**Program Overview**

With funding from the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant, the MENTOR (Mentors Empowering Now to Overcome Recidivism) Program began a follow-up pilot program in late 2016. As further explained on MENTOR’s website, the program is a problem-solving court in Philadelphia that “seeks to interrupt the cycle of recidivism by providing a holistic and supportive reentry experience through mentoring and case management.” Judges Michael Erdos and Kai Scott coordinate the program in collaboration with a Program Director and Program Coordinator. MENTOR program participants (“mentees”) who are serving county probation sentences are matched with a volunteer mentor from the community, receive case management from MENTOR staff, and attend a monthly status hearing with one of the MENTOR judges.

The program evaluation relied on several data sources to assess program effectiveness, including surveys and focus groups with mentees, online monthly reports from mentors, internally collected program data on service referrals, interviews with stakeholders, and official records from Adult Probation and Parole (APPD). A summary of the findings from these data are provided in this brief.

**Participant Perceptions**

Based on surveys and focus groups with participants, participant perceptions of the program were extremely positive. Nearly all survey respondents agreed that they like their mentors and feel comfortable talking to their mentors. Focus groups revealed that participants appreciated the emotional and instrumental support from their mentors, have some concerns about whether relationships with mentors are empowering or enabling, and valued mentors who were more relatable with similar lived experiences. Surveys also showed that nearly all respondents reported positive relationships with their MENTOR judge and provided high ratings for status hearings. Participants further elaborated in focus groups by explaining that status hearings were like a “sanctuary” from their regular chaotic lives, which represented a new criminal justice system experience for them.

**Program Dosage**

Several measures of program dosage revealed that participants had a high quantity and quality of contact with the program. According to the mentee surveys, the most commonly identified frequency of in-person interactions with mentors was a few times a week. Mentor monthly reports showed less frequent in-person contact, with 44 percent of mentor responses indicating only one in-person meeting per month, but with an average meeting length of 90 to 119 minutes. Both mentors and mentees also reported a high number of electronic contacts per month. As a measure of the quality of contact, the pairs regularly discussed criminogenic needs, including employment, housing, and education. Lastly, analysis of internal program data showed that MENTOR staff made an impressive 432 service referrals between April 2017 and July 2019. Of these 432 referrals, program participants made at least some contact with the service provider 65 times and completed the service 155 times. The highest number of referrals were made for legal services followed by employment-related opportunities.
**Stakeholder Perceptions**

Interviews with program stakeholders identified a number of program strengths, including some examples of beneficial mentoring relationships, access to services via case management, the accountability and social support provided during status hearings, the benefits of a non-adversarial model for improving understanding among stakeholders and changing justice system actors’ traditional behaviors, and a genuine focus on participants’ humanity. A number of challenges were also recognized, such as the mentor matching process; mentor training; ongoing social service needs; the program’s organizational structure; stakeholder disagreement about sanctions, particularly for marijuana use; and recruitment issues, including stakeholders advertising the program, the program’s reputation, the transfer of one of the judges to civil court, narrow eligibility requirements, and competition with other court programs or short probation sentences under the Krasner administration.

**Effects on Recidivism and Employment**

The outcome evaluation included 38 MENTOR participants and a matched comparison group of 114 individuals under the regular terms of supervision. A three-to-one matching technique was used that matched MENTOR participants to comparison group individuals on age, gender, release date, risk level, and MENTOR’s offense type exclusion criteria.

Bivariate analyses revealed that while 29.2 percent of the comparison group experienced at least one new arrest during the 12-month study period, only 16.2 percent of MENTOR participants had a new arrest. While this is a notable difference between groups that suggests MENTOR influences recidivism, these differences did not reach statistical significance with a sample of this size. However, a statistically significant effect of program participation was found for probation revocations. Only 10.8 percent of MENTOR participants had their probation supervision revoked during the 12-month study period compared to 31.9 percent of the comparison group. An impressive 64.9 percent of MENTOR participants had some form of employment at the end of the 12-month study period, compared to 52.2 percent of the comparison group. Again, this is a substantive difference between groups, but did not reach statistical significance.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MENTOR</th>
<th>Comparison Group</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New arrest</td>
<td>16.2%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Probation revocation*</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>64.9%</td>
<td>52.2%</td>
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</table>

* p < .05

Multivariate analyses, which isolated the independent effects of MENTOR program participation on each outcome after controlling for other known predictors of those outcomes, failed to find significant effects of MENTOR participation on any of the three outcomes.