Using a core components approach in evidence review and service redesign in youth mentoring

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We acknowledge the tradition of custodianship and law of the Country on which the University of Sydney campuses stand. We pay our respects to those who have cared and continue to care for Country.
Overview

➢ Project purpose & aims
➢ Project approach and methodology
➢ Key findings
➢ Application of the evidence review in the Youth Frontiers program
Youth Frontiers program

• The Youth Frontiers program delivers quality mentoring to young people in contact with the youth justice and child protection systems in NSW, with the aim of increasing their wellbeing and connection to community, and avoiding further contact with the justice system.

• Young people participating in Youth Frontiers are matched with mentors who spend a minimum of 52 hours over 12 months supporting them to achieve their goals.

• In 2021, the program has been reshaped to focus its mentoring and support activities to young people that are part of a vulnerable priority cohort.
Project aims

• The aims of this evidence review were to:

  ➢ Explore what early intervention and diversion programs have been implemented in Australia and overseas that have included a mentoring aspect.

  ➢ Identify outcomes that these programs have contributed to and critically assess the strength of evidence for interventions focused on pro-social activities and youth justice diversion for vulnerable young people.

  ➢ Determine specific core components of these programs that effectively deliver positive outcomes for young people.
Approach

• We conducted an evidence review on youth mentoring programs that divert high-risk youth from coming into contact with the criminal justice system.

• Closing the Gap Clearing House evidence review on the effectiveness of mentoring programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people identified activities, practices and approaches that should be used when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

• Key outcomes for these programs include: reduced risk of entry (or re-entry) into the youth justice system, antisocial behaviour, and criminal activity.
Rapid review process

1. Define research question and scope
2. Search for evidence
   - Search strategy
3. Screen studies for inclusion
   - Assess for risk of bias
4. Extract data
5. Data analysis and synthesis

Created by Maxim Basinski from Noun Project
What mentoring programs for young people, who are at risk of contact or are in contact with the juvenile justice system, are effective in reducing antisocial and/or criminal behaviours and diverting youth from the juvenile justice system?

**Participants/population:** Young people aged 10 – 17 years, who have had (or are at risk of) contact with the youth justice systems.

**Interventions:** mentoring program or intervention and any type of mentor

**Comparisons:** Any comparison group

**Outcomes:** reduced risk of entry (or re-entry) into the youth justice system and reduced antisocial behaviour or criminal activity

**Study designs:** e.g., systematic reviews, meta-analysis, randomised controlled trials, quasi-experimental designs
The screening process

Records identified through database searching (n = 251)

Additional records identified through other sources (n = 89)

Records after duplicates removed (n = 296)

Records screened (n = 296)

Records excluded (n = 271)

Full-text articles assessed for eligibility (n = 25)

Studies included in synthesis (n = 15)
  RCT: n = 6
  QED: n = 5
  SR: n = 4

Studies included for program evaluation (n = 9)
  RCT: n = 5
  QED: n = 4

Studies excluded, with reasons (n = 10)
  • Mentoring not the primary intervention: n = 5
  • Study does not assess relevant outcomes: n = 3
    • Outside age range: n = 1
    • Study does not meet study design: n = 1

Full-text articles excluded, with reasons (n = 10)
  • High risk of bias assessment: n = 5
  • Individual references gathered from high quality systematic for data extraction: n = 1
When using the core components and flexible activities to design or implement a program, it must be tailored to fit the needs and characteristics of the target group.

E.g., well-evidenced and effective interventions (e.g., Intervention A and Intervention B) are comprised of Practices X, Y and Z.
We identified 5 core components recommended as standard program components for youth mentoring programs:

1. **Extending prosocial support networks**
   - Group mentoring
   - Community engagement
   - Social network & connections

2. **Core components for mentoring programs**
   - Education and skills
     - Practical & life skill building
     - Youth-directed goal setting & coaching
   - Specialised curriculum & education
   - Mentor-mentee relationship
     - Creating a safe & supportive space
     - Establishing reliable & consistent contact

3. **Mentor screening and matching**
   - Match mentors & mentees based on their preferences

4. **Mentor training or support**
   - Select & screen mentors
   - Practical & theoretical mentor training
   - Mentor supervision & reflection

5. **Mentor training or support**
   - Mentor supervision & reflection
Considerations for working with Aboriginal communities

- More frequent and intense contact may be appropriate - the more vulnerable the mentee, the more contact time needed.

- Involve local Elders as mentors or in other activities, enhancing cultural connections and respectful relationships with local community leaders.

- Promote pathways for education – e.g., organising mentoring partnerships with university students.

- ‘Yarning up, not down’ is important when setting goals (Ware, 2013). Mentors and mentees should talk together about solutions to challenges, rather than mentors coming in with outside solutions.
Mentor screening and matching

The process of screening and matching prospective mentors with potential mentees is an important preliminary step to ensure a meaningful mentor-mentee relationship can be fostered.

Flexible activities include:
- Select and screen mentors
- Match mentors and mentees based on their preferences

The process of screening mentors ensures they are ‘fit for task’ and can work with the targeted mentee population.
Mentor training or support

Providing mentors with the knowledge and skills to be a mentor is crucial. This involves becoming aware of the needs of the mentees and issues that are likely to arise.

Flexible activities include:
- Practical and theoretical mentor training
- Mentor supervision and reflection

Activities involve not only the provision of adequate and informative training to mentors, but also allow frequent opportunities for mentors to give updates, reflect on their mentoring journey, and receive support.
Mentor-mentee relationship

The quality and meaningfulness of the primary mentor-mentee relationship is critical to a successful mentoring program.

Flexible activities include:
- Creating a safe and supportive space
- Establishing reliable and consistent contact

It’s important to create a safe and supportive space where mentors and mentees can interact and engage in activities and establish pathways for communication between the mentor and mentee.
Mentoring programs should consist of structured activities that focus on education and skills to allow mentees to set goals and trial new skills in a safe environment. They should also be intentional and prepare youth for independent living. Decisions about the nature of these structured activities can be tailored based on the needs and interests of mentees.

Flexible activities include:
- Practical and life skill building
- Youth-directed goal setting and coaching
- Specialised curriculum and education

These activities include opportunities for mentees to develop and refine practical life skills, acquire new knowledge and information, as well as determine their own goals and be guided to achieve them by the mentor. Structured activities can work in parallel with unstructured activities, such as socialising between mentee and mentor or between mentee and peers.
Extending prosocial support networks

Promoting connections beyond the primary mentor-mentee relationship helps to build social skills and establish and extend prosocial support networks.

Flexible activities include:
- Group mentoring
- Community engagement
- Social network and connections

Community engagement can encourage mentees to extend their social network and interact with, and give back to, prosocial individuals in their local community.
Applying core components to Youth Frontiers

Be clear about the change we’re trying to make for clients and how we’ll know that change is being achieved.

Be disciplined in how we specify outcomes, use evidence to design our service response, and measure the effectiveness of our service.

Work together with clients, communities and service partners.

Start by building the core components into the Program Logic
Use of the

Youth mentoring is a consistent, prosocial relationship between a young person and an older peer or adult intended to support positive development of youth. Five core components are common across these programs. Each core component has different flexible activities that describe how it can be implemented.

1. Mentor screening and matching

Flexible activities include:
- select and screen mentors
- match mentors and mentees.

2. Mentor training or support

Flexible activities include:
- mentor supervision and support
- mentor partnerships with other agencies.

3. Engagement

Flexible activities include:
- mentor-mentee relationship
- reliable and consistent contact.

4. Personal and life skills development

Flexible activities include:
- practical and life skill development
- goal setting
- personal growth and development
- educational activities and support.

5. Social networks and community engagement

Flexible activities include:
- relationship with the youth
- involvement in community activities.
Youth Frontiers - Outcomes

• **Goal** - young people avoid contact with the justice system.
• Early intervention focus - increase young people’s wellbeing and connection to community.
• Outcomes tested with service providers and measured through the Data Exchange.

• **Short-term Outcomes**
  • young people have supportive relationships
  • young people have access to the services they need.

• **Medium-term outcomes:**
  • young people have a sense of choice and control (self-determination) in their lives
  • young people are resilient and can tackle major life challenges
  • young people feel a sense of connection and belonging to their communities
  • young people are less likely to engage in risky behaviours.
Youth Frontiers - Program

• Target group - young people 10 – 17 years of age in contact with the justice and child protection systems.

• Each core component has different flexible activities that describe how the component can be implemented – tested with service providers.

• Components can be tailored to the local context and client needs, allowing for local service design – important for Aboriginal organisations.

• Mentors - paid or voluntary.

• Mentoring type - one-to-one, team or group mentoring (face-to-face or e-mentor).

• Mentoring duration - 12 months with weekly mentoring for 1 hour.

• Four locations, with defined target groups:
  • Central Coast & Sydney LGA - Aboriginal young people
  • Fairfield LGA & Illawarra - young women.
Referral Pathways

• Engage young people as early as possible regarding contact with the justice system:
  • warnings or cautions issued by Police, or be known to Police, or
  • involved in a Youth Justice Conference, or
  • appeared before court for the first time, with or without proceeding warnings or cautions.

• Referral pathways established locally by service providers, including referrals from:
  • NSW Police
  • Youth Justice
  • Youth Koori Court
  • Police Citizens Youth Club
  • Community or Neighbourhood Centres
  • Youth organisations & homelessness services
  • Community Elders
  • DCJ Community Service Centres.
Youth Frontiers - Theory of Change

• Quality youth mentoring is associated with a range of positive outcomes, including enhanced mental health and reduced offending.

• For Aboriginal young people mentoring can strengthen connection to culture, a protective factor associated with positive life pathways.

• Screening and matching mentors with mentees is an important step to ensure meaningful mentor-mentee relationships.

• The person who mentors matters - training and supporting mentors is critical, ensuring mentors are well equipped to meet the needs of young people, and in turn, ensuring young people get high-quality support to make positive changes in their lives.
Youth Frontiers - Theory of Change

- Establishing mentor-mentee relationships that are reliable and consistent can build trust and respect, and in turn empower, support and encourage the young person.

- Supporting young people to develop practical and personal life skills can build their confidence, resilience and independence.

- Promoting connections beyond the mentor-mentee relationship (e.g. family, peers) helps build social skills, and establish and extend support networks.

- Activities that support young people to engage with their community and culture can increase their sense of belonging and build confidence to access services and ask for help when needed.
Communities & Justice Evidence Portal

• Expected go live end-2021 - publically available online.

• Early intervention sector wants access to evidence that is high quality, accessible and relevant, and able to be used to design and implement services.

• Will include two types of evidence: evidence-informed programs; and core components and flexible activities.

• Evidence-informed program summarises detail - what the program is, outcomes it contributes to, strength of evidence, program effectiveness, and how it is implemented.

• Information about what each core component is, how components work together and how they can be used to inform program design.

• Each flexible activity is described with information for practitioners - how the activity can be implemented, what should be considered when working with specific client groups, who the activity has been conducted with, and which programs implement it.
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Email to register for our mailing list.
<table>
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<th>Program name</th>
<th>Country*</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Mentor Type</th>
<th>Format</th>
<th>Program duration</th>
<th>Meeting length and frequency</th>
<th>Outcome domains</th>
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<td>Group and Individual</td>
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