

2009

GMCC Community Justice Project Evaluation Final
Report on Best Practices for Strengthening
Mentor/Mentee Relationships

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Introduction

The Greater Minneapolis Council of Churches (GMCC) has operated since 1905 to battle poverty in Minneapolis. GMCC operates a successful family of social service programs and recruits support across denominational lines to help struggling Minnesota families remain self-reliant. The Community Justice Project (CJP) is a collaborative program, where the GMCC shares an employee with the Minneapolis Police Department and partners with the Hennepin County Adult Correctional Facility to increase public safety by reducing recidivism through changing the behavior of offenders and effecting system change. Specifically, CJP operates a mentoring program for individuals about to be released from Hennepin County Adult Correctional Facilities.

Each week CJP interviews inmates at the Adult Corrections Facility who are referred from three primary sources: the City and County Attorney's list of chronic offenders for the City of Minneapolis; the PREP program at the Adult Corrections Facility; and, self-referrals from inmates. After an inmate is interviewed CJP matches him or her with a mentor and/or refers the inmate to other agencies or resources. Project volunteers make a commitment to attend training and work with offenders prior to release and re-entry back into the community. All mentors have a background check and attend a five hour training. Mentors commit to mentoring for at least one year, specifically, four hours per month to work with their mentee while they are incarcerated and after their release. CJP communicates with mentors on a monthly basis to provide ongoing support and supervision. In addition, if an inmate has a probation or parole officer, CJP tries to connect the inmate's mentor with their parole or probation officer.

The recently released Pew Center on the States report "One in 100: Behind Bars in America 2008" notes that the gradual increase in prison population over the past thirty years has resulted in the sober fact that "more than one in every 100 adults is now confined in an American jail or prison." The financial implication of this data is staggering, and as a result state and local government agencies are exploring new alternatives not only to save money, but also to improve public safety. Additionally, CJP has collected statistics on its participants and found that 55% of mentees stay connected with their mentor upon release. Of those that stay connected to their mentor, there is a less than 10% recidivism rate. CJP secured a grant to further understand how to improve the connectiveness of mentors and mentees.

Evaluation

The key objective of the evaluation was to try to determine why some mentors and mentees do not stay in contact once the mentee is released, and how to increase the connection. To seek information to answer this question, twenty-five mentors, twenty-four mentees, and three criminal justice staff were interviewed from February through April of 2009. See Appendix A for interview questions.

Key Themes

The matches (mentees and mentors) are good.

“I think they do a really good job, or as good of job as possible with matching clients up, with the clients I have seen, with the women that I work with the matching has been outstanding.”

“I think really it was a perfect first one [mentee], we are about the same age and we have a lot of common interests you know we got kind of a family situation and the roofing construction, I know something about that, done that, and also I spent four summers on the White Earth Reservation when I was in college, so I worked with native people and in the prisons so you know I could talk to him about South Dakota, the reservation, things like that somewhat knowledgably”

“I’m 24 years old myself and I can actually relate to her more than anybody else. I believe that she can learn a lot from me due to the fact, instead of like someone that’s like 30 years old telling her what to do, and I’m there telling her this is how I live my life I’m actually in school, work you know just live my life in the right direction so you know I do think we are a perfect match up.”

“I think he is a good match because we have a lot in common.”

Many view the role of the mentor differently, but when the mentor views the role as being some sort of friend to the mentee increases the connection. It is also very important to have a strong understanding of the sort of lives some of the mentees are used to. Be there for them, not for you (don’t have an agenda).

“It’s relationship, not someone who has some kind of compartmentalized role in their lives.”

“I think just having an understanding that you know if the lifestyle of this person is very different from yours, don’t have high expectations of people being punctual and following through, don’t take it personally.”

“I think just listening to the person and finding out what the needs are and not making assumptions beforehand is the best way to, and sometimes people just want someone to listen, sometimes they don’t want people to fix them.”

“I make it a point that they have all my contact information, so they can reach out to me”
“I never asked her, but I put it, you know, call me anytime you want to, ask me anything, you know I’m here and I let her know when I’m not because she’s always calling me. You know, it’s up to you.”

“My main objective when I get a match is just to connect with someone on a deeper level than what they are used to connecting with people on a day to day basis.”

“Some of the mentees just want to get out of their cell, that’s one of the reasons why they would go in and talk to mentors and in the meantime if the mentor is not friendly enough with the mentee and build that relationship early enough, you know where the mentees can have enough confidence to stay in contact with their mentors, then once a mentee is released they will be caught up with so much things that they wouldn’t even have the time to think about getting in touch with their mentors, but if we do build that confidence in them and that relationship where they feel very comfortable talking to us about everything, then they will stay in touch.”

“I think most of all [the role of the mentor is] to be a friend that can be called on, a friend with experience who can be called on to work through problems together when they hit the streets”

“I don’t try to go in there with a set agenda.”

“I’m not going to keep trying to chase you down. I’m here for you if you want to get a hold of me you can. I haven’t heard from him since.”

There are two extremely important factors in whether a mentor and mentee stay connected once the mentee is released, nature of relationship and length of match. The most important factor is the nature of the relationship. If the mentee does not view you as a friend, as someone they trust and would want to keep in contact with, they won’t. The length of the match is important as well because it increases the likelihood of a connection, but it should be noted that being matched with a mentee for a year will not automatically result in a connection and those that have been matched for just a few weeks have stayed connected because that relationship was there.

“The first one, after he was released I never heard from him again... We got matched in November 2007 and he got released in May 2008, so about 6 months.”

“I saw him maybe four times at the workhouse... he was released on January 21st and we exchanged phone numbers before he left and he has not called.”

“I got to spend about three months with her [mentor]... I don't think she's just going to drop me off where I'm at, she wants to know, basically for infinity that I'm doing well and she wants to see me grow.”

“I was only in there for two months... I just wanted to meet her and see how we connected and then it just kind of all fell in place.”

“[Matched] about a month.... When I was first released... I was in a pretty bad place, and really needed, I needed for her to reach out to me.”

“[Match] was possibly three months or four months... I lost connection.”

There is an uncontrollable factor of the mentee not being “ready.”

“You know one of things that I have learned with the women that I work with is there is really no way to tell who is ready and who is not and so you kind of have to treat them all like they are and just see what bubbles up, and I don't know.”

“I have seen a lot of people have very good relationships with their mentors while they are here and just drop off the radar. So, it's all about choices, same choices they have to make on every issue they face.”

“I think some people are just not ready.”

There needs to be more training, whether ongoing or having a special training for mentors who have recently released mentees.

“The recommendations that I have made to Hillary already are increased training in the area of re-entry for offenders, for the mentors. I think the more closely we can align our language, probation to mentors, so that mentors can recognize what probation officers are trying to do, I think the better the results will be. And just to give the mentors some, you know, education on what they're trying to do as far as mentoring someone that has a lot of these situations here that they need to deal with and really defining what risk, risk areas are in our profession and

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“I just would like to see it be a little more publicized from within the system.”

how, and once you find out about them, how to create strategies to overcome them. So, one of the biggest recommendations is training for the mentors themselves.”

“Maybe some of those guys don’t know how to say this isn’t the right guy for me, don’t know what they’re looking for. So, maybe some training for the residents too on what to look for in a mentor.”

“I would like to see this happening more with other types of offenders.”

“I would really like to know how do you connect with what I would call the criminal mind, and make an impact on that person that there is a better way of life.”

“I just would like to see it be a little more publicized from within the system.”


“If a mentor is trained to kind of recognize that and motivate someone and make like a two week plan, you know if you fill up somebody’s days when they leave here for that first two weeks, you got a better shot at keeping in touch. If they don’t have a plan for the first day usually someone comes up with a bad one.”

“We need to educate the probation officers as to the benefits of this program, because there are huge benefits and if you’re not communicating with the probation officer and the mentor that’s part of losing them when they walk out the door too.”


“As far as the training is concerned, really talking about where the boundary is, I mean I know loaning money isn’t a good idea and I suppose double dating wouldn’t be a good idea, I don’t know.”

“I guess I really think it’s an important thing and I think it’s so inexpensive compared to some of the other things we do and we get such good results for it I’d like to see it spread.”

“I would like to, I don’t know, it’s just, talk to other mentors and see what, how they, how they go about it, situations and how they handle things.”



“We need to educate the probation officers as to the benefits of this program, because there are huge benefits and if you’re not communicating with the probation officer and the mentor that’s part of losing them when they walk out the door too.”



The Community Justice Project does make a difference. It affects real and visible change in the mentee's lives and helps to prevent them from re-offending.

“Mr. H., he’s very angry about being here, he’s very angry about the situation he has put himself in and it comes out in a lot of different ways. Just the other day in the hallway, an officer told him to tuck in his t-shirt and he just lost it. He kind of went off on him and he was just, just finished meeting with his mentor, Henry B., so when he walked downstairs he had time to think about what he did and he came back up and apologized to the officer, he apologized to me, and he apologized to Henry and said that he realized that he had nothing to be angry about, he was just angry. So, it was kind of nice to see that.”

“There is a much lower recidivism rate for those people that stick with a mentor than those who don’t and the ones that we have seen in court seem like they’re more motivated, they’re more positive.”

“I think that it would have been a little harder... [to] have stayed on the right track, I would have still had to try to find a support system because through him [mentor] I met a lot of good people, you know, just by meeting the community justice and meeting my church members... I feel that it would have been a lot harder [without a mentor].”

“I go by and check on him every once and a while, but he’s not in the system anymore, so that’s success for him, you know.”

“I volunteer with him now, you know doing the Habitat for Humanity and I would never have thought, I was pretty selfish before... he’s helped me change that way.”

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“It’s a good thing that I did have her [mentor] because she plants a lot of seeds in me... I would have struggled more, and I would have came out of jail feeling smaller than I did feel.”

Possible Further Research

To further explore this topic, further research could be done. To further support theme #2 and #3, that length of a match is not as important as the type of relationship and values of the mentor, a qualitative study could be completed. The qualitative study should include all mentors that have mentees that have been released should collect information about:

- How long a mentor and mentee have been matched
- How often the mentor and mentee met while incarcerated
- Have the mentor and mentee stayed in contact once the mentee is released
- How long have they stayed in contact once the mentee has been released

All mentors should also be asked qualitative questions such as:

- Do you think the role of the mentor is being the mentee’s friend?

- Do you think that you should be doing everything you can to keep in contact with the mentee, or is it their job to call you when they need you?

Recommendations

A model for a successful mentor and mentee relationship, that stayed connected once the mentee was released, would include the following components:

- Well-trained mentor
 - Mentor understands that this is not a “professional” relationship. That the mentees expect the mentors to be their friend, the person that they can talk to, and the mentors must be willing to accept this role.
 - The mentor understands boundaries and has knowledge or access (via CJP) to resources to assist mentee with post-release.
 - The mentor should not have an agenda.
- Good match (CJP does a good job of this right now)
 - Some screening is done to help determine if mentee is “ready.”
- Frequent and regular visits (once per week)
 - While this research does not show length or frequency as a deciding factor in staying connected, it does help mentees and further increases the opportunity for connection.
 - While mentees are not able to leave and mentors always know where they are, it is a matter of respect to be on time for visits with them. It also helps them to have a set schedule for them to rely on and to build trust with the mentor.
- Mentee Release
 - There is discussion about what will happen when mentee is released.
 - Mentor is comfortable and open to meeting mentee, and provides phone numbers for mentee to contact them at.
 - Mentor understands that many mentees don’t just meet people for coffee, and that they need to do what they can to keep in touch and suggest activities they can do together. That although the mentee isn’t calling them – it doesn’t mean they don’t need them or want to talk.
 - If the mentee “drops off,” the mentor needs to understand that it is nothing personal.

Appendix A

The goal is to figure out how to increase the connection between mentor and mentee upon release.

Interview Questions for Mentees

1. Have you met with your mentor?
2. How often have you met with your mentor?
3. Who normally initiates the meeting (who calls who)?
4. Where do you normally meet (if mentee is not currently incarcerated)?
5. How have you used your time together?
6. What specific information have you gained from your mentor?
7. Has that information been helpful? How helpful?
8. How has being matched with a mentor impacted you or changed you or your actions?
9. Do you feel like you have been matched with the right mentor? Why or why not?
10. What (if anything) would you change about your mentor?
11. What additional information, support, direction would be helpful to you as a mentee?

Interview Questions for Mentors

1. Have you met with your mentee?
2. How often have you met with your mentee?
3. Who normally initiates the meeting (who calls who)?
4. Where do you normally meet (if mentee is not currently incarcerated)?
5. How have you used your time together?
6. What specific information provided to your mentee?
7. Does it seem like that information has been helpful to your mentee?
8. Do you feel like you have been matched with the right mentee? Why or why not?
9. What additional information, training, support would be helpful to you as a mentor?

Interview Questions for Criminal Justice Staff

1. What observations have you made about the effectiveness of the mentor matching process?
2. Have you noticed a difference in inmates that are participating in this program?
3. What recommendations would make about this project?