# The Promise and Challenge of Mentoring High-Risk Youth:

## Findings from the National Faith-Based Initiative

Shawn Bauldry
Tracey A. Hartmann

A Publication of Public/Private Ventures

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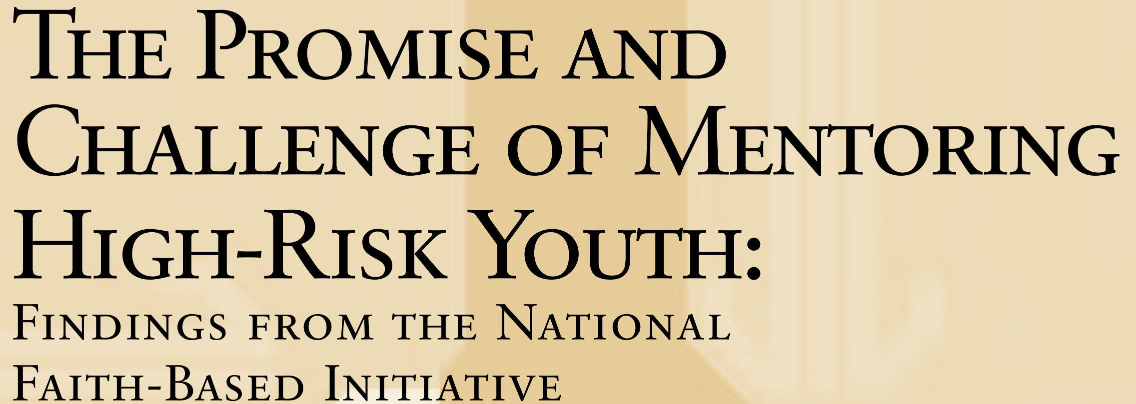

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# Introduction

Each year law enforcement agencies detain more than 2 million juveniles. A little more than 25 percent are released without charges or referred to another law enforcement or welfare agency.[1] The others, with the exception of a few referred to the adult system, go to juvenile court and eventually return to their communities. To make these communities safer and to give these young people a chance to succeed, society needs to find ways to support and redirect those who come into contact with the juvenile justice system. To date there have been few interventions with promising results.

Young people involved with the juvenile justice system often lack healthy relationships with adults, an important component in making a successful transition to adulthood. The youth are typically disengaged from school and tend not to participate in constructive social activities, further limiting the possibilities for positive contact with adults. Some of these youth might find a caring adult in a mentor, but more traditional programs often struggle to recruit mentors for older youth, and few organizations even attempt to find mentors for youth involved in the criminal justice system. Where, then, can caring adults be found to support the youth in greatest need?

For the last five years, Public/Private Ventures has been testing the idea that faith-based organizations, with their inherent mission to serve those less fortunate, might be willing and able to work with this difficult population. Drawing on key aspects of the experiences of the Boston Ten Point Coalition, P/PV

designed an initiative uniting faith-based institutions with one another and with juvenile justice agencies to reduce recidivism and improve the educational and employment levels for court-involved youth. In this report, we explore whether a mentoring program run by a faith-based organization is a viable intervention for high-risk youth. In particular, we address three questions:

- How did the faith-based organizations adapt the best practices of community-based mentoring programs (screening, training, matching and monitoring) to meet the needs of older, high-risk youth and faith-based mentors?

- How successful were the sites at recruiting mentors? Who came forward as volunteers?

- How successful were the mentoring relationships? How long did the relationships last, and what potential did they show?

## The National Faith-based Initiative for High-risk Youth

The National Faith-Based Initiative (NFBI) began in late 1998. From September 2001 to August 2002, the program year in which the P/PV research began, 12 sites were participating. The programs—in Baton Rouge, the Bronx, Brooklyn, Cleveland, Denver, Detroit, Fresno, Indianapolis, Oakland, Philadelphia, Seattle and Washington, D.C.—ranged in size, theological orientation and programmatic strategies. All, however, were committed to a design that included three key features:

- **A focus on high-risk youth:** Sites agreed to target youth already involved in delinquent or violent activities or considered by community members to be headed for trouble.

- **Key program components:** Each site agreed to develop programs that included mentoring, education or employment readiness.

- **Collaborations with faith-based institutions, justice institutions and social service agencies:** Sites agreed to develop partnerships among small to midsize congregations from different faith denominations. Sites also agreed to partner with law enforcement agencies to strengthen efforts

to identify, recruit and serve high-risk youth. Finally, sites promised to collaborate with social service agencies and other public and nonprofit organizations to provide services for participants and training for staff and volunteers. In addition, P/PV hoped these partners might refer youth who could benefit from the initiative.

## Study Purpose and Methodology

P/PV undertook a study to provide credible information about the value of faith-based initiatives and to identify effective strategies. A multiyear effort, the first phase of the research focused on the implementation of programs and documented the sites' strategies, successes and challenges with setting up programs. As part of that research, this report offers information about the implementation of faith-based mentoring programs, the use of faith-based volunteers and the potential of the intervention for high-risk youth. The report does not offer a final assessment of the value and effectiveness of faith-based mentoring programs. Research to examine these questions is currently underway.

### Sites and Their Programs

By Fall 2001, four sites had developed a central focus on mentoring and had organized the recruitment, screening, training and monitoring components important for success. Although each program emphasized mentoring, the design of the programs and the array of additional services differed.

#### Baton Rouge Walk-By-Faith Collaborative
#### Baton Rouge, LA

The Walk-By-Faith Collaboration in Baton Rouge was the newest of the four programs P/PV studied. Organized in 2000, the program operated its first full cycle of mentoring during the 2001-2002 program year. During that time, the program matched 34 youth with churchgoers from East Baton Rouge. The program organized monthly recreational activities for mentors and youth, and also offered a weekly optional Bible study that many attended. Most of the mentors came from Beech Grove Baptist Church, which served as the lead agency. However, seven other African American Baptist churches were members of the initiative, and mentor recruitment efforts were underway in these congregations as well.

### BronxConnect
### Bronx, NY

BronxConnect was run by the Urban Youth Alliance Initiative, an affiliate of the Latino Clergy of the Bronx. A small program with a staff of two, BronxConnect focused on matching youth and mentors from the same communities. The mentors came largely from Pentecostal churches. BronxConnect matched 13 youth with mentors during the 2001-2002 program year. The Bronx Juvenile Probation Department referred the youth and required them to participate in mentoring.

### Youth and Congregations in Partnership
### Brooklyn, NY

The Juvenile Crimes Division of the Brooklyn District Attorney's Office ran Youth and Congregations in Partnership (YCP). The YCP program recruited mentors from the complete spectrum of the borough's faith-based institutions: Jews, Muslims and Christians were all partners. The program served youth on the juvenile caseload who were considered amenable to mentoring. The program asked congregations in Brooklyn to adopt just one youth and provide a team of three to five mentors. With four full-time staff, the program matched 43 youth with mentors during the 2001-2002 program year.

### Southwest Youth and Family Network of Philadelphia
### Philadelphia, PA

Southwest Youth and Family Network (SYFN) was run by the African American Interdenominational Ministries of Philadelphia, the social service arm of the Black Clergy of Philadelphia. Developed in 1998, SYFN relied on an extensive network of faith-based and secular agencies in southwest Philadelphia and recruited mentors from African American, largely Baptist congregations. Truancy courts, the Department of Human Services, the Probation Department, alternative schools and school counselors referred youth to the program. A staff of five full-time employees and additional part-time people matched 52 youth with mentors in the 2001-2002 program year.

## Data

To learn about the mentors and their perspective on the programs, researchers sent a survey (see Appendix A) to all volunteers active during a three-month period (March to May) in 2002.

*Table 1*
Characteristics of Selected National Faith-Based Sites*

| Site | Number of Youth Served | Type of Mentoring | Mentoring Commitment | Other Services |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Baton Rouge Walk-By-Faith Collaborative; Baton Rouge, LA | 54 | One-to-one | 2 hrs/week for 1 year | Tutorial and GED services, employment program, case management |
| BronxConnect; Bronx, NY | 13 | One-to-one | 2 hrs/week for 1 year | Case management, employment, education services |
| Youth and Congregations in Partnership; Brooklyn, NY | 43 | Team | 3 times/week for 1 year | Intensive case management, referrals to education, counseling and arts programs |
| Southwest Youth and Family Network of Philadelphia; Philadelphia, PA | 111 | One-to-one | 2 hrs/week for 1 year | After-school program with preemployment training, educational supports, opportunities for service learning and arts |

* All information is based on the 2001-2002 program year.

Researchers also visited the Philadelphia and Brooklyn programs three times and the Baton Rouge program once to interview staff, mentors and youth. We collected in-depth information about 22 relationships through interviews with 22 mentors and 10 youth. We observed group mentoring activities, but not one-to-one activities, which, by their nature, are difficult to observe. Although we cannot generalize to the larger population of young people involved in the initiative, the information from the interviews helps us understand strengths and weaknesses of the programs.

We received data from P/PV program officers who visited the sites bimonthly and talked with staff monthly. Program officers conducted a yearly intensive assessment of the sites' organizational capacity and program implementation.

In addition, the sites submitted quarterly progress reports to P/PV documenting implementation efforts and regularly submitted data that included demographic information and the status of each match.

## Structure of the Report

In Chapter II, we take a brief look at the youth the sites provide with mentors. Chapter III examines the ways that faith-based programs modified their training, screening and supervision of volunteers to accommodate faith-oriented mentors and high-risk youth. We turn to the question of how successful the sites were at recruiting mentors and who they recruited in Chapter IV. Finally, in Chapter V, we examine the duration of the mentoring relationships—our only indicator to date of their potential. We summarize our conclusions in Chapter VI.

# Who are the Youth?

In order to put the successes and challenges of the NFBI sites in context, we need to first understand the young people who are mentored. The NFBI participants differ substantially from youth involved in other community-based mentoring programs, such as Big Brothers Big Sisters. In this chapter, we document some of these differences.

Table 2 presents data on the 221 youth served by the four NFBI sites. Most were African Americans and a majority were young men. The average age for the group was 15 years old, several years older than youth typically served by mentoring programs.[2]

The participants enrolled in the NFBI programs were not only older on average than youth in other community-based mentoring programs; a majority had also been arrested or were otherwise involved in the juvenile justice system. Roughly 60 percent of the youth acknowledged committing some criminal offenses, for which they may or may not have been arrested. The most common of these offenses involved crimes against persons, such as robbery, rape or assault.

Even as they enrolled in the NFBI programs, close to a third of the youth said they still hung out with friends involved in criminal behavior. In some cases, the young people remained members of gangs or had family members involved with gangs. In addition, 10 percent of the youth had already started using drugs.

The young people in the initiative, however, had a couple of positive connections with their school or community to build upon. Even though many of the young people were involved in the justice system or had committed crimes, few had formally dropped out of school (only 9% were not enrolled). Also, about half reported that they were currently attending a congregation.

Nonetheless, these young men and women were already engaged in many of the behaviors typical community-based mentoring programs are designed to help people avoid or resist. As such, the NFBI sites faced a difficult task of not only developing a mentoring program that met the more pressing needs of these youth (compared with those in other community-based mentoring programs) but also finding volunteers willing to put in the extra effort and accept some of the frustration of building relationships with these youth.

### *Youth Profile*

The second time David was arrested for assault, he faced either going to a juvenile detention center or enrolling in one of the NFBI programs. Not surprisingly, he opted to enter the mentoring program. When we spoke with him, David was 16, but only in 10th grade—he had had to repeat a grade. David occasionally drank and smoked marijuana, but considered his hot temper the main source of his problems. David did not see himself as a religious person, but since his grandfather was a preacher, he felt comfortable in religious settings.

### *Youth Profile*

Maya is currently enrolled in school, but only after several months of not attending. She was picked up and sentenced to participate in one of the NFBI programs by a truancy court. Her absence from school cost her a year, and even though she's 15 years old, she's in 9th grade. Maya lives with her mother, sister and brother. Religion is an important part of Maya's life; she attends church with her mother and grandmother most weeks.

*Table 2*
## Characteristics of the Participants at Selected NFBI Sites*

| Participant Characteristic | |
|---|---|
| **Mean Age** | 15 |
| **Gender** | |
| Male | 61% |
| Female | 39% |
| **Race** | |
| African American | 89% |
| Latino | 5% |
| White | 2% |
| Other | 3% |
| **Currently Enrolled in School** | 91% |
| **Employed, Part Time or Full Time**** | 10% |
| **Number of Times Arrested** | |
| Never | 43% |
| Once | 40% |
| Two or more times | 17% |
| **Ever Committed a Juvenile or Criminal Offense** | 58% |
| **Offense Committed** | |
| Crimes against persons | 59% |
| Property offenses | 30% |
| Juvenilestatus offenses | 22% |
| Public order offenses | 16% |
| Drug law offenses | 10% |
| **Friends Involved in Criminal Behavior** | 28% |
| **Associates with Gang Members** | 12% |
| **Uses Drugs** | 10% |
| **Currently Attending a Church or Congregation** | 51% |
| **Total Number Received Services** | 221 |

* Based on all participants receiving mentoring services in Baton Rouge, the Bronx, Brooklyn and Philadelphia from September 2001 to August 2002.

** Percentage based on participants 15 and older (n=156).

# How Did The Faith-Based Organizations Implement a Mentoring Program for High-risk Youth?

Effective mentoring programs share five elements:

- Staff members require volunteers to understand the demands of mentoring and have a way of determining whether the mentor will behave appropriately;
- New mentors receive training in how to conduct the relationship and what to do if challenges arise;
- Program operators put care into matching young people with mentors;
- Staff members conduct ongoing training and supervision of the relationships; and
- Staff members enjoy the flexibility to modify programs to address the needs of specific populations of mentors and youth.[3]

As the four faith-based organizations designed and implemented their programs, they realized they needed to modify some of the best practices of traditional programs. Youth participating in the initiative had a greater array of educational, employment-related and relational needs than young people typically involved in mentoring programs, and retaining mentors, particularly

minority men, became paramount because of the need for volunteers. Sites also modified their programs to address the issue of faith; they attempted to incorporate it for the inspiration and support of the mentors but to limit the mentors' expressions of faith with the youth.

## Screening Practices

Screening in mentoring programs should focus on three key areas:

- Ensuring the mentor is a safe adult;
- Guaranteeing the volunteer can commit to the expectations of the relationship; and
- Making sure the mentor understands that the relationship focuses on building friendship, not transforming the youth.[4]

All four sites demonstrated a concern for these key areas. The formal screening included applications and child-abuse clearances. Each site also conducted interviews and checked references.

**The congregations and pastors served as an additional layer of reference.** Because most volunteers had long-term and active involvement in their congregations, the mentors were well known by the pastors and other congregation members. Pastors and congregations did turn volunteers away. One pastor said: "I made a generalized announcement and then approached people individually. A couple of people were tragic mistakes, and we said no to them right off the bat. It was by personal invitation."

**Programs used less-rigorous screening strategies than other community-based models to shorten the process and maintain volunteer interest.** After experimentation, the sites discontinued the most rigorous screening strategies, such as home visits and psychological testing, because faith-based volunteers often found the practices intrusive and lengthy and dropped out while waiting for approval. The Big Brother Big Sister (BBBS) screening process, for example, can take as long as eight months to complete, leading many volunteers, particularly men, to lose interest.[5]

Mentoring guidelines suggest that programs serving high-school youth may safely use more flexible screening procedures than programs that serve elementary

school children, and the faith-based programs found this flexibility very helpful. The two sites using BBBS screening practices dropped the home visit. One site also dropped the psychological testing, while the other dropped the driving record check. Also, the interviews were not as lengthy or intrusive as the interviews conducted by BBBS, which explore sexual history.

The elimination of some components of the BBBS process allowed most of the official screening to occur in several weeks as opposed to several months, and allowed volunteers to begin training shortly after signing up while waiting for the criminal background checks to clear.

**The programs found two characteristics—commitment and attitude—important to explore in the screening process.** The directors wanted to find mentors willing to spend at least two hours weekly with the teens, a larger commitment than some other community-based mentoring programs require. As one director said:

> *Some people want to mentor and their heart is in the right place but they don't have enough time or patience. We are trying to find mentors who are willing to make the commitment…We try to devise a screening process to find people who will take the responsibility and see it through.*

All four sites recruited a dedicated cadre of volunteers who spent an average ranging from 6 to 10 hours a month with their teens.

The sites were also concerned about finding people who could respond appropriately to the youth's previous behavior. One executive director said: "We are trying to find mentors…[who] won't lecture kids…Some people will treat them as a bad child."

**A desire to recruit mentors who could respond effectively to the needs of youth involved with the justice system made sites more willing to accept adults with prison records.** As one NFBI site director explained:

> *A criminal record will not necessarily disqualify a mentor from participation—in fact, some of the best mentors were formerly involved in the criminal justice system. However, [the program] requires a minimum five-year space between an applicant's last arrest or release from prison. The applicant's church leadership must also be able to testify that the applicant is above reproach.*

**Site operators also tried to gauge a volunteer's desire to proselytize, explaining that proselytizing was not a program goal.** However, the subject was sensitive because the sites were using faith to recruit volunteers and all sites needed more mentors. While the staff members screened out volunteers with a clear desire to proselytize, they accepted some volunteers with a more subtle sense of faith-sharing into their mentoring programs (this issue is discussed in more detail below).

## Training Practices

All sites borrowed from the standard mentor training packages, and staff members at two sites became certified to conduct Big Brothers Big Sisters training. The training programs included standard topics such as the stages of a mentoring relationship, the role of the mentor versus the parent, boundaries and limits, and communication skills.

**All four sites conducted training, and the more training mentors underwent, the more they reported feeling prepared.** A majority of the mentors participated in at least six hours of training. The Philadelphia training was the most extensive: 10 hours of core training and monthly mentor support sessions. Forty-eight percent of the Philadelphia mentors reported spending 16 hours or more in training. Approximately 70 percent of the mentors from all four sites reported feeling well prepared, with the mentors from Philadelphia feeling the most prepared.

**All four sites adapted the training to prepare mentors for responding to the greater needs of high-risk youth.** At minimum, this involved describing the barriers to successful development that the youth might have because of challenging family situations, educational deficits, difficulty relating to adults or resolving conflict and anger resulting from their arrests or incarcerations. Two mentoring programs also incorporated role-playing involving situations that might come up in mentoring older, adjudicated youth, such as how to respond if a young person became angry or belligerent. In Philadelphia operators conducted a session on the juvenile justice system, providing statistics and information about how the system works. They took the mentors on a tour of a juvenile detention facility. They also showed a video about urban youth culture that mentors found particularly helpful.[6]

**The training discouraged mentors from attempting to convert the young people to their faith.** One organization even asked mentors to sign a form

promising not to proselytize. The mentors were told they could answer questions about religion. They also were allowed to invite young people to church but not to pressure them or make them feel as if the relationships hinged on attending religious services.

Three sites offered the mentors an alternative way of thinking about what faith-based means. Sites talked about the importance of being Christian role models. They asked the mentors to see themselves evangelizing through their behavior and their commitment to the young person. One coordinator explained that she wanted her mentors to function as "examples of the Christian life" and that they should understand their service as bearing witness to the Christian life.

## THE MATCHING PROCESS

**Sites reported that personality styles and gender were critical elements in matchmaking.** The faith-based organizations placed great emphasis on the matching components of the process, taking time to learn the personalities and needs of the youth and mentor. One social worker said, "If you don't make the right match, it's as bad as making no match."

Sites also considered gender an important factor, trying to make same-gender matches. However, the preponderance of male participants and shortage of male mentors occasionally led to a waiting period for male youth. The team-mentoring model in Brooklyn allowed more flexibility, and teams occasionally included men and women.

**Matching by race was a preference for most sites.** However, program staff expressed a willingness to match across race if the two individuals had compatible interests.

**Sites were unconcerned about matching youth and mentors from different Christian denominations, but three sites did not match across faiths.** Three of the four sites recruited mentors only from Christian congregations. Brooklyn, the only site that was not led by a faith-based organization, was also the only site to recruit and match across faiths. The program recruited mentors from Islamic congregations and one Jewish congregation so that inter-faith as well as cross-faith matching could occur.

## Monitoring and Case Management

Ongoing support for mentoring relationships is key to their success.[7] Two sites, Brooklyn and the Bronx, had two staff dedicated to staying in regular contact with both mentors and youth. In Brooklyn, professional social workers checked in weekly with the youth and at least monthly with the mentors. The relationships social workers developed with youth seemed particularly important. The social workers frequently received feedback from youth about what they liked and did not like about the mentoring relationships, and they passed this information on to the mentors when appropriate. The social workers also talked with and met regularly with mentors to coach them in their relationships.

At the other sites, one staff member typically stayed in contact with mentors while another focused on the youth. For the first couple of months, staff members tried to make contact with all youth and mentors monthly. After that period, individual contact between staff and youth or staff and mentors happened more casually, often within the context of group events.

**The programs needed to provide more and different types of support.** While most mentoring programs monitor and support relationships, the sites turned to an array of social service providers to help address the more significant needs of the youth, including psychological problems, drug addiction and education deficiencies.

**The programs also realized the mentors needed ongoing training and support groups to respond to issues that arose in working with older, high-risk youth.** The sites organized regular support sessions. Mentors came together to talk about difficulties with their youth and get feedback from staff and others in the group. Staff also used the sessions to provide additional training on specific issues that mentors faced.

Congregations provided a natural setting for support. In Baton Rouge, during the first year many of the mentors and program staff members came from the same church, Beech Grove Baptist Church. They formed a network of support, discussing experiences informally at church gatherings. Mentors also met and worked with many of the teens at the Wednesday evening Bible studies. The lead agency had limited organizational capacity in the first year, and the informal support found in the congregations most likely helped keep many mentors engaged.

**As they did through screening and training, the sites also continued to emphasize the appropriate role of faith with mentors.** Although we reported in our first implementation study that the inappropriate sharing of faith from program staff was minimal,[8] we found that faith-sharing from the volunteers who mentored the young people was more prevalent and more likely to involve proselytization. Faith-sharing occurred in 14 of the 22 mentoring relationships explored, though the youth we spoke with did not feel the mentors "pushed" faith on them. Nonetheless, the staff at all the sites said they occasionally felt compelled to confront mentors. One mentor coordinator said:

> *When we talk about issues of a faith-based approach, we sometimes have to rein in the mentors because they want to evangelize too much. We continue to emphasize it is a faith-based program…(but) we've had instances where we have had to tell them you can't convert a kid in two weeks. We try to point out the importance of building a trusting relationship first.*

The staff of faith-based organizations could understand the mentors' desire to share their faith. However, from a professional viewpoint, they also could understand the broader context of the programs and the reasons to limit faith-sharing. Volunteers found the distinction more difficult to make. They were recruited through their church, volunteering on their personal time—time normally devoted to the church, and often met with the young person at the church. From their perspective, their volunteer work was an extension of their involvement in the church.

The staff was most concerned about intensive proselytizing or overt pressure on youth to go to church, pray or convert. When staff members became aware of this type of proselytizing, either from conversations with the mentor or the youth, they asked the mentor to stop because they viewed it as destructive to the relationship.

However, the sites permitted other types of faith-sharing, such as invitations to attend church or church-related events or the incorporation of faith in discussions with youth about their lives. For example, one mentor explained, "The spiritual side came up the last time we were talking about the obedient kid and how it's biblical for that [obedience] to happen." Another mentor gave her youth a prayer journal and told her "If you can't talk to anyone, talk to God. Write them [prayers] down like a journal." Faith-based people considered this type of faith-sharing natural in relationships. Despite staff efforts to limit faith-sharing, it occurred because faith was a significant element of the mentors' lives.

**The needs of the high-risk youth also led programs to adapt their expectations for the focus of the mentoring relationship.** The programs asked the mentors to work with the young people on specific educational or employment-related problems. Other P/PV research has found that mentoring relationships that focus on trying to change the young person too quickly are less appealing to the youth and less effective. Relationships focused on developing trust and friendship are almost always more beneficial.[9] But a relationship focused purely on friendship may not be enough to redirect youth facing imprisonment, on the brink of school failure or near the end of their high school careers and facing critical decisions about their futures.[10] So mentors needed to figure out how to work on these problems and goals while, at the same time, developing a trusting rapport with the youth.[11]

## Conclusion

NFBI site staff put a lot of thought and energy into designing their mentoring programs to address the needs of faith-based mentors and older, high-risk youth. They systematically adapted the key components of a mentoring program—screening, training, matching and monitoring—to address two key issues: 1) the potential for inappropriate faith-sharing by the mentors and 2) the greater needs of the youth. The sites' staff added to the screening and monitoring components to minimize the incidence of proselytization and encouraged the mentors to see themselves as Christian role models in their training and monitoring components. In their screening and training, the sites' staff discussed some of the specific needs of the youth and likely challenges in forming a relationship with them. The sites' staff also increased the amount of monitoring to address the needs and challenges that arose as the mentoring relationships progressed.

# How Many Mentors Came Forward and Who Were They?

Programs often struggle to find volunteers willing to make the necessary commitment of time to mentor a youth. Working with older, high-risk youth makes recruiting mentors even more difficult, and few programs even attempt to serve these teens. P/PV hypothesized that faith-based organizations could fill this void because the mentors would be motivated by their religious faith and would receive support from their congregations.

## How Many Mentors?

The programs were established to provide a modest number of high-risk youth with intensive services. The number of mentors active at the sites ranged from 13 in BronxConnect to 56 in Brooklyn's Youth and Congregations in Partnership, which appointed teams of three to five mentors for each youth. The four sites had a total of 112 active mentors at the time of the study. Brooklyn's relative success in recruiting mentors most likely reflects its efforts to reach out to a broader base of churches and congregations in the community than pursued by the other sites.

To put the number of active mentors in context, it is useful to compare it with the 221 youth served by the sites during the program year. In order to match each of the participants in Baton Rouge, the Bronx and Philadelphia with one mentor and each of the participants in Brooklyn with four mentors, the sites

*Table 3*
Number of Mentors and Participants*

| | Number of Mentors | Number of Participants |
|---|---|---|
| Baton Rouge | 17 | 54 |
| Bronx | 13 | 13 |
| Brooklyn | 56 | 33 |
| Philadelphia | 26 | 111 |
| Total | 112 | 221 |

* The number of active mentors during the third quarter of the 2001-2002 program year differs from the number of youth matches with mentors because a number of mentors matched in other quarters were not active in the third quarter (discussed in more detail in Chapter V) and Brooklyn's team mentoring matched multiple mentors with a single youth.

would have needed to recruit 350 mentors. This suggests the sites managed a 32 percent success rate with recruitment. The 32 percent success rate, however, is an underestimate for two reasons: 1) the sites, especially Baton Rouge and Philadelphia, offered other programs and did not necessarily seek to match all of their participants with mentors, and 2) some matches made in the first two quarters of the program year were no longer active in the third quarter (discussed in more detail in Chapter V), which dropped the mentors from our consideration. Nonetheless, the numbers indicate that even faith-based organizations had difficulty recruiting adequate numbers of mentors for high-risk, older youth. As we will see in the next section, this may be due to the particular demographics—a high proportion of older women—of the churches and congregations from which the NFBI sites recruited.

## Who Were the Mentors?

**Mentors at the NFBI sites tended to be older and 84 percent were African American.** Eighty percent of the NFBI mentors were at least 40 (see Table 4), an older group of mentors than other programs attract[12] but consistent with research showing faith-based organizations tend to attract older individuals as formal mentors.[13] In contrast to other community-based mentoring programs—in the study by Roaf, Tierney and Hunte (1994) of BBBS agencies, only 16 percent of volunteers were minorities—the NFBI sites did not experience difficulty attracting minorities, primarily because they recruited mostly from African American and Latino congregations.

*Table 4*
## Characteristics of the Mentors at Selected NFBI Sites*

| Mentor Characteristic | |
|---|---|
| **Age** | |
| 20-30 years old | 6% |
| 31-40 years old | 14% |
| 41-50 years old | 41% |
| 51 years old and older | 40% |
| **Gender** | |
| Male | 36% |
| Female | 64% |
| **Race** | |
| African American | 84% |
| Latino | 6% |
| White | 2% |
| Other | 8% |
| **Employment** | |
| Part-time or full-time | 82% |
| Retired | 11% |
| **Level of Education** | |
| Some high school | 5% |
| High school graduate or GED | 27% |
| Some college | 20% |
| 2-year or 4-year college degree | 21% |
| Some postgraduate study | 8% |
| Advanced degree | 20% |
| **Marital Status** | |
| Single, never married | 15% |
| Currently married or domestic partnership | 57% |
| Separated, divorced or widowed | 27% |
| First-Time Volunteer | 26% |
| Total Number of Mentors Responding to Survey | 88 |

* Based on responses to a survey mailed to all mentors active during the third quarter of the 2001-2002 program year. The sites reported 112 active mentors during the period, giving us a response rate of 79 percent.

*Table 5*
Faith Orientation of the Mentors*

| Mentor Responses | |
|---|---|
| Member of Church or Congregation | 92% |
| How long member of church or congregation? | |
| Less than one year | 2% |
| One year to five years | 12% |
| More than five years | 85% |
| How often do you attend worship services? | |
| One or more times a week | 93% |
| Less than once per week | 7% |
| Live in same neighborhood as place of worship | 41% |
| Average number of activities at church or congregation** | 5 |
| Total Mentors Responding to Survey | 88 |

* Based on same sample as Table 3.

** Responses included: hold an office, do administrative work, lead worship, lead congregation in prayer, lead/organize a church group, lead/organize a youth group, organize church events, teach a class or Bible study, hand out bulletins or greet people, serve on committees, make announcements during service, read the scripture during service, sing in a choir, administer communion and engage in other church-sponsored outreach activities.

**Typical of most mentoring programs, two thirds of the volunteers were female.** Sites avoided cross-gender matches because of the age of the youth, the high-risk nature of the teens and the belief that the youth lacked gender-specific role models and would benefit from a mentor of the same gender. Due to this policy, some participants had to wait several months for a match.

**As expected, the mentors regularly attended worship services.** Ninety-two percent of the mentors belonged to a church or congregation (see Table 5), most had been long-standing members and almost all attended at least weekly. The mentors were active in their congregations, participating in an average of five activities such as leading the congregation in prayer, organizing a church youth group, serving on committees, participating in ministries or singing in the choir. In addition to being active in their congregations, three quarters of the mentors reported previous volunteer experience.

**Less than half of the mentors lived in the same neighborhood as their places of worship.** We expected the opposite, and thought the residential proximity would foster deeper mentoring relationships and provide positive role models in the neighborhood. However, drawing mentors from outside the

*Table 6*
Mentor Level of Education by Whether Mentor Lives in the Same Neighborhood as the Congregation

| Level of Education | Mentor Lives in Same Neighborhood as Congregation* | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | No | Yes | Total |
| Less than Two-Year College Degree | 26% | 25% | 51% |
| Two-Year College Degree or More | 33% | 16% | 49% |
| Total | 59% | 41% | 100% |

Note: Chi-square statistic not significant.

* Based on the number of mentors who are a member of a church or congregation (n=81). An additional two cases are missing data on their level of education and an additional two cases are missing data on their neighborhood.

participants' neighborhoods possibly held other benefits. For instance, the mentors were a highly educated group (almost 50 percent had at least a two-year college degree), and a higher percentage of the well-educated mentors lived in different neighborhoods from their places of worship (see Table 6).

Highly educated mentors living in different communities than the youth may prove significant in expanding young people's social networks to those with access to information and skills in short supply in low-income urban communities. For instance, one mentor who worked for a law firm mentioned that his mentee

> *…comes around my firm and sees a bunch of us, five African Americans in suits and ties. Now he carries a date book and wants to wear ties. So we gave him a bunch that we don't use anymore.*

In addition to transferring work-related soft skills, these mentors may also provide assistance with education-related issues, such as completing a college application. We are currently conducting research to assess some of these possibilities.

Overall, a picture emerges of a dedicated group of individuals who volunteered to be mentors. These mentors came forward despite multiple constraints on their time—most were employed and most volunteered in other areas. Furthermore, the mentors continued to volunteer with the NFBI sites for an average of 20 months, typically mentoring more than one youth during that time.

## How Were the Mentors Recruited?

Faith-based organizations that foster close relationships with congregations would seem to enjoy a built-in recruitment base not typically available to other mentoring programs. Therefore, in addition to recruiting through traditional channels such as advertising and public service announcements, the NFBI sites recruited from within the collaborating congregations.

Even recruiting from within congregations, however, did not usually attract a large number of volunteers. With the exception of Baton Rouge, which recruited most of its mentors from a single congregation, the sites established partnerships with congregations that provided roughly five to seven mentors each. We estimate these congregations average 600 to 700 members, meaning roughly 1 percent of the members volunteered. Although it's not clear whether greater efforts by the sites' staff could have produced more volunteers,[14] this provides some indication of the size of the local religious community needed to support mentoring programs for high-risk, older youth.

Pastors used a variety of venues to solicit volunteers. Depending on the size and resources of the congregation, pastors formed committees or ministries to identify candidates for mentoring and to coordinate mentor recruitment efforts, incorporated a call for mentors into their sermons, and invited someone from the NFBI site to speak or preach to the congregation about the need for mentors. Of these approaches, identifying likely candidates and approaching them about becoming a mentor was most effective, a finding consistent with other research showing that most mentors report being asked to volunteer.[15]

# How Long Did the Mentoring Relationships Last?

Research has indicated that the benefits of mentoring are tied to the duration of the relationship. Younger, lower-risk youth begin to show some benefits after 6 months[16] and more significant benefits after 12 months.[17] No research, however, has established the length of time that older, high-risk youth must experience mentoring to see benefits. One would anticipate that these youth may require a longer period of exposure to mentoring to see the benefits, but that may be difficult because they often face crises that need quick resolution, and some participate under court orders, which seldom last longer than one year. At this stage in our study of the National Faith-Based Initiative, the duration of the relationships provides an indication of the potential for faith-based mentoring programs to have an impact on the lives of the youth they are serving.[18]

## How Long Did the Relationships Last?

Across the four sites, the average amount of time youth stayed in mentoring relationships varied from 7 to 11 months, with an overall average of 8 months (see Table 7). However, some sites had a greater percentage of long-lasting relationships, and within each site 34 percent to 62 percent of the youth stayed in mentoring for 11 months or longer (see Appendix B). Overall, 34 percent of the mentoring relationships lasted less than 5 months. As a point of comparison, a

*Table 7*
Number Of Months Mentoring Relationships Lasted

| | N | % |
|---|---|---|
| 1 to 4 Months | 76 | 34% |
| 5 to 10 Months | 56 | 25% |
| 11 or More Months | 89 | 40% |
| Average Number of Months | 8.0 months | — |
| Total Number of Youth | 221 | — |

sample of BBBS matches examined for an impact study had met on average 12 months, and more than 60 percent of those matches were still active.[19]

## What Factors Contributed to the Duration of the Relationships?

Differences existed between the youth who received longer-term mentoring and those who did not, as Table 8 shows.

**Relationships with younger youth lasted longer than those with older youth.** Almost half of the matches with youth younger than 15 lasted 11 months or longer. In contrast, only 34 percent of matches with older youth lasted as long. Brooklyn mentors were most successful in sustaining relationships with older youth, with 58 percent of youth over the age of 15 staying in mentoring relationships for the full 11-month term (see Appendix II).

**Young people with more risk factors were less likely to stay in mentoring.** Of those who had never been arrested, 47 percent stayed with mentoring for 11 months or longer, while 39 percent of those who had been arrested once stayed as long. Only 23 percent of the youth who had been arrested two or more times stayed in mentoring relationships for at least 11 months. Similarly, youth who were referred by the juvenile justice system (instead of by schools, families or members of the community) were less likely to stay in mentoring relationships 11 months or longer.

**The age of mentors might have played a role in the length of the relationships.** As mentioned above, the volunteers for the initiative were older than typical mentors, with 40 percent being 50 and older. This age range may have created too great a generational difference for the older teens.

*Table 8*
Characteristics of the Youth by Length of Match*

| Youth Characteristics | 1 to 4 Months N = 84 (%) | 5 to 10 Months N = 59 (%) | 11+ Months N = 78 (%) | Total** % |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Gender** | | | | |
| Male | 34 | 27 | 39 | 100 |
| Female | 35 | 24 | 42 | 101 |
| **Age+** | | | | |
| Age 9-14 | 26 | 25 | 49 | 100 |
| Age 15-21 | 42 | 25 | 34 | 101 |
| **Referral Source** | | | | |
| Non-Legal | 36 | 21 | 43 | 100 |
| Legal | 35 | 30 | 35 | 100 |
| **Number of Arrests** | | | | |
| None | 33 | 21 | 47 | 101 |
| One | 33 | 29 | 39 | 101 |
| Two or more | 44 | 33 | 23 | 100 |

Note: Chi-square tests:

+ $p \leq .05$

* Based on MIS data for all youth at the selected NFBI sites reported in mentoring programs during the 2001-2002 program year. Missing data (less than 10% for any item) excluded from calculation of percentage.

** Numbers may not add up to 100 percent because of rounding.

Several of the youth and mentors mentioned the importance of youthfulness—either in actual age or communication style—of the mentors. One youth said:

> Do you enjoy spending time with them?
> *Yeah…it's like one of my friends.*
>
> Are you closer to some more than the others?
> *Yeah…those that are younger, 'cause we go out more.*

Youthful mentors were able to connect to adolescent culture. A male mentor said:

> *I was interviewing him, and I know a lot of the slang and jargon…and we connected. Later he said he wanted me to be his mentor…it's all about knowing how to talk to them.*

One mentor, a grandmother, said she experienced problems because she didn't seem "hip enough" to her youth. Staff also found that age and generational differences could make matches more difficult.

The age of mentors may be one factor in explaining why the overall duration of matches across sites was lower than hoped, but no significant difference existed across sites in the age of mentors. The evidence points to another, more decisive, factor in explaining site differences.

**The most significant difference between sites with more success and those with less involved the amount of intensive case management they offered.** The two sites that provided the most intensive case management—the Bronx and Brooklyn—recorded a greater average duration of the mentoring match and a higher percentage of matches lasting 11 months or more. These sites were also best at retaining older and higher-risk youth.

In Brooklyn's case, the amount and intensity of the case management reflected their organizational capacity and where they chose to allocate their resources. BronxConnect, however, was a small program with limited organizational capacity, but it kept the number of youth served small and focused its resources on intensive case management. Two full-time staff members worked to support 13 mentoring relationships. This program had the greatest success rate, with 62 percent surviving for a year or longer. The other two programs may have possessed greater organizational capacity than BronxConnect, but they chose to serve more youth and case management was not a key element of their services. As such, the amount of case management reflects resource allocation more than organizational capacity.

# Conclusions

With the recent interest in exploring more deeply the potential of faith-based organizations to provide services to high-risk groups, it is important to begin to assess the domains in which they can be effective social program providers. The National Faith-Based Initiative is one of the first demonstrations designed to assess the capacity of small faith-based organizations to deliver services targeting high-risk youth. Judging by the experiences of four sites in the National Faith-Based Initiative, faith-based organizations can operate a mentoring program targeted toward high-risk youth, but they face significant challenges. They can adapt best practices of other mentoring programs to suit the needs of faith-based mentors and older, high-risk youth, and the mentors can adapt their relationships with the youth to meet specific needs. The two main challenges arise in recruiting a sufficient number of mentors and maintaining the matches over time, which requires intensive case management. Further research will focus on the experiences of the youth, thus addressing the effectiveness of these mentoring programs.

The experiences of the four NFBI sites offer three main lessons that may guide other faith-based organizations or funders implementing similar programs:

**Drawing on faith-based volunteers requires a different approach to the screening, training and monitoring practices common to mentoring programs.**

There were advantages to drawing volunteers from faith-based institutions, although doing so required that sites address the appropriate inclusion of faith practices in the mentoring relationship. Recruiting mentors from congregations permitted the sites to informally screen volunteers. Site staff members were willing to consider volunteers if the pastor vouched for them, which allowed them to consider those who had served in prison and also to shorten the screening process. Both utilizing congregations for informal screening and considering potential mentors with a criminal record increased the number of volunteers accepted, making the recruitment process more manageable.

Staff discovered, however, that they needed to adapt their screening, training and monitoring to address the possibility of proselytizing by the mentors. The sites discussed the issue with volunteers to ensure they felt comfortable mentoring without engaging in inappropriate faith-sharing. The sites also discussed appropriate ways to share their faith with the youth. They emphasized that mentors could not pressure or require youth to engage in any faith-related activities, and pointed out that the volunteers were sharing their faith through example. The sites did, however, allow mentors to invite youth to church and church-related events.

Despite efforts, faith-sharing did occur, because it was an important part of the mentors' lives. Staff members continued to monitor mentoring relationships and needed to intervene occasionally. Despite staff members' concerns, youth felt the mentors were respectful of their limits and did not "push" faith on them.

**The size and composition of the local religious community set boundaries and provided opportunities for faith-based organizations' recruitment efforts.**

Sites' staff in the NFBI recruited mentors by relying on the support of pastors from local congregations. This approach allowed them to draw on the legitimacy and resources of the congregations, as the pastors of the congregations often made a direct appeal for mentors. On average, the sites recruited roughly 1 percent of the members of each congregation, an indication of the size of the local religious communities needed to support similar faith-based mentoring programs.

Recruiting through congregations that drew primarily African American worshippers resulted in a higher proportion of minority mentors than other community-based mentoring programs have typically been able to recruit. The mentors were also older on average than in other mentoring programs. The

NFBI sites recruited more women than men, and all of the sites reported difficulty finding enough male mentors. The difficulty finding male and younger mentors who may be more attuned to youth culture might simply reflect the demographics of many African American congregations, and is therefore likely to be a challenge for any faith-based organization operating a mentoring program for similar youth.

Even though the sites recruited through small to midsize local congregations, a majority of the mentors did not live in the same community as their places of worship. This may have two implications for mentoring relationships. We began this study assuming that the presence of mentors in the community would be beneficial. If the assumption is true, then those mentors who do not live in the community may not be as readily accessible to the youth as those who do. On the other hand, we saw that the mentors who lived outside the community are twice as likely to have college degrees as those who live in the community. Well-educated mentors may be able to provide experiences for the youth that they would not typically have, especially if they meet outside the young people's communities. We are currently conducting a study that will allow us to assess these different possibilities.

**Though it may require additional resources, especially in the area of case management, particular attention needs to be paid to maintaining the relationships when mentoring older, high-risk youth.**

The sites added training devoted to working with older, adjudicated youth, and increased the support available for mentors. Three of the four sites addressed the specific needs of high-risk youth during training. In some cases, the training included a discussion about the juvenile justice system, a tour of a detention center and materials about youth culture. The sites also added an ongoing training and support session for mentors. Despite these modifications to the training, our research found that the relationships with the oldest and highest-risk youth had the shortest duration. Although 49 percent of the relationships with youth between 9 and 14 survived beyond 11 months, only 34 percent of the relationships with youth between 15 and 21 did. In addition, the more arrests a young person had, the shorter the mentoring relationship. This is not surprising, as one would anticipate that the highest-risk young people would prove most challenging for mentors to connect with. Nonetheless, these young people may be in most need of support for an extended period.

Although sustaining relationships with older, adjudicated youth was a challenge for all of the NFBI sites, sites with an intensive case management

component were relatively more successful. Regular meetings with both the mentors and the mentees provided an opportunity to address some of the early and ongoing strains in the mentoring relationships and ultimately led to a higher average match length at these sites. Having an intensive case management component did not necessarily require great organizational capacity, but rather a commitment to focusing available resources on closely managing and monitoring the mentoring relationships.

# Endnotes


1 Snyder, H.N., and M. Sickmund. 1999. *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1999 National Report*, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Justice.

2 For example, the average age of mentees in the BBBS study was 12. Tierney, Joseph, and Jean B. Grossman with Nancy L. Resch. 1995. *Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers Big Sisters.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

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4 Ibid.

5 Roaf, Phoebe A., Joseph P. Tierney, and Danista E.I. Hunte. 1994. *Big Brothers/Big Sisters: A Study of Volunteer Recruitment and Screening.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

6 Juzang, Ivans J., MEE Productions, Inc./ Elizabeth J. Leburo (Producers), and Juzang, Ivan J., MEE Productions, Inc./ Eugene Martin (Directors), 1994. *Reaching the Hop Hop Generation,* Motivational Educational Entertainment. (Video).

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11 Branch, Alvia Y. 2004. *Relational and Programmatic: Service Delivery in the National Faith-Based Initiative for High-Risk Youth* (forthcoming, working title). Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

12 Roaf, Tierney, and Hunte. 1994. *Big Brothers/Big Sisters: A Study of Volunteer Recruitment and Screening.*

13 AOL Time Warner Foundation via Pathfinder Research & MarketFacts. 2002. Mentoring in America 2002. Retrieved 4/12/04 from National Mentoring Partnership at http://www.mentoring.org.

14 See the report on Amachi for an example of a program able to attract a greater percentage of congregants as volunteers. Jucovy, Linda. 2003. *Amachi: Mentoring Children of Prisoners in Philadelphia.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

15 AOL Time Warner Foundation via Pathfinder Research & MarketFacts.

16 Grossman, Jean B., and Jean E. Rhodes. April 2002. "The test of time: Predictors and effects of duration in youth mentoring programs." *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 30.

17 Ibid; Tierney and Grossman. 1995. *Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers Big Sisters.*

18 All of the participants in the NFBI programs received services other than mentoring, and, as such, were involved in the overall program longer than they were matched with mentors.

19 Tierney and Grossman. 1995. *Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers Big Sisters.*

# Appendix A:
# Volunteer Survey Questions

## General Information

Age, gender, ethnicity, employment status, occupation, marital status, children.

## Volunteer Experience

- How long have you volunteered with this organization?
- Is this the first time you have done volunteer work?
- Do you currently volunteer with any other organizations?
- How did you learn about the volunteer opportunities at this organization?
- What is the nature of the work you perform, and how many hours per month do you spend doing it?
- How important were the following reasons in your decision to volunteer?
  - Volunteering makes me feel needed.
  - I feel compassion toward those in need.
  - Volunteering is an important activity to the people I respect.
  - Volunteering allows me to gain a new perspective on things.
  - Volunteering helps me better handle some of my own personal problems.
  - I had an interest in the activity or work.
  - I wanted to gain experience in social service.
  - Volunteering is an important aspect of my faith.
  - I wanted an opportunity to work with youth.
  - I wanted an opportunity to work with high-risk youth.

## Volunteers Working with Participants

- If you are a mentor, how long have you been matched with your current mentee?
- Were any of the following required before working with participants:
  - A written application?
  - A list of references?
  - A personal interview?
- How many hours of initial training did you complete before working with the participants?
- How well did your initial training prepare you for volunteer work?
- Have you received any additional training since you began your volunteer work?
- How often do you see or talk with a supervisor or staff members about how things are going with your volunteer work?

## Satisfaction with Volunteer Work

- Did you select the specific volunteer activities you engage in or were they assigned to you?
- How satisfied are you with the volunteer work you do?
- How much difference do you feel your volunteer work makes?
- How important is your volunteer work for this organization?

## Faith Orientation

- Are you a member of a church or congregation?
- How long have you been a member of your church or congregation?
- How often do you attend worship services at your church or congregation?
- Do you live in the same neighborhood as your place of worship?
- How often do you attend church- or congregation-sponsored activities outside of regular services?
- How many members are there in your church or congregation?
- What church- or congregation-related activities are you involved in?
- How does your church or congregation inform members about volunteer activities/opportunities?

# Appendix B:
# Duration of Mentoring Relationships by Site

*Table 9*

## Number of Months Mentoring Relationships Lasted by Site*

| | Baton Rouge | | Bronx | | Brooklyn | | Philadelphia | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| 1 to 4 Months | 25 | 46% | 3 | 23% | 7 | 16% | 41 | 37% |
| 5 to 10 Months | 10 | 19% | 2 | 15% | 12 | 28% | 32 | 29% |
| 11 or More Months | 19 | 35% | 8 | 62% | 24 | 56% | 38 | 34% |
| Average Number of Months | 8.0 | — | 10.6 | — | 9.5 | — | 7.0 | — |
| Total Number of Youth | 54 | — | 13 | — | 43 | — | 111 | — |

* Based on MIS data for all youth at the selected NFBI sites reported in mentoring programs during the 2001–2002 program year. The number of active mentors during the third quarter of the 2001–2002 program year differs from the number of youth matches with mentors because a number of mentors matched in other quarters were not active in the third quarter and Brooklyn's team mentoring model matches multiple mentors with a single youth.

**Public/Private Ventures**
2000 Market Street, Suite 600
Philadelphia, PA 19103
Tel: (215) 557-4400
Fax: (212) 557-4469

*New York Office*
The Chanin Building
122 East 42nd Street, 41st Floor
New York, NY 10168
Tel: (212) 822–2400
Fax: (212) 949-0439

*California Office*
Lake Merritt Plaza, Suite 1550
1999 Harrison Street
Oakland, CA 94612
Tel: (510) 273–4600
Fax: (510) 273-4619

http://www.ppv.org

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