



Mother Offenders Mentoring Moms *that are*
Incarcerated *to* Encourage Sustainability
(MOMMIES)

Sponsor Support and Mentoring Program

Mentoring for the lives of your children...one Offender at a time

This M.O.M.I.E.S. Sponsor Support and Mentoring Program outline was created and developed to uplift, encourage, educate and reform, by a living example, the parental cognitions of incarcerated mothers in the redevelopment and restructuring of parental roles, rights and responsibilities for their current and/or unborn child(ren). This two (2) month, intensive program, was designed to help the released inmate to innerstand the primary focus of their choice to become a parental sponsor and what that role means to their Mentees. This program has direct affiliation with the Incarcerated Childbirth Empowerment & Children of Incarcerated ParentS (ICE CHIPS) Program

Program Requirements:

- Mentor must be released for more than 90 days and have successfully reunited with their birth children; parental rights **CANNOT** be revoked at time of program acceptance.
- Clean and sober for one year or *concurrently* enrolled a Substance Abuse program within their NA/AA Chemical Dependency confines
- *Directly* recommended and referred to the program from their counselor, Probation or Parole Officer or Court
- Not currently in violation of any court order, probation or parole.

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Section 1: Comprehensive Planning and Program Design

Before the implementation of any successful program, substantial planning is critical. There are a number of key questions that should be answered before getting started:

1. How does mentoring fit within the larger vision, mission and goals of reentry?
2. What are the goals (and outcomes) desired for a mentoring program?
3. What kind of mentoring will occur (one-on-one, group, etc.)?
4. What is the target offender population?
5. Who will manage the mentors and provide program oversight?
6. How will mentors be identified, recruited, and trained?
7. What process will be used to match offenders and mentors?
8. What additional or inclusive programs are needed to be included at the planning and design phases of the program?
9. What monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be in place?

Experience suggests that mentoring programs be designed so that mentors and offenders can meet regularly for at least a year in order to ensure that enough time is provided to form bonds and produce benefits.

Section 2: Mentor and Mentee Recruitment

Once the planning process has been completed and goals for recruiting both mentors and mentees have been established, the creation of a marketing plan and marketing tools will be needed to assist in promoting the program.

▪ **Mentors**

There are several approaches that have been used to recruit mentors. One method is to reach out to numerous stakeholders – advisory committee members, staff, and community members – as they can assist in marketing the program and the recruiting process. In San Diego, the PRI grantee Metro United Methodist Urban Ministry used “mentoring buddies” to work with mentors. Mentoring buddies are volunteers who may be interested in mentoring but do not have the time to commit to becoming a full-fledged mentor. Instead, they provide support to mentors in the program for only as much time as they are able. This approach allows the program to engage the interest of the volunteer, increasing the likelihood that he or she becomes a formal mentor at a later time.

Consideration should be given as to whether the program will use ex-offenders as mentors, commonly called “peer mentors.” Some believe that ex-offenders make excellent mentors because they understand the issues facing participants, have more credibility in that they have “walked in the offender’s shoes,” and often put more effort and passion into the mentoring role. Many departments of corrections, however, have policies that may restrict or prohibit ex-offenders from entering secure facilities or policies prohibiting anyone with a past criminal record from having active involvement in offender programs. Despite these challenges, many of the Generation 1 PRI sites report using ex-offenders as part of their mentoring programs. Lastly, another issue to consider is whether mentors will be paid for their time and/or reimbursed for costs associated with mentoring (e.g., travel expenses, mentoring activities).

Most mentoring programs are clearly volunteer programs (only a few pay a nominal fee of some kind); and there is no evidence to suggest that either method – paid or volunteer – is more effective than the other in terms of recruiting mentors or providing mentoring services.

▪ **Mentees**

Participation in mentoring programs is often not mandatory, therefore some strategies for engaging offenders in a mentoring program include:

1. Engaging offenders while they are still in prison by providing informational sessions on the benefits of becoming a mentee (i.e., that participants are more likely to find a job and are less likely to go back to prison),
2. Allowing interested offenders to attend group mentoring sessions to see if the program services resonate with them before formally committing themselves to participation,
3. Offering incentives and other services at group mentoring sessions to encourage offender attendance (e.g., stipends, job training classes, gift cards for grocery stores).

Section 3: Mentor and Mentee Orientation

Both potential mentors and mentees are typically provided an orientation to the program as part of the recruitment process. This orientation would provide detailed information about the program, the time commitment required, and the benefits and challenges of mentoring – *before* mentors and mentees officially enroll. Orientations might include the use of vignettes, videos, question and answer sessions, or guest speakers in order to provide information about what mentors and mentees should expect. For example, during the recruitment process in Chicago’s PRI site, The Safer Foundation staff was clear with volunteers, before they agreed to sign up as

mentors for the program, that a one-year time commitment was critical.²² The Safer Foundation found that volunteers were more likely to follow-through with their time commitment to the program when they realized that leaving early could be damaging to their mentees' success.

Section 4: Mentor and Mentee Screening

Once commitment from mentors and mentees is secured, the use of a screening process determines who is eligible for the program and ensures that safety issues are addressed. Some common screening activities include requiring written applications, conducting reference/background checks of potential mentors, and having in-person interviews with mentors and mentees. Completion of the orientation and training sessions might also be considered requirements of the screening process.

Section 5: Creative Mentor Recruitment

1. Provide group mentoring opportunities to decrease the number of mentors who need to be recruited.
2. Expand the pool from which mentors are drawn – mentors do not need to have previous mentoring experience, mentors can be formerly incarcerated individuals (with some parameters).
3. Play to potential mentor motivations – ex-offenders express the desire to help and serve as role models because they've had the same experiences; non-offenders express interest in mentoring ex-offenders because their relatives or friends have been incarcerated.
4. Reach out to pastors of minority congregations to recruit mentors for minority populations.
5. Recruit mentoring buddies – individuals who are willing to help out occasionally without becoming a full-time mentor; such individuals may become more invested in the program to become an official mentor.

Section 6: Mentor Training

Once mentors and mentees are recruited, screened, and enrolled in the program, training mentors is the next critical step. While mentors receive an introduction to the program during the recruitment process (i.e., an orientation session), a comprehensive training session provides them with more detailed information about the program's rules and guidelines (including, for example, policies regarding confidentiality and safety issues), emphasize the commitments necessary to be a mentor, enhance their understanding of the barriers facing ex-offenders as they transition from prison to the community, and provide them with the skills necessary for effective mentoring (i.e., communication skills, how to build relationships, Interviewing, problem solving skills)

At the conclusion of the initial training (or at the latest, prior to being matched with a mentee), mentors should be asked to sign a participation contract that expresses their commitment to the program.

Section 7: Mentor Expectations

1. Inform and reiterate with mentors the importance of their committing to the program for an extended period of time (i.e., one year or more), and that this will result in better outcomes for their mentees.
2. Provide clear policy on what is and is not permitted (e.g., mentors are only allowed to discuss religious issues in response to a question from the mentee and attending religious services as an activity is only permitted when the desire is expressed by the mentee).
3. Provide guidance to mentors on confidentiality procedures, including when it is and when it is not acceptable to share information they learn about their mentee.

Section 8: Mentee Engagement

While efforts to engage mentees in the program should occur throughout the life of the program, it is particularly critical during the early stages. Typically, offenders do not immediately see the benefits of having a mentor. Agencies should consider ways in which they can demonstrate to ex-offenders that joining the mentoring program may assist them in making their transition to the community a success. For example, Talbert House (Cincinnati's PRI grantee) does not mandate that offenders participate in the mentoring program, but they do require that participants meet with mentoring program staff at the same time they meet with job training and placement staff. This program stresses, with participants that joining the mentoring component will assist them in all areas of transition and reentry. The better offenders understand how to use the program to their advantage, the more engaged they are likely to be.

Section 9: *Pair Matching*

In order to ensure that mentee-mentor relationships are successful (in both one group mentoring settings), mentoring programs need a strategy to match compatible individuals. Matching considerations include things like hobbies, interests, geography, religiosity, and/or gender. For one, a more controlled first introduction mentoring, staff might allow pairs of mentors and mentees to immediately mix with mentors, before group mentoring sessions begin. This allows new mentees to facilitate a more natural matching process and doesn't hold pressure to the relationships inception.

Section 10: *Mentor and Mentee Retention*

One lesson learned from the Ready4Work Initiative was the importance of focusing on the retention of mentors and mentees. When mentees drop out of a program, they not only increase their own risk of failure, but also impact the mentors' commitment to the program.

Mentors whose mentees quit might feel disappointed and frustrated by the failure. By being clear with mentees and mentors about the work involved and the possibilities for failure (and what happens when a mentee drops out of the program), all parties can have realistic expectations for the program. In addition to clear expectations, mentoring programs should also utilize supervision, recognition, and incentives to keep mentees and mentors motivated to stay in the program. Career Opportunity Development, Inc. holds an open house every two weeks before group mentoring sessions. These open houses include meals, engaging activities, and interesting presentations. For example, to retain mentees, The Safer Foundation staff follows the motto "*we will not give up on you*" – whether this means meeting mentees at home or changing the meeting times to accommodate busy schedules, the intention is to meet the Mentee where they are so the success of the relationship will not falter.

Section 11: *Program Monitoring*

Monitoring, which is another critical component of a mentoring program's accountability, increases the likelihood of success. By supervising matches, a program can assess one-on-one mentoring activities; your program staff and any troubleshooting that may need to happen. For group monitoring, one can assess rules that are (and are not) being followed, if matches are meeting regularly, and that both mentors and mentees are satisfied with the program. This also facilitates the evaluation process, as the information collected during monitoring activities informs the evaluation of outcomes (e.g., attendance in the program, job outcomes, mentors/mentees satisfaction with the program).

An example of this is shown with a PRI grantee in New Jersey. They hold an open house twice a month allowing all past and current mentees and mentors to get together to discuss current events and better ways to move forward in both their connection and the programs sustainability. This allows old 'partners' to refresh their connection and allows new mentees get to know mentors in a less structured process. This type of program promotes more of a peer-to-peer mindset and lessens the inhibition of a teacher-student relationship.

Section 12: *Consider the mindset of the transitioning Mentee*

1. Consider other descriptive terms for mentors like "life coach," "career coach," or "transition coach" to appeal to an adult offender population.
2. Emphasize that the benefits of becoming a mentee address offenders' top concerns around reentry – that participants are more likely to find a job, stay employed, and not recidivate.
3. Share success stories of previous participants whose mentoring relationships assisted in their transition to the community.

Section 13: *Keep it appealing to the Mentee*

1. Offer mentoring sessions at various times of the day to accommodate mentees' work schedules and various other appointments.
2. Provide reminders to mentees of upcoming meetings and activities.
3. Offer refreshments at group mentoring sessions.
4. Offer additional services (e.g., resume-building workshops) to mentees who attend group sessions.
5. Allow offenders to participate in group mentoring sessions in lieu of one-on-one mentoring if that is their preference.

Section 14: Keeping Mentees engaged

1. Ensure that everyone is a participant in group mentoring activities, including mentors.
2. Discuss topics that mentees suggest or ask mentees to create the topics/agenda for group meetings.
3. Provide opportunities for outside activities (e.g., eating at restaurants, going to sporting events).
4. Bring in guest speakers.
5. Encourage mentors to socially interact with mentees one-on-one before and after meetings, and over the phone in between meetings.

Section 15: Faith-Based Community Organization (FBCO) involvement

FBCO's are uniquely positioned to successfully recruit volunteers to serve as mentors, while corrections entities supervise an offender population in need of mentoring services. Therefore, implementing successful mentoring programs requires an effective working relationship between corrections and faith-based community organizations.

Both benefit from the establishment of mentoring programs that facilitate successful offender reentry and increased community safety. Once these joint goals are recognized, an effective working relationship can be established.

The following lists some steps that FBCOs and departments of corrections can take to help facilitate a partnership to provide mentoring services to offenders.

Some steps for FBCO's interested in forming a collaborative partnership with departments of corrections to provide mentoring services include:

1. Reach out to prison chaplains or other faith-based leaders with previous experience working with corrections entities in similar settings.
2. Enlist corrections staff to jointly plan the mentoring program to ensure that both partners are equally invested in the program's success.
3. Sign memoranda of agreement with departments of corrections to formalize the agreements made and to ensure that roles and responsibilities of each partner organization is clear.
4. Determine what kind of information the FBCO staff will need to collect on offenders participating in the program from the department of corrections.
5. Solicit information on prison regulations and/or supervision conditions and requirements so that mentors better understand the unique challenges facing offenders leaving prison.
6. Ask whether mentors might participate in the training available for department staff that is applicable to their work as mentors (e.g., communications skills, Motivational Interviewing) to assist with training efforts.

Section 16: Steps for others that want to Mentor

Some steps for other staff/personnel/outside groups interested in working with mentees or FBCO's to provide mentees the help they need, include:

1. Gather contact information from interested FBCO's; create an open system of communication to foster new relationships.
2. Demonstrate how partnering to offer a mentoring program is consistent with their mission.
3. Partner with FBCO staff to assist in the creation of programs, instead of just asking them to join later as volunteers.
4. Provide training and information to ensure that FBCO staff has the skills to work effectively with offenders.
5. Discuss with faith-based organization partners how they will balance religious and secular demands in providing mentoring services.
6. Both FBCO and other entities interested in establishing a mentoring program might facilitate such a partnership by enlisting a "champion" – a leader with credibility in both the secular and faith-based communities who can engage all in the effort. For example, the program director and "champion" Reverend Dr. Goode, previously the Mayor of Philadelphia, successfully mobilized partnerships between faith-based and secular organizations and developed the *Amachi Program*, a mentoring program for the children of prisoners.

One key lesson from the Gen 1 PRI Initiative was that joint planning is critical to a successful partnership. Without equal buy-in from both parties, partnerships suffered. Furthermore, establishing clear and open lines of communication are also critical. Reports on program progress, questions or concerns about policy or procedures, and changes in staff should be shared regularly between the partner organizations. While collaborating to create successful mentoring programs continues to be challenging, these lessons provide

guidance to departments of corrections and FBCOs interested in working together to provide a critical support to offenders entering the community.

Section 17: Program Evaluation

To determine the effectiveness of the program, an evaluation process should be established that seeks to determine whether the mission, goals, and objectives of the program were met. Information on the mentoring process, mentee outcomes, and level of program satisfaction should be collected and analyzed. Determining how to identify, collect, and measure intermediate and program outcomes are all important considerations.

While the experiences of mentoring programs offer the best practices discussed in this document, further research on implementing mentoring programs and their benefits for offenders is needed. The evaluation of current and future mentoring programs is critical to determine the essential elements of effective mentoring programs; for example, the length of the program, program components, attributes of effective mentors, and the types of offenders who may benefit most from mentoring.

With respect to establishing an evaluation process, consider the following:

1. What specific outcomes do you seek through this mentoring program (e.g., job attainment, decreased recidivism)?
2. How might these outcomes be measured?
3. How will you collect the data that speak to these outcomes (e.g., interviews with mentees, official DOC records, follow-up surveys)?
4. What other data might you collect that serve as indicators of the program's achievement (e.g., training hours, meeting frequency, length of relationship)?
5. Where would this data come from (e.g., mentor logs, interviews, questionnaires, surveys)?
6. Are tracking systems currently in place? What other systems might be set up to assist in data collection and tracking?
7. What will be required in order to make data collection routine?
8. Who will analyze the collected data?
9. How will findings be disseminated?
10. How will refinements to the program be made based upon findings?

Section 18: Match Closure

Attention must also be paid to the termination process – when mentees and mentors come to the successful end of the program. Since the end of the program might be a difficult time for both parties emotionally (e.g., both feel they have created a bond, mentees might experience feelings of abandonment), program staff should regularly remind both the mentor and the mentee of the time left in the program, and should be clear about the program's policy on continuing the relationship after termination. At this time, mentors and mentees might be asked to sign a termination contract, which indicates that they understand how their relationship will change post-program.

Exit interviews might also be conducted to collect feedback on how the program could be improved.