

# MENTORING & YOUTH VIOLENCE PREVENTION



In 2019, the CDC's Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that 8% of youth in grades 9-12 reported being in a physical fight one or more times in the 12 months preceding the survey, with more than 7% reporting being threatened or injured with a weapon on school property. Homicide is the 3rd leading cause of death for young people ages 10-24, and is the leading cause of death for African Americans in this age range. Data from 2014 show that 501,581 young people ages 10 to 24 were treated in emergency departments for injuries sustained from physical assaults. Needless to say, youth violence is a serious problem that can have lasting harmful effects on both the perpetrator, the victim, and their family, friends, and communities.

Studies have shown that mentoring can serve in both prevention and intervention roles in addressing youth violence. This document discusses these findings and provides examples of successful program models from across the country.

## RESEARCH BACKGROUND

### **Mentoring has long been a staple of juvenile justice and violence prevention efforts.**

- Going back to its origins over 100 years ago, programmatic mentoring relationships for youth have often been used to combat juvenile delinquency and violence in communities through both prevention that keeps youth engaged in prosocial activity and direct interventions that seek to re-engage young people who have become involved in the juvenile justice system.
- Mentoring has long been part of the federal government's approach to combating youth delinquency and violence. The practice of mentoring is rated as "effective" in reducing delinquency outcomes, which include violent offenses, by The National Institute of Justice's CrimeSolutions clearinghouse.

### **Mentoring can offer comprehensive support to youth at risk for committing violence or victimization, as it can address many risk factors at once.**

- Mentoring serves as a critical violence prevention strategy by offering flexible, broad support to young people on a wide variety of their needs, being one of the few prevention and intervention strategies that can effectively address multiple risk and protective factors simultaneously.<sup>i</sup>

### **Mentoring can also be integrated into existing multi-component violence prevention efforts.**

- Mentoring can be offered as a stand-alone service or effectively incorporated into multi-component violence prevention frameworks.
- Prominent criminologists have noted that mentoring programs may make excellent partners within multi-component crime and violence-prevention initiatives, because their relationship-centric focus fits well within established evidence-based frameworks, such as the Risk-Need-Responsivity model for offender assessment and rehabilitation.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

### Meta-analytic reviews have found that mentoring can reduce aggressive behavior and other indicators of violence.

- A meta-analytic review of 39 studies of mentoring found that mentoring had positive effects for aggressive behavior (e.g., fighting, bullying) and for delinquency in general. The effects were strongest in programs where offering emotional support was a key component of the intervention.<sup>ii</sup>

## STUDIES FROM THE FIELD

- The **Big Brothers Big Sisters** program has conducted a number of evaluations of their model that have demonstrated an impact on violent youth behavior:
  - The 1995 impact study of their community-based model indicated that mentored youth were 33% less likely to have hit someone compared to a control group of unmentored youth.<sup>iii</sup>
  - A 2009 survey of BBBS alumni found that 90% said their relationship with their Big helped them make better choices throughout their childhood; 86% said their relationship with their Big has helped them make better choices throughout their adult life; and 76% said they learned right from wrong from their Big.
- An evaluation of **Becoming a Man**, an intervention for disadvantaged male youth grades 7-10 from high-crime Chicago neighborhoods, found that program participation reduced violent-crime arrests by 44 percent.<sup>iv</sup>
  - A subsequent evaluation, which combined the results of the 2013 study with a second wave of program participants in 2014-15, found that in both program years, mentored youth reduced total arrests by 28-35% and violent crime arrests by 45-50%, compared to a control group.<sup>v</sup>
- An evaluation of **One Summer Plus**, a summer jobs program with mentoring provided by adults at the worksite, reduced violent arrests by 43%, compared to a control group.<sup>vi</sup>
- An evaluation of **Saving Lives, Inspiring Youth**, a cross-age peer mentoring program, found that serving as a mentor reduced aggression and delinquent behaviors generally, concluding that “Providing mentors with a ‘helping role’ encourages them to better understand the experiences of another person and appreciate their impact on others.” Mentees in this program also reported decreased aggression and increased negative attitudes toward gangs and gang membership.<sup>vii</sup>
- A mentoring program for youth who presented in emergency rooms with injuries sustained in fights with peers was evaluated and found to reduce misdemeanor activity and youth-reported aggression scores, as well as increase youth self-efficacy.<sup>viii</sup>

- One study of the influence of role models on attitudes toward violence and violent behaviors for African American adolescents found that role models' prosocial behavior reduced youth violent behavior by changing youth attitudes about violence. Unfortunately, antisocial role model behavior increased youth violence and appeared to be more influential than prosocial role model behavior.<sup>ix</sup> Studies like this emphasize the importance of violence prevention efforts providing vulnerable youth with prosocial role models such as mentors in an effort to offset or negate the influence of negative role models.
- In one study, youth with mentors who participated in enhanced training reported being less likely to engage in violent offending, be suspended from school, and to experience depressive symptoms, relative to those youth whose mentors engaged in these activities less frequently.<sup>x</sup>
- A study of **Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care** for adolescents, which often includes intensive mentoring services by staff, found that the program produced a statistically significant reduction in both felony assaults and index offenses (serious property and person offenses, such as auto theft or aggravated assault).<sup>xi</sup>
- A study of the **Boston (MA) Reentry Initiative** for violent young adult offenders found that the program reduced overall arrests for those mentored and reduced violent crime arrests by 30%.<sup>xii</sup>
- A holistic review of what reduces youth violence found that mentoring services can increase social support and bonding to prosocial adults and organizations, leading to reductions in self-reported violent behaviors.<sup>xiii</sup>
- Another broad review of “what works” to prevent violence among young people concluded that *all* youth violence efforts should provide opportunities for positive relationships.<sup>xiv</sup>

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- <sup>x</sup> Jarjoura, G.R., Tanyu, M., Forbush, J., Herrera, C., & Keller, T. E. (2018). *Evaluation of the Mentoring Enhancement Demonstration Program. Technical Report*. NCJ 252167, Washington, DC: American Institutes for Research.
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