Children and Youth in Care and Mentoring
References & Resources

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Research Studies


This is the first study focusing on the association between natural mentoring relationships and the adult outcomes of youth in care. The goal of this study was to determine whether youth in foster care with natural mentors during adolescence have improved adult outcomes. Youth were considered mentored when they reported the presence of a nonparental adult mentor in their life after the age of 14 and before the age of 18 that lasted at least 2 years. Youth in care with mentoring relationships during adolescence had more favourable outcomes in multiple domains of late adolescent/young adult functioning than nonmentored youth. Areas of improvement included educational attainment (borderline significance), suicidal risk, physical aggression, general health, and risk for having a sexually transmitted infection. The findings suggest that mentoring relationships with nonparental adults cannot be expected to outweigh completely the significant risk conferred by the experience of having been in foster care but the improvements seen are noteworthy. Conclusions were drawn that mentoring relationships are associated with positive adjustment during the transition to adulthood for youth in foster care and strategies to support natural mentoring relationships for youth in care should be developed and evaluated.


This study conducted individual qualitative interviews with 23 former foster youth regarding their relationships with supportive non-parental adults to identify factors that influence the formation, quality, and duration of these relationships and to develop a hypothesis for
intervention strategies. Findings suggested several themes related to relationship formation with non-parental adults including barriers and facilitators. Themes were also identified related to the ongoing development and longevity of these relationships. Proposed intervention strategies include systematic incorporation of important non-parental adults into transition planning, enhanced training and matching procedures with formal mentoring programs, assistance for youth to strengthen their interpersonal awareness and skills, and the targeting of specific periods of need when linking youth to sources of adult support.


Whereas mentoring programs are well received as support services, very little empirical research has been conducted to assess the effectiveness of these programs to meet the diverse needs of different special populations of youth. Potentially useful theoretical orientations (attachment, parental acceptance-rejection, social support, adult development, host provocation) and a socio-motivational model of mentoring are presented to complement Rhodes’s (2002) model. Mentoring research literatures for five special populations of youth (abused and neglected youth, youth who have disabilities, pregnant and parenting adolescents, juvenile offenders, academically at-risk students) are critiqued. Systemic, longitudinal research must address the co-occurrence of risk factors, populations, and interventions. The authors conclude with specific recommendations for future research.


This article presents a qualitative evaluation of the first year of a mentor program for at-risk high school youth (Project R.E.S.C.U.E) in a low income urban setting in Los Angeles County with high rates of youth and violent crime. The findings suggest that services to at-risk youth can be significantly increased by establishing community programs that employ committed adult volunteers who are willing to establish one-to-one relationships with youth. Mentor programs offer an effective, low-cost method for expanding the number of youth who can receive individualized supportive intervention.


The authors used meta-analysis to review 55 evaluations of the effects of mentoring programs on youth. Overall, findings provide evidence of only a modest or small benefit of program participation for the average youth. Program effects are enhanced significantly, however, when greater numbers of both theory based and empirically based best practices are utilized and when strong relationships are formed between mentors and youth. Youth from backgrounds of environmental risk and disadvantage appear most likely to benefit from participation in mentoring programs. Outcomes for youth at-risk due to personal vulnerabilities have varied
substantially in relation to program characteristics, with a noteworthy potential evident for poorly implemented programs to actually have an adverse effect on such youth. Recommendations include greater adherence to guidelines for the design and implementation of effective mentoring programs as well as more in-depth assessment of relationship and contextual factors in the evaluation of programs.


This study gathered qualitative data about the experiences of female youth of colour in foster care(n=7) with their natural mentors – naturally occurring important adults in a youth’s environment that can include teachers, extended family members, neighbours, coaches, and religious leaders. Theoretically, it is argued that natural mentoring may provide a better fit than programmatic mentoring for youth-in-care as the relationships are formed gradually and are less pressured; the mentor is not a stranger to the youth, and as a result, the youth has less difficulty trusting the adult; the adult and youth are already in the same environment and are likely to remain there; the chances that the relationship will endure over time are greater and the likelihood of positive outcomes increases. Five themes emerged from the qualitative analysis: relationships characteristics that matter (trust, love and caring, like parent and child); support I received (emotional, informational, instrumental, appraisal); ‘how I’ve changed’, ‘thoughts on my future’, and ‘what I think about foster care’. The results suggest that child welfare professionals should connect youth in care with caring adults by incorporating natural mentor relationships into typical service provision processes. Natural mentors should be supported in cultivating the qualities defined by the youth as important. Natural mentors should be provided with the resources to offer different types of support (ex. training, funding, information and skill-building).


The focus of this article is on trends in mentor program for adolescents in foster care. The authors surveyed 29 child welfare programs and found that mentor programs for adolescents in foster care tend to fall into several categories: transitional life skills; cultural empowerment; corporate/business; programs for young parents; and group homes with mentors. They concluded that mentoring has the potential to connect youth in foster care with a cross-section of caring adults who can provide a bridge to higher education and employment, and serve as a resource for transitional problem solving.


The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of the non-kin natural mentoring relationships among 19 year old youth in the process of ‘aging out’ of the foster care system in
Missouri along with the kinds of support they may offer as the youth transition out of care. Analyses yielded descriptive information grouped into four categories: a) types of natural mentors; b) qualities of these mentors; c) qualities of the natural mentoring relationships; and d) the nature of the various forms of support these relationships offered to the youth participants. Natural mentors were predominantly friends of the family, professionals and various community members. Some of the salient qualities included their understanding and non-judgmental nature and the directness of their communication and advice. Similar experiences and hardship made them especially trustworthy and credible sources of support. Data suggests that those developing mentoring initiatives may want to encourage natural relationships and recruit adults with similar life experiences. Important qualities included trust, consistency, empathy, and authenticity. Implications for social work policy, practice and research are discussed including that organizations should support natural mentoring relationships rather than try to create new ones that may or may not take hold.


This study uses qualitative and quantitative data from a study of the ‘Advocates to Successful Transition to Independence’ programme, a mentoring programme designed to train mentors to assist older adolescent foster youth in acquiring skills and resources needed for successful transition out of foster care and into adulthood. Results suggest that the use of a mentoring program for older adolescent foster youth represents a beneficial prevention strategy that may help prevent negative outcomes. Advocates to Successful Transition to Independence (ASTI) provides mentoring and advocacy services to youth in the child welfare system between the ages of 14 and 21. The purpose is to provide youth who are expected to transition out of the child welfare system with assistance and guidance out of the system and into adulthood. A qualitative and quantitative study found that establishing a strong relationship served as an important foundation for working on independent living skills. Youth reported being more open with their feelings, understanding their emotions better and being less angry. Advocates reported having difficulty finding resources and services for their youth and confusion over how to complete certain tasks. Three key recommendations were identified: 1) the establishment of a strong, supportive and caring relationship between mentor and youth appears to be necessary before mentors can support youth in developing independent living skills; 2) stronger linkages between mentoring programs and independent living programs may improve youth participating in ILPs; and 3) mentoring programs may benefit from more program coordination and support for mentors.


In this study, the authors examined the extent to which a formal mentoring program facilitated improvements in foster youth’s peer relationships. The influence of a mentoring program (Big Brothers / Big Sisters) on the peer relationships of foster youth in relative and non-relative care
was examined. Youth were randomly assigned to either the treatment or control condition, and changes in their peer relationships were assessed after 18 months. Foster parents were more likely than non-foster parents to report that their child showed improved social skills, as well as greater comfort and trust interacting with others, as a result of the intervention. In addition, whereas the peer relationships of all non-foster youth remained stable, treatment foster youth reported improvements in pro-social and self-esteem enhancing support, and control foster youth showed decrements over time. When the foster youth were differentiated further on the basis of their placement, a pattern of findings emerged in which treatment youth in relative foster care reported slight improvements in pro-social support, whereas treatment youth in non-relative foster care reported slight declines. All foster you in the control group reported decrements in peer support over time, with non-relative foster youth reporting the sharpest declines. Implications for research and intervention are discussed.


This randomized controlled trial study evaluates the efficacy of the Fostering Healthy Futures program in reducing mental health problems and associated problems. Children in the intervention group received an assessment of their cognitive, educational, and mental health functioning and participated in a 9-month mentoring and skills group program. Results indicated that the treatment group had fewer mental health problems 6 months after the intervention, reported fewer symptoms of dissociation 6 months after the intervention, and reported better quality of life immediately following the intervention. A 9-month mentoring and skills group intervention for children in foster care can be implemented with fidelity and high uptake rates, resulting in improved mental health outcomes.

Articles and Reports


This report documents major findings from the AMP’s strategy to support innovative mentoring pilot programs targeting underserved and diverse children and youth. The information focused on mentoring pilot programs with Aboriginal children and youth and/or immigrant children and youth. Although some of the children and youth involved in these programs may also have been in care, there was not a specific focus on the needs of this population and addressing the specific and complex needs of this population was indicated as beyond the findings of this report.

This article summarizes published research regarding the effectiveness of mentor programs in general, and for youth in foster care specifically, as a basis for evidence-based practice in child welfare. It examines the pros and cons of mentor programs and characteristics of programs that are more or less effective for achieving specific social goals. The author explores the opportunity cost of investments in transitional mentor programs versus efforts to find permanent parents for youth aging out of care. The author posits that the creation of a strong social scaffolding will require at least one parental adult and one or more adult mentors who provide other forms of support and guidance on a more temporary, less committed basis. Mentoring relationships are no substitute for the intimate and lifelong bond to an adult willing to serve as a permanent parent to a child. Mentoring programs should be viewed as a compensatory resource contributing to relational permanency and are more limited in the terms of support they can offer.


A collaborative relationship among three organizations developed a mentoring project using social work students (mentors) and independent living program (ILP) foster youths (mentees). The goal was to increase the mentees' awareness of educational possibilities beyond high school graduation while analyzing the mentors' learning as defined by the Council on Social Work Education core competencies. This pilot project paired mentors with ILP youths in this experiential opportunity conducted on a university campus. The students, acting as positive role models applying social work skills, engaged in an effort to improve the mentees' educational outcome, which would ultimately lead to self-sufficiency.


This report explores longer term mentoring for young people leaving care. It describes young people’s experiences of mentoring relationships and their outcomes. In an analysis of 181 mentoring relationships, the authors profile the young people and their mentors, describe their planning and goal setting, as well as the outcomes of mentoring. The study also includes interviews with 17 young people and their mentors, exploring the mentoring process, reasons for referral, matching, motivation for mentoring, and making plans and setting goals. The report concludes that for young people leaving care, who are coping with the challenges of transition to adulthood, often without consistent support from families, mentoring offers a different but complementary relationship from formal professional support.


Many youth in care are isolated, marginalized, lonely, depressed and have low self-esteem. Adolescents need an adult to confide in, someone they can share their uncertainties with and
who will offer guidance in a non-judgemental manner. Studies indicate that a trusted mentor could play a strategic role in changing antisocial behaviour, such as drug misuse or offending. The role of a mentor is important when youth leave the care system. A mentor must be reliable and trusted, someone not afraid to broach sensitive issues and who will persevere with the relationship no matter what happens and for as long as the teenager requires their support. The author recommends a stronger partnership between local authorities and the voluntary sector.


This research summary from the United Kingdom highlights the evidence of what works in supporting young care leavers’ successful transition to independent living. Part of the success of ‘leaving care services’ are the relationships young people cultivate while in care and moving out of care. Mentors are described as operating between professional and informal support. Young people valued the advice they received from mentors during their transition to independence. They perceived that mentors helped them with important practical advice, and acknowledged that they would benefit from better matching, greater flexibility and fewer time restrictions. Most of the direct support given to young people during their transition was provided by residential or foster care providers.

**Garringer, M. (2011) It may be the missing piece: Exploring the mentoring of youth in systems of care (Reflections from the 2011 Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring). National Mentoring Center. Portland State University.**

This article reflects on the themes and information presented at the 2011 Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring. The presentations highlighted the diversity of system involved youth and their intersection with mental health services, homelessness prevention programs, drug and alcohol treatment, public welfare systems, clinical therapy and mental health services, special education, and immigration and neutralization systems. Any discussion around best practices is dependent on a wide range of factors – age, abuse, history, placement, etc. Systems also overlap and studies show that a youth who is involved with one system is very likely to be involved in others as well, further complicating mentoring programs. Three audiences are looking for guidance: wrap around services that have integrated mentorship into a variety of clinical, educational, and life-skill related supports; stand-alone mentoring programs trying to adapt their current model to better serve youth in care; and policymakers and funders looking for fresh ideas and reliable program practices. This article provides main considerations for traditional mentoring programs wanting to serve youth in care, as well as takeaways for multi-service programs and policy makers and funders.

Mentoring of young persons in care in cultural, sporting and other activities by concerned adults – members of the child’s social network or volunteers – can foster the potential of the young person, build self-esteem, strengthen mental health and open new social relationships beyond the care system. Mentoring refers to the encouragement and support of the young person in care’s talents, interests and leisure activities by a committed adult. It is suggested that the potential of this neglected dimension of care can only be fully realized through alert professional practice, imaginative engagement with potential ‘natural’ mentors, supportive agency policy, effective care planning systems, and relevant training and professional supervision for social workers. A mentoring relationship with someone other than a caregiver or a professional with obligations to the child is more desirable since it gives the young person access to an additional positive relationship. Mentoring relationships are a way of attending to the social and emotional support needs of young people in care and involving ordinary members of the community. Formally organized schemes for the recruitment and support of mentors may yield less fruitful and profound relationships than may emerge informally in a child’s network. Methods to recruit an appropriate mentor are explored along with the role of the primary people in the child’s life.


The resiliency literature documents that adult caring relationships are key to the development of resilience in children. The present ethnographic study of 23 youths’ perceptions of caring adults explored the meanings they ascribe to caring relationships in helping them face adversity. The study confirmed that caring adults can serve as a protective factor for at-risk youth. In addition, the study delineated seven characteristics of those caring relationships: trust, attention, empathy, availability, affirmation, respect, and virtue. The presented results suggest a road map for self-reflection and skill development for those who seek to have a positive impact on the lives of challenging youth.


This study examined the non-kin natural mentoring relationships between older foster care youth and their mentors, along with the associations between these relationships and psychosocial outcomes. Natural mentors were defined as unrelated adults that are older than the participants that are willing to listen, share experiences, and guide the youth through their lives. Mentoring was related to important psychological and behavioural outcomes among youth in the present study. A non-kin mentor at age 18 was related to fewer depressive symptoms, less perceived stress and greater satisfaction with life six months later. A long term mentor was related to less perceived stress and a lower likelihood of being arrested at age 19. Long term mentoring relationships were not related to differences in substance use or employment. The foster care system may benefit from enhancing services by providing relational components to already existing services. Possible mentor-type interventions, which could incorporate youth that previously made the transition as role models, may lead to a
youth's enhanced understanding of the transition experience, coupled with an enhanced ability to trust in relationships.


This article describes the mental health issues experienced by many youth in foster care. These youth may be more likely to struggle in school due to limited supports to navigate barriers. Many lack a consistent adult to encourage them in school and advocate for them. The goal of the Better Futures Project is to empower and support young people in foster care with serious mental health issues to prepare for and participate in college or vocational school. Better Futures is conducting a preliminary study of the effects of the intervention model. Across all project components, youth meet and learn from near-peers (peer coaches) who encourage youth around self-care and work with their mental health care providers and foster parents to support them. They try to remain in contact during stressful experiences and crises, focusing on highlighting youth’s strengths and supporting them to continue working toward educational goals.


The purpose of this paper is to explore why youth aging out of the Canadian child welfare system do not fare as well as their peers. This paper aims to bring together the current research, experience of the authors and the voices of youth themselves to provide a knowledge base to help build stronger policies and practices for youth exiting child welfare systems across Canada. Education, housing, relationships, life skills, identity, youth engagement and emotional healing are the seven pillars of necessary support, with financial support as the foundation to enable the recommended supports to be predictable and sustainable. Mentoring and peer programs are listed as providing opportunities to share experiences and build friendships amongst other youth and adults who can relate. The province of Alberta is named as being at the forefront in implementing mentoring programs and as currently working with 300 youth bursary recipients being mentored in a variety of areas. This article is referencing the Advancing Futures Bursary Program. The recommendation is made that mentorship programs must be developed and supported so every youth in care in Canada has access to a mentoring relationship when required.


It is only recently that social and behavioural scientists have focused their attention on a more rigorous examination of mentoring for children and adolescents. In this article, the authors review the highlights of this research and critically examine recent trends in practice and policy.
in view of current directions in research. A longitudinal study found those in a mentoring relationship in adolescence exhibited significantly better outcomes within the domains of education and work, mental health, problem behaviour, and health. The magnitude of these associations was fairly small. A meta-analysis of 55 mentoring programs found benefits in the areas of emotional/ psychological well-being, involvement in problem or high-risk behaviour, and academic outcomes. However, the effectiveness of mentoring programs was found to be relatively small. Beneficial effects are based on a strong connection characterized by mutuality, trust and empathy. Positive effects were greatest in relationships that lasted at least 1 year. Policies that demand greater adherence to evidence-based practices and the use of rigorous evaluations are needed to ensure that quality receives as much attention as does quantity. If youth mentoring relationships are to offer optimal and sustained benefit to young people, theory and research will need to assume a more central role in the development and growth of interventions to cultivate and support such caring relationships between adults and youth.


This literature review points to research indicating the concurrent and multiple issues affecting boys in foster care including fetal alcohol syndrome, narcotics addictions, and AIDS. The research indicates that one of the most potentially effective interventions for at-risk children is to offer a caring and responsible adult role model who can make positive, lasting impressions on the child. All youth require caring adults to help them develop the resilience that they need to face the challenges of life.


This article discusses the challenges of meeting the conditions of an effective mentoring program when working with transitioning youth. The authors identify and critique the research literature on the effectiveness of mentoring programs for youth more generally and the implications of this evidence for programs serving youth leaving foster care utilizing an ecological approach. It is typically presumed that the psychosocial and vocational challenges faced by these youth are related to the lack of strong, healthy and stable relationships. Mentoring has been identified as a potential way to meet the critical need for supportive connections. There is currently little empirical evidence regarding whether and how mentoring may enhance the well-being of transitioning youth. The authors draw on general mentoring research by Rhodes and Dubois (2006) identifying consistency, duration and emotional connection as key characteristics of effective mentoring relationships. The authors identify barriers to meeting these goals including the complex circumstances faced by transitioning youth impacting the development and consistency of relationships; histories of maltreatment and insecure attachments; detrimental impact of premature endings; the intersection and dynamics of the family relationship; and the heterogeneity of the population. Further
evaluation of programs is required. Mentoring is critiqued as an individual-level solution to systematic problems requiring macro efforts to occur simultaneously.


*Fostering Healthy Futures* is a randomized controlled trial of an innovative prevention program for preadolescent youth (ages 9-11) placed in out-of-home care. Half of the youth are randomly selected to participate in a nine-month prevention program, which is manualized and consists of mentoring and therapeutic skills groups. The theoretical model underlying FHF is based on resilience literature. In developing the program, focus groups identified that key participants felt that mentoring and skills groups would be beneficial for youth. Mentors were drawn from schools of social work. The structured mentoring component involves one-on-one mentoring focused on creating empowering relationships with youth, ensuring youth receive appropriate services, helping youth generalize skills learned in skills groups, engaging in extracurricular activities and promoting positive attitudes.


This brief highlights the strengths and challenges of youth in care, discusses best practices for mentoring these youth, and outlines the components of effective training for mentors including unique characteristics of effective foster care mentoring programs and vital best practices.


Recruiting mentors to work with system-involved youth can be challenging. Potential mentors may fear that mentoring these youth requires specialized knowledge or training that they don’t possess. This publication provides guidance on recruiting mentors to work with system-involved youth including: identifying the people you want to recruit; reaching the people you want to recruit; marketing the benefits of working with system-involved youth; and recruiting men, minorities and people in rural areas.
Youth facing considerable life challenges are most likely to benefit from a strong mentoring relationship. This publication focuses on how strategies related to training, supervision, support, accountability, and recognition can serve to increase mentor retention.


Youth in foster care face significant life challenges that make it more likely that they will face negative outcomes (i.e., school failure, homelessness, and incarceration). While the reason(s) for out-of-home placement (i.e., family violence, abuse, neglect and/or abandonment) provide some context for negative outcomes, such negative outcomes need not be a foregone conclusion. In fact, interventions created to serve at-risk youth could ostensibly address the needs of youth in foster care as well, given that they often face similar social, emotional, and other challenges. Specifically, the author posits that supporting foster care youth through the use of mentoring and social skills training could reduce the negative outcomes far too common for many of these youth.


The Youth Leaving Care Working Group was established by the Minister of Children and Youth Services in conjunction with the Office of the Provincial Advocate for Children and Youth. Its mandate was to act on the first recommendation of My Real Life Book – Report of the Youth Leaving Care Hearings that the province of Ontario should recognize the current system needs to fundamentally change to better prepare young people in care to succeed. A section of the blueprint focuses on relationships: “supportive, long lasting relationships are critical to the success of children and youth in and from care.” Recommendations include that every child and youth in and from care has permanent lifelong relationships that meet their personal and cultural needs, and grow up with many opportunities to develop permanent, supportive relationships with others. A specific recommendation is to partner with community agencies to provide opportunities for children and youth in care to be matched with peer-mentors who have been in care or adult mentors from the community through formalized mentoring organizations that can meet their individual needs.


This article looks at some of the mentoring and resilience literature concerning building positive and significant adult-child relationships and outlines some of the factors involved in intensive adult-child mentoring relationships can become a ‘lifeline’ to high-risk children. Research on mentoring and resilience shows that later, non-familial relationships both strengthen and advance ongoing child development. Children exposed to early and ongoing difficult life events are more likely to have problems forming and sustaining trusting and healthy relationships with adults. Harsh, abusive and neglectful care-giving experiences can
cause a child to perceive the world as a cold and dangerous place. Such experiences can also result in physical, social, emotional, and cognitive developmental and functional delays and/or difficulties. From a behavioural perspective, these youth may present as indifferent, defiant, disrespectful, and resistant. From a mentoring practice standpoint, these types of functional problems make forming meaningful, long-term mentor/mentee relationships far more challenging, and require large doses of patience, openness, and perceptiveness on the part of the mentor.

**Presentations, Webinars, and Courses**


Dr. Ahrens draws on studies by Rhodes et al. (1999) which shows that mentoring relationships with youth in care can have a positive impact on social skills and self-esteem. She indicates that other research (Brittner et al.) shows that mentoring relationships with youth in care that disrupt early (specifically within 3-6 months) can have increases in delinquent behaviour and other negative behaviours. Dr. Ahrens research looks at what lessons can be taken from natural mentoring relationships with youth in care. Initial barriers identified for forming relationships included fear of emotional risk, fear of indebtedness, a fear that the mentor will fail them, resistance to directed advice, and an adult who does not understand their culture or background in the foster system. Initial facilitators to these relationships included a persistent and patient mentor, adults who display authentic affection and emotion, adults who share their own experiences, common past experiences or current interests, and when a youth is in a vulnerable transition period. Ongoing facilitators included adults who set clear expectations, are consistent, display confidence, plan activities that incorporate the youth’s interests, are responsive to the youth’s needs and method for maintaining ongoing contact. Dr. Ahrens identifies practical upshots around things to consider when choosing mentors, providing specialized training and ongoing support, a youth training component, considering matching youth during times of transition, and considering improving linkages with the child welfare system.


This presentation, found on the Alberta education website, provides information on the Alberta Mentoring Partnership and focuses on the resiliency and strength-based practice. The presentation describes three types of significant adult relationships: strategic, formal, and informal. Mentoring is defined and research on its positive outcomes is described in relation to enhancing resiliency in others.

This webinar describes foster care youth, challenges, instability and negative outcomes when transitioning out of care. Creating matches for these youth can be especially challenging with potential harm from early endings and inconsistent mentoring. There is currently little research on the nature and efficacy of mentoring programs for foster care youth and only a couple of studies have control group comparisons. More information is presented on general mentoring research and how it may apply to foster care youth, natural mentors, facilitators of connections, and elements of effective practice for mentoring foster youth. Mentoring is furthermore described as something that should be in conjunction with, and not substituted for, other supportive services.


Dr. Butts speaks about his work with the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Youth need help with day to day challenges, overcoming past challenges, and concrete help to introduce stability in their lives. Mentoring has become a beacon of hope in juvenile justice systems and very influential on policy makers. The success of mentoring has the downside that there has been some political contention as services in the United States have been cut while mentoring continues to be supported. Mentoring is being seen as a pathway to funding; people are trying to include mentoring into their program models to obtain funding. Dr. Butts asserts that mentoring is a way to make juvenile justice programs stronger. Mentoring is a natural fit for these programs. Youth justice interventions should involve enhancing positive youth development including opportunities to learn about career, to have success in learning, to have experience and an outlet for artistic expression, physical activity and an enduring relationship with a pro-social adult. Mentoring has become a cornerstone for youth justice programs.


MENTOR/ University of Massachusetts Amherst Boston Center for Evidence-Based Mentoring short course is an intensive 1.5 day course providing expert lecturers and group discussions aimed at deepening practitioners’ capacity to train and supervise volunteer mentors working with youth who are in foster care system to promote more effective mentoring programs and stronger relationships between mentors and foster youth. This short course will take place September 30 and October 1, 2013.

Dr. Keller applies his research with school-based mentoring and mentor attunement to the experiences of youth-in-care. This approach involves taking time to learn about the youth or child, a desire to understand and connect with youth, being attuned to the responses of the mentees and being persistent and open to trying new things. In research focusing on youth transitioning out of care, Keller defined three groups: 1) distressed and disconnected; 2) competent and connected; and 3) struggling but staying. When supporting youth in care, it is important to remember the diversity of the group. Mentoring has such potential because it allows mentors to respond to the needs and circumstances of youth on an individualized basis.


This presentation from the National Mentoring Symposium describes various mentoring programs for youth in care. The BEST kids mentoring program works to promote better futures for youth in the District of Columbia’s child welfare system by developing and supporting mentoring relationships with caring, consistent adults. The BEST kids program utilizes volunteer mentors for one-to-one mentoring and experiential learning peer groups for children ages 6 and up. Mentor Michigan’s foster care initiative has involved identifying Michigan programs serving youth in foster care, identifying the capacity of these programs, identifying the barriers to serve more youth, and developing relationships between mentoring programs and local DHS offices (to increase referrals and communication). This initiative has also included training mentoring programs on DHS practices, DHS on mentoring programs, and foster care specific training to mentoring programs. They have also supported these programs with tools and resources from www.mentormichigan.org. Dr. Taussig presents on the Fostering Healthy Futures program where she discusses the assessment process and the program’s two main components: therapeutic skills groups and mentoring. The role of the mentor involves creating a web of support for children, improving social skills, and providing advocacy. Dr. Taussig addresses the qualitative and quantitative results describing positive perceptions by participants and their families, improved mental health outcomes and enhanced placement and permanency outcomes.


Leslie Leve presents a rigorously researched intervention being administered at the Oregon Social Learning Center – Multi-Dimensional Treatment Foster Care (MTFC) which runs for 4-6 months with two main components: a parenting group for foster parents and a child-adolescent skill building component. In the child and adolescent skill building component, a coach or mentor provides one-on-one support for one or two hours each week. They expose the youth to positive role models, new activities and pro-social skills. The same program is done with preschool and elementary-school aged youth in a group format. Youth in foster care as well as in the juvenile justice system showed a decrease in criminal referrals, days in detention, association with delinquent peers and pregnancies. There were increases in placement stability, connection to mentoring adults, and school engagement. For female youth in care, there was a
decrease in internalizing problems, externalizing problems, delinquency, risky sexual behaviour and drug-use. There was an increase in placement stability and pro-social behaviour.


Dr. Munson focused on meaningful “natural” mentoring relationships that developed without much, if any, program-based support. In Munson’s first study, she looked at the role of “key helpers” for youth and young adults with multiple-system involvement and mental health diagnoses. 73% of the youth reported the presence of a key helper. These natural mentors provided mutuality and understanding, consistency in support, encouragement, positive role modeling, honesty and love. Key aspects of the relationships included consistency, a shared background, and unconditional acceptance. Munson is working at taking the traits of these naturally-successful mentoring relationships and building them into a mentoring program model. As the mentoring field continues to expand 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?


About 40% of youth in foster care and 50% of incarcerated youth require special education with emotional, behavioural and learning disabilities. 70-80% of youth in care have a DSM diagnosis. Data shows that youth with disabilities in care compared to those without disabilities have increased negative outcomes, especially when transitioning out of care. These youth are considered high-risk. In a series of small, rigorous studies on mentoring, positive results for this population have been noted. Things that they have learned from these studies include: use goals/outcomes to guide program design; involve mentors who can relate to the youth’s experiences and the program’s goals; mentors need training and ongoing support;


30-70% of youth in foster care have disabilities with the majority being emotional, behavioural, and learning disabilities. Mentoring is described as a method for self-determination – helping young people make decisions, learn and succeed in their lives. In two studies looking at youth being mentored individually and in group formats, impacts included an increase in self-determination, lowered levels of feelings of depression, and improved academic behaviours. Peer mentoring was cited as an experience that can offer knowledgeable, credible and powerful influence for mentees.

This powerpoint, provided for Children and Youth Services staff working under the CYFEA defines high risk youth and examines theoretical and practice principles for working with this population. Peter Smyth examines the use of harm reduction, a resiliency approach, utilizing community relationships and partnerships, and relationship-based intervention. He outlines strategies for working with high risk youth and defines the seven characteristics of caring relationships (trust, attention, empathy, affirmation, availability, respect and virtue).


Heather Taussig presents on the work she has been doing with children who have experienced maltreatment and have lived in some form of out of home care. Fostering Healthy Futures is a multi-component program for children in care ages 9-11 in the Denver area. The 30-week program involves a therapeutic skills group led by a clinician and mentors that provide personal support, friendship and opportunities to practice these skills. Mentors are graduate students who spend 16-20 hours a month working with their mentees and attend 40 hours of training prior to working in the program. Mentees spend almost 3 hours a week discussing their mentees with clinicians and participate in ongoing training and skill-building. Taussig has conducted intensive research testing the effectiveness of the program showing a higher quality of life, lower anxiety, and increased social support for youth. Youth also had fewer placements within the system and were two and a half times more likely to be reunified with their family. Taussig provided the following tips: the types of maltreatment children experience matter when developing an intervention; programs should clearly identify the desired outcomes of the mentoring component; and planning for sustainability and long-term partnerships is critical.


The Foster Club ‘All-Stars’ 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. Former youth in care and current Foster Club All Stars (fosterclub.org) provided insight into their time in care including difficulty creating relationships based on trust and a lack of support. They shared the following information regarding mentors: consistency is very important; mentors normalize their experience and help remove stigma; listening was a key part of building trust in the relationship; mentors were tenacious about keeping the relationship going; youth in foster care may need assistance learning to reach out for help as they may feel powerless or unworthy of support. Further recommendations are provided for mentoring programs including: collaboration between mentoring agencies and child welfare agencies; develop an understanding of the special needs of youth and training mentors on these topics; providing extra time to mentees to develop trust within the relationship; and connect with youth groups and youth leaders to provide support on a peer mentoring level.
Alberta Youth In Care Resources


Success in School for Children and Youth in Care – Provincial Protocol Framework (PPF) is a joint initiative of Alberta Education (AE) and Alberta Children and Youth Services (ACYS) to support improved school outcomes and high school completion rates for children and youth in provincial government care. The PPF describes the roles and responsibilities of the two ministries in implementing policies and procedures to provide the foundation for collaboration efforts at all levels of their respective systems to achieve this goal. The primary purpose of the PPF is to identify and enable strategies to improve educational outcomes for children and youth in care, and to promote consistency of practice across the province.


This article offers support to core team members (ex. caseworkers, caregivers, and teachers) for supporting educational success for youth in care through relationship building.


There are many opportunities for caregivers, such as foster parents, group home staff, and extended family, to help children and youth in care be successful in school and in life. Caregivers help young people in care discover their strengths and abilities and increase their confidence in decision-making. Caregivers celebrate successes with young people in care, and help them learn how to overcome challenges and adversity. This article looks at how caregivers can support educational success for young people in care.


When children and youth in care speak about their school experience, many share that they feel stigmatized, labelled and disconnected. As with other students, they also say they want to succeed in school and have adults in their lives who care, support, mentor and advocate for them. This article looks at how educators can support educational success for young people in care.

This article offers support to core team members (ex. caseworkers, caregivers, and teachers) to assist children and youth in care to advocate in educational or other settings to increase likelihood of success as well as enhance their maturity and development.


This article offers support to core team members (ex. caseworkers, caregivers and teachers) to create powerful relationships and collaborations. Strategies are presented based on research and successful practices and are intended to assist communities and teams as they plan together to help young people in care.


Alberta Children and Youth Services (ACYS) and Alberta Education are working together to improve high school completion and other educational outcomes for children and youth in care. To support this joint work, the ministries of ACYS and Education signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to allow data matching in order to generate education results for children and youth in care. This report covers the school years from 1995/96 to 2006/07.


Based on focus groups with youth receiving services under the Child, Youth and Family Enhancement Act, three themes emerged: 1) Youth need additional access to programs and supports; 2) youth need genuine connections to supportive adults in the community; and 3) youth need increased resources to help them become independent. Youth described their desire for connections to trusted and caring adults who they could go to for advice and support as they transitioned to adulthood. This report refers to the Advancing Futures bursary which provides youth with access to funding for upgrading and post-secondary education. It provides examples of an Edmonton-based youth in care mentoring program (Boys and Girls Clubs Big Brothers Big Sisters of Edmonton), and a southern Alberta program that provides wraparound services to homeless young people.

Youth in Care Canada
http://www.youthincare.ca/

Across Canada, there are a number of local, regional and provincial Youth in Care Networks and groups. These networks give youth opportunities to speak out on important issues regarding being in the system, develop important life skills, and make lasting friendships with other youth who have similar life experiences. General contact information can be retrieved from
info@youthincare.ca. At this time, the Alberta Youth in Care and Custody Network is not accessible.

Guides for Practice


This toolkit is designed to help Senior Corps (and organization that connects today’s 55+ with the people and organizations that need them most) directors recruit, train, and place volunteers in mentoring programs serving foster youth. It also examines how to identify, partner with, and begin placing volunteers in high quality programs serving foster youth. Special considerations for mentoring foster youth include consistency, the right skills and temperament, understanding that delivering services can be difficult, and connecting to clinical support.


This resource is designed for mentor program managers in the state of California who serve or who wish to serve youth in foster care. The workshop is comprised of seven modules: a child’s path through the foster care system; the role of a mentor in the life of foster youth; what mentors can offer foster youth; helping foster youth prepare for the future; building trust into your mentor program design; creating a foster youth friendly mentor program; and next steps. The workshop also includes Foster Youth Mentorship Training for use with mentors that provides trainer’s notes and presentation slides. Program development resources include descriptions of mentoring programs serving this population and a partnership model and pilot program draft document.

NYC Administration for Children’s Services
Best Practice Guidelines for Foster Care Youth Mentoring

Outlines the best practices for implementing a mentoring program as a part of a child welfare agency including: guaranteeing mentoring is supported agency-wide; appropriate recruitment, screening and training principles, and working with case workers.

Current Mentoring Organizations Serving Youth In Care

Adoption and Foster Care Mentoring
http://www.afcmentoring.org/
Mission: to empower youth in foster care to flourish through committed mentoring relationships and the development of essential life skills.

A Boston-based organization that exclusively serves youth in care ages 7 and older through one-on-one mentoring as well as group mentoring services to youth ages 14 and older with a focus on transitioning out of care (life skills workshops, paid internship, peer network). AFC will continue to serve youth as long as they wish to participate in the program. http://www.afcmentoring.org/wp-content/uploads/DC-Full-Revised-2-pg.pdf

Advancing Futures Bursary Program
http://humanservices.alberta.ca/family-community/15616.html
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JaZVn0Q0qJg

The Advancing Futures bursary program was established in 2004 to increase opportunities and improve outcomes for at-risk or high-risk youth in care. The program focuses on transitioning youth from care into adulthood while funding them to complete a post-secondary education and obtain a marketable skill. In 2012-2013 the program provided close to $6.5 million dollars in funding and transitional supports such as how to access employment, education and life skills to 585 students. Each of the 585 students is assigned to a program coordinator who provides coaching, mentoring and transitional supports. In June 2010, in partnership with Advancing Futures, ATB Financial introduced the ATB Financial Youth Education Support Program (YES Program). The 2010 YES Program provided six students with a financial bursary to pursue a four year degree or two year diploma at an Alberta post-secondary institution. The YES Program included a mentoring component and students were provided with guidance throughout their educational pursuit and are also offered part-time employment. Advancing Futures bursary continues to provide transitional supports to these students and ATB Financial provides the mentoring and employment opportunities. Over the past 3 years ATB Financial has increased their commitment and added one additional youth per year. In 2012-13 ATB Financial committed over $105,000 towards the YES Program. In 2013-2014 ATB will provide 8 AFB students with bursaries and we will also introduce a ‘career planning’ component to the program. Below is a video that was created to profile the partnership between ATB YES program and AFB from a student’s perspective.

Contact: Jackie Astle, Manager Youth In Transition, Ministry of Human Services, (780) 644-2559, jackie.astle@gov.ab.ca

BEST Kids
www.bestkids.org

BEST Kids, Inc., is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that provides mentoring to foster care children in the District of Columbia’s Child Welfare System. One of the strongest single protective factors a child can have is a close relationship with a caring adult who serves as a mentor and role model. Despite this, long term, consistent, one-on-one mentoring is almost non-existent for foster care children. We are the first pilot program in the District of Columbia to provide volunteer mentors dedicated to mentoring children in foster care. Operating under
the first ever Volunteer Mentor Partnership (VMP) Grant with the District of Columbia’s Child and Family Services Agency, BEST Kids mentoring program is able to provide volunteer mentors for children as young as six and continue, as needed, until they reach the age of twenty-one years old. BEST Kids asks mentors to commit to at least one year of mentoring and to perform, on average, 10 hours a month of face-to-face contact. The program’s mission is to promote better futures for youth in the District of Columbia’s child welfare system by developing and supporting one-on-one mentoring relationships between the youth and caring, consistent adults.

**Better Futures**
This program serves transitioning youth, specifically those with a history of mental health conditions. Better Futures focuses on higher education attainment. The mentors are peers who share the same 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. Mentors use self-disclosure to role-model and normalize the experience of transitioning out of care. The youth also participate in a week-long institute over the summer that provides workshops and training opportunities on a variety of relevant topics. Initial findings suggest improved self-determination and post-secondary planning.

Hear about the program through the eyes of a youth participant:
“Like everyone else, foster youth need support from the people around them. Without support a dream will stay a dream and never become a reality. I know from experience, however, that just one person saying, “You can do this,” can tune out some of the “You’re never going to get there” messages that are commonly conveyed to youth in care. It just takes one person to inspire youth to create a future for themselves.”

**Child Welfare League of America**
http://www.cwla.org/programs/fostercare/peermentoring.htm

Fostering Healthy Connections through Peer Mentoring: Foster Youth Give Each Other a Helping Hand
In partnership with the FosterClub, funding has been secured for a three-year initiative in which former foster youth mentor children and youth currently in the foster care system. Goals include improving behavioural and educational outcomes as well as strengthening interpersonal relationships. CWLA will provide a mentor and mentee curriculum, peer-to-peer learning opportunities, and youth-friendly online resources and materials.

**Emancipated Youth Connections Project**

The vision of the California Permanency for Youth Project is to achieve permanency for older children and youth in California so that no youth leaves the child welfare system without a lifelong connection to a caring adult. The goals fall in two categories: 1) participants searching for family members; and 2) participants hoping to find a non-relative ‘parent’ or ‘lifelong mentor’ figure. When described by youth, it was clear that they were hoping for a relationship much broader than the one typically provided by a mentor. They desired someone more like a parent figure but were uncomfortable using the term ‘parent.’ The author recommended that child welfare professionals need to consider a variety of permanent relationships. Although mentor relationships are often temporary, it is possible to connect youth to mentors who will make lifelong commitments. The client will lead the way to the needed connection.

**Foster Club All Stars**
www.fosterclub.com

The Foster Club ‘All-Stars’ 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.

**Fostering Healthy Futures (FHF)**
http://www.cebc4cw.org/program/fostering-healthy-futures-fhf/detailed

The Fostering Healthy Futures 9-month preventative intervention is designed for preadolescent children aged 9 to 11 years recently placed in foster care due to child maltreatment. The FHF intervention includes two major components: skills groups and mentoring. Skills groups were designed to bring children in foster care together to reduce stigma and provide opportunities for them to learn skills in a supportive environment. Mentoring was designed to provide children in foster care with an additional supportive adult who could serve as a role model and advocate. The intervention *demonstrated* a significant effect in reducing mental health symptoms, especially those associated with trauma, anxiety, and depression.

**Mentoring USA**
Foster Care Programs
http://www.mentoringusa.org/our_programs/Program_Descriptions

Mentoring USA's Foster Care program is uniquely designed to provide structured, one-to-one mentoring for youth in care through New York City. These programs follow the same important guidelines as the Mentoring USA General Programs do, all while expanding service to youth up to 21 years of age. When foster care children turn 21 years old and 'age out' of the system, they are presented with a whole new set of challenges, many of which their mentors can help them overcome. As part of the foster care programming Mentoring USA also offers unique programs that link adopted youth with adults who were adopted. Mentoring USA's Foster Care program passionately aims to provide these youth with someone who cares, in order to develop a long term relationship increasing the likelihood of future success.
Mentoring System Involved Youth Inventory of Foster Care and Reentry Mentoring Programs
http://msiy.edc.org/publications/MSIY%20publications/MSIY_Inventory%20of%20Foster%20Care%20Reentry%20Mentoring%20Pgms.pdf

My Life Program
Mentors (coaches) help youth achieve self-identified goals for early adulthood. Mentors are primarily graduate students and paid staff who are compensated for their time and use a set curriculum called Take Charge to guide their goal-focused work. Mentors are highly trained and supervised; their coaching sessions are often filmed and reviewed by clinicians and they complete fidelity checklists and activity logs. Youth also participate in group mentoring workshops by foster care alumni and volunteers. Participants show increased perceptions of self-determination and quality of life, as well as improved transition planning. They also tend to have higher employment rates after leaving the program. Mentors are trained to persist and work through the initial resistance many traumatized youth have to trusting adults and forming relationships.

The Powerhouse Mentoring Program began providing mentoring services to foster care youth aged 13-21 in Multnomah County in October 2000. The mission of the Powerhouse is to provide community-based mentoring to teens in foster care to enhance their successful transitions from adolescence to adulthood. Two part-time staff members are responsible for all phases of the mentoring program which serves approximately 25 youth annually. The average length of matches is 28 months. This report attributes the success of the program to their intensive, specialized training program and ongoing support for mentors. Mentors learn about the youth they will be serving and how they can build a relationship with them.

This document identifies mentoring programs in the United States that serve foster youth with contact information.

True Colors Mentoring: Sexual Minority Youth and Family Services
http://www.ourtruecolors.org/Mentoring/
One-on-one mentors meet with youth individually as well as in group activities. The majority of the youth come from the Department of Children and Families.
General Information Regarding Youth in Care


This article focuses on the lack of a safety net for youth aging out of the foster care system and the increased likelihood that they will suffer from homelessness, be involved in criminal activity, be uneducated, be unemployed, experience poverty, and lack proper health care. This article identifies the specific needs and outcomes of youths who age out under current foster care policies. The writer makes an argument for a universal safety net for former foster care youth including such services as mentorship, daily life skills training, housing support, job training, healthcare, counseling services, educational scholarships, and emergency contacts. Atkinson notes group homes, where older youth are often placed, often hinder the development of relationships with members of the community and give youth fewer opportunities to become adopted or develop adult mentors. Congregate care facilities are often staffed with young workers and sustain high employee turnover rates, preventing youth from developing lasting relationships with responsible adults, one of the key factors typically associated with aging out successfully.


This study gathered qualitative information about the experiences of youth transitioning out of foster care into adulthood, from the perspectives of youth themselves, as well as foster parents and professionals. Data was gathered from 10 focus groups comprised of a total of 88 participants, including youth currently in foster care, foster care alumni, foster parents, child welfare professionals, education professionals, Independent Living Program staff and other key professionals. Findings of key themes included: (a) self-determination; (b) coordination/collaboration (c) importance of relationships; (d) importance of family; (e) normalizing the foster care experience; (f) the Independent Living Program and (g) issues related to disability.


The transition to adulthood is marked by new roles and responsibilities in such interrelated domains as education, employment, and family formation. This study investigates the capacity of adolescents on the verge of emancipation from the child welfare system to navigate this transition. The authors argue that by identifying distinctive subpopulations characterized by particular combinations of strengths and challenges provides a basis for tailoring programs and services to the needs of different types of youth in the system. The purpose of the study is to
investigate heterogeneity among youth who are on the verge of exiting the child welfare system. The analysis suggests four subpopulations defined by distinctive profiles on indicators reflecting multiple domains of life experience: distressed and disconnected; competent and connected; struggling but staying; and hindered and homebound. Identifying the particular needs and challenges of subpopulations has implications for efforts to match adolescents aging out of the child welfare system with appropriate services. Competent and connected youth are described as being the most likely to benefit from opportunities and services that enable them to nurture their talents, form mentoring relationships, engage in youth development programs, attend college, and participate in vocational training.


This is a collective Life Book written by youth served by the Children’s Aid Society system in Ontario as a way of documenting the stories presented at the Youth Leaving Care Hearing which took place November 18th and 25th at Queen’s Park. This report is written by youth in and from care, with the support of the Advocate’s Office. One theme that emerges is that ‘youth are vulnerable.’ The main difference between the vulnerability of a child in care and a child at home is the support system and environment they live in. Another theme is that of isolation. This is described as preventable as it takes one person to reach out and help, listen, actually hear what is said and then guide youth in the right direction. The theme that ‘no one is really there for us’ is described. A steady and stable relationship with at least one person is said to make all the difference in the world. A professional recommended that children need someone that will be there in the long term that will help them achieve their goals. The youth also described requiring more support in transitioning out of care at age 21 – with job training, financial assistance, life skills education, and support for medications, dental care and mental health. Recommendations made is to make sure youth have permanent relationships with positive relatives, adults, mentors and peers; support children and youth in care to identify mentors; offer more peer mentoring or role models to check in with and talk to; support any meaningful relationship a youth has through transition, a strong relationship will facilitate transition.

Newspaper Articles


Discrimination against gay and lesbian youths in foster care has led to federal health professionals sending a letter in 2011 encouraging states to develop training for caseworkers and foster parents on the issue. Advocates in some states have increased efforts to train
caseworkers, recruit foster parents and assign mentors. The largest issue for these youth is homelessness. This article draws attention to the non-profit mentoring organization True Colors that works closely with Connecticut child welfare workers. Massachusetts opened a co-ed group home for gay foster youth. Child welfare officials there also recently started a mentoring program along with life skills classes. Recruiting foster parents and mentors has been challenging, according to the Executive Director of Adoption and Foster Care Mentoring.