

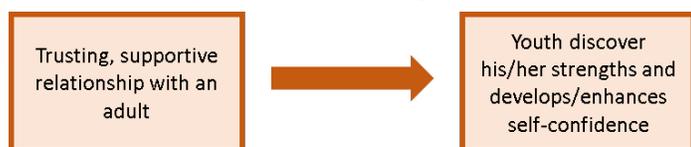


# Texas Juvenile Justice Department Mentoring Program

For nearly 20 years, the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) has operated a mentoring program for youth in its custody. Because many similar programs around the United States have found it difficult to sustain mentoring programs for this population, it is remarkable that the TJJD mentoring program has continued to thrive and to show positive impact.

## Program Description

Youth are eligible to participate in mentoring while they are incarcerated in a TJJD facility or in a halfway house. They are also eligible to participate in mentoring while on parole. Further, as youth transition from one type of custody to another, it is possible for them to continue to receive mentoring support. There are a variety of different structures to the mentoring services available at TJJD. Mentoring in this program has traditionally meant one-on-one mentoring by an adult volunteer. Mentors are expected to provide 4–8 hours of face-to-face contact per month for a minimum of 6 months. Mentors are asked to “focus on establishing a positive relationship, helping with goal setting, obtaining resources, and increasing a youth’s social skills” (TJJD, 2016). The program’s theory of change envisions that mentoring matters for these youth in the following way:



Youth are referred to the program by a caseworker, the Community Relations Coordinator at their facility, or another TJJD staff person. Youth may also request to participate in mentoring. Consistent with best practices for mentoring programs serving incarcerated youth, this program prioritizes participation for higher risk youth and those likely to be in the program long enough to benefit from a relationship lasting more than 6 months (Jarjoura, 2007). In fact, a recent program evaluation indicates that youth participating in the mentoring program for more than 6 months are more likely to be “determinate-sentence offenders and have high-severity committing offenses” (TJJD, 2016). Participation in mentoring is voluntary and youth who sign up may choose to end their involvement at any time.

## Program Practices

Consistent with the *Elements of Effective Practice* (MENTOR, 2015), the TJJD mentoring program has a number of practices in place to recruit, screen, train, and support mentors. The Community Relations Coordinators are primarily responsible for recruiting adult volunteers, but active mentors are also encouraged to participate in recruiting others through word-of-mouth referrals.

New volunteers are required to complete an application and provide references. They must complete background checks for criminal history, fingerprinting, and their driving record. Finally, they must complete an interview with a TJJD staff person. Every new mentor must complete a 3-hour training and orientation, and must sign a confidentiality agreement.

To prepare adult volunteers for their role, mentor training focuses on understanding adolescent development; catering to the learning styles of adolescents; developing critical communication skills; and providing suggestions for ways to spend time together with mentees. In addition to the required initial training, each mentor is expected to participate (either in person or by phone/videoconference) in at least two mentor mixers each calendar year. The mentor mixers offer an opportunity to interact with other mentors while also receiving additional training on topics important for those mentoring youth involved in the justice system.

## The Different Forms of Mentoring

It is noteworthy that over the years the TJJD mentoring program has expanded to offer a number of different types of mentoring options. In addition to the traditional one-on-one mentoring program, they also offer the following options:

- The Faith Mentoring program enables youth to focus on their own personal spiritual growth along with the other intended outcomes of the mentoring relationship. Faith mentors receive specialized training on the scope of faith mentoring and the strict restrictions against proselytizing. This mentoring option now accounts for nearly half of all youth participating in the program. This option is likely attractive for adult volunteers who seek to work with incarcerated youth as part of prison ministry programs.
- The Sponsorship Mentoring program pairs youth with 12-step program sponsors addressing substance use disorders. This type is a very small part of the overall mentoring program, with fewer than 10 youth participating per year.
- The Group Mentoring program provides more youth an option to engage with adult mentors. A brand new option launched in 2016, called “Mentoring Circles,” and was designed to expand the number of youth who are able to participate with adult mentors. Using a ratio of one adult to three youth—either one adult working with a group of three youth or two adults working together with a group of six youth—mentors are provided with specialized training on group facilitation that lays out a recommended structure for conducting the mentoring circles. Mentors are encouraged to allocate time for the group to share how things are going, and also to set aside time for curriculum that is either values based or skills based. There are also Faith-Based Circles.

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TJJD reached out to National Mentoring Partnership (MENTOR) for assistance in the design of their *Mentoring Circles* program. They were able to take advantage of the services of an expert consultant assigned through the National Mentoring Resource Center. This is a free resource for all youth mentoring programs.

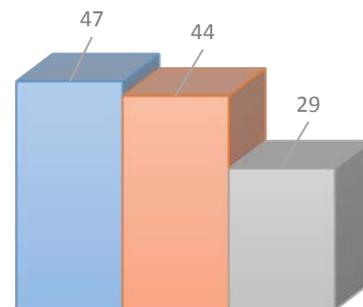
## An Evidence-Based Model

The TJJD mentoring program is a mature program reflective of sustained leadership over its history, an organizational commitment to mentoring excellence and positive youth outcomes, and a commitment to ongoing program evaluation and continuous quality improvement. Since the program began, the research division of TJJD has conducted regular analyses of program outcomes, comparing the youth in the mentoring program to all other youth in the correctional facilities. A number of results stand out from the evaluations:

- Between 2007 and 2015, there was a complete overhaul of the Texas Juvenile Justice Department, in which they went from 15 high secure correctional facilities (each with hundreds of youth), down to 5 facilities. The juvenile correctional population was cut drastically because of the changes in the laws. This led to several years of declining numbers of youth in the mentoring program. The number of participants substantially increased in FY 2015. This success in sustaining the program in the context of reduced numbers of youth to serve is noteworthy during a time when many mentoring programs for youth in custody are struggling to find the resources to continue.
- More than half of the mentoring participants take part in mentoring while confined in high-security facilities. This is an impressive indication of commitment to serving the youth who are at highest risk even under the most challenging circumstances related to security within the facilities.
- About 40 percent of those participating in mentoring do so while housed in halfway houses. As mentoring has been shown to be critical for success upon reentry (Jarjoura, 2007), it is important that TJJD supports mentoring in these facilities. A challenge of serving youth in halfway houses is the shorter length of stay. This has apparently contributed to shorter mentoring relationships (i.e., less than 6 months in duration) within these settings.
- About 10 percent of the youth being mentored participate while on parole.
- Historically, the average length of mentoring relationships has been about 9 months. The average length of mentoring has been a bit longer for those in faith mentoring. In the most recent period in which results are available, the average length of the mentoring relationships has been somewhat lower. This change is of concern, and attention will be focused on turning this around in the near future.

- Compared with youth in TJJD facilities who are not participating in mentoring, those who are matched with a mentor have better outcomes. For instance, in FY 2014, 36 percent of those who participated in mentoring were rearrested within 1 year after release, compared to 47 percent of those who were not participating. Keeping in mind that most of the mentoring is taking place before the youth is released, it appears that mentoring sets up the youth for success.

One-Year Rearrest Rates (FY 2014)



■ NO MENTORING (n=3515) %  
■ LESS THAN 180 DAYS OF MENTORING (n=437) %  
■ MORE THAN 180 DAYS OF MENTORING (n=361) %

- The length of mentoring is important. For those participating in mentoring for more than 6 months, only 29 percent were rearrested within 1 year after release, compared with 44 percent for those with less than 6 months in the mentoring program.
- When examining rearrest rates for violent offenses, there is also a reduced rate for those in mentoring (8 percent versus 12 percent).
- When solely examining 1-year reincarceration rates, there is also a reduced rate for those in mentoring (12 percent versus 15 percent). The differences are larger when we consider the rates of reincarceration over a 3-year period after release. For the cohort of those participating in mentoring in FY 2012, 26 percent had been reincarcerated within 3 years, compared with 37 percent for those who did not participate. Again, it is worth emphasizing that the mentoring that was completed before release is associated with better long-term results. Again here, even lower reincarceration rates were found for those participating in mentoring for longer than 6 months.
- There are also differences in positive educational outcomes for those taking part in the mentoring program. Among those youth who were old enough to earn a GED or high school diploma within 90 days of release from TJJD facilities, only 45 percent of the youth actually reached this milestone in FY 2014. Yet, among those participating in mentoring, 56 percent achieved this educational outcome, and for those with mentoring relationships over 6 months in length, a full 63 percent completed this goal.



## Conclusion

The TJJD mentoring program is a thriving program with almost 20 years of experience in providing high-quality mentoring services to incarcerated youth who are at high risk across the State of Texas. In FY 2015, 409 youth were served, and the program appears to have found a formula that provides a portfolio of mentoring options in a sustainable way. With positive outcomes related to lower rates of recidivism and higher rates of positive educational outcomes, this program offers a model that can inspire other similar programs across the United States.

The information in this profile comes from program evaluation reports produced by TJJD researchers, and from an interview with the director of the TJJD mentoring program, Tammy Holland. For further information on this program, Ms. Holland may be contacted at [Tammy.Holland@tjjd.texas.gov](mailto:Tammy.Holland@tjjd.texas.gov).

## References:

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