

## SUPPLEMENT ARTICLE

# Mentoring Programs for Adolescents: A Research Summary

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**Abstract:** This summary reviews the research conducted on youth mentoring programs from the mid-1980s through the late 1990s. A number of studies have documented the varied benefits youth derive through participation in programmatic mentoring ranging from improved relationships to a reduction in the initiation of drug and alcohol use. Not all mentors or mentoring programs, however, are equally effective. Strategies that mentors use to foster the development of positive relationships and effective program practices, related to screening, training, and ongoing support are also discussed. Finally, some questions that remain to be addressed by the mentoring field are presented. © *Society for Adolescent Medicine*, 2002

**KEY WORDS:**

Adolescents  
Mentoring  
Youth development

In 1983, lamenting the lack of caring, mature adults in the lives of many young people, Margaret Mahoney, then president of the Commonwealth Fund, called for a “renaissance of mentoring.” She suggested that the “absence of traditional family and community linkages to bring younger people together with older ones means that our society must find a new strategy to create these linkages” [1]. In the 15 years since that exhortation, numerous indi-

viduals and programs have sought to do just that: The number of programs offering mentors to disadvantaged youth has grown astronomically.

Although mentoring as a concept can be traced back to the ancient Greeks [2] and the use of mentors in the development of young professionals is a longstanding practice, providing at-risk adolescents with mentors who could help them develop as individuals is a relatively new practice. The growth of mentoring in this context has been accompanied by a host of questions. Could unrelated adults really make a difference in the lives of these youth? What would these relationships look like: Would they mirror natural mentoring relationships that develop spontaneously? What could and should programs do to facilitate the development of successful and effective relationships? How many youth could benefit from having a mentor? Are there enough adults willing to volunteer to meet the need?

To address these and other questions, researchers have studied a wide range of mentoring programs over the past 15 years. Many have attempted to document the benefits that youth derive from participation in programmatically developed mentoring relationships. Others have focused on the nature of mentoring relationships and the practices of effective mentors, compared with those who are less successful. And much attention has been paid to defining best practices for programs, the structures and supports necessary to ensure quality mentoring. This paper presents a summary of what we have learned to date. Although the paper draws heavily on Public/Private Venture’s (P/PV) research, synthesized by Sipe [3], it expands on that work by including findings reported by numerous other researchers.

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### *What Impact Does Mentoring Have on Youth?*

Since the growth of mentoring programs for disadvantaged youth began in the early 1980s, a number of studies have been conducted to determine the benefits to youth of participation in such programs. As a result, the field has gradually been building a body of evidence that programmatic mentoring can have a number of positive benefits for youth.

Research on the impact of mentoring has been conducted on programs with various target populations: Project RAISE [4], Across Ages [5], and TeamWorks [6] all serve middle school students; Career Beginnings [7] and Sponsor-A-Scholar (SAS) [8] target high school students; and Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) serves youth aged 5 through 18 years, although the impact evaluation of BBBS focused on youth aged 10 through 15 years [9]. These programs also represent a range of program goals; many, including Project RAISE, Career Beginnings, SAS, and TeamWorks, hope to improve academic outcomes, ranging from improved attendance and grades to increased rates of college enrollment. Across Ages is a substance abuse prevention program; and individual mentoring pairs in BBBS develop goals tailored to the specific needs of each youth, including improved academic outcomes, better relationships with family and friends, and prevention or reduction of antisocial activities (such as substance use and delinquent behavior). Program structures also vary: BBBS is a one-on-one mentoring only program; TeamWorks is the only group or team mentoring program included in this review; the remaining programs all include one-on-one mentoring as one component of a larger program.

The evaluation designs also vary across this set of studies. The BBBS and Career Beginnings evaluations randomly assigned eligible youth to treatment and control groups and compared outcomes for these two groups over time. The Across Ages evaluation randomly assigned classes to one of three groups: a control group that received no intervention, a treatment group that participated in a drug prevention program but had no mentoring, and a treatment group that participated in the same drug prevention program plus one-on-one mentoring. The SAS evaluation used a carefully implemented matched comparison group strategy. Other studies developed comparison groups using less rigorous methods.

A review of the findings from all these studies suggests that mentoring does have important bene-

fits for the youth who participate in these programs. The BBBS evaluation [9] provides the most conclusive and wide-ranging evidence that one-on-one mentoring alone can make a difference in the lives of youth. During the study period, Little Brothers and Little Sisters were 46% less likely than their control group counterparts to initiate drug use and 27% less likely to initiate alcohol use. They were less likely to hit someone, and they skipped only half as many days of school as control youth. The participating youth felt more competent about their ability to do well in school and received slightly higher grades by the end of the study. They also reported more positive relationships with their friends and parents. These results were sustained for both boys and girls and across races.

The Career Beginnings [7] and SAS [8] evaluations both addressed the effectiveness of broader, academically oriented programs that include one-on-one mentoring as one component among a range of services offered to high school students, including academic support; assistance with college applications; and, in the case of SAS, financial support for college expenses. Students participating in SAS improved their academic performance. They earned higher grade point averages in 10th and 11th (but not 12th) grades than students in the comparison group, and they were more likely to participate in college preparatory activities. Participants in both programs were more likely to attend college during the first year following high school graduation than nonparticipants. In addition, length of stay in college increased for Career Beginnings students.

Across Ages [5] is a substance abuse prevention program that targets sixth-grade students. The program combines community service, a life-skills curriculum, and parent workshops with one-on-one mentoring by older adults. The evaluation compared outcomes for students who participated in all components of the program with those who had all the components except mentoring and with students who did not participate in any aspects of the program. The students who had mentors had better attitudes toward school, the future, and elders than did youth in the other two groups. These youth also used substances less frequently and had somewhat better school attendance than did youth who did not participate in the program.

The evaluation of Project RAISE [4] found that program participants (middle school youth) have somewhat better grades and attendance than youth not involved with the program. Although the evaluation design makes it difficult to isolate the effects of

mentoring, the researchers concluded that the results suggest mentoring is an important component of the program: The three programs studied with weak mentoring components showed no effects, and two with strong mentoring showed significant positive results.

TeamWorks [6] is a group mentoring program in which a team of three adults (a classroom teacher, college student, and community adult) are assigned to work with a group of 10 middle school youth. The evaluation, which used a comparison group strategy, found that participants had better attitudes toward school, their family, and their community. Participants also had better school attendance than comparison students.

Finally, Brown [10] cited findings from several studies that suggest positive effects of mentoring for students.<sup>a</sup> Brown [11] found that Toronto students participating in the Change Your Future Program had lower dropout rates and higher credit accumulation than comparable students. Slicker and Palmer [12] compared results for 10th-grade students who were "effectively" mentored with results for those who were "ineffectively" mentored relative to a control group who received no mentoring. The students who were effectively mentored experienced higher academic achievement relative to control group youth, but ineffectively mentored students showed a decline in academic achievement.

Taken together, the results of these evaluations provide clear evidence that involvement in programatically created relationships with unrelated adults can yield a wide range of tangible benefits for youth. What this research does not indicate, however, is that any mentoring relationship or program will produce these results. In addition to the findings reported by Slicker and Palmer regarding effectively mentored students, LoSciuto et al. [5] found that students who were highly involved with their mentors had better school attendance than youth who were less involved with their mentors. McPartland and Nettles [4] reported that programs with poorly implemented mentoring components were less likely to produce benefits for their participants. And P/PV's research on mentoring programs that are less structured than BBBS found that mentors in such programs are typically less prepared and less successful [3]. Further studies are needed to help develop benchmarks that can be used to judge whether programs have

sufficient structure in place to optimize the development of successful relationships and therefore increase the likelihood of producing benefits for youth.

### *Making Relationships Work*

A number of studies have looked at mentoring relationships to better understand why some matches are successful and others are not [13–16]. In particular, what can mentors themselves do to ensure that a relationship is more likely to succeed? The findings across studies are fairly consistent regarding practices of effective mentors, compared with less successful ones.

The key to creating effective mentoring relationships lies in the development of trust between two strangers [3,16]. Volunteers typically come to mentoring programs because they want to help disadvantaged youth. Without establishing trust, however, mentors can never truly support the youth with whom they interact. Learning to trust, especially for youth who have been let down before, requires time; youth cannot be expected to trust their mentor simply because program staff have put the two individuals together. Establishing communication and developing a relationship can often be a difficult process [8]. Mentors who follow a gradual path in trust-building with these youth find that the types of support they can offer, and that will be accepted, broaden considerably once trust has been established.

The most critical factor in determining whether matches develop into satisfying and effective relationships characterized by high levels of trust is the approach of the mentor. Mentors who focus first on building trust and becoming friends to their youth tend to be more effective than those who are overly goal-oriented and who immediately try to change or reform their mentees. Adults whose attention is concentrated on reforming youth are often frustrated by youth's lack of receptivity. These volunteers make the mistake of pushing too hard and too quickly on youth's problems, pressing them to talk about sensitive issues before they are ready and ignoring youth's desire to help set the agenda for the pair's activities. Ironically, these mentors set themselves up to fail precisely because they are too focused on their specific agenda.

Volunteers who take the time to develop real relationships with youth are much more likely to promote the changes that the other, more goal-focused volunteers pursue. Effective mentors are more likely to engage in the following practices:

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<sup>a</sup>The original sources have not been reviewed for this study. Thus, no information about either program implementation or the methodology of these evaluations is available.

- They make a commitment to being consistent and dependable, maintaining a steady presence in the youth's life. Almost every study reviewed [3,6,8,16] stresses the importance of the mentor's consistency and persistence for the development of a good relationship.
- They recognize that the relationship may be fairly one sided and take responsibility for keeping the relationship alive. P/PV's research [13,15] found that youth often test adults to determine whether they will actually stay around; successful mentors initiated contact and ensured that meetings were scheduled rather than waiting to hear from youth. Other research found that successful mentors exhibited an attitude of caring and wanting to do more for those mentored [16].
- They respect the youth's viewpoint. Effective mentors are open and flexible; they listen to what youth have to say and pay attention to what they think is important [3,16].
- They involve the youth in deciding how the pair will spend their time together. Whereas youth are often reticent to express what they want to do, successful mentors take the time to learn about the youth's interests and provide them with options for how to spend their time rather than planning everything without input from the youth [15].
- They pay attention to youths' need for fun. Not only is having fun a key part of relationship-building, but it also provides youth with valuable opportunities that are often precluded by their family situations [6,13,15,16].
- They tend to be better acquainted with the mentored's families. Nonsupportive parents can sabotage these programmatic relationships; successful mentors have found that it is helpful to meet and interact with the mentored's parents [8,16]. At the same time, mentors have to guard against overinvolvement with the family to the detriment of their relationship with the youth [15].
- Finally, successful mentors seek and utilize the help and advice of program staff. These mentors recognize that they do not have all the answers and value the support and guidance that program staff can provide [3].

Less effective mentors tend not to follow these practices. In contrast, these volunteers tend to do the following.

- They have difficulty meeting with youth on a regular and consistent basis, often demanding that youth play an equal role in initiating contact. Unsuccessful mentors often complain that their

youth did not call them to schedule meetings, or they themselves fail to show up for meetings when they said they would [8,13–16].

- They attempt to instill a set of values that may be different from, or inconsistent with, those to which the youth is exposed at home [15,16]. Although mentors often expose youth to new and different ideas, undermining the youth's family's values can be detrimental to both the relationship and to the youth's own development.
- They attempt to transform or reform the youth by setting too many tasks and adopting a parental or authoritative role in their interactions with the youth. The value of a mentor is often in being a supportive adult who is not a parent or teacher; adopting the posture of these authority figures undermines the development of trust between a mentor and youth [4,15,16].
- They emphasize behavior changes over developing mutual trust and respect in the relationship. Mentors cannot force youth to change; too much focus on what is wrong with a youth is more likely to turn the youth away from the mentor [3].

Adopting these ineffective strategies most often leads to dissatisfaction with the match on the part of both the youth and the mentor and results in premature termination. In a study of BBBS pairs, P/PV researchers found that more than 70% of the matches that included volunteers who took this approach met only sporadically and nearly 70% had ended between an initial interview and a second interview 9 months later. In contrast, for matches in which volunteers adopted the effective trust-building approach, more than 90% met on a regular and consistent basis and only 9% had ended at the time of the second interview [15].

Clearly volunteers' approach to the match is critical in determining the type of relationship that develops between the partners. Adults who become effective mentors most often see themselves as friends rather than teachers or parents and define their role as supporting the youth in a variety of ways. In contrast, less effective mentors approach the relationship with narrow, specific goals aimed at changing the youth's behavior. As some program operators put it, a mentor must be caring, steady, patient, realistic, resourceful, respectful, and resilient [17]. The key question for mentoring programs then is how to ensure that volunteers will approach a match with an eye toward building trust and establishing a friendship.

### *Effective Program Practices*

One of the strongest conclusions that can be drawn from the research on mentoring is the importance of providing mentors with support in their efforts to build trust and develop a positive relationship with youth. Volunteers and youth cannot be simply matched together and left to their own devices; programs need to provide an infrastructure that fosters the development of effective relationships [3].

Across the mentoring programs that have been evaluated, the extent to which they include standardized procedures in areas such as screening, orientation, training, matching practices, match supervision and support, and regular meeting times varies tremendously. Some programs include virtually none of these elements of program infrastructure, whereas others are highly structured. The research suggests that three areas are especially important in fostering the development of successful relationships: screening, orientation and training, and support and supervision.<sup>b</sup>

The screening process provides programs with an opportunity to select those adults who are most likely to be successful as mentors by looking for individuals who already understand that a mentor's primary role is to develop a friendship with these youth. The process of developing a long-term, high-quality relationship begins with the selection of mentors from among the adults who present themselves as potential volunteers. Mentoring can be difficult and time consuming. Volunteer screening determines the adult's suitability, ensures the safety of the youth, and protects the reputation of the program [18]. Specific procedures that many mentoring programs use include interviewing the potential mentor, reviewing personal references, and checking police records.

Program staff members should review volunteers' commitments and discuss how they intend to fit their mentoring responsibilities into their overall schedules. "Mentoring not only requires commitment to a young person, [but] it also requires having consistent free time and the financial resources to support an active relationship" [16]. If the pair does not meet regularly, the potential for the adult to influence the youth can never be realized. In addition, inconsistency may damage a youth's ability to

trust. Individuals whose other commitments or lack of resources indicate they will have difficulty meeting with a youth on a consistent basis should be screened out.<sup>c</sup>

The screening process also can be useful in determining a potential mentor's approach to the match. Individuals who understand the importance of building trust and being a friend to the youth with whom they are matched are most likely to experience success in the relationship. Those who indicate they are interested in being a mentor to help transform a youth should probably be screened out of mentoring programs and steered toward programs with less emphasis on one-to-one relationships (e.g., tutoring programs).<sup>d</sup>

Having selected the best volunteers, programs need to ensure that these adults are prepared for their new roles as mentors by providing good orientation and training. Orientation and prematch training provide important opportunities to ensure that youth and mentors share a common understanding of their respective roles and to help mentors develop realistic expectations of what they can accomplish. The amount and focus of training provided varies widely across programs. Some programs offer minimal orientations focused on explaining program procedures and requirements. At the other extreme are programs that require several hours of training and include sessions on program rules, youth's background, theories of adolescent development, active listening skills, problems mentors typically encounter, and so forth.

Although research has not been able to document the optimal amount and content of training, there is general consensus that some training is critical. The issues that frequently develop in mentoring relationships suggest several topics that are appropriate to

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<sup>c</sup>These individuals may be useful to programs in other ways. Staff may be able to develop alternative roles that volunteers with less available time or limited resources may be able to fill. Programs may also want to consider offering mentors small stipends to offset the costs mentors tend to incur [15].

<sup>d</sup>Although we suggest that programs screen out individuals with these tendencies, it is possible that at least some individuals may be redirected in their efforts with appropriate training and support. By identifying volunteers' tendencies initially, programs may be better able to focus training attention on individuals with greater need. There is evidence that volunteers who are not oriented toward building the relationship are less likely to seek advice from case managers and less likely to heed that advice when given; this fact lends support to simply screening out these individuals from the beginning. Flaxman and colleagues [19] suggest that training be used as a further screening device, claiming that training "is unlikely to turn someone who is unsuitable for mentoring into a good mentor, but it can be used as part of the selection process to weed out those who are unfit."

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<sup>b</sup>Although matching is also an important factor in the success of mentoring relationships, as discussed below, programs have not yet developed objective criteria that can reliably predict whether specific pairings will develop into successful relationships.

cover in training. Training can equip volunteers with the information and strategies they need to maximize their chances of developing mutually satisfying relationships with youth. Toward this end, training should focus on the practices of effective mentors. Mentors with unrealistic expectations about what they can accomplish will inevitably become frustrated and disappointed when these expectations are not met. By encouraging mentors to approach the match with the goal in mind of simply developing a good relationship, program staff can help foster realistic expectations among mentors [3,16].

Training also can help mentors and youth alike to recognize their similarities and bridge their differences. Programs often recruit mentors who come from backgrounds that are quite different from those of the youth with whom they work. Training can create an awareness of these differences and better prepare mentors to work effectively with these youth [20]. Mentors themselves often indicate the need for more information about the youth with whom they will be working [13,16,21].

Finally, for programs in which mentors take on dual roles (e.g., when a youth's work supervisor is also his or her mentor), training can prepare the adult to shift between the two distinct roles. Similarly, in programs located within a large institution (e.g., juvenile detention center, hospital, school), mentors need an orientation to that institution and its rules and procedures [14,17].

Ongoing supervision and support of matches by staff are critical for ensuring that pairs both meet regularly over a substantial period and develop positive relationships. Programs in which professional staff provides regular support to volunteers are more likely to have matches that meet regularly and whose participants are satisfied with their relationships. Programs in which mentors are not contacted regularly by staff report the most failed matches, those that do not meet consistently and thus never develop into relationships. This is true across various types of programs: school-based programs [5,6,8], institution-based programs [14], and friendship-based programs [3].

In addition, mentors (and consequently youth) benefit tremendously from the support they receive from program staff. Most mentors experience considerable frustration, especially early in a match's life. Whereas training can prepare a mentor for some of the possible challenges ahead, ongoing support, either from professional staff or through mentor support groups, provides the moral support that mentors need to keep meeting with the youth and get

through the rough spots so that the match has a chance to develop, rather than dissolving prematurely [3,17,22]. Such support seems to be especially critical for mentors whose youth have greater personal, social, and financial problems [16].

Mentor support groups are helpful because volunteers can discuss their frustrations and problems with others who have faced similar challenges. The research suggests, however, that programs should not rely exclusively on this means of support because there is a danger of reinforcing unproductive strategies for coping with difficulties in the relationship. Professional staff can be instrumental in helping volunteers forge appropriate roles in their matches, fostering the development of positive and lasting relationships [3]. Some experienced and professional oversight is helpful and usually needed.

Although programs vary in the way they match youth with mentors, research on mentoring has not been able to isolate the best strategy for pairing mentors and youth. Some programs attempt to replicate natural mentoring by facilitating group activities and allowing participants to match themselves. Other programs go to extensive lengths to create matches in which youth and mentors share as many characteristics, both demographic and in attitudes and interests, as possible. But the failure rate of matches remains high in many programs. Research has consistently shown that the mentor's behavior is far more important to the success of the relationship than the manner in which the pair is matched [3,8].

None of the characteristics of mentors, such as age, race, or gender, that staff tend to take into account when making a match correlates strongly with frequency of meeting, length of match [18], satisfaction with mentor [20], or mentee outcomes [8]. However, matches that take into account both the youth's and the mentor's preferences (in terms of demographic characteristics, attitudes, and the activities in which they want to participate) are more likely to result in relationships that are satisfying to both members of the pair. Youth who perceive high levels of similarity (in terms of interests or personality, not demographics) with their mentors report greater liking and satisfaction with their mentors [20].

The majority of youth being served in mentoring programs are members of minority groups. Proponents of same-race matches stress the importance of providing a positive role model who is also minority, someone who may be pivotal in the development of these youth. At the same time, the majority of adults who volunteer to be mentors are white. Thus, the

efficacy of same-race, compared with cross-race, matches has been hotly debated in the mentoring field.

Several studies shed light on the relative effectiveness of same-race and cross-race matches. P/PV's examination of the frequency of meetings and longevity of relationships for both same-race and cross-race matches found no significant differences between these two types of matches [22]. And in-depth interviews with both youth and mentors in several programs suggest that cross-race matches are nearly as likely as same-race matches to form positive relationships [13,15]. Ensher and Murphy [20] found that youth in same-race relationships reported receiving more instrumental support but not more psychosocial support than youth assigned to different race mentors, and race did not affect the youth's satisfaction with their mentors. Their research stressed the importance of perceived similarity in youth's satisfaction and suggested that "if protégés find themselves to be similar to their mentors on some dimension other than race, they may be just as satisfied with mentors of a different race as with mentors of the same race."<sup>e</sup> Finally, analyses of BBBS matches uncovered no differences in outcomes for youth involved in same-race, compared with cross-race, relationships [9]. Although none of this research provides definitive evidence in and of itself, taken together the data suggest that cross-race matches are viable alternatives to same-race matches.

Philosophically, programs may prefer to make same-race matches. Furthermore, parents as well as youth often prefer a mentor of the same race. Given the importance to relationship-building of respecting participants' wishes, programs should continue to honor these preferences and make same-race matches whenever possible. At the same time, it is clear that youth who wait years for a same-race mentor who never appears cannot derive the benefits that a mentor, of any race, can provide. Mentors involved in cross-race matches may need more preparation and ongoing support, but these matches can be satisfying and rewarding [3].

Although the elements discussed above appear to be the most critical for maximizing the number of successful relationships, a number of programs have used additional strategies that may contribute to developing good relationships. Several programs

have found that establishing regular meeting schedules encourages pairs to meet on a regular basis [16,21]. For mentors with busy schedules, having a specific time and place to meet helps build this activity into their overall commitments. An evaluation of Bay Area mentoring programs found that mentors without sufficient funds to participate in common activities such as going to movies, bowling, renting videos, going out for breakfast or dinner, or attending baseball games were more likely to be inconsistent in meeting with youth [16]. Thus, some programs provide mentors with a small stipend to offset expenses [13]. Programs may want to publish a monthly calendar of low-cost events or solicit and distribute free tickets to sporting, cultural, and other events [16] as a way to reduce the cost of mentoring for the adult volunteers.

### *Mentor Recruitment*

How does a program find enough adults with flexible time and the emotional and financial resources to take on the demands of mentoring at-risk youth? Across programs, the youth desiring mentors nearly always outnumber the adults who volunteer their services; locating sufficient numbers of adults represents a major challenge for most programs [3,4,16].

The most effective strategy for recruitment seems to be word of mouth; many programs successfully use existing mentors to recruit their friends, family, coworkers, and acquaintances. Because of their personal contact with someone who is already mentoring, these volunteers usually have a good understanding of the commitment and persistence required to be a successful mentor. Although a number of programs have used mass media advertising as a recruitment strategy, media campaigns, especially television advertising, typically attract far more youth who want a mentor than adults who can realistically make a mentoring commitment.

Still, for programs to attract a diverse group of volunteers, it is important to employ a variety of recruitment strategies. Church-sponsored programs are often successful in recruiting members of their congregation as mentors [4]. Other programs have successfully used institutions such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the Retired Senior Volunteer Program [14] to recruit volunteers. This strategy gives a program access to populations they might not otherwise be able to recruit. Still other programs connect with local businesses and recruit their employees to be mentors.

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<sup>e</sup>These researchers suggest that the development of a scale that assesses psychosocial and instrumental needs, which could be used in the matching process by determining similarities, would be a useful contribution to the field.

Colleges also are often considered a fertile source of volunteers. Research shows, however, that the demands of college students' academic schedules often make it difficult for them to keep up with the demands of a mentoring relationship [21]. Programs need to use stringent screening procedures and conduct rigorous monitoring to ensure that students are willing and able to persist in the relationship.

With the renewed call for large numbers of mentors, the question of how many adults will come forward and whether the resources and practices necessary to have effective mentoring will be in place remains an important and complex issue. At least one researcher has concluded that the pool of capable mentors willing to spend substantial time is small, and thus the number of youth in need who can be affected by mentoring is also small [8]. The question of how large the pool of willing and able mentors actually is remains a critical issue that needs to be addressed more systematically.

### *Questions for Future Research*

Mentoring research over the past 15 years has generated important findings. First and foremost, the field now has definitive evidence of the positive benefits mentoring can produce for the youth being served by these programs. We have also learned that unrelated youth and adults can come together to form meaningful and satisfactory relationships but not without time and the right attitude. Not only does effective mentoring require effort on the part of the volunteers, but programs, too, must provide the time and resources to adequately screen, train, and support mentors. Although our knowledge and understanding of programmatically created mentoring relationships have increased over this period, several critical issues remain to be addressed.<sup>f</sup>

As a strategy for youth programming, mentoring is only as good as the relationships that develop. Many programs exist without sufficient infrastructure to ensure a quality mentoring experience. Programs need standards or benchmarks to guide the development and monitoring of quality programs and successful relationships. As researchers have begun to identify best practices and the characteris-

tics of effective mentoring, practitioners are learning how to assess their programs in these terms.

However, agreed-on standards that can be used for such assessment do not yet exist. To the extent that the field can develop a set of benchmarks, programs and their funders will be able to infer the likely impacts of their mentoring programs. Grossman and Johnson [23] have taken the first steps toward providing the field with standards that can be applied across program types. In particular, the authors present indicators related to a program's target population, measures of the quality of individual mentor/youth relationships, and outcomes that programs could use to assess their own effectiveness.

Various estimates of the number of youth who could benefit from a mentoring relationship exist. Regardless of whether that number is 5 million or 15 million, program operators and researchers alike agree that many more youth than are currently being served could benefit from having mentors. But the research to date has not been able to determine how many adults are willing and able to serve as mentors. At the same time, numerous communities have undertaken efforts to develop wide-scale programs, but none has yet been successful in reaching the goals.

Two research projects were recently undertaken to address issues of scale. First, the Commonwealth Fund commissioned a survey, the results of which were reported at the State and Future of Mentoring Symposium [24] to shed some light on the question of how many adults are currently mentoring youth, whether informally or as part of a formal program, and how many others would be willing to become mentors. Although this survey found that the number of adults (about one-third) who reported ever having mentored a young person was high, the small proportion (17%) of these relationships that occurred within the context of a formal mentoring program suggests that most adults may already be so involved in informal mentoring activities that they do not have the time or inclination to take on a programmatic mentoring relationship.

P/PV is currently engaged in a study of several large-scale mentoring efforts. This research is examining the question of how to operationalize such massive efforts. Will these efforts be successful in identifying and recruiting thousands of new volunteers? And what levels of staffing and resources are needed to recruit, train, and support a large cadre of volunteers?

The resource question itself remains a critical issue for the field. If current programs, and new undertakings, are successful in their efforts to recruit large

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<sup>f</sup>Most of these issues were identified in P/PV's synthesis of its mentoring research [3], published 2 years ago. In the interim, new research has been undertaken to begin to address these issues; findings from several of these studies were presented at The Commonwealth Fund-sponsored symposium *The State and Future of Mentoring*, June 1998.

numbers of new volunteers to meet the needs of youth, are there sufficient resources to train and support them? Current estimates of the cost of providing the infrastructure deemed essential for quality mentoring are limited. P/PV's research found that the average cost of maintaining a BBBS match for 1 year is about \$1000 [9]. The cost per student to operate the SAS program was about \$1500 in 1996 [8]. Most of the Hospital Youth Mentoring programs spend between \$2500 and \$3000 per student per year, although some spend as little as \$1000 per student, and one spends about \$10,000 per student [25].

These are all rough estimates of cost per youth derived by dividing total program budgets by the number of youth served. More precise estimates of costs are needed so that program operators and funders can better understand how many matches can be effectively supported by available resources and how that support may differ across different types of programs. The Lewin Group, with assistance from P/PV, recently surveyed a sample of mentoring programs about their program costs to begin to address the need for more precise estimates of costs and to better understand the main program components contributing to these costs. Fountain and Arbretton [26] presented the results of that research. Using data collected through a survey of 52 mentoring programs, they estimated the annual cost per youth. These programs varied in terms of the number of youth served, ranging from 5 to 2000, with an average of 192 currently matched. Although the average program spends \$1114 per youth per year, the range is wide, from \$12 to \$1900 annually per youth. The median expenditure is \$685 per youth annually. Fountain and Arbretton also presented information on off-budget costs, including the value of volunteer time and which program components are represented in mentoring program budgets.

Most of the research in this field has focused on one-on-one friendship-oriented or school-based academic-oriented mentoring models. Very little research has been conducted on programs in other settings, with other goals or other relationship structures. The drug prevention program, *Across Ages*, reviewed for this paper, however, provided evidence of mentoring's effectiveness in that context. Research on the Commonwealth Fund's Hospital Youth Mentoring Program [27] suggests that mentoring is also a viable vehicle for career exploration for older youth. The evaluation of *TeamWorks* reported on here is a rare example of an assessment of a group mentoring model. But more work is needed if we are to understand the full range of outcomes that mentoring can

affect as well as the limitations of this approach to serving disadvantaged adolescents.

In the wake of the positive effects that mentoring can have for youth, at a time when few youth programs have been able to report success, practitioners across the country are jumping on the mentoring bandwagon. But many of these programs are implementing mentoring models that have not been adequately researched. We do not yet know whether some of these alternative models, such as matching adults with groups (of varying sizes) of youth rather than one-on-one or short-term programs designed to impart specific skills, will result in the development of meaningful mentoring relationships characterized by the trust and support observed in long-term one-on-one programs. And not knowing whether relationships in these programs develop, we do not know whether they will produce benefits for youth similar to those we have observed in traditional mentoring programs. P/PV's current work for the U.S. Department of Education (in conjunction with the National Mentoring Partnership's Public Policy Council) is designed to explore the range of programs operating under the mentoring rubric and learn more about the types of relationships developing within them.

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