

# Intergenerational Poverty & Intensive Community Mentoring

A Discussion Paper for  
The Task Force on Children and Youth of  
The Commission on Poverty

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## Every Mentor's Poem

*How can one anticipate the future and  
offer protection?*

*He is like a butterfly hovering above the  
raging torrent of life.*

*How can one imbue him with toughness  
Without encumbering his lightness in flight,  
How to temper him without wetting his wings?*

*What about with one's own example,  
help, advice and words?*

*But what if he rejects them all?  
In fifteen years' time his gaze will be fixed  
into the future,  
Whilst your will be looking to the past.*

*You will be filled with memories and habits  
and he with change and hope.*

*You are full of doubt,  
He is expectant and full of trust.  
You are anxious, he is fearless.*

*When it is not ridiculing, cursing or being  
contemptuous of something,*

*Youth invariably wants to change the  
imperfect past.*

*This should be so.*

*Let him search but without blundering.*

*Let him climb high but without falling.*

*Let him clear the ground but without bloodying his hands.*

*He will say:*

*"I don't agree with you. I have had enough  
of supervision. Don't you trust me?"*

*by Janusz Korczak, 1879 – 1942*

## Nature of Mentoring

*“What a powerful effect on the sad life of a child,  
Would be the memory of that person – Perhaps the only one –  
Who showed kindness, understanding and respect*

*In a world where cruelty had become the norm.  
The child’s future life and sense of himself could take a different course,  
Knowing there was one person who would not fail him.”*

*Janusz Korczak, 1879 - 1942*

While mentoring as a concept can be traced to the ancient Greeks (Freedman, 1992), to provide adolescents with mentors who could help them develop as individuals can be considered a relatively new practice. Recent interest in mentoring programs have been fueled in significant part by the importance that positive relationships with extra-familial mentors have been able to promote resiliency among youth from at-risk background (Rhodes, 1994).

## An International Initiative

In the international communities, especially the US, interventions that link adolescents with adult volunteer mentors have recently been shifted from a general approach for positive developments of youth to a promising public health strategy for promoting youth. For instance, in the first *World Report on Violence and Health* published by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2002, mentoring is a recognized violence prevention strategy most effective for youth in middle childhood (6-11 years old). And, in *Best Practices of Youth Violence Prevention: A Sourcebook for Community Action* published by the Center for Diseases Control and Prevention (CDC) in 2002, mentoring is recommended as one of the four best strategies in preventing youth violence. The public health perspective implies that mentoring is an approach that deals with conditions and problems affecting youth health, and its concern is to prevent health problems and to extend better care and safety to the entire youth population (WHO 2002).

## Popularity and Effectiveness

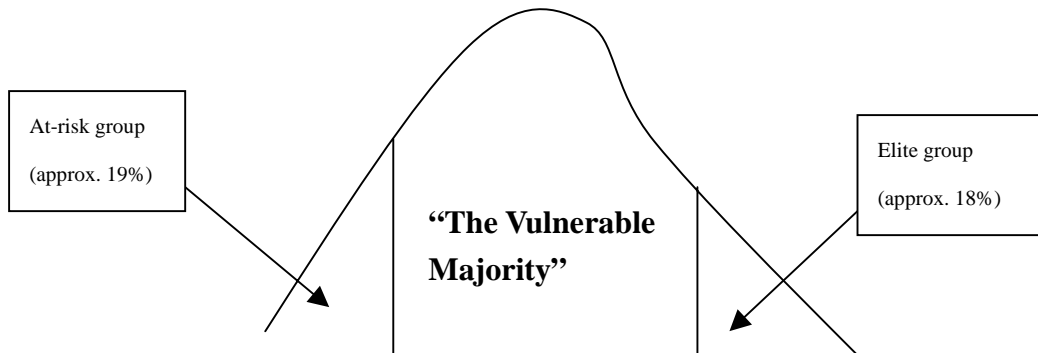
In the US, an estimated five million American youth are currently involved in school- and community-based volunteer mentoring programs nationwide, including more than 100,000 participants in Big Brothers Big Sisters of America (BBBS) programs (McLearn, Colasanto, & Schoen, 1998). And, the US government continues to place a priority on youth mentoring. President Bush announced in February 2004 that the 2005 budget had earmarked US\$100 million to expand and support school-based mentoring programs for at-risk middle school students. Mentoring Australia is a similar initiative on a nation-wide level.

In parallel with the popularity of mentoring, the field has gradually built a body of evidence confirming that well designed and supported mentoring programs can have many positive effects on youth. For instance, BBBS is a mentoring program aimed at helping the mentee develop individualized goals, improving academic outcomes, better relationships with family and friends, and reducing antisocial behaviors, such as substance use and delinquent behavior. The impact study of BBBS (Tierney and Grossman, 2000) has provided the most conclusive and wide-ranging evidence that one-on-one mentoring alone can make a difference in the lives of youth. Meta-analytical reviews (DuBois, et al, 2002) and local experimentations (Chan, 2004) confirmed these trends.

### **A community-wide mentoring program -- Is Hong Kong ready yet?**

Bearing in mind that mentoring – as a promising public health strategy – is to provide the maximum benefit for the largest number of people, we suggest that it is appropriate to see mentoring in the context of Hong Kong as a selected intervention strategy oriented around the needs of youth who constitute what we call the “vulnerable majority.” In numeric terms, the “vulnerable majority” roughly refers to less than two-third of the youth population who belong neither to the 18% of “elite” group, nor to the 19% of “at-risk” group (Choi, 2004). While the “elite” group is able to enter the adult world through the resource-demanding tertiary education system, the “at-risk” group usually takes alternative paths as being intensively supported by social workers, police, as

well as other pertinent government and community resources (see figure 1).



**Figure 1: A Schematic Illustration of the Hong Kong Youth Population**

Therefore, the “vulnerable majority” refers to those who:

- are consistent middle-to-low achievers in school.
- exhibit signs of low motivation, such as low self-esteem, low self-expectation and short attention span.
- occasionally, enact risky behaviors, such as truancy, interpersonal violence, breaking laws, and taking drug.
- lack adequate individual, family, and community resources when they are to deal with personal and relationship problems

Unlike the “elite” group, the “vulnerable majority” can benefit from mentoring by acquiring – through building youth-adult relationships – the skills and competencies they need to meet the challenges of adolescence and become successful adults.

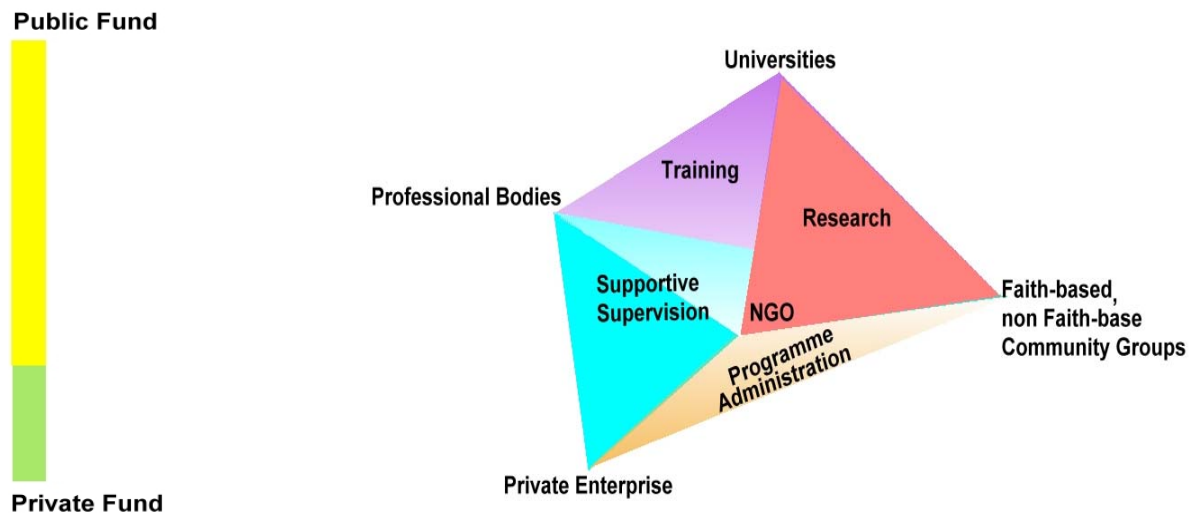
And, unlike the mentoring targeted at the “at-risk” group, mentoring targeted at the “vulnerable majority” helps the youth build on their own assets and strengths, and develop competencies they need to master the challenges of adolescence and become healthy, responsible and caring adults (Public/Private Ventures 2000). The underlying premise is that the more they realize their own assets and strengths, the more likely they are to engage in positive behaviors that are valued by society, and the less likely they become “at-risk.”.

## Current state of affair -- What do we have to begin with?

A model of university-professional body-NGOs alliance with community groups

Public-private funds

Public-private ventures



**Figure 2: Schematic relations between multiple stakeholders in a community-wide sustainable mentoring program administration**

### **Public funds & private funds**

Our research group and partners have received grants from the Health Care & Promotion Fund (HCPF), Quality Education Fund (QEF) and the Community Inclusion & Investment Fund (CIIF) and from private funds on **multiple but isolated social experimentation efforts** in mentoring programs for a number of years and will likely to continue in this way. However, starting from April 2006, the QEF has moved into funding research and development work on completed projects deemed successful in areas such as life education with an aim to build “Quality Network” with stakeholders who have **capacity to disseminate proven effective programs further in the schools**. The EMB area office may also have mandate to offer development programs in 2006-07.

## University's role in research and training

Over the last few years, the Network for Health and Welfare Studies (the Network) of the Department of Applied Social Sciences of the Hong Kong Polytechnic University has nurtured a couple of these “alliance” using research grants from public funds, namely in the areas of child injury and adolescent violence prevention. The Network is one of the Founding Members of one such platform known as the **Hong Kong Alliance for Safe & Healthy School**, together with the Chinese University's Faculty of Medicine, Centre for Health Education and Health Promotion, the Occupational Safety & Health Council, the Hong Kong Childhood Injury Prevention and Research Association, under the auspices of the **WHO Collaborating Centre on Community Safety Promotion**.

You may appreciate that a platform of this nature will at once satisfied the **stigma-free** requirement as well as being **inter-sectoral for building legitimacy** of its mission among existing service providers **to avoid duplication**. Currently, the Network has two full-time PhD students (2006-2009) working in this area, one of them being a young academic from Nankai University, Tianjin, who has successfully completed a United Nations Children's Fund on mentoring in 2005.

## Professional bodies' role in providing supportive supervision

About 20 social work supervisors, clinical psychologists, and Consultant Supervisors of the Hong Kong Professional Counseling Association's Supportive Supervision Scheme (2003-2005) have been providing supervision to our trained mentors on a one-to-four ratio in a QEF project known as ICM – the Intensive Community Mentoring Scheme (2004-05).

Our experience concurred with the international literature that regular supervision for mentors is one of the essential elements in any mentoring program to **ensure better protection of the mentoring dyads**. Incentive packages including honorarium and social recognition will be needed to enhance enthusiastic participation of the supervisors for sustained interest and commitment.

## **NGOs’ role in providing specialist in programming & administration**

The one-on-one mentoring must be complemented by mass and multiple group skills training and social programs. The existing capacity in a number of NGOs is invaluable to this line of work. Potential partners may include Breakthrough, Eternal Flame, Boy’s Brigade, Haven of Hope Christian Services and many others. Initial reaction to **house the secretariat** of such an alliance in one or more existing NGOs is largely positive.

## **Faith-based and other community groups’ role as sustained places**

Recent positive outcomes of the Industrial Evangelistic Fellowship’s role in organizing an “adoption” program of sorts from late 2005 by matching mentor families from nine churches in the Shamshuipo area with nine needy families referred by the SWD testified the importance of community groups in **providing sustained places** for mentoring programs, in this case problematic families with young children. Table 1 provides a tabulated presentation of a model of university – professional bodies – NGOs alliance that has worked with potential faith-based & other community groups.

**Table 1: A model of university – professional bodies – NGOs alliance that has worked with potential community groups**

	<b>University-</b>	<b>Professional</b>	<b>NGOs</b>	<b>Community</b>
	<b>Research &amp; training</b>	<b>Body- supportive supervision</b>	<b>Program administration</b>	<b>groups sustained places</b>
<b>HCPF, QEF, CIIF, COP, Private Foundations</b>	<b>HK Alliance of Safe and Healthy School, PolyU</b>	<b>HK Professional Counseling Association &amp; others</b>	<b>Breakthrough, Eternal Flame, Boys’ Brigade, Haven of Hope Christian Services etc.</b>	<b>Industrial Evangelistic Fellowship – SWD -- churches</b>
<b>Mentors from private enterprise, public organizations, government department (Hong Kong Police Force), church groups etc.</b>				



## **Difficult issues to be resolved**

### **Individual level issues**

1. Accountability and ethical practice of trained community mentors – Infra-structures of supportive supervision and mediation service needed to respond to potential allegations of sub-standard practice
2. Demands and attrition from unsatisfied parents – Empirically-based mentor-mentee matching programs and the use of written contracts with parents and schools
3. Incentive and development of mentors and supportive supervisors – Highest possible social recognition to be issued by relevant Government Bureau / Department on a regular basis to both successful and committed mentors and supervisors

### **Organization level issues**

1. Affiliation and structural development – Central vs. regional program administration role (Evolving out from health promotion, franchising, and faith-based models)
2. Resource distribution and intellectual property – Pilot scheme in social experimentation vs. longer-term community-wide implementation (Changes in funding criteria)
3. Mixed funding models – public-private ventures (Changes in funding mix from Government-led to private foundation-led models)

## **Deliberation required**

Members of the Task Force on Children and Youth are to discuss the potential of resolving difficult issues raised in this paper.

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