

Peer Mentorship in Restricted Housing

Using peer mentors to improve outcomes among restricted housing unit residents

Agency: Nebraska Department of Correctional Services Tecumseh State Correctional Institution (TSCI)

Trial Duration:
04/04/17–07/01/17

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Context

Anecdotal reports suggest that the informal use of peer mentors at TSCI has improved functioning and behavior in participating residents, but no evidence has been gathered on the program's effectiveness.

Key Finding

Having a peer mentor did not reduce misconducts or increase participation in programming in this small pilot trial.

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Background

Peer mentoring offers a reliable listener and exposure to fresh perspectives, as well as significant prosocial benefits. Within corrections, peer mentoring has been found to help reduce alcohol use, lower recidivism, increase communication skills, improve participation rates in outpatient psychiatric and substance abuse programs, and help incarcerated persons pursue education goals, find future housing or employment, and consider career plans.

Trial Design

TSCI tested an existing peer-mentor program in its restricted-housing unit (RHU) in a small, proof-of-concept trial. Outcomes included rates of misbehaviors, grievances, participation in programming, and medication compliance. RHU residents randomly assigned to the intervention condition (n=12) were offered twice-weekly meetings with a peer mentor, whereas those randomly assigned to the control condition (n=12) were not offered a peer mentor. The trial lasted for 90 days. Although mentors were given checklists of suggested session topics, mentor/mentee pairs determined what issues to address.

Results

The small number of participants limits statistical analyses, so we report only numbers/percentages. Both groups experienced an almost 50% overall reduction in misconducts as compared with a pre-trial period of the same duration. The mentored group did not have improved participation in programming, misconducts, grievances, or medication compliance compared with the control group. The only variable that predicted the number of misconducts in each group was the number of previous misconducts.

This is an important first trial as it shows the feasibility of testing this program; a larger-scale trial is being considered.

Peer Mentor Trial Results

	Intervention	Control
Misconducts Prior to Trial	41	17
Misconducts During Trial	22	9
Percent Reduction	46%	47%

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