



A White Paper
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Trusted Mentors:

Transforming Lives Through
Authentic Human Connection



Trusted Mentors

Trusted Mentors is an Indianapolis non-profit that connects trained, volunteer mentors with at-risk adults to help more people stay housed and out of prison.

Trusted Mentors serves 3 vulnerable populations who live complicated, often chaotic, lives related to prior circumstances. They are participating in community homeless prevention and re-entry programs. The three populations served are:

- Young adults (18-24 years old) who are aging out of foster care, or diagnosed with a mental health issue, as well as young mothers struggling economically. These young adults have a higher likelihood of community disengagement, homelessness, or incarceration. They struggle with forming healthy relationships due to trauma experienced early in their young lives.
- Adults (25 years and older) who face unique social-economic or social emotional challenges, such as chronic homelessness, destructive addictions and/or mental illness. Our work with St Vincent de Paul expands our work into low-income communities, helping to stabilize lives *before* they become at risk of homelessness.
- Re-entering adults (ex-offenders), pre- or post-release, who desire a supportive network that assists with entering employment and successful reintegration into Indianapolis communities.

This White Paper is provided through a capacity building grant of the Central Indiana Community Foundation. It explores how mentoring relationship can be transformative for both people in the relationship, and how acquiring knowledge of others can also transform our understanding of societal problems.

It's Tuesday afternoon. Guy just met with his new case manager at a re-entry program. He's stressed and anxious. No one will hire him with his record. He can't seem to repair his relationship with his family. Nothing is going right.

Across town, Shaundra is talking with her coach at a community center wondering how she can rebuild a life for her and her daughter. She's made a string of bad decisions. She doesn't trust herself. She's freaking out about a decision she made Monday morning to sign up for a career training program. She was excited but today, all she knows is she dropped out of school years ago - pregnant and with bad grades. She's going to fail again and lose her daughter for good.

Before the end of the day, 19-year old Alex has called the social worker. Living with friends who have all been forced to leave a group home last year when they turned 18, one is trying not to flunk out of his last semester of high school. Another doesn't make enough money to pay rent next week and forgets to take her medications that help her manage well day-to-day. Alex thinks finding a boyfriend is probably the only option left to avoid being homeless. Alex and the roommates are really scared and feeling pretty hopeless.

Every day across Marion County, adults are living on the margins. They may have started life well but, for reasons too many to list, they are struggling. Suffering. They may have been in and out of the justice system. They made one or many rash decisions. They have bad luck or run up against discriminatory housing and work policies. They may have a childhood story that breaks hearts. Trying a drug on a whim, they may find themselves addicted and trying to stay sober every minute of every day. They are all ages from 18 to well over 70 - single, divorced or parents who love their children. Nearly all of them are alone, if not physically disconnected, mentally disconnected. Like every one of us, they once had and still have dreams. They want to hope. They want to feel safe. Most certainly, they want to thrive. Like every human, they have tried and failed many times to make changes.

Fellow residents may see them – or may not. We may avoid certain areas of our community. We may turn away. We may feel uncomfortable or angry when we see folks who don't seem to “belong” or fit in. We don't know the story of any one of them, but our minds quickly form opinions about “those” people. We make assumptions about the faults that led them to this life. Maybe they deserve it. Many of us feel certain there is nothing about those lives or the people who live them that in any way mirrors our own. While we know the concept, most of us find it difficult to imagine any “shared humanity” with adults who live on the margins.

Truthfully, our neighbors living on the margins also question this shared humanity. Like “us”, they cry during a movie when relationships heal, someone beats all odds to make a dream come true or – after a troubled journey - finds herself in a better place; he finds compassionate love. They, too, love stories of friends who help each other without regard or drama. Those fictional and real stories touch their own deep desires and unresolved difficulties. But, when those movies end, they hear pundits talk about their inherent unworthiness and permanent failing. They sense the palpable unacceptance around them, reminders of their brokenness and rejection. They know they are the “other.” Even they believe they have nothing in common with those who aren't on the margins. They don't know how to reconcile their own hopes and dreams with their obvious track record and all the messaging they receive. Some don't even try anymore. They know they will never be seen differently than how they are viewed now.

Othering: Its Power, Effect and an Antidote

“Othering” isn't new. Left over from our mammalian days, our brains are wired for it. It's human nature, protecting us from enemies - quickly determining what is safe, what to pursue and what to reject. Categorizing simplifies tasks and makes quick meaning of everything. It can be a literal lifesaver.

Through millennia, it has also been harnessed to tip power to favor one group. Othering has always excused conquest. Our wiring and its subsequent bias confirmation tell us that our fellow humans are less than or different enough that it becomes very easy for us to rejoice in what is good in *us* and reject what we don't know or understand in *them*. Othering leaves us feeling confident about ourselves - and right. We can attribute negative

characteristics that differentiate others from our perceived normative ways. It leaves us fearful. It's easy for us to make decisions on their behalf, bend policy to help us and (intentionally or not) harm them.

“While the brain’s efforts are sensical, the categories themselves are human constructs. They are typical arbitrary...Over time, the stories we create, share and believe solidify our commitment to these categories as non-negotiable...Inscribed in our minds, consciously and unconsciously, [they] do not remain there but manifest in the world. They affect our behavior and inform [every] decision... When replicated across society and over time, individual acts of discrimination against group-based stereotypes have a cumulative and magnifying effect that may help explain many group-based inequalities. Neuroscientists have mapped the networks in the brain that ... internalize meanings and assumptions... into mental shortcuts [so we can] evaluate groups, events, and anything encountered in the world. They also underpin and inform judgments about groups and people that are members of those groups...Othering becomes structured in the world through processes that are institutionalized or culturally embedded at different levels of society, from the neighborhood level to the larger political-legal order.” ([otheringandbelonging.org](#))

Described by *Very Well Mind* ([verywellmind.com](#)), othering allows us to see through a lens of “us vs. them” in terms of human connection and relationship. We believe “they are not like me.” We can dismiss one person’s individual humanity. They become less worthy of our respect. We don’t attribute dignity to them. While we recognize the unique, individual stories and experiences of “us,” we struggle to recognize the same in “others.”

Right now, othering is on open display everywhere, even among those who practice faith traditions. Being led by that mammalian brain, we give ourselves permission to judge, to be sharp-tongued, to dictate with whom we shall interact or be in relationship with. Acceptability and worth are gone. With ease, “others” become overwhelmingly different with a chasm so wide, we can’t imagine any bridge that leads to shared connection.

But othering comes at a cost, for many of us a very high one. Our intentional and unintentional thoughts, emotions and acts of othering reduces our personal and collective empathy. It blocks genuine dialogue. It limits solutions to challenges. This impacts all of us. And it releases us from personal responsibility to make this world a better place. (For more powerful discussion on this topic, read [The Problem of Othering: Toward Inclusiveness and Belonging](#))

To limit the potential for conflict or war, othering requires solutions. Segregation is one. It doesn’t work. Neither does assimilation – working so hard to acknowledge only our commonality, we wipe out what is unique to a single person or a group. Assimilation leaves “others” to repress what is uniquely them in order to fit into the larger social group. It lets those in power dismiss what doesn’t fit into a single story, a common narrative.

[A Hopeful Response to Othering: Drawing on Our Own Personal Agency](#)

A third option exists: *belonging*, welcoming both what is universal and unique to each person, creating a “circle of human concern.”

The only viable solution to the problem of othering [involves] inclusion and belongingness. The most important good we distribute to each other in society is membership. The right to belong is prior to all other distributive decisions since it is members who make those decisions. Belongingness entails an unwavering commitment to not simply tolerating and respecting difference but to ensuring that all people are welcome and feel that they belong in the society.

Widening our [circle of human concern](#) challenges and rejects negative representations and stereotypes. “It is a process by which the most marginalized outgroups are brought into the center of our concern through higher order love—the Beloved Community that Dr. King envisioned. Of course, the core value in the quest for Dr. King’s [Beloved Community](#) was agape love – a form of love that is seemingly allusive for humans:

“Redeeming goodwill for all, an overflowing love which is purely spontaneous, unmotivated, groundless and creative, the love of God operating in the human heart. Agape does not begin by discriminating between worthy and unworthy people...It begins by loving others for their sakes and makes no distinction between a friend and enemy; it is directed toward both. Agape is love seeking to preserve and create community.”

If this concept is “too meta,” a great deal of data tell us how to [combat othering](#), at minimum: 1) intentionally seeing each person we interact with or hear stories about as an individual - with his own unique story and a wide complexity of motivations/beliefs/feelings, 2) becoming aware of our own unconscious biases, 3) remembering

that every individual is multidimensional in dozens of ways - even people who seem unlike us, and 4) broadening our social circles beyond those who feel comfortable and familiar. It is very difficult to “other” when we initiate these four actions.

[In 2019](#), social psychologists proposed the “*contact hypothesis*” – the idea that conflict and prejudice can be reduced when people who belong to different groups spend time with one another. A meta-analysis of 20 years of research (*Personal Social Psychology Review*) shows that when adults intentionally “*bridge*” - as they become “*more familiar*” with others - they speak up among their peers and networks. Over time, they advocate for and against policies and leaders who promote belonging or strengthen efforts to divide people or whole segments of our community.

[Greater Good Science Center](#) reports that when in relationship with someone seemingly unlike us, we: 1) pay attention to how bias impacts our behaviors, where we turn to for advice, and who we typically trust; 2) expose ourselves to counter-stereotype images; 3) reach out across difference, and 4) begin to “*ask [not] assume, listen [not] judge.*” We squash our brain’s effort to hold rigidly to our own circle of concern.

Does something so simple as actively including others work? The University of Texas gave it a try. It changed messages it believed it was unintentionally sending to students from “*outgroups.*” It created new messages it hoped would be more welcoming to incoming, marginalized students. *What happened?* The University saw a dramatic improvement in both outcomes and health among these students.

Today, the word “*ally*” is batted about. An ally is typically a self-acknowledged person of power or privilege who uses that position to stand next to – in support of – an outlier or marginalized group as that person or group effects change. Allies are useful and necessary. Kate Johnson, author of *Radial Friendship: Seven Ways to Love Yourself and Find Your People in an Unjust World* offers another term that aligns more deeply with Dr. King’s vision – “*radical friendship.*”

Radical friendship “*acknowledges that both sides of the friendship need liberation.*” Both members accept that they don’t have the answers, but with enough tools and resources to navigate together, both members experience “*tremendous spiritual growth and deepening intimacy*” with themselves and another human. With a commitment to the friendship, the very act of the friendship – and what grows out of it – effects meaningful social change.

“There’s just no way we can accomplish the changes we need to see [in society, at the level of policy, culture, and institutions] without a mass movement that requires bridging differences...Movements in the past that have had impact, like the civil rights movement, occurred through friendships, relationships between individuals and communities - forged across racial [and wealth] divides. In our radical friendships we learn more and more about all the identities that show up or are impacted by our own life experiences, as well as my friend. We become very aware of our inner stance about all kinds of things...[It’s] a social act. We see our friend as a person who has everything they need to meet the circumstances of their life. We both recognize that our friend – like all people - could benefit from our company as they move forward on their path...[We] accompany each other as fellow travelers. We may have different roles towards one another...but whatever role we have with each other, it’s about having this deep intention to support and walk with them in that journey. (Dec 21, 2021)

Spiritual teachings across the spectrum and governments across time know something many of us forget – it’s nearly impossible to retain your own amassed power or go to war (whether metaphorical or physical) with fellow humans that you genuinely care for and know the stories of. When we know each other’s stories – when we work to understand and can imagine being in one another’s shoes - it is difficult not to see each other’s life in a more generous way. We can reimagine environmental and social impacts that led us to where we are. Even if we don’t see eye-to-eye, it becomes easy to support each other as equals on a journey.

It’s not just those in power - with privilege or membership in a normative group - who “other,” everyone does. Adults facing homelessness, aging out of foster care, or coming out of prison (among other marginalized residents) also have beliefs about the world around them. They often believe they are unacceptable, that no one cares. It’s hard to trust systems or other adults. Genuine caring between those with power and those on the margins changes perceptions of both individuals. It helps both learn to individuate all humans. Through subtle, active effort, it helps a marginalized adult sift through their own assumptions and see that there are people who want to care and who genuinely seek community with them, that there is a welcome place for them in the community. That they are sufficient just as they are. Mutual relationship is transforming for everyone.

Stepping into this space together - building a personal relationship or friendship with “others” - we mortar another block into the foundation of Martin Luther King’s universal vision of a Beloved community.

Trusted Mentors: A Transformative Response to Othering

I just want someone who can help me stay on the right path. Accomplish my goals. Someone I can trust, vent to, and have a friend in. Someone who can provide emotional support. (Mentee application)

I would love to be an *empathetic champion to someone that needs someone like that* right now. (mentor)

Trusted Mentors steps into this space, embracing the idea that authentic friendship can be revolutionary. It also knows that friendships between “others” can be challenging to forge. In response, it offers a vehicle that gives both friends something to “do.” Through free 1-to-1 mentoring, adults who live on the edges of our community work with an “other” to make progress toward their own goals, re-discover their own strong voice and simultaneously star center stage with their mentor in an act of resistance against those who divide us all.

The power dynamic is flattened by requiring that mentors are volunteer. For mentees, the idea that someone is journeying with them, someone said “yes” to them – unpaid and simply out of a desire to support them as an individual - can be, on its own merit, emotionally overwhelming. Mentors don’t *have to*, they *want to*. Mentees also approve their mentor and may close the match at any time. For both friends, this is the first time someone chastised by society sits across from someone with power and privilege – a cup of coffee in both hands – and begins.

Love and justice are not two. Without inner change, there can be no outer change; without collective change, no change matters. You do not have to wait for permission to ‘belong’ from external power – from the community around you. Belonging belongs to you. First and foremost, belong to yourself. And know that your own belonging should never be on the backs of other people who do not belong.

(Rev. angel kyodo williams)

The term “mentor” gives structure to the friendship, but this relationship is built on the same ideals laid out in the section above. It is built on mutual intention. Meaningful conversation occurs – both on purpose and organically. The very act of having these conversations expands our worldview, leaving us better informed and more connected, less compartmentalized, or isolated from one another. Through conversation, mentors and mentees learn more about their own and each other’s identities - the norms, roles, values, and beliefs influencing a person’s perspectives, interactions, and behaviors.

Like radical friendship, this mentoring vision begins with understanding that each mentee has their own dreams and goals. The mentor’s role is not to define or guide the mentee into a life that looks like the mentor’s life, but to support a life that takes on a shape mirroring the deepest hope of the mentee. Good mentoring creates a path that very naturally opens up an inclusive space for sharing, learning, and ideation. It respects the inherent worth and lived experience of each mentee.

Even the act of a mentee setting goals that are supported by their mentor is both an equalizing act and a reminder to mentees that they are not alone. Over time, many begin to feel belonging. They feel seen. Their stories no longer feel shameful or disregarded. They care for and feel cared about by a stranger from the “other” side.

Not only are many mentors changed through their friendship, but a veil is lifted. A world is intimately revealed. As they get to know their mentee and help scaffold victories toward stability, mentors learn about local entities that are addressing systemic inequities and finding alternate solutions. Mentors learn about blocks and hoops. They watch staff stretch incredibly limited resources and patience to help clients navigate opportunities and barriers, often absorbing the incredible stressors of their clients. Opinions and assumptions once cut-and-dry now appear more nuanced and layered.

A Brief History of a Small but Mighty Force for Good

Jeri Warner was predisposed to welcoming, loving and feeling comfortable among all forms of diversity. She doesn’t remember a time when that wasn’t true. Like many who see from that lens, she assumed it was just as easy for everyone else, natural. But as an adult working in a local worship community, she discovered this wasn’t so. Her spiritual teachings laid out a mandate; she bought into it with ease. Her faith community did not. They couldn’t stop themselves from ‘othering,’ from distancing, from withholding. Their membership was a refuge from the

outside world - including the many poor and suffering just outside their own doors. Any relationship with the “other” was orchestrated, outreached, and singular in its directional message. These efforts kept members safe, and while they would not have agreed, it kept our “circle of human concern” at bay.

As life would have it, Jeri soon found herself one of the hidden “other.” External circumstances left her and her family struggling to make ends meet. The stress was unbearable. She couldn’t ask for help or support. She felt shame. She knew she was a hard worker, a good mom. But the messages around her were loud, persistent. They wore at her. She began to wonder: *If I’m highly educated, a professional, well-connected in this community and can absorb these messages so quickly and deeply, what must we be doing to families who have been poor for a generation or generations, who have felt the ugly messages of racial animosity, who have tried and failed, who have knocked on doors of opportunity and been pushed back- over and over? Aware of the mistakes they made, frustrated by their own missteps and labeled over and over. Why does it seem like we punish them? Where are voices of hope and encouragement for them?*

Jeri had an “*ah ha*” moment: seeing the world the way she saw it – a place of compassionate connection, mutual respect and support that wasn’t to be feared – was a learned skill. Learned in community with “others.” Both sides sharing their vulnerability with equal power and agency.

As she found her way back from poverty and the incredible stressors it spread across all areas of life, she was offered an opportunity by the Coalition for Homeless Intervention & Prevention (CHIP) to develop her idea - Trusted Partners - with adults at risk of homelessness. Using best practices, Jeri built, piloted and served as a mentor herself. There were 14 matches at first. By 2008, the fledgling idea became a 501c3 – Trusted Mentors. Soon, it welcomed men and women participating in local re-entry programs. In 2014, it expanded again, opening to young adults (ages 18-24) who were aging out of foster care, and later, young adults with a diagnosed mental health issue or who were alone and new moms. In 2014, this was revolutionary.

Today, Trusted Mentors recruits, qualifies, trains and supports unpaid mentors dedicated to helping adults *practice necessary life skills they need to stabilize themselves, gain a stronger sense of self-worth, and benefit from knowing they belong and are capable of the success they see for themselves.* Each year, approximately 200 matches are supported. In fact, Trusted Mentors has seen over 170% growth since 2012.

- Critical to its model of self-determination, mentees apply through partner agencies where they are clients. Potential mentees make their own decision and apply if interested.
- The mentee and mentor pools are increasingly diverse with 56% of mentees and just under 30% of mentors self-identifying as BIPOC. At least 44% of mentees self-identify as female. While 46% of mentees are ages 25-49 at least 31% are over age 55 and 10% are under age 25.
- At least 21% of mentee applicants haven’t graduated high school, yet 34% have some college courses done and 12% have a postsecondary degree (including master’s degrees.)
- Two-thirds of board members have been mentors in the past.
- While matches are a one-year commitment, on average, they last 20 months. Thirteen have continued at least four years. The longest supported relationship is still going strong at eight years. As hoped, many matches stay friends long after their formal closure.

Trusted Mentors operates from *radical generosity* – the concept that the suffering of others should be as intolerable as our own suffering is to us. It doesn’t pity or “other.” It steps into this space with solidarity and equity. With humility, Trusted Mentors engages our vulnerable neighbors in relationships of trust, guidance, and reciprocity. It facilitates long-term solutions and bridges the gap between local residents.

Recognized as a thought leader for its model and vision, the founder and organization received a 2016 Vision Award by The Indianapolis Foundation. Trusted Mentors continues to be the only known community-based adult mentoring program in Indiana and one of very few in the U.S. Now offering two-year licensing opportunities to other vetted organizations in communities across Indiana, the model is unfolding in Evansville, West Lafayette and Bartholomew County.

Who doesn’t want a mentor?

Poverty can be exhausting and isolating. Giving up becomes an option, but a mentor can provide encouragement and options that the individual needs to move forward. Besides, 70% of corporate executives admit to having mentors and that it made the world of difference. Isn’t that a good reason for everyone to have one?

Mentoring as a Vehicle: Does It Help Adults Who Live on the Margins?

The internet abounds with distressing data about often-unsurmountable difficulties faced by vulnerable adults. Outcomes can be grim.

Many vulnerable adults face the terror of impending homelessness and hunger every day; These experiences alone can produce traumatic effects, both brief and chronic. Layered under those effects can be a lifetime (or a season) of effects from trauma (including PTSD.) In fact, 25% of local adults who don't have safe, stable housing self-identify with substance use disorder; 26% self-identify with serious mental health challenges (2020.) Many struggle to trust anyone or to feel safe/at ease in any one moment.

Research is clear that chronic poverty impacts neurology and working memory. As a by-product of constantly re-working next steps, the act of survival and high levels of ongoing stress often led to perpetual chaos – creating more impact. The children in our care are also impacted. It becomes more and more difficult to plan or make critical changes to stop the cycle.

Chaos isn't synonymous with poverty but when you are in constant stress mode, constantly having to keep a roof over your head - deal with all the difficulties that emerge every day because you don't have money - the impact that emotional stress often has on your relationship with those around you whom you love, with your neighbors or peers as you navigate shared conflict.... It just feels like constant chaos. I always talk about the chaos of poverty – my mindset hasn't recovered from the chaos of my own poverty yet because it's such a traumatic way to live. You're constantly on the go and thinking about how to save your arse. Stable housing and stable income can change everything. We make the same mistakes as everyone else. Same decisions but when you are poor you have no safety net. One mistake can tumble everything down (Cash Carraway, British author/playwright, 2020.)

For another perspective from a woman living in poverty, read Linda Tirado's 2013 [autobiographical post](#).

Trusted Mentors currently partners with agencies that serve one of three vulnerable populations, all of whom are at significant risk of future homelessness or incarceration. The rest of this section discusses challenges and the latest wisdom about the benefits of mentoring or intentional relationship among specific populations.

Young Adults

Every day young adults turn 18 and 'age out' of foster care, even from the best of homes. Laws require that they leave a stable system of care and manage their own affairs – while many in government are still emotionally or financially supporting their own 18-year-old child. Legally adults, those who age out may be behind in developmental milestones with few positive role models and tenuous networks. They may be estranged from biological families. They may still be in high school, while also fully responsible for every bill, living alone in an apartment, managing all aspects of life, including feeding, educating, transporting and caring for themselves. As they struggle alone to survive, at least 37% drop out of high school. Annie E Casey Foundation notes that just four years after aging out – by age 21 – 25% have been homeless, less than 50% have a HS diploma, 42% have become parents, and 80% are unable to support themselves. *If they aren't supporting themselves, who is supporting them?* Until their mid-20s, many continue to struggle to develop impulse control, reasoning and healthy judgement.

The [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Administration](#) reports that young adults who leave foster care continue to be at risk of homelessness. *“By age 26, 36% of them have experienced homelessness.”* They face enormous challenges in achieving housing stability, especially if they have run away while in foster care, have been abused, had multiple foster care placements, or have a mental health diagnosis.

However, national research also tells us that young adults (ages 18-24) who are involved in positive, meaningful respectful relationships with older adults see improved skills and competencies and are less likely to engage in dangerous behaviors.

While the [Chronical of Evidence-Based Mentoring](#) describes youth aging out of foster care as a *“uniquely marginalized group at-risk for a multitude of negative well-being outcomes,”* it also notes that decades of research on high-quality mentoring (in general) show powerful, positive effects across many areas, including to

well-being. That said, formal mentoring with this population is very new. It looks promising. While these youth often struggle to form bonds with adults, it is highly likely that a good-quality mentor “*may act as a protective factor.*” Preliminary qualitative data suggests that mentees are more likely to complete high school or receive an HSE. Mentoring may help promote healthy behaviors, reduce vulnerability, improve self-efficacy and buffer against mental health symptoms. “*Natural mentoring*” seems to improve the transition adjustment. A longer-term, consistent mentoring relationship, one where the young adult perceives their mentor as very caring or parent-like already seems “*vital*” to a successful transition.

Unlike many of their peers, young adults leaving foster care have fewer natural positive networks or “social capital.” A mentor can help build positive networks, help connect with a new job or provide reliable emotional support and wise counsel during difficult moments – stepping in for the role many parents, relatives or guardians normally serve as older teens navigate into adulthood. While current studies have not investigated connections between mentoring and specific outcomes for [this group], it is clear from these few studies that mentors are valued as a positive bridge between the foster care system and life as an adult by youth transitioning out of that system.

At its core, mentoring confirms to a young adult that someone cares about them – voluntarily - giving them a sense of hope, connection and assurance that they are not alone in dealing with day-to-day challenges, that they matter. In partnership with local aging out services, Trusted Mentors provides a consistent presence of a caring adult. This mentor helps a young person practice independent living skill, serves as important trusted adult and helps keep one more young adult safe as they find their own way.

Recently Incarcerated

In 2019, more than 10,400 adults were released from prison in Indiana - 2480 to Marion County. Hundreds of reports outline in frustrating detail how difficult it is for someone who has served their time to successfully re-establish themselves in a productive way.

Adults returning from prison “arrive” with pent-up hope and deep fear. Discouragement and hopelessness can soon follow as they butt up against systemic and personal realities that trip up their efforts. They don’t meet minimum qualifications for free job training. Their record precludes them from applying for a job they’re otherwise qualified for. Their communication skills are out-of-sync with the broader community. They may be overwhelmed by the freedom they have every day. Technology may seem utterly confusing, an embarrassment to hide. They may feel out of touch with many cultural references, feel anxious in crowds or open spaces and discover they don’t have a sense of “self” anymore. While holding all this, they are presented with debts now due. They may be separated from family, may have suffered losses they couldn’t grieve in prison and may have no good friends to turn to. They might not know how to fix a meal, manage money, shop or find a medical home. Before they were imprisoned, 75% struggled with addiction.

When they arrive in the community, most ex-offenders don’t have an appropriate ID and 60% don’t have a high school diploma. At least 55% of parents owe at least \$20,000 in back child support. Most offenders have to pay \$70 a week toward debt as soon as they return. In part, this is why the national unemployment rate among the formerly incarcerated is 27% (35-43% for BIPOC.) More ex-offenders are looking for work each day than are their peers of the same age.

In a powerful 2022 report by [Prison Policy](#), the author asks this question “*What makes people more or less likely to succeed upon release?*” Findings are too detailed for the purposes of this paper, the following discussion offered by the report speaks to the value mentors bring to this group of vulnerable adults:

- While two out of three adults stay out of prison, recidivism should not be the only measure of successful transition. Others are equally important. There is overwhelming evidence regarding the prevalence of homelessness, joblessness and poverty among the formerly incarcerated.
- Nearly twice as many adults are under community supervision as live in all jails and prisons combined. Typically, only 50% of adults under supervision successfully complete conditions of probation or parole. On average, they must comply with 18-20 requirements every day, at least a few seemingly arbitrary.
- “*Intense scrutiny*” is often what leads to failure to stay on track with conditions. Adults often miss simple tasks or technical violations that would, for the general population, be unremarkable or handled through fines and community service. For an ex-offender, the result is often a short return to prison, further exacerbating one’s ability to provide stability for a child, complete job training or secure stable work.

- Probation fees and fines can be crippling for many adults who leave prison and return to poverty, who struggle with mental health issues or who have very little formal education.

Of course, unable to find work and often facing discrimination every day, ex-offenders are nearly 10 times more likely to *experience homelessness* than the general population. They are banned from applying for or living in public housing. If they find housing, it is typically in one of two places that do not discriminate: 1) motels and 2) shelters. Shelters are common options as both immediate housing and long-term solutions.

National research also suggests that in the year *before* imprisonment (the first or a subsequent time), 15% of adults experience homelessness. Adults who have been to prison just once experience homelessness at a rate nearly 7 times higher than the general public and are *twice as likely* as the general population to experience homelessness if they have been to prison more than once. Homelessness then increases the odds of interacting with police.

85% of new offenses happen when an ex-offender is unemployed, 85%! They come out and they can't get a job. Who is going to hire them? And they can't get housing because they've been in prison. We've created this system where we've lost capital in terms of people can't get employed. Sometimes they returned to prison – because that's the only place they know they can survive. At TM we know when you combine the statistics and the reality of what it's like upon re-entry, when you have people coming out of prison who are hungry to build a good life and people who want to provide meaningful service, we look for individuals who are willing to build a relationship and to get to know somebody. We don't expect that we'll solve all the problems. Incarceration is such a big problem. But we do know we can help people leaving prison and leaving homelessness do it better. We can support them in their efforts to change, to stabilize their lives, and then help them succeed – not as professional but as a friend. The skills to survive in prison and the skills to survive outside prison aren't the same set of skills. In prison they tell you exactly what to do and when. When you're out of prison, you make all those decisions yourself. Similarly, what makes a good employee isn't the same set of skills. It's such a big learning curve when you've spent 35 years in prison – including parts of your childhood. The world had changed a whole lot when he got out. He's learning cell phones, computers, budgeting, writing checks, how to live in his own apartment. You can see when you watch [the match] 1-on-1 the difference that relationship is making to both partners. Then when you get the entire group of matches together, you begin to really notice what an impact these relationships are making in our community. Quietly. Under the radar.

Once housed, far more Latinx adults and most men remain in unstable housing. Homelessness is far more likely during the first two years after release than it is after four years.

A 2004 study in Oregon and Minnesota noted that among *women*, the likelihood of re-arrest was directly attributed to their *rate of poverty*. A 2021 report showed that women who find *stable employment* early in their release are much less likely to return to prison within 4 years.

A 2020 report further illustrates the intense challenge and strain that former inmates are under. Within 6 months, *social support beings to decline*. And, while many find work and transportation quickly after release, by the 8th month, more than 40% have *lost at least one job or income needed to support themselves and their family*. More than a third have *lost their transportation or housing*. More than a third begin *losing employer, peer or family support* and *find themselves socially isolated*. If “churched”, they stop attending. At least 25% who *relied on a trusted “other” for advice and counsel lose that relationship*. About the same number *lose their health benefits* or begin *experiencing food insecurity*.

Within the first 8 months after release, over 50% also experience at least one personal, negative high-stress life event, a third experience three or more: 1 in 5 *lose a loved one to homicide*, 60% receive *news of a serious injury or death to a loved one*, nearly 25% are *violently assaulted*, 31% *witness a serious injury or death*, and 31% are *diagnosed with a life-threatening illness*.

Prison Policy states that mentors are a beneficial support to ex-offenders as they maintain a job, regularly report to a parole officer, stay clean, find stable housing, form healthy new relationships, and manage community supervision.

Available from the start, mentors are an important resource for our recently-incarcerated to count on through what is arguably the most difficult period of adjustment – the first year.

A report by [Public Private Ventures](#) shows that a good mentoring program can successfully support ex-offenders. Its findings state that:

- young men in re-entry programs who also have a mentor are more likely to stay in their re-entry program longer – which improves their transition/life outcomes
- the best outcomes occur when an ex-offender is active in a re-entry program and has a mentor
- male mentees are twice as likely to find a job and are significantly more likely to retain that job
- male mentees are 35% less likely to return to prison at the one-year mark
- on average, mentees stay in the relationship for three months (3-4 hours each month), but 33% quit before the end of the first month
- 50% of potential mentees resist the opportunity, so those who pursue and sustain the relationship should celebrate (ex-offenders struggle to meet consistently with their mentors, leaving many mentors to quit.)

The Council of State Governments Justice Center offers up [best practices for integrating mentoring in reentry programs](#) (2017):

- matches should last 6 months to one year
- mentors should understand that mentees – who volunteer for this opportunity – have competing and important priorities that make engagement very challenging
- mentors should focus “*primarily on building a supportive, prosocial relationship*” with mentees
- mentors should be trained in the vast “*collateral consequences*” that come with a criminal record, the basics of mental and behavioral health, substance use disorder, trauma, the challenges of community supervision, and other ways in which a newly released adult can be overwhelmed in this new life
- mentors should learn tools that counteract challenges to change (like evidence-based motivational interviewing) as well as learn active listening skills, the varied ways adults learn and how to help mentees replace maladaptive behaviors with positive feelings or behaviors
- staff should collect qualitative feedback from mentors via surveys, check-ins and support groups

With so much practicing, failing and poor decision-making while ex-offenders find their “*footing*,” best practices also include helping mentors avoid expected frustration. (2013)

A 2015 Mentoring & Befriending Foundation report says that while both “*befriending and mentoring*” play significant roles in re-entry, it is very important that mentoring be part of an integrated approach designed to stop recidivism or downward-spiraling cycles. Mentoring should be offered alongside education, employment, mental health, behavior management, health, and housing services. Mentors should work on goals and build a meaningful relationship but should also help mentees develop new, positive friendships that will remain important to the mentee long after the match ends.

Another 2015 study in the *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology* (reported in the Chronical of Evidence-Based Mentoring) reports that “*desistence*” (the ongoing process of change toward prosocial decisions) happens over time, aided by self-discovery and openness to positive change. Every person has agency over his decisions, but the speed of desistence can be greatly influenced by positive opportunities in a community, their own ability to financially manage life, and any difficulty reintegrating after prison. “*Positive social connections can boost the likelihood of a whole range of beneficial outcomes.*”

According to the study, mentoring programs are emerging across the U.S. to offset deficits for adults who reenter the community without positive supports. Mentoring may be “*particularly beneficial*” for *women* because they are more likely, upon reentry, to abuse substances, to experience abuse or to experience poor physical and mental health compared to male peers. Women also tend to be more receptive to an opportunity for a meaningful friendship. Keys to effective mentoring with women in re-entry include:

1. **The relationship should provide nonjudgment and unconditional support:** This kind of support is seen by mentees as *“one of the most beneficial aspects of the relationship.”* To mentees, this approach is often more powerful than professional help they receive to address specific challenges. *“With my mentor, I don’t get personal about my drug usage. I just get personal about life.”* Mentees especially feel this when the mentor has direct or indirect experience with substance use disorder, even if the issue is never directly addressed.
2. **Both members work toward mentee change:** Desistance is difficult to do alone. The mentor actively works to help the mentee refrain from destructive behavior or relapse into destructive thinking. This is especially important when working with women who return to troubled relationships or have poor self-efficacy. Mentors provide important *“outside”* perspective that helps mentees find agency to reframe problems or issues. More often than men, returning women need help seeing that a decision is a bad one but that they are not inherently bad or damaged.
3. **Boundaries are clear:** Like mentors, returning female mentees also want clear boundaries. The mentoring benefit emerges through consistent, measured presence over time not a constant presence in the middle of every crisis. Mentees want self-determination, to benefit from solving their own problems, to work through things that are difficult without *“too much”* help. With few positive networks, the presence of a mentor is vital. Mentors help mentees make *“crucial cognitive and behavioral shifts.”* A healthy balance *“provides the scaffolded independence that enables women to take pride in their accomplishments,”* which for many may be a new experience.

When mentoring works, it looks deceptively simple: the mentor and participant go out for dinner together and talk; a group of mentors and mentees sit around a table and discuss successes and challenges on the job; a mentor phones the ex-prisoner she is paired with to ask how things are going in the computer skills training she just started. But as all mentoring programs have learned, and as research has consistently demonstrated, programs have to implement a number of key practices—involving staffing, recruiting, training, and supervision and support—if the mentoring efforts are going to succeed. Because the terms “mentor” and “mentee” can sound like subjugation to ex-offenders, programs often use the term “coach” which for many ex-offenders has positive association.

Women in re-entry face many of the same hurdles as men - correctional compliance, maintaining sobriety, reunifying with family members, finding and maintaining a home, finding and maintaining work. Many women have a lifetime of trauma or abuse behind them. They may have lost children to adoption or, at minimum, a lot of catching up as parents. A good female mentor can provide opportunities to practice a *“non-competitive relationship.”* They can practice promoting each other’s well-being and success, as well as giving and accepting positive feedback. Goal-achievement is necessary but for women, it is important to offer an *equal attention to empowerment, belonging and friendship that helps promote growth through positive reinforcement.* Many have limited experience relating comfortably with confident, supportive women. From a mentor, they often seek out opportunities to reframe or establish new ways of seeing themselves and their relationships with other women. ([Co-Occurring Collaborative Serving Maine](#) has a list of best practices for mentoring women in re-entry.)

The Lived Experience and Wisdom of All Vulnerable Adults

Mauricio Lim Miller ([UpTogether](#)) has a vision that people living on the margins, typically in poverty, are the very people who should be in charge of how they move out of their circumstance and improve life outcomes for their own children. Along with hundreds of partners across the globe - led by people in poverty - Mauricio is transforming our “flawed” ideas of how to alleviate poverty and do “self-sufficiency” work. As adults chart their own course, they do this best with the support of peers, not under the direction of professionals or programs. Working as their own experts and building on their own strengths, they discover how to invest in themselves. That investment *includes* finding mentors and support from among their own community and volunteers in wider networks. It’s not an unfamiliar concept to “us” but is it revolutionary in how we perceive “them.”

This idea is familiar to Trusted Mentors where each mentee uses their own agency and inherent wisdom to determine the course and trajectory of the mentoring relationship they requested. Mentees set the goals, the pace and make all decisions. Escaping poverty - or homelessness - is not a matter of one person’s “boot strap” determination, achieved with zero support or encouragement. An effective mentor offers encouragement and

insight, makes connections, and helps the mentee draw on her own strengths to find strategies and – if necessary – determination – to overcome very real obstacles.

We don't avail ourselves of the incredible, omni-present, self-renewing power of social change that exists in everyday people, in every neighborhood, & has existed throughout history. We need to work with what people are already doing.
(Rohit Menezes, Partner at the Bridgespan Group)

Mentoring: What produces the best outcomes?

The discussion above lays out a handful of really good tips when mentoring vulnerable adults. At this point, it is instructive to pull back – view the landscape more broadly – to learn about the factors or elements that should be in every high-quality mentoring program, even one as unique as Trusted Mentors.

In general, mentoring helps mentees develop social and emotional skills to move forward. It builds confidence and personal assets from a strengths-based lens. A mentee sets the pace of a mentoring relationship while a mentor listens, reflects and presents other options. A mentor offers courage during difficult moments and a neutral voice, a safe space to vent and explore ideas. Mentors model good communication and stress reduction skills. They help mentees develop and practice new life skills. Mentors are a resource for concrete ideas and an expanded network. Mentoring is not therapy or professional case management.

Even though little research has been conducted on the particular benefits of *independent, community-based, volunteer mentoring programs for vulnerable adults*, there are plenty of common sense, evidence-based best practices from which to build a strong program. Trusted Mentors follows them all.

Researchers synthesized these effective practices from interviews with 50 mentoring programs through California:

1. active and positive partnerships or networks with other community organizations.
2. a formal structure, formal training and substantive support for mentors - provided by professional staff.
3. authentic relationships between professional staff and mentors.
4. a singular agency focus on mentoring OR one team with dedicated resources singularly focused on mentoring activities.
5. ongoing staff training and participation in mentoring networks to stay abreast of “what works.”
6. “unique” or exceptional features (i.e., mentoring populations that face extreme odds, uplifting culture that enlivens mentoring experience, a unique tradition.)

MENTOR promotes standards of quality around six elements that should be present in the very best mentoring programs:

1. recruitment of both mentors and mentees.
2. readiness screening of both mentors and mentee.
3. training for mentees and mentors (good mentor training is correlated with length/success of a match relationship).
4. quality matching and initiating (specific steps to formally establish or start a successful relationship).
5. ongoing monitoring of match, ongoing support/training for mentor, and access to resources; and
6. closure that affirms the contributions of both members.

National best practices in mentor training include five quality elements present in a 5-6 hour training:

Last year in April I finally surrendered to a substance abuse problem I had. It was a good program. I got some odds and end jobs through them. They supported me. Through them I asked for a mentor. I go the call and I thought, 'Oh boy! Okay....' You gotta learn how to trust and love and let people in but I know it was the right thing to do and I needed help. I do have a sponsor from NA but I figured every little bit helps so we met. I really liked her when we met. She was like model material and I couldn't believe someone like that wanted to mentor me. We started talking and communicating. It was like WOW. We clicked. I went over who I was. She went over who she was. My life was not always about active addiction. I was from a middle-class lifetime and middle-class home. My mother gave me the best. I just made some decisions that took me down my path. (Crying) I'm not crying 'cause I'm sad. I'm crying cause I'm happy. I've always had those survival jobs. I've never worked for something that means anything so I went to this other program. She just said, "Keep going! Keep going!" And I finished! It's been a lot of encouragement. It's been tears. It's been a lot of sweat on my part. It's been a wonderful change. Being a mentee wasn't as bad as I thought it would be. You come in 'Oh, my God. She's gonna talk me to death! Nitpick me to death!' But she didn't and I've grown up in the process. I'm a year clean in part because of this relationship. I've got a job I'm proud of now, helping patients for St Vincent's. I have my first nice apartment. I have something to offer. I have compassion now, for people who suffer or who have been through some things.

- 1) help mentors understand the scope and limits of their role.
- 2) help mentors practice skills and attitudes needed to serve well (i.e., active listening, non-judgment, communication and problem-solving skills).
- 3) review policies and requirements.
- 4) discuss strengths and needs of the population (generally and variances) and how to manage their own expectations/beliefs.
- 5) build confidence through interactive activities and a review of support staff will provide (providing a handbook of all information, tips and guidance given.)

One critical feature and a “marker” of successful programs is the *ongoing, quality support*. Mentors are expected to build trust and a genuine relationship with mentees who are simultaneously wading through difficult, complex, stressful life circumstances. Programs that expect professionally trained staff will provide regular support and build relationship with mentors, are *more likely* to report *matches that meet regularly* and *high mentee satisfaction*. Programs that do not have trained staff regularly contacting mentors have the “*greatest percentage of failed matches*” (matches that never launch.) At its best, support looks like the following:

- regularly scheduled times to connect/check in with each mentor (at least 2x a month for a few months, then at least 1x a month).
- mentors submitting a log after each interaction with their mentee.
- staff checking in with each mentee, soon after the match begins, then monthly.
- the partner/referring agency checking in on the mentee once a month re the match (research indicates that when partner agencies also support the match, there are longer matches and better outcomes).
- making it very easy for mentors to chat with staff on short notice.
- hosting regular mini-trainings with topical experts and gatherings for mentors to share their experiences, stories, challenges with each other (4-5x a year).
- procedures to officially close or end the match with both the mentor and mentee even if it ends early/mentee stops responding.
- regularly celebrating the commitment and hard work of both members, conveying positive comments heard from each other, sending notes, providing free/discounted event tickets, holding periodic celebrations of mentee success and social events.

The National Mentoring Resource Center (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency) offers a [full toolkit](#) of evidence-based practices, promising practices, training guides and handbooks. National best practice suggests that matches are *more successful* when match support is limited to 35-40 matches per professional staff; Trusted Mentors adheres to this, as well.

We know this act alone – giving mentees a choice re who they want to be in relationship with – is new for many. Mentees report that while they may have been assigned a mentor or coach in the past, they had no agency over the decision. The simple opportunity to agree or disagree shows them a kind of respect they may not have known before.

While rarely mentioned in the literature, Trusted Mentors staff shift the balance between “mentor” and “mentee.” While many of these efforts appear small or under the radar, they seem especially key features to embed in friendships that bridge racial, economic, education, power and privilege divides.

The Trusted Mentor Model

Unique among adult mentoring, the Trusted Mentor model includes the following features: 1) it exclusively provides mentoring to existing clients at partner agencies; 2) partner agencies ensure potential mentees are ready for mentoring; 3) mentees determine their own readiness for a mentor, apply, and decide if they accept the recommended mentor; 4) mentors are unpaid and do not work at the partner agency; 5) matches commit for one year, not a few months; 6) mentees set goals in partnership with their mentor and agency partner case manager; and 7) the relationship is 1:1, not a group.

In addition, a mentoring pair serves on our board of directors.

These features change interpersonal dynamics, empower the mentee and leverage existing community resources.

Descriptions of six key elements of the Trusted Mentors model are described below.

Collaboration with agencies: By offering an independent mentoring program to agencies that already host programs for vulnerable adults, agencies can use their own limited resources where most needed and still avail themselves of an effective, adjunct support for clients. In fact, they directly benefit from one person dedicating 100% of her volunteer time to a single client, someone they do not have to manage. The agency's own success with clients improves. Their clients further benefit from an expanded social network and access to a trusted adviser when case managers aren't available.

Trusted Mentors manages all aspects of recruitment, training, supporting and evaluating these matches. Mentors feel more confident knowing someone is supporting them while a professional at a partner agency is working alongside their own mentee. Because Trusted Mentors does not report to partner agencies, mentees can let down their guard which helps the mentor be more effective and helps the relationship become more genuine.

Trusted Mentors has provided mentors for nearly 30 agencies in recent years, including RecycleForce, Adult and Child, PACE, John P. Craine House, Children's Bureau, Keys to Work, Society of St. Vincent dePaul, IMPD, CAFÉ, Nurse Family Partnership, Sandra Eskenazi Mental Health and Horizon House.

Trusted Mentors *and its licensed affiliates* operate exclusively under this partnership model. Mentee outcomes bear out the model's effectiveness. Equally compelling, the creative use of community resources in this way keeps the cost of supporting one match per year at only \$1300.

Mentor training: The training curriculum and manual were developed from the work of a national expert as well as tools provided by MENTOR. They are regularly updated. Interested mentors attend the two-part, four-hour orientation and receive a manual full of examples, tips and guidance. Training sessions are led by teams of trained, volunteer mentors, 40% of whom are BIPOC. Topics include:

- an introduction to implicit bias
- interactive discussions re the strengths of marginalized adults, complex challenges or obstacles they face, and a poverty frame of reference
- basics of motivational interviewing and five stages to change
- keys to building trusting, genuine relationships
- tempering expectations and establishing healthy boundaries in the relationship
- elements of effective mentoring and research on the benefits of mentoring
- signs of active addiction or mental health distress
- resources available to support the match and mentee needs
- Trusted Mentor policies

Applicants consistently give this training very high marks. One applicant shared: *Part A training was incredibly comprehensive. I have been an instructor, manager, sensei and tutor in the past. Part A was inclusive of all the qualities that a person in a position of leadership should have. It was quite impressive. I'm looking forward to part B.*

Match Process: Potential mentors and mentees submit applications (which allow them to check over 70 "interest and hobby" areas and check any of 7 direct life experiences they may share with vulnerable populations.) Staff meet with each potential mentor and mentee after mentor background checks and before selecting the best match for both members. Both members approve or reject that selection. The mentee sets goals. Trusted Mentors has an established process for a successful launch. The first 90 days is critical to success.

While not a requirement, 74% of current mentors already know someone who is or has been incarcerated and 61% are in relationship with someone living with mental illness. On the other hand, while most mentees have either a diploma or did not finish high school, nearly all mentors have at least a 4-year postsecondary degree.

Match Experience: Throughout their one-year commitment, matches interact at least six hours per month, two of which must be in person. While it can be very difficult at first, eventually they are in frequent contact via text, calling or email. The single most important priority for each mentor is to establish a caring connection, to develop genuine interest. This effort creates factors that help mentees successfully work through obstacles they face in their work together. After a successful relationship, many mentors return for another mentee.

Mentors help mentees find creative solutions to their problems and creative way to achieve their goals. A new way of seeing yourself and the world around you requires time. It has to be encouraged and nurtured. If it happens too quickly, it can be overwhelming, causing us to run in the opposite direction. Fear is real. Fear of failing is real. Withdrawing – or retreating to old habits – is something we all do when we get scared or lose confidence.

Match Support and Celebration: Each month, mentors submit an 18-question report on the Trusted Mentors platform, updating staff on progress toward goals, and reporting any new job, education or other circumstances. To honor the relationship and privacy of each mentee, these reports are not submitted to partnering agencies. Instead, staff use them to track mentee victories and reach out with additional ideas or resources. Mentors regularly chat with staff. At least three times a year, mentors meet for training around specific topics or expert speakers (e.g., annual motivational interview training, debt reduction, nutrition, effects of social isolation, communicating with technology.) Other times, mentors meet to talk as a cohort - sharing stories, offering advice and encouraging each other. Once a year, staff host *Recognition Night*, honoring any cause to celebrate each mentee. Partner agencies attend. And, finally, matches are invited to attend events that help further or deepen their relationship, like the recent racial trauma workshop hosted by Trusted Mentors and designed for matches.

High – yet tempered – expectations: Both members accept that the priority of their match is the health of the relationship - not the goals - because at the core of human potential and success are positive, healthy relationships and interactions. Mentors show up as genuine, authentic people who – over time – demonstrate true liking or admiration of their mentees. Mentors understand – at least intellectually – a set of common challenges their mentees are likely facing and – intellectually - accepting the limits or capacity of the unique person they are starting a relationship with. Mentors step into this space knowing that their mentees have entered this relationship with many strengths. It is the mentor’s job to see or discover them.

Mentors know that mentees have developed exceptional survival skills. Mentees have likely developed life skills and perspectives that are new (and transformative) for mentors. Mentees enter the relationship hopeful, uncomfortable, anxious - possibly terrified – and often with a spotty personal success record. A good match starts with realistic expectations. For some time, the road can be very bumpy as both members enter uncharted territory.

Seeing mentees as equals from the start, mentors become thought partners, curious and wise counsel – accepting their own limits of understanding with humility. Mentees begin to absorb that this “other” from a very different world truly sees them as equal-and is trying. Mentors listen and ask solutions-focused questions. As mentors continue to consistently show up – in a positive, patient, accountable way – many mentees begin to reflect that modeling. They further develop their own tool kit of personal assets and life skills. For many mentees, this is often the first time another person – certainly someone outside their own circle of influence - has shown them such care and commitment. They begin to trust, in itself a monumental achievement over the course of a year.

Mentors are often equally transformed as they are - for the first time -in authentic relationship (friendship) with another adult they may never have interacted with otherwise. They are “in the trenches” face-to-face with a person

Personal assets include things like *self-worth, accountability, hope, insight, dependability, integrity, courage, tenacity, responsibility, social and emotional competence.* These are the underpinnings of building life skills.

Life skills include things like *finances, parenting, time management, beneficial health habits, participating in positive leisure activities, healthy sexual/romantic skills, securing/keeping a job, conflict/stress management and communication – all of us need these vital skills to survive and thrive, no matter our dreams.*

These prosocial skills help all of us navigate the details of our daily lives.

who struggles every day with things a mentor may not even think about. Many see how systems and the absence of natural supports make it exceedingly difficult for marginalized adults to thrive. It changes perspective.

Mentors benefit in other ways. They develop skills to be an effective partner with their mentee. These transfer well to all their relationships - as parents, partners, employees, employers, neighbors, family members, friends. They reap well-documented benefits from being of service in the world without compensation, of walking alongside someone who is changing their own life -and often the lives of others - for the better. Many mentors see their communities – the groups and neighborhoods that they often ignore, discount or avoid – in a new light and consider policies or decisions that impact them with a different mind.

In fact, the simple work of building a friendship with an “other” changes the very fabric of our community and becomes a tool of resistance against the current tides that push us apart. These relationships may seem of isolated value but viewed from a distance are transforming far beyond the members of the match.

Trusted Mentors: *Quality and Impact*

Limited by its own resources to test the model or rigorously evaluate impact, Trusted Mentors turns to national research to learn if its model and the way staff execute it is truly beneficial. National research makes clear that when mentoring best practices are in places, good outcomes emerge - like this one: *the addition of mentoring to a nonprofit program working to improve life outcomes dramatically improves client outcomes at that nonprofit.*

Trusted Mentors operates from best practices well-documented in this paper. It is always adapting and improving.

It provides mentors for adults living on the edge - those who don't feel stable, who work but don't make enough to pay their rent, who live with horrific effects of trauma or the impact of their own short-sighted solutions, who are leaving prison with a mountain of debt and a mark on their name. Trusted Mentors believes “*even they*” can reap huge benefits from the same mentors available to “*everyone else.*” Mentoring doesn't have to be a coveted secret doorway, available only to those well-connected or well-resourced.

Does it know for certain it's making any real impact? Because each mentee establishes unique goals that may take months or years to achieve, Trusted Mentors tracks only two goals universally important for all mentees and only during the match period: 1) stability in housing and 2) no incarceration.

To many professionals, these two outcomes may seem too limiting. Staff may miss evidence of other important outcomes that are “really” changing a life. However, Trusted Mentors has learned that these two outcomes represent dozens of large and small victories that undergird these simple signs of stability, like: *consistent self-regulation, management of addictions or mental illness, an ability to keep a good job, completing an industry certificate or learning to read, a stable loving relationship or better parenting skills, the presence of social supports during times of stress – and many others.* In fact, while many of us take it for granted, stability is also necessary to achieve any other life goal.

Trusted Mentors knows the stories and victories behind these two, simple goals that staff track for mentees who have remained in their match relationship at least 90 days (fewer than 10% do not last that long):

- 98% stay housed
- 95% of young adults are stable with 100% in stable housing
- 92% stay out of prison (recidivism of 8%, compared to state rate of 38%)
- 88% of those in re-entry complete their DOC requirements

Of course, 132 children are also positively impacted by the stability of a parent or custodial grandparent (2021.)

At the end of their year's commitment, it's not uncommon for re-entry mentees to also have completed re-entry requirements. It's not uncommon that support networks have expanded to include a whole range of new, supportive champions and peers. Many are making progress on education dreams. Relationships are repairing or new relationships discovered. They've started to volunteer in areas of personal interest or begun mentoring others, themselves. They've given birth to a healthy child and feel confident in their ability to parent differently from their own parent. They might have a savings account for the first time in their life or feel pride in cooking a delicious dish

for a new friend. At minimum, they have a non-transactional relationship with someone who genuinely cares – by choice. That will never change.

An IUPUI report commissioned by Trusted Mentors has also found that 80% of mentees feel less isolated because of their new relationship. (Social isolation leads to depression, withdrawal from community/family and new coping strategies like substance use. Physical health and motivation also typically decline.) Referring programs praise Trusted Mentors while their own staff support their client/mentees through the match period.

On the horizon (2022), Trusted Mentors is testing a variation of its model inside a re-entry employment program it already provides mentors for. In this peer mentoring pilot, participants are trained in the Trusted Mentors model and are provided mentor support once matched with coworker mentees. Peer mentors helped adapt this training and roll-out the model.

Ultimately, Trusted Mentors impacts a triple bottom line: 1) the lives of mentees and mentors are changed, 2) the work of radical friendship makes it much more difficult for local residents to “other” people and groups, and 3) community resources are released for other uses because residents have stability.

Many reports speak to the cost-effectiveness of prevention and intervention. Marion County spends \$73,000,000 in public health care and criminal justice to “manage” chronic homelessness (2016.)

It costs approximately \$20,000 to incarcerate one adult for a year. Indiana spends \$500,000,000 per year incarcerating adults. In fact, while recidivism in Indiana was 37% in 2019, ex-offenders released in Marion County had a 44% chance of returning to prison within three years. Stabilized ex-offenders save money the state of Indiana and the City of Indianapolis can use elsewhere. At minimum, for every day Trusted Mentors helps one person stay out of prison, the state of Indiana saves \$54.

Data show that 85% of new offenses happen when an ex-offender is unemployed. By helping ex-offenders retain work, Trusted Mentors actively helps restore their lives. Mentees contribute back to their communities. A lifetime of lost productivity is avoided.

Individual outcomes matter because they are *real* – with a real story behind it – and because they trend positive for a mentee and those who love him.

More broadly, helping 200 adults stay housed and out of prison also helps our entire community - \$1300 a match compared to the vast sums we all spend on addressing the effects of homelessness is no comparison at all. At this point – with so many vulnerable adults in our community – Trusted Mentors is limited only by resources. *Why?* It only costs us \$1300 per match - and the ROI is stellar – but Trusted Mentors is fully committed to one *key* best practice – that each staff only manage 35-40 matches. For every effort this community makes toward investing in one support staff, Trusted Mentors can begin another 35-40 transformative relationships.

An Unlikely Friendship

(Mentor, white man) *I had a fairly uneventful childhood. We moved a lot. My dad worked for DOC, so I spent a lot of my growing up in and around the Boys School. I eventually decided to be a stay-at-home dad and was looking for some way to volunteer, something that was effective. That I felt good about and it made some difference. It's just one-on-one and you're building a relationship with someone, a long-term relationship to effect change. I am paired up with a unique person who spent decades in prison. I wasn't apprehensive because of how and where I grew up. Sure, there were some rational reservations given his record but when I met him my instinct told me I didn't have to worry. With this particular individual, it just wasn't a concern. When I met him, his goal was very specific. He was very energized about what he wanted to do. He wanted to help young people avoid the kind of life that he had. What do you think really happens when you release people out of prison without the very real skills needed to survive? There are people who need to stay in prison. There are other people that need to have a chance. We have this very punitive mentality like you did something wrong and you deserve to be*

punished – always. But you have to take that person into account. I'm not really concerned about politics, but I am concerned about what I do, what my values are and so I'm going to live those out.

(Mentee, older African American man) – I was raised in violence and in an environment that wasn't actually the best of surroundings for a child. At age 7, my father's brother came in trying to purchase some narcotics that he wouldn't sell him. I heard my stepmother in there screaming. I went in and saw my father's brother stabbing a butcher knife, so you know at 7 you don't really know what you're doing, so I just ran to the closet, got a double barrel shotgun. Put the stock up against the wall. The gunshot killed him. I was sentenced to a boy's school until the age of 21. While I was there, I formed a gang with my friend. [The mentee was released at age 16 instead of 21 but basically spent his childhood behind bars. Four years later, he was in federal prison for gang-related charged, including robbery and homicide.] I have remorse for the things I've done to people, that I've taken. I can't bring them back. I can't get all that back. But, maybe had I not gone to prison I'd probably be in the graveyard. Seriously, I'd probably be dead. When I got out, I told my case manager, 'I got to get myself a mentor.' He said, 'YOU, a mentor? As old as you are?' Yeah. I've learned some things during incarceration, and I've learned you have to have someone you can confide in, to talk to when I have a problem. I thought, 'I'll be able to go to this man and share my problems. I need help.' I got paired up with my mentor and we just hit it off. I know concern when I see concern. Or hear it. This guy has been in my corner ever since we met. My passion is for these youngsters out here. If you came down the street someday, you might just see me out there on the corner with about two or twenty of them just standing on the corner. I know what it's going to take to help these kids. I know. There's a lot of obstacles out here now that I'm out and the biggest one is that stamp on me. I think without all that help I got from my mentor, I think I would have made that call and said, 'I'm coming back.'

APPENDIX

Stories/QUOTES to use

In February 2020, we recognized Mickey at our Empowerment Luncheon because of his accomplishments. He got his driver's license, his own apartment and generously gave gifts to children at Riley Hospital. Today, his mentor, Mike, shared that Mickey is still working at Mission 27 and has turned into a valuable employee. He has become a role model of what is possible for other Changing Life participants! It wasn't easy. It wasn't magic. But with the support of Mike and his own determination, he's contributing in countless ways to our community.

In February 2019, we met Daniel when he was matched with his mentor, Tim. He was getting ready to move into an apartment through a local housing program for homeless young adults. He lacked family support—or really any support—at the time. He needed help finding and keeping a job and being able to maintain housing. He had experienced the trauma of homelessness and struggled with depression, but he wanted to stay housed. It hasn't been an easy journey, with bumps along the way, but now Daniel is working full time and picking up OT shifts to save for a new apartment. He has purchased a car and is working within his budget to cover insurance, maintenance, etc. Now that they have a car and a little extra cash, Daniel and his roommate can get out of their apartment more. Attitudes have improved greatly. He is now on a good trajectory to be self-sufficient!

When our employees come home from prison, they have so many needs, including housing and transportation. But perhaps the greatest need, and one often overlooked, is the lack of social capital. Working with Trusted Mentors provides our employees with that important need – social capital. Trusted Mentors is a strong partner for our program. (Greg Keesling, Recycle Force Inc)

[Tyrell, a mentee, is both formerly homeless and a formerly incarcerated veteran. In his own words:] I was nervous meeting someone from a different walk-in life, but it was a blessing. He's been there for me. He's provided inspiration. [His mentor says:] I became involved with Trusted Mentors after I learned about the consistent, impressive, positive outcomes they achieve with the populations they serve. Trusted Mentors calls on each of us to contribute our time and resources to help close the gaps in our city, empowering those in need with the tools they need to find life changing opportunities – one relationship at a time.

(Mentor, young African American) Everyone who knows I mentor says it's so great and amazing that I'm mentoring or helping someone, like I'm special and so motivating to another person, but my mentee has done so much for me. Her story, her perseverance, her hard work are just as motivating to me in my own life. A mentor is like a tangible person in front of you, not just someone famous on tv or in a book and they know YOU. You can ask questions, get feedback. We started out as not knowing each other and now we consider each other family. We thank Trusted Mentors for that

(Mentee, young African American) I've wanted a mentor a long time. I had one once through another program, but it didn't work out very well. Trusted Mentors really interested me because they wanted to find me a mentor that was right for me, someone I had some common interests with. And it wasn't just that, but she's done some things – like being in the military and being a model - that are goals for me, too. She helped me expand my horizons. She helped me realize my potential as an individual who has gone through so much. She has made me

realize I am very capable. When we started, I was trying to start school. But I right away found out I was going to be a mommy. I was so scared, but she stayed with me. And now she's a mom herself and my child's godparent. Even though we aren't officially mentored anymore, we are still close and support each other. We've created a lifelong relationship.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=F2zenCJ-oiw

- (mentee) I may be able to do something here that I never thought I'd be able to do. I'd like to thank my mentor. She has a very kind spirit. She's very uplifting.
- (mentee) One of the greatest things Trusted Mentors does is that me and George set goals and he makes sure I make them go. I think that's the most beneficial thing to me
- (mentee) She's like my mother. I thank Trusted Mentors from the bottom of my heart. I have learned so much from this lady. I've learned how to have self-respect for myself. How to care about other's feelings. NO matter if I was in the down part of life, she was always there to try to inspire me and bring me back up.
- (mentee) There've been so many things that spoke volumes to me and one of the biggest things was the amount of volunteers who really don't have to do what you all do. It's one thing to have a job and get paid for what you do but the volunteers give their time, their ear, their hearts selflessly. It was a huge factor in me changing who I am.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=cf-YdbZ5U E <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVg57bHvclg>

- (Mentor, African American) You know, I think about how in my life I have had many mentors. One such mentor was a good friend of my mother's. Every time I came home from modeling, I would have to stop in and see her. She was a mentor to everyone of my mother's seven girls. She saw me in things and was so proud. One morning, she said, 'You come on in and make me breakfast.' That to me has been a great help, giving back, grounding me. Another great friend was a mentor. 'Let's help them.' She would always come out with, 'Let's help them.' Always in my spirit you have to help. I've been richly blessed in my life. I want to plant something in someone's life, so I can help them have a better life. She [mentee] just set goals to get a full time job and get an apartment so we are working on that. I'm helping her work through it and I'm going to be with her on that. How do I help her? I help her by being her coach. I believe in sports. Teamwork truly makes the dream work. I listen very patiently to my mentee. I love that. I appreciate her by texting her every morning That's a pledge of mine. Sometimes we even talk more than that if we need to. 'How is your day going? What can I do? What have you tried today?' Just to encourage her to know I love her I believe in her. She has great ambition. I have great faith in her.

Synthesized application notes

MENTEES

I need someone to hold me accountable and to help me help myself to plan my future to live a good clean life.

I need to start being able to learn how to trust others, to accept help from those whom I can trust and to help me hold myself accountable - to be my voice of reason until I can unlearn all this stinkin' thinking. Someone that can love me until I learn how to love myself.

I'm tired of losing. I want a productive, full life.

I'm starting over after 38 years in prison. It's overwhelming. To know someone is there matters.

I want to become a driving force for positive change; my mentor can help me become that.

I have no support system. My daughter just passed a month ago. My father is deceased. My mom is in nursing home. I have a husband whom I love, but mentally he is broken. I just need to know someone is there and can guide me in the right direction and find housing.

I'm a recovering alcoholic. I was homeless and now live in the Barton Annex. I am very blessed. A mentor would be amazing.

I hope a mentor can help me to gain a rewarding, joyful honest life when I am able to go home, to help me work on that now and for when I go home.

I love to learn from others' experiences in life and to help others understand what it's like to be a returned citizen.

I believe a support system is what helps people to succeed in life! Networking and having reliable people in your life is vital. I've never had a mentor.

Synthesized reasons:

Stay on the right path/the track – give me guidance to try to “do right”, not fall back to the streets. Get help before I get out so I start well. Get help – so I don't go back to prison. To help me successfully transition from prison life. To stay focused. To not procrastinate on things I want to do for myself or to help me actually just make decisions which I find hard to do. Or just someone helping me make sure I take my medication so I don't end up back in prison.

Person I can trust. I need someone I can really let in and be able to talk to. This is my first attempt to reach out for help.

To better my life, to become the best person that I can be and for motivational help. Somebody to bounce ideas off of, give me good advice Decision making, relationships, personal goals. I would like to gain better communication skills. Do more to help myself. Keep me motivated as I attempt to move forward in life. I hope to gain a new understanding of self, money management life coping skills and a little guidance goes a long way. I want to gain better communication skills and better practices when engaging in interpersonal conversations. I would like to learn how to effectively advocate for myself in the office while still holding a professional demeanor. To help me learn to read better. motivate me in the proper ways. Budgeting skills. Leadership skills.

Social or emotional stability, having one reliable, responsible and stable presence. Doesn't feel she has anyone to talk to now since her mom passed away. She's been getting locked up and doesn't feel she has anyone to talk with now or anybody who can walk w/ her thru her good and bad days like her mom did. Someone I can count on to talk with when I'm feeling alone and depressed. Someone to talk to, lift my spirits up. Someone to talk about life with who doesn't have a medical background and gets paid to help me. Friendship. Someone positive and supportive so I don't have a mental breakdown and return to using. Social supports, learning to feel comfortable getting back into the community, becoming less paranoid/anxious and getting to know new people. I'm a very quiet, isolated, socially anxious person who spends most of my days to myself. I hope by having a mentor, I will learn to be socialize, increase confidence and explore healthy activities.

More structure - hold me accountable but supportive I want a friend who can relate to some of the things I've been through without judgement but will also hold me accountable while also being supportive.

I need support in **continuing to be strong for my child(ren)** while I also set goals for myself and my family.

Someone to help me **achieve a successful, sober, clean living**

Someone to help me find ways I can feed the hungry in the community.

So that I can begin to have positive relationships in this area and better understand the resources I can turn to for help, because I plan to stay here after sentence.

Provide healthy adult guidance as I become an adult and have no parents to rely on. I aged out during the beginning of Covid, which was a stressful time. Outwardly my now coworkers and former coaches think I am transitioning well but I still feel like there is a lot of grey area because I'm still in the cycle of stabilizing my life. Help me figure out adult living. Help set goals and priorities. Help me get through college. I feel like it is so much for me to learn as far as becoming a young lady going into a young woman, also will just like to gain a better mindset and way that I look at things and to have more support. I am just now learning to be an adult, so my hopes are for someone to help me navigate thru life decisions.

Have good or successful people in my life. Would like to see good side of world. To spend time with a positive person who I might have similar interests with. Guide me so I can eventually teach others/help others who are like me. I'm alone in life and often don't feel like I have anything in common with people so just knowing

someone is there, someone I can trust who cares about me will be so helpful. Have never had close friends and my romantic relationships haven't been healthy. To surround myself with people who are successful, change the day-to-day people I'm involved with. And they do this without getting paid to spend time with me.

Help me **find my way into a career** in construction or something like that. Help me grow my job skills. Someday I want to own a business.

MENTORS

I know that sometimes people just need guidance to move from instability to stability.

I'm passionate about preventing homelessness. I've mentored others in a professional business environment and would very much like to mentor those exiting the foster home program.

As an attorney, I've had a number of clients who have experienced homelessness, are unable to pay bills, are incarcerated, or are suffering with an addiction. Many of those people have no family, no friends, and no support. I want to be someone who supports people like my clients.

I want to be part of the solution of keeping people out of jail and prison.

I want to share my professional skills and abilities with people who've struggled to acquire the same. I like the idea of helping someone develop skills to thrive in life.

I enjoy training, teaching and coaching. I have a servant leader's heart and a passion for assisting those who fit a pattern or feel like they are the least, the lonely, of believing they are being left out.

I have valuable skills, knowledge and experience that could be of assistance to helping empower another to be economically independent and establishing a stable home. I want to use some of the skills I have learned in life to make someone else's life better

Synthesized reasons to mentor:

Have been a mentee and want to give back. It's important to me to pay it forward to help that I was given through the Trusted Mentors program. I had a mentor and I want to help others by my experiences. I was previously a mentee and I would like to give back to.

I feel **personally called** (by faith or other reasons) to help people find direction in life, specifically mentoring, or to support young adults transitioning, adults re-entering the community, folks who are precariously housed. I'm passionate about helping in any way possible to stop the cycles. As a second-year attorney, having interned in re-entry work in college, now I want to mentor adults so they avoid prison.

I'm retired (or at height of my career or have been very blessed in my own life) **and am ready to mentor others**, particularly those whose life has not been as easy as mine. I like that this allows me to mentor adults who might really benefit from a relationship with a mentor.

I'm **early in my career** and know how valuable mentors have been in my life. I want to be that for another person who hasn't had that opportunity.

I've persevered. I know these difficulties first-hand. Over addictions in my own life. I was in foster care as a child. I come from a non-traditional background myself and am extremely passionate about sharing the knowledge that I have gained to lift young people moving into adulthood. I have family members who have been in the prison system. My father spent most of our lives in prison and now my 24 year old son is currently in prison. I myself have a difficult background, I have had to deal with alcohol addiction, that led me down the wrong path. I ended up incarcerated for 64 days the last time I was in trouble. I've had a lot of hardships in my life and I wish I had someone in my younger years to help guide me through some dark times.

I am in or am working toward a career in related nonprofit fields and love the idea of a 1:1 relationship with someone working toward change. It provides a different perspective, allows me to help in a very different way – to be a friend or mentor – not a paid professional. It will also make me a better professional in the field.

I love the idea of serving in relationship, not as a program volunteer. I want to be of service in this life. Simple as that. I already volunteer elsewhere as a program volunteer.

I believe in the power of the human spirit, redemption, and connection. Everyone deserves happiness. I can contribute to the happiness of someone who is seeking support, help support someone who needs more assistance than I do.

I have previously mentored and enjoyed the opportunity to listen and guide others down their chosen path and or if they don't know what path, helping them find their path.