



PREVALENCE OF MENTORING REPORT 2004

INTERPRETATIONS & NEXT STEPS



Prevalence

Since 32% of the mentoring organizations listed in the Mentoring Partnership of Minnesota's (MPM) contact database are represented in the 2004 prevalence figures, it is clear that the reported total of 170,477 mentors is a conservative estimate. It is possible that this figure is about half as much as the "true" total had all mentoring organizations been represented. Nevertheless, we documented that at least 170,000 youth had a significant mentoring relationship in their life. This is an encouraging finding! It is important that the Minnesota mentoring community celebrate these efforts, but also continue to work hard to reach our collective goal of having 450,000 mentored youth by 2010.

Next Steps:

- Develop an annual reporting system (such as the Prevalence Survey) to track trends and gain insight about critical issues facing mentoring programs. **(MPM)**
- Examine impact and implications of new mentoring models and clarify the definitions of these models (e.g., group mentoring, peer mentoring, and e-mentoring). **(MPM)**
- Expand and grow resources for all mentoring programs. **(MPM)**
- Due to increasing growth in this area, offer new resources specific to school-based mentoring. **(MPM)**
- Continue to build a support network for mentoring programs where ideas, practical information, and proven practices can be shared with one another. **(MPM & PROG)**
- Use these findings to seek increased funding and support for the development and maintenance of mentoring programs across the state. **(MPM & PROG)**

Program Information

The research literature around mentoring has consistently shown that the longer youth are in a supportive, consistent relationship with a mentor, the better off they are in terms of a host of positive developmental outcomes. Indeed, 46% of the mentoring programs surveyed reported a typical mentoring relationship length of two or more years.

We understand that some mentoring opportunities do not lend themselves to long-term mentor-mentee relationships (e.g., school-based mentoring), and this fact may be reflected in the 23% of the programs reporting a typical relationship length of 7 – 12 months. It is nonetheless imperative that mentoring programs highlight and build around the benefits of quality, long-lasting relationships for mentees and mentors alike. The growth of school-based mentoring offers an opportunity to capitalize on the support system of adults that already exist in a school and draw adults and youth into mentoring relationships that might be less likely to be connected to a community based program. Also of note was that a great majority of the programs served youth ages 5 – 14, a finding consistent with that reported in 2002. Providing more opportunities for older youth is an increasingly important priority, given that this age group is also experiencing critical developmental challenges as demonstrated by recent findings on adolescent brain development.

Next Steps:

- Disseminate research findings on best practices related to retention of mentors and build strong connections between mentors and youth. **(MPM & PROG)**
- Continue to recognize successes of all kinds, not only the extraordinary achievements of mentors and mentees. **(MPM & PROG)**
- Increase the number of mentoring opportunities available to youth ages 15 – 18. **(MPM & PROG)**
- Provide support networks and sharing opportunities for mentors themselves to pass on problem-solving strategies and help guard against burnout. **(PROG)**
- Listen and respond to feedback from mentors about obstacles to maintaining more long-term relationships with youth. **(PROG)**
- Continue exploring school-based mentoring models, dissemination of best practices, and resources available with particular emphasis on connecting youth development with out-of-school opportunities. **(MPM)**

Mentors

A majority (57%) of the mentoring programs indicated that they require a minimum length time commitment from mentors of 10 months or more, while 6% of the sample did not require a specific time commitment. The 2004 survey results also show that longer commitments are more typical than in the past (79% of programs required at least 7 months in 2004 versus 72% in 2002). Another meaningful finding was that 68% of the programs require at least two hours of orientation training for mentors (which is down from 79% in 2002). MPM believes strongly in the benefits of training mentors and encourages programs to ensure mentors are adequately prepared.

Perhaps the most pressing issues for the mentoring community right now is criminal background checks for mentors. We found that 24% of the programs did not implement any type of background checks of its mentors. If background checks were used, the most common type was at the state level (25%). However, these findings may not be surprising given that mentoring programs consistently raise a number of concerns that affect their use of background checks. One concern is that they may engender volunteers' negative perceptions of the program (e.g., privacy issues). Another is confusion about where to get reliable information. Finally, screening may result in information that is not useful for the program, making it difficult to justify the time and money spent conducting them. As discussion continues to occur within statewide partnerships and the national MENTOR organization, as well as at the legislative level, we are hopeful that these concerns will be sufficiently addressed.

Next Steps:

- Explore alternative delivery methods and expand the content of training materials available to mentoring programs. **(MPM)**
- Work with legislators at local and national level to secure funding for screening mentors. **(MPM)**
- Advocate for the importance of a reliable system for screening mentors and background checks. **(MPM & PROG)**
- Provide on-going training and education for mentors throughout the length of the mentoring relationship. **(MPM & PROG)**
- Institute training for all mentors before they begin the mentoring relationship. **(PROG)**

Evaluation Data

Survey information regarding evaluation data was particularly important this year as MPM is currently conducting a study to evaluate the costs and benefits of mentoring (i.e., Social Return on Investment). In an age of accountability, it is not surprising that the mentoring community too has been increasingly asked by funders and others to show that programs are effective in terms of youth outcomes. In other words, is it worth the investment? Survey results indicated that only 22% of the mentoring programs did not conduct any systematic outcome evaluation of their program. However, the survey specifically asked only about outcome evaluations. Some programs conduct other types of evaluation in addition to, or in the place of, outcome evaluations. What was perhaps most encouraging was that the many of the programs not only conducted evaluations because of a funder requirement, but also as a way to improve and develop program procedures and clarify goals. Given the current climate in the youth development field and beyond, we suspect that the number of programs conducting program evaluations will continue to increase for years to come.

Next Steps:

- Develop systematic new ways to track mentee outcomes over time. **(MPM & PROG)**
- Highlight and celebrate program impacts through reports and other public documentation strategies. **(MPM & PROG)**
- Develop program self-assessment tools to document execution of program practices and validate program quality. **(MPM & PROG)**
- Create methods to recognize and publicize program quality. **(MPM)**
- Utilize evaluation information in grant proposals and to secure increased funding. **(MPM & PROG)**
- Include youth outcome and program evaluation data as a component of regular program "book-keeping." **(PROG)**