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Sincerely,

Judy Strother Taylor  
Project Director



# U.S. Department of Education Mentoring Resource Center



## Case Study

### *Effective Peer Mentoring: The California Friday Night Live Mentoring Program*

By Kerrilyn Scott-Nakai

## Introduction

Peer programs of all kinds are increasing in both school and community settings across the United States. Dr. Michael Karcher estimates that “within a decade, cross-age peer mentoring will constitute half of all mentoring matches in the country”. This is further evidenced by the recent surge in Big Brothers Big Sisters (BBBS) peer mentoring programs—with High School Bigs making up over one-third of the total number of matches by 2003 and increasing annually.

The growing popularity of these programs can be attributed to a number of factors, including:

- An increased national emphasis on community service and volunteerism by young people.
- The emergence of positive youth development as a significant set of principles in working with at risk youth.
- An increased need for support in schools to overcome youth violence, negative peer pressure, educational failure, and other problems.

The term “peer helping programs” refers to the broad category of programs involving youth serving youth. Recently, the term “cross-age” has been used to describe peer programs in which the peer helper is older than the student being helped. According to the California Association of Peer Programs, Peer/Cross-Age Mentoring is defined as a program in which,

- “Students develop an encouraging and supportive relationship with other students, usually younger in age, for the primary purpose of providing broad support, guidance, and friendship”.

#### Are peer mentoring programs effective?

The impact of mentoring programs on young people has been firmly established; mentoring can positively impact a young person’s life. However, the research on peer mentoring programs is less firmly established. While empirical research on the effectiveness of cross-age mentoring programs is still sparse, recent studies have shown promising results:

- 2001 findings from the California Association of Peer Programs (CAPP) showed that programs had a positive impact on peer mentors, the students they served, and the general school population. School staff reported academic improvements for both the mentees as well as their older peer mentors.
- A 2004 BBBSA internal study found that Littles matched with high school Bigs, showed more improvements in grades than Littles matched with corporate or college- age Bigs. High school Bigs also spent more time with their Littles at each meeting and had the lowest premature closure rate

compared to matches using corporate and college-age mentors.

- A 2002 research study using an experimental design with a randomly assigned control group found positive effects on the mentees' connectedness to school, parents, and their sense of future (Karcher, Davis, and Powell 2002).

### What are the potential benefits of integrating a peer mentoring design?

For ED Mentoring grantees, peer—or cross-age—mentoring may provide a powerful opportunity to harness the natural influence that young people have on each other, turning it into a positive experience for both mentor and mentee. The model may be especially appealing to ED Mentoring programs for several reasons:

- Peer mentoring programs, in both school and community settings, often focus on helping participants improve academically and become more connected to school—two important outcomes for ED Mentoring programs.
- Volunteer recruitment is simplified and draws on a relatively untapped (and easily located) population—older teens who have an interest in helping their younger peers.
- The youth development approach benefits both participants in the match, and programs working with a broad age range—e.g., fourth-through eighth-graders—may be able to serve both ends of the age spectrum through cross-age matches.

A number of ED mentoring programs are already implementing a peer mentoring model, while others may be thinking about adding this approach as an additional component to their existing programs. Before implementing peer mentoring services, programs should have defined what their peer mentoring model will include and have a good understanding of the best practices and typical outcomes suggested by research. This case example of the California Friday Night Live Mentoring Program provides an

excellent example of best practices and considerations for developing a peer mentoring program.

## Program Description

**The California Friday Night Live Partnership (CFNLP)** was formed as a collaboration between the Tulare County Office of Education and Teenwork, Inc. in 1996. Funded through the California Department of Alcohol and Drug Programs (ADP), the Partnership's mission is *"to promote youth development, involve youth in changing community norms related to ATOD use, and prevent and reduce harms to young people"*.

*"FNL's Vision is to work hand-in-hand with young people so they are both problem free and fully prepared --Executive Director, Jim Kooler"*

In 1997, the CFNLP began a process of integrating mentoring into the operation of the organization. In 1998, the partnership began a pilot process for FNL Mentoring. Five original counties were selected through a competitive RFP process. The original counties had great success and within two years had developed the FNL Mentoring Model. In the Fall of 2000, FNL embarked on an ambitious two-year expansion plan. In the first year, eight additional counties were funded and an additional thirteen counties were funded in the subsequent year; bringing the total to twenty-six counties by the fourth year of program implementation.

The primary focus of the FNL Mentoring Program is to form youth/adult partnerships with young people, providing programs rich in opportunities and support, so young people will be less likely to engage in problem behaviors, more likely to achieve in school, and more likely to attend higher education or secure a full-time job. FNL Mentoring provides opportunities for young people to be in ongoing, mutually beneficial, caring

relationships, which strengthen a young person's resiliency to challenges in life.

More specifically, the FNL model engages teams of older high school-aged youth to mentor teams of middle school-aged youth in a structured ongoing one-on-one relationship.

#### FNL Mentoring Programs

- Introduce young people to the concept of volunteerism
- Encourage young people to develop programs that are fun and meaningful
- Promote messages through shared experiences
- Encourage peer-oriented programming (youth driven and youth led)
- Develops skills, such as communication, team work, and active listening
- Encourage and empower young people as active leaders and community resources
- Encourage youth to engage in mutually beneficial relationships with peers and younger youth

As the newest addition to the FNL family of programs, counties that participate adhere to certain quality assurance standards while maintaining local creativity, energy and self-determination. The FNL Mentoring model is based on the California Mentor Initiative (CMI) Quality Assurance Standards and includes the following components:

- Two lead adult staff, including an on-site Program Advisor and a County Coordinator mentor screening and protégé risk assessment,
- Mentor training and protégé and parent orientation,
- Prescribed matching procedures,
- 16 weeks of prescribed ATOD and violence prevention curriculum coupled with longer-term interactive group activities and individual

mentoring time and recommended summer booster activities

- On-going relationship monitoring procedures,
- On-going parental feedback and engagement,
- Closure activities,
- Evaluation

In addition to the 16 weeks of curriculum, supplemental program materials have been developed and include: a mentor screening application, a protégé risk assessment package, mentor and protégé training and orientation materials, mentoring relationship monitoring forms, and parental feedback forms. In addition, the CFNLP has developed standard technical assistance services for a number of key programmatic areas (i.e. appropriate recruitment techniques) and is equipped to provide customized assistance and training as needed.

The weekly mentor sessions include:

- Two one hour sessions per week
- 1 weekly rap planning session for mentors;
- Integration of standard 16 week curriculum into weekly group activities
- Dedicated one-on-one time each session
- Brief 5 minute warm-up and closure group exercises

The program utilizes effective strategies such as an interactive and engaging format for youth participation, extensive mentor training, on-going monitoring of the mentoring relationship, and parental involvement. FNLM is a school-based service model, with 2 hours of service provision per week.

## *Best Practices and Strategies*

There are several key strategies that the FNL Mentoring model incorporates into the design and implementation of their cross-age peer mentoring program. The following best practices provide clear examples of considerations.

### **#1 *Appropriate Referral and Screening Processes***

**Identifying long-term mentors—the value of “non-traditional leaders”** The FNL Mentoring team realized early on that the development of effective screening procedures for the mentors was critical for ensuring their long-term availability, interest level, and commitment to the program.

Initially, the County Coordinators expressed that their biggest challenge in youth participation and retention was after-school conflicts. Many of the mentors were involved in after-school sports and/or other extracurricular activities. These students may have been available at the beginning of the school year but developed conflicts as the year progressed and became involved in other activities. Asking students what activities they were currently involved in and/or interested in becoming involved in became a standard part of the mentor screening interview.

The program team realized that the most dedicated and effective mentors were not always the high achievers in the school, but those who have a genuine interest in helping others, are able to be empathetic, and can identify with others. The FNL Mentoring program refers to these youth as “non-traditional leaders”. These youth may not be heavily involved in other school activities and thus may not be quickly identified by school staff but may be very effective peer mentors.

**Protégé Referral Procedures.** Prospective protégées that meet the target population profile are recruited and referred by school personnel (i.e. principals, counselors,

teachers), parents, and social service providers. Youth can also self-refer. For each referred youth, school staff complete a Protégé Risk Assessment form. The information gathered from this form is used as baseline evaluation data and to determine the youth that are the best fit for the program. The prospective protégée and their family/guardian attend a program orientation to learn more about program goals, objectives, and expectations, and participant/parent roles and responsibilities.

During the initial evaluation of the program, it was learned that the manner in which the protégés are informed about the program can impact their initial impression of the program and their interpretation of the reason they were identified to participate. The protégé selection process was refined with increased sensitivity to the potential negative connotations. For example, being called to the school counselor’s office tends to have a negative connotation; whereas, receiving special invitational letters to participate in the program seems to be more positively perceived by the protégés.

**Knowing Your Best Recruitment Sources.** Program advisors were asked to rate the top three recruitment sources for mentors and protégés. The three sources rated most important in recruiting mentors were other students (43.1%), program advisors (37.3%) and teachers (33.3%). Positive word of mouth amongst students is very effective for recruiting mentors.

For protégés, school counselors (51%) and teachers (49%) were seen as the most important referral sources. Additionally, program advisors or coordinators are also actively engaged in the recruitment process (35%).

### **#2 *Critical Role of Adult Advisors***

The use of adult program advisors to support local level program activities has been central to the success of the FNL Mentoring program. Ideally, site advisors are

responsible for planning and attending all of the mentor sessions, securing a meeting site, and reminding students of meeting times. Program advisors are most often teachers (42%) or counselors (32%) and to a lesser extent other school staff (20%).

There is a direct relationship between the amount of monitoring and involvement needed at the county level and the activity level of the program advisors. For those counties that were able to recruit active advisors, the time and burden at the county level was more feasible. In general, it was difficult for counties to implement the program at 4 or 5 school sites if they had a limited number of “active” program advisors. The feasibility of the model is dependent on having an active and supportive school-based adult program advisor.

Staff receive on-going professional development trainings at a biannual statewide FNL training institute and quarterly FNL Mentoring trainings. These trainings address specific issues to assist staff in addressing program target populations, such as but not limited to: engaging and serving non-traditional/at-risk youth; engaging parental involvement; serving diverse populations (parents/youth); collaborating and engaging diverse community partners; addressing the cultural and special needs of diverse program participants.

An effective training strategy was providing new program coordinators and advisors with the opportunity to visit established programs as a way for them to develop a concrete understanding of the program. Peer site visits were integrated on an annual basis.

A helpful recruitment strategy is noting the personal benefits advisors receive. The majority of advisors report improved relationships with their students and the opportunity to establish rapport with their students in another context—being seen in a role other than teacher or counselor. One-fifth of the advisors have been with the program for over five years--this makes a

strong statement about the advisors’ long-term commitment to the FNL system.

### #3 Formal Training and Monitoring Guidelines

While having clearly developed roles and responsibilities, formal trainings, and supervision is important for adult mentoring programs these components are even more critical for peer mentoring programs. Young people need structure and clear expectations and what may seem obvious to an adult may be unclear to a young person.

**Mentor Training.** The CFNLP has clear guidelines regarding the information to be covered in the mentor training. Quality assurance measures are implemented by CFNLP and/or the Policy Committee.

- For example, counties that are utilizing their own materials should present an agenda and materials to the partnership for review before providing the training.
- In addition, formal training materials/binders have been developed and reviewed with all mentors.

**On-Going Monitoring and Supervision.** The monitoring guidelines as outlined by CFNLP are in alignment with the California Mentoring Quality Assurance Standards.

For the mentors, monitoring is an inherent part of the program design and is addressed in the weekly planning sessions “rap sessions”. Mentors are provided the opportunity to discuss issues regarding their protégé on a weekly basis in both a group and individual setting.

For the protégés, the monitoring component is conducted more informally—with the exception of a few sites that have found the addition of weekly protégé rap sessions to be effective. The program advisors create an

“open door policy” in which students can feel free to approach them regarding their relationship with their mentor. However, program evaluation data demonstrates that many students will not proactively take advantage of these discussion opportunities. Program Advisors need to create opportunities to discuss how the relationship is going with the protégés as well.

Several additional monitoring strategies have been found to be effective including: weekly protégé rap sessions, youth journal entries, and site developed feedback forms for the mentors and/or protégés to comment on the sessions. In addition, offering a variety of mediums by which youth can express concerns is very important. This meets the needs of youth who feel uncomfortable expressing themselves in either a group or one-on-one setting.

- *Having mentors weekly updates was helpful. I built strong relationships with the mentors so they were comfortable walking to me about anxieties, questions, comforts.*
- *We have leaders for each time – two females and two males. I meet with the four of them and it’s very nice to get feedback that way, face-to-face and casual*
- *I meet one on one with students and opened door with each of them to talk with me. I set time after each session and pulled each protege and talked with each for 5 minutes.*

## #4 Provide Strength-Based Youth Development Activities

**A Strength-Based Approach:** The youth development and resiliency research has established the value of integrating a strength-based approach to working with young people (Bernard, 1999). More recently, the risk and protective factor research has supported a balanced approach

to addressing both risk and protective factors when working with youth (Hawkins and Catalano, 2001).

Youth development research indicates youth need opportunities to contribute to their communities in safe, meaningful, and healthy ways. FNL Mentoring aligns peer mentoring goals with the FNL youth development Standards of Practice.

- Both mentee and mentor participants:**
- Will experience a safe environment
  - Will have opportunities for involvement and connection to community and school
  - Will have opportunities for leadership and advocacy
  - Will have opportunities to engage in meaningful skill building activities that are designed to capture the interest and participation of young people
  - Will have opportunities for caring and meaningful relationships among youth and with adults

**Youth-Led Structured Sessions.** The structure of the mentoring sessions is reported to be very effective and is able to be replicated with a high level of consistency. The hands-on and interactive nature of the activities is a strength of the program and is a proven prevention strategy. Based on evaluation findings, the overwhelming majority of participants find the activities fun and engaging.

The mentor led sessions are a program strength in terms of developing leadership skills amongst the mentors and represent a strong component of the youth development framework. However, the youth led sessions make it more difficult to guarantee the quality of the content and implementation of the activities. Thus, increasing the importance of establishing set methods for allowing youth program planning and facilitation experiences within a standardized set of program activity and topic parameters.

Mentors participate in weekly rap (discussion) sessions to plan and assign specific facilitation duties for the next scheduled mentor session. This is also an opportunity for mentors to address any challenges they may be experiencing with their one-on-one relationship with their protégé as well. FNL Mentoring staff utilize these sessions to advise mentors in problem-solving and skill development.

The weekly mentoring sessions are designed to provide opportunities for protégées and mentors to engage in 1-to-1 discussion and activities as well as small and large group participation with the other protégées and mentors. As mentioned the entire mentoring sessions, beginning to end, are designed, planned and facilitated by the mentors using the 16-week curriculum as their guide for content discussion and skill development.

### **Program Replicability**

As noted earlier, peer mentoring may provide a powerful opportunity to harness the natural influence that young people have on each other and is compatible with a school-based services.

- Plan a program that fits your school and/or community. Take a look at the strengths and challenges of the schools you serve and shape your program accordingly. Include teachers, administrators, parents, and youth in the planning process.
- Recognize the critical role of adult supervision and plan resources accordingly.

- Be conscious that formal training and monitoring are even more critical components for a peer mentoring program.
- Take advantage of the dual benefits for both the mentees as well as the mentors. Integrate youth-led and empowering activities for the mentors.
- Develop a program that is grounded in solid youth development principles and focuses on strength-based approaches.
- In order to keep the relationship going, be sure to accommodate for the summer months, by integrating planned activities for the mentors and mentees.
- Identify mentors who are able to make long-term commitments. These are not always the high achievers in the school, but may be “non-traditional” leaders who are interested in helping others.
- Ensure on-going monitoring of the relationship. Offer a variety of mediums by which youth can express concerns--this meets the needs of youth who feel uncomfortable expressing themselves in either a group or one-on-one setting.

### **About the Author: Kerrilyn Scott-Nakai**

Kerrilyn Scott-Nakai is a Senior Project Director at CARS and has over 12 years of progressive experience conducting research and program evaluation projects focusing on prevention programming for at-risk youth and their families. Ms. Scott-Nakai has worked at the local, state, and federal levels. She has overseen local and statewide evaluation projects, managed staff, contributed to the management and design of large-scale national studies, and worked on reports for local, state, and federal agencies. She is also highly skilled in the provision of consultation and training services. Over the years, she has established a strong track record of effectively providing technical assistance to a broad array of prevention staff in the areas of program design, evidence-based implementation practices, evaluation, and fidelity (including adherence to federal and/or state funding requirements, model program designs, and adherence to prescribed research design protocols). She is currently the Project Director for the Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities (SDFSC) Technical Assistance Project and oversees the provision of TA, training, product development, and resource dissemination to 43 grantees throughout the state of California.

# Mentoring Resource Center

## Case Study Series

**The Mentoring Resource Center (MRC)** has been created to provide United States Department of Education Mentoring Program grantees with training, technical assistance, publications, research, and consultation, all in an effort to help their program staff design and implement the highest quality mentoring programs. Funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools, the MRC is a collaborative effort between EMT Associates, located in Folsom, CA, and the National Mentoring Center, located in Portland, OR.

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