, the mentors seemed to enjoy talking with the mentees regarding personal issues. The youths however, did not feel as close to their mentors and did not feel comfortable sharing. The teachers reported that the mentor-mentee relationship did not seem as strong as other relationships when the youth did not share much personal issues with their mentors.

Herrera (2004), outlines the effects mentoring had on the Big Brothers and Big Sisters program participants. The first item measured is relationships with their peers. Youths who met with their mentors for more than nine months for mentoring sessions had better outcomes than those that met for a shorter period of time. These youths reported making more friends and reported that they felt that they were more popular. Social skills actually saw a decline in the skill acquisition area when the mentoring match was shorter than six months. The social skills measurement checked for the ability to express their feelings appropriately, confidence in communication, and other self-esteem type areas (Herrera, 2004).

A significant indicator for mentoring matches of more than nine months is the amount of referrals to the principal's office that occurred. The percentage of youths that had a principal's

office referral during their program participation, of nine months or longer, is 14 percent compared to the group of youths that had a mentoring relationship of six months or less is 37. This is a twenty-three percent decline in referrals to the principal's office by following best practice guidelines and ensuring a nine month or longer mentoring match. The duration of the length of mentoring match is one of the most important best practice benchmarks for programs to strive towards.

The youths scored themselves at the start of the school year and at the end of the school year in regards to liking school (Herrera, 2004). Not surprisingly, youths that are having difficulty in school academics, relationships and home life usually look at school as not a positive experience. What the Big Brothers Big Sisters study by Herrera (2004) found out is that the youths that were in matches that were six to nine months long rated themselves as liking school 2% of the time and the youths that were in mentoring matches of nine months or longer reported liking school 7% of the time. Although these gains in liking school may not seem significant, when they are compared to the youths that were not in matches or were in matches of less than six months, they are statistically significant. The zero to six month mentoring matched group of youths reported liking school at an alarmingly declining rate of -28% (Herrera, 2004)! If we use the zero to six month mentoring match percentage as a baseline, then this correlates to a 30 percent improvement in youth's liking school attitudes if mentoring matches are longer than six months and a 35 percent improvement if the mentoring matches are nine months or longer. This is very strong evidence towards establishing guidelines and expectations so that mentors understand the vital importance of long term (nine months or longer) mentoring matches.

In regards to following best practice guidelines and benchmarks, it appears that the Big Brother Big Sister program complies in most areas. In regards to program design and

implementation, the program is established to occur within the timeframe guidelines and for the appropriate length of time. The mentors and the mentees are informed of program expectations and guidelines. In regards to screening and matching, the mentors are screened for criminal backgrounds, they receive ongoing training, and are attempted to be matched according to similar interests. In regards to frequency and length of contact, this is also another area that Big Brother Big Sister programs do a good job ensuring that these important mentoring matches occur at least weekly and for an hour or two per week. The Big Brother Big Sister programs are also well known for developing and incorporating neighborhood programs, youth sporting leagues, free meal sites and community center programs for youths and adults to provide precious wrap-around services to assist the entire family.

#### Section IV: Theoretical Framework

The different case studies presented in the previous section were used to outline best practice guidelines for mentoring programs. In this section, theory will be applied to what has been shown to be effective in the literature with the at-risk youth population with special emphasis on mentoring programs. The concepts of social disorganization and collective efficacy became widely used by criminologists in the twentieth century. These terms have been used to help explain the effects of the neighborhood's composition on the delinquency rates within the various communities. Social disorganization is a term that is used to describe a neighborhood where the neighbors do not get along with one another; do not belong to local organizations aimed at bettering the community; do not work together effectively to address problems; they hold different values about what is and is not acceptable behavior in the community; and neighbors are unlikely to interfere when they see other youths or adults engaged in wrongdoing

(Taylor, 2001; Markovic, 2009). If a community does have several of these characteristics, although in a positive manner, it is said to have collective efficacy. Collective efficacy is the glue that holds communities together. These neighborhoods share a willingness to work together and engage all parts of their community (even the police) to work towards goals (Markovic, 2009; Wilson, 2009).

Taylor states high delinquency rates occurred in low-income, ethnically diverse, unstable locations because those ecological characteristics made social disorganization more likely (Taylor, 2001). Collective efficacy tends not only to impact the quality of parenting but also to decrease both delinquency and affiliation with deviant peers (Simons, 2005). Communities need to foster a sense of “collective efficacy.” This is when neighbors get along with each other; hold the same values about acceptable behavior; the residents belong to similar organizations to better their community; neighbors step in when they see non-appropriate behavior by children and adults; and they work together to get things done for their neighborhood (Taylor, 2001; Simons, 2005; Markovic, 2009; Wilson, 2009). At risk youths are exposed to many risk factors during their early childhood. These risk factors can include living in distressed neighborhoods, divorced parents, single mothers, volatile home environments, lower standard of living, and sexual or physical abuse. It seems to follow that more at-risk or delinquent youths appear to live in areas where social disorganization is prominent. Taylor (2001) discusses the ecological factors of low-income, ethnically diverse, unstable locations as making social disorganization more likely.

School based teen mentoring programs can counteract the risk factors for an at risk youth who is living in a socially disorganized community. The youths try to survive their neglectful or abusive upbringings by finding “healthier” relationships outside of their homes (Keating, et. al.,

2002). If school-based or community-based mentoring programs are not established in the community to assist these youth, they may try to find a healthier relationship in the community's gang(s) or with other delinquent youth that are searching for healthier relationships as well. According to Keating et al. (2002), exposure to caring adults helped the at-risk youths to feel better about themselves and to engage in less destructive behavior towards themselves and others. Since socially disorganized communities do not lend themselves to offering a caring adult or healthier relationships outside of the home, it makes sense that mentoring programs must be established in these communities to provide healthy relationship options for the at-risk youths. Also, an added bonus would be if the school based mentoring program provider could expand out into the socially disorganized community by establishing a community center to bring the community together and begin to develop that sense of collective efficacy. Important wrap around services could be provided at the center in an effort to assist to bring the community back together. This is one of the best practice points discussed in section three of this paper in relation to the Big Brothers Big Sisters program. The combination of developing a strong sense of community in the socially disorganized neighborhoods as well as providing a caring adult to relate to through mentoring services appears to be the best solution to assist the at-risk youths.

Taylor explains how collective efficacy did not completely stop the severe negative impacts from the neighborhood (Taylor, 2001); extreme disadvantage – neighborhoods with lots of poverty, unemployment, African-American households, and female-headed households – continued to strongly influence the neighborhood's outcomes regardless of collective efficacy. So, even with collective efficacy, there were higher rates of juvenile delinquency due to the extreme disadvantage in the neighborhood. The second theory to be discussed in this section is Hirschi's 1969 social bond theory. Social bond theory discusses how people who engage in

delinquency are free of intimate attachments, aspirations, and moral beliefs that bind them to a conventional and law-abiding way of life (Conklin, 2004). These delinquents are able to break the law because they do not have ties to the laws of normal society. Hirschi's theory of social bonds has four components to it. The first component is attachment to parents (preferred), teachers, other adults, or peers. Hirschi's idea was that in adolescence, when an individual was faced with an opportunity for delinquency, an attached youth would reflect on what their parents would want them to do and not commit the delinquent act. If the parents are not involved with the youth's life due to a socially disorganized community, incarceration, broken home, neglect or abuse, the youth could form an attachment to a mentor. Mentoring programs are a great option for the youth to form an attachment to a positive adult role model (Rhodes & Lowe, 2008).

Hirschi explains that delinquents are not forced into delinquency so much as they are free to commit delinquent acts because they lack ties to the conventional social order (Conklin, 2004). In other words, a youth's bond to society becomes weak or broken. A home with one or more parents absent may contribute to continued delinquent behavior of the youth (Corbitt, 2000). If the mother is the parent that has the youth living with her and the father is absent, it may be very difficult for the mother to control the youth in regards to following an established curfew, attending school, doing homework, or staying away from negative peers. When the youths have to live with only one parent it may stress the family budget so much that they may end up living in an affordable apartment in an extremely disadvantaged neighborhood that predisposes the youth to a negative peer group and bad role models (Markovic, 2009). These neighborhoods do not have collective efficacy to help combat the negatives of a broken (single parent) home. The youths are more likely to develop delinquent behavior patterns because they haven't been able to identify with appropriate role models in their environment (Keating et al.,

2002; Deutsch & Spencer, 2009). By having a mentor, the youths will have a caring adult that can be a role model for them in regards to appropriate socially acceptable behaviors (Rhodes & Lowe, 2008). The absence of a positive role model for these at-risk youth that are already in a disadvantaged neighborhood and stressful home life calls out for the need of mentors (Keating et al., 2002) to step up and help fill these voids in an effort to curb the effects of a broken home.

Hirschi explains that through close attachment to a parent, and with more intimate communication with the parents, the less likely that the child is to be delinquent (Conklin, 2004). However, this is in direct conflict with the data found in the *Profile of Jail Inmates, 2002*, 56% of jail inmates said they grew up in a single-parent household or with a guardian and about 1 in 9 had lived in a foster home or institution. Thirty-one percent of jail inmates grew up with a parent or guardian who abused alcohol or drugs; 46% had a family member who had been incarcerated (James, 2004). Therefore, with no strong parental figure to attach to, social control is reduced and delinquency/gang involvement is highly likely. The use of a mentoring program for these at-risk youth is vital to form attachments with positive role models. The U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention estimates that between 5 to 15 million children could benefit from being matched with a mentor (Keating et al., 2002).

This also lends itself to the second component to Hirschi's social bond theory which is the commitment to conventional conformity. The at-risk youths feel as though they have nothing to lose and are thus freer to break the law since they do not have a stake in conformity (Cullen, 2003). These youths are free to become delinquent or join a gang since they feel they have no other choices for a future. They may feel that they do not need to worry about criminal involvement within gang activities since they do not need to keep their record clean for background checks for employment or school options. In a sense, these youths are committed

but to a delinquent or gang lifestyle. This is where mentoring programs can have a positive effect by providing a different point of view about conformity and modeling the results of a positive pro-social lifestyle. If an adolescent wants to go far in life with a job, school or a career, they will not risk it for participating in delinquent behavior (Britner et al., 2006). Youths that report lower levels of social support are more withdrawn, hopeless about their future, inattentive and harmful to others (Keating et al., 2002). If the youth's mentor meets weekly with the youth as established as a best practice, discussions can be intertwined in the mentoring sessions regarding careers, goal setting and so forth that can foster a sense of social support and a commitment to conventional conformity.

The third component of Hirschi's social bond theory is involvement in school and extra-curricular activities. The at-risk youth with too much time on their hands could get into trouble with the law. School-based mentoring assists in this aspect as it provides a positive weekly interaction (minimum) in a school-based extra-curricular activity. These at-risk youths should also be encouraged to be involved with other positive supportive activities such as the Boy or Girl Scouts, YMCA After school programs, or Boys and Girls Clubs to pursue conventional activities. If the mentoring agency can have the mentors and mentees participate in a monthly school based activity such as a sporting event, school play, or outing in the community to represent the school, this will help foster this sense of involvement in school and extra-curricular activities.

The fourth component of Hirschi's social bond theory is the belief to follow the norms of society and abide by the laws set forth. The youths that are involved in delinquent activities have rationalized to themselves why they do not need to obey the rules of society. The association with other delinquent youths facilitates the formation of delinquent beliefs (Battin-Pearson,

1998). Hirschi states that delinquency is made possible by the absence of beliefs that forbid delinquency (Cullen, 2003). Mentoring could assist with this component as well. Weekly mentoring sessions can touch on socially acceptable norms, appropriate life goals, social support and so forth. The agency providing the school-based mentors will need to provide ongoing training in this area to assist the mentors to work this into their sessions in a non-confrontational way. On-going training by the agency providing the mentors is another best practice that should be followed and can be helpful towards improving the youth's formation of positive and pro-social beliefs.

School based teen mentoring program for at-risk youth can be effective to deal with the effects of social disorganization, a broken home or social bond theory. By meeting after school for a few hours per week, the at-risk youth would hopefully form an attachment with their mentor - a positive role model. By agreeing to be part of the mentoring program and going through the orientation and screening process, the youth is attempting to commit to following the norms of society and working towards something positive – their schooling and their future. When the at-risk youths are involved in a mentoring program, they hopefully will become involved in school activities with their mentors and this provides the involvement and investment aspect of the social bond theory. Hopefully the mentoring agency provides ongoing training and larger group activities that can provide a backdrop for conversations about following society's norms versus risk taking and going against societal norms. Therefore, when an at-risk youth is involved in a youth mentoring program, it is very possible that all theoretical aspects of at-risk/delinquent behavior can be addressed within the mentoring program.

## V: Summary and Conclusion

### Lessons Learned from Effective Programs

In regards to the program design and implementation best practices, the Village Model of Care and Big Brothers Big Sisters can both provide significant recommendations. Both programs started up right away at the beginning of the school year with very little missed mentoring weeks spent by the programs gearing up and getting ready. Most of the preparation time had been spent in the summer or the end of the previous school year to get the mentoring programs ready for the start of the current school year. Both the Village Model of Care and the Big Brothers Big Sisters program did inform the mentors and the mentees of program requirements and expectations. Both parties agreed to the guidelines prior to being accepted into the programs. Both programs held mentoring sessions throughout the school year, during winter break and spring break. Also, a noteworthy aspect of both of these mentoring programs is that they also established wrap around services within the neighborhoods and involved the parents, or caregivers, community members and other neighborhood stakeholders in events, services and the program components.

The screening and matching best practice guidelines were followed in respect to both programs. In the Village Model of Care, due to the group mentoring aspect, the mentor was not matched individually to each mentee. However, the backgrounds of the mentors were similar to the mentees since they came from the same socially disorganized community that the mentees were coming from. Both the mentees and the mentors were available for the 2 to 3 hours after school time period that the program operated within. In the Big Brother Big Sister mentoring

program, the mentors are screened for criminal backgrounds, receive initial training sessions and were attempted to be matched to their mentees based on similar interests.

The lessons learned from the Village Model of Care in regards to the best practice guidelines of frequency and length of contact is very important. The youths received four times the recommended weekly dosage for school based mentoring programs. Rather than meet weekly for an hour or two, the Village Model of Care met with the youths four afternoons per week for up to three hours per day. The program maximized the duration as long as possible until school let out for the summer. Even in the summer, all of the community outreach and networking that went on during the school year paid off and the youths were connected with resources over the summer months within their communities. The study by Hanlon et al. (2009) of the Village Model of Care mentoring project showed that at the intervention site, the youths tended to have a better grade point average improvement over the control group and the improvement was increased relative to the number of after school mentoring sessions the youths attended. This supports the best practice guideline for at least minimal weekly contact of an hour or two over as long as possible of the school year to produce the best outcomes.

Lessons learned from the Big Brother Big Sister program (Herrera, 2004), outlines the effects mentoring had on the Big Brothers and Big Sisters program participants in relation to length of mentoring program participation. Youths who met with their mentors for more than nine months for mentoring sessions had better outcomes than those that met for a shorter period of time. These youths reported making more friends and reported that they felt that they were more popular. Social skills actually saw a decline in the skill acquisition area when the mentoring match was shorter than six months. The social skills measurement checked for the

ability to express their feelings appropriately, confidence in communication, and other self-esteem type areas (Herrera, 2004).

A significant indicator for mentoring matches of more than nine months in the Big Brother Big Sister program was the amount of referrals to the principal's office that occurred. The percentage of youths that had a principal's office referral during their program participation, of nine months or longer, is 14 percent compared to the group of youth that had a mentoring relationship of six months or less is 37. This is a twenty-three percent decline in referrals to the principal's office by following best practice guidelines and ensuring a nine month or longer mentoring match. Also in the big Brother Big Sister program study by Herrera (2004), the youths scored themselves at the start of the school year and at the end of the school year in regards to liking school (Herrera, 2004). What the study found out is that the youths that were in matches six to nine months long rated themselves as liking school 2% of the time and the youths that were in mentoring matches of nine months or longer reported liking school 7% of the time (Herrera, 2004).

Although these gains in liking school may not seem significant, when they are compared to the youth that were not in matches or were in matches of less than six months, they are statistically significant. The zero to six month mentoring matched group of youth reported liking school at an alarmingly declining rate of -28% (Herrera, 2004). If we use the zero to six month mentoring match percentage as a baseline, then this correlates to a 30 percent improvement in youth's liking school attitudes if mentoring matches are longer than six months and a 35 percent improvement if the mentoring matches are nine months or longer. This is very strong evidence towards establishing guidelines and expectations so that mentors understand the vital importance of long term (nine months or longer) mentoring matches.

## Lessons Learned from Ineffective Programs

Many lessons can be learned from The Study of Mentoring in the Learning Environment (SMILE) case study discussed in Section III of this paper in regards to ineffective programming. In the study by Karcher (2008), the effects of school based mentoring services provided to Latino students were examined across 19 different schools. The youth included in this study were elementary, middle and high school youths who received one hour of mentoring per week during the school year.

This study did not meet best practice guidelines for program design and implementation. The start up process took much too long at the start of the school year and a couple of precious mentoring months were wasted at the beginning of the school year because matches had not yet been made. We can learn from this that the effort put into recruiting and screening mentors prior to the school year starting will assist in a quicker match once the school year begins and the youth that need mentors are established. We have already seen in the lessons learned from effective programs that the longer the mentoring duration, the better the outcomes for the youth being mentored. When the SMILE program used time at the beginning of the school year to gear up for the program, they were already cutting into their 6 to 9 month best practice guideline for length of program duration.

The program also did not prepare for winter break or spring break missed mentoring time by potentially scheduling a larger mentoring group meeting, project or outing to continue to provide some sort of cohesive relationship building group time. The study also reported that after spring break, many of the mentors did not return to their assigned mentoring relationship (Hanlon et al., 2009). This issue of ending the mentoring relationship prematurely has been

discussed previously and is not an effective best practice method; in fact, it does more harm than good to the mentee (Herrera, 2004; Karcher, 2008; MENTOR, 2009).

Another major area of concern that this study highlighted was the need for ongoing support and training for the mentors. Ongoing training and monitoring for the mentors is one of the best practices that DuBois (2002) and Herrera (2004) mentioned as achieving better outcomes. Another concern was that the mentoring sessions were fairly lax and didn't include a lot of structure. This was the result of the mentoring agency not providing a supportive framework or blueprints to hold these weekly mentoring sessions. Training for the mentors included a one hour orientation prior to being matched with a youth. There were other ongoing and evening training sessions offered to the mentors but unfortunately only 29 of the 292 mentors attended one of these sessions and none of the mentors ever participated in two training sessions (Karcher, 2008). Although there were case managers at the various school sites that were available for any consulting regarding the mentoring process or the youth, the case managers were often busy with other school tasks and sometimes didn't even see the mentors when they were at the school (Karcher, 2008).

This study also did not meet best practice guidelines in matching and screening. Although the mentoring agency took the time to give the mentees and mentors interest surveys, they were only utilized approximately 17% of the time. In the other 83% of the matches, the mentors and mentees were matched based on their schedules and availability. In the case study of the Village Model of Care, the program also did not match on similar or common interests. However, their mentors came from the same community that the mentees were from so there were many items that they had in common and there were a lot of similarities in their lives and circumstances that were a good basis for discussion. Therefore, although the SMILE study did

utilize one of the best practice guidelines of attempting to match the mentors and the mentees on similar interests, they did not put this information to good use. The matches were not based on these similarities but rather schedules and availability. In the end, the benefit of screening and matching of mentors and their mentees was not realized and instead valuable mentoring time was not utilized and therefore did not conform to the best practice guideline of a mentoring match being six to nine months duration.

## VI: Summary and Conclusions

This paper took a look at mentoring programs discussed in the literature and sketched out several benchmarks for programs to strive towards as a best practice guideline. The areas examined were program design and implementation, screening and matching, mentee-mentor relationship, frequency of contact and length of contact. It is imperative for the school based teen mentoring programs for at-risk youth to follow these guidelines. If mentoring programs do not follow these guidelines as addressed and outlined in this paper, the program may do more harm to the youth than would have occurred without the mentoring services (Herrera, 2004; Karcher, 2008; MENTOR, 2009).

### Benchmarks for Program Design and Implementation

A mentor must be over the age of 18 and be able to devote a few hours per week to the mentee relationship. Ideally, the mentor and mentee should reside in the same community. The mentor must attend training sessions prior to providing mentoring services and learn about the warning signs of child abuse, child development, problem solving skills, and effective interaction and communication skills (Keating, 2002, Karcher, 2008). Mentors also should check-in with

the mentoring agency's mentor coordinator, or referral source (school teacher or other staff) on a weekly to monthly basis to update on mentoring activities (MENTOR, 2009).

Ideally, the mentor and the mentee should spend a scheduled one to two hours together per week. This "scheduled" time is important to build trust and bring a supportive function to the youth's chaotic life (Keating, 2002; MENTOR, 2009). Any type of activity for individual time on a weekly basis is acceptable. Individual time can be spent going over homework, attending a school function (play, music concert or sporting activity), reading a book together, watching a movie or just hanging out and talking about the week's events. The important thing is to spend consistent and scheduled time together (Deutsch & Spencer, 2009). The evidence supports the push for the mentee-mentor relationship duration to be as long as possible (DuBois, 2002; Karcher, 2008; MENTOR, 2009). The better outcomes are seen in those relationships that last 12 months or longer versus the shorter relationships that are under 12 months (Herrera, 2004). Even more damaging is to end the mentoring relationship prematurely before the end of the program and school year dictate, this can have a negative effect of the youth's sense of self-esteem and connectedness (MENTOR, 2009).

An excellent extra service idea for the mentoring agency to do on a monthly basis is a group activity for all mentors and mentees to participate in together (DuBois, 2002; Keating 2002). These events should be varied and on a rotating basis so that those with varied interests will have an opportunity to participate. These group activities could be guest speakers to come in and talk with the group of mentors and mentees at their school. If the budget allows and the group is fairly cohesive, some other group activities that have been successful are community service projects, sporting events, educational or artistic experiences (Keating, 2002). The idea is

to try to build the mentee's individual self-esteem as well as try to build on the sense of belonging and feeling part of the school community.

### Benchmarks for Screening and Matching

Recruiting for mentors and mentees needs to be upfront and needs to be realistically portrayed for what mentees and mentors can expect from the relationship. The program needs to outline and have available the goals and expected outcomes for the mentoring match. When the mentors are being recruited they need to be informed of the potential challenges and best practices for mentoring. The youth needs to be informed about what mentoring is and what the expectations are for the mentoring match. Although this seems like a basic thought, it is one that is often overlooked. If the expectations and potential outcomes are not explained and established at the beginning of the process, confusion for both the mentee and the mentor can result (MENTOR, 2009). Ending the mentoring relationship prematurely can be detrimental to the youth's sense of self esteem and can have a negative effect on the youth's outcomes (Herrera, 2004; MENTOR, 2009).

Usually, the youth and the mentor are screened and matched according to the mentoring service agency's data sheets. Some of the usual fields that are matched are gender, ethnicity, age, geographical location, and common interests (DuBois, 2002; Keating, 2002). Both the mentee and the mentor will rate their preferences in the various screening areas and their file will be kept on hand until a match can be made. Matches can be made in as little time as a month while some of the longer wait times can extend out to two years (Keating, 2002).

It is an important element of screening for the mentoring programs to also do reference and background checks for the mentors prior to meeting with a youth (MENTOR, 2009). By

utilizing reference and background checks for the potential mentors, programs can attempt to reassure the parents, guardians and the youth that the potential for any match with a potentially dangerous mentor is mitigated. According to MENTOR (2009), an additional best practice step is to run potential mentors through a national database system that employs a fingerprint based criminal background check. An individual who may be charged with crimes in one state against children will more likely be flagged in a national check, rather than a state check, if he or she moves to a different state and applies for a mentor match. Although the background and reference check process may slow down the match process, the evidence based best practices appear to agree that it is an important and necessary step for mentoring programs (Herrera, 2004; MENTOR, 2009).

Most quality mentoring programs do a fairly decent job of the initial training for mentors in order for them to start the relationship (DuBois, 2002). However, there should be push for continued ongoing training of these mentors by the mentor sponsoring agency. The idea that the mentors are busy and may not have time to attend an occasional ongoing training session should not preclude these from occurring. In fact, a good suggestion for the introduction materials regarding expectations for mentors is to include attendance at occasional training sessions by the mentoring agency is a must. According to MENTOR (2009), this is one of the best practice benchmarks where programs need to provide quality mentor training. Ideally, the mentoring program should provide minimally two hours of pre-mentoring training in the areas of program rules, goals/expectations, obligations/appropriate roles, development of the mentoring relationship, ethical issues, effective strategies and sources of assistance if necessary (MENTOR, 2009).

The majority of programs focus their energy and costs in the start up phase where background checks, references and orientation take up a lot of the agency's time (DuBois, 2002; Keating, 2002). However, in an effort to provide the best possible services, agencies should continue to offer ongoing training or refresher sessions. According to the meta-analysis by DuBois (2002), initial training and/or orientation has been provided to mentors on a routine basis in about seventy one percent of the studies, compared to ongoing training that occurred in about 23% of the studies.

#### Benchmarks for Frequency and Length of Contact

The literature has shown that that the most effective relationships between mentee and mentor are those that maintain regular contact over a significant length of time (DuBois, 2002; Herrera, 2004; Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; MENTOR, 2009). This can be difficult for the school based programs to maintain this contact over the summer months when school is out for summer break. When the program is beginning to match the youths at the start of the school year, they need to be timely and mindful that screening, matching and training need to be a priority. Any footwork such as locating mentors, doing the background checks and initial training that can be done prior to the school year starting is a plus. This time saved can then be put into matching the at-risk youths with an appropriate mentor at the start of the school year and can add a valuable month or two of weekly mentoring meetings. A suggestion for programs to consider when providing school based teen mentoring programs is to schedule regular monthly events at the school site so that mentors and mentees can keep in contact over the summer. These events could be a family picnic or carnival to get the youths there and maintain this relationship with their mentors. Also, other possible contacts that count as mentoring time could be weekly phone calls or e-mails to maintain that sense of connectedness over the summer months.

Mentoring is all about assisting the youth to establish healthy relationships. When selecting mentors, the agency overseeing the selection and screening process needs to ensure that the mentors are able to commit to this mentoring relationship for a minimum of a year and possibly a two year period of time. According to DuBois (2002), one of the best practice principles is to establish and hold firm on the expectations for frequency of contact between a mentor and the mentee.

The frequency of the contact between the mentee and mentor needs to be established at the onset of the mentoring relationship. It should occur at least weekly and for one to two hours in the school setting. The length of time of the mentoring relationship is extremely critical for these at risk youths. These youths are already having behavior problems that may have resulted in their initial referral for services so to have their mentor bail out on the relationship prematurely could be extremely damaging to their sense of self esteem and feeling of belonging to the school culture (Keating, 2002; MENTOR, 2009). These types of situations need to be minimized by all measures possible. Some of these measures could include having potential mentors on a wait list in case of a mentor having to suddenly end the mentoring relationship prematurely and then use the back-up mentor. The frequency and length of contact benchmarks are probably the most important best practice principles of effective mentoring services (Herrera, 2004; Deutsch & Spencer, 2009; MENTOR, 2009).

In conclusion, this paper was intended to combine as much of the known “best practice” literature regarding teen school based mentoring programs for at-risk youth into one cohesive guide for future programs as they begin their program development phase. School based mentoring programs should try to develop their agenda so that they can follow the benchmarks outlined in this paper as much as possible. The benchmarks discussed were studied extensively

through the literature review and were determined to be the best predictors of effective programming for school based teen mentoring. By utilizing these benchmarks, mentoring programs can be effective with their scarce resources. Efforts can be made to not waste precious dollars on facets of a program that will not produce effective results or on ineffective programming that could do more harm to the youths than without the mentoring services.

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