



OJJDP-FUNDED RESEARCH IN BRIEF

# Advocacy-based Mentoring Evaluation

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*Youth participants in an advocacy-based mentoring program had better academic and offending outcomes, especially when the mentor and youth engaged in playful activities later in the match.*

## Research Overview

Researchers with the University of Texas at San Antonio examined the effectiveness of the Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. (YAP) advocacy-based approach to mentoring. YAP provides a wraparound, nonresidential, community-based program for court-referred youth who are at immediate risk of residential placement due to violent offenses or repeat property offenses. The mentoring focuses on the youth and their mentors developing a trusting relationship and ensuring that youth satisfy their community service and court mandates.

This study examined processes and outcomes in the YAP program in four cities (Camden, NJ; Las Vegas, NV; Lebanon, PA; and Toledo, OH). The goal of the evaluation was to identify whether this type of mentoring and treatment approach could reduce delinquency and other risk behaviors and identify which program components appear to be key contributing factors to any changes.

## Research Findings

Participants in the YAP program demonstrated self-reported improvements in connectedness to school (i.e., how positively they feel about school and teachers, and how hard they work to be successful academically and to maintain teacher relationships) as corroborated by increased academic engagement (i.e. participation and interest in school), and greater pursuit of employment from program entry to discharge. Participants reported declines in misconduct and crime engagement both across the treatment period (at discharge from the program) and 12 months post-discharge.

Analyzing the moderators (specific treatment elements that appeared to influence the effect of the program), the authors found that the timing and type of interactions the mentor and youth engaged in best explained the reductions in youth misconduct.

Engaging in playful or recreational activities later in the match, after the relationship had formed, predicted reductions in misconduct (yet, playful interactions early in the match did not). Conversely, the authors also found that when mentors and youth engaged in casual and problem-focused discussions later (as opposed to earlier) in the match it predicted more misconduct.

Reductions in misconduct also related to specific mentor characteristics. Benefits appeared greater in matches with advocates/ mentors who had been teachers. The authors suggest this was because those matches spent more time learning about the youth (casual conversation and problem-focused discussions) earlier rather than later in their relationship. Larger reductions in misconduct also were found in matches with more educated mentors, except when those matches engaged in less play later in their relationship. These findings deserve additional study.

## Research Design

The study used a quasi-experimental design called a recurrent institutional cycle design, in which data from program graduates (i.e., the treatment group) were compared to pretreatment data collected from a different cohort prior to their participation in YAP. The authors conducted between treatment cohort, within-person, and other analyses to address statistical dependencies to minimize selection threats and rule out other validity threats.

Source: Karcher, M., Johnson, D. 2016. "Final Technical Report: An Evaluation of Advocacy-based Mentoring as a Treatment Intervention for Chronic Delinquency." Final report for the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, grant number 2011-JU-FX-0001. NCJ 250454, available at <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/ojjdp/grants/250454.pdf>

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## Policy/Practice Implications

The positive effects observed for the YAP approach on academic and offending outcomes suggest that this can be an effective intervention for court-involved youth who would otherwise be placed in juvenile residential facilities. Program benefits may be enhanced by aligning the training of mentors with their specific background characteristics and emphasizing the value of play and of strategically timed interactions.

### Resources

- **OJJDP.gov:**  
<https://www.ojjdp.gov/research/evaluation-of-an-advocacy-based-mentoring-program.html>
- **Youth Advocate Programs, Inc.:**  
<http://www.yapinc.org/>
- **University of Texas at San Antonio:**  
<http://www.utsa.edu/>