Youth Mentoring as a form of support for children and young people at risk: Insights from research and practice

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Main Messages from our Presentation

Formal mentoring programmes, which facilitate the development of a friendship or ‘match’ between and older volunteer and a young person, have been shown to be an effective way of supporting troubled youth, helping them sustain positive mental health, cope with stress, and lead successful lives through adolescence and into adulthood (Rhodes, 2002; Dubois et al, 2011).

- Because youth mentoring is generally framed as a preventative intervention, it is often not considered as a viable option by social workers working with young people with higher levels of need.

- Balance is between belief that people with challenging personal lives would benefit from the development of a positive relationship with a non-parental adult BU, the needs of the young person may be too complex for a volunteer to take on.

- We wish to consider how children with high levels of need or risk in their lives can best utilise mentoring as a form of social support.
Overview

- Brief Overview of Background and Literature
- **Rationale for youth mentoring using Big Brother Big Sister Programme case study**
- Consideration of how mentoring can work effectively for young people with higher levels of risk?
- Brief review of the questions:
  - Is mentoring protective or preventative intervention?
  - How can services avail of mentoring more effectively of youth mentoring
  - We Conclude with some key Messages for Practice
Rationale for Youth Mentoring
The arguments in support of Youth Mentoring

Young people, facing adversity, can make a successful transition if there have consistent support from an adult outside of the family (Werner and Smith, 1982 and Garmzey, 1985 and Rutter and Giller, 1983).

Supportive relationships with family and friends during adolescence are critical to well-being and coping (Bal et al, 2003, and Dooley and Fitzgerald, 2013).

Having at least one caring adult in a young person’s life can help in dealing with stress and improve mental well-being (Dooley and Fitzgerald, 2012).

That many young people draw on natural mentors – i.e. non-parental adults for guidance, encouragement and emotional support (Munson et al, 2010; Zimmerman et al 2002).

Garmezy (1985) and Rutter and Giller (1983) found that the presence of at least one non-parental adult who provides consistent support as contributing to the resilience of young people.
Some notable outcomes for Youth Mentoring

Studies of youth mentoring interventions have shown evidence of outcomes in a variety of areas of such as emotional well-being, education and risk behaviour and relationships with parents and peers (DuBois et al., 2011; Blinn-Pike, 2007; Tierney et al, 1995).

• Young people who developed meaningful relationships with their mentors reported increased confidence, social support and involvement with their communities. Philip and Spratt’s (2007)

Not all youth mentoring programmes will be effective; a structured and formal approach to programme practices (Furano et al, 1993; Tierney et al 1995) is associated with positive outcomes for youth participating in mentoring programmes (Dubois et al, 2002).

• BASED ON book chapter BY: MCGREGOR, LYNCH and BRADY, 2016.
# Development of Child and Family Services

## INDEPENDENT AGENCY FOR CHILD WELFARE

**TUSLA**

- Move to Prevention and Early Int.
- Parenting
- Prevention and Family Support
- UN CR
- International and Global Influence

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Definition ..</th>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>‘No additional needs/child achieving expected outcomes’ (Thresholds Document, 2014; 2)</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>‘Children with additional needs’ (ibid)</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Children with multiple (complex) needs (ibid)</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Children with highly complex, acute (need) and/or immediate risk of harm (ibid)</td>
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Source: Thresholds Guidance, TUSLA, (2014)
Mentoring: Young people with higher levels of risk

Research: mentoring can be a positive option for these young people:
Rhodes, 2005: vulnerable young people may be more likely to seek out positive supports
Greeson et al. 2015: young people, in child protective services, especially in foster care, draw on support of natural mentors
Dubois et al(2002, 2011) Higher risk young people have benefited from programme involvement at least as much as lower risk youth.

BUT ALSO Challenges for this target group of young people:
- May have difficulty in forming attachments
- Families may have many professionals working with them
- RISK may be too high
- Mentor may not feel confident in managing complexity
Evidence of Hope and Potential?

- Herrera, Dubois and Grossman (2013) assessed the effects of mentoring for 1310 young people aged 8 to 15 years who were deemed to be ‘high risk’. They found that youth mentoring programmes reached young people with varying ‘risk profiles’ and that these young people had relationships of similar strength and duration and derived similar benefits from programme participation. The key benefits found were reduced depressive symptoms, gains in social acceptance, academic attitude and results.
Case Study:
Foróige’s Big Brother Big Sister Programme
Benefits of Mentoring for young people

Time Out
Enjoyment of shared leisure activities.

- Builds a solid positive relationship
- Enhances Social Networks
- Encourages Learning and positive messages about Education
- Provides Emotional and Practical Support
- Encourages Positive Life Choices
- Builds Self-Esteem and confidence
Mentoring ‘higher risk’ young people;

In 2015, 28% of young people presented to BBBS with higher level of need.

Included Young people
- Living in care
- Cautioned by Juvenile Liaison Officer
- Not attending formal education or training
- Living in temporary accommodation.

Presented with a broad range of issues
- Social isolation
- Bullying
- Alcohol and or substance misuse within family
- Bereavement
- Impact of parental imprisonment
- Experienced abuse.
A young person must:

- Be between 10-18 years

- Want to participate

- Have needs suitable for volunteer intervention.
Participant Intake and Matching:

**Youth Intake**
- Referral
- Application
- Interview Carer/ Youth
- Home Visit

**Volunteer Intake**
- 3 References
- Garda Vetting
- Application
- Interview
- Home Visit

**Matching**
- Interests and hobbies
- Complimentary personalities
- Needs of youth
- Capability of volunteer.
However, through case-planning, BBBS seeks to meet specific objectives that relate directly to each young person’s need.

**Caseplan**
- How BB/BS can support young person
- Individually tailored to meet the needs of each young person
- Consultation with young person, parent and volunteer
- Staff member liaises with agencies involved with young person
- Needs at intake and needs that have arisen over the 6 months, monitored regularly.

Developing a friendship is the ultimate goal of the BBBS programme.
Successful Mentoring Youth Higher Needs

**Young Person**
- Clear understanding
- Wants to be involved
- Needs suitable for volunteer intervention.

**Volunteer**
- Committed
- Capable and Open to match with youth with higher level of need
- Trained and Supported
- Not given detailed history of youth prior to matching.

**Staff**
- Supportive and proactive in supervision
- Contact for external agencies.

**Well Matched**
- Based on common interests and complimentary personalities
- Need of young person matched with capability of volunteer.
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<th>Barriers That have Arisen (From Chapter)</th>
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<td>From Foróige’s experience, challenges include:</td>
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<td><strong>Recruitment of suitable volunteers</strong> (especially male volunteers)</td>
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<td><strong>Young person’s needs become too acute</strong> for the volunteer to cope with.</td>
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<td><strong>Young person and volunteer do not connect</strong> with each other.</td>
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<td><strong>Staff that are under-resourced</strong> to manage match caseloads and support volunteers who are matched with young people with a higher level of need.</td>
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Main messages for use with children with higher levels of need:

Mentoring can be suited to both preventative and protective interventions, though greater care is needed in the use of mentoring where there are high levels of need or situations where children are involved with protective services.

While mentoring will clearly not always be suitable for higher levels of need or children at risk, its potential seems to be under-used at present with services relying perhaps too much on formal services only.

It is evident that young people often prefer less formal mechanisms for support and thrive on them. This has been the experience of Foróige and is also borne out in the literature (NEF, 2014).

It seems overall that the resource offered by BBBS to supplement, reinforce and indeed help a young person to engage with formal services, has further potential for utilisation by social work.
Conclusion:

Guidance points:
• Find out and engage with mentoring service in your area
• Become familiar with research showing the value of informal supports
• Discuss mentoring as an option with young people and their families
• Include mentoring agency as a key support and consult appropriately
• Take time to discuss progress of young person, offer advice and information
• Ensure professional training courses include mentoring.
Mentoring is not a ‘panacea’ but can produce quality outcomes for young people presenting with higher levels of risk.