P/PV *Brief*
Public/Private Ventures

Mentoring, Policy and Politics

Gary Walker
October 2007

Public/Private Ventures is a national nonprofit organization that seeks to improve the effectiveness of social policies and programs. P/PV designs, tests and studies initiatives that increase supports, skills and opportunities of residents of low-income communities; works with policymakers to see that the lessons and evidence produced are reflected in policy; and provides training, technical assistance and learning opportunities to practitioners based on documented effective practices.

Introduction

For the past 15 years, mentoring has been America's single most publicly talked about, written about and broadly popular social intervention to improve the lives of disadvantaged youth. It now appears as an approved activity in many pieces of legislation, from the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 to the Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Block Grant of 2005-2006. Foundation officials say that mentoring is featured in almost all human service funding proposals, whether requested or not.

Our highest elected officials love it. In 1997, then President Clinton, former Presidents Bush and Ford, and former First Lady Nancy Reagan joined General Colin Powell in Philadelphia, along with thousands of citizens representing communities across America, to celebrate volunteerism and to propose five essential "nutrients" key to disadvantaged youth. Mentoring was first on the list. And in his 2003 State of the Union address, President Bush proposed nearly half a billion dollars for two new mentoring initiatives. Sitting in the seat next to the First Lady was Philadelphia's Democratic Mayor John Street, whose city the president had recently visited twice—specifically to spend time at Philadelphia's innovative mentoring program for children of prisoners. The list could go on and might include the placement of mentoring messages in many TV shows—a purposeful inclusion inspired by one wealthy philanthropist's belief in the power of the mass media to affect volunteering.

All this during an era when skepticism about the effectiveness and utility of social programs was increasing, and included many Democrats; when long-standing social programs that seemed like permanent fixtures, such as Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and Head Start, were ended or challenged; and when the language of social welfare was being replaced by that of personal responsibility.

How did mentoring fare so well in these times? Is mentoring now a durable part of American social policy? If so—is this unalloyed good news?

How It Happened

Social policy trends, like trends in any part of life, are not totally explainable by rational analysis and orderly chains of logic. But it is also not entirely mysterious why mentoring should have such sustained popularity.

First, *mentoring makes sense to most people,* regardless of their politics. Young beings need support and guidance from older beings—we all know that instinctively. Watch a few nature shows on the Discovery Channel and you see how universal the need is; it applies to bears, foxes, birds and whales as well as humans. Read a little science on mammalian development and you find that the more complex a young being's brain, the more adult support and guidance needed; ergo, little humans need a lot of help from bigger humans. Common sense and science wholeheartedly agree.

And many people—again, regardless of their politics—can remember the importance to them of a nonfamily adult in their lives, how that person helped them think clearly about a hard issue or set them on a learning or work path that has made a great positive difference in their lives. So besides the backing of common sense and science, mentoring stirs up in many adults very personal, meaningful and positive memories.

Mentoring also offers to some people a comfort from the fear of ungoverned little humans growing up into unruly adults, wreaking havoc on everything around them. Though I have not taken a scientific survey, my experience is that except for a few ideologues, most adults, perhaps especially those with children, would take a view of raw human nature that has at least as much of Hobbes as of Rousseau. I once heard a report on National Public Radio about 225 Chihuahuas in California that had been set free as pups, turned feral and were roaming in bands, frightening hikers. If unparented Chihuahuas can group together and inspire fear in adult humans….

Second, *mentoring fits neatly with dominant American cultural values.* That mentoring makes sense—intuitively, experientially and scientifically—may not seem so distinctive to some:

After all, doesn't meeting any number of youthful needs (e.g., housing, health, education) make sense?

But mentoring's strength is not only that the need it represents—adult support and guidance—seems somehow more basic than other needs but also that it can be met in ways that do not grate against dominant cultural values. Most Americans are not for "big government"; they are for volunteerism and the "personal touch" versus the paid professional as a means to help people; and they prefer to think most individual issues can be resolved by willpower and determination, with a minimum of outside help, rather than by the provision of comprehensive services. Agree or not, right or wrong, these are rock-solid elements of the American value system.

Most social programs scrape like fingernails on a blackboard against one or more of these values. Talk of the need for "comprehensive" or "long-term" services not only runs counter to these values—to many, it seems to undercut their development! Mentoring does no such grating against these basic values. It seems in fact to affirm them: some help from a kindly adult, a volunteer at that, no government bureaucracy needed; and the result is that the youth marches into his or her future on a mainstream path, transformed. The specter of dependency is not present. Thus, mentoring has never had the uphill struggle that most social programs face in gaining support; rather, it has only picked up speed and momentum, like a downhill racer.

Third, *mentoring has results.* In an era in which social programs are increasingly called on to prove their worth with hard numbers, mentoring seems golden. P/PV's 1995 impact study of the Big Brothers Big Sisters program, using a

random-assignment methodology, produced evidence that mentoring had positive impacts on a range of important elements in a youth's life, from curtailing drug use to improving school attendance to reducing fighting in the schoolyard (Tierney, Grossman, Resch 1995). BBBSA has used the impact study and its findings very effectively in its marketing, helping the organization almost triple in size during the first nine years after the results came out. In a political atmosphere where the prevailing sentiment is that most social programs are either ineffective or, if effective, not impressively so, mentoring stands out.

Much as mentoring's commonsense appeal benefits from its consistency with American cultural values, so does the perception of its evaluation findings. Though the impact findings are real and impressive, in fact they apply only to the 18 months after mentoring began—that was as long as comparative follow-up work could extend, as no one wanted to deny the control group the possibility of a mentor longer than that. Thus, we have no scientific evidence that mentoring "turns lives around"; its long-term transformational impact is, scientifically speaking, not known. The truth is that a number of social programs that have been rigorously evaluated also produce positive impacts for a modest time period. But none affirm common sense and basic American values as much as mentoring, and thus mentoring's documented good results, albeit more short term than transformational, are widely accepted as ultimate proof of its value.

Fourth, *mentoring has BBBSA as its exemplar.* Ideas abound for helping young people. Many get tried; some have their brief moment in the sun; most come and go in fairly short cycles. There are many reasons for this revolving-door nature of American social policy, and one in particular is very relevant to the staying power of mentoring: America is a land of institutions and brand names more than it is a land of ideas. Its competitive, free-market economic system drives this orientation and makes most Americans fleetingly interested in ideologies and ideas and enduringly interested in the institutions and brand names that represent them. Though it is easy to criticize this orientation as anti-intellectual and shallow, it is equally easy to spot its strength: Americans are inclined to pay more attention to the concrete manifestations of ideas—to the *accountability* of ideas—than to their mental images.

BBBSA is one of America's most recognized, most respected nonprofit institutions. It was privately initiated, organized, governed and grown to a national federation; it uses volunteers; it only does mentoring. It fits perfectly with American values, and it is well known. Mentoring as a social program idea benefits enormously from the existence of BBBSA: It gives it not only respect and credibility but staying power.

Fifth, *mentoring's costs are not high.* At an estimated $1,000 to $1,500 per year per mentor, (Fountain, Arbreton 1999), mentoring's costs fall in the range of most after-school and summer programming and are much less than intensive remedial programming and more comprehensive service programs. In addition, mentoring's costs, which mainly go toward the selection, training and ongoing support of mentors, have been supported in the evaluation literature as critical to the effective functioning of volunteer mentors (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine, Cooper 2002).

In short, mentoring has a significant number of important assets that help explain why it has become such a popular social intervention—and why its popularity has endured. But why now? Mentoring and BBBSA have been around for a long time—as a formal program, for almost a century (see Baker and Maguire, in DuBois, Karcher 2005). Why the surge in growth and popularity in the last decade of the 20th century and the early years of this one?

It's difficult to address issues of "historical period" confidently when the one you're living in is part of the issue. But there are several factors that no doubt play important roles. One is simply a sense of discouragement that many feel—Republicans and Democrats, conservatives and liberals—that so few social programs generate substantial and positive results. That discouragement has prompted a lot of searching for new ideas, or for ideas to revitalize. The notion of a more straightforward and humanized social intervention, after several decades of interventions focused on "services," was, in retrospect, simply waiting to happen.

The private sector also actively promoted the idea. The Commonwealth Foundation was aggressively spreading the word of mentoring's virtues and effects by the late 1980s. Early in the 1990s, several individual philanthropists, most notably Ray Chambers and Geoff Boisi, began to promote mentoring in high-profile ways that the social policy sector rarely attempts or is comfortable with. The 1997 Presidents' Summit was one result; the formation of a national mentoring advocacy organization, The One to One Partnership, Inc. (now referred to as MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership) was another; use of the popular media was another.

The 1997 Presidents' Summit was formed to build on the work of organizations such as the Points of Light Foundation, United Way of America, Communities in Schools and MENTOR. In fact, mentoring (caring adults in the lives of young people) was considered the cornerstone of America's Promise, the organization that emerged out of the Presidents' Summit. So, in short, mentoring had champions, who bred other champions, across all sectors.

By 1995, the evidence of mentoring's effectiveness was out—and was picked up and used by its already growing number of champions. As noted, by 2003, BBBSA was almost triple the size it had been less than a decade previously. It had been roughly the same size for the preceding two decades.

Finally, America's politics—almost always conservative about social policy except for brief periods in the 1930s and 1960s to 1970s—returned to conservatism in the 1980s and 1990s. Though the 1990s were dominated by a Democratic president, a flush economy and a healthy federal budget, there were few new social policy initiatives of any size or significance. President Bill Clinton declared the end of "the era of big government"; his Democratic secretary of labor (Robert Reich) did not pursue additional funding for youth programs because there was so little evidence of their effectiveness. An intervention based on volunteers, like mentoring, was appealing simply because it was politically feasible. Some of its supporters were enthusiastic; others were lukewarm, resigned to it because so little else was viable; together, they made its growth possible.

Is Mentoring Now Established Social Policy?

You might think, after the foregoing discussion, that the answer to the question of whether mentoring is now established social policy would be a resounding "yes." But the answer is more complicated than that, despite mentoring's popularity, press, results and growth. Part of the complication has little to do with mentoring and more to do with the complex political structure of the United States. If, for example, our standard of "established social policy" is a major act of Congress, funded sufficiently to meet the needs of a substantial share of those who need it, mentoring is not established social policy.

But of course few things meet that standard. Social Security is (for now); Head Start almost is; Job Corps is not; nor is the recent No Child Left Behind (2001) legislation—as most social policy legislation is not. If we take away the "substantial share" requirement, we get more "established" social policy, but we also get more emptiness: Consider the legislation of several decades ago calling for full employment….

Mentoring has neither a major act of Congress nor an allocation of federal funds sufficient to provide mentors to more than a modest share of those youth who might need them. So it is not "established federal policy."

On the other hand, mentoring has enjoyed the leadership of many in Congress, including former Representative Tom Osborne of Nebraska, who, in 2002, spearheaded the creation and funding of a new federal grant program dedicated exclusively to mentoring. Just two years later, this program was slated for a major increase, along with a mentoring program for children of prisoners, as part of the Bush administration's proposal to expand the reach of mentoring. Representative Chaka Fattah and Senators Landrieu, Clinton and Specter, among others, have also promoted mentoring initiatives. Mentoring is now promoted or permitted in a wide range of federal legislation, over a wide range of federal departments. There are special mentoring initiatives located in the Justice, Education, and Health and Human Services departments; the Workforce Investment Act (1998), administered by the Labor Department, encourages mentoring generally, while the Labor Department's major initiative on prisoner reentry specifically emphasizes it.

Thus, mentoring has made numerous inroads into federal policy in every federal department that deals with youth. It has the support of all major political and business leaders—and the public. Thus, it could be said to be "beginning" to be established federal social policy, and the extent to which those beginnings flourish (or wither) is, simply, unknown. But the foundations are strong.

So strong that even in an era of serious budget deficits and competing fiscal priorities—an era in which discretionary social programs are likely to be one of the first lines of attack for reduction—mentoring's foothold is probably as firm as a social program could hope for. You can read the 2003 and 2004 State of the Union addresses as an indication that it may be one of those rare social interventions that are promoted and increased as others are criticized and cut.

In addition, assessing whether a particular idea is established social policy solely or primarily through the lens of major federal legislation is a narrow view in several respects. Certainly, federal funds are indispensable to any social policy if it is to achieve significant size. But there are ways to use federal funds that do not involve major legislation: earmarks; special initiatives within federal departments; and an emphasis, encouragement or allowance of a particular practice (like mentoring) within other pieces of legislation. Mentoring has achieved all of these "other" ways of using federal monies. In total, their actual use amounts to probably no more than $250 million in federal funds, which at a $1,000 per mentor, per year, would fund 250,000 mentors. But that is triple the size of the entire BBBSA program in America in 1995, which provides some idea of how recent the growth in mentoring, and public funding for it, has been. Until recently, mentoring was supported primarily through private funds.

The size of that private funding is difficult to confirm with precision. Like public funding, it seems to have been growing, as evidenced by the new mentoring programs that have sprung up like wildflowers during the past decade, well before the recent increase in federal monies. A 1997 survey indicated that almost 40 percent of the mentoring programs surveyed were less than five years old (Sipe, Roder 1999). Most of those are small, and

unlike BBBSA, it is difficult to know much about their size, effectiveness or funding source. My conservative estimate is that in aggregate, they equal the size of BBBSA and are heavily financed by private funds, usually individual philanthropists, small foundations or local United Ways. Thus, they represent perhaps $250 million in private funds, which, along with BBBSA's private funding of $200 million, amounts to close to $500 million in private funding.

No thorough survey has been done of state and local government funding of mentoring using state and local tax revenues. We do know that some states—New York and California are major examples—have established statewide mentoring initiatives using state resources. So have some localities. Though it is impossible at this point to make an accurate guess about the collective state and local resources being used, it does seem likely that when all public and private finances being directed to formal mentoring programs are added, mentoring funding is in the billion-dollar range.

Is that large? Certainly, not by federal standards, where billion-dollar programs are numerous. But viewed as funds directed to one very particular and defined kind of intervention, mentoring programs join a less numerous class. Regarded as funds directed to a particular kind of intervention with robust, positive results—even if not quite so strong as some of its advocates claim—it joins an even more exclusive club.

But more important than the total funds is the depth and variety of these funding sources, which strengthen mentoring's potential to become a vital element of America's social policy. Ron Haskins, formerly majority staff director of the House Ways and Means Committee during the first Bush administration and now a senior fellow at The Brookings Institution, has created, based on his legislative experience, an interesting pictorial of the various factors that influence the durability of legislation (Haskins, 2003). Though he does not claim exactness or invariability for the share of influence he ascribes to each factor, two broad features stand out: One is the variety of influences; the second is the power of inertia that a "policy continent"—the collection of institutions and influential individuals that have a stake in a

particular policy—can exert. Change is not easy in our form of government. Once something is in, with many people and institutions behind it, it's hard to get out. Being so consistent with dominant values and having some hard evidence of impact, as mentoring is and does, must add something to that staying power.

Haskins is talking about federal legislation only, but it does not seem much of a leap to see his first broad feature—variety of influences—as a critical feature for the sustainability of any particular social policy at all levels of government. In a representative form of government with a complex, competing set of institutions, sectors and individuals that can have influence, the broader the support for a particular intervention as policy, the better its chances to become policy, stay policy and grow. Thus, mentoring, though relatively new to the public social policy agenda and neither established nor large on that agenda, would appear to have a strong foothold. The very fact that it came to public policy with such strong and varied support from private institutions and individuals makes it likely that its presence on that agenda will not be fleeting.

Is Mentoring as Social Policy a Good Thing?

It is not hard to make the argument that mentoring's emergence into the world of public social policy and funding is an unalloyed good. The substantive bottom line is clearly positive, for even if mentoring is not quite as effective and transformational as its advocates claim, there certainly is hard evidence that it does in fact improve the lives, behavior and performance of many youth—and 30 years of social experimentation have not produced a wide range of options to choose from that can make that claim. Who can be against something that has evidence of effectiveness?

It also would appear to have a broader social value. The decline in confidence in the capacity of social programs to make a real difference in the lives of youth has steadily grown over the past 30 years. The erosion has been particularly deep concerning policies for adolescents and has even made many who generally favor strong public social policy turn their support and efforts almost exclusively to young children—leaving little political capital for social initiatives to help youth in the

8-to-17-year-old age range. Some speak openly, some whisper, but agreement has grown: This age range may be too late.

There are several solid grounds on which to decry this "go younger" trend, but it is foolish to dismiss it as totally irresponsible or to claim it is entirely political. Certainly, it is consistent with the conservative trend in American politics, but the skepticism about the effectiveness of social policies for youth also embraces much of the center of American politics and some of the left of center. That leaves very little. Skepticism has spread this far in good part because there is substantial evidence to support it—and much less evidence to counter it. Dissappointing results from some studies of after-school programming have added yet another arrow to the quiver of skepticism (Dynarski et al. 2003).

Surely, having a concrete policy initiative like mentoring, which works for adolescents, is an essential step in rebuilding confidence in public social policy. For how can moral advocacy secure anything beyond rhetorical agreement, heartfelt sympathy and window dressing funding if there is no confidence that much of anything can in fact be accomplished?

Mentoring would also appear to be a direct (if insufficient) response to another broad trend in American life: the reduction of adults in the lives of youth. Both parents working, the prevalence of one-parent families, the growth of a distinct youth culture, the reduction of local funding for recreational programs, legal and practical reasons why employees in public systems (teachers, correctional officials, etc.) are discouraged from befriending youth—these factors have all converged to make declining adult presence in youthful lives a major social transformation. Mentoring at best only dents this transformation, but it is hard to see that as an argument against it.

In short, the above three reasons present a powerful rationale for applauding the appearance of mentoring, if not breathing a healthy sigh of relief that something has taken root that actually helps young people and that has broad support across the political spectrum.

Case closed? If only it were so simple. There are, in fact, several important critiques and some real resistance to mentoring as mainstream

social policy. On analysis, some seem weak—and some very thoughtful. Few are voiced publicly or loudly because mentoring is popular and successful and has the three strong rationales outlined above. I have presented the concerns below and tried to assess their substantive and political importance.

The Zero-Sum Game

Many involved in social policy see it as a sector with no significant prospects for expansion: If one aspect of policy gets bigger, another will get smaller. Those who grew up in the 1960s and 1970s may have believed that such expansion was inevitable or have seen its achievement as simply a function of politics, but in retrospect, those views seem optimistic and naive.

For the past 25 years, America's basically centrist values vis-à-vis the role of the public sector on social welfare issues have asserted themselves. The profusion of legislation in the 1960s and early 1970s to address social issues now seems less an inevitable social trend than an artifact of an unusual set of historical circumstances, shaped primarily by America's success in World War II and the climax of the civil rights movement.

This reassertion of dominant values was most vividly apparent in the 1990s, when a Democratic president in a booming economy with a massive federal budget surplus could not move forward major "progressive" social legislation, nor did he really make much effort to do so. To say that the Republican-controlled House and Senate blocked such movement is only to say that the American political system on balance did not support such movement—much as it also did not support any major "regressive" movement on social policy, as the brief flash of Newt Gingrich and the Contract with America movement showed.

The political system instead reflected well the preference of the culture for a centrist, practical conservatism on social issues. The Democratic Party itself reflected that centrism; its leadership was proud to "change welfare as we know it" (read: remove entitlements and their incentives for dependency) and be the ones to proclaim the end of the era of Big Government.

Does this mean the end of public social policy? Hardly. Centrism does not imply total destruction of or lack of opportunity in social policy; it does imply caution and limits rather than unbridled enthusiasm.

The most powerful and durable manifestation of centrism is the outcomes movement, which in the 1990s spread like wildfire throughout the social policy world, in both the public and philanthropic sectors. Put most simply, that movement said: Don't just tug at my heartstrings; prove that your social policy accomplishes something. The fact that this proof has not come easily has played a strong role in the growing suspicion that maybe many social problems are simply not "solvable" by social policy.

That suspicion and the evidence that backs it have a political consequence: They generate declining interest in the body politic generally in continuing to try to create social policy that will solve those problems and generate fuel for those who never wanted to try in the first place.

Passion of a few for not trying at all, and less interest from many in the prospects of trying, add up to an emerging political decision that moves social policy another notch down on the priority list of uses for public policy and taxpayer money. And given that only a small minority of Americans ever had the desire for America to become like a Northern European social welfare state, the politics of social policy for young people begins to look more like a series of occasional arguments than a sustained and serious effort.

In this view of the current state of American politics, the success of mentoring becomes less a building block—hey, things do work; have hope, voters, we should keep at these issues!—than a growing piece of a diminishing pie. For many voters, discovering that mentoring works is a satisfying end to this somewhat depressing process of finding solutions to tough human and social problems.

Furthermore, mentoring's success may hasten the pie's shrinkage. For mentoring is something volunteers do, and what they do is very limited: They develop a relationship. If that's all it takes, some social conservatives would (and do) say, what is all this talk about social change and comprehensive services? What does the public

sector need to do except provide a little cash for expansion of mentoring? The major work and the major money are all private.

These conclusions play very well to the interests and beliefs of a small but very vocal and politically powerful group of American leaders and institutions; they also are very seductive to a larger group of Americans who would like to believe these kids can be helped, and if it can be done simply, privately and without much burden on taxpayers' wallets, all the better.

Is the "zero-sum/declining sum" critique of mentoring accurate? More accurate than the "building optimism for social policy through success" argument? I think that both these positions are accurate, in the sense that both are in play. We are currently in some version of a zero-sum game, with mentoring absorbing a larger share of the resources. But we do need to have success as well, not just moral claims, to increase interest and the size of the pie.

How this all resolves itself—which analysis turns out right—is less a matter of cultural values or historical trend and more a matter of *who uses mentoring the most effectively as an advocacy tool.* Centrism, even a conservative centrism, does not inherently deny growth or possibility for new initiatives in social policy: It simply makes them hard to get. The pie can grow—if a convincing case can be made not only that it should, but that it will produce outcomes.

One thing seems likely: To deny or undercut mentoring's importance is not a sound strategy for the future of public social policy for youth. Mentoring simply has too much going for it: It is a social initiative with broad appeal that gives hope that adolescence is not too late to intervene. Mentoring needs to be built on—used as a foundation stone—to advocate successfully for other social initiatives.

Mentoring's greatest usefulness, far beyond its value as a program, is its affirmation of the value and role of nonfamily adults in children's lives and in their healthy development. Focusing on mentoring only as a program can easily play into the zero/declining-sum game because mentoring's advocates, in their zeal to expand, will undercut the importance of other initiatives—that's what competition is all about. Seeing mentoring too broadly—as affirming the role of adults—only plunks

mentoring into the thicket of family policy issues (e.g., shouldn't we promote more family in kids' lives, rather than mentors?). That can go many ways.

No, mentoring is a practical response to the immobilizing "Does it take a village or just parents to raise a child?" debate. The answer is, as usual, in between: It takes parents and some caring strangers. Mentors are strangers, at least at first; so are coaches, teachers, police, juvenile detention staff and so on. Mentoring programs formalize and demystify what the "village" means. But it's just one way. Kids need more support—in today's world, as much as they can get. Mentoring is the headline on what needs to be done in every institution that deals with young people. Practice will vary, because roles vary, but youth need more nonfamily adults making intentionally positive contributions to their sense of importance, usefulness and integrity. Strangers have a lot to do with both success and character.

The Limits on Scale

Though mentoring seems straightforward—a caring relationship—that simplicity is deceptive, and that deceptiveness has profound consequences for the number of volunteers mentoring can expect. For one, not all adults are adept at developing relationships with a young stranger (even in BBBSA, with its careful selection and training, about one in four just don't do that good a job; see Tierney et al. 1995). Second, only a modest percentage of adults want to serve as mentors (Scales 2003).

Getting volunteers always has been a challenge for mentoring agencies. When P/PV did its study in the early 1990s, most sites in the study had long waiting lists, and it was not unusual for a youth to wait 18 months to get a mentor.

But the more serious limit on the number of volunteers available is neither competence nor desire, but what mentoring asks of its volunteers. This is no monthly visit to the playground or weekend help rebuilding the barn. It's once a week, several hours a week, for 52 weeks—that's what the research to date tells us it takes to get results (Grossman, Rhodes 2002; Tierney et al. 1995). A little multiplication delivers the sobering message that a mentor commits to more than 100 hours a year—that's almost three standard workweeks!

How many adults, even the most competent and caring, will volunteer to do that? Of course, better effort on the part of mentoring agencies will unearth more volunteers—but most new volunteers replace retiring ones. It is difficult to substantially increase the number of volunteers willing to put in the time mentioned above (see Stukas and Tanti, in DuBois, Karcher 2005).

So unlike most social policies, "going to scale" is not primarily a function of financial resources. Beyond a certain point, you simply can't "buy" volunteers.

When you hear that Americans are the hardest-working people on the planet—averaging, for example, *nine weeks a year* more work than the Germans—you can imagine why adding three weeks of mentoring would be a challenge. An AOL Time Warner poll conducted in 2002 found, however, that of those adults who do not currently volunteer as mentors, 42 percent (or 54 million) would seriously consider mentoring if they had a variety of supports (AOL Time Warner Foundation 2002). These include a choice of mentoring options tailored to schedule and interests, access to expert help, orientation and training before mentoring, release time and encouragement from their employer and flexibility in where the mentoring takes place.

Mentoring organizations have been responsive to the challenges and the opportunities. Some BBBSA localities—Boston is a notable example—have brought in business consultants, streamlined their process and sunk more resources into recruitment in order to find out what the natural limits on scale are. Smart effort will move that limit well beyond the current number. Some corporations and mentoring providers, Goldman Sachs and LA Team Mentoring, for instance, have incorporated more flexible, volunteer-friendly approaches such as bringing young people to the workplace for mentoring sessions and teaming up two or more adults to mentor one or more children.

Advocates estimate that about 15 million youth need mentors (MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership). It seems a safe bet that the natural limit on volunteers willing to serve as mentors in formal programs such as BBBSA is substantially short of that.

That mentoring can never address the full scope of need is not a criticism but simply a fact; it is a natural limitation of any social initiative based on volunteering. The importance of this concept lies not in that it invalidates mentoring or that it should reduce efforts and resources to take mentoring to its fullest scale, whatever that is, because social initiatives with evidence of effectiveness are not legion. The importance of this idea is that it should be realized and stated for the fact that it is.

The tendency to embrace simple solutions and to become exhausted by tough social problems are ordinary human traits, which if allowed to flourish become serious social and moral failings of the larger society. Mentoring's advocates have the tough responsibility of not overselling their product; it is a discipline achieved only by remaining aware of and stating that volunteer mentoring is an important but limited programmatic solution. If mentoring's critics will not encourage it reaching its maximum scale—and mentoring's advocates will not acknowledge that the maximum will still fall way short of need—they both may contribute to the "diminishing sum" process noted earlier.

Quality Control

The most confounding factor regarding tracking and assessing the scale issue over the coming years is knowing what we mean by mentoring and what we expect of it—that is, the issue of quality control. A significant part of mentoring's appeal as a public policy initiative worthy of taxpayer support is the belief generated by the 1995 impact study that mentoring produces changes in youth behavior related to drug use, violence and school performance. Our current state of knowledge says it takes the volunteer time and effort noted above to achieve these results.

But the current strategy emphasized by BBBSA and many of its local affiliates is to recruit volunteers to mentor children at their schools, usually over lunch, for one to one and a half hours per week. This does make recruitment easier and accounts for a substantial share of the growth of BBBSA during the past five years. It also raises the question of whether such modifications to mentoring's

basic and proven model will produce the same impressive results. If they don't, does mentoring still make sense as a public policy initiative?

P/PV recently completed an impact study of BBBS school-based mentoring. The study confirmed that school-based programs are able to attract mentors who would be unlikely to volunteer in traditional community-based programs. And researchers found that school-based mentoring does produce important outcomes, including improved performance in science and oral and verbal language, fewer serious school infractions, fewer unexcused absences, and improved confidence in their academic abilities. Unfortunately, these benefits dissipated in the second year of the study. Researchers identified several ways that programs should be strengthened if school-based mentoring is to reach its potential, and BBBSA is now working to implement these recommendations.

And what about the issue of quality control in non-BBBSA programs, which account, by the best estimate, for the majority of all current mentors? The quality control problem is not peculiar to mentoring; it is the bête noire of all social initiatives that achieve popularity and scale. Our decentralized political system and romance with "local uniqueness" make it very difficult to replicate initial impact. Head Start is a relevant example, because it too had early evidence of impact and achieved rapid popularity and growth; its growth has been plagued by a lack of rigor and quality control.

Should the quality control issue—both its generic nature and mentoring's early swerve from the "proven model"—be enough to dampen enthusiasm for mentoring as a social policy fixture with a steady tap into the taxpayers' pockets?

The answer is a clear "no." Quality control of large-scale social policy initiatives is, as noted above, largely an artifact of our political system and culture, often exacerbated by the inadequate capacity of public bureaucracies to train, monitor and control. Mentoring is a rare social policy initiative in that it comes to the taxpayer with a private, nationwide organization, BBBSA, already in place. A second, more recent private organization, MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership, not only advocates mentoring but actively promotes quality

standards. Thus, the capacity and potential for quality control and transparency of action are at a higher level from the outset than the vast majority of social policy initiatives. In fact, each of the 3,700 programs in MENTOR's volunteer referral system agrees to adhere to the *Elements of Effective Practice* (MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership 2003) and can get help doing so from the network of State Mentoring Partnerships (MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership 2004).

Though BBBSA is not and will never be the only organization doing mentoring, its "market share" is substantial (if you're from the for-profit world, it's awesome). MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership's influence is extensive with other mentoring initiatives. Thus, the potential for widespread high-quality programming is great.

The Mentees

Perhaps the most challenging critique of mentoring as a programmatic intervention is that its mentees are not the youth who are likely to be the biggest problems to themselves, their families, their friends, their communities and society at large. Analyzing this critique demands care, for it is not true that mentoring as commonly practiced purposefully enrolls youth who don't need much help. In fact, mentoring's traditional practice of enrolling youth whose single parent or guardian says they need a mentor (or in school-based mentoring, enrolling youth whose teachers say they could benefit from a mentor) get about as intimate a judgment of need as you could ask for—certainly more likely to be accurate than eligibility based on race or income, professional interviews or Rorschach tests.

No, mentoring's limit on the youth is not that the youth it usually gets can't benefit from mentoring; it's that the youth it usually doesn't get have the bigger problems. Mentoring's strengths, based on experience and data, are generally in the 8- through 13-year age range and concentrated in 9- to 11-year-olds. They are youth with responsible parents or teachers who want to connect them with mentors.

Youth who are older; who don't have a parent caring, knowledgeable, or insightful enough, or a teacher who finds them sympathetic; who are on the streets or in homeless shelters; who

are in foster care or a juvenile institution—these youth do not often get volunteer mentors in the course of ordinary mentoring programs. Yet their "at riskness" is clearly magnitudes higher than the 10-year-olds who now make up the majority of mentees.

At first blush, it seems unlikely that these higher-risk youth will get mentors: How many adult volunteers will take on such a challenge? In fact, the emerging evidence is mixed. Rigorous attempts to resolve this ambiguity represent one of mentoring's most promising opportunities, for the more likely its mentees are, without mentors, to become problems, the more valuable its services are; the more important (and justifiable) it becomes as public social policy; and the less important it is to have huge numbers of volunteers. The better you can target, the smaller the numbers get.

P/PV's multisite, high-risk older-youth demonstration (The National Faith-Based Initiative—or NFBI), which focused in part on securing mentors for older youth who had already had brushes with the criminal justice system, had very modest success in securing volunteer mentors. Given a choice about how to use their time and good intentions, few volunteers chose to work with older youth (Bauldry, Hartmann 2004).

More recently, P/PV's Ready4Work/Juvenile Ready4Work initiative showed slightly more encouraging results. Programs in this 17-site prisoner reentry demonstration were able to recruit large numbers of mentors for a very challenging group of mentees—young men and women (ages 14 through 34) returning from incarceration and juvenile detention.

The WAY program of Children's Village, a residential treatment facility for very troubled foster care youth, has been successful in getting volunteer mentors for these youth as they are leaving foster care. Careful analysis of projects such as these may tell us whether strategy, effort, personnel or happenstance made the difference in recruiting mentors for high-risk populations—and whether success appears replicable.

For younger youth without the support of a referring parent, the record is also mixed. The Amachi initiative, which provides mentors for youth with parents in prison, has been remarkably successful in getting volunteer mentors by targeting faith organizations and congregations (Jucovy 2003). In Philadelphia, Amachi's demonstration city, more than 500 volunteers came forward in the first year. That is clearly a success by the standard of traditional mentoring, though it also reflects the conclusion of the earlier discussion: It is far short of the number of youth with an incarcerated parent, which in Philadelphia alone is more than 25,000.

But Amachi's success, however modest, indicates the appeal to policymakers of focusing mentoring on a group of youth with significant prospects of troubled lives: President Bush announced it in his 2003 State of the Union as a major policy initiative, and there are currently more than 270 mentoring children of prisoners programs, including Amachi programs, around the country.

On the other hand, an initiative begun in the early 1990s in Portland, Oregon, called Friends of the Children (FoCh), which targets first-graders who are already exhibiting troubling behaviors in the classroom and whose families range from unsupportive to dysfunctional, tried but finally gave up on providing mentors through volunteers and instead hires and pays its Friends. Some of the difficulty in recruitment may have been FoCh's blunt message: These kids need help and support, lots of it, and they're going to need it for a long time. No seduction here.

But the decision that volunteers were insufficient was not made without trying, and it certainly was not tinged by ideology: The program's founder is not biased toward professional social services, nor does he hope for a social welfare state. Given that in its initial years, he paid for the program out of his own pocket, he had many reasons to prefer volunteers.

FoCh appears to target a higher-risk group than Amachi and proposes a more demanding program; it is no surprise that volunteers were judged insufficient. But Amachi youth are not all cherubs, and certainly their "situation" is bound to chill some volunteers. Amachi, by recruiting largely through churches, is betting both that faith volunteers will take on tougher kids and, equally important, that their congregations will support the individual volunteers and supplement what they do, thus emulating

a family setting in density and duration (see Maton, Sto. Domingo and King, in DuBois, Karcher 2005). Again, it will be critical to look more closely at the issues posed by the very different approaches of Amachi and FoCh and see whether volunteering is indeed a viable strategy for addressing older and higher-risk youth groups.

In short, innovative approaches to targeting and recruitment may both increase mentoring's value to social policy and take some pressure off the numbers of mentors required to ensure that youth at serious risk of a life of problems are served. Or they may not; we just don't know yet.

These issues are mentoring's "frontier."

Insufficient Content

Another substantive critique is simply that mentoring is not enough. In this view, mentoring's results are not likely to hold up as a youth ages; it won't be transformational, because an at-risk youth needs more, at more times of his or her life, than a mentor provides.

Like the previous critiques, this one does not lend itself to a clean answer. On the one hand, mentoring does not provide all or even most things that every youth needs. But then, no social intervention does or ever will. Nor do most families. Nor, I think, is this sort of perfection worth pursuing—it only diverts us from what is possible.

Mentoring doesn't provide enough to ensure even a fair chance that each youth's assets and talents are built on. Only a lucky minority in life get that, and we have yet to figure out how to duplicate it through social policy with consistency, at any scale. But this is worth striving for. And no doubt, some form of mentoring will be a part of it.

The question for social intervention policy is: Does mentoring provide enough input to help avoid some problems, achieve some successes and leave some personal attributes that together provide a stronger foundation for the challenges and decisions that these youth will likely face? Only evaluations will answer that series of questions definitively; the findings to date are promising. But it is on this issue that

I think mentoring's critics undervalue it. For many youth who are already behind in life, with only modest support and few prospects, neither services and opportunities (the liberal approach) nor punishment and/or appeals to determination and resolve (the conservative approach) touch the chords that make humans keep moving forward when they are in difficult circumstances and have little to fall back on. Both the standard conservative and standard liberal approaches assume enough emotional connectedness in reserve to counter those inevitable moments when services aren't sufficient, opportunities aren't what they seemed, determination just falters or punishment doesn't deter. What young people need at moments like that is something much more personal: faith; or another person we don't want to let down, who has confidence in us; or best of all, both.

The need for these "other factors" is especially acute for many disadvantaged youth. For though we all love to tell youth that "you can be anything you want"—and love to celebrate those exceptional individuals who have done just that—in fact, most youth, like most of us, don't believe it. Most youth with a strike or two against them especially don't believe it. They know that whatever they get out of life will be a struggle and will most likely have limits. When that is your view on life, and when it is rooted in experience, disappointment and setbacks are wearying, not inspirational pebbles on some inevitable path to the top. Willpower alone wavers; plans seem futile; services seem abstract.

The desire to pick yourself up and go on demands a deeper touch. A nonfamily friend who cares may do the trick. The very lack of family ties is what makes this possible for some youth; the caring and confidence are more trustworthy, unaffected by history (see Rhodes, in DuBois, Karcher 2005).

Thus, mentoring often may not be enough to achieve certain goals; it also often may be the indispensable element to ensure that the bottom doesn't fall out for youth attempting to achieve those goals, to ensure that hope and effort are maintained. Maintenance of hope and effort through difficult times do build character, confidence and resilience. That is the stuff that makes, step-by-step, for transformation.

Change, Not Charity

This critique harks back to the earlier discussion of "zero/declining sum," with a slight twist: that at its core, mentoring is a charitable act, a kindness to a stranger, improvement in the life of people one at a time—whereas what we need is social change, where change comes to larger groups of individuals all at once and, at the same time, positions future generations better. Mentoring as social policy, under this critique, is diversionary at best, reactionary at worst. Even if it is effective and does build confidence in social policy, it remains diversionary and/or reactionary because it builds confidence in the capacity of individuals to help individuals and thus blunts the fundamental need for broader social change.

It is hard to see how any responsible citizen could be against a social change that would suddenly improve the lives of large numbers of youth. Thus, I pay careful attention to this critique.

But the strength of this critique seems primarily at the ideological and rhetorical level. Unless we can set forth what social change we're talking about in concrete terms and make the case equally concrete as to how mentoring gets in the way, it's difficult to see why we shouldn't help individuals when we know how to do it, and when it's politically feasible to do so. Putting aside individuals for the sake of highly conceptual ideas of a greater good has been a common practice throughout human history in every corner of the globe; it's hard to find good examples where the promise has been delivered and easy to find examples where it has not. But we should always be open to broader changes with widespread benefits, so long as they can be concretely articulated and examples brought forth.

The notion of helping individuals is too easily maligned by rhetoric. That such help, even out of charity, has become regressive to many in the social policy world seems more the product of frustration than of clear-minded strategy.

Future Directions

Reviewing the pros and cons of the above issues leads me to conclude that on balance, the advance of mentoring into the realm of public policy and public funding has been a very positive phenomenon, substantively and strategically. It has injected the importance of adult–youth relationships, and in particular nonfamily relationships, into almost every major policy initiative that deals with youth—an important counter to the highly techno-cratic and/or highly political approaches that have dominated so many policy initiatives and that miss the simply human factor at the core of most individual improvement.

Mentoring is also something about which there is broad agreement that it works. Though I don't dismiss lightly the "zero/declining sum" and "change not charity" cri-tiques, I think that both underestimate the widespread sense that little or nothing works and the role this attitude has played in getting social policy to the low esteem in which it's held today. I think both also underestimate the durability of the outcomes movement; it is too consistent with a centrist-practical political culture to be dislodged for long by the fervor of big ideas, whether from the left or right. We should use its traction, not resist it.

However, despite all its benefits, I am not con-vinced that mentoring as a program initiative should have its own policy domain or its own major legislation. It is better for the long-term effectiveness of social policy if mentoring and its broader idea of the critical importance of nonfamily relationships are as policy (a) injected in appropriate forms into the various existing legislation and policy domains relat-ing to youth and (b) highlighted or tested as special initiatives to demonstrate new uses or emphases for mentoring, be they targeting chil-dren of prisoners or homeless families, assisting the transition from foster care, guiding the transition into work and careers, reducing the extreme isolation of juvenile facilities or work-ing with very young children who are exhibit-ing poor behaviors in the classroom. It is with these highest-risk youth that the human factor

exemplified by mentoring is most missing and needed, and it is with those youth and the insti-tutions with whom they interact that its lessons most need to be injected and integrated. The 2003 report from the White House Task Force for Disadvantaged Youth underscored this view.

Efforts to aggregate mentoring into, say, a "Million Mentors" piece of legislation, as some have suggested, would in my judgment shift the balance among the pros and cons laid out above under the various critiques away from mentoring's strengths:

- It would make quality control more diffi-cult in the rush for numbers and funding.

- It would remove incentives to target under-served, high-risk youth, again, to get num-bers and money.

- It would play to the sense that "we've found the answer," which is just too convenient and easy to do in a political world so fix-ated on sound bites and media strategy.

- It would narrow mentoring's importance to that of a program, when its ultimate impor-tance lies more in the imaginative and flex-ible use of its lessons in all institutions that deal with youth.

In sum, mentoring's emergence over the last decade from the world of private philanthropy into that of public policy and funding has been important and beneficial. But the usual next step—consolidating its various gains into major social policy legislation—is not, in my judgment, the best next step. Infiltration, not consolidation, is where mentoring's greatest usefulness lies in the years ahead.

References

AOL Time Warner Foundation.
2002   *Mentoring in America 2002.* New York: Author. Retrieved July 20, 2004, from http://mentoring.web.aol.com/ com-mon/one_report/national_poll_report_final.pdf

Bauldry, S., and Hartmann, T.
2004   *The Promise and Challenge of Mentoring High-Risk Youth.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

DuBois, D. L., Holloway, B. E., Valentine, J. C., and Cooper, H.
2002   "Effectiveness of mentoring programs for youth: A meta-analytical review." *American Journal of Community Psychology,* 30, 157–197.

DuBois, D. L., Karcher, M.
2005   *The Handbook of Youth Mentoring.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Dynarski, M., Moore, M., Mullens, J., Gleason, P., James-Burdumy, S., Rosenberg, L., et al.
2003   *When Schools Stay Open Late: The National Evaluation of the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Program, First Year Findings.* Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education.

Fountain, D. L., and Arbreton, A.
1999   "The Cost of Mentoring." In J. B. Grossman (Ed.), *Contemporary Issues in Mentoring,* 48–65. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

Friends of the Children
2002   Retrieved June 1, 2004, from http://www.friendsofthechildren.com/

Grossman, J. B., and Rhodes, J. E.
2002   "The Test of Time: Predictors and Effects of Duration in Youth Mentoring Relationships." *American Journal of Community Psychology,* 30, 199–219.

Haskins, R.
2003   *"Does Research Influence Policy?"* Presentation to W. T. Grant Foundation Board of Trustees meeting, New York City.

Jucovy, L.
2003   *Amachi: Mentoring Children of Prisoners in Philadelphia.* Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

Leave No Child Behind Act, 20 U.S.C. § 6301
2001

MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership. (n.d.).
Retrieved June 1, 2004, from http://mentoring. web.aol.com/about_us/what_we_do.adp

MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership.
2003   Elements of effective practice (2nd ed.). Alexandria, VA: Author.

MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership.
2004   State Mentoring Partnerships. Retrieved July 21, 2004, from http://www.mentor-ing.org/state_partnerships/state_local_profiles.adp?Entry=home

Scales, P. C.
2003   Other People's Kids: Social Expectations and American Adults' Involvement with Children and Adolescents. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum.

Sipe, C. L., and Roder, A. E.
1999   Mentoring School-Age Children: A Classification of Programs. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures. (Published in collaboration with MENTOR/National Mentoring Partnership, Alexandria, VA)

Tierney, J. P., Grossman, J. B., and Resch, N. L.
1995   Making a Difference: An Impact Study of Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Philadelphia: Public/Private Ventures.

Welfare Reform Act—Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, 42 U.S.C. § 1305 (1996).

The White House Task Force for Disadvantaged Youth: Final Report.
2003   Retrieved October 1, 2004, from http://www.ncfy.com/disadvantaged/FinalReport.pdf

Workforce Investment Act, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act, 29 U.S.C. § 794d (1998).

P/PV