Title: *Youth Mentoring as a Form of Support for Children and Young People at Risk: Insights from Research and Practice*

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Number of participants: 12

Starting hypothesis:

Because youth mentoring is generally framed as a preventative intervention, it is often not considered as a viable option by social workers working with young people with higher levels of need. On the one hand, it can be argued that young people with challenging personal lives would benefit from the development of a positive relationship with a non-parental adult but on the other hand, the needs of the young person may be too complex for a volunteer to take on. Drawing on insights from research and practice, this session explores the issues relating to the suitability or appropriateness of youth mentoring as an intervention for young people with higher levels of need.

Sequence of content:

Bernadine Brady first presented the theoretical background of the meaning of youth mentoring for young people at risk according to researches and discussed the challenges and the risks. Mary Lynch continued with insights from practice experience about successful mentoring for youth at risk based on the Irish Big Brothers Big Sisters Programme. She presented a video showing participants experiences of the programme and ended with some key messages for the practice.

Main results presented by the facilitator:

Studies have shown, that young people often react better to a less formal befriending context than to professional relationships. For several young people at high risk mentoring brought about positive changes in form of reduced depressive symptoms, gain in social acceptance and more positive academic attitudes and results. In their book chapter the facilitators point out that the potential of mentoring seems to be under-used in the present and is applicable to both preventative and protective interventions.

Main points of discussion:

Due to the duration of the presentation, one part based on the theory, the other one on the practice, there was no discussion.

Results of Session:

Mentoring can be a successful possibility for young people at higher risk, when it's based on enduring and stable relationships and especially, when the mentors have had similar difficult experiences in their own lives. The mentoring of young people with challenging lives can lead to some challenges and risks, which should be taken into consideration. The basis for successful mentoring is effective case planning, which enables the staff members of the mentoring organisation to identify needs, anticipate any difficulties and develop strategies to support the young person to overcome issues.

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