

Realising their Potential: A Survey of Young People in Youth Mentoring



October 2011



Victorian Youth Mentoring Alliance

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Thanks also to the dedicated, and often under resourced, program coordinators who encouraged young people's participation.

We would also like to acknowledge the pro bono support given by Survey Matters and the contribution of the Statewide Local Learning and Employment Network in printing the report. In addition we would like to acknowledge the ongoing support of the Office for Youth who continue to lead policy development in youth mentoring across government.



CONTENTS

YOUTH MENTORING IN VICTORIA

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Where is it happening? | 4 |
| Who are we reaching? | 4 |
| How does it work? | 4 |
| Who supports youth mentoring? | 4 |

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | 5 |
|--------------------------|---|

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| METHODOLOGY | 6 |
|--------------------|---|

| | |
|------------|---|
| The Sample | 6 |
|------------|---|

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| RESULTS BY IMPACT AREA | 7 |
|-------------------------------|---|

| | |
|--------------------------|---|
| Confidence & Self Esteem | 7 |
|--------------------------|---|

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| Relationships & Behaviours | 7 |
|----------------------------|---|

| | |
|--|---|
| School / Work Attendance & Achievement | 8 |
|--|---|

| | |
|-----------------|---|
| Future Pathways | 8 |
|-----------------|---|

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| RESULTS BY PROFILE | 9 |
|---------------------------|---|

| | |
|--------|---|
| Gender | 9 |
|--------|---|

| | |
|-----|---|
| Age | 9 |
|-----|---|

| | |
|------------------------|----|
| Length of Relationship | 10 |
|------------------------|----|

| | |
|-------------------|----|
| Meeting Frequency | 10 |
|-------------------|----|

| | |
|--------------|----|
| Program Type | 11 |
|--------------|----|

| | |
|---------------|----|
| Program Style | 11 |
|---------------|----|

| | |
|--------------------------|----|
| FUTURE DIRECTIONS | 12 |
|--------------------------|----|

| | |
|-------------------|----|
| REFERENCES | 13 |
|-------------------|----|

| | |
|-----------------|----|
| APPENDIX | 14 |
|-----------------|----|

| | |
|---|----|
| One – Respondent Youth Mentoring Programs | 14 |
|---|----|

| | |
|-------------------------|----|
| Two – Survey Statements | 14 |
|-------------------------|----|

| | |
|--------------------------|----|
| Three – Written Comments | 15 |
|--------------------------|----|

“My social skills have improved and I have more respect for people in the community. I also know that I have people there for me.”

YOUTH MENTORING IN VICTORIA

Youth mentoring in Victoria is expanding. Each year more not-for-profit organisations and their supporters bring young people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support and encouragement. The following data provides a snapshot of the state of youth mentoring in Victoria.

Where is it happening?

- The number of youth mentoring programs in Victoria has tripled since 2005
- 65% of Australia's youth mentoring programs are based in Victoria
- 47% of Victorian programs operate in Metropolitan Melbourne. There are between 16 and 34 programs in each of the five rural/ regional areas

Who are we reaching?

- 233 programs support 6,500 volunteers to mentor 7,000 young people
- Mentors spend an average of two hours a fortnight with young people – this amounts to over 350,000 hours of volunteer support being provided to young Victorians every year
- The majority of young people being mentored are aged between 16 and 21 years old, however ages range from 7 to 25 years
- Programs support 12 to 100 matches each year, depending on the setting and young people involved

How does it work?

- 60% of youth mentoring occurs in a community setting rather than in a particular institution. 30% of mentoring occurs in schools, sometimes including combinations with community, workplace and e-mentoring settings
- 82% of programs establish one to one relationships between a young person and mentor. This model is often complimented by structured life skills or recreational group activities
- 67% of mentoring matches last for 12 months or more

Who supports youth mentoring?

- 57% of programs receive less than \$50,000 per annum
- 64% of programs receive core funding from the state government. There is also significant investment from the federal government (13%) and philanthropy (7%). The remainder of programs receive core funding through individual donations and churches. Only one VYMA member reports covering core costs with corporate funding
- 90% of funding goes to the salaries of Program Coordinators who ensure mentors are appropriately screened, trained and supported. Mentors are volunteers who receive no payment
- 20-30% of programs close every year due to a lack of funding

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Youth mentoring is a structured and trusting relationship that brings young people together with caring individuals who offer guidance, support and encouragement (National Youth Mentoring Benchmarks, 2007).

In the absence of any significant Australian research into the impacts of youth mentoring, the Victorian Youth Mentoring Alliance (VYMA) engaged Survey Matters to gather data to measure how youth mentoring makes a difference to the lives of young Victorians.

The survey was intended to give a broad indication of the effects of youth mentoring. It was designed to seek out the changes that occur in respect to: confidence and self esteem, school attendance and achievements, negative behaviour, the use of drugs & alcohol and awareness of pathways towards higher education and employment.

Overall, the feedback indicates that young people have gained a number of benefits as a result of having a volunteer mentor in their lives.

“I feel like I can be myself and not like I’m a shadow of someone else. I feel I can turn to my mentor if I need help with stuff I don’t like to talk to Mum or Dad about.”

Key Survey Findings

This report is based on the findings of a survey of 153 young people aged 12 to 25 across a diverse range of 34 youth mentoring programs. Of the young people who participated in the survey, the following percentage ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that because of their relationship with their mentor:

- 93% know where to go for help if they need it
- 90% have a more positive view of their future
- 87% feel more confident
- 81% go to school more often
- 79% have a clearer idea of what they want to do in the future
- 78% are less likely to use drugs or alcohol
- 75% know more about the education/ training/ work options that are available to them

When considering the results by participant or program profile, it was found that:

- Females reported slightly better outcomes than their male peers
- Older young people (21-25 years) found less impact in school related indicators and drug and alcohol use
- Being mentored for a longer period of time often resulted in positive changes in behavioural and attitudinal areas
- Regular meetings with a mentor resulted in better outcomes in improved behaviour, reduction in drug and alcohol use, getting along better with family and being clear about education and training options
- School based programs resulted in improved school attendance, attitude and clarity regarding education and training options
- Community based programs assisted young people in being clearer about their work options and goals for the future
- A combination of one to one and group mentoring generally resulted in better outcomes for young people

METHODOLOGY

This report is based on the findings of a survey that was promoted to 233 Victorian youth mentoring programs, via the VYMA's bi-monthly e-newsletter and email correspondence to program coordinators. Respondents could access online and printable PDF formats of the survey via the VYMA website. Paper surveys were returned to Survey Matters for data processing.

The survey was structured to collect respondent profile information, evaluation data and general comments about perceived impact. Respondents were asked to give statements a rating (strongly disagree, disagree, not sure, agree, strongly agree) based on how much they believed their mentoring relationship had impacted on various aspects of their lives. A 'not applicable' option was also provided to accommodate those respondents who felt the question was not relevant to their circumstances. See Appendix One for a list of these statements.

The survey was conducted between July and September 2011. Young people who completed the survey had the option to opt in to be in the running to win one of two \$50 iTunes vouchers.

Survey Matters was engaged to ensure the anonymity of responses. The findings are reported as per the actual feedback, without any inference as to the effectiveness or otherwise of youth mentoring programs.

This report was written by the VYMA's Executive Officer Sarah Johnson.

"Having a mentor has given me a really good insight into what I want I want to achieve in life and how to go about achieving it."

The Sample

A total of 153 young people, representing 34 separate youth mentoring programs, completed the survey. See Appendix Two for a list of these programs.

Fifty-one percent were female and 49% were male. The largest number of respondents were aged 15-17 (43.9%), with most of the remainder aged 12-14 (25%) and 18-20 (21%). The smallest percentage of respondents was aged 21-25 (9.6%).

There was a good spread of relationship length amongst the sample with 29% matched for 1-3 months, 24% for 4-6 months, 14% for 7-12 months, 23% for 1-2 years and 10% for over 2 years.

A significant percentage (47.1%) of respondents met with their mentor every week with 37% meeting every two weeks. Some met once a month (8.9%) and the remainder (6.4%) selected 'Other', which tended to mean infrequent and/or non-scheduled meetings.

Respondents came from a range of program types with 52% from community based programs, 42% from school based programs and 6% from work/site based programs.

Program styles ranged from one to one and group (31%), to one to one only (65%) and group only (4%). Further description of program types and styles can be found in the 'Results by Profile' section of the report.

RESULTS BY IMPACT AREA

To analyse the results, the survey questions have been broken down into four broad dimensions that youth mentoring programs often aim to impact: Confidence & Self Esteem, Relationships & Behaviour, School Attendance & Achievement and Future Pathways.

Results in this section are presented via the percentage of young people who 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with each statement.

Confidence & Self Esteem

Anecdotal evidence in Victoria shows an increase in the self esteem and confidence of young people involved in youth mentoring. International research supports this observation with a number of studies in the US finding improvement in young people's perceptions of their self-worth (Tierney et al., 2000) and in positive social attitudes to school, others (families and friends) and the future (LoScuito et al., 1996).

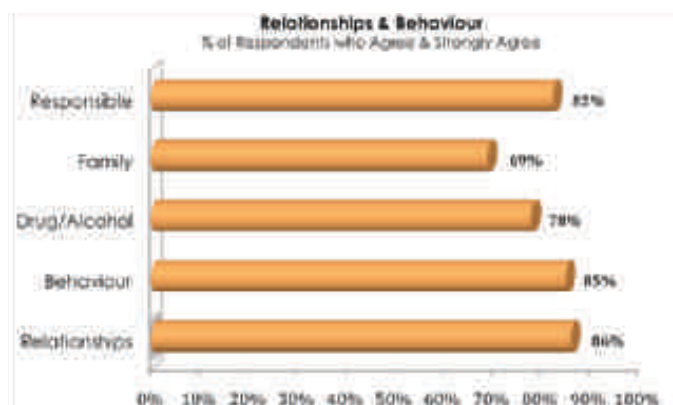
Not surprisingly, these were amongst the highest rating statements within the survey. Ninety-three percent of young people 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that, because of having a mentor in their lives, they now knew where to go for help if they need it. Ninety percent felt more positive about their future and 87% felt more confident or better about themselves.



Relationships & Behaviours

There are a number of studies that explore the impact of youth mentoring on negative behaviours. These have included a reduction in early involvement in sexual behaviour and pregnancies (Beier et al. 2000), a reduction in antisocial, criminal and gang behaviour (Grossman & Garry, 1997; Aseltine et al., 2000; Becker, 1994) and the prevention or reduction of substance abuse (Centre for Substance Abuse Program, 1996; Beier et al., 2000).

There was some variance in responses about relationships and behaviour in this survey. Eighty-six percent of young people identified that they got along better with people, 85% felt their behaviour has improved and 82% identified they were more responsible. Ratings regarding being less likely to use drugs and alcohol (78%) and getting along better with family members (69%) were somewhat lower.



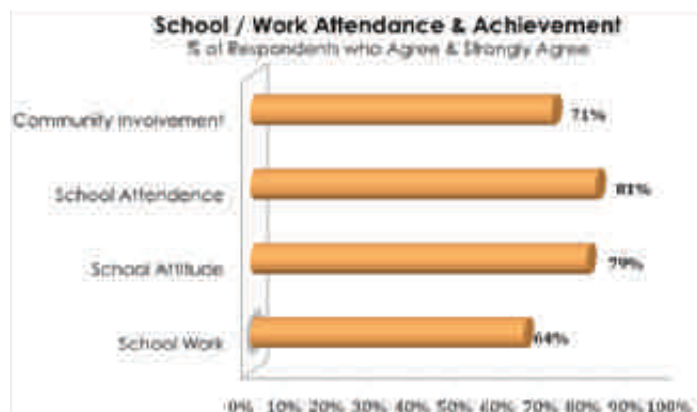
“My mentor has made me feel more confident and helped me think about the future.”

School / Work Attendance & Achievement

Youth mentoring has been linked to improvements in school attendance and attitudes. Tierney et al (2000) found a reduction in truancy, while LoScuito et al (1996) and Aseltine et al (2000) found improvements in attitudes to school.

Respondents to the survey identified that they attended school more often (81%) with 79% feeling their attitude to school or work was better. Attendance and attitude did not necessarily result in doing better with school work (64%). Considering the focus of youth mentoring programs is not usually on improving grades, but on keeping young people engaged in school, this lower rating is not a surprise.

Only 71% of young people identified they were more involved in community or social activities. As youth mentoring is, in the first instance, about building a relationship between the young person and mentor, it would not be expected that broader community involvement would be high, especially for programs based at a work place.



Future Pathways

While we know that youth mentoring has been linked to improvements in school completion rates and chances of moving into higher education (Zimmerman et al, 2004), future pathways statements were rated slightly lower when compared to other areas in this survey.

Seventy-nine percent of young people identified they were clearer about what they wanted to do in the future, 75% knew more about further education or training options and 74% knew more about the employment options that were available to them.

It should be noted that not all respondents came from programs where raising awareness about education and employment was the focus. It is therefore understandable that these statements received comparatively lower ratings.



"I have a greater insight into a better future for myself. I feel more confident about going into uni or work."

RESULTS BY PROFILE

The survey results have been analysed by respondent profile (gender, age, length of mentoring relationships and frequency of meeting) and program profile (type and style). Results in this section are presented by charts representing mean scores for each statement.

Gender

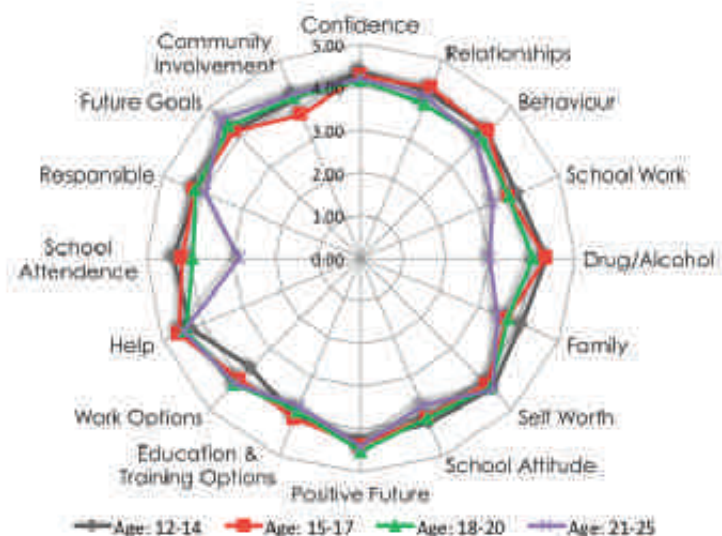
When considering gender differences in the survey responses, there was not a great deal of variance between males and females. Females indicated that having a mentor had a slightly greater impact on their school attendance and on having a clearer idea about what they want to do in the future.



Age

Age played a significant role in variance across a range of indicators. Not surprisingly respondents aged 21-25 years rated their school work, attendance and attitude lower as many could be assumed to be no longer involved in school. In addition it could be that their lower rating for being less likely to use drugs and alcohol is a result of having legal exposure to alcohol.

Another interesting variance is that 15-17 year olds indicated they were not more involved in community or social activities when compared to their peers.

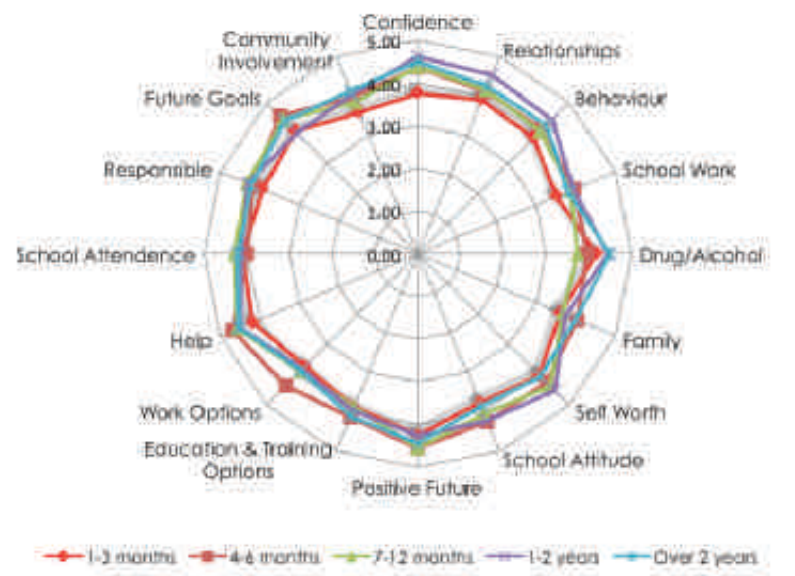


"I have the confidence to talk to other people about how I'm feeling."

Length of Relationship

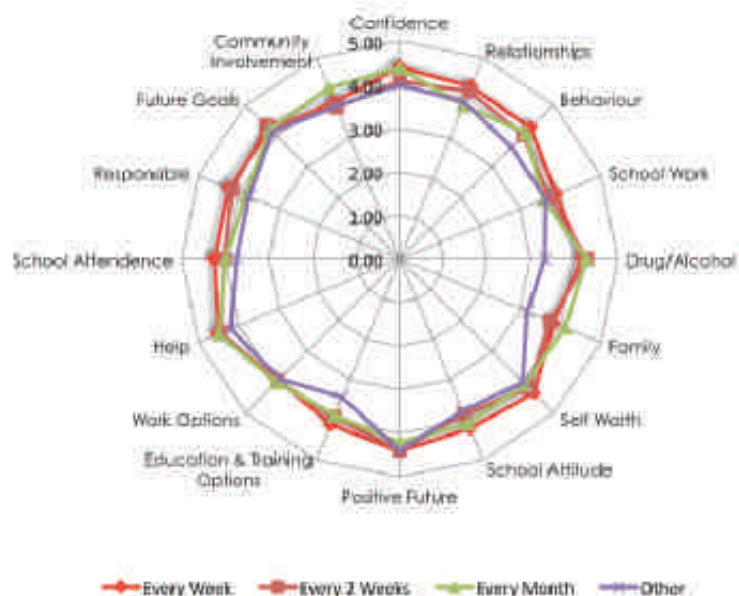
The length of the relationship at the time the survey was completed demonstrated that, in the first 1-3 months of a match, impacts were often lower than more established matches. Interestingly, respondents who were involved in relationships of 3-6 months were most likely to know where to go for help and be clearer about work, education and training options and their future goals. This result is most likely due to a number of respondents being from shorter term, education and employment focused programs.

Relationships that lasted for more than one year had the strongest impact in almost every other area. This demonstrates that it takes time to establish relationships that can make real changes in behavioural and attitudinal areas such as self confidence, behaviour and relationships.



Meeting Frequency

The frequency of the young person meeting with their mentor was found to alter the impact in some areas. Respondents who met with their mentor once a week reported slightly better outcomes in most areas. Most significantly, those respondents who did not see their mentor on a regular basis had more varied outcomes. They rated lower with regard to improved behaviour, reduction in drug and alcohol use, getting along better with family and being clear about education and training options.



“Before meeting my mentor I knew nothing about my culture and I didn’t have much respect. My mentor has given me the opportunity to be proud of my culture.”

Program Type

Youth mentoring occurs in a range of settings across Victoria. Whilst there are programs that operate in universities, youth justice centres and even online via e-mentoring, survey respondents came from programs in the following settings:

- **Community Based Mentoring:** is usually one to one mentoring where the mentor shows the young person different social experiences within their local community.
- **School Based Mentoring:** takes place at the young person's school either during school hours or immediately after. These programs often target students at risk of leaving school early.
- **Workplace/Site Based Mentoring:** usually takes place in the mentor's workplace and includes activities such as job shadowing and career exploration.

(Adapted from Australian Youth Mentoring Network, 2011)

As there were insufficient responses from young people involved in Work/ Site Based programs to provide valid data, the chart does not include data for this program type.

There are a number of areas of variance across community based and school based programs. Not surprisingly, school based programs were found to have a greater impact in areas of school attendance and attitude as well as clarity regarding education and training options. In addition young people reported better behaviour and a reduction in drug and alcohol use. On the other hand, community based programs had better outcomes in relation to clarity about work options and goals for the future.



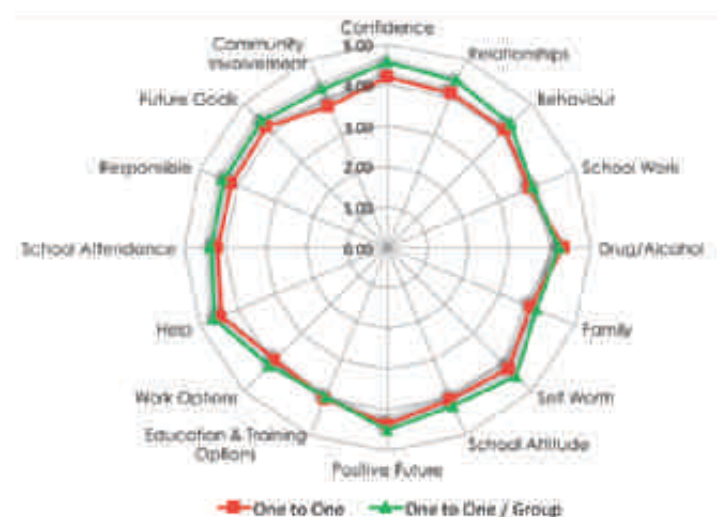
Program Style

Youth mentoring is conducted in a range of different styles. Survey respondents were involved in programs that operated in the following ways:

- **One to one:** One mentor supports one young person
- **One to one/ Group:** One mentor supports one young person with occasional group activities with other matches
- **Group:** One mentor supports up to four young people

Once again, due to the small sample size for group mentoring, the chart does not include these results.

Analysis of the survey statements against program style demonstrates that, in most instances, a combination of one to one and group mentoring results in better outcomes for young people. Respondents involved in programs with only one to one mentoring had better impacts with regard to clarity of education and training options. They had similar scores to one to one and group for knowing where to get help, getting along better with family and others and having a positive view of their future.



FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Whilst this survey has provided data that is useful in understanding how young people feel as a result of their relationship with a volunteer mentor, it does not replace the need for further long term research into the impacts that mentoring has both on young people and the wider community.

The Victorian Youth Mentoring Alliance sees great potential for future research into the impact of youth mentoring. A statewide evaluation of a full range of programs would not only provide more rigorous data about the ways in which youth mentoring influences young people, but could also assist in program and policy planning by offering a picture regarding the impact of particular styles, types and focus areas of youth mentoring.

“I feel much more positive about every aspect of my life since having my mentor. I wish to continue meeting with her even after the program has finished.”



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"I think mentoring is a great idea for the community. I am very proud to be part of it."

APPENDIX

One - Respondent Youth Mentoring Programs

- AIME Mentoring Melbourne, AIME Indigenous Corporation
- Asista Mentoring and Friendship Program, YWCA
- Ballarat Group Training
- Big Brothers Big Sisters of Melbourne
- Bonnie Doon Rural Mentor Program, Bonnie Doon Community Group
- Community Integration Program
- Connect9 - Benalla Community Mentoring, Tomorrow Today Foundation
- FReeZACentral, The Push
- Gunditjmara Mentoring Program, Gunditjmara Aboriginal Cooperative/ Brophy Family & Youth Service
- Inner Northern Young Women's Leadership Program, Inner Northern INLEN
- Jindi Woraback, Shire of Yarra Ranges Youth Services
- Kildonan Youth Mentoring Program, Kildonan Uniting Care
- L2P Leaner Driver Mentor Program, Berry Street
- L2P Leaner Driver Mentor Program, Eastern
- L2P Leaner Driver Mentor Program, Hume Whittlesea LLEN
- L2P Leaner Driver Mentor Program, Inner Northern LLEN
- LARF, The Salvation Army Karinya
- Leaving Care Mentoring - Gippsland, Whitelion
- Leaving Care North West Metro, Whitelion
- LenZone, Central Grampians LLEN
- Macpherson Smith Rural Foundation Mentoring Program
- Making the Links Mentoring Project, Strathbogie Shire Council
- MATES, Wimmera Southern Mallee LLEN
- Melton Shire Youth Mentoring Project, Melton Shire Council
- RAMP Mentoring, Whitelion
- Right Click Records, Lead On Ballarat
- Standing Tall - In School Mentoring Program, Baimbridge College
- Student to Student Telephone Mentoring, The Smith Family
- Toyota Mentoring Program, Youth Now
- Volunteers in Schools Program, Young Life Australia
- Wodonga Leadership and Mentoring program, City of Wodonga
- YMCA School Based Mentoring – Bass Coast, YMCA
- Youth Mentoring Assisted Pathways, Maribyrnong Moonee Valley LLEN

Two - Survey Statements

Because of my relationship with my mentor:

- I am more confident
- I get along better with other people
- My behaviour is better
- I am doing better with my school work
- I am less likely to use drugs or alcohol
- I get along better with my family
- I feel better about myself
- My attitude towards school or work is better
- I have a more positive view about my future
- I know more about further education or training options that are available to me after I finish school
- I know more about the employment options available to me
- I know where to go for help if I need it
- I go to school more often
- I am more responsible
- I have a clearer idea about what I want to do in the future
- I am more involved in community or social activities (eg sports, music, dance etc)

Three – Written Comments

How has your life changed as a result of having a mentor?

Note: These are verbatim quotations from a selection of young people who responded to this question. Only minimal punctuation has been added and typographical errors corrected to aid legibility.

I'll be able to get a much better job because I'm able to drive and get to and from work places. Also my mentor is a really nice guy and we have a good chat while driving.

My mentor has made me feel more confident and helped me think about the future.

I have someone in my life who really focuses just on me and who listens to what I need and helps me find stuff that is available in my community.

I feel like I can be myself and not like I'm a shadow of someone else. I feel I can turn to my mentor if I need help with stuff I don't like to talk to mum or dad about.

Since the mentor program started my life is starting to make more sense about what I want, and not to stress about the little things.

My life has changed as now I have somebody who I can talk to and lead me in a positive path in life.

I feel more comfortable around people and I have more confidence in myself.

I can trust again.

I now have my license and I can keep safe, go to school, see family, take my daughter places and start work. I can finally have a life now.

Being able to get help, support and friendship from a mentor has made a big impact on me. My mentor inspires me to do anything and to be the best at what I do.

I have been feeling safer and am feeling better about myself.

I feel like I've got a much clearer career path. The mentoring program has allowed me to move forward in my career much faster than if I hadn't done the program.

I have more refined career opportunities and have gained a clearer understanding of how to achieve my goals within the industry in which I want to work.

Having a mentor has given me a really good insight into what I want to achieve in life and how to go about achieving it.

It has changed me. I am more confident and I don't use drugs any more.

I have started two Internships within the Industry and am building up a network. I am enjoying work and feel I've taken on more responsibility and direction.

My life has changed as now I have more direction of where I want to go in the future and where I want to be. I have gained more confidence and furthered my networks and industry opportunities for my future career.

I have been given a stronger understanding of my career paths and opportunities in my chosen field. I have been offered interviews and job opportunities as a result of the relationship I have with my mentor.

I have a greater insight into a better future for myself. I feel more confident about going into uni or work.

I behave better and my temper is under control. I don't act like someone I'm not to impress others.

I have the confidence to talk to other people about how I'm feeling.

I have learnt not to yell at teachers.

I'm happier and excited about coming to school.

I get along better with people and am not as shy as before.

I feel more positive.

I'm always looking forward to spending time with my mentor. I love talking with her and exchanging advice with each other.

Before meeting my mentor I knew nothing about my culture and I didn't have much respect. My mentor has given me the opportunity to be proud of my culture and respect it.

My mentor is so lovely and has helped me a lot. She gets me out of the house. It has boosted my confidence. I have someone I can trust and go to for help. My attitude towards life has changed greatly. I try new things.

My social skills have improved and I have more respect for people in the community. I also know that I have people there for me.

I feel more responsible for the things I do. I have matured more and have learnt to respect others and their thoughts.

I think mentoring is a great idea for the community. I am very proud to be part of it.

I feel much more positive about every aspect of my life since having my mentor. I wish to continue meeting with her even after the program has finished.

VICTORIAN YOUTH MENTORING ALLIANCE

The Victorian Youth Mentoring Alliance is the coordinating body for youth mentoring in Victoria. We are an independent, not-for-profit organisation providing leadership and expertise to ensure the growth of quality youth mentoring across the state.

Our vision is for strong, connected Victorian communities where young people have the opportunity to reach their potential through quality mentoring experiences.

Since its establishment in 2005 the Alliance has become accepted as the voice of youth mentoring programs in Victoria. Today, the VYMA provides an effective mix of consultation, professional development, resource development and advocacy.

Get involved

How you can get involved

- Sponsor a VYMA project initiative
- Sponsor an event
- Make a donation
- Become a corporate partner

Support a Program

- Become a mentor
- Partner with a mentoring program
- Sponsor a mentoring program

Youth mentoring providers across Victoria can become a member of the VYMA at www.youthmentoringvic.org.au

Contact details

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