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Evaluation of an educational mentoring program for children in foster care

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**EVALUATION OF AN EDUCATIONAL MENTORING PROGRAM
FOR CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE**

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of Psychology

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Science in Industrial/Organizational Psychology

by

Melanie Ines Bauer

December 2002

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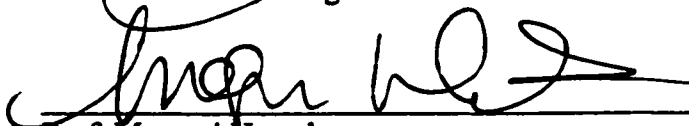
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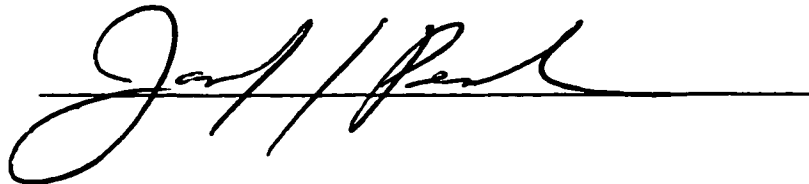


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ABSTRACT

EVALUATION OF AN EDUCATIONAL MENTORING PROGRAM FOR FOSTER CARE CHILDREN

by Melanie Ines Bauer

In America, on any given day, there are over 500,000 children and youth in foster care. Between 1986 and 1996, the number of children in foster care increased 90 percent. This study addresses the topic of foster care youth and the difficulties they face in attaining their educational goals. A 12-month educational mentoring program, proposing mentoring as a way to help foster care youth achieve their educational goals, was evaluated. A pre-and post-test analysis of 14 foster care youth revealed positive changes in behaviors and attitudes among the youth after the mentoring program had been completed. Observable positive changes occurred among school related behaviors such as less time spent in detention, fewer suspensions, more time spent doing schoolwork, more positive views about education and its importance, an improved GPA, and changes in the youths' self-perception, especially when it comes to the belief of having a good life, once they are adults.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my mom and dad who have given me the opportunity of studying abroad and who have been my source of love, support, courage, and guidance from day one. I hope you both know that I love you very much and I could not have gotten to this point without your constant support and love. I am forever grateful for everything you have done for me and all the sacrifices you made to help me succeed in all the things I do. You are the best parents anyone could ever wish for. Thank you for being there for me and giving me the strength to get through this. I love you very much.

I would like to thank my brother for being there for me for over 25 years now. I hope you know that I love you more than words can ever say and I can't wait to spend more time with you again once I return home. Thank you for being there for me when times were tough and I did not think I could make it through. You are a wonderful person; please don't ever change.

Last, but not least, I would also like to thank Darcy Cabral and the Social Advocates for Youth for letting me use their data and taking up a lot of their time with interviews and questions I needed answered. Thank you for giving me this opportunity. I wish you much success in all your future endeavors.

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Introduction

In America, on any given day, there are approximately 588,000 children and youth in foster care (Barbell & Freundlich, 2001). Between 1986 and 1996, the number of children in foster care increased 90 percent. Foster care youth have to deal with the same difficulties of growing up and making the transition from childhood to adulthood as non-foster care youth, but there are many other factors that make this transition more difficult for them. Many of them have to deal with the fact they have been abused, neglected, and have been deprived of parental love and guidance. Each year, approximately 20,000 to 25,000 youth reach their 18th birthday and “age out” of foster care. Too often this means an end to the ongoing support and guidance of caring adults. Most of these youth have not been prepared to face the world on their own. They are not yet ready to assume the burdens and responsibilities of adulthood.

Werner and Smith (1992) have conducted a compelling body of scientific studies which indicate that the more risk factors children are exposed to while growing up, the more likely they are to suffer serious negative consequences that are reflected in their behavior and development. There is an abundance of research that shows that foster care youth are exposed to a variety of risk factors, therefore, this is a very troubling picture and cannot be ignored.

The Effects of Changing Environments on the Transition of Foster Care Youth to Adulthood

Youth in foster care tend to come from unstable environments, which means that they have experienced multiple placements in different foster homes and they have not

received a chance to grow some roots and find some stability in their lives. Typically, children and youngsters who spend considerable time in substitute care must traverse the difficult years of adolescence and young adulthood without strong support systems. They are also likely to experience disrupted living situations resulting from removal from home and from transfers between foster homes and group homes that interfere with their ability to sustain community level ties (Collins, 2001).

Foster care children tend to experience and generally have a higher occurrence of depression and show lower levels of self-esteem (Barth, 1990; Benedict et al., 1996). Dubowitz (1990) found that the incidence of emotional, behavioral and developmental problems among children in foster care was three to six times greater than the incidence of these problems among children not in foster care.

Health Problems and Developmental Risks Faced by Foster Care Children

Foster care youth are among the most vulnerable children in the country. Nearly 40 percent of them are born with a low birthweight and/or premature and these two factors increase the likelihood of medical problems and developmental delay (Halfon et al., 1995). Over half of the children in foster care experience developmental delays, which is four to five times the rate found among children in the general population (Silver, 2000). For example, one recent study found that more than half of over 200 children in foster care under the age of 31 months had language delays, compared to the general population of preschoolers in which only 2 to 3 percent had speech disorders (Amster, Greis & Silver, 1997). The inconsistent and unresponsive caregiving which foster care youth are often exposed to sets the stage for potentially serious emotional and

behavioral difficulties, often involving difficulty in forming close relationships and managing emotions (Morrison et al., 1999).

Academic Challenges and Educational Gaps Foster Care Youth have to Overcome

Nationwide, aggregate data suggest that foster care children fare poorly in educational settings, often receiving low grades and ultimately not advancing to their full academic potential (Blome, 1997). Studies comparing foster children with non-foster children show that foster children are more likely to experience gaps in their education because of school transfers, more likely to be in special education, more inclined to gravitate towards vocational classes, and less likely to be on a college preparatory track (Blome, 1997). Also, significantly fewer foster children are expected to graduate from high school. National estimates of the number of foster care youth who leave care with a high school diploma range between 37 to 60 percent (Blome, 1997; Westat, 1991).

Importance of Completing School and Consequences of Losing State Support

Many aspects of foster care can affect educational outcomes. Citing several studies, Geroski and Knauss (2000) suggest that the combination of pre-placement and placement trauma appears to detrimentally affect foster care youths' academic performance and school behavior. For foster youth, high school completion has been viewed to be of primary importance. Once foster care youth are discharged and no longer in the care of the state, their future prospects will be in large part determined by their performance in school.

Research shows that children who have experienced abuse and neglect are more likely than others to fail in school and be involved in the juvenile justice system. Yet

research also has found that when neglected or abused children succeed in school, they are less likely to engage in violence or be incarcerated (Chamberlain & Mihalic, 1998). In other words, success in school might help foster children overcome even very disadvantaged beginnings.

Recent estimates reported by the Government Accounting Office (GAO) suggest that approximately 20,000 adolescents leave the foster care system each year because they reach the age of 18 and are expected to live independently (GAO 1999). Studies have found that a substantial amount of these youth have not attained basic educational goals, such as completing high school, and are dependent on public assistance. In addition, many young people experience periods of homelessness after leaving care and have other difficulties that impede their progress toward self-sufficiency, such as being unemployed (GAO, 1999). Rather than return to their families, increasing numbers of older foster youth plan to live independently after leaving foster care. The movement toward independent living requires support systems that will help youth attain self-sufficiency. However, the task of helping large numbers of foster care youth make a successful transition to adult living is a difficult undertaking (Mech, Pryde & Rycraft, 1995).

Research shows that many former foster youth have serious educational deficiencies, and rely on public assistance. A study of former foster care youth in the San Francisco Bay Area who had been out of care at least 1 year but not more than 10 years, showed that 55 percent of them left foster care without graduating from high school and that 38 percent still had not graduated at the time of the study (Barth, 1990).

Furthermore, a study of foster care youth interviewed 2.5 to 4 years after they left care found that 46 percent of these youth had not finished high school (Westat, 1991). The Westat study further showed that completing high school prior to leaving foster care was positively related to stable employment and overall self-sufficiency. Further, youth who held at least one job during their stay in foster care were more likely to maintain a job after care.

Programs Set-up to Support Foster Care Youth after Leaving Foster Care

In order to combat the aforementioned problems foster care youth have to face, there have been a variety of steps taken to help those youth succeed and have prospects once they leave foster care. Many different types of programs have been set up which were intended to help foster care youth ease into adulthood and be successful in their personal and professional lives.

Many organizations have set up independent living programs (ILP's), which provide life-coping skills to young adults before they lose state support and housing when they turn 18. These young adults receive training in critical skills such as looking for a job, managing money, finding affordable housing, and using community resources. A study conducted by Courtney et al. (2001) interviewed a cohort of youth who had left out of home care in Wisconsin in 1995 and 1996. The study found that the child welfare system might be able to improve the transition from youth to adulthood through independent living by building on family strengths while minimizing negative family impact, providing additional concrete assistance in locating housing and employment, providing an improved transitional safety net for those with the fewest life skills, and

ensuring that former foster youth have access to health and mental health care during their move to self-sufficiency.

There are many programs that offer education and employment services to foster care youth. The most frequent service offered is skills building/tutoring, which is often provided in partnership with local schools. In general, programs offer tutoring to improve students' basic skills and to assist them in achieving a General Education Diploma (GED).

The second most frequent service is helping foster care youth obtain work experience (Workforce Strategy Center, March 2000). This ranges from job shadowing to community service to internships and paid employment. Work experience programs primarily focus on immediate job opportunities with lesser emphasis on long-term career employment. A notable example is the Living Classrooms/UPS School to Career partnership, which provides foster care youth with entry-level experience that can lead to career employment.

A number of programs place an emphasis on educational counseling and introducing students to specific college opportunities. Casey Family Services' programs in particular provide an introduction to college opportunities, orientation to financial aid, and make specific connections to postsecondary institutions. Several programs offer generalized career counseling, including basic employability skills and some discussions of appropriate career options.

Importance of Education in Providing a Successful Transition from Foster Care to Independence

All of the aforementioned programs are taking an important step toward helping foster care youth achieve their potential, but they are not reaching the youth where it is most crucial. In order for the foster care youth to reach their potential and make the best use of all opportunities available to them, it is crucial to emphasize the importance of education. The existing programs are not a driving force in helping the youth get the right education, which will eventually lead them to a successful and independent life. The programs that have been set up so far are focused primarily on helping the youth cope emotionally or even helping them deal with the fact that they are living in single parent households or state run facilities. Generally then, the focus of the existing programs is to help the youth cope with their lives and the situations they are in at the moment. The programs that have been established up to this point are not trying to help the youth change their lives for the better or help them focus on a brighter future; they are “merely” trying to help the youth cope. However, it is time to right the wrongs and help the youth help themselves. There has to be a way to show the youth that the future is in their own hands and they can always change their situations for the better. One way to go about doing this is to help them in their academic development and show them that getting a good education will enable them to pursue a career and lead a happier and more successful life once they reach adulthood.

In the search for interventions that could enhance this transition, mentoring is usually an untapped and underestimated resource for foster care as well as non-foster care youth. Mentoring is a way to provide support and guidance to youth in a variety of areas, especially when it comes to the youth’s education and educational decisions.

McPartland and Nettles (1991) define mentoring as “a one-to-one relationship between a caring adult and a student who needs support to achieve academic, career, social, or personal goals”(p. 568). According to Kogler-Hill, Bahniuk, Dobos and Rouner (as cited in Kelly & Schweitzer, 1999), mentoring has been defined by the nature of the activity when an older, more experienced member plays a guiding role with a less experienced protégé. Another definition of mentoring offered by Anderson and Shannon, (as cited in Colwell, 1998) is a nurturing process in which a more skilled or more experienced person, serving as a role model, teaches, sponsors, encourages, counsels, and befriends a less skilled or less experienced person for the purpose of promoting the latter’s professional and/or personal development. Functions of the mentoring process are carried out within the context of an ongoing, caring relationship between the mentor and the protégée.

Mentoring is an Intervention which Provides Support to Youth on Many Different Aspects

Mentors can help youth overcome personal and social barriers, expose them to new relationships and opportunities, and assist in the development of problem-solving and decision-making skills (LoSciuto et al., 1996). A key goal of mentoring programs is to provide a caring and supportive adult for youth. Mentoring relationships offer these youth the potential to overcome hurdles, cope with problems, and learn basic skills necessary for a productive, healthy adulthood. A mentor can provide critical assistance, including extra encouragement, academic help, and most importantly – for students who may not have access to an adult who has been through the college application process –

guidance about which courses college-bound students need to take and how to prepare for and apply to college. Further, mentors can serve as a vital link to resources which students and their families may otherwise be unaware of, including help in applying for financial aid for college.

By offering youth friendship, guidance, and a positive perspective on life over a sustained period of time, mentoring programs clearly show the youth that someone cares. Ensuring sustained presence of a caring adult in a youth's life is especially critical during adolescence. This transitional period can be a very challenging time for youth since it is also a time at which they must begin to make important choices that can influence the rest of their lives. Students face serious decisions about which courses they will take, what activities they will engage in, and how seriously they will take their schoolwork. For most youth, the presence of an adult mentor can be essential for reinforcing the importance of school, fostering good work habits and study skills, and providing youth with the information they need to make the right choices.

Mentoring is an Intervention that Produces a Positive Impact

There is empirical evidence that demonstrates that mentoring, as a prevention strategy, has positive effects on young lives (Flaxman, Ascher & Harrington, 1988; Freedman, 1988). Studies on mentoring programs provide evidence of positive influences on adolescent developmental outcomes, including improvements in academic achievement (McPartland & Nettles, 1991), self-concept, lower recidivism rates among juvenile delinquents (Davidson & Redner, 1988), and reductions in substance abuse (LoSciuto, Rajala, Townsend, & Taylor, 1996). A national evaluation of Big Brothers/

Big Sisters programs found that in addition to positive changes in grades, perceived scholastic competence, truancy rates, and substance abuse, mentored youth were more likely than non-mentored youth to report improved parent and peer relationships (Grossman & Tierney, 1998). By conveying messages regarding the value of school and serving as models of success, mentors may stimulate adolescents' thinking toward school achievement, perceived academic competence, and school performance (Bowman & Howard, 1985; Hamilton & Hamilton, 1990), as well as adolescents' beliefs about the relationship between educational attainment and future occupational opportunities (Klaw & Rhodes, 1995; Mickelson, 1990). In addition, through their provision of emotional support and positive feedback, mentors are thought to enhance adolescents' self-concept (Felson, 1993; Ryan, Stiller & Lynch, 1994), which in turn, is related to more positive perceptions of scholastic competence (Covington, 1992; Harter, 1993), and to school-related achievement (e.g. grades) and behavioral outcomes (e.g. motivation) (Eccles, 1983).

Jekielek et al. (2002) reviewed studies of ten youth mentoring programs, including both nationwide and locally-based programs. Their conclusions about the programs' impacts are based on experimentally designed evaluations, which compare youths who were randomly assigned to a mentoring program with a group of similar youths who were not assigned, acting as a control group. The overarching finding from their research was that mentoring programs in general can be effective tools for enhancing the positive development of youth. Mentored youth are likely to have fewer absences from school, better attitudes toward school, more positive attitudes toward their

elders and toward helping in general, and improved relationships with their parents. Mentors help youth apply knowledge gained in school to everyday life, and translate life experiences into learning opportunities. They improve academic skills by helping with school projects and encouraging the use of libraries and community resources. Mentors aid youth in exploring the world of employment and may assist in career planning and entry (Dondero, 1997).

In summary, adolescents' capacity to benefit from the support of parents and other providers is presumed to be facilitated by the sense of support and acceptance that is derived from mentor relationships. Mentor relationships are expected to improve adolescents' parental relationships, which in turn, should positively influence adolescents' global self-worth, scholastic competence, school value, grades, and attendance. Additionally, through role modeling and the provision of emotional support and positive reinforcement, mentoring is expected to influence adolescents' perceptions of self-worth and their beliefs about their competence as learners and their valuing of school.

Program Evaluations Help to Demonstrate Program Effectiveness

Despite its history, few empirical studies have documented the effectiveness and benefits of mentoring on the lives of young people. Most mentoring programs are not formally evaluated. They rely heavily on anecdotal information and participant reports to determine program effectiveness. Measuring change in participant outcomes is one of the primary means of demonstrating program effectiveness. The most important reason for carrying out a mentoring program evaluation is that it provides a way to obtain data

concerning the effectiveness of the mentoring program and the effects it has on the mentored youth. Conducting a program evaluation will enable organizations that run those programs to improve their programs so that they will be most effective. Program evaluation can play an important role in adjusting and improving programs. Evaluations can indicate weaknesses in the programs and point out uneconomic or missing components (Harnick, Smit & Knorth, 1997). If changes can be made to improve program effectiveness through conducting an evaluation, then the program will be better able to serve the youth and their needs.

Big Brothers/Big Sisters, for example, have been providing youth from single parent households with adult support for over 90 years without evidence that “conclusively demonstrated that youth who participate in Big Brothers/Big Sisters programs fare better than they would have had they not participated” (Furano, Roaf, Styles & Branch, 1993). Grossman and Tierney (1998) evaluated the Big Brothers/Big Sisters program using a random assignment evaluation design. A total of 1,138 youth from eight agencies were enrolled in the study over a 17-month period. The data collection was done through administering pre- and post questionnaires. The results of the study showed that by having a Big Brother/Big Sister, the youth were “less likely to use drugs or alcohol, felt more competent about doing school work, attended school more, got better grades, and had a better relationship with their parents and peers.” Slicker and Palmer (1993) evaluated the impact of a school-based mentoring program on 86 at-risk tenth grade students. The initial results indicated that those students who were effectively mentored (e.g. the mentors had an impact in some way) had a lower dropout

rate than ineffectively mentored (e.g. mentors did not cause any changes) students. McPartland and Nettles (1991) evaluated the academic outcomes of middle school students who were involved in project Raise, which was designed to provide high risk children (e.g. at risk for substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, etc.) with mentors and advocates. One of the major goals of the program was to improve the academic progress of these children. The researchers compared participants from project Raise with non-participants from the same school. The variables measured included student absence rate, average English and Math grades, Grade Point Average, On-Grade Promotion, reading CAT GE and Math CAT GE. They found statistically significant positive effects for students involved in the program. First, there was a reduction of nearly 3 percent in the school absence rate of youth involved in the program when compared to students in the same school who did not have a mentor. Second, students involved in project Raise received better grades than other students at their schools.

Overall it can be seen from the above-mentioned studies, that mentoring does have an impact on youth, especially on at-risk youth. In the literature, there is only a sparse amount of studies that have examined effects of mentoring programs. There were no studies available however, which examined educational achievement among foster care youth and the risks and barriers they have to face when it comes to completing school.

Purpose of the Current Study

The purpose of the current study was to critically evaluate the impact of an educational mentoring program for foster care children, which has been set up by the

Social Advocates for Youth (SAY). This study was done to obtain feedback about the effectiveness of the mentoring program and its ability to help foster care youth succeed in reaching their educational goals. It is hypothesized that the foster care youth participating in the program will show a higher value for school, improved grades, a clearer understanding of their educational goals and an improved self-concept.

Program Description

The goal of the educational mentoring program was to match one youth who was in need of educational assistance with one mentor and have them begin a one-on-one mentoring relationship. The mentor and his or her protégée had to set up an educational goal in the beginning of the mentoring program and to achieve that goal before the end of the program. The matching of the mentors and the youth was done very carefully and diligently, since this is the most important part in a mentoring relationship. If the matching is not done carefully, a successful mentoring relationship is not able to develop. Mentors and foster care youth were matched according to similar interests and reasonable geographical proximity so that an effective mentoring relationship could develop and be possibly sustained past the official one-year relationship. Throughout the mentoring program, mentors were supported by SAY staff who provided encouragement, support, and emergency assistance when matches were unsuccessful or when mentors ran into problems they were not sure how to solve on their own.

SAY's mentoring program goals. The main goal of SAY's mentoring program is to connect foster care youth with a mentor whose primary task is to help them with their education and their educational decisions. What sets SAY's program apart from other

mentoring programs, is that its primary focus is on the youths' education. Through this program, it is hoped that the foster care youth will have a reliable and trusting person whom they can ask for help when they have questions about their education and what they need to do to succeed in school and reach their educational goals (e.g., completing high school, improving GPA, preparing for college). By showing that they value education, take an interest in the youths' school progress, and demonstrate the importance of education to later success, mentors may influence their protégées' attitudes toward school and their school performance.

Responsibilities and preparations of the mentors. There were three major roles the mentors had to fulfill. First, the mentors had to assist the youth in creating and completing their educational goals. Second, the mentors had to advocate for the youth in their schools, if necessary. Third, the mentors had to assist the youth in creating an educational support network and providing all resources possible to help the youth fulfill their educational goals. The mentors had to commit themselves for one school year and the mentor and protégée were to meet face-to-face every other week for at least two hours. In addition, the mentors had to contact the youth via telephone at least once a week. The approximate time commitment for the mentors was planned to be five to six hours per month.

In order to be included in the program, the mentors received mandatory training. This initial training informed the mentors about the general mentoring process, the expectations everyone had of each other and the possible frustrations everyone would have to face. The first training session was done to give the mentors an overview of what

to expect once the program started. The training sessions which were ongoing throughout the year included such topics as setting boundaries, an overview of the social services systems, goal setting, legal rights for youth, developmental assets and time and life management.

Throughout the mentor/protégée meetings, the mentors were asked to log all their activities they did throughout their meeting sessions, as well as the progress they were making toward reaching the educational goal(s). They were also encouraged to log all of the problems they encountered throughout their sessions in their mentoring logs. These logs were an essential part of the meetings occurring twice a month. There were two types of meetings; one meeting would be a training session for the above referenced topics and the second monthly meeting was a “status” meeting. In the “status” meetings, the progress of each individual foster care youth was discussed with the other mentors and the program coordinator. The meetings started with a summary given by each mentor about his/her mentoring progress and experiences so far. After these updates, problems were discussed and possible solutions were brought to the table. The purpose of these meetings was to help the mentors exchange vital and helpful information with the other mentors. If one mentor was not able to find a solution to a problem, maybe another mentor was able to help out.

Method

Participants

Foster care youth. Table 1 shows that there were a total of 14 foster care youth with ages ranging from 14 to 21, with the majority of youth being between the ages of 17

and 19 years. The youth participating in the mentoring program were comprised of five males and nine females. The ethnic distribution was 79 percent Hispanic, 14 percent African American and 7 percent Caucasian.

The foster care youth were selected from an already existing independent living program (ILP) run by SAY. Their ILP counselors referred the youth to participate in the educational mentoring program. The youth had to fulfill the following requirements: They had to live in a non-supportive home environment (e.g., parents were not there for them, there was no interest in their educational future) and show a strong desire to finish high school or attend college. The parent or guardian of each participant was contacted to explain the purpose of the study and gain his or her initial verbal consent. Written parental consent was obtained before the start of the initial assessment.

Mentors. There were 14 mentors, one mentor per foster care youth, with ages ranging from 24 to 41 with a variety of professional backgrounds. The mentors were recruited using a recruitment plan, which spelled out all possible sources through which mentors could be found and be recruited from. Some of the resources used to find suitable mentors were newspaper advertisements, companies such as banks and semiconductor companies, as well as other volunteer organizations. City institutions such as libraries, universities, junior colleges and fire departments also offered great opportunities to find mentors. Furthermore, SAY's homepage and several other online recruitment resources were targeted to obtain mentors for the mentoring program.

Table 1

Demographic Variables of the Foster Care Youth

Demographics	# of youth	% of youth
Age		
14 – 16	1	7.1
17 – 19	11	78.6
20 – 21	2	14.3
Gender		
Male	5	35.7
Female	9	64.3
Ethnicity		
African American	2	14.3
Caucasian	3	21.4
Hispanic	9	64.3

N=(14)

The prospective mentors had to fill out applications, which asked about general demographic information, employment, mentoring history, and an explanation of their expectations from participating in the mentoring program. Background checks were also conducted to ensure the safety of the foster care youth.

Measurement Instrument

The youth survey developed for the educational mentoring program consisted of 21 closed-ended items designed to assess the youth's feelings and attitudes about different aspects of their education: school importance, commitment to school, educational future, and self-perception/self-esteem.

The survey items were developed based upon a comprehensive review of the academic and professional literature, and those categories and items were seen as assessing four general dimensions regarding different aspects of the foster care youth.

A pool of items, which had previously been used to evaluate the effectiveness of mentoring programs, was collected by looking at existing evaluations and reference sources. Further, specific categories of interest to the current research including questions about foster care youths' education and problems these youth had to face were examined. SAY's staff looked at existing program evaluation measures and modified some of the items to fit the current research purpose. The items had to be clear, unambiguous, and as concrete as possible. The items that reflected the questions to be addressed were chosen and included in the scale.

For the majority of the items, the youth had to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with the item using a five-point scale, ranging from strongly agree (1) to

strongly disagree (5), where higher ratings indicated stronger levels of disagreement. The survey also included questions, which asked the youth to indicate a concrete number such as the number of career interests and their current GPA, as well as indicating a range for items such as the number of suspensions/detentions and how regularly they attended school. Following are the four main categories that were to be evaluated by the scale.

Importance of school/education. Items in this section were designed to assess the extent to which the youth wanted to finish high school and go on to college and eventually graduate from college as well. Items in this category included highest level of education completed, importance of going to college, having a strong desire to do well in school, importance of education, and the youth trying hard to do the best in school.

Commitment to school. Individual items relating to scholastic behaviors were asked, including time spent in detention or being suspended, the amount of time spent on homework, coming to class prepared and being committed to doing their best, trying their hardest to succeed in school, active class participation, and regular school attendance.

Educational future. Questions regarding the youth's future included wanting to go to college as well as the importance of having a career. Another question asked was whether education was looked at as being an important part of their lives and believing that getting a good education is the basis for obtaining a good job later in life.

Self-perception. Items in this category included the youths' life expectations as adults, believing their lives have a purpose and feelings they have about themselves, good or bad. In addition, questions about their perception of the existence of rules and consequences for their behavior were also asked.

Procedure

The pre-test surveys were administered to the entire group of participants in the beginning of the program and included several demographic questions as well as the items in the four categories mentioned earlier. The youth were encouraged to answer all questions honestly and they were informed that the surveys were kept anonymous. The youth were informed that their input would help improve the program for them as well as other youth.

The next step in the evaluation process was for the foster care youth to participate in the mentoring program for an entire school year. Toward the end of the year, the foster care youth were again asked to fill out the same survey as they filled out at the beginning of the program. The survey administration took place at the same time of day and in the same environment as the pre-test to avoid compromising the reliability of the results due to any outside impacts. Again, the survey administration was anonymous and the youth were encouraged to answer the questions truthfully and to the best of their abilities.

In the beginning of the program, the mentors were also asked to provide some information about their expectations regarding the mentoring program. They were given an array of open-ended survey questions a few weeks after the mentoring program had started, and again toward the end of the program. The purpose of administering these survey questions was to obtain back-up information besides the data collected from the youth. There were three parts to the mentor questions: the first set of questions dealt with the mentoring program itself and the mentor's past mentoring experiences, if any, the second set was related to the mentoring relationships and the mentor's satisfaction with

their foster care youth matches. The third set asked about the goals the mentor and the youth had set for themselves as well as the likelihood of obtaining these goals. The final questions asked at the end of the program inquired about the mentors' overall satisfaction regarding the mentoring program, their thoughts about the sufficiency of the training they had received in the beginning of the program, the approximate time they had spent with their protégées and their ability to meet or come close to their educational goals they had set in the beginning of the program.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 shows the pre-test and post-test descriptive statistics for each of the four categories measured in the evaluation. The higher the mean scores, the "worse" it is because in that case, the answers had a tendency to be in the "disagree" and "strongly disagree" range rather than in the "agree" and "strongly agree" range.

Looking at the first category, the importance of education, there was a trend of answering the questions more negatively at the end of the mentoring program than in the beginning. The only item that showed a slight positive trend from the first to the second survey administration was the importance of college as seen by the foster care children. This item showed an increase of importance between the first survey administration $M=1.45$ ($SD=.69$) and the second survey administration $M=1.36$ ($SD=.67$). The other three items in this category, which were examining the foster care youths' views of the importance of their education, were almost the same before and after the mentoring program. The mean scores for trying to do the best in school $M=2.00$ ($SD=.96$), having a

desire to be good in school $\underline{M}=1.64$ ($\underline{SD}=.75$) and seeing education as important $\underline{M}=1.29$ ($\underline{SD}=.47$) were all lower in the beginning compared to the end of the program $\underline{M}=2.07$ ($\underline{SD}=.83$), $\underline{M}=1.79$ ($\underline{SD}=.89$) and $\underline{M}=1.43$ ($\underline{SD}=.65$) respectively.

The second category, commitment to school, clearly showed a trend of the youth being more committed to school and their schoolwork. Also, there was a slight drop in the number of classes the youth were enrolled in after the mentoring program $\underline{M}=3.46$ ($\underline{SD}=1.99$) than before $\underline{M}=3.85$ ($\underline{SD}=.89$). School attendance actually showed a downward trend after program completion. In the beginning, more youth $\underline{M}=1.44$ ($\underline{SD}=.73$) went to class regularly than toward the end of the program, $\underline{M}=1.89$ ($\underline{SD}=1.05$). The number of suspensions before $\underline{M}=1.30$ ($\underline{SD}=.48$) and after $\underline{M}=1.00$ ($\underline{SD}=.00$) the program went down as did the number of detentions given to the foster care youth before $\underline{M}=1.70$ ($\underline{SD}=1.25$) and after $\underline{M}=1.10$ ($\underline{SD}=.32$) the program. Class preparedness also showed a positive trend when the youths' preparedness before the program $\underline{M}=2.36$ ($\underline{SD}=.84$) is compared to their preparedness after the program $\underline{M}=2.00$ ($\underline{SD}=.96$). The youth also increased the amount of time spent doing homework, which they indicated on the sixth item, where the amount of time spent to prepare for school changed from $\underline{M}=2.86$ ($\underline{SD}=.95$) to $\underline{M}=2.71$ ($\underline{SD}=1.38$). Another positive trend in this category was class participation. The youth reported that they participated more actively in class toward the end of the mentoring program $\underline{M}=2.14$ ($\underline{SD}=1.17$) than in the beginning $\underline{M}=2.36$ ($\underline{SD}=.84$). Looking at the grade point average item (GPA), which should generally be a good indicator of educational improvement, a slight improvement of grades also could be seen from $\underline{M}=3.08$ ($\underline{SD}=1.26$) to $\underline{M}=3.15$ ($\underline{SD}=.99$). This category

showed overwhelmingly positive results when comparing mean scores before and after the intervention has taken place.

The third category, youths' educational future, showed two items which did not provide any difference between the first survey administration and the second one. The desire to finish school stayed the same and showed a mean of $\underline{M}=1.29$ ($\underline{SD}=.61$) before as well as after the program $\underline{M}=1.29$ ($\underline{SD}=.47$). Also, the importance of having a career did not show any change from the first $\underline{M}=1.14$ ($\underline{SD}=.36$) to the second $\underline{M}=1.14$ ($\underline{SD}=.36$) administration. The youth showed a change in their views of needing a good education to obtaining a good job later on in life. There was a trend $\underline{M}=1.21$ ($\underline{SD}=.43$) in viewing education being more important after the mentoring program had taken place $\underline{M}=1.14$ ($\underline{SD}=.36$). Lastly, the different careers the youth were interested in increased. There was a slight trend in considering more career prospects after the program $\underline{M}=3.43$ ($\underline{SD}=1.02$) than before the program $\underline{M}=3.00$ ($\underline{SD}=1.11$).

All five items included in the fourth category, self-perception, did show an overall improvement in how the foster care youth perceived themselves. The youth answered more positively when asked about their lives having a purpose and their self-perception was more positive when comparing the beginning $\underline{M}=1.93$ ($\underline{SD}=1.27$) to the end of the program $\underline{M}=1.71$ ($\underline{SD}=.82$). Expecting to have a good life once they were adults was the second item in this category. Again, the youth expressed more positive views on their future at the end of the program $\underline{M}=1.21$ ($\underline{SD}=.43$) compared to the beginning of the program $\underline{M}=1.71$ ($\underline{SD}=.82$). The youths' answers also showed improvements when asked about how they felt about themselves. The answers were more positive at the end of the

program $\underline{M}=1.57$ ($\underline{SD}=.51$) than in the beginning $\underline{M}=1.79$ ($\underline{SD}=.58$). The fourth item asked the youth if they thought their teachers cared about them. In the beginning of the program the youth felt less cared about by their teachers $\underline{M}=3.14$ ($\underline{SD}=1.23$) compared to the end of the program $\underline{M}=2.86$ ($\underline{SD}=1.10$). The last item in this category was trying to assess the youths' perception of there being consequences for their behaviors at school. There was an increased realization among the youth when comparing before $\underline{M}=2.29$ ($\underline{SD}=1.07$) and after $\underline{M}=2.21$ ($\underline{SD}=.70$) survey results.

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of the Youths' Attitudes Toward Education and Their Self-Perception Before and After Program Participation

Item	Pre-test		Post-test	
	M	SD	M	SD
Importance of education				
Importance of college	1.45	.69	1.36	.67
I do my best in school	2.00	.96	2.07	.83
Desire to be good in school	1.64	.75	1.79	.89
Education is important	1.29	.47	1.43	.65
Commitment to school				
# of classes taken	3.85	1.99	3.46	.88
School attendance	1.44	.73	1.89	1.05
# of suspensions	1.30	.48	1.00	.00
# of detentions	1.70	1.25	1.10	.32
I am prepared for class	2.36	.83	2.00	.96
1+ hours of homework/day	2.86	.95	2.71	1.40
I participate in class	2.36	.84	2.14	1.17
GPA	3.08	1.26	3.15	.99
Educational Future				
Desire to finish school	1.29	.61	1.29	.47
Education is imp. for a good job	1.21	.43	1.14	.36
Career importance	1.14	.36	1.14	.36
# of career interests	3.00	1.11	3.43	1.02
Self-perception				
My life has a purpose	1.93	1.27	1.71	.83
I will have a good life	1.71	.83	1.21	.43
I feel good about myself	1.79	.58	1.57	.51
My teachers care about me	3.14	1.23	2.86	1.10
My behavior has consequences	2.29	1.10	2.21	.70

Note: N's range from 9 - 14

Paired Sample T-Test

The hypotheses of this study were tested using a paired sample t-test with a Type I error rate of .05. As shown in Table 3, there was only one statistically significant result in the fourth category, which was the assumption of the foster care youth having a good life once they reached adulthood $t(13)= 2.19, p=.05$. The youth felt more positive about being able to lead a good life once they were adults after they had participated in the mentoring program.

Answers Provided by the Mentors on the Program Effectiveness at the End of the Program

The effectiveness of the program and the mentoring relationships were assessed through a content analysis of open-ended questions given to the mentors at the end of the program. Generally, the feedback provided by the mentors about the training given to them in the beginning of the program in preparation for their mentoring relationships was very positive. The majority of the mentors explained that the information given to them by SAY staff helped to adjust their often too high expectations they had regarding their mentoring relationships. The training provided to the mentors enabled them to start their mentoring relationships with the right mindset and the ability to better understand the different needs foster care youth have, compared to non-foster care youth. The feedback provided by the mentors showed that they realized foster care youths were in need of a patient adult; an adult who would spend the time needed to build a trusting relationship, someone who was not just there to pass judgment but who was a stable source of support in their otherwise unstable lives.

When asked about the mentor/protégée pairing process, all mentors participating in the program provided positive responses regarding the pairing process. The mentors emphasized that there has to be some common ground shared between themselves and their protégées in order for a trusting relationship to develop and the mentoring program goals to be reached. Through the information collected in the beginning of the program about the mentors and the foster care youth, a careful matching had taken place, which proved to be very successful in building trusting relationships.

Questions about the educational goals met by the mentors and the youth provided mixed answers. To some extent, the goals were put within reach of the youth, but they were not completely achieved. Many mentors were able to help their youth plan their educational future better; while other mentors were able to help their youth apply to and get into college. There were great differences in terms of educational goal accomplishment, but this was due to many different factors influencing the mentoring relationships. Not all youth showed the enthusiasm and drive expected from them throughout the program as compared to the beginning of the program. Many youth had personal problems that hindered the attainment of their educational goals, but that was not an unforeseen dilemma. However, the majority of the mentors did report that they felt they had an impact on the youths' perception of the importance of their education and the educational paths the youth were going to pursue in the near future. Overall, the mentors reported that they would engage in a mentoring relationship again and that they would try and sustain the relationships they had built with their protégées even after the mentoring program officially had come to an end.

Table 3
Paired T-Test of Youths' Pre-and Post-Test Scores

Categories/Items	N	Paired t	p value
Importance of education			
Importance of college	11	.56	.59
I do my best in school	14	-.27	.79
Desire to be good in school	14	-.81	.44
Education is important	14	-.69	.50
Commitment to school			
# of classes taken	13	.89	.39
School attendance	9	-1.51	.12
# of suspensions	10	1.96	.08
# of detentions	10	1.76	.11
I am prepared for class	14	1.00	.34
1+ hours of homework/day	14	.43	.67
I participate in class	14	.82	.43
GPA	13	-.43	.67
Educational Future			
Desire to finish school	14	.00	1.00
Education is imp. for a good job	14	.56	.56
Career importance	14	.00	1.00
# of career interests	14	-1.47	.16
Self-perception			
My life has a purpose	14	.72	.49
I will have a good life	14	2.19	.05*
I feel good about myself	14	1.38	.19
My teachers care about me	14	.81	.43
My behavior has consequences	14	.25	.81

* $p \leq .05$

Discussion

The results presented in this study evaluated the impact of mentoring on academic achievement, attitudes toward education and the self-perception of foster care youth. The findings of the study generally support the initial proposition that the educational mentoring program would result in positive changes on the selected outcome measures. At the conclusion of the 12-month study period, analyses demonstrated that three out of four categories evaluated (e.g., commitment to school, educational future and self-perception) showed positive changes in foster care youths' attitudes and behaviors.

Analyzing the Different Categories Measured in the Evaluation

Looking at the first category, the importance of education, the actual "importance of college" item shows more youth agreeing to it after participating in the program as compared to the beginning. This demonstrates a slight tendency for the youth to perceive college as having a higher importance to them. The reinforcement given to the youth by the mentors as well as information provided by the mentors about their education and their career path(s) most likely contributed to the youths' more positive view about going to college or the importance of their education in general. The other three items in this category showed a trend of the youth agreeing less strongly with these questions. When asked about "doing their best in school", there was only a very small difference between the beginning and the end of the program. This was the item with the least amount of difference between the first and the second survey administration. The youth generally agreed to do their best in school, however it appeared that their school work habits did not change through program participation. The "desire to be good in school" item, as well

as the general question about the importance of education did show that the youth still considered both these items important after the program; however there was a tendency for the youth not to agree as strongly at the end of the program as they had done in the beginning. These results suggest that the foster care youth were already sure how they felt about their education and the level of importance education has for them, before participating in the mentoring program. It has to be kept in mind that the reason they were able to participate in the program was that they had to show a desire to finish school or go to college to begin with.

The second category, the youths' commitment to school demonstrated the most significant positive changes in the attitudes and behaviors the foster care youth displayed after they had participated in the program. The items in this category primarily showed a behavioral change among the foster youth. However, there were two that did not follow this pattern: the number of classes taken and the youths' school attendance. Specifically, the youth were taking less classes/units at the end of the program compared to the beginning. This could be due to the fact that some of the youth had entered college and were not yet taking on a full load of classes. They might still have been trying to cope with the transition from high school to college and were therefore slowly easing into this new and different environment. School attendance is the second that showed a slight downward trend after the completion of the mentoring program. The reason for this slight decrease in attendance might also be due to the fact that the youths' attendance at their college classes was not mandatory. Once in college, they had more leverage and decision

making ability and might have tried to test their boundaries and take advantage of their new found freedom.

Generally, the rest of the category showed improvements in the youths' behaviors regarding their education. Spending less time in detention approached a level of significance in the evaluation, as did the number of suspensions the youths' served throughout the mentoring program. It seemed as though the mentors had influence on this behavioral change occurring among the youth in this 12-month period. This might be due to the fact that the mentors provided an example of how a good education and commitment to school can enable someone to have a great career and many other advantages an education has to offer. Furthermore, having someone in their lives they could turn to and ask for advice and help regarding their education as well as having someone who cared about them succeeding in their education and ultimately succeeding in life could have influenced the positive changes. Another improvement could be seen in the youths' GPA's after the program. Despite the short 12-month duration of the mentoring program, an increase in the youths' GPA suggested that hard work and increased commitment was needed for these changes to come about. It seems that for the youth having the possibility to ask their mentors for educational assistance or help in managing their time so they would finish papers by the deadline as well as start preparing for quizzes and exams on time was very valuable to the youth and something they gladly took advantage of.

The third category, the youths' educational future, showed the least amount of change out of all categories. The item inquiring about the youths' desire to finish school

as well as the items that asked how important they perceived having a career did not show any change from the survey's first administration to the second administration at the end of the program. It seems that these items were seen as important by the youth even before participation in the program. The notion that education and having a career are important was, as mentioned earlier, the main factor of the youths' inclusion in the mentoring program. Therefore it is not surprising that the youths' opinion about the importance of these two items did not show any change before and after the program.

There was a slight change in the youths' views of an education being important to get a good job. This more positive view can be attributed to the mentors providing the youth with the tools to apply the knowledge gained in school to their everyday life. The mentors were able to show the youth that what they learn in school is valuable and how they can use and apply it in the real world. This is an important connection, which often goes unnoticed. Through the mentors' help, the youth will be able to see how their education impacts their future life course and that their education is the foundation for leading a successful life once they reach adulthood. The last item in this category, the number of careers the youth were interested in, showed the most improvement compared to the rest of the items in this category. The number of career interests showed an overall increase and was attributable to the mentors providing the youth with more information and insight into the different opportunities available to them. The mentor protégée meetings provided the youth with the opportunity to obtain feedback from the mentors about their career dreams and aspirations. The mentors, on the other hand, were able to guide the youth in the right direction and help them pinpoint careers that would match the

youths' interests and most importantly their abilities. Since the time the mentors were able to spend with the youth was fairly long, there was a chance for the mentors to advise the youth in terms of the careers that would be appropriate for them to pursue.

The last category, the youths' self-perception, was the category that showed the most positive changes in the youths' view of themselves and the future ahead of them. Among the five items in this category, one showed a significant positive change in the youths' perceptions. After participating in the mentoring program, the youth felt that they would have a good life, once they were adults. This is important considering the circumstances most of these youth had to face when growing up and the many obstacles they had to overcome to even get to where they are today. Having this significant change in the youth's attitudes is of great importance for their future well-being. This changed attitude the youth showed at the end of the mentoring program is most likely due to them having a trusting and reliable person in their lives. Too many foster youth do not see any prospects for themselves once they reach adulthood because they have no one to show them the possibilities and opportunities that are open to them. Through the provision of emotional support and positive feedback, mentors were able to enhance the youths' self-concept, which in turn, influenced the outlook the youth had about their future. Another item in this category asked the youth to indicate if they felt good about themselves. After the program, there were more youth who had a more positive view about themselves than before the program. Again, having someone in their lives who cared and provided support had a big impact on how the youth feel about themselves. There was also a slight positive change in the youth viewing their lives as having a purpose. However, one has to

understand that while the mentors were able to help the youth in many educational and even personal aspects, it is clear that some previous experiences must have had too big of an impact on the youth which could not be erased in a 12-month period. Mentors cannot make foster care youth forget all the hardships they had to face throughout their lives and many of these youth will carry the scars of their past with them forever. This should be kept in mind when looking at all the evaluation results that are non-significant or only approach significance in this study. There was also only a slight positive change in the youth thinking that their teachers cared about them. Having one caring person in their lives did not mean that their perception of all other adults in their lives had changed. Lastly, the youths' perception that their behavior has consequences did hardly show any changes at the end of the program when compared to the beginning. The youth were not really sure how to answer this question and the majority had answered this question in the "neutral" range at the first survey administration, which was the case at the second survey administration as well.

Summary of the Findings

Overall, after the program foster care youth tended to view their education as important, showed a greater commitment to school and showed a more positive view of themselves and their future. The only category that did not produce any tangible results was focused on the perception of the youths' educational future. This category included questions about the youth desire to finish school, considering education to be important for getting a good job and viewing a career as important. Since foster care youth who were included in the program were chosen for program participation only if they showed

an interest in their education, the non-significant changes in their attitude regarding the perception of their future education was foreseeable. The foster care youth had made up their minds already about wanting to complete high school or going on to college before any mentoring intervention had taken place.

Benefits of Mentoring and Conducting Program Evaluations

The present study can be viewed as an initial exploration of mentoring programs focused on academic achievement of disadvantaged youth. Participation in a mentoring program that has a well established foundation appears to be effective in influencing and increasing academic achievement in foster care youth. Consistent, positive one-on-one attention from an adult role model may have the potential to reduce some of the academic dangers that foster care youth and at-risk youth in general encounter. In addition, the existing literature provides evidence that mentoring relationships are able to increase youths' self-esteem and self-perception. By being able to discuss school related as well as personal problems with an adult who cares and shows empathy for the youths' problems, their academic performance will increase and more importantly, the youth will automatically start to feel better about themselves and their abilities.

Youth who have experienced foster care are at a higher risk of not being able or capable to adjust in several different areas of their lives as compared to non-foster care youth. They are educationally and economically disadvantaged from the start, with part of this disadvantage stemming from lower educational expectations coming from both themselves and the adults in their lives. Without encouragement and resources to advance beyond high school or even graduate from high school, the youth are placed at risk of

having to take lower paying jobs that offer less stability and fewer benefits and consequently result in lower economic well-being. This can create an economic hardship that is not only unfair, but also preventable as is demonstrated by the results provided by this study. Offering a mentor to foster care youth who is able to assist them in planning their educational future as well as help them increase their academic achievements, is a very effective way of changing the sometimes grim futures these youth have to face. Foster care youths' futures can be a lot brighter if they receive the proper support regarding their educational aspirations and if they are offered more opportunities to fulfill their educational goals. The support given by a mentor will enable the youth to follow a more successful path than they would if no support was provided to them.

A thorough evaluation of existing as well as new programs will enable the program coordinators to create a program that will be most effective in reaching its goals. The evaluation of the current mentoring program will help program coordinators to work on the weaknesses and therefore make the program even more effective. This program evaluation was successful in determining the effectiveness of the program and providing many youth with a better understanding of where they see themselves in the future and how to go about reaching their educational goals. Another effect the program evaluation uncovered was an increase in the foster care youths' self-perception and self-esteem. Evaluations of these types of programs therefore are a successful way to improve programs, determine the successful components and obtain instant feedback on program effectiveness and the impacts the programs have.

Limitations of the Study

Although this study did not provide statistically significant results that implied that mentors had an impact upon the foster care youth, this is not to say that no important changes in the attitudes and behaviors of the youth has occurred; only that the measures used did not detect any appreciable effects. The non-significant results obtained in this study can be explained by a variety of factors. It should be noted that the sample size in this study was very small. This is partially due to the fact that this was a pilot study and the mentoring program had been conducted for the very first time. Considering the small sample size, one has to understand that there is a tendency for small samples to “tolerate” differences that in a larger sample would likely produce statistically significant results.

Also, there were other impacts that were likely to have had an influence on the statistically non-significant results of the evaluation. Mainly, the time the mentors and their protégées spent together did not seem sufficient to offset poor school performance, negative influences on self-esteem, and many years of living in unstable environments. Although the mentors might have been able to teach responsibility and values, discuss the importance of education and have tried their best to provide a brief glimpse of some of the opportunities available in the larger world, they cannot be expected to have completely neutralized the harsh conditions in which many of these youth have lived and still live in.

Suggestions for Future Research

In order for these types of mentoring programs to become even more effective and reach those who need it most, the results of this study need to be replicated to determine generalizability. There is a need for more longitudinal studies, which would

follow the educational paths of the foster care youth long after they have participated in these types of educational mentoring programs. Following up and determining where these youth are five or ten years after leaving the program, would be the only way to precisely determine the effectiveness of these types of mentoring programs.

On another note, it would be interesting to evaluate the age group that mentoring would have the greatest impact on youths' academic achievement. If the right age can be pinpointed, mentoring programs will reach their highest effectiveness and have an increased likelihood of making a lasting impact. The sooner these types of studies are being conducted the better the future of today's foster care youth will be.

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From: **Nabil Ibrahim, N. Ibrahim**
AVP, Graduate Studies & Research

Date: September 18, 2002

The Human Subjects-Institutional Review Board has approved your request for exemption from human subject's review under category "D" in the study entitled:

**"Evaluation of an Educational Mentoring Program
for Foster Care Children."**

This approval is contingent upon the subjects participating in your research project or the subject's data collected for the research project being appropriately protected from risk. This includes the protection of the anonymity of the subjects' identity when they participate in your research project and concerning all data that may be collected from the subjects. The Board's approval includes continued monitoring of your research to assure that the subjects are being adequately and properly protected from such risks. If at any time a subject becomes injured or complains of injury, you must immediately notify Nabil Ibrahim, Ph.D. Injury includes but is not limited to bodily harm, psychological trauma, and release of potentially damaging personal information.

Please also be advised that all subjects need to be fully informed and aware that their participation in your research project is voluntary, and that he or she may withdraw from the project at any time. Further, a subject's participation, refusal to participate, or withdrawal will not affect any services that the subject is receiving or will receive at the institution in which the research is being conducted. This approval is granted for a one-year period and data collection beyond September 18, 2003 requires an extension request.

If you have any questions, please contact me at (408) 924-2480.