

Adoption Mentoring Partnership

A supportive intervention in the lives of adopted individuals...

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Background

- Rudd Chair presented opportunity to develop university - community partnerships
- Motivating problem was identified and raised by parents in the local community - issues had to do with adoption, race, and identity
- Our university adoption program partnered with Big Brothers and Big Sisters to develop a preventive intervention

Partners



UMass Amherst –
Rudd Adoption Research
Program

Big Brothers Big Sisters
of Hampshire County



**Amherst Regional
Public Schools**



**UMass Amherst -
Psychological
Services Center**

**Adoption Journeys –
Post Adoption
Services**



Fall 2010 mentors



Mentoring - What is Known?

- Big Brothers Big Sisters model has been around for many years as an effective intervention -- most frequently used for children and adolescents from single parent and low income families
- Other adoption mentoring programs exist, but most focus on provision of cultural experiences

Goals

- For the adopted children
- For the college student mentors
- For the children's families

What happens?

- Mentors & mentees ("Bigs" and "Littles") spend 3 to 5 hours per week together -- to build a relationship
- Activities are chosen by the participants -- attending events, recreation, eating in the dorms, hanging out, etc.
- Not framed as a clinical intervention; this is about building a friendship that has the potential to last for life

What happens? - 2

Mentors also participate in bi-weekly mentor group meetings

- readings and presentations about adoption, culture, identity
- guest speakers from university & community
- group discussions / support
- receive university credit

The story so far

- 6 matches completed during fall 2010 - all mentors are adoptees and were matched on gender & ethnicity (when possible)
- Have recruited a comparison sample of undergraduates, also adopted, but not serving as mentors or participating in the mentor group meetings
- Have completed 2 rounds of data collection with mentors and comparison sample

Research Component: Mentors & Comparison Group

	0 mos	3 mos	6 mos	9 mos
Adoptive Identity Interview	X			X
Adoption Dynamics Questionnaire	X	X	X	X
Adoption Communication Questionnaire	X	X	X	X
Multigroup Ethnic Identity Measure	X	X	X	X
Self-Liking / Self-Competence Scale	X	X	X	X
Strength of Relationship Survey			X	X
Writing about Experience		X		X
Case Manager Notes		X	X	X

Research Component - Children & Parents

CHILDREN	3 months	9 months
Strength of Relationships Survey	X	X
Harter Self-Perception Profile for Children	X	X
PARENTS		
Achenbach CBCL	X	X
Interview	X	X

Parent view - from caseworker notes

One mother told me that she could have never anticipated how meaningful the relationship would become to her daughter. Only a couple of weeks into the match, the "Little" chose to spend a Saturday with her Big Sister in lieu of a classmate's birthday party. It gives the mother peace of mind to know that her daughter will have at least one positive and successful role-model in her life who is also adopted.

Impact on children

During a recent outing, the Little Brother turned to his Big Brother and casually asked, "So, you're adopted, right?" The Big Brother responded that he was, which was one of the reasons they were matched together. The Big Brother then asked if he wanted to ask him any questions about his adoption story. The Little said, "No. I just wanted to know for sure," and settled back into his seat with a contented smile on his face.

Mentors - comments after 4 months

"I think that the impact of my participation in this program might help me in the future by ***opening up my eyes to new things and help me deal with my adoption in a positive way,*** whether it be going back to my home country or joining adoption groups so that I can help others deal with their adoption."

Mentors

"The class meetings have brought about ***more conversations with my mother*** about my adoption. Before this program, I would barely talk about my adoption with anyone, but after each meeting I call my mom and talk to her about what I learned and ask her questions about my adoption. "

Mentors

"This program has helped me ***feel less alone as an adopted person.***

I don't feel like the only one on campus who is adopted."

Mentors

"I have learned that by just being a mentor ***I can impact and change a single child's life*** or experience growing up."

Mentors

"From this mentoring experience ***I have realized how little I have thought about my adoption, and how a lot of things I did feel every now & then other adopted individuals felt as well.***

...The mentoring program has ***broadened my perspective on adoption and has made me more curious about how others view adoption,*** whether it's their own or just adoption in general."

Mentors

" I hope in the end my Little will see me as a friend she can always talk to even after this year. Even though we don't talk about adoption I hope one day when she thinks back to this program she will think what her adoption meant to her when she was 11 years old. .. ***I've really started to think about who I am as a person, and how adoption plays into it.*** I hope she will want to be a friend to someone like I am to her."

Mentors

"My goal is to be a friend that he can count on having a good time with and talk openly about whatever is on his mind. ***I'm there to listen, learn, and share, while maintaining a positive role.*** I think this will work out fine because I treat him like an equal and demonstrate that what he has to say matters. Being age 13 can be a difficult time, especially since he has older parents he might not relate to as much in terms of culture and technology."

Mentors

"The most valuable part that I will be taking away from this experience is how ***I was able to reflect upon my childhood and see a little of me in my mentee.*** .. This experience has allowed me to realize that sometimes you just have to relax, breathe, and enjoy life for what it is. I am extremely thankful for being able to participate in this program for it has allowed me to both teach as well as learn."

Identity-relevant themes for mentors

- opened up my eyes to adoption; broadened my perspective
- more curious about adoption
- better able to reflect on my childhood
- thinking about how adoption plays into who I am as a person
- more conversations with mother about adoption

- can change a child's life
- can show a child that he matters

Challenges

- Funding to sustain the program
- Research component - it may take several years / cohorts of matches to have enough cases to do rigorous quantitative analyses
- In the meantime, qualitative data from participants will document what is happening
- Huge interest in the community; already have a waiting list. Finding and recruiting the college student mentors is challenging and very time consuming.

Strengths

- Has the potential to be a powerful preventive intervention -- already seeing evidence of this in the caseworker and mentor comments
- Benefits accrue to children, mentors, and families
- Program is increasing awareness of adoption in the community and sensitivity to the challenges faced by adopted children, especially around issues of race / ethnicity

Thanks!

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