



FACTSHEET

Commissioning Mentoring Programs to Prevent Gang Involvement and Youth Violence

Content developed from *Preventing Gang Involvement and Youth Violence: Advice for those Commissioning Mentoring Programs* by Robyn M. O'Connor and Stephanie Waddell

Although mentoring programs are often used as an intervention method in preventing gang involvement and youth violence, it is important to be aware of the pros and cons of such programs to make sure that mentoring is the right choice for your youth.

What is mentoring?

A general definition of mentoring is a “one-to-one, non-judgemental relationship in which an individual (the ‘mentor’) gives time to support and encourage another (the ‘mentee’).” That being said, mentoring can take many forms and varies depending on program goals and expected outcomes.

Practical Guidance for Commissioning Mentoring Programs

1. Planning your mentoring provision:

Like most things in life, a successful mentoring program hinges on a solid understanding of your target group and clear project expectations and outcomes. There are many complex reasons that youth join gangs or become involved in violence. As such, the needs of these youth need to be understood. These complexities may mean that your mentoring program is only one part of a larger intervention that includes things like supplementary education and employment programs.

2. Understanding Risk:

The risks associated with being in a gang are high. Mentoring providers need to be aware of risks and have a plan in place if there are concerns about a youth's welfare. Mentors need to be mindful of referral processes and be ready to use them if necessary. A gang's ‘territory’ can play a significant role in the safety of program participants. This needs to be considered when choosing safe and neutral meeting places.

3. Ensuring quality:

Planning for these programs need to be intentional from the beginning to ensure quality throughout. Clear recruiting processes should be in place so that you get the right people. This will involve necessary background checks so that the people you choose have the appropriate skills, motivations, and time to commit. It can seem easy to match mentors and mentee based on demographics alone, however, there is a general consensus that making these matches based on compatibility (shared interests etc.) is the best practice. Finally, expectations need to be clearly explained to mentors and mentees alike.

4. Integrating Peer mentoring, ex-offenders as mentors, and peer group interventions:

Sometimes using peer mentors can be a great way to relate to mentees. If you choose this route you will have to be diligent in your recruiting practices and provide solid training to make sure your mentors can handle working with mentees of the same age/peer group. If working with ex-offenders as mentors, have risk assessment procedures in place. Many of the youth you will be working with will be considered vulnerable. As such, your staff and volunteers will need to undergo vetting and security checks.

5. Monitoring impact and delivery:

Throughout your program, you should always be monitoring and collecting data that can be used for internal and external evaluation. Collecting this data will help you determine what is working and what isn't working in your program. The actual mentorship may be short in duration, but the outcomes tend to be long-term. It is a good idea to track these long-term outcomes after your program has finished to see if any benefits were limited to the mentoring period, and whether any impacts you made continued and improved (or in some cases, got worse.)