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Undergraduate Students as Job Mentors to Support Youth Transitioning from Incarceration

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Abstract: *Helping Offenders Prosper through Employment (HOPE) is a university-based mentoring program that trains undergraduate students to serve as job mentors to incarcerated youth serving a sentence in Indiana's juvenile correctional facilities. The purpose of this article is to describe HOPE's mission, principles and components, underscoring how undergraduates are prepared and serve as positive role models to incarcerated youth during and after confinement to improve community reentry. This article is intended for practitioners interested in implementing evidence-based peer mentoring in juvenile correctional facilities as well as scholars interested in the study of factors that reduce juvenile recidivism.*

Keywords: *Undergraduate mentors, incarcerated youth, reentry, transition from incarceration, HOPE mentor*

Juvenile incarceration is used as a deterrent and punishment for criminal behavior. The United States (U.S.) has one of the highest rates of juvenile incarceration in the world (Slaughter, 2018). Every year, over 500,000 youth are in detention and these statistics show that on any given day, approximately 70,000 youth are in a juvenile detention facility, group home, or a correctional facility (Slaughter, 2018). While in correctional confinement, youth must comply with stringent daily routines, including waking up at a specified time, showering on a schedule, completing daily morning chores, and eating with their cell unit peers. Furthermore, by law, youth are required to attend school as they would in their community (Ochoa, 2016). For many of these youth who have a record of suspension and expulsion from school, regular school attendance is a new experience. In addition, youth are required to complete a variety of treatment programs mandated by the sentencing juvenile courts and a team of correctional facility personnel. For example, youth sentenced with drug-related crimes may be required to attend programs offered by the correctional facility on drug rehabilitation and enroll in mental health courses. In turn, youth sentenced with gang-related crimes would likely be required to attend programs to deter gang behaviors. The daily activities and expectations of incarceration are a significant departure from home life. Complying with the demands of a highly structured routine can be challenging for incarcerated youth. Challenges or difficulties notwithstanding, Clark and Unruh (2010) pointed out that community reentry from the correctional confinement can be more difficult than incarceration.

VanderPyl (2015) argued that correctional confinement primes incarcerated youth for failure. Research has established that incarceration disrupts the normal developmental process and stigmatizes the youth

who are incarcerated (Uggen, Manza, & Thompson 2006). Burrell (2014) and Burrell and Moeser (2014) pointed out that incarceration increases the likelihood of dropping out of high school and being unemployed. Worse yet, other studies have found adverse effects of incarceration, including leading some youth to reoffend at higher rates than their non-incarcerated counterparts (Bernburg, Krohn, & Rivera, 2006; Leiber, 2002; Petrosino, Turpin-Petrosino, Hollis-Peel, & Lavenberg, 2013). National rates of recidivism indicate that 55% of youth who leave correctional confinement return to incarceration (Clark, Mather, & Helding, 2011). Specifically, Indiana has a recidivism rate of 33% (Ross, 2018). It is critical to determine the factors leading to re-incarceration.

Leaving confinement without transition support or a job increases the risk of recidivism. One reason why reentry might be difficult is due to the fact that only a relatively small proportion of youth in correctional confinement are released with any sort of probation or supervision (Clark et al., 2011; Ochoa & Swank, 2018). In some states in the U.S., the only youth who receive supervision are those considered high risk of committing more crimes after release based on a criminogenic assessment. In contrast, the majority of youth leave confinement as straight discharges, which means all supervision and support services are terminated upon reentry. That is to say, the structured daily routines imposed upon the youth during incarceration vanish as soon as youth leave the facility. Ochoa and Swank (2018) found this practice to be consistent with previous research (e.g., Clark et al., 2011), which asserts that providing transition support is a critical factor to reduce youth recidivism. Clark et al. (2011) provided transition services to 4,809 youth ages 8 to 17 from two correctional facilities in the Southwest, and found that transition support, including help with resume-development and aiding in the job search process, reduced the likelihood of reoffending by 64%.

Research has consistently shown that lack of employment is the top predictor of recidivism. Lockwood and Nally (2017) concluded that individuals who are young, unemployed, and without a high school diploma are the most likely to return to correctional confinement. Being unemployed and not being able to find employment may frustrate youth, which sends them into a cycle of chronic unemployment and further criminal and illegal activities (Lipsey, 2009; Steinberg, 2007). Not only does unemployment increase the risk for criminal activities, it also reduces opportunities for youth to acquire skills to function and succeed in a work environment and to enter adulthood as responsible, law-abiding citizens (Lipsey, 2009; Steinberg, 2007). Pager (2003) asserted that many incarcerated youth leave the correctional facility under-skilled and under-employed. As such, finding mechanisms that promote the development of employment skills is of paramount importance to reduce youth recidivism (Pager, 2003).

Mentoring and Employment Are Important for Transition and Reduce Recidivism

Mentoring and employment reduce the probability of re-incarceration. Mentoring is one of the oldest forms of community-based interventions for youth, with empirical evidence confirming that the enduring mentoring relationship results in successful youth outcomes through positive, social-emotional and instrumental support (Ochoa & Swank, 2018; Schwartz, Rhodes, Spencer, & Grossman, 2013). Jones, Clark, and Quiros (2012) asserted that one of the most important roles of mentors is to help youth improve goal-setting skills and inspire hope for the future. Mentors help mobilize existing resources for mentees as they work toward their goals. They connect mentees to community resources and they keep youth focused on improving their lives. Those are all factors which are known to reduce recidivism, showing that mentors help in the rehabilitation process of youth in correctional confinement.

Efforts to reduce juvenile recidivism by providing support systems through mentoring is built on the foundation of credible messenger mentoring (Camplin, 2009; Farrall, 2004; Lopez-Humphreys & Teater, 2018). Credible messenger mentoring proposes that pairing mentees with mentors who come from the same communities and backgrounds and who have similar shared life experiences will produce positive outcomes for incarcerated youth. Under the credible messenger framework, mentors use their own life experiences to help incarcerated youth prepare to exit confinement, secure employment, and abstain from criminal and illegal activities. Studies looking at the impact of credible messenger mentoring have found improved outcomes for incarcerated youth based on increased engagement with support programs and services, improved relationships with the juvenile justice system personnel and other community stakeholders, and improved social

capital upon community reentry (Camplin, 2009; Farrall, 2004; Lopez-Humphreys & Teater, 2018).

Empirical evidence exists documenting the influential role supportive, non-parental adults have in the lives of adolescents (Rhodes, Spencer, Keller, Liang, & Noam, 2006; Sterrett, Jones, McKee, & Kincaid, 2011). DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, and Cooper (2002) and DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silverthorn, and Valentine (2011) found that in the absence of a parent, the social support and consistency provided through a formal mentoring program produced positive outcomes on the social, behavioral, emotional, and academic development of incarcerated youth (DuBois et al., 2002; DuBois et al., 2011). While the foundations of credible messenger mentoring are based on pairing incarcerated youth with mentors who have been incarcerated themselves, doing so limits the pool of motivated candidates who can serve as mentors to incarcerated youth.

In addition to the benefits of mentoring, employment also serves as a protective factor against recidivism. Some studies have found that having early and favorable work experiences in adolescence are strong predictors of developing the necessary skills to think critically, deal with conflict, accept feedback, and seek assistance when needed (Harris, Lockwood, & Mengers, 2009). In other words, favorable employment experiences are the best predictors of success for future employment. Nonetheless, many incarcerated youth return to their communities without support to find a job. Hawkins, Lattimore, Dawes, and Visher (2010) reported that youth leaving correctional confinement identified help finding a job as their most urgent need upon transitioning out of confinement.

Homeboy Industries is an example of a reentry program which assists individuals who were incarcerated acquire skills for employment. Individuals begin their employment experience at a Homeboy sponsored-employment facility with the objective of eventually gaining regular unsupported employment in their own communities. Once program objectives are met, job counselors help these employees secure employment outside of Homeboy Industries by helping them make connections and prepare for an interview (Leap, Franke, Christie, & Bonis, 2011). Similarly, Encompass Community Services provides transition services to youth on probation. Encompass' (2015) mission is to aid youth to find and maintain employment, provide life skills coaching, and link them with additional community supports. More reentry programs like Homeboy Industries and Encompass are needed. Additionally, every youth, not only youth on probation, can benefit from transition programs and mentoring support that help them gain employment when they return to their communities.

In this article, we describe the mission and principles that guided the development of a state-wide youth job mentoring program for incarcerated youth. Helping Offenders Prosper through Employment (HOPE) is a mentoring initiative for incarcerated youth that starts in the correctional facility and continues at reentry, when the youth returns to a community. We provide qualitative evidence from participants to demonstrate the impact that the HOPE mentoring program has on mentees and the undergraduates who serve as their mentors.

Mission and Principles of the HOPE Mentoring Program for Youth

HOPE is a university-based mentoring program that pairs one incarcerated youth to one undergraduate student. The mentor serves as a positive role model for the youth as he or she develops job-related skills while in correctional confinement. The same mentor also provides continued support when the youth is released to return to the community. HOPE's mission is to use employment as a tool to reduce the number of youth who come into repeated involvement with the juvenile justice system. Job mentoring support during and after incarceration prepares and supports each youth in the reentry process into their community, which increases the likelihood the youth will engage positively in the community.

The HOPE mentoring program was piloted in 2013 in the correctional facility for girls. In 2016 the Indiana Department of Correction (IDOC) adopted the HOPE mentoring program and HOPE was expanded to all juvenile correctional facilities in the state of Indiana. When the IDOC adopted the HOPE mentoring program, it also committed Title 1 funds to hire a youth mentoring director, signaling its high regard for the mentoring program. The HOPE mentoring program serves youth in the Pendleton, Logansport, and LaPorte Juvenile Correctional facilities. The HOPE mentoring program consists of two components: HOPE for Youth and HOPE for Home. In this article, we focus only on the mentoring program for incarcerated youth.

Three main principles guide the HOPE mentoring program: 1) Exit Begins at Entry; 2) Collaboration; and 3) Positive and Responsive Mentoring. These three principles help address the need to begin transition-planning during intake so that youth do not fall through the cracks, to improve communication between the individuals and agencies involved in the rehabilitation of incarcerated youth, and to shift away from punishment as a main focus of rehabilitation. HOPE principles have been discussed by Ochoa et al., 2019 and reflect best-practice guidelines. For purposes of this article, each principle is discussed below:

1. Exit Begins at Entry—Preparation to reenter the community after correctional confinement should begin from the moment the juvenile enters the facility (Risler & O'Rourke, 2009). The importance of planning for the youth's release as soon as the youth begins to serve the sentence is paramount. Planning for release from the start ensures that rehabilitation programming will be focused on reentry. HOPE begins mentoring as soon as the youth enters confinement. The goal is to increase the probability that the mentoring relationship is sustained when the youth reenters the community by having the mentor be a part of rehabilitation from the start of confinement. IDOC personnel give parents information about the HOPE mentoring program during the intake process and seek parental consent to allow HOPE personnel to offer this voluntary program to youth when a mentor is available. Once a mentee is assigned to a mentor, the HOPE mentor meets with the youth one-on-one on a weekly basis in the correctional facility. At the time of release, the youth and the same mentor continue to meet in person on a weekly basis. In addition, they may have daily contact via text messaging, phone calls, or emails. The mentor serves as a bridge between the facility and the community by providing a continuity of services from the start of incarceration and when the youth reenters his or her community.

2. Collaboration—Collaboration is the second principle of the HOPE mentoring program and it is an essential ingredient for success. By design, the HOPE mentoring program is not a stand-alone program. Instead, HOPE is embedded into the activities within the correctional facility to allow mentors to assist each youth with behavioral and programmatic goals. As such, mentors serve as liaisons between the youth's teachers and the facility transition coordinator when the youth is confined. Similarly, mentors serve as liaisons between the facility, parents, and community at the time of release and in the community. The message conveyed to mentors and facility personnel is that mentors serve as extra hands and feet to help meet the programmatic goals established by and for the youth. HOPE mentors are part of the caring group of individuals looking to conspire on behalf of each youth. In the community, the mentor supports and assists the youth by connecting him or her to the community services and other individuals who can guide the youth to access existing education and employment resources. For example, the HOPE mentoring program has established a collaboration with One Heart Indiana, a faith-based organization, to connect the youth and family to services that include transportation and other related services. Essentially, HOPE works with pre-existing organizations and services to collaborate to foster youth engagement.

3. Positive and Responsive Mentoring—Positivity and responsiveness to the unique needs of the youth is central to, and the heart of, the HOPE mentoring program. HOPE mentors are encouraged to create an environment of hopefulness to inspire and encourage youth to achieve their goals. Mentors are trained with the understanding that they are not therapists, teachers, or caretakers to these youth. Mentors are reminded that their main responsibility and objective is to be a positive role model and an unconditional, non-judgmental presence during their time with the youth. This approach to interactions with youth is based on empirical evidence that shows that positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) are more effective than punitive or contingent approaches to behavioral change (Ochoa, Otero, Levy, & Deskalo, 2013). As indicated in Ochoa and Swank (2018), a HOPE mentor is encouraged to reward the socially appropriate adaptive behavior of the youth, remaining positive, consistent, patient, and respectful, regardless of

the youth's behavior. HOPE mentors do not use threats or punitive consequences when a youth cannot or will not participate in the mentoring activity. Neither HOPE mentors nor facility personnel force youth to participate in mentoring activities. As previously stated, participation in the HOPE mentoring program is voluntary and this helps reduce the likelihood of straining the mentoring relationship. In addition to positivity, HOPE mentors use a responsive approach by individualizing activities to fit each youth's needs. For example, mentoring activities for older youth might focus on practicing for a job interview, while younger youth might explore different career interests or receive help with school assignments (Ochoa & Swank, 2018).

Recruitment and Training of HOPE Mentors

HOPE mentors are recruited from any undergraduate academic field and from the different Indiana University (IU) campuses. HOPE has enlisted undergraduates majoring in criminal justice, psychology, education, sociology, school of public and environmental affairs (SPEA), nursing, and liberal studies majors from the Indiana University Bloomington, Kokomo, and Northeast campuses. Undergraduate students have unique attributes that position them to be effective role models and mentors of incarcerated youth. Age proximity is the most obvious attribute among undergraduate students that makes them credible job messengers to the incarcerated youth mentees. Because of the closeness in age and because they too are searching entry-level jobs, mentees can relate more authentically to HOPE mentors.

An example of building effective, formal mentoring programs on the foundation of credible messenger mentoring can be seen in the community service and engagement commitments of the millennial undergraduate student. Even if the HOPE mentors do not have personal experiences with the juvenile justice system, millennials represent the largest percentage of the U.S. population (Bialik & Fry, 2019), and they are a cohort with high rates of altruism and community-engaged attitudes and behaviors (Dallos & Comley-Ross, 2005; DuBois & Silverton, 2005). Collectively, millennials represent a group of individuals who have the time, resources, and civic-mindedness motivation to provide social and emotional support. Millennials can also provide authentic help with skills such as helping youth obtain a bus pass to get to an interview or providing a booklet to study for a driver's license examination because they might be engaged in those activities themselves.

One of the benefits of having a millennial undergraduate student serve as a mentor is the closeness in age between the undergraduate and the youth in confinement (Dallos & Comley-Ross, 2005; DuBois & Silverton, 2005). The similar age range between mentor and mentee provides some level of mentor credibility based on the fact that they are experiencing similar demographic transitions. Likewise, the mentor represents a peer who can provide personal experience and advice versus an adult who may appear out of touch with the social and cultural pressures facing today's youth (Bodie & Jones, 2012; Newburn & Shiner, 2006). Millennial undergraduate students represent a cohort of individuals who are resourceful, flexible, and proficient at developing pathways towards success in reaction to changing social, economic, and political climates (Bodie & Jones, 2012; Newburn & Shiner, 2006). These characteristics have the potential to positively serve the mentee because the undergraduate mentor is adept at providing advice, tools, and support that meet the needs of the incarcerated youth (Bodie & Jones, 2012; Newburn & Shiner, 2006). Finally, the traditional millennial undergraduate student has the luxury of time to fully engage and commit towards being a mentor (Blechman, 1992; Bodie & Jones, 2012; Newburn & Shiner, 2006). Thus, undergraduate students represent an untapped resource to help incarcerated youth adapt to their community upon reentry.

The process of becoming a HOPE mentor takes approximately three months. Applicants undergo background screening by both the IDOC and the university. Undergraduates who pass the initial background screening proceed to HOPE training where they learn about youth development and characteristics of youth in confinement through a set of online modules. HOPE mentor training emphasizes that the role of the undergraduate is to develop a supportive relationship with the youth and to serve as a positive role model. Part of the training requirements includes a tour of the facility and a session in which the mentor-in-training observes another mentor working with his or her mentee. The training process ends with a face-to-face meeting be

tween the new mentor and the mentoring director who presents the new mentor a resource binder with materials for activities to implement with the mentee. The lengthy and rigorous training process serves as a filter to identify and retain the most qualified and well-prepared undergraduate mentors.

Once trained, each mentor is paired with one youth for the duration of the mentoring relationship. While it might appear to be more time efficient to have one mentor paired with multiple youth to make the two-hour long trip more resource efficient, the reason behind the 1-1 pairing is to convey to the youth that s/he is special and that the mentor is at the facility only for that single youth. In addition, the 1-1 pairing conveys to the mentor that their sole focus of his or her attention is on the one youth. The one mentor to one youth approach used in HOPE has proven to be very positive. The youth feels special and the mentor is able to fully concentrate on the needs of the single youth. Each HOPE mentor is asked to commit to mentoring for a minimum of one year. However, many HOPE mentors choose to serve beyond the one-year commitment and provide high quality mentoring to youth involved with the criminal justice system.

Youth's Perception of HOPE Mentors

In this section, we include a statement by one mentee and three excerpts from weekly mentor logs to showcase the positive impact of the HOPE mentoring program for the mentees and the mentors. The following comment was written, upon our request, by one female youth who participated in the HOPE mentoring program while in confinement and found a job after she finished completing her sentence. We asked her to tell us what she thought of the HOPE program and her mentor. She responded as follows:

> At first, I was excited and nervous with my mentor since she was a new person to me. Over time, I began to trust her and get comfortable and I told myself she's probably one of the most amazing people I've ever met. I felt like I could trust her. I was always excited to see her, and I know if I needed help, I could always ask her. For me, it was the fact that it built my self-esteem and confidence and my hope for the future that I could be a better person. I felt confident that I could succeed. Some of the things we did helped me once I got home like the practice job interviews. I was scared I'd mess up, but with the help of my mentor, I overcame that. I kept in touch with my mentor and the people from the HOPE mentoring and it made me feel so good when they invited me to visit their campus to recite my poem. It gave me confidence that I can do anything. That anything can happen. It helped inspire me to keep on writing and follow my dreams. Whenever I have questions, I can always ask [my mentor] or [the Executive Director] for advice. They're so kind and helpful. I would recommend it [HOPE]. Kids with broken self-esteem, kids who feel like they need that extra push, and any kid in general could benefit from this program. HOPE helps you to see the brighter side of things. They give you hope. They show you all the possibilities and opportunities you have instead of letting you give up. They've made it fun while being able to learn at the same time.

This excerpt conveys the mentee's enthusiasm toward working with her HOPE mentor and emphasizes the mentee's sense of empowerment through the acquisition of skills necessary to obtain employment and stay engaged in her community. The mentor is described as a positive role model who was responsive to the mentee's needs and challenges of incarceration, which is an aim of the HOPE program. Moreover, the mentee indicated that other incarcerated youth could benefit from the HOPE mentoring program, which further highlights the program's positive impact.

Weekly Mentoring Logs

After each weekly visit with the mentee, mentors are required to complete a report log, in which the mentor describes the session, indicates what went well, and notes what could be improved for the following session. In this section of the article we showcase one mentor log from each of the three correctional facilities. Mentor, mentee, and facility identifying information were removed to preserve confidentiality. Below is the first weekly log between a mentor and her mentee who was in a medium security facility. Activities highlighted in this log come from a resource-binder that is provided to all HOPE mentors and includes various

employment-related activities.

Describe the session. The session began at 9 a.m. and ended at 10 a.m. We started with a reading called Perseverance: the Key to Success. I highlighted three words from the story to make sure he understood what they meant, and he seemed glad that I did that because he didn't know what they meant. He told me that he does not like reading, but he did like the reading we did today. After, we did a What Makes You Shine worksheet and he wrote about six things. Finally, we went over long-term goals and the plan to reach them. I could tell he was getting frustrated because he only knew one, which was skating as a career. I could tell that [skating] was the only thing he wanted to do but did not want to work. We discussed that he would need to get a job to sustain himself while trying to reach that goal. I knew that it was only the second time we had talked, so he didn't [completely] trust me, but that day he trusted me a little. He did not know that with a GED [General Education Degree] he could still go to college. After I told him he could, he told me of a couple of careers he wanted to do. He ended up smiling and wrote them down as long-term goals, even though he does not know which one he is interested in more.

What went well in this session? He learned that he could start in a community college with a GED. He was very excited when I told him that it was possible. He started telling me about why he would want to be a herpetologist, marine biologist, or a mortician.

What is the plan for the next session? I am planning to research the requirements of the careers that he is looking at, so he knows what to expect, and I plan on going over them next week with him.

As evidenced in this excerpt, feelings of trust are beginning to form between mentor and mentee. The mentee initially showed no interest in careers because he did not see attending college as a possibility. However, once the mentor told him he could attend college with a GED, the mentee indicated he had three possible career goals (i.e., herpetologist, marine biologist, and mortician). Given such career specificity, it is undeniable that the mentee had goals and dreams. It appears that what the youth lacked was information that dropping out of high school did not automatically prevent him from reaching a preliminary goal (i.e. attending college) that would enable him to achieve one of his three ultimate goals

The second weekly log is by a mentor about her 17-year-old male mentee who is in a high-security juvenile correctional facility.

Describe the session. I arrived at [facility] at 6:30 p.m. I had [mentee] complete a worksheet about what respect meant to him. We walked through the different types of respect and how to apply them to different people and situations. I was very proud of [mentee] in this session because he was able to articulate clearly where he needed to work on respecting others while also acknowledging the progress he has made. We continued the discussion by looking through quotes about respecting others and respecting oneself. We also talked about self-respect and self-worth, which is where [mentee] really excelled. He talked about struggling to find his self-worth, and how being incarcerated had given him the chance to re-evaluate his worth. He told me that now that he can see his own worth, he feels like he deserves more than his old life could give him and wants to do better for himself and his family. I was very impressed with how well thought-out his ideas were on this topic, and I think that he has made some incredible progress towards a healthier mental state.

What went well in this session? This was our most successful session yet, and I was very impressed with [mentee]. He was open with me about his thoughts and feelings on his self-worth and it seems that he has reached a point where he understands what he wants his life to be. We had a great discussion on why his old life doesn't reflect who he is and who he wants to be, and how changing the thought processes he uses to evaluate himself and others is a great step in the right direction. He also told me that he was proud of the "baby steps" he's been taking to improve upon his mental health, which is something that he didn't believe in before. He's starting to see the positive effects of his work, and I think he's inspired to

continue on this path.

> **What could be improved for the next session?** This session went extremely well, so much so that we ran out of time while having our discussion. [Mentee's] attention was also drastically improved from the last few sessions so there wasn't much to be improved upon.

It is noteworthy that through the discussion between mentor and mentee, the mentee recognizes improvements in his self-worth and his potential for further growth. He also notes that his old life no longer reflects the new person he is becoming, nor does it determine his future. The mentors statement about "running out of time" suggests that the mentee is invested and motivated in the weekly mentoring sessions.

The third mentor log is by a female mentor about and a young woman from the girls' juvenile correctional facility.

> **Describe the session.** The session began at 10 a.m. and ended at 11 a.m. We started the session by working on a crossword puzzle, then discussed work ethics and completed the work ethics worksheet. [Mentee] was very precise in understanding good work ethics and poor work ethics when we discussed her answers to the worksheet. We also completed Job Related Conflict Scenario #1. We ended the session by finishing the crossword puzzle as well as Appreciation: Through Her Eyes reading from Urban Dreams. Next week we plan to review work ethics and complete another job-related conflict scenario. We then plan to begin covering Learning Strategies and Social Skills: Decision Making.

> **What went well in this session?** [Mentee] notified me that she passed [behavioral] conduct this past week. Her goal is to not get a conduct [behavioral warning] for three weeks. It was great news and she is very happy and proud of herself. We still have two weeks to go, but I know she can do it.

> **What could be improved in this session?** Next time, I'd like to take in an example of a completed job application because today as we talked about work ethics, [mentee] stated that she doesn't know how to fill out a job application.

On the surface, this log is mundane. However, the fact that the mentee felt comfortable sharing her behavioral accomplishments [conduct review] with her mentor is indicative that the mentee perceived her mentor as someone who cared that the youth met a behavioral goal and would continue to be responsive to the mentee's progress in the facility. It appears the mentee sees her mentor as someone who would hold her accountable for continued good behavior. These selected excerpts make evident that the mentees value their relationship with the HOPE mentor and felt empowered by the growth resulting from the HOPE program. The continued 1-1 mentoring support during incarceration was an invaluable experience for these youth. In sum, the weekly mentoring logs portray the multidimensional nature of the mentoring relationship in which job-related activities also lend themselves to building trust and identifying continued areas of need and growth that the mentee will need upon release.

HOPE's Impact on Mentors

In addition to benefitting mentees, the HOPE mentoring program also benefits the mentors. We contacted individuals who served as HOPE mentors to ask them how being a HOPE mentor influenced their post-baccalaureate employment and educational choices. Reflections from three past HOPE mentors follow:

HOPE mentor #1. After graduating from college, I decided to dedicate the next year to service before continuing higher education. I was accepted into the PULSE (Pittsburgh Urban Leadership Service Experience) program, which invites university graduates to partner with a Pittsburgh nonprofit for a year of service and leadership. I have been fortunate enough to partner with the Hockey Sticks Together Foundation as their Director of Program Development for the year, where I am doing outreach to grow their inner-city hockey program. HOPE ignited a passion in me to serve inner-city and underserved communities because all too often these populations are becoming incarcerated. HOPE transforms lives inside juve-

nile facilities and it showed me how much a difference just one person can make in someone's life, which is what I hope my work continues to do.

HOPE mentor #2. After finishing my university degree in Special Education, I decided to move to Baltimore, Maryland in order to pursue my passion to become a special education teacher for students in inner city communities. The school is focused on transitioning over-age and under-credited middle school students to high school. Most of my students have emotional behavior disabilities, and they have been expelled from their local public school due to their behavior and/or poor attendance. My work as a mentor with HOPE has provided a strong foundation where I can apply the skills that I learned working with my mentees in order to be a positive role model for students struggling to make ends meet in their inner-city neighborhoods. HOPE is the organization that allowed me to pursue my interest in working with this population of students, and I am forever indebted to HOPE for opening the door to the first step of my long career in education.

HOPE mentor #3. After graduating from my university with degrees in Psychology and Criminal Justice, I started a graduate program in Chicago furthering my education in psychology. I am currently a doctoral student studying clinical psychology with a concentration in forensics. As part of my clinical training, I was a diagnostic extern for the 19th Judicial Circuit Court at the adult probation building and juvenile detention center. This year, I provide diagnostic services at a youth center. I am also currently a therapy extern where I provide therapeutic services to adult males in a restrictive housing unit. My work as a HOPE mentor gave me the confidence to work with incarcerated individuals of all backgrounds. HOPE taught me that there is more than meets the eye in a population that is misjudged and misunderstood far too often. Being a HOPE mentor helped open my eyes to the importance of being a positive role model while providing support in ways that the individual may have never been exposed to previously.

As evident from the three statements from HOPE mentors, the mentoring program served to enhance each mentor's commitment to youth at risk for incarceration or incarcerated populations. In sum, these reflections document that the experience for the HOPE mentors has led to improved community leadership, reinforced a commitment to educating youth, and has been instrumental in looking for the potential, not the deficits, of incarcerated populations. From their perspective, HOPE mentors benefitted from participating in the program, as it enhanced their leadership skills in a direction of service and leadership, indicating that the HOPE mentoring program not only works to serve incarcerated youth, but also has a positive impact on the future of the college students.

Conclusion

Mentoring programs such as HOPE provide much needed support not only to incarcerated youth, but also have a positive impact on the future of the college students who dedicate their time and skills to improve the lives of incarcerated youth. While Indiana's rate of recidivism is currently below the national rate of 55%, the fact that more than 30% of youth return to correctional confinement warrants the development and provision of programs that target the reduction of re-incarceration. The HOPE mentoring program for youth is uniquely positioned to serve that purpose for several reasons:

- HOPE reflects a best practice guideline that indicates that reentry is a process that must begin at the start of incarceration and continue when the youth returns to his or her community;

- HOPE is responsive to the needs and goals of each youth and connects each one to a positive role model close in age with similar entry-level employment goals and commitment to social justice;

- HOPE's focus on employment reaches a wider population of youth who would otherwise run the risk of being idle when they return to their community because they are not inter

ested or ready to attend college;

- HOPE's connection to a university provides a steady source of volunteers, thus increasing the sustainability of a mentoring program.

These attributes of the HOPE mentoring program address the need to provide transition support to youth who have been incarcerated in Indiana and provide college student mentors with a rigorous mentoring experience which helps them in their career path in deciding to work in the service of youth and the community. HOPE improves reentry one youth at a time.

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