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Author(s): **Sharon Johnson**

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Project Research to Action in Mentoring

Grant Number: 2010-JU-FX-0114

Final Project Report

Sharon Johnson
Principal Investigator
University of Missouri-St. Louis

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Although there is a growing body of research and literature on youth mentoring programs and best practices, most of the research is based on the one-on-one mentoring model that focuses on the dyadic relationship between one adult and one youth. With the increasing awareness and understanding of mentoring as a successful intervention or prevention strategy for youth delinquency, the demand for mentoring programs is likewise increasing.

Many studies have acknowledged the need for youth mentoring programs to target their approaches in order to increase efficiency, effectiveness and heightened levels of positive outcomes (DuBois et al., 2002; Rhodes & Lowe, 2008; DuBois et al., 2006). Rhodes (2008) and Karcher et al. (2006) challenged researchers to compare methods of implementation and outcomes for different kinds of youth, analyze success and failure in different applications of mentoring, and effectively communicate these findings to the field.

Project Research to Action in Mentoring (Project RAM) was proposed as a collaborative effort between the University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL), Alliance for Families & Communities Affected by Incarceration (AFCAI) and Better Family Life (BFL) to examine group versus one-on-one mentoring in community-based agencies. AFCAI and BFL were selected due to their established community-based mentoring programs targeting at-risk youth. Both agencies agreed to undertake the research study by incorporating randomization and systematic programming into their existing mentoring approaches.

The short-term goals were to compare one-on-one mentoring to group mentoring to assess whether one is more effective as a prevention/intervention approach to reducing negative outcomes and to assess the differential impact of mentoring across levels of risk. The long-term goal was to examine whether observed effectiveness in group or one-on-one mentoring across levels of risk were sustainable post intervention.

METHODOLOGY

Design

Project RAM began October 1, 2010. The initial period of the grant was dedicated to start-up activities that were required to successfully implement the proposed research.

Start-up activities included meeting with the Mentoring Directors of both community agencies to solidify the research plan and ensure that all parties were clear on the expectations for each agency in providing research related services and how these services would differ from traditional agency-based programming.

Initial start-up activities also included applying for human subjects' certification from the Institutional Review Board at the University of Missouri-St. Louis (HSC Approval #101012J).

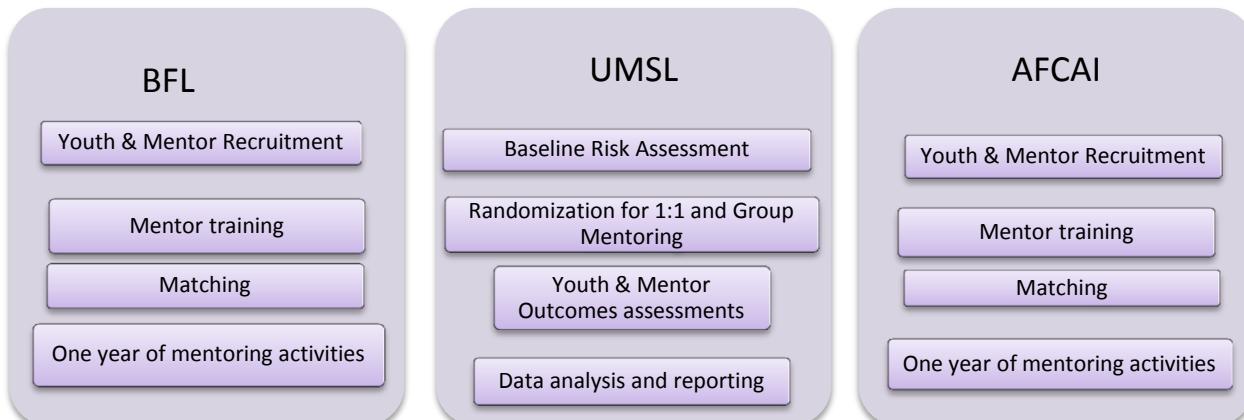
The project was staffed by 3 full-time coordinators, one for each agency (Mentor Coordinators) and one for the project (Project Coordinator). The Mentor Coordinator for each agency was responsible for youth recruitment, mentor recruitment and training, and mentor-youth matching.

The Project Coordinator was responsible for baseline and follow-up assessments, randomization, and overall project coordination.

Once all project staff was hired, meetings were held with the two designated collaborating agencies to develop and refine elements of the agencies' existing mentoring programs to align with each other and the goals of the research.

BFL did not have an existing group format for mentoring. The project worked with the agency to utilize evidence-based guidelines to establish a model that was similar to the existing model of AFCAI.

Summary of Proposed Design of the Collaborative



Mentoring Models

One-on-one mentoring was structured so that mentors were to: make a one-year commitment, spend a minimum of 6 hours per month with the youth; and, communicate weekly with the youth. Mentors were required to attend an initial two-hour training session and attend an additional training session each year.

Group mentoring followed the same protocol but involved one mentor matched with up to 4 youth. In addition, group mentoring also could involve larger group activities in which several mentors could coordinate activities across their group of mentees.

Each agency provided oversight of mentoring activities to maximize participation by youth and mentors. Structured activities and regular follow-ups with youth and mentors were attempted. As a tracking mechanism, the following protocol was developed:

- Mentors completed monthly logs of their activities with youth.
- Project Coordinator conducted 3 and 6 month brief phone assessments to determine relationship progression.
- The Mentor Coordinator contacted caregivers and mentees every two weeks within the first six months of the match and then monthly, thereafter to provide ongoing support to the mentor/mentee.
- Mentees and caregivers were notified of services and activities available to facilitate mentor/mentee contact on a monthly basis.
- Mentor Coordinators and the Project Coordinator provided a mechanism for mentor support and were available to help resolve mentor-youth challenges.

Sample

Youth

Youth were recruited for Project RAM utilizing the same recruitment mechanisms ACFAI and BFL currently had in place. After applications were completed by parent/guardians, the agencies provided a referral form to Project RAM. The Project Coordinator then contacted the family and scheduled the baseline assessment.

Youth and a consenting adult had to provide assent/ consent to be a part of the research design which included their willingness to complete assessments and actively participate in the mentoring relationship. The agency then forwarded a copy of the application and accompanying intake documents for each youth to the Project Coordinator.

After completion of the baseline assessment, the Project Coordinator randomly assigned youth to either group or one-on-one mentoring. The randomization process involved a simple first-in, first-assigned method. Assignments were then communicated back to the agencies so that matching with a mentor could take place.

The project targeted 180 youth who had to be between the ages of 12 and 17. It was anticipated that the three year project period would allow for the recruitment of 90 youth in

Year 1 and in Year 2 across both programs. Baseline and 12-month data were to be gathered from 180 youth with 18-month data collected from 90 youth. This targeted number was based on the numbers of youth that each agency reported serving in the year prior to Project RAM even though it was noted that both programs traditionally provided mentoring to a broader age range (4-17) of youth.

Project RAM received youth referrals on 173 youth. The referred youth were 98.8% African American and 51% male. The youth ranged in age from 11-18 being a mean age of 13.90 ($SD=1.646$). Youth were in grades 5th -12th at the time of referral.

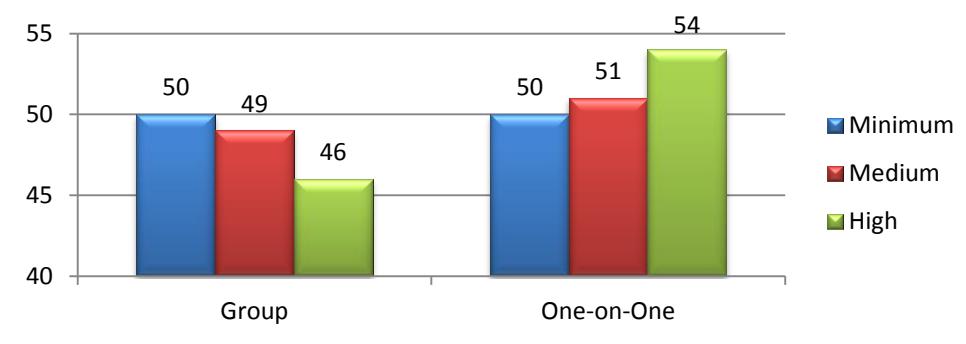
Baseline assessments were completed on 130 (75%) of the referred youth. Those youth not completing assessments did not meet project criteria (N=2); declined (N=6); or the project was unable to contact them based on information provided by the agencies.

The assessed youth were 99% African American and 46% male. The youth were a mean age of 13.89 ($SD=1.596$). Youth were in grades 5th -12th at the time of assessment. Socio-demographic levels of risk were as follows:

- 64% resided in single-parent households with their mother;
- 89% eligible for free or reduced lunch;
- 28% had an individual education plan;
- 52% of families received food stamps;
- 29% resided in public housing;
- 15% had an incarcerated family member with 75% of those being a parent;
- 10% were in foster care.

Youth were randomly assigned to either one-on-one or group. The final assignments were 51.5% one-on-one and 48.5% group. Youth were also stratified by risk into 3 problem behavior risk levels based on baseline assessments: 43% grouped as minimal risk; 30% grouped as medium risk; and 27% grouped as high risk.

The following represents how the risk levels were represented after randomization:



Mentors

Once potential mentors were recruited each agency maintained the criteria that they had in place to ensure that youth were matched with mentors who were qualified to be in this role. Mentors were screened to determine if they had the personal characteristics needed to be a mentor and if they could safely work with youth. Screening included child-abuse registry, reference, driving record, and criminal records checks. This process was initiated by each agency's human resources department.

Agency criteria included that the mentor: be at least 21 years old; reside in the St. Louis area; have an interest in working with young people; be willing to adhere to all program policies and procedures; complete the application and screening process; be dependable and consistent in meeting the time commitments; attend mentor trainings; be willing to communicate regularly with program staff; have access to an automobile, auto insurance and a good driving record; have no criminal history; not use illicit drugs or inappropriately use alcohol; and not currently be in treatment for substance abuse or for a mental disorder.

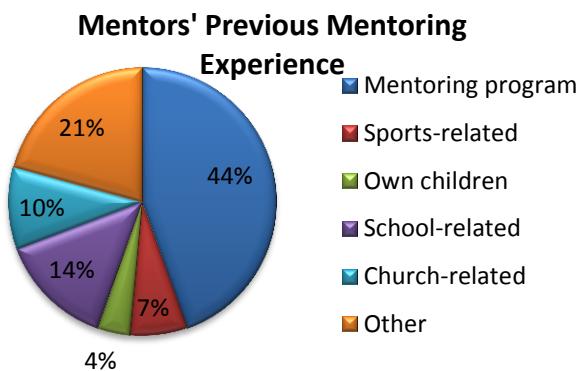
To ensure that Project RAM had enough mentors to provide both types of mentoring, it was estimated that 113 mentors were needed (90 for one-on-one and 23 for group). To reduce wait time for mentors, both agencies sought to have a mentor pool of 70 adults (140 total) who would be available to provide mentoring across the 3 year period of the project.

The resulting mentor pool for Project RAM included 145 adults. The mentors ranged in age from 21-72 years being a mean age of 37.21(SD=11.83). The mentor pool was 52% female and 48% male. The pool was predominately African American (96%). The majority (72%) of the mentors in the pool reported being employed at the time of their application.

Of the mentors recruited:

- 12% reported no previous experience
- 77% reported previous experience
- 11% did not provide a response

Of the mentors with previous experience (N=111), almost half had been involved in mentoring through an organized mentoring program. The other reports of experience included being a teacher, coach, or working with youth through their church.



Mentors provided the following reasons for why they wanted to become mentors:

- Wanting to give back
- Desire to make a difference in or impact the life of a youth
- Passion for working with youth
- Wanting to provide encouragement to youth
- Wanting to share their knowledge, wisdom, and life experiences with youth

Matching

The project targeted an average of 14 business days to complete mentor-youth matches after youth were randomized. To perform matches, the agencies used some common matching criteria including: the mentor/mentee personality and temperament; similar interests; special needs of the mentee that may be met by a particular mentor; geographic proximity; similarity of racial/ethnic/cultural/language background; and, gender.

There were a total of 139 matches across the 130 youth with baseline assessments. Fifty-two percent (N=68) of the youth had 1 match; 20% (N=26) had 2 matches; 4% (N=5) had 3-5 matches; and 24% (N=31) never received a match. Slightly more than half (55%) of those not matched were randomized to group.

At project's end, there were 40 active youth currently matched with a mentor with only 11 of those being assigned to group mentoring.

Measures

Performance measures were maintained and reported based on agency data. Youth's delinquent behaviors, school engagement and social support were assessed for short and long-term impact of the mentoring approaches. The following instruments were administered to youth at baseline and at follow-up:

- *Family Attachment and Changeability Index-8*. A 16-item instrument that measures family member's attachment to each other and how flexible the family members are in their relationships with each other (Cronbach's alpha range of .73-.80; McCubbin et al, 2001).
- *Social Support for Adolescents Scale*. A 21-item scale that measures instrumental & emotional social support & the respondent's satisfaction with the person being rated (Cronbach's alpha= .80; Cauce et al., 1982)
- *School Engagement Scale*. A 9-item scale that measures behavioral and emotional engagement of youth in educational settings (Fredericks et al., 2005).
- *Attitude towards Gangs*. A 9-item measure of attitudes toward gang involvement (Cronbach's alpha=.74; Nadel et al., 1996)
- *Problem Behavior Frequency Scale*. A 14-item measure of youth self-reported delinquency (Cronbach's alpha =.76; Multisite Violence Prevention Project, 2004) and inclusive of 6 items that measure self-reported use of alcohol, marijuana and cigarettes.

- *Youth Coping Index*. A 31-item measure of youth's spiritual and personal development, positive appraisal and problem-solving, and communication and tension management (Cronbach's alpha= .86; McCubbin, Thompson & Elver, 1995).
- *Likelihood of Violence and Delinquency*. A 9-item instrument that measures perceived likelihood of engaging in violence and other high risk behaviors (Cronbach's alpha = .89; Flewelling, Paschall & Ringwalt, 1993).
- *Individual and Protective Factors Index*. An 8-item instrument which measures a sense of support from an adult (Cronbach's alpha =.65; Gabriel, 1994).

In addition, the following instrument was administered to youth at each of the follow-up assessment points:

- *Quality of Mentor-Youth Relationship*. Assessed quality of the mentoring relationship from the youth's perspective and youth's emotional investment in the relationship (Grossman & Johnson, 1999).

Mentors also completed a short survey that asked questions regarding their interest in mentoring, their experience with the mentoring program, their opinions about the matching process, and their satisfaction with their mentoring performance.

IMPLEMENTATION ISSUES

Implementation issues occurred with the agency, youth, mentors, and with matching that affected the ability to answer the primary research question of the effectiveness of group versus individual mentoring.

- *Agency issues*

During the initial phases of the grant, the Alliance for Families and Communities Affected by Incarceration (AFCAI) was in the process of undergoing a name change and mission expansion. The newly named agency, Bridge Over Troubled Waters (BOTW), provided mentoring services to youth but focused on a broader population of youth besides those affected by incarceration. This mission change did not impact their involvement in this particular research activity but the agency did not begin to engage in any recruitment or mentoring activities for research purposes prior to December 31, 2010. Due to staff turnover, BOTW hired a new mentoring coordinator to focus on the goals of the project. The new coordinator was hired in mid-January of 2011.

After staff was in place, BOTW continued to be challenged recruiting and training mentors for the program and with subsequent matching of youth once they were interviewed and assigned to either group or one-on-one. Due to these constant staffing issues and the inability to recruit mentors, BOTW withdrew from providing mentoring services under the contract.

In response to the severance of the BOTW relationship, BFL agreed to enhance their program efforts to accommodate the mentoring program as proposed. This effort included providing mentoring services to youth who were recruited and assessed under the BOTW agreement

(N=20 of which only 9 were actually assessed). A second BFL staff person was hired to facilitate the added responsibilities.

At times, background checks were delayed as BFL was slow to process paperwork and this delay limited the project's ability to have the targeted pool of mentors available to be matched with youth once they completed baseline assessments.

- *Youth issues*

Due to standardization issues with many of the instruments proposed for administration, Project RAM only recruited those youth who were at least 12 years of age. This restricted age range required a more deliberate effort by both programs to identify youth for inclusion in the research. Thus, funding for enhanced recruitment (an additional mentor coordinator and associated costs of recruiting youth and mentors) was included for both agencies.

Though youth and their guardian had to agree to randomization once they completed assessments, some parents had concern with their youth being assigned to group mentoring.

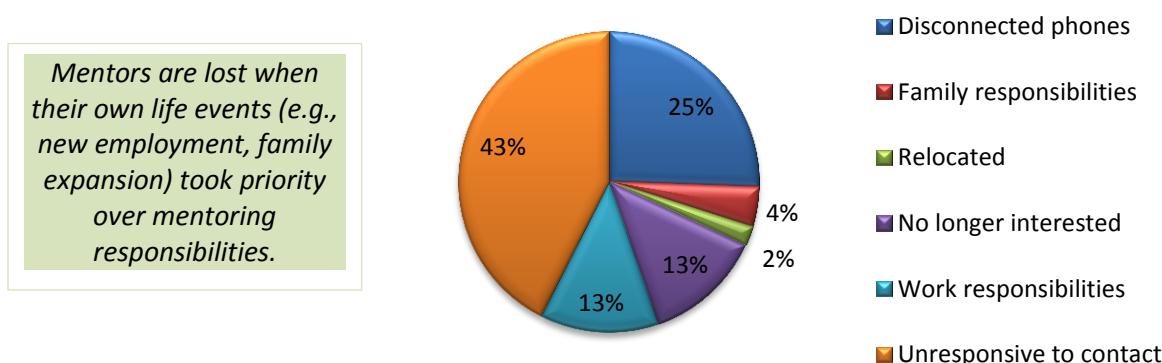
Youth were sometimes lost once the dynamics of their living situations changed and they became difficult to contact even though the project had multiple levels of contact information for each youth.

Communication was the most significant barrier and created a challenge for some mentors, agency staff, and research project staff. Specifically for mentors, communication was a concern as mentors had the expectation that youth should initiate some of the contact with them.

- *Mentor issues*

Some recruits were hesitant to complete required paperwork. Only those individuals who successfully passed the agency's screening process were placed in the mentor pool for potential matching with youth. Unfortunately, almost half (48%) of the mentor pool recruited became inactive throughout the course of the project.

Reasons for Inactive Status- Mentors



Mentor recruitment presented a significant challenge to the project. Male mentors were targeted as they represented the demographic that proved most difficult to retain.

Mentor training was another concern. Even though mentors were “required” to attend trainings, many mentors did not participate in the group sessions that were held. These mentors were still matched with youth if they were a good fit for the youth. Only 26% of mentors completing applications completed training.

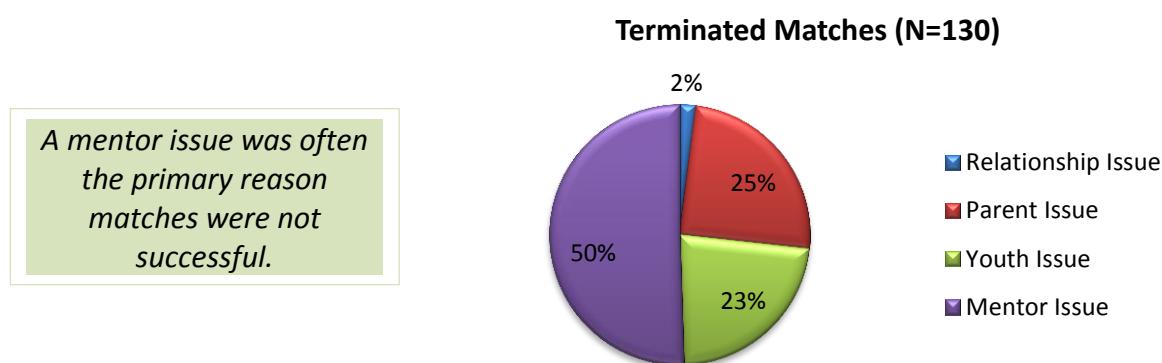
- *Matching issues*

Due to difficulties in recruiting mentors and delays in the background checks, the overwhelming majority of matches did not occur within the targeted 14 days. Once a potential match was identified, the mentor, caregiver and mentee were notified, and a structured, introductory home visit was scheduled. This introductory meeting could be delayed if the mentor had to reschedule or the family had a conflict.

Once matches were made, the project remained challenged in retaining mentors for the 1-year commitment to mentoring. This meant that youth who were interviewed and randomly assigned to group mentoring had longer waits as fewer mentors were interested in being a group mentor.

The group mentoring approach was challenged as mentors noted the difficulty in coordinating youth for group events. The group dynamic was not established and often the mentors who attempted to conduct group mentoring formed a relationship with the youth who was more open to forming a relationship and engaging with the mentor.

Another matching issue was determining how long to give mentors/youth to begin the process of meaningful engagement in the mentoring relationship. When it was determined that mentors were not meeting with youth, an intervention that included conversations with the mentor, parent and youth was conducted. When not successful, these interventions could prolong the unsuccessful match.



STRATEGIES IMPLEMENTED

The following strategies were implemented to address the issues encountered throughout the course of the project:

- In an effort to reduce the time between initial assessments and youth-mentor matches, we adjusted the scheduling of initial assessments of youth until mentors were recruited and had gone through screening and background checks.
- Throughout the 3-year project, BFL utilized aggressive recruitment strategies to attract adults who met the criteria for mentoring. The organization formed a partnership with a local career college and a middle school; they attended community cultural and sporting events (N=69); they also utilized participant databases from the agency's other community programs to identify potential mentors. Recruitment also consisted of newsprint advertisements within prominent African American based news outlets (e.g., *St. Louis American* newspaper).
- In order to address the training requirement, Mentor Coordinators expanded the individual mentor orientation that was provided to each mentor. The sessions placed emphasis on the detrimental aspect of not fulfilling the mentoring obligation, time commitment required for mentoring, expectations that youth will initiate contact, safety issues, and ideas for planning activities and contact with youth.
- To address the communication issue with families and youth, BFL held a “mandatory” family training to inform parents and youth of their responsibility to the mentoring relationship. While the training was positively received, only 5 youth who were active at the time had families represented at the family training.
- Mentor coordinators organized group activities including monthly game and movie nights, sporting event attendance, a kickball league, and a robotics tournament to facilitate the group mentoring process.
- Follow-up assessment of those youth who received an initial match but the match was not successful was postponed until youth have been consistently matched for a period of 6-months. The project expanded the 6-month brief phone assessment to an in-person interview. This approach helped test the shorter-term impact of group versus one-on-one when matches were not maintained for the targeted 12 months.
- To increase the moral of retained mentors, the project held a mentor appreciation event to recognize those mentors who were dedicated to the project and to providing mentoring to youth.

RESULTS

The following tables represent the final project totals, outputs and outcomes for the 3-year grant period.

Activity	Final Project Totals
Youth recruited/referred	173
Youth interviewed	130
Youth inactive	93
Mentors recruited	274
Mentors completing applications	153
Mentors retained	54
Mentors trained	40

Performance (Output) Measures			
Project Objectives	Measure	Deliverables	Status Report
Provide program support to AFCAI and BFL to sustain current mentoring program models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Youth w/ an evidence-based practice • Program mentors recruited • Mentors completing training 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biannual Progress Reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 76% of referred youth were exposed to evidence-based mentoring • 56% of mentors recruited completed an application • 26% of mentors completed the required training
Implement a quasi-experimental study that randomly assigns youth to one-on-one or group mentoring for one-year	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percent of youth randomly assigned • Percent of sustained matches • Percent of research-related deliverables 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biannual Progress Reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100% of youth assessed received random assignment • 31% of youth had a sustained match • 100% of biannual progress reports submitted
Conduct assessment of targeted outcomes at baseline, 12-month, 18-month follow-up	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percent of youth assessed at each time point 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biannual Progress Reports 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 17% 3-month • 16% 6-month • 12% 1-year • 8% 18-month
Implement an analytic plan to assess the effectiveness of mentoring approaches across levels of risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percent of deliverables that meet OJJDP's expectations for depth, breadth, scope and quality of study and pertinence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final Report • Research Reports (3) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Final report –current • Forthcoming Research Reports: 1) Successful mentor profiles; 2) Risk-level indicators of attitudes toward delinquency; 3) Pros and cons of group mentoring within a community setting.

Table 2: Performance (Outcomes) Measures

Project RAM Objective	Outcome Measure	Status Report
The project will provide program support to AFCAI and BFL to sustain current mentoring models.	• Percentage of mentoring programs with active members	50% of the contracted agencies had active program participants at the conclusion of the project
	• Program youth served	76% (n=99) of assessed youth were matched with at least 1 mentor
The project will implement a quasi-experimental study that randomly assigns youth to one-on-one or group mentoring.	• Youth completing program requirements	75% of referred youth were randomly assigned to group or one-on one mentoring
The project will conduct pre and post analyses of outcomes on measures of delinquency, school engagement and social support at baseline and 12-month.	• Youth who have a decrease in antisocial behavior	No significant change in youth's reported antisocial behaviors from baseline to 12-month follow-up nor by mentoring approach
	• Youth who have exhibited an increase in school engagement	No significant change in youth's school engagement from baseline to 12-month follow-up nor by mentoring approach
	• Youth who have an increase in adult social support	Overall youth did not differ on their levels of adult support, but youth in one-on-one reported significantly less adult support at 12-month than they did at baseline
The project will implement an analytic plan to assess the effectiveness of mentoring approaches across levels of risk.	• Youth who have decrease in antisocial behaviors based on levels of risk	Due to small numbers of youth who were matched for an extended period of time, no analyses were conducted to address this objective.
The project will conduct 18-month follow-up assessments of youth examining delinquency associated outcomes.	• Youth who have decrease in antisocial behavior	No significant change in youth's reported antisocial behavior from baseline to 18-month

GOAL ATTAINMENT SUMMARY

The overarching goal of the project was to help agencies maximize allocation of resources by providing evidence that targeted approaches to mentoring can have the greatest impact on youth outcomes. The dual purpose of the project was to produce evidence of mentoring type effectiveness and differences in mentoring effects across levels of risk within a community-based setting.

Goal 1: To assess differences in group mentoring compared to one-on-one mentoring on youth delinquency associated outcomes.

This was the primary goal of the research effort. While the data presented does not indicate any differences in one-on-one versus group outcomes, it is noted that sample N's were very small. The lack of difference could reflect this small N or it could reflect the implementation issue noted regarding youth in the group process. Those youth who completed assessments were likely those who participated in the process and essentially formed a one-on-one relationship with the group mentor.

While previous literature indicated promise in the use of group mentoring approaches, within this sample of youth and associated mentors, both one-on-one and group met with significant challenges although there was more success in maintaining mentoring relationships when the method was one-on-one.

Goal 2: To examine mentoring effectiveness across youth levels of risk

The project was successful in recruiting the targeted number of youth who represented varying levels of risk for negative outcomes based on their baseline self-reported problem behaviors. However, due to challenges with maintaining matches, the sample sizes across the mentoring types, stratified by 3 levels of risk, were not large enough to run analyses to test this goal of the research.

Goal 3: To explore differences in long-term outcomes for group versus one-on-one mentoring and levels of risk.

The purpose of this goal was to determine if any mentoring differences that were found at 12-month follow-up would be sustained at 18-months once youth were no longer matched with a mentor. Those youth who were assessed at 18-months did not differ in their scores from baseline to this time period so no significant changes occurred. Again, the sample size is too small to conduct analyses across mentoring type and levels of risk.

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