

# **Mentoring Works: California Programs Making a Difference**

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## **Executive Summary**

Alcohol and other drug use, teen pregnancy, academic failure, and gang participation and violence are four major social ills facing our youth today. The U.S. government invests billions of dollars to fight these challenges, yet not enough results are seen. One strategy that is showing great promise and has solid research results is mentoring. The California Mentor Foundation surveyed over 300 quality assured mentoring programs in California during the summer of 1999. This survey of programs, while not a rigorous scientific design, provides further concurring results that mentoring is having a positive impact. The strength of the survey is in the breadth of youth represented and in the consistency of the results. The Mentoring Movement in California is making a significant difference for youth.

## **Introduction**

California's youth are confronted with what many have called an epidemic of social ills. In 1997, almost 20% of youth ages 12-17 across the United States used an illicit drug. More than 50,000 teenagers in California gave birth. Over 50,000 teens dropped out of school in 1997. Juveniles committed almost 22,000 violent crimes in 1996.

Against this backdrop of problems, the California Mentor Initiative has been gaining momentum for the past seven years. There are currently over 300 mentor programs that have passed a quality assurance review and operate serving the needs of youth. Until the California Mentor Foundation conducted this survey, there was not a single assessment of the overall impact of the current mentoring effort. The statistics are quite powerful and speak for themselves regarding the necessity of mentoring in our communities.

## **Methodology**

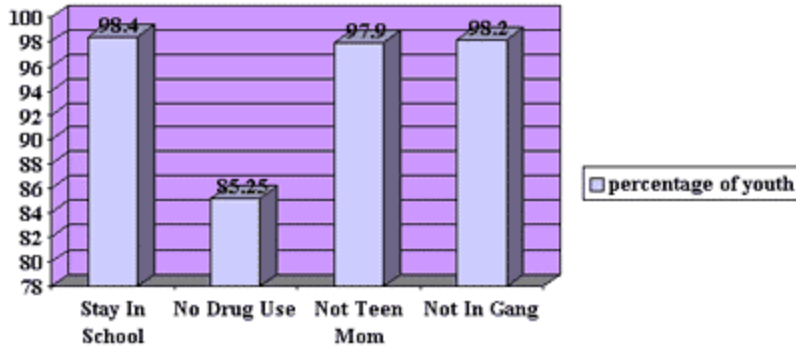
A simple survey was sent out to all 312 quality approved mentor programs in California. The survey asked six questions:

- 1) Numbers of mentors in 1998-1999
- 2) Number of participants served
- 3) Number that stayed in school
- 4) Number that did not use drugs
- 5) Number that did not become a teen mom
- 6) Number that did not join a gang

These questions were generally answered by the program director through a review of their program files or existing reports. There were 274 programs contacted and 124 completed the survey. The survey was conducted during the summer months and it is anticipated that school-based programs are underrepresented in this sample because school was not in session.

## **Results**

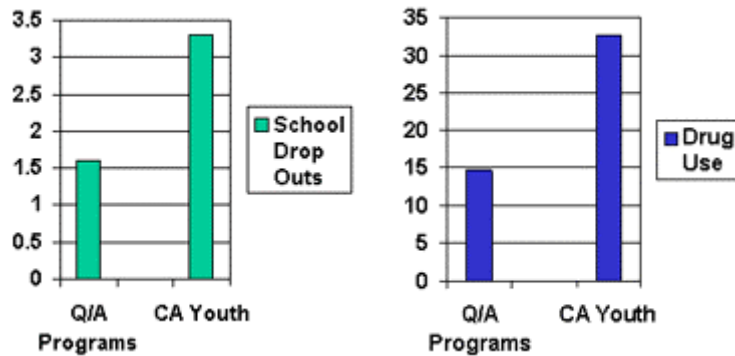
The responses of the survey provide a snap shot of the quality mentoring programs in California. These programs report having 36,251 mentors that supported 57,659 young people. They reported that 56,736 (98.4%) stayed in school, 49,154 (85.25%) did not do drugs, 56,448 (97.9%) did not become a teen mother, and 56,621 (98.2%) did not get involved in a gang.



These responses are showing a significant positive impact in the lives of youth. What is particularly valuable is the consistency of the findings; it is not just one or two programs that are finding a positive impact, it is virtually all of them. These results are also consistent with research findings from mentoring programs across the country. In the study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Public Private Ventures found that youth experienced a 52% reduction in absenteeism and improved school performance. The Sponsor-A-Scholar program in Philadelphia found mentored youth had higher GPAs in the 10th and 11th grades and were more likely to enroll in college.

Little Brothers and Little Sisters were 46% less likely to start using illegal drugs. They were also 27% less likely to start drinking alcohol. Teen pregnancy was also reduced to 1.1% in the Best Friends mentoring program, compared to 26% for peers. Delinquent youth in a mentoring program reduced recidivism by 65-75%. Mentored youth in the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program were 34% less likely to hit someone.

Looking specifically to California, two findings of note are students whom are staying in school and the use of illegal drugs. The percentage of dropouts in the mentored youth is half of that in the general population of youth. The rate of drug use in the mentored youth is less than half of what is reported in the statewide student survey.



**Recommendations**

The overwhelming evidence of the positive impact of mentoring provides a number of public policy opportunities. The Governor, Legislature, and local community leaders should consider the following:

1. In the pursuit of academic success, mentors can play a significant role. Academic mentoring programs that provide a consistent caring person over an extended period of time can improve academics, interpersonal skills and should be expanded.
2. Investments in academic mentoring programs will have impacts in other areas, because when youth feel connected to school, they begin getting better grades and are less likely to have other problems like drug use, alcohol, and violence.
3. A variety of mentoring models is required to meet the diverse needs of society's youth. The cost of different mentoring models differ from approximately \$1000 for one to one mentor matches, to \$250 for academic mentoring. Both of these mentors are definitely needed. Team Mentoring, Inter-generational Mentoring, and Older Youth as Mentors for younger youth, are three promising models deserving further attention and consideration.
4. Expanded effort is necessary to systematically document the mentoring activities and outcomes of the California Mentor Initiative. Triadigm is assisting with the development of Internet based tools to assist local mentoring programs to evaluate their impact. A further investment should be made to expand the survey of programs conducted by the California Mentor Foundation to a more rigorous annual effort.
5. The use of mentoring as a strategy to reduce academic failure, alcohol and drug use, teen pregnancy, and violence and gang participation, should be adopted across service systems that have an interest in any one of these issues. The rapid expansion of after school programs for youth would benefit greatly from a strong relationship with local mentoring programs.
6. The Quality Assurance Standards for mentoring programs should continue to be adopted by more mentoring programs. The Quality Assurance Standards provide the essential elements of effective practice and the mechanism to document quality assured mentoring programs.
7. Specific populations, such as youth in foster care or group home settings, should be targeted for involvement in mentoring programs. These youth that have become the responsibility of the State need additional long-term relationships with caring individuals.
8. California has untapped resources of volunteers that should be invited to participate more, including older Californians, service clubs, faith communities and college students.
9. Fiscal capital from government - targeted to reduce the four social ills - should be leveraged with matching funds, in-kind, and human capital from the private sector.

### **Conclusion**

Mentoring in California is leading the way for the entire nation on how to mobilize a state initiative to improve the quality of life for youth. The strategy of mentoring seems like a simple approach for a range of complex issues. The powerful nature of mentoring relationships that adapt to the needs of young people by accessing a range of resources and opportunities is proving to be effective.