

**The Bishops' High School Old Students' Association**

**and  
The Bishops' High School**

**Mentoring Programme for  
Third Form Students**

**' . . .the best thing that could have happened to me'**  
*Voice of a Mentee*

**Evaluation of  
the Pilot Project 2002-2003**

**Georgetown  
Guyana**

**May 2004**

## Preface

The Bishops' High School Old Students' Association is committed to assisting in the continued development of the Bishops' High School. Among its objectives are:

- To encourage and foster the interest of the old students in the present day activities and aspirations of the school; and
- To make some contribution in the sphere of education by giving help primarily to the school and also to the community in general.

In keeping with these objectives, the BHSOSA responded to a request of Ms Maureen Massiah, Headteacher (1987-2002) to design and implement a mentoring programme for third form students. The Association relied on a Committee to spearhead the initiative. This Committee comprised Janice M. Jackson, Vidyaratha Kissoon, Magda Pollard and Joyce Sinclair. It was expanded to include Jennifer Dewar who subsequently served as the Coordinator for period of three months.

The mentoring programme was launched on January 12, 2003 with an orientation session for mentors. Its momentum increased gradually with the first meeting to introduce mentors to their mentees and parents being held on February 11, 2003.

To better assess the viability of the programme, the Committee undertook an evaluation during the 2003-2004 academic year. This activity entailed the conduct of interviews with mentees, parents/guardians, the Headteacher – Elizabeth Isaacs-Walcott and the Staff Liaison –Hazel Friday-Burrowes as well as the completion of questionnaires by mentors. Elsie Croal, Janice M. Jackson, Karen Livan, Rosemarie Terborg, Terry Stuart and Carla Thomas conducted the interviews. The Committee greatly appreciates the inputs of all who participated in the evaluation.

The evaluation has revealed the value of the mentoring programme.

- It has shown that with nurturing, students can achieve higher standards of performance and behaviour than previously expected.
- It is yet another activity that dispels the myth of the BHS being a school whose students have little or no material needs; in fact, several students are in dire need of material and psychosocial support.
- It has exposed the possibility of collaboration between home, school and Old Students' Association for the benefit of the students.
- It has uncovered the desire of students from varied backgrounds to achieve, be respected, engage in meaningful relationships and develop a high self-esteem.
- It has brought home the fact that, regarded of sex, race or class, adolescents have needs that must be taken seriously if they are to become worthwhile citizens of Guyana.

The pilot programme has yielded insights and experiences which should be shared with others. It is the intention of the BHSOSA to do just that.

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## **Introduction**

The Bishops' High School Old Students' Association (BHSOSA), in collaboration with the Bishops' High School (BHS), introduced a pilot of a mentoring programme for students in Form 3 of the BHS during the second term of the 2002-03 academic year. As envisaged, the programme forged links between former and current students. It also afforded contact between parents and alumni on a formal basis for the first time in the school's history.

The programme has the following objectives:

- To foster development of positive values, attitudes and behaviours of the student;
- To promote development of a healthy self-esteem and self-image;
- To explore the nature and limits of relationships;
- To encourage the student in the selection/identification of a role model; and
- To facilitate exploration of goals, visions, wants and needs.

To enable determination of the value and viability of the programme, the BHSOSA carried out an evaluation during the first half of the 2003-04 academic year. It utilized interviews with students, parents/guardians<sup>1</sup>, the Headteacher and the Staff Liaison as well as questionnaires completed by mentors to glean the different perspectives. It sought perspectives on issues such as the reason for participation in the programme, the degree of satisfaction with the programme and the relationships, changes in the student's behaviour and their understanding of themselves. It also invited suggestions for improvement in the programme as well as the demand for its continuation.

This report describes the level of participation and the nature of the response of key participants – mentees, parents, mentors and staff – to the evaluation. It presents their perspectives on issues such as the reasons for becoming involved in the programme; satisfaction with the programme and the mentoring relationship; the nature of interaction between the mentee and the mentor as well as between the mentor and parents; the most meaningful activities and interactions for the mentees and suggestions for improving the programme.

## **Response to the Evaluation**

The programme involved 34 students (mentees) and their parents and 33 mentors. It received ongoing support within the school from the Headteacher and a staff member, the Staff Liaison, who functioned as the link between the BHSOSA and the BHS. A total of 68 respondents shared their perspectives on the programme (Table 1). Of the partnerships identified during the programme, 30 resulted in relationships involving more than two contacts.

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<sup>1</sup> "Parents" is used to refer to parents or guardians in the remainder of the report.

Table 1: Distribution of Participants in the Programme and Respondents in the Evaluation						
Category	Participants			Respondents		
	F	M	T	F	M	T
Mentees	24	10	34	20	8	28
Mentors	29	4	33	16	2	18
Parents	na <sup>2</sup>	na	34	15	5	20
Headteacher	1		1	1		1
Staff Liaison	1		1	1		1
Total	na	na	103	53	15	68

## Getting Involved

Parents were invited to participate in the programme via a letter signed jointly by the President of the BHSOSA and the Headteacher of the BHS. They were given one week to indicate an interest in the programme.

The response to the invitation was overwhelming. In fact, within two days of dispatch of the letters, over 40 of the 110 households to which the invitation was sent indicated an interest in participation. This response far exceeded the intention to limit the pilot programme to 20 students and caused the BHSOSA to rethink the scope.

The BHSOSA had stipulated that participants should be accepted on a first-come, first-served basis. It intended the programme to be one of opportunity for students to experience different kinds of relationships rather than one to address problems which students faced. The BHSOSA enlisted the assistance of the BHS in assignment of students to mentors. In actuality, some students were selected by the BHS rather than all mentees being assigned by the order of their response. The BHS had decided that some students warranted individual attention and were likely to benefit from the experience. One consequence of this strategy was an expression of discontent by a few parents who had given an immediate response but whose child was not included in the pilot programme.

The reasons for participating in the programme offered by the mentees and their parents were varied.

### Getting Involved: Mentees' Perspective

Of the 28 students responding, 7 were influenced by the Headteacher or another staff member; of these 2 were also encouraged by a parent. Not all students could articulate reasons for participating in the programme; one indicated that she resisted participation for no good reason but was eventually persuaded to become involved.

The benefits envisaged by the mentees related to:

<sup>2</sup> Data were not disaggregated by sex.

Becoming more organized;  
Developing study skills;  
Experiencing adventure;  
Gaining an opportunity to socialize;  
Getting assistance with social problems in school and at home and receiving guidance generally;  
Getting help with some academic work;  
Getting to know a new person;  
Having someone other than a parent with whom to speak;  
Learning how an older person would communicate;  
Meeting someone from the “old school;” and  
Receiving words of encouragement.

### **Getting Involved: Parents’ Perspective**

A parent was the primary decision maker with respect to the student’s participation in the programme. While parents were given the option of accepting or rejecting the invitation, two indicated that they felt compelled to become involved since the programme was offered with the school’s concurrence. Another did not want the student to miss out on anything the school was offering, seeing refusal of the invitation as leading the student being considered an outcast. A fourth indicated that she wanted her child to gain exposure which she lacked as a child.

Generally, the parents expected the programme to benefit the student positively. In this regard, they thought that involvement could lead to improved academic performance, greater stability and enhanced social development. They saw the programme providing an opportunity for:

Gaining knowledge;  
Interaction with a role model, in some cases this being someone closer to the student’s age and in others to compensate for the death of a mother;  
Learning from an alumna/us who had achieved in life and, therefore, demonstrating what could be attained through hard work and dedication; and  
Receiving guidance in areas such as making choices, fields of study, improving performance and career choice.

A few parents welcomed the chance for assistance since they were experiencing some problems with the student. In this regard, issues included the student riding the minibus and difficulty getting the student to do things which the parent desired. In fact, one parent indicated that she learnt of the programme while attending a Parent-Teachers Meeting, as the student had not delivered the invitation.

Parents found value in the interaction between the student and another adult. They suggested that this would be of assistance to the parents, since students are not always open with them. One parent noted that she felt the need for such a programme and would have participated in one outside of school if it had been offered.

## Satisfaction with the Mentoring Programme

Both students and parents expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the mentoring programme. Many indicated that their expectations were met. In some cases, these were surpassed. A few students and their parents were disappointed with the programme, since the students had little or no contact with the mentor (Table 2).

Level of Satisfaction	Students			Parents
	F	M	T	
Very satisfied	3	3	3	3
Satisfied	10	5	15	12
Partially satisfied	4		4	2
Not satisfied	3		3	2
Too soon to tell				1
Total	20	8	28	20

### Satisfaction with the Mentoring Programme: Mentees' Perspective

The opportunity to interact with a different person, the degree of contact, the activities undertaken and results of those activities contributed to the degree of satisfaction derived by the mentees.

The programme helped students to interact with new persons, exposing them to different perspectives. For instance, it enabled one student to gain a sense of the culture of the school, past and present. For others, it resulted in assistance with assignments, transfer of skills and approaches to other subject areas and improvement in grades.

Satisfaction was also derived from learning how to deal with peer pressure, gaining an appreciation that a lot by hard work and dedication could lead to greater achievement and having a mentor who was accessible whenever a problem arose and instilled confidence, enabling the mentee to share information about himself. Satisfaction also resulted from the opportunity to “have fun” with the mentor and to see the Australia/West Indies Cricket match free of charge.

Dissatisfaction accrued primarily from limited contact between the student and the mentor. While one student met his mentor almost every weekend during the academic year, others were not so fortunate. In one case, the student felt that she was reaching out to the mentor more than the other way round while in another, the mentee did not think that it was her role to contact the mentor even though she had the mentor's telephone numbers. Another student expressed dissatisfaction with the limited contact which resulted from the absence of her mentor from the country.



## **Satisfaction with the Mentoring Programme: Parents' Perspective**

The parents' level of satisfaction was, in part, related to the degree of involvement with the mentoring pair. Involvement ranged from high interaction between mentor and parents to little or no contact; in fact, one parent indicated that he did not know how often the mentor and mentee met. At the upper level, parents and mentors conversed often; in one instance, a mentee was known to point out that the mentoring relationship was between her and the mentor and not between the parent and the mentor. The more common topic of communication related to activities being proposed.

Several parents expressed satisfaction with and appreciation for the programme. They considered the programme as being timely and beneficial. One considered the entry of the mentor into the lives of the family members as "a blessing to the family" in many ways. Another stated that she and her son had benefited financially, physically and mentally. Other views on the programme were:

Grateful to the team which put the programme together;  
Hope that the programme would be continued and strengthened;  
Pleased that the mentor respected the parent's authority; and  
Programme overdue – will help to uplift moral standards and provide local role models for students.

One parent indicated that the time was too short to determine satisfaction.

The parents of some of the students who were not in an active relationship indicated that they would have liked the student to have a mentor. Others expressed much disappointment with the outcome. One parent appreciated that the mentor was very busy but stated that she had hoped that the mentor would have been able to meet the mentee at least once a month. Another parent noted that the student's interest seemed to have waned after a few meetings.

One parent recognized that the student's involvement in church and school activities limited the amount of time available for interaction with the mentor; in fact, this parent acknowledged that the student was pressured by these activities and was attempting to live up to everyone's expectations. The parent also pointed out that the student was not proactive in the contacting mentor.

## **Satisfaction with the Mentoring Programme: Staff's Perspective**

Some staff members were unhappy about the programme at the inception. Some showed displeasure about the essays written by the students prior to the introduction of the programme. Many changed their perceptions of the programme when the potential benefits were explained and the real benefits were witnessed.

The school took cognizance of the issues raised in the students' essays and implemented decisions leading to positive change. As a consequence, the students have displayed a greater degree of trust in their teachers.

Students saw their mentor as an adult on whom they could depend. Some students requested their mentors' attendance at school when problems arose.

Other students and several parents have recognized the value of the experiences gained by mentees. Several have asked to be included in the programme.

### **Satisfaction with the Relationship with the Mentor**

The majority of partnerships in which the mentee and the mentor interacted over a period of time resulted in satisfactory relationships (Table 3). In several instances, the relationship led to the building of trust, demonstration of honesty and good communication. In all cases but one, the mentor and mentee did not know each other before they became involved with the programme.

Level of Satisfaction	Students			Parents
	F	M	T	
Very satisfied	3	2	5	2
Satisfied	10	6	16	13
Partially satisfied	3		3	
Not satisfied	4		4	2
Little contact				3
Total	20	8	28	20

### **Satisfaction with the Relationship with the Mentor: Mentees' Perspective**

Satisfaction with the relationship with the mentor was determined in large part by the quality of the interaction as well as the support and opportunities provided. One student noted that involvement in the mentoring programme was the best thing that could have happened to her during her time at BHS. Another noted that the mentor was willing to offer reprimands/give lectures when deemed necessary. For other students, the relationship evoked reactions such as:

- An additional resource for interaction and problem solving;
- Discussed issues with her mentor who would discuss them with her parent; helped clear up some of her issues this way;
- Excellent, great, wonderful!
- Got encouragement to overcome challenges;
- Got relief, could tell the mentor anything and get help;
- Having someone near her age meant a lot;
- Just the greatest mentor;
- Made a new friend;

Pleasantly surprised to find that an older person is not boring;  
Role model to be emulated, notably in style of speaking and communication;  
Speak openly and enjoy the relationship; and  
The mentor is a good person who is trying to help her be a better person; the mentor is close to the mentee's parents and looks out for her in a strange way; the mentor converses with her parents and keeps in touch with her.

For two mentees, the frequent absence of the mentor from the country meant that the intensity of contact desired was not achieved. However, the mentor initiated contact and always put time aside for the mentees when she was in the country, often reminding them of the importance of education.

Another mentee appreciated the willingness of the mentor to intercede on her behalf and that of other students. In this particular case, the mentor was able to obtain copies of an essential textbook for a number of students.

While most mentees expressed satisfaction with the relationship, others did desire more face-to-face contact. They found telephone conversations useful but envisaged physical proximity as being highly beneficial.

### **Satisfaction with the Relationship with the Mentor: Parents' Perspective**

Parents appreciated the efforts of the mentors. They liked the fact that mentors made an attempt to keep in touch with them and gave advice, for instance, where to go for lessons.

One mother stated that she does not speak with the mentor too often since she does not want "to get in the way." Another observed that the student felt free to visit the mentor and to consult on everything and that the mentor was "very in tune" with the student. Yet another described the relationship as a "parent and daughter" one. In one case, the mentor seemed to be on the right track by being able to build a good relationship and thus serving as a positive influence on the student; also the mentor was accessible to the student. In a few cases, a good relationship was established with other members of the family.

### **Nature of Interaction with the Mentee: Mentors' Perspectives**

Mentors and mentees engaged in a variety of interactions. The principal activities were discussions. The mentees found this the most meaningful activity, since some had issues they wished to discuss but no one else with whom to do so.

Discussions covered a range of topics, one of the most significant being academic performance. In this vein, mentors provided support in the form of:

Advice on the choice of stream;  
Assistance with assignments;

- Coaching in mathematics, either directly or by another alumnus;
- Design of a study chart;
- Establishment of a personal contract, including the number of hours of private study and grade targets;
- Feedback on the student's work;
- Provision of textbooks and motivational material; and
- Setting SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time bound) goals.

Other forms of support geared to improving academic performance were:

- Enrolment of the mentee in the Georgetown Reading and Research Library to improve his reading skills; and
- Facilitation of access to the Internet by paying for this service or allowing the mentee to use the mentor's computer; in this case, the mentor noted that the student used the service responsibly.

Outings proved to be a valuable experience for many mentees. For some, they provided new experiences. In one case, the mentee revealed that she had never been asked what she wanted to do. In others, they had never visited a restaurant or the one where the meal was taken. In one case, the outing included a sibling. Outings took the form of:

- A meal at a restaurant (e.g., Hotel Tower, Le Meridian Pegasus) or a fast food outlet (e.g., Dairy Bar, Pizza Hut, Popeye's);
- A show at the Cultural Centre;
- BHSOSA carol singing;
- Cricket at GCC;
- QC House Feed;
- Shopping;
- Tea at the Sidewalk Cafe;
- Viewing an exhibition; and
- Woodside Choir and other concerts.

Mentors performed other roles as well. In one instance, the mentor accompanied the mentee to a meeting with the Headteacher. In another, the mentor attended the hospital with the mentee and his mother when he paid a follow up visit after being involved in accident.

The interactions took place frequently via the telephone and on a face-to-face basis. In one instance, telephone contact was limited, since the mentee had no telephone at home; in this case, the student initiated calls, using a pay telephone.

Several mentors visited the mentee's home and/or hosted the mentee at their home. In the latter case, activities including the use of the computer, preparation of a meal together and communication with the mentor's family.

Face-to-face interaction also occurred at the school and in the mentor's office.

## **Nature and Value of Interaction with Parents: Mentors' Perspectives**

In general, mentors had limited contact with parents. The extent of the interaction ranged from that which occurred at the BHS during the first meeting involving parents, students and mentors to a few telephone conversations to visits to the mentor's or parents' workplace as well as visits to the student's home. In one case, the parent was invited to lunch at the mentor's home.

Telephone conversations were the most frequent form of interaction. These served to keep the parents abreast of activities planned, gain permission for participation in activities and give advice on/support to the parent-student relationship as well as on a personal concern of the parent. The home visits enabled a better appreciation of the conditions, both physical and social, under which the students live.

The interactions informed the mentor of the perspectives which parents have on the student. In one instance, the parent seemed to be in awe of the student's achievements. In another, the parent communicated that she felt that the mentoring relationship had a positive effect on her daughter, including her achieving over 70% at school. In yet another, the parent seized the opportunity to share her concern about the student's behaviour.

## **Most Meaningful Activities/Interactions for Mentees**

Activities which may seem trivial or insignificant to an adult or may be taken for granted proved important to the mentees. The most meaningful activities or interactions for mentees included:

- Attendance at shows and programmes;
- Discussion of the mentee's problems;
- Encouragement;
- Getting help from the mentor when having a tremendous problem at home; the mentor spoke with the mentee's mother and helped her out;
- Getting help with mathematics and English;
- Going out to meals e.g., lunch at the Hotel Tower;
- Got into trouble with Mrs. Walcott for telling a fib; the mentor accompanied her to Mrs. Walcott; that helped her to remember that she can turn to her mentor for assistance;
- Learning to time self when studying;
- Meeting at the mentor's office;
- Receiving subject guides;
- Telephone and face-to-face discussions;
- The day he was enrolled in mathematics lessons;
- Visit to the mentor's church;
- Visit to the mentor's home; and
- Visit to the Reading Centre.

## **Student Circumstances, Behaviour and Attitudes: Mentors' Perspectives**

The home environment poses problems for some students, including lack of adequate financial resources, limited parental support and guidance and poor interpersonal relations. As a result, students have several challenges, including:

Going without lunch some days;

Having very complex issues to deal with at home and, consequently, displaying unacceptable behaviours at school;

Lack of access to textbooks and other needed resources; and

Poor communication with parents.

The peer group is also a significant feature of the lives of the students. One major problem involving female students is “riding the minibus,” resulting in intimate relationships with drivers and conductors, some being older men.

The academic environment has also presented issues of concern. Among these are:

Apparent fear/reluctance among some students about divulging information about groups/cliques in the school and some of the pranks they play on other students;

Students seeming to change career paths depending on their assessment of the quality of teaching;

The inability to find books in the libraries to extend reading;

The reliance on extra lessons and the resultant limitation of time for other activities, including interaction with the mentor as well as lack of opportunity to internalize material; and

Truancy.

Some students were unclear about the purpose of the programme, their role and their responsibilities. Some are in need of guidance on appropriate behaviour in difference circumstances. Mentors observed that:

Some students perceive the mentoring programme as a money-making opportunity.

Students should be told clearly in advance of expected or approved behaviour at special functions.

Students talk to their peers about the mentoring programme when they go out with their mentors.

(There is) need for balance between discipline of students and communication of shared values.

## **Impact of the Programme on the Mentees' Behaviour, Attitudes and Circumstances**

Many mentees and parents were able to identify positive changes which had occurred in the students' behaviour or lives. Only a few had observed no change; one mentee observed that she is still loud but normal, although teachers and her parents believe that she is hyperactive. One mentee realized that change in her behaviour was unlikely to occur since she had not opened up to her mentor and she had not shared aspects of her life that need to be addressed.

### **Impact of the Programme on the Mentees' Behaviour, Attitudes and Circumstances: Mentees' Perspective**

For many, involvement in the programme yielded an improvement in academic performance and change in behaviour which supported such an improvement. It led to better grades in subjects such as mathematics and changes such as reading more, better use of time and better problem solving skills. In addition, it encouraged a more focused approach to studying, a greater investment of time in studying, enjoyment from studying, working harder in the belief that it was the right thing to do and a decrease in procrastination with assignments.

Changes occurred in mentees' their attitude to and perceptions of others. These include:

- Inspiring younger siblings to achieve higher grades;
- More consideration of others and less selfishness;
- More thoughtful; and
- Now aware that persons in the "upper echelons" of society can be friendly in ways that one would not necessarily have expected them to be.

Positive changes, which mentees recognized in their attitude and behaviour, include:

- Greater comfort when interacting with peers and particularly speaking his mind when he disagrees with them;
- Improvement in classroom behaviour; formerly got into trouble with teachers from time to time; was advised by mentor to be more respectful, considerate and mature so adopted a more positive attitude to interaction at all levels – in and out of school;
- Improvement in communication skills;
- More confidence in expressing himself in class;
- More open and not as shy;
- New/different outlook on life, looks at everything in a different way;
- Now more likeable; in 3<sup>rd</sup> form, the teachers said that she was in her own world; she thinks that was from bad associations; and
- Used to behave rashly but learnt to think rationally, is able to apply what she learnt to other situations; sometimes used to stay away from peers, stay in a corner, but is better able to socialize and now she has really good friends.

## **Impact of the Programme on the Mentees' Behaviour, Attitudes and Circumstances: Parents' Perspective**

Parents' also recognized positive changes in some mentees. In particular, some identified improvement in academic performance, less antisocial behaviour, increased motivation and consciousness, a calmer and more settled demeanour, increased self-esteem and decreased stubbornness. They mentioned other positive changes as being better communication between the parent and the student and broadening of the student's outlook, helping her to pitch her goals higher.

One parent observed that the mentee had stopped "riding the minibus," a practice which has serious consequences for students and introduces much anguish for parents. He stated that this change in behaviour had been accompanied by a reduction in the size of their telephone bills.

Another parent stated that it was too early to tell whether change had taken place. A third claimed that the student has always had a mature attitude and had displayed no change. A fourth said that there were no negative effects and that the programme reaffirmed values taught within the home.



## **Impact of the Programme on the Mentees' Behaviour, Attitudes and Circumstances: School's Perspectives**

The staff observed positive changes in the behaviour and academic performance of many of the mentees. In fact, they noted a marked reduction in discipline problems, especially among the male students. They reported that students had adopted a more serious approach to their schoolwork, with the result that the majority of children achieving over 70% in class were mentees.

The staff also stated that the relationships have led to improved self-esteem, greater self-discipline, improved teacher/student relationships, greater respect for authority and greater stability among the students.

## **Effect of Participation on Parents/Family**

For some parents, having another adult interact with the student was an objective of participation in the programme. Such a decision had implications for individual family members as well as the family as a whole. One such implication was the need to break down barriers, thus revealing private matters to a stranger. Fortunately, the shyness was overcome and a fruitful relationship developed between the mentor and the family. Additionally, the change in attitude has led to improved communication between the student and members of his family and, in particular, the way in which he speaks to his parent.

Raising an adolescent is a challenge in itself. The programme proved to be a great relief to one single parent who was unsure whether she could raise her son alone. In fact, it helped psychologically as well as socially, since it has enabled the mentee to get the exposure which his mother wanted him to have. One parent noted that the student makes him feel comfortable.

The interaction with the mentor has led one parent to be more positive in his thinking. It has also taught him to be tolerant and accommodating of the view of others.

## **Successes of the Mentoring Relationship: Mentors' Perspectives**

The mentoring programme benefited mentors as it caused some to reflect on themselves as well as increased their understanding of the life of an adolescent and that of a single parent. In this regard, individual mentors:

- Got to know one student better and to have a better understanding of some of the problems students face at school;
- Reflected on her attitude to young people and gained an appreciation of the plight of a single parent whose child is placed at a senior secondary school;
- Saw a lot of herself reflected in the student and understood the importance of self-confidence and problems associated with low self-esteem; and

Were able to ascertain problems affecting the student which could be resolved at various levels.

The programme has provided the opportunity for young people to discuss issues and engage in activities with an adult other than a parent; this was particularly important where the student was not living with parents. It enabled students to vent their frustrations with and disappointments related to home and school, feelings of isolation, relationships with their peers and their own behaviour. It allowed for access to guidance with respect to streaming, strategies for improving academic performance, academic support (including the provision of textbooks) and career pathing.

A particularly significant achievement of the mentoring programme is the building of trust between mentee and mentor, and parents and mentor. The willingness of students to share their innermost feelings, insecurities and concerns as well as the parents who face difficult circumstances opening up to the mentor is stellar. One mentor noted that the greatest success was “that the parents felt comfortable enough to tell me the truth.”

Other important achievements were:

Exposing the student to new activities and broadening her horizons by providing experiences “outside the box”;

Improvement in academic performance based on the student’s desire to do so; and

The mentee being able to recognize when she should take responsibility for her actions.

## Challenges Faced, Continuing Challenges and Solutions Found

Mentors encountered several challenges. They were able to overcome some of these. However, some still need to be addressed if the mentors are to respond effectively (Table 4).

Table 4: Challenges Faced, Continuing Challenges and Solutions Found		
Challenges Faced	Solutions Found	Continuing Challenges
Extent of communication with the parent about the mentee		
Interacting with the parent older than the mentor		
Lack of access to the mentee/mother		
Lack of openness on one or both sides	Brought up issues of interest or that might be troubling an adolescent and used these to discuss how to act in given situations	
Lack of practical, hands-on experience		
Lack of understanding of dynamics of the nuclear and extended household	Encouraged the mentee to write as a means of understanding her own feelings and to share this with her mother	
Making time to meet the mentee	Talking more on the telephone Enlisting the help of the mentor’s daughter who is in a higher form	
Refraining from telling parent to cut back on lessons	Spoke with Joyce Sinclair	

The mentee's apparent lack of commitment to self-development		
The parent's attitude to the mentee	Exchanged views and experiences with the mother on the telephone	
What to say to and do with the mentee		

## Desired Characteristics of Mentors

Both mentees and mentors shared ideas on characteristics they consider important for the mentor. The composite list of characteristics offered by the mentors appears in Table 5.

### Desired Characteristics of Mentors: Mentees' Perspectives

Mentors should have time to devote to the relationship. They should keep appointments and not make promises which they cannot fulfill.

Efforts should be made to enlist younger mentors. This may facilitate the relationship more rather than if the mentor was closer in age to the mentees' parents.

### Desired Characteristics of Mentors: Mentors' Perspectives

Mentors identified several characteristics which a potential mentor should possess. These characteristics are related to the individual's outlook on life, adherence to core values, capacity to respond positively to adolescents and availability to contribute in a meaningful way.

A love of children	Flexibility/going with the flow
A positive outlook	Good communication skills
Ability to analyze the student and determine a particular strategic area in which the mentor can help	Have time
	Honesty
	Kindness
Ability to communicate values	Non-judgmental
Ability to deal with miscreants and still love them	Open-mindedness
Ability to evoke confidence and get the mentee to discuss issues honestly	Patience
	Perseverance
Ability to keep confidences, when necessary	Reliability
Ability to make some financial input	Respect for diversity
Ability to motivate the student	Role model
Ability to provide help (directly or indirectly)	Self-assurance
Accessibility	Sensitivity
Appreciation of adolescent issues	Supportiveness
Approachable/easy to talk to	Tactfulness
Availability in times of need	Tolerance
Caring personality	Understanding
Commitment	Well adjusted
Complimentary	Willingness, e.g., to provide exposure, to point out shortcomings, to accept and respect mentee and family as they are, to offer guidance for improved behaviour, attitude or performance
Constancy	
Demonstrate empathy	
Desire to help the students	
Encouraging	



## Continued Involvement in the Programme

The majority of mentees, mentors and parents indicated a desire to continue with the mentoring relationship (Table 6).

Participant	Yes	No	Other	No Response
Mentees	25	3		
Mentors	12	3	1	3
Parents	10	1		9

### Continued Involvement in the Programme: Mentees' Perspectives

One mentee mentioned that, although he enjoyed the relationship, he did not think he needs it any longer. Another said she would like to start meeting her mentor again; even though she terminated the relationship, she was not confident enough to make contact with the mentor. A third indicated that continuation would depend on being assigned a mentor who had more time to invest in the relationship.

### Continued Involvement in the Programme: Mentors' Perspectives

One mentor indicated that continuation of the relationship with the mentee depended on the mentee's attitude. Three mentors would be unable to continue in the programme due to absence from the country, lack of time and pressure of work.

## Improving the Mentoring Programme

Mentees, parents and mentors suggested ways in which the mentoring programme may be improved. Suggestions related to when the programme should be introduced, orientation of all partners, the structure of the programme, the frequency and nature of the interaction, reporting mechanisms and the supporting activities. Some mentees considered the programme appropriate for their needs and could offer no areas for improvement

### Introduction of Programme

The pilot programme was introduced for the third form students. Institution of the programme for younger students was considered apposite.

### Introduction of Programme: Mentees' Perspectives

Mentees suggested that the programme should be introduced to first form students to contribute to the students being more positive and increasing their ability to express their views with peers.

One believed that introducing the programme at this stage would instill a sense of confidentiality in the students.

## **Introduction of Programme: Mentors' Perspectives**

One mentor suggested that the programme should begin in the first form. Another concurred that it should be introduced before the third form. A third opined that it should begin in the first term of the third form, in order to alert the students of their weaknesses early enough for them to work to improve them.

## **Orientation of the Mentor to the Programme**

At the inception of the mentoring programme, it was attested that the pilot phase would yield many lessons which would inform the development of the programme. One of the decisions was to begin mentoring relationships after mentors had participated in two discussion sessions. The following perspectives represent reflections on the process used and requirements for preparing mentors to function effectively.

For some mentors, the preparatory and follow up meetings enabled them to function well. However, it was suggested that persons who missed the first session may have been at a disadvantage. At this session, the purpose, the structure and the process involved in implementing the programme were discussed. Additionally, several concerns were raised, with some being addressed and others being noted for further attention.

In order to improve the preparation of mentors, the following suggestions were advanced:

- Discussion of problems facing adolescents;
- Discussion of the nature and limits of confidentiality since this has implications for disclosure of information to authority figures such as parents and the Headteacher;
- Examination of ways of offering advice;
- Involvement of persons with mentoring experience as well as appropriately qualified persons in discussions;
- Pairing a new mentor with an experienced mentor;
- Provision of guidelines for assessing situations to identify risk factors and possible ways of responding to those problems;
- Provision of specific guidelines on the nature and frequency of the interaction between the mentor and the mentee; and
- Use of case studies prepared by practising mentors.

## **Orientation of the Mentee to the Programme**

Both mentees and mentors revealed that some mentees were unaware of the reason for their involvement in the programme. This led to unclear expectations of the programme and the requirements for participation. It is important therefore for all mentees to participate in orientation activities before beginning a relationship with a mentor.

### **Orientation of the Mentee to the Programme: Mentees' Perspective**

The objectives of the programme and the reason for its establishment should be made known to the mentees and their parents. Additionally, a fuller briefing before the start of the programme would enable the mentees to have a better appreciation of its scope. It would clarify the role of the programme as a means of building a relationship rather than one intended to provide items to the mentee.

### **Orientation of the Mentee to the Programme: Mentors' Perspective**

Mentees should be engaged in discussions about the nature of the programme, the type of interaction anticipated and their role in the process. More specifically, mentees should have a better understanding of the need to participate actively in problem solving and to be proactive in forging communication links with the mentor.

The mentor should meet with the mentee and the parents to discuss their expectations.

### **Structure of the Programme**

The manner in which the programme is designed and implemented has implications for the level of involvement of all partners and the extent to which objectives can be achieved. It is crucial that all partners understand their role in the process and develop a sense of inclusion and ownership. Both parents and mentors offered suggestions on desired elements of the programme.

### **Structure of the Programme: Parents' Perspectives**

The programme should be based on measurable objectives. This would enable the mentor and the parent to discuss achievements, e.g., getting the student to speak up, as well as the extent to which the objectives have been achieved.

There should be more meetings involving the mentor, the parent and the student as well as more communication between the mentor and the parent. Additionally, meeting or activity times should be convenient for the mentor as well as the parent.

### **Structure of the Programme: Mentors' Perspectives**

The need for more interaction between partners in the programme resonated among mentors. More meetings among mentors, possibly on a monthly basis, were seen as facilitating exchange of information, sharing of experiences and gaining solutions to problems in the relationships as well as those affecting the mentee. Additionally, formal monthly meetings with mentors, teachers and parents should be considered to reinforce the objectives of the programme.



The programme should cater for group activities. This would enable the building of a sense of community, inject an element of fun as requested by the mentees and allow for shared responsibility for programme delivery and sustainability.

In addition, training should be provided to better equip mentors to perform in their role. This should include discussion of issues such as dealing with adolescents, communicating with parents and the nature and extent of confidentiality.

The programme should also facilitate access to specialists such as child psychologists and counselors in a timely manner.

Sessions on parenting skills should be arranged for parents. In particular, young, single parents are likely to benefit from such a series and should also receive other support.

### **Frequency and Nature of Interaction**

During the pilot phase, mentors had the primary responsibility for determining how often the pair would meet and the form the interaction would take. Mentees, parents and mentors offered suggestions for a more systematic approach to the interaction.

#### **Frequency and Nature of Interaction: Mentees' Perspective**

Contact between the mentor and the mentee should be more frequent than experienced. More formalized arrangements for meeting should be made rather than allowing contact to occur on an ad hoc basis.

The interaction should entail more face-to-face meetings and more opportunities for communication, with discussion ranging beyond schoolwork. The mentor should talk to the mentee more to help bring about change.

Mentees recognized that there were differences between the mentoring relationships. In order to increase the chance of equity among the students, it was suggested that a Fun Day be organized for mentors and mentees. Also, mentors should take mentees on outings to places which are of interest to the mentee, taking into account the mentor's ability to meet the costs or having the costs met through a central fund.

#### **Frequency and Nature of Interaction: Parents' Perspective**

The mentor should be more involved with the mentee. He/she should contact the mentee more often in order to forge a stronger and closer relationship. He/she should monitor the student's performance and progress at school as well as generally. The mentor should also arrange weekend activities with the student and tutor the student, e.g., in mathematics, rather than the student taking lessons elsewhere.

## **Frequency and Nature of Interaction: Mentors' Perspectives**

Mentors should have a greater degree of contact with the mentees than obtained during the first year. They should meet on a weekly basis, utilizing the weekend as appropriate. Mentors should take the mentees on outings. They should also collaborate on group activities since this would contribute to the development of a collective spirit as well as alleviate the challenge faced by some mentors in deciding on how to engage the mentee.

In addition to interacting with mentees and their parents, mentors should interact with teachers of the students involved in the programme.

## **Expanding and Implementing the Mentoring Programme**

Mentees suggested that the mentoring relationship should be continued throughout the student's tenure in the school. Some also opined that more students should benefit from the programme. They recognized that more mentors would need to be involved.

## **Reporting**

A format and schedule for reporting should be developed to ensure that feedback is provided to the school or the family in an effort to help in the process of the student to realize his/her potential.

Mentors suggestions for improving the school's programme should be shared with the school's administration and this should in turn be communicated to the Ministry of Education. A direct link should be established with the Ministry to act on the feedback from the programme; one suggestion was for the identification of an Education Liaison Officer who would work in direct contact with the Staff Liaison.

## **Supporting Participation**

A number of initiatives were deemed necessary if the programme is to achieve success in the reduction of stress on the mentees, the parents and the mentors. Some of these initiatives identified were:

- Access to a fund or devising of another strategy to meet the students' needs such as provision of textbooks, nutritional requirements and group outings; clear guidelines would be necessary;

- Access to persons with relevant experience to guide mentors;

- Distribution of a list of referral persons/agencies to address varied areas of need of mentees and guidelines for accessing these;

- Guidelines on mentor response to financial needs of mentees and financial outlay by mentors;

- Linking of mentors with similar challenges/interests;

- List of suggested activities;

Means of inculcating the standards of the BHS in parents and students;  
Profile of the mentee to reduce the chance of surprises;  
Profile of the mentor to better match mentor and mentee along common interests;  
Recruitment of more middle aged Old Students as mentors as they could possibly give more support to younger mentors; and  
Strategy to imbue in parents the value of the development of life skills and its relationship to family values and cohesiveness.

## **Conclusion**

The mentoring programme proved to be extremely useful for all partners in the programme. The mentees, in large part, found satisfaction in their relationships and reaped rewards from their responsiveness to the opportunities provided. The parents were generally pleased with the experiences afforded their children, some even realizing benefits for themselves and other members of their family. The mentors welcomed the chance to help shape the lives of the students, many of whom were given exposure to new people, places and things. The school recognized a changed climate, one in which discipline was improved, academic performance enhanced and teachers' attitudes to the programme becoming more positive.

Challenges arose during implementation of the programme. These have served as stimuli for the design of an initiative which is more sensitive to the needs and interests of the mentees, their parents, the mentors and the school.

Of importance is the congruence between the expectations held by mentees and parents at the inception of the programme with their responses during the evaluation. For instance, mentees had envisaged benefits such as developing study skills, gaining assistance with academic work and learning how an older person would communicate. For most mentees, these were realized. Similarly, parents perceived the programme as providing the students with guidance in areas such as fields of study and improving performance, assisting the parents with social and communication problems and giving the students exposure to new experiences. The majority of parents expressed satisfaction with the programme, indicating the extent to which their expectations had been met.

The evaluation has yielded information which demonstrates the worth of the programme. It has also provided material which may be used to refine the programme and enable the sharing of the model with other schools in the country.