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Mentoring and crime prevention: what is good practice?

In a crime prevention context, mentoring is often directed towards young people already involved in the criminal justice system or 'at-risk' of engaging in criminal activity. Such programs are targeted secondary prevention as opposed to universal prevention within either multi-component or stand-alone programs. Current prevention literature on developmental pathways identifies risk and protective factors that are associated with young people engaging in risk-taking behaviour (see CRM no. 4). Mentoring may seek to address risk factors associated with negative outcomes such as low achievement in school, anti-social peers and lack of neighbourhood attachment. It may also seek to increase protective factors such as skills development, pro-social attitudes and social bonds.

Little evidence of the long-term impact of mentoring programs exists as there are so few evaluations. However, some positive short-term outcomes have been identified, including reductions in offending behaviour, completion of juvenile justice orders, reductions in substance misuse, and increased participation in education, training and employment (National Crime Prevention 2003).

Good practice components that may lead to effective mentoring programs include:

- a program structure that screens volunteer mentors and provides orientation, ongoing training and supervision for them;
- engaging young people voluntarily and providing activities that are needs-based and developmentally appropriate (National Crime Prevention 2003); and
- involving all parties in forming the relationship, including caregivers (DuBois et al 2002).

In addition, good practice components for Indigenous youth include:

- strong links with Indigenous communities and services;
- an understanding of the historical, cultural and social factors that affect Indigenous peoples' lives;
- sensitivity to cultural requirements in matching Indigenous mentors and young people; and
- adequate consultation with, and promotion in, Indigenous communities (Hartley 2004).

Organisations developing mentoring programs should also consult Mentoring Australia's (2000) key principles for establishing and managing effective mentoring programs.

References

Note: all URLs were correct at 2 March 2006

DuBois DL et al. 2002. Effectiveness of mentoring programs for youth: a meta-analytic review. **American journal of community psychology** 30(2): 157–197

Hartley R 2004. *Young people and mentoring: towards a national strategy. A report prepared for Big Brothers Big Sisters Australia, Dusseldorp Skills Forum and The Smith Family.* Sydney: The Smith Family http://www.smithfamily.com.au/documents/tsf_Mentor_May04_85540.pdf

Mentoring Australia 2000. *Mentoring: benchmarks for effective and responsible mentoring programs* <http://www.dsf.org.au/mentor/benchmark.htm>

National Crime Prevention 2003. *Early intervention: youth mentoring programmes.* Canberra: Attorney-General's Department available at <http://www.ag.gov.au/agd/WWW/ncphome.nsf/Page/Publications>