

Youth Mentoring

EVIDENCE BRIEF

There is consistent international evidence that youth mentoring reduces crime, particularly when professionally delivered.

OVERVIEW

- This evidence brief focuses on youth mentoring. Mentoring is a well-known community-based crime prevention method. Mentoring is one of the most commonly used interventions to help youth engaged in, or thought to be at risk for, delinquent behaviour and other negative outcomes.ⁱ
- Definitions of mentoring vary. However, four central elements include:
 - Interaction between two individuals over an extended period of time.
 - Inequality of experience, knowledge, or power between the mentor and mentee (with the mentor having the greater share).
 - The mentee is in a position to imitate and benefit from the knowledge, skill, ability or experience of the mentor.
 - The absence of the role inequality that is typical of other helping relationships and is marked by professional training, certification, or predetermined status differences.ⁱⁱ
- Though the use of mentoring in New Zealand has been steadily growing since the 1990s, a thorough assessment of mentoring in New Zealand has yet to be conducted. In 2016, work is expected to better understand Government-funded youth mentoring.

- The international meta-analytic literature shows that mentoring is moderately effective in reducing offending and reoffending.
- Mentoring is most effective when:
 - programmes have a higher proportion of male youth participants;
 - professional development is a motivation for mentors and a high degree of training is provided;
 - mentors provide emotional support and advocacy, mentors and youth are matched based on similarity of interests,
 - mentors and mentees spend a reasonable length of time together and meet frequently.

EVIDENCE BRIEF SUMMARY

Evidence rating:	Promising
Unit cost:	Unknown
Effect size (number needed to treat):	For every 12 young people given mentoring, on average, one fewer will offend. ⁱⁱⁱ
Current justice sector spend:	None: Wider government spent approximately \$5 million in 2015 on government developed mentoring programmes.
Unmet demand:	Yes

DOES YOUTH MENTORING REDUCE CRIME?

International evidence

Internationally, mentoring has a long history as a social intervention. Over the past twenty years, mentoring has attracted significant interest from policymakers, intervention theorists, and those interested in identifying promising and useful evidence-based approaches to interventions for criminal justice and child welfare outcomes.

Mentoring has been extensively studied, particularly in the United States. Meta-analyses of the research find that mentoring is somewhat effective in reducing offending and reoffending.

In general meta-analyses also show that mentoring is moderately effective at improving a number of other outcomes related to reducing crime and reoffending, such as attitudinal/motivational, social/relational, psychological/emotional, conduct problems, academic, and physical health outcomes.

The most common effect size for mentoring across the international meta-analytic literature is 0.21. This means that if mentoring is given to a high risk group of young people, then for every 12 young people given mentoring, on average, one less will offend.

One meta-analysis, from the Campbell Collaboration, involving 25 studies with a delinquency outcome, found that mentoring had a significant positive effect on reducing delinquency. This same meta-analysis also found that mentoring worked to reduce aggression. Results were modest (with an average effect size of Standardised Mean Difference = .21), though statistically significant.^{iv}

Results from a rapid evidence assessment for the UK Home Office of the impact of mentoring

on reoffending suggested that mentoring significantly reduced subsequent offending by 4 to 11 percent. However, better quality studies did not suggest that mentoring caused a statistically significant reduction in reoffending.^v

Another widely cited meta-analysis found that the average recidivism reductions for mentoring were greater than 20%, and ranked near the top for effectiveness of the interventions examined in the meta-analysis.^{vi}

Much remains to be understood concerning efforts to support mentoring relationships in the lives of youth and the circumstances in which such efforts can most reliably make a meaningful and enduring difference.^{vii}

NZ evidence

Only a small proportion of known, active mentoring programmes in New Zealand have had any evaluations of the effectiveness of their programmes for mentees, and research conducted to date in New Zealand has been of varying quality.^{viii}

This means we are currently unable to conclude whether mentoring is effective, not effective, or has a harmful effect in New Zealand.

WHAT MAKES YOUTH MENTORING EFFECTIVE?

What factors increase success in reducing crime?

Meta-analyses have highlighted the following characteristics of mentoring as being key to making the delivery of mentoring more successful (moderating variables).

Moderator effects related to participant characteristics

Individual/environmental risk levels: There is some indication the effects might be greater for high risk youth, although the results are not consistent.^{ix} Evidence indicates that mentoring is more effective where programmes serve youth who have been involved in problem behaviours.^x

Male youth: Mentoring was found to be more effective where programmes were associated with a larger proportion of male youth.^{xi}

Youth not residing in single parent households: Evidence indicates that mentoring programmes are more effective when youth do not reside in single parent households.^{xii}

Moderator effects related to the design and delivery of mentoring programmes

Professional development: Evidence shows that mentoring is more effective when professional development is a motive for becoming a mentor.^{xiii} Additionally, ongoing training of mentors is cited as a factor associated with effective mentoring programmes.^{xiv}

Emotional support: Mentoring programmes that emphasise emotional support and friendliness to promote mentees' belief in their own ability to succeed, confidence, and a sense of mattering, are indicated to be more effective. Results suggest mentoring programmes should

ensure emotional support from the mentor is emphasised.^{xv}

Advocacy: When mentors were given an advocacy role, mentoring was more effective.^{xvi}

Mentor-youth matching based on interests: When youth and mentors are matched based on what interests they share, this has a significant association with study effect size.^{xvii} It appears that this improves the likelihood of a good relationship.^{xviii}

Education/occupational backgrounds of mentors and the program's goals: That there is greater effectiveness of programmes in which mentors' educational or occupational backgrounds are well matched to program goals.^{xix}

Duration of each meeting: A rapid evidence assessment showed that interventions where the mentee and mentor spent more time together per meeting were more effective in reducing offending than interventions in which mentors and mentees spent less time together, or interventions where the average intervention length was not set out.^{xx}

Frequency of each meeting: A rapid evidence assessment found that where mentors and mentees met once a week or more, this often reduced offending more than interventions with less frequent meetings, or where the meeting frequency was not set out.^{xxi} Frequent contact is also cited as a factor associated with effective mentoring programmes.^{xxii}

Mentoring works best as part of a multi-modal treatment: Those studies in which mentoring was the sole intervention were less effective. When mentoring was part of a multi-modal treatment including behaviour modification, supplementary education and employment programmes, significant reductions in offending occurred.^{xxiii}

Maintaining fidelity: Achieving good outcomes is dependent on maintaining commitment to the principles identified and represented in most of the evidence-based models of mentoring. New Zealand is perceived, in some quarters, as having a poor track record of investing in the training, supervision, continuous feedback loops, fidelity monitoring technologies and especially the evaluation of mentoring interventions. This means a significant risk of failure may exist within the current New Zealand approach.

How does youth mentoring reduce crime?

Evidence is thin on what exactly about mentoring may work to reduce offending and improve other outcomes. However, the theoretical basis for mentoring involves Differential Association Theory (Sutherland, 1947), Social Learning Theory (Akers, 1973), and Social Control Theory (Hirschi, 1969) all of which suggest that criminal behaviour is more or less likely depending on with whom we share the immediate environment, and the value we place on the relationships that are shared. This suggests that mentoring may help balance out the effect of having anti-social peers by creating a positive social bond with a more encouraging peer (mentor).^{xxiv}

Mentoring aims to strengthen attachment, improve social competence and increase social capital by introducing new connections. Several studies have found that social support predicts “healthy behaviour” and academic achievement,^{xxv} positive outcomes which logically correlate with keeping individuals out of the justice system. In addition, there is evidence to show that a social-cognitive intervention (such as mentoring) can improve both schooling and delinquency outcomes for disadvantaged youth.^{xxvi}

WHAT OTHER BENEFITS DOES YOUTH MENTORING HAVE?

A number of meta-analyses found that mentoring improved attitudinal/motivational, social/relational, psychological/emotional, conduct problems, academic, and physical health outcomes.^{xxvii}

One meta-analytic study found that on an analysis of 46 studies on four outcomes measuring delinquency or closely related outcomes of aggression, drug use, and academic functioning, mentoring for high risk youth has a modest positive effect for delinquency and academic functioning, with trends suggesting similar benefits for aggression and drug use.^{xxviii}

Another meta-analysis found positive effect sizes for outcomes including achievement motivation and social attitudes, social skills and peer relationships, depressive symptoms and self esteem, drug use and bullying, and standardised test scores and absences.^{xxix}

CURRENT INVESTMENT IN NEW ZEALAND

Current Government investment in New Zealand is about \$5 million per year, for programmes developed through the Ministry of Social Development (MSD), Child Youth and Family, and the Ministry of Education.

Programmes funded by these three agencies include: Fresh Start Therapeutic Youth Mentoring (Youth Justice - MSD), Check and Connect (Youth Workers in Schools - MSD), and the National Māori and Pasifika Mentoring Service (Education).

Not a lot is known about how effective mentoring is in New Zealand. Agencies tend to evaluate the effectiveness and quality of programmes they fund on an individual basis.^{xxx}

In 2016, further Government work is expected, and required, to:

- Improve consistency in data collection.
- Report on mentoring across Government to help prioritise funding and purchasing of mentoring.
- Evaluate Government's investment in youth mentoring.^{xxxi}

EVIDENCE RATING AND RECOMMENDATIONS

"Each Evidence Brief provides an evidence rating between Harmful and Strong".

Harmful	Robust evidence that intervention increases crime
Poor	Robust evidence that intervention tends to have no effect
Inconclusive	Conflicting evidence that intervention can reduce crime
Fair	Some evidence that intervention can reduce crime
Promising	Robust international <i>or</i> local evidence that intervention tends to reduce crime
Strong	Robust international <i>and</i> local evidence that intervention tends to reduce crime

According to the standard criteria for all evidence briefs,¹ the appropriate evidence category for youth mentoring is: Promising.

According to the standard interpretation of the Promising rating, this means that:

- There is robust international or local evidence that interventions tend to reduce crime.
- Interventions may well reduce crime if implemented well.
- Further evaluation is desirable to confirm interventions are reducing crime and to support fine-tuning of its design.

This result is encouraging, especially given the importance of addressing the needs of vulnerable youth and providing social support as a key protective factor.^{xxxii}

There remains more to be done to improve understanding of how effective mentoring is in New Zealand. Further work in this space is expected to help support enhanced safety and

¹ Available at www.justice.govt.nz/justice-sector/what-works-to-reduce-crime/

efficacy of Government funded youth mentoring, and enhanced coordination across government for youth mentoring.

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Tolan, P. H., Henry, D. B., Schoeny, M. S., Lovegrove, P., & Nichols, E. "Mentoring programs to affect delinquency and associated outcomes of youth at risk: A comprehensive meta-analytic review" (2014) *Journal of Experimental Criminology* 10:179–206.

FIND OUT MORE

Go to the website

www.justice.govt.nz/justice-sector/what-works-to-reduce-crime/

Email

whatworks@justice.govt.nz

Recommended reading

Jolliffe, D., & Farrington, D. P. (2007) *A Rapid Evidence Assessment of the Impact of Mentoring on Re-offending: A Summary*. Cambridge University: The Home Office.

Tolan P., Henry D., Schoeny M., Bass A., Lovegrove P., & Nichols E. *Mentoring Interventions to Affect Juvenile Delinquency and Associated Problems: A Systematic Review*. Campbell Systematic Reviews 2013:10. DOI: 10.4073/csr.2013.10

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- ⁱⁱⁱ Summary of Effect Sizes from Meta-Analyses table, page 8 of this evidence brief.
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SUMMARY OF EFFECT SIZES FROM META-ANALYSES

Treatment type	Outcome measure	Meta-analysis	Reported average effect size on crime	Number of estimates meta-analysis based on	Assuming 50% untreated recidivism		Assuming 20% untreated recidivism	
					Percentage point reduction in offending (to prevent one person from reoffending)	Number needed to treat (to prevent one person from reoffending)	Percentage point reduction in offending	Number needed to treat
At risk youth	Delinquency	Tolan et al September, 2013	$g = .21$	25	9%	12	5%	19
Youth	Conduct problems	DuBois et al, 2011	$d = .21$	39	9%	12	5%	19
School-based	Behaviour	Wood & Mayo-Wilson, 2012	$g = 0.03$ (NS)	6	1%	74	1%	117
Youth	Recidivism	Lipsey, 2009	$\Phi = 0.108$	17	10%	10	6%	18
Youth	Recidivism	Joliffe & Farrington, 2007	$d = 0.21$	18	9%	12	5%	19
Youth	Problem/high-risk behaviour	DuBois et al, 2002	$d = 0.21$	15	9%	12	5%	19
Youth	Aggression	Tolan et al 2014	$d = 0.29$	7	13%	8	7%	14

d =Cohen's d or variant (standardised mean difference)

Φ =phi coefficient (variant of correlation coefficient)

g = Hedges' g (variant of standardised mean difference)

NS: Not significant