

Our nation faces a crisis of youth who are disconnected from their families, communities, and other meaningful relationships. The Youth Mentoring Grants program is a cost-effective, evidence-based mechanism for reconnecting youth with their community and building resilience in young people.

**The Youth Mentoring Grants (YMG) program, administered by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP),** supports one-to-one, group, and peer mentoring services for youth who are underserved, disconnected, and at-risk or high-risk for involvement in the juvenile justice system. Youth Mentoring Grants provide direct mentoring support, capacity building, and practice enhancements to national, multistate, and local mentoring organizations nationwide.

### **COVID-19 Impact**

- Prior to COVID, 1 in 3 of today's youth reached age 19 without the support of a formal or informal mentor.
- COVID-19 has furthered isolated young people during the most critical time in their social-emotional development.
- Surgeon General, Dr. Vivek H. Murthy issued a public statement in 2021 calling for urgent action towards youth mental health.<sup>1</sup>
  - It's estimated that as of June 2021, more than 140,000 children in the US had lost a parent or grandparent caregiver to COVID-19.<sup>2</sup>
  - Youth who are BIPOC, LGBTQ+, Low-income, live in rural areas, part of immigrant communities, or are involved in the juvenile justice system, child welfare system, or runaway youth and youth experiencing homelessness are at an increased risk of mental health challenges during the pandemic.<sup>1</sup>
- A 2020 review found that, "*Children and adolescents are probably more likely to experience high rates of depression and most likely anxiety during and after enforced isolation ends... Clinical services should offer preventive support and early intervention where possible and be prepared for an increase in mental health problems.*"<sup>3</sup>

The YMG program at OJJDP is the only federal program dedicated to supporting mentoring initiatives and is underfunded to meet the growing national need for mentors. YMG is an evidence-based prevention and intervention strategy that connects children and youth who are at-risk with a mentor. Decades of research have shown that the presence of a caring, supportive adult --such as a mentor-- builds youths' adaptive capacity, or resiliency, to adverse or traumatic experiences which might otherwise lead to poor decision making and negative consequences.

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<sup>1</sup> Murthy VH. COVID-19 Pandemic Underscores the Need to Address Social Isolation and Loneliness. *Public Health Reports*. 2021;136(6):653-655. doi:10.1177/00333549211045425

<sup>2</sup> Hillis, S. D., Et al. (2021). Covid-19-Associated Orphanhood and Caregiver Death in the United States. *Pediatrics*. DOI: 10.1542/peds.2021-053760

<sup>3</sup> Loades, M. E., Et Al. (2020). Rapid Systematic Review: The Impact of Social Isolation and Loneliness on the Mental Health of Children and Adolescents in the Context of COVID-19. *Journal of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry*, 59(11), 1218–1239.e3. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jaac.2020.05.009>

In recent years, the Center for Evidence-Based Mentoring, OJJDP, and other researchers have developed a wealth of data demonstrating effective practices in mentoring. By way of example:

- Youth who are at-risk of falling off track but have a mentor are 55% more likely to enroll in college and 81% more likely to participate in sports and extracurricular activities that support positive behaviors.
- Youth with a mentor are also 52% less likely to skip a day of school than their peers and maintain better attitudes towards school.
- Mentoring also plays a role in preventing young people from engaging in harmful behaviors, youth with mentors are 46% less likely than their peers to start using drugs.
- Mentoring also can prepare young people for transitioning into careers by providing them with support with setting career goals and preparing them for the workplace.
- Evaluations of mentoring programs report significant increases among youth in self-confidence, self-efficacy, and a positive attitude about their futures.

The Youth Mentoring Grant Program serves as a prevention and intervention strategy for young people at times when they are most likely to need support. It has helped hundreds of thousands of young people achieve positive academic, professional, and personal outcomes. It serves our nation's young people directly through community-based youth-serving organizations, prioritizes evidence-based research and practice to support the field, and provides mentoring programs with free training and technical assistance. When Members of Congress support the Youth Mentoring Grant they invest in the future of America's young people.

## **Recommendation**

On behalf of the more than 200 organizations and 13,000 youth development professionals that comprise Youth Collaboratory, **we respectfully request \$130 million for the Youth Mentoring Grants program in Fiscal Year 2023.**

	<b>FY 2022 Final</b>	<b>POTUS FY23</b>	<b>FY 2023 Request</b>
<b>Youth Mentoring Grants</b>	<b>\$102,000,000</b>	<b>\$120,000,000</b>	<b>\$130,000,000</b>

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