

Evaluation in community welfare

Business



From a program design standpoint, YouthHealth Project have focused solely on providing mentoring relationships to youth. In other instances, mentoring has been implemented as one of several distinct components of a multifaceted intervention program. enhanced benefits generally have been expected to result when mentoring is linked to other supportive services (Davison, 1994). Nevertheless, there also may be certain advantages to program specialization in mentoring. With regard to this latter possibility, YouthHealth Project has been widely discussed as a model of “ best practices” for youth mentoring. The effectiveness of this program relative to non-BB/BSA programs is thus of particular interest.

Mentoring programs also have differed in their basic goals and philosophy. Thus, whereas some programs have pursued the general goal of promoting positive youth development, others have adopted more focused or instrumental goals relating to areas such as education or employment. Further considerations pertain to the procedures used for recruiting prospective mentors and the levels of training and supervision that are provided to mentors once selected. Background checks and other screening procedures have been included consistently in recommended guidelines for the selection of mentors in program. Some programs also have specifically sought out individuals whose backgrounds (e. g.

, teacher) may make them especially well-suited to forming effective mentoring relationships with youth. There has been less consensus regarding needs for training and ongoing supervision of mentors and accordingly the YouthHealth Project have varied considerably in these areas. Nevertheless, there is general agreement that some type of orientation should be provided

and that mentors should have ongoing support available to them. Additional recommendations include matching of youth with mentors on the basis of criteria such as gender, race/ethnicity, or mutual interests; communication of guidelines and expectations regarding frequency of mentor-mentee contact and duration of relationships; monitoring fidelity of implementation through mentor logs and other procedures; incorporation of structured opportunities for mentor-mentee interaction; and provisions for the support and involvement of parents. The significance attached to mentoring relationships as a protective influence suggests that the YouthHealth Project may provide greater benefits to youth who can be considered “ at-risk” by virtue of individual and/or environmental circumstances.

Accordingly, these youth have been the focus of a large proportion of mentoring programs and currently constitute the majority of all those receiving mentoring. Other specific subgroups that have been targeted by programs include youth from single-parent homes and those belonging to racial or ethnic minority groups. Programs also have been directed toward youth of varying ages and developmental levels. Possible sources of influence on outcomes in this regard include the optimal timing of mentoring as a preventive intervention as well as practical issues pertaining to implementation (e. g.

, receptivity of youth to mentoring at differing stages of development). In order to yield desired outcomes, it may be necessary for the program to establish mentoring relationships between youth and adults that involve patterns of regular contact over a significant period of time. Realization of this aim can be limited, however, in actual practice by difficulties

encountered in the recruitment of needed mentors, inadequate levels of mentor-mentee involvement, and premature termination of relationships prior to fulfillment of program expectations. The extent to which mentoring relationships with consistent and sustained patterns of interaction are actually formed in programs therefore represents a potentially important source of variation in outcomes. A related, methodological consideration is whether youth with relationships that fail to meet criteria for minimum levels of contact or longevity are excluded from analyses of program effectiveness. When this is done the result may be an unduly positive assessment of the benefits that can be realistically expected for all youth referred to the given mentoring program.

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