

Best Practices in Mentoring Youth in Foster Care

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Adoption & Foster Care Mentoring

www.afcmentoring.org

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AFC Mentoring Overview

Organization founded by a former youth in foster care

- AFC approaches our work from a strengths-based perspective in which we value youth's voices

Two Programs

- AFC Mentors – long term 1:1 mentoring relationships
 - LGBTQ specific mentoring offered
- AFC Leaders – lifeskills workshops and 1:1 support for older youth
 - Matched Financial Savings offered

AFC's unique successes

- AFC is the only mentoring organization in MA exclusively focused on youth in foster care
- Youth may be re-matched if their match closes for any reason
- Average match length nearly 3x the national average (26 months vs. 9 months)
- Program staff are all Masters level licensed clinicians
- Evidence-based practices and ongoing evaluation
- Youth never age out of AFC's services

Agenda

Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring Youth in Care

- Recruitment
- Screening
- Training
- Matching
- Monitoring and Support
- Closure

Mentor Training

- Mentor training messages and content

Lessons from the Field

- Mentor screening
- Match support

Q&A

- Questions from participants

Background and Context

- Great interest for mentoring youth currently in, and transitioning out of, foster care
- At first glance, a natural fit
 - Stable, consistent, caring adult precisely what many lack
- Engineering close, consistent, and enduring mentoring relationships can be challenging under best of circumstances
 - Especially so with these youth
 - Potential for harm from early ending and inconsistent mentoring
- Need to get mentoring “right” with these youth is great
 - Highly vulnerable group
 - Already experienced significant ruptures in important relationships

Experiences in Foster Care: Instability

- On average, a child placed out of the home changes placements slightly more than **3 times over the course of 3 years** .

(Rubin, O'Reilly, Haftner, Luan, & Localio, 2007)

- **Placement:** 47% non-relative foster family homes; 28% relative foster homes; 9% institutions; 6% group homes; 6% trial home visits; 4% in pre-adoptive homes; 1% on the run; 1% supervised independent living

(U.S. DHHS, 2012)

- This placement instability can have consequent effects on: **educational achievement, identity development, mental health, and risky behaviors** .

(Smith, 2011)

- 56% of youth in foster care are **youth of color**.

(U.S. DHHS, 2012)

- **LGBTQ** youth are **disproportionately represented** among youth in foster care.

(CWLA, 2006 - Best Practice Guidelines Serving LGBT Youth in Out-of-Home Care)

Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring Youth in Care

- **Recruitment**
- **Screening**
- **Training**
- **Matching**
- **Monitoring & Support**
- **Closure**

Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring Youth in Care

Recruitment

- MENTORS: committed, stable lifestyle, self-aware (know own limits), flexible, able to manage expectations, not trying to fulfill an unmet need, youth centered, can meet rejection/challenge/change with consistency
- MENTEES: desire to have a mentor, caregiver(s) who will support mentorship

Screening

- MENTORS: responsible, follow through, be open, able to “unpack” understanding of identity/family/privilege/experiences (for self and with youth), engage in difficult conversations, be non-judgmental
- MENTEES: consent from caregiver(s), not pushed into participation, understand expectations

Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring Foster Youth

Training

- MENTORS: bring curiosity, understand factors of risk & resilience among foster youth, work through realistic controversial scenarios, don't ignore red flags, understand need for communication with caregiver(s) and program staff, clear expectations, talk about closure
- MENTEES: share what information mentors will know about youth, allow youth to voice questions, concerns, expectations, hopes

Matching

- MENTORS: understand inherent challenges of process, communicate with stakeholders, know it is "all about the youth," meet youth where they are, avoid forcing chemistry, be patient!
- MENTEES: communicate wishes/needs, manage expectations

Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring Youth in Care

Monitoring & Support

- MENTORS: regular check-ins, ask for help, share successes and concerns, support caregiver(s)/placement, over-communicate around transitions & crisis, identify & respond to youth's coping mechanisms, share resources, predict developmental changes/milestones, non-linear cycles of support, be relationship historian
- MENTEES: regular check-ins, ask for feedback, provide opportunities to influence program/activities

Closure

- MENTORS: talk about closure in advance, DON'T AVOID, don't put guilt in the driver's seat, participate in healthy endings, celebrate successes, reflect on relationship, set realistic expectations for future
- MENTEES: talk about closure in advance, communicate wishes, reflect on relationship, opportunity for re-match?

Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring Youth in Care

Conclusions

Greater potential for rewards, but greater potential for harm.

- Proceed cautiously and thoughtfully when embarking on mentoring foster care youth.
- No single kind of mentoring will suit the needs of all youth. Foster youth are a widely varying group, with a variety of resources and strengths.
- Mentoring is not a substitute for other supportive services. Mentoring should be done in conjunction with other services.

http://www.mentoring.org/program_resources/training_and_events/webinars

Mentoring Foster Care Youth (dated May 20, 2011)

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Mentor Training Messages

Themes throughout mentor training

- **Consistency, consistency, consistency:** It's a marathon, not a sprint.
- **Strengths-based, youth-focused:** Consistent positive relationships are a necessary part of healthy development for ALL youth.
- **Youth do well if they can:** Youth are doing the best they can with what they have to work with.
- **Families do well if they can:** Families are doing the best they can with what they have to work with.
- **Learn, don't judge.**
- **It's more about transition (internal process) than change (external event).**

Mentor Training

“Lots of people may have dropped out on me — my teachers, my family. Don’t you do it. That doesn’t mean that you can’t ever leave. I understand that you have other commitments and other things to do. But at least be my friend. Sit down and explain to me why you can’t be with me any more. Don’t just desert me. If you’re not willing to stick with me when I’m obnoxious, don’t start in the first place.”

-Don Shaw, youth

Mentor Training Content

- **Strengths-based Approach**
- **Expectations:** conscious and unconscious, misguided vs. realistic
- **Boundaries**
- **Terms and Language** related to foster care and adoption, DCF, etc
- **Child Welfare System**
- **Communication**
- **Role plays** and more role plays!
- **Transitions and Change** – Transitions Framework
- **Mentee and/or Mentor Panel**
- **Attachment:** Secure vs. Insecure
- **Effects of Trauma**
- **Resiliency**
- **Diversity and Cultural Sensitivity** – race, LGBTQ identity, class, etc.
- **Safety Policy**
- **Mentor Self-assessment**

Lessons from the Field

Potential Mentor Screening Scenarios

- Punctuality; communication; language; patience
- College students
- The Zealous Mentor
- The Savior Mentor (internalized superiority)
- Mentors with personal histories of abuse, neglect, out-of-home care → too much or not enough communication
- The “Perfect” Mentor... who will start grad school in a year

Match Support Scenarios

- “I’m not having a positive impact on my mentee. I’m not doing enough/making a difference.”
- “My mentee is getting older, independent, and doesn’t need me anymore.”
- “My mentee moved out of state, and I don’t have time to see her. I think we should close. “
- “My mentee has been telling me she is doing well in school, but I learned today that she constantly is misbehaving and not passing her classes. I am so upset she’s been lying to me. “
- “My mentee and I weren’t that close; I don’t think my mentee needs a closure.”

Wrap Up

Question & Answer Session Workshop Evaluation

Thank you!

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