Amachi

Multi-State Grant *(2014-2016)*

Summary of Key Evaluation Findings

Amachi
People of Faith Mentoring Children of Promise

McClanahan Associates, Inc.
Evaluation for Progress

Kelly Piccinino, Ph.D.
Wendy S. McClanahan Ph.D.

July 15, 2016

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

Current thinking in mentoring focuses on tailoring mentoring approaches through evidence-based enhancements designed to increase the likelihood that mentees experience meaningful and impactful outcomes.[1] While enhancements to mentoring programs may result in improved relationship quality and youth outcomes, little empirical evidence exists to understand *how these enhancements are best implemented* and *how mentors perceive their utility*. Amachi, a mentoring program launched in 2000 to provide children impacted by incarceration with a different path by establishing the consistent presence of loving, caring mentors, set forth in 2014 to provide mentors in five sites across the nation with evidence-based enhancements in the form of training. This online, on–demand training was designed to support mentors in using a youth centered developmental approach in their mentoring relationships, to develop and implement an advocacy/teaching style within their relationships, and to teach them explicitly how to make the most of role modelling in their mentoring relationships—all with the goal of creating stronger, more positive mentoring relationships. This Amachi effort provides an opportunity to explore how on-demand, online mentor training is implemented and if and under what circumstances mentors find it useful.

Amachi program overview

Amachi, under the stewardship of Dr. W. Wilson Goode, Sr., is a national mentoring program that seeks to prevent at-risk youth from becoming involved in the juvenile justice system, especially youth whose parents have been incarcerated or who have been impacted by incarceration. Since Amachi's inception, more than 300,000 youth affected by incarceration have received focused mentoring through Amachi-modeled programs in 250 cities across the U.S.[2] Experienced social service organizations implement the program; they recruit, screen, match, train, track and support Amachi mentors and identify youth who could benefit from the program.

Through mentors, young people gain access to the supports needed to build a positive future.[3] Research demonstrates that mentoring has the power to improve young lives and, eventually, adult productivity. Children who participate in mentoring relationships demonstrate better school attendance, higher likelihood of going on to higher education and a better attitude toward school than non-mentored youth.[4] Moreover, studies of mentoring programs show that mentoring relationships can reduce negative youth behaviors.

The 2014 Amachi Multi-State Amachi effort incorporated mentoring enhancements into the program model of five sites across the country. Mentoring enhancements are practices that

---

[1] Darling, N., Bogat, G. A., Cavell, T. A., Murphy, S. E. and Sánchez, B. (2006), Gender, ethnicity, development, and risk: Mentoring and the consideration of individual differences. J. Community Psychol., 34: 765–780. doi:10.1002/jcop.20128

[2] G. Roger Jarjoura, David L. DuBois, Rebecca J. Shlafer, and Konrad A. Haight, Mentoring Children of Incarcerated Parents: A Synthesis of Research and Input from the Listening Session Held by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and The White House Domestic Policy Council and Office of Public Engagement (OJJDP), p.18

[3] Tolan, P., Henry, D., Schoeny, M., & Bass, A., (2008). Mentoring interventions to affect juvenile delinquency and associated problems. Campbell Systematic Reviews, 16. DOI: 10.4073/csr.2008.16

[4] Susan Jekielek, Kristin A. Moore, Elizabeth C. Hair, Mentoring Programs and Youth Development: A Synthesis, Child Trends, Washington D.C., January 2002

research has shown to increase program effectiveness[5]. Amachi's Multi-State project aimed to enhance mentoring services for both existing and new matches made through the program.[6] Specifically, these enhancements included three key mentoring practices outlined in the table below.

Table 1: Process and Description of 2014 Amachi Multi-State project mentoring enhancements

Process and Description of 2014 Amachi Multi-State project mentoring enhancements	
Using a Youth-Centered Developmental Approach	At the beginning of their match relationship, each mentor in the Amachi program will meet with their mentee to discuss his or her goals and devise a plan to obtain the goals outlined. Amachi trains the sub-grantees on how to teach mentors to implement the goal development activity with mentees. This train-the-trainer approach for youth-centered development is enhanced with role-playing scenarios that will also include materials appropriate for mentors, as well as age-appropriate examples for mentees. Training description: "In this lesson, you will learn about the importance of a strengths-based approach to helping your mentee develop and thrive. The lesson will teach you how to leverage developmental assets of youth, while focusing on building strengths. By the end of this lesson, you should be able to demonstrate a strengths-based approach to youth centered development and employ strategies that support positive youth development."
Incorporating Advocacy/Teaching Roles for Mentors	Amachi mentors are trained on how to provide active guidance to youth, facilitate relationships with peers and/or other supportive adults, and support engagement with appropriate activities and resources. The best way for mentors to advocate and teach mentees is to create opportunities to practice desired skills with the mentees. For instance, rather than listening to a training on how to navigate peer relationships, it is more effective to role play with a child to demonstrate how best to steer the relationship. Role playing scenarios are available through Amachi's online portal to demonstrate a variety of relationship challenges. These immersive scenarios provide mentors with appropriate examples they can use with respective mentees. For older youth, these scenarios can be a good reference for review and practice with their mentors. Training description: "In this lesson, you will learn about the functions of advocacy and teaching in your role as a mentor and ways to provide your mentee with access to resources and support. You will also learn how to turn everyday activities with your mentee into teachable moments. By the end of this lesson, you should be able to operate as an advocate for mentees and provide guidance to mentees through teachable moments."
Encouraging the Mentor to Think of	Amachi mentors are trained on how to serve as a role model for their mentee. Frequently, initial training addresses the mentor as a role model in general terms. Amachi encourages

---

[5] The National Mentoring Partnership (2015). Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring: Research-informed and practitioner-approved best practices for creating and sustaining impactful mentoring relationships and strong program services (4th edition). Accessed: http://www.mentoring.org/images/uploads/Final_Elements_Publication_Fourth.pdf

[6] The majority of sub-grantees met their match goals for the Amachi Multi-state grant. In most sites, the expectation was to match 100 at-risk, high-risk, or under-served youth, with sub-goals of reaching 80 youth impacted by incarceration, 40 male youth of color, with 30 mentors affiliated with local congregations. Most sites met their year-one and year-two match goals and sub-goals for the grant (see Technical Appendix for a full breakdown of site progress in meeting their goals for the Amachi Multi-state grant). Site A came in just shy of meeting their overall match goals for year one and sub-goal of reaching their target number of male youth of color for year two. Site E also did not meet their local mentor goal for year one.

| Him/Herself as a Role Model | that training; however, Amachi also understands that the mentee's perspective of her/his role model is influenced by environment, experiences, and current risk factors. For the role model to be effective, the mentor must first understand the challenges and potential obstacles to following that model. Amachi's short, mini-scenarios will underscore those variations, such as examples of age-relevant emotional trauma, environmentally based positive goal setting, and culturally relevant match activities.

Training description: "In this lesson, you will learn how your actions and behaviors can make a strong impression on your mentee. This lesson will include information on how to be a role model and tips and strategies to lead by example. By the end of this lesson, you will be able to practice leading mentees by demonstrating exemplary behavior." |
| --- | --- |

To teach mentors about these mentoring practices, Amachi relied on mentor training. Indeed, research shows that mentors benefit from training and on-going support. For instance, Dubois, Holloway, Valentine, and Cooper (2002) demonstrated that mentors who receive training feel better prepared to develop a positive relationship with their mentee, and that their matches tend to last longer and produce more positive results than those in which mentors receive little or no training.

But not all mentors take advantage of training beyond what is required for them to become mentors. Many mentors (and other volunteers) have other obligations—such as work and family—and may have limited time to devote to volunteer activities. Yet, too little training or support may leave mentors with too few tools to access when they are facing challenges in their mentoring relationships or may not adequately prepare them to approach the mentoring relationship in the ways that research has shown are most likely to promote positive outcomes for mentees.[7] Moreover, too little flexibility in mentor training may also discourage otherwise willing individuals from mentoring altogether, especially if they feel that the supports provided are not bolstering the quality of their relationship with their mentee.

Because of this, it is critical that programs find an appropriate balance between program training and support requirements and mentor availability. Amachi designed its enhancement training for mentors with accessibility in mind. In addition to in person pre-mentor training, Amachi used e-learning to put the timing and location of training in the hands of the mentor.

Amachi's on-demand e-learning was focused on the three mentoring enhancements displayed in Table 1, as well as topics related to them. It included "fundamental" trainings on each enhancement (see description of training in Table 1) designed to provide mentors with a deep understanding of the enhancement and how to implement it. These fundamental trainings were complimented with on-demand scenario-based micro training opportunities to provide "just-in-time" solutions to a range of challenges mentors face, including peer conflicts, threats to goal accomplishment, and reintegration challenges.

---

[7]For instance, many un-trained mentors believe that taking a prescriptive approach with a mentee is most likely to lead to positive outcomes for the youth; however, research shows that a developmental approach focused on recreation, relationship-building, support and joint decision-making is ideal. Kristine V. Morrow; Melanie B. Styles. (1995). Building Relationships with Youth in Program Settings (Philadelphia, PA: Public/Private Ventures).

The current study

The purpose of this study was to identify successes and challenges associated with Amachi's mentoring enhancements. Since the enhancements are implemented via training, our study focuses on the implementation and utility of the enhancement trainings. The key research questions are as follows:

- What supports did Amachi mentors receive in addition to the enhancement trainings?
- Did mentors participate in the enhancement trainings?
- Did the site staff and mentors believe that the enhancement trainings were valuable?
- Did mentors believe that the enhancement trainings were helpful?
- Did the e-learning technology present any challenges for mentors?

We found the following key findings:

- Grantee staff generally found the trainings helpful, with a good balance between new material and review of previous training. They felt that the online, micro e-learning modules (*Role Modelling, Youth-Centered Development, and Teaching and Advocacy*) were a valuable approach to on-going mentor training.
- Mentors were receptive to the training, but most did not feel that they enhanced the quality of their mentoring relationship. Many felt that the impact of the training was fleeting and mainly reinforced what they already knew. Most felt that the trainings would be more beneficial if it was more customized.

Study methodology

Our research employed a multi-pronged qualitative effort to better understand implementation of Amachi's enhancement trainings across the five Amachi sites.

Table 2. Evaluation design

Evaluation design	
Document Review (October 2014-June 2016)	• A systematic review of relevant documents, including training materials and curricula was conducted.
Virtual Site Visit Interviews (Spring 2015; Summer 2016)	• Two rounds of "virtual" site visits were conducted with the mentoring team at each of the five Amachi sites. • Via in-depth interviews, information about the implementation of enhancements; the approaches the programs use to implement the specified mentoring enhancements, the successes and challenges associated with putting enhancements into practice, the content, frequency, and duration of mentoring training; and information about case manager protocols and supports were gathered.
Virtual Mentor Focus Groups to Gauge Perception of Mentoring Enhancements (Winter 2016)	• In-depth mentor focus groups with up to eight mentors per site were conducted. • Focus groups were aimed to garner detailed information on: 1) the degree to which training and supports provided to mentors deliver, in their opinions, adequate preparation for implementing the targeted mentoring enhancements and, 2) the extent to which mentors are trained in, adopt, and experience success in implementing these enhancements in their mentoring relationships.

Program staff interviews were first conducted in May/June 2015, where we initially talked to 12 program staff associated with the Amachi program across the five sites[8], and then again in July/August 2016, where we followed up with eight program staff, for a total of 20 program staff interviews across the two years. Of note, at the time of round one phone interviews, the bulk of mentors had not yet taken the trainings. Third, we conducted one round of virtual mentor focus groups[9] in January/February of 2016. Mentor focus groups were conducted to examine the degree to which training and supports provided to mentors prepared them for their mentoring relationships. Specifically, we sought to understand and document the extent to which mentors are trained in, adopt, and experience success in implementing the content of the enhancement trainings in their mentoring relationships. We requested that grantee staff recruit 6 to 8 trained mentors for each focus group—a combination of mentors who were matched during the Amachi 2014 program, as well as those who were in mid-stream matches at the time Amachi 2014 launched yet participated in the enhancement trainings during (instead of at the start of) their match. Most of the grantees struggled to recruit the target number of mentors for the focus groups. In all, we spoke with 17 mentors across five Amachi sites.

Online trainings and internal documents (e.g., Amachi OJJDP grant proposal) specific to this grant were examined and utilized to inform early points of data collection and interview protocol development. All interview and focus group data were first fully transcribed and then manually coded according to a number of constructs (e.g., mentor supports, mentor recommendations, enhancement challenges, enhancement successes, etc.). Larger conditions, contexts, and interactional effects and consequences surrounding the Amachi Multi-state grant were also considered and documented during analysis. All coded data were later analyzed to identify broad patterns and themes across sites and stakeholder types – these data form the basis of the findings highlighted in this report. Themes represent the voices of more than two stakeholders that participated in interviews, unless otherwise noted.

Report outline

The next section of the report presents our findings. Although we learned many details relating to each individual program (e.g., their organizational structure, training phases, mentor/mentee recruitment practices, screening/match process, match activity suggestions, history with Amachi, Inc, and additional outside partnerships), we have pulled out just the findings relating to our key research questions. The next section of the report describes the recommendations that program staff and mentors had to improve the enhancement trainings. The report concludes with a brief discussion.

---

[8] Site A is considered one site in our study, although it comprises four sub-grantees – each with unique implementation strategies.
[9] Mentor focus groups ranged in size from one to six mentors per site, totaling 17 mentors across all five sites.

FINDINGS

What supports did Amachi mentors receive in addition to the enhancement trainings?

Amachi mentors reported receiving in-person pre-match training, thoughtful matching, formal and ad-hoc conversations with match coordinators, and mentor support groups. Mentors generally reported being satisfied with the level of support their respective organizations offered them. First, mentors were positive about the initial, general trainings they received through their respective agencies. One mentor explained,

> -[...] I think that they're really good at making sure that you're prepared to mentor a child before they just set you loose, with "here's, you know, someone and go change their life." I think they're really good about making sure you are really prepared for it, and that you know what you're getting into and you know challenges you might face or any kind of problems you might encounter. I think they kind of make sure they don't put someone who's not prepared for it out there.

One mentor described the thoughtful matching process that their organization went through to connect them with their mentee and how it, and the screening process, made him feel prepared and supported. In his own words,

> -[...] the program staff, in my opinion, has been extremely thoughtful in terms of the matching that they did. [...] we had our pre-interview, they came in and talked with me for about an hour, one of the staff did, before getting started. [...] they seemed very thoughtful about the matching and then answered all of my questions. They had a lot of questions for me, so I feel very supported [...]

Once matched, mentors were supported formally by match specialists[10] on a monthly basis through a verbal check-in. Mentors credit match specialists with good staff support, timeliness, and valuable resources. Mentors shared the following thoughts about supports that their match specialists had provided to them,

> -They ask targeted questions during monthly check-ins, targeted questions about spending time with the child, what kind of interactions are happening, how the child is growing in the relationship and what are our expectations from month to month.

> -[...] I've asked them (program staff) and they've given me specific feedback on my mentee [...], some of the risks she faces in school and at home. So, if you seek that and you and you ask for that feedback [from X organization] then they're willing to give it to you.

> -[...] I've been really [...] pleased and impressed. [...] when I've asked for help they've always been there [...] they check in once a month to remind me to submit what I've been doing. But there is a level of constant contact, and I [...] get the feeling that if I were to ever need to call or email [...] that I would get a quick and thoughtful response.

Mentors also reported having access to their match coordinator on an as-needed basis. Mentors reported having 24/7 access to their match specialists via email and phone in the daytime,

---

[10] This position has different names in different programs, but their role in supporting matches is similar across sites.

nighttime and weekends--whenever the mentor needed help. Almost all mentors reported positive feedback about their match supports. These mentors' sentiments summarized those of most mentors,

> -I think the organization is spot on as far as being available, you know, essentially 24/7 [...] and communicating with the schedule every month. Makes sure that the relationship is smooth and progressing and [staff] being more than willing to answer questions.

> -[...] working with my match support specialist, where it's been kind of informal. Just having a person who knows a lot [...] my mentee's background and history and having someone to kind of talk through different things that are there, I would say, has been the most beneficial in helping me [...]

Some mentors noted the reference materials that match specialists provided to them were especially helpful.

> -My coordinator passed along books to me and these were helpful.

> -They provide connections, things to do, people to contact.

Mentors who had access to mentor support or roundtable groups, felt that the meetings provided an opportunity to gather valuable feedback on their mentoring efforts and really appreciated the opportunity to talk with other mentors and learn from their experiences. **Despite all of the training and support, mentors shared that their prior life experiences were extremely important to the success of the match.** Mentors explained that they drew on prior training, work and life experiences to strengthen their current mentoring relationship. Many mentors report receiving relevant training through their current and prior jobs (police department, public school system). Mentors agreed,

> -Prior experience really helps confidence...it alleviates fear going into mentorship.

Some mentors had been mentees as children and were able to draw on that experience to motivate their mentoring and provide them with a unique perspective on the relationship. One mentor shared,

> -[...] because of my experience growing up...I grew up in a relatively poor family, and so I was pretty early on, through my school, matched up with a mentor that helped me set goals and learned how to, you know, make decisions that were good steps in my life so that I could move into a better place, not just financially but just as a person while I was growing up. And that was one of the reasons I decided to become a mentor, was because I knew what a benefit it had been to me, and I wanted to have the opportunity to maybe do that for another child.

Did mentors participate in the enhancement trainings?

A majority of newly matched Amachi mentors completed the enhancement trainings, but there was variation by site. As displayed in Table 3, some sites were able to get all, or mostly all, of their mentors to participate in the training, while others struggled. While two sites were able to encourage all new mentors to take all of the on-demand trainings, six sites were not. Staff across sites spoke of the need to "hound" or "track down" mentors to

complete the trainings. One explanation for the variation is that some sites made the trainings voluntary and others made them mandatory for mentors. One staff member pointed out that although the rates of completion looked low, they were actually quite favorable. She noted,

> -*Fifty percent completion rate is good for mentors doing a voluntary training.*

Program staff cited time as being the biggest challenge in getting mentors to take the trainings.

> -*Buy-in and participation after a two-hour training [is a challenge].*

> -*Time is an issue in getting mentors to take training.*

> -*[The training] is too long.*

> -*[Online training modules] required additional follow-up to see if mentors completed the training.*

One site shared that in order to get mentors to take the training they moved away from the on-demand aspect of e-learning which was intended to increase participation by permitting mentors with the flexibility to complete the trainings at their convenience. Instead, this site ended up requiring mentors to complete the training in the site's office.

> -*Online trainings is leisure-based so making sure they finish it in the office face-to-face [is quicker].*

Similarly, site staff shared that some mentors asked if the on-line trainings could be combined with the pre-match trainings to save time and effort. Sites also offered online training modules to existing mentors, and similarly, sites experienced broad variation in their success in securing these mentors' participation in the trainings.

Table 3. Number of mentors taking enhancement training through Amachi Multi-State

Number of mentors taking enhancement training through Amachi Multi-State							
		Number of Newly Matched Mentors who Completed Enhancement Training			Number of Mid-Match Mentors who Completed Enhancement Training		
Site	Number of New Matches	Role Modelling	Youth Development Approach	Advocacy/ Teaching	Role Modelling	Youth Development Approach	Advocacy/ Teaching
Site A	30	24	24	24	27	27	24
Site B	44	7	6	6	25	30	36
Site C	31	31	31	31	19	19	1
Site D	20	8	8	8	13	8	7
Site E	133	60	60	60	14	14	14
Site F	100	42	34	44	20	22	22
Site G	100	100	100	100	58	58	58
Site H	119	50	50	50	43	25	21

Although several site staff noted that time was a challenge, they also noted that many mentors appreciated the efficiency of the micro e-learning modules. They shared sentiments like these,

-The training was catered to and perfect for a busy mentor.

-The succinctness of the trainings has been well received [by mentors].

Did the site staff and mentors believe that the enhancement trainings were valuable?
In general, the majority of program staff and mentors we spoke to found value in the enhancement modules. A program staff member at one site reported that mentors felt the trainings were "beneficial" and were "thankful" to have access to them. Another staff member at another site described them as "more engaging and more user-friendly [than traditional mentor trainings]." Yet another staff person said a mentor liked the trainings so much and found them to be beneficial to the point that she "wanted to use [the on-demand enhancement training material] at another organization." Staff made some other general positive comments related to online training, including:

-[...] topics are really relevant.

-Having them do more training has been useful [...] gives them a base and more knowledge and confidence.

The majority of program staff felt the enhancement trainings provided a mix of both new information as well as overlap with their organization's pre-match training. The advocacy and training module particularly stood out as containing new information.

-[...] 60-70% of the time [the modules] are bringing new knowledge to the mentors.

-trainings provide new info but similar to org[anizational] trainings.

-[...] difference between the two [org training and online training] and doing both is good.

Program staff also shared that the online aspect of the trainings was valuable because mentors could access it more than once, if needed.

-[...the online platform provides] trainings [mentors] can go back to [...] some mentors have revisited the trainings.

While program staff and mentors noted that overlap is sometimes useful, they also reported that mentors experienced some frustration with redundancy in the trainings. Several staff members noted that the on-line enhancement trainings were redundant with some of the information that they already presented to mentors in pre-match training, particularly in the youth development approach and role modelling training. One staff member shared that this could be overcome if there was a way to skip through or customize the training to ensure that redundancies were appropriate and not simply teaching the same information all over again. Lastly, one staff member reported that the on-line enhancement training was "too basic."

While some staff reported that the trainings were redundant, several of the mentors we interviewed did not experience the trainings this way. In the words of two mentors,

-[...] the organizational [pre-match] training is more focused on mentorship relationships, but the modules [taught me] how to deal with certain issues. So, the trainings were not overlapping or redundant.

-The online modules were different than prior training.

And for the mentors that did experience an overlap in content between the in-person pre-match training and the on-line enhancement trainings, for the most part they did not report being frustrated with the redundancy when they did experience it. They appreciated the "refresher." The mentors we spoke with described it like this,

> -[The on-line] modules provided new info, refreshed my memory on things I already knew, and helped prepare me.

> -[...] some of the material really just reinforced the material I had previously learned, but I would say that the training was very valuable and I would say it was very helpful.

> -I have received some similar trainings, but it's always refreshing to be reminded of some things and review some things so that I can attempt to be the best mentor that I'm capable of being.

Did mentors believe that the enhancement trainings were helpful?

Generally, some mentors found the enhancement training helpful and others did not. At the most basic level, almost all of the mentors we spoke with reported that they found some new tips in the online modules that were helpful to them.

> -[the online training modules] gave me different ideas for things to do with my [mentee], different ways to approach things.

> -[...] the information that was provided in the modules was great [...] I think there was some new stuff in it [...]

> -[...] it's pretty great in terms of [...] a lot of activities and things that they were suggesting [...]

However, when asked about if and how the enhancement trainings enhanced the quality of their relationships with their mentees, there was a lot of agreement among mentors that the online trainings did not result in learnings that impacted the quality of their mentoring relationship, or that when there was an impact, it was short-lived or "fleeting." The mentors describe the impact of the enhancement trainings this way,

> -[...] I don't think [the on-line enhancement trainings] enhanced the quality of my match [...the trainings were] useful, but didn't enhance it.

> -I don't think [the on-line enhancement trainings] changed a lot of my mentoring.

> -[...the on-line enhancement trainings provided] good reminders but they didn't enhance my mentoring relationship.

Others described the transient nature of the enhancement training lessons,

> -It really didn't stay with you [...] I had to go look at it to remember it.

> [...] had I not had the previous experience and had just taken the modules prior to becoming a mentor, I don't know how much of it I really would have absorbed.

Mentors found some of the modules more helpful than others. Mentors report liking training content related to teachable moments, advocacy (since it dealt more with at-risk youth),

and childhood development ("the different stages of development and psychological things mentees may be going through or experiencing at this stage"). A handful of mentors reported particularly liking the videos and live-case scenarios and found these hypothetical situations useful.

>-[…] teachable moments module gave me ideas of new stuff to try.

>-[…] live-case scenarios helped [shift mindset] and be more aware.

>- the videos were really helpful and it was, it was definitely really helpful to kind of go through and kind of learn a little bit more that I hadn't known before […] because I feel like when I first started Big Brothers Big Sisters it was a lot of information at the same time […] and it was kind of hypothetical situations that I wasn't sure if I was going to encounter, but I felt like one that was kind of more to help my mentee grow was […] really helpful to have.

Mentors had three major concerns related to the content of the enhancement training materials. First and foremost, mentors felt that the trainings were not customized and did not really focus in on Amachi's target population—at-risk youth, particularly youth impacted by incarceration. Mentors reported that they oftentimes relied on prior training or mentoring experiences to help their mentees, and that having more content in the enhancement trainings relevant to youth impacted by incarceration would have been really helpful to them. In the words of the mentors,

>-[…] my kid was starting to question about his father who is incarcerated, […] and how to deal with those questions – how to deal with his inquiries […] as it related to those things, how to deal with those…help him deal with those questions, those emotions. […] The modules didn't really pinpoint that. It's more like the modules were "this is how you mentor a particular kid" and that was it. The deep-rooted issues that my kid is facing were not covered in the modules, so I think the modules need to be a little more in-depth and be more intentional with the type of information that it's providing, so that way we can have the necessary resources and tools to accommodate our kids or the kids that we're mentoring. Going off that, if I was just someone who didn't have the experience with dealing with this particular population, I would probably be in the dark. I wouldn't know how to adequately serve or provide the necessary services to these kids. I would be stuck.

>-[…] some of the training elements that focus on […] the part of the mentoring relationship between the mentor and mentee is needed but without the context of again characteristics of a particular at-risk young boy or girl and some of those other things that come into play, if that's left out […]. Then you can walk in as a mentor with different expectations, you know. So, even touching on it briefly, like I mentioned earlier, did help change my awareness a little bit before I went into this one, but when you're let out of the mentoring training it is just about "oh okay, in the first meeting you do this, second meeting you do that, and here's the activities you'll be doing" without some training and helping mentors understand some of the at-risk characteristics, then you could walk into a situation that it's, you know, not the most ideal.

>-[…] the organization does really well preparing how just to mentor in general, but I think the other component is lacking in how to deal with a kid who is maybe at-risk or

has a parent incarcerated and I think just because you're learning how to mentor in general, those techniques are not [...] as useful. Well, I shouldn't say that, those techniques need to be a little more fine-tuned to deal with this particular population and the [...] circumstances or issues that may arise.

Second, some mentors felt the scenarios in the training modules were unrealistic. Mentors said the "scenarios did not seem real", were "too corny to stay with you", and were "hard to imagine myself in them." Third, a handful of mentors did not feel that all parts of the training were relevant or appropriate for them given the age of their mentee. There was some mentor agreement that trainings were more for matches with middle grade schoolers, not high school students. Although, some mentors were in agreement that the character development training specifically was aimed at older mentees, and not as relevant to younger mentees.

Mentors really appreciated the reference materials they were provided through the trainings. Mentors found the research informative, particularly the research related to at-risk populations. Many mentors spoke of archiving emails to search and re-read materials at later dates. Mentors also reported printing the notes from the modules to use as reference.

> *-The handouts you can download are really valuable.*

> *-[...] printed the notes from modules [...] used diverse set of examples that weren't just sports activities (liked the variety).*

> *-[materials] easy to reference [...] archived emails and can easily search and reread everything I missed.*

Did the e-learning technology present any challenges for mentors?

Generally, there were very few mentors or staff members who reported that technological problems prevented them from completing the training, but they did experience challenges with other features of the e-learning approach. First, a few mentors experienced difficulties getting access and completing the online trainings. And while this was not an obstacle in and of itself, the challenge was that these mentors did not know who to turn to for help. Staff also reported just a few login glitches, and one mentioned that older mentors had a harder time navigating the training on-line than younger mentors. In some cases, this challenge was solved by having mentors complete the training in the program office, or program staff traveled to the homes of mentors with tablets and assisted mentors with the training.

What was more pervasive was that while mentors really appreciated the reference materials made available through the enhancement trainings, some mentors were frustrated due to challenges they had accessing them post-training. Several mentors we interviewed expressed interest in re-reading the materials contained in the enhancement trainings, but to access them they had to navigate through the entire training as well as re-take pre- and post-training quizzes. The two mentors quoted below expressed the sentiments of the majority of mentors,

-You have to take the quiz again to look at the materials, so that's not that helpful.

-If there was something I wanted to view again, I had to re-take the training […] instead of being able to retrieve that actual information I wanted to re-read.

Lastly, as noted above, the enhancement trainings required a pre- and post-test. Mentors were required to get 100% correct on the post-test to "pass" the training. Mentors and staff alike expressed frustration with this protocol and with the content of the training quizzes themselves. Generally, mentors and staff agreed that they felt that the "correct" answers on the quizzes were subjective. Mentors who voiced concern had a difficult time picking just one right answer. As a result, they felt they were forced to answer in one way when other options would work too.

-[…] series of three questions in one training and kept getting one wrong and I wasn't sure which one it was, and I couldn't progress. It drove me a little crazy.

-[playing a logic game to get through some quizzes] took me far away from what it was actually supposed to be teaching me.

Furthermore, mentors who could not pass the quiz reported that it was "time-consuming" to repeat the quiz multiple times.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In our interviews we asked program staff and mentors for recommendations about how to improve the enhancement training. The themes that emerged from this question are presented below.

Training logistics
Staff shared four strategies for ensuring that more mentors took advantage of enhancement trainings:

> 1) Consider providing access to computers or tables for mentors who need them to complete the training, and suggested that home or office visits should be considered when mentors were having trouble navigating the enhancement trainings.
>
> 2) Consider making the trainings a pre-match requirement.
>
> 3) Consider providing incentives to mentors who complete the training.
>
> 4) Consider having mentors take trainings in a group setting - which mentors like since it allows for peer-to-peer conversations. The trade-off is that group training will negate the "on-demand," "self-directed" nature of the e-learning experience.

Mentors were not in agreement as to when trainings should occur. Some mentors thought the enhancement training would be most beneficial on the front-end of the match to prepare the mentor prior to entering into the mentorship. As one mentor explains, this was not possible for existing mentors newly taking the trainings.

> -[...] the training might have been more helpful and valuable as training if it was offered early on in matches or before you're actually matched with somebody, as opposed to, you know, some of us have been matched for several years with our children that we mentor. So, its good reinforcement, but it would've been more helpful on the front end [of the match].

In contrast, a handful of mentors proposed year-round refresher trainings that would occur on a quarterly basis. Although other mentors reacted to this suggestion by saying if the trainings had the same content they likely would not re-take them as a refresher.

Training content
Mentors recommended more interactive training. A few mentors requested a more "practice-like in-person demo" and even more opportunities for role-playing. Role-playing would allow mentors to practice mentoring by working through some scenarios prior to meeting their mentees.

Mentors offered multiple suggestions to better align enhancement training content with the population of youth they are mentoring and the structure of the mentoring program. As previously mentioned, mentors felt there was a lot of general mentoring resources in the enhancement training, but these resources weren't tailored specifically to the target population of youth the program serves—children impacted by incarceration. Mentors recommended providing more resources related to underserved children, and children of incarcerated parents in particular, such as more relatable examples, outcomes, and tangible goals.

-[...there] needs to be more relatable examples, more realistic situations, outcomes, tangible goals that can be accomplished when dealing with this particular population rather than a broad overview of the mentoring aspect.

Multiple mentors requested advice on serving "at-risk youth" in particular.

-[...] the organization does really well preparing how just to mentor in general, but I think the other component is lacking in how to deal with a kid who is maybe at-risk or has a parent incarcerated and I think just because you're learning how to mentor in general, those techniques are not [...] useful. Well, I shouldn't say that, those techniques need to be a little more fine-tuned to deal with this particular population and the circumstances or issues that may arise.

Alternatively, mentors suggested if the trainings couldn't be made so specific that the mentors be given access to "someone on staff dedicated to dealing with resources for at-risk populations that [a mentor] could contact if [a mentor] needed to." Mentors spoke of needing access and knowledge of counseling and support services for mentees as well as their parents, since parents are "a little isolated" and need supports too.

One mentor spoke of their mentee's frustration with teacher turnover in an urban school district. Mentors would welcome additional training on dealing with issues related to the mentee's school and city schools in general. Another mentor suggested training could be specific to the location of mentoring. For example, if location-based mentoring (in school) the training could review tips on being in school and walk the mentor through the school schedule and process. If home-based, the training could cover how to manage the relationship with caretakers.

Lastly, as previously mentioned, many mentors experienced that the trainings were not always offering information that was developmentally appropriate for their mentees' age. Several mentors felt that customizing the training based on the age of the mentee would present numerous benefits to the mentor as they work with their mentee to navigate the key tasks of their developmental stage. One mentor described it this way,

-Because it is different mentoring in different ages so I think it would be kind of good to keep them in sets of, if you're dealing with a young teenager, here's more of what you'll run into. Because, you know, a 5 year-old on the playground is going to run into something different than, you know, a 12-year old with their first school dance or something like that. So, I think it could kind of be more tailored towards ages, which then it would seem to reinforce ideas for different ages, like, you know, the college preparation. Mine is too little to think about that, but it is something that's really beneficial to remind people, or, you know, the transition from middle school to high school, to be some things to different age groups.

Mentors recommended that the enhancement trainings should be customized to the mentor's experience. Mentors routinely pointed out that prior experiences and trainings make a huge difference in mentors being prepared for mentoring their mentee. One mentor suggested that trainings could be tailored specifically to their own levels of experience. So, mentors with more experience would attend trainings with less general content while mentors with little to no experience would receive trainings not only specific to the population they are mentoring but on general mentoring as well.

Some mentors suggested additional content for trainings that they felt would help them improve their match quality. First, mentors expressed an interest in training on certain "virtues", such as patience in developing the mentoring relationship, hope for a long lasting relationship, and openness to the unexpected. Three mentors shared these examples,

> -[a training that focused on] hope or inspiration not to quit [end match] would be fantastic.

> -[...training that helps the mentor realize that] every mentee is different, their situations and backgrounds are different [and that they should] be prepared for that and ask for help if needed.

> -I would say that it's important to remember to be patient. [...] you're not [going to] necessarily evolve to this amazing relationship on the first day on mentoring your mentee but it's a process that takes place over time.

Second, a handful of mentors suggested that training on goal setting would be helpful to mentors, as would a training on improving communication and dialogue with mentees. Several mentors spoke of communication challenges with their mentees; for instance, one mentor did not know of how best to deal with a mentee who stole from them and could have used support in addressing this issue productively. Mentors generally felt that the training was light on communication content.

Lastly, some mentors asked for general support in how to plan activities week-to-week. One mentor was specifically interested in receiving direction on how best to encourage a mentee to plan an activity/outing.

> -[...] having my [mentee] plan something is definitely a really good experience for them in planning an event and then it's also not like I'm always trying to choose the thing and then also they have a chance to kind of share what they really want to do, [be]cause sometimes I think my [mentee] is really quiet so she just kind of agrees with something I suggest, even if she doesn't enjoy it. [...] it's a really good exercise to have your [mentee] try and like plan an activity for the both of you.

Another mentor shared that he could benefit from additional support in selecting relationship-building activities to do with his mentee.

Mentors recommended linking mentors to each other as resources to learn from past experiences. Despite the fact that mentor support groups and ongoing training are among the hardest facets of mentoring programs to implement, almost all of the mentors we interviewed felt they could benefit from additional collaboration with one another to share their experiences. Within the e-learning structure, mentors suggested online discussion forums and webinars. Three mentors shared these specific ideas,

> -Create a discussion forum (webpage) to post online, anonymous issues to get mentor feedback from other mentors.

> -Mentor webinar to discuss common mentoring issues and suggestions on resolutions.

> -Peer-to-peer coaching [...] with other mentors and with program staff lots of experience seeing what works and what doesn't.

Mentors also described that in-person connections with other mentors would be helpful.

DISCUSSION

There was some notable overlap between program staff interview and mentor focus group findings. Generally speaking, program staff and mentors both found value in the online training modules. They recognized the on-demand trainings offer both a mix of new information as well as overlap with prior training. For the most part, the overlap with prior training was welcomed and understood as a "refresher." Also, both program staff and mentors reported very few technological issues with accessing or completing the on-demand trainings.

The mentoring literature suggests mentors do benefit from on-going training and support but not all take advantage of it. Our study found this to be consistent with the literature, in that program staff at most sites reported the need to "hound" and "track down" mentors to complete the trainings. One site said:

> *-This is the most success we've ever had with getting Bigs to complete a post-match training. We are quite happy about our 50% completion rate. [...] the issue is not the online aspect. It is just that it is hard to get Bigs to do training after they are matched. However, the options that are not in-person (like these) have been the most successful.*

The literature also suggests the utility of mentoring enhancements, like those focused on in the on-demand enhancement trainings, rely heavily on mentors'—both their participation in the training and their adoption of the approaches covered in the training. Our study found that not all mentors participated in all three trainings. Furthermore, of those mentors who completed the trainings, many suggest there are multiple ways to react to the training scenarios and they were not always in agreement as to the "right" answer - calling into question whether the mentors who even take the trainings are actually internalizing and adopting the training material. This may explain why mentors felt that the enhancement trainings did not actually result in higher quality relationships. Also a number of mentors felt that the content was "too broad" and did not hone in on the particular population targeted for this grant - youth with incarcerated parents.

Overall, mentors are very receptive to online trainings like the on-demand enhancement training modules offered. In fact, some sites had more success in getting voluntary mentors to participate than any other format. So, generally there is promise in this strategy, but the content needs to be more customized for it to be effective. For instance, the mentoring literature suggests mentors should understand the structural and logistical factors that influence possible match termination (family instability, scheduling conflicts, family problems, and match incompatibility). Also, the literature suggests mentors working with this population should be specially trained to understand the challenges these families experience (ensuring mentors have training to support the family needs, provide monetary support to cover meals, activities and transportation). Mentors in our study recognized these areas as crucial to their mentoring relationships, but many felt that the enhancement trainings could be stronger if they were addressing these issues. Amachi and other mentoring programs could benefit from applying these mentor suggestions to further encourage mentor buy-in and improve the quality of mentor training generally.

APPENDIX

Number of Amachi Matches Made by Five Sub Grantees (8 Sites) as Reported by Program Staff (October 2016)

Did you meet year one (Oct. 1, 2014-Sept. 30, 2015) Amachi match goals? (Yes/No & Number of Matches)				
Site	Matches	Impacted by incarceration	Male youth of color	Local mentors
Site A	No 14	Yes 14	Yes 6	Yes 6
Site B	Yes 22	Yes 22	Yes 10	Yes 22
Site C	Yes 15	Yes 14	Yes 6	Yes 15
Site D	Yes 10	Yes 10	Yes 10	Yes 10
Site E	Yes 50	Yes 50	Yes 22	No 7
Site F	Yes 50	Yes 50	Yes Unreported	Yes Unreported
Site G	Yes 50	Yes 42	Yes 13	Yes 50
Site H	Yes 66	Yes 58	Yes 33	Yes 32

Did you meet year two (Oct. 1, 2015-Sept. 30, 2016) Amachi match goals? (Yes/No & Number of matches)				
Site	Matches	Impacted by incarceration	Male youth of color	Local mentors / Volunteers
Site A	Yes 16	Yes 16	No 4	Yes 6
Site B	Yes 22	Yes 22	Yes 10	Yes 22
Site C	Yes 16	Yes 16	Yes 7	Yes 16
Site D	Yes 10	Yes 10	Yes 10	Yes 10
Site E	Yes 83	Yes 83	Yes 41	Yes 44
Site F	Yes 50	Yes 50	Yes Unreported	Yes Unreported
Site G	Yes 50	Yes 35	Yes 15	Yes 50
Site H	Yes 53	Yes 38	Yes 30	Yes 18