DC Family Policy Seminar

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Seminar Highlights

Helping Families and Schools Get it Done: Mentoring Interventions in the District

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Another equally appropriate title for this seminar could have been: "Mentoring Interventions in the District: How to Bridge the Gap Between Good Intentions and Effective Interventions." Mentoring means very different things to different people. Mentoring may be thought of in a very broad perspective as any positive interaction between adult and child. Also, mentoring may be defined as a transmission of experience and wisdom from one person to another. Despite the variations in definitions, there are some general observations to be made about mentoring. First, some mentoring interventions are extremely effective in working with our young people. A newly released Public/Private Ventures report found that 10--16 year old's who participated in Big Brothers/Big Sisters (BB/BS) programs nationally have improved school performance and attendance, better attitudes towards schools and were less like likely to use alcohol or drugs compared to 10-16 year old's that had signed up to use BB/BS programs but were randomly assigned to waiting lists and could not participate. It is encouraging to finally see empirical documentation to confirm anecdotal information we have all collected.

A second observation we can make is that some mentoring organizations are extremely effective in sustaining themselves over time and perpetuating/facilitating effective mentoring relationships. Many of these mentoring organizations even manage to do so with all volunteer staffs. However, we must temper this observation with the knowledge that mentoring relationships and organizations are sometimes less effective than we might like. Our purpose today is to share ideas on how to make mentoring programs more effective in creating nurturing and sustainable relationships in the lives of our young people.

Richard Majors, Ph.D.
former Senior Research Associate, Urban Institute, and
President of the National Council of African Men

Studies show the need to standardize and build infrastructure to ensure the successful development and continuation of community mentoring programs.

Main Points:

• My purpose today is not to give you a litany of statistics relating to mentoring. Most of us in this room really do understand the positive effects of mentoring and many of the contributions that mentoring has made in our respective communities.

• My focus and research is on young African American males. I have written **two books:** *The American Black Male: His Present Status and Future* **and** *Cool Pose the Dilemmas of Black Manhood in America.* **While I don't consider myself an expert,** like many of you, I am trying to do the best I can to empower our communities and develop our black boys. Most of my comments thus will be on African American male youth.

• I will deal with two questions: 1) what do we know and; 2) what can we do. Recently at the Urban Institute, we completed a study on African American male youth that looks at independent programs in various black communities that serve these boys. The study was funded by the Kellogg Corporation. We went to 10 cities in the U.S. to find out what programs in black communities were making a major impact on African American boys. One area we investigated was mentoring.

• In interviewing direct service providers who work with African American boys we found that mentoring programs were making a major contribution; but there are not enough mentoring programs for African American boys.

• Some of the issues that complicate positive youth development is the proliferation of single parent families and its implications on youth: 60 percent of black boys come from fatherless homes; there is an increase in latchkey children, and the impact of outside influences (like MTV for instance) in raising our children and inculcating certain values. We are also competing with drugs, crime and violence among other things. However, I think that mentoring is the best thing to come around in a long time to save our children.

• We found during our research that everyone has a different definition of mentoring. As we move into the 21st Century, its crucial that find a better way to assess, measure and standardize mentoring programs.

• To provide better mentoring services our studies found three things need to happen: 1) creating better measurement tools; 2) develop a databank, and 3) develop technical assistance for launching new programs.

• Fabricio Balazar at the University of Kansas developed an instrument in 1988 to evaluate and access various mentoring programs. Many people are interested in working with children but have no idea where to start. Lack of information and instructional material deters individuals from getting involved. In addition to evaluation material Mr. Balazar has also created instructional guides to help provide direction in working with young boys. For example, the instructional guides have role playing strategies to develop certain life skills (e.g. interviewing skills) with young boys.

• The second recommendation from the study stems from the lack of information on best practices and programs in the country. There is no infrastructure, clearinghouse or database for mentoring programs or best practices. Now is the time to discuss the idea of a clearinghouse to provide crucial information to impact our communities. As President of the National Council of African American Men, I am currently working with John Crapo of Georgetown University regarding establishing a clearinghouse for resources.

• Our third recommendation from the study is to provide technical assistance to individuals eager to volunteer but without the right knowledge of mentoring programs who do not know where to start. A clearinghouse can provide technical assistance on how to begin a mentoring program and who to go to for assistance.

Ernest White
Founder
WDCU Radio Mentoring Program

Intensive mentoring coupled with tutoring, training and family workshops, have increased our programs' success with youth.

Program:

• The WDCU Mentoring Program is a nine year old program begun to involve the station and listeners with the community in a non-traditional way that would make a tremendous long term impact in the community.

• We choose to "adopt" Malcolm X Elementary School. At that time, a great proliferation of homicides were occurring within blocks from the school. Many of the boys in that school were relatives of those that were losing there lives.

• Discussions with the Vice Principle highlighted an attitudinal change in boys between the summer of 2-3 grades and 3-4 grades. Many boys returned from summer break hostile and withdrawn as they took on the attitudes of the men in their community. A need existed to provide these boys with positive African American role models to combat negative influences in their community.

• Seventeen male listeners signed up to help begin this program. We conducted a training to ensure that they understood the necessities of the program. We devised an intense program of one-on-one mentoring that entailed more than once a week contact. Mentors call frequently to follow up with boys to ensure that they are completing assignments and many mentors tutor once a week.

• Training is a key part of our program. Mentors need to be really aware of what to expect and what will be expected of them. We began the program by holding a fellowship for parents, youth and administrators to allow for natural paring of relationships.

• Early on we decided to address a few subjects. Our first topic was education. Each parent and mentor signed a statement of commitment listing their "duties" in the partnership to ensure that their son gets the best opportunities.

• Each Saturday we set up a tutorial program to teach children from 8:30 - 12 noon in a local church. We work closely with the school and teachers to find out what topics children are learning in school. We found that teaching is not as easy as it looks. We invested in training our mentors as tutors. We've seen an improvement in test scores and academic achievement since the program started.

• A second aspect of our program is in teaching parenting skills. We have a parenting workshop once a month dealing with issues that parents identify they need help with. We have a speaker knowledgeable about the issue and hand out a booklet on main points of the workshop so parents may have a reference at home. These workshops have made a major difference with the schools and the children. Parents are developing new skills; students are not as angry as they used to be; and teachers are happy with the outcomes in class.

• An important component of our parenting workshops is role modeling. Parents are asked to see an issue through the eyes of the child and vice versa. This makes a major difference in the communication between the parents, children and the mentor.

• To get all the parents to the workshops, we invite the whole family and provide dinner for everyone. We currently have about 100-150 people at each workshop.

• A third aspect of our program is activities with the mentees; group and individual. We take 20-30 boys skiing every year. In August, 10 boys went to St. Martin for four days. 15 boys each year go to the Piney Wood Country School in Mississippi. These boys tend to be ones that need to be removed from their current environment for a while. Trips are funded via grants from few foundations.

• Lastly, we've set up a mentoring training program. Our training model walks people through the mentoring experience, we give them both the highs and the lows, and go through some role playing. We've established about 25 programs in the past five years.

• There are not a lot of mentoring manuals. Those that do exist have some mis-information since the producers may not have had first hand experience with a mentoring program. Therefore, some of these manuals do more harm than good.

Carol Gay
Vice President and Chief Operating Officer
Mentors Inc.

Ongoing training for both the mentor and student is the key to facilitating successful mentoring relationships.

Main Points:

• Mentors Inc. differs from other mentoring programs in the district. Our program has an academic focus. Our mentors work with the students to reach their appointed goals by graduation. Our matches begin in 10th grade and run through graduation.

• We currently serve 1800 students in the District. Our goal this year is to match 500 students by January. We serve all comprehensive High Schools in the District (13 total) and cover all the Wards.

• Our mentoring relationship entails students and mentors speaking by phone at least once a week and see each other at least once a month. We encourage our mentors to do more if they are able.

• 85% of our students go on to college; 97% graduate from High School. Compared to the 55% graduation rate in the District, our program is doing quite well.

• Though we focus on academics, that does not mean that mentors ignore other aspects of the students life. Mentoring transcends all boundaries. Mentors have

to be involved in every aspect of this young persons life. Our program is two and half years since we believe a strong relationship takes a while to establish rapport and trust.

• With respect to funding, I welcome standardization of mentoring across all boundaries. Funding is critical and is becoming more so each year. It would be helpful for those reviewing funding proposal to have a standard to follow so funding choices are consistent with quality of mentoring programs.

• Training is an important aspect of the mentor/student relationship. Training is important for the student as well since they need to be reminded of their responsibilities in the relationship. For instance, if the mentor is helping the student find a job, the student needs training on how to write a resume, present themselves at the interview etc. The student needs to be kept up on what their responsibility to ensure that they reach their goals.

• Training must be ongoing. We begin with a two and half hour workshop on the basics. We follow up with periodic workshops in areas that the mentors are interested in. For instance, we had a workshop on who to call if you think your student is on drugs. This kind of follow up is important since the mentors may otherwise back away from the match if they feel unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the situation.

• Our student training in the spring focuses on job search and preparedness training. We send them to job interviews and help them clean up (or create) their resumes for the job search. We also have an SAT preparation program in connection with Fannie Mae.

• Matches are made in this program by connecting students career interests first and extra curricular interests second with a possible mentor. Part of our training deals with how the mentors can get through to the student using some of their extra curricular interests.

• Mentors Inc. provides monthly follow-up calls to ensure that the relationships are ongoing and provide support.

• Lastly, we try to get the parents involved in this relationship as well. Though the relationship is between the mentor and the student, it is important to have reinforcement from the parents. Mentors want to know that all they are trying to accomplish with the student is being supported by the parents. For instance, if the student wants to go to college and you're helping him/her fill out financial aid forms, you're not going to get anywhere until you get the tax forms from the parents. To facilitate this process, we hold a student-parent-mentor reception with school administrators, staff, board members to discuss issues and to share ideas.

Shepherd Zeldin
Director of Research and Planning
Center for Youth Development and Policy Research,
Academy for the Educational Development

We need to develop a language for youth development.

Main Points:

• What is mentoring? Mentoring is everything. It is the essence of how all adults should be with young people. Mentoring is guiding, teaching, loving, respecting, but most of all, it is always being there for the young person.

• Most people do not have any trouble in agreeing with this definition of mentoring. However, when we start to talk about funding, we can disagree with the definition a little since the definition is very soft. We have to recognize that mentoring doesn't make sense to a lot of people that hold the purse strings. We need to explain what mentoring is. It is not about "controlling" young people, "treating" or "preventing" problems, mentoring is about "development" of young people and preparing them for adulthood.

• Most of our policies are stuck on control and treatment. We don't have a language to talk about development and preparing youth for the future. We need to include this discussion of language into our training programs for ourselves and mentors.

• Mentoring is a strategy to help young people reach the competencies and personal identity for young people to become adults.   We need to step back and think of the experiences young people need to be prepared for adulthood. If we are able to provide some of these experiences to all young people through mentoring programs, we'll have a lot more young people fully prepared for adulthood and have less problems with young people.

• Research tells us that what young people have a variety of developmental needs.   First, research tells us that young people need supports and opportunities.   Young people need: nurturing and friendship; to be encouraged to succeed; receive clear messages regarding rules, norms and discipline; receive guidance and caching for achievement and need to have access to resources.

• Secondly, young people need knowledge. They need to know how to read, write and compute. Young people also need the opportunity to play for development to occur. Exploration and reflection is also crucial. Research shows that young people need to make choices and they need the freedom to make good and bad choices.

• Young people also need an opportunity to express themselves to peers and in groups. Theater, arts, dance, crafts, membership are all important to give them the opportunity to express themselves.

• Research is clear that with these opportunities to promote development, young people are better off. Young people are more likely: to achieve a positive sense of identity and acquire knowledge and skills for daily living; to do well in school and are less likely to engage in delinquency, drug use, or to become pregnant at an early age. It doesn't matter who provides these opportunities and support (church, mentor, teacher, parent, extended family member) the support itself is crucial. Mentoring, however, is well positioned to provide these supports.

• Training of mentors is crucial. There are some core elements for a successful mentor. First is undivided attention. Mentors need to treat the young person, as Helen Mayor writes, as the "one and only one that counts at that moment".

• Secondly, the mentor needs to be in the rhythm of the young person. Helen Mayor also writes; "have you noticed when people jog, dance, throw a Frisbee... they seem to experience momentarily a great sense of bonding and a great sense of unity. In fact, it seems to me that rhythm is the key to adult/youth relationships".

• Undivided attention, rhythm, trust are hard to develop with a young person, but they are a prerequisite to whatever it is that we want to develop with that young person. Thus training needs to focus on how to achieve these basic elements of a mentoring relationship. Then the mentor is in the position to foster certain abilities and foster a sense of mastery in whatever the goal may be. All this (supports and opportunities) can be built into any mentoring relationship to encourage young people.

• Though mentoring is crucial, young people also need membership and involvement in other activities so that there is another social network. Research shows that if they don't their basic needs from one place, they'll go somewhere else to get it.

• On a policy level, mentoring needs to be an integral aspect of *any* adult/youth relationship (teachers, probation officers, youth workers all have the opportunity to be mentors).

• We need to work on our own language so that we can explain to all people in communities the importance of formal and informal mentoring and how they can support youth. The problem is that we don't have a language for mentoring and youth development to get public policy to start funding the type of work that we do.

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Discussion and Community Announcements

The DC Family Policy Seminar graciously acknowledges the generous space and facilities offered by the D.C. Board of Appeals.

(1) Need to Broaden Base of Who we Call Mentors:
Harriet Stonehill: MegaSkills Education Center:
We need to broaden the base of who we call mentors. Parents are mentors too and they need training to act in the capacity of mentors as well. I want to acknowledge Janice Melvin from the D.C. Public Schools for brining in the program to the D.C. Public Schools. We have a program that trains leaders and these leaders are teachers that serve as partners between the schools and the home. This training provides information on how to provide attributes and attitudes that are needed for both academic and personal growth; such as problem solving.

Janice Melvin: D.C Public Schools:
We have a Homeless School Institute where we have trained 600 parents and community members with MegaSkills workshops. We believe that parents are parents first and then teachers and mentors. Collaboration with workshops and schools is very important. Some workshops focus on how to help children with homework or how to help children get ready for school. We have 20 trained leaders that can go anywhere to teach (at no cost) these skills. If you want more information, or in need of a workshop, please call me at (202) 541-5929 or 5530.

(2) Background Checks for Mentors:
Mark Robinson, New Community Family Place:
What about background checks? We have a fathers group in our program and some of the dads want to help and be mentors. But some of these fathers have issues of their own and may not pass a background check. For this kind of group how do we train them and get them ready to mentor?

Responses:
Richard Majors: That is an excellent point. There are many African men that have criminal backgrounds or that have been incarcerated and it is difficult for them to become involved in the community. Often times there are different standards in black community about these issues. I sense that we need some kind of security check but it can be informal. There are many people that can make a valuable contribution, by working with kids, that have records, but we do need to set parameters.

Carol Gay: We don't do background checks. Security checks are too costly and time consuming. We couldn't find anyone to underwrite a background check. We also lost some volunteers by waiting for background checks. That is one of

the reasons that we work only with High School children since they are more savvy. We do reference checks and one-on-one interviews to get an idea of each potential mentor's experience with teenagers and their reasons for wanting to mentor.

Janice Melvin: For volunteering in the public school system a police clearance in necessary along with a TB test. These are standard procedures for all employees and volunteers.

Jens Ludwig: There are certainly many that do not pass the checks but can make a valuable contribution anyway. This is likely to become more of an issue as organizations become increasingly aware of their liability exposure. To date, many organization's have been blissfully ignorant of liability issues. If something goes wrong and the volunteer had no background check and a criminal record that can dramatically change the landscape of the organization.

Shep Zeldin: Many organizations that I know focus on a very structured, in-depth interview as the next best thing (to security checks). We all do things for different reasons and they are looking for if the person interested in mentoring who is doing largely for young people or are they doing it for themselves. If you are doing it for yourself it is more likely that your own issues will get involved rather than doing it for the young person.

(3) Individual Development v. Community Development and Cross Race Issues:
Chris Koliba, Georgetown Volunteer and Public Service Center:
I advise 27 students at the University who are mentors. One of the tensions for them and for us is the issue of empowering them to be active citizens with in their own communities vs. pulling them out of a sinking ship, and trying to balance that. On the same line, I'd like to talk about the class/race issue that has emerged. Many of our students come from predominantly middle class backgrounds and are struggling with how to relate to their protégés with respect to language and culture. I'm interested in knowing how people in this room have dealt with these issues; particularly with experience of white mentors and African American high school youth.

Responses:
Alice Adams, Bell Atlantic:
I commend you for working with the program. Mentoring is about learning to deal with clashes of culture and race. It's about trust to get another person to learn who you are and to not pass judgment on them based on your own values. Just listening and learning and being there and being committed to the mentee is important. There is no magic formula for mentoring. Just make a commitment. By learning and sharing with the youth maybe the child will give back to the community. There is no instant gratification; sometimes the long term value of

the mentoring relationship is more important. Perhaps the youth will one day give back to someone else in the community.

Richard Majors:
Cultural differences are important in terms of communication. In my travels around the country, I have often heard questions from my white brothers and sisters asking if they can make a difference in the lives of African American boys. I'm from New York and I had a Jewish mentor and to me it only mattered that he made a commitment and showed up every week to take me to basketball. Hence, his color did not matter, just being there.

Chris Koliba:
The issue when working with college students is a little more complex. My question really focuses on how to prepare college students to mentor. These mentors have had very many different experiences and backgrounds and mentoring is more complicated than it looks. My question is what kind of training is out there to look at these issues.

Carol Gay:
Training is very important. These issues we are talking about all have to do with time and nothing but time. When I was young, I didn't have to go through the same experiences that youth today need to go through. We all need to understand what is going on with the youth today; and that is what our training focuses on.

Robert Abney, Fannie Mae:
I would approach it this way. First, the mentor is a trusted guide and friend. Second, I have a student that has very different interests and desires that is very different from my educational background. Part of trust is sharing. I can't be everything to this student but I can share the network I have to find the right person the child needs. So maybe if we don't have relational or class experience, we can find someone who does. I don't think so much that training is involved as finding someone to help you reach that child by looking into your network.

Richard Majors:
Many students and individuals have the desire to help others in the community but have no idea of what to do. There is a gentleman of the name of Roland Gilbert in Oakland California who works for Symbols Inc. that has the best training program I have ever seen. It is eight weeks long and thorough. You are right, researchers need to do a better job in disseminating information and preparing individuals to be better mentors.

Alice Adams:
All of us have special qualities that we can share with others. Mentors are not saviors. We can't change this child's life, we can only help them reach their

goals. All we can do is be a resource so that if they have needs we can support them.

Shep Zeldin:
Youth participation cuts across race, culture and class. We focus our training on adults to really adopt youth participation strategies. We need to follow the young person. If the young person wants to get involved, we need to help them find the social network to create options. If the young person wants to get involved in the community, it is up to us to have those options available.

Carol Gay:
I agree with both Robert and Alice that mentoring alone is not the answer. Mentoring is just one resource the mentors can tap into. Training provides you with the tools you need to help the child reach their own personal goals.

Melanie Roberson: Community Action International Alliance
My questions is directed to Richard; what criteria did you use to assess the efficacy of the programs?

Richard Majors:
I will try to answer your question, but please bear with me. I am a psychologist by training. I know from my own interviews that black boys may have more baggage and its very important to be more patient with boys. They are much less likely to self-disclose and it takes a longer time to develop trust with African American boys. You need mentors that are more patient and don't mind giving them more time. Its important to also understand where anger comes form and we need to find mentors and train them on how to deal with conflict. For any population we need to tailor and match mentors and mentees.

Melanie Roberson:
I have actually had more issues with African American girls in terms of anger. I have had trouble reaching them and in connecting in my workshop.

Richard Majors:
The research shows that young African American youth are harder to reach for a number of reasons: how people perceive them, stereotypes, biases, not having outlets to express themselves and fear of authority.

Jose Vargas: Latino Community Big Brothers/Big Sisters
I have two questions: 1) how can we develop culturally appropriate mentoring and 2) how do we handle drawing a child out of a community through mentoring and then putting them back in.   A mentor can provide a bridge between the youths culture and the culture of the larger society. It would be a disservice to the youth if we draw them out of their community and not give them skills to function outside of their own community. Take employment for example.   Americans have many rituals imbedded with employment (cover

letter, resumes, interviews, follow up calls) and the youth need to know these rituals in order to get a job.   If you draw children away from their communities, and give them all these other tools, sometimes they become dysfunctional in both communities.

Jean Phillips: Community of Hope
I grew up on an island and personally never thought of cultural differences. It is strange to talk to young people today and hear them ask "how come we don't own the stores?" We need to be open and honest with these young people when they ask the hard questions. Young people in America seem much more honest and open then they were before. We need to be asking ourselves the following questions: Are we building a community? Are we raising test scores? Can we deal with racial issues? Are we teaching and dealing with the real questions? Are we being honest? The problem is bigger than each of us. We need everyone. How do we be honest? When students ask us how to get into corporate America, do they really want to know what's its like? Can we be honest to them about what its really about?

Richard Majors:
We've never had an honest debate about racism and that is why we have so much conflict in this country. There is more talk now because of the Million Man March and the O.J. trial. Is this positive or negative? This is an issue for whites as well. Why do we have a proliferation of neo--white hate groups? Maybe we need more honest open discussion of these issues with parents on an everyday basis.

Shelley Stark: National Center for Education for Maternal and Child Health.
I hear from the audience that we need to be more open to hearing what the mentees are saying. I'm wondering if in any of these programs there are needs assessment tools to help understand exactly what it is the youth want out of the program. The second point I have is that it seems that there are a lot of people asking for resources; I know that Prof. Ludwig is trying to establish a clearinghouse and I'd like to hear more about it.

Carol Gay:
We initially encourage a goal setting activity and signing a contract between mentor and mentee. The listening aspect of the relationship is so important. Listening has to be consistent. If you listen you'll hear the themes that are important to the youth. Mentors are not there to change the student or tell them what to do, just listen.

Jens Ludwig:
Each of the questions we have raised in the last two hours has been asked repeatedly within each one of your organizations. The purpose of the clearing house will be to share information between one another so that we don't keep reinventing the wheel.

Davena Proctor: For the Love of Children (FLOC) Outdoor Education Center
I want to share with you a scenario that occurred this summer. I led a workshop with seven African American youth from ages 15-18. As an African American female, I couldn't come up with answers to some of their questions. It took a person who'd been in their shoes to understand and be honest about the answers. I hope that we are able to include the males into your program that have criminal backgrounds. We need to look past the traditional resources. Parents are not that dysfunctional and we need to keep them involved. Include the parents into the program; look for the kids that have graduated from the program and ask them to be resources. Answers come from a wide variety of sources: parents, graduates, community members and everyday average people.

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