

**Sears, J. S., Hall, M. T., Harris, L. M., Mount, S., Willauer, T., Posze, L., & Smead, E. (2017).** *“Like a marriage”: Partnering with peer mentors in child welfare.* *Child and Youth Services Review, 74, 80–86.*

**Study Purpose/Design:** Describes the experiences of family mentors, caseworkers, and supervisors as they operate in a collaborative START team. Twenty-two interviews were conducted of caseworkers (n=9), family mentors (n=9), and START supervisors (n=4).

**Results:** Successful partnerships between mentors, caseworkers, and supervisors involve four processes:

- Sharing a common vision, of “keeping families together” while balancing the primary concern for child safety using the strategies of START.
- Developing working relationships with refining roles and building trust.
- Learning with open-mindedness, valuing the knowledge of each team member, gaining new skills, sharing the role of assisting families.
- Identifying the many benefits of the partnership - increased family engagement, developing empathy for families.

Supervisors needed to expand topics in supervisory sessions to personal concerns such as family challenges or that impacted the team’s efforts. The supervisor’s role was critical in fostering a worker/mentor working alliance.

**Implications for Leadership/Management:**

- Supervisors need support from leadership and training on supervising the worker/mentor dyads.
- Learning to function as a team and do the child welfare casework differently requires training, support, and ongoing oversight.

**Huebner, R. A., Hall, M. T., Smead, E., Willauer, T., & Posze, L. (2018).** *Peer mentoring services, opportunities, and outcomes for child welfare families with substance use disorders.* *Children and Youth Services Review, 84, 239-246.*

**Study Purpose/Design:** This descriptive study utilized existing datasets to explore the work, outcomes and challenges of 28 START family mentors providing services (n= 45,184 daily contacts) to 783 families over 8 years of operation.

**Results:**

- Family mentors spent an average of 55.3 hours over 60.5 contacts with each family during START.
- Mentor services were more intense initially with 7 contacts made within 23.6 calendar days or an average of one family contact every third calendar day.
- There were significant differences in the services provided in rural or more urban environments.
- The best predictor of family unification status at case closure was the number of face to face contacts that the family mentor made with the child/ren in the family.
- The effects of mentors may be synergistic with the strategies of START that align with parent expectations/needs – a sense of urgency, help to navigate the system, and skill development.
- 2/3rds of mentors experienced career advancement opportunities while 1/3<sup>rd</sup> experienced challenges such as violating boundaries, relapse, or other actions that resulted in termination.

**Implications for Leadership/Management:**

- Consider how to discuss the challenges and opportunities of family mentors with community partners, legislators, advocacy groups and others.
- Develop a plan to proactively address family mentor challenges before they occur.
- Devote time to reinforcing the team, coaching supervisors, and providing oversight and training.