

RESEARCH INSIGHTS FOR PRACTITIONERS

*An NMRC E-Newsletter Focused on Mentoring Research
and Research-Informed Tools for Program Improvement*

Welcome! This edition of the National Mentoring Research Center E-Newsletter is a special issue (one of four planned this year) focusing on mentoring research, the work of the NMRC Research Board, and emerging knowledge that can help you plan and implement more effective mentoring services for youth. In this issue, we:

- Highlight the findings from a major new evaluation of leading service provider (and OJJDP grantee!) Big Brothers Big Sisters”
- Summarize some great new research articles produced by the members of our NMRC Research Board, and
- Offer information about a few new NMRC publications that you may have overlooked

One of the other things we'd like to do in these special issues each quarter is answer a question from the field about mentoring research. This can be about the impact of mentoring, what research says about effective mentoring strategies, issues of program design or evaluation, or anything else where you'd like to have the greatest collection of mentoring scholars in our field answer what's on your mind!

If you have a question you'd like to submit for the next issue, please write to mgarringer@mentoring.org and we'll answer a few user-submitted questions next time.

Thanks for reading and look for more research-focused newsletters, in addition to our usual NMRC updates, in the year ahead!

- Mike Garringer, Director of Research and Evaluation at MENTOR



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Disclaimer: The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this presentation are those of the author/s and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.

FEATURED READING

Can One Person *Really* Make a Difference? New Findings on the Effectiveness of One-to-One Mentoring for Disadvantaged Youth

David DuBois, PhD – Chair of the NMRC Research Board

Carla Herrera, PhD – NMRC Research Board Member

The field of youth mentoring has long benefitted from an active research arm. Indeed, few would argue with the premise that the remarkable growth in the number and reach of mentoring programs directed toward disadvantaged youth in the U.S. over the past few decades is in some good measure attributable to the boost that the field received from the encouraging findings of Public/Private Venture's (P/PV's) seminal study of the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) Community-Based Mentoring (CBM) program. Released in the 1990's when the value proposition for investing in social programs for youth was being viewed with skepticism by many in the political and policy spheres, the results of the P/PV study were a welcome tonic to those who remained believers in their promise.¹

With a fair degree of consistency, subsequent studies have yielded findings in support of the field's foundational premise that the programmatically orchestrated pairing of a young person with a caring adult previously unknown to them — a “stranger,” to borrow the terminology of Marc Freedman's classic inspirational treatise² — can give rise to a relationship that makes a meaningful, potentially even transformative, difference in the life of a developing young person. Yet, with few exceptions, these studies have been carried out with “convenience” samples of relatively small numbers of youth participating in a locally situated mentoring program, thus leaving the generalizability of results and the viability of achieving impacts “at scale” as increasingly pressing and unanswered questions for the field. It also has become commonplace for programs to combine mentoring with other supports and activities, such as skill-building curricula or summer employment opportunities. There are promising indications that some of these programs can be effective when delivered at scale (e.g., the [National Guard Youth Challenge Program](#)). Yet, because of their multi-faceted nature, the role of mentoring in accounting for any observed benefits for participating youth is largely not discernable, even in the most rigorous evaluations.

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But, what about those P/PV study findings? As powerful as these were, they also have become concerningly dated. Serious questions thus can be raised about their applicability to contemporary youth. Consider, for starters, that the racial and ethnic diversity of youth in the U.S. is notably greater today than it was in the 1990s.ⁱⁱⁱ With the rise of the internet and the introduction of technology such as the smartphone, the allure of screen time, moreover, has become a highly formidable competitor to those seeking to forge in-person connections with youth. The intervening decades have also been marked by efforts to enhance the reach, efficiency, and equity of mentoring programs — these include, for example, initiatives within organizations such as BBBSA to expand access for various groups of vulnerable youth (e.g., those whose families have been impacted by parental incarceration). Such programmatic developments, while laudable, bring with them uncertain implications for previously observed levels of effectiveness.

With these considerations in mind, we embarked several years ago on an update of the landmark P/PV study. With the benefit of support from Arnold Ventures (Laura and John Arnold Foundation at the time of initial funding) and strong partnerships with BBBSA leadership and more than 15 of its affiliated agencies, we were able to enroll more than 1,300 youth ages 10 and older in our study over a two-year period. Three-quarters were randomly selected to be immediately eligible for matching with a BBBS mentor. The remaining youth were eligible for matching at the conclusion of their study participation four years later while retaining access to programming and activities that many agencies provide for those on their waitlists. Having now collected and analyzed data from youth and their parents/caregivers at an 18-month follow-up, we recently released an [interim report of study results](#). The findings are, in a word, encouraging. They are also remarkably similar to, and thus replicate, findings of the earlier P/PV study.



As in the original report of that research, our current results are based on “intent-to-treat” analyses — that is, we compare outcomes across the “treatment” (immediately eligible for matching with a mentor)

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and “control” groups and do so for all youth, including the approximately one-third of youth (35%) in the treatment group who had not been matched with a BBBS mentor. We find statistically significant differences favoring the treatment group on two of our four primary hypothesized outcomes:^{IV} arrest (4.9% and 10.7% of the treatment and control groups, respectively, were indicated by youth- or parent-report to have had an arrest in the 18-month follow-up period) and substance use (reported by 10.1% vs. 17.2% of youth in the treatment and control groups, respectively, during the 18-month follow-up period). The latter result closely parallels findings from the P/PV study that indicated reduced likelihoods of initiating alcohol and illicit drug use among those in the treatment group at the 18-month follow-up. We did not find statistically significant effects on the other two primary hypothesized outcomes, property- and violence-related delinquent behavior. As hypothesized, statistically significant differences favoring the treatment group also were found on measures of a variety of other outcomes as reported by youth and/or their parents, specifically aggressive behavior, self-control, social skills, grit, self-advocacy, hopeful future expectations, parental use of inconsistent discipline, family functioning, school engagement, and college exploration.

Some of these, such as aggressive behavior and family functioning, align with findings from the P/PV study in which results included lower reports of fighting and better parent-child relationships for the treatment group. Others, such as grit and self-advocacy, lack counterparts in the earlier research and thus broaden the scope of demonstrated areas of impact for the program. Significant group differences were not evident for a good number of other outcomes, such as self-esteem, grades in school, and school misbehavior. Still, we see the overall picture that emerges from these interim findings as one that supports the effectiveness of one-to-one mentoring as provided through the BBBS CBM program for promoting positive development and resilience among participating youth. The extent of alignment with the P/PV study findings, generational and programmatic differences notwithstanding, also gives us added confidence that one-to-one mentoring arranged and supported through a program like BBBS CBM can, at least over the near-term, make a meaningful difference in a young person’s life.

Looking ahead, there is more to come in our research. We are the process of collecting official records of arrest, for example, which represent our ultimate metric for this outcome. As would be expected, we are also collecting additional outcomes data from youth and their parents at the 4-year end-point of their study participation. These data will provide a valuable, opportunity to rigorously gauge effects of the BBBS program over a time frame that (for most) encompasses the full duration or “dose” of

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mentoring that is received through the program. With a good portion of our sample now well into their teen years, this assessment is also enabling us to examine potential program benefits in additional important areas such as post-secondary education and self-harm behavior. In addition, we will assess how the COVID pandemic may be affecting program benefits. For just over half the youth in our study, their 18-month follow-up survey took place after the start of the pandemic. Such intersections with the pandemic are noteworthy for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that in-person meetings between mentors and youth were not an option during the height of the pandemic. We look forward to providing further updates as these and other new results become available.

You can find the full interim report at:

https://indigo.uic.edu/articles/report/Randomized_Controlled_Trial_of_the_Effects_of_the_Big_Brothers_Big_Sisters_Community-Based_Mentoring_Program_on_Crime_and_Delinquency_Interim_Report_of_Findings/20767438

ⁱ “Big government, Big Brothers” (1995, December 25). *The New Republic*, 7.

ⁱⁱ “The Kindness of Strangers: Adult Mentors, Urban Youth, and the New Voluntarism,” authored by Marc Freedman, was published in 1999 by Cambridge University Press.

ⁱⁱⁱ Reflecting this demographic trend, 43% of youth in the P/PV study were reported as being White, whereas in our study (described later in this article) the corresponding percentage is only 24%.

^{iv} The outcomes selected as primary reflect the aim of the initiative through which the study received funding, which sought to build rigorous evidence about approaches for improving “public safety and other important criminal justice outcomes.”

NEW RESEARCH OF INTEREST

Each quarter in this space, we'll highlight new(ish) research articles that might be of interest to those of you planning, running, and evaluating mentoring programs. Where these articles are publicly available, we have provided a link. For those that are not, you can likely get them through the journal collections of your local public library or any academic library you have access to. In most cases, article authors are also able to share single copies with folks who contact them. Please reach out to the NMRC if you have questions about how to access one of the articles mentioned below. NMRC Research Board members are noted in bold text and Associate Board members are noted in bold italics.

All Things Considered: Examining Mentoring Relationships Between White Mentors and Black Youth in Community-Based Youth Mentoring Programs

by **Kristian Jones**, Ruben Parra-Cardona, **Bernadette Sánchez**, Shetal Vohra-Gupta, and Cynthia Franklin

This study examines how White mentors address topics acknowledging ethnic/racial identity and issues centered around social justice and recognize their own privileges when mentoring Black youth in community-based youth mentoring programs. Findings reveal that some mentors felt uncomfortable discussing issues centered around race and others do not think it is relevant at all. Further, findings suggest that mentoring Black youth can significantly impact mentors' perceived awareness of social issues and acknowledgment of privileges they hold.

Relevance for practitioners: This is a wonderful piece of research on a very complex topic and will be helpful to any mentoring program looking to better understand the racial dynamics within mentoring relationships and better prepare volunteers and youth for their cross-cultural exchanges.

Available at: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/36407718/>

One of These Things Is Not Like the Other: Predictors of Core and Capital Mentoring in Adolescence

by **Grace Gowdy**, Veronica Fruiht, Helen Tadese, and March Rivera

Informal mentoring has many demonstrated impacts on young people, including increased educational attainment, economic mobility, and both physical and mental health. Emerging work on a typology within informal mentoring suggests that “core” mentors are often extended family members and

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provide emotional support, while “capital” mentors are connected to formal institutions and provide valued advice and social capital. The present paper contributes to this emerging body of work by examining which qualities of a young person and their environment may lead to core versus capital mentoring using a nationally representative sample of youth (N = 4226). Findings demonstrate the importance of racial and ethnic identity and socioeconomic status.

Relevance for practitioners: We have known for years that mentoring relationships are not equally distributed across race and class lines and that lower-income and BIPOC youth can experience not only fewer mentors, but also mentors who lack certain types of social capital. This study unpacks many complex intersections of community, extended family and kin, and non-familial mentors and suggests that mentoring practitioners should deeply understand the gaps in a youth’s social capital that can be filled best by volunteer mentors. A must read for anyone looking to use program mentors to supplement the webs of support mentees already bring to the program.

Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdf/10.1002/ajcp.12627>

Everyday Acts of Resistance: Mexican, Undocumented Immigrant Children and Adolescents Navigating Oppression with Mentor Support

by **Bernadette Sánchez**, Yesenia Garcia-Murillo, **Lidia Y. Monjaras-Gaytan**, Kay Thursby, Grevelin Ulerio, **Wendy de los Reyes**, Ida R. Salusky, and Claudio S. Rivera

This study examined oppression in education among Mexican immigrant youth with undocumented status and how mentors and other adults helped them resist oppression. Analyses revealed critical junctures in which participants experienced oppression: (1) developmental milestones and school events, (2) college application process, (3) unforeseen life events, and (4) incidents of racial discrimination. Mentors and other adults helped participants to resist oppression through advocacy, social capital efforts, role modeling, and emotional, instrumental, and financial support. Often extended family members and provide emotional support, while “capital” mentors are connected to formal institutions and provide valued advice and social capital. The present paper contributes to this emerging body of work by examining which qualities of a young person and their environment may lead to core versus capital mentoring using a nationally representative sample of youth (N = 4226). Findings demonstrate the importance of racial and ethnic identity and socioeconomic status.

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Relevance for practitioners: Increasingly our field is focused on providing mentoring to the most vulnerable and those who might benefit the most from mentoring in the face hardships. Certainly, there is no group of young people in our country more vulnerable than undocumented youth trying to navigate life in America. This groundbreaking study brings the voices of the young people to the forefront and offers practitioners valuable information about how mentors can step up and support youth facing considerable obstacles. There are also lessons here for all mentors on how they can advocate for and support any youth experiencing marginalization.

Available at: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/jora.12755>

Are Adults Influenced by The Experience of Mentoring Youth? A Scoping Review

by Lisa McGarrie, Emily Heberlein, Eric Napierala, Brittany Jean Taylor, Carrie Oliver, and Angela Snyder

This research examined youth outcomes from an enhanced mentoring approach for urban Boys and Girls Clubs (BGC) in the Southeastern United States delivered by paid staff who serve as mentors through group activities and 1:1 interactions with youth. The study found that this model had a significant relationship with youth retention, with those mentored being almost twice as likely to return the following program year. Mentored youth also experienced higher expectations from staff and were less likely to be involved in a physical fight with peers.

Relevance for practitioners: Many in the mentoring field have wondered about the practicality and effectiveness of using paid staff to mentor youth in a multi-faceted youth development context. This study points to some important benefits from supporting staff to build meaningful relationships. Those relationships appeared to be critical in boosting program engagement and attendance. Programs emphasizing very frequent, regular connections with youth should examine this study and glean practices that might enhance their mentee engagement (whether mentors are compensated or not).

Available at: <https://jyd.pitt.edu/ojs/jyd/article/view/22-17-3-RES-03/1512>

RECENT RESEARCH BOARD PUBLICATIONS AND TOOLS

- **New Resource on Youth Participatory Action Research**

Research Board member Amy Anderson, with Associate Board members Wendy de los Reyes Moore and Lidia Y. Monjaras-Gaytan, provide an excellent introduction to the world of youth-led participatory action research (YPAR) in this 6-page primer. This approach represents a major opportunity for elevating youth voices in mentoring programs to create positive change. As mentoring programs aim to develop more equitable practices and contribute to societal change, it is imperative for youth to take the lead because they are the most impacted by conditions of societal inequality and are therefore best positioned to identify solutions. This primer examines basic principles, alongside tips for practitioners and a good selection of additional reading and resources.

Available at: <https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/NMRC-YPAR-Brief-Primer.pdf>

- **New Measurement Guidance Toolkit Updates focus on Measures of Program Quality**

The multi-faceted concept of program quality encompasses the extent to which appropriate practices are in place to support such areas of activity, whether they are being implemented as intended, and, importantly, the degree to which they are experienced as helpful by youth, parents, mentors, and others to whom they are directed. This section of the Measurement Guidance Toolkit provides relatively brief and easily accessible tools that programs can use to assess the quality of their practices and service delivery.

Available at: <https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/resource/measurement-guidance-toolkit/#measures-of-program-quality>

- **The Effects of Law-Enforcement Mentoring on Youth: A Scoping Review**

This brief scoping review by the NMRC's Kelly Stewart provides an overview of current research findings relating to law enforcement mentoring of youth. While not a systematic review of all available research, the findings present the current landscape of the types of programs that have been studied, the goals of such programs, and the evidence of their effectiveness for achieving intended outcomes. The review begins with a brief history and theoretical justification for engaging law enforcement (e.g., police) as mentors. Next, an overview of the review scope and

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literature search strategy is provided, along with a summary of findings of identified studies and consideration of their limitations. The final sections provide conclusions as well as recommendations for practice and research.

Available at: <https://nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/NMRC-Law-Enforcement-Mentoring-Review.pdf>

