MENTORING CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS

A SYNTHESIS OF RESEARCH AND INPUT FROM THE LISTENING SESSION HELD BY THE OFFICE OF JUVENILE JUSTICE AND DELINQUENCY PREVENTION AND THE WHITE HOUSE DOMESTIC POLICY COUNCIL AND OFFICE OF PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In September 2013, a Listening Session on Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents was held in Washington, DC. This session was organized by the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention in partnership with the White House Domestic Policy Council and Office of Public Engagement. It continues the administration's commitment to support youth with incarcerated parents and to ensure that all young people get the best possible start in life. The day-long session comprised more than 40 participants and was co-facilitated by the first two authors of this report. Participants included:

- Officials from relevant government agencies and departments;

- Individuals recognized by the White House in June 2013 as Champions of Change for Children of Incarcerated Parents;

- Representatives from mentoring organizations and other programs with experience serving children with incarcerated parents and their families; and

- Youth who were current or previous participants in two of the mentoring programs represented, along with their mentors and family members.

This report summarizes both the research and stakeholder input shared during the Listening Session and offers recommendations to further advance the availability and effectiveness of mentoring for children of incarcerated parents. The organization of the report largely follows the agenda of the Listening Session, provided in the appendix. The Listening Session began with brief overviews of research on children of incarcerated parents (Dr. Shlafer) as well as mentoring programs and relationships for youth in general (Dr. DuBois) and for children with incarcerated parents specifically (Dr. Jarjoura). Following an opportunity to discuss the presentations, participants were asked to share their views concerning the

significance and most important features of mentoring relationships in the lives of children with incarcerated parents. Next, Drs. Jarjoura and DuBois facilitated an in-depth participant discussion on specific areas of program infrastructure and practice as they pertain to effectively mentoring this population. The session concluded with participants sharing their views regarding the most important next steps for making high-quality mentoring available to children of incarcerated parents. It should be noted that the recommendations included in this report, although informed by the perspectives of session participants, are solely those of the report's authors.

RESEARCH AND BACKGROUND: CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS AND MENTORING

Parents may be incarcerated in correctional facilities at either the local or state level and the length of incarceration varies by type of facility. Jails are locally-operated correctional facilities and sentences to jail (typically for misdemeanors) are usually one year or shorter, whereas prisons (state or federal) are typically further away and generally involve sentences (typically for felonies) that are longer than one year. The number of youth who have an incarcerated parent has grown considerably over the past two decades. It is estimated that 1.7 million youth in the United States have at least one parent currently in prison and that millions more have a parent in jail. As a group, these youth fare worse than other youth on a range of immediate and longer-term outcomes that relate to mental and physical health as well as educational achievement. Evidence suggests that, in combination with other sources of risk and adversity, the incarceration of a parent can increase the likelihood that youth become involved in antisocial and delinquent behavior. Yet, it is clear that parental incarceration affects families in different ways and that experiences before, during, and after incarceration contribute to youths'

outcomes. Furthermore, as many youth faced with the incarceration of a parent do well, a parent's incarceration is clearly not an insurmountable barrier to a young person realizing his or her full potential.

The broader research literature supports mentoring programs as a promising form of support for youth with incarcerated parents. Findings indicate that participation in a mentoring program can benefit a young person in several different areas, including emotional well-being, social relationships, avoiding problem behavior, and academic achievement. Research also suggests the following specific qualities of mentoring relationships are important for fostering positive youth outcomes:

- **Active guidance** (mentor efforts to build mentee's skills and facilitate development of mentee's character and values; mentor helping mentee to set and work toward personal goals)

- **Advocacy** (efforts to identity and address a mentee's needs for services and resources and foster the mentee's skills for self-advocacy)

- **Closeness/emotional connection** (mentor and mentee caring for one another)

- **Collaborative/developmental orientation** (responsiveness to mentee's interests; cultivation of mentee's strengths and sense of contribution)

- **Consistency** (mentor follow-through and trustworthiness)

- **Longevity** (extended duration of relationship)

- **Parent engagement** (mentor efforts to partner with mentee's primary caregiver in meeting mentee's needs; demonstrating respect for the caregiver's wishes and caregiver-child relationship).

- **Positive role modeling** (mentor exhibiting personal integrity, healthy behaviors, and concern for others)

Recognition of the potential benefits of additional adult support and guidance in the context of a parent's incarceration has inspired a number of initiatives to make high-quality mentoring (as summarized above) available to youth who are faced with this life circumstance. The evidence available regarding the effectiveness of mentoring as a form of support for children with incarcerated parents specifically is limited and best regarded as preliminary. Available findings are, however, encouraging because they point to a range of potential benefits that are similar to those observed in the much more extensive body of research that has evaluated mentoring program outcomes for youth in general. Many of the youth at the Listening Session, furthermore, spoke with conviction about the ways they had been influenced positively–often in ways that transformed their development and futures—from their involvement in mentoring programs that were represented. Session participants also emphasized how, in their experience, essentially all of the features of high-quality mentoring relationships suggested by research are instrumental to ensuring that children with incarcerated parents benefit from their program experiences and, importantly, are shielded from unintended harm (e.g., feelings of abandonment stemming from lack of mentor follow-through on commitments).

SUPPORTING HIGH-QUALITY MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS FOR CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS

Much has been learned about the ways to design and manage mentoring programs to maximize the potential for meaningful and effective mentoring relationships. Along with the critical need for adequate organizational infrastructure, research suggests that attention to practices in several different areas (recruitment, screening, matching, training, structure and

supports for mentoring activities, monitoring and support, family engagement, external

partnerships, and closure) is important for ensuring the quality of mentoring relationships and

thereby positive youth outcomes. During the Listening Session, participants emphasized specific

aspects within these areas as both particularly important and challenging in making high-quality

mentoring available to children of incarcerated parents. These include:

- Taking into account the complexities of the home and family situations when a parent is incarcerated, including how this may influence the experience for mentors, and establishing realistic expectations when recruiting prospective mentors.

- Screening and intake procedures that ensure that prospective mentors have the time, commitment, and personal qualities to be effective mentors and that consider the possibility that suitable mentors may be adults with similar backgrounds as the youth and may already be known to them (e.g., relatives or acquaintances).

- Being attentive to how the experience of having an incarcerated parent may shape youths' openness to, and expectations about, a relationship with an adult mentor and using this and other information to match youth with mentors whose characteristics and backgrounds are appropriate to their needs.

- Providing training that prepares mentors to be supportive of children with incarcerated parents—to understand their own personal biases and views about incarcerated parents as well as the cultural attitudes and values of the youth they will serve and how to respond when issues arise (e.g., when to contact staff, how to make referrals, how to listen non-judgmentally, and so on).

- Having structured support for mentors working with children of incarcerated parents and providing targeted preparation for mentors to support these youth effectively—this includes ensuring that mentors understand how mentoring fits in with other support systems in place and with family/caregiver needs.

- Establishing clear expectations about the regularity and amount of contact that should occur between mentor and youth as well as the duration of the relationship—especially given that when youth experience the kind of disruption in their relationships with adults that is sometimes associated with having an incarcerated parent, consistency and predictability as well as a long-term commitment may be necessary for youth to cultivate open and trusting relationships with their mentors.

- Entering into partnerships between the mentoring agencies and other organizations is particularly important when serving this population, especially in terms of building the support that youth with incarcerated parents need to be successful in the school setting.

- Providing a structured process for closing the mentoring relationship so that it acknowledges the contributions of both mentor and mentee and gives both a chance to reflect on the experience, keeping in mind that because children of incarcerated parents sometimes have a background of strained and disrupted relationships with adults, it is critical that relationships they experience with mentors be healthy and positive in all aspects, including their closure.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND POLICY

The research evidence and Listening Session discussion summarized in this report point to a number of useful next steps that can be taken to support the availability of high-quality and effective mentoring for youth with incarcerated parents. The authors' specific recommendations follow:

Provide strategic supports to programs to enhance the availability of high-quality mentoring for children of incarcerated parents. These supports should be structured (i.e., tiered) to respond to mentoring organizations' varying needs and degrees of readiness, taking into account the extent to which foundational evidence-based practices are established components of their programs as well as their levels of experience providing mentoring to children of incarcerated parents. Assisting all programs to efficiently and effectively engage high-quality mentors from diverse backgrounds should also be a priority. As emphasized during the Listening Session, the need for access to more timely and affordable background checks as part of the mentor screening process is a particularly pressing concern.

Cultivate a community of practice for mentoring children of incarcerated parents. There is a need to facilitate sharing of ideas and exchange of resources among programs involved in providing mentoring for children of incarcerated parents. The recently funded OJJDP National Mentoring Resource Center as well as mechanisms to foster peer learning and collaboration among organizations working at national, regional, and local levels should be utilized for this purpose.

Invest in research to advance the evidence base for effective mentoring for children of incarcerated parents. Any efforts to enhance the availability and effectiveness of mentoring for children of incarcerated parents should be grounded in a strong evidence base. As a first step in addressing this need, federal funding should be provided for a well-designed and rigorous

evaluation study. This study should be designed to advance understanding of how best to support the implementation of key practices in making mentoring available to children of incarcerated parents as well as how to achieve optimal levels of mentor and youth engagement in programs. It also should be structured to improve knowledge of the ways in which youth outcomes may be contingent on the different characteristics and practices of programs, key features of mentoring relationships, and the widely varying life circumstances and backgrounds of children of incarcerated parents. When and how mentoring is most likely to complement the broader array of supports that such youth with incarcerated parents and their families may receive from other organizations should also be carefully examined.

INTRODUCTION

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A BRIEF PROFILE OF CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS

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incarcerated parent are less than 4 years old.[6] Notably, African American youth are more than seven times as likely as White youth and nearly three times as likely as Hispanic youth to have a parent in prison.[7]

As a group, children of incarcerated parents are at increased risk for both internalizing (e.g., depression, anxiety, withdrawal) and externalizing (e.g., delinquency, substance use) behavior problems, cognitive delays, and difficulties in school (e.g., school failure).[8] The associations between parental incarceration and poor developmental outcomes are complicated, however, because incarcerated parents and their children are a heterogeneous group and often experience many additional challenges that place them at risk for suboptimal outcomes even before the parent is incarcerated. These environmental risks (e.g., single parenting, poverty, parent substance use, parent mental health problems, exposure to domestic violence) could compromise a family's stability and a child's developmental outcomes. This may be particularly true for children who lived with their parents before the parent's incarceration. About 50% of parents in prison report having lived with their children before they were incarcerated, and mothers are more likely than fathers to report living with their minor children before incarceration.[9] So for some youth—but certainly not all—the parent's incarceration results in a disruption in the household. This may be particularly important in the context of the discussion of mentoring for this population, because the experiences before, during, and after a parent's incarceration vary considerably and the intended goals of mentoring programs may not address the unique needs of individual youths.

Recent evidence[10] suggests that even after environmental risks (e.g., race, education, poverty, and prior criminal convictions) are accounted for, parental incarceration continues to predict youths' likelihood of engaging in antisocial and delinquent behavior. In addition, parental

incarceration has been linked to poor physical and mental health in adulthood, including increased risk of high cholesterol, asthma, migraines, HIV/AIDS, depression, posttraumatic stress disorder, and anxiety.[11] These results suggest that parental incarceration can have long-lasting implications for the physical and mental health of the next generation. At the same time, it should be noted that the available evidence does not support a view that parental incarceration *causes* poor developmental outcomes among children. As with most social problems, any one risk factor, such as parental incarceration, is probably most accurately regarded as part of a complex web of myriad intersecting circumstances and events.

MENTORING PROGRAMS AND RELATIONSHIPS FOR YOUTH

MENTORING PROGRAMS

Rigorous evaluations of mentoring programs generally support their ability to make a positive difference in multiple domains of the behavior and development of participating youth.[12] Findings include enhanced self-esteem; better relationships with parents and peers; improvements in school attendance and performance; and reductions in substance use, violence, and other risk behaviors. The most common pattern is for mentored youth to exhibit positive gains on outcomes, while non-mentored youth experience declines. Thus, it appears that programs can serve both promotion and prevention aims.[13] There is also evidence that mentoring programs can foster inroads in multiple areas for the same young person,[14] thereby facilitating holistic growth and development.[15] Furthermore, existing research supports the value of mentoring programs for youth of varying ages, ranging from young children to older adolescents, thus positioning them as a potentially beneficial form of support throughout the formative stages of a young person's development.[16] Likewise, although programs typically have used adult volunteers and focused on cultivating one-to-one relationships, findings are also encouraging

when using older peers as mentors and when offering mentoring in a group format.[17] In summary, existing evidence points to the flexibility and broad applicability of mentoring as an approach to supporting positive youth development.

Gains with regard to outcome measures for the typical young person in a mentoring program, however, have been modest.[18] Although comparable to those observed for other types of community-based programs for children and adolescents,[19] these benefits fall short of the transformative levels of impact that have widely been assumed possible with mentoring.[20] Substantial variability in effects has been observed across programs[21] as well as among youth served by the same program. Notably, these findings have revealed instances in which program involvement was potentially harmful to youth.[22] As discussed in later sections of this report, much of the observed variation in effectiveness appears likely to be attributable to differences in the quality of the relationships formed between youth and their mentors in programs and, in turn, unevenness in the use of practices that may be best suited to cultivating high-quality mentoring relationships. Yet, even the most encouraging findings typically have not reflected what would be considered large benefits for participating youth. Nor has there been discernible improvement in program effectiveness over time.[23] Along with inconsistency in adherence to currently identified evidence-based practices, these trends may reflect limitations in the attention that has been given to developing and evaluating program innovations (i.e., new evidence-based practices and models).

There are also a number of significant gaps in the current evidence base for mentoring program effectiveness. These include a relative lack of research to inform understanding of the capacity of mentoring programs to address youth outcomes likely to be of particular interest to policy makers, such as juvenile offending, educational attainment, and obesity.[24] Likewise, very

few studies have examined whether the benefits of program participation for youth are sustained at later points in their development, especially extending into adulthood.[25] Related to this, evidence concerning the economic return associated with youth mentoring programs is currently limited. Some analyses have produced estimates of a sizable monetary return on investment for select youth mentoring programs.[26] A key untested assumption in these analyses, however, is that the short-term gains observed for youth in evaluations have translated into long-term educational and vocational benefits.[27]

MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS

It is clear from available research that not all mentoring relationships are "created equal" with respect to their likelihood of fostering positive outcomes for youth. Table 1 provides an overview of features of mentoring relationships that were discussed at the Listening Session. As discussed in this section, there is evidence to indicate that these qualities can be important in realizing the potential benefits that mentoring relationships hold for youth. It should not be assumed, however, that all of these characteristics are necessary or desirable for any particular relationship or that this list in any way exhausts all relevant considerations.

Theoretical perspectives have emphasized mutual trust and a sense of being liked, understood, and respected as fundamentally important in meaningful mentoring relationships for youth.[28] In line with this view, research points to the youth's experience of an emotional bond (e.g., feelings of closeness) with his or her mentor as a key facilitator of positive outcomes, such as improved academic performance[29] and avoiding involvement in problem behavior.[30] Similarly, relationships that are collaborative and youth-centered (sometimes referred to as "developmental") in their orientation, as opposed to being driven primarily by the interests or expectations of the mentor (sometimes referred to as "prescriptive"), appear more likely to last

and to be experienced positively by mentors and youth,[31] and have been linked to improvements

in youths' relationships with other adults.[32,33]

Mentoring relationships characterized by feelings of emotional security and a sense of

collaboration may also be important for establishing the conditions necessary for more active

forms of guidance or support to be well received and thus prove beneficial. Considerable

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**Table 1: Characteristics of Mentoring Relationships Associated With Positive Outcomes
     for Youth**

Active guidance—Mentor sharing information, providing skill-building opportunities,
supporting the development of character and personal values, and offering a broadening
perspective on the world; mentor helping youth to set and work toward personally meaningful
goals.

Advocacy—Mentor efforts to identify and meet a mentee's needs, such as through facilitating
connections to relevant services and resources and introductions to adults who can open doors to
opportunities in areas such as education or employment; helping the mentee to become confident
and skilled in advocating for himself or herself.

Closeness/emotional connection—Mentor and mentee caring for one another and being
"bonded," potentially in a kin-like manner.

Collaborative/developmental orientation—Eliciting and being responsive to a mentee's
interests and concerns; recognizing the mentee's contributions and cultivating his or her
strengths.

Consistency—Mentor follow-through on expectations for engagement with a mentee, such as
how often they spend time together, and mentor demonstrating trustworthiness in terms of living
up to promises and expectations established in the mentoring relationship.

Longevity—Mentor and mentee sustaining an active relationship over a substantial period.

Parent engagement—Active efforts of the mentor to partner with a mentee's primary caregiver
in supporting the mentee; seeking out and respecting parental wishes; maintaining appropriate
boundaries to avoid disrupting the parent–mentee relationship or the mentor–mentee
relationship.

Positive role modeling—Mentor serving as an example of how to conduct oneself with personal
integrity, look after one's mental and physical health, demonstrate caring and concern for others,
etc.

evidence indicates, for example, that mentors can be an important resource in helping youth to set and work toward goals, especially in the context of the above-described youth-centered approach to mentoring.[34] Likewise, although the teaching and advocacy dimensions of mentoring relationships have not received much direct study, greater effectiveness has been observed in programs that are intentionally structured to support such roles.[35]

Mentoring relationships that involve more consistent or frequent patterns of contact and that are sustained over longer periods of time have also been implicated in more favorable outcomes for youth.[36] Available evidence suggests that relationships characterized by greater intensity of interaction and longevity may be beneficial, at least in part, because they afford a greater opportunity for other desirable features of relationships to take root and be operative, such as feelings of closeness and collaboration on goals.[37] It is important to note, however, that favorable results have nonetheless been reported in evaluations of programs intentionally structured for mentoring relationships to last relatively short periods of time (e.g., a few months).[38] Likewise, available evidence suggests that youth can be adversely affected when program-arranged relationships end prematurely[39] or if, in the wake of such endings, a youth is paired with a new mentor.[40,41]

Theory and available research also point to the importance of taking into account the ways that the mentoring relationship interfaces with other important relationships in youths' lives (and possibly those of mentors).[42] The extent to which mentors can forge the types of connections with youths' parents or other caregivers that enable collaboration on behalf of youths is a significant consideration in this regard.[43] It seems likely, however, that other social network linkages, such as those involving youths' teachers or peers, when examined will prove to be consequential as well.

The recent attention paid to mentoring for youth with incarcerated parents has been characterized as a "national movement."[44] In 2000, the Amachi mentoring organization was developed to support these youth through the consistent presence of caring adult mentors. Amachi is a faith-based initiative that began in Philadelphia under the leadership of (former mayor) Rev. Wilson Goode. Originally, the Amachi model was a partnership with Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) in which mentors were recruited through religious organizations. Specialized training was developed to prepare mentors, who were then supervised and monitored by BBBS agencies. To date, more than 300,000 children have been mentored through Amachi-modeled programs in 250 cities across all 50 states.

President George W. Bush took the Amachi concept and built a national initiative under the leadership of the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives and the Administration for Children and Families (ACF). In 2002, through the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Amendments, Congress established the Mentoring Children of Prisoners Program. Through this program, in 2003 the ACF provided $8.9 million of funding to 52 mentoring programs specifically serving children of incarcerated parents. The program was reauthorized in 2006, and in 2008, ACF awarded $45.6 million in funding to support 219 mentoring programs. Through the Mentoring Children of Prisoners Program, grants were awarded to faith-based and community organizations, along with tribes and state and local government entities.

Unfortunately, evaluations of the mentoring programs targeting children of incarcerated parents through these initiatives were unavailable at the time of this report. In the most rigorous evaluation to date, 272 youth (ages 7 to 13) with an incarcerated family member were randomly assigned to receive mentoring immediately or to be placed on an 18-month wait list within the community-based mentoring programs of three BBBS agencies in Texas. At a 6-month

assessment, findings indicated the favorable effects of program participation on several outcomes, including more positive relationships with parents/caregivers, higher self-esteem, and a more positive sense of the future.[45] Similar differences on outcome measures favoring the mentoring program group were also apparent at the final, 18-month assessment. As noted by the report authors, however, these results are best regarded as exploratory because these follow-up data could only be collected for approximately half of the youth in the original study sample.[46] Of further note, no significant differences were found between the groups at any point in the study on measures of school/academic-related outcomes (e.g., attitudes toward school, school competence as rated by parent, and suspensions).[47]

In other research from the same program, stakeholder interviews and focus groups were conducted with parents/caregivers, mentors, youth, and program staff. These pointed to the importance of mentors demonstrating consistency and commitment, and thus being involved on a regular, long-term basis. Also emphasized was the need for mentors to be compassionate listeners and to be supportive and open-minded in the context of family structures and values that might differ from their own. Parental/caregiver involvement was also perceived as essential, especially as reflected in the parent/caregiver's understanding and acceptance of the role of the mentor in his or her child's life, making an effort to communicate regularly with the mentor, and making outings between the mentor and child a priority.[48]

In further research, national data from BBBS agencies were used to compare the mentoring relationships that children of incarcerated parents experienced compared to other youths'. For the organization's community-based program model, findings indicated that the experiences of children of incarcerated parents in their relationships with their mentors (e.g., feelings of closeness) were for the most part similar to those experienced by other youth. This

was true for assessment data gathered at 3 months, 1 year, and 2 years into the development of relationships. Children of incarcerated parents did, however, report greater feelings of disappointment in their relationships with mentors (which were relatively rare for all youth) compared to other youth at both 3 months and 1 year. In the organization's school-based program, children of incarcerated parents reported levels of relationship quality similar to or more favorable than those of other youth in all areas. When considering mentor ratings, those in community-based based programs who were paired with youth who had incarcerated parents reported higher levels of frustration and challenge in their mentoring relationships than did other mentors; a comparable difference was not observed for mentors in school-based programs. Proportions of mentoring relationships that lasted at least one year did not differ in community-based programs; whereas for school-based programs, the 1-year retention rate was significantly higher for youth with an incarcerated parent.

The potential for mentoring programs and relationships to significantly benefit youth with incarcerated parents was a prominent theme in participants' contributions during the Listening Session. Several of the youth attributed transformative changes in their development, such as refraining from involvement in gang activity and success in pursuing postsecondary education, to mentoring relationships they had experienced in the programs represented at the session. At the same time, participants highlighted a number of formidable challenges that could be encountered in efforts to cultivate mentoring relationships with young people whose lives have been affected by a parent's incarceration. These include the potential for some youth to be reluctant to trust or engage possible mentors in the wake of past disappointments in relationships with other adults, and a corresponding vulnerability to feelings of abandonment when mentors end relationships abruptly or fail to follow through on promises of continued involvement. It was

noted that success in overcoming such barriers required mentors to exhibit patience, empathy, and trustworthiness. The importance of mentors demonstrating a sustained high level of commitment to supporting youth with incarcerated parents not only by their encouragement and guidance, but also advocacy (e.g., facilitating connections to other supportive adults and resources) was also a prominent theme. Mentors' efforts to support youths' relationships with their incarcerated parents (e.g., writing letters to the parent together) and their indirect value as supporters and sources of inspiration for current caregivers were also cited as important. These features of mentoring relationships, emphasized by participants in the Listening Session, reflect many of those noted earlier (see Table 1) as linking to more positive outcomes for youth in the research literature.

In summary, available findings, with input from Listening Session participants, point to mentoring as a valuable source of support for youth with incarcerated parents. It is noteworthy, for example, that children of incarcerated parents are as likely as other youth to have the kinds of positive experiences in their relationships with mentors that contribute to positive outcomes. At the same time, attention to special considerations that may arise in mentoring children of incarcerated parents is warranted. These include, for example, the importance of mentor qualities such as patience, flexibility, compassion, and commitment as well as a strong parent–mentor alliance characterized by mutual respect.

SUPPORTING HIGH-QUALITY MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS FOR CHILDREN OF INCARCERATED PARENTS

Much has been learned about the ways to design and manage mentoring programs so they maximize the potential for meaningful and effective mentoring relationships. Research suggests that, along with organizational infrastructure and capacity, practices in each of several areas can

influence program effectiveness.[49] Table 2 provides a brief description of these areas of practice. We explore each in detail here.

As noted previously, in considering research that addresses the overall effectiveness of youth mentoring programs, most of what we know about the importance of specific types of program practices comes from research that has not been specific to mentoring programs serving children of incarcerated parents. It is also important to note that many traditional mentoring programs undoubtedly served children with incarcerated parents, recognizing them as "at-risk" because they were experiencing challenges or being raised by single parents, for example, but not specifically because they had an incarcerated parent. Thus, previous research on the characteristics and practices of mentoring programs likely has included children with incarcerated parents, but only rarely have such studies reported findings specific to this population.

To help offset this limitation, in this section of the paper we draw on input from the Listening Session. Although much of what we highlight from the Listening Session points to practices and personal experiences that typically have not been the subject of research, at the very least this can expand our perspective on and understanding of mentoring initiatives that specifically target children of incarcerated parents. Throughout the rest of the paper we identify program features and approaches that merit careful consideration as we explore recommendations specific to mentoring practice and research for this population.

PROGRAM PRACTICES

In the third edition of the *Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring* (hereafter, referred to simply as the *Elements),* six "evidence-based standards for practice that incorporate the latest research and best-available practice wisdom" are identified.[50] These standards include

Table 2: Mentoring Program Practices

Mentor and youth recruitment—Identifying and engaging potential mentors through such means as community outreach, partnerships with businesses and universities, and social media; engaging the youth intended to be served by the program and their families through community outreach, partnerships with schools and service providers, and so forth.

Screening and intake assessment —Strategies to ensure that potential mentors have appropriate backgrounds and readiness, such as child abuse and neglect background checks, in-person interviews, and contacting references; efforts to ensure that there is a good fit between what the program can offer and the needs and desires of the youth and their families.

Matching—Pairing youth and mentors according to program format (e.g., one-to-one, group) informed by considerations such as mentor, mentee, and parent preferences; the compatibility of mentor and mentee interests and personalities; mentee needs; and the professional judgment of staff members.

Training—Providing mentors with information and opportunities to build skills that will support them in developing effective and beneficial relationships with their mentees; can be delivered in a variety of formats (e.g., in person, online) and both before and after the mentoring relationship has begun.

Structure and supports for mentoring activities—Strategies and resources used to ensure that mentoring relationships reflect regularity and the amounts of activity, overall duration, styles of interaction, and activity content consistent with program goals.

Monitoring and support—Personalized staff check-ins with mentors that can occur on an established schedule and an ad hoc basis in response to emergent needs; also includes similar check-ins that might occur with mentees and their caregivers.

Family engagement—Outreach by program staff and mentors to a mentee's family focused on partnering to best support the mentee's development; may include staff and mentor check-ins with a mentee's parent, inviting a mentee's family to participate in program-sponsored events and activities, having a mentor partner with a mentee's parent to carry out activities on behalf of the mentee, and so on.

External partnerships—Collaboration with other organizations involved in providing services or resources to support mentees and their families.

Closure of mentoring relationships—Procedures to help mentees and mentors prepare for and manage the ending of the mentor–mentee relationship such as establishing appropriate expectations, facilitating mentor–mentee communication, and so on.

benchmarks that guide programs in establishing or revising procedures to recruit mentors and mentees for the program; screen volunteers to ensure they fit with the goals and principles of the program; train volunteers to best prepare them to build effective mentoring relationships; match mentors and youth to maximize the likelihood of a meaningful mentoring relationship; provide ongoing training and support for the mentors and youth; and formally end the relationships. In addition to the benchmarks identified in *Elements*, enhancements to practices are recommended for each area.

Determining the specific form that a mentoring program will assume is, of course, one of the most fundamental issues to be addressed when developing a mentoring program. Programs can focus on one-to-one, group, team, or e-mentoring. They can be school- or community-based, stand-alone or one piece of a larger youth-serving program. Currently, research offers support for the potential effectiveness of each of these formats.[51] Decisions regarding format can, however, be informed by a needs assessment focused on the youth to be served through the program as well as by other pertinent considerations such as the likely availability and characteristics of mentors, staffing and other resources of the host organization.[52] The format selected typically will then, in turn, have implications for decisions that are made about program practices in each of the areas discussed below.

MENTOR AND YOUTH RECRUITMENT. One standard from the *Elements* is that programs should recruit mentors and youth who are "appropriate" based on program objectives and anticipated outcomes. More specifically, recruitment efforts that provide a realistic sense of what mentors and youth should expect from the program are advised.[53] It has also been recommended that mentoring programs take particular care in their recruitment efforts to accurately portray what being in a mentoring relationship may be like, because some research

has indicated that mentors' unrealistic expectations for the mentoring relationship can contribute to the risk for relationships to close early and unexpectedly.[54]

Establishing realistic expectations when recruiting prospective mentors for children of incarcerated parents may be especially critical. During the Listening Session we heard how mentoring programs experienced in serving this population have paid attention to how best to communicate background information about the youth to the mentor. Is it important for mentors to know that a youth has an incarcerated parent? A related question pertains to what responsibilities come with knowing that a parent is incarcerated. It is clear from input received during the Listening Session that perspectives on this matter are not uniform across providers. During the session, it was shared that in some families dealing with the incarceration of a loved one, parents have chosen not to share this information with a child. In some families, a parent's absence from the home is explained with more positive stories—the parent is in the military or working in another region. In such situations, some participants in the Listening Session felt that it was appropriate for programs to share information about the parent's incarceration with the mentor. These considerations suggest the potential value of programs working with families of incarcerated parents on an individual basis to find out what a child has been told and using that to inform what information is shared, in turn, with the youth's prospective mentor.

In practice, some mentoring programs specifically advertise that they are looking for volunteers to mentor youth with incarcerated parents, making it impossible not to tell mentors that the youth has a parent in prison.[55] During the Listening Session, we heard from mentors who learned after the relationship was already in place that their mentees had incarcerated parents. Those mentors expressed mixed feelings about not knowing earlier in the relationship and not feeling prepared to handle such a dynamic. Indeed, we heard that the mentors might need to be

prepared for the confusing questions that youth could have if they have not been told about their parent's incarceration. Likewise, if youth have been informed, the mentors may need to be prepared to deal with questions the youth may have about their parent's incarceration. These considerations suggest the potential importance of specific training for mentors to help anticipate some of the special needs of these youth, a topic addressed further below.

Mentoring organizations use various strategies to recruit good mentors, including presentations to community and professional groups, appeals by current staff and volunteers to friends and associates, and advertising campaigns.[56] Some mentoring programs also form relationships with corporations as well as colleges or universities and even high schools, which then may become an ongoing source of volunteers.[57] Mentoring programs may also find that establishing a recognizable and reputable name, or branding, is beneficial for recruiting mentors.[58] Offering mentors stipends or other benefits (e.g., course or service learning credit for students) is still another strategy used to recruit mentors. Currently very little research addresses the likely effectiveness of different recruitment strategies.[59] However, some evidence suggests the importance of programs looking beyond where and how to recruit mentors most easily to also consider the type of volunteer being recruited. In particular, available research points to the value of seeking out, through recruitment strategies, pools of potential mentors likely to possess relevant skills or abilities, not simply avoiding pools that might have undesirable traits or characteristics.[60]

Research on why people volunteer points to two of the biggest reasons: (a) having a passion for and/or personal commitment to the work; or (b) being asked to volunteer by someone they have a personal relationship with. During the Listening Session we heard powerful stories about mentors that brought a great deal of personal commitment to the young people in the

program, which led to a transformative experience for the youth. Yet, we also heard about the challenges of converting recruited volunteers into engaged mentors. One way to maximize the number of engaged mentors is to get key people to ask people they know. A national strategy ideally suited for the role of the faith community in initiatives focused on mentoring children of incarcerated parents is the Mentor Recruitment Ambassador.[61] Each ambassador makes a commitment to identify and ask five adults to become a volunteer mentor. Coupled with a deliberate strategy built around the profile of the mentor ideal for serving youth with incarcerated parents, the right people are positioned to ask the right people.

SCREENING AND INTAKE ASSESSMENT. When screening is done correctly, it helps enhance the safety of the program for youth, mentors, and the organization.[62] In the *Elements,* one of the standards is to screen prospective mentors effectively so the program is confident the mentor has the "time, commitment, and personal qualities" to be an effective mentor. In screening potential mentors, programs often consider the volunteers' interests and skills. In a recent meta-analysis of evaluations of mentoring initiatives, programs were found to be more effective when mentors' educational and occupational backgrounds fit well with specific program goals.[63] In addition, programs were found to be more effective when shared interests were considered when matching mentors and youth; thus, it is important for programs to assess the interests of both potential volunteers and the youth served by the program. In addition to assessing youths' interests, programs can capture information about the youths' strengths and needs as well as their characteristics or life circumstances that represent sources of vulnerability or risk for negative outcomes. A recent study of the role of risk in youth mentoring relationships concluded that understanding a youth's level of risk may have implications for the way that programs should prepare their volunteers for the mentoring role.[64]

Of course, screening potential volunteers should also focus on protecting youth from victimization. Yet, although it is widely agreed that background checks are an important tool in screening prospective (and current) mentors for safety concerns, they should not be relied on as a stand-alone measure for mentor screening.[65] Instead, a mentoring organization's approach to screening mentors and protecting youth should include established eligibility, screening, training and monitoring processes; staff training and supervision; a written application to be filled out by volunteers; maintenance of a database of applicants; written eligibility criteria for applicants; a position description for the mentor role; a commitment statement that volunteers will sign; an in-person interview; a state and federal criminal history background check; a check of sex offender registries; searches of the Internet/social media; and a check of character references.[66]

In terms of screening potential mentors for work with youth with incarcerated parents, during the Listening Session we heard about the power of having a mentor who has "been there." The discussion challenged government funders and others to consider the potential benefits of engaging mentors who have overcome similar (in some cases, criminal) backgrounds and have a track record of personal success that may inspire the youth. Of further note is the importance that Listening Session participants placed on having a way to complete affordable and rapid background checks. The length of time some programs had to wait to approve volunteers was seen as a barrier to keeping potential mentors engaged during the waiting period. It was also recognized that many background checks were cost-prohibitive, making it a serious challenge for many programs. It was noted during the Listening Session that legislation designed to address these barriers is currently pending.

MATCHING. Mentoring programs use a variety of methods to match mentors with youth. These include giving priority to—or in some cases requiring—matching youth with mentors who

share one or more aspects of their demographic background, such as gender or race/ethnicity, whose skills are judged most likely to fit a youth's needs, and/or who have interests in common with a youth. Still others match youth in a more organic fashion, where mentors and mentees are allowed to meet in large groups and matches are made on the basis of natural pairings that occur.[67]

Programs that place an emphasis on systematically matching youth and mentors have stronger effects than those that do not.[68] However, little empirical evidence suggests that when programs systematically match according to demographic factors such as race and gender, the results for youth are more positive. On the other hand, as previously noted, evidence suggests that matching based on similarity of interests contributes to better outcomes for youth.[69] Available research also points to the value of matching mentors and youth with respect to characteristics judged likely to be important in the context of program goals, coupled with close monitoring of relationships in the period immediately following the matching.[70]

Because the experience of having an incarcerated parent may shape youths' openness to, and expectations about, a relationship with an adult mentor, the characteristics and backgrounds of the mentors such youth are matched with merit particular attention. We heard during the Listening Session, for example, how the identities of some youth had seemingly been influenced by having an incarcerated parent (e.g., some participants at the Listening Session said that they looked up to their fathers for the very reasons that led to their incarceration). It was suggested that matching such youth with adults who were previously involved in criminal activity and have since forged a more positive identity was potentially significant.

The Listening Session discussion also underscored the importance of acknowledging the positive role models already in the day-to-day lives of these youth. In fact, it was made clear that

in many families experiencing the incarceration of a parent, there are often caregivers who are appropriate role models, and in some cases incarcerated parents also functions as positive role models in their relationships with their children. Allowing such youth to identify adults that may be positive role models aligns with research on Youth-Initiated Mentoring. The strategy to provide training and support to mentors identified by the youth builds on the strengths and available resources in the youth's natural environment. Many of the challenges that mentors experience in the early stages of building the relationship would not necessarily surface in relationships with these "natural" mentors.[71]

TRAINING. In the *Elements*, the standard for training mentors points to the importance of focusing on the "basic knowledge and skills" shown to lay the foundation for effective mentoring relationships.[72] Key considerations when planning mentor training include the frequency, dose, duration, and timing.[73] Research suggests that providing mentors with training is related to the success of mentoring relationships and, ultimately, program effectiveness in promoting desired youth outcomes.[74] Mentor training may foster stronger outcomes for youth participating in programs by improving the quality of the mentor–mentee relationship, as well as the length and duration of the relationship.[75] It is recommended that the initial (pre-match) mentor training last at least two hours, with the best results argued to be most likely when the amount of initial training is six hours or more. Ideally, training includes topics such as the objectives of mentoring; how to be an effective mentor, with special attention to roles, behaviors, and program expectations; a code of ethics for mentors; insights regarding the mentoring of youth served by the program; program policies and procedures; communication skills; conflict resolution skills; appropriate physical and emotional boundaries between mentor and mentee; and procedures for reporting child abuse.[76] Mentor training should also include an in-person component and an

interactive element; utilize evidence-based training materials; and be used as a method for the continued screening of mentors.[77] The mentoring relationship may also be improved by focusing on training mentors in active listening, empathy, and problem solving.[78]

Ongoing training may be an important opportunity for mentoring programs to provide education on new topics that become more relevant as the mentoring relationship develops. It also provides a means for mentoring programs to refresh mentors on topics they may have forgotten since the initial training.[79] Consistent with these possibilities, whether or not programs provided ongoing training opportunities for mentors was found to be one of the strongest predictors of effectiveness in one meta-analysis of youth mentoring program evaluations.[80]

As noted above, a theme that emerged during the Listening Session is the potential value of providing training with content that addresses the unique considerations that may be associated with mentoring a youth who has an incarcerated parent, including how incarceration affects families. Given the range of challenges and trauma that children of incarcerated parents may be experiencing in their home lives, it may be important to prepare mentors for ways to be supportive and understand how best to respond when issues arise (e.g., when to contact staff, how to make referrals, how to listen, and so on). It will be critical to help mentors understand their own personal biases and views about incarcerated parents. Input received during the Listening Session also underscored the importance of preparing mentors to understand the cultural attitudes and values of the youth they will serve. Culturally competent mentors were noted to have a greater impact on the youth they mentored. It was clear that to effectively consider the role of culture in building high-quality mentor–mentor relationships, we must also attend to the complexities that may infuse the experiences of some youth because of race, poverty, and previous trauma experiences.

MONITORING AND SUPPORT. One of the standards in the *Elements* addresses providing ongoing staff monitoring and support for mentors that focus on helping mentors deal with problems and challenges in the mentoring relationship.[81] Recommended initial "match support" activities by program staff include meetings with the mentor, and the parent and youth separately before the match, and then meeting with mentor, parent, and youth together for an initial meeting. Once the relationship is launched, there should be monthly contacts of staff with the mentor and mentee to monitor and facilitate the development of their relationship. Quarterly contact with a key person in the mentee's life (e.g., parent, guardian or teacher) is also recommended for the duration of the match. As part of ongoing support, mentoring program staff should be available to answer questions, troubleshoot issues, and recommend alternative strategies when it appears the relationship is not moving in a good direction.[82] A recent study found that when program staff provided more consistent support for mentors, mentor–mentee relationships tended to be characterized by more frequent meetings, longer duration, and positive reports from the mentor and youth regarding the closeness of the relationship.[83] The quality of the support provided to mentors appeared to be important as well, contributing to greater strength and longevity of the mentoring relationship.

When serving youth with incarcerated parents, features of the youth's situation can create events that mentors are likely to be ill-equipped to handle without ongoing support from the program, for example, the residential mobility of the youth and family, contact with the incarcerated parent, understanding how mentoring fits in with other existing support systems and with family/caregiver needs. For instance, while it was noted that some youth do not know about the incarceration of their parents, there are some youth that will want to talk about the incarcerated parents. The mentor should be prepared for such a conversation should it arise.

Match support is particularly valuable for helping mentors respond to these issues. The Listening Session discussion reinforced the importance of having structured support for mentors working with children of incarcerated parents and providing targeted preparation so mentors were prepared to support these youth effectively.

STRUCTURE AND SUPPORTS FOR MENTORING ACTIVITIES. Programs can also build in structure to increase the likelihood that the mentoring relationship will be meaningful and impactful. Research suggests that key considerations in this area include the regularity of mentor–youth meetings, the amount of time spent together in these meetings, and the length of time over which they take place (i.e., relationship duration). Programs establishing clear expectations about the frequency of contact between mentor and youth, for example, have been found to be more effective.[84] Likewise, youth outcomes appear to be facilitated, and risk for unintentional harm reduced, when their relationships with mentors are sustained for periods of time that align with program goals and expectations.[85] Available findings, however, fail to provide a basis for clear-cut guidelines about what may be the most desirable (or minimally effective or safe) levels of mentor–youth interaction or relationship duration that programs should target. Such guidelines, too, may well need to be modified according to differences among mentoring programs in areas such as goals, youth populations served, and infrastructure.

On the surface, there is the potential for tension between program practices oriented toward fostering differing aspects of mentoring relationships, such as fun on the one hand and goals on the other. Over the course of a mentoring relationship, however, research suggests that programmatic encouragement of a developmental orientation may be able to set the stage for practices focused on more instrumental aims (e.g., skill development) to achieve more desirable results. Likewise, when programs are structured to encourage an initial focus on instrumental

purposes, they may offer mentors and youth a foundation of shared experience (e.g., work together on projects) that facilitates the success of efforts to cultivate stronger personal connections or bonds between them. On the basis of a review of relevant research within and outside the area of youth mentoring, it is recommended that mentees be integrally involved in the process of setting and working on goals, and that care be taken to avoid the pitfall of mentors becoming overly directive or task-oriented.[86] In line with the value of efforts to foster mentor–youth activities directed toward relationship development, as well as more instrumental aims, the results of a recent meta-analysis indicate that a joint emphasis on supporting mentors in functional roles pertaining to both emotional support and teaching was most predictive of program effectiveness.[87]

The types of experiences to which children of incarcerated parents are known to be susceptible make it important for programs to adopt practices to facilitate meaningful mentor-mentee relationships. Establishing regular and consistent patterns for meetings may be especially vital for building trust in the wake of past disappointments in relationships with adults. In fact, youth members of the Listening Session shared first-hand experiences with mentors who built strong relationships by being consistent and "hanging in there" during early testing by the youth. Several participants also spoke of their mentors imparting critical life lessons to them and actively supporting them in both setting and reaching ambitious goals (e.g., attending college). Thus, their shared experiences were very much in accord with mentoring programs for children of incarcerated parents benefiting from a dual focus on relationship development and more instrumental aims.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT. Earlier research suggested that programs were more effective when youths' parents were more engaged.[88] The body of research on parental involvement in the

mentoring relationship supports that it generally has a positive impact, but no studies have isolated whether parental involvement specifically improved outcomes or whether they resulted from one of the many activities mentoring programs use to try to engage parents.[89] Thus, it may not be a question of determining *whether* parental engagement can help strengthen positive outcomes for youth, but *how*.

Family engagement received significant attention at the Listening Session. The focus of the work that might be done with families has many dimensions, including the relationship the child has with his or her incarcerated parent, as well as the relationship between the child and his or her caregiver(s). During the Listening Session, we heard examples of how mentoring can be critical for healthy youth development. We also heard about programs where the youth were engaged in laying the foundation for parents' effective reentry once they were released from prison. One example in the Listening Session focused on working with parents while they were in prison; this work involved rebuilding relationships with family members, training in parenting, and engaging parents with the youth in meaningful experiences. Such programs were made possible by strong collaborative relationships between the service organizations and correctional agencies.

EXTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS. Through the National Mentoring Partnership and its affiliated state partnerships, attention has been directed to the collaboration of mentoring programs with other service providers and external partners.[90] There are many reasons to develop such collaborative partnerships. The needs of youth served by the programs may be complex and provide reasons to engage other service providers. Partnerships can elevate program visibility, making a strong case for the need for mentoring services. Efficiencies may be realized when partnerships enable the sharing of resources for training and screening mentors.

Collaborative relationships between mentoring programs and businesses, faith-based groups, and community-based organizations can be key elements of volunteer recruitment and fundraising campaigns.

Listening Session participants addressed the need for partnerships in many different ways. One school-integrated program noted that although mentoring is powerful, it should be enhanced "through the specialized training you give teachers, principals, and administrators." This program focuses on what it will take for children of incarcerated parents to do well in school. They pay attention to appropriate emotional support and understand that visiting a parent in prison can be traumatic. Part of their strategy is to "train teachers and principals in the schools because they might not know the impact of having a parent in prison."

CLOSURE OF MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS. Engaging in a closure process can help bring mentoring relationships to an end in a positive way that sets an example for future healthy relationships in a youth's life. Important steps for programs to have successful relationship closure may include introducing the idea of and process for closure to the mentor and mentee from the beginning of the relationship; making closure policies and procedures clear to the mentor, the mentee, and the mentee's family; preparing mentors for day-to-day challenges to avoid premature and unmonitored relationship endings; regular monitoring of mentoring relationships to assess whether they have reached a point where closure is appropriate; and conducting interviews with all participants as part of the closure process.[91] In the *Elements,* one of the standards requires programs to provide a structured process for "bringing the match to closure in a way that affirms the contributions of both the mentor and the mentee and offers both individuals the opportunity to assess the experience."[92]

Research suggests that youth may experience more harm than good when their program-arranged mentoring relationships end prematurely.[93] It is not yet clear, however, whether this harm derives from the relative brevity of the relationship or the fact that the ending was unexpected. Studies of a number of different mentoring programs reveal that premature endings occur frequently in mentoring relationships; in some research, relationships with older boys and girls have been found more likely to end early.[94] These relationships end prematurely for a variety of reasons. One study of a mentoring program for children of incarcerated parents identified the following five reasons for early termination of relationships: scheduling conflicts, personal or family issues, residential mobility, mentors underestimating the commitment, and match incompatibility.[95] Keeping in mind that these youth sometimes have a background of strained and disrupted relationships with adults, it may be especially critical that the mentoring relationship be healthy and positive in all aspects. This includes its closure.

ORGANIZATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND CAPACITY

Deciding the format and practices to be used in a given mentoring program is, of course, vitally important. Equally critical, however, is the extent to which the program has the infrastructure necessary to support the practices chosen. Ideally, it has been recommended that staff be aware of the strengths and challenges of the youth they serve and understand how recruiting, screening, training, and ongoing mentor support will contribute to the quality of the resulting mentoring relationships.[96] Standards address the types of training that mentoring program staff should receive.[97] In addition to training on each of the evidence-based practices described above, program staff should also be prepared to track and document the progress of the mentor-mentee relationship and any challenges that arise.[98]

As in other types of youth programs, another area of emphasis in recommendations for mentoring programs is the need for written protocols and procedures that encompass all areas of program operations and practice. For example, programs are advised to have specific, written procedures—including background check procedures—to screen potential volunteers. Similarly, research on why mentor–mentee relationships fail has also stimulated recommendations that programs have clearly defined procedures for when to end a relationship.[99]

A final element of program infrastructure and capacity has to do with the attention the program pays to assessing its own performance. Performance assessment measures the degree to which a program adheres to the original program design. Written protocols and procedures, discussed above, become critically important because they provide a measure of this adherence. Program goals and objectives are another piece of performance assessment. Establishing goals and objectives for a program is important in determining its structure, but it is also an important part of performance assessment. Goals and objectives identify desired outcomes against which program progress can be measured.[100] It has been recommended that, at a minimum, programs track mentoring relationship progress in written or computerized records and resolve issues that arise within relationships.[101] Ideally, though, the full range of program operations and practices should be tracked and subject to ongoing evaluation.[102]

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE AND POLICY

The research evidence and Listening Session discussion summarized in this report point to a number of useful next steps that can be undertaken to support the availability of high-quality and effective mentoring for youth with incarcerated parents. Our specific recommendations follow:

Provide strategic support to programs to enhance the availability of high-quality

mentoring for children of incarcerated parents. Both available research and Listening Session input underscore the potential for the types of support that can be made available through high-quality mentoring relationships to benefit many young people for whom parental incarceration is part of their life circumstances—perhaps in ways that are profound and life changing. Therefore, we see a strong case to be made for renewed investment in supporting the mentoring of children of incarcerated parents. It is equally clear from the available research and perspectives shared at the Listening Session that many unique considerations and challenges are involved with making mentoring relationships available to children of incarcerated parents and that considerable time and experience are likely to be required to ensure that program infrastructure and practices are responsive to these. Accordingly, although there is likely value in initiatives supporting diverse and wide-ranging programs and organizations, we believe it is imperative that such support be tailored appropriately to the needs and circumstances of each recipient. For programs with foundational, evidence-based practices in place that have considerable experience in providing mentoring to children of incarcerated parents, it may be optimal to provide support that facilitates expansion of services to reach greater numbers of such youth. In contrast, other programs will still be in the process of establishing core infrastructure and practices or will have begun only recently to develop strategies to best address the specific needs of children with incarcerated parents. Under these scenarios, supports directed toward program planning and small-scale piloting, respectively, are likely to be most advisable. As such examples suggest, it may be possible to establish progressive tiers of support within a single initiative and operational performance criteria for moving from one tier of support to the next.

Steps also should be undertaken to ensure that adequate supports are available in areas likely to be of common concern to programs in their efforts to make high-quality mentoring

available to children of incarcerated parents. Of particular note, during the Listening Session we heard about formidable challenges faced by programs in their efforts to engage enough suitable mentors. As noted by participants in the session, individuals who have overcome personal difficulties (e.g., nonviolent criminal histories) may bring unique capacities to connect with youth who have an incarcerated parent as part of their life circumstances, but remain a largely untapped resource. In this regard, we see significant value in providing programs with resources and guidance in areas such as mentor recruitment, screening, and support to better equip them to engage those who represent less traditional, but nonetheless potentially effective sources of support for children of incarcerated parents. Youth-initiated mentoring, a strategy in which young people engage effective mentors from within their own social networks, also deserves attention. Ensuring program access to affordable and timely background checks as part of screening potential mentors is critical as well. Reestablishing a reliable and cost-effective resource that can be used for this purpose at the national level should be a high priority.

Previous governmental initiatives have had a similar overarching goal of increasing the availability of high-quality mentoring for children of incarcerated parents. Any new initiatives should build on what was learned from these earlier efforts. All available accounts of results and lessons learned from this work should be carefully considered as a first step in the planning and design process.

Cultivate a community of practice for mentoring children of incarcerated parents.
The Listening Session highlighted a range of promising practices and resources that participating programs have developed and refined in their efforts to provide effective mentoring for children of incarcerated parents. Participants, too, clearly welcomed the opportunity for networking and sharing that the session itself provided. These considerations lead us to recommend that efforts

be undertaken to strengthen the community of practice for mentoring children of incarcerated parents. Rather than mechanisms to connect grantees of specific funding initiatives, we see the greatest value in networking strategies that extend more broadly and can be sustained over time. The recently funded National Mentoring Resource Center provides one promising vehicle in this regard because it will include, for example, a clearinghouse dedicated to sharing the resources developed by programs. Support for cooperative efforts among national organizations that have established commitments to high-quality mentoring for children of incarcerated parents, such as MENTOR, BBBS, and Boys & Girls Clubs, are also recommended as these may facilitate useful peer sharing and learning not only within, but also across such organizations. Similar supports should be instituted for sharing and collaboration for organizations working at local and regional levels.

Invest in research to advance the evidence base for effective mentoring for children of incarcerated parents. To achieve desired results, any efforts to enhance the availability and effectiveness of mentoring as a support for these youth should be grounded in a strong base of research-derived evidence. At present, the evidence base is notably limited in both scope and rigor. We therefore recommend that substantial investments be made to address the most critical gaps in current knowledge. These include, first and foremost, a better foundational understanding and documentation of the effectiveness of mentoring as an intervention strategy for children of incarcerated parents. This gap should be addressed by investment in a high-quality, federally-funded randomized controlled trial so as clarify both the immediate and longer-term effects of mentoring program participation for children of incarcerated parents. From the perspective of process evaluation, this study should be designed to advance understanding of how best to support implementation of key practices in making mentoring available to children of

incarcerated parents as well as how to achieve desired levels of mentor and youth engagement in programs. From the standpoint of outcome evaluation, the study should be structured to improve knowledge of the ways in which effects on youth outcomes may be contingent on different program characteristics and practices (such as, for example, one-on-one vs. group mentoring format, types and amount of training provided to mentors), key features of mentoring relationships, and the widely varying life circumstances and backgrounds of children of incarcerated parents (such as, for example, the youth's relationship with the incarcerated parent and availability of support from existing adults in the youth's social network). As demonstrated in the Listening Session, large numbers of grassroots programs, including those that are faith-based, have a longstanding commitment to mentoring children with incarcerated parents. These organizations—many of which have been able to develop and refine their practices over extended periods of time—will no doubt continue to be pivotal in making high-quality mentoring available to this population. With this in mind, the above-recommended trial should be structured to ensure it will shed light on the effectiveness of smaller, locally-based programs, not only those that operate on a larger scale. Similarly, there clearly is a need to better understand the role of mentoring as an intervention strategy in the context of the much broader array of supports that these youth and their families often need and may receive from a number of different organizations. Clarifying the circumstances when mentoring is most likely to be a valuable complement to other services and how it can be combined most effectively with such supports will be critical for ensuring that youth and their families derive the greatest benefit possible from the investments proposed in this report.

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APPENDIX

Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents (COIP)
Listening Session
September 30, 2013 8:30am – 5:00pm
Eisenhower Executive Office Building, Room # 430

Agenda

8:30–9:00   **Welcome and Introductions**

- Tonya Robinson, Special Assistant to the President for Justice and Regulatory Policy, Domestic Policy Council
- Robert L. Listenbee, Administrator, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

- Attendee Introductions

9:00–9:15   **Overview and Purpose of the Listening Session**

A review of the goals of the listening session, format, and governing principles by the facilitators for the session.

- Dr. David DuBois, Professor, University of Illinois at Chicago
- Dr. Roger Jarjoura, Principal Researcher, American Institutes for Research

9:15–9:45   **Research and Background: Children of Incarcerated Parents (COIP) and Mentoring**

What do we know about children with incarcerated parents?

- Dr. Rebecca Shlafer, Assistant Professor, University of Minnesota

What do we know about what works in mentoring relationships and programs for youth?

- Dr. David DuBois

What do we know about the challenges faced by and the effectiveness of mentoring programs that have served COIP?

- Dr. Roger Jarjoura

9:45–10:00   Break

10:00–11:20   Q & A and Discussion of Presentations

A facilitated discussion allowing participants to react and respond to the information presented:

1. What points resonated with what you know from your own experience?
2. Were things presented that you want to get more clarification on?
3. What did you hear that you want to question or challenge?
4. What was missing from the presentations (either that you can provide perspective on or that you feel is still an unanswered question)?

11:20–11:30   Congressman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott, U.S. House of Representatives

11:30–12:30   Lunch on your own

Due to federal regulations, lunch will not be provided. For convenience, there is a café/deli on the ground floor of the building. **For security purposes, please do not leave the premises for lunch.

12:30–2:15   Discussion: What characteristics of the mentoring relationship would likely best support COIP?

Research points to certain qualities or elements of mentoring relationships as being important contributors to better outcomes for youth (see below). This discussion will focus on the ways in which these (and potentially other) qualities may be important specifically for COIP.

1. Collaborative/developmental orientation
2. Consistency
3. Longevity
4. Closeness/emotional connection
5. Active guidance
6. Advocacy
7. Modeling of positive behaviors
8. Parent engagement

2:15–2:30   Break

2:30–4:00 **Discussion: How might high-quality mentoring relationships be best supported by programs?**

Does it make more sense to build a stand-alone program for COIP or build the capacity of broader mentoring programs with infrastructure and flexibility to respond to a variety of youth, including COIP?

How would the qualities of effective mentoring relationships be translated to practice within a mentoring program serving COIP? Some aspects to consider include:

1. Recruitment
2. Screening
3. Matching
4. Training
5. Support
6. Meeting structure
7. Family engagement
8. External partnerships
9. Closure of match

How do we ensure adequate infrastructure of mentoring programs to effectively serve COIP? Some aspects to consider include:

1. Written protocols/procedures (manualization and communication)
2. Organizational structure and capacity
3. Training of staff
4. Performance measurement
5. How mentoring programs can work most effectively with other supports and services for COIP and their families.

4:00–4:45 **Discussion: Where do we go from here? What needs to happen next?**

What are the take-away points from today's conversation?

How can OJJDP and the Administration help build, support, and enhance successful mentoring programs for COIP?

4:45–5:00 **Closing Remarks**

- D. Paul Monteiro, Associate Director, Office of Public Engagement
- Robert L. Listenbee

NOTES

[1] Although there may be similarities between individuals incarcerated in both jails and prisons (e.g., history of substance use, mental health problems), there are also important differences. The type of offender, sentence length, and availability of services may vary considerably between jail and prisons. In general, in comparison to a county jail, prisons house more serious offenders, for longer periods of time, and have more space, infrastructure, and staff available to provide additional services (e.g., remedial education, chemical health treatment, parenting education). Compared to prisons, jails are often closer to the inmate's residence at the time of arrest, potentially impacting the frequency of family visitation. In addition, the format and rules for visitation differ between jails and prisons. These differences in the type of setting within which a parent is incarcerated are important to keep in mind when considering how the parent-child relationship is maintained during incarceration and the implications that this might have for the outcomes of youth with incarcerated parents (Eddy & Poehlmann, 2010) as well as for mentoring relationships that may be provided to these youth.

[2] Maruschak et al. (2010).

[3] Glaze & Maruschak (2009).

[4] West & Sabol (2008).

[5] Maruschak et al. (2010).

[6] Maruschak et al. (2010).

[7] Maruschak et al. (2010).

[8] Eddy & Poehlmann (2010).

[9] Glaze & Maruschak (2009).

[10] In their systematic review of the literature, Murray, Farrington, and Sekol (2012) examined evidence on the associations between parental incarceration and children's later antisocial behavior (i.e., behaviors that violate societal norms and laws such as delinquency, juvenile arrest, persistent lying and deceit), mental health problems (e.g., anxiety, depression), drug use, and educational performance. In their meta-analysis, the most rigorous studies that controlled for socio-demographic risk factors (e.g., race, education, poverty), children's antisocial behavior before parental incarceration, or parental criminality (e.g., prior criminal convictions). Murray and colleagues (2012) found that parental incarceration was associated with children's increased risk for antisocial behavior, but not for mental health problems, drug use, or poor educational performance (Murray et al., 2012). Although previous studies have found parental incarceration to have multiple types of adverse effects on children's outcomes, results suggest that when important co-occurring risk factors are taken into account, the only outcome that appears to be uniquely affected by parental incarceration is children's antisocial behavior.

[11] Lee et al. (2013).

[12] For comprehensive meta-analytic reviews of youth mentoring program evaluations, see DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, & Cooper (2002) and DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, & Valentine (2011); for meta-analytic reviews of evaluations of youth mentoring program effects on outcomes associated with delinquency, see Tolan, Henry, Schoeny, & Bass, 2008; and Tolan, Henry, Schoeny, Lovegrove, & Nichols (2013); and for a meta-analysis of evaluations of school-based mentoring programs, see Wheeler, Keller, & DuBois (2010).

[13] DuBois et al. (2011).

[14] DuBois et al. (2011); Herrera, DuBois, & Grossman (2013).

[15] Rhodes (2005).

[16] DuBois et al. (2011).

[17] DuBois et al. (2011).

[18] DuBois et al. (2002, 2011); Tolan et al. (2008, 2013); Wheeler et al. (2010). DuBois et al. (2011) found in their meta-analysis that the typical benefit of program participation was equivalent to a difference of 9 percentile points from scores of nonmentored youth on the same measures.

[19] DuBois et al. (2011).

[20] Walker (2005).

[21] DuBois et al. (2002, 2011); Tolan et al. (2013).

[22] See, for example, Grossman & Rhodes (2002); Grossman, Chan, Schwartz, & Rhodes (2011); Karcher (2005); and Spencer (2007).

[23] DuBois et al. (2011).

[24] DuBois et al. (2011). Juvenile offending in this context refers to formal involvement with the juvenile justice system, and educational attainment would entail outcomes such as completion of high school and postsecondary education. Current support for the capacity of mentoring programs to impact these and other outcomes positively with high levels of policy interest (e.g., obesity) is for the most part restricted to evaluations of programs that have focused specifically on these goals. For juvenile offending, see, for example, Jarjoura (2005); for educational attainment, see, for example, Anderson, Christenson, Sinclair, & Lehr (2004); for obesity, see Black et al. (2010); for adolescent pregnancy, see Black et al. (2006).

[25] A recent randomized controlled study (O'Donnell & Williams, 2013) examined long-term effects of the Buddy System, a mentoring program for youth between the ages of 11 and 17, on adult criminal offenses 35 years later. The proportions of the control and participant groups with adult arrests did not differ significantly (46.4% and 47.8%, respectively, from Table I of O'Donnell & Williams, 2013). The study did find evidence of a significant beneficial effect of the program on reducing the likelihood of adult arrest among those who had been arrested in the year before program referral as well as a significant effect in the opposite (i.e., harmful) direction among females without a history of prior arrest at program referral. These divergent findings, which are similar to variable impacts on arrest rates immediately following program participation (O'Donnell, Lydgate, & Fo, 1979), were interpreted by the authors as "peer network" effects that had been created during the opportunities the program provided for youth to interact with one another during their participation.

[26] See, in particular, Lee, Aos, Drake, Pennucci, Miller, & Anderson (2012).

[27] Foster (2014).

[28] Rhodes (2005); Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam (2006).

[29] Bayer, Grossman, & DuBois (2013); Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, Feldman, & McMaken (2007).

[30] DuBois & Silverthorn (2005).

[31] Herrera, Sipe, & McClanahan (2000); Morrow & Styles (1995); Styles & Morrow (1992).

[32] Karcher, Roy-Carlson, Benne, Gil-Hernandez, Allen, & Gomez (2006).

[33] Although whether the youth and mentor share the same racial/ethnic background could be expected to be consequential as to whether a positive emotional bond is formed in the relationship, existing research provides little support for this (see Sanchez & Colon, 2005; Sanchez, Colon-Torres, Feuer, Roundfield, & Berardi, 2014). The consequences, if any, in this regard of mentor and youth being of the same gender (Bogat & Liang, 2005; Liang, Bogat, & Duffy, 2014) or sharing comparable socio-economic backgrounds (Deutsch, Lawrence, & Henneberger, 2014) have received very limited investigation to date. There is evidence, however, to indicate that perceptions of similarity (e.g., in interests or personality) may tend to foster stronger and longer-term relationships between mentors and youth (Ensher & Murphy, 1997; Herrera et al., 2000; Madia & Lutz, 2004). Likewise, as discussed later in this report, research suggests that an emphasis on similarity of interests when pairing youth and mentors enhances the effectiveness of mentoring programs in terms of promoting positive outcomes for youth (DuBois et al., 2011).

[34] For an in-depth examination of goals in mentoring relationships, a review of relevant empirical literature, see Balcazar & Keys (2014).

[35] DuBois et al. (2011); Tolan et al. (2013).

[36] See, for example, Grossman & Rhodes (2002); Herrera et al. (2000); Klaw, Rhodes, & Fitzgerald (2003); McLearn, Colasanto, & Schoen (1998); Parra, DuBois, Neville, Pugh-Lilly, & Povinelli (2002); and Schwartz, Rhodes, Spencer, & Grossman (2013).

[37] Rhodes & DuBois (2006).

[38] See, for example, Elledge, Cavell, Ogle, & Newgent (2010) and Wyman et al. (2010).

[39] Grossman & Rhodes (2002).

[40] Grossman et al. (2011).

[41] These are not the only circumstances under which research indicates mentoring relationships can have a counter-productive or negative influence on youth. Others include inconsistent follow-through on established expectations, an overly prescriptive style, and mentors modeling unhealthy behaviors (Rhodes & DuBois, 2006; Rhodes, Liang, & Spencer, 2014). These possibilities exist alongside the potential for sexual abuse and other types of overt exploitation that, although thankfully rare by all available indications, clearly represent the most egregious of possible risks attendant to the trust and emotional investment that a young person places in a mentor figure (Kremer & Cooper, 2014).

[42] Keller & Blakeslee (2014).

[43] Spencer, Basualdo-Delmonico, & Lewis (2010).

[44] Eddy et al. (2014).

[45] ICF International (2011). The favorable program effects on outcomes reported in this evaluation involved more favorable change from baseline to follow-up assessments for youth assigned to receive mentoring in comparison to the change observed for youth assigned randomly to the control group.

[46] The proportion of youth with incomplete follow-up data was substantially higher for youth in the treatment (mentored) group (61%) than those in the control group (37%). The study report does not address the reasons for this differential attrition, which represents a significant source of potential bias in the findings of evaluation studies. One possibility is that no concerted effort was made to collect follow-up data from those in the treatment group whose mentoring relationships had ended and who were no longer being served by the agency. If this is the case, the differential attrition would be of considerable concern because youth with shorter mentoring relationships are likely to be less well-adjusted than other youth before mentoring program participation (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002; see Grossman, 2005, for an excellent explanation of the bias that can result from systematically excluding such youth from study analyses, which is discussed under the topic of "suspicious comparisons"). It is also noteworthy that only approximately one-third of parents of eligible youth who were approached agreed to study participation (for them and their children). It is thus unclear whether the study's results generalize to the larger population of children with incarcerated parents served by the agencies involved in the research.

[47] Further findings bearing on the effectiveness of mentoring for children of incarcerated parents were reported in a recent evaluation that involved seven community-based mentoring programs in the Pacific Northwest (five of which were BBBS agencies). The sample for this evaluation included youth ranging in age from 8 to 15 years. Analyses tested for differences in estimated program effects based on whether the youths' parent/caregiver reported that a parent or other close family member was incarcerated or had frequent problems with the police. A difference was evident for 3 of the 10 outcomes tested: trust in the parent–child relationship, depressive symptoms, and number of outcomes showing negative change. In all instances, youth with a family member incarcerated or experiencing frequent problems with the law (about one-quarter of the study sample) did not seem to benefit from mentoring program participation; whereas significant program benefits were evident for the other youth in the study. For three of the remaining outcomes for which differences were not found (perceived social acceptance, grades in school as reported by youth, and number of outcomes showing positive change), the benefits of mentoring program participation were evident at the level of the overall sample and thus may well have been evident for youth who had family members experiencing incarceration or related challenges.

[48] In this research, youth assigned to the treatment group also were asked to report on the quality of their mentoring relationships using several scales designed for this purpose. In each of the areas addressed—youth-centeredness (e.g., taking the youth's interests into consideration when planning activities), emotional engagement (e.g., feeling happy or special when spending time with mentor), and satisfaction (e.g., youth not reporting feeling made fun of by the mentor)—ratings were comparable to those obtained for similar, although not identical, versions of the same scales in the landmark evaluation of the BBBS community-based mentoring program (see Grossman & Johnson, 1999).

[49] See, in particular, DuBois et al. (2002, 2011); MENTOR (2009).

[50] MENTOR (2009), p. 2.

[51] DuBois et al. (2011). A notable exception in the current evidence base is the lack of significant research examining the effectiveness of e-mentoring. In their meta-analysis, DuBois et al. (2011) were unable to locate controlled evaluations of any program that utilized e-mentoring as its primary format.

[52] Weinberger (2005).

[53] MENTOR (2009).

[54] Stukas et al. (2014).

[55]

http://www.bigbrobigsis.com/site/c.dvKQIaOWImJaH/b.6625367/k.F3E3/Mentoring_Children_of_Prisoners_Program.htm

[56] Stukas, Clary, & Snyder (2014).

[57] Weinberger (2005).

[58] Stukas et al. (2014).

[59] Stukas et al. (2014).

[60]In their review of the research, Stukas et al. (2014) summarized the evidence with regard to the best outcomes related to the quality of the mentoring relationship. Higher-quality relationships have been found to be more likely when the mentor demonstrated empathy. There is also research that found that mentors were more likely to fulfill their commitment to the relationship (i.e., sustained the relationship past the minimum length of time to which they committed) when they were abstract thinkers, conscientious, and imaginative. DuBois et al. (2011) found that programs were more effective when there was a good fit between the educational or occupational backgrounds of mentors and the goals of the program.

[61] See http://www.mentoryouth.com/index.cfm/fuseaction/recruitment.ideas.

[62] Weinberger (2005).

[63] DuBois et al. (2011).

[64] Herrera, DuBois, & Grossman (2013).

[65] Kremer & Cooper (2014).

[66] Kremer & Cooper (2014). Similarly, the *Elements* identifies a number of benchmarks under the standard of Mentor Screening. These include at least one face-to-face interview with the prospective mentor; professional and personal reference checks on the applicant; and a "a comprehensive criminal background check on adult mentor, including searching a national criminal records database along with sex offender and child abuse registries." (MENTOR, 2009, p. 6)

[67] Jarjoura (2005).

[68] DuBois et al. (2002); Pryce et al. (2014).

[69] Pryce et al. (2014).

[70] Pryce et al. (2014).

[71] Schwartz et al. (2013).

[72] MENTOR (2009).

[73] Weinberger (2005).

[74] Kupersmidt & Rhodes (2014); Weinberger (2005). Training has been directly linked to mentor retention and mentee outcomes. Effective training affects mentoring outcomes by improving mentors' feelings of closeness, support, satisfaction, and efficacy. Some research has identified a link between training and match length, which may ultimately affect how much of an impact the mentoring relationship has on positive outcomes. See also Herrera et al. (2013) and Herrera et al. (2000). Herrera et al. (2000), for example, found that mentors in community- and school-based programs who received at least 6 hours of pre-match training reported higher levels of closeness with their mentees than those who received less than 6 hours, and that mentor who received less than 2 hours reported the lowest levels of closeness.

[75] Kupersmidt & Rhodes (2014).

[76] Kupersmidt & Rhodes (2014).

[77] Kupersmidt & Rhodes (2014).

[78] Kupersmidt & Rhodes (2014).

[79] Kupersmidt & Rhodes (2014).

[80] DuBois et al. (2002).

[81] MENTOR (2009).

[82] Weinberger (2005).

[83] Herrera et al. (2013).

[84] DuBois et al. (2002).

[85] Grossman & Rhodes (2002); Schwartz et al. (2013).

[86] Balcazar & Keys (2014).

[87] Tolan et al. (2013).

[88] DuBois et al. (2002).

[89] Taylor & Porcellini (2014).

[90] See, for example, http://www.iyi.org/resources/mentor/pdf/Indiana-Mentoring-Partnership-Brochure.pdf

[91] Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico (2014).

[92] MENTOR (2009), p. 16.

[93] Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico (2014).

[94] Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico (2014).

[95] Shlafer, Poehlmann, Coffino, & Hanneman (2009) as cited in Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico (2014).

[96] Herrera et al. (2013).

[97] Weinberger (2005).

[98] Weinberger (2005).

[99] Spencer & Basualdo-Delmonico (2014).

[100] Weinberger (2005).

[101] Weinberger (2005).

[102] See DuBois (2014) for an in-depth discussion of process evaluation for youth mentoring programs.