



An Australian Government Initiative



NATIONAL COMMUNITY CRIME PREVENTION PROGRAMME

Mentoring and young people

Making a contribution to crime prevention outcomes for young people

This Tip Sheet outlines information about mentoring programmes for young people. Mentoring programmes as a crime prevention strategy are characterised by contact between individuals that have had contact with the criminal justice system, or are 'at risk' of becoming involved in offending or anti-social behaviour, with positive role models. These role models are usually older and more experienced, and provide support, guidance and encouragement to the less experienced young person (Joliffe & Farrington 2007).

Mentoring programmes typically aim to:

- Reduce offending and/or re-offending
- Reduce substance misuse and other risk-taking behaviours
- Increase young people's participation in education and employment
- Improve self-esteem, social/life skills and personal relationships

This Tip Sheet outlines the evidence about how mentoring programmes have contributed to crime prevention outcomes, outlines some of the good practice principles for those considering developing a mentoring project, and provides links to other useful mentoring resources.

What is mentoring?

Mentoring is when a more experienced person takes on a role advising a less experienced person. Mentoring involves trust and friendship. It does not replace parents' or counsellors' or teachers' roles in the young person's life. A mentor is someone a young person can confide in and bounce ideas off.

Mentoring may occur in a variety of settings including within communities, schools, work places amongst others. For a full description of types of mentoring see www.youthmentoring.org.au

Mentoring projects targeting young people at critical junctions and transitions

Mentoring projects can be used at critical junctions or transition points in children's and young people's lives such as referring a young person to a mentoring programme after their first contact with the criminal justice system (National Crime Prevention 1999). Alternatively, a programme could focus on young people 'at-risk' of engaging in criminal or anti-social behaviour.

Mentoring projects promote protective factors in young people's lives through:

- social bonding
- opportunities for community involvement
- skills development
- recognition/ praise (Youth Justice Board 2001).

Evidence that well designed mentoring programmes can have crime prevention outcomes

There is little evidence of the long-term impacts of mentoring programmes. However, the increased popularity of mentoring programmes as a viable approach to working with youth has resulted in a recent growth in the amount and quality of research into its effectiveness. Some of these evaluations report positive outcomes for projects working with at-risk youth and/or young offenders (Moodie 2005).

The outcome measure of greatest interest in crime prevention with young offenders is lowered recidivism (Australian Institute of Criminology 2006). Positive findings amongst evaluations of mentoring projects include:

- *Reduction in re-offending:* Almost half of the studies evaluating mentoring programmes in the UK that were assessed by Joliffe and Farrington (2007) demonstrated a significant positive impact on re-offending rates.
- *Reduction in offending behaviour:* Evaluation of a programme for at-risk youth, which focused on assisting young people back into education and employment, found that arrests among participants were reduced by 61% (Benioff; cited in Shaw 2001). The evaluation of the One2One mentoring programme for young offenders found participants reduced their offending while participating in the project (Delaney & Milne 2002).
- *Completion of juvenile justice orders:* An evaluation of the Brayton mentoring project found that of the participants who were on juvenile justice orders (94%) none were breached for non-compliance and 10% were breached for further offences (ARTD 2001b; cited in National Crime Prevention 2003). However, this evaluation did not include a control group who did not participate in the mentoring project.

Other positive outcomes from mentoring programmes include the reduction of risk factors. The following evaluations of mentoring projects illustrate this.

- *Reduced substance misuse and other risky behaviours:* Participants in a Big Brother Big Sister mentoring project were less likely to have started using drugs or alcohol than individuals in a matched control group (Grossman and Tierney 1998). An evaluation of the New Trax mentoring project reported that of the 85% of participants who had a drug problem, 64 % either stopped or reduced their drug use (Upper Yarra Community House n.d.; cited in National Crime Prevention 2003).
- *Increased participation/performance in education, training and employment:* In one project participants who were assigned a mentor felt more competent about their school work, attended school more, and got better grades than individuals in a matched control group (Grossman and Tierney 1998). In another mentoring programme that focused on education and employment it was found that 73% of those who completed the first phase of the project were in college or employment (Benioff 1997; cited in Shaw 2001). The Brayton mentoring project evaluation found that participation in employment, education and training increased from 36% on entry to 85% on exit (ARTD 2001b; cited in National Crime Prevention 2003).

In terms of evaluating programmes for economic efficiency even small reductions in the prevalence of high risk behaviour could be considered cost effective in the case of the Big Brother Big Sister (Moodie 2005). This is because lifetime cost estimates for a young person who disengages from school, uses drugs and embarks on a criminal career are large.

Key factors associated with successful implementation of mentoring projects

Mentoring Australia (2000) has a publication titled *Mentoring: Benchmarks for Effective and Responsible Mentoring Programs*. This document outlines key principles for establishing and managing effective mentoring projects and is an important resource for organisations looking to establish a mentoring project.

A useful resource is the 'Youth Mentoring Network' website www.youthmentoring.org.au/contact_us.php

This network is an initiative of the National Youth Mentoring Partnership which consists of four not-for-profit organisations (The Smith Family, Dusseldorp Skills Forum, Big Brothers Big Sisters Australia and Job Futures) and the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. The Youth Mentoring Network aims to work with interested

youth mentoring organisations and practitioners to foster the growth and development of high quality mentoring projects for young people in Australia by providing a national base of collaboration, support, guidance and expertise.

This website has links to mentoring research and resources, and includes the benchmarks developed by Mentoring Australia.

Good practice principles

Research has identified a number of good practice principles for maximising the crime prevention outcomes from mentoring projects.

Importance of context

Mentoring projects should reflect the social context of the communities in which it is implemented. These factors may include: the size of the community, the location (rural, regional or city-based), the demographics of the community, other support services available in the community and the experience of the auspice agency (ARTD 2002).

There is also evidence to suggest that mentoring can be most effective when it is incorporated into a range of services provided by an organisation and their partners (Joliffe & Farrington 2007; National Crime Prevention 2003; Wilczynski et al. 2004).

Mentors

In recruiting mentors, projects need to look for people who will be successful mentors. Successful mentors have:

- listening skills
- respect
- empathy
- the ability to be open
- the ability to be flexible
- the ability to see solutions
- the ability to recognise opportunities (Moodie 2005).

Mentors may be ineffective if they adopt a paternal or maternal style, have difficulty maintaining regular contact, have high expectations for immediate change and have unrealistic expectations including that the young person will initiate contact.

High profile mentors may be particularly appealing to young people (National Crime Prevention 2003).

Recruitment of mentors

A national evaluation of the UK's Youth Justice Board's mentoring projects found that the two most effective methods for recruiting mentors were advertising in newspapers and word of mouth (Tarling, Davison & Clarke 2004).

In addition:

- the selection of mentors for a project should be based on a series of formal and informal checks. These should include police checks and an interview. Other techniques include group selection days where potential mentors can discuss and debate a range of issues relevant to working with young people.
- it is useful for projects to build and maintain a pool of mentors and establish effective partnerships with referring agencies to ensure they have ongoing capability to perform matches.

Training mentors

Projects should provide orientation and training (at least 20 hours) before the mentor is matched with a young person (National Crime Prevention 2003).

- training should cover a range of topics relating to the mentoring relationship, for example, child and personal safety, communication and conflict management skills, confidentiality, adolescent-related health issues, legal issues (such as mandatory reporting) (Delaney & Milne 2002).
- mentors may also need training in what is regarded as desirable behaviour and coached on what attitudes they could model. In addition mentors need to know how to positively reinforce appropriate behaviour (Australian Institute of Criminology 2003; McLaren 2000).
- mentoring young offenders may involve greater intensity and complexity than mentoring to general 'youth at risk' (National Crime Prevention 2003). People who will be working with young offenders need to understand the challenges of working with young people who have offended.
- it is important to be realistic about the skill level of mentors, particularly where employment is voluntary—some participants may require more professional support than can be provided by a mentor (National Crime Prevention 2003).

Supervision of mentors

Projects are most successful when mentors are provided with supervision (a regular meeting with an appropriate person allowing mentors to debrief and get advice), appraisal meetings as well as ongoing contact with the programme co-ordinator and/or peer supervision (DuBois et al. 2002; Tarling, Davison & Clarke 2004). Supervision should occur at least once per month, particularly in the early stages of the project (National Crime Prevention 2003).

Youth participants

- The best outcomes for young people are found when they are engaged voluntarily, regardless of whether they are referred by the courts or youth justice agencies (National Crime Prevention 2003).
- Not all young people are appropriate for mentoring programmes, and participants should be screened to assess their suitability.
- Mentoring activities should be based on the needs of young people and this will increase the likelihood of young people volunteering to participate (National Crime Prevention 2003).
- All aspects of the project should be tailored to the target group, and will be influenced by whether programme participants are young offenders or 'at-risk' young people (Wilczynski et al. 2004).
- There is limited evidence to suggest that youth in their early teens may be more responsive to mentoring programmes (National Crime Prevention 2003).
- It is important that mentoring projects have strong working relationships and referral networks with other local service agencies, to ensure a regular flow of appropriate referrals to the programme (National Crime Prevention 2003; Wilczynski et al. 2004).

The mentoring relationship

- Procedures should be developed that take into consideration the preferences of all parties in the relationship when matching the mentor and the young person
- Mentoring should be based on the needs of the young person rather than the expectations of the mentors and/or administrators (Moodie 2005). The goal of empowering the young person involved should involve all aspects of the project (Wilczynski et al. 2004)
- Expectations of frequency and longevity contribute to a successful relationship and more positive outcomes for the young person (Dubois et al. 2002; Moodie 2005).

The length of a relationship should be a minimum of six months and contact should ideally be at least once a week (Joliffe & Farrington 2007; National Crime Prevention 2003).

- The nature, duration and role of the mentoring relationship should be communicated to all people involved or affected by the mentoring relationship (Wilczynski et al. 2004)
- Program managers and mentors should be aware of the age, gender and culture of the young person/s to assist in structuring appropriate activities (National Crime Prevention 2003).
- The organisation should have a policy on the termination of the relationship which would involve discussion about the closure of the relationship and may include official closing activities (National Crime Prevention 2003).
- Where possible the provision of support and involvement of the parents in the project is beneficial (Dubois et al. 2002).

Clearly defined policies

Those involved in developing and implementing a mentoring project should develop and document clearly defined policies relating to the screening, recruitment and training of mentors, matching mentors with participants and the strategies in place to end the mentoring relationship, consistent with the principles described above (Wilczynski et al. 2004).

Indigenous youth

Mentoring has been used as an intervention with young Indigenous Australians, and there is a widespread view that it is more effective than for non-Indigenous participants (National Crime Prevention 2003). A number of factors have been identified as having contributed to the effectiveness of mentoring projects with Indigenous young people, including:

- The project has strong links with Indigenous communities and services.
- The project is based on an understanding of the historical, cultural and social background factors which influence young Indigenous peoples' lives.
- There is adequate consultation with and promotion in Indigenous communities.
- There is sensitivity to cultural requirements in matching Indigenous mentors and young people (Hartley 2004).

References and further reading

All URL's were correct as at 17 April 2006.

ARTD Management and Research Consultants 2001a.

Strategic review of the DJJ mentor program. Report prepared for NSW Department of Juvenile Justice. Sydney: Department of Juvenile Justice

ARTD Management and Research Consultants 2001b.

Evaluation of the youth offenders pilot program. Report prepared for the Youth Programmes Strategies Section, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs. Sydney: Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs

[http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/VIA/yopp/\\$File/FINALREPORT.PDF](http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/VIA/yopp/$File/FINALREPORT.PDF)

Australian Institute of Criminology 2006. *Measuring crime prevention outcomes.* AICrime reduction matters no. 41. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology

<http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/crm/crm041.html>

Delaney M & Milne C 2002. Mentoring for young offenders: results from an evaluation of a pilot programme. Paper to crime prevention conference, Sydney, 12–13 September

<http://www.aic.gov.au/conferences/crimpre/delaney.html>

DuBois D et al. 2002. Effectiveness of mentoring programmes for youth: a meta-analytic review. *American journal of community psychology* 30(2): 157–197

Grossman J & Tierney J 1998. Does mentoring work? An impact study of the Big Brothers Big Sisters programme. *Evaluation review* 22(3): 403–426

Hartley R 2004. *Young people and mentoring: towards a national strategy.* A report prepared for Big Brothers Big Sisters Australia, Dusseldorp Skills Forum and The Smith Family. Sydney: The Smith Family

Joliffe, D & Farrington, D.P. 2007. *A rapid evidence assessment of the impact of mentoring on reoffending: a summary.* Home Office Online Report 11/07. London: Home Office

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs07/rdsolr1107.pdf>

Loxley W, Toumbourou J & Stockwell, T 2004. The prevention of substance use, risk and harm in Australia: a review of the evidence. Canberra: Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing

http://espace.lis.curtin.edu.au/archive/00000284/01/PDF_with_links_to_The_Prevention_of_Substance_Use,_Risk_and_Harm_in_Australia_-_a_review_of_the_evidence.doc

McLaren K 2000. *Tough is not enough: getting smart about youth crime: a review of research on what works to reduce offending by young people.* New Zealand: Ministry of Youth Affairs

Mentoring Australia 2000. *Mentoring: benchmarks for effective and responsible mentoring programs* [accessed 20 January, 2006]

<http://www.dsfg.org.au/mentor/benchmark.htm>

Moodie M 2005. *Building an evidence base to practice 2004.* Richmond: Big Brothers Big Sisters Melbourne

National Crime Prevention 1999. *Pathways to prevention: developmental and early intervention approaches to crime in Australia.* Canberra: Australian Government Attorney-General's Department

<http://www.crimeprevention.gov.au/agd/www/Ncphome.nsf/Page/B78FEDFB9A1D980ACA256B14001A096E?OpenDocument>

National Crime Prevention 2003. *Early intervention: youth mentoring programs.* Canberra: Australian Government Attorney-General's Department

<http://www.crimeprevention.gov.au/agd/www/Ncphome.nsf/Page/AB5020EC5414D137CA256DC100037FC2?OpenDocument>

Rhodes J, Ebert L & Fischer K 1992. Natural mentors: an overlooked resource in the social networks of adolescent mothers. *American journal of community psychology* 22: 211–218

Shaw M 2001. *Investing in youth: international approaches to preventing crime and victimization.* Canada: International Centre for the Prevention of Crime

Tarling R, Burrows J & Clarke A 2001. *Dalston youth project part II (11–14): an evaluation*. Home Office Research Study no. 232. London: Home Office
<http://www.crimereduction.gov.uk/youth28.htm>

Tarling R, Davison T & Clarke A 2004. *Mentoring projects: the national evaluation of the youth justice board's mentoring projects*. Institute for Social Research, University of Surrey
<http://www.youth-justice-board.gov.uk/Publications/Scripts/prodView.asp?idproduct=165&eP=YJB>

Upper Yarra Community House n.d. *New Trax programme evaluation 1998–2000*. Victoria: Upper Yarra Community House

Wilczynski A, Ross S, Schwartzkoff J, Rintoul D and Reed-Gilbert K 2004. *Evaluation of the Mentor Marketplace Program*, report prepared by Urbis Keys Young for the Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services. Canberra: Department of Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
[http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/vIA/youth/\\$File/mentor_marketplace_evaluation.pdf](http://www.facs.gov.au/internet/facsinternet.nsf/vIA/youth/$File/mentor_marketplace_evaluation.pdf)

Youth Justice Board 2001. *Risk and protective factors associated with youth crime and effective interventions to prevent it*. London: Youth Justice Board for England and Wales