



The annual Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring at Portland State University brings top mentoring researchers and experienced practitioners from around the world for an intensive week-long seminar presenting the latest developments in theory and research on youth mentoring.

The Institute is directed by Dr. Thomas Keller, Duncan & Cindy Campbell Professor for Children, Youth & Families with an Emphasis on Mentoring, School of Social Work, Portland State University.

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Reflections from the 2011 Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring

“It May Be the Missing Piece” – Exploring the Mentoring of Youth in Systems of Care

Michael Garringer, National Mentoring Center

As youth mentoring has grown in popularity over the past two decades, the field has consistently faced a dilemma: wanting to expand mentoring into new service areas and bring support to increasingly high-risk youth, while potentially struggling to find sufficient resources and relevant research to guide this expansion. Early mentoring proponent Mark Freedman called this dilemma “fervor without infrastructure” in his seminal 1993 book *The Kindness of Strangers*, and in many ways, his past concern for mentoring’s future has been realized in its present.

The high-quality research of the 1990s and early 2000s by organizations like Public/Private Ventures, and researchers such as David DuBois and Jean Grossman, demonstrated the convincing effectiveness of certain mentoring models while also creating new curiosity as to how mentoring could be used to support different populations or be fused with other youth services. The apparent combination of effectiveness and flexibility of mentoring interventions has created an environment where mentoring is viewed as a “go to” strategy for many serious issues facing disadvantaged youth. As a result, recent years have seen substantial funding, both public and private, directed to programs serving higher-risk youth: children of incarcerated parents, gang-

involved youth, homeless youth, youth who have suffered abuse and trauma, teenagers in juvenile detention, children and adolescents with disabilities, and most recently, youth who have been victims of sex trafficking.

While this expansion of mentoring has increased support for young people, many in the field note that the research on these innovative models tends to be sparse. Mentoring is being applied to more difficult youth issues, but there continues to be a shortage of research around best practices for developing, implementing, and sustaining mentoring programs that serve youth involved in various systems of care. Just how much do we know about mentoring “system-involved” youth? What can we learn from current research? And what remains unknown or unconsidered by researchers, practitioners, and policy-makers?

These questions provided the backdrop for the 2011 Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring (SIYM), where over 50 mentoring researchers, practitioners, service providers, and policymakers gathered to discuss the issues related to mentoring youth in the child welfare, juvenile justice, and other systems. The week-long event at Portland State University featured presentations from innovative researchers and clinicians, as well as

Video presentations by mentoring researchers participating in the 2011 Summer Institute can be found on the Web at:

www.youthmentoring.pdx.edu

Fellows for the 2011 Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring

Timothy Cavell, Ph.D. - Professor of Psychology and Director of Clinical Training at University of Arkansas. Professor Cavell's research focuses on the mentoring of aggressive children at risk for later delinquency and substance abuse. For the SIYM, he focused on how to best understand mentoring as a "context" that we provide to youth and explored the way we define mentoring relationships and the impact this definition has on program development and service delivery.

Sarah Geenen, Ph.D. - Research Professor in the Regional Research Institute for Human Services at Portland State University. Professor Geenen conducts research on programs designed to enhance the self-determination of youth in foster care and youth with disabilities. At the SIYM, she presented information and findings from two major research projects devoted to mentoring youth transitioning out of foster care.

Roger Jarjoura, Ph.D. - Associate Professor in the School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. Professor Jarjoura, a criminologist, is the founder and former executive director of the Aftercare for the Incarcerated through Mentoring (AIM) program for youth making the transition from corrections back to the community. At SIYM, he presented findings from AIM and explored ways that mentors can best support youth through what he termed "transformative" mentoring.

Thomas Keller, Ph.D. - Duncan & Cindy Campbell Professor for Children, Youth and Families in the School of Social Work at Portland State University. Professor Keller is the Director of the Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring and of the Center for Interdisciplinary Mentoring Research. In addition to his research on youth mentoring relationships, Professor Keller has studied the mental health and well-being of youth in foster care and those aging out of care.

Michelle Munson, Ph.D. - Associate Professor in the Silver School of Social Work at New York University. Professor Munson has expertise on youth aging out of the child welfare system and has published numerous articles from a major study of youth leaving care. Her SIYM presentations focused on the presence of natural mentors in the lives of youth in care and the ways that programs can design effective services by closely examining the practical needs of the people they serve.

Julia Pryce, Ph.D. - Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at Loyola University Chicago. Professor Pryce's research has examined the relationship experiences of youth aging out of foster care, the nature of relationships in school-based mentoring programs, and the implementation of health-focused mentoring programs for early adolescent females and high risk adolescents in low income urban neighborhoods. For this year's SIYM, she presented research and program design considerations from a number of projects aimed at youth struggling in the systems surrounding them, including an innovative program in rural India.

Heather Taussig, Ph.D. - Associate Professor in the Kempe Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect within the Dept of Pediatrics at the University of Colorado School of Medicine. Professor Taussig gave two presentations at the 2011 SIYM on the design and impact of the Fostering Healthy Futures program, a multi-county trial of an innovative mentoring and skills-based intervention for preadolescent youth in foster care.



Research Fellows and Practitioner Scholars of the 2011 SIYM

intense discussion about the implications for practice. This year's proceedings also featured two new events hosted by the Center for Interdisciplinary Mentoring Research (CIMR) and designed to engage the broader youth-serving community: The Summer Symposium on Mentoring Research (see page 20), which brought a dozen prominent researchers together for a series of short presentations, and a Policy Summit (page 21), which fostered a dialogue on these issues with government leaders, private philanthropists, foundations, and others in position to influence the future direction of the mentoring field.

Held July 18-22 in Portland, OR on the PSU campus, the 2011 SIYM featured six distinguished Fellows from the research community (see sidebar) who offered presentations on their research into how youth in systems of care benefit from mentoring and the types of programming that can create meaningful mentoring relationships. The event also featured brief presentations from various state mentoring partnerships, international mentoring organizations, and other major mentoring organizations, such as Big Brothers Big Sisters of America, Friends for Youth, the National Mentoring Center, and the Australian Youth Mentoring Network.

Attending were 30 mentoring practitioners from around the country, representing a wide variety of programs and youth serving agencies. As in years past, this SIYM was designed to promote dialogue and an exchange of ideas between researchers and practitioners. And while every SIYM has explored critical issues in the youth mentoring field, the 2011 event seemed particularly timely: never before has so much been expected of youth mentoring programs, yet there is still so much to learn about how to best apply mentoring concepts and program structures to youth in systems of care.

A Framework for Examining the Mentoring of “System-Involved” Youth

One of the major themes that emerged quickly during the Summer Institute is that there is tremendous diversity within the term “system-involved.” Most often this term is applied to youth in child welfare systems or juvenile justice systems (courts, correctional facilities, probation and parole). But the presentations and discussions at the SIYM also highlighted mental health services, homelessness prevention programs, drug and alcohol treatment, public welfare systems, clinical therapy and mental health services, special education, and even immigration and naturalization systems. Each of these systems presents unique opportunities and challenges for youth and the mentoring programs trying to serve them.

The event also highlighted just how much diversity there is within any of these specific “systems.” The mentoring program designed for a nine-year-old in foster care must be very different than the one designed for the teenager aging out of the system. The nature of the abuse or neglect that led them to be placed in care in the first place also matters a great deal in terms of designing appropriate services. Similarly, the needs of youth who have committed a first-time misdemeanor will be different than those of a youth coming out of a correctional facility. SIYM attendees quickly realized that any discussion of, say, “best practices for mentoring foster youth” was going to be dependent on a wide range of factors—age, abuse history, placement circumstances, and so forth—and that there are no easy answers or across-the-board methods of defining effective programming. “System-involved” is far too general a term to describe such a diverse array of young people and their needs.

However, participants were also struck by just how much overlap there is across these systems. For example, SIYM Fellow Sarah Geenen of the Regional Research Institute in Portland noted that 40% of foster youth in Oregon are also in special education and that 54% of foster youth in one of her studies also had a DSM diagnosis of some kind (a shocking 20% had three or more conditions). In one of Fellow Michele Munson’s projects serving youth

with mental health disorders, almost half of the participants had been involved with the juvenile justice system and 70% had been in child welfare at some point. And according to the National Institute of Justice, abused and neglected youth (those who wind up in the child welfare system) are 59% more likely to be arrested as juveniles, especially for violent crimes (which then adds them to the justice system). So while there is tremendous diversity within the term “system-involved” the field must recognize that these systems often overlap, and the chances are that a youth who is involved with one system of care is very likely to be involved in others as well. This further complicates things for mentoring programs trying to serve these youth.

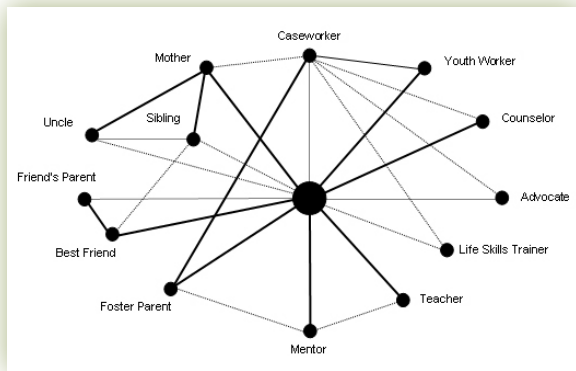
One also finds considerable diversity in the types of programs being designed to support these children and adolescents. Perhaps the most surprising information for participants of the 2011 SIYM was seeing the broad diversity of the program models presented—all involved a mentoring component, but the way they used mentoring to support youth looked very different across programs.

As the field wrestles with the best ways of using mentoring to serve these youth, there seem to be three distinct audiences that are looking for guidance and answers:

- Innovative wrap-around service programs that are integrating some form of mentoring, perhaps for the first time, with a variety of clinical, educational, and life skill-related supports.
- Stand-alone mentoring programs, often a community- or school-based model, trying to adapt their existing model to better serve the youth who happen to be in systems of care.
- Policymakers and funders who are looking for fresh ideas, replicable models, and reliable program practices.

Each of these audiences was represented at the 2011 SIYM, and each found valuable information to help further their efforts. In fact, we end this article with a summary of “key takeaways” for each of these audiences. But there was also recognition that this type of programming is very complicated, with many gaps in the available research, and that perhaps the best way forward is to acknowledge that these three groups can learn from each other.

¹Widom, C. S., & Maxfield, M. G. (2001). An update on the “cycle of violence” (Research in Brief). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, National Institute of Justice. <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/184894.pdf>



Social Network Map of Youth in Foster Care²

THOMAS KELLER

As in years past, Institute Director Tom Keller opened the Summer Institute with his reflections on where the mentoring field has been and where it seems to be headed. Keller noted that the very concept of formal mentoring in America, going back over 100 years to the formation of Big Brothers, is rooted in helping “system-involved” youth: these first mentoring efforts were aimed at juveniles in Chicago and New York who had run afoul of the law.

He also highlighted that mentoring, unlike other disciplines, tends to be a field where innovation and adaptation at the program level happens before research is conducted, not as a result of research. This explains why we find mentoring being applied to so many high-risk populations and social problems in spite of the dearth of rigorous research supporting many of these efforts. Keller’s hope is that events like SIYM will close this gap between research and practice and help programs make better decisions in serving youth in systems of care.

Keller also discussed one of his new publications with doctoral student Jennifer Blakeslee that analyzes mentoring through the lens of social networking.² In this view, the program is not only linking mentor and youth, but they are connecting many individuals in the mentor’s life to the “network” of people in the youth’s life. In turn, all of these individuals are connected to the program staff and

other service providers. This type of social network mapping has huge implications for the mentoring of youth in systems of care, who often have many service providers, clinicians, educators, and system representatives working with them at once—in addition to the mentor. This mapping can help programs understand the interconnectedness of these supports and key players in the young person’s life, helping deliver more targeted mentoring and ensuring communication among the many individuals supporting the young person at any given time. You can learn more about this social network view of mentoring in the next edition of the Handbook of Youth Mentoring.

TIM CAVELL

Another SIYM veteran, Tim Cavell of the University of Arkansas, also helped set the stage for the week of presentations by exploring the idea that mentoring is not just a relationship, but rather a “context” that we provide to youth. His work on mentoring programs for highly aggressive youth has led him to draw from socialization theory, which states that children and adolescents will find and participate in contexts that offer greater and more reliable “payoffs.” This can be both positive and negative—certainly youth can find internal value in anti-social behaviors and with deviant peers, especially when prosocial contexts are lacking in their lives. This means that the process of mentoring is not simply a top-down transmission of wisdom and guidance from mentor to

mentee. Youth are active players in their development and if programs are to be successful they, along with their mentors, have to provide youth with experiences and opportunities that are consistently rewarding and engaging.

As mentoring programs serve youth in systems of care, they must provide a positive context that, hopefully, will draw the youth away from the negative contexts that led to, or resulted from, their system involvement. Mentors must not only provide this healthy context, but help the youth succeed in it. But, Cavell noted that a mentoring relationship is only one context, competing with many others, which cautions us to perhaps temper our expectations of what a stand-alone mentoring program can do for high-risk youth.

²Blakeslee, J (in press). “Expanding the scope of research with transition-age foster youth: Applications of the social network perspective.” (Research in Brief). *Child & Family Social Work*



Cavell also explored an interesting distinction: the difference between a “match” and a “relationship.” All mentoring programs have “matches” but he wondered: how many of these are true “relationships?” As mentoring has expanded over two decades, strong emphasis has been placed on serving more youth, but Cavell wonders if we have simply created more matches, but fewer meaningful relationships. This distinction might be especially salient for youth in systems of care, who are often connected to many adults working for them in a professional capacity such as lawyers, case workers or probation officers, but often report having few supportive adult relationships.

To illustrate how programs might build those deeper relationships, Cavell presented his research into the characteristics of effective mentors, which suggests that the attachment style of mentors plays a major role in how they perform in a mentoring relationship, especially when there is conflict. Mentors with a healthy, secure adult attachment pattern are able to withstand periods of conflict in mentoring relationships. Those who have a less healthy pattern of attachment may struggle to bond with the youth, invest in the relationship, or stick with it through a challenging time in the relationship.

This has implications for programs serving high-risk youth, who may be more likely to “test” their mentor or resist the relationship. Programs serving youth in systems of care must be careful to avoid mentors who have less-than-ideal attachment patterns. They are unlikely to be successful in creating those positive contexts and following through on the commitment. One consideration may be to test for these attachment patterns during mentoring recruitment and screening.

This big-picture framework presented by Keller and Cavell helped participants better understand and interpret the wealth of research and information that followed throughout the week.

Supporting the Spectrum of Foster Youth

Many of the most compelling presentations from the 2011 SIYM were related to mentoring youth in the child welfare system. Trying to identify best practices for mentoring these youth is challenging for a variety of reasons:

- The child welfare system varies from state to state in terms of quality, available resources, areas of emphasis, willingness to work with other service providers, and policies governing how children in the system are managed and the types of support provided.
- Youth at various ages and at different stages in the system need very different supports.
- Youth wind up in the child welfare system for many reasons—some have substantial abuse and trauma, others do not. Programs serving youth who experienced extreme violence will have different best practices than those serving youth who did not.

Finding one set of program practices that serves the wide variety of children in these systems equally well is almost impossible. Which is why it is no surprise that most 2011 SIYM presentations dealt with program models that were intently focused on giving specific groups of foster youth exactly what they needed, when they needed it, as they moved through that system.

HEATHER TAUSSIG

One such model was the **Fostering Healthy Futures Program**, discussed over two presentations by Heather Taussig, an Associate Professor at the Kempe Center for the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect at the University of Colorado School of Medicine. Fostering Healthy Futures is a multi-component program for foster youth age 9-11 in the Denver area. The 30-week program is built around a model that attempts to improve cognitive, social, and behavioral functioning of youth who have been thrust into the chaotic world of foster care. The idea behind the model is to provide intense support in key areas to reduce the impact of a negative circumstance or event (such as the events leading to placement, as well as the placement itself).

The program primarily accomplishes this through therapeutic skills groups, led by a clinician, and a structured

curriculum that helps the children work through their feelings and somewhat “normalizes” the experience they are all going through. The program provides a lot of social engagement and opportunities for the youth to succeed within the program setting (those positive “contexts” as noted by Cavell earlier).

The program’s mentors are the “glue” of the model. They provide the participating youth with everything from personal support and friendship to logistical aspects, such as transportation to the skills groups and coordinating information with caseworkers and others. They are also responsible for reinforcing the skills being developed in the groups. The main intervention may be delivered by the clinical staff, but the mentors are the personal supports that make that intervention really sing.

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Interestingly, because of their critical role, and the extreme needs of the youth in the program, the mentors are not your typical volunteers. Instead, mentors are graduate students, primarily from the Kempe Center, who spend 16–20 hours a month working with the mentees. They attend 40 hours of training before working in the program, spend almost 3 hours of time a week discussing their mentees with the supervising clinicians, and participate in many hours of ongoing training and skill-building through the Kempe Center.

Perhaps the most innovative aspect of the program is the tight coordination with the local child welfare system. According to Taussig, it took a long time to build the partnerships with all five county child welfare agencies in the Denver area, but the cooperation is impressive: the program is notified of every single child in the program age range who goes into the child welfare system. Once notified, Taussig’s clinical staff conducts a thorough assessment of each child’s emotional and physical well-being. The child welfare agencies then use this assessment to provide targeted supports at the entry point of children into their system. In turn, Taussig’s staff is able to identify children who would benefit the most from their intervention and recruit them into their program. The “system” gets an accurate picture of the youth they are caring for, the mentoring program finds youth who can benefit from what it offers, and all of the children get more appropriate care and support.

Many mentoring programs struggle simply to identify foster youth, and here we see a collaborative model where

the system itself feeds access and information into the program. A liaison at each county agency serves as the main partner in making sure these referrals happen (this role is codified in a formal MOU with each county).

Over time, the caseworkers inform the mentors of any changes in placement or any other new information about the child’s circumstances. This helps considerably with keeping children in the program for the full 30 weeks—it allows to program to track the youth so that a change in placement does not result in a dropping of the program.

Taussig has conducted an impressive 10-year study testing the effectiveness of the program using a randomized experimental design,

which is the highest standard for demonstrating intervention results. In addition, she has carefully evaluated almost every aspect of the program: all of the therapeutic skills groups are videotaped and reviewed for efficacy and, as noted earlier, every aspect of the mentoring relationship is discussed with clinicians and monitored closely. Because of this research focus, Taussig has been both able to adjust the model over time, while also producing compelling evidence of program success:

- Foster care families, kinship care providers, and parents all have expressed deep appreciation for the program and support the youth’s involvement, evidenced by the fact that over 90% of the participants complete the full program, even after they have been reunited with their family or otherwise left foster care.
- 96% of the youth said that the program helped them deal with their feelings about being in foster care and helped them get through the experience.
- Participating youth also reported a higher quality of life, lower anxiety, and increased social support compared to the control group that did not receive the services.
- Caseworkers and other child welfare professionals reported that the program helped the youth they were responsible for find appropriate care and community supports, mostly as a result of the assessment when they enter the program.
- At the time of a third follow-up with participants (six months after they were in the program) participants reported fewer mental health problems and fewer trauma symptoms than those in the control group.

- Perhaps the best evidence of the program success has to do with child permanency, the degree to which children find a stable home, either in a foster setting or reunified with their family. The program had less of an impact for youth who started while in kinship care (staying with a non-parental relative) but for youth in true foster care, they had far fewer placement changes (moving within the system) and were two-and-a-half times more likely to be reunified with their family. This increased permanency has the potential to save the child welfare system in the Denver area substantial amounts of money by reducing the number of placements and getting youth back home and out of the system.

Taussig thinks the main benefit of the program is that it improves youth resiliency. “We meet them where they are at and we give them timely support that keeps this negative experience from overwhelming them.” But she also worries that this resiliency may not last, noting, “I’d like to try doing a ‘booster program,’ so to speak. I worry that nine months is not enough given some of their experiences.”

Taussig also had several other tips for programs attempting to meld mentoring and this type of clinical support:

- **The types of maltreatment that children experience matter when developing an intervention.** For example, among Fostering Healthy Futures participants, exposure to physical violence was associated with more and longer placements in the system, as was total cumulative exposure to violence. Abandonment was associated with increased feelings of anxiety and lower life satisfaction. Different types of abuse result in different problems, and programs need to pay attention to exactly what each youth has experienced (highlighting the need for that thorough intake assessment).
- **Programs should think clearly about the outcomes they want to foster with the mentoring component.** Taussig chose to focus on those cognitive and behavioral factors as a way of building resiliency. Other programs may choose to provide support in other areas. Taussig noted that there were several types of emotional and practical support that the clinical staff could not provide because of their professional role—but mentors could. Role clarity is important in these types of models.
- **Planning for sustainability and building long-term partnerships is critical.** Taussig estimated that a model like Fostering Healthy Futures costs substan-



tially more than most mentoring programs due to the clinicians’ time, the research costs, the intensive program activities, the partnerships with local systems of care, and the costs of the intake assessments. Funders need to be prepared for the higher cost of these types of interventions. But Taussig is confident that these programs can provide good return on investment by reducing placements, increasing reunification, and helping youth avoid more serious mental health issues and delinquent behaviors in the future.

Many SIYM participants were impressed by the intensity of this intervention, the commitment of the mentors, and the unparalleled partnerships that drive Fostering Healthy Futures. The program serves as an excellent example of how mentors can be used as a support piece for a larger suite of targeted services. But the question did arise: Is a program like this replicable? Could it work in other cities or states with different—and maybe less cooperative—child welfare systems? Could other clinicians utilize this program model, or was this a unique vision that Taussig had brought to life? And are funders willing to spend many thousands of dollars per child to support a program like this? These are the challenges for the mentoring field as we get evidence of what is working in serving foster youth. Can compelling models such as Fostering Healthy Futures be implemented more widely? Or are they examples of catching “lightning in a bottle” in terms of location, timing, and leadership?

SARAH GEENEN

Sarah Geenen, a Research Professor in the Regional Research Institute for Human Services at Portland State University, presented on two models for mentoring youth at the end of the foster care spectrum: those aging out of services and transitioning into independent living and

adulthood. Unlike Taussig's model, which supported younger children by building resiliency, these programs aimed at "aging out" youth provide more tangible support and services designed to achieve very practical outcomes, like independent living and higher education enrollment.

The **MY LIFE PROGRAM**, for example, is a self-determination model: the mentors help the youth achieve self-identified goals for their early adulthood. While many youth choose practical things like finding a first apartment or filling out college applications, many of the participants set lofty goals, such as becoming a famous musician or pursuing an ambitious career.

But Geenen explained that in their model the mentors support any youth goal. "Even if the goal is unrealistic, we can still use it to teach skills," notes Geenen. "They can still learn to break down their goals into steps, prioritize activities, learn to ask for help, build confidence as they move toward their goal. These are valuable skills to have and they last a lifetime."

In My Life, the mentors are technically called "coaches," who are primarily graduate students and paid staff, some of whom have personal experience in foster care themselves. The mentors are compensated for their time and use a set curriculum called Take Charge to guide the goal-focused work. As with Taussig's program for foster youth, these mentors are highly trained and supervised. Their coaching sessions are often filmed and later reviewed with a clinician so that they can improve their coaching interactions. They also fill out a number of fidelity checklists and activity logs to make sure that they are implementing the program properly.

In addition to working with their coaches, youth also participate in group mentoring workshops led by foster care alumni and other volunteers. These quarterly workshops provide an opportunity to interact with other participants, explore feelings about leaving foster care, and provide information and skill building on relevant topics, such as preparing for a job interview, finding housing, and improving personal communication. These workshops provide a sense of togetherness for participants, normalizing the often intimidating transition out of care, while the one-on-one coaches provide personal support toward youth-nominated goals. This illustrates how one

program model can implement several styles of mentoring (1-on-1, peer, group) that supplement each other.

The outcomes of My Life are being evaluated in a rigorous randomized trial, and the results are impressive: participants show increased perceptions of self-determination and quality of life, as well as improved transition planning

"This shared background is tremendously important in building trust and rapport with the program youth. A current mentor in the program says: "The youth feel like 'you're just like me, so I'll listen to you.'" By using strategic self-disclosure about their own pasts, these mentors role-model and normalize the experience of transitioning out of care."

compared a control group of youth who do not participate. They also tend to have higher employment rates after leaving the program.

As with Building Healthy

Futures, the mentors here act as the "glue"—they help keep youth focused on their goals and ensure that they participate in the other program services and supports. "Our mentors have done a lot of tracking down of youth to make sure they complete the program," says Geenen. "We have to literally go out and find them sometimes, but that's what it takes." Mentors are trained to persist, and work through the initial resistance many traumatized youth have to trusting adults and forming mentoring relationships. They are guided to interpret a lack of follow-through or communication by the youth as a need for more supports.

Geenen also presented findings from her **BETTER FUTURES PROGRAM**, which also serves transitioning foster youth, specifically those who have some history of mental health conditions. Unlike My Life, which is built around individual goals, Better Futures focuses intently on higher education attainment. In this model, the mentors are peers who have a shared background: almost all have been in foster care, many have a history of homelessness or mental health issues, and all have gone on to college.

This shared background is tremendously important in building trust and rapport with the program youth. A current mentor in the program says: "The youth feel like 'you're just like me, so I'll listen to you.'" By using strategic self-disclosure about their own pasts, these mentors role-model and normalize the experience of transitioning out of care, forming a connection with participants that would be hard to replicate otherwise. It also creates a personal investment for the mentors: their desire to provide support is heightened by having been in this situation themselves.

The mentors provide an average of about 4 hours of mentoring a month per participant, mostly over a nine month period heading into the transition out of care. This time is split fairly evenly between supporting the youth in pursuing their goals and “catching up” time where the mentors get to know the youth and build trust and mutuality.

As with My Life, Better Futures also has supports beyond just mentoring. The youth participate in a week-long institute over the summer that provides workshops and training opportunities on a variety of relevant topics: applying for financial aid, researching and choosing schools, acclimating to college life, finding housing, and more. The program is designed to work alongside the separate Independent Living Program (ILP) that all transitioning foster youth go through. But Geenen noted that Better Futures participants seemed to do better in the ILP as well, where they were able to use skills and information from their mentor to participate more fully in that program. This is a good example of what might be called “parallel programming.”

Data for Better Futures is still being collected but initial findings from the first wave of youth suggest improved self determination and post secondary planning; all intervention youth except one have applied to and been accepted into college. The program is expanding from the first wave and will serve 60 to 70 youth.

These findings indicate that a focused program like this can have a tremendous impact and help move young people along in their lives in ways that may have seemed (to them) unrealistic just a few months earlier. Fellow SIYM presenter Roger Jarjoura referred to this as “transformative” mentoring, where mentors really do change how youth think about their future and their ability to achieve. Could it be that these times of stressful transition are also ideal times to build skills, change mindsets, and really transform individuals in positive ways?



The Foster Club All-Stars

Each year of the Summer Institute has featured a presentation by Foster Club, a national organization that provides a wealth of supports to youth in foster care. Their “All-Star” program provides leadership development to youth who are aging out of the foster care system. The program trains All-Star participants to travel around the country and advocate on behalf of foster youth in each state, speaking with policymakers, legislative bodies, and others in positions to improve the child welfare system.

Obviously, this presentation took on added meaning for this year’s SIYM. The All-Stars shared their personal histories about the child welfare system and talked very eloquently about mentors and other supportive adults who kept them on the right path through their experience. In many ways, they echoed themes that came up in the other presentations on serving youth in systems of care:

- Consistency was a very important trait in their mentors. These youth really needed someone they could rely on, no matter what.
- Their mentors normalized their experience and help remove the stigma. One of the All-Stars talked about the importance of their mentor, a teacher, holding them to as high of a standard as the other students—even though the mentor was aware of her circumstances: “She made me feel normal by not giving me special treatment. I wasn’t allowed to be a victim anymore.”
- Listening was a key part of building trust in the relationship. These successful mentors let the youth express themselves openly and without judgment.
- Their mentors were “tenacious” about keeping the relationship going. Even when the youth pushed them away, the mentors stuck with them.
- Perhaps the most compelling point made by the All-Stars is that youth in systems of care may need assistance learning how to simply ask for help. They may not be comfortable reaching out to an adult. They may feel powerless or unworthy of support. A trusting relationship with a mentor can be a great place to learn how to ask for support and practice this behavior which will be so critical as they move forward in life.

You can learn more about Foster Club at:

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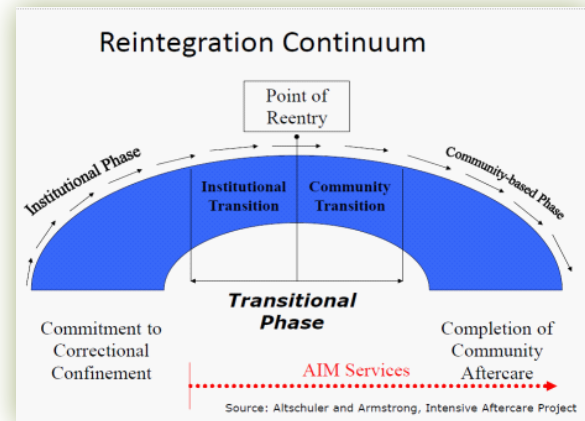
The Other Big Transition: Juvenile Justice Reentry and Reintegration into Communities

As with youth leaving the foster care system, those making the transition out of correctional facilities and juvenile justice systems have complicated personal histories and evolving life circumstances that make providing a mentor challenging. Even after their release, these youth are often engaged with a number of other “systems” and service providers—everything from parole officers and employment specialists to mental health services and housing agencies. But unlike youth aging out of the child welfare system, these youth can go back into their system, or worse, graduate to the world of adult corrections. The goal for reentry mentoring programs is to make sure that the youth is done being involved with that system. Unfortunately, this is easier said than done: according to a U.S. Department of Justice analysis of several states’ data, 55% of juveniles who were released from incarceration offend again within a year.³

ROGER JARJOURA

Roger Jarjoura, Associate Professor in the School of Public and Environmental Affairs at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, thinks mentoring is a big part of the answer. “Juvenile justice programs that do not utilize mentoring are really missing the boat,” Jarjoura noted during his first SIYM presentation. “I think it’s the missing piece in making justice programs work. These youth need the personal element and the focused attention.”

Jarjoura is the founder of the **AFTERCARE FOR INDIANA THROUGH MENTORING PROGRAM (AIM)**, a reentry program targeting juveniles in the correctional system who will be transitioning back into their communities within a year. The goal is to not only reduce the possibility that these youth will wind up back in their facilities, but also to provide transformational mentoring that will help them thrive once they integrate back into the outside world. Jarjoura noted that often reentry programs focus on supporting the transition plan itself, but often don’t



The AIM Reintegration/Aftercare Model

address the characteristics of the individual and their ways of thinking that might ultimately make the transition difficult.

AIM is built on an intensive aftercare model that begins while the youth is still incarcerated, moves through the transition phase, and provides support well after release (see model above). The core elements include what’s called “institutional transition,” which uses the Life After Incarceration curriculum to develop life skills and map out a transition plan, and “community transition,” which uses support centers and partnerships with community organizations to provide a wide variety of support to youth once they come back to the community.

As with the intensive models we’ve seen with foster youth, Jarjoura’s mentors are not your typical volunteers: they include college students from relevant fields, such as criminology, psychology, and social work. They meet with participants for four hours a week prior to their release, and are trained in how to effectively use the Life After Incarceration curriculum. During the institutional phase, mentors learn as much as possible about the needs of each student and their current and future participation in other services or systems. This helps them develop appropriate and comprehensive transition plans with each student.

The program, to this point, has excellent outcomes. An experimental evaluation using random assignment has shown the following results: Participating youth have positive gains in employment status and enrollment in educational programs, suggesting that they find increased success with their transition compared to reentry youth who did not go through AIM.

³Snyder, H.N., and Sickmund, M. (2006). *Juvenile offenders and victims: 2006 National Report*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. <http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/nr2006/>

The most impressive finding for the program relates to its core goal: preventing reincarceration. In Jarjoura's study of AIM, youth who did not participate in AIM were far more likely to be arrested and convicted down the road, with over 62% becoming reincarcerated. AIM participants were reincarcerated only 49% of the time, but that percentage drops to 28% for youth who participated fully in AIM and had a mentor that stuck with them through the duration of the program.

Because AIM is such an intensive program, commanding a lot of time, effort, and resources, Jarjoura has also examined the cost-benefit aspects of their model. He found that those reduced reincarceration costs saved the state of Indiana a considerable amount of money: for a one-time investment of \$500,000 to fund the program, the state may realize a savings of over \$3.2 million. This is the type of impact that should catch the eye of funders and policymakers who wonder if mentoring "system-involved youth" is economically viable.

Jarjoura noted that AIM operates under a continuous improvement approach—his research feeds back into the program in the form of changes in service delivery and allocation of resources. By carefully studying the program over these years, Jarjoura has found several "lessons learned" that he shared with SIYM attendees who are developing or planning similar programs:

- Mentors in these programs need lots of support. The work is often challenging and the youth can do a lot of "testing" of their mentors. Mentors need to be thoroughly trained in what to expect from the experience. Jarjoura mentioned that their mentor training tries to "inoculate" their mentors against quitting the program at some point by openly telling them all of the reasons they will want to quit down the road. "We just are frank with them," says Jarjoura, "and tell them 'here is why you will want to quit and here is why you just can't. Once they know what to expect, they handle problems better when they inevitably come up.'"
- The youth must feel like they are part of something larger than just their relationship with their mentor. Jarjoura thinks that these mentees benefit from being part of a cohort and knowing that others are going through this transition. In his experience, isolated mentees and mentors struggle to participate in the program and fully engage all of the available transitional support.
- AIM also implements a "team" mentoring approach. Mentors and youth would often meet in groups, mini-

mizing the disruption when a mentor could not make a meeting. "We always had someone there ready to step in and fill that mentoring role."

- The program put a lot of thought into the matching process, allowing youth to nominate their mentor through a natural matching process. Jarjoura recommends starting with some group activities that allow the mentees to get to know the mentors and see how many "natural" pairings develop.
- Jarjoura feels that one of the keys to success for AIM has been the tight control they have over their model. They decide who gets into the program (they do not take referrals dictated by a third party). They have authority over the curriculum and the design of the program. They also work well with, but are not managed or restricted by, parole officers and other players in the juvenile justice system. Jarjoura notes: "I think with these types of programs, they work best if the staff has control of their own destiny."
- Do not assume that mentoring is going to be the entire solution. Echoing Tim Cavell's caution about mentoring being only one "context" among many, Jarjoura notes that his program is only one piece of a complex puzzle for turning these mentees' lives around. But mentoring can be a critical form of support, especially if the pair engages in activities that make the mentoring, as he puts it, "transformative."

Transformative Mentoring: *"I think we change the way they think about the world. . ."*

In his second presentation at the SIYM, Jarjoura emphasized the importance of transformative mentoring—a mentoring relationship that uses conversations and activities to really change mentees at a deeply personal level.

"You shouldn't aim too low," he noted. "If you can't see the big picture, your program will only achieve small results."

So what is the "big picture" in transformative mentoring? Simply put, it's changing how young people think. Jarjoura thinks this can be done by changing perspectives—things traditionally viewed as risk factors can instead be viewed as "relationships" that can be managed and improved upon. A youth struggling with school may

just need better relationships with their teachers. A dysfunctional family is comprised of relationships that can be improved. A youth keeps accumulating debt can change their relationship with money—they can learn to curb impulse purchasing, open a savings account, improve their credit, and mostly change the unhealthy ways they think about money. Jarjoura believes if you can change the way youth think about their problems, you empower them to solve their problems.

How does AIM do this? Through a variety of innovative methods:

- **A life preparation focus** — The program spends considerable time working with mentees on the practical aspects of adult life: finding a job, housing, personal relationships, being responsible. “If youth never think or talk about these things,” noted Jarjoura, “they will be unprepared to follow through when they need to.”
- **Targeted mind growth** — As Jarjoura put it, “We get them thinking about their thinking.” The program uses “case studies” from the youth’s own past to get them to reflect on their decisionmaking, the assumptions that went into certain actions, and ways in which they can creatively solve similar problems in the future. Mentoring researcher Jean Rhodes has speculated that cognitive development is one of the pathways through which mentoring changes mentees for the better, and AIM’s approach ensures that a cognitive focus is a huge part of the program.
- **Teaching communication skills** — Jarjoura noted that almost every aspect of successful adult life requires good communication skills. AIM mentors spend a lot of time teaching students how to communicate more effectively and respectfully.
- **Requiring mentors to be a resource bank** — The reason that mentors in AIM spend so much time getting to know their mentees is that they need to be a “resource connector” for youth once they reenter communities. These mentees have so much on their plate when they leave incarceration. Having someone to help find appropriate resources and services can be a huge advantage. The mentors don’t have to overstep their bounds and be everything to the youth, but they can be a conduit to other resources in the community, helping the youth maximize the overall support they receive.
- **Providing that positive “context” for the youth** — If mentors can not only pass on skills but also provide a safe place for mentees to practice and master those

skills, they will be creating the kinds of “payoffs”— to borrow Cavell’s phrase—that will keep youth engaged and away from negative contexts.

Unfortunately, not all mentors will come pre-packaged with the skills and abilities needed to be a transformative mentor. But they can learn this. See page 18 for a list of tips that Jarjoura shared that can help train mentors to be more transformative in the work they do.



Finding the Right Support: The Spectrum from Targeted Programming to Completely “Natural” Mentors

As seen in the presentations by Taussig, Geenen, and Jarjoura, the types of mentoring programs being developed to serve youth in systems of care are often complex and labor intensive. The thinking behind this is easy to understand: for a youth population dealing with many overlapping issues and needs, providing a wide variety of supports and services would seem to make sense. The inclination is to try to improve as many areas of the youth’s life as possible.

But is this a slippery slope? Might mentoring programs do more harm than good by trying to offer “too much?” Can the mentoring relationship suffer if it is embedded with a larger array of services and program features? How does mentoring keep from getting lost in the shuffle? And do mentoring programs start to drift away from their core

reason for being if they become key players in, or coordinators of, wrap-around services?

These program design questions were explored over several presentations offered by Julia Pryce and Michelle Munson, who each wrestled with the question of “what does good program design look like?”

JULIA PRYCE

Julia Pryce, an Assistant Professor in the School of Social Work at Loyola University Chicago, discussed the design considerations of several programs she has either developed or studied over the course of her career. Each illustrated the challenges of designing appropriate programming for high-risk youth while also highlighting just how powerful these programs can be when they are designed well.

Pryce began by sharing some of her research on adults who had been in the foster care system as children. In her analysis of data from the Midwest Study of Adult Functioning of Former Foster Youth, 81% of respondents said that they had someone in their past who they had considered to be a “mentor.” Over half of these mentors were biological family members who, although they were related, provided the youth with relationships and guidance that many would consider to be “mentoring.” Only about 30% of these self-reported mentors were provided through a formal program.

Pryce’s research examined exactly how these mentors became meaningful to this population and the barriers their relationships faced. One of the main challenges facing these relationships was the chaotic nature of life in foster care itself. Youth would often lose contact with these mentors when they moved from placement to placement. Many respondents expressed frustration at having formed a relationship with a caseworker, teacher, or program mentor, only to have that relationship ripped away when some aspect of their placement changed.

This helps explain the relevance of natural mentors to these youth: they were the most stable mentoring relationships they could find.

Another barrier to effective mentoring of foster youth Pryce examined in her research was the idea of “survivalist self-reliance.” This term refers to a theme she saw over and over again: youth in foster care adopting an attitude that they did not need other people’s help, other role models, or tangible or emotional support from adults or peers. Pryce described this attitude as a fall-back position for youth who had been hurt by the very adults and caregivers who were supposed to provide safety and nurturing. These “survivalist” foster youth not only had trouble bonding with supportive individuals, such as mentors, they didn’t even feel a need to look for this kind of support after a while. To them, the only person they could count on for the rest of their lives was themselves.

In addition to being heartbreakingly sad, this also creates a situation where these individuals are “stuck” in their personal development, even if they wind up getting by in their adult lives. How can a mentoring program effectively serve youth who have adopted this stance? How much can programs change this mindset? And for youth who are in the verge of thinking in “survivalist self-reliance” terms, how can the program ensure that the mentoring experience will be positive and not push the youth further toward this seemingly permanent state of isolation? The

“Pryce described survivalist self-reliance as a fall-back position for youth who had been hurt by the very caregivers who were supposed to provide safety and nurturing. These “survivalist” foster youth not only had trouble bonding with supportive individuals, such as mentors, they didn’t even feel a need to look for this kind of support after a while. To them, the only person they could count on for the rest of their lives was themselves.”

unfortunate reality might be that mentoring programs have to recognize that some individuals in systems of care may have attitudes or ways of thinking that leave them somewhat incapable of taking what the program is offering, no matter how well the mentoring relationship is structured and supported.

Pryce also discussed two programs she helped develop aimed at youth involved in the juvenile justice system. The first, an “economic” mentoring program in Chicago, started out as a focused intervention but wound up suffering from what Pryce called “kitchen sink syndrome.” The program was primarily designed to teach financial literacy and money management skills to participating youth, but it also included components related to careers, life skills, community engagement, academic achievement, and more. In the end, the mix of services, even though they were all relevant to the population being served,

may have been just too much of a good thing. “I think it’s hard for adults to design appropriate programming for these youth, especially if we don’t come from a similar background,” said Pryce. “We often don’t understand their motivations or engagement points. We think we are offering exactly what they would want, but we sometimes miss the mark.” Pryce noted that involving youth more in the planning process can help address these issues.

The other juvenile justice mentoring program Pryce discussed also seemed well-designed “on paper” only to struggle with implementation. In this instance, staff turnover disrupted the program timeline and the grant funds that allowed the program to ramp up in the first place came with restrictions that impacted program design roll out. “It was a catch-22,” Pryce explained, “we needed these grants to get the program up to scale, but with the grant came administrative concerns, restrictions on what we could and could not do, new partnerships that had to be managed, and concerns about sustaining all that we’d built.”

This highlights one of the most difficult circumstances facing mentoring programs trying to branch out and mentor youth in systems of care: not only are there questions of appropriate program design but there are also concerns about implementation, sustainability, and replicability. These programs require close partnerships and increased coordination of support. But doing all that well, in a climate of tenuous funding and competing organizational agendas, can be tremendously difficult. Hopefully policymakers and funders will begin to build in more time for “working out the kinks” with these types of programs.

Pryce also shared a compelling international example of innovative program design: the **LEADING INDIA’S FUTURE TODAY (LIFT) PROGRAM**. LIFT is a mentoring and leadership development project with the ambitious goal of empowering rural Indians to break the barriers of their caste system and participate fully in India’s growing economic and technological future.

LIFT was developed by four priests from rural India. It is designed to tap into India’s most abundant resource: people. The program takes rural youth from all over the country—often orphans nominated by their villages—and provides them with a residential program that offers mentoring, academic support, leadership development, community engagement, and opportunities for further education and career mobility. The program is rooted in the core value that every human being is a gift and that we

can consciously improve ourselves so that we become a gift to our communities. The idea is that over generations, LIFT graduates will go back to their communities in rural India and become leaders who will change the very nature of Indian society.

Unlike programs in the United States, where programs often have to struggle with parents to get their support and buy-in, the caregivers for LIFT participants are often thrilled to have this opportunity. According to Pryce, the families see LIFT as a huge asset to their futures, a chance to change their lives for the better. This was the type of big-picture thinking Jarjoura was hinting at when he told SIYM participants “don’t aim too low.” And although it will take LIFT’s 172 students per year a long time to change the fabric of an entire nation, one has to admire the vision and moral compass behind the program.

Compared to several of the domestic programs Pryce discussed, which offered a wealth of services but struggled to get youth on board, it becomes clear that good program design is not just finding the “right” blend of services. It also involves offering those services to the right participants at the right time and place, in conjunction with and a shared set of values and long-term support from the larger community. This is difficult for any mentoring program, but LIFT offers a solid, values-based starting point: viewing every child in your society as a gift that needs to be nurtured and who can contribute to a greater good.

MICHELLE MUNSON

While Pryce noted many of the challenges in creating intensive, multi-faceted programming for youth in systems of care, Michelle Munson, Associate Professor in the Silver School of Social Work at New York University, focused on the opposite end of the spectrum: meaningful “natural” mentoring relationships that developed without much, if any, program-based support. After hearing so much at the SIYM about wrap-around services and coordinated systems of care, it was fascinating to learn about highly at-risk youth who had simply gone out and found their own mentors.

The first study Munson shared looked at the role of “key helpers” for youth and young adults (18–25) with multiple systems involvement and mental health diagnoses. She found that 73% of the youth in her study reported the presence of a key helper, defined as a meaningful relationship that provided some form of support to the individual. Munson was quick to note that there were many blended roles with these key helpers: they were often

parents or other biological relatives, former caseworkers, or even spouses and partners. But many were neighbors and friends, people who had found a connection with these system-involved youth and developed a long-term relationship. In fact, almost half of these relationships were over 10 years old.

When looking at what youth said these natural mentors provided, the list looks very familiar:

- Mutuality and understanding
- Consistency in support — “They were always there for me through thick and thin”
- Encouragement
- Positive role modeling — “Just looking at who she is empowers me.”
- Honesty
- Love

Many also reported that their mentor helped them move beyond seeing themselves as defined by their illness— “She helped me become more of myself”—allowing the youth to forge a more well-rounded self-identity.

These are essentially the things we ask program mentors to provide, yet these natural mentors seemed to be providing these supports quite well in the absence of any program support. So how did this happen?

Munson’s research points to some key aspects of these relationships:

- **Consistency** — This was noted time and again by the youth. Caseworkers come and go, other individuals fluctuated in their support. But these key helpers displayed consistent, long-term caring and guidance. They were simply a part of these young adults’ lives, day in day out. Some of that may be attributable to the blended roles noted above; obviously an aunt who lives down the street might be more consistently available than a volunteer mentor. But it is worth noting that this was critical to getting the relationship to a certain level of trust. Can a volunteer mentor provide the type of frequency and duration that these young adults said was so important?
- **A shared background (especially around mental health issues) and use of self-disclosure** — Many of the respondents noted that they were inspired by how their key helper had overcome (or effectively managed)

similar mental health issues. They could see themselves in their mentors, and when their mentor said “I know how you feel” they could trust that the phrase was not just a figure of speech. This echoes the use of mentors of similar backgrounds in Sarah Geenen’s programs for foster youth—it makes a big difference in the development of the relationship.

- **Unconditional acceptance** — Munson’s interviews with these youth made it clear that many of them felt judged or marginalized by their experiences in multiple systems of care. They’d often had a lifetime of people telling them what their problems were and how to fix them. They’d felt stigmatized by their illness and undervalued by the world around them. But these key helpers accepted them for who they were.

Munson also asked the key helpers themselves what they thought made the relationships work. As with the youth, they also noted the trust and understanding of the relationship, as well as the consistency and availability of their time and support. Perhaps most tellingly, they didn’t really think of their relationship as all that hierarchical: compared to many program-created mentoring relationships, these seemed to be truly mutual—a “two-way street,” as one mentor put it.

Munson concludes that mentors for adolescents and young adults with mental health diagnoses and system involvement can provide three major types of support:

- General emotional and relational support — What we typically think of a mentor providing to a young person.
- Mental health-specific support — this includes feelings of acceptance and belonging, but also practical help like remembering to take medication and helping address mental health “episodes.”
- Tangible support — Mentors can help with basic things, such as financial assistance, transportation to and from other service providers, tutoring or educational support, and childcare. These are the little things that help with “day to day life” for the youth, and can go a long ways in building trust and respect in the mentoring relationship.

While this presentation illustrated that natural mentors can form very close and meaningful relationships with highly at-risk youth, the SIYM attendees wondered how traditional mentoring programs can make use of this



information? How can one take the qualities of these natural relationships and recreate or use them in a programmatic setting? Are program-based mentors operating in a different world, under a different set of rules, than natural mentors? And how big of an issue is this for those who want to serve youth in systems of care with program-based mentors?

Munson helped SIYM participants explore these issues by enlisting their help in thinking through a new program model she is developing. Her goal is to develop and test a program for young adults with substance abuse issues using “Recovery Role Models.” These mentors would be individuals who had overcome serious substance abuse problems and who were in a position to provide support to others. The idea is to take many of the traits of these naturally-successful mentoring relationships and try and build them into a program model.

The SIYM attendees discussed many considerations related to developing such a Recovery Role Model program: how to recruit and screen mentors, ways of ensuring match safety, how much a clinician should be involved in service delivery, the best ways of supporting these mentors and recreating the spark of those natural mentoring relationships. This exercise highlighted just how difficult it can be to develop the right program model for these types of youth populations and just how many advantages naturally-occurring mentoring relationships can have over programmatic ones. As the mentoring field expands to serve increasingly high-risk populations it may be worth asking: is a program-based mentor the best fit? Or might we be better off identifying those natural “key helpers” and making sure they have the support needed to keep those relationships thriving?

Key Thoughts Emerging from the 2011 SIYM

As one can see from the presentation summary above, the 2011 Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring packed a tremendous amount of information, research, program philosophy, and practitioner discussion into a single week. What struck participants most keenly was the tremendous diversity of program models and the many ways in which mentors were working with, and around, systems of care. Almost all of the programs presented on seemed to be working well—they had solid strategies and innovative approaches, backed up with data showing the program’s impact. And yet, many SIYM participants found themselves still asking, “Where do we go from here?” Can information on these specific models be generalized? What are the emerging ideas that the field can grow on?

Dr. Keller noted several key “standout” themes that emerged for him over the week:

- Programs models for serving system-involved youth, whether in foster care, correctional settings, or mental health services, all seem to challenge what we typically think of as mentoring “best practices.” Many offer short-term interventions, when the mentoring mantra is usually “longer equals stronger.” They place the mentoring relationship adjacent to other forms of support. Rarely is the mentoring relationship the primary component of the intervention. In many ways, these programs have mentors taking on a much more practical and purposeful role: they get youth to group skills sessions or other appointments, they help review transition plans, they set up connections with other community supports, they interact with case workers and parole officer, they lead curriculum activities. There is still a personal relationship at the heart of all of that work with the youth, but these programs really are conceptualizing the work of mentors differently than most traditional programs.
- Along those same lines, there is more accountability and expectation of these mentors. In many of the programs, the mentors were assuming a paraprofessional role. Graduate students who are looking for practical experience in their field, course credit, and additional training have tremendous motivation to stick with the program and give strong effort. They also bring skills to the table that most volunteer mentors would not.

Many of these programs had mentors spending double digit hours a week meeting with youth, and even more going through training and match support activities. This is outside of the scope of what a stand-alone program could probably hope to provide with community volunteers. But it does hint that perhaps using paraprofessional mentors is a good strategy for serving youth in systems of care, especially if the program model is blending mentoring with other transitional, life skill, and clinical supports.

- In addition to bringing a wealth of skill and time to the table, these mentors also spent considerable time being attentive to the background and history of the youth they were working with. Taussig's program begins with a very thorough assessment of the youth's needs; Jarjoura's AIM model has mentors working with youth on an individualized transition plan. But while a lot of the mentoring is tailored toward individual need, a huge aspect of these programs is the building of a sense of community among participants. They encourage youth to talk about their experiences, break the stigma these youth may be feeling, and normalize their journey through these "systems." That combination of personalized support and group sense of belonging seems to produce powerful results.
- These programs are focused on real empowerment. Jarjoura spoke quite passionately about the need for transformational mentoring; mentoring that changed how people view themselves and their abilities in the world. All mentoring programs inherently have some form of personal growth as their core goal (that's kind of the point), but many of the programs presented at the SIYM emphasized putting youth in charge of this personal growth and making them very active players in determining their own futures. That is a powerful message for youth who may have felt extremely disempowered by their experiences in systems of care. Sarah Geenen summed up this empowerment approach well with a phase from her My Life project that governs their self-determination work with mentees: "Nothing about me, without me."
- Many of these programs were researcher-led, which provides two advantages: it allows programs access to clinician expertise and it allows for continuous improvement. All of the researchers who presented on program models talked about how their expertise went into the initial program design and how their own research had fed back into the program to improve practices over time. Many talked openly about how

much they had "got wrong" early in their programs. Hopefully funders can begin to support longer program development and research cycles, because even the most philosophically sound program on paper will still need to research how the program is working and how it can be improved.

- Considering the three randomized trials described during the institute (by Geenen, Jarjoura, Taussig), the field of mentoring has an impressive body of evidence to support effectiveness with youth involved with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Not many programs serving these populations have been subjected to such rigorous evaluation, and mentoring stands out as an evidence-based intervention.

In addition to these broad themes, there were several "key thoughts" that are applicable to specific groups in the mentoring community.

Takeaways for Stand-Alone Mentoring Programs

Some of the main considerations for traditional mentoring programs who want to serve youth in systems of care more effectively:

- Considering working closely with clinicians, academics, and other professionals with knowledge of these youth populations. They can help you determine which aspects of your mentoring model may need reconsidering to serve these youth well, create or recommend curriculum that can guide match activities, and offer guidance on how mentors should be trained to connect with your mentees. They may also want to be involved with subsequent research on your efforts.
- Don't overextend your program. While your program may want to bring the power of mentoring to every youth in your community who needs it, the reality may be that you are best positioned to serve certain youth, or work in a particular setting. "Mission drift" is the term often applied to nonprofits who try to do too much or deviate from their core mission. Focus on what you do best and only branch out your services if you know your program can serve these vulnerable youth well.
- Explore direct partnerships with systems of care. Obviously not all programs will be able to develop as close of a coordination of services as Taussig's program in

Colorado, but the more programs can work with case workers, parole and probation, and out-of-home care providers, the better.

- Consider a team approach to your mentoring relationships. Remember that Jarjoura's program was able to provide more consistent mentoring, without sacrificing that personal connection, by utilizing a team approach.
- Consider recruiting mentors with a similar personal background as the youth they will be serving (or perhaps some experience in the helping professions). Remember that normalizing the youth's experience is critical, as is role modeling successful coping strategies, so mentors can benefit greatly from personal experience here. It may be helpful to heavily incentivize the mentor's involvement to ensure their commitment and consistent support.
- Remember that extensive training and ongoing support are critical for mentors who will be working with this population. Mentors must be able to connect with and help transform the youth they are working with. The training for the AIM project emphasizes concepts such as:
 - ✓ Expressing yourself clearly, both verbally and non-verbally
 - ✓ Being able to listen to how the youth feels
 - ✓ Responding in positive and appropriate ways, even when the mentor is frustrated
 - ✓ Being nonjudgmental
 - ✓ Respecting the youth's confidence (except when it may impact the health and welfare of others)
 - ✓ Not being surprised or upset if the youth lies about something; recognizing that this is often just a coping mechanism for deeper issues that the mentor can address
 - ✓ Offering suggestions about problems the youth is having, but not dictating what the youth should do (and accepting that the youth may make some bad decisions)
 - ✓ Keeping the commitment over time; no quitting!
 - ✓ Being positive, even when talking about difficult or painful topics
 - ✓ Knowing that there will be ups and downs along the way, and using disappointments and frustrations as an opportunity to grow the relationship

- Don't set your mentors up for failure by asking them to be the only solution for these youth. Time and time again at the SIYM, presenters noted that mentoring cannot, and should not, be the only or primary support these youth get. Give your mentors a clear role, explain how their work fits in with other supports, and help them understand both the power of their support and the limitations of their mentoring relationship.

Takeaways for Multi-Service Programs Utilizing Mentoring

For programs who offer a lot of services in addition to mentoring, the following tips can help with program effectiveness:

- Analyze your theory of change and your program's logic model. What are the missing pieces? What forms of support might be best delivered by a mentor, as opposed to a clinician or other staff member? How can mentors support the work of the other services? And how will you keep the mentoring component from getting lost in the shuffle?
- For programs focused on clinical interventions, consider how adding a mentoring component might enhance the intervention. For example, mentors can be trained to reinforce the skills that are learned in clinical sessions, provide emotional support by taking children to and from group sessions, or provide important "peer support." In this context it is interesting to note that several of the interventions presented started with mentoring as a sidebar to a clinical intervention, yet came to believe that it was the "glue," or "missing piece." There is probably a case to be made that just providing fun may be one of the most valuable components of an intervention and is something that is too often overlooked. In the words of Heather Taussig: "At the end of the day we must never lose sight of the fact that children are individuals with individual strengths, challenges, hopes and dreams, and blanket policies and procedures will never be as effective as tailored interventions, and to me that's the beauty of mentoring."
- As Roger Jarjoura put it: "Don't aim too low." Have high expectations of your staff and your mentors. Think about the type of programming you would want to be in place if a family member wound up in a system of care. Envision what that would look like and go build it.

- Once it's built, research and test the program model. Is it working as expected? What pieces need to be strengthened? Are mentors providing sufficient support? Is the mentoring piece enhancing, or detracting from, the other services? Continuous improvement should be a core value for the program.
- Think carefully about who would make an ideal mentor in the program. What skills would they need? What kind of personal background? What does the time commitment look like and how can you ensure their level of involvement? What incentives might help? Can you get your mentors through a partnership with an existing mentoring program? Or are you better off recruiting your own?
- Think carefully about program sustainability. In spite of the brilliance of many of the programs presented at the SIYM, all had faced dilemmas about future funding, political or institutional support, difficult partnerships, and losing key staff. If you build a quality program, can you keep it going?

Takeaways for Policymakers and Funders

A lot of what happens in the mentoring field is dictated by the funding sources, both public and private, and policymakers that provide the resources programs need. Those in a position to fund programs can best support the mentoring of system-involved youth by:

- Recognizing the scope of the investment and being patient. Serving these youth with mentoring (and a host of other services) is complicated. There is a lot that the field is still learning about how this might work best. The worst thing funders can do is quickly pull their investments in programs right at the time when they might be “working out the kinks.”
- As noted in Jarjoura’s prior comment about building “what you would want for a family member,” policymakers should aim for what is right for these youth, not simply what is doable. Fund programs at a level that will allow them to build the proper supports. This may cost considerably more per youth than a traditional mentoring program, but that is what is needed to do this well.
- Recognize that mentors can’t be the only solution. Mentors can be a huge asset to youth in systems of care, but understand that they can’t overcome all of the

circumstances that led to that system involvement on their own, nor can they compensate for a system that is dysfunctional itself.

- Explore program models that build partnerships and break down “silos.” The most compelling models presented at the SIYM featured innovative and meaningful collaboration among service providers. Ask not only how you can increase collaboration but what it will take to maintain that collaboration over time.
- Target program models that seem both sustainable and replicable. Can the success of one program reasonably be replicated elsewhere in the country? Remember that many systems of care operate quite differently from state to state or even across counties. One program model might not be a good fit everywhere.
- Fund further research. In the rush to serve more youth and make sure we support program staff, we often forget to fund the research that tells us whether we are hitting the mark. If we are going to use mentoring to address serious social problems, and support our most disadvantaged citizens, then we must continue to fund the research that helps improve those efforts over time.

Conclusion

Hopefully events like the 2011 Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring will begin to establish best practices and spur new thinking about how to best serve youth in child welfare, juvenile justice, and other large-scale systems of care. This work is only just beginning, but it is encouraging to know that mentoring can be applied so powerfully, in so many different ways, to support these young people.

As the event wrapped up on the last day, each SIYM participant talked briefly about how they would go home and use the information they had gathered in their programs. Some were going to forge new partnerships. Others were going to focus on mentor training or building a meaningful activity curriculum for their matches. Others vowed to research what they were already doing to see how their model was performing. But everyone agreed that mentoring is most definitely part of the solution for improving the lives of these youth and helping them transition out of these systems and into healthy and productive lives. But it remains to be seen if the infrastructure will follow all this fervor.



Summer Symposium on Mentoring Research

The main innovation at this year's Summer Institute was the addition of the Summer Symposium on Mentoring Research, a special one-day event that served as a capstone to the week of information sharing and dialogue. Open to both SIYM attendees and the community at large, the Symposium featured a dozen presenters—including all six of the 2011 SIYM Fellows—as well as other prominent researchers, clinicians, and practitioners. Each presenter offered a short, substantive talk about their best ideas related to mentoring youth in the child welfare, juvenile justice, mental health, and other systems.

This event, attended by over 150 mentoring and youth development professionals, students, and policymakers, allowed many of the best ideas from the Summer Institute to reach a larger audience, helping to disseminate best practices and spur further dialogue in the field. Each presentation is summarized below—downloadable video and materials from each are available online at the link above.

Thomas Keller, Portland State University — The man behind the Symposium began the day by discussing the qualities that mentors serving youth in these systems must have: the ability to innovate and try new approaches to old problems, listening skills that allow them to be attuned to what their mentee is really saying, and a deep interest in learning about their mentee's needs, strengths, and dreams so that they can provide appropriate supports.

Michelle Munson, New York University — Munson built on her presentations earlier in the week on "natural" mentors, showing how these adults support youth in systems of care through advocacy, emotional engagement and mutuality, and helping provide practical things like financial assistance and transportation to appointments with service providers—all without the backing of a formal mentoring program structure. She noted that these dedicated mentors come to be considered "like a parent" by the youth who are supported in this way.

Kym Ahrens, University of Washington — Ahrens, an Assistant Professor at the UW School of Medicine, presented her research on the effective skills of mentors working with foster youth. She explored traits such as persistence, patience, self-disclosure, flexibility, and confidence as they related to building trusting relationships.

Heather Taussig, University of Colorado — Taussig discussed her Building Healthy Futures program, which has demonstrated that short-term mentoring interventions can work for youth in foster care if they can help reduce the stigma of maltreatment while also working effectively with the child welfare system itself.

Jeffrey Butts, John Jay College of Criminal Justice, CUNY — A leader in researching juvenile justice programming, Butts talked about how the services we create to support youth in "systems" often wind up missing the mark, or even exacerbating the problem. Done poorly, these services can increase stigma and isolation. He noted that "Most juvenile justice youth do not need services, they need normalizing."

Roger Jarjoura, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis — Jarjoura spoke about the need to design very structured programs for youth in juvenile justice and correctional settings, noting that these youth need intensive support, not loosely-defined interventions. He emphasized that mentoring isn't a "quick fix" and policymakers need to look beyond short-term solutions to address problems related to youth in systems of care.

Foster Club All-Stars — The most moving presentation of the day came from two former foster youth who are now advocating for child welfare reform through the Foster Club All-Star program. They talked openly about their experiences in care, how mentors gave them the support they needed, and closed with a powerful message about youth in care: "Come and find us, we are waiting for our mentors."

Laurie Powers, Portland State University — Powers, Associate Dean for Research & Director of the Regional Research Institute for Human Services, presented many of her compelling findings on mentoring youth with mental health diagnoses, involvement in multiple systems, and physical and cognitive disabilities. Her research illustrates how tight program design can lead to powerful, focused results.

Leslie Leve, Oregon Social Learning Center — Leve, a Senior Scientist and Science Director at OSLC, provided an overview of her work developing a multi-dimensional treatment model for youth in foster care and their families. Her approach blends mentoring concepts with parenting groups, child skill building classes, couple and individual therapy, and crisis management.

Julia Pryce, Loyola University Chicago — Pryce talked about the connection between curiosity and good mentoring. She argued that the best mentors are those who are truly curious about their mentees, building on that desire to know more about the youth by learning to recognize subtle verbal and nonverbal cues and building the same "attunement" with their mentee that Keller spoke of.

Tim Cavell, University of Arkansas — Drawing on many stories from his family's past, Cavell offered up a vision of mentoring as a six-sided box: three sides of relationship conditions (acceptance, containment, leadership) and three of relationship foundations (clear goals, solid structure, and healthy communication). When these six elements come together, we find a "whole" mentoring relationship.

Renee Spencer, Boston University — Spencer closed the event by talking about many of the lessons learned from her research into mentoring relationships. She emphasized that making mentoring work is harder than the field initially thought, and that we often don't think of mentoring relationships as real relationships, noting that they suffer from the same inconsistencies, misunderstandings, and challenges as any other human relationship.

A video of each presentation can be found at: www.youthmentoring.ssw.pdx.edu



Research-Policy-Practice Dialogue: Improving Outcomes for System-Involved Youth

One of the most vexing problems for the mentoring field is how to get new best practices and critical research into the hands of policy-makers and funders and work with them to implement innovations in the programs they support. It sometimes feels as though mentoring researchers, practitioners, and funders are not all working with the same information or goals in mind.

In another addition to the 2011 SIYM schedule, Tom Keller organized the first Research-Policy-Practice Dialogue, held the Monday following the week-long Summer Institute. This event, hosted by the PSU Center for Interdisciplinary Mentoring research and co-sponsored by MENTOR and Oregon Mentors, brought together over 50 researchers, practitioners, and representatives from public and private funding agencies for an open discussion about how mentoring can best be supported as a prevention and intervention strategy for youth in various systems of care. The focus was on state-level opportunities and initiatives for supporting these youth through mentoring.

The day began with an opening talk from 2011 SIYM Fellow Roger Jarjoura, who outlined the current thinking about effective models for mentoring in a juvenile justice context. This was followed by three panel discussions—one featuring several researchers, another featuring leaders from the Oregon and Washington child welfare systems and other agencies overseeing high-risk youth, and one featuring various public and private funders. These panels allowed for open discussion on what seems to be working, based on the current research, and how these findings fit with the priorities of state agencies and policymakers.

Olivia Eudaly, who directs the Texas State Amachi Program, provided an excellent overview of how Texas has built effective state-wide services by creating a highly collaborative partnership between the state systems of care and Big Brothers Big Sisters. This is a compelling model that might find considerable success being replicated in other states.

The day ended with a stimulating activity: breakout discussions of what all the stakeholders in the room would build if the Foster Care Mentoring Act of 2009 became funded. This act would provide \$15 million in grants to states to develop or expand statewide academic mentoring programs for children in foster care, as well as fund media campaigns and a program that would encourage graduate students to mentor by assisting with their student loans.

This was a wonderful thought exercise that allowed all of the key players a chance to design their “wish list” program should these funds be available. One group discussed what the model would look like; another explored how partnerships could be fostered and maintained; another examined potential problems with implementation. It was an exhilarating example of the type of coordinating planning that unfortunately does not happen in practice very often.

Keller plans on doing a similar dialogue between researchers, practitioners, and funders as part of future Summer Institutes.

Learn more on Center for Interdisciplinary Mentoring Research website at:
www.mentoring.research.pdx.edu

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