

This Changes (Almost) Everything: Mentor, Youth, Parent & Staff Perspectives on Youth Initiated Mentoring

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Program Partners



Big Brothers Big Sisters
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Project Everlast
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Mentoring Matters

- Mentoring associated with host of positive educational and psychosocial outcomes among youth
- Improvements in
 - Multiple developmental domains (i.e., social, emotional cognitive, academic)
 - Attitudes , behaviors, performance
- Broad and flexible approach
 - Across ages
 - Multiple formats – one-to-one, group, peer

DuBois et al. (2011) *How Effective Are Mentoring Programs for Youth? A Systematic Assessment of the Evidence. Psychological Science in the Public Interest.*

A Tale of Two Relationships

Tiffany & Elizabeth 8-year Match

"I was like a terrible kid **I was like wicked bad**. Take tempers and stuff... I wouldn't let kids touch me, talk to me, say hi to me or nothing. I didn't like teachers, I'd give them attitudes. Yell at them and stuff. and then ... in 6th grade I started getting like honors and stuff. And **doing wicked good**..."

"I'm glad she's my Big Sister. I don't know what I would do if she wasn't and I don't want to know."

Eugene 1st Match: 2 months

"we just kept on callin' and callin', and nobody answered. So. We just gave up on him.... My mom said, 'It's okay. It's not your fault'" "So, I was like **really devastated**" "cause he was like really keepin' in touch with me, like most of the time. ... he said exactly six weeks."

2nd Match 1 year later: 3 visits

"I was like, **really, really so angry ...** I really had wanted to hit him but I was like, Naw, don't hit him 'cause it might be somebody else."

Importance of Match Quality and Duration

- Relationships most likely to be effective
 - Enduring - 1-year or more, SB continue into 2nd year
 - Connected – youth feels “close” to mentor, sees mentor as significant adult
 - Collaborative - developmental or youth driven
- But many formal relationships never achieve this
 - 1/3 to 1/2 end early
- Potential for decrements in youth functioning
 - Early ending relationships
 - Inconsistent relationships

(Aseltine et al., 2000; DuBois et al., 2002; Grossman & Rhodes, 2001; Herrera et al., 2007; Karcher et al., 2007; Karcher, 2005; Rhodes, 2002; Spencer et al., 2017; Whitney Henricker & Offutt, 2011)

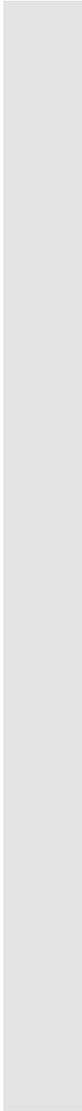
Youth-Initiated Mentoring (YIM)

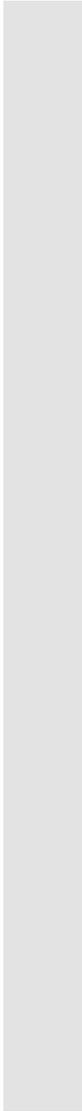
- What is it?
 - Youth identify adults they know to serve as their mentors
 - Program finds, recruits, screens, and trains adults and formalizes matches
- Why do it?
 - Mentor attrition
 - Premature match closures
 - Not enough mentors to meet demand
 - Low to modest effect sizes, particularly for higher risk youth
(DuBois et al., 2011; Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; Herrera et al., 2011)

Youth ChalleNGe Program

- Sites in 27 U.S. states and Puerto Rico
- Youth age 16-18 dropped out of school, unemployed
- 17 month program: 5-month intensive residential phase, followed by 1-year nonresidential phase
- Goal: Return to school, obtain GED or employment, enlist in military
- Innovative mentoring component –YIM
 - Developed to address recidivism
- 3-year follow-up:
 - More likely to have GED, to be employed, earning more than controls
 - Youth with longest-lasting mentoring relationships did the best, while those in shortest relationships not different from controls

(Millenky et al, 2011; Schwartz et al., 2013)

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- But, we still don't really know very much about YIM
 - No research to-date captures youth, mentor, parent and program staff experiences of these relationships



Our Research on YIM

Study Purpose

- Describe YIM relationships
 - Mentor and youth experiences
 - Types of support
 - Perceptions of influence
 - Strength of connections
 - Durability
- Document YIM program practices
 - Challenges
 - Lessons learned

Participants and Data Collection

- Mentor and Youth Interviews
 - Program 1: Youth in or recently aged out of foster care system
 - Program 2: Youth who were first-time offenders in juvenile justice system
- Program Staff Interviews
 - 2 from agencies referring youth to YIM
 - 3 from programs implementing YIM
- In-depth, in-person (mostly), semi-structured interviews
- Coded and summarized thematically by case

Participant Type	Age	Race
Youth n=16	15-25 yrs (M=18 yrs)	Racially diverse
Parents n= 5	29-47 yrs (M=37 yrs)	Racially diverse
Mentors n=15	21-58 yrs (M=38 yrs)	80% White

All matched < 1 year

Had known each other 7 months- youth's lifetime

Who were the mentors?

Mentor's Previous Role in Youth's Life

School employee	6
Social services (e.g., case worker, CASA)	5
Church activities	2
Friend network	2
Extended family member (aunt, informal cousin)	2
Former foster parent	1

YIM Influenced More than just Matching Process

- Recruitment
- Matching
- Parent/guardian involvement
- Expectations
- Relationship development
- Support provided and received
- Challenges

Youth Recruitment

- Engaged more typically difficult to engage youth
- Motivated to keep connections and to have help with that

"I wanted to do it because I wanted to stay in touch with [mentor]." (Rosie, youth)

"being able to go and like, build a more structured relationship with someone who wasa good influence on me in my past because it's really hard to set that up yourself." (Cole, youth)

Mentor Recruitment

- Reaching different pool of mentors
 - Capable and trustworthy adults who were interested but “too busy” to sign up for a mentoring program
- Felt compelled to serve because asked by youth

“I would not have done this, ... without it having been a youth-initiated piece. They really roped me in with that one ...at first I thought, boy I’m overwhelmed... but when I heard that it was [youth] I was more than willing to help him..”
(Ashley, mentor)

It wasn't like it was a professional person thinking that I would be a good fit for her, it was [youth] remembering me and asking if I could do it. And how do you say no to that? I can't imagine saying no.”
(Molly, mentor)

Program Recruitment

- Prior to this YIM initiative, the JJ program had referred 30 youth to mentoring programs but none had been matched
 - *"for the most part every time we would contact the mentoring organization, they would say 'We'll try but it's really hard,' you know over the course of time we'd be in meetings with different organizations and they'd say well we need special training because you know these kids are scary, and very much misunderstanding of these kids are our kids. This could be your son or daughter in fact many of these kids are sons and daughters of school teachers, police officers, you know people you know, your neighbor.... and so there was a real from I believe the administrators of mentoring programs, having a disconnect more than mentors themselves..."*
(Referring Program Staff)

Matching: Youth Voice and Choice

- Youth intentional in their selection – chose mentors who:
 - They trusted

"It's hard for me to trust. When I would get in trouble, instead of ... sending me to the principal's office, she would try to get down to the core emotion and why I was feeling that way. And, I remember, I had, I had like a big huge fit one day, and she told me, ... 'You know you're safe here, I'm never going to let you down. Never going to hurt you. Never going to lie to you.' And then that right there, I knew, just like seeing it and hearing it in her voice, I knew she was honest." (Marie, youth)
 - Felt comfortable talking to

"I was comfortable talking to her like back then... so I knew I would be comfortable talking to her... now." (Jane, youth)
 - Knew, understood them and challenges and did not judge

"Because she under- she's been through half the things I've been through so she really understands, and she went, she's not like judgmental." (Angel, youth)

"I wanted somebody... who wouldn't judge me for things I've already done". (Amy, youth)

Parent/ Guardian Involvement

- In some cases, engaged parent/guardian in selection
- When involved - approved, appreciated, and felt supported by mentor

"I didn't want her just spending time with somebody that we wasn't, you know, okay with." (Parent)

"There was never a feeling of 'Hey, you're taking my job here'... You know, because sometimes... as parents... we need a little bit of help... I just believe in you know, 'Hey, sometimes you can give me good pointers on maybe you know, I've done something wrong, you know, or maybe you can help me in this area that I can't seem to get through.' So he does assist." (Parent)

Expectations

- Specific and based on real knowledge of the other person, rather than general idea of mentoring
 - *"When I found out... I was picking [mentor], I was really excited because I knew exactly what we were going to be doing."*
(Cole, youth)
 - *"...my thought was just kind of how it's been. like that we would touch base either, through phone calls and kinda be that support she struggles with the relationship of her children's father and stuff like that, and her family, and just kind of letting her talk about it encouraging her.... with different jobs ..."* (Nikki, mentor)

Support Provided and Received

- Appraisal
- Informational
- Instrumental
- Emotional

"She's given me pride..... I used to think I would never be able to do anything, because I'm so different..... compared to everybody else that I wouldn't get a job. I wouldn't do anything in life." (Amy, youth)

"I'd say about 90% of what we do is really talk and try to figure out what's going on with his life or the current girl in his life, or whatever thing that might be troubling him at that moment... and like ... sometimes it's just getting him out of his place and letting him just blow off some steam. And just go and sit down and watch a movie or sit down and drink a coffee or something and vent." (John, mentor)

Relationship Development

Start out a few, or even many, steps ahead

"We had so much to talk about, so much to catch up. And it was like [program staff person] was just kind of like sitting there like, alrighty then. Yeah, she eventually ended up leaving and we still talked and talked and talked, and she had my number already and we just, said that we'll text and set up a day to meet." (Nikki, youth)

"... every time she's had a new therapist, or a new case worker, or a new whoever, they've you know. You always start with, 'Okay. Tell me about,...what you've been through.' And then she has to tell that story so many times. And I know she's sick of it, because she's told me that. So, with me it was like we met at a restaurant and we just started talking about normal things and she didn't have to explain herself or who she is or what she's been through." (Molly, mentor)

"Because we had some interesting early on track record...[laughs] that first year that we met, and he kind of figured out that shock value didn't really work, and figured out that I'd still be there, even if he tried all this stuff." (Sarah, mentor)

Program Staff Noted this as Well

- *"I think they just really appreciate someone that knows what they've been through,.... without having to necessarily lay it all out again. ... like I did a match ... the one that was her 5th grade teacher, and she knew all about how the girl had come into foster care. She knew all about her family situation. They didn't have to talk about it, but she was really supportive of the struggles she was going through and she let her know, like, 'Yes, things are hard for you, but just think about what you've been through already.' So, her knowing what she has already gone through was you know, really helpful to her."*
- *"it helps the youth be genuine up front about who they are... You know it's not 6 months of let's get to know each other. I mean some of them of course don't have a super close relationship. Maybe it was someone from three years ago who was an after school [counselor] or something, but that there's some sort of familiarity that helps them just sort of um jump right in."*

Relationship Development

Mentor engagement

- *"It is important to me. I didn't take on this role lightly. So I see it as a ... priority... It's one of my things I prioritize and make time for."* (Charlize, mentor)
- *"I definitely feel close to her. she's a cool young woman... she's somebody that I think is gonna do really interesting things with her life and I think it's really neat,.... to sort of see her at these beginning steps...I adore her. I think she is just a wonderful, wonderful young woman and so.... I totally want to brag about her....she's a neat young woman and I feel very close to her and I do feel honored to get to spend this time with her and like I said, I'm in a better mood."*
(Ashley, mentor, matched 2 months, known mentee 3 years)

Relationship Duration

Potential for long-lasting connections

- *"I don't think I'll ever really get to a point where I say 'I don't want you to be my mentor anymore'.... I hope nothing like that ever happens. I don't think it will"*
(Stephano, youth)
- *"Well the contract's for two years, but you know my door will always be open if he needs help or advice, so, as long as it needs to go."* (John, mentor)

The Difference These Relationships Made

- *"She gave me the nudge to keep going... I was just gonna give up and slow down like everybody else did and not care about school anymore... But she was the one to say, 'Hey, you got to keep going. You need to go. Okay, you want to be successful in life. You don't want to be one of those people living off of pennies on the car floor.' ... I was like, 'Huh.' So, she is the drive. She is what's making me want to keep going."* (Amy, youth)
- *"She's important to me....Because she's a big influence on me. She's pretty much what got me to go to college."* (Stephano, youth)

Challenges

- Many challenges similar to agency-matched pairs
 - Communication, scheduling, no-shows
- Burden of them is not
 - Challenges not taken personally, understood in context of youths' lives

Why Program Staff like YIM

- Youth empowerment and ownership (voice and choice)
 - *"I don't know why a mentoring program wouldn't start with this"*
- Reach more relationally vulnerable youth with whom it can be difficult to build new relationships
 - *"A lot of kids who we see here already struggle with relationships and ... certainly don't want necessarily new folks just invasively brought in. They wouldn't buy into that."*
(Referring program staff)

Why Program Staff like YIM

- Wait lists a poor fit for these youth
 - JJ and transitioning foster youth need support now, not in 6 months to a year or more
- Steps over the awkward “getting to know you phase”
- Mentors begin relationship with an understanding of youth’s background
 - *“The way that you can offer like support and encouragement or if you already have a relationship with a kid if you already know that they've been in some sort of trouble for whatever reason, it's different because you have a more like holistic sense of that kid is, the person.”*

Paul & Mr. Good Looking

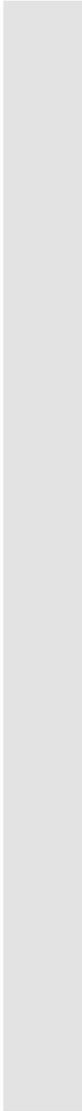
Matched
2 months

- Paul, 16 yrs, Hispanic, had been caught stealing with friends
- Mr. GL, 32 yrs, Hispanic
- Mentor selection
 - Parent: helped youth pick – younger daughter’s teacher and basketball coach of younger son
 - Someone the mother would want her son to be like
 - Also, “he is very strict but the kids like him a lot. So there is something that makes the kids appreciate him, even after his way of doing things that he has of being really strict.”
 - Youth: liked mentor because he was “nice” and was “someone who had been through a lot”
 - Mentor: responded right away when contacted, because he knew who Paul was and “was very interested in helping out”
 - Had considered mentoring before but was always “too busy” with other things
 - Being asked to mentor “sounded like a privilege”
- Mentor commitment
 - Youth late to first match meeting – mentor waited for over an hour said he would have waited as long as it took “because obviously he needs it” and also said, “Maybe it proved to him too that I cared about it... too. If I stayed there I cared about him”
 - He “wanted to make sure” Paul knew he was “invested in the relationship”
 - When not able to spend time with Paul, felt like he was “neglecting” him
 - Wants to “provide the support” Paul needs to achieve whatever goals he has
- Paul does indeed feel like mentor is invested in him
 - Notes that Mr. GL “makes time” for him” and that he is someone he can talk to “about just about anything” and feels that he could turn to him if he needed help

Michelle & Bridgette

Matched 7 months

- Michelle 22 yrs, Black
- Bridgette 37 yrs, Black, was Michelle's foster mother for 7 weeks
- Michelle chose her because they were still in touch and very close, so it seemed natural, and because Bridgette "*already knew, basically, what [she] went through and basically why [she] was in the system*"
 - Knew she could talk to her ("*she didn't judge me no matter what*") and that Bridgette would "call [her] out"
 - Described Bridgette as someone who "knows she messes up" and "doesn't think that she (Bridgette) is better than anybody." She contrasts this with her experiences of caseworkers who "just go off what's in [her] file" and "don't really get to know you"
 - Also picked her because she sees her as "an alpha" and as someone she "wants to learn from"
- In formal mentoring relationship, Michelle felt like Bridgette is "more and more on her", which "encourages [her] and helps [her] to better more and more".
- Relationship is focused on helping Michelle become more independent, to get and keep a job, go to and stay in school
 - Bridgette says her goal for Michelle is to "better herself over all in everything she does" and sees her role as saying things that a parent would say because Michelle "doesn't really have any type of good parent figures in her life"
- Michelle said her relationship with Bridgette has "*made [her] think of the world different*" and has helped her manage her anger better by helping her think through the consequences of her actions



What's not to like?!

Poses New Challenges in Implementation

- Much more work up front
 - Helping you understand what a mentor is and how they can benefit
 - Supporting youth in identifying and selecting mentors
 - Locating and contacting mentors
 - Mentors passing background checks

Work to Help Youth See the Benefits of Mentoring

"They have a hard time trusting new people. With trusting people period....Then a lot of our young adults are at that age where they're trying to branch out on their own become independent and prove that they could do it on their own. Now is not the time where they're coming to us and asking for a lot. They want to do things on their own. A couple years down the road they come back to us and say 'I need some help.' But usually around this age where a lot of clients are around the 19 year old range. They're just first starting to get out there by themselves. They really want to prove that they can do it on their own." (Referring Program Staff)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1LPkA2q-Rbg>

Have to Support Youth Selection of Mentors

- Provide information about characteristics of good mentor
- Guide them through identifying potential mentors
 - Asset mapping exercise prompting youth to think of potential mentors from different areas of their lives (e.g. school, sports, work, church, neighborhood, family friends)

"our young people, they know who's actually positive in their life and, and who will make a good example." (Program Staff)

What won't Work

"I've had a handful of youth where I've talked to them about, thinking about some potential mentors talked to their parents about it have a list ready for me when I come for the interview so we can discuss those mentors. ... and there's been several times when I've gone to the home and there's no list. They can't think of anyone. Parent can't think of anyone we told them ... You're going to have to figure out some potential mentors for yourself ... So in that month they still can't put together a list, that's kind of concerning" (Program Staff)

Shift from Recruiting to Locating Mentors

- Can be difficult to track down adults selected by youth

"But it, you know also it's like, we're like all hands on deck when it comes to you know, finding a prospective mentor. We're you know, all Googling people, trying to use our networks to try to reach people to find these mentors. We search Facebook, we make phone calls if we know someone who knows someone who might know this person. So, it's been interesting. And I think too often times the kids will identify a person but they maybe won't know they're last name, they'll only know their first name and work....So there is a lot more work in trying to just identify who these people are."

- When found, don't always pass background checks
 - Important to identify multiple possible mentors
- Honored to be asked!

"when a youth approaches you and says, 'Hey I'd like you to be my mentor.' That is such a sense of ownership of, you know, 'oh my gosh, this is an important relationship.' ... The value there of this young person sought me out."

Match Support: Easier in Some Ways

- Participants – mentors, youth, parents – less nervous at start
- Relationships take off quickly
- Match support less intensive

"[The] relationship is just expedited. ... So instead of us waiting or a mentor in our program waiting like 3 months, 6 months, you know it may be even a year to connect with the youth, ... that connection is already there.... it's kind of a relief for support staff in that they don't have to do as much support.... they still do their monthly phone calls, but if they take the incoming calls of any issues or questions that the mentor might be having or the mentee might be having, there's a lot more reduced, decreased than it would be in a traditional match."

Match Support: More Challenging in Others

- Contacting participants for follow-up
- Navigating shifts in the relationship
 - *".. because they were workers in some official capacity before. They kind of still feel like it's an extension of that time. It's really hard. Even though I have a conversation like, 'Yes, I know that you were an authority figure, but you're not that anymore.' I think they just can't help themselves that it's just the role they've always played."*

Other Program Challenges

- Hard to introduce YIM into program using traditional matching
 - Can conflict with agency branding
 - Lack of flexibility
 - Tendency to revert to traditional matching when challenges encountered
- Length of time from identification of mentor to match can be long
- Typical mentor training may not address needs of YIM mentors
 - Less focus on relationship start-up and more on navigating changing relationship

Mentor Experience

Traditional Matching	YIM
Committed to idea of mentoring, intends to commit to mentee	Mentee is reason mentor agreed to serve
Wants to make a difference	Has just learned s/he has already made a difference
Hope youth will like them	Knows youth must already like/feel comfortable with/appreciate mentor
Work to earn youth's trust	Has earned some trust already – typically selected because youth sees them as someone who knows their circumstances and does not judge them
May not be sure what experience of mentoring will be	Has a pretty good idea what it will mean to mentor this youth
Has to get to know youth; hope they will like youth	Already knows something about this youth and what s/he is like
Not sure how they'll respond to youth's circumstances	Tend to have a good understanding of youth's challenges

Program Experience

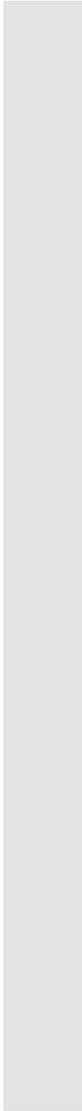
	Traditional Matching	YIM
Recruitment	Identify and maintain an ongoing pool of mentors	Help youth identify potential mentors
		Track down adults identified
		Reach out to and invite adults to serve
	Lengthy waiting lists for youth	Lengthy matching process
Mentor Screening	Screen for safety	Screen for safety
	Screen for mentoring skills	Screen for adult agreeing because they want to and not out of guilt
Match Support	Manage expectations	Set expectations for formal match
	Check-in to make sure matches are meeting	Check-in to make sure matches are meeting
	Help mentors build a relationship	Helping mentors and youth navigate change in relationship
	Help mentors persist (feel like they are making a difference, etc)	
	Help mentors build productive relationships with mentee's family	Help mentors build productive relationships with mentee's family

Limitations

- Small, observational study
- Retrospective
- Not a test or evaluation of YIM
- Only talked with people who were matched and who agreed to participate

Potential YIM Difference

- Youth voice and choice
- Trust
- Mentor engagement and commitment
- Aligns programs, parents, mentors and youth on the “same team”



Thank you!

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