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Although formal youth mentoring is often perceived as a simple and inexpensive intervention, its success is likely to depend upon the degree of infrastructure and expertise that programs bring to the difficult task of creating strong, long-lasting relationships between two strangers (Freedman, 1993; Rhodes & DuBois, 2006). Evidence for the value of program infrastructure comes from a meta-analysis of evaluation studies that indicates that the effectiveness of youth mentoring programs is directly associated with the number of theoretically and empirically supported practices that they employ (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper, 2002). It stands to reason that the professional staff members who design the program models and implement the program policies and procedures make important contributions to establishing strong mentoring relationships and achieving the goals of the intervention. For example, workers who recruit, screen, train, match, and monitor program participants have a role in supporting the mentoring relationship at every stage in its development (Keller, 2005a). In the process of maintaining clear communications, ensuring adherence to guidelines, and providing encouragement and advice, the workers may form their own meaningful relationships with mentors, children, and parents/guardians (Keller, 2005b). Ideally, as representatives of the program, these mentoring professionals would serve as excellent models of the very attributes they wish to see in mentors: being consistent, attentive, and responsive; and providing appropriate structure and guidance to program participants.

It is unknown, however, to what extent the personal characteristics or professional activities of program staff actually affect the quality of mentoring relationships because this topic has not been addressed through research. In fact, virtually nothing about the professional staff of mentoring programs appears in the research literature. This absence of systematic study is unfortunate because program staff positions in youth mentoring represent a special combination of responsibilities and challenges distinct from most other jobs in the human services. One aspect of the role demands the interpersonal and clinical skills used in direct practice with both youth and adults, such as assessment, training, advising, negotiating, and resolving conflicts. On the other hand, because the primary focus is on the mentor, the staff person tends to assume a secondary, supportive role in facilitating the mentoring relationship and acting as a volunteer manager. As an additional twist, the program worker also may perform the functions of a case manager for the child and family by providing referrals and opportunities (e.g., tutoring, summer camp).

Perhaps the closest parallels in the nature of the work are found with child welfare workers who screen and license foster parents, place children in foster homes, and monitor relationships among child, foster parent, and biological parent. In addition, the closest parallels in the nature of the workforce are found with the field of youth development, which attracts individuals interested in working with youth in a variety of community-based and after-school programs but does not yet have a clear set of employment qualifications or a strong sense of professional identity.

Given the lack of information about staffing issues in youth mentoring, this review necessarily draws on the literature available in related fields, such as child welfare and youth development. Of course, it is acknowledged that important differences exist between the conditions of youth mentoring programs and those of other settings. For example, child welfare workers typically operate in large, bureaucratic state agencies; work with severely abused and behaviorally challenging youth; and encounter involuntary, adversarial parents. Finally, although it is recognized that various leadership and administrative responsibilities are essential for the success of mentoring organizations, this review focuses on staff positions related to program operations.

Staff Qualifications

Because academic degree programs focusing specifically on preparation of students for work in youth mentoring programs are rare, if not non-existent, it seems reasonable to assume that the staff members of mentoring programs hail from a range of educational and occupational backgrounds, many of which may be relevant for providing services to children and youth. An unscientific review of the nationwide employment postings for program staff positions on the Web site of Big Brothers Big Sisters of America indicates that a commonly stated qualification is a bachelor's degree in a human services field. A major national survey of more than 4,000 workers in a variety of after-school programs (e.g., 21st Century Learning Centers, YMCA, Boys & Girls Clubs, 4-H, Parks & Recreation) paints a portrait of a fairly well educated workforce: 67 percent had a two-year degree or higher, and 55 percent had a four-year degree or higher; an additional 8 percent had completed a special certificate or credential; the remaining 24 percent had a high school diploma (National Afterschool Association, 2006).

The most common field of study for workers was education (early childhood education for those holding an associate's degree). Several other disciplines were represented, including psychology, counseling, social work, administration, and liberal arts. A question on the survey about occupation immediately prior to after-school work revealed a wide range of employment experiences, many unrelated to work with children. If the field of after-school youth development serves as a good example, similar research attention should be devoted to the qualifications of staff in youth mentoring programs.

A separate study involving more than 4,000 children and 78 after-school programs in the state of Massachusetts found that higher educational attainment among program directors and staff, a higher percentage of staff certified as teachers, and higher staff wages were associated with positive indicators of program quality, such as staff-to-youth engagement, youth-to-youth engagement, challenging and engaging youth activities, and high quality homework time (National Institute on Out-of-School Time, 2005).

Staff Training

An eclectic workforce, such as in the field of after-school youth development, may spur the development of additional education and training opportunities to impart an under-standing of core principles and practices. In fact, advocates cite research showing the effects of specialized training and recognized credentials on the quality of early childhood education in their call for a similar professional development infrastructure to enhance quality and credibility in the field of after-school youth development (Dennehy, Gannett, & Robbins, 2006). Distinguishing between intra-organizational training of staff to perform specific job-related tasks and training to establish a common body of knowledge for practice, Huebner and colleagues (Huebner, Walker, & McFarland, 2003) describe a systematic process by which they developed a framework incorporating the fundamental content of the positive youth development (PYD) paradigm and then developed a peda-gogical approach for sharing the content with adult learners. Using a non-experimental retrospective evaluation design, Huebner et al. (2003) found that participants reported self-perceived gains in knowledge on multiple topics covered by this training program.

Beyond the acquisition of knowledge, an important consideration is the ability of staff members to actually transfer what is learned in training sessions to practical application in the workplace (Baldwin & Ford, 1988). Factors affecting the "transfer of training" may include the design of the training, trainee characteristics, and work environment charac-teristics. Among identified barriers to transfer, many involve conditions in the work envi-ronment: lack of managerial and peer support; time and workload pressures; resistance to new ideas; short-term perspectives; lack of opportunity or responsibility; perform-ance and reward structures; and organizational politics (Belling, James, & Ladkin, 2003). Another important consideration in training and professional development is the career trajectory of the employee. For example, Caplan and Curry (2001) suggest that training opportunities should be tied to important transitions: internship—transition from student to worker; entry-level—transition to professional role; leadership development—transi-tion to leader in the organization; master practitioner—transition to leader in the field.

Attention to professional development issues at both individual and organizational levels may be responsible for the success of a training initiative entitled Building Exemplary Systems for Training Youth Workers (BEST). Since 1996, BEST has promoted the institutionalization of comprehensive professional development systems that establish partnerships with local colleges and universities, encourage interagency collaboration and knowledge sharing, and pool resources to train and support youth workers in 15 cities across the nation (Center for School and Community Services, 2002). The central component of the BEST strategy is the delivery of a coherent youth development curriculum, Advancing Youth Development: A Curriculum for Training Youth Workers (AYD), for entry-level, direct-service workers. However, an AYD Curriculum for the Supervision of Youth Workers also was developed in response to an identified need for organizational policies and supervisors supportive of adopting youth development approaches. An evaluation relying on pre- and post-training surveys with AYD participants and interviews with youth workers and stakeholders suggested that training participants not only had an improved understanding of youth development principles but also made shifts in their programming focus and increased application of youth development concepts in their interactions with youth (Center for School and Community Services, 2002). For example, there were statistically significant increases in the frequency with which workers encouraged youth participation, provided youth with opportunities to develop specific competencies, and implemented activities with a developmental focus. Furthermore, the evaluation indicated that several participating organizations increased their commitment to youth development approaches and to the professional development of staff through mentoring, supervision, and opportunities for training.

In the absence of formal academic programs preparing future mentoring professionals, a number of short-term training opportunities and technical assistance resources have emerged at local, regional, and national levels. For example, most state Partnerships affiliated with MENTOR, as well as other organizations that promote mentoring initiatives (e.g., Friends for Youth Mentoring Institute, Tutor/Mentor Connection), convene annual conferences and workshops. The National Mentoring Center has been awarded contracts to provide training and technical assistance to recipients of federal grants from the Departments of Education and Justice. MENTOR, National Mentoring Center, and Public/Private Ventures offer a wide range of training tools and technical assistance publications on their Web sites, and online mini-courses in selected topics are offered by California's Mentoring Technical Assistance Project. In addition, the Summer Institute on Youth Mentoring at Portland State University brings together researchers and experienced mentoring professionals for an intensive, week-long seminar on selected mentoring topics.

Staff Retention

Conventional wisdom suggests that the retention and advancement of qualified, well-trained staff is a priority in most organizations, including youth mentoring programs. There is widespread perception of substantial staff turnover in the field of youth mentoring, but no facts and figures are available to suggest the actual scope of the problem. Staff turnover is also a concern in the related fields of youth development and child welfare. Turnover has a monetary impact on organizations due to the costs associated with separation, replacement, and training (Graef & Hill, 2000). In addition, turnover may have negative consequences for the morale of remaining co-workers burdened with extra work, and also result in disruptions in the continuity and quality of services (Barak, Nissly, & Levin, 2001). For example, it has been argued that mentoring professionals are integrally involved in maintaining the system of relationships between mentor, child, and parent in the mentoring intervention (Keller, 2005b), so staff turnover may have adverse effects on the sustainability of the match.

In general, human service professionals spend large amounts of time focusing on difficult and emotionally charged issues, and the intense demands of the work can cause stress, frustration, and fatigue (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Particular challenges in mentoring programs may include the necessity to work evenings and weekends to accommodate volunteers and parents as well as the pressures and anxieties associated with child safety issues. Two comprehensive, systematic reviews of research on factors associated with staff turnover in human service professions and child welfare provide consistent evidence that feelings of role overload and burnout, particularly emotional exhaustion, are linked with turnover (Barak et al., 2001; Zlotnik, DePanfilis, Daining, & Lane, 2005). Likewise, these two reviews demonstrate several points of agreement regarding the predictors of staff retention in three broad domains: individual factors (previous work experience, self-perceived competence or efficacy); professional perceptions (job satisfaction, organizational or professional commitment); and organizational factors (reasonable workload, support from supervisors and co-workers, higher salary, and perceptions of a fair, supportive organizational climate) (Barak et al., 2001; Zlotnik et al., 2005). It is interesting to note that several organizational factors associated with the successful transfer of training knowledge to practice, particularly supervisor support, also correspond to improved staff retention (Curry, McCarragher, & Dellmann-Jenkins, 2005).

Taken together, these findings on turnover and retention tend to emphasize the importance of the workplace climate, which is defined in terms of the psychological impact of the work environment on the individual worker (e.g., emotional exhaustion, role overload) (Glisson, Dukes, & Green, 2006). Evidence from the child welfare and juvenile justice systems shows that workers experiencing more positive organizational climates not only remain in their jobs longer but also demonstrate better attitudes about work, deliver higher-quality services, and achieve better outcomes for children (Glisson & Hemmelgarn, 1998). Among the most significant studies to date on staff retention in the

human services is a true randomized control experimental evaluation of an organizational intervention aimed at improving the Availability, Responsiveness, and Continuity (ARC) of child welfare and juvenile justice workers for the youth in their care (Glisson et al., 2006). The ARC intervention comprises a set of strategies for changing organizational culture and climate according to five guiding principles of effective service systems: mission-driven, results-oriented, improvement-directed, relationship-centered, and participation-based. Caseworkers in sites receiving the ARC intervention reported less emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, role conflict, and role overload. Furthermore, there was a dramatic reduction in staff turnover: 65 percent of caseworkers in the control group left within the one year timeframe of the study, whereas 39 percent of the intervention group left. After controlling for demographic and office location factors, the intervention effect was even greater. The estimated probability of leaving for the control group was 89 percent, but for the intervention group the estimated probability was just 23 percent (Glisson et al., 2006). The success of this intervention supports the importance of organizational climate not only for staff retention but also for more positive attitudes and productive work among the employees who remain (Bednar, 2003).

An implication of this research for mentoring organizations is that the likelihood of retaining qualified staff may be enhanced when the culture and climate experienced by employees embodies the stated values of the program (Robertson, 1997). For example, in the context of youth mentoring, the principles of ARC intervention may translate to motivating staff through the mission of serving youth; recognizing and acknowledging what works and what doesn't; providing opportunities for growth, development, and innovation; fostering relationships among co-workers; and encouraging worker participation in establishing the direction of the program. In this case, program managers and supervisors would serve as positive role models and supportive mentors for program staff.

Conclusion

Considering the many ways in which program staff may influence the experiences of mentors, youth, and parents in mentoring interventions (Keller, 2005b), greater attention should be devoted to the recruitment, training, and retention of well-qualified and highly competent program professionals in the field of youth mentoring. Although research from similar fields is informative, inferences and implications drawn from these studies may not translate directly to the realities of youth mentoring programs. The investigation of staffing issues in youth mentoring presents an opportunity to guide wise investment in the infrastructure of the youth mentoring movement and to ultimately improve the quality and quantity of services provided to young people who could benefit from the support and guidance of caring adults (Wandersman et al., 2006).

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Notes

Program Staff in Youth Mentoring Programs: Qualifications, Training, and Retention

Mentoring programs often focus their scarce resources and energy on providing direct services to youth, resulting in limited investment in program staff. Yet, program staff that are not qualified, ill-trained, or leave their positions prematurely may disrupt the implementation and effectiveness of the program which may, in turn, cause harm to youth. In his article, Dr. Keller explores strategies to strengthen the capacity of mentoring programs to recruit, train, and retain highly qualified youth service workers. This action section provides programs with a checklist of important organizational practices to assess program infrastructure and identify areas for improvement.

Program Staff: Keys to Successful Mentoring
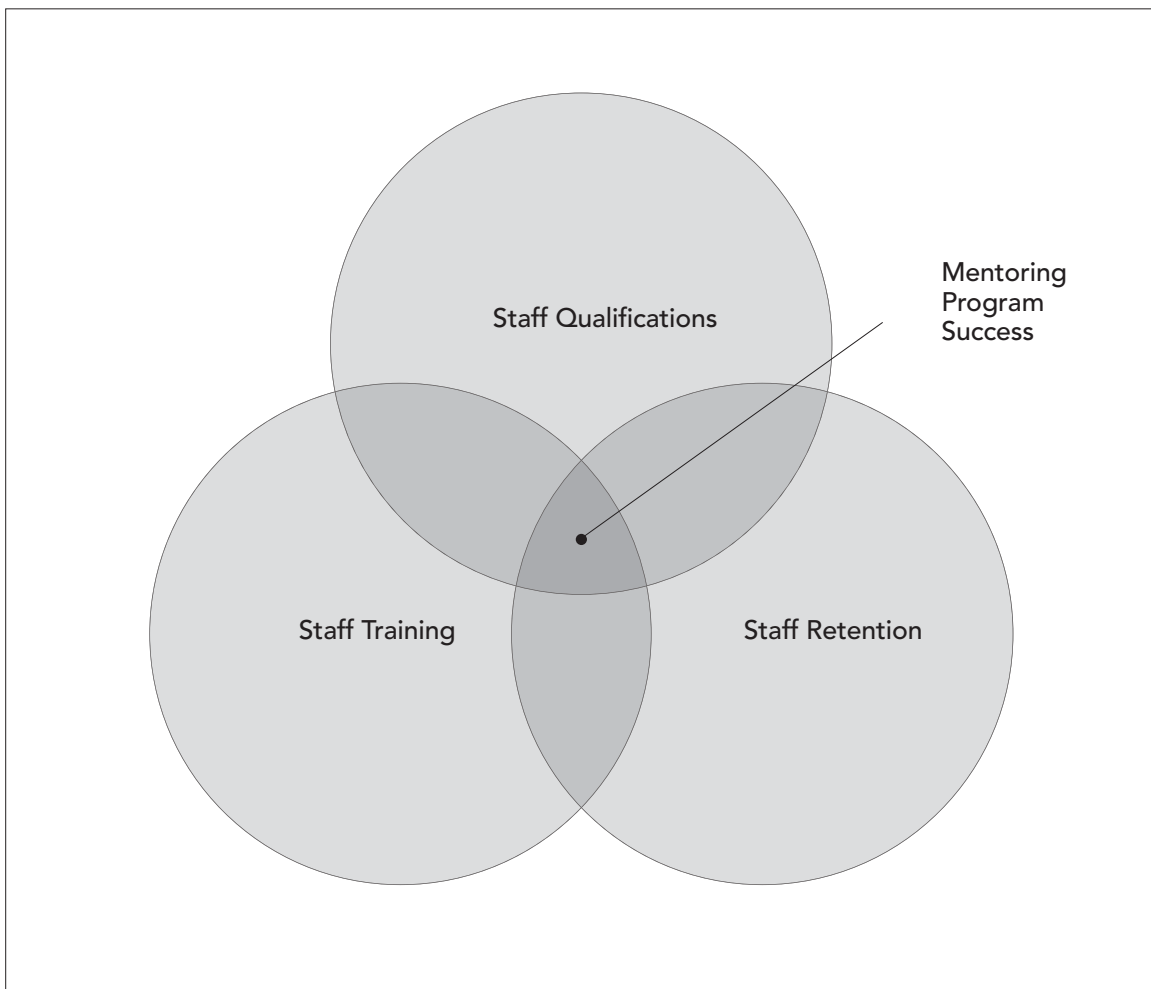
Staff Qualifications

Mentoring programs should hire staff who possess:

☐ A strong commitment to the program's mission.

☐ Strong interpersonal skills and the ability to develop relationships with diverse community members, staff, and youth.

☐ The ability to role model behaviors for mentors—including consistency, active listening, and compassion for youth.

☐ Previous experience in youth development work.

☐ Excellent written and oral communications skills.

☐ A degree in a field related to mentoring, such as education, psychology, social work, and counseling, or equivalent experience.

☐ A solid history of continuous employment without multiple short tenures or gaps in employment.

Staff Training

Mentoring programs should offer staff:

☐ An orientation to the program and work environment.

☐ Initial training on specific duties required for the position.

☐ An overview of research on the effectiveness and best practices of mentoring including the *Elements of Effective Practice.*™

☐ Training on positive youth development strategies.

☐ Opportunities to transfer knowledge gained from training into action.

☐ An individual professional development plan.

☐ Supervisory skills training for those who oversee mentors or other staff.

☐ A role in evaluating the effectiveness of training received.

Staff Retention

Mentoring programs should:

☐ Create a positive workplace climate that includes opportunities for managerial and peer support.

☐ Understand and address the causes of staff turnover.

☐ Ensure that staff are recognized for high-quality work.

☐ Provide a framework for success, giving staff opportunities to achieve, demonstrate competence, and experience growth.

☐ Budget appropriately to compensate high-quality staff.

☐ Provide access to internal and external mentors/coaches for staff.

General Organizational Practices

To strengthen the hiring, training, and retention of mentor program staff, programs should incorporate the following human resources and organizational development practices.

Develop

☐ A comprehensive policy and procedures manual that details all aspects of hiring, training, and retaining staff.

☐ A thorough understanding of employment law.

☐ A job description for each position that includes the knowledge, skills, abilities, and duties required.

☐ Interview protocols that ask questions related to the competencies of each position.

☐ A new employee handbook.

☐ An evaluation to understand the effectiveness of staff training and retention efforts.

Conduct

☐ A job analysis to understand the roles and responsibilities of each staff position.

☐ Background and safety screening of all employees including reference checks from at least one previous supervisor.

☐ An organizational assessment of potential barriers that may limit staff success.

☐ An assessment of the organization's culture.

☐ An analysis of organizational structures and policies to determine if they limit the ability of staff to work effectively and efficiently.

☐ Regular performance reviews for all staff.

Program Staff in Youth Mentoring Programs: Qualifications, Training, and Retention

Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA). Organization that supports and promotes court appointed special advocates for neglected and abused children. *www.casanet.org*

- Tips and tools for effectively managing volunteers working with youth
  www.casanet.org/program-management/volunteer-manage/

MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership. The leader in expanding the power of mentoring to millions of young Americans who want and need adult mentors.
www.mentoring.org

- Finding a Qualified Program Coordinator
  *www.mentoring.org/program_staff/staff_development/finding_a_program_
  coordinator.php*

- Finding Qualified Staff
  www.mentoring.org/program_staff/staff_development/finding_qualifed_staff.php

- Job Description for Program Staff
  *www.mentoring.org/program_staff/eeptoolkit/design/management/
  jobdesdutiesprostaff.doc*

- Training Topics for Staff
  *www.mentoring.org/program_staff/eeptoolkit/management/staffdev/
  trainingtopicsstaff.doc*

National Youth Development Information Center. Provides information and resources to youth workers about programming, policy, research, and training related to promoting positive youth development opportunities. *www.nydic.org*

- Recognition and Rewards for Youth Development Workers
  *www.nydic.org/nydic/staffing/profdevelopment/documents/Recognition_and_
  Rewards.pdf*

U.S. Department of Labor. Federal government agency with information and resources on employment. *www.dol.gov*

- Information about employment laws for organizations
  www.dol.gov/compliance/guide/index.htm