



Mentoring Positive Child Development

Positive child development means that a child is maturing on a positive, upward course, growing physically, emotionally, and behaviorally, prepared to meet life challenges and take advantage of opportunities. Most young people in communities served by YouthZone are well on their way toward a successful adolescence and adulthood. Some are not.

In every school classroom there is at least one student who, as a consequence of being undernourished physically, emotionally, or through an insufficiency of resourceful adult models, is experiencing a neutral or negative development. Commonly, they are recognized by their teachers, parents, and others, including their peers. Contrary to some beliefs, a neutral or negative development in childhood or adolescence is not overcome with just the passage of years.

In YouthZone communities, resource options for young people whose positive development is faltering include support from family, congregations, activity directors, school staff, and professional counselors. Many adults can tell a life story of how their own struggle to grow up was sparked by an important person outside the family. Even as they had seemed to “lose their way” developmentally, a mentor appeared who helped set them back on the right course for a positive future. The Pals Mentoring Program assures that enrolled children do not need to happen on one of these unique mentors, but through program support receive a mentor who is accepted by parents and matched to their child’s personality and developmental needs.

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This report does not present the Pals Mentoring Program in detail, but it does attempt to measure some of its benefits. The word “some” is chosen intentionally. It is impossible to capture fully in quantitative methods children’s experience and growth. Research in the field of child experience and growth does help with measuring “challenges” or problems often seen by professionals with specialties in growth and development. Similar methods help with measuring “assets” or strengths that help young people overcome setbacks and take advantage of opportunities in their lives.

This *Pals Mentoring Program Evaluation Report* analyzes and interprets changes in challenges and assets that mentoring supervisors and parents observed with young people who had either a teen or an adult mentor over the course of a year. Finally, the report makes recommendations for informing communities about the program’s benefits and offers suggestions for program improvement.

Measuring the Development of Mentored Children

The evaluation study began with information about 107 children. Previously, during a federally funded three-year phase of the program, methods had been developed by which mentoring supervisors could document the characteristics and developmental progress of

children. These methods saved information in an Access database. Database forms collected: a) child demographic characteristics, b) the extent of community intervention prior to mentoring, c) challenges that children faced in five areas, d) five types of developmental

assets, and e) parents' ratings of child behavior. Challenges and assets had been identified and refined in the federal study through extensive case study of mentored clients.

The evaluation was designed to answer these three questions for children completing at least one year of mentoring:

- What changes occurred in *challenges* faced by clients in the following areas?
 - Adjusting to stressful family circumstances
 - Behavioral adjustment with others
 - Social adjustment with peers
 - Coping with depression
 - Adjustment in school
- What changes occurred in *development of assets* by clients in the following areas?
 - Sense of self-reliance and efficacy
 - Ability to have empathy for others
 - Cooperation with others
 - Problem solving in everyday life
 - Motivation to succeed
- How did parents of mentored children describe their child from the beginning to year's end?

Mentoring supervisors recorded the characteristics and backgrounds of children as they matched them with mentors. In addition, they monitored and recorded the quality and consistency of mentoring and the support of mothers and fathers (whenever present) for the mentoring relationship. Following a match, supervisors recorded the child's status on the five challenges and assets.

Supervisors administered a Behavioral Inventory to one parent at the beginning and end of the year's mentoring. The primary parent involved in supporting the mentor-child relationship responded to 57-items describing children's behavior, at the intake of the client and then again at the end of one-year of mentoring services. Through previous evaluation development, the inventory was scored on 11 scales. Evaluation combined these data with mentoring supervisors' assessments of clients.

For the evaluation, statistics were computed to identify significant changes over time, matching children on the quality of their mentoring and comparing changes according to whether they had a teen or adult mentor.

Evaluation Results: Characteristics of Children and Mentoring Services

Among the 107 children enrolled in mentoring services there were 78 (72.9%) who were completing their first year of mentoring. 29 (27.1%) of 107 mentored children were in their second year of the Pals Mentoring Program. Of those in their first year, 50 had completed 12-months of the program. Those who had completed their first year and children in their second year (total = 79) became the "evaluation sample." In a future evaluation, when numbers are greater, assessment of change will incorporate clients who were mentored over longer periods. Table 1 shows the characteristics of clients in the evaluation sample.

Most mentoring clients were elementary or early middle school-age, in the 1st - 6th grade, when they began services. Only 9.3% of the evaluation sample was 13-14 years. None was older than 14 initially. Girls and boys were equally represented. Anglo and Latino clients were the ethnicities most often enrolled.

The Pals Mentoring Program provides clients with either a trained and supervised teen mentor or an adult, selected for the child's developmental needs. In the evaluation sample, 48 (60.8%) mentors were adolescents, 31 (39.2%) were adults.

Supervisors rated mentors at 30-, 180-, and 365-days on the consistency of their contact with their child and the quality of their mentoring. Consistency was defined as regular mentor-child contact. Quality was defined generally as attempting to create a caring, child-centered relationship. Mentoring was not intended as a problem solving intervention.

Quality and consistency were rated on five-level scales ("Not at all," "A little," "Some," "Quite a Bit," and "A lot"). Quality declined very slightly over time, from a 30-day to the 365-day assessment ($X_{30} = 4.28$, $X_{365} = 4.11$, $t = 1.68$, $p < .096$). On average, consistency declined significantly for mentors

| Table 1 Evaluation Sample Child/Youth Characteristics | |
|--|-------|
| Age | |
| 6-9 Years | 43.0% |
| 10-14 years | 57.0% |
| Gender | |
| Girls | 59.5% |
| Boys | 40.5% |
| Ethnicity | |
| White American | 62.0% |
| Hispanic Latino | 35.4% |
| Native American | 1.3% |
| Multiracial/ethnic | 1.3% |
| Spanish Language in Home | |
| Yes | 25.3% |
| No | 74.7% |

from the beginning to the end of the year ($X_{30} = 4.29$, $X_{365} = 3.68$, $t = 1.68$, $p < .000$). Because these conditions may have affected mentoring outcomes for children, statistical analysis considered the influence of both quality and quantity.

At the beginning, mid-year, and at the end of the year, supervisors assessed maternal and paternal investment in the mentoring process. Investment was defined as being available to the mentor and endorsing the child-mentoring relationship with the child. This support declined slightly among mothers ($X_{30} = 4.35$, $X_{365} = 3.94$, $t = 3.51$, $p < .001$), but not for fathers, who were much less involved in the process ($X_{30} = 2.14$, $X_{365} = 2.11$, $t = 0.341$, $p < .734$).

Mentored children had or were receiving other supportive services. For example, when they enrolled, 40.6% had “Quite a bit” – “A lot” of case management support

before being matched. Supervisors had recommended that 41.8% take part in recommended supportive services that would supplement mentoring and of recommended families, 42.9% were successfully engaged in a YouthZone child or family activity while they were waiting for their match. Supervisors assessed 43.0% of the evaluation sample as having had “Negative” or “Very negative” events in their life prior to their match.

This information shows that the average boy or girl beginning their first year of mentoring was about 10-years old. Their mother actively supported mentoring, but their father was much less involved. Some had had very significant adverse events in their life history (parental incarceration, abandonment, mental illness, or prolonged family disruption) and they were probably considered in need of other formal and informal support to supplement mentoring.

Evaluation Results: Challenges to Child Development - 30 to 365-Day Assessments

Previous development of the Pals challenges assessment identified five topics incorporating the “problems” most commonly faced by enrolled children. Fig. 1 shows the assessment topic areas and provides three examples of issues representing each topic. Individual issues were rated as present or not present. Statistical analysis had shown that when a total score was computed for the items in a topic area that individual items all correlated significantly with this total.

Mentoring supervisors completed the challenge assessment for each child 30-days after their match, then at 180-days, and then again at 365-days following the match. Topic area total scores became the data for studying change over a year for two study groups: teen and adult mentored children.

The possibility that change in challenge assessment data would be influenced by the consistency and quality of mentoring prompted a decision to regulate statistically any differences in consistency/quality between teen and adult mentoring samples. Analysis found highly significant correlations among supervisors’ ratings in consistency/quality. Accordingly, for all analyses of evaluation study data, Mentoring Quality at 30-days was used as a statistical covariate. This step guaranteed that differences in mentoring quality would be equalized between the teen-adult study groups.

1. Challenges within the Family for Mentored Children

At the beginning of mentoring, clients with teen mentors were slightly more challenged by family issues than were adult-mentored children ($t = 1.59$, $df = 1$, p

Fig. 1 Mentoring Supervisor Assessed Youth Development Challenges

1. Challenges in the Family (15 issues)

- Parents in a conflicted divorce or on-going marital instability
- Parent has mental problems
- Chaotic family lifestyle

2. Challenges in Child or Youth’s Behavior (10 issues)

- They lose their temper too often and too quickly
- Youth is hyperactive, lacks self-control, deliberately disturbs or disrupts others
- They are hostile to a parent

3. Challenges in Socialization (13 issues)

- They have limited social skills
- Often passive and do not make decisions
- Are not easily accepted by peers

4. Challenge with Sadness and Emotional Sensitivity (8 issues)

- They have bouts of low self-esteem
- Are depressed or sad much of the time
- Get their feelings hurt easily

5. Challenges with School (7 issues)

- Not completing schoolwork
- They are underachieving, given their ability
- Are not motivated in school

$< .117$). During the course of a program year, conditions in families of adult-mentored clients improved, while

those in families served by teen-mentors appeared to worsen to some extent ($F_{Day \times Mentor} = 3.05, df = 1, p < .085$). While these findings are not necessarily compelling statistically, they suggest a potential disproportional benefit for children with having an adult mentor, if the child's family is especially stressful for them.

2. Challenges in the Child's Behavior Supervisor ratings showed that the behavioral challenges exhibited by mentored clients were unchanged over the one-year study period ($F = 1.30, df = 1, p < .259$). Children in the two study groups had comparable behavior total scores when they began mentoring and these did not change significantly, either for teen or adult-mentored clients.

3. Challenges in the Child's Socialization Skills Clients' socialization skills and behavior improved significantly during the study period ($F = 3.64, df = 1, p < .031$). Adult and teen-mentored clients were similar in these skills at the initialization of mentoring. Teen-mentored clients, however, appeared to benefit somewhat more from their relationship ($F_{Day \times Mentor} = 2.92, df = 1, p < .055$). Socialization benefits for clients with teen mentors seemed to continue throughout the study year, while adult-mentored clients showed little change between 180- and 365-day assessments.

4. Challenges with Sadness and Emotional Sensitivity Evaluation of challenge data found no relationship between mentoring and child emotional status ($F = 0.332, df = 1, p < .566$), though total scores on this topic did decline (improve) a little during the study year. Apparently, teen/Adult mentoring did not influence these changes.

5. Challenges with School At the outset, underperforming in school was a common sign among Pals Program clients. Though not at all a focus of mentoring services, supervisors assessed this and other developmental problem areas both to understand the potential impact of mentoring and to become informed about other sources of support that children may need in addition to a mentoring relationship. Challenge assessment found that mentored children did improve substantially in school ($F = 5.781, df = 1, p < .019$). For this challenge and for others, where improvement was significant statistically, mentoring, quality played a role ($F_{Day \times Quality} = 7.32, df = 1, p < .008$). Only clients who received optimal mentoring enjoyed school performance benefits. There was a slight tendency for adult-mentored children to perform better over time in their schoolwork ($F_{Day \times Mentor} = 2.92, df = 1, p < .085$).

Evaluation Results: Assets in Child Development - 30 to 365-Day Assessments

Pals Program evaluation development had previously invested substantially in identifying, analyzing, and creating child-specific measurements of inner strengths, developmental assets, or resiliency characteristics. Shown in Fig. 2 are the results of these studies. The same procedures followed for this evaluation with the challenge assessment were used with asset assessment.

Mentoring supervisors completed the asset assessment for each child 30-days after their match, then at 180-days, and then again at 365-days following the match. Topic total scores became the data for studying change.

1. Assets with Self-Efficacy Mentored clients' confidence, belief in their ability to accomplish goals, and willingness to take advantage of opportunities improved during the study year, but only for teen-mentored children was the change statistically significant ($F_{Day \times Mentor} = 3.46, df = 1, p < .067$). For these latter clients, data trends showed a small, steady rise in self-efficacy across supervisors' 30-, 180-, and 365-day asset assessments. Clients who were adult-mentored appeared to have somewhat lower initial levels of this asset ($t = 1.72, df = 1, p < .060$) which

Fig. 2 Child Behavioral Inventory Scales

1. Self-efficacy Asset (10 issues)

- Has great self-esteem
- Independent and outspoken
- Very resilient, considering what they have faced

2. Empathy Asset

- Kind and compassionate
- Can be caring
- Willing to help others

3. Social Cooperation Asset

- Socially outgoing with adults
- Good communicator
- Has lots of friends

4. Problem-solving Asset

- Are inquisitive
- Youth is bright, intelligent, and smart
- They are intuitive, talented, and resourceful

5. Motivation to Achieve Asset

- Does well in school, a good student
- Has goals and thinks about their future
- Active and successful in what she/he does

may have contributed to a lower level of responsiveness to the mentoring relationship.

2. *Assets with Empathy* A child's capacity for understanding and responding appropriately to the feelings of others and the emotional environment in social situations has long been associated in developmental studies with adaptability. This developmental asset did not, however, respond to the mentoring relationships of either teens or adults ($F = 0.143, df = 1, p < .710$).

3. *Asset with Social Cooperation* Clients' cooperation asset, as assessed by their mentoring supervisor, strengthened during the course of the study year ($F = 2.943, df = 1, p < .056$). Change occurred equally often in teen and adult relationships ($F_{Day \times Mentor} = 0.003, df = 1, p < .956$). Initially, at the 30-day assessment, clients of teen mentors were found to have higher levels of this asset ($t = 1.98, df = 1, p < .051$), though both types of mentoring relationships saw similar improvement. Most of the growth in the cooperation asset came in the second 6-months of the

relationship, suggesting the importance of rapport building with influencing developmental assets.

4. *Assets with Problem-solving* Though on average, clients in the evaluation sample improved in their capacity to solve everyday problems, find ways to take advantage of opportunities, and to be creative, it was only teen-mentored children who changed significantly ($F_{Day \times Mentor} = 4.10, df = 1, p < .046$). This result was seen even though the clients of adult mentors enrolled with slightly higher levels of this asset ($t = 1.73, df = 1, p < .087$). Clients in both mentoring relationships showed growth during both the first and the second 6-months of the study year. Gains for teen and adult relationships appeared to accelerate over time, again suggesting the importance of relationship building for mentoring outcomes.

5. *Assets with Motivation to Achieve* Mentoring appeared not to influence supervisor ratings of this asset, whether for teen or adult mentors ($F = 1.47, df = 1, p < .229$).

Evaluation Results: Behavior Ratings at Intake and 365 days Post Match

Parents of mentored children were asked by mentoring supervisors to describe their child on a behavioral inventory. Inventory scales and a sample item are shown in Fig. 3. Ratings were on a six-level metric ("Never," "Once in a while," "Not very often," "Sometimes," "Most of the time," and "All the time.") All of these scales and their items contained deficit content, that is, the parent was asked to identify problems their child was having with adjustment. Data were the total of items on each scale.

Parent Ratings of Child Behavior There was a slight tendency for the clients of teen mentors to show less of a deficit with Attention span and Distractibility by the end of the study year ($F_{Pre-Post \times Mentor} = 2.78, df = 1, p < .100$). Mentoring quality supported this change. The Behavioral Inventory's scale measuring parents' observations of the child's mood, the Sad and Depressed scale, showed improvement for clients with teen, but not adult mentors ($F_{Pre-Post \times Mentor} = 3.96, df = 1, p < .051$). Comparable results came from an analysis of the Self-confidence scale. Significant improvement was seen for clients with teen mentors ($F_{Pre-Post \times Mentor} = 5.29, df = 1, p < .025$), whereas clients with adult mentors were rated as unchanged by observing parents.

Restless Hyperactivity remained unchanged over the study year, according to parent ratings, though again, the slight benefits with mentoring were associated with

Fig. 3 Behavior Inventory Scales and Sample Items

1. **Attention Span and Distractibility** (5 items)
 - Has short attention span
2. **Restless Hyperactivity** (5 items)
 - Fidgets with hands and feet
3. **Impulsiveness** (5 items)
 - Difficulty waiting their turn
4. **Immature Behavior and Emotions** (4 items)
 - Prefers to play with younger children
5. **Argumentative and Breaks Rules** (5 items)
 - Argumentative
6. **Domineering and Manipulative** (5 items)
 - Initiates fights
7. **Sad and Depressed** (5 items)
 - Seems sad, does not smile very much
8. **Nervous and Anxious** (3 items)
 - Frequently nervous
9. **Self-confidence** (5 items)
 - Trouble answering questions in front of others
10. **Sleep** (4 items)
 - Difficulty going to sleep
11. **Social Skills** (5 items)
 - Gets along with people

having a teen mentor. Parent ratings of Impulsiveness, Immature Behavior and Emotions, the scale measuring Argumentative and Breaks Rules and Domineering and Manipulative, Nervous and Anxious, the Sleep and the

Social Skills scales were essentially unchanged over time. Nevertheless, when slight improvements were observed, but not found to be statistically significant, improvement in these scales was more often seen when a teen mentor was involved.

YouthZone Pals Mentoring Program Evaluation Summary

YouthZone's Pals Mentoring Program is a voluntary one-on-one mentoring program that provides children and young adolescents with support, counsel, friendship, reinforcement, positive role modeling, and activities. Mentors are adults or older teens who care about and want to be a guiding friend to a child. Volunteers in the program are highly screened and trained. Children in the program receive a thorough interview. A mentor match is made according to activity interest, personality traits, individual likes and dislikes, location, and life experiences. This report presents findings from an external evaluation of the YouthZone Pals Program outcomes.

While program-based mentoring is provided by many youth-serving organizations and qualitative evidence of its value is widely recognized, quantitative assessment of program benefits is uncommon. School-based mentoring has shown some benefits for engagement and achievement. Other studies suggest a positive impact on substance use. Apart from government or foundation funded demonstration programs, however, few examples are available that show measured outcomes for community-based, local mentoring services. The primary purposes of this report was to show the culmination of five years of program evaluation development and the tangible benefits of mentoring that can benefit children and their families.

To accomplish its evaluation goals, evaluation considered children of different ages, genders, and ethnicities. The consistency and quality of their mentoring were assessed as were parental support for mentoring. Mentoring supervisors rated their child clients 30-, 180- and 365-days following the match on five challenges to child development and five developmental assets. Parents rated their child's behavior at intake and end of the mentoring year. Extensive prior development had refined the measurement of these outcomes and had created efficient means by which mentoring supervisors could record their observations periodically for later statistical analysis.

Child Client Characteristics The findings from this evaluation are most likely to apply to children living in rural communities, who are late elementary, early middle school-age, and who have been exposed to above aver-

age environmental stresses in their families, schools, and in social settings. This study sample consisted of young people who had or were receiving supportive services in addition to mentoring. Findings may not apply to clients from other settings or with dissimilar ages or backgrounds.

Mentoring Consistency/Quality and Parental Support Evaluation found that where significant program outcomes were demonstrated, there was a consistent tendency, though not always statistically significant, for mentoring quality to promote more favorable relationship benefits. This connection was not seen for parental support – which was commonly strong for all mothers and less so, but consistently, for fathers. Evaluation suggests that high quality mentoring (consistent, caring, and child-centered relationships) is a necessary condition for hoped-for program results.

Mentoring and Life Challenges for Children Whether family circumstances and stressors improved or child clients were better able to cope, there was a tendency in evaluation data to show that a high-quality adult mentor was a contributing factor to children doing somewhat better with adapting to difficult family circumstances. On the other hand, mentoring supervisor assessment of client behavioral problems showed no significant change during the study year. Yet, supervisors' assessments of clients' socialization skills were substantially improved from 30- to 365-days. Teen mentoring was a stronger influence on this outcome. Child sadness and emotional sensitivity went unchanged over the course of the 12-months. Performance in school, on the other hand, improved so that clients were more likely to be motivated to do the work that was within their ability. Adult mentors may be more effective in stimulating greater engagement and commitment to school by clients.

These findings suggest that not every challenge to a child's development can be ameliorated through a mentoring relationship. Some challenges will benefit, however, and benefits are probably influenced by both quality and the mentor's role, as either an adult or a teen. Mentoring is not, according to this study, an effective intervention for behavioral problems. Depending on a child's need, however, it may help them cope with diffi-

cult family circumstances and will certainly improve social skills and school engagement.

Mentoring and Child Developmental Assets Children mentored by a teenager seemed to grow in their sense of being effectual in their lives. With this and other changing assets, growth was slow, steady, and extended across the study year. Clients' empathy asset, their ability to appreciate and respond to subtle emotional qualities in relationships and social settings did not grow. Social cooperation, appearing mostly during clients' peer relationships, did mature. Involvement in a mentoring relationship with a teen seemed to be particularly beneficial. Adult mentored clients, experienced growth with problem solving – that is, using opportunities constructively – while this was less a mentoring benefit during a relationship with a teen. Neither adults nor teens influenced their clients' motivation and future outlook.

As with results of the challenge assessment, monitoring and analyzing child developmental assets over the study year showed that some assets are more responsive to these relationships than others are and that a teen or adult match may have differing values in promoting positive child development.

Parent Assessments of their Child When parents were asked to mark intake- and 365-days post match the presence or absence of 57 common behavioral issues with children, three scales of 11 showed some program benefits, with significant and marginal improvements often linked with having a teen mentor.

Evaluation Limitations All program evaluations are limited, a natural consequence of attempting to focus on certain program components within a defined budget. For this evaluation, the absence of a comparison group is significant. It is not possible to conclude that observed changes were only related to the provided mentoring relationships. Other limitations are more minor, yet, considering developments in the field of mentoring research methods, results are certainly promising.

YouthZone Pals Mentoring Program Improvement The evaluation does not specifically lead to comparisons that recommend how the Pals Mentoring Program should be improved. Perhaps a more appropriate approach is to bring attention to the significance of relationship consistency and quality. Where these can be improved, there is little doubt that clients will benefit. Evaluation results can assist with defining mentoring goals so that referring organizations and parents can estimate potential value. Finally, findings showing that mentoring results are related to the presence of a teen or adult are particularly interesting. For children typical social skills or who are having difficulty actualizing assets, a teen mentor, more easily recruited and supported, may be an invaluable companion.

Future Evaluation Mentoring supervisors have observed that relationship benefits for children continue when mentoring extends into a second and third years. Future evaluation will explore this observation. Experience also suggests that mentors themselves, particularly teen mentors, receive benefits for themselves with developing a relationship with a child. This can also be a subject of future evaluation.

Acknowledgement

Evaluation recognizes current and past mentoring supervisors, who have contributed ideas to the design and improvement of the evaluation, and who have been dedicated to following the assessment process that makes this study possible.

Pals Mentoring Program

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