



Guide to Mentoring Aboriginal Young People



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Introduction

The Guide to Mentoring Aboriginal Young People provides advice for Western Australian (WA) agencies to establish or reorient youth mentoring programs to be culturally appropriate and secure in their interactions with Aboriginal young people.

This Guide focuses on formal or program-based mentoring and targets WA mainstream youth mentoring agencies that want to work with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal mentors and young Aboriginal mentees.

The Guide provides information on:

- how to recruit appropriate mentors;
- culturally appropriate mentoring training and guidance to agencies

- how to develop and sustain effective mentoring relationships with Aboriginal young people.

This Guide has been designed to complement, but not replace training sessions on mentoring Aboriginal young people. Individual agencies can customise the Guide with their specific community context and local Aboriginal cultural information.

The Guide to Mentoring Aboriginal Young People is an addition to the existing suite of Mentoring Worx resources found at www.dlgc.wa.gov.au/mentoring-worx-resources which have been produced as part of the Western Australian Youth Mentoring Reform Project, with funds provided by the Australian Government under the former National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions.

The Aboriginal Workforce Development Centre, Department of Training and Workforce Development has produced relevant resources which are available on their website at www.dtwd.wa.gov.au

The Guide to Mentoring Aboriginal Young People was prepared by the Department of Local Government and Communities,

through consultation with members of a reference group. This includes community agency representatives from True Blue Dreaming, David Wirrpanda Foundation, the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) and the Indigenous Communities Education and Awareness (ICEA). The WA Youth Mentoring Reform Group member agencies involved are The School Volunteer Program, Youth Focus, the Department of Training and Workforce Development and the School of Education, Murdoch University.

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Definitions

Aboriginal

The term 'Aboriginal'¹ as used in this resource is inclusive of Torres Strait Islander Australians, however, the use of the term 'Indigenous' is retained, if it is used in specific references in published material. References to Indigenous Australians are intended to be inclusive of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

It is important to recognise that although Aboriginal people may have much in common from cultural perspectives, Aboriginal people differ in values, customs, beliefs, language and many other aspects of their identity. Aboriginal people come from various regions in Australia; speak in many languages and their life experiences can be very diverse.

Youth mentoring

Youth mentoring is defined by the Australian Youth Mentoring Network as a structured and trusting relationship that brings young people (mentees) together with caring individuals (mentors) who offer guidance, support and encouragement.

A trusting and supportive relationship with a caring adult is essential for young people to grow and to develop their full potential. Some young people who are disadvantaged or 'at risk' will benefit from extra support and guidance from a person who is outside their immediate family. Mentoring programs exist to provide those sorts of relationships for young people who might otherwise miss out.

1 As adopted by the Department of Training and Workforce Development.

There are two types of mentoring styles.

Natural mentoring (informal) is the casual support, guidance and advice that many people get, particularly when they are young, through contact with family members, family friends, teachers, sports coaches or neighbours. Among Aboriginal people, mentoring is often spontaneous through the Elders' traditional role of sharing their wisdom and knowledge. Elders can play an extremely important role in Aboriginal families as role models, care providers and educators.

Formal mentoring (program based or structured mentoring) is planned through a facilitated youth mentoring program in which mentoring relationships are initiated, monitored, supported, concluded and evaluated to ensure maximum benefit to the young person being mentored and a rewarding experience for the mentor. Aboriginal Elders often play a part in these programs.

Cultural awareness

The term 'cultural awareness'² is used throughout this Guide, and there are three components that can be applied to youth mentoring. They are:

2 The Reference Group agencies and Aboriginal members decided to use the term cultural awareness throughout this Guide. Cultural competency is often used instead. Some Reference group members believe that cultural competency is aspirational for non-Aboriginal people.

- cultural awareness and beliefs—extent to which mentors have an understanding of their own cultural background; are aware of how their values and biases may play a role in their perceptions of mentees, including vulnerabilities and strengths, and how they experience their relationships with mentees
- cultural knowledge—the mentor with self-awareness, listens, exchanges and learns about the mentee’s culture and world view as well as their expectations for the relationship
- cultural skills—ability to apply cultural knowledge in relationships.

Cultural security

Cultural security is the outcome of a process which involves a youth mentoring program recruiting staff and mentors with cultural awareness, adding to their cultural knowledge and providing opportunities for staff and mentors to develop and apply their cultural and cross-cultural skills.

Cultural security requires a shift from cultural awareness to a deeper focus on service provider behaviour, how the service is conducted and whether the program delivers outcomes for Aboriginal people.

Best Practice Resources

The [Australian Youth Mentoring Benchmarks](#) serve as the standard that all mentoring programs should achieve in order to have a strong, successful and sustainable program. The Benchmarks are the result of collaboration between a representative group of Australian practitioners and researchers and will continue to evolve with collective knowledge and experience. The Australian Youth Mentoring Benchmarks 2012 are on the Youth Mentoring website at www.youthmentoring.org.au

[Mentoring Worx](#) is a suite of resources developed as part of Western Australia’s Youth Mentoring Reform Project and assist youth mentoring programs to effectively meet the Benchmarks. The suite has been developed by Western Australian youth mentoring organisations and is based on their experience in working with the Benchmarks. The resources are available at the WA Youth Mentoring website at www.dlgc.wa.gov.au/mentoring-worx-resources

Aboriginal perspectives on mentoring

Mentoring is a particularly promising initiative with Aboriginal people, because it fits well with Aboriginal teaching and learning styles.

Aboriginal people's concept of self is rooted in the context of community and place and in the inter-relationship between people and the land. These views manifest through an emphasis on maintaining and sustaining cultural traditions where language, culture and respect all play a vital role.

Emerging research shows that there are differences in the focus of the Aboriginal mentoring relationship between the mentee and the mentor.³ Aboriginal mentoring focuses on the relational and communitarian rather than the success of the individual.

Mentoring to Aboriginal young people can be delivered in a number of ways. It can involve adult or peer mentors⁴. It can be:

- face to face mentoring – in which the mentoring sessions are held in person
- electronic mentoring – which uses technology to connect the mentor and the mentee. It is used in situations where the mentees and mentors are unable to meet face to face, or even as an alternative to face to face. One example is The Smith Family iTrack Mentoring Program with students who are in school and mentors who are at their work desks. They chat using a MSN style medium.

3 Canadian researchers Sinclair and Pooyak 2007 conducted research on Aboriginal mentoring in Saskatoon, Canada for the Indigenous Peoples' Health Research Centre in collaboration with Big Brothers Big Sisters of Saskatoon and the Community University Institute for Social Research.

4 It is often assumed that peer mentoring will be at least as effective as adult-to-youth mentoring, due to the ability of peers to more readily build relationships. However, where there is an expectation that peers will act as a proxy for an adult in the mentoring relationship or where peers are expected to convey adult values and norms, peer mentoring appears to be an ineffective strategy for improving the behaviour and attitudes of 'at-risk' youth. Pawson R 2004. Mentoring relationships: an explanatory review. ESRC UK Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice: Working paper no. 21. London: UK Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice.

According to a recent literature review⁵ ‘mentoring provides a context for young people to develop relationships with caring adults; enhance their social relationships and emotional well-being; improve their cognitive skills through instruction and conversation; and promote positive identity development through meaningful connection to role models and advocates’.

Mentoring relationships and mentoring programs can have different areas of focus which include:⁶

Social and emotional wellbeing. Mentoring assists young people to increase their self-esteem, self-efficacy, and resilience by actively supporting their social and emotional wellbeing. This includes focussing on increasing the young person’s life skills, peer and family relationships, exploring family dysfunction and reducing any sense of shame.

Culture and cultural identity. The mentoring program actively supports young people to be proud and confident of their identity and culture and be able to exercise this appropriately in their community.

Education, training and employment. Mentoring assists young people to positively engage in and maintain their participation in education, training and employment. These programs assist young people to develop a vision for their future, provide support to achieve their education, training and career goals and provide practical help to study away from home.

Talent and leadership. Mentoring can encourage young people to further develop their personal talents and/or leadership skills.

Youth justice and crime prevention. Mentoring can assist young people to avoid anti-social and offending behaviours by encouraging connectedness with positive elements in their community and increasing protective factors.

Youth mentoring particularly works:⁷

- with young people who are most likely to engage in risky behaviours. Youth mentoring produces the most positive results with those in high-risk categories (that is, those experiencing multiple risk factors for antisocial behaviours)
- as an early intervention and should commence before anti-social behaviour starts. Given that Aboriginal young people who engage with the juvenile justice system tend to be younger than non-Aboriginal young people, early intervention is particularly important
- as an integrated part of broader youth programs and services.

5 Scrine, C., Reibel, T. & Walker R, 2012, Key findings of the literature on effective mentoring programs for young people, Telethon Institute for Child Health Research Perth WA. p.4.

6 NGRise Kickstarting and Strengthening your youth mentoring program, Australian Youth Mentoring Network 2013.

7 Ware V-A 2013. Mentoring programs for Indigenous youth at risk. Resource sheet no.22. Produced for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Selecting the right mentor for Aboriginal young people

Foremost, a successful mentoring relationship relies on the mentor being able to meet the needs of the Aboriginal young person, while respecting the social and cultural priorities of Aboriginal young people.

As Scrine et al (2012)⁸ pointed out ‘the dynamics through which mentoring relationships can promote positive developmental outcomes relies on the formation of a positive connection between mentor and mentee. Factors such as trust, empathy, authenticity, mutual respect, and sensitivity are considered critical to a quality mentor relationship’.

An effective mentor:

- is a good listener
- is non-judgmental
- is patient, tolerant and flexible
- is reliable and consistent
- respects others’ values, cultures and viewpoints
- wants to understand the cultural background and history of the Aboriginal mentee

- likes young people and cares about their futures
- shares their own knowledge and life skills
- can develop and work towards shared goals with a young person
- respects a young person’s right to make choices
- seeks to understand a young person’s struggles
- empathises rather than sympathises
- sees solutions rather than barriers
- is committed and available for the duration of the program
- ensures group cohesion and safety for group-based mentoring.⁹

Some of the best mentors are those who have been mentored themselves and are motivated from understanding their own journey and the important role their mentor(s) played.

8 Scrine, C., Reibel, T. & Walker R, 2012, Key findings of the literature on effective mentoring programs for young people, Telethon Institute for Child Health Research Perth WA. p.5.

9 DuBois, D. and Neville, H. (1997) ‘Youth mentoring: Investigation of relationship characteristics and perceived benefits’ *Journal of Community Psychology*, 25 (3): 227-234

Case Study

True Blue Dreaming

True Blue Dreaming youth mentoring program at www.truebluedreaming.org.au asked three of their Aboriginal mentors. Why do you want to be a mentor?

1 'As an Indigenous woman, my passion and what drives me to study is to build myself to be able to engage, support and educate Indigenous youth and work within communities as a psychologist. We all have our stories and what I want to teach these kids is that their story is as unique as the different seashells that scatter the ocean. Sometimes, we all need a little nudge or someone to tell us that we have the potential and the capability to do something meaningful and rewarding. I want to be able to ignite the spark within their imagination to rise to their full potential and realize that YES they can do it.'

2 'I want to be a mentor because it gives me and them the chance to learn something new. Being a mentor isn't about making your resume look good and being able to gloat about how you've done all these things, to me it's about sharing yarns and learning culture, getting down in the dirt and exploring their country, it's about them and at the end of what will be an amazing experience I want to take away the fact that I've affected these students to be a part of the big picture and be a part of the amazing Aboriginal journey.'

3 'I believe Indigenous students need positive role models to provide support to them throughout their schooling. Many Indigenous students do not finish school and are more likely to drop out of school compared to non-Indigenous students. I believe through support and positive role models they will feel empowered and will have the belief that they too, can complete school, go on to study at university and achieve their goals. I want to be a mentor because I want to make a change in the community and be a role model for other Indigenous students. I have had experience mentoring at Bidyadanga for True Blue Dreaming in 2013. I found this experience very rewarding and this has inspired me to do more.'

Matching mentors

A recent review found that young people value relationships where the mentor's approach is focused on developing a relationship that places them at the centre. How young people perceived they were being treated by their mentors was more important than being matched on the basis of common interests and demographic backgrounds.¹⁰

Are there benefits of matching Aboriginal mentors with Aboriginal young people?

Further research is required to assess whether there are measurable benefits from matching Aboriginal mentors with Aboriginal young people in a context that is specific to Aboriginal Australians¹¹. Ware (2013) states that culturally-specific programs can sometimes be effective and at other times counterproductive. For example, in contexts where Aboriginal young people are disconnected from their history, culture or family, a culturally-specific mentoring program may be a vital part of building a strong cultural identity.¹²

In some cases it is better to have mixed (or culturally non-specific) programs. In contexts where Aboriginal young people face social exclusion on the basis of race, having a mixed group of mentees may improve social inclusiveness and cohesion.



¹⁰ Scrine, C., Reibel, T. & Walker R, 2012, Key findings of the literature on effective mentoring programs for young people, Telethon Institute for Child Health Research Perth WA. p.5.

¹¹ Ware V-A 2013. Mentoring programs for Indigenous youth at risk. Resource sheet no.22. Produced for the Closing the Gap Clearinghouse. Canberra: Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

¹² Hollis H, Deane K, Moore J & Harré N 2011. Young Maori perceptions of a youth development programme. *Kotuitui: New Zealand Journal of Social Sciences Online* 6(1-2):50-61.; Barwick H 2004. Young males: strengths-based and male-focused approaches: a review of the research and best evidence. Wellington: Ministry of Youth Development.; Stacey 2004.

Aboriginal cultural awareness training

Introduction

If a non-Aboriginal mentor aspires towards cultural awareness, and has specific knowledge and the skills and a genuine desire to work sensitively with Aboriginal young people, they are more likely to make a connection with the young person which lays the ground work for positive outcomes for the mentee and mentor.

This section will assist mentors and agency staff to:

- gain an understanding of some of the issues that Aboriginal people face due to the impact of historical and contemporary grief and loss
- develop sensitivity to cultural differences and begin to appreciate the cultural diversity of Aboriginal Australians
- increase knowledge and skills necessary for effective communication.

Cultural awareness agency training will be more powerful when there is:

- input from Aboriginal people
- input from Aboriginal Elders and young people to provide their perspective, guidance and local cultural context
- attendance by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal mentors and agency staff together. This can provide a platform towards a better understanding of cultural differences and similarities and help build better relationships
- commitment to ongoing training through all stages of the mentoring relationship.

More information

More detailed information is available from the Aboriginal Workforce Development Centre, Department of Training and Workforce Development in the brochure 'How well do you understand the Aboriginal people you employ?' Although the setting is the workplace, the information is relevant for all agencies and mentors.

Information includes:

- what the statistics tell us
- history
- a time line of key events in Aboriginal affairs in Western Australia
- a list of training providers who deliver cultural awareness training
- a list of Aboriginal support agencies in the metropolitan Perth area.

The brochure is available on the Department of Training and Workforce Development website at www.dtwd.wa.gov.au/employeesandstudents/aboriginalworkforcedevelopmentcentre/employers/Pages/understanding-aboriginal-employees.aspx

What the statistics tell us

Australia is regularly ranked among the top five countries in the world on the Human Development Index, which measures achievements in terms of longevity, education and standard of living. In 2003 Australia ranked fourth, Aboriginal Australians were ranked at 103¹³.

To help remove some of the disadvantages faced by Australian and Torres Strait Islander Australians, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in 2008 initiated 'Closing the Gap'.¹⁴ This is a strategy that aims to reduce Indigenous disadvantage with respect to life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood education, educational achievement, and employment outcomes. To monitor change, COAG has set measurable targets to monitor improvements in the health and wellbeing of the Aboriginal Australian population.

13 Silburn SR, Zubrick SR, De Maio JA, Shepherd C, Griffi n JA, Mitrou FG, Dalby RB, Hayward C, Pearson G, 2006, The Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey: Strengthening the Capacity of Aboriginal Children, Families and Communities. Perth: Curtin University of Technology and Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, p. 560.

14 For concise information on Closing the Gap aims, history and targets see www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/closing-the-gap?

On the life expectancy target, there has been a small improvement for Aboriginal people. In educational achievement, the target to halve the gap for Aboriginal people aged 20–24 in Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates by 2020 is on track to be met.

There is still a long way to go.

Young Aboriginal people are 45 times more likely to be in detention than non-Aboriginal young Western Australians.¹⁵

Aboriginal people are twice as likely to commit suicide as other Australians, with much higher rates in the younger age group. Rates for

Aboriginal females aged 15–19 years are nearly six times higher; rates for Aboriginal males in the same age group are four times higher.¹⁶

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were nearly four times more likely than non-Indigenous people to be unemployed (18% compared with 4.5%).¹⁷

The median personal income for Aboriginal Western Australians aged 15 years and over is \$348 a week compared with \$672 for other members of the community.¹⁸



¹⁵ Commissioner for Children and Young People, 2012, *The State of Western Australia's Children and Young People – Edition One*, Perth, p. 174.

¹⁶ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012, *Suicides, Australia, 2010 – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide deaths, NSW, Qld, SA, WA, NT*. Cat. No. 3309.0.

¹⁷ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013, *2011 Census of Population and Housing, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (Indigenous) Profile, Western Australia*, Cat. No. 2002.0. Table I14.

¹⁸ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013, *2011 Census of Population and Housing, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (Indigenous) Profile, Western Australia*, Cat. No. 2002.0. Table I04.

It is important for mentors and staff to understand the everyday realities facing some Aboriginal young people.

A recent study of young people's experiences of health services in Western Australia¹⁹ found that all young people identify a large number of health issues of relevance to people their age.

Key health issues for young people include depression and anxiety, drugs, obesity and body image, diet and exercise, smoking, bullying, violence, peer pressure, relationship and friendship issues and community connectedness. A focus group with Aboriginal young people found these concerns were even further magnified.

The issues young people experience change over the teenage years—from a focus on friendship situations as most important—to more 'serious' issues due to experiencing greater levels of stress, more intensified peer pressure and greater likelihood of experimentation and risk-taking.

History

This section has been summarised from the Department of Training and Workforce Development brochure 'How well do you understand the Aboriginal people you employ?'²⁰ For more comprehensive information refer to the brochure.

Pre-settlement

Aboriginal people had a rich, strong culture and sense of wellbeing. Aboriginal people effectively managed their society and environment prior to the coming of the Europeans. No one knows how many Aboriginal people lived in Australia before 1788 – estimates vary between 500 000 and 1 million.

The trauma of colonisation

Captain Phillip took formal possession of the colony of New South Wales on 26 January 1788. English colonisation gradually spread from Sydney in 1788 to the rest of the continent during the nineteenth century.

The impact of colonisation in Western Australia began at first settlement and carried on into the Kimberley into the late nineteenth century. It brought with it diseases such as smallpox, influenza and the common cold, as well as dispossession and massacres of Aboriginal people. Violent battles over rights to land, food and water sources occurred. There are documented massacres of Aboriginal people into the 1920s.

¹⁹ Van Dyke, N. Maddern, C., Walker, R. and Reibel, T. 2014, Young Peoples' Experiences with Health Services, WA Commissioner of Children and Young People

²⁰ Adapted from Department of Training and Workforce Development website at www.dtwd.wa.gov.au click Aboriginal Workforce Development Centre/Employers/Brochure/How well do you understand the Aboriginal people you employ?

Government policies for managing Aboriginal people

Commonwealth and State government policies throughout the twentieth century further afflicted Aboriginal people. These harsh policies were managed by government officials who had the power to control the lives of Aboriginal people.

The *Aborigines Act 1905 (WA)* included the right to remove children from their parents and place them in church missions and government institutions. Under this legislation, many Aboriginal people were gradually forced into large, poorly resourced reserves. Aboriginal people not in reserves were subject to a wide range of restrictions including evening curfews on entering towns. The *Native Administration Act 1936 (WA)* imposed additional controls over the lives of Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal Western Australians did not achieve the right to vote until 1962. The referendum in 1967 resulted in the amendment of the Constitution to allow the Commonwealth to legislate in relation to Aboriginal matters and Aboriginal people to be included in the Census. There continued, however, to be many de facto restrictions and prejudices which significantly limited the opportunities available to Aboriginal people. Legislation changed gradually but the disadvantage remained.



The recent impacts

The report of the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody* (1991) and the *Bringing Them Home Report* (1997) demonstrate the ways in which policies of forced removal of Aboriginal children from their parents, and the associated pain, ongoing grief and loss affected the lives of Aboriginal people. It is now well known that many Aboriginal people endured much physical, emotional, mental and sexual abuse in residential institutions.

For more detailed information on the 'Stolen Generations' see The Bringing them Home Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families, Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1997; available at www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/stolen

It is also widely recognised that many Aboriginal people continue to experience trans-generational trauma and disenfranchisement. People who had been children in these institutions often grew into parents who had been deprived of exposure to parenting and the opportunity to develop parenting skills. As a mentor or coordinator, it is important to have an understanding of the effects of these policies in order to challenge the misconceptions of the wider community and the on-going disadvantage that affects many Aboriginal families today.



The legacy

As in the broader community, some Aboriginal people may be struggling with their social and emotional wellbeing. There are factors in the circumstances of Aboriginal people that make some particularly vulnerable. Some Aboriginal people continue to struggle with social and emotional problems associated with unresolved grief and loss; trauma and abuse; racism and discrimination; physical and mental health issues; over-representation in the justice and welfare systems; homelessness; family and domestic violence; loss of cultural and community identity.

Many Aboriginal people still experience racism and stereotyping that can erode self-esteem and sense of identity. It may also result in unresolved and suppressed grief which might be expressed as anger; fear and timidity; apathy; withdrawal and isolation; depression; guilt; and poor health.

Understandably, mentors may not always be aware of the difficulties that some Aboriginal young people may face in dealing with these issues. Aboriginal Psychiatrist Professor Helen Milroy offers insights into the way this legacy impacts on Aboriginal young people in 'Understanding the Lives of Aboriginal Children and Families'.²¹

There is still much to be done to assist those who need help to heal the trauma and hurt and move on in their lives. There are various empowerment, healing and leadership programs being offered around the country to assist individual Aboriginal people and communities in this process.

A link to Aboriginal and other agencies support services based in Perth is at the Department of Training and Workforce Development website at: www.dtwd.wa.gov.au click on Aboriginal Workforce Development Centre.

Despite the adversity of colonisation and harmful policies and practices, Aboriginal people have demonstrated remarkable resilience. This is shown in the way many Aboriginal people have maintained traditional culture and practices, have adapted to numerous aspects of Western culture and continue to develop fresh understandings of Aboriginal identity and ways of being Aboriginal.

There are many inspiring stories about the achievements of Aboriginal people across expanding fields of endeavour ranging from academia, politics, aviation, professions like law, medicine, teaching and engineering; music, dance, film and literature; public services; and a wide range of businesses and trades. Many are establishing solid foundations for their children and contribute strongly to the community and workforce.

Factors that strengthen and protect Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing have been identified as 'connection to land, culture, spirituality, ancestry, family and community'. These factors serve as a unique reservoir of resilience in the face of adversity, and have helped to moderate the impact of an array of stressful circumstances on the social and emotional wellbeing of families and communities'.²²

21 Milroy, H. 2014, 'Understanding the lives of Aboriginal Children and Families' Chapter 21 in Working Together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Wellbeing Principles and Practice. Pat Dudgeon, Helen Milroy, Roz Walker. Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. <http://aboriginal.telethonkids.org.au/media/699863/Working-Together-Book.pdf>

22 Hear our Voices, Community Consultations for the Empowerment Healing and Leadership Program for Aboriginal people living in the Kimberley, Western Australia, Final Research Report, Australian Government, 2012, p.48.

Image and identity

The ability for people to say who they are, to define their own identity and to relate their history is fundamental to their existence. In Australia, Aboriginal people are subject in the main, to images created by non-Aboriginal Australians. For example, there are different viewpoints for 1788 – many Aboriginal people may call it the invasion while non-Aboriginal people may call it British settlement.

Events since 1788 have had a dramatic impact on the identity of Aboriginal people. Some of the effects are:

- many Aboriginal people find themselves questioning their identity. Some Aboriginal people have a strong sense of identity. Others are unsure of their identity, while others are just discovering their identity. Some are proud of their identity. Others are not. Some Aboriginal people feel caught between two worlds – ‘white’ and ‘black’
- people who don’t know their stories and history may be unsure of their identity
- non-Aboriginal people may have stereotypes of Aboriginal identity
- how an Aboriginal young person sees their identity will have an impact on how they relate to youth mentoring agency staff and mentors.



This has implications for agencies and mentors:²³

Kinship and belonging to a specific family group is integral to Aboriginal identity and culture. The concept of family for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, often includes a widely extended family, sometimes placed across several households. It is the extended family that teaches a child how to live, how to treat other people and how to interact with the land. There is a clear focus on mutual obligation and sharing within the extended family. The care and financial support of a child may also be shared by the extended family, with different members taking on different roles.

Members of the Stolen Generations have grown up without family ties or cultural identity. Aboriginal young people may have lost their connection to traditional land, culture and family. This may create social and financial disadvantage, feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem which can lead to depression, violence, suicide or other self-harm, abuse of alcohol and other drugs, crime and a general lack of trust. It is important to recognise the effects of this loss of 'identity' and offer support and referral where appropriate. 'Link-Up' is an Aboriginal organisation that works with Aboriginal adults who were separated from their families and homes when they were children.

Due to internalised oppression, some young people may only just feel comfortable or secure to start exploring their Aboriginal heritage. It is important for mentors to 'honour' and remember that only Aboriginal people can determine who is Aboriginal and who is not. One's heritage is something that is very personal. However there may be circumstances when Aboriginal young people do need verification of their Aboriginal heritage, for example; applying for Indigenous specific grants, loans, University courses, Centrelink and Housing assistance, employment and school programs. (There is an official formal criteria used by the Australian Government and most state and territory Governments.)

Today, many Aboriginal people live in cities, towns and other urban areas away from their traditional lands. Many of these Aboriginal people have maintained their 'identity' and culture through family and Aboriginal community organisations. These networks give physical and emotional support and provide a sense of security and belonging. Aboriginal community organisations have been established with a focus on meeting specific Aboriginal needs through the provision of culturally-appropriate services.

23 Information has been adapted from www.workingwithatsi.info/content/key_ideas4.htm. This website is a project of the Muswellbrook Shire Council Community Services Team.

Aboriginal kinship

Understanding the concepts of family and kinship²⁴

When mentoring Aboriginal young people, the mentor may find that some mentees rarely call their family members by name, instead they may use relationship terms such as brother, mother, aunt or cousin. Aboriginal people of the same sex and the same sibling line may be identified as the same, so when one has a child they both become mothers or fathers. Today many Aboriginal families in both rural and urban communities retain some level of the 'kinship' system. For example, you may hear an Aboriginal person ask another Aboriginal person, "Who's your mob?" They are asking where do you come from, where do you belong and who are your family?

Aboriginal peoples place great value on belonging to a group and conforming to the obligations and responsibilities of the group. A sense of belonging is integral to the Aboriginal culture and enables them to connect to their land and their people.

Extended family responsibilities

In traditional Aboriginal society, children are the responsibility of not only their biological parents but their entire extended family. This is still a common practice today. Aboriginal communities have particularly strong family values and raising a child including their care, discipline and education, is everybody's responsibility. Aboriginal families rely on and nurture strong family ties as a means of passing on their cultural beliefs from one generation to the next.

Respecting and learning from Elders

Many older Aboriginal people have a major role in raising their grandchildren and great grandchildren. Their position in the family is highly respected as are their knowledge and opinions. Elders have a very important role in traditional and contemporary Aboriginal families. They are often the key decision makers. They teach important traditional skills and customs, pass on knowledge and share personal stories. The traditional meaning of an Aboriginal Elder is someone who has gained recognition within their community as a custodian of knowledge and lore and who has permission to disclose cultural knowledge and beliefs.

Storytelling

In Aboriginal communities, story-telling is an important aspect of teaching children about life and their culture. The Elders use story-telling to share knowledge about the dreaming, language and lore.

All kinds of modern media are used to share stories and songs, including television, the web, music, art and books. Sharing this information is important in nurturing Aboriginal traditions and culture and educating the wider community.

²⁴ Information has been adapted from www.workingwithatsi.info/content/key_ideas4.htm. This website is a project of the Muswellbrook Shire Council Community Services Team.

Case Study

Identity

“Identity” tip sheet Parenting WA Guides, Department of Local Government and Communities at www.dlhc.wa.gov.au

“Hey Sis!” “Who’s your mob?”

“My mob comes from up North!”

“Deadly.”

“Hey, you might be my people too!”

“Who’s your mob?” Heard this before? How many times have you been asked: “Where do you come from?” or “Who is your family?” This does not mean where you have just come from or how you got here, but meaning ... “Where do you belong?” By knowing the answers, we know where we belong. It’s our security. It’s our identity! Our identity brings unity. It’s our family ties.

It’s knowing about how we all fit together. And we need to feel good about it and good about ourselves. We want our kids to know our ways, to understand and to practise them.

Our kids learn at an early stage by watching, listening and practising, and by close contact with others. Our identity as Aboriginal people keeps growing throughout our lives.

Even if you don’t know all of your family, it’s important to understand how you fit with the family members you do know. We need to know who we are, where we’ve come from, where we are now and where we’re going.

Reminders for Mentors to use active listening and communication

Active listening²⁵

Listening is the mentor's greatest tool for developing relationships with Aboriginal young people. Being listened to makes someone feel valued, important and respected. Often young people don't feel truly listened to; this is one of the greatest gifts a mentor can give.

Active listeners:

- suspend judgement and criticism
- wait for the speaker to comment or respond
- don't interrupt
- respect the speaker's viewpoint and value system
- understand that silence can also tell a story or give a message
- resist distractions
- let the speaker know if they are inaudible, ambiguous or incongruent
- are open and deal with any negative emotions they might be hearing.

Communication

Protocols vary in different areas. If you are going to be working with people from traditional and remote area communities you will need locally based training or advice. However, in most areas there are some general protocols—appropriate behaviour—that is worth remembering:²⁶

- Confirm what your mentee likes to be called, write down their name and ensure you have the right pronunciation.
- Use clear and uncomplicated language. Steer away from using jargon or acronyms.
- Do not attempt to copy your mentees way of speaking, this is inappropriate in any culture.
- Genuinely listen, watch out for the nonverbal cues which may provide information as to your mentee's feelings.
- Use questioning carefully, do not probe. Use indirect questions as direct or blunt questions may be considered confrontational.
- Your mentee may seek knowledge by presenting information for confirmation or disapproval.
- Silence/s may provide your mentee with a chance to listen and prepare an answer. The length of your mentees reply may be something with which you need to be flexible.

²⁵ Refer to the Mentoring Worx Mentor's Handbook, pages 22–23 www.dlgc.wa.gov.au/mentoring-worx-resources

²⁶ Adapted from Mentoring Indigenous Youth, Factsheets for Mentors produced the Australian Youth Mentoring Network 2011. www.youthmentoring.org.au

- Follow your mentees lead on the amount of eye contact to use. In some Aboriginal cultures it is considered inappropriate or rude to look someone straight in the eye.
- Your mentee may not initially offer opinions. They may prefer to listen to others and wait to share their view.
- Speak at a medium pace, too fast may be hard for your mentee to understand, while slow speech may seem condescending.
- Use verbal (oh, yes, mmm) and nonverbal (nod head, lean forward) cues to show you are listening, while providing space and time for your mentee to share.
- Let your mentee's actions guide you on the appropriate amount of personal space to provide.
- These cultural terms should always be written with a capital letter: Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Elder and Indigenous.
- Do your homework: find out as much as you can about your mentee's background, this may involve spending some time researching.
- Be aware of any cultural boundaries that exist, if you are uncertain ask your program coordinator.
- Help your mentee become resourceful; provide them with strategies to support themselves such as directing them to specialist support services.
- Get involved in program activities, encourage your mentee to develop friendships with the other mentees in the program.



Cultural security within your youth mentoring program and agency

Cultural security or appropriateness refers to more than just mentors and program staff being culturally aware and having knowledge and skills to work with Aboriginal young people. It refers to a focus on service provider behaviour, how services perform, and whether they deliver outcomes for Aboriginal people.

Features of culturally secure programs or services are, that they:²⁷

- are culturally relevant to Aboriginal people
- involve Aboriginal people in agency governance and employ Aboriginal staff (in service delivery and/or front line roles)
- have built trust and close relationships with local Aboriginal people
- recognise, understand and acknowledge Aboriginal culture and incorporate Aboriginal ways of knowing and being
- understand and acknowledge the impact of history
- ensure that staff are knowledgeable, culturally aware and trained about Aboriginal culture
- attempt to address issues in a holistic way rather than focus only on a single issue.



²⁷ From the WA Department of Aboriginal Affairs website.

Reorient or build your program to be culturally secure

In this section, certain standards that are derived from the Australian Youth Mentoring benchmarks are highlighted, with specific suggestions to:

- be inclusive of Aboriginal mentors and mentees
- assist staff and mentors to be culturally aware
- provide a youth mentoring program that is culturally appropriate and secure.

The Australian Youth Mentoring Benchmarks serve as the standard to which mentoring programs strive in order to have a strong, successful and sustainable program. Together they provide a model of quality practice and a step by step process for planning a quality mentoring program. The Benchmarks are found at www.youthmentoring.org.au

Planning and design

The outcome of thorough planning and design is clarity about the youth mentoring target group, aims, criteria and model of the program. Some of the additional issues to be aware of in planning a culturally secure program are described below.

- Organisational endorsement and commitment from the leadership team is necessary to ensure that Aboriginal mentoring will remain on the agenda of the organisation.
- Review agency/program vision, mission and values statements.
- Consult with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community stakeholders and young people. Conduct a survey or needs assessment and ensure that Aboriginal and young people are actively involved in the process.
- Create opportunities and entry points for Aboriginal people to participate—go out to where Aboriginal young people congregate, go to the Aboriginal community services, use ‘yarning’ meetings and focus groups.
- Develop partnerships with Aboriginal organisations and mentoring programs.
- Reframe the language used when describing mentoring so that it is culturally relevant; ask the local Aboriginal young people and community for their recommendations.
- Consider how the mentoring program will become cross cultural in focus and service. How does one ensure that the program is inclusive for Aboriginal mentors and mentees, particularly if the Aboriginal mentees are dispersed across many schools or across the metropolitan area. How do you provide for cultural appropriateness?
- Ensure Aboriginal community members have genuine input—into tailoring the program to the local or regional context, and opportunities are created for their participation as mentors, involvement in program processes and outcomes. Local sports mentoring programs²⁸ are well placed to offer these opportunities and ensure that local cultural protocols can be applied.
- Document how the program will operate—consider the focus of the mentoring relationship, the setting, and how the mentoring will be conducted.
- Consider the duration, frequency and consistency of the proposed mentoring relationship with an Aboriginal young person. Ware (2013) suggests from research findings that the following works best:
 - long-term mentoring relationships of at least 12–18 months duration, based on common interests
 - mutual respect, genuine friendship, fun and a non-judgemental approach
 - a mentoring relationship that continues on with the mentee after the ‘at risk’ period and continues to support them through a phase where positive changes are consolidated
 - consistent, regular contact between mentor and mentee. In the initial stages, this may need to be quite intensive depending on the young person’s needs.

28 CaFCA (Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia) 2009. Sports Mentoring Project—Coonamble. Promising Practice Profile. Melbourne: CaFCA, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

- Likewise research states that short-term mentoring can actually harm and disadvantage 'at-risk' youth as it can reinforce or compound the sense of loss and disappointment frequently linked with other youth-adult relationships. This sense of loss can be acutely felt where the relationship has ended poorly or suddenly.²⁹
- Establish an advisory group with Aboriginal stakeholders and young people who will provide some guidance on program design and the ongoing relevance of the mentoring program.
- Review or develop the policies and procedures for the mentoring program operations and organisational governance and management.

Staffing

It is necessary to have a staffing and resourcing structure that is sufficient for the mentoring program model. For example, a coordinator is often required for either³⁰:

- a community based program supporting approximately 25 'at-risk' young people for 12 months via fortnightly meetings with a mentor, or
- a school based program supporting approximately 50 young people for six months via weekly meetings with a mentor.

It is important that a coordinator has the skills such as a calm demeanour, a commitment to the local community and seen as a role model. These will result in a positive influence in the lives of mentees, their parents and mentors. Coordinators who are also respected members of the community can have a greater influence on that community.

An important aspect of culturally appropriate practice in mentoring is staff and mentor commitment to build and strengthen family connections. Stacey (2004) describes how the coordinator of the Panayappi Indigenous Youth Mentoring Program also engaged with families. This additional support to the parents as well as to their young people contributed to decreased stress in parenting, increased support for the youth mentoring and improved family relationships.³¹ This can be done very informally and respectfully through holding a barbeque at the local high school and inviting parents to come along and hear about the benefits of the youth mentoring program and the activities young people will be involved in.

29 Dawes GD 2011. The challenges of reintegrating Indigenous youth after their release from detention. *Journal of Youth Studies* 14(6):693–707.

30 From Element 4 Staff in the Australian Youth Mentoring Benchmarks produced by the Australian Youth Mentoring Network, 2012.

31 Stacey K 2004. Panyappi Indigenous Youth Mentoring Program: external evaluation report. Prepared by beyond... Kathleen Stacey & Associates Pty Ltd. Adelaide: South Australian Department of Human Services.

Recruitment

The literature is rich in descriptions of the importance of high-quality mentoring relationships. Studies also talk about the importance of mentors and mentees having fun together and enjoying each other's company.

The following information will assist with the suitable recruitment of mentors and young people from the program's target groups.

- Develop a targeted mentor recruitment strategy and plan that includes identification of mentors, a marketing plan that outlines a variety of promotional and recruitment methods encouraging diversity in recruitment, clear linkages to the program's purpose and the needs of young people.
- Develop program information sheets that clearly identify the program's aims, roles and responsibilities. Identify what is required of mentors and young people in the mentoring relationship, including criteria regarding the mentor's experience, qualities and characteristics.
- Develop and provide clear information about what is required in the mentoring relationship (e.g. frequency and duration of contact, privacy and confidentiality and match closure procedure).
- Establish a clear process for referral/application of young people that takes into account the young person's needs and suitability for the program.

Mentors often work with young people who are struggling to come to terms with the world around them and their place in it. It is important to make explicit that the mentor-mentee relationship is non-judgmental, affirming, empowering, inspiring; and built upon trust, mutual respect and dialogue³².



³² Barwick H 2004. Young males: strengths-based and male-focused approaches: a review of the research and best evidence. Wellington: Ministry of Youth Development.

Selection and screening

Mentors

Formal selection criteria on the application form should include that the applicant:

- is able to communicate in a sensitive and open manner (see section entitled Reminders for Mentors to use active listening and communication)
- has life/work experience that can assist and benefit an Aboriginal mentee.

The mentor selection process should be well-documented and involve more than one person in the decision-making. The effective recruitment and screening of mentors includes:

- an interview
- two reference checks
- 100 point ID check
- national criminal history check
- Western Australian Working with Children Check when the mentees are under 18 years of age
- ideally one face to face contact with program staff.

All mentors need to be screened to protect vulnerable children from potential exploitation. It is important to note that some Aboriginal mentors might need assistance to collect all the necessary documentation, due to the ongoing effects of Aboriginal history.

Mentors who have faced complex life challenges and succeeded in breaking out and living fulfilling lives can be the most influential in achieving positive behavioural change³³. This is particularly important for Aboriginal young people given the additional intergenerational challenges of dispossession and cultural discontinuity their families may have faced.

Mentees

It is important to develop clear selection criteria and processes for program staff to determine the suitability of young people for the program.

A process needs to be developed for informing young people of their successful or unsuccessful referral into the mentoring program. Prompt and appropriate verbal and written explanations are necessary for the young person, family and referring agencies. A suitable referral process to other appropriate support agencies is recommended, if an application is unsuccessful.

³³ Pawson R 2004. Mentoring relationships: an explanatory review. ESRC UK Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice: Working paper no. 21. London: UK Centre for Evidence Based Policy and Practice.

Case Study

AIME



The Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) is a dynamic educational program that is proven to support Indigenous student mentees through high school and into university, employment or further education at the same rate as all Australian students. Connect with AIME at www.aimementoring.com

‘The x-factor piece with AIME’s work is two-fold.’ The first is that Indigenous young people going through AIME are finishing school at almost the same rate as every Australian child and transitioning through to university and employment almost on par with their non-Indigenous peers. The second piece is that the majority of AIME’s university student mentors are non-Indigenous, meaning that AIME is helping build a generation of educated Australians who will have a direct relationship and connection with Indigenous people.

AIME believes that Indigenous = success. The structured mentoring program is delivered by a team of inspiring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander presenters at university campuses around Australia. Sessions cover themes such as respect, identity, life skills, drama, art, goal setting and leadership. The mentoring program aims to give Indigenous students additional skills, opportunities, belief and confidence to grow and succeed.

Recruitment of mentors: AIME mentors are the lifeblood of the program. They encourage, engage and empower the mentees to unlock their limitless potential. AIME staff work with the university to promote the mentoring opportunity through lecture pitches, direct emails to students, stalls at university market days, posters across campus and social media.

There is a rigorous recruitment and training to ensure AIME puts the best mentors forward. Applicants complete an online application, which is reviewed by AIME staff at the university, at which time Working with Children Checks are conducted. Applicants that meet the criteria for AIME mentors are invited to an interview. If successful, the applicant is sent a link to Mentor Training One, an online training module that covers cultural awareness, child protection and program rules.

Following this, Mentor Training Two is the official start of the mentor's AIME journey, where they meet on campus with other mentors who will be involved in the program. This is a three-hour training that covers the role of a mentor, AIME program content, cultural awareness, role playing, child protection and communication. AIME endeavour to use Indigenous staff for all Cultural Awareness training. and to provide ongoing training opportunities for mentors once they have begun the mentoring relationship.

Orientation and Training



The Mentor Handbook is one of the Mentoring Worx resources produced as part of the Western Australian Youth Mentoring Reform Project found at the WA Youth Mentoring website at www.dlgc.wa.gov.au/mentoring-worx-resources

The Mentor Handbook outlines the mentor's role and provides practical advice on how to develop a rich relationship with the young mentee. The Mentor Handbook has been designed to complement, but not replace mentor training sessions.

Mentors

All mentors need appropriate preparation for the mentoring role, including training and resources to enable them to perform their role. Mentor groundwork topics include:

- mentoring definitions, including roles, responsibilities, expectations and boundaries of the relationship
- communication skills, including conflict management, confidentiality and risk management issues
- developing and implementing cultural awareness and appropriate practices.

As emphasised previously, where non-Aboriginal mentors work with Aboriginal young people, context specific cultural awareness training is important.

Mentors often work with young people who are struggling to come to terms with the world around them and their place in it. One approach that is based on the principles of respect, empowerment and the young person taking control of their own process of change is the strengths-based approach³⁴. This approach focuses on the young person's strengths, not their vulnerabilities. Mentors can help a young person:

- recognise that they have the ability to change their life for the better
- identify, value and use their strengths to bring about change
- take control of the process of change.

Following training, mentors should have the option to opt out. This approach represents a valuable way of screening out those who may not be the most appropriate mentors.³⁵

All mentors are encouraged to engage with pre and post-match training that is offered to them by the mentor coordinator.

Mentees

Young people should receive appropriate preparation for their participation in mentoring. Mentee groundwork topics must include:

- definitions of mentoring
- roles, responsibilities, expectations and boundaries of the relationship
- confidentiality and other relevant issues
- how the young person will communicate with other parties involved in the program, including staff and mentors
- how program staff will communicate with mentors, teachers, case managers and parents/guardians about the young person involved in the program.

34 Refer to Mentoring Worx The Mentor Handbook, pages 26–29.

35 CaFCA (Communities and Families Clearinghouse Australia) 2009. Sports Mentoring Project—Coonamble. Promising Practice Profile. Melbourne: CaFCA, Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Making the match

Making the match is critical, as no-one wants the mentoring experience to falter from a failed relationship or break down. However for a young person 'at risk' the fallout can be even more devastating and reinforce the sense of loss and or failure frequently linked with other relationships.

A poor mentoring relationship can work against change in the young person's life. Some ineffective mentoring practices are:

- short term mentoring programs
- irregular contact between mentor and mentee
- an authoritarian or judgemental mentor
- too much initial focus on behavioural change rather than relationship building.³⁶

The matching process

The matching focuses on the needs of the Aboriginal young person and considers the following:

- feedback from the mentee and family whether an Aboriginal person or a non-Aboriginal person is the best mentor
- a suitable mentor match is identified
- the mentor is approached about the proposed match
- the coordinator facilitates an introduction between the Aboriginal young person and the potential mentor³⁷
- the young person and the mentor have separate discussions with the coordinator regarding their interest in the potential match
- both the young person and the mentor decide whether they would like to be matched
- a trial period.

36 Allard T, Ogilvie J & Stewart A 2007. The efficacy of strategies to reduce juvenile offending. Brisbane: Justice Modelling @ Griffith, Griffith University.

37 Group activities may sometimes be run with young people and mentors to provide opportunities for 'natural' matches to be made.

Trialling the match

The trial period usually lasts one to two months (two to three match meetings). This period provides an opportunity for the mentor and the Aboriginal young person to see if there is a connection before formalising the match.

The coordinator can guide the mentor as to how much contact they should have with the young person and what sort of activities they should do together. This period can be complex due to a number of factors including:

- the young person's availability
- the young person's personal issues
- time required to build trust
- the compatibility of the match.

The match commitment

Following the trial period, the mentor and the Aboriginal young person can formally commit to their match.

The development of the mentoring relationship is a journey in which the mentor is influential and can make a real difference in the life of the young person. The mentee may be vulnerable, struggling to come to terms with the world around them and their place in it. On the other hand the mentee may want to 'get back on track' and orient their life away from negative behaviour including criminal behaviour.

The mentor can model appropriate behaviour for the young person.³⁸ The mentor will need to consider the consequences of their own public behaviour outside of the mentoring relationship, including on social media.

Some young people may have limited understanding and knowledge of goal setting and problem solving in defining their pathway or direction. In working with a young person to set and achieve goals, the mentor may play a significant role.

The mentor should guide the mentee to focus on a small number of goals. If a mentee has a large number of goals; the challenges may become too great and the mentee may give up. It is better to define small and precise goals, that are broken down into concrete activities and tasks, can be built on as success, as larger issues are tackled.³⁹ For more information on goal setting and problem solving, see section Developing Mentoring Skills in the Mentoring Worx Mentor Handbook on pages 26–33.

38 See the Mentoring Relationship Journey in the Mentoring Worx Mentor Handbook, pages 20–25 at www.dlhc.wa.gov.au/mentoring-worx-resources

39 Farruggia S, Bullen P, Dunphy A, Solomon F & Collins E 2010. The effectiveness of youth mentoring programmes in New Zealand. Auckland: Youth Mentoring Network.

Monitoring and support

Ongoing training and support for mentors is important to ensure they have the necessary skills and develop the resilience to remain mentors. Mentoring is a journey for both mentors and mentees, and there can be setbacks and relationship difficulties. A mentor needs support to rebuild the relationship if it falters and to deal with the complex challenges faced by at-risk youth. The mentoring relationship framework is outlined in the Mentoring Worx Mentor Handbook, pages 20–23.

Therefore it is important to develop a clear policy and procedure to monitor and respond to match developments, which ensure that:

- program staff contact both the young person and the mentor no less than fortnightly in the first three months of the relationship and monthly thereafter
- mentors are provided with formal feedback after the first month, at the midpoint, and at the conclusion of the match
- arrangements are in place to monitor and support young people
- issues that arise in the relationship are communicated to the program staff
- mentors receive ongoing training and support in response to their needs and the evolving relationship with the young person
- verbal acknowledgment of the contribution of mentors occurs on a regular basis
- young people receive support in response to their needs, for example track their needs via regular meetings, surveys and/ or interviews and refer young people and families to suitable support services, where appropriate
- program staff continually acknowledge and celebrate mentoring relationships.

Confidentiality and Duty of Care⁴⁰

Each organisation should induct the mentors on core program policies and procedures, so that the mentor can be clear about their roles as mentors and their responsibilities on confidentiality and duty of care.

Confidential information relates to the personal facts about the young person's life that they have confided to the mentor. The mentee may seek advice about an issue or they may just want to talk about it. It is crucial for the developing relationship between the mentor and the mentee that both understand when shared information is confidential, and when the mentor has a duty of care to report information to the coordinator.

If the mentor feels it necessary to refer information, which has been given in confidence, it is appropriate to discuss this first with the young person. If the mentee perceives that the mentor has 'gone behind their back', the mentee will probably never trust them again. Furthermore, it may result in long term damage for the young person.

A mentor has a duty of care to their mentee and may encounter situations which are potentially harmful or dangerous to the young person. It is possible that the mentor may become aware of information that indicates the possibility of child abuse (where the person is under 18), or other information that causes concern for the young person's wellbeing, such as the young person discloses that he or she intends to hurt themselves.

⁴⁰ For more information, see Legal Boundaries in the Mentoring Worx Mentor Handbook, pages 34–35.

In such a situation it is imperative that the mentor contact the agency through the coordinator with their concerns which should never be dismissed as over-reacting.

An appropriate decision, regarding how best to proceed and whether or not a notification to child protection authorities is required, should be made in conjunction with the coordinator.

Closing the match

Research shows that it can be extremely detrimental to a young person when the mentoring relationship 'fades out' or the mentor leaves abruptly. Planning for the end of the match ahead can save confusion and heartache.

Closure of the match is a formal policy with clear procedures for exiting the program and guidelines regarding:

- future contact between the mentor and young person
- assistance for young person to define the next steps in achieving personal goals
- linking the young person to relevant supports in the community to assist with ongoing personal growth
- program staff acknowledging and celebrating the successes of the mentoring relationship.



Case Study

Closure

Quality mentoring programs have a process in place to formally close the match. Closure can take place and be marked in a variety of formats that observe cultural matters and practices.

One example of a closure process whilst not unique to Aboriginal people is from Youth Focus www.youthfocus.com.au. This mentoring program supports young people aged 13 to 18 years, who may be experiencing early signs associated with depression, self-harm and suicide.

‘There is a planned end to the Youth Focus mentor-mentee relationship which is clearly agreed and adhered to by the mentee, mentor, youth counsellor and youth programs coordinator. The closure is anticipated to happen at the end of twelve months.

‘To signify the relationship is coming to close a closure meeting is initiated by the youth programs coordinator. All the parties are invited to this meeting. A formal closure report is completed during this meeting and documented in both the mentor’s and the mentee’s file. During this closure meeting there is also a presentation of a small meaningful gift which is presented by the youth programs coordinator. The meaningful gift is meant to represent a connection within the mentoring relationship. This way both parties may leave the relationship with something meaningful to hold on to.’

‘In situations where the relationship has closed sooner or due to unforeseen circumstances the meaningful gift is not always appropriate. In this case, the closure is done in a respectful manner based on the circumstances and taking into consideration the mentor and the mentee. For instance, the mentor or mentee may offer to write a letter to one another to signify the closure of the relationship. At other times, a debrief with the mentor by the youth programs coordinator and debrief of mentee with the youth counsellor is the most appropriate closure procedure.’

It must be noted however, that not all mentoring programs include gift giving as part of the closure process and in some circumstances this may not always be appropriate. If in doubt the mentoring coordinator should be contacted for clarification and reference to specific agency policies and procedures.

End Note:

Eight principles underlying good mentoring practices with Aboriginal students were identified by Dr Judy MacCallum and colleagues (2005).⁴¹

These were:

- dialogue and relationship building
- positive mentor qualities
- recognition of Aboriginality
- involvement of Aboriginal families and community
- recognition of the range of cultural, social and educational needs of Aboriginal students
- clarity of the vision and part of a broad plan
- leadership and commitment of staff
- thinking creatively when confronted with constraints.

The authors noted that for many young Aboriginal people involved in the mentoring programs, effective relationship building was an outcome in and of itself given the lack of healthy relationships in their lives. Critical to this relationship building is for mentors to:

- allow enough time for those involved to build rapport and trust; and getting to know each other
- have a sense of humour, empathy and flexibility
- recognise the importance of Aboriginal identity, history and different world views.



41 MacCallum, J., Beltman, S., and Palmer, D. (2005) Mentoring as a context for developing motivation. Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education Conference, Sydney, November 29, 2005 available at: www.aare.edu.au. The paper examines the findings of a national pilot project of mentoring programs for Indigenous students, and interprets them in terms of motivation and the socio-cultural contexts which supported the mentoring relationship.

Conclusion

The consistent and enduring presence of a caring adult in a young person's life can be the difference between staying in school or 'dropping out', making healthy decisions or engaging in risky behaviours, realising one's potential or failing to achieve one's dreams.

For the mentor the mentoring relationship is an exciting and exacting journey in which the mentor can make a real difference to a young person's self-esteem and even their life chances. Being a mentor is a developmental and a transformative process in which the mentor can discover and learn new things about themselves, do something very important, and walk beside a young person guiding them as they start to steer the mentoring process.

Non-Aboriginal people can be excellent mentors for Aboriginal young people, but they should have appropriate cultural awareness training. Programs which mentor Aboriginal young people will be more effective if they involve Aboriginal mentors and Elders in the design and ongoing management of the program.

The Guide to Mentoring Aboriginal Young People has been designed to provide guidance for Western Australian youth mentoring agencies to set up or orient their service so the program is culturally appropriate and secure in their interactions with Aboriginal young people.

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www.workingwithatsi.info/content/key_ideas4.htm. This website is a project of the Muswellbrook Shire Council Community Services Team.

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The Guide to Mentoring Aboriginal Young People is one of the Mentoring Worx resources produced as part of the Western Australian youth mentoring reform project with funds provided by the Australian Government under the former National Partnership on Youth Attainment and Transitions.

Mentoring Worx resources can be found at www.dlgs.wa.gov.au/mentoring-worx-resources



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