Family Strengthening Policy Center

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Mentoring as a Family Strengthening Strategy

This paper, one of a series of periodic briefs produced by the Family Strengthening Policy Center (FSPC), seeks to describe a new way of thinking about families raising children in low-income communities and, importantly, how this new way of thinking can and should influence policy. The premise of "family strengthening," in this context and as championed by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, is that children do well when cared for by supportive families, which, in turn, do better when they live in vital and supportive communities. This and other briefs in the series describe ways in which enhancing connections within families and between families and the institutions that affect them result in better outcomes for children *and* their families.

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This brief reflects the findings and views of the Family Strengthening Policy Center, which is solely responsible for its content.

Mentoring programs are based on the idea that all children need caring adults in their lives, and that it's possible to create a relationship based on trust between a youth and an adult who were previously strangers. Research shows that these relationships can promote positive youth development and offer support similar to the kind of support a youth receives from parents or caregivers. This brief examines the following two questions:

- *Can greater family engagement in traditional youth mentoring programs lead to better outcomes for mentored youth?*
- *Can mentoring principles be applied to help connect isolated families to valuable resources and supports to achieve stability and self-sufficiency?*

The Center's analysis is based on Q & A's with youth and family-serving professionals and case studies of programs that apply principles of mentoring to serve vulnerable families and youth, It suggests that youth mentoring that involves parents or caregivers and emerging family mentoring approaches hold significant promise for strengthening disadvantaged families with minor children.

Introduction to Mentoring

Youth mentoring has achieved extended reach in the United States. Urban, rural and suburban communities across the country have recognized that mentoring is a powerful way to make a difference in the lives of young people. As a result, funding from the federal government for mentoring activities reached its highest level in 2004 with $100 million being distributed to local mentoring programs from the Department of Health & Human Services (for Children of

Incarcerated Parents) and the Department of Education (for school-age programs in grades 4-8) (Weinberger, 2004).

Traditionally, mentoring is defined as a sustained relationship between a youth and an adult in which the adult offers support, guidance and assistance aimed at developing the competence and character of the young person (U.S. Department of Education, 1993; Rhodes 2002). Adult mentors are expected to offer support and friendship, yet not try to change the youth's behavior. Trust and friendship are established between youth and adults through the participation in developmentally appropriate activities, which may include taking walks, attending a sporting activity, visiting the library, or simply sharing ideas or thoughts in informal conversations.

Over time, mentoring programs have used a number of different approaches to serve a wide variety of purposes, including:

- ***Educational or Academic Mentoring*** to help youth improve their overall academic achievement;
- ***Career Mentoring*** to help youth develop the necessary skills to enter or continue in a career path; and
- ***Personal Development Mentoring*** to support youth during times of personal or social stress and to provide guidance for decision making. ("Mentoring," U.S. Department of Education, p. 2)

Mentoring programs also occur in a variety of different settings. Community-based mentoring such as the kind supported by Big Brothers Big Sisters, the largest mentoring organization in the country, is the most common. Other settings include the workplace, faith-based organizations, schools, juvenile corrections facilities and in "virtual communities" in the case of e-mentoring.

The forms of mentoring also vary. Traditional mentoring models[1] are based on a one-on-one, adult-youth relationship; however other models include:

- Group mentoring (one adult working with up to four young people)
- Team mentoring (several adults working with small groups of young people)
- Peer mentoring (youth mentoring other youth)
- E-mentoring (mentoring via e-mail and the Internet)

Impact of Mentoring

Over the last decade, the research agenda to study the outcomes of mentoring programs has expanded greatly to assess whether formal, structured mentoring relationships between adult and youth that are intense (weekly, multi-hour meetings) and enduring (over a year in length) have positive impacts on adolescent development. In 1995 an impact study of the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) program was undertaken by Public/Private Ventures (P/PV). The P/PV four-year study included eight local BBBS agencies and compared 959 10-16 year olds over an 18-month period of time. Half of the youth were assigned to a treatment group (BBBS either attempted or successfully made a mentor match) and the other half of the youth were assigned to a BBBS wait list.

[1] For more information about mentoring models, please visit the website of MENTOR: National Mentoring Partnership, http://www.mentoring.org

The results offered encouraging evidence that caring relationships between youth and adults who are unrelated can be created and supported by mentoring programs and can yield positive and tangible results. The following are some of the key findings of the study (Tierney, Grossman, Resch, 2000):

Youth who were assigned to a mentor were:

- 46 percent less likely than controls to initiate drug use during the study period. A stronger effect was found with the minority Little Brothers and Little Sisters who were 70 percent less likely to initiate drug use than other similar minority youth.
- 27 percent less likely than controls to initiate alcohol use during the study period, and minority Little Sisters were about one-half as likely to initiate alcohol use.
- Almost one-third less likely than controls to hit someone.
- Skipping only half as many days of school as control youth, felt more competent about doing school work, skipped fewer classes and showed modest gains in their grade point averages.
- More likely to see an improvement in the quality of their relationship with their parents than the controls at the end of the study period, due primarily to a higher level of trust in the parent.
- More likely to experience an improvement in their relationship with their peers relative to their control counterparts.

In addition to the outcomes observed in the impact study of BB/BS, other studies (Jekielek et al, 2002) documented that youth participating in mentoring programs have:

- A better chance of going on to higher education (from evaluation of Career Beginnings program);
- Better attitudes towards school with a higher value placed on schooling (from evaluations of the Across Ages program and BELONG program);
- Reduced negative behaviors related to delinquency, including fewer misdemeanors and felonies (from evaluations of the BELONG program, Buddy System program and Across Ages program); and
- Improved positive social attitudes and relationships toward school, the future, the elderly and helping behaviors (from evaluations of Across Ages program).

Mentoring as a Family Strengthening Approach

Given the demonstrated positive outcomes of mentoring for youth, the Family Strengthening Policy Center decided to explore the idea of whether mentoring might be a family strengthening approach. In doing so, we posed two questions to determine how mentoring programs might serve to support and strengthen families:

1. ***Can greater family engagement in traditional youth mentoring programs lead to better outcomes for mentored youth?*** Research on parent involvement in the formal education of their children has demonstrated that parent involvement can translate into positive results in academic outcomes for youth (including test scores, attendance and graduation rates) and positive outcomes for parents and caregivers, such as enhanced confidence in their parenting skills and greater ability to make contacts and build social networks that they can use to create opportunities for their children and themselves (Henderson, A.T. & Berla, N., 1994).

2. ***Can mentoring principles be applied to help connect isolated families to valuable resources and supports to achieve stability and self-sufficiency?*** Gary Walker, President of Public / Private Ventures wrote in the foreword to the re-issued 1995 impact study of BB/BS: "Mentoring is both a discrete program and a broader idea: that individual change and progress is fundamentally about having other individuals care, support, tend to and guide on a one-to-one basis." If mentoring can be thought of as a "broader idea" based on providing individuals with caring and supportive relationships, what might this look like when applied to an entire family unit instead of individual youth? Might families benefit from the care, support and expanded networks and opportunities that youth receive from mentoring?

This led us to examine two types of programs:

1. Traditional youth mentoring programs that build in a strong family engagement component, and
2. Family mentoring programs that use a mentoring model to connect families to volunteer mentors.

The following case studies and practitioner interviews present some of our findings about family engagement in mentoring and family mentoring practices.

Family Engagement in Youth Mentoring Programs

There is growing interest and commitment to engaging parents and sharing leadership with parents in community and youth serving institutions. But what role might family engagement play in traditional youth mentoring programs?

Dr. Susan G. Weinberger, an international consultant on mentoring and a pioneer in designing and developing the first one-on-one school based mentoring program in the United States has commented on the role of families in youth mentoring: "After two decades of experience in establishing, maintaining and evaluating mentoring programs, I have found that, for the most part, the role of the family in the mentoring experience has been minimal. It is time to take a look at the potential and benefits of the involvement of families in mentoring activities" (Weinberger, 2004).

Other agencies and professionals in the mentoring movement have begun to examine the opportunities for family engagement in youth mentoring and the potential for mentoring programs to strengthen families. With funding support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA), undertook surveys and focus groups with staff and primary caregivers of mentored youth to understand how BBBS mentoring may add to the strength of the family and to determine the parents' and caregivers' interest in greater family involvement.

Feedback from the BBBSA staff focus group suggested that "more confident and optimistic parents play a more productive role in their children's BBBS experience than those who are

threatened or hypersensitive to insult or rejection" (BBBSA, 2004). Staff recommendations for bolstering and reinforcing caregivers included[2]:

- Congratulating parents for coming forward to give their child the gift of a new friend
- Sending a note of congratulations to a parent for their role in improved grades or other positive changes of their child
- Publicly celebrating parents
- Developing more recognition events for parents
- Providing sensitivity training for staff regarding how to reinforce parents and their role in promoting positive impacts

Recommendations from caregivers included the following:

- Sensitize both staff and mentors to the challenges and difficulties in typical parents' lives
- Honor and celebrate parents or guardians as a "good parent" who had the courage, caring and commitment to seek out or agree to a match
- Provide networking opportunities for parents
- Consider forming a cadre of long-term parents as peer counselors

Furthermore, the BBBSA study of its school-based mentoring programs found that "an informed, empowered parent strengthens and supports a school-based match in the same way it helps a community match, leading to a stronger family" (BBBSA, 2004).

These findings suggest that youth mentoring programs can benefit from applying some of the core principles and practices central to family strengthening,[3] which include:

- Honoring the central role of parents and caregivers in the life of the child
- Creating opportunities for families to develop supportive networks within their own community
- Serving children and youth in a manner that acknowledges the primary influence of the family system in their lives

Mentoring programs have only begun to examine how to integrate a spectrum of parent involvement activities into their existing models. However, there are a number of emerging approaches that demonstrate the promise of a "family-centered" approach to mentoring youth. These are featured in the following case studies and practitioner Q & As.

Q & A with with Ann Adalist-Estrin and Arlene F. Lee, Mentoring Children of Prisoners Curriculum, Child Welfare League of America

The Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), Inc. through its Federal Resource Center for Children of Prisoners, has developed a mentor training curriculum, co-authored by Ann Adalist-Estrin and Arlene F. Lee. (More information is available on CWLA's Web site at www.cwla.org/programs/incarcerated/ cop_currentactivities.htm.) The curriculum is being used

[2] Staff and caregiver recommendations were taken directly from BBBSA document reporting on Annie E. Casey Family Strengthening Initiative, October 2003-2004 (p. 2).
[3] For more information about family strengthening principles and practices, please see Brief No. 1 Introduction to Family Strengthening, available at: http://www.nassembly.org/fspc/practice/practices.html

with many of the grantees of the Department of Health and Human Service's (HHS) Mentoring Children of Prisoners grants. The HHS program funds 170 grantees for a total of $37 million[4].

The CWLA curriculum is available with six master trainers to teach mentoring programs how to train mentors to work successfully with children of prisoners. The first part of the curriculum educates volunteers about mentoring, the children of prisoners, their families, the importance of the parent-child bond, and racial and ethnic issues. The second part, designed ideally for use after mentoring begins, discusses building relationships and doing activities with kids; encouraging practical ways to connect with the incarcerated parent, where appropriate; and the role of faith in children's lives. The goal of the training is to ensure that successful mentoring relationships lead to positive outcomes for children affected by parental incarceration.

Q: Why should parents, guardians and/or caregivers be involved in mentoring programs?
A: In order for children to have the best opportunity for success, they need a strong sense of who they are in the world which depends on where they come from, their family history, and their relationships with the adults they depend on. These variables can define a child's self image and future possibilities. In order for a mentor to develop a strong and healthy bond with the child, to give them the support necessary to see a positive future, the mentor must have a strong and positive relationship with the family. In fact, research shows that when the mentor has a strong relationship with the family, and is part of the "team" that supports the child, the outcomes for the child are dramatically improved (Grossman et al., 2000).

Q: How does the Mentoring Children of Prisoners Curriculum take a family-centered approach to mentoring?
A: The whole philosophy of the Mentoring Children of Prisoners curriculum is based upon a belief that children need to be viewed in the context of the significant adults that are raising them. This borrows from research on brain development that stresses the importance of family relationships as well as family support research demonstrating that children develop in the context of families. For children of incarcerated parents, caregivers are the gatekeepers. They can facilitate or form obstacles to the mentoring relationships. Mentors need to be aware of all of the factors in the child's life, most especially the family. The curriculum weaves this throughout, with chapters specific to variations within families, the importance of families, and involving the family members in the relationship between the mentor and family. The curriculum teaches this in two ways:

- Giving mentors both information and skills so they can communicate in ways that will foster trust and minimize loyalty conflicts for the child, and
- Giving the mentors information that will allow them to work with the family as part of the child's support team.

Q: What research guided the development of this curriculum?
A: The backdrop of research for the Mentoring Children of Prisoners curriculum is the family support research conducted by the Children's Defense Fund (Allen, et. al, 1992) and Ann Adalist-Estrin's work on "Family Support in Criminal Justice" (Kagan and Weissbourd, 1994). Another contributing element is the compendium of research on brain development, *Neurons To Neighborhoods* (Shonkoff and Phillips, 2000), which says that how children feel is more important then what they learn or what they know. A child's feelings depend on his/her relationship with family and/or caregivers. The research by Shonkoff and Phillips bears out the

[4] For more information on federal funding of mentoring programs, please visit the web site of MENTOR: National Mentoring Partnership at http://www.mentoring.org/take_action/leg_alerts/legalert_10-01-04.adp?Entry=whatsnew

importance of attachment and relationship as the foundation for all child outcomes. This research makes clear that the first and primary relationship is the family, followed by supplemental or outside relationships.

We then examined work by Jean Grossman, Susan Jekielek and Jean Rhodes As well as the resilience literature of Emmy Werner. Finally, we relied on the work specific to children of prisoners regarding inmate families and their children by Denise Johnston and Creasie Hairston, as well as Ann's 20 years of clinical observations and interviews with children of prisoners, incarcerated parents and family/caregivers of these children. .

Q: How does the CWLA curriculum prepare mentors to work with youth and families?
A: The Mentoring Children of Prisoners curriculum gives mentors knowledge and information about what to expect in terms of child development and family dynamics and the specific impact of parental incarceration. The curriculum challenges them to examine their points of view, assumptions, beliefs, ideas, goals, and expectations. It is designed to both increase awareness and provide new knowledge to build a base upon which mentors can understand this unique population of children. The curriculum merges their good instincts as mentors with new information and data to ensure successful relationships between the mentor, the child and his/ her family. In addition, the curriculum gives mentors an opportunity to practice new skills when responding to a child and their family or caregivers in conversation and behavior.

Q: Can this mentoring model be replicated? If so, please explain. What types of agencies or initiatives would benefit from the model?
A: The Mentoring Children of Prisoners curriculum blends various disciplines, practice ideas and current thinking which could be adapted to many different audiences. It can be replicated or adapted by:

- Traditional adult/child one-on-one mentoring programs- by using it to train national level staff, regional staff and then training trainers to train mentors. Training national level and regional level staff will inform policy and practice related to decisions about screening, training and mentor/match support, as well as program design issues such as involving and engaging parents and caregivers in the mentoring relationship. By training the trainers you enable agencies to better equip mentors in their relationships with both the child and his/her family.

- Programs and systems not providing organized mentoring services but looking for ways to increase staff capacity to engage with families whether or not there is an incarcerated member. Examples include staffs in child care, child welfare, schools, literacy programs, and health care. These front line staff would then be better prepared to support the family's role in the larger context of relationships, child development and improving child/family wellbeing.

Q & A with Susan Weinberger, Mentoring Consultant and creator of "F.A.M.I.L.Y." curriculum

Q: What does a quality program look like that includes the family as part of the initiative?
A: Some time ago, I created a F.A.M.I.L.Y. (Families and Mentors Involved in Learning with Youth) component of the Norwalk (CT) Mentoring Program which I believe should be a critical part of any effective mentoring initiative. Based on the rationale that involved parents and other caregivers in the lives of their children is vital to the overall health of youth and their families, the model offers great potential for the future. Here is how it works:

The F.A.M.I. L.Y. model's goal is to involve the family along with mentors in supporting the youth they have in common. Each year the staff of the mentoring program conducts a series of workshops for families and mentors, generally scheduled in the evening so working families can attend. Ensuring that families are offered food, transportation and babysitting reduces barriers to good attendance. Families are often enticed with the chance to meet their child's mentor, enjoy good food, have fun and learn together.

The workshops are led by experts in their professional field and may include topics such as: Stress in the twenty-first century; AIDS Prevention; How to listen to your child; How to bridge the communication gap between children and adults; Avoiding drug and alcohol use; Conflict resolution; Avoiding bullying and other risky behavior; How to read to and with your child; Career direction; Goal setting; Manners and etiquette; Helping with homework.

Over the years, on average, 63% of families have attended the workshop series on a regular basis and 72% attended parent-teacher conferences at the schools. In many cases, it has been reported that family members attending the series had never been to school before. [5]

The series, which can be scheduled at lunch time or early mornings as well, is designed to provide a warm, informal and non-threatening environment for families to interact with mentors and to improve their parenting skills.

Q: Families are learning parenting skills at these sessions. Are there any other benefits?
A: While learning how they can help their children to succeed, the families often end up receiving critical assistance to improve their own competence and skills. Professionals running the series reach out to the local adult or continuing education department to provide sessions for family members who wish to take the courses necessary to pass the GED test in order to complete high school. Staff members help families who are unemployed to write a resume, design their own business card, read the want ads, fill out a mock application and seek job opportunities. Similar support is provided to those completing high school education and looking for a good job, at the same time their child is being mentored.

Q: What are some of the barriers to incorporating families in the youth mentoring experience?
A: At first, some family members may be reluctant to become involved. They may feel uncomfortable or embarrassed about seeking assistance for themselves or their child. They may not have the proper transportation to get to the family events. When this is the case, it is important to hold events for families, mentors and mentees in a location and a time of day that is convenient for everyone.

Q: Should or could mentors be involved in "mentoring" the entire family?
A: Some mentoring programs today are training mentors to work with the entire family and may include such activities as driving them to job interviews, helping them gain financial independence or managing their time. However, the major role of a mentor is as a guide, friend and positive role model for mentees. When mentors are involved in the F.A.M.I.L.Y, model described above, they play a role by sharing with the family the strategies they use when working with the mentee.

[5] Weinberger, Susan G. *How to Start a Student Mentor Program.* Phi Delta Kappa Education Foundation Bloomington, Indiana 1992.

Q: Do mentors have to have a special knowledge base in order to assist the entire family?
A: No, not really. The same criteria that apply to working with a mentee should apply for the entire family. These include caring, commitment, patience, good listening skills, and a sense of humor.

Q: How can local mentoring programs build family engagement into their current mentoring models?
A: Staff of mentoring programs should seek grant and foundation support to incorporate family involvement in mentoring. I am involved in designing a new program on several Indian reservations where mentoring will be offered for youth. The family will be included in this project from its inception. It just seems natural. The mentor and the family work together for the benefit of the youth they "share in common." The involvement of the family is the wave of the future in mentoring.

Case Study: Aguante Project and Family Mentoring Program, University of Nebraska at Omaha School of Social Work

The Family Mentoring Program was initiated by the University of Nebraska at Omaha School of Social Work (UNO) in 1996 under the leadership of Dr. Theresa Barron-McKeagney. It was prompted by concern about increased criminal activity, low educational attainment and poverty in the immigrant and first generation Latinos living in South Omaha. The program received funding from various sources, including the Department of Education, the Department of Housing and Urban Development and in 2001, was continued with support from the Justice Department's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Programs' Juvenile Mentoring Program (JUMP) grant to continue and expand the program under the new name "Aguante" (meaning "to persevere" in Spanish).[6]

A core principle of the program was to honor the important role of the family in Latino culture. Together with six social work students, the Community Coordinator acted as a conduit between the mentors and families, helping them address concerns that included immigration issues, Social Security and Medicare assistance, navigating the public school system, networking with other social service agencies that do not have Spanish speaking professionals, translation support, and assistance with the legal system. Parents were also engaged in informal activities such as group dinners, parties and special community events.

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For more information about the Family Mentoring Program and the Aguante Project, please see http://www.nassembly.org/fspc/practice/practices.html.

[6] Federal funding ended in June of 2004 with the resulting termination of the project.

Family Mentoring: An Emerging Model

Family mentoring applies many of the principles of youth mentoring to families trying to break out of a cycle of poverty or struggling with life stressors. While family mentoring programs vary across agencies, they generally involve pairing a family with volunteers who will provide consistent support and encouragement as the family makes positive changes and becomes increasingly self-motivated and self-sufficient.

Family mentoring programs distinguish themselves from other family support programs that provide case management services by focusing on helping the family establish a caring and supportive relationship with a volunteer adult mentor. The Salvation Army's Project Break-Through defines the volunteer mentor as someone who serves as a "critical sounding board, resource, role model, and emotional support system" for a family trying to break out of poverty. Mentors can be a true support network, providing encouragement and serving as a resource to help the family become more socially connected.

An important premise of most family mentoring programs surveyed for this brief is that every family has strengths that, if nurtured, can help the family make sustainable change, bringing them closer to stability and self reliance. Such programs employ an empowerment approach to help families work toward such goals as improving their financial situation, seeking employment, improving and applying parenting skills, repaying old debts, and improving their formal education.

Barriers Addressed by a Family Mentoring Approach

Family mentoring programs recognize that families transitioning out of poverty require more than just material resources. They need caring and supportive relationships. Volunteer adult mentors can provide these as well as being advocates for families.

Family mentoring programs generally address the following barriers facing families struggling with poverty:

- Isolation and a lack of social connectedness
- Absence of emotional support
- Difficulty accessing services and maneuvering through the social service system
- Social, economic and other stressors that make self-sufficiency challenging, including illiteracy, teen parenthood, limited education and job skills, inadequate or unstable housing, lack of transportation and child care, low self esteem

These barriers are addressed through a combination of supports offered through family mentoring programs, including:

- ***Developing a relationship with an adult volunteer mentor*** who can provide support and guidance, help problem solve with the family, and help the family access valuable information or resources in the community
- ***Case management*** to address varied service needs of family, which is usually provided by full-time, trained staff.
- ***Group meetings*** to enable families to share their experiences and build relationships with other families as a means of reducing their isolation.

What Does Family Mentoring Look Like?

While family mentoring is still a new approach to strengthening families in underserved communities, there are a number of promising practices in various communities and states that offer opportunities to learn about this model and adapt it to local community needs. This brief in no way intends to offer an exhaustive study of family mentoring programs. Instead, the following models can be used as a reference point for understanding family mentoring program approaches, how they work, and what results they are producing to help strengthen families.

Case Study: Project Break-Through, The Salvation Army

Founded in 1990, Project Break-Through, based in Minneapolis, MN,[7] is an outcome oriented program administered by the Salvation Army that promotes self-sufficiency, strengthens families, and reduces isolation through mentoring and ongoing support. The program uses a holistic approach to empower participants. It is designed to address isolation and the difficulty of navigating the social service delivery system-- two major barriers that can block the path to self-sufficiency and meaningful change. Mentors and social workers help participants develop plans to attain goals, advocate for the family within the community, and help the family become better connected to the community. Families set their own goals and determine the pace at which they will work.

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For more information about the Project Break-Through, please see http://www.nassembly.org/fspc/practice/practices.html.

Case Study: Family Mentoring Program, Family Promise

Family Promise is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to helping homeless and low-income families achieve sustained independence through four separate initiatives, of which Family Mentoring is one. Based in Summit, NJ, Family Promise was founded in 1988 on the belief that Americans are compassionate people who want to make a difference. 100 affiliates in 34 states involve more than 95,000 volunteers from 3,500 faith communities. They are part of a single national strategy to mobilize and unleash communities for social change. The programs relate to each other and build on a network of religious congregations of all faiths working closely with community agencies, organizations and institutions.

[7] The program has since been replicated in Milwaukee, WI; New Zealand, Janesville, WI; Flint, MI; Fort Wayne, IN; Buffalo, NY; Old Orchard Beach, ME; and Norfolk, VA. Replication of the Project Break-Through program is also underway in Madison, WI and is being considered by the Cabrini Green Legal Aid Clinic in Chicago, IL.

The goal of the Family Mentoring Program is to assist economically vulnerable families to become self-reliant by pairing them with volunteer mentors who are trained to offer both practical and emotional support. They help a family define and set goals, review their progress, possibly assist with education, parenting skills and employment, as well as other practical needs. Family Promise has mentoring programs in six locations and is currently working with other communities to develop them. Family Promise provides technical assistance and training to other nonprofits and communities that want to begin their own mentoring programs.

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For more information about the Family Promise's Family Mentoring Program, please see http://www.nassembly.org/fspc/practice/practices.html.

Case Study: Friends in Action Mentoring Services, Community Ministry of Montgomery County, Maryland

The Friends in Action Family Mentoring Program (FIA) was developed in Montgomery County, Maryland in 1986 to help families realize maximum independence. They link teams of three-ten volunteer mentors with low-income families for one year to provide friendship, mentoring, advocacy, tutoring, and other needed support. Case managers also work with the families to set goals and address barriers that may arise. Recently, FIA has also begun to administer the Interfaith Housing Coalition to place homeless families in a three-year transitional housing program.

Families have a wide variety of goals, including parenting help, household management, budgeting, continuing education, tutoring, enrichment activities, employment, and much more. Family needs are addressed through specialized workshops, tutoring, individualized attention, and other approaches. Families and mentors are supported by two full time caseworkers. The families served are mostly African-American, single mothers with more than one child.

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For more information about Friends in Action Mentoring Services, please see http://www.nassembly.org/fspc/practice/practices.html.

Lessons Learned and Policy Recommendations

The Center's analysis suggests that youth mentoring that involves parents or caregivers and emerging family mentoring approaches holds significant promise for strengthening disadvantaged families with minor children and can be replicated in communities nationally.

The following lessons learned and recommendations are drawn primarily from the experiences of the agencies and practitioners profiled in this brief.

Promoting Family Engagement in Youth Mentoring Programs

Family and Youth Serving Agencies

- **Build-in parent recognition activities and rewards.** Agencies can honor the parent and their important contributions to the child's development and for supporting the child's continued participation in mentoring programs. This can be achieved through parties that bring together parents, youth, mentors, and staff, and through small tokens of recognition such as certificates and t-shirts that celebrate the parents.
- **Create opportunities for parents and caregivers to meet with mentors throughout the program.** Parties, dinners or other informal gatherings are safe and inviting venues for parents and caregivers to establish a relationship with their child's mentor. These meetings are an opportunity to develop trust and share information between the adults who play a critical role in a child's life. Make such gatherings accessible by convening meetings at a convenient time for parents and caregivers and whenever possible, provide food, access to transportation and child care to reduce barriers to participation.
- **Train staff to honor the role of the parent or caregiver.** Staff should develop skills that enable them to build confidence in parents whose children participate in mentoring programs, and to promote the parents' or caregivers' role as a primary protective factor in the child's life. Staff should also be able to work with the family as part of the child's support team.
- **Raise staff awareness about family systems and how they impact youth outcomes**. Staff can become more effective advocates for the youth they serveif they are sensitive and aware of conditions in the lives of parents and caregivers, different family coping styles and cultural values, family norms and behaviors.
- **Establish partnerships with comprehensive service providers as a resource for children and parents**. Youth mentoring programs have enough on their hands dealing with the challenges of operating a mentoring program, but by partnering with mental health, advocacy, job training, and other community agencies, they can be a bridge to other valued services that may be needed.
- **Seek out partnerships with local universities that offer graduate and undergraduate social work and community organizing programs of study**. Mentoring organizations may be able to work with universities to recruit mentors as well as volunteer case workers and parent advocates to develop parent engagement activities.

Private Sector Funders

- **Dedicate funds to the evaluation of mentoring programs that are family-centered and incorporate family engagement principles.** Though far from a main stream practice, family engagement in youth mentoring programs is emerging. By studying

them, private agencies can capture and widely share lessons learned and identify priority areas for further program investment.

- **Leverage the work of existing youth mentoring agencies by supporting family engagement resources. Youth mentoring a**gencies might be able to achieve better results through more active family engagement; however, this requires added resources such as funding for family gatherings, child care, transportation, and additional staff training.
- **Bring together agencies and professionals from diverse fields to study parent engagement strategies and find opportunities to integrate expertise within mentoring programs.** Many school districts and education groups have made major strides in promoting family engagement in education. Mentoring professionals and educators can begin to share the knowledge and experience of parent engagement strategies that have proven successful.

Policy Recommendations

Local, State, and Federal Agencies

- **Identify and evaluate mentoring programs with family engagement components to determine their efficacy.** Likely models include grantees who will provide mentoring programs for children of incarcerated parents and the Justice Department's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Programs' Juvenile Mentoring Programs grantees (such as UNOs Family Mentoring Program and Aguante Project).

Legislators

- **Promote family engagement in mentoring programs by recommending them in categorical grants.** Appropriating funds to develop family engagement resources will provide an impetus for agencies to incorporate them.

Building Family Mentoring Practices into Programs

Family and Youth Serving Agencies

- **Develop client-driven programs that are rooted in the needs of the family**. Families should play the lead role in setting personal goals and developing strategies for achieving these goals. Programs should be flexible enough to support the family in identifying their needs and charting their own course for self-sufficiency.
- **Provide qualified case management services to support families and volunteer mentors.** Social workers, community organizers or other qualified staff with experience conducting family assessments, connecting families to other social and human service agencies and helping families maneuver through formal systems are good candidates for case management positions.
- **Establish clear boundaries for mentors and families.** Mentors should not be expected to play the role of a social worker for families. Their connection to the family should be based on establishing a trusting and caring relationship. Mentors can be a resource to families by helping to serve as a bridge to agency resources, but this should be supported with qualified agency staff.
- **Carefully screen and train volunteer mentors to become effective advocates for families.** Training topics could include: listening skills, problem solving, racial and socioeconomic diversity, cultural competency, criminal justice and social service

systems, and working within a family system. Volunteer mentors should be willing and able to give a sustained commitment to work with a family for at least one year.

- **Create opportunities for families to network and support one another.** Family support and networking groups can help reduce isolation and connect families to one another.
- **Develop partnerships with community agencies, institutions and service providers to extend valued support and services to families**. By partnering and building strong relationships with community-based organizations, schools, faith institutions and service providers, mentoring agencies can connect families to valuable services (mental health, education, etc.) and help them maneuver through complex systems more effectively. Agencies should also consider seeking out partnerships with local universities that offer graduate and undergraduate social work and community organizing programs of study. Universities can be a rich source of resources, including volunteer mentors, qualified and eager case workers and community outreach volunteers, and research and evaluation tools and expertise.
- **Develop a clear set of criteria for program success and outcome measures.** Agencies administering family mentoring programs should build in evaluation and measuring program outcomes into their program design. These may include defining what is meant by "family self-sufficiency" and "improved family relationships." Agencies should solicit feedback from families and mentors to guide ongoing program development and better tailor services and activities to family's needs.

Private Sector Funders

- **Dedicate funds to support the study and evaluation of family mentoring programs.** Family mentoring is ripe for research. Greater understanding about the effectiveness of family mentoring programs and the mechanisms for achieving desired results would enable promising family mentoring models to be replicated more effectively.
- **Support family and youth serving agencies that administer family mentoring programs.** Foundations and donors interested in promoting family strengthening and self-sufficiency should consider funding or supporting family mentoring programs.

Policy Recommendations:

Local, State, and Federal Agencies

- **Dedicate funds to study and evaluate existing family mentoring programs**. By supporting research on family mentoring models, state and federal agencies can determine the effectiveness of such models to serve vulnerable families and set priorities for program development.
- **Connect agency and department staff with family mentoring providers**. Family mentoring programs facilitate connecting families with service providers and to help families become less dependent on formal social services. Through collaboration and partnership with family mentoring programs, state and local agencies can better serve clients and assist them in transitioning to stability and self-sufficiency.

Legislators

- **Authorize family mentoring demonstration projects** to create a critical mass of programs at multiple sites across the country that can be studied for effectiveness in promoting stable and self-sufficient families**.**

- **Develop legislation that authorizes federal agencies to commission studies on the efficacy of family mentoring.**

Resources

Web Resources

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America
www.bbbsa.org
Founded in 1904, Big Brothers Big Sisters is the oldest and largest youth mentoring organization in America serving over 220,000 young people ages 5 through 18, in 5,000 communities through a network of 460 agencies.

Harvard Mentoring Project
http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/Organizations/chc/web/mentoring.html
Promotes the growth of mentoring through a national media campaign and coordinating National Mentoring Month in January.

Juvenile Mentoring Program (JUMP),
http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/jump
The Juvenile Mentoring Program (JUMP), funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), supports one-to-one mentoring projects for youth at risk of failing or dropping out of school, or becoming involved in delinquent behavior, including gang activity and substance abuse.

Mentor Consulting Group
http://www.mentorconsultinggroup.com
Dr. Susan Weinberger, Founder and President
The Mentor Consulting Group, located in Norwalk, CT, provides consultation services to schools, businesses, government agencies, religious and community organizations, states, and Canadian provinces who are seeking comprehensive guidance in the area of adult to youth mentoring or adult coaching programs.

National Mentoring Center
http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring
A national training and technical assistance center for providers for mentoring programs. Created and funded primarily by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), the National Mentoring Center provides a range of services including: a comprehensive training conference; in-depth coaching and program consulting; electronic information resources development and management; print material development and dissemination; data collection and evaluation; and projects that support state and national initiatives.

MENTOR: National Mentoring Partnership
www.mentoring.org
MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership is an advocate for the expansion of mentoring and a **resource** for mentors and mentoring initiatives nationwide. By leveraging resources, MENTOR helps communities tackle the barriers that hinder their efforts to expand mentoring.

Public/Private Ventures

www.ppv.org

Public/Private Ventures is a national nonprofit organization whose mission is to improve the effectiveness of social policies, programs and community initiatives, especially as they affect youth and young adults. P/PV has conducted extensive research and evaluation on the impact and implementation of mentoring programs or "created" adult/youth relationships.

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