

Closure of Mentoring Programs and Matches

The Reality of Program Closure

Funding for youth mentoring programs is often limited to a finite period of time. Unfortunately, Victorian Youth Mentoring Alliance (VYMA) data shows that 20-30% of Victorian programs will close every year. Many program coordinators will need to manage both the closure of youth mentoring matches and the program more broadly. Programs and their participants benefit from having a controlled, organised and safe process for finishing up.

This guide provides organisations with information about what to consider when closing a program and its matches. Program coordinators must be well supported by management in the implementation of program closure as this is usually a challenging time for them.

Considerations when Closing a Youth Mentoring Program

Who needs to be told?

- Young people
- Mentors
- Parents and guardians
- School staff
- Other workers supporting the young person
- Program partners
- Funders and other supporters

What is the message being given to stakeholders in the program?

- What is the timeline for the communication of program closure?
- What specific information needs to be given to each audience?
- Is the message authentic?
- What is the best way to deliver the message? Is a generic letter appropriate?
- Will the young person/ mentor feel rejected? How might this be managed?
- How will mentoring coordinators respond to difficult questions from a range of stakeholders?
- Are mentoring staff aware of the organisation's Grievance Procedure?

Who will benefit from resources developed and lessons learned?

- What did the organisation learn from the program and how will this be used to improve future programs? (ie what worked well in terms of program management, governance, quality control, risk management and communications?)
- What information can be shared with external agencies who may have agreed to support the young people and/or mentors in future?
- How will learnings be shared both internally (for continuous improvement) and externally (to assist other youth mentoring programs)?
- How will program policies, templates and forms be used internally (for future programs) or externally (by the VYMA to ensure a legacy for the program)?

Considerations when Closing Mentoring Matches

Some programs do not have formal closure procedures for mentoring matches. Program staff sometimes allow matches to fizzle out without a formal recognition of an end point or milestone for the relationship.

Best practice guidelines highlight the importance of a formal match closure. It is best to have a clear point at which the match ends rather than letting the relationship drift. The National Youth Mentoring Benchmarks (2007) highlight that “to signal an appropriate end to the formal relationship and for safety, legal and professional reasons, all stakeholders must clearly understand when the relationship ends.” The match closure process also acknowledges the commitment and achievements of the young person and mentor.

What options are available for current matches?

1) Graduating matches into friendship

When a mentoring match has been going for a significant period of time (eg, one year), the coordinator may assess the match for transition using the following checklist:

- The match partners have been catching up regularly for a significant period of time.
- There have been no concerns/issues with the match in the past 6 months.
- The mentor and coordinator agree that mentor support is no longer required.
- The young person feels independent and is linked into adequate support networks.
- The mentor and young person are able to set and maintain boundaries that are appropriate to a friendship and that will keep them both safe.

If the above criteria cannot be met, only because the young person isn't linked into appropriate support services, then the coordinator can assess which services might be most appropriate to refer them to. The match may then be transitioned into a friendship.

The procedure undertaken when a match becomes a friendship is as follows:

- a) If the above indicators are checked and the mentor, young person and coordinator all agree that the match should become a friendship, arrange a celebration of the mentoring relationship.
- b) At this celebration explore how things will be different, identify any potential safety concerns, and provide referral numbers to both the mentor and young person for 'worst case scenarios' in the future.
- c) Send (or present) a certificate and a graduation letter outlining the indicators and congratulating the match partners on their achievement. The letter should also state that your organisation is no longer responsible for the match.
- d) Send a letter to other relevant parties (eg parents, teachers, case workers) to advise of the match 'graduation' and clearly state that your organisation is no longer responsible for the match.



2) Referring matches to other programs

This option has not been overly successful in the past. There are several reasons for this:

- The relationship that mentors and young people have with coordinators is often very strong and a new coordinator often struggles to provide the same level of support and relationship needed by the match
- external programs often have different training and requirements for their mentors and may not want to take on 'unknown' mentors
- many programs do not have space for new matches in their programs

Organisations should have a clear strategy to overcome these potential issues before attempting to transfer matches to another program or organisation.

3) Retaining newer matches

Research tells us that closing a match within the first three months can be more detrimental to a young person than never having a match at all.

The organisation should find a way to ensure new matches, that expected to be matched for at least a year, can be supported for at least another 6 months. It might be helpful during this period to focus the match on a short term goal that can be achieved before the match is closed at the end of the period.

What options are available for unmatched young people?

An assessment with the young person needs to occur to assess whether they are still interested in mentoring. If this is the case, then a referral can be made to another service (if available). If no other service is available a referral can be made to another support service as appropriate.

What options are available for unmatched mentors?

If the mentor is still interested in being involved in mentoring, they can be referred to another service who may be recruiting mentors.

