Mentoring Youth Toward Employment

A Knowledge Synthesis

Prepared in consultation with Workforce Planning Hamilton

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth mentoring is a deliberate formal arrangement where more experienced individuals (mentors) are paired with youth (mentees) in a fluid relationship for a limited period of time to achieve social, psychological or instrumental goals within a learning environment. Concretely, youth mentoring entails: connecting youth with employment opportunities, expanding their professional network, and developing skills for the workplace and further career aspirations. A review of scholarly and grey literature indicates that effective youth mentoring is based in the consolidation of a highquality relationship between mentor and mentee to obtain positive outcomes. Characteristics of effective youth mentoring programs include: long-term and frequent interactions between mentor and mentee; regular planned activities; promotion of relationships between the mentor and the mentee's family and social circle; strong mentor training that includes training in conflict management, intercultural awareness, youth development; a framework for setting and monitoring achievement of specific goals. Characteristics of effective mentors include: personality and motivation similar to mentee; commitment to a long-term relationship.

A review of the literature revealed two unexpected findings that may have direct bearing on program design and mentor recruitment. First, while having a mentor of one's own gender or race is appreciated it has little or no impact on program outcome. Rather, the mentor's characteristics that are found to affect program outcomes are: substantial training, and similar attitudes, values, beliefs and personality traits. Second, related to the above point, while a mentor of similar age may be perceived as more likely to possess compatible values, and therefore likely to offer a good "match," long-term commitment is more important.

To positively address the needs of youth who experience barriers to employment, we suggest that the Workforce Planning Board of Hamilton develop a program that promotes and fosters the building of high-quality relationships between mentor and mentee by:

1. Building a structured, intentional program that welcomes youths' social and family circle

- Stipulate and support frequent mentor-mentee interactions
- Planning a long-term mentoring program for a minimum of 12 months o Include regularly scheduled activities that mentor and mentee accomplish together
- Build positive rapport between the mentee's family and social circle with the mentor
- Develop specific goals to assess the expected successful outcomes of the program

2. Selecting, matching, and training mentors with appropriate qualities and commitment

a. Match mentors and mentees with similar in-depth characteristics
b. Select and "hire" volunteer mentors who can commit to regularly scheduled activities for a minimum of 12 months
c. Offer mentors a robust training package which includes training in conflict resolution and cultural attunement

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"An impressive body of research on resilience in at-risk youth and the role of supportive adults suggests that a relationship with at least one significant adult who is not a parent leads to improved outcomes (Greeson, Usher, & Grinstein-Weiss, 2010)."

Introduction

The purpose of this knowledge synthesis is to address the questions:

1. How do we define mentoring?

2. What mentoring practices and program characteristics are most likely to yield positive outcomes with youth who experience barriers to employment?

To address these questions, we conducted methodical and systematic searches of the internet and scholarly databases. The knowledge synthesis is organized in the following sections: Methodology; Definitions of mentoring; Components of youth mentoring; Relevance of youth mentoring; Best practices informed by empirical studies.

Methodology

In order to determine the definition of mentoring, we conducted a search in Social Sciences Abstracts (published by H. W. Wilson) and Google Scholar. This was supplemented with a search of the internet in Google to see how youth employment mentorship has been practically applied in different municipalities. Using the Social Sciences Abstracts database, the search was maximized by using keywords organized as follows (youth OR or teen or adolescent OR young adults) AND (mentor) AND (job or employment or work). In Google Scholar and Google, the search term was "youth employment mentorship." This internet search captured sources that were not published in the academic database.

We evaluated search results to include only those that provided empirical evidence of best practices. We included articles and reports with titles and abstracts related to youth in general as well as disadvantaged youth. We excluded articles and reports that had a narrow focus on career, higher education, career advancement, or deep personal learning. We excluded literature that pertained to mentoring practices outside deliberate formal mentoring programs (e.g. informal mentoring provided by coaches or family members). We further screened the articles and reports obtained to focus on those with concrete best practices rather than the description of programming or the foundational principles of a specific program.

Definitions

Categories of mentorship

Mentorship is commonly understood as a relationship between individuals with varying degrees of experience. There is sharing of knowledge from the more experienced person (mentor) to the less experienced person (mentee or protégé), primarily for the learning and development of the latter (mentee or protégé) (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2010; Gutiérrez, 2012; Hamilton & Hamilton, 2014; McDonald et al., 2007; McDonald & Lambert, 2014; Miller, 2005; Zippay, 1995). Mentoring takes place in different learning environments through various developmental processes and stages to achieve different goals (McDonald & Lambert, 2014). Given that adolescence is a transitory stage of exploration resulting in new experiences and growth (Johnson, Crosnoe, & Elder, 2011), there is a large body of literature delving into the nature and the delivery of youth mentoring, as well as its effectiveness.

Mentees can derive support and wisdom from their mentors (Boddy, Agllias, & Gray, 2012; Gutiérrez, 2012; Miller, 2005). The first category of mentors consists of natural mentors who provide informal mentoring. Natural mentors are usually embedded within the mentee's personal social network and include: teachers, coaches, relatives, and elder family friends (Goldner & Mayseless, 2009). This form of organic natural mentoring can be traced back as far as Greek mythology (Gutiérrez, 2012). Indeed, as King Odysseus leaves for war, he asks Mentor to guide his son, Telemachus, to promote his full development to maturity. Natural mentoring provides its own benefits in comparison to deliberate formal mentoring because of the pre-existing relationship between mentor and mentee. It is more likely that the dyad will continue to maintain the relationship on a long-term basis since both parties exist in each other's social network (Greeson et al., 2010).

In contrast to natural informal organic mentoring, the second category of mentoring involves a deliberate formal arrangement. Formal mentoring involves volunteers for a short, circumscribed period of time. In recent decades, many societies, including Canada, the UK, and the US, have experienced a growing popularity of mentoring programs (Miller, 2005). Through community organizations and corporate companies, groups of mentors and mentees are created. Then, matching is facilitated to arrange formal mentoring (Miller, 2005; Zippay, 1995). This literature review focuses on deliberate formal mentoring programs' best practices for youth experiencing barriers.

Traditionally, deliberate formal mentorship involves one-on-one, face-to-face interactions, and this environment has been studied more extensively than others (McDonald et al., 2007). However, small group-based, team-based, peer-based, or telecommunication-based mentorship opportunities have also been developed (Miller, 2005). See Figure 1. For instance, the Government of Manitoba encourages a wide range of mentoring arrangements. The literature does not specify which arrangement is more effective.

Figure 1: Mentoring Arrangements

One-on-one	Group	Team	Peer
• 1 adult • 1 youth	• 1 adult • 2-4 youths with similar goals	• Multiple adult youth pairs	• 1 individual or a group of youths, led and facilitated by another caring youth

(Source: Government of Manitoba & Miller, 2005)

Reciprocity and Symmetry

There are two features of mentorship that elicit debates among scholars and community-based workers. These features refer to the reciprocity and symmetry of a mentoring relationship and the specific role and behaviours of a mentor. Eby, Rhodes, and Allen (2010) claim that mentorship is "reciprocal yet asymmetric" and that development revolves around the mentee's goals. On the other hand, Peer Resources (2015) emphasizes that mentorship is a two-way street and that both parties are to give and take in some way. Some scholars distinguish mentors from teachers, advisors, and coaches (Eby, et al, 2010). However, a different group of scholars have proposed models that show overlapping expectations for the mentor's "helping behaviours", ranging from befriending, counselling, advising, teaching, sponsoring, directing, and encouraging (Miller, 2005). This illustrates the fluid nature of a mentoring relationship. Mentors may adopt different roles at different stages (Gay, 2000; McDonald & Lambert, 2004). These roles vary from pair to pair, group to group, depending on the needs of the youth and dynamics between both parties. Each relationship is unique (Miller, 2005).

Our definition

For the purpose of this report, we define youth mentoring as: a deliberate formal arrangement where more experienced individuals (mentors) are paired with youth (mentees) in a fluid relationship for a defined period of time that supports mentee's achievement of social, psychological or instrumental goals within a learning environment.

Why youth mentoring?

Because youth experience a number of developmental processes, mentoring can be beneficial to provide psychosocial or instrumental support (Miller, 2005; Zippay, 1995). Knowing that youth can experience psychological distress, it is critical to emphasize social and emotional development and to assist youth in finding a sense of self-worth. Mentors can provide counselling and they can encourage positive behaviours (Zippay, 1995). In addition to psychological and social well-being, mentors can invest in preparing youth to become responsible and self-sustaining citizens (Greater Toronto CivicAction Alliance, 2014). Several benefits to youth mentoring have been identified: academic functioning, peer relationships, life skills, rule-governed conduct, and overall self-worth (Thomson & Zand, 2010). Youth experiencing barriers can also experience positive outcomes: decreased substance abuse, greater self-efficacy, self-esteem, independent living skills, higher performance on measures of academic achievement, and improved family and peer family relationships (Madia & Lutz, 2004). Concretely, youth mentoring entails: connecting youth with employment opportunities, expanding their professional network, and developing skills for the workplace and further career aspirations (Greater Toronto CivicAction Alliance, 2014; McDonald, Erickson, Johnson, & Elder, 2007). For example, the PATHFINDER Youth Centre Society in British Columbia offers mentoring programs that foster stress management, time management, self-confidence, communication, workplace conflict resolution, customer service, and strategic job searching (PATHFINDER Youth Centre, 2015).

Best practices for mentoring youth

A high quality mentor-mentee relationship is the pillar of an effective mentoring program (Chan & Ho, 2008; Goldner & Mayseless, 2009). Therefore, the characteristics of a mentoring program, as well as the mentor's characteristics should aim at consolidating a strong high-quality relationship between mentor and mentee.

The outcomes of a mentoring program rely on the "closeness" of the dyad or a high quality relationship (Chan & Ho, 2008; Goldner & Mayseless, 2009). Indeed, this subjective dimension should be prioritized: closeness matters for the outcome of mentoring (Goldner & Mayseless, 2009). The most impactful mentoring relationships are linked to high quality relational experiences between mentor and mentee (Pryce, 2012). Empirical data indicate that the quality of the relationship between mentor and mentee is strongly associated to relationship related outcomes (Thomson & Zand, 2010). Thomson and Zand (2010) concluded that high quality relationships between mentors and mentees are characterized by authenticity, empathy and companionship. This relationship should also be nurturing, insightful, supportive, protective, and role-modeling (Anderson & Shannon, 1995; Peer Resources, 2015b). Among the structural characteristics that should be emphasized are: frequent interactions, long-term duration, regular activities, positive mentor-mentee's family and social circle relationship and the assessment of specific goals to monitor success. The mentor's characteristics that should be stressed are: similar in-depth characteristics between mentor and mentee, enduring commitment on the part of mentors and substantial training to help build the relationship between mentor and mentee.

Program Characteristics

Frequent interactions

Frequent interactions through regular contacts contribute to build a high-quality relationship between mentor and mentee. Frequent interactions, such as once week, which imply intense and regular mentee-mentor contacts can further the mentor-mentee relationship (Chan & Ho, 2008). The frequency of interactions influences the perception of mentees of the instrumental support available in the program and the quality of the relationship with the mentor (de Tormes Eby et al., 2012). Therefore, it is highly encouraged that a youth mentoring program integrates scheduled regular meetings to enhance the feelings of closeness between mentor and mentee (Madia & Lutzl, 2004).

Long-term duration

Longevity of a youth mentoring program is crucial for the effectiveness of youth mentoring programs. Programs that are able to run for long periods of time, for instance, for a period of 12 to 18 months are more likely to yield positive outcomes (Chan & Ho, 2008). Mentoring programs should be long enough to avoid creating dependency and to promote autonomy. It is suggested that programs should last a year or longer (Goldner & Mayseless, 2009). In sum, match duration matters, including for educational related outcomes (Grossman, Chan, Schwartz, & Rhodes, 2012).

Regularly scheduled activities

Structuring activities or regularly scheduled activities can reinforce the positive outcomes of youth mentoring programs. Community service activities enhance resiliency because of the reciprocal and dialogical benefits of meaningful actions in the community (Dryfoos & Taylor, 1998/1999). Indeed, Goldner and Mayseless (2009) report that along with the duration of a program and parents' involvement in the program, mutual activities between mentor and mentee furthers youth mentoring effectiveness. Structured youth mentoring programs based on activity and expectations (conditional support) are more beneficial than unstructured programs based on low-levels of activity and unconditional support (Langhout, Rhodes, & Osborne, 2004). In addition to structured or scheduled activities, a curriculum that addresses life skills can strengthen social competence of the mentees (Dryfoos & Taylor, 1998/1999).[1]

Positive mentor- mentee's family relationship

Empirical data indicate that a positive relationship between the mentor with the family and other members of the mentee's environment can further the positive outcomes of youth mentoring. Therefore, reinforcing the relationship between mentor and mentee's parents is highly encouraged (Dryfoos & Taylor, 1998/1999). Indeed, as mentioned earlier, Goldner and Mayseless (2009) consider that parental involvement can enhance the outcomes of youth mentorship. Lakind, Atkins and Eddy (2015) as well concluded that a close relationship with the family and other members of the mentee's environment enhances mentoring.

Assessment of Specific Goals for Success

Prior to the start of the program, program success should be defined to facilitate the evaluation of specific objectives. It is important to determine what success means for the mentoring program in order to articulate clear goals that can be operationalized (Langhout et al., 2004). Successful outcomes can be defined as relational, where mentors and mentees develop a strong relationship or they can be defined as psychological, educational or employment-related outcomes. The program should be intentional (Anderson & Shannon, 1995) and should rest on initiative, clear expectations and purpose, the creation of an agenda, the organization of meetings, and active listening (Peer Resources, 2015b). Otherwise, the effects of youth mentoring can fall short of certain objectives and the positive outcomes can be temporary (Pryce, 2012). Mentorship should involve a dynamic relationship with a clear measurable impact over time (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2010). Therefore, a good youth mentoring program should include an evaluation that aims to assess the impact rigorously (Taylor & Dryfoos, 1998/1999).

Mentor Characteristics

Share similar in-depth characteristics with mentee

A high quality relationship between mentor and mentee is paramount to the success of a youth mentoring program. In that respect, similarities between members of the dyad facilitates the development of a fruitful and dynamic relationship. Having a mentor of one's own gender or race is usually greatly appreciated by women and racialized students but, it has no impact on academic achievement (Blake-Beard, Bayne, Crosby, & Muller, 2011). Therefore, agencies should not be surprised if there is a discrepancy between satisfaction expressed by mentees and the intended outcomes of a program. Indeed, factors that produce satisfaction such as having a mentor from the same gender and/or race may not necessarily result in intended outcomes (Blake-Beard et al., 2011). In fact, other characteristics may be more important than birth-acquired characteristics, such as gender or race (Blake-Beard et al., 2011). Similar personalities and motivations are more important (Bake-Beard, Bayne, Crosby and Muller, 2011). Indeed, similar attitudes, values, beliefs and personality traits between mentors and mentees result in mentee's positive percep-tions (de Tormes Eby et al., 2012). By in-depth characteristics, we mean similar communication skills or personality traits (Madia & Lutzl, 2004). Overall, similar in-depth psychological similarities are more important than other demographic characteristics for the creation of a high quality relationship. This means that even if the majority of mentors are from a majority group while mentees are from a minority group, it is possible to provide effective mentoring for women and visible minorities.

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1 The literature does not specify what activity is best, ideal or most effective. It only specifies that it should be built/planned in advance in the program (e.g. every Monday, baseball or every Wednesday, improvisation.). Community service activities (meaningful work for self and others) seems to contribute to communication skills development (Dryfoos 1998). However, this is the only study that mentions this and there is no study comparing different activities and assessing clearly the merit of different types of activity.

Be enduring committed mentors for a long-term relationship

Keeping in mind that the duration of the mentor-mentee relationship is of capital importance, mentors' screening should be completed with care in order to promote long-term relationships with mentees (Grossman et al., 2012; Madia & Lutzl, 2004; Martin & Sifers, 2012). The integrity of the match matters for intervention since mentors should have an enduring commitment. In fact, intact relationships provide more positive outcomes than mentoring relationships that are terminated prematurely (Grossman et al., 2012). Mentoring relationships that are terminated and re-matched result in negative impacts (Grossman et al., 2012). Matches with college students are more likely to terminate their relationship early and volunteers with prior experiences of mentoring are more likely to remain in long-lasting relationships (Grossman et al., 2012). Youth who had experienced several life stressors were more likely to experience termination (Grossman et al., 2012). Therefore, challenging dyads with youth who experienced several life stressors and trauma should be monitored closely and ongoing support should be provided (Grossman et al., 2012). Since problems arise when there is a premature mentor attrition among mentors (Madia & Lutzl, 2004), agencies should ensure that mentors understand the long-term time commitment required for mentoring in order to avoid attrition. Therefore, potential mentors with changing schedules like college students may experience more difficulties to fulfill their tasks in comparison to retirees for example (Martin & Sifers, 2012).

Substantially trained to develop different skills

Substantial training to develop specific skills is essential to promote self-confidence, to encourage the appropriate attitude, to learn the foundation of developmental literature, to ensure a clear understanding of logistical procedures of the program and to consolidate strong communication skills with mentees and mentees' closed social circle (Lakind, Atkins, & Eddy, 2015; Langhout et al., 2004; Martin & Sifers, 2012; Pryce, 2012). Since the relationship between mentor and mentee's family enhances mentorship, the upshot is that even organizations with less means can explicitly provide ongoing support and training to assist mentors in their interactions with other individuals in the mentee's life, including parents (Lakind et al., 2015; Martin & Sifers, 2012). Mentors should be trained to be more like good parents rather than like peers (Langhout et al., 2004). Moreover, mentors should familiarize themselves with the strengths and constraints of the youth involved, as well as the literature on youth development (Langhout et al., 2004). Mentors should be trained to be attuned to contribute to a better relationship (Pryce, 2012). Indeed, closely related to attunement, training should include the development of communication skills for conflict-resolution and adaption to transition as the mentee matures (Martin & Sifers, 2012). Extensive training and selfconfidence are associated with increased mentor satisfaction (Martin & Sifers, 2012). Mentor satisfaction can contribute to a decrease in attrition, especially when mentors are volunteers (Martin & Sifers, 2012). There should also be clear instructions about the logistics and procedures of the program. Discussions about finances or agency guidelines about who pays for the different activities initiated should be well known and understood (Martin & Sifers, 2012).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on the findings of this knowledge synthesis, we suggest that community organizations draw from the following recommendations to implement a mentoring program for youth experiencing barriers to employment that promotes and fosters the building of high-quality relationships between mentor and mentee by:

1. Building a structured, intentional program that welcomes youths' larger social and family circle

- Stipulate and support frequent mentor-mentee interactions

    o Frequent interactions through regular contact contribute to build a high-quality relationship between mentor and mentee.

- Plan a long-term mentoring program for a minimum of 12 months

    o Mentoring programs should be long enough to avoid creating dependency and to promote autonomy. It is suggested that programs should last a year or longer.

- Include regularly scheduled activities that mentor and mentee accomplish together

    o Structured youth mentoring programs based on activity and expectations (conditional support) are more beneficial than unstructured programs based on low levels of activity and unconditional support. In addition to structured or scheduled activities, a curriculum that addresses life skills can strengthen social competence of the mentees.

- Build positive rapport between the mentee's family and social circle with the mentor

    o Parental involvement can enhance the outcomes of youth mentorship.

- Develop specific goals to assess the expected successful outcomes of the program

    o Successful outcomes can be defined as relational, where mentors and mentees develop a strong relationship or they can be defined as psychological, educational or employment-related outcomes. These should be clarified. A good youth mentoring program should include an evaluation that aims to assess the impact rigorously.

2. Selecting, matching, and training mentors with appropriate qualities

- Match mentors and mentees with similar in-depth characteristics

    o Factors that produce satisfaction, such as having a mentor from the same gender and/ or race, may not necessarily result in intended outcomes. In fact, similar personalities and motivations are more important.

- Select and "hire" volunteer mentors who can commit to regularly scheduled activities for a minimum of 12 months

    o Mentoring relationships that are terminated and re-matched result in negative impacts (Grossman et al., 2012). Since problems arise when there is a premature mentor attrition among mentors (Madia & Lutzl, 2004), agencies should ensure that mentors understand the long-term time commitment required for mentoring in order to avoid attrition

- Offer mentors a robust training package which includes training in conflict resolution and cultural attunement

    o Mentors should be trained to be more like good parents rather than like peers (Langhout et al., 2004). Moreover, mentors should familiarize themselves with the strengths and constraints of the youth involved, as well as the literature on youth development (Langhout et al., 2004). Mentors should be trained to be attuned to contribute to a better relationship (Pryce, 2012). Indeed, closely related to attunement, training should include the development of communication skills for conflict-resolution and adaption to transition as the mentee matures

This relationship-centred understanding of mentoring is visualized below.

Figure 2: Relationship-Centred Mentoring

Central: High Quality Mentor/Mentee Relationship

Surrounding: Frequent Contact · Long-term Mentoring · Regular Activities · Relationship Mentor/Mentee's Social Network · Goals for Success · Mentors Similar to Mentees · Committed Mentors · Trained Mentors

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