

**Mentoring and its Effect on
the Life Chances and Experiences
of Children in group Homes**

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(ABSTRACT)

Mentoring relationships can be defined as an interaction between a less experienced individual, called a mentee or protégé, and a more experienced individual known as a mentor. The relationship that the mentee and the mentor establish is one that provides influential and emotional support. Research suggests that mentoring relationships have a positive effect on children in group homes. Although children in group homes may not have strong support from their biological families or kin, they often count on the undivided support from their counselors. For this study, group home stakeholders (director, counselors and children) were supportive of developing a formal mentoring program as part of the group home experience.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to my family, past, present and future. Thank you. I would like to thank my mother Michelle for encouraging me to be successful in graduate school and keeping me motivated.

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Chapter 1- Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Mentoring relationships can take different forms- formal and informal. Formal mentoring programs are typically established within an organization, where a mentor is assigned to a protégé. Informal mentoring relationships more often develop through work relationships as potential mentors and protégés get to know each other in the organization or through a professional group outside the workplace (Furano, 1993). Few would argue that there are distinct differences in formal and informal mentoring relationships. One major difference lies in the initiation of the mentor/protégé relationship. Informal mentorships are spontaneous and unstructured relationships with minimal organizational involvement. Informal protégés generally have proven they possess the 'right stuff' and are worthy of the attention that they are given by their informal mentors. In contrast, formal mentoring programs are officially recognized, sanctioned, and managed by the sponsoring organization (Nemanick, 2000).

Informal relationships occur among family, or friends in a social environment. This type of environment is an open environment where any influential behavior can impact a child's development process. An example of this type of environment is the group home. A group home is an alternative to traditional in-home foster care for children, in which a) children are housed in an intimate or home-like setting, b) a number of unrelated children live for varying periods of time with a single set of house parents, or c) with a rotating staff of trained caregivers. More specialized therapeutic or treatment group homes have specially-trained staff to assist children with emotional and behavioral difficulties. The make-up and staffing of the group home can be adapted to meet the unique needs of its residents (Nemanick, 2000; Ragins, 1999).

The Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to see if a formal mentoring relationship would be feasible within a group home setting. The reason I am posing the question is to see if it could possibly have an impact on a child's life choices and experiences. Research has shown that mentoring relationships have a positive effect on children's life chances and experiences (Dodge, 2006; Furano, 1993; Tierney, 1995). Children in group homes who have a positive mentor relationship are less likely to engage in violent activities and do better academically (Tierney, 1995). Whereas, children in group homes who do not have positive mentoring relationships are more likely to engage in violent behavior and have poor academic and social background (Tierney, 1995). This study will try to add to the current research on mentoring relationships and in particular on the effect of mentoring relationships in group homes. This study will be qualitative because group homes presently do not have formal mentoring programs therefore, this study will try to ascertain the understandings of the children, counselors, and director's as to the importance of having a formal mentoring relationship in group homes.

Chapter 2-Literature Review

Supportive Relationships

Supportive relationships with non-parent adults can powerfully influence the course and quality of adolescents' lives (Rhodes, 2000). Indeed, researchers have identified adult role models, supportive relationship with three or more other adults, and adults in community valuing youth as essential to youth's health and well-being as well as access to ongoing relationships with caring adults having a positive relationship with youth (Rhodes, 2000; McPartlend, 1991; Tiask, 1986). Moreover, researchers working from within a youth at risk framework have repeatedly called attention to the protective influence of supportive relationships with adults (Rhodes, 2000; McPartlend, 1991; Tiask, 1986). Tiask, (1986) highlighted the importance of one good relationship, and discussed the critical importance of significant adults in promoting the healthy development of highly stressed youth. Later studies done by Furano (1990), Tierney (1995), Quinn (1999), and Rhodes (2000) further exemplified the importance of having a mentor relationship for an adolescent to improve their life circumstances and increase their social mobility.

Unfortunately, many adolescents never manage to form connections with caring adults. This is not surprising, given that traditional sources of initial mentoring contact—extended families, schools, and neighborhoods—have changed in ways that have dramatically reduced the availability of caring adults (Baker,2004; Easterlin,1991; Ferre, 1987). Cuts in school budgets have resulted in even fewer adults per child, and declining neighborhood safety has led to social isolation and restricted opportunities for mentoring contact (Ferre, 1987). At the same time, changing economic, social, and cultural conditions have sharply increased adolescents' vulnerability to negative life outcomes (Fagan, 1998).

A growing number of evaluations suggest that volunteer mentoring relationships can positively influence a range of outcomes including improvements in peer and parental relationships, academic achievement, and self-concept as well as lower violent crime rates among juvenile delinquents, and reductions in substance abuse (Rhodes, 2000; McPartland, 1991; Tiask, 1986).

Mentoring relationships can be seen in two ways formal and informal. Informal mentoring is the most common form of mentoring and may be undertaken by a supervisor, a family member or by any member of the community. It is traditionally viewed as spontaneous, exclusive, and reliant upon the "chemistry" between the mentor and the protégé. By comparison, formal mentoring is accomplished by a deliberate pairing of protégé and mentor in order to develop specific skills and competencies. Formal mentoring provides a standardized but flexible structure that is more conducive to the organizational environment, and better able to prevent potential obstacles.

Formal Mentoring Relationships

Formal mentoring programs have several advantages in terms of safety and inclusion. They provide safety by promoting safe practices among peer group, family and community settings. Formal mentoring provides standards to which a child must follow in order to be successful in the program (setting high goals for academic achievement). They provide supportive relationships that include connectedness, communication, and guidance. Lastly, they provide the opportunity to develop a meaningful relationship through inclusion into a group. All of these are extremely important when considering adolescent development.

Informal mentoring relationships differ significantly from formal mentoring in terms of safety and inclusion. Informal mentoring relationships do not promote safety for children when

considering physical health dangers, crime and abuse. Informal mentoring relationships often do not provide standards to where a child can perceive achievement either academically or socially. Informal mentoring relationships may not provide supportive relationships that would make the child feel inclusive and they often perceive their adult (authoritative figures) as distant and untrustworthy (Tiask, 1986).

Formal mentoring programs have the several advantages in terms of diversity and opportunities for the future. They promote diversity with greater opportunities for women, minorities and other underrepresented groups. Formal mentoring opens doors for protégés by mentors offering coaching, contacts and guidance. They also provide a vehicle for successful planning by nurturing talented individuals who would be considered as upwardly mobile (Nemanick, 2000).

There are two additional significant differences. First, the mentor and protégé are not matched by the third party but rather selects each other informally. Second, the informal mentoring relationship is not structured, as compared with a formal mentoring program. Also, informal mentoring relationships can have some negative effects including; the mentoring relationship may be viewed by others as an inappropriate relationship. The mentor may not be well trained in the responsibilities of mentors leading to the protégé not understanding the purpose and or parameters of the mentoring relationship (Nemanick, 2000).

Formal mentoring involves an organizationally sanctioned and established learning relationship in which mentors and protégés are matched through a standardized process with the goal of providing career development guidance to the protégé. They are typically planned to meet organizational goals within large organizations and span a limited time horizon. Formal relationships are initiated by a program administrator using a matching process and

involve a medium level of social intensity, directive mentor behavior, and objective monitoring and evaluation of the protégé's performance according to specified criteria in a written mentoring contract.

An example of an organization that uses a formal mentoring program is the Big Brothers Big Sisters Organization. There are some basic qualifications needed for someone to be a BBBS potential mentor. This would involve attending all mentor staff development & support group meetings once becoming a mentor. In addition, they must have recent experience in an assignment similar to the protégé's and live and/or work in close proximity to the protégé. Finally, a person must have the professional and personal strengths that would complement the needs and strengths of the potential protégé, as is determined by the commitment of volunteered time the mentor has for the mentee (Furano, 1993).

Informal Mentoring Relationships

In contrast, informal mentoring involves a voluntary and naturally-occurring learning relationship in which the protégé typically selects the mentor and receives career development advice through an autonomous process aimed at advancing the protégé's career. They typically emerge unplanned regarding their organizational objectives and develop based primarily on the protégé's desire to achieve personal career goals. Informal relationships are initiated by the protégé based on voluntary friendship and/or perceived similarity in values, attitudes, demographics or life experiences with the mentor. The relationship involves a high level of social intensity, participative decision-making, and subjective or perceptual evaluations of the protégé's performance by the mentor (Colley et al., 2003). In both relationship types, mentors provide three functions to protégés: psychosocial support, in which they provide acceptance and friendship, and confirm the protégé's behavior; role modeling, in which their

attitudes, values and behaviors guide the protégé; and career development (vocational support), in which they act as coaches to the protégé, protect the protégé from adverse organizational forces, provide challenging assignments, sponsor advancement, and foster positive exposure and visibility (Colley et al., 2003).

Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America

Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBSA) is the largest youth mentoring organization in the United States. The organization provides one-to-one mentoring relationships between children and adults. Its purpose is to provide friendship, emotional support, and guidance to youth through their involvement with positive role models. BBBSA's national motto is "making a difference, one child at a time."

In 1904, a young New York City court clerk named Ernest Coulter was seeing more and more boys come through his courtroom. He recognized that caring adults could help many of these kids stay out of trouble, and he set out to find volunteers. That marked the beginning of Big Brothers Big Sisters of New York City and the Big Brothers movement. By 1916, Big Brothers had spread to 96 cities across the country. At around the same time, the members of a group called Ladies of Charity were befriending girls who had come through the New York Children's Court. That group would later become Catholic Big Sisters. Both groups continued to work independently until 1977, when Big Brothers of America and Big Sisters International joined forces and became Big Brothers Big Sisters of America. Big Brothers Big Sisters currently operates in all 50 states and in 35 countries around the world. The program has been shown to impact a variety of behavioral outcomes without providing a behavior-specific intervention or targeting a specific behavior such as academic improvement, drug use, or violence (Dodge, 2006;

Furano, 1993; Tierney, 1995).

BBBS is a community mentoring program which matches an adult volunteer (known as a Big Brother or Big Sister) to a child (known as a Little Brother or Little Sister) with the expectation that a caring and supportive relationship will develop. Hence, the match between volunteer and child is the most important component of the intervention. Equally important however is the support of the match by the ongoing supervision and monitoring of the relationship by a professional staff member. The professional staff member selects, matches, monitors, and closes the relationship. The volunteer and child communicate with the parent/guardian and throughout the matched relationship (Dodge, 2006; Furano, 1993; Tierney, 1995).

In practice, the volunteer intervention in the traditional one to one relationship is three to five hours a week over the course of a year or longer. The generalized activity of the relationship is related to the goals that were set initially when the match was established. These goals are identified from the extensive case manager interview held with the parent/guardian and with the child. The foremost goal usually set is to develop a relationship- that is mutually satisfying where both parties come together freely on a regular basis. More specific goals relate to school attendance, academic performance, relationships with other children and siblings, general hygiene, learning a new skill or developing a new hobby. The goals established for a specific match are developed into an individualized case plan which is updated by the case manager as progress is made and circumstances change over time (Nemanick, 2000; Ragins, 1999).

Public Practice and Venture conducted a comprehensive study of nearly 1,000 ten to sixteen year olds from eight BBBS agencies during the years 1992-1993. All of the youth who

participated in this study came from underprivileged back grounds. Half of these youth were randomly assigned to a treatment group for which BBBS matches were made and the other half were randomly assigned to a control group and were not matched. At the conclusion of the 18 month study period, it was found that Little Brothers and Little Sisters were less likely to have started using drugs or alcohol, were less likely to have hit someone, felt more competent about doing school work, attended school more, got better grades, and had better relationships with their parents and peers than those who did not participate in the program (Tireney,1995).

Public/Private Ventures, looked at 959 boys and girls, ages 10 to 16, through Big Brothers Big Sisters agencies in Phoenix, Ariz.; Wichita, Kan.; Minneapolis, Minn.; Rochester, NY; Columbus, Ohio; Philadelphia, Pa.; and Houston and San Antonio, Texas. The agencies were selected for their large size and geographic diversity.

Of the young people taking part in the study, more than 60 percent were boys, and more than 50 percent were minorities. Most came from low-income households, and many lived in families with histories of substance abuse and/or domestic violence. Approximately one-half of the children were matched with a Big Brother or Big Sister. The others were assigned to a waiting list (control group). The children were randomly assigned to one group or the other. The matched children met with their Big Brothers or Big Sisters about three times a month for an average of one year. Researchers interviewed the Littles, the children who were not matched, and their parents on two occasions: when they first applied for a Big Brother or Big Sister, and again 18 months later. The results Little Brothers and Little Sisters included that they were 46% less likely to begin using illegal drugs, 27% less likely to begin using alcohol ,52% less likely to skip school, 37% less likely to skip a class, more confident of their performance in schoolwork, one-third

less likely to hit someone, and getting along better with their families. These results indicated improvements that occurred with a supportive mentoring relationship. There was a decrease in drug use, alcohol use, skipping school, and getting along better with peers and family as well.

Big Brothers Big Sisters volunteers had the greatest impact in the area of alcohol and substance abuse prevention. For every 100 youth between ages 10 and 16 who start using drugs, the Public and Private Ventures study found that, only 54 similar youth who are matched with a Big will start using drugs. Minority boys and girls were the most strongly influenced. They were 70 percent less likely than their peers to initiate drug use. BBBS youths were 46 percent less likely to initiate illegal drug use. Analyzed separately, boys were 55 percent less likely to initiate illegal drug use. When examined by racial/ethnic group, no significant differences were found for whites, but minority boys were 68 percent less likely to start using illegal drugs. There were no significant differences found for girls as a group, or for white girls as a subgroup. Minority girls were 73 percent less likely to initiate illegal drug use, a difference that was marginally statistically significant. BBBS youths were 27 percent less likely to initiate alcohol use, a marginally significant difference. No significant differences were found for either boys or girls as individual groups, or for minority boys or white boys or girls. Minority girls were 54 percent less likely to initiate alcohol use than were control group girls, a difference that was marginally significant. BBBS youths were 32 percent less likely to hit someone. There were no significant differences for boys as a group or for minority boys as a subgroup. However, white boys in BBBS were less likely to hit someone than were white boys in the control group. Girls overall were less likely to hit someone, a difference that was marginally significant, but no significant differences were found for either minority girls or white girls as subgroups. No significant effects were found for the BBBS group as a whole or for any of the subgroups for

theft, property damage, involvement in fights, cheating on tests, being sent to the principal's office, or smoking (Dodge, 2006; Furano, 1993; Tierney, 1995).

"We have known all along that Big Brothers Big Sisters' mentoring has a long-lasting, positive effect on children's confidence, grades, and social skills," said Judy Vredenburg, Big Brothers Big Sisters' President and CEO, "and the results of this impact study scientifically confirm that belief. These dramatic findings are very good news, particularly at a time when many people contend that 'nothing works' in reaching teenagers," Public/Private Ventures President Gary Walker added. "This program suggests a strategy the country can build on to make a difference, especially for youth in single-parent families" (Tierney, 1995, 11).

According to the research (Tierney,1995), these one-on-one matches are such a powerful force for influencing children's behavior because of Big Brothers Big Sisters' signature approach to mentoring. A Big Brothers Big Sisters' match is carefully administered and supported by rigorous standards and trained personnel. Professional agency staff strives for matches that are not only safe and well suited to each child's needs, but also are influential and built to last. That is why so much care is taken in screening and orienting volunteers, and then in matching them with children.

However, Big Brothers Big Sisters professionals are much more than just "matchmakers." They provide ongoing support and supervision to the Big, the Little, and the Little's family. They offer training and advice to help ensure that the match is satisfying and fulfilling for everyone involved.

Additionally, every Big Brothers Big Sisters agency subscribes to a uniform set of standards and procedures. They also receive ongoing training and consultation from the Big Brothers Big Sisters national office. It is this web of support that helps maximize the

likelihood that a Big Brothers Big Sisters relationship will "take root" and flourish. The research found, for example, that Big Brothers Big Sisters' matches consistently spend more time together, and continue as a match for longer periods, than do their peers in other mentoring programs that Public/Private Ventures has studied. "In mentoring programs without this infrastructure, we have found that relationships evaporate too soon for effects to be possible" said Walker. (Tierney, 1995, 23)

Mentoring programs are an advocacy program in promoting the academic achievement of adolescents who may be at risk for school failure (Dodge, 2006; Furano, 1993; Tierney, 1995). It has also been said that evaluations of volunteer mentoring programs provide evidence of positive influences on adolescent development outcomes, including improvements in academic achievement, self concept, lower recidivism rates among juvenile delinquents and reductions in substance abuse. 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 use, mentored youth were more likely than non mentored youth to report improved parent and peer relationships (Tierney, 1995).

With regard to academic outcomes, compared with control group participants, BBBS youths attained slightly higher grade point averages (GPAs), with average GPAs of 2.71 versus 2.63, a difference that was marginally significant. No significant differences were found for boys as a whole, or for minority boys or white boys as subgroups. Girls who participated in BBBS attained significantly higher GPAs than did the comparison girls, with an average GPA of 2.84 versus an average of 2.67.

Differences in GPAs were marginally significant for minority girls in BBBS, who

had an average GPA of 2.83 compared with an average of 2.62 for control group girls. No effects were found for white girls. BBBS youths were 52 percent less likely to skip a day of school. No significant differences were found for boys as a whole, or for minority boys or white boys as subgroups. Girls who participated in BBBS skipped 84 percent fewer days of school than did control group girls. Effects were significant for both minority girls (78 percent fewer days skipped) and white girls (90 percent fewer days skipped) (Dodge, 2006; Furano, 1993; Tierney, 1995).

Group Homes

Current research on group homes states that there are a growing number of children entering group homes. There are 30,000 group homes in the United States (Pecora, 2003). Pecora (2003) indicates that group homes are a safe resource for children to escape abuse and neglect because group homes provide a secondary care provision for children without families or resources to live. Group homes are small, residential facilities located within a community and designed to serve children. These homes usually have six or fewer occupants and are staffed 24 hours a day by trained caregivers (Wooden, 2006).

There is considerable evidence indicating that children in group homes experience a great deal of difficulty in the school system and are frequently not receiving the attention that they need there. Recent research has suggested that many children who grew up in group homes are less likely to be supported in school by the adults in their lives (Rhodes, 2000, McPartland, 1991, Quinn, 1999).

In a review on foster care/group home, Hooks (2005) indicated that children in group homes were not receiving required services, such as medical exams or attending school. Caseworkers were not maintaining sufficient contact with children and providers (case workers)

were not always closely monitored to ensure children were placed in safe environments (evidence of background checks, as well as health and safety inspections was missing Hooks, 2005). This information was obtained from case files of children who lived in group homes in the Baltimore, MD area. The end result of this review was that such audit issues, some of which have a long history, highlight problems related to the inadequacy of the group home setting.

Education of Children in Group Homes

Research has looked at education (Freeman, 1997; McPartland, 1991), violence (Best, 2003; Dodge, 2006; Jones, 2006; Li, 2000; The National Center for Youth Law, 2006) and quality outcomes of children in group homes (Dodge, 2006; Kools, 1997; Quinn, 1999; Thomas, 2006, Wooden, 2006). Additional research(Dodge, 2006) found that young people leaving the foster care agency at the age of 18 found that within 12-18 months after leaving care, 37% had not finished high school, 39% were unemployed, 27% of males had been incarcerated, 10% of females had been incarcerated, and 39% were receiving public assistance. The researchers highlight the failure of funding educational programs towards youths who enter the foster care system resulting in a negative impact on foster children's education (Dodge, 2006; Furano, 1993; Tierney, 1995).

Violence among Children in Group Homes

According to a study, done by The National Center for Youth Law, researchers noted that more than half of all participants with records of violent behavior began to engage in such behavior between the ages of 14-17 (the average age of children in group homes). Jones (2006) notes that African American males experience more violence in group homes than any other race. They also note that most African American males (in group homes) experience the pain of discrimination, racial hatred, rejection, personal and emotional attacks and many stereotypes that

deny individuality and importance. In an effort to possibly help African American males in the foster care system, Jones suggests that the foster care system should be more open to African American males experiences in foster care and provide any resourceful care that they need. For example, Jones emphasized that African American males need support that provides assistance with activities of daily living to help individuals access other community resources such as tutoring and a positive mentoring relationship that would increase their integration and independence.

With the association between violence among individuals in care, there is also a high factor of depression among adolescents living in group homes (Li, 2000). The study concluded that 74.5% of children in group homes had clinical depression. One can also look at the interaction among children in group homes. According to Dodge (2006), young people often learn to become deviant by interacting with deviant peers. If youths are put together with deviant problems then they would continue to have negative problems (Dodge, 2006). He notes that children with deviant behavior need individual attention rather that group attention. He feels that group homes will be a negative factor in contributing to the development of a child who needs help with deviant behavior. Dodge (2006) feels that individual counseling dealing with deviant behavior will be more effective than group intervention.

By looking at the aspects of violence and education within group homes, one would question the quality of the group home facility. Foster care group homes (another term to describe a group home or a name in which the group home is a part of) function less like conventional families, and more like dormitories (Harris, 1998). According to The National Center for Youth Law (2006), there is a high number of abuse and neglect within the foster care system. They looked at such dynamics as the reoccurrence of abuse and neglect, incidence of

child abuse within foster care, and re entries and stability of foster care placements. This study highlights the growing number of abuse and neglect in foster care and states the failure of the state to protect children in care.

The Self-Fulfillment Prophecy

Labeling theory is especially crucial to understanding juvenile delinquency because it explains how during the time of adolescence a juvenile's self identities are formed leading to longer-term consequences on a person's social identity (Best, 2003). If a juvenile is labeled as delinquent, then their self- identity may develop as such and they will be far more prone to engage in criminal activity. Because of a juvenile's negative self-concept, he or she may choose to engage in crime and associate with other delinquents.

Michael Hardman (1996) summarizes in his book, *Human Exceptionality, Society, School and Family* about the effects of labeling and the self-fulfilling prophecy. He states that a self-fulfilling prophecy occurs when a person has expectations of another person and these expectations affect the behavior of that person, which in turn creates the prophesied expectations. A student's behavior is affected by his or her core beliefs about him or herself. This core belief could be positive or negative. The student's behavior usually reflects his or her personal beliefs.

The idea that one's expectations about a person can eventually lead that person to behave and achieve in ways that would confirm those expectations is a key component of a mentoring relationship. Few educators understand exactly how to use the Pygmalion effect or self-fulfilling prophecy (SFP) as a purposeful pedagogical tool to convey positive expectations and, maybe even more importantly, to avoid conveying negative expectations. The term "self-fulfilling prophecy" was first coined by sociologist Robert K. Merton (1948). As part of his explanation of

the SFP, Merton drew upon the theorem: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas, 1928, p. 257).

The following five-step model explains how the SFP works:

1. The teacher forms expectations.
2. Based upon these expectations, the teacher acts in a differential manner.
3. The teacher's treatment tells each student (loud and clear) what behavior and what achievement the teacher expects.
4. If this treatment is consistent, it will tend to shape the student's behavior and achievement.
5. With time, the student's behavior and achievement will conform more and more closely to that expected of him or her.

What characteristics influence expectations? Teachers form expectations of and assign labels to people based upon such characteristics as body build, gender, race, ethnicity, given name and/or surname, attractiveness, dialect, and socioeconomic level, among others (Good, 1987). Once we label a person, it affects how we act and react toward that person. "With labels, we don't have to get to know the person. We can just assume what the person is like" (Oakes, 1996, p. 11). The self-fulfilling prophecy works two ways. Not only do teachers form expectations of students, but students form expectations of teachers--using the same characteristics described above. Therefore, I believe a formal mentoring relationship in group homes could turn around some of the negative outcomes for group home residents as discussed above.

When mentoring is introduced to enhance the self-fulfilling prophecy it can be seen as complementary. When expectations are set, positive behavior outcomes and expectations of achievement are developed and with continuous encouragement with a supportive role for the mentor, the self-fulfilling prophecy theory would work on this model for mentoring. In a group

home setting, with the self- fulfilling prophecy as a guiding theory to enhance the indication of a positive formal mentoring relationship between group home children and their counselors it could possibly produce positive results. For one, the SFP first goal (setting expectations) can be used as a guideline to set clear and consistent rules and expectations. With these expectations set, group home counselors can then create an environment that promotes opportunities for meaningful inclusion that would help the group home children succeed in any given tasks. In addition, behavioral outcomes would be positive because of the expectations that are embedded in the SFP theory because of the social engagement that is involved in the counselor/ child mentoring relationship. Questions involving the structure of group homes emerge when one looks at all of the research done on group homes.

The overall focus of this study is to address how to improve the relationship between group home workers and children leading to positive outcomes. Past research only limits itself to the conditions and outcomes of the children who are in group homes. This research will try to access the stakeholders perspective on the possible effect of developing a formal mentoring relationship in a group home setting.

Chapter 3- Methods

Data Analysis

The aim of this study is to talk with the stakeholders (children, director and counselors) in a group home setting to determine if a formal mentoring program would be a positive addition to the group home experience. This study used formal interviews designed to gather data from the group home children, counselors and director concerning the importance and feasibility of having a formal mentoring relationship in the group home setting.

During the 1970's in the Tidewater area of Virginia, planners were concerned with the juvenile social service system. They felt that there was a need to address the issue of residential facilities for juveniles. At the time, there was only one juvenile group home that was a success in providing teenagers foster care, a place to live and develop skills for independent living once the children left the group home. A decision was made to use that group home as a model for all group homes that would be established in the Tidewater area (Chesapeake, Franklin, Portsmouth, Suffolk, and Virginia Beach Virginia Beach). Through the years the development of group homes for juveniles in the Tidewater area continued to grow. More group homes were made to accommodate the growing number of children being labeled delinquent in foster care (www.hampton.va.us).

Participant Selection

The group home that was chosen for this study is located in Hampton, VA, a central location in the Tidewater area and represents a typical group home facility. The requirements of a group home is that there are more than 3 children living the group home, the children have been in foster care for five or more years, and the children has been labeled as being difficult or a delinquent in the foster care system. This particular group home has been open for

eighteen years and is staffed with one director, 12 counselors and 39 children. It was the perfect place to conduct this study.

The challenges of this study were engaging the trust of the children and having them participate. Many children in group homes have problems with trusting some individuals. They tend to be avoidant and lack communication skills (Kools, 2003). The first step taken to establish a trustworthy relationship with the people within the group home was to make a connection with the group home director. By making this connection with the group home director, I had a sense of presence in the group home (which meant that I was a familiar face) and by the children perceiving me as a connection to a high authority figure, they in return had the same level of respect for me.

The children between the ages of 14-18 and had been in the group home for more than two years. The reason behind choosing this age group was to engage in conversations with kids who tend to have a better understanding of the quality of care in the group home setting. Another reason for the choice of this age group was because most of the children in the group home had lived there for three or more years. The director of the group home has more than five years of experience working in this particular group home and overall has over ten years of group home experience. Most of the counselors in the group home had between one and seven years of experience working in group homes.

After several weeks of establishing trust with the director, counselors and group home children, I proceeded with the formal interviews. I first interviewed the director by explaining the study and its purpose. I then handed the confidentiality form (see appendix) and then proceeded with the formal interview. Second, I talked with each counselor that was interested in the study and explained to them the purpose of this study and handed them the counselor confidentiality

form and proceeded with the formal interview. In addition, for privacy reasons, I scheduled different meeting times for the counselors for confidentiality purposes. With the children, I explain to them the purpose of this study in a general open room with all of the children present. For those who did want to participate, I had them sign up for an interview and the interview took place in a private area in the home without exposing the children's identity to any of the other children, counselors or director in the home. This whole process took a total of three weeks. Before they answered the questions, I approached each group in a private meeting area within the group home and again explained the purpose of this study and why it was important. I met with the director in her office, with the counselors in a private room, and then with the children in a private room. I provided all of them (when it was their time) with a copy of the proposal and the study. I handed them the consent form, designated for their group, and started the process. All of the responses were kept confidential in a sealed envelope until I reviewed them for analytical purposes. I then shredded the responses for further confidentiality. At the end of the study I thanked everyone provided everyone that participated with a \$5 gift card to McDonalds.

The data was analyzed from the opinions of the children, counselors, and director in order to see if they felt a formal mentoring program would be an asset in the group home setting. The following questions were asked to each group of stakeholders.

The numbers of participants in the study are as follows: the director participated in a formal interview, 8 counselors out of the 12 participated in a formal interview and 25 out of the 39 children participated in a formal interview.

Confidentiality, the Interview, the Researchers Role and the interaction in the group home

The relationship in this particular group home could be described as informal. There is no formal set of rules established between the children and the counselors. When it was time for the

children to go to school there was a lack of encouragement from the counselors. They only informed the children once that it was time for them to go to school and then left them alone. It was optional that the children had breakfast. The children who actually went to school, when they returned, some of them did their homework others would go watch television, or drop off their book bag and leave the home. There was no offer of help with homework from anyone. There was no interaction between the children counselors or director at this point. The only thing that was said was curfew was at 9pm. On the weekends the children were free to do anything. There were usually no activities planned. The children often use their time on the weekends to go see family members, friends, or to hang out in the street.

The director and counselors could address to improve the lives of children within the group home is to establish a formal mentoring relationship. A structured formal mentoring relationship can be beneficial for the children as well as the counselors and director. A formal mentoring relationship requires constant communication between the mentor and the mentee. In the mornings the counselors could encourage the children to go to school by telling them how important an education is. When the children return from school, the counselors could once again establish communication with the children by providing tutoring for the children with their homework. This could lead to a high academic achievement from the children. In addition to high academic achievement, the children director and counselors could later have self esteem building activities, or other activities such as team builders that would promote group participation and communication to boost self esteem and discourage children from participating in violent group behavior.

There are twenty children who are African American, two are Hispanic and three are of another race. The age range of the participants in this study is between the ages of 15-18 (the

group home has children as young as 13 but they were not in the group home for at least three years). There were fourteen males and eleven females. Finally, the education level of the children was seven of the children was in the ninth grade, six of the children was in the tenth grade, eight of the children was in the eleventh grade and four was in the twelfth grade.

The workers of the group home race are six are African American, one is White, one is Hispanic and the final one is of another race. Three of the workers of the group home is between the ages of 18-24. Three of the workers are between the ages of 25-31. Two are between the ages of 32-39 and one is in the forty eight plus range. The gender of the group home workers is two are male and seven are female. Finally the education levels of the group home workers are two have a high school degree, one has some college experience, three of the workers have a four year degree and three have a graduate degree.

When looking at the backgrounds of the children and workers of the group home, I believe that there is a little difference in the set up of the group home. I think the race of the individuals in the group home fairs evenly in the group home. However, I believe the gender aspect in the group home is not represented equally there are more female counselors than male and there are more male children than female children. This could possibly explain why there is a lack of communication in the group home.

Chapter 4-Summary of Findings

During the formal interviews, the director counselor and children were asked if the children and counselors get along with each other. There was a general concern about the quality of the relationship between the children and counselors by both the director and counselors.

The director responded:

“I believed that the children and the counselors had an average rating of getting along with each other. I feel that the children and counselors could get along better if they both had strong trust values therefore they do not have a positive mentoring relationship”.

The counselors had a different reaction to this question. They believed that they got along well with the children but at times when the children were misbehaving it can be difficult.

One counselor responded:

“I get along with the children well with the exception of that at times it was hard to get respect from the children and some days with them was good or bad”.

There were mixed reviews from the children when they responded to this question. Some of them liked their counselors and some did not. The children responded:

“I really don’t like talking to them.”

“I get along ok with them.”

“ I get along well with them.”

Out of all 25 children that participated in this study, 14 said that they get along well with their counselors, 4 said they have a good relationship with their counselors and 7 said that they have a bad relationship with their counselors. The reason why I asked the first question about how well children get along with their counselors is because I would like to know the type of relationship the children have with their counselors. This is important in determining the feasibility of a mentoring relationship. A formal mentoring relationship involves trust between the mentor and mentee. If there is no trust then it would be hard to establish a mentoring

relationship.

The next question I felt that was relevant for this study was to ask the director was there any current mentoring programs in the group home. This question is asked to see if there are programs that support a positive mentoring relationship. There are no current programs in place to promote mentoring. Some of the changes that the director suggested to promote a better relationship between the counselors and children were to have programs that would help counselors work with children that are labeled delinquent. Such a program would make trust issues easier between the counselors and children.

The director's response was:

"There are no current programs in place to promote mentoring, but there are programs that promote independent living for the children who leave the group home".

When the counselors were asked the same question, they varied on how much support the children expected of them. Five of the counselors said that most of the time the children ask them for support with either personal or other issues. Two counselors said that the children sometimes ask them for support and one counselor said that the children never asked him or her for support. Their responses were:

"Some of the children ask us for support with either personal or other issues".

"It just really depends on the day and their mood (the children)".

"Sometimes they do, but they are hesitant to ask".

For the children they had a mixed response of yes and no for the question of do they receive any help with school or social activities. I had then asked the children if they get along with their peers. The children indicated that 14 of them get along well with their peers, 9 of them have a good relationship with their peers and 2 of them have a bad relationship with their peers. The reason why I asked this question is because I wanted to know if the children had a support network beside their counselors or director. Peer influence can either be a negative

or positive network between adolescents. The responses of the children in the group home were:

“Okay with some and not okay with some”.

“Fine”.

“No, I don’t like anybody”.

The next step was to ask what changes the director, counselors and children felt needed to be made to promote a better relationship between the counselors and children in the group home.

The director felt that there needed to be more communication and investment between the counselors, herself and the children.

“There needs to be more communication established. We [the staff] need to invest more in the children. We need to have a more open environment for the children”

From the counselor’s point of view, they believe that a wide range of changes are needed. Many of their suggestions could be addressed by having a more formal mentoring relationship.

Their responses were:

“Some of the changes that need to be made to improve mentoring relationships in the group home are structure guidelines to give the children structure”.

“Boundaries are needed to be set for the children, trust, honesty, initiative and interest in wanting to do better in school and socially”.

“More services such as tutoring, psychological help, more funding, and skills for counselors to build a better relationship with children”.

“Better guidelines to give the kids structure”.

“More mentoring services, mentoring sessions, psychological training”.

“Offer kids more services and communication with each other”.

“Have more skill training for counselors and build better relationships with the children”.

The children indicated that they not only needed more supportive and structured relationships that could be improved by formal mentoring relationships but that they had greater need of material goods as well. The children responses were:

“There needs to be more activities and games”.

“Help with homework and activities, better communication, more freedom, more shoes, clothes,

more help, more people to care for us, and more family involvement”.

“We sometimes talked and never got anywhere. I want to go more places, and I would like my mother and brother to go to. I would like for everyone to get along. I would like more one on one help”.

“We need clothing, more outside activities like parties, swimming, food, for the counselors to show interest in us and are willing to help, more talk and more listening and less people and more help”.

When asked about if a formal mentoring relationship will have a positive impact on the children here in the group home there were some positive reviews. The director felt that certain aspects of a formal mentoring relationship will help the children and counselors in the group home. All of the counselors felt that having a formal mentoring relationship would be good for the group home because the children need positive professional role models and provide stability.

“I feel that certain aspects of a formal mentoring relationship such as improving school attendance, academic performance, relationships with other children, general hygiene, learning a new skill or develop a new hobby will help the children and counselors in the group home”.

All of the counselors felt that having a formal mentoring relationship would be good for the group home because the children need positive professional role models and provide stability.

“It would be good to have a formal mentoring relationship. This would be good for the group home because the children need positive professional role models and provide stability”.

“I think that it is especially necessary with these kids. They need a positive professional role model”.

“I think it is a good idea because the children need that extra support and mentoring”.

“I think it would benefit the children and make them feel like someone is concerned about them”.

“It can be helpful when children have someone to confide in and go to in a time of need”.

The children also felt that having a formal mentoring relationship would tend to be beneficial for the group home. Some of their responses were:

“In certain ways yes because there would always be someone to talk to”.

“Yes, it can help us kids that have problems”.

“It really depends on the counselor and whether or not they really care”.

Finally, when asked the question do you (the director, counselors and children) believe that a formal mentoring relationship will improve the lives of the children here, responses from all three groups were positive. The director feels that certain aspects of a formal mentoring relationship tutoring and being supportive would help the children in the group home. The counselors believed that a formal mentoring relationship will improve the lives of the children in the group home because the children can have someone to look up to and the children would get stability and structure from a mentor. The children believed that a formal mentoring relationship with your counselors will improve their life in the group home.

“I feel that certain aspects of a formal mentoring relationship such as improving school attendance, academic performance, relationships with other children could improve from an formal mentoring relationship.”

The counselors believed that a formal mentoring relationship will improve the lives of the children in the group home because the children can have someone to look up to and the children would get stability and structure from a mentor.

“I believed that a formal mentoring relationship will improve the lives of the children in the group home because the children can have someone to look up to and the children would get stability and structure from a mentor.”

“Yes, definitely. The kids need stability and structure from the mentors that they are not getting here.”

“Yes, because they can have someone to look up to.”

The children believed that a formal mentoring relationship with your counselors

will improve their life in the group home. Twenty of the children believe that a formal mentoring relationship with counselors would improve their life in the group home, whereas 5 believe that it would not improve their lives in the group home.

“Yes”.

“Yes. It will make me a better person”.

“I think it might”.

“Yes, I really do”.

From the responses attained from the formal interviews, there is a strong indication for a formal mentoring relationship to be established. Each of the respondents had a concern for academic performance, getting along with others and having a better life within the group home. In addition, the counselors, director and children want to have stronger trust among each other in the group home. Furthermore, the director and counselors want more stability and psychological help for the children. Finally, they all believe that a formal mentoring relationship would help the children be successful academically, socially and not lead them towards violence.

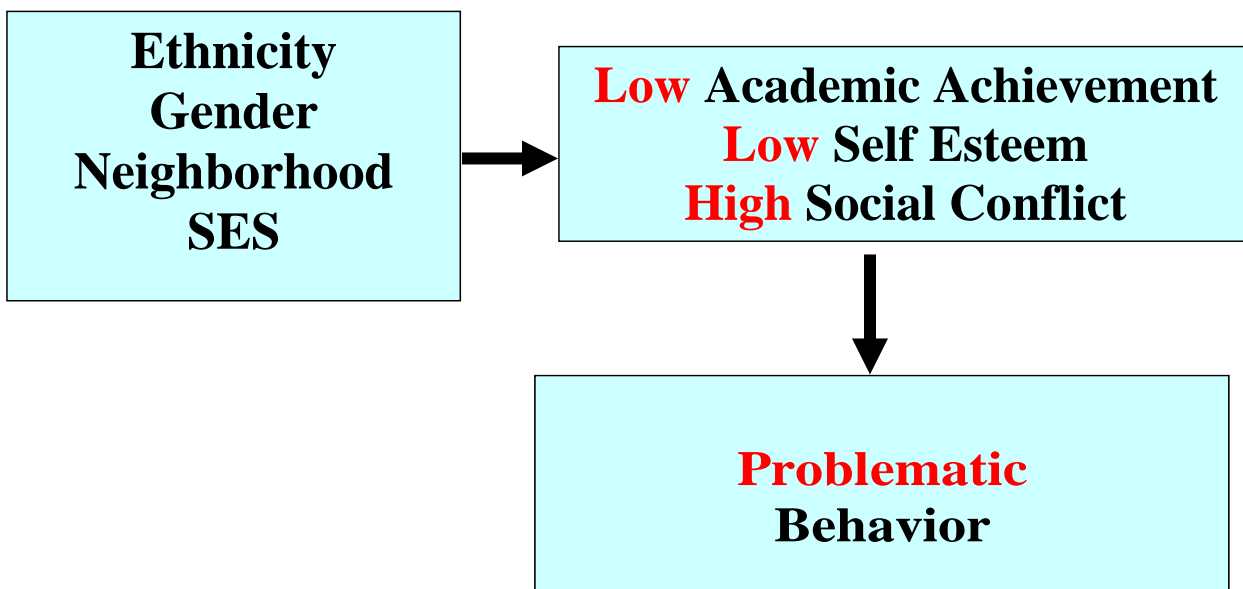
Chapter 5-Development of a Model

What would a formal mentoring relationship look like in a group home setting?

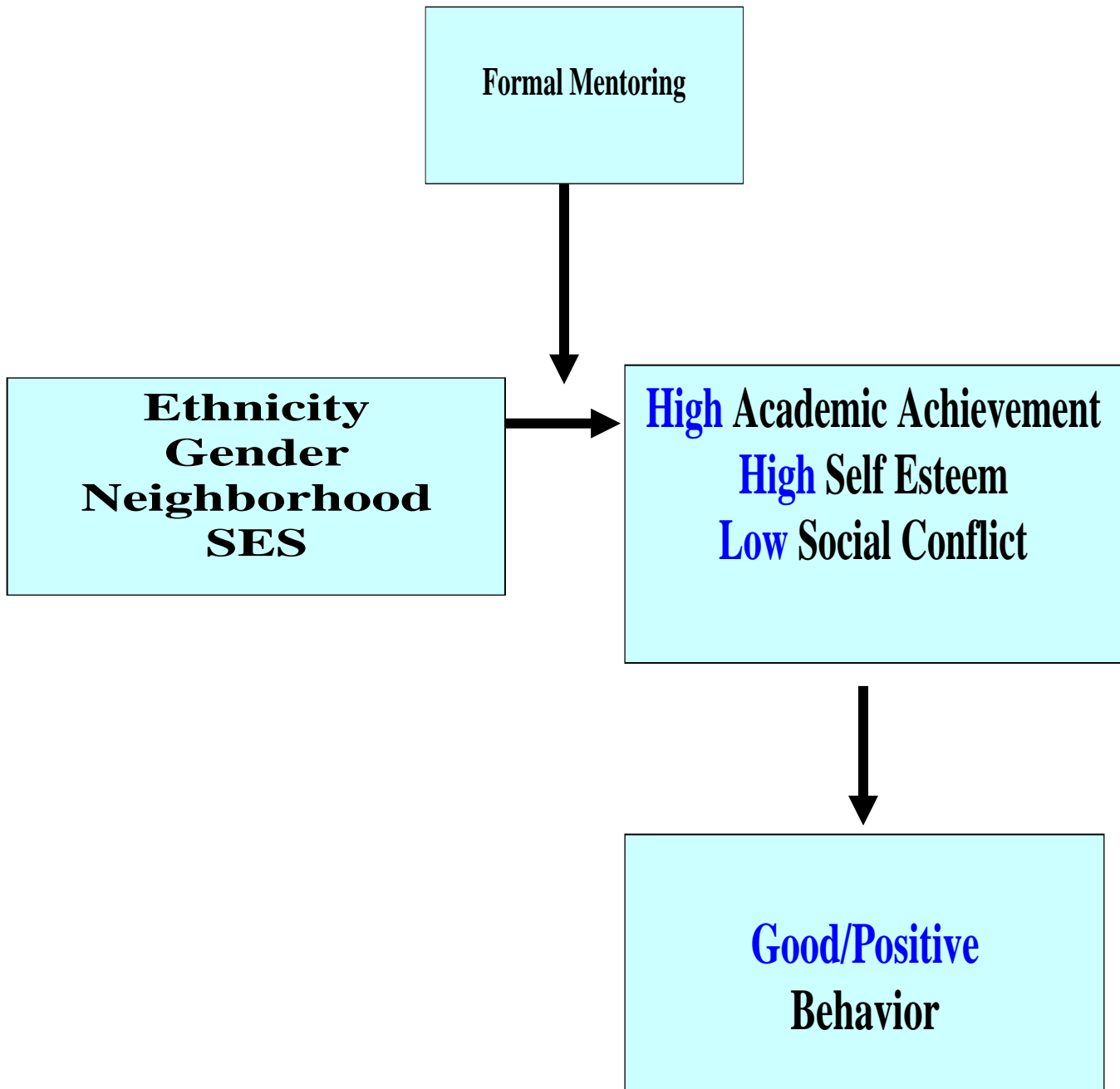
From the data gathered from this particular group home, there was a strong indication that a formal mentoring relationship should be established. Each of the respondents had a concern for academic performance, getting along with others and having a better life. It is this researcher's perspective that the group home experience can be enhanced if a formal mentoring program similar to the one used by Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America.

Previous research suggest that a person's ethnicity, gender and neighborhood socioeconomic status (in this case concerning the children with in a group home) would lead to low academic achievement, low self esteem and the children would have high social conflict. In addition, these negative outcomes would lead to problematic behavior (Best, 2003, Dodge, 2006, Jones, 2006, Kools, 1997, Li, 2000Wooden, 2006).

Literature Review Model



My Model



In this study, the model that is indicated for a better mentoring relationship between the group home children, director and counselors would involve implementing a formal mentoring relationship. Having a formal mentoring relationship serve as a moderator for children in group homes could possibly improve their life chances. Studies have shown that Big Brothers Big Sisters of America formal mentoring produces positive outcomes (Tierney, 1995). Big Brothers and Big Sisters formal mentoring relationship involves the mentor and mentee having at least living in the neighborhood, connectedness, and the mentor having at least two hours a week of contact time with the children (Tierney, 1995). If this type of formal mentoring model was used in a group home setting with certain modifications, it could possibly improve the children's life chances. Children in group homes are more at risk than other children outside of the group home. Therefore they need more direct involvement from authoritative figures (Tisak, 1986). A formal mentoring relationship in this group home would improve a child's academic achievement because of the amount of tutoring that could be invested between the counselors, director and children, which was indicated as one of the needs for the children in this group home. There also can be a direct relationship between the children's teachers and counselors as well as the director to ensure academic success. The children's self esteem could increase. Children in this group home are in the group homes for more than twenty four hours seven days a week and are away from their families or do not even have families at all. If the authoritative figures have a positive relationship with the children such as providing them with encouragement, then they would develop higher self esteem (Nemanick, 2000). Finally, if there is high encouragement for the children to be successful in school or to obtain certain positive behaviors, then the children would display low social conflict. Therefore, the indication for a formal mentoring relationship

would lead to good behavior. Within this particular group home, the counselors and director can spend multiple hours helping the children with homework, developmental and social activities such as lessons on hygiene, career and college preparation, and providing unconditional motivational support. There has not been a connection established between Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America and group homes therefore the model that is suggested by this study would follow the Big Brothers Big Sisters style of a formal mentoring relationship but with moderations to suite the children within a group home.

What can be said about this research that has not been addressed in previous research is what the director, counselors and most important the children what to change within their group home. It has been indicated in previous research that there are problems academically, socially and violence concerning children in group homes. The opinion of the children, counselors or director was never evaluated. This research attempted to fill the gap of knowledge that did not address the concerns of the individuals involved in a group home. The opinions of the children, counselors and director is important so that programs could be put in place to help the children in this group home have a better life chance.

Further research needs to be done on the effect of a formal mentoring relationship being implemented in this group home. One can form a better perspective on how a formal mentoring relationship can help children be successful by following up with the director of this group home to see if there were any changes made to improve the children lives in this group home. What the director and counselors could do is develop programs for the children to develop diversity, leadership, achievement, and provide them with outside resources that would help them mature into adulthood. A good example of designing a program that would benefit the children in their development is to help them with college applications. The director could get the children

interested in going to college by having annual field trips to various universities and get the children interested in attending college. Another possible interest is having a program on career development. The counselors and director can have different people come to the group home to talk and serve as motivators for the children.

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Appendix A

Invitation to Participate

I, Laquana Young, a graduate student at Virginia Tech is conducting a study on mentoring relationships in group homes. You are invited to participate in this study because you live in or are associated with a group home in the Hampton, VA area.

This study has two objectives:

1. To see if a mentoring relationship for the children in this group home is feasible based on their opinions.
2. To see if the director and social workers in this group home think that by having a better mentoring relationship will benefit the children with in the group home.

You will be given a questioner individually. This brief questioner will take approximately 15-30 minutes. The questioners will be given to you individually, and you will be able to fill the questioner out in a private conference room located in the group home.

There are minimal risks attached to this study. Your questioner responses will be kept confidential; available only to the researcher (myself) for analysis purposes. If the length of the questioner is inconvenient for you, you may terminate the questioner at any time without any consequences to you.

Although there is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study, we feel your participation will likely benefit learning about your impressions of having a mentoring relationship.

All questioners will be locked in a safe place. Only the researcher (myself) will analyze the information you give me. The questioners will be destroyed once this study is completed. The questioner responses will not be linked to your name or any other personal information about yourself. We do this to ensure your responses remain confidential and that you feel free to respond as freely as possible. You should know that the Institutional Review Board (IRB) may inspect and study records as part of its auditing program, but these reviews only focus on the researchers and the study, not your responses or involvement. The IRB is a committee that reviews research studies to make sure that they are safe and that the rights of the participants are protected.

Participation is voluntary. You do not have to participate in this study if you do not want to. If you agree to be in this study, but later change your mind, you may withdraw at anytime. There are no consequences of any kind if you do decide you do not want to participate.

If you have any questions about his study, I will be happy to answer them now. If you have any questions in the future, please contact our principal investigator Ted Fuller at 540-231-8969 and at fullertd@vt.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact our Institutional Review Board Chair David Moore at 540-231-4991.

I agree to participate in this research study.

I do not agree to participate in this research study.

Participants Name

Date

Participants Signature

Researchers Name

Appendix B

Consent form for Child

I am willing to take part in the study called “Mentoring Relationships in Group Homes”. I understand that the researchers from Virginia Tech are hoping to get the opinion from me about mentoring relationships in group homes. I understand I will do a short questioner in a private room in the group home and the questioner will not reveal my identity. I will be asked questions about my opinion about the possibility of having a mentor. This study will take place in my group home and will only take between 15 and 30 minutes of my time.

I am taking part of this study because I want to. I have been told that I can stop at anytime, and if I do not like a question, I do not have to answer it. No one will know my answers. If I have any questions I can contact principal investigator Ted Fuller at 540-231-8969 and at fullertd@vt.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact our Institutional Review Board Chair David Moore at 540-231-4991.

Name

Signature

Date

Consent forms for Counselors

You are invited to be in a research study of mentoring relationships in group homes. You were selected as a possible participant because of your association with a group home. This study is being conducted by Ted Fuller at 540-231-8969 and at fullertd@vt.edu and myself Laquana Young a graduate student at Virginia Tech in the Sociology Department. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in this study. We are asking you to fill out a brief questioner on your opinion of mentoring relationships in the group home.

There are minimal risks in this study. There are minimal risks attached to this study. Your questioner responses will be kept confidential; available only to the researcher (myself) for analysis purposes. If the length of the questioner is inconvenient for you, you may terminate the questioner at any time without any consequences to you. Although there is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study, we feel your participation will likely benefit learning about your impressions of having a mentoring relationship.

All questioners will be locked in a safe place. Only the researcher (myself) will analyze the information you give me. The questioners will be destroyed once this study is completed. The questioner responses will not be linked to your name or any other personal information about yourself.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and anyone may withdraw from this study at anytime with no consequences. Any personal identification will be omitted so that you or your staff or children's identity will not be identifiable in the written analysis. All of the questioners will be kept in a safe place. Only I will have access to the questioners. If you have any questions about this study, you may contact Ted Fuller at 540-231-8969 and at fullertd@vt.edu. Questions about your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Institutional review Board Chair David Moore at 540-231-4991.

I agree to participate in this research study.

I do not agree to participate in this research study.

Participants Name

Date

Participants Signature

Researchers Name

Consent form for Guardian

I, Laquana Young, a graduate student at Virginia Tech is conducting a study to assess the opinion of mentoring relationships in your group home. The children in your group home as well as yourself and your staff are being asked to participate in this study because of the interest of mentoring relationships in a group home. If you, your staff and the children agree to participate in this study, you all will be asked to fill out a brief questioner.

There are minimal risks in this study. There are minimal risks attached to this study. Your questioner responses will be kept confidential; available only to the researcher (myself) for analysis purposes. If the length of the questioner is inconvenient for you, you may terminate the questioner at any time without any consequences to you. Although there is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study, we feel your participation will likely benefit learning about your impressions of having a mentoring relationship.

All questioners will be locked in a safe place. Only the researcher (myself) will analyze the information you give me. The questioners will be destroyed once this study is completed. The questioner responses will not be linked to your name or any other personal information about yourself.

Participation in this study is voluntary, and anyone may withdraw from this study at anytime with no consequences. Any personal identification will be omitted so that you or your staff or children's identity will not be identifiable in the written analysis. All of the questioners will be kept in a safe place. Only I will have access to the questioners. If you have any questions about this study, you may contact Ted Fuller at 540-231-8969 and at fullertd@vt.edu. Questions about your rights as a research participant should be directed to the Institutional review Board Chair David Moore at 540-231-4991.

Yes, I give permission for the children within this group home to participate in this study.

No, I do not give permission for the children within this group home to participate in this study.

Participants Name

Date

Participants Signature

Researchers signature

Appendix C

For Children:

1. How well do you get along with your counselors?
2. How well do you get along with your peers?
3. Do you receive any mentoring help with school, or any social activities?
4. Do you believe that a formal mentoring relationship is good for this group home?
5. What changes do you feel need to be made to make mentoring relationships improve within the group home?
6. Do you believe that a formal mentoring relationship with your counselors will improve your life here?

Age:

Race:

Education Level:

For the Counselors:

1. How well do you get along with the children in the group home?
2. Do the children ever ask you for support?
3. How do you feel about a formal mentoring relationship being established within the group home?
4. What changes do you feel need to be made to make mentoring relationships improve within the group home?
5. Do you believe that a formal mentoring relationship will improve the lives of the children here?

Age:

Race:

Education Level:

For the Director:

1. Do you believe that the counselors and children have a positive mentoring relationship?

2. Are there any programs in place to promote mentoring relationship in the group home?

3. What changes do you feel need to be made to promote a better relationship between the counselors and children with in the group home?

4. What changes do you feel need to be made to make mentoring relationships improve within the group home?

5. Do you believe that a formal mentoring relationship will have a positive impact on the children here in the group home?

Age:

Race:

Education Level:

