

**Mentoring Programs:
An Answer to the Cultural & and Social Challenge of Juvenile Rehabilitation**

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Spring Public Policy Conference
Promise of the Declaration: Building on the Legacy of "Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of
Happiness."
2023

Abstract

The juvenile delinquency epidemic in the United States has been approached using many methods. This paper is an attempt to showcase one method that is often glanced over, but may provide the best solution yet. A new promising outlook for the overall well-being of juveniles within the criminal justice system is the formation of mentoring programs. These programs connect at-risk youth and/or current juvenile delinquents to a mentor who, in turn, can help shift the direction of their lives. They often take place within community centers throughout the day and can present themselves in a number of different methods. Through a thorough examination of crucial definitions, key characteristics and implementation styles, promising literature, as well as including thoughts of whole-person transformation, it is evident that mentoring programs are a compelling method in benefiting juvenile lives. The mission to increase successful juvenile rehabilitation in America is not only a duty in order to uphold liberty and justice for all, but it is also a cultural and social challenge that needs to be at the forefront of the criminal justice system.

Keywords: Juvenile, Criminal Justice System, Delinquency, Mentoring, Mentoring Programs, Rehabilitation, Biblical Christian Worldview, Social Challenge, Cultural Challenge, Whole Person Transformation.

Mentoring Programs Defined

The term juvenile defines a young person, while juvenile delinquency refers to the habitual committing of criminal acts or offenses by a young person. Over the centuries of growth within the United States, dealing with juvenile delinquents has been somewhat controversial. Through the development of the criminal justice system, the process of juvenile detention and rehabilitation has taken shape in many different forms. Despite the seemingly unending debate on juvenile delinquency, the pressing issue still lies with understanding how to reduce juvenile recidivism and prevent juvenile delinquency in the first place. Implementation of mentoring programs may be one approach in that battle to help troubled juveniles get back on track. A mentoring program consists of “[a] relationship between an older and more experienced adult and an unrelated younger mentee wherein on-going guidance, instruction, and support from the adult seeks to enhance the character and life skills of the mentee”¹. This form of treatment against troubled juveniles and convicted juvenile criminals is appreciated by many for its low-cost, simplified process, and sense of community. Mentoring programs can present themselves in many different variations, such as pick-up basketball games between model figures and at-risk youth, a series of motivational speeches or talks, or even resource fairs and academic engagement events. How mentoring programs are defined coincides with how they are characterized. The vast array of programs serves as models and supports the case for increased production. It is through a Biblical worldview that the challenge of juvenile delinquency is seen as the responsibility of a Christian; after all, we are all called by God to serve others (Phil. 2:4). These variations in mentoring program models, allow Christians to interject themselves into this pressing epidemic while aligning with the word of God.

Characteristics and Implementation of Mentoring Programs

Mentoring programs usually consist of two main parts: a) a mentor and b) a mentee. How the mentor and mentee are characterized, varies drastically based on a number of factors. The most prudent factors include what type of mentoring program is taking place, where the program is located, the budget of the program, as well as the overall goal of the program. These characteristics really make up the foundation of mentoring programs and the overall mission of implementation.

Mentor and Mentee Relationship

One of the first major points of a mentoring program revolves around the premise of “who is mentoring whom?”. The creation of a mentoring program begins with the selection of specific mentors, which leads to the decision of how the matching process with a juvenile will unfold. Pitzel notes, “[o]ne of the most important aspects of mentor program development is selecting volunteers to mentor youth”². Whenever a program is in development, it is crucial to develop a clear and focused plan of obtaining mentors, training them, and connecting them to at-risk youth. Pitzel outlines key specific criteria for picking mentees and how the overall relationship shapes the success of the youth.

Mentoring Model & Location

¹ Barnes Miller, “Exploring the link between mentoring program structure and success rates”, *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, 38 no. 3(2021): 439-456. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-012-9188-9>

² Allyson Pitzel, “Contextualizing mentoring programs into juvenile justice facilities”, *Journal of Correctional Education*, 72 no. 2 (2021): 5-23. <https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/contextualizing-mentoring-programs-into-juvenile/docview/2622811316/se-2>

The process of mentoring at-risk youth and juvenile delinquents is very fluid according to the method being used. The most common mentoring model usually takes place through a community outreach organization or a paid government-sponsored program within the community. These community centers are often connected with a local school system and a juvenile detention center. They generally occur either during the normal allotted school time for those who have been relieved of the privilege of attending school, or they take place after school in the form of after-school care. Mentoring centers often have two routes: route A is for those who are considered at-risk and have not yet been administered into the system, and route B is for those who are in the system and need help getting connected back into society. Whichever route a juvenile decides to join or is placed in, they are often mentored by an older figure similar in nature to the juvenile. This similarity can take the form of similar gender, race, socio-economic status, etc. Mentoring can present itself through a number of implementation styles such as: playing games, participating in sports and arts, academic work, social re-engagement, career preparedness, and overall moral retraining.

Mentoring Budget

Financing and budgets are always pressing issues regarding the Federal government. What is promising to note is that mentoring programs and other rehabilitation efforts, in reality, cost less than the operation of juvenile detention centers. The average cost of all government and public sector mentoring programs is around \$275 million annually, while the cost of operating juvenile detention centers is \$21 billion annually. There are zero claims that detention centers are useless. Still, an appropriate inference would be that shutting down or converting ‘some’ juvenile detention centers into mentoring centers could save millions, if not billions. Increasing mentoring center locations could lead to less staff, less infrastructure/buildings, and fewer resources required.

Mentoring Goal

The goal of mentoring programs and centers differs from the other characteristics previously mentioned. There are varying competing goals that can be achieved by creating mentoring programs in the hopes of “turning around” the lost youth. They include eliminating the growing population within the juvenile criminal system; helping at-risk youth and preventing them from damaging their lives permanently; providing juvenile guidance through the experience of a mentor who they can connect with, learn from, and build trust in. How these primary goals are accomplished varies greatly, but the eyes of all mentors are fixed on eliminating repeat offenders and saving those who are lost. Outside of the secular agenda, it is the duty of Christians to find methods of introducing the Gospel to lost juveniles.

Mentoring Programs in Action

The following studies will provide a better understanding of how mentoring programs are currently working and will additionally outline some specific evidence in support of this rehabilitation method. The goal is to outline successful cases and to highlight three primary focuses in the development of mentoring programs and how they directly influence whole-person transformation.

In 2021, Montel Powell, in connection with Walden University, conducted research on the effectiveness of juvenile delinquency programs in reducing juvenile recidivism. In order to produce the support needed, a study was drawn up on the premise that “[t]he research questions were aimed at determining the reasons why deviant behavior is increasing and identifying effective methods for improving organizational aftercare program efficiency to reduce juvenile

delinquency and recidivism.”³ Powell’s goal ultimately was to extrude evidence in support of switching incarceration methods for some mentorship. The research concluded the following “[i]mproving rehabilitation and treatment methods offered through aftercare programs starts from initial contact, induction, adjudication, and treatment to identify the root causes and render solutions that demonstrate a decrease in juvenile delinquency”⁴. This study directly correlates to the overall message that mentoring programs affect the outcome of juvenile delinquency rates. After completing a comprehensive line of questioning in the form of surveys and interviews, it was concluded that accurately designed mentoring programs could prove as a successful rehabilitation effort for juveniles. Powell stated, “...[i]f there is no safe and secured environment for youth to mature in, society’s most precious treasures will always be at risk for the future of our children.”⁵ This research serves as the pivotal foundation for future promising mentoring opportunities to take heart in.

The need for youth mentoring programs and how they might benefit society, is shown through another pilot study conducted through *Psychological Services*. The study was based on a career mentoring program for juveniles and how that type of counseling serves as beneficial to society. Within the study, mentoring programs were defined, characterized, and outlined in the hopes of providing a concrete plan for the future of juvenile rehabilitation. The research focused on the future employment of troubled youth and how mentoring programs would create a positive environment for success. The overall conclusion of the research indicated, “[c]onsidering the value of positive influences for juveniles and the need for pro-social career development for this group, combining both mentoring and career development may be especially useful in fostering healthy career development in this population.”⁶ According to research conducted by Varghese, it is fair to presume that mentoring programs are critical and necessary for the future course of many juveniles.

An entry into the *Journal of Correctional Education* of works from Kearley Pitzel, outlined the foundations of juvenile mentoring programs. According to Pitzel, “[m]entoring programs for incarcerated youth have shown promising outcomes, with researchers suggesting that this population can benefit from mentoring relationships.”⁷ The study was conducted to verify the efficiency of mentoring programs. The research revolved around the impact of mentoring programs on the youth community, mentor training and recruitment, mentor and mentee matching system, and the future of juvenile recidivism post-mentoring era. Pitzel’s conclusions are in direct correlation with the thought that mentoring programs have been done before, and there are effective ways of development. The journal entry also stressed the importance of ensuring a proper system of mentor and mentee matching. Proper mentorship matching is vital as “[h]aving a caring adult involved in the life of at-risk youth can help them overcome adversity and lead them toward a life of future success.”⁸ Pitzel goes on to conclude a

³ Montel Powell, “Examining the effectiveness of juvenile delinquency prevention programs to reduce juvenile recidivism”, Walden University ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

<https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/examining-effectiveness-juvenile-delinquency/docview/2600680013/se-2>

⁴ Powell, “Examining the Effectiveness,” 167.

⁵ Powell, “Examining the Effectiveness,” 178.

⁶ F.P. Varghese, “Pilot study of career mentoring program for juveniles”, *Psychological Services*, 2022, 2.

<https://doi.org/10.1037/ser0000689>

⁷ Pitzel, “Contextualizing mentoring programs”, 1.

⁸ Pitzel, “Contextualizing mentoring programs”, 1.

number of different variables based on his research, but what is fundamentally important is that there is a working solution out there.

All three of these studies serve as promising literature for anyone who is looking into starting a mentoring program. Powell stressed the fact that mentoring programs work and provided a more clear path of how they are created. Varghese focused more on the idea of how mentoring programs can help troubled juveniles with their future and possible career pathways. Finally, Pitzel prioritized the importance of creating a strong relationship between the mentor and the mentee. Each of these conclusions all tie into the overall theme of whole-person transformation. Mentoring programs have already been created and are not new, yet they struggle in catching the traction that proponents desire. If this idea of whole-person transformation is the primary direction for Christians, then reviewing successful case studies like these will allow for a better understanding of how mentoring programs provide a platform for this transformation.

Whole-Person Transformation and a Christian Worldview

Mentorship is a fundamental part of the Christian faith; often, it is a method of leading others in love and guiding them into the good deeds of life (Heb. 10:24-25). If guiding someone is the action of mentoring, then this idea of a whole-person transformation is the destination. Despite the apparent lack of faith in today's government, it should not detour Christians from extending their faith in all aspects of life. In the book of Matthew, Jesus Christ lays out the Great Commission for all Christians; "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19). This order set forth by Jesus is all-encompassing and reaches into all vocations. If it is by His command that all Christians ought to share the Gospel globally, then the inclusion of the criminal justice career field is a given. The connection between the Christian duty of evangelism and the role of the juvenile system is far greater than one may think. The inclusion of mentorship into the lives of juveniles is a golden opportunity for Christians to capitalize on true transformation. The idea of whole-person transformation has been around for a while and is a pinnacle study for many Christians; however, the introduction of this principle tied to juvenile mentoring programs may be something to further study.

Whole-person transformation is most easily broken down into "[a] six-dimension model of human wholeness that illustrates but does not exhaust the concept including Physical, Intellectual, Emotional, Social, Moral and Spiritual."⁹ Although this concept has been approached from various angles, and the dimensions are often shifted based on the author, this model serves best in conjunction with juvenile mentorship. The best way to showcase the connection between these two concepts is to dive deeper into each dimension and connect it to a reciprocal action in mentorship.

Physical

When examining the physical dimension of whole-person transformation, Dr. Mary Lowe stresses the importance of Paul's references to the Christian physical body and how it develops. Paul teaches that our physical bodies experience redemption through the work of Jesus and the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:23). Dr. Lowe concluded, "[m]aturing Christians will exhibit care in how they treat the body because they recognize that it is the temple of the Holy Spirit."¹⁰ If this is true, then the duty of Christians working in the criminal justice field should urge others to introduce mentoring programs into every sector of juvenile rehabilitation. Throughout the

⁹ Mary Lowe and Stephen Lowe, "Whole-person transformation into the image of Christ", (2008): 1.

¹⁰ Lowe and Lowe, "Whole-person transformation", 2.

process of mentorships, juveniles are actively participating in physical activities. These physical activities could include exercise, physical games, and group activities. Outside of the obvious physical actions juveniles undertake within mentoring programs, the collectiveness of being present with other juveniles takes form in Paul's understanding of our in Jesus. The Body of Christ, the Christian community, serves as a framework for how we should connect with a population at risk of detachment and disengagement. The intertwined web of Christians should exert effort into infiltrating the juvenile justice system, so that the web can ultimately absorb the pain and suffering juveniles face.

Intellectual

Another dimension of whole-person transformation revolves around the intellectual growth and development of an individual. The transformation includes various arenas of life, but intellect is one that the word of God urges greatly; the word tells us that as Christians, we need not conform to this world, and it is our duty to renew our minds through Jesus (Rom. 12:2). Dr. Lowe urges that “[t]he mind of the Christian must be totally engaged and firing on all cylinders if it is to assist one in achieving whole person transformation into the image of Christ...[i]f one is going to achieve “the mind of Christ” then a Christian must present not only their body as a living sacrifice but their mind as well.”¹¹

If the end-all-be-all goal in the transformation of the mind is to be more “Christ-like,” then the relation to mentoring programs is simple. Christians ought to develop a mentoring program that incorporates modes of intellectual growth. The method of mind renewal can take place in many forms, such as academic work, trade skill courses, career planning mentorship, and even classes based on hobbies that, in the end, stimulate the mind. Mentoring programs are not just for social rehabilitation nor just retribution, but they are also for the intellectual development of juveniles. There are numerous directions mentorships can choose to include intellectual growth, but Christians must ensure that the growth is in some way mirroring the *imago Dei*. There is evidence to suggest that engaging the mind also engages the rest of the individual as they seek to develop more fully into all aspects of maturation.

Emotional, Social, and Moral

The emotional, social, and moral dimensions are very similar to the rest of the six, in fact all of them are integrated. The emotional part of the puzzle focuses more on individuals' feelings. Controlling emotions is a struggle for all people, not only juveniles. It is more about the success of controlling emotions and not letting them take hold of one's actions, that is more the center of attention. Dr. Mary Lowe references that “[t]hat is, Jesus acted on the basis of emotions and in response to genuine human needs;” if this is a formative principle all Christians should act upon, then it is important to instill this principle to the young.¹² Mentoring programs allow direct access to troubled or at-risk juveniles who often do not have complete control over their emotions. Developing a program consisting of counseling not only allows for an individual to release their emotions in a safe space, but additionally creates moments of teaching. The social and moral dimensions tie directly to this idea of counseling. If targeted counseling can take place that ultimately guides a juvenile's life into one with great control over emotions, strong social skills, and correct morals, then the program would be successful.

Spiritual

¹¹ Lowe and Lowe, “Whole-person transformation”, 4.

¹² Lowe and Lowe, “Whole-person transformation”, 5.

This final section of spirituality is where things can get tricky. “Maturing Christians will manifest growth in the spiritual dimension by a deep passion for Christ, humbly submitting to his authority as Lord.”¹³ Most Christians have some grasp as to what it means to be spiritually active and chasing after the Lord yearning to be Christ-like. The model of whole-person formation assumes an integrated view of development. With that in mind, spiritual growth is impacted by and impacts all the dimensions noted previously. This bi-directional engagement allows the developing person to deploy more fully maturing principles, resulting in greater transformation and change. As Christian believers, we understand the holistic and transforming power of redemption. All persons are impacted spiritually but it is the contention of this writer that Christian spiritual formation is the goal for those who do not yet know Christ. Unfortunately, most mentoring programs are funded by the government, which leads to the seemingly immovable obstacle of Church and State. As it stands now, Christians or any other faith members are not allowed to directly share their faith with juveniles sentenced to a specific mentoring program, unless the program is privately funded and is optional. The duty of being spiritual still lies on the believer, and to what they can do to imitate a spiritual nature within the mentoring program. To end with a question; what can a Christian do to show that he/she is spiritually active and has a healthy life with the Lord without verbally sharing the Gospel? The answer to this question will further the success rate of spreading the Gospel through mentoring programs.

It is important to note that all of the above dimensions do, in fact, benefit the transformation of an individual, but none of it is truly possible without the power of Jesus. The book of John shows that Jesus has been sent to pay due to the debt of all sin (Jn 3:16). It is by the death and resurrection of Jesus that those who believe in Him may have eternal life; salvation comes from belief transformation comes following His footsteps while allowing the Holy Spirit to work within (Jn. 14:16). Jesus’s acts have eliminated the need for continual shaming, especially of troubled youth, and allows Christians the opportunity to inspire new repentant life and belief in the works of Christ (Rom. 8:5).

Conclusion

The dichotomous nature of this paper is purposeful and complementary. Far too often, there is a distinct separation between Christianity and the rehabilitation of criminals. To best understand the conclusion of the views presented, a more simplified structure is necessary. Ineffective rehabilitation and control of criminal juveniles is the problem. Mentoring programs are a supported and defined solution to the problem. Whole-person transformation is a third key variable that acts as a subliminal yet crucial duty of Christians to act upon. If mentoring programs are the solution to the problem, then the inclusion of whole-person transformation is the primary method in which mentorship should be facilitated.

As it stands, mentoring programs have a long way to go before they reach the level of complete use throughout the country as an alternative punishment for certain crimes. If that is the end goal, if liberty and true justice for the wronged is the goal, if advocating for juveniles is the goal, and if applying true Christian values is the end all be all goal, then the production and advocating for mentoring programs is one solution. It is the duty of all Americans to advocate for future generations. Instead of incarcerating juveniles blindly, citizens of this great nation ought to take further interest in providing accurate and effective learning for the youth in order to prolong any chance of an enslaved nation.

¹³ Lowe and Lowe, “Whole-person transformation”, 9.

“If virtue and knowledge are diffused among the People, they will never be enslaved. This will be their great Security.”

Samuel Adams, Letter to James Warren, February 12, 1779

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