

MENTORING: AN INVESTMENT IN REDUCING YOUTH VIOLENCE

A CRITICAL NEED FOR REDUCING YOUTH VIOLENCE

Youth violence remains a critical challenge facing many American communities. In 2010, an average of 13 young people aged 10 - 24 years were victims of homicide **each day** and in 2013, more than 580,000 were treated in emergency rooms for nonfatal injuries sustained from assaults.¹ Homicide remains the third leading cause of death for young people ages 15 to 24² with a stark increase in rates for young people of color.

In addition to the pain and trauma experienced at the individual level, these numbers paint a picture of real lost economic and social potential for the United States. In addition to causing injury and loss of life, youth violence leads to increased health care, reduced productivity, reduced property values, and a disruption of social services.³ In 2010, the estimated costs of youth violence were \$17.5 billion, which includes an estimated \$9 billion in medical expenses and work loss due to homicide and \$8.5 billion in nonfatal medical and work loss assaults.⁴ Youth violence has a ripple effect that goes beyond the lives of the young people who experience it first-hand — it affects their families, peers, and members of their community. In fact, youth victimization increases one's odds of becoming a *perpetrator* of violent crimes,⁵ creating an endless cycle in far too many communities nationwide. Given the high prevalence of youth violence, and its burden on the government and society as a whole, the need to look at levers for reducing youth violence is more urgent than ever.

82.8%

THE PROPORTION OF HOMICIDE VICTIMS AGES 10 TO 24 YEARS OLD WHO ARE KILLED BY A FIREARM.

MENTORING AS A LEVER FOR REDUCING YOUTH VIOLENCE

Positive mentoring relationships can transform the trajectory of young peoples' lives by leading them away from violent and risky behavior and toward sustainable and productive opportunities. Mentoring — the pairing of a young person with a supportive non-parental adult or older peer — can significantly shape the successful path to adulthood. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention lists mentoring as one of four strategies that

“Virtually every aspect of human development is fundamentally shaped by interpersonal relationships. So it stands to reason that when close and caring relationships are placed at the center of a youth intervention, as is the case in mentoring programs, the conditions for healthy development are ripe.”

Dr. Jean Rhodes, Director, MENTOR/University of Massachusetts Boston Center for Evidence-Based Mentoring

holds the most promise for youth violence prevention. Primarily, this is because mentoring has a proven ability to decrease risk factors and enhance protective factors associated with reducing youth violence, such as staying engaged in school or displaying positive social behaviors.⁶ A meta-analysis of 73 independent evaluations of mentoring programs showed that mentoring improves a young person's behavioral, social, emotional, and academic outcomes simultaneously.⁷

By providing youth with the confidence, access to resources, and ongoing support they need to achieve their potential, mentors increase the likelihood of young people developing external and internal assets — skills, structures, relationships, values, and beliefs that promote healthy development and lead to future success. Programs that formally incorporate mentoring are often designed around specific goals, such as academic achievement, career preparation, and positive social behaviors. However, mentoring can also occur informally in youth programs or in other settings where young people receive guidance and support from an adult they engage with naturally, such as a teacher, basketball coach, or job supervisor. Different forms of mentoring have emerged in recent years: peer-to-peer, group, and online, all of which can be effective if implemented with evidence-based practices.

APPROACHES TO MENTORING

Developmental Mentoring

Promotes general healthy and positive development

Instrumental Mentoring

Emphasizes skill development and progress toward specific goals

While mentoring programs may emphasize one of these two approaches, most mentoring relationships by their very nature incorporate aspects of both approaches.

MENTORING: A CALL TO ACTION

This brief is meant to provide an overview of the state of youth violence in the United States and to illustrate the role mentoring can play in reducing its prevalence. Whether as a public/private investor, researcher, or program staff, we all have a role to play in investing resources strategically in a way that can improve the quality of, and access to, mentoring, while expanding our understanding of this approach.

Enhance Protective Factors

- High academic achievement
- Connectedness to family or adult outside family
- Commitment to school

Reduce Risk Factors

- Substance use or abuse
- Poor behavior control
- Poor academic achievement
- Low parental involvement
- Association with delinquent peers or gangs
- History of violent victimization or exposure to violence

A NEED TO INVEST IN MENTORING

Research indicates that the combination of individual, community, and societal risk and protective factors impact youth in their development (see graphic).⁸ Mentoring can be particularly effective because it simultaneously tackles the various complex factors that lead young people to violence in three important ways: reducing the impact of risky behavior, enhancing protective factors that promote positive development, and providing access to external supports.

“When young people are connected to caring adults, communities do well.”

Mark Edwards, Founder and Co-Chair,
Opportunity Nation

A. REDUCING THE IMPACT OF RISKY BEHAVIOR AND JUVENILE JUSTICE INVOLVEMENT

Mentors can play a critical *prevention role* in reducing a young person's tendency toward engaging in risky or violent behavior, while also mitigating the effects of exposure to such behavior. Strong positive mentoring relationships have been shown to reduce the likelihood of a young person engaging in risky activities such as substance abuse,⁹ displaying aggressive behaviors, and general delinquency.¹⁰

Mentors can also serve as an *intervention* for youth who have been exposed to violence¹¹ or for those who have become involved with the juvenile justice system. For example, mentors might work with incarcerated youth to: navigate reentry and reengage with the school system, communicate more effectively with parents and other supportive adults, and negotiate conflicts with peers as they re-enter communities. Mentors can help connect youth with resources such as jobs, healthcare services, and new educational opportunities. This type of intervention strategy supports youth in achieving goals, such as gaining employment or finding stable housing, which can help reduce recidivism. Programs working with juvenile offenders have proven most effective when mentors work with youth both before and after reentry into the community and when mentors connect with youth in multiple aspects of their lives (e.g., in school and in the community or a workplace).¹²

It is equally important to provide mentoring support to youth who have been exposed to violence but have not been

incarcerated or involved with the juvenile justice system. One study, for example, explored the impact of mentoring for youth who visited the emergency room of a large urban medical center with injuries from peer violence. Through an anti-violence curriculum conducted with mentors and family meetings, these youth expressed a lower approval of physical violence and were less likely to retaliate violently.¹⁴

B. ENHANCING PROTECTIVE FACTORS TO PROMOTE POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT

Mentors play a crucial role in enhancing the quality of protective factors — academic achievement, connectedness to family or non-familial adults, involvement in social activities — that help prevent youth from engaging in violent behavior. For example, mentors can serve as an intervention at the onset of early warning signs for not completing high school. Mentors can help mitigate risk factors by providing consistent guidance as young people navigate challenges and help them develop character: the ability to persevere, be optimistic, and make good choices. Mentors can work with youth to find constructive and non-violent ways to deal with stress, resolve conflict, develop self-confidence, and problem solve. Essentially, quality mentoring equips young people with the character traits that allow them to face challenges without having to turn to aggressive behaviors, drug abuse, or violence.¹⁵

C. PROVIDING ACCESS TO EXTERNAL SUPPORTS

As youth transition into adulthood and try to navigate complex

MENTORING & ENHANCING PROTECTIVE FACTORS

Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America, the nation's largest mentoring network, has a long history of promoting a range of protective factors. One recent report found that their mentees were doing better than their non-mentored peers in terms of scholastic competence, parental trust, social acceptance, and feeling like they have a caring adult.¹⁶ The results of these protective factors are clear: An impact study showed that mentored BBBS youth are less likely to skip school, initiate drug use, hit someone, or begin using alcohol.¹⁷

MENTORING IN ACTION: Positive Effects of Mentoring

A recent study¹³ conducted on the effects of mentoring showed that mentoring was linked to improved academic, social and economic prospects and to strengthening communities and the nation as a whole. The nationally representative survey found that compared to at-risk young adults without a mentor, those with a mentor were:

81 percent more likely to report participating regularly in sports or extracurricular activities.

78 percent more likely to volunteer regularly in their communities.

More than **twice as likely** to say they held a leadership position in a club or sports team.

MENTORING IN ACTION: AMACHI

AMACHI was started in 2000 to serve youth of incarcerated parents. AMACHI initially started by partnering with 42 congregations in Philadelphia, with each church committing to recruit 10 mentors to be paired with children of incarcerated parents and to track the activity of those matches. It has since expanded to all 50 states and serves at-risk youth, with a focus on matching youth in high crime areas with mentors from congregations in or around those areas. In serving these youth, AMACHI is striving to break the multi-generational cycles of violence and criminal behavior.

Most matches last **2-3 years**.¹⁸

82 percent of mentees reported increased self-confidence.

60 percent of caregivers said their child had an "increased sense of future".¹⁹

decision making on important life choices, mentors can serve as a bridge to other external supports that youth and their families may not be aware of, and that may be critical in preventing violence. Examples of these wrap-around services include mental health services, individual and family counseling, and economic support services. Mentors can also be valuable connectors to other mentors, who can provide deeper, individualized support.

MENTORING & ACCESS TO EXTERNAL SUPPORT

The 2014 national survey²⁰ on young people's perspectives on mentoring conducted by Civic Enterprises and Hart Research Associates compiled the following anecdotal testimonies around mentoring:

"My mentor came into my life and provided structure, did things with me that my parents couldn't. He took me out to play ball, just sat and talked with me, and kept me from doing other things, like being in the streets."

"My mentor attended the college I'm at now, and she took me out and informed me of how to get into college. She was always there to support me."²¹

SPOTLIGHT ON BLACK MALE ACHIEVEMENT

While caring adult mentors can help turn any young person away from a life of violence, or heal from its effects, there is a growing opportunity for the mentoring movement to make a difference in the lives of black boys who have been involved in, or impacted by, community violence. Recent statistics paint a sobering picture:

- The homicide rate for black youth ages 10-24 is over three times higher than any other group of youth in America.²²
- The homicide rate for black boys ages 10-24 is over 51 deaths per 100,000, compared to only 12 for boys in general.²³
- Of the more than 700,000 young people ages 10-24 treated in emergency rooms for assault-related injuries in 2011, over 61 percent were males,²⁴ (and most commonly black males).²⁵

The impact of this violence on black youth is far reaching — juvenile justice involvement, mental health and substance abuse, and risk of educational failure. Worst of all, it can wear down a young man's resiliency over time: young people exposed to peer violence are **88 times more likely** than unexposed youth to be injured by a peer again.²⁷ But there are signs that things are trending in the right direction for black boys: Crime rates for African-American youth have been dropping for over 20 years.²⁸

There is an opportunity to leverage mentoring as a strategy to ensure this progress continues. Mentoring has been cited as one of the core ingredients in youth violence prevention,²⁹ especially for black males who are struggling to remain connected to educational and career opportunities. Mentors can provide guidance to make better choices, set goals that lead away from violent paths, and develop conflict resolution skills.

Mentors of color can particularly engage black boys in deeper conversation about the intersection of violence, culture, and masculinity — reframing negative thinking about concepts of strength, power, and "being a man." They can also help them effectively navigate systems and institutional barriers to success. MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership is piloting a mentor training curriculum on how to bring this "critical consciousness" out in black boys, hopefully equipping more caring adults to successfully support black boys to build skills leading to a disruption of the cycle of violence.

Mentors won't solve this issue alone, but they are an indispensable system of support that can help the nation's young black males navigate towards a safer and more successful adulthood.

"We all know that the influence of an older, caring mentor with adequate training and supervision—who is consistently involved in a child's life over a significant amount of time—can make all the difference in the world. It can change lives for the better and forever set children on a new and more positive path."

Robert L. Listenbee, Administrator, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

MENTORING IN ACTION: Aftercare for Indiana Mentoring (AIM)

With the mission of supporting Indiana youth transitioning from corrections to community, Aftercare for Indiana Mentoring (AIM) pairs youth with mentors for pre-release preparation. After release, mentors become the key resource for a young person's re-entry into society. AIM has proven to be successful with this model of providing a consistent adult in the young person's life.

After 48 months, youth in the program who have completed all the requirements have a recidivism rate of **28 percent** compared to 62 percent for those not in the program.

The program estimates that each 100 youth in the 2-year program saves taxpayers more than **\$1,000,000** over their lifetime.²⁶

WAYS TO INVEST IN MENTORING

In the past thirty years, the federal government has strengthened its investment in mentoring programs³⁰, with many of those investments coming through the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention with the intention of reducing youth crime and violence. However, there are still 16 million young people, including 9 million at-risk youth, who will reach age 19 without ever having a mentor³¹. Public and private investors, school administrators and staff, and programs and researchers can help reduce youth violence by improving the quality of mentoring, increasing access to mentoring services, and expanding the understanding of the impact of mentoring.

I. IMPROVE QUALITY OF MENTORING

The quality of mentoring provided to youth is critical to the relationship experience and desired outcomes. To ensure the quality of a young person's mentoring experience, public and private investors, program staff, and researchers can all play various roles.



Public and private investors can ensure that their grantees incorporate proven, evidence-based practices in their programming. MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership's *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring*TM and National Quality Mentoring System offer excellent entry points for identifying proven, effective programs. There is also a need to invest in technical assistance and capacity building efforts to support programs in the implementation of these best practices. These investors can also advance the field by funding innovative program models and encouraging rigorous evaluations that produce strong program evidence of impact — ideally return-on-investment information that can bring a promising program to scale.



Mentoring program staff play a critical role in shaping the quality of the mentoring experience as they recruit and train mentors by ensuring that youth exposed to violence are matched with appropriate mentors. Programs should more thoroughly assess a young person's previous exposure to, or experiences with, violence to both identify the right mentor, as well as to provide additional interventions or services, either directly or through partner organizations. Another way to improve the quality of mentoring for youth engaged in violence is to engage adults who have been part of the criminal justice system — this shared experience can often be critical in reaching youth who have tuned out adult voices.

II. INCREASE ACCESS TO MENTORING

In addition to the quality of mentoring, stakeholders can play a role in increasing young people's access to mentors.



Public and private investors can support and scale mentoring programs that intentionally reconnect youth to family, school, and community supports. Youth who are disconnected from educational and career paths — and the support of caring adults — need paths away from violent or destructive lifestyles and reconnection with family and community. Mentoring programs are instrumental in this effort.



Mentoring programs can work in partnership with the juvenile justice system to develop referral systems to pair youth with mentors early in their system involvement. Strong partnerships between local programs and the juvenile corrections system can also support incarcerated juveniles in creating individualized support plans before they leave, with qualified mentors working to support them upon release. Program staff can also help youth map out connections to potential natural mentors and additional support services.

III. EXPAND UNDERSTANDING OF THE IMPACT OF MENTORING



To truly understand the impact of investing in mentoring programs, public and private investors can fund program evaluations to identify proven, replicable models that support victims and perpetrators of youth violence. When evaluating these programs, public and private investors should examine outcomes in addition to recidivism rates, such as attitudinal changes of youth toward violence. Doing so can show how intermediate outcomes may be predictive of long-term success.



Researchers can further the field's knowledge by conducting longitudinal studies on the effect mentoring has on reducing lifetime exposure to, and engagement with, violence, and on breaking the cycle of violence. The return on investment for mentoring can be considerable by reducing recidivism rates and lowering the significant costs society spends on incarceration. Researchers can also investigate the impact of alternative forms of mentoring — informal, peer to peer, online, group — for youth exposed to violence, juvenile offenders, and other high risk groups.

MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership is the unifying champion for quality youth mentoring in the United States. MENTOR's mission is to close the mentoring gap and ensure all young people have the support they need through quality mentoring relationships to succeed at home, school, and ultimately, work. To achieve this, MENTOR collaborates with its network of affiliate *Mentoring Partnerships* and works to drive the investment of time and money into high impact mentoring programs and advance quality mentoring through the development and delivery of standards, cutting-edge research and state-of-the-art tools.

This report was prepared by Root Cause for MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership and supported by the Open Society Foundations.

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