

Remarks of Robert L. Listenbee
Administrator
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
At the
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Good morning, everybody. It's indeed a pleasure to be here and to hear about so many exciting activities involving mentoring. I want to thank David for the introduction and MENTOR for hosting this important summit. And thank all of you for being here today, especially those of you who came from the upper Northeast who had to wade through a lot of snow to get here.

Before I begin, I'd also like to acknowledge the summit sponsors, my fellow presenters, and more than 25 national organizations that joined with MENTOR for this summit as supporting partners, many of whom are also mentoring grantees for OJJDP. Finally, I'd like to congratulate the Corporate Mentoring Challenge awardees, their dedication to mentoring and motivating and inspiring our young people.

We at the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention feel that one of the most important jobs we have is to support positive youth development by ensuring that America's youth have the opportunity to connect with dedicated, energetic, and well-trained mentors. Having a responsible caring adult who can provide guidance and direction can make a major difference in a child's life. This is an idea that I have long believed in and is now supported by research. Evaluations of mentoring programs show mentors do make a difference in young lives by boosting self-esteem, strengthening relationships with parents and peers, improving school performance, and reducing violence, drug use, and other risky behavior. Unfortunately, too many youth don't have this guidance at home. Together we can fill this void.

I know you are doing your part. Every day each of you strives to provide youth with close personal relationships, emotional connections, and active guidance. You are positive role models for these young people, and for that, I'd like to thank you. I've been fortunate to have had exceptional mentors in my own life. I credit them with shaping who I am today. So at a time when we acknowledge the importance of mentors, I'm proud to say that I am a benefactor of mentors. And I'd like to have the opportunity to thank my mentors for helping me navigate my path then and now.

My mentor primarily was my high school guidance counselor, Ms. Hazel Persons. Ms. Persons met me at the front door when I was in the 9th grade. She said, "You know, Bob, I think you should go places." She helped me get involved in student government in my first year; became president of my

student class. She helped me get involved in other activities that were part of the process, that we were involved in in school—other student governments, magazine sales.

And then when I became a junior in high school, she decided that I should do something special—that I should go abroad; that I should have an opportunity to go to a foreign country. And she arranged, with lots of help from our community, for me to travel to Germany and live with a German family for 6 weeks. I had spoken German before so I had a chance to live right directly in the family, go to a German high school. That was a profound experience that shaped the direction of my life. But that wasn't all.

I decided I wanted to go to a small college in Michigan, a place called Kalamazoo College—500 students. I was accepted and ready to go. She pulled me aside and she said, “You know, Bob, I think there's a judge downtown I need you to talk to. I think he has another kind of opportunity in mind for you.” So I talked to the judge, and the judge said, “I want to have somebody come over and visit you.” Now, my family was staying in public housing. And that person came over from Harvard University and said, “You know, maybe you ought to apply to Harvard.”

And so my life began, and I became a Harvard student as a result of my mentor giving me direction, lifting me up, inspiring me, encouraging me, and making sure that I had an opportunity that I had never even thought of. And then I had a chance. I had a chance the way that many of you have had a chance to turn around and give back. And so when the opportunity came along for me to become a resident director of an ABC program of gifted and talented minority youth, I became a resident director and I had ten young people that I could mentor every single day from 5 a.m. to midnight. Every single day. They woke me up; they put me to sleep. They inspired me. They gave me more exciting moments in my life than I have had, perhaps, since then. We spent 4 years together.

Now, here's the twist: half of them were boys and half were girls. Oh! That's how I felt, too—“Oh, my God, how are you going to be able to deal with this?” And so I went on and mentored them. And you know what I had a chance to do, thanks to World Learning, Inc., in Brattleboro, Vermont? I had a chance to make sure that every single one of my students travelled abroad. They picked the place they wanted to go; they went to the country they wanted to go to—be it Ghana, be it France or Germany; be it Brazil, be it Mexico or Spain. They went all over the world—be it go to Thailand and teach English in a refugee camp. So I was able to give back. And that's what you all are doing. And you're inspiring all of these young people the same way that I was inspired, the same way that you were inspired, the same way that we need to inspire America's youth.

So a lot of what I have to say now is about the particulars of it. But I want you to know that this is a heartfelt feeling. This is not something I do because I'm the Administrator of OJJDP. It's something that I do because I believe in, because it has directly impacted my life.

So I can say that, as we go forward, in 2011, OJJDP awarded approximately . . . Since 2011, we've awarded approximately \$287 million in mentoring grants. Those grants have helped organizations focus on capacity building, the special needs of target populations, and, of course, research. At OJJDP, research is our mother's bread. We wake up trying to figure out what the research says about all the programs we do. And what this research says, it says that in developmental psychology and neuroscience, it's shown that kids are not mini adults; they are equipped differently cognitively. But what is important to note, the evidence shows that troubled youth are capable of reforming inappropriate behavior, especially when they are guided by the proper interventions.

Now, this is the science that we live by. This is the science that we share in our recreations across the nation. And this is the science that we've used and developed in the mentoring programs to help guide what you're doing. That is why mentoring can be lifesaving—and I do mean lifesaving. How many of you, if I were to ask you to stand up and just raise your hands, think that you know mentors who've mentored somebody that's saved a child's life. Just by a show of hands. Look at you! You've saved children's lives; that's an amazing thing. You know, there are very few jobs or professions or activities where you go to every day where you can say that what you have done, or you know somebody who, has saved a child's life. What an amazing and powerful force you are, and what an amazing and powerful force mentoring is.

And when we are dealing with at-risk youth—youth who have been subjected to psychologically crippling trauma, have been held back by poverty or ineffective education—we know that trauma can derail normal development. But we also know that children are resilient, and their resilience is what we're trying to encourage in children by learning about trauma and learning about trauma-informed care.

It is for these reasons that OJJDP is invested in learning more about what works and what doesn't work in mentoring. Research indicates three things are critical: the length of the mentoring, the frequency, and the quality of the mentoring relationships. And to the extent that we can work to increase these and increase the quality of these, we expect better outcomes with mentoring. We're also finding, as you know, that there is no one-size-fits-all answer. Our mentoring programs are designed to address the special needs of youth, to include tribal youth, children with disabilities, and victims of child sex trafficking. Let me say that again, because we know that in America we just turned a corner on

victims of child sex trafficking. In past years—and I’m not talking about too far back—victims of child sex trafficking were being arrested and charged with prostitution. And I’m not talking about just girls but boys, as well. And we know we’ve turned a corner on that, thanks to a lot of work at the national level and throughout the nation that you all have been involved in to try and make sure that these victims—these victims of rape, to be very specific—are given the kind of mentoring, given the kind of programs that address the unique needs they have and help them heal.

Also, along with our partner, MENTOR, I am extremely proud to announce the unveiling of the OJJDP National Mentoring Resource Center. That deserves a round of applause. This is special. The center’s goal is to provide comprehensive resources and training materials that will enhance the capacity of mentoring organizations to develop, implement, and expand effective mentoring practices. The National Mentoring Resource Center has three components: an interactive website, a no-cost—let me say that again—no-cost specialized training and technical assistance for mentoring programs, and the National Mentoring Center Resource Board.

The website, located at nationalmentoringresourcecenter.org, features resources for the youth mentoring field, including a “What Works in Mentoring” section, targeted program and training materials, and a portal providing access to technical assistance. The resources and technical assistance align with the national standards for high-quality, evidence-based mentoring. Users of this website can also access, by request, free training and technical assistance to support the implementation of “Elements of Effective Practice for Mentoring.” This technical assistance resource allows practitioners to interact with other experienced counterparts and benefit from their guidance as they implement new or expand existing programs.

The Research Board, which is chaired by Dr. David Dubois of the University of Illinois at Chicago, conducts program evaluation reviews to determine their effectiveness using standards and protocols of the National Institute of Justice’s stellar Crimesolutions.gov site. The Resource Center also offers an array of material, including guidebooks and examples of evidence-based practices and programs. You’ll even find examples of programs that didn’t achieve exactly what they had anticipated. This is a useful tool for policymakers and practitioners when deciding which programs to recommend or implement, or for customizing a program to your own needs.

Now, I was with a mentoring program at my church and we were trying to get started for 2 years. All the basic things that you need to just get started, we didn’t know how to do. If we had had this resource center, we would have been able, in very short order, to find out what works and what doesn’t work, how to go about setting up a mentoring program, and then get on about our business of working

with kids. It took us 2 years to go through that process. So I'm hopeful that as you all share this resource, as you all work to share with your organizations and other organizations out there throughout the nation, that we will be able to expand to address the mentoring gap that we're all so aware of. So share the site with your colleagues and trainees. Help us share this so everybody gets to know what they can do with mentoring out there.

As I have indicated, OJJDP has long been committed to expanding and enhancing mentoring programs offered in communities throughout the United States. In fiscal year 2014 alone, we provided more than \$77 million to support state and national organizations that engage youth in mentoring and in positive activities that help connect youth with caring adults. We know that youth need mentoring, that people want to mentor, but the gap still persists. As was highlighted last year in the MENTOR and Civic Enterprise report, 1 in 3 young people will reach the age 19 without the benefit of a mentor. And that is an estimated 16 million youth that will reach adulthood without connecting with a mentor. We are diligently working with our partners to close that gap and expand mentoring opportunities. Just this past November, my office convened a roundtable attended by diverse stakeholders, including youth, social scientists, and representatives from the community-based programs and from the federal government. We asked the attendees how we can enhance the infrastructure to support, sustain, and expand mentoring programs. We were asked to help facilitate partnerships. My office and I are putting people together who can help complement each other's work, extend each other's program resources, and do a better job overall.

At this point, I'd be remiss if I did not mention the work being done by our partners. The NBA and MENTOR are collaborating to elevate mentoring and support President Obama's My Brother's Keeper initiative, with the goal of recruiting 25,000 mentors over a 5-year period. Let's give them a round of applause. This is a fantastic partnership, and we are so appreciative of the admirable work they are doing to address this critical shortfall. In closing, I'd like to leave you with this final message. Let's continue to share, shape, and strengthen quality mentoring during this summit, through the National Mentoring Resource Center, and by cultivating long-term, mutually beneficial partnerships. So I want to thank you again and ask you to have some fun while you're here, as my other colleagues who went before me spoke. Thank you very much.