



Mentoring Resource Center

FACT SHEET

In This Issue . . .

...We take a look at the importance of mentor retention and explore practical ways mentoring programs can keep volunteers engaged, motivated, and committed over the long term.

The Pub Hub (beginning on page 8) focuses on resources to help you infuse the creative arts into your mentoring programs, including both printed and online art activity guides.



More Than Saying Thank You:

Comprehensive Approaches to Mentor Retention

Anyone who has ever run a mentoring program will agree that volunteer recruitment is a major, ongoing challenge that requires considerable investments of time, energy, and resources. They would also agree that even the most carefully planned recruitment efforts may not yield sufficient volunteers to provide mentors for every child waiting for one. Each volunteer who passes through the screening process is therefore a precious commodity, an opportunity for another child to be matched and to develop a lasting, positive relationship with a new adult friend.

Yet, alarmingly, as many as half of volunteer mentoring relationships terminate within the first few months of the match (Rhodes, 2006). Findings from recent mentoring research, such as Grossman and Rhodes' (2002) study of BBBS programs, clearly show that youth in matches that end prematurely actually have worse outcomes in several key areas than youth who are never mentored. And matches that last longer than 12 months are significantly more likely to achieve positive outcomes. Thus, in terms of youth outcomes, keeping volunteers is at least as important as recruiting them in the first place.

Volunteers who end their service early generally do so for one of two main reasons: because of a significant change in personal circumstances that impedes their ability to fulfill their obligations, or because they are dissatisfied in some way with the volunteer experience. As practitioners, we can do very little to affect the circumstantial issues causing early termination, but we do have considerable control over ensuring that mentors have a satisfying and rewarding volunteer experience. This fact sheet explores practical ways mentoring programs can keep volunteers engaged, motivated, and committed over the long term.

Volunteer retention requires a comprehensive approach

What keeps mentors coming through your doors every week? What motivates them to take on a second mentee when their first match ends? Emerging research on volunteer motivation and retention indicates that formal recognition is perhaps the least significant reason volunteers continue. In fact, several studies that asked people why they stopped volunteering indicate that the ways volunteers are utilized and treated are more important in retaining them than demonstrations of thanks. Among the primary reasons given in these studies for ending volunteer service were:

- Organization not well managed
- Lack of training
- Time or skills not used well
- Lack of clarity about the volunteer assignment
- Too much responsibility/not enough responsibility
- Lack of support and supervision

Not feeling appreciated and not being thanked are also cited, but less frequently (McCurley & Lynch, 2005).

In short, people who volunteer need an experience that is personally satisfying, with an organization that shows its appreciation by providing the tools, training, and support needed to do the job well. They need to feel:

- Appreciated
- Useful

- Successful
- Involved/empowered
- Committed/connected to your organization
- Fulfilled by the experience
- Important – the work they do is recognized by the larger community

It's important to remember that volunteer retention is an *outcome*, not a *task*. Unlike recruitment, you can't set out to "do" volunteer retention. Your success in achieving this outcome will be the *result* of a comprehensive set of approaches, strategies, and activities that help keep your volunteers engaged. These retention-focused approaches begin with recruitment messages and don't end until the volunteer leaves your organization after a long and successful term of service. They represent a continuum that encompasses:

- Recruitment strategies
- New mentor orientation and training
- Physical site structure and environment
- Support and supervision
- Agency-wide commitment to volunteers
- Meaningful recognition and acknowledgment

Mentor motivation: An important factor in retention

One significant factor in retaining volunteers is understanding their underlying motivations for seeking a satisfying volunteer experience. We know that people who volunteer are motivated to do so for a wide variety of reasons: to enhance personal or professional skills, give back to their community, meet new people, feel better about themselves, or gain social or community prestige. Some motivations are altruistic—"I want to make a difference to others less fortunate than myself"—while others are more selfish—"I need to gain youth-related experience in order to pursue my career goal." Volunteers generally are motivated by more than one interest, and as they volunteer their motivations may change, becoming more altruistic as they connect with their work and the organization they work for (Rhodes, 2006).

Using the VFI for Volunteer Retention

Volunteer Function/ Motivation	Examples of Mentor Retention Activities
Values: expressing humanitarian and prosocial values through action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information about the progress of their mentees and program outcomes • Emphasize their dedication and caring actions during recognition events • Encourage them to participate in community service activities with their mentee
Enhancement: to boost self-esteem, feel important and needed by others, and form new friendships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure that mentees, staff, and organizational leaders voice their thanks to mentors • Provide group outings and other opportunities for socializing with other mentors and staff • Frequently praise mentors for their positive qualities
Social: satisfying the expectations of friends and close others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find ways to share your appreciation of volunteers with their employers and co-workers • Invite friends or family members to participate in mentor-mentee picnics • Send thank-you cards to volunteers' homes so they can share them with family members
Understanding: desiring to gain greater understanding of the world, the diverse people in it, and, ultimately, oneself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide ongoing training opportunities that help mentors learn more about mentoring, youth service, and other relevant topics • Inform mentors about other opportunities to learn, such as community events, books, or online articles • Encourage mentors and mentees to reflect together about their relationship, such as through journaling
Protective: seeking to distract oneself from, or work through, personal problems in the context of service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer extra praise and one-on-one support time to reinforce their personal growth as mentors • Encourage them to draw on their own experiences as they develop relationships with mentees • Help mentors reflect on the ways that volunteering makes them feel good about themselves
Career: exploring career options and gaining career-related experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invite outside speakers to training events who can expand awareness of careers working with youth • Provide written documentation of completed training and hours of volunteer service • Include opportunities for professional networking at mentor training or other group meetings

Researchers studying volunteerism tend to agree these motivations are a key factor in both the initiation of volunteer service and in ongoing participation of volunteers over time. Simply, volunteers whose motivations and needs are met through their service are more likely to keep coming back.

One significant tool to help identify and understand volunteer motivations is the Volunteer Function Inventory (VFI). Since its development, research (such as Clary, Snyder, & Stukas, 1996) has shown it to be accurate in predicting the types of volunteer work people will gravitate to depending on their personal motivations, as well as how rewarding they will find the experience to have been upon reflection.

The six main categories of motivations identified by Clary and colleagues are:

- Values: expressing humanitarian and pro-social values through action
- Career: exploring career options and increasing career opportunities
- Understanding: learning about the world, the diverse people in it, and, ultimately, oneself
- Enhancement: boosting self-esteem, feeling important and needed by others
- Protective: distracting oneself from, or working through, personal problems through service
- Social: satisfying the expectations of friends or family, making new friends

Whether you use the VFI at screening or not, you can learn about what motivates your volunteers as they move through the screening process, and this information can help you provide more individualized encouragement and support to mentors throughout the match (see table on p. 3). For additional information on this topic, see the list of MRC resources at the end of this article.

Infusing retention into everything you do

As a mentoring professional, you are naturally focused on your volunteers, who are the essential ingredient for the services you provide to youth. But it's easy to miss seeing the forest for the trees when it comes to volunteer retention: you can't always see how each piece of your work affects how volunteers feel about the overall experience. Assessing your organization in the context of volunteer retention can yield useful information and opportunities to make simple changes or enhancements that can greatly improve volunteer retention.

The following framework and assessment questions may be helpful as you review your agency's current practices and develop new approaches:

✓ Recruitment and selection: setting up expectations

In the rush to find volunteers it's easy to paint a rosy picture of mentoring, both in recruitment materials and during the screening process. The messages that you use to attract volunteers will stick with them as they begin working with mentees. If the realities of the mentoring experience do not match their expectations, mentors may become discouraged or disillusioned and may decide not to continue. Sometimes even simple things lead to retention problems, such as misunderstandings about scheduling or the length of service. Take some time to review your recruitment and selection process, the messages you are using, and the information you provide as potential mentors go through your screening and selection process:

- What are you telling your volunteers about the experience they will have? Are your messages about mentoring and the youth you serve realistic?

- What motivations do your recruitment messages address and are they appropriate given your program goals and structure? For example, if you emphasize that mentoring can provide an opportunity to meet new people, be sure your program includes such opportunities for volunteers.
- Does your screening and interview process help you learn about the volunteers' motivations, strengths, and limitations, and their personal goals for the mentoring experience?
- Do you provide thorough information up front about such details as time commitment, meetings and training requirements, travel distances, length of service, and physical environment of match meetings? Sometimes volunteers give assurances that they can meet these requirements without thinking them through, so make sure they understand your expectations and can meet them.

✓ New mentor training: Preparing mentors for their role

Initial training should help mentors understand why their work is important, how your organization works, and the mentoring program's expected outcomes. Review your initial training and orientation to make sure you are providing mentors with realistic, practical information and a clear sense of their purpose and role. Specifically:

- Does training emphasize a youth development approach that encourages relationship development over "making mentees change"?
- Do mentors have an opportunity to share their hopes and expectations for the volunteer experience and to learn about how mentoring relationships develop and change over time?
- Do mentors learn what activities they will be doing with mentees—and why?
- Are practical details reviewed and provided in writing, such as location, meeting schedule, contact information, and policies and procedures?
- Do mentors gain an understanding of your program's short- and long-term goals, how your organization is structured, and how mentoring fits within your entire organization?

✓ Creating a supportive environment: Making the volunteer feel welcome

There is nothing more daunting when starting a new experience than finding yourself in a strange setting with no one available to help you find your way. Adults who mentor in school settings may not have entered a school building since they were students themselves, so it is especially important to help them feel comfortable as quickly as possible. A well-organized space, thorough site orientation, and simple welcoming details will go a long way to making your volunteers feel valued.

- Where do mentors go on their first day? Who greets them?
- If your program is in a school, do they meet important staff, such as the school secretary, principal, librarian?
- Does the room matches meet in feel welcoming? Are there photos of other mentors on a bulletin board or positive images of youth and adults on the walls?
- Do volunteers know what is expected for the first few weeks and do they have what they need to get off to a good start with mentees?
- Are activities and supplies kept in good order, easy to access, with clear instructions about their use?
- Do they have all needed contact information, a visitor or volunteer badge, schedule, how to handle an emergency, and other details?
- After that first session, does someone thank them for coming and ask how their meeting went? Is that person regularly available?
- Is there a designated space where mentors can chat with each other or with the site coordinator, pick up any new information, or just sit and reflect?

✓ Ongoing training and supervision: Meaningful ways to support mentors

Building quality training and support activities for

mentors to enhance their experience is an important piece of mentor retention. Chances are you will have a mix of volunteers, some college age, others in retirement, still others who are squeezing mentoring into an already busy work life. While it is not usually realistic to individualize mentor training and support, mentors will feel respected and valued if they know you have considered their specific motivations, needs, interests, and situations when designing support activities.

When developing plans for providing ongoing training, supervision, and support, consider these questions:

- Does your program conduct regular, personal check-ins with mentors that provide an opportunity for them to talk about how the match is going, ask questions, and voice concerns or frustrations, and obtain advice and support?
- Do mentors understand your expectations for maintaining regular contact with them, including the methods and frequency of check-ins, any written reporting requirements, and other details? Are these expectations reasonable and likely to be followed by all volunteers?
- Do mentors know your expectations regarding attendance at meetings, support group sessions, or formal training events?
- Are you using what you know about your mentors' motivations, expectations, schedules, skills, and interests to develop varied training and group support activities?
- Are training or support group events meaningful and not likely to be considered a "waste of time" by volunteers?
- Are events scheduled well in advance and detailed information provided to mentors?
- Do mentors have regular opportunities to evaluate trainings and other mentor events and to offer suggestions for new topics or activities?
- Do mentors know how to get one-on-one support from staff when needed?

✓ **Building connection and belonging: Agency-wide commitment to volunteers**

A significant factor in retention is the extent to which volunteers feel connected to the organization they serve. Volunteers whose ideas and opinions are regularly sought, who learn about the entire organization and receive regular updates on its activities, who see that the agency commits adequate resources to the program, and who generally feel like part of the team, are more likely to feel committed and connected to the organization and to continue volunteering (McCurley & Lynch, 2005).

Think about how your program helps mentors feel connected and supported by the entire organization:

- Do you offer multiple opportunities for mentors to give feedback on mentoring activities and other aspects of the program, through such avenues as brief surveys, verbal check-ins, or idea boxes? Do you solicit—and use—their ideas for new activities or program enhancements?
- Do mentors have opportunities to take leadership roles, such as developing a group activity, sharing a skill, designing a new poster or flyer, participating on a committee?
- Do mentors receive agency-wide newsletters and other information that helps them understand the work of the entire organization?
- Do mentors have access at your site to spaces reserved for staff, such as a teachers' lounge, staff bathrooms, office space, or lunchroom?
- Does your principal, CEO, program director, or other leadership make occasional visits to the mentoring site when mentors are present?
- Do school and agency staff not involved in your mentoring program know who your mentors are, and do they greet them as they enter or leave the building?
- Does your organization demonstrate its commitment to the mentoring program by allocating adequate funds for supplies, making

the physical space inviting, and keeping the program running smoothly?

- Does the organization recognize the program's achievements in board reports, publicity releases, and other materials? Are these materials shared with mentors?

✓ **Recognizing volunteers throughout the year: Many ways to show appreciation**

Last but certainly not least, regularly acknowledging and thanking your mentors is an important part of retention, especially when your expressions of appreciation complement the ongoing attention you give to making mentors feel like they are a vital part of your work. They can include a spectrum of approaches: a simple thank-you each time the mentor makes a meeting, personalized notes of encouragement, a special treat at a mentor meeting, a newsletter highlighting matches, or a formal recognition ceremony. Take the time to review how you recognize volunteers, how you can enhance what you are already doing, and how ongoing volunteer recognition can become part of your agency's culture.

- Is volunteer recognition happening at many levels and at many times throughout the year? Try making a list of all the ways your mentors receive acknowledgment and recognition.
- Who is involved in recognizing and thanking mentors? Develop and support appropriate ways for mentees, parents, school or partner agency staff, agency leadership, and board members to participate in this important task.
- Does your program personalize some recognition activities, expressing appreciation in a way that a specific volunteer will find meaningful? For example, one volunteer may really appreciate those free basketball tickets your program obtained, while an invitation to have coffee with you would make another mentor feel valued.
- Do you consider volunteer motivations when crafting recognition activities and approaches? For example, mentors with

strong connections to their families and friends will appreciate an occasional family picnic or other social event to which guests can be invited.

- Do you recognize different accomplishments in different ways? For example, a simple expression of thanks each time a mentor shows up for a match meeting rewards their consistency, while a write-up in your monthly newsletter gives special recognition for a mentor who recruits five new volunteers one month. Mentors will appreciate extra recognition for going the extra mile.
- If you hold annual recognition events, do they really achieve the goal of making volunteers feel appreciated and valued, or are they more work than they are worth? While public recognition is important, it may be possible to achieve that goal in other ways, such as including volunteers in your company picnic and giving them all a round of applause, or taking out a half-page ad in the local newspaper thanking your mentors. Be creative in finding cost effective, fun, and meaningful ways to give public thanks to mentors.

In conclusion...

By providing your mentors with a welcoming and well-organized environment, clear information about the mentoring experience, quality training and ongoing support, and meaningful forms of recognition for work well done, your program will be more likely to keep volunteers coming back. These volunteers will also be more likely to recommend your organization to others interested in mentoring, providing you with a larger pool of potential new mentors. And, most

important, these satisfied and committed volunteers will be able to provide the youth you serve with a positive mentoring experience that will truly make a difference in their lives.

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References

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- Grossman, J.B., & Rhodes, J.E. (2002). The test of time: Predictors and effects of duration in youth mentoring programs. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 30(2).
- McCurley, S., & Lynch, R. (2005). *Keeping volunteers: A guide to retention* [Electronic version]. Denver, CO: Fat Cat.
- Rhodes, J. (2006, April). "From intention to action: Strategies for recruiting and retaining today's volunteers," Research Corner, National Mentoring Partnership. Downloaded February 25, 2009, from http://www.mentoring.org/access_research/strategies_all/

Additional Reading and Resources

"Utilizing volunteer motivations for mentor recruitment and retention," in *Special Issues in Targeted Mentor Recruitment*, an MRC Web seminar presented on February 20, 2008. http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/recruitment_book.pdf

Fact Sheet 8: Volunteer motivation and mentor recruitment, March 2006. <http://www.edmentoring.org/pubs/factsheet8.pdf>

The Pub Hub

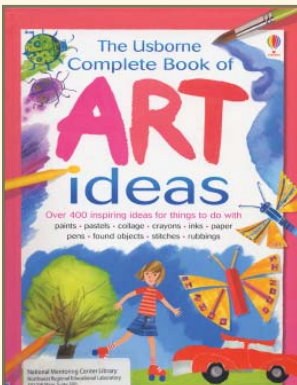
A Look at Publications and Tools You Can Use!

This month's PubHub focuses on the Arts, including both printed and online art activity guides. Also, a recording of an MRC Web seminar on the topic of infusing creativity into mentoring programs, presented April 7 by Sarah Kremer of Friends for Youth, will be available for viewing on our Web site later in April.

Please contact library coordinators Michael Garringer (garringm@nwrel.org) or Kay Logan (logank@nwrel.org) if you have any questions about searching or using the collection.

From the Lending Library

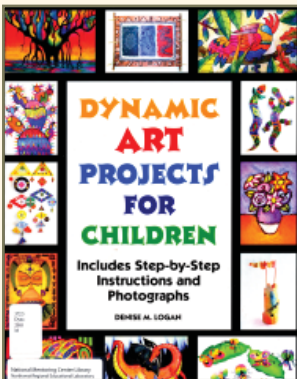
The Usborne Complete Book of Art Ideas: Over 400 Inspiring Ideas for Things to Do, by Fiona Watt, 2004, EDC Publishing



This beautifully illustrated book is full of fun, low-cost visual art activities that would be great for mentors and mentees to do together, or for group activities. It is a useful book to have on hand at sites where your matches are meeting. There are activities appropriate for a wide range of ages, many of which could be completed in a single session.

The step-by-step instructions are clear, and mentors and mentees without much experience with art projects will find them easy and fun.

Library link: <http://www.nwrel.org/resource/singlere-source.asp?id=17919&DB=res>



Dynamic Art Projects for Children, by Denise M. Logan, 2005, Crystal Productions

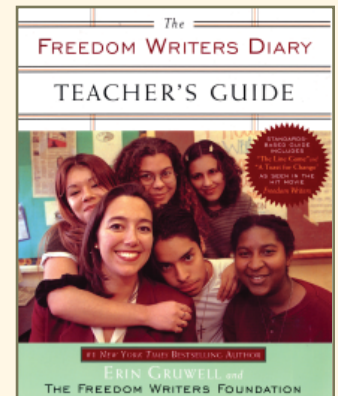
This visual art activity book is designed to be used with elementary-age children in both group and one-on-one settings. Again, the instructions will make it easy for your mentees and mentors to follow along. One great thing about this book is the inclusion of

useful templates of motifs from all over the world for mask making, making appliqués, and creating folk art.

Library link: <http://www.nwrel.org/resource/singlere-source.asp?id=17920&DB=res>

The Freedom Writers Diary, Teacher's Guide, by Erin Gruwell and the Freedom Writers Foundation, 2007, Broadway Books

This resource for activities to inspire youth to write comes from the teacher behind the bestselling book and hit movie *Freedom Writers*, documenting the true story of her high school students who turned their lives around through journaling about their experiences with violence, gangs, poverty, drugs, and academic difficulties. It is a very rich resource, and even though it is aimed at high school students, some of the activities, and certainly most of the approaches, would be great to use with younger students. Activities are designed to inspire journaling, prompt writing, and create a youth voice for positive community change.



Library link: <http://www.nwrel.org/resource/singlere-source.asp?id=17994&DB=res>

Academic Activity Guide: A Learning Resource for Mentors and Mentees, by Heather Laird, 2003, Friends for Youth Mentoring Institute

This is one of our favorite activity guides because it offers a wealth of constructive learning activities designed specifically for mentoring matches. Along with activities for science, math, and social studies, there is a section devoted to language arts activities. Activities are adaptable to a wide range of ages, and they are designed to stimulate interest in learning and discovery and to nurture the development of the mentoring relationship itself. This resource also includes a list of fiction for adolescents.

Library link: <http://www.nwrel.org/resource/singlere-source.asp?id=17517&DB=res>



Online Resources

■ **YouthARTS, Arts Programs for Youth at Risk: the Handbook, by Marlene Farnum and Rebecca Schaffer, 1998, Americans for the Arts, (<http://www.americans-forthearts.org/youtharts/>)**

This comprehensive online toolkit describes the implementation of comprehensive arts-based prevention and diversion programs for youth involved in the juvenile justice system or struggling with school. It covers program planning, working with parole officers and case workers, recruiting and training artists, appealing to funders, and program evaluation. The toolkit also includes companion videos that can be viewed online, including one on the transformative power of arts programming to engage struggling youth, and another giving an in-depth look at how three demonstration sites implemented art programs for youth involved in the juvenile justice system.

■ **Afterschool Training Toolkit: Promising Practices in Afterschool, by the National Center for Quality Afterschool, SEDL, 2004–2009, WGBH Educational Foundation, (<http://www.sedl.org/afterschool/toolkits/>)**

This online resource for afterschool programs has activities and practices that could easily be modified for mentoring programs. There are activities to build art and writing skills, promote literacy, and help youth use technology for creativity and storytelling. Each module has an overview, a template for planning the lesson/activity, detailed instructions, and additional resources on the topic that can serve as a gateway to a wealth of online arts resources for your matches to explore.

■ **The Learning Center for the United States Library of Congress American Memory Project, (<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/ndlpedu/>)**

For over 10 years, the Library of Congress has been digitizing its collection and making it available online. The collection now includes over seven million photos, historical documents, and music and film clips documenting all aspects of American life. As part of this massive project, they have created a learning center for educators and kids to serve as a portal for exploring the collection. The Learning Center offers a wealth of online activities and themed guidance on a broad range of fascinating topics such as the history of the civil rights movement, immigrant stories, women's stories, Hispanic American Heritage, and the invention of flying machines. Whether your matches are interested in exploring history and culture, or are interested in art, photography, writing, and music, this site is a rich resource.

■ **PBS Teachers, (<http://www.pbs.org/teachers/>)**

The Public Broadcasting System has created this rich site, which includes a search function to identify activities and lesson plans by grade range and topic. Topics run the gamut from art history, to dance, photography, filmmaking, and writing, so this is a great way to track down age-appropriate activities specific to a mentee's particular interest. The site also has a lot of content on creative and appropriate use of media that may spark some activity ideas. For example, a recent feature article described how to use Web 2.0 tools to explore Shakespeare.

■ **NGA Kids, (<http://www.nga.gov/kids/kids.htm>)**

Most major art museums now host Web sites for kids with all sorts of activities. This site, from the National Gallery of Art, focuses on interactive art kids can make online, including virtual painting and photography tools, and might be particularly useful for site-based programs that don't have art software. There are also wonderful exploratory activities hosted by the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York: <http://www.metmuseum.org/explore/index.asp>; and the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles: http://www.getty.edu/education/for_kids/, among others.

■ **The Comic Book Project, (<http://www.comicbook-project.org>)**

This fun nationwide project is aimed at promoting both visual and written literacy, and was originated by Dr. Michael Bitz at Columbia University. It engages middle school students in writing, sketching, designing, and publishing original comic books. At the beginning of each school year, a theme is announced. Past themes have included "Bullying Backfires," and "If I Ruled the World..." Every child who completes a comic book is featured on the Web site art gallery. Also, through a partnership with Dark-Horse Comics, winning comics are selected for printing and nationwide distribution.

■ **The Groovy Little Youth Media Sourcebook, by Jesikah Maria Ross & Listen Up!, 2001 Learning Matters, Inc. (<http://listenup.org/ymip/?p=curricula>)**

This online publication includes a section of group activities to get youth communicating, working in teams, and thinking of multimedia strategies to convey their messages. Many of the activities focus on video projects. The sourcebook also includes tips for working with groups of youth on projects and exhibiting and presenting projects to the community.

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New Policy Brief Explores Mentoring's Next Steps

Five of the most prominent researchers in the youth mentoring field have teamed up to produce a new policy brief that explores what we know about youth mentoring and makes important recommendations to the field about future priorities and next steps. Written by Timothy Cavell (University of Arkansas), David DuBois (University of Illinois at Chicago), Michael Karcher (University of Texas at San Antonio), Thomas Keller (Portland State University), and Jean Rhodes (University of Massachusetts, Boston), *Strengthening Mentoring Opportunities for At-Risk Youth* provides sound guidance for the mentoring field. The document can be downloaded in PDF format here: http://www.nwrel.org/mentoring/pdf/mentoring_policy_brief.pdf

The goal of the brief is to start a dialogue among mentoring researchers and practitioners on what the mentoring movement needs in order to keep growing as a key youth development strategy. It outlines what we know about mentoring's strengths and its limitations, describes recent initiatives and innovations in the field, and makes recommendations for next steps in policy development. Says DuBois, "We welcome hearing your comments/observations about the brief and how it may be relevant to the different activities and initiatives in which you are engaged." Dr. DuBois can be reached at dldubois@uic.edu

The Mentoring Resource Center is grateful to the authors for their contributions to the field and for producing this needed document at a critical time in youth mentoring. We urge you to share and discuss this policy brief with your program staff, government and community leaders, and other stakeholders. Healthy exchange between the worlds of research and service providers can only result in stronger programs at the local level and timely, well-considered policy reforms at the state and national levels.

STAMP

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