

MENTORING FOR YOUNG OFFENDERS – RESULTS FROM AN EVALUATION OF A PILOT PROGRAM

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Executive Summary

This paper presents findings from an evaluation of the Mentoring for Young Offenders pilot program (1999 – 2002) piloted at two sites, one metropolitan, the other rural NSW. The NSW Attorney General's Department Crime Prevention Division (CPD) and the NSW Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) funded the program to explore the effectiveness of mentoring with young offenders referred through Police Cautions or Youth Justice Conferences (YJC).

The program was managed as a partnership between the funding agencies and three other government agencies: the NSW Police, the Department of Community Services (DOCS) and the Office of Children and Young People in the Cabinet Office.

The model of mentoring was based on the Big Sister Big Brother (BSBB) model of one to one mentoring with carefully screened adult volunteers matched with a young person, with the goal of developing a friendship.

The pilot demonstrated that mentoring, using the adapted BSBB model, could be an effective intervention for suitable young offenders. However, the findings also reveal that the scope of mentoring as an intervention with young offenders is limited and should be considered as only one element in any strategy targeting young offenders.

Introduction

Mentoring generally refers to a mutually beneficial relationship which involves a more experienced person helping a less experienced person. It has been used very widely in the USA in particular to match disadvantaged young people with suitable adults to provide support and guidance, often in relation to schooling or career development (Grossman 1999). In recent years it has become a popular strategy for crime prevention with significant commitments by government in the USA (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention the UK (Youth Justice Board), New Zealand (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet). In Australia, the NSW government funded the pilot program that is the subject of this paper, while the Commonwealth government has recently commissioned a national review of mentoring programs for young offenders (see paper by Ania Wilczynski at this conference).

Despite this level of activity, there is, to date, little evidence to support claims that mentoring is an effective crime prevention intervention. The most commonly cited study (Tierney, Grossman and Resch, 1995) that examined Big Brother Big Sister mentor programs in the US did find that participants in this 'traditional' mentor program were less likely to start using drugs and alcohol, less likely to hit someone and had improved school performance and peer and family relationships, compared with a control group. However, the participants in the mentoring were young people at risk, not generally young offenders.

The Tierney study focussed on well-established mentoring projects rather than new initiatives and so does not offer insights into how to implement such programs. However, a recent New Zealand study (Ave et al 1999) that did examine the development of mentor programs for young people at risk found that the programs took much longer than expected to be developed, with some experiencing considerable barriers and issues in the process. Similarly, evaluations of large mentoring programs aimed at crime prevention in the USA, England and Wales, while yet to report on outcomes, have found barriers in establishing projects including varying degrees of success in recruiting mentors (OJJDP 2000 a, 2000 b, 1998; Tarling, Davison and Clarke 2001).

The recently completed evaluation of the NSW Mentoring for Young Offenders pilot program (1999 – 2002) was both formative and summative – examining the development of and outcomes from a mentor program for young offenders. The evaluation is expected to contribute to the growing body of knowledge about mentoring as a crime prevention strategy, and provide insights into the scope for developing viable mentoring projects for the future.

Background to the Pilot Program

The NSW Young Offenders Act 1997 introduced new methods for diverting young offenders from the court system in the face of increasing evidence that current approaches had not reduced offending. The Act established a system of official warnings, cautions and youth justice conferences as alternatives to court for a range of offences when young people admitted guilt. Cautions are formal processes conducted by police officers, often specialist Police Youth Liaison Officers (YLOs). The Youth Justice Conferencing (YJC) system, managed by the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), brings together young offenders, their families and the victims of the crime.

In 1998 the NSW Government decided to pilot a mentoring program with young offenders. The initiative arose in part from a desire to complement the 1997 reforms by methods to support young offenders and reduce re-offending. It was also influenced by advocates of mentoring including the YWCA of Sydney that had put together a proposal for a mentoring scheme based on its own Big Sister Big Brother (BSBB) mentor program which has been operating in central Sydney for over twenty years. The YWCA's program was based on the US Big Brother Big Sister approach, and in line with the majority of mentoring programs for young people at risk, it primarily targeted young people with family and social problems, typically in the 10-12 years age range.

Development of the Program

The program was developed and managed as a partnership between five NSW government agencies: the Crime Prevention Division (CPD) of the Attorney General's Department, the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), NSW Police, the Department of Community Services (DOCS) and the Office of Children and Young People in the Cabinet Office. Representatives of these agencies, and from a youth sector NGO, formed the project's Steering Committee that provided oversight through quarterly meetings from 1999 until mid 2002.

The purpose of the pilot program was to explore the effectiveness of mentoring with young offenders. All referrals were to come through Police Cautions or Youth Justice Conferences. Participation was voluntary, focussing on young people who were interested in mentoring and had difficulties that a mentoring relationship could address.

By targeting young people already within the criminal justice system, the program had a critical advantage as a crime prevention initiative. Mentoring programs with a broader target group of disadvantaged young people considered 'at risk of offending' can easily miss their mark in crime prevention terms as the majority of the young people who participate may never offend.

The pilot was designed to run for three years, and sites were selected, one in metropolitan Sydney (Parramatta) the other in regional/ rural NSW (Coffs Harbour/Clarence). In early 1999 the YWCA of Sydney successfully tendered for the two pilot projects and adapted their (BSBB) program to the referral processes and the expected target group of young offenders in the 14-16 years age range, naming the new program One₂One.

While the YWCA retained overall management, local Advisory Committees were established for each project, and a local agency assisted in management of the Coffs Harbour/Clarence project.

During the first 18 months, take up of the program was far less than expected. The program design had estimated 200 matches over the three year period (35 per year for each project). The reality was very different. Projects developed slowly, and referrals were lower than expected. By February 2001 the projects had accepted only 20 referrals and were supervising only 8 matches, around 10% of the optimistic initial target. However, by early 2002 the Coffs Harbour/Clarence project had developed some momentum, supporting 18 matches with a further 13 young people waiting to be matched. The project in Parramatta, while supporting a small number of ‘performing matches’, never achieved the same level of success due to a combination of factors including poor implementation, high staff turnover and difficulty in recruiting mentors and receiving referrals.

The pilot program continued until May 2002 when the Parramatta project was subsumed into the YWCA’s BSBB program and the Coffs Harbour/Clarence project is seeking alternative sources of funding to continue.

The Model of Mentoring

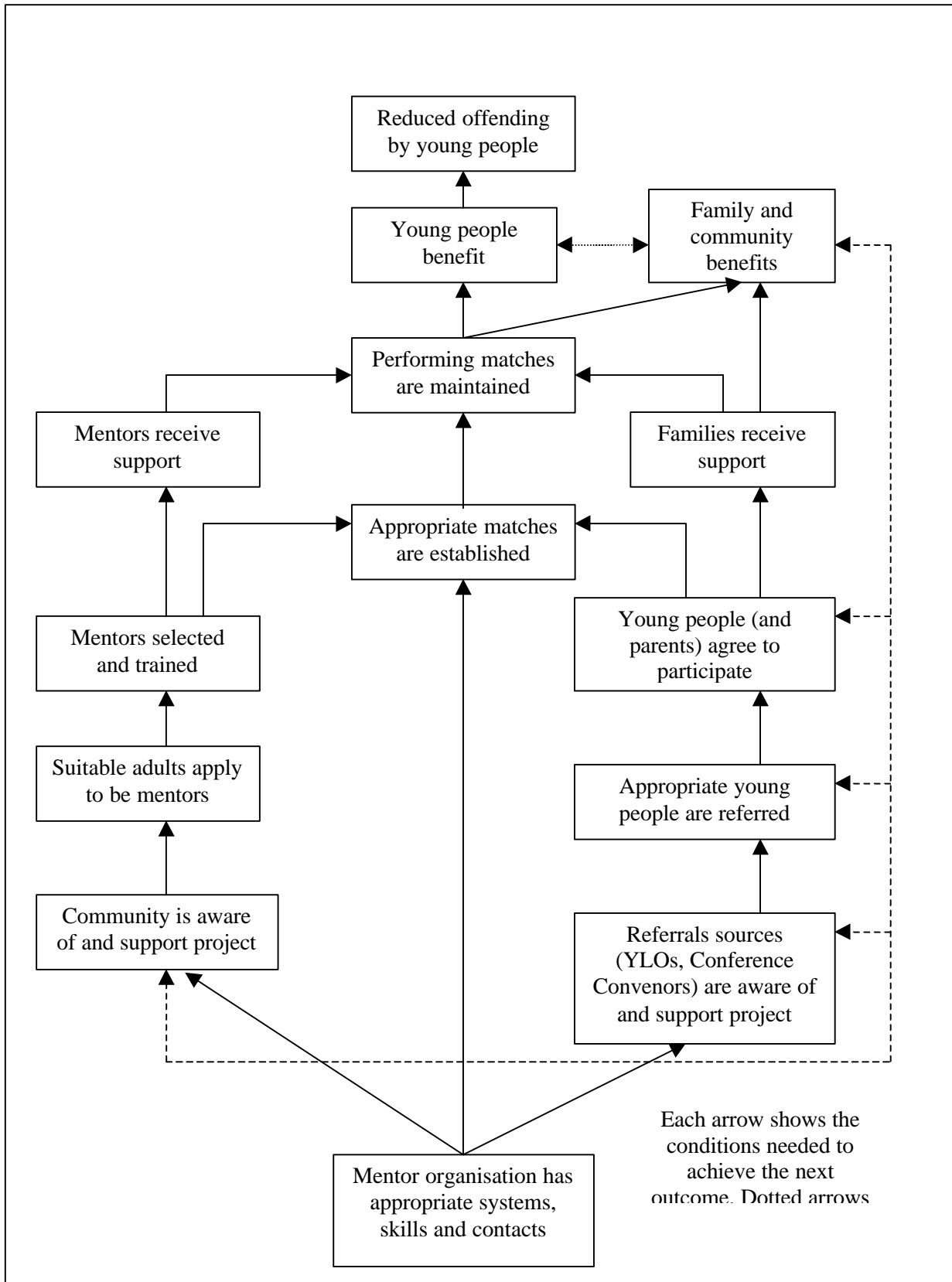
The BSBB model of mentoring offers disadvantaged young people the chance to have a one-to-one friendship with an adult on a regular and ongoing basis. The model of mentoring has three essential elements:

- referrals of young people – involves promoting the program to referral agents (Police Youth Liaison Officers, Youth Justice Conference Convenors), applying selection criteria, encouraging suitable young people to participate and seek agreement from their family, assess needs and issues, liaise with family, provide support while waiting for match;
- recruiting volunteers - adult volunteers are carefully screened and selected for their ability to provide support, friendship, guidance and leadership to a young person. The screening process can take up to four months and includes a training program, after which the volunteers are matched with a young person based on mutual interest, personal compatibility and geographical proximity. The mentor is given ongoing support by the YWCA during the match, and debriefed on completion.
- making and supporting matches – involves aligning needs and interests of the young person and the mentor, arranging meetings, supporting the mentor and the family, monitoring the match, dealing with issues that arise, closing the match and supporting exit. The model also included regular group outings of the young people and their mentors, and a new component, a family support worker, to assist the families of the young people

The links between these elements are illustrated by the two parallel strands at the bottom of the outcomes hierarchy (Figure 1.1) whereby recruiting volunteers and referrals of young offenders are necessary for the establishment of matches.

An important aspect of this BSBB model, in terms of program outcomes, is that it has no stated goals for the relationship other than to present a child and an adult the opportunity to get to know each other, become friends and both benefit from the experience. It assumes that the experience of a quality mentoring relationship in itself is a positive outcome for the young person at risk. The criteria that define a quality mentoring relationship (or to use the BSBB term, a “*performing match*”) include that it is sustained and functional for a minimum of twelve months. The BSBB model links “*performing matches*” to crime prevention and other broader outcomes through the assumption that “*the most effective strategy for preventing youth problems is youth development*” (YWCA Submission page 6). In other words, it assumes that if “*performing matches*” have been achieved, then the program has contributed to preventing young people offending.

Figure 1 Outcomes Hierarchy for One₂One Mentoring Project in the Community



The Evaluation

In March 1999, ARTD was commissioned to conduct an independent evaluation of the pilot program over three years, with both formative and summative functions.

The formative function involved providing regular feedback to the Steering Committee and the YWCA so issues could be identified and improvements made. We developed a comprehensive match monitoring system in conjunction with the projects for them to collect data on participation, satisfaction and outcomes for the young people and mentors. We also developed a data collection system covering all young people who were cautioned or conferenced in the two target areas.

The summative function was to assess the effectiveness of the pilot projects in achieving outcomes for young offenders and to inform decisions about the potential replication of the program as a crime prevention strategy. We used a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods within a realist orientation.

Due to the lower than expected take up of the program, the design of the evaluation changed considerably in the second year. Rather than the intended quantitative monitoring of matches, we began to monitor the much larger population of young people attending cautions and conferences to look for reasons behind the low numbers of referrals to the program and to compare them with referral group, to check for biases and barriers. At the same time, our qualitative work was expanded to explore the barriers to developing the program and recruiting volunteers.

The primary methods used to complement the monitoring were field visits to the projects and interviews with project stakeholders over the course of the program, interviews with mentors, a comprehensive international review of the literature and related schemes, and case studies of a set of matches based on interviews with young people, their families, project workers and mentors.

To meet timelines for decision making, the field work was finalised by end October 2001, with additional data on matches included in the Final Report of the Evaluation, which was completed in April 2002.

Mentoring Works with Some Young Offenders

The major findings of the evaluation show how and in what circumstances mentoring can work with young offenders.

The pilot demonstrated that mentoring, using the adapted BSBB model, could be an effective intervention for suitable young offenders. All young people involved in '*performing matches*' of six months or more ($n = 13$, as at October 31, 2001) reported reduced offending, increased community involvement, improved self esteem and communication skills and more motivation. These outcomes were consistent in reports by the projects, by young people themselves, by their families and by police. Families in particular noted the changes in the young person's attitudes and behaviour and how much their family relationships had improved as a result.

The positive outcomes highlight the potential of mentoring for crime prevention and diversion. They were achieved by young people already some way down the offending pathway and at risk of further offending, with around a third being repeat offenders. Most were experiencing significant conflict at home and at school, some had left school early, and many were socially isolated, had poor communication skills, anger management problems and low self esteem. This is illustrated by the story of Alan and Narelle (see below), selected from seven case studies documented in the final report of the evaluation (Delaney and Milne 2002).

An unintended but positive outcome reported by some YLOs involved with the program has been their improved profile in the community.

The evaluation found that mentors can have a wide range of roles and influences with the young people they are mentoring including role model, skill development and filling in time (Ave et al 1999). These vary depending on the characteristics and needs of the young person, the mentor's skills and interests and the purpose of the match. Role modelling and social (and emotional) support were expected and there was also evidence of mentors assisting young people to modify their undesirable behaviours and developing young people's positive social skills.

The Coffs/Clarence project demonstrated that family support work can add value through supporting and assisting families of young people matched to mentors. Another highly valued component of the program, from the perspective of the young people and their mentors, was the group activities that provided opportunities for socialising, fun and games in a safe and supportive environment.

Limited Scope for the Program Overall

The evaluation also concluded that the scope of a mentoring program with the target group is limited. Firstly, it is likely to be appropriate for only a minority of those who are cautioned or conferenced. The two pilots found less than 30% and 14% of the potential target group in Coffs/Clarence and Parramatta respectively were referred to them as suitable for mentoring and interested in participating. This suggests that mentoring should be only one element in any strategy targeting young offenders.

Secondly, the total number of matches (27) was low, reflecting significant difficulties for both projects in recruiting enough volunteers (with a further 16 young people waiting to be matched as at March 2002). While it is not clear whether the same difficulties would be experienced in other locations, these findings question the model's scope and sustainability for working with young offenders.

Case study - Alan and Narelle (ongoing match, 12 months)

Alan, aged 15 years, was referred to One₂One following a police caution for a stealing related offence. Alan had 3 prior offences. At the time he was experiencing conflict at home where he lived with his father, who expected Alan to take on a lot of adult duties. Alan was seen as very responsible in his approach to others.

Alan was matched with Narelle, a TAFE student in her late 20's and parent of young children. Alan enjoyed going to the beach with his mentor and talking and visiting her home, she provides me with advice and we have a good laugh. He says his mentor is a really good friend, like a sister.

Around 6 months into the match, Alan made the decision to leave school, having become disillusioned with school. He then spent a difficult period unemployed, experiencing some mild depression. Narelle kept regular contact with him during this period, and she and the One₂One worker actively helped him with finding work, including developing a resume and ongoing encouragement. Alan eventually gained full time employment in a job he enjoys.

Alan notes that he no longer has any difficulties with the police and is thinking much more positively about his future and the possibility of study. He thinks that leaving school was a good idea as he is now less angry than he used to be. He also feels he has a better attitude toward himself and other people, is trying to swear less and resists taking responsibility where it is not required (eg at One₂One Mega gatherings). Alan feels the changes in him have been a combination of mentoring and maturing — the mentor has brought out his maturity and he puts it into practice now.

According to Alan's mother, having a mentor has benefited Alan — he has increased self confidence knowing someone is there for him. She was surprised as she thought that mentoring would be more like counselling once a month. She believes that without the program Alan would probably be on probation by now. Alan, his mother and the One₂One project worker saw that the mentor had contributed to his development in the following ways:

- *always being there and being positive;*
- *demonstrating acceptance of the person he is ‘underneath’*
- *he was treated respectfully which has helped bring out his self respect*
- *being a confidant, I have told [mentor] things I would not tell anyone else*
- *persistent encouragement and support, especially through significant transitions such as from school to work and moving to live with his mother*
- *learning to have fun and ‘lighten up’.*

Issues for Replication

The program, while maintaining the core elements of the BSBB model, was implemented differently at each location. It is important, in contemplating potential replication at other locations, to consider not only the interventions (mechanisms) and outcomes, but also the social contexts in which they occurred, in order to reach conclusions about what is likely to work and in which circumstances (Pawson and Tilley:128-135).

Important issues when considering replication of a mentoring program in other locations include:

- **a significant lead-time may be required to build the project to the level where it is sustainable**

The pilot projects took considerable time to establish, an experience common to new mentor programs in the USA and England. To be sustainable, a mentoring program may need to reach a certain minimum size (eg 20-30 current volunteers), or be delivered in conjunction with other youth and family support programs.

- **a community development approach can be an effective way to build broad local support, and a limited geographic area is more feasible**

The community development approach used by the Coffs/ Clarence project was an effective way to build the service. The project engaged with local services to address youth and family support issues and expanded from its core of creating matches to a much broader service delivery base, responding to the gaps in local services for families with adolescents including dispute resolution, parenting skills and group work.

By contrast, the project in Parramatta was far less aligned with its local community in western Sydney, had difficulties in developing partnerships with all the YLOs in the catchment, and ultimately did not become viable. This was reinforced by the mentors who were recruited and their strong identification of the project as a western Sydney initiative, rather than aligned with the inner city.

Both projects also had difficulties covering their large catchment areas. For the rural project, distance was a barrier with many mentors having to travel long distances to visit the young person they were mentoring.

- **ensure there is the capacity to build an effective referral process, which includes strong partnerships with local referral agencies such as YLOs and YJC administrators**

Police Cautions and Youth Justice Conferences were an appropriate source of referrals, ensuring that the program remained targeted on young offenders. Partnerships with the referral agents were the key to an effective referral process. For the mentoring service, this includes the provision of good quality promotional material, and regular liaison to provide up to date information and feedback on the progress of the young people referred. When adequately briefed, YLOs and YJC Administrators became committed supporters of the program.

The referral process, based on the “hands on” experience of Police YLOs and YJCs personnel, was applied effectively, and most referrals were appropriate. However, most young offenders were unsuitable for mentoring or not interested. An estimated 20% of young people who attended cautions or YJCs and lived within the catchment areas were referred.

The majority of referrals (n = 91) were young men aged 13 -15 years. Referrals were younger than the population attending cautions and YJC in the two locations, but otherwise generally matched the target population. The exception occurred in Parramatta where the proportion of young people referred who came from culturally and linguistic diverse populations (8%) was much lower than the proportion of all young people being cautioned/ conferenced (40%), with no referrals from the three largest cultural groupings - Arabic, Pacific Islander or South East Asian young people.

- **considerable time and resources are necessary to attract suitable volunteers to become mentors, which is best achieved through word of mouth and connections in local communities rather than mass promotion**

The BSBB model had effective processes for screening and training suitable mentors for working with this target group. However, finding volunteers willing to mentor a young person involved in the juvenile justice system was the most significant barrier faced by the program. While recruiting volunteers is difficult for many community based programs, the projects also found that some potential volunteers did not proceed because they feared being involved with young offenders.

A large amount of time and effort went into promoting the service to potential volunteers, resulting in a small pool of committed volunteers in each project, with around 5% of people who made an enquiry going on to becoming a mentor. This was far fewer than the number of young people referred for mentoring.

The experience of the pilots suggest that volunteers are more likely to be recruited if the program has a local identity in the community, and can develop partnerships with other local programs. For example, the Coffs/Clarence project developed an accredited mentor training course with the local TAFE, which has proved successful in recruiting volunteers. Meeting volunteers’ costs such as travel, especially in rural communities, may reduce barriers for potential volunteers.

- **create ‘performing matches’ through careful matching , monitoring and support**

The BSBB model was effective in creating and sustaining “performing matches”. Most (76%) matches developed into ongoing relationships that had lasted almost 9 months on average (as at October 2001). Young people, families and mentors were satisfied with the matches.

The most common match was a boy aged 13 years matched with a female mentor, which reflected the patterns of referrals and volunteer recruitment. There was no evidence that a particular match type was more or less likely to perform.

The “performing matches” were associated with an effective matching process, and ongoing support from the pilot project workers. By contrast, the “non performing matches” highlighted the need for careful screening of volunteers and assessment of each young person’s capacity for a mentor relationship.

The majority of young people involved in matches were Anglo Australian. Four Indigenous young people were matched with Anglo Australian mentors (no Indigenous mentors were recruited). No young people from other culturally and linguistic diverse backgrounds were matched, and little is known from this pilot about the needs of such young people and whether a mentor program would be suitable.

- **the importance of pre-match activities for referred young people waiting to be matched and group activities to support matches**

A quality matching process is essential to generating “performing matches”. This requires time and careful assessment by program workers and also requires a number of young people and volunteers who can be matched. As a result, waiting times for both young people and volunteers appear to be inevitable. However, while it is reasonable for adult volunteers to wait, it is unrealistic (and not good practice) to have the young people simply wait. In particular, it may lose the “turning point” of the opportunity created by the young person and their family’s involvement with the criminal justice system.

To address this, pre-match activities will be required by projects to continue to engage young people following referral until they are matched and, as has occurred in the Coffs/ Clarence project, to begin to address un-met needs (including family support).

In addition, both pilot projects held regular group activities for the matches and the young people and mentors waiting to be matched. These outings were particularly popular amongst the young people and provided them, along with their mentors, a range of fun and exciting group activities. As with the pre-match outings, however, these activities take a considerable amount of resourcing that needs to be included in future programs.

- **the social context can have a major impact on establishment and implementation**

Factors include the size, location (rural, regional or city based) and demographics of the target area, the range of other support services available, and the experience of the auspice agency (in implementing similar projects, and in management).

A summary of key features of the contexts and the mechanisms at each location and which led to the different outcomes is shown at Appendix 1.

Further Research

The pilot program highlighted areas for further research to understand the potential of mentoring as a crime prevention intervention:

- what is the scope for mentoring with young offenders from Arabic, South East Asian and Pacific Islander cultural backgrounds? What were the barriers to these young people being referred to the project?;
- examine in greater detail the impact of mentoring on the families of young people;
- further explore the conditions required for a mentoring project with young offenders to become sustainable (such as optimal time period, size of community, which combination of strategies and type of auspice organisations);
- is there scope for other mentoring models to become viable interventions with young offenders whilst retaining standards and safeguards?

Appendix 1 Summary of Context, Mechanisms and Outcomes

Figure A.1 Coffs/ Clarence Project

<i>Context</i>	<i>Mechanisms</i>	<i>Outcomes</i>
<p>Large target area covering two diverse regional centres (Coffs Harbour and Grafton) with rural surrounds. Selected for high numbers of young offenders. Range of socio-economic circumstances, but culturally limited (mainly Anglo-Australian and significant Indigenous communities). Few youth and family services.</p> <p>Auspice organisation managed the project from Sydney. Local autonomy an issue, with increased local management over the period. Project run from dedicated building in Coffs Harbour town centre.</p> <p>Support from YJC Administrator and YLO for project.</p> <p>Staffed by the two youth workers and P/T family support worker, all with local community experience, including existing links with police and with other local services.</p>	<p>Traditional model of mentoring with rigorous selection and volunteer training, careful matching, and support of matches.</p> <p>Project expands from mentoring to address other needs. Workers provide pre-match support to young offenders and their families, and run activities (eg anger management sessions).</p> <p>Workers liaise closely with YJC Administrator and YLO for referrals.</p> <p>Volunteers sought from variety of sources including TAFE welfare students, local promotion, word of mouth.</p> <p>Project focussed on Coffs Harbour. Active Advisory Group of local stakeholders monitor progress, suggest directions.</p>	<p>Relatively low numbers of matches are created (11), but most become performing matches. Young people in performing matches demonstrate reduced offending and risk behaviour.</p> <p>Young people and their families highly supportive of service.</p> <p>Adequate numbers of suitable referrals received, mainly boys 13-15 years, including Indigenous boys.</p> <p>Core group of volunteers developed, though never enough for all matches. Volunteers are mix of (mainly) women, with range of ages and backgrounds.</p> <p>Project well established in Coffs Harbour, seen by stakeholders as valuable service. Limited resources delayed establishment in upper Clarence.</p>

Figure A.2 Parramatta Project

<i>Context</i>	<i>Mechanisms</i>	<i>Outcomes</i>
<p>Initial target area was the major CBD in western Sydney, with small surrounding residential population. Selected for high numbers of young offenders. Range of socio-economic circumstances, and diverse cultural mix. Adjacent areas had large residential populations, and range of youth and family services.</p> <p>Auspice organisation established project in its own premises in Parramatta, with project managed from central Sydney.</p> <p>Support from YJC Administrator and Parramatta YLO for project.</p> <p>Majority of project staff (2 positions) are new to the region and do not have existing links with police or other services. High turnover of workers. Little knowledge of potential for recruiting volunteers in the region.</p>	<p>Traditional model of mentoring with rigorous selection and volunteer training, careful matching and support of matches.</p> <p>Sporadic links with Youth Justice Conference Administrator and Parramatta YLO for referrals.</p> <p>In response to continued low rate of referrals, target area expanded to five additional LACs, taking in adjacent residential areas.</p> <p>Project has a promotional strategy to attract volunteers, through media and events, using generic BSBB promotional material and strategies</p> <p>Local Advisory Group formed, but difficulties attracting a steady membership.</p>	<p>Few matches created (7), but most performing , with some enduring well over 12 months. Young people in performing matches demonstrate reduced offending and risk behaviour, including improved family relations. Families support matches.</p> <p>Small numbers of suitable referrals received from YLO, with long gaps between referrals. YLOs and YJC Conveners have limited knowledge of the project. When area expanded, problems in engaging new YLOs.</p> <p>Only 5% of volunteer enquiries are suitable. Never enough volunteers for all matches. Most are young professional women.</p> <p>Project has limited local identity or support. Project will not continue, matches absorbed into auspices' general mentoring program.</p>

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