

## MENTOR – A TRUSTEE FOR DISADVANTAGED YOUTH

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***Abstract.** The perception of oneself and the surrounding environment are developed during childhood. The behaviour of others directly influences the attitude towards oneself and decisions and observations about one's value. One of the biggest deficiencies of institutional out-of-family care that significantly hinders the comprehensive development of children is the inability of children to form close bonds with adults. To come to a conclusion that you are not loved and worthless means the feel of deep disappointment. The child becomes shore that he has been deceived and abandoned. These thoughts evoke protests, depression, and insecurity. Due to these misconceptions the socioemotional development of children is hindered. The main goal of the mentor programme is to provide an emotional support and promote the well-being of the young people not having felt a real family environment and care. Youth mentoring in Latvia is a comparatively new concept, and there are only few non-governmental organisations providing this kind of support for young people in the high-risk group. It should be mentioned that there has not been a theoretical study about mentoring so far.*

***Keywords:** mentor, mentee, mentor programme, young adult.*

### Introduction

*Equality creates friendship  
/Plato/*

Each of us in our lives has met a person who have affected the development of our system of values or even radically changed our decision making process. When reading or hearing stories about famous people who have achieved something wondrous in art, sport or business, often there has been a specific person who has provided support or has been an idol, thus helping to achieve these results: someone said a thought that later became a motto; someone helped to become more self-confident and to start believing in self; maybe someone just pointed out the deficiencies or introduced to the right people in the relevant area. This can be called situation monitoring that unnoticed happens daily. It is difficult to assess its value in the respective moment. Mentor only acknowledges situation and offers help – then someone can either accept or decline the offer. The true meaning and importance of these people becomes clear only later.

Mentoring is one of the first means of the development of the society. In the ancient times, leaders of tribes passed their knowledge to their youth. That was their role for the development and preservation of civilisation. The origins of the word *mentor* can be traced to the antique Greece mythology. There is a myth about Mentor in the Odyssey by Homer. The name of the teacher of

Telemachus was Mentor – he was a wise old man that often shared with his life lessons. Mentor's task was to prepare the son of Odysseus for his mission, his destiny set out since the moment of his birth. Mentor was responsible not only for the education of the young man, but also for his character, decision making, determination and clearness of mind (Homer). This myth demonstrates the legend behind mentoring and provides insight into the development of various values characteristic to mentoring, as well as distinguishing the most important ones. For example, Homer stresses these guiding words Mentor explains to the young man – sometimes work must be carried out even if you do not have the necessary courage or resources because none of the works is valuable enough if there is no long-term goal or agenda.

Later the meaning of the word *Mentor* expanded: trustworthy advisor, trustee, tutor, old friend. The main goal of a mentor is to provide help to young people understand their abilities and become valuable members of the society.

Mentoring is a culture of mutual influence and cooperation. Mentoring also can be described as a determined action carried out using specific methods and techniques. Mentoring as a method is compiled of a row of processes that encourages development and support of relationships. A supportive, developmental, and helpful mutual cooperation is created between a mentor and mentee – one person donates his time, knowledge, and efforts to another person for the development of his skills, knowledge, and convictions. Mentor follows the needs of a mentee that the mentor perceives as being important (Jusela, Liliija, 2005). Mentoring is characterised as a developing and learning process of both parties in which a mentor and mentee spends a lot of time and energy (Rivža, Konstantinova, 2006).

Mentoring (as a method based on partnership) is well-known in management theory and entrepreneurship. In these the Mentor provides his professional support to the mentee, thus promoting the development of his career and business. However, in past few decades, mentoring has become known as a development method in social work and education. It was started to be used as a support for new teachers in the USA in 1980s. In Latvia, mentoring has being researched only for the last decade – starting with the business sector (Konstantinova, 2007) and later in education (Akopova, 2004; Kačkere, Odiņa, Rieksta, 2005).

Mentoring has become a trend of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and is perceived as an educational process that transfers knowledge between two people and is based on the non-formal education.

### **Mentoring of Youth**

The first researcher who proposed this mentoring idea was Hirschi in his social control theory (1969). This theory was based on the perception that crimes and violation of law (delinquent behaviour) are expressed when people's

ability to follow rules and order is diminished or non-existent. The socialisation process, that usually advances the understanding of life in the society lived by specific rules, has not been successful. Hirschi uses this to propose that all people are born with tendencies towards delinquent behaviour (Bartol, 2004). The interaction of risk and resilience (rehabilitation, rejuvenation) was researched and that provided basis for the idea of youth mentoring (Garmezy & Masten, 1986; Werner, 1995). A big influence came from Werner's opinion (Werner, 1986). He believed that to help the young people who have committed crimes and undergo rehabilitation process at least one adult should be involved.

In 1995 in the USA, a study was carried out (Public/Private Ventures) about the contribution of public mentoring programme *Big brothers Big sisters* (Tierney, Grossman & Resch, 1995). During that period, only not so well acknowledged scientific research served as evidence for the contribution of mentoring programmes, thus approving the usefulness of it and starting to attract funding (Boyle, 2007). The conclusions of the study approved the positive theory about mentoring: the young people who were supported by a mentor were 46% less likely to abuse drugs, 27% less likely to abuse alcohol, and 33% less likely to get involved in fights (Tierney, Grossman & Resch, 1995).

Baker and Maguire believe that the youth mentor programmes have a great potential, but they should be thoroughly developed. They indicate that historically the goal of mentor programmes was charity: give to those who have received the less. Charity organisations provided an adult for the disadvantaged youth in order to provide a positive example (Baker & Maguire, 2005). The idea that an adult could help (not hurt) disadvantaged youth was considered as self explanatory with the conviction that an adult would be able to help to live according to the law. Nowadays, we have information and studies about the young people who have committed crimes and the reasons for such actions (Cavell, Hymel, Malcolm & Seay, 2007), as well as the negative consequences that could arise from not particularly well organised programme (Dishion, McCord & Poulin, 1999) or inclusion of insufficiently situated mentors (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002).

51 years ago, Caplan had discussed the necessity of a support person that operates out of family borders – he would be older and with good reputation or very wise. He indicated that this person geographically and socially could be much closer to those in need of help than the professional workers (Caplan, 1964). Sociologists use similar arguments when talking about the importance of a mentor in the lives of disadvantaged youth (Lefkowitz, 1986; Williams & Kornblum, 1985).

The model of youth mentoring proposed by Rhodes indicates that the mentoring relationships can introduce positive changes in various processes in the young people. These relationships would especially promote the socioemotional, cognitive development and development of identity (Rhodes, 2002). The model states that the positive mentoring results can be

achieved only if such a personal bond is created that can be characterised by trust, empathy and mutual respect. Theoretically, meaningful relationships can be achieved only if a mentee is ready to share (open himself) his emotions and self-perception, and is actively participating in the building of relationships (Csikszentmihalyi & Rathunde, 1998).

It is important to note that the mentor's role is not only intricate, but also very emotional. Mentor deals with the success and failure of his mentee through his own personal emotions (Bullogh & Draper, 2004). The mentor wishes to stay and be respected, to be valued. Cullingford concludes that the majority of the studies of the feelings and attitude produced and received by mentors have found out that they feel valued and isolated. At the same time, if they take part in the mentor programmes full of enthusiasm and interest, after a short while, they came to a conclusion that there are requirements and responsibilities they had not anticipated (Cullingford, 2006). This is the reason why the selection of mentors, support, and consultation throughout the whole programme are necessary.

Mentoring relationships can be both formal and informal. The informal or natural mentoring bonds are: relationships with an adult who is not older (trainer, neighbour, teacher, etc.); the bonds that have been developed spontaneously by receiving a positive encouragement and guidance (Baker & Maguire, 2005). The formal or planned mentoring is organised via a mentor programme with the purpose of providing individual relationships between an adult and young person. The formal mentoring can be carried out in schools, youth organisations, workplaces, etc. (DuBois & Karcher, 2005). The formal mentoring can have various forms: one-on-one relationships between a young person and adult using a schedule; group mentoring – an adult develops relationships with a group of young people; team mentoring – several adults develop relationships with a group of young people; peer mentoring – the mentor is a young person as well, for example, if the goal is to help with fit in a school; internet mentoring (Mentor/National Mentoring Partnership, 2006).

Theoretical literature provides a division of mentoring: mentoring – relationships; mentoring – context.

The first part stresses the relationships themselves; a vital part of mentoring. If there are no relationships, no mentoring can be carried out (Rhodes, 2005). The young people who have received mentoring do not talk about mentor programmes; they talk about relationships (Rhodes & DuBois, 2008). The researchers of youth mentoring have concluded that the quality of relationships (stability, length) is the defining factor that indicates success or failure of the mentoring programme (Parra, DuBois et. al., 2002; Rhodes, Spencer et. al., 2006). Only if the bond is full of trust and relationships between mentor and mentee are close, the mentee can benefit greatly (Rhodes, DuBois, 2008). Theoretical models unequivocally put forward the individual approach – the importance of one-on-one relationships that promote unity,

empathy, and trust (Rhodes, DuBois, 2008, Rhodes et. al., 2006). The importance of relationships has also been underlined in the mentoring definition by DuBois and colleagues: intervention programme with the goal to promote positive results via relationships of young people (18 years old or younger) and adults who have joined the programme voluntarily and are not the parents for these young people. There have been studies about the ratio of the quality of relationships and benefit for the young people involved. There is a correlation between these two factors. Two possible scenarios exist: conflict and premature leave from the programme or strong relationships and a noticeable result in the end of the programme (Cavell et. al., 2009; Rhodes et. al., 2005).

Mentoring as a context exist in cases when the goal of a mentoring programme is to provide experiences for the young people involved and organise necessary preventive activities. There are some kind of relationships between the mentor and mentee, but the strength of those is meaningless. This could be the case when a mentor is a substitute for practise or the young people have been involved in non-formal education. In these cases, the success or failure of the programme do not depend on the quality of relationships (DuBois et. al., 2011).

### **Contribution of Mentoring**

Usually the one who benefits from the mentoring programme is the one who captures the experience. However, the mentor can gain new knowledge and skills as well. Sometimes even more than the receiver of the experience provided. The most typical effects are:

- ability to stop and look at his/her achievements;
- ability to question his/her opinion, thoughts, and beliefs, as well as to avoid learning about things not topical at the given moment;
- ability to develop his/her leadership – not through giving orders, but through providing support;
- ability to listen to the people around, to ask questions correctly, because these are the preconditions for the creation of good mutual relationships (Rivža, Konstantinova, 2006).

The most typical effects for the young people are:

- psychological, intellectual, and social support;
- valuable advice, a helping hand in problem solving;
- experience of positive relationships with an adult;
- spending spare time differently;
- opportunity to acknowledge appropriate behaviour of each gender (single parent cases) (Buckley & Zimmermann, 2003).

The cooperation of a mentor and mentee is successful if:

- positive mutual relationships have been created;
- cooperation goals and basic principles are clear;

- both have time for meetings;
- not too great distance in between;
- trust has been developed (Rivža, Konstantinova, 2006).

### **Conclusions**

Apart from origins of mentoring found in the ancient world, 21<sup>st</sup> century is marked as the birth of mentoring theory in academic literature. Studies conclude that mentoring is a successful tool for diminishing social exclusion, promoting social development, carrying socialisation process, and promoting the feeling of comfort, being safe.

Those young people who have not experienced enough love and care from family due to several factors (for example, the lack of parental love and support, parents are alcoholics, the young people lack self-confidence and self-respect, the social skills of the young people are poorly developed) are perceived as a potential risk group that could start abusing alcohol, narcotics, or other similar substances. A different positive experience could be provided by a mentor, or advisor – trustee who provides support for the young people by listening to them, devoting undivided attention, and spending time together in various social activities. Mentors can serve as models with whom youth might identify, leading to increased socially appropriate behaviour and reduced delinquent behaviour. A support of a motivated mentor through close and individual relationships could serve as strong basis for the development of the young people involved.

### **Discussion**

The article analyses the concept of social mentoring and its differences with mentoring in the work place. The author's interest towards this concept stems from taking part in the mentoring programme for the young people who grow up outside of family unit. The distinctive feature of social mentoring is that it is based on voluntary work. It implies developing relationships between the mentor and a young person.

Social mentoring programmes become more and more popular worldwide. That's why it is important to research programme's outcomes and success criteria based on gained experience. The future research could include some comparison with the countries where mentoring is more advanced, for example, United Kingdom and Norway.

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