



JANUARY 2005 SPOTLIGHT:

Mentoring Refugee Youth

January is National Mentoring Month in the United States. The concept of mentoring is an old one, dating to ancient Greek times when Odysseus asked his trusted friend, Mentor, to counsel his son Telemachus. Since that time, "mentor" has come to mean a wise and trusted counselor or teacher. Mentors play a role in everyone's life whether it is an unofficial mentor such as a grandparent imparting life's lessons to their grandchildren or an official mentor as designated by a program such as Big Brothers Big Sisters. The value of mentoring is gaining recognition. For example, companies are increasingly implementing formal employee mentoring programs. The [National Mentoring Partnership](#) website contains a wealth of information including program how-to's, the National Mentoring Database, Ask an Expert, research, guides to running programs including community-based and faith-based mentoring programs, an online tutorial for mentors, and information on National Mentoring Month.

The Value of Mentoring Refugee Youth

As described in [Young Refugees: Setting Up Mentoring Schemes for Young Refugees in the UK](#), having a mentor can provide a number of benefits for refugee youth. A mentor can provide an understanding of local culture, reduce feelings of isolation and loneliness, serve as a source of practical advice and problem solving assistance, provide a forum for improving English, help the youth maintain cultural links to their country of origin, and serve as a catalyst for fun activities. In return, mentors obtain the satisfaction of helping young people, acquire new skills and learn about refugee issues as well as other cultures.

Mentoring programs for other refugee populations can serve as models for the development of programs for youth and children. One example is the Refugee Women's Association mentoring program in the United Kingdom [this resource is no longer available on the web].

Starting a Mentoring Program

According to the [National Mentoring Center](#), research has shown that mentoring programs with a strong foundation of service delivery and program growth are more likely to succeed. A number of resources are available to aid in establishing mentoring programs including [Foundations of Successful Youth Mentoring: A Guidebook for Program Development](#), [Generic Mentoring Program Policy & Procedure Manual](#), and [Yes You Can: A Guide to Establishing Mentor Programs to Prepare Youth for College](#).

As described in [Running a Safe and Effective Mentoring Program](#), key components of establishing and operating a successful mentor program include having a strategy for matching mentors and mentees, mentor recruitment, training and support, and program evaluation. The BRYCS Clearinghouse contains resources that describe strategies and tools for these components.

Matching Mentors and Mentees

There are several issues to consider when matching mentors and mentees. As described in [Young Refugees: Setting Up Mentoring Schemes for Young Refugees in the UK](#), the primary factors are (1) what the mentee wants from the relationship, and (2) if the mentor has a preference about the mentee with whom they are matched. Mentors may wish to meet one-on-one with their mentee or they may prefer to have several mentees with whom they meet as a group. According to Public/Private Ventures, "group mentoring is reaching youth and volunteers who are unlikely to participate in traditional one-on-one mentoring, and ... the approach may provide youth with important benefits, especially the development of social skills." ([Group Mentoring: A Study of Mentoring Groups in Three Programs](#)). Mentors are typically thought to be older than the mentee but peer mentoring is also possible. Refugee youth may benefit from having mentors who are themselves refugees.

Other considerations include cross-race matching, gender and the use of paid mentors. [Same Race and Cross Race Matching](#) “provides practical tips on how to tailor matching, training, and support processes to increase the chances that cross-race matches survive.” In the WEEA Digest article [“Mentors Confirm and Enhance Girls’ Lives”](#), mentoring issues for girls, particularly girls of color and immigrant girls, are discussed. The use of paid mentors is described in [Guides for the Journey: Supporting High-Risk Youth with Paid Mentors and Counselors](#).

Recruiting, Training and Supporting Mentors

According to Public/Private Ventures, “In most communities, there is increased competition for volunteers, especially for people who possess both the time and personal characteristics required of mentors. There are no easy solutions to the challenges of recruiting. However, a systematic recruitment plan, carefully developed and implemented, will increase your chances of success.” [Recruiting Mentors: A Guide to Finding Volunteers](#) includes strategies, checklists and sample forms.

Training for new mentors is a crucial part of running a mentoring program. [A Training Guide for Mentors](#) includes an agenda and components of a structured mentor training program, tips for successful training and information such as a mentor job description, goals of mentoring and limits of mentoring. [Training New Mentors](#) provides suggested activities for training new mentors and tips for the trainer. [Building Relationships: A Guide for New Mentors](#) provides advice from mentors and mentee youth about successful mentoring relationships.

One aspect of mentor training is educating mentors about potential activities in which they can engage their mentee. The number of activities is limitless. Activities can be as mundane as completing paperwork or as exciting as attending a sporting event. [The Academic Activity Guide](#) offers a collection of affordable, constructive learning activities that mentors and mentees can use to learn about the world and each other. The book includes more than 20 detailed activities in areas such as science, language, math and personal development, a list of 101 simple activities and a calendar of global holidays and events. [A Year’s Worth of Mentoring Activities](#) provides 52 suggested activities that range from practical to purely fun. For example, suggested activities for July include viewing a fireworks display and talking about how to look for a job.

Once mentors are recruited and trained, ongoing support is critical. There are varying degrees of support – from regular phone calls to ensure mentors and mentees are meeting to ongoing training. [Supporting Mentors](#) “helps programs develop and implement strategies that support mentors, helps them build trusting relationships with their mentees and, ultimately, contribute to positive outcomes for youth. The materials include checklists to help guide planning and a list of additional resources.”

Evaluating Mentoring Programs

It is important to periodically evaluate mentoring programs to ensure their ongoing success. A number of evaluation tools are available including interviews with mentors and mentees, surveys and focus groups. The BRYCS Clearinghouse includes several guides for evaluating mentoring programs including [What’s Working? Tools for Evaluating Your Mentoring Program](#), [Measuring the Quality of Mentor-Youth Relationships: A Tool for Mentoring Programs](#), and [Evaluating Your Program: A Beginner’s Self-Evaluation Workbook for Mentoring Programs](#).

This month’s BRYCS Featured Search supplies resources to help providers establish and evaluate mentoring programs as well as suggested activities for mentors and mentees.

The featured search for this month provides additional resources about child development issues for service providers and parents that challenge all refugee communities.