

# MENTORING AND LEISURE-TIME ACTIVITIES

A GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE YOUTH INTERVENTIONS



DANISH CRIME  
PREVENTION COUNCIL

**TrygFonden**

**Mentoring and leisure-time programmes – a guide to effective youth interventions**

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Thank you to all the unnamed young people who agreed to impromptu photo shoots at various train stations, sports grounds, parks and other locations.

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# Foreword

Mentoring and leisure-time programmes are already implemented in various forms in many countries. When carefully executed, these interventions offer many effective tools for supporting young people at risk of offending.

Only a few evaluations on the impact of such programmes exist in Denmark, but if we look abroad, we find mentoring and leisure-time programmes that are well-documented and show promising results.

In this guide, we have compiled a number of recommendations for decision-makers and professionals who work with children and young people in vulnerable situations. The recommendations are based on systematically collected information about the direct or indirect impact of mentoring and leisure-time activities on de-

linquent behaviour and crime, including youth group crime.

The solid body of knowledge about the impact of mentoring and leisure-time programmes derives chiefly from international studies focusing primarily on young people aged 12 to 17 who are vulnerable to one or more risk factors. We consulted Danish professionals, researchers, associations and institutions about their experience and knowledge in order to put the international research into various, specific actor perspectives.

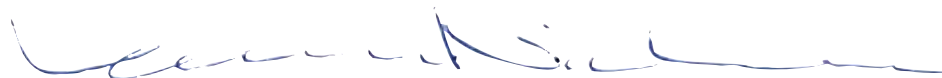
This guide is intended to qualify and provide guidance about the effect of mentoring and leisure-time interventions on both general and group-related delinquency and crime. The guide shows how local initiatives can be launched and the efforts required, also

when the aim is to strengthen an existing programme involving volunteer mentors, support workers, recreational pursuits or club activities.

The examination of mentoring and leisure-time programmes and the recommendations in this guide was prepared in collaboration with TrygFonden. Over the next few years, we will jointly focus on various programmes that can help prevent youth crime and get at-risk youth back on the right track.

The systematic review and summaries of the studies and programmes that form the basis for this guide can be read in *The Effectiveness of Mentoring and Leisure-Time Activities for Youth at Risk. A Systematic Review* (Danish Crime Prevention Council, 2012). <http://www.dkr.dk/mentoring-and-leisure-time-activities-youth-risk>

Yours sincerely



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Director of Secretariat  
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DANISH CRIME  
PREVENTION COUNCIL

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# Introduction

Many children and young people grow up without a stable base or support in a society that puts high demands on them as individuals from an early age. Lack of networks and resources, family conflicts, frequent moves, abuse, and difficulties with schoolwork are among the problems that can derail young people.

A mentoring or leisure-time initiative in the local community can strengthen young people's personal and social development. However, this requires programmes that are well planned and executed. Such programmes can increase young people's resilience and positively impact various factors at school, among friends, in the local community, at home and in the youth themselves.

Leisure-time programmes can offer youngsters an opportunity to socialise with their friends as well as a safe place to be, attentive adults and activities that enhance their skills. A mentor can be a stable, long-term, personal support and role model who listens confidentially and guides the young person according to his or her wishes and needs. The mentor can be a paid support worker or a volunteer.

If a young person takes part in a leisure-time activity and also has a mentor, the two elements can go hand in hand. This means that the young person gets various kinds of support from different sources in a range of social contexts. However, the various programme elements must be coordinated.

Holistic, combined interventions have the advantage that they can impact several aspects of a young person's life – friends, family, school, leisure time and local community. An intervention that reaches more broadly and deeply into

a young person's life over a longer period of time has a greater chance of success.

## Youth in groups

Friends are important for young people. Young people naturally take their cues from each other and often meet in groups. The incentives may be shared interests, friendships, backgrounds or experiences. Sometimes their get-togethers may turn into activities aimed at breaking norms, causing trouble or committing crime. In these cases, individual youngsters may be negatively affected by the other group members and get pulled into a downward spiral.

If both group and individual approaches are used to help a young person, as is the case with combined mentoring and leisure-time interventions, the group's social dynamics can be put to constructive use. Watching how a young person interacts with his peers lets us discover special sides of his personality, and we can use specific incidents in the group to create time for reflection, new points of view and new roles. There are many possibilities of change, and no two youth groups are the same to work with. Professionalism is crucial and continuous assessment is needed to decide whether the intervention is benefiting anyone.

## Effects

The three types of interventions – mentoring, leisure-time and combined – concern more than keeping young people occupied or giving them good experiences here and now. Overall, research has proved that the interventions can positively impact youth:

- Behaviour
- Mental health

- Schooling
- Relationships with friends and family
- Attitude
- Substance use
- Crime.

Solid mentoring studies can document all the above effects. However, well-documented effects of leisure-time activities come primarily in the form of improved youth behaviour and mental health, including self-esteem. Solid studies of combined programmes show they have effects in all the above areas, with the exception of attitude.

Mentoring and leisure-time activities are promising preventive methods for young people who for various reasons are deemed at risk of offending. The programmes should be adapted to youth needs, and research shows that the effect varies depending on how the programme is implemented, for whom and for how long. The guide outlines the key characteristics of effective programmes and what to avoid.

## Local challenges

Although a number of general recommendations regarding mentoring and leisure-time interventions are available to guide us, such programmes must also be assessed in light of local conditions. The scope and nature of crime-related challenges can vary significantly from place to place as well as change over time.

Assess the need in your area before initiating any activities. You will create the best basis for your work by first analysing the exact nature of the problem. At the end of this guide we offer ideas for tackling this challenge and questions which you can ask to identify local needs and solutions.





*'Remember that crime is a symptom of something else.'*

*Daniel Frank,  
SSP, Odense*

*'Vulnerable youth and their families have a history. The earlier we see them, the better.'*

*Kristoffer Rønde Møller,  
BL - Federation of Social Housing  
Organisations in Denmark*

A mentoring programme can generate positive changes for young people in vulnerable situations and make a positive impact on a range of factors.

## Mentoring programmes

The emotional support and relationship of trust between mentor and mentee are believed to be the mechanisms that make an impact and strengthen a young person's psycho-social development. This relationship can help a young person to build other trusting relationships and improve his or her self-perception.

A mentor can be a role model who helps a youngster to handle pressure, get involved in socially acceptable activities,

reflect on the consequences of his or her actions and look positively at a future filled with hopes and ambitions. A mentor's supervision and guidance can also provide a protective factor in the young person's life and help enhance his or her skills.

### Youth aged 11–14

Young people who benefit most from having a mentor are generally only aged between 11 and 14.

They are at less risk of committing offences and at a stage in their lives where they may start to feel socially excluded. Such youth typically live in urban areas with special socio-economic problems.

*'The relationship is always the foundation of any youth-targeted initiative.'*

*Heidi Alstrup,  
youth counselling service, Århus*

### Examples

#### **Big Brothers Big Sisters**

*An intensive mentoring programme from the USA involving volunteer mentors.*

The participants are children and youth from low-income, single-provider families that often have a history of substance abuse and domestic violence. In just one year, the programme showed it could reduce the likelihood of participants starting to take drugs, drink alcohol, play truant from school or commit violence.

An improvement was also seen in their academic perfor-

mance and attitude to homework. The youngsters' relationships with peers and their own parents also improved, as did their perception of their own academic skills and others' social acceptance of them.

#### **Den Korte Snor (The Tight Leash)**

*An intensive programme from Copenhagen using professional contact workers.*

The participants are 10–17-year-olds with massive social and personal problems. Many have been involved in delinquent behaviour or violence against the person. In

addition to family interviews and network meetings with schools and afterschool activities, the programme primarily consists of 15 weekly hours of relationship building.

An evaluation showed better school attendance and participation in organised leisure activities among participants. Criminal reports and charges fell by two-thirds on average, and the conflict level in the most conflict-ridden families dropped slightly. After the programme, the youth's friendships tended to be slightly more pro-social, and more youngsters focused on positive targets.

## Key practices

Mentoring programmes stand the best chance of success when:

- They are tailored to local conditions and youth needs
- They entail emotional support and a long-term relationship of trust
- The young mentee is motivated to take part
- Professional staff screen and match mentors and mentees
- The match accommodates the wishes of the young person, parents and mentor
- The young person and the mentor share the same interests
- All those involved have clearly defined expectations for the programme from the outset – including its aims and duration
- They last at least one year with weekly contact
- Professional staff train the mentors, offer support and supervision, and continuously monitor the match
- The mentor has no preconceived or specific change in mind on the young person's behalf
- The volunteer mentor does not represent an official institution.



*'Attentiveness, trust and determination are important programme parameters. You mustn't make any promises you can't keep.'*

**Torben Bertelsen,  
SSP, Varde**

## Try to avoid ...

While some conditions can have an especially positive impact on a mentoring programme, so can others be particularly detrimental. Longterm mentoring relationships are required to create the conditions needed for youth development. Conversely, a prematurely ended relationship can be harmful.

### A prematurely discontinued mentoring relationship can make a young person feel betrayed

It has been shown that relationships that end within six months can increase young people's alcohol consumption and those shorter than three months can diminish their self-esteem.

Adopting the practices mentioned in this chapter can counter this risk. The next step is to consider alternative interventions for specially vulnerable youth, as their needs require extra attention. In particular, avoid assigning untrained, unprofessional persons to be their mentors.

You should also gain the parents' support for the programme and ensure that the young person has sufficient resources and social skills to be part of a mentoring relationship.

Other mentee and mentor characteristics appear to influence the all-important duration of the relationship. It has been shown that matches with 13–16-year-olds break down more often than matches with 10–12-year-olds. This indicates that this type of intervention best benefits younger youth.

Volunteer mentors aged over 25 also seem to be more stable than 18–24 year-old mentors, whose own lives are often undergoing many changes.

The close personal bond formed between mentor and mentee – a key impact criterion – can also become a challenge in itself:

### Without supervision, mentors may burn out

A mentor can easily become burned out by the turbulence in his mentee's life, for which the mentor must not feel personally responsible.

The mentor-mentee relationship is person-dependent, which can make the initiative fragile. The mentor may fall ill or move, or the match may simply be doomed from the start. A new match must then be made, for which reason several mentors must be on standby.

*'Getting a youngster and his parents to see the need for a mentor can be a challenge – what can a mentor do that a parent can't?'*

*Christian Østergård,  
South and Southern  
Jutland Police*

### A relationship that ends abruptly will disappoint young people

Young mentees are often deeply disappointed when their mentoring relationship ends – especially if it ends abruptly.

A clear timeframe for the programme, a gradual reduction in interaction, a ritual ending and a possible follow-up session can ease the transition and make it more acceptable. Many local authority mentors in Denmark often allow the young mentee to phone them if they need to. In this way, the relationship can continue informally at a lower intensity. Volunteer mentors frequently continue the relationship after the agreed first year.

*'Volunteer mentors should not be allocated to the most hardcore youth. Prepare professionals better and meet the young people not as equals but as equally worthy.'*

*René de Claville Juhler,  
youth counselling service, Århus*

## Implementation experience

Knowing the practical experience gained from other mentoring programmes can be useful if you are to be personally involved in a mentoring programme. The following examples are intended as a checklist before starting such a programme. It lists both pitfalls and proposed solutions to be aware of.

### Initial challenges

- Professionals may be sceptical about volunteers' potential and whether a new programme will create a heavier workload
- Embedding the mentoring programme in existing local bodies whose staff train and supervise the new mentors encourages local co-ownership and support
- Professionals fail to refer enough young people to the mentoring programme despite clear guidelines, or refer youth who do not meet the criteria
- Limited time and resources reduce the number of volunteer mentors admitted and trained, so fewer youth benefit from the programme
- The time gap between training mentors and matching them with mentees can be too great: they may forget their training, become demotivated or have less spare time
- Letting a young person wait a long time for a mentor can be undesirable
- It can be difficult to find enough volunteer mentors – particularly male mentors. The need for mentors is greatest amongst

### Facts

Matches with the most vulnerable youth are most likely to break down. Young people who have been subjected to physical, psychological or sexual abuse are also those who will be most negatively affected by a prematurely ended mentoring relationship.

boys, and a male mentor can better influence boys who are most crime-prone

- Recruiting, assessing and matching youth and volunteers is time-consuming
- Staff can feel pressured to create a match even if the perfect volunteer is not available, making the match dependent on convenience rather than on the common interests of mentor and mentee.

### Being a mentor feels easy when:

- Mentor and mentee have a common background, common interests and activities and have fun together
- The mentee is enthusiastic and willing
- The mentor can relax and be himself
- Volunteer mentors gain a privileged role in the young person's life because they are not employed staff and have taken on the job with no desire for financial compensation
- Volunteer mentors are not restricted by a system framework, but can negotiate their own support systems with young people with whom they have a common understanding
- Both volunteer mentors and mentees participate in the programme in their free time and, as such, have the same interest in how the programme is adapted and negotiated to suit their needs
- Mentor and mentee maintain a dialogue
- Mentors can listen, be patient and be tenacious.

*'Remember to guide. Young people can provide many answers themselves. Help them to help themselves. Have a solution-oriented outlook on people and invite yourself into their way of seeing the world.'*

*Daniel Frank, SSP, Odense*

### But the process can get tough when:

- The young person fails to initiate contact or suggest activities or seems totally uninterested in meeting
- The local neighbourhood offers only a few places to go to
- The location is remote, and long distances mean the mentor needs a car
- The mentor has to stand by and watch the youth's problems and difficulties without being able to help
- The mentor finds talking about the mentee to staff problematic because he fears that the young person may take this the wrong way
- The mentor worries about being inadequate as a mentor
- The mentor is affected by e.g., the young mentee's being placed outside the home
- The young person inexplicably breaks off the match.

*'Remember, it's the system they're mad at. Take something positive home with you. And it is important to be clear about giving in to anything else.'*

*Henrik Vang Nielsen,  
Social Services, Copenhagen*

#### Facts

Consistent contact between mentor and youth for several hours at a time three to four times a month can be decisive for positive change.

### Volunteer mentors want:

- More training, networking and support
- More opportunities for group activities with other matches and/or mentors
- Better transition processes when matches end
- More teamwork with parents/providers to make the match more efficient.

## Costs

The costs of a mentoring programme vary greatly depending on whether the mentor is a volunteer or a professional. However, only a professional can deal with young people with massive, complex problems dependably – in terms of both the young person and him/herself.

According to American cost-benefit analyses, the voluntary mentoring programme Big Brothers Big Sisters is a paying proposition. Support and supervision allegedly cost approx. 1,000 US\$ per match per year. The money pays for professional staff who recruit, screen and train the volunteers, while also establishing and supervising the matches. The mentor is unpaid and works in his spare time.

Embedding the programme in existing local bodies can also be preferable to setting up a new, separate framework. In other words, local youth workers are involved in training and supervising. This takes time, but it promotes ownership and context.

*'A young person who turns 18 and has smoked marijuana since he was 12 is not ready to cope with life, even though his birth certificate says he can. This is an obvious case for a mentor.'*

*Thomas Gajhede,  
The Joint Council for Children's  
Issues in Denmark*

#### A good idea...

Ongoing training and support for volunteer mentors can help them handle new insight and information about the young person, e.g., if he or she has a family history of substance misuse or incarceration.

Existing leisure-time programmes for special-needs youth can make a greater impact, if they follow certain recommendations.

## Leisure-time activities

There are several explanations for the mechanisms that produce positive effects. Developmental research indicates that opportunities to spend time with a supportive adult and take part in meaningful, challenging activities with peers can enhance a young person's development and skills.

By the same token, the risk of deviant behaviour may increase if young people do not take part in organised le-

isure activities with adult supervision. Efforts could be made to introduce this group to well-organised recreational activities instead.

Some group-oriented programmes are run on the notion that a leisure-time programme – a club, for instance – can offer young people what they would otherwise seek through youth groups that exhibit delinquent behaviour. The club can provide an alternative by offe-

ring challenges, fellowship, supportive adults and a place to belong to.

Finally, a systematic review of the effect of organised leisure-time programmes for children and young people has shown that programmes that spotlight personal and social skills can enhance participants' self-perception, positive social behaviour, school marks and commitment to school while curbing their problem behaviour.

### Examples

#### **Clubs – Gang Prevention Through Targeted Outreach (GPTTO) & Gang Intervention Through Targeted Outreach (GITTO)**

*American club initiatives for young people at risk of getting involved in youth gangs or who are already involved in them.*

The GPTTO preventive initiative is used mainly by 10–12-year-olds, while the GITTO intervention initiative chiefly has 16-year-old users. These youths have grown up in poverty and many are already – or are becoming – involved in gangs. They have problems at school, and many carry weapons, have committed crime, etc.

The clubs organise interest-based activities and offer abuse services, school, job and skills training – as well as tattoo removal. The youth are identified by outreach work and other methods.

Frequent participation in the programmes helps youths to improve their academic performance, strengthen social relationships, make more constructive use of their spare time, lessen their contact with the legal system and reduce criminal behaviour. The likelihood of their stealing and smoking marijuana falls, while the onset of gang-related behaviour, including special clothing, is delayed.

#### **Maryland's After School Community Grant Program**

*A recreational programme from the USA offering leisure activities such as sport, art and handicrafts.*

The recreational activities alternate with homework assistance and sessions in social, emotional and cognitive skills, including the ability to express feelings and solve problems.

Positive friendships help to significantly reduce the criminal behaviour of 11–14 year-old students, and their incentive not to start taking drugs increases. The participants live in areas with high crime rates.

The specific practices and characteristics of effective leisure-time programmes seem to play an important role for the extent and value of their impact.

## Youth aged 10–16

According to research, young people between the ages of 10 and 16, primarily 11–12-year-olds, who are at major or minor risk of offending can benefit from a leisure-time programme that adopts the practices described on this page. The youth investigated typically live in mid-sized towns or cities with higher poverty and crime levels than the rest of society.

Attracting and engaging the relevant youth groups – those who are generally most left to their own devices and thus, perhaps, in greatest need – can be a challenge for leisure-time programmes. Motivating these youth can be more demanding and takes time.

*‘The youth we work with want adults who care, are fun to be with and stick by them in thick and thin ... every day! Hang in there! As they would say ... then you’ll earn their trust and respect. To change their narrative, they need more adults to respect.’*

*Clifford Phillips,  
Buret, youth sports club,  
Copenhagen*

## Key practices

Leisure-time programmes offer the best chances of creating positive changes when they involve:

- Well-qualified, welltrained, attentive, supportive and stable staff
- Structured activities
- Clear, explicit goals
- An adult response to disruptive and antisocial behaviour
- An emphasis on and support for the social and emotional skills of the youth
- Step-by-step learning using active learning methods at focused times and with a clear, well-defined purpose
- Youth who participate actively and frequently
- A duration of at least one year
- Activities geared to the age, lifestyle and daily rhythm of the young people
- Active outreach work to identify the most vulnerable youth
- Collaboration between different stakeholders who can refer youth to the intervention.

### Facts

A study of Copenhagen youth clubs shows that 25% of the young people would like more club rules while 40% wanted more consistent sanctions against the bad behaviour of their friends.

## Try to avoid ...

Although a leisure-time programme can lead to improvement, it can occasionally provoke the opposite of its intended effect.

### Young people can have a negative impact on each other

When a group of youth whose behaviour deviates from accepted social norms are brought together in an intervention, their risk of offending may increase, regardless of whether they already know each other. Already knowing each other may reinforce their group affiliation and gang-related behaviour.

Programmes offered by drop-in centres and clubs have occasionally proved to be an unfortunate line of approach if not staffed by competent, attentive personnel.

### The older, the more difficult

The outcome can also vary depending on the characteristics of the target group. For example, the GITTO initiative had positive effects for the club’s 10–13-year-old participants. The programme seeks to get young people to leave existing delinquent youth groups. They take fewer drugs, generally exhibit less criminal behaviour, appreciate school more and do more homework, and their family relationships improve. On the other hand, there are no measurable effects of participation for the slightly older group of 14–18-year-olds.

The related, but preventive, club initiative, GPTTO, has a positive impact on the school grades of 13–15-year-olds. However, youth aged 16–18 show an increase, over the year, in their association with negative peers, despite being more self-confident at school. In this respect, the initiatives provide inadequate benefit for older youth. Drop-in centres have occasionally been seen to start as – or develop into – hubs of violent episodes. However, as The Neutral Zone initiative in the USA shows, massive staff presence can stop troublemakers.





*'It's difficult to reach the 14-16-year-olds. They're often so engrossed in their daily lives.'*

*Søren Nørregaard Madsen,  
institutional department,  
Fredericia*



*'A concentration of young people with problems can in itself fuel more problems. However, in high-quality institutions it has been shown that this institutional initiative can bolster children's social, cognitive and emotional development. The bottom line is that you have to analyse what's going on in a project.'*

*Mogens Nygaard Christoffersen, SFI, The Danish National Centre for Social Research*

### Perseverance is a must

The Youth Inclusion Project in England

The leisure-time project actively sought to identify the most vulnerable youth in an area. On average it took nine attempts to make contact with a youth from this target group, but it could take anything from 1 to 30!

## Examples

Here are two examples of what to avoid. In both cases, the programmes had to change their strategy:

### Gang Intervention Through Targeted Outreach (GITTO)

*Out of control*

The club programme, which tries to get youth to leave existing delinquent groups, hired former local gang members to recruit participants. Indeed, they were good at persuading young people to join the club, but lack of experience and training meant they were not good at running the programme. The club became a place where substance use and signs of the young people's gang affiliation abounded, e.g., in the young people's clothing. A project coordinator hired to supervise the outreach workers added structure. The club issued strict rules regarding dress code and behaviour to make sure participants 'left their gangs mentality at the door'.

## Implementation experience

Leisure-time programmes have certain distinctive characteristics that you must consider when introducing a new leisure-time initiative or considering reviewing and assuring the quality of an existing one.

### Referring youth

- It is sometimes difficult to get youth to participate, as participation is usually voluntary
- Street-level outreach work can be a key recruitment factor
- Working with the school, social workers, police and others can give tips about which youth with emergent problems could be referred to the club, etc.
- Collaborative relationships take time to build and maintain

- If a collaboration partner replaces some of its staff, the fact that newcomers are untrained can cause problems. Resolve this issue by providing continuous instruction for new employees in youth programmes
- Supportive friends and parents play an important role in getting young people involved
- When accompanied by a key staff member, young people who are already participants are good at recruiting other youth.

### Retaining youth

- Over time, young people often drop out, which is problematic because a positive outcome depends on long-term, frequent participation
- Different age groups need different activities. Sometimes youth fail to turn up if required to do an activity with a younger person
- Activities can be gender-segregated, if considered culturally appropriate
- In cities, different youth gang territories must be taken into consideration. Activities must be offered either in neutral locations or within the gang's own boundaries
- Cancelling activities causes future youth participation to drop
- Establishing links with existing organisations, sports clubs, etc, enables participants to continue attending the programme after it ends
- Involving youth in planning and choosing activities boosts attendance.

*'Youth must be part of a project so they can take some ownership of what we do.'*

*Ronny Frank, volunteer, Gademix dropin centre, Kolding*

### Commuter project in Århus

*Unclear pedagogical goals*

According to the evaluator, the lack of clearly defined pedagogical goals was a problem, with staff focusing their efforts exclusively on the youth relationship, regardless of where it was headed.

15–18-year-old boys got their own club, as the existing one could not capacitate them. The adults made no demands on the youth, going along with the boys' talk instead, despite its vulgarity. The teaching staff decided to adopt a more formal approach.

The youth seemed more interested in learning something than in taking part in action-packed activities. They appreciated the change and now ask for stricter rules for their behaviour, both within and outside the project. They do not want to 'just come and go as they please'.

## Difficult programme start

### Positive Activities for Young People

#### *Basic start-up problems*

PAYP is a large-scale programme in England and Wales that offers a range of activities for youth at risk of social exclusion, offending or becoming the victim of crime. These young people live a chaotic lifestyle involving e.g., drug or alcohol use.

PAYP aims to reinforce their personal and social skills through such activities as sport, art, bowling, go-carting, dancing, climbing, anger management and much more.

The programme start-up had insufficient time and difficulties recruiting staff, finding appropriate activities and identifying its target group.

The PAYP programme is implemented, however, and the young people say that it helps them feel better about themselves, improves their relationships with adults and gives them a chance to acquire new friends and skills.

## Costs

The cost level varies greatly, because the leisure-time programmes cover such a wide variety of activities, based on a wide range of premises. Several elements are often combined, particularly in the American after-school programmes, ASPs. Structured educational elements are added in combination with recreational activities such as sport, games, and films.

According to its evaluation, the wide-reaching English and Welsh leisure programme that focuses on inclusion, The Youth Inclusion Programme, is financially viable. It is estimated that the programme has returned 2.5 times the investment made, when the drop in number of crimes during the programme's existence is taken into account. The programme costs about £1,641 per youth over a three-year period.

Club programmes like the American The Neutral Zone, which is open during the evening, is cost-effective according to the authors of the study. This is possible because the club borrows school premises, receives donations of food and activity materials, and is run by volunteers. In terms of effect, the programme curbs crime, but only during the club's opening hours, and the results are uncertain. However, other after-school programmes such as the Enhanced after-school program, are expensive and have a weaker effect than expected.

Some leisure-time studies indicate, though, that early preventive programmes for youth at high risk, such as GPTTO and GITTO, pay off in the long term.

They are far less expensive than the costs of dealing with the problems in court.



Having a mentor while joining in organised activities and spending time with other young people and adults can have a positive impact.

## Combined interventions

A combined programme offers opportunities to influence several areas of a young person's life – both one-on-one with a mentor and in a forum that enables the young person to relate to peers. The combination creates new options and challenges.

The active mechanisms underlying combined mentoring and leisure-time programmes will be explained in the same way as for mentoring programmes and leisure-time programmes. Young people's development is streng-

thened, supported and enhanced by a supportive adult, with whom they form trusting, personal bonds. The adult can also act as a role model with which the youngster can identify. Leisure activities enhance the young people's skills, while also cancelling out the young person's other options for associating with delinquent friends.

### Youth aged 11–14

Youth aged 11–14 are the group shown to derive particular benefit from combi-

ned interventions and are defined merely as being 'at risk'. They are assessed to be at risk primarily because they live in city districts with a low socioeconomic status. Some are identified because they are not thriving at school, have academic difficulties, play truant or display particular behavioural or emotional characteristics. Consider what typifies these youth and how best to support their psycho-social development.

### Example

#### The South Baltimore Youth Center

Youth take part in positive social activities and play a role in determining them. They have to plan and carry out all activities. The centre is informally organised and located in an American city with high poverty and unemployment rates.

The centre offers pool, TV and computer facilities and is open during daytime hours after school, at the weekend

and during school holidays. The staff see their role as a support for whatever the young people want to do – whether at the centre or in their personal lives. The centre also provides staff or student volunteers as mentors, and the young people are further taught academic skills. Outreach workers on the street recruit youth to the centre, and youth are also referred by schools and others.

The centre is founded on the notions of trust and empowerment.

The staff substitute for the adults absent from the young people's lives, thus strengthening their socialisation.

The intervention affects high-risk behaviour and seems to reduce substance use, crime and violence.

The centre's rules:

1. If something needs doing, do it
2. No drugs
3. No fighting
4. No shoes on the furniture
5. The youth must make sure the rules are followed.

## Key practices

The characteristics of the mentoring and leisure-time programmes that have shown to generate the greatest improvements are:

- Weekly contact and at least one year's duration
- The programme develops in line with the young person's needs
- Offering a safe and positive social environment
- Activities that appeal to youth – through variety, challenges and surprises
- Activities that promote social, emotional and cognitive skills
- Committed and competent adults who are there for the young people
- Adults who can be appropriate role models
- Involvement of the young people's parents
- Positive development is a clear goal of the relationship and the activities
- Help with school and homework as needed.

In a combined mentoring and leisure-time programme, staff can influence young people one-on-one and in their interaction with other youth as well as observe them in different contexts.

A well-coordinated programme can create new avenues of understanding and reach more spheres of a young person's life, thus potentially promoting more fundamental change than if only one sphere were addressed.

The previous chapters describing mentoring and leisure-time programmes, respectively, outline approaches that can also be used in combined programmes. The particularly effective practices have many identical and recurring characteristics.

*A sense of failure can cause young people to underestimate their potential. Focus on the social relationships that underpin their self-esteem.'*

*Mogens Nygaard Christoffersen, SFI, The Danish National Centre for Social Research*

*'We have a homework club to help young people along and to tell them that school isn't a taboo.'*

*Ronny Frank, volunteer, Gademix drop-in centre, Kolding*

### Youth or adult mentors

A study of volunteer mentors shows that young high school mentors focus more strongly on their mentees' social relationships with other young people and more frequently involve them in decisions. Conversely, adult mentors put more focus on academic activities. They help foster a far higher number of greater improvements than the young high school students, including stronger pro-social behaviour, less truancy and better academic performance.

## Try to avoid...

Many of the challenges of mentoring and leisure-time programmes repeat themselves – separately and in combination.

The close personal bonds with the mentor can become so demanding that mentors – volunteer and professional alike – risk burning out and giving up. However, the greater the challenges facing a young person, the greater the importance of having a professional mentor.

### Lack of supervision can lead mentors to drop out

On the other hand, a mentor who is constantly supervised can work

through his concerns and frustrations. A mentor's availability should follow clear guidelines, which brings up the question of the mentor's private life and overtime rules. And has anyone considered ensuring the mentor's continued commitment?

*'A programme must focus on actively retaining the adults – their continued interest is vital. Follow-up is also important! All too often the relationship fizzles out.'*

*Søren Gøtzsche, Leisure and Society*

### Insufficient closure and follow-up on the relationship create disappointment

These are relevant advance issues to address before the end of the mentoring relationship, because strong personal bonds that stop or take on another status create a vacuum.

### Abstract, irrelevant activities do not capture young people's interest

Juvenile life is multifaceted, and young people will drop out of activities that they find meaningless or unrelated to their interests and problems. Recreational activities must reflect an understanding of the young people targeted, and their goal must be to enhance youth well-being and development.

### Impressive activities do not necessarily generate impressive results

Some projects try to reach the 'tough guys', offering extreme activities such as gocarting, paintball, military assault courses and trips into the wild. They are not always appropriate.

Activities may be ill-suited to developing or bringing out skills and may also be disproportionately costly. Excursions or extended trips to remote wilderness areas can typically end up challenging the capabilities of both youth and staff. Physical tests and

sanctions may become too extreme on such excursions, tipping the balance between harsh and benevolent discipline.

**The programme group can affect individuals positively and negatively**

Combined mentoring and leisure-time programmes are characterised by the fact that youth have a personal relationship with a mentor as well as engage in a forum with other young people. But this puts demands on adequate staffing.

Working with an existing group shows respect for the positive aspects of the young people’s relationships. Therefore, the young people are more likely to participate. Staff can work on specific conflicts that occur in the group, and the young people can support each other’s development, thus making collective progress.

*‘Young people prefer the support of other young people. Other youth can have a positive influence.’*

*Benny Wielandt, FUE  
(federation of associations for education and career counsellors)*

Conversely, young people can also drag each other down. However, good group work will often fracture the group, thus enabling the youngsters to be integrated into other group contexts as they gain new perspectives and the desire to change their behaviour.

*‘Synergies arise between young people. They position themselves. Some cast a cloud on the others’ positive attitude. This might require a one-on-one talk with the “alpha male.” There are no easy solutions, but you need to be aware of it.’*

*Leif Jønsson,  
Federation of Youth School Headmasters*



## Implementation experience

You may encounter, or are already familiar with, some of the following pluses and minuses.

You can also find inspiration in the previous sections dealing with mentoring and leisure-time programmes separately. They share characteristics, and some of the experiences below will be relevant for mentoring or leisure-time interventions on an individual basis, too.

### Challenges posed by combined programmes and volunteer use

- It seems harder to implement intensive, more comprehensive programmes, if local staff are unaccustomed to such initiatives
- Finding enough volunteer mentors can be a problem, resulting in waiting lists for young people and a lack of replacements for mentors who e.g., move away
- Finding male volunteers can be slightly harder – volunteers are usually women. Mentor gender may matter less, however, if the mentor is an adult rather than a youth

- Volunteers may have difficulty meeting documentation requirements, eg, recording the time they spend with the young person
- Young mentors cancel mentee meetings more often than adult mentors
- Young mentors who are given special privileges for participating are more likely to end the mentee relationship after the obligatory mentoring period than those who are not rewarded.

### Meetings with other mentor matches can fuel mentor motivation

When young mentors meet other mentor matches, the support they may feel coming from other mentors can prolong their own match.

## Costs

Combined mentoring and leisure-time programmes can be either costly or relatively inexpensive to initiate. Obviously, their design can vary even more than separate mentoring and leisure-time programmes, there being more options

for combining programme elements. The cost therefore varies depending on the choices made.

Some examples of combined programmes and their costs may give a sense of the scope.

Volunteers can add an extra dimension to a programme without making it more expensive. Some fixed-budget programmes have succeeded in taking this approach. Some studies point out that using a volunteer mentor enables an initiative to be launched for a youth group that social workers would otherwise have been unable to reach.

In other instances, volunteer sportspeople act as both basketball coaches and mentors for the young people they coach and play games with.

Finally, some projects originate from the bottom-up, for example, the local initiative Denver's Gang Rescue and Support Project (GRASP) in the USA. GRASP is based on adult volunteers and former gang members who have started a non-profit organisation. Their main need is for local premises.

## Advantages of combined programmes

Using mentoring and leisure-time interventions in tandem can also offer special advantages:

### HardWork, Copenhagen

The evaluation showed that the combination of group and individual relationship work offered more scope for changing young people's behaviour and enhancing their skills. Personal contact was vital to the entire programme. Group work supplemented this relationship, and joint competency-enhancing activities were key to building

the young person's new identity and behaviour.

### 1990s 'Dogsled' project

*Young people will not betray trust*

A mentor worked with a group of five to seven friends in fixed activity groups on the Copenhagen island of Amager.

The 13–18-year-old boys built a close, confidential relationship with their 'bonus pater' mentor and identified with him. They would not betray his trust, and were

therefore ashamed when he confronted them with their criminal behaviour – he was immediately informed of their reported offences.

The confrontation caused a rift between their norms and the new group codex which the 'bonus pater' had helped to set up. The effect on their personal attitudes was so profound that the participants ultimately believed that their changes reflected their own process of maturity.

An intensive mentoring programme in the USA, involving volunteer mentors and ongoing group activities, is estimated to cost about 1,000 US\$ per young mentee because the programme requires professional programme consultants and administrators.

Expensive or wide-reaching programmes are not necessarily more effective. Numerous factors determine a programme's effectiveness, including implementation.

The Quantum Opportunity Program costs about 25,000 US\$ per young person over a five-year period. Despite its countless elements, the programme did not reduce risk behaviours, crime or negative gang-related behaviour. The programme consists of case management combined with a mentoring programme, teaching and tutoring activities, community service activities, developmental activities and practical support.

However, the programme appears to increase participants' use of alcohol and illegal substances, although also helping them to graduate from high school. The caseworker-mentor elements, which had an educational purpose and had been well implemented, explain this positive impact.

Sometimes, excursions and trips can make a combined programme expensive. A trip to Greenland culminated the 1990s' Danish 'Dogsled Project' involving an adult professional mentor and a group of young men. In the evaluator's opinion, the trip's preventive value was questionable.

On the other hand, the programme was believed to have potentially saved costs in that it eliminated the need for 24-hour placements. At the time, such placements cost DKK 35,000 a month compared with the monthly programme cost of DKK 2,000 per participant,

excluding the salary for the mentor ('bonus pater') and materials for their collective activities.

All in all, a host of opportunities exist for compiling a programme that meets youth needs. It is not so much the number of programme components or scale of events that make a positive difference as the practices adopted by the programmes and their understanding of the multifaceted settings in which they have to operate.

*'The programme has to be tailored to the group or young person every time. Location makes a huge difference. It's hard to transfer a method to another place or person.'*

*Kristian Larsen,  
SSP, South Djurs*



# Analyse and assess

## Case-by-case assessment

Assess the local challenges and needs before initiating an intervention. This assessment will increase the likelihood that the solution you choose will fit the situation and have the best possible impact.

There are many models around that pose constructive questions to help you identify local needs and solutions. The models also help you learn from what you do and make adjustments over time.

The model below is inspired by the Beccaria standards developed for European collaborations and designed to ensure the quality of crime prevention projects.

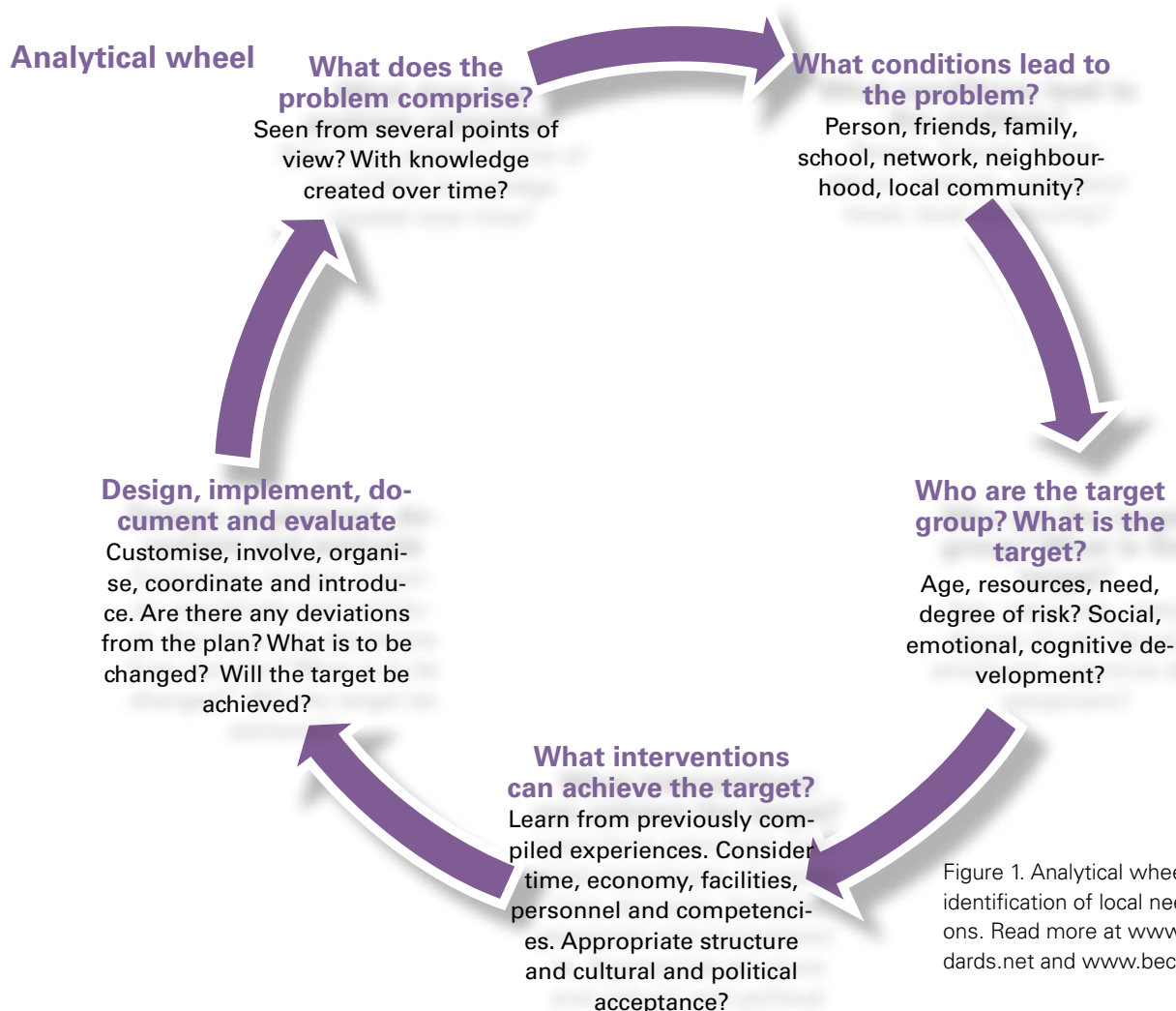


Figure 1. Analytical wheel for ongoing identification of local needs and solutions. Read more at [www.beccaria-standards.net](http://www.beccaria-standards.net) and [www.beccaria-portal.org](http://www.beccaria-portal.org)



## Prevention dilemmas

In addition to the well-documented effects, practices and implementation experience described for mentoring and leisure-time programmes, there are a number of other aspects that have no simple answers or precedents.

Some of our partners have suggested answers to the most central questions, described below. You may also have experience that could be integrated into future programmes.

### Facts

A programme that declares its aim to prevent crime may scare off potential participants, especially if they are still nowhere close to offending and only in the 'low-risk' category.

### How do you handle the risk of stigmatising programme participants?

*'How can we, as a system, get better at addressing the role we play in producing children and young people with social problems?'*

Heidi Alstrup,  
youth counselling service,  
Århus

*'Stigmatisation needs to be a focus of attention – and is inevitable when establishing programmes targeted at specific youth groups. We can then base bridge-building on established programmes. Mixing youth ('red, yellow, green') is a possibility. Otherwise the outcome may be negative.'*

Søren Nørregaard Madsen,  
institutional department,  
Fredericia

*'You mustn't be reluctant to tackle the programme aim as it relates to the problem, but you have to think about how you advertise it!'*

Thomas Gajhede,  
The Joint Council for Children's  
Issues in Denmark

*'Normality is everyone's goal and desire.'*

Claus Jul,  
Culture, sports and  
leisure, Furesø

### How do you address youth group problems?

*'It's better to focus on phenomena (in this case subcultures or group cultures) than on individuals and their actions – and assess the importance of the problems in those subcultures. Vulnerable youth are often excluded and perceive themselves as excluded – and thus essentially stigmatised. They often form their own groups, isolating themselves. If you repeatedly feel excluded as a child, it's wonderful to be part of a group from which you can exclude others.'*

Knud Erik Hansen,  
Danish Building  
Research Institute

*'Why do young people form groups? Because they lack something in other areas of their lives. It's dangerous to define them as a group if they don't do so themselves. You might even lose sight of their individuality, their hopes and dreams for their personal lives.'*

Charlie Lywood,  
SSP, Furesø

*'Acknowledge that the group-ego can be stronger than the personal ego. Work on creating a new narrative for the community, but remember the individually oriented part.'*

Daniel Frank, SSP,  
prevention and counselling,  
Odense

*'You have to constantly analyse the group and each of its members, if they are to join a programme. Will each win, or will he or she lose out or be stuck in a negative pattern? People stick to their own positions, and that's why other people or events have to break that identity.'*

Kjeld Pedersen, SSP,  
Frederikssund

*'Anyone can switch groups and change their degree of risk in one go or gradually.'*

Benny Wielandt,  
FUE

## How do you involve the young people's parents – and to what extent?

*'Many parents want to know what their children are up to and find the contact positive. It's important to listen to parents – most want the best for their children. How can we support parents who have difficulty dealing with the situation so they don't feel alone with the problem?'*

Anne Jensen, Street Team, outreach work, Horsens

*'Parents are important because they stay – the professionals leave.'*

Kjeld Pedersen, SSP, Frederikssund

*'Not necessarily. Parents can be the reason a programme is needed. In other cases, parental involvement wouldn't hurt when it comes to retaining the young people.'*

Thomas Gajhede,  
The Joint Council for Children's Issues in Denmark

*'You have to define the issue. Stay away from working with parents if the mentor doesn't match up to the task. It takes a little effort, but it's best if the parents are involved.'*

Leif Jønsson, Federation of Youth School Headmasters

## Parent involvement

Parents can be involved in many ways and to varying degrees, from simple consent to their children's participation to getting involved themselves. Some leisure-time programmes e.g., use parents as volunteer helpers on excursions. In certain mentoring programmes, the mentor can be a mentor for the whole family, helping to contact the doctor, social worker, etc. Finally, parents can be involved or informed through visits, meetings, parent get-togethers, newsletters and emails.

## Which local partners should you work with to ensure your programme succeeds?

*'Many interdisciplinary groups want a say – who heads the table? Local coordination is important – civil society, local authority and home have to interact.'*

Kristoffer Rønde Møller,  
Federation of Social Housing Organisations in Denmark

*'Work, for example, with local clubs, associations, the job market and the police – and instruct associations in how to include young people.'*

Anne-Marie Møller, SSP, Ringkøbing-Skjern

*'Create a community neighbourhood feeling by building relationships – I mean, becoming a collective part of an area.'*

Clifford Phillips, Buret, youth sports club, Copenhagen

*'Initiatives for children and young people are good if they focus on involving them - give them ownership during and of the process. We shouldn't come up with all sorts of adult inventions without sounding out the young people first. If a project isn't running properly, we have to get hold of the youngsters and discuss tangible ideas for changing the situation.'*

Marianne Grønbech, SSP, Svendborg

## Does your programme directly improve the academic performance of young people?

*'When you're not enjoying school, a change of scene, for instance, to a youth club, is a welcome opportunity.'*

Jon Anders Jørgensen, BUPL

*'That depends on the problem. There are pros and cons. For some, school is the main problem – the place they least want to be and where they've had far too many failures.'*

Claus Hansen, SSP, Randers

*'Activities that make demands on children's mental and motor skills can enhance their cognitive functions. We can capitalise on this by designing schools and afternoon activities that rely on physical rather than mental activities to promote learning. In some areas, local partnerships with schools, afterschool care facilities and sports associations have been able to increase the physical dimension of in children's everyday lives.'*

Jan Toftegaard Støckel,  
University of Southern Denmark

*'What about strengthening academic – and cognitive – competencies? Bolster talent. Social problems and school go together. We have to include them.'*

Kristoffer Rønde Møller,  
Federation of Social Housing Organisations in Denmark



*'How can I document that I was the first person a young man who had been in my care as a youth called five to seven years later to tell me he had just become a father? The relationship had special significance for this young man.'*

**Henrik Vang Nielsen,**  
Social Services,  
Copenhagen

*'Look beyond a young person's behaviour to see the individual behind.'*

**Heidi Alstrup,**  
youth counselling service,  
Århus

# Summary

## In brief

The effect of mentoring and leisure-time programmes is contingent on certain conditions.

Mentoring schemes that do not include regular, reliable meetings between mentor and mentee reduce the probability of their achieving the desired outcome. In fact, unstable mentoring relationships can often be worse than nothing for a child or young person's self-confidence. Duration and quality are alpha and omega.

Neither is merely getting a young person to spend time at a club or doing sports and other pursuits enough. These activities are unlikely in themselves to prevent criminal behaviour or resolve wellbeing issues, unless they deploy certain practices. Short-term, non-intensive initiatives cannot be expected to produce significant changes either.

Leisure-time programmes can actually cause direct problems if they end up as vehicles for some young people to negatively influence other youth. Sometimes, the programme participants may not be those who need it most.

Finally, one must remember that younger youth who are not already involved in crime or exhibit seriously problematic behaviour gain the prime benefit from taking part in leisure-time and/or mentoring programmes.

These types of programme are not generally geared to dealing with severe problems – and must not replace other, better-suited initiatives.

### Key pointers

#### Mentoring and leisure-time programmes must

- Last at least one year
- Provide participants with weekly sessions lasting several hours
- Provide a personal, trusting relationship with a supportive adult
- Have explicit goals
- Enhance personal and social skills
- Have well-trained, stable staff who can also manage volunteers.

### Remember that

#### Mentoring programmes

- Can be directly harmful if they end after only a few months
- Require professional personnel for youth with serious problems
- Depend on careful matching and continuous support
- Must have a clear timeframe that includes gradual disengagement and follow-up.

#### Leisure-time programmes

- Can bring young people with delinquent behaviour together and thereby increase or spread such behaviour
- Can negatively affect the young people's self-perception and widen the gap between them and others
- Require the presence of professional personnel who can intervene
- Must specifically and actively aim over a long period to bolster youngsters' psycho-social development.

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The recommendations set out in this guide are based on a solid body of knowledge and are aimed at anyone who works with mentoring and leisure-time interventions or is considering launching such initiatives. Such bodies could be local authorities, housing associations and volunteer organisations, including decision-makers and front workers.

The guide offers insight into the impacts of mentoring and leisure-time activities, why they work and the young people who most benefit from them. It gives good advice about key practices – and important pitfalls that special care must be taken to avoid. An outline is given of experience in implementing the programmes and of their varying cost levels. Finally, the guide offers pointers to which specific, local evaluations may help increase the chances of success of a given mentoring and/or leisure-time intervention.

The guide is based on a systematic review of 50 studies identified from among thousands of texts. The studies had to meet several criteria to form part of the review. These criteria included: an examination of the programme's direct or indirect effect on crime, the inclusion of 12-17-year-olds as programme participants, at least half of whom had to be boys, and the perception that the programme participants were 'at risk' according to one or more factors related to local community, family, school, friends and/or the individual. The quality of all the compiled studies was assessed, and deficient studies excluded.

The guide's main recommendations are based on the review studies that had the highest quality and used control groups. The recommendations are thus based on a well-documented foundation.

Read the systematic review here: <http://www.dkr.dk/mentoring-and-leisure-time-activities-youth-risk>



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