



Issue Brief No. 40

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The Afterschool Alliance, in partnership with MetLife Foundation, is proud to present the final in a series of four issue briefs examining critical issues facing older youth and the vital role afterschool programs play in addressing these issues. These issue briefs address workforce and career development; recruitment and retention of older youth; dropout prevention; and mentoring. They examine just a few of the ways afterschool programs support middle and high school youth, families and communities.

Afterschool: A Place for Older Youth to Mentor and Be Mentored

Mentoring is a structured and trusting relationship that brings young people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support and encouragement. Mentoring programs have grown rapidly in recent years and now serve an estimated 15 to 20 percent of young people who need the care and support of a mentor.ⁱ While that percentage translates to three million youth, it leaves almost 15 million more youth unserved, many of whom are from disadvantaged social and economic backgrounds or do not have caring adults in their lives.ⁱⁱ Mentoring is a critical element in every child's social, emotional and cognitive development. It builds a sense of industry and competency, boosts academic performance and broadens horizons. Along with parents, mentors help young people realize their potential by providing them with support, advice, encouragement and friendship. Afterschool programs, with their history of supporting families and communities, are an ideal platform for successful mentoring programs.

The Benefits of Mentoring are Wide-Reaching

Mentoring programs provide mentees with multiple benefits, and can make positive differences in several areas of youth behavior and development, including:ⁱⁱⁱ

- Improved self esteem
- Stronger relationships with parents and peers
- Greater school connectedness
- Improved academic performance
- Reductions in substance abuse, violence and other high-risk behaviors

Mentors also gain considerable rewards such as:^{iv}

- Improved health and self esteem
- Sense of accomplishment
- Insight into one's own childhood or children
- Public recognition
- Inclusion in a volunteer community

You're motivated when, over the course of a year, you see how much they've improved. We had a seventh-grade student who had been kicked out of several schools—she was defiant and angry. Eventually, though, the program just clicked with her, and she went from the worst level to the best level and stayed there. You see that and just say, "Wow!"

--John Terry, a senior psychology major and Challenging Horizons volunteer

The positive effects of mentoring are well documented, and as a result, many mentoring programs seek to expand their reach by integrating older youth as mentors to younger children. These relationships not only provide participants with the same benefits as traditional mentoring relationships, but also offer the youth mentors additional rewards including:^v

- High school credits
- Leadership opportunities
- Increased interest in social issues
- Greater respect for others' cultures
- Increased knowledge of child development
- Increased personal and interpersonal skills

Despite Clear Rewards, Barriers to Successful Mentoring Programs Exist

The overall record of success of mentoring programs is encouraging. Studies show that mentoring relationships are most likely to promote positive outcomes when they are close, consistent and enduring.^{vi} In order for mentoring relationships to be successful, they must incorporate several key elements:

- Close emotional bond based on empathy and authenticity, basic compatibility and opportunities for having fun.^{vii}
- Youth-centered approach, focusing on the developmental needs of youth.^{viii}
- Consistent, regular meetings, at least four hours per month.^{ix}
- Enduring relationships that last one year or longer.^{xi}

Most mentoring is site-based, taking place in a wide array of settings such as the workplace, faith-based organizations, community settings, juvenile corrections facilities, and schools, where the vast majority of mentoring takes place.^{xii} School-based programs offer benefits such as convenience, safety and the ability to attract a wide pool of volunteers. However, there are downsides. Because the school-based mentoring approach is built around the school curriculum and calendar, it is inherently limited in its ability to create the close, long-term relationships that are critical to successful mentoring.^{xiii} Further, school-based programs tend to focus on academic achievement often at the expense of other enrichment activities and experiences.^{xiv}

Just by having Farid as my mentor, my sense of pride and independence rose...he was able to see me, and what I could be...I am most grateful that he volunteered to become a part of my life.
--**Damon, a high school sophomore in Georgia**

Afterschool Programs are an Ideal Venue for Mentoring

Afterschool incorporates the benefits of the school-based mentoring model without the potential limitations imposed by school calendars or a stringent focus on academics. Afterschool programs, many of which operate in summer and during holiday breaks, provide critical flexibility that allows participants to take part in experiences that reach beyond the traditional school calendar.^{xv} Afterschool programs can engage community-based organizations – expanding the pool of administrators and volunteers and providing more enduring relationships.

Afterschool can also facilitate the involvement of older youth as mentors, providing them with a structured, familiar environment and supportive adults to help them fulfill their commitments as mentors to younger children, benefitting all participants.^{xvi}

- **Challenging Horizons Program (CHP)** in Columbia, SC, provides two innovative afterschool mentoring programs: Transitional Mentoring and Self-Efficacy Enhancing Mentoring. The Transitional Mentoring program pairs students transitioning from elementary to middle school with college students taking a course on the transition from high school to college. The knowledge and enthusiasm of the college students, acting as role models, provides support for the middle school students, easing their transition to middle school while also promoting the goal of higher education. The Self-Efficacy program pairs mentors with youth who are receiving supplemental education. During weekly meetings, mentors teach self-regulation skills and promote positive attributes designed to help middle school students become self-reliant, persistent learners.

My Little Sister Alexis is a shy, smart and funny sixth grader. She ... loves to learn experientially – so, we’re exploring her dream to become a doctor or a teacher by field trips to places that can fuel her desire to learn. Recently we went for her first outing (ever!) to the Pacific Science Center. For Alexis, it was magical. We also spent a very long time in the bumper cars at Seattle Center, uh, learning about the laws of physics, but, really, laughing and giggling and letting Alexis just be the 11-year old she is in a safe and fun space.

--Tina, a Big Sister from Big Brothers Big Sisters of Puget Sound

Afterschool mentoring programs can offer access to long-term relationships, which are vital to successful mentoring. Mentors who have the opportunity to forge these bonds teach life-long skills that help young people navigate current challenges, while providing the foundation for success in the future.

- **Big Brothers Big Sisters of Puget Sound** in Seattle, WA, connects actively involved community members with middle school students. The goal of the program is to prevent and intervene in youth violence through mentorship – offering consistent, safe and stable support and encouragement. The program, which unites the public, private and nonprofit sectors, successfully matches 300 caring adults with 300 middle school students. Mentors meet with their student once a week, for at least a year, successfully addressing the challenges of truancy, violence and risky behavior in a holistic manner.

Offering access to enrichment activities that engage youth is a hallmark of a successful afterschool program, and also a critical component of a successful mentoring program. Providing participants with access to extracurricular activities strengthens bonds and boosts retention and participation. Connecting youth to caring adults is one of the key factors in keeping youth involved in afterschool programs – programs that inspire learning, keep kids safe and help working families.

- **Movement City** in Lawrence, MA combines arts and academic support with leadership development and multi-layered mentoring. This innovative mentoring program incorporates a residency program, in which college

seniors and recent graduates participate in everyday operations and develop the culture of the program, serving as role models and mentors to the program's youth. The residency program provides resident mentors free living space for up to two years in return for a commitment to Movement City, assisting in programs, workshops and activities. The program provides training to all staff, and encourages older teens to mentor younger participants. Paid staff members mentor both youth participants and residents.

Academic supports can be an important part of mentoring; pairing struggling students who may not have access to academic assistance with caring adults. These types of mentoring programs are often the turning point for students who might otherwise drop out of school.

- **Communities in Schools of Peninsula's Math Mentor Program** in Vaughn, WA provides trained adult mentors to middle school students who are at risk for academic failure, specifically in math. Together, the mentor and mentee discuss problem-solving techniques; identify equation strategies; work on homework; play math games; use computer-assisted instruction; and focus on math basics to improve learning. The participants meet once a week, and continuously adjust their strategy based on the needs of the student. This approach leads to gains in math scores and innovative academic encouragement.

I learned. I couldn't understand the teacher in class, but I did understand math with my mentor.
--Middle school math student at the Communities in Schools of Peninsula's Math Mentor Program

Conclusion

All young people have the potential to succeed in life and contribute to society; however, not all youth get the support they need to thrive. Mentoring programs help give youth the confidence, resources and skills they need to reach their potential. Afterschool programs offer an ideal platform in which to implement the necessary components of a successful mentoring program, ensuring positive outcomes for all participants.

ⁱ Mentor (2006). *The National Agenda for Action. How to Close the America's Mentoring Gap.*

ⁱⁱ Rhodes, J.E., & DuBois, D.L. (2006). Understanding and facilitating the youth mentoring movement. *Social Policy Report*, 20(3). Available online at: <http://www.srcd.org/documents/publications/spr/spr20-3.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Taylor, A., & Bressler, J. (1996). *Mentoring across Generations: Partnerships for Positive Youth Development.* Kluwer Academic/Plenum Press, New York, NY.

^v Herrera, C, Kauh T.J., Cooney, S.M., Grossman, J.B., & McMaken, J. (2008). *High School Students as Mentors. Findings from the Big Brothers Big Sisters School-Based Mentoring Impact Study.* Public/Private Ventures, Philadelphia, PA.

^{vi} Rhodes, J.E., & DuBois, D.L. (2006). Understanding and facilitating the youth mentoring movement. *Social Policy Report*, 20(3). Available online at: <http://www.srcd.org/documents/publications/spr/spr20-3.pdf>

^{vii} Spencer, R. (2006). Understanding the mentoring process between adolescents and adults. *Youth Society*, 37, 287-315.

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- ^{viii} Herrera, C., Sipe, C.L., & McClanahan, W.S. (2000). *Mentoring school-age children: Relationship development in community-based and school-based programs*. Public/Private Ventures, Philadelphia, PA. (Published in collaboration with MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership, Alexandria, VA)
- ^{ix} Blakely, C.H., Menon, R., & Jones, D.C. (1995). *Project BE-LONG: Final report*. College Station, TX: Texas A&M University, Public Policy Research Institute.
- ^x Mentor (2005). *Mentoring in America 2005. A Snapshot of the Current State of Mentoring*.
- ^{xi} Grossman, J.B. & Rhodes, J.E. (2002). The test of time: Predictors and effects of duration in youth mentoring relationships. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 30, 199-219.
- ^{xii} DuBois, D.L. & Karcher, M.J. (2005). Youth mentoring: Theory, research, and practice. *Handbook of youth mentoring*. Thousand Oaks, CA.
- ^{xiii} Herrera, C., Sipe, C.L., & McClanahan, W.S. (2000). *Mentoring school-age children: Relationship development in community-based and school-based programs*. Public/Private Ventures, Philadelphia, PA. (Published in collaboration with MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership, Alexandria, VA)
- ^{xiv} *School based Mentoring*. Mentor. Retrieved on July 6, 2009 from http://www.mentoring.org/access_research/school_based/
- ^{xv} Rhodes, J.E., & DuBois, D.L. (2006). Understanding and facilitating the youth mentoring movement. *Social Policy Report*, 20(3). Available online at: <http://www.srcd.org/documents/publications/spr/spr20-3.pdf>
- ^{xvi} Herrera, C., Kauh T.J., Cooney, S.M., Grossman, J.B., & McMaken, J. (2008). *High School Students as Mentors. Findings from the Big Brothers Big Sisters School-Based Mentoring Impact Study*. Public/Private Ventures, Philadelphia, PA.