

Transformative Mentoring Overview

Transformative Mentoring is a specific mentoring modality targeting the highly at risk or hardest to reach youth population. Transformative Mentoring is an intensive youth development model that seeks to transform the mentality and behavior of delinquent youth and provide them with healthy relationships with positive adults.

Developed by The Mentoring Center (TMC) in Oakland, CA, TMC defines Transformative Mentoring as is "an intentional, structured, systemic and corrective intervention focused on personally transforming the attitude and mental framework of a disrupted human development cycle."

Although, as described below, there are several possible iterations of the model, a successful Transformative Mentoring Program must include:

- A curriculum based, cognitive restructuring program: This curriculum is designed to “change the mentality that gives rise to destructive behavior” and covers issues of identity, purpose, decision making, character development, culture, and life skills.
- The Mentoring Spirit: Mentors must believe that every young person, regardless of their current condition or behavior, has unlimited potential and innate greatness: “Young people don’t care about how much you know, until they know about how much you care.”
- Transformative Mentoring Structure: Transformative mentoring begins with Group Mentoring and grows into one-to-one mentoring.
- Intensive Case Management: Case management includes a life coach who facilitates development of a Life Plan and hands-on brokering of vital services including: Housing, Employment, Transportation, Education, Substance Abuse Treatment, and Mental Health services.
- Long-Term Commitment: It takes youth years to develop the destructive behaviors that Transformative Mentoring is designed to address, and, as such, behavior change will not occur overnight. The mentor/mentee relationships established should be at the very least last one-year, but preferably life-long bonds are established and maintained.

The Mechanics

Transformative Mentoring begins with a group process where mentors who facilitate a cognitive behavior intervention curriculum work with a group of youth – a 4:20 mentor to mentee ratio is optimal. The four mentors deliver an interactive, dynamic curriculum to a group of 20 youth over the course of several weeks or months; during that time, natural mentor/mentee matches occur. After the completion of the groups (approximately 21-28 weeks of weekly, 1.5 hour sessions),

one-to-one mentoring occurs for at least the next 12-18 months. The mentoring relationship must also be resourced to provide vitally needed services and supports to mentees. Transformative Mentoring often begins in institutional settings and continues when youth are released.

Transformative Mentoring at Work

For many years, TMC piloted a Transformative Mentoring program in the country's most notorious juvenile prisons, those operated by the California Youth Authority. TMC developed the African American Males Transition Program that worked with incarcerated young black males aged 15-25 who were being released to the Oakland area. A group of 3-4 facilitators went into the institution every week to deliver a cognitive behavioral training curriculum that focused on issues of identity, character development, decision making, life skills, and preparing for transition back into the community. The 24-week, interactive curriculum included presentations, open discussions, reading material, and multi-media presentations. Midway through the 24-week program, one-on-one mentoring relationships developed and facilitators/mentors would spend time with their mentees outside of the group sessions.

At the end of the 24-week session, a graduation was held, formally celebrating and recognizing the youth for their accomplishment.. When youth who graduate from the program are released, they maintained relationships with their mentors and were eligible to receive support services from TMC, including employment services and educational assistance. At a time when the California Youth Authority had an abysmal 75-90 percent recidivism rate, graduates of TMC's program maintained a 15 percent recidivism rate.

Building on the success of the African American Males Transition Program, TMC developed the Positive Minds Group, a program in the community utilizing a similar curriculum and mentoring process. TMC eventually brought the program to schools and community centers throughout the Bay Area. The program inside the juvenile facility evolved into Project Choice and was funded by the City of Oakland to serve all youth in the state's juvenile prison system returning to Oakland.

Transformative Mentoring programs have also been developed in Chicago, Washington, DC and New York City.