Mentoring Programs For Aboriginal Youth

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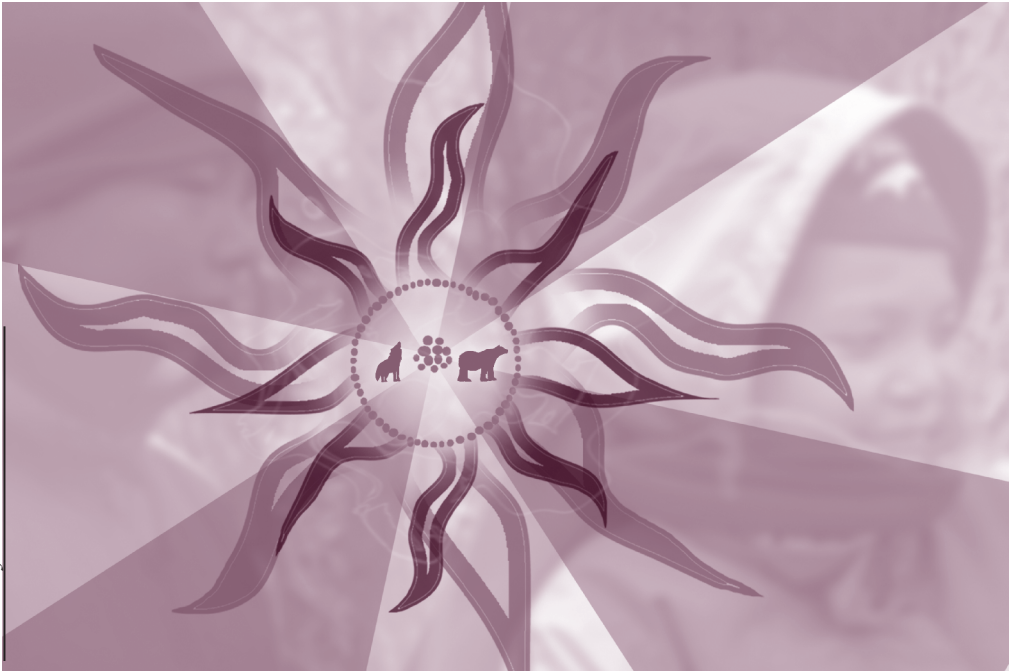
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Abstract

In this study we explore and compare concepts of mentoring from both mainstream and Aboriginal perspectives. Our objective was to identify factors that could influence the development of an Aboriginal specific mentoring program in a mainstream national program. Key factors for Aboriginal mentoring programs were determined through interview and focus group discussions about program successes and challenges in local communities. It was determined that successful mentoring programs should be developed in collaboration with community members from the outset and built on existing strengths and programs within the community. Successful Aboriginal mentoring programs must also include the mentee's family, traditional values and culture, and adequate resources for sustainability. Formation of a community advisory group for guidance and support is essential for success and sustainability, especially for programs involving outside organizations.

Introduction

Adults who provide friendship, guidance, and support for children and youth outside of their own immediate families often are called mentors. The process of mentoring is viewed widely as having a positive and valuable impact on how children and youth develop (Grossman and Tierney 1998; Jekielek et al. 2002, Sipe 1996), and programs designed to create and nurture these relationships have grown rapidly in recent years (Sipe and Roder 1998). Despite this general growth, mentoring programs designed specifically for Aboriginal children and youth are relatively rare, as is literature in this area (Smith-Mohammed 1998). In response to a perceived need for Aboriginal mentoring programs, agencies are beginning to explore methods for developing such programs in ways that will meet the diverse needs of children, youth, and communities. To facilitate this process, and identify some of the critical issues that must be addressed, we examine the concepts and components underlying traditional mentoring programs and compare them to Aboriginal perspectives on mentoring. To gain additional insights into these issues, we also interviewed individuals experienced in developing and administering programs for Aboriginal children and youth.

Western Mentoring

The evolution of the concept and practice of mentoring within Eurocentric cultures has been diverse enough that no single definition of mentoring ex-

ists in the literature; each application is subjective (Kartje 1996) and changes over time. The word mentor originally comes from Homer's *Odyssey* (800 BCE) in which Mentor is appointed by the king of Ithaca to raise the king's son, Telemachus. This account regards the mentor as a person with many roles (i.e., father, teacher, friend, advisor, supporter) who must balance being an authoritarian and egalitarian figure in the youth's life. Further contributions have come from youth organizations such as Boy Scouts, who emphasize skill and personal development under the supervision and support of adults, striving to "create modern American character in children (especially boys)" (Deloria 1998: 96). Within the last few decades, mentoring literature and programming have become specialized within three settings — academic, corporate, and social (personal) each with its own goals and strategies (Kartje 1996). These mentoring specializations have focused on end goals of, respectively, career advancement (Zey 1984), academic achievement (Lyons et al. 1990), and personal development.

Of these three types of mentorship, however, the most broad in scope is social or personal mentoring, a practice that has entered the mainstream as an alternative to government-run social programs for addressing the social problems of children and youth (Bein 1999). Personal mentoring occurs within organizations that initiate and support personal relationships between at-risk youth and volunteers from the community. Increasingly, the mentor's role in social mentoring has shifted from being authoritarian, such as a parent, to egalitarian, such as an older sibling or a friend. This trend towards greater respect for the mentee's goals is evidenced in The Mentoring Centre's (a non-profit mentoring think-tank) description of the mentor's role as providing "support, guidance, learning and concrete help as needed (italics added)" (Jacks 2000: 1). Volunteerism is also a central component of the contemporary understanding of a social mentor. This places responsibility on the community from which the volunteers are drawn and has thus caused many mentoring organizations to nurture closer community links and greater involvement (Littkey and Allen 1999).

Personal mentorship has developed and employed several strategies of recruitment, screening, and matching to increase the chances of program success. Recruitment of volunteers is crucial: a shortage of mentors creates a long waiting list of potential mentees (Leroy et al. 2002). Strategies such as advertisement, networking, and word of mouth are used to increase program awareness, outline selection criteria, and set recruiting deadlines (Jucovy 2001), all to the end goal of attracting mentors with the desired qualities.

Screening is also important to protect youth who may be vulnerable often due to social problems and/or their minority status; in a study of Big Brothers Big Sisters programs, for example, more than half of mentees were from racial minorities and 80% were from impoverished families (Tierney and Grossman 2000). The potential risk of harm to mentees is decreased through checking mentors' criminal/financial records and conducting personal interviews, which increase the likelihood of finding mentors who are available, trustworthy, mature, stable, respectful, and committed (Sipe 1996). Finally, matching mentors and mentees is important for creating long-lasting relationships with desirable results. Same-race and gender matches allow mentees to closely identify with mentors due to the belief that they share common life experiences, and can also allow mentors to teach culturally specific history, traditions, language, and learning style (Smith-Mohammed 1998). Generally, the most important indicator of a good relationship, however, and that which recruitment, screening, and matching attempt to establish, is long-term commitment, trustworthiness, and mutual respect (Sipe 1999).

Aboriginal Mentoring

From an Aboriginal perspective, informal mentoring has also had a long history, developing around shared societal values. Prior to contact with European culture, First Nations people had tribal customary practices for providing mentor-like guidance for children and youth. The whole tribe (or community) contributed to raising children; everyone had a role to play in teaching the young. "Children were regarded as a gift from the Creator and members of the community shared responsibility for their upbringing" (Rail 1996: 141). According to Makokis (2001), family relationships have been central to social organization among Aboriginal people. Indigenous tribes, in the past and the present, hold the extended family in high regard as they assist in mentoring the children.

Several extended families combine to form a band. Several bands combine to form a tribe or nation; several tribes or nations combine to form confederacies. The circle of kinship can be made up of one circle or a number of concentric circles. These kinship circles can be interconnected by other circles such as religious and social communities. This approach to Aboriginal organization can be viewed as a "spider web" of relations (Little Bear 2000: 79).

Little Bear's analogy reflects the importance of kinship ties not only with the nuclear and extended families, but also the community. It is through this complexity of interweaving and interconnecting social circles that Indigenous

people usually find themselves relating to each other. Therefore, when considering the mentor/mentee relationship the mentor's knowledge of the Aboriginal social context can be helpful in establishing a strong connection.

The Indigenous family structure, however, was disrupted by the policies imposed by the colonial administration. Strategies of assimilation were established by the state and church to enforce the adoption of European lifestyles, such as work, agriculture, and religion (Milloy 1999: 6). Education, via residential schooling, was a critical element of assimilation (Jaenen 1995, Milloy 1999), forcefully separating young children from their families, language, and culture. The result of such disconnection and isolation was compounded with serious health problems (Royal Commission of Aboriginal Peoples 1996) and terrible living conditions (Millar 1996) in the residential schools, leaving indelible scars on individuals and entire communities.

As a non-Aboriginal mentor to an Aboriginal youth, it is important to understand the impact that the legacy of the residential school experience has had on many Indigenous people today, such as loss of language, pride, spirit, culture, family, innocence, and sense of self (Assembly of First Nations 1994, Ross 1996, Steinhauer 2002a). Many Indigenous families are still experiencing the intergenerational effects of residential schools, which have hindered the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual life of community members (Lafrance 2003). There has been much research indicating that residential schooling has many negative impacts, such as lack of role models and training for child rearing (Bull 1991).

In contrast to the style of education imposed through residential schools, Aboriginal views on education are more holistic, rather than individualistic (Henderson 2000), and inclusive of immediate family, extended family, and the community (Steinhauer 2002a). Indigenous realities (such as culture, values, and customs) represent a world view that is different from that of non-Aboriginals (Steinhauer 2002b) and, from this perspective, learning through mentoring should emphasize beliefs and values in accordance with this world view, such as respect for all things that are living, individual responsibility, self-reliance, and proper conduct (Barman et al. 1995). Finally, the way families traditionally shaped behaviors was through the use of positive examples and role modeling (Barman et al. 1995, Hall 1996, Miller 1996). Mentors and mentees can learn from stories, examples, and actions that are based on their relationship with each other.

Hampton (2000) found that Indian culture has different ways of communicating than mainstream society. The use of oral tradition (stories, games,

and role modeling) and hands-on interactive learning were often used to set examples for the young (Hall 1996, Miller 1996). Given that some experts suggest that Native students learn more easily in small groups (Little Bear 2000), group mentoring may be an effective strategy for Indigenous children and youth, facilitated with methods and symbols appropriate for Aboriginal culture. For example, the sharing circle, in a mentoring context, builds respect and trust between the mentors and the mentees — in a circle everyone is equal (Chisan 2001); the medicine wheel views the mentor's and mentee's lives in a holistic way, encompassing the spiritual, mental, emotional, and physical.

Incorporating knowledge of Indigenous history and culture is very important for strengthening the relationship between mentor and mentee. In particular, mentoring programs for Aboriginal communities must be based on a thorough understanding of the traditional centrality of the family in community organization, the importance of the community for raising children and youth, and the lessons learned from imposed residential schooling. Moreover, mentoring programs need to be developed with sensitivity to the fact that people in Aboriginal communities are likely to differ significantly from non-Aboriginal communities in their perspectives on optimal ways of teaching and learning and, more generally, in the nature of the educational experience.

Summary of Approaches

Both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal approaches emphasize the need for children and youth to have strong role models when they are growing up. These role models are often family members. Both approaches acknowledge that the roles of immediate family members in child development can be replicated or enhanced by extended family or non-kin community members. This recognition is demonstrated, for example, in the terms used to describe people who take the role of mentors. The Cree word for aunt on the mother's side of the family, *nikawiys*, is translated as "little mother," thus defining a non-immediate family member in terms of her mother-like role toward her niece or nephew. In a non-Aboriginal context, the use of kin terms such as "big brother," "big sister," and "uncles at large" as references to non-kin mentors indicates the kin-like role they play in mentees' lives. Thus there is a shared recognition of the importance and flexibility of role modeling, and the importance of role modeling to personal development.

There are also, however, differences between these cultural approaches. While non-Aboriginal mentoring is more focused on the mentor/mentee pair and often involves a one-on-one structure, Aboriginal learning and child rearing more commonly takes place in a group setting. The latter typically is a more informal atmosphere where there is less distinction between who is teaching and who is being taught. Further, in Aboriginal communities close bonds among both immediate and extended family, as well as non-kin members, are valued and important for raising children and youth. All mentoring-like activities, then, are closely connected to the surrounding community or at least linked to the Aboriginal culture.

The Research Project

A national mainstream mentoring organization was exploring the possibility of developing an Aboriginal specific mentoring program in collaboration with local communities and wanted to study the differences and similarities between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal approaches to mentoring. Such factors would influence the development and implementation of mentoring programs for Aboriginal children and youth in Canada. In order to assess the extent to which these factors might pose new and unique challenges to current program development methods and to gain additional insights about existing mentoring practices in Aboriginal communities, we interviewed a number of individuals with experience in establishing and maintaining a wide variety of programs for Aboriginal children and youth.

Methods

The research process was guided by an advisory committee that included an Elder and representatives from several Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal organizations providing mentoring services. Participants were selected through this network which included a research centre devoted to Aboriginal health issues (the Alberta ACADRE Network), a national agency responsible for implementing mentoring programs (Big Brothers Big Sisters), and additional suggestions from other advisory committee members. A purposive sample was chosen based on experience in developing, implementing, or administering programs for Aboriginal children and youth. In order to reduce sample bias, additional criteria were also considered to allow for a greater diversity of interviewee experience such as gender, age, race, geographic location, setting (urban and rural), group (First Nations, Métis, etc.), and type of program ex-

perience (traditional mentoring and mentoring-like programs that may not have been defined as mentoring but had similar components).

The resulting sample of participants came from urban centres such as Edmonton, Calgary, and Winnipeg, as well as from First Nation Reserves and Métis settlements. Our sample included people from several different types of youth programs and positions within those programs. All participants, except one, were Aboriginal. Most of the Aboriginal participants had experience as program developers and all were experienced leaders and community role models. Finally, there was a mix of participant genders and ages, including youth representation. Ten individual interviews and one focus group (with five participants) were conducted during March 2003.

A standard set of questions and probes was developed for use in both the interviews and focus group, to ensure consistency. The questions focused on how participants defined the mentoring concept, and the activities they associated with such programs. In order to avoid any confusion associated with the word "mentor," a concept approach was used where mentoring was consistently referred to as a program where adults provide friendship, help, and guidance to youth. We also explored the underlying value of similar programs for youth in Aboriginal communities. Lastly, we inquired about the factors that contribute to the success or failure of such programs.

The resulting tape-recorded interviews and focus group session were transcribed, along with any relevant notes taken during the interviews. First the transcripts were coded in relation to the structure of each interview question. Second, the data were analyzed to discover emergent themes and sub-themes, and these were: mentoring need and purpose, examples of activities/programs, success factors, challenges, protocol, and resources. Though the themes that emerged in this second coding process were similar to the initial thematic sorting by question, the complementary coding process increased our validity, and uncovered new concepts. The data fell into two general themes: (1) the fundamental nature of community and culture, and (2) key elements of successful mentoring programs. Two researchers conducted the individual and focus group interviews and two did not, to minimize researcher bias. All the researchers were involved in the data analysis and coding, and several parallel coding exercises were conducted to reduce coding bias. This entire process was carried out by four researchers (one of whom is Aboriginal).

Results

The primary purpose of data collection was to explore Aboriginal, community-based mentoring practices and programs that could inform the development of a mentoring program for Aboriginal children and youth in a primarily non-Aboriginal organization. An important finding was that mentoring is a word not normally used in Aboriginal communities. Focus group participants described this difference.

> My mentors? I mean, I didn't even know they were my mentors.

> We all teach, we all guide. We may not define it as mentoring … but in essence we are mentoring.

This basic variance between Indigenous and mainstream perceptions of mentoring and the language used to describe them sets the context for the data analysis. Two major themes emerged from the data that provided direction for the development of mentoring programs for Aboriginal children and youth — one concerning the nature of community and culture and the other involving challenges and solutions for mentoring programs.

The Fundamental Nature of Community and Culture

Inclusion of family in mentoring was mentioned in a number of ways throughout the focus group and interviews. Some participants felt that family was an essential partner in the mentoring process. Thus, there needs to be a relationship between the mentor (Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal), the mentee, and the mentee's family to ensure success.

> [M]entoring is an effective treatment program for families, not just youth.

> We need more family-oriented services. Right now there are only band-aid solutions.

Others suggested that the mentoring process could be a means of enhancing traditional values and healthy living patterns.

> We need to design and develop a life skills program for families.

Residential schools have changed the family dynamic:

> You have to realize the homes that [youth] come from and
> the lifestyle, especially the urban lifestyle.

Some participants suggested that youth need to be taught about their
parents' residential school experiences and the impact this has had on tradi-
tional parenting skills.

Individuals in the focus group emphasized how programs that bring fam-
ily and community together create an interface for "community identity"
that Aboriginal youth need. One person explained how at-risk youth nor-
mally do not have any attachment to family or community, so there is no
compulsion to respect and value themselves or others.

> Youth need to positively identify with community. They need
> to feel like they have a connection that builds a sense of be-
> longing.

This sense of community, rural or urban, creates an atmosphere where
families can learn, and where adults can learn to become mentors and role
models themselves. Overall, respondents strongly emphasized the need for
community involvement from the outset of any program.

> It should be community driven and if it is a community need
> it would work better.

Community involvement encompasses two key sub-themes in the data:
protocol/politics and ownership. Following proper protocol within an
Indigenous community conveys respect and trust, and it involves approach-
ing the appropriate community leaders (e.g. chief, council, elders) at the out-
set.

> Meet with chief(s) and council(s) and let them know your
> intentions.

> It is better if the community members want to do it.

> Once you [approach elders, council and community] prop-
> erly they can help out with the program.

> Often times it's not so much what you do but how you at-
> tempt to do it [that determines] how much success you'll
> have.

Some participants suggested that the most harmful influence on the suc-
cess of youth programs is interagency politics. External organizations must be
aware that protocols and politics vary from community to community.

> Each city is unique and each community is unique.

Regardless of whether programs are initiated by community or external
organizations, protocol is important, and community buy-in is essential. One
person suggested an Aboriginal community advisory group for each mentor-
ship program to provide guidance for program creation and maintenance.

The ideal situation for mentoring program development, identified
strongly by all participants, was when people in a community initiated the
program themselves. A number of respondents mentioned that youth should
play a key role in the planning process. If youth have a sense of ownership of
the program they are more likely to respect and feel connected to the pro-
gram.

> The youth need to own and develop their own program.

> The program should be developed by the youth themselves
> to create pride.

However, one participant mentioned that adults are reluctant to relin-
quish leadership power to youth. Most participants were insistent that role
models and mentors must be Aboriginal people; that although Aboriginal
children learn from a number of leadership models, mentorship should be
from Aboriginal mentors, who can affirm traditional values.

> Aboriginal adults must be the mentors for the Aboriginal
> kids; that's the bottom line.

Having community members as mentors who are reinforcing traditional
cultural values with youth and children creates a level of ownership and re-
sponsibility essential to program success. In the absence of Aboriginal men-
tors, there is some support for cross-cultural mentoring.

KEY ELEMENTS OF SUCCESSFUL MENTORING PROGRAMS

Even though Aboriginal mentors were identified as the most appropriate role models for youth in mentoring programs, there was much discussion about the shortage of appropriate Aboriginal role models in the communities. Several factors were identified to account for the lack of community mentors: many Aboriginal families are single-parent families; some adults have not healed from residential school experiences, drug and alcohol abuse, or criminal activities. Another participant also pointed out that

> …most people are too busy raising their own families and their own extended families to be doing volunteer work.

Two community leaders expressed concern about the need for a screening process that adequately protects the children from adults who may want to take advantage of them.

> I'm very cautious when I start thinking about adults working with youth. Children are very vulnerable and people think they can take liberties with our children that they can't take with other children.

> In allowing those who have records [to act as mentors] this may allow them to relate to those youth struggling in life.

Our data indicate that a different screening program for Aboriginal mentors may be useful. Recruitment and screening need to be culturally appropriate in order to expand the number of Aboriginal mentors; criteria for inclusion of people who have recovered from addictions or criminal activities may have relevant experiences to share.

Several participants mentioned the need for training role models within the community, and the fact that once they are trained there are few opportunities for them to use their skills. People reported feeling undervalued as mentor. Our participants mentioned that there are few role models in city institutions. For example, one person noted that he knew of four Aboriginal police officers in Edmonton, and several Aboriginal teachers, but that these teachers were rarely in the city schools. Nevertheless, he felt that teachers are often good mentors, and that a mentorship program should start in the school, within the educational program, at the level of Grade 1 or 2. Another

solution to the lack of available mentors, suggested by two respondents, was peer or group mentoring.

> Sometime it's better to have a few mentors with a larger group of kids.

One of the main conclusions from the data was the need to build on existing programs and strengths, thus avoiding duplication of services.

> I get frustrated when they bring in new programs when they can't sustain the programs they have right now.

> You need a substantial budget for programs and staff and one that is stable over time.

A successful mentoring program would be one that is connected to other programs in the community with similar objectives whether they are mentoring specific or not.

> They have tried almost every program in the world on Aboriginal people. They last a little while and then there is no sustainability to them.

Some of the organizations mentioned as providing something akin to mentoring programs include: Boys and Girls Club; Bosco Homes; HIV/AIDS programs; safe homes; summer day camps; summer student programs; drop-in programs; cultural programs such as round dances, Young Warriors, conferences and workshops; Aboriginal Head Start program; Alberta Future Leaders Program; Ben Calf Robe School; and recreation programs such as dance, computer, karate, and archery.

Participants mentioned that many successful programs for children and youth involved recreation as the vehicle for the mentoring process. Others suggested that a recreation program could be modified to become a mentoring program. Many participants felt that children and youth need to have fun in a positive environment where they feel comfortable.

> Programs must be fun (can include food, music, etc.) so that youth want to be there.

One rural community example was given where a school-based program

provided young people with a place to get together and adult supervision to model positive relationships.

> You have a group of young people and a peer dynamic here but you also have adults teaching them how to interact with each other. It's an informal mentoring relationship. It's not a one-on-one.

Respondents saw volunteers as a scarce but essential resource, and some suggested that youth were a resource as peer mentors.

> Creating positive peer groups is most powerful for kids.

> Screening to ensure positive mentors that work well with youth and who have been through similar circumstances to youth — mentors can be youth themselves.

> Attracting volunteers is very difficult since mentoring is draining of time and emotion — incentives are needed (not just monetary ones).

Many Indigenous people cannot access existing resources. Several people raised the issue of the ability to participate for members of poor families with many children. One gave the example of the need for transportation to be provided for activities, as a parent cannot leave the other children to drive one child, and the entire family may not want to come to wait for the program of only one child. Further, the need for financial support and buy-in from local communities and provincial governments was also mentioned.

> All the Aboriginal teachings say that programs for Aboriginal people have to be developed with the Aboriginal community.

A few raised the issue of financial support and sustainability for programs.

> I get frustrated when they bring in new programs, when they can't sustain the ones they have right now.

There was general agreement on the need for commitment and owner-

ship. One participant spoke strongly of the need for government to view existing Aboriginal organizations as resources, and to consult them for research such as this, as well as program design and implementation.

> Why didn't they come to an Aboriginal agency? We've been doing this stuff in the community for the last 18 years.

All participants agreed that mentoring is a good idea, although there was disagreement on whether the programs are "needed" in the communities more than other programs might be. One participant defined mentoring as a process of teaching youth to make healthy choices, become self-responsible, and transfer skills to increase self-esteem. Most agreed that there is little formal mentoring in the communities but there is considerable service provision.

DISCUSSION

The concept of mentoring has changed considerably over time and is likely to continue to evolve as mentoring practices expand to different contexts. As evident from our review of the literature and from participants in our interviews, the term mentoring is uncommon in Aboriginal communities, but the core concept — adults providing friendship, guidance, and support for children and youth outside of their own immediate families — is culturally ingrained. Developing mentoring programs for Aboriginal children and youth will present challenges, but it also is likely to require solutions that will contribute to the continued evolution of mentoring concepts and practices.

Several elements of the literature we reviewed on Aboriginal perspectives were confirmed, and often expanded, by the participants in our interviews. One such example was the centrality of the family and the community, raised in both cases, but our participants also cited the pressing need for family-oriented services and for helping children and youth to gain a sense of community identity. Another was the importance of having Aboriginal mentors matched with Aboriginal youth, despite the relative shortage of these mentors, to encourage traditional cultural values.

There were also issues raised that indicated a gap between current standard mentoring practices and community realities, as described by the participants. For example, it was noted that the screening of criminal records may eliminate several potentially excellent Aboriginal mentors from a pool that is already quite small. Also, whereas youth (mentees) are typically viewed

by mentoring organizations as a "target" of programs, some participants described them as potential resources who could help in group mentoring or volunteering of other sorts. Thus, there is a fundamental difference in perspective.

Finally, our participants identified a number of concerns not mentioned in the literature, such as the need to follow local community protocol in initiating projects and the importance of community ownership. It is necessary that mentoring programs, especially if run by outside organizations, make an effort to integrate into community structure and closely link with existing programs. Resource support for existing community youth organizations may be more beneficial than the development of entirely new programs, as stability is vital to success.

Successful mentoring programs for Aboriginal children and youth are likely to require a careful merging of the components that underlie success in non-Aboriginal programs with the perspectives and needs of individual Aboriginal communities. These perspectives and needs are likely to vary from community to community, and so it would be foolhardy to suggest that one approach could be developed to fit all contexts. Programs developed for First Nations reservations may not fit the needs of people on Métis settlements or in urban settings, although our data were not sufficient to distinguish the likely differences. We can, however, recommend several principles and guidelines that should facilitate the initial planning and development of successful mentoring programs for Aboriginal children and youth.

1. Mentoring should not be seen as a stand-alone, narrowly targeted program but rather as an activity that is entirely supportive of community values and goals and that is integrated fully with other activities related to community building, education, and healing.

2. Mentoring should be embedded in existing programs.

3. A community advisory group should be established at the outset of any mentoring program to inform and guide the development, evolution, and maintenance of the program.

LIMITATIONS

The main limitation of this study was the time constraint imposed by the funder which resulted in a limited sample size. Though we strove to be as diverse and representative as possible in our selection of participants, the sample was too small to be of any quantitative or qualitative significance for

internal comparison of groups, such as urban versus rural perceptions of mentoring. As an Elder observed, the sense of time differed for the research team, the funders of the study, and the community participants.

This study nonetheless does provide some important findings on which future research and programming can be based and compared. The responses of participants were very helpful in addressing the questions that served to motivate this study, thus supporting the strategy of using these methods of collecting data. Participants were enthused about their involvement, and many offered their services as advisors for the development of mentorship programs. Thus the amount of participation in the research process itself, similar to program development, is a good indicator of success.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

To be successful, mentoring programs should be developed in partnership with community members and linked to similar existing community programs. Coordinators must be appropriately trained and supported, mentee families should be incorporated where possible, and programs should have a flexible structure that includes group mentoring and cultural events. Mentorship programs will likely experience challenges in recruitment due to a lack of available mentors in the community, though existing programs specializing in leadership training may provide a valuable pool. There is also a need to adjust the screening process so as not to filter out potential mentors who may have had a troubled past but who have important experience to contribute. Incorporating these elements will help to make mentoring programs meaningful and address some of the challenges that undoubtedly will arise.

The literature review supports the concept of group mentoring and Aboriginal mentors for Aboriginal children. The biggest challenge facing mentoring organizations in Aboriginal communities may be the recruitment and screening of Aboriginal mentors. These tasks may be accomplished best through existing programs where mentoring skills are provided to the leadership and as an incentive to membership in the organization. As people become familiar with the role of a mentor it is important to provide opportunities for self and external evaluation to ensure that appropriate boundaries are maintained. Evaluation processes should be appropriate to the community and team being evaluated, and the goals developed at the outset by the community. The process of establishing trust with the community takes time and patience for both partners as this serves as a new learning experience for

everyone. Finally, program planners must ensure adequate and realistic time for the community to develop trust and commitment.

Implementation

Since the completion of this research, the mentoring organization that sparked the research has applied the recommendations to the development of an Aboriginal mentoring pilot program in collaboration with four regional communities. Provincial funding has been provided to support the pilot programs to set up advisory groups to create community-specific programs. Each pilot program is as unique as the community that is creating it. Evaluation will be conducted throughout the development process in order to capture and share the learnings of this unique process nationally.

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