Care Experienced Young People Programme

Mentoring Briefing

April 2015
Introduction

Care experienced young people tell us that, above all else, relationships matter to them. Research increasingly indicates that, for care experienced young people, having a consistent adult who is interested in them, holds them in mind and supports them through difficulties is a crucial step towards future healthy, interdependent relationships and adulthood.

Access to this consistent adult is particularly important for care experienced young people who may have had constant disruption, or difficult attachment and relationship histories in their young lives. These factors can make developing and sustaining healthy relationships particularly difficult.

The resurgent interest in relationship-based approaches within the context of social care is strongly endorsed in the Scottish Government’s ‘Staying Put Scotland’ document and other key policy and research documents (Ruch, 2010; Smith, 2009). Government reports regarding child protection (Munro, 2011), youth justice (Youth Justice Board, 2008), family support and preventative services (Ofsted, 2011), and residential and foster care (The Scottish Government, 2013), have recognised the important influence of positive relationships on the effectiveness of interventions.

Mentoring, as one approach to relationship-based practice, can be of significant and enduring value for care experienced young people, can make a profound difference to their cognitive and social-emotional development and, consequently, contribute to improved life chances.

“Within the caring role, the relationship is the intervention”
Fewster, 2004
1. Concepts and definition

There is no one universally agreed definition of mentoring. However, practice and research highlights that the mentoring relationship is ideally based on partnership, voluntary participation, and progressive empowerment, all happening in an informal and friendly atmosphere. Key to success is a non-judgemental attitude and unconditional support.

In terms of care experienced young people, it is helpful to note the definition of mentoring adopted by the Scottish Government Looked After Children Strategic Implementation Group (LACSIG) Mentoring Hub in 2013:

“a relationship-based approach to supporting an individual or group of individuals by another or others. It should include both goal-oriented and social aspects of mentoring, based on the intrinsic value of relationships and consent of the child or young person.”
(Developing a National Mentoring Scheme for Looked After Children and Young People, Elsley, 2013)

2. Research and rationale for mentoring

Evidence shows that mentoring has proliferated as an intervention strategy in recent years, addressing the need young people have for adult support and guidance. Overall findings support the effectiveness of mentoring for supporting young people’s behavioural, social, emotional and academic development.

For example, a meta-analysis of the findings of 55 evaluations on the impact of mentoring on young people (DuBois, Holloway, Valentine & Cooper, 2002), showed positive benefits across five outcome domains: emotional/ psychological; problem/high-risk behaviour; social competence; academic/educational; and career/employment. Programmes typically use adult volunteers and focus on cultivating one-to-one relationships, although older peers as mentors and group formats show comparable levels of effectiveness.
Findings point toward the flexibility and broad applicability of mentoring as an approach for supporting the positive development of young people.

While there is not a specific body of evidence relating to mentoring programmes targeting care experienced young people, there is evidence from mentoring programmes in Scotland, the UK and the USA (where mentoring of young people is particularly well-developed and evaluated) which is relevant.

**Summary of key research findings to date**

- Definite and robust international evidence-base now available on the positive impact of high quality mentoring for young people (DuBois, Portillo, Rhodes, Silvertorn, & Valentine, 2011).

- Mentoring programmes with specific goals (e.g. to improve educational achievement) are not necessarily more effective than programmes which simply offer young people the option of a mentor – the value comes most significantly from the relationship which develops.

- Evaluation of mentoring schemes for young people leaving care in the UK in 2005 (Clayden & Stein, 2005) showed benefits to both the young people who were matched with a mentor, and the mentors themselves – in terms of confidence, relationship skills and interest in working with young people.

- Programme practices are important, particularly in relation to recruitment, selection, training, matching and ongoing support of mentors (Jucovy & Garringer, 2007).

- Evidence shows that poor quality mentoring experiences are actually more damaging to young people than doing nothing – when matches break down or end in an unplanned way, young people feel let down. Programmes need to think very carefully about re-matching for a young person in this situation, as in fact it may do more harm than good (Spencer, 2007).
3. Guidance for mentoring programmes

Role of Scottish Mentoring Network
The Scottish Mentoring Network aims to provide a Scottish perspective on mentoring, and supports the development of good practice. It is a membership organisation which promotes understanding of mentoring approaches and encourages the adoption of the Scottish Mentoring Network Quality Standard. This standard supports mentoring programmes to achieve and evidence strong outcomes.

SMN offers a range of resources to members to support the set-up, development and evaluation of mentoring programmes. It also offers opportunities for members to collaborate in area-based and thematic networks.

Guidance from research
Renee Spencer, Ed.D, is an Associate Professor at the Boston University School of Social Work who has eight years of mentoring research experience, with the focus of her research being the relational processes that are at work in youth mentoring, and the factors that determine whether a mentoring match will be successful or unsuccessful. Having conducted her own primary research, collaborated with other researchers and reviewed the literature, she has identified ten key messages for those developing mentoring programmes, outlined in the summary below.
1. Mentoring is harder than we think
   - as many as 1 in 3 to 1 in 2 matches end early
   - often viewed as a "cheap" option or quick fix, when it is neither
   - evidence shows having a poor quality mentoring experience is worse than doing nothing

2. Mentoring is a real relationship
   - comes with all the usual relationship challenges
   - benefits tend to accrue over time - trust builds
   - proper goodbyes matter - early, unplanned endings are damaging

3. Quality matters
   - mentors must show up consistently
   - mentors need to be able to get alongside young people - collaborative approach
   - mentoring programmes offering matches of one year or longer are more effective

4. Fun matters
   - young people place high value on taking part in fun activities with their mentor
   - enjoying each other's company is key indicator of authentic relationship

5. We underestimate the power of small, consistent acts
   - sending a text or email, remembering about an exam or event
6. No mentoring relationship is an island
- important to be aware of the context
- mentoring is one support, not the only one

7. Programme practices matter
- recruitment and selection of mentors
- ongoing support & training
- discussing expectations - with mentor & young people
- engagement with family/carers
- planned endings

8. Not everyone is a good mentor
- some of us are better at relationships than others!
- mentors often have fixed expectations
- those who can adapt and adjust expectations do better
- need to have time, patience, interest, resilience
- it is a big ask - but it is important to be choosy

9. Good mentors are everywhere
- some programs now based on young people identifying adults who could mentor
- builds on idea of "natural" mentoring role
- family friends, sports coaches etc often play this role

10. Mentoring higher risk young people can be especially challenging
- can be more challenging to build trust
- mentors need to be prepared
4. Peer mentoring: definitions and evidence

Similarly to mentoring, there is no single, universally agreed definition of peer mentoring. However, there are common features which occur in the relevant literature (both research studies and reviews of specific projects and services). Peer mentoring can provide opportunities for one-to-one support in a relationship which is entirely voluntary on both sides (as with mentoring more generally). However, the added element is that both the mentor and the mentee will share one or more characteristics.

The Scottish Government (2012) report, Peer Mentoring Opportunities for Looked After Children, suggests that, in terms of peer mentoring for looked after children and care leavers:

- “The shared experience of being in care is the single most important factor in identifying the target groups offering support to and receiving support from their peers.”

- “Care Leavers believe that they could have benefitted from being supported by someone “who’s been there”, who had a “shared experience” which would have helped them understand and know “what we were going through” (Care Leavers and ex-Care Leavers).

The evidence on the impact of peer mentoring as a specific form of mentoring is less well-developed. There are currently very few peer mentoring schemes for care experienced young people in Scotland. However, as shown in the Scottish Government report referenced above, care experienced young people consistently tell us that they see peer mentoring as a valuable opportunity. This perception of the value of peer mentoring was also demonstrated in the report produced by the Venture Trust following intensive engagement with a small group of care experienced young people.

“The (Third) group described their aspirational world as one where all young people leaving care would have access to a peer mentor, someone who would walk beside them on their journey.” (Venture Trust, 2011)
Subsequent outreach activity by Trust staff during 2014 has provided anecdotal evidence of the interest in peer mentoring support. For example, at the Trust’s outreach event in Stirling in May 2014, a care experienced young person spoke of her experience of training to become a peer mentor in Argyll & Bute, and explained that the approach was being developed following requests from young people to be supported by someone “who understands what I’m going through”.

The Final Evaluation Report of the Greater London Authority “Near Peer Mentoring Project” (Rogers & Apps, 2013), also highlights another potential benefit of peer mentoring for care experienced young people – in this case the mentors were university students/graduates with care experience, and as such, were able to act as positive/aspirational role models.

5. Peer mentoring for care experienced young people

There are significant factors to consider when asking individuals to act as peer mentors due to the personal commitment and emotional investment a relationship can entail. For example, the potential issues that could stem from mentors who are themselves care experienced having past experiences triggered through undertaking a mentoring role and/or experiencing periods of instability in their own lives need to be taken into account.

The Mentoring for Looked After Children Dissemination Manual (Rainer, The Princes Trust & Mentoring and Befriending Foundation, 2008), provides guidance on specific elements to be considered when carrying out peer mentoring with care experienced young people. This manual was created following a national pilot in England. Peer mentoring programmes for care experienced young people may need to be designed flexibly so that mentors can be drawn from a wider pool, e.g. to include older care experienced mentors, mentors with experience of disadvantage and others.

As we have seen, the importance of careful selection, training, matching and ongoing support for mentors is important for any high quality mentoring scheme, and has particular resonance in the context outlined above.
6. Mentoring in Education: definitions and evidence

In 2012, less than 10% of adults living in our most deprived communities held degree level qualifications compared with 40% living in the most affluent areas. Almost 80% of ‘looked-after’ children left school at the minimum age, compared with less than a third of all children in Scotland.

The Trust sees mentoring which provides additional support to achieve educational goals as an important step towards bridging the educational attainment gap for care experienced young people, providing greater access to employment and improved quality of life. This mentoring approach is particularly relevant to the Care Experienced Young People programme, as evidence suggests that it is easier for school-based mentoring programmes to reach the most disadvantaged groups, due to teachers generally referring young people, as opposed to parents or primary carers (Herrera, 1999).

In general, mentoring within education involves an adult mentor and a young person (mentee) meeting for a session each week within school, at an allotted time during the day, or at the end of the school day (Karcher & Herrera, 2007). The mentoring sessions can be structured in different ways, and the focus on particular outcomes may also differ from programme to programme.

The general aim of this form of mentoring is to support the young person to build confidence, self-esteem and develop resilience, rather than focusing specifically on educational outcomes, although this may be indirectly affected by the mentoring relationship.

A number of advantages of mentoring in education have been reported, with research suggesting that the sessions taking place within the school context offer a unique environment and set of opportunities not available to other types of mentoring. For example, the school-based context provides the mentor with the potential to influence school based outcomes, which may even involve taking on the role of advocate for the young person, as well as a greater motivation for the young person to behave well and attend school (Herrera, 1999).
Additionally, the school setting allows for sessions to be appropriately supervised and structured, opening up a greater pool of mentors/mentees who feel more comfortable with this arrangement (Karcher, 2005).

Finally, another clear advantage of sessions taking place within a school setting is the availability of school resources and the potential to incorporate these into the mentoring relationship.

Recent research has evidenced the effectiveness of mentoring in education for young people, and positive effects have been reported in a range of factors, such as school performance, behaviour and relationships with peers (Karcher & Herrera, 2007).

In a study completed by Slicker and Palmer (1993) titled ‘Mentoring At-Risk High School Students: Evaluation of a School-Based Program’ the authors reported that 100% of young people who had been effectively mentored returned to school the following year, which can be compared to the control group (who received no mentoring) with a return rate of 74%, and a group who had been ineffectively mentored with a return rate of 69%.

This study highlights the importance of creating quality mentoring relationships, as well as the point previously mentioned - that ineffective mentoring relationships can be more damaging to young people than no mentoring at all. In this research, those who had been effectively mentored also reported greater levels of achievement than the group who had been ineffectively mentored (Slicker & Palmer, 1993).

**What makes an effective mentoring in education programme?**

A number of key characteristics for effective mentoring in education programmes have been identified. Importance is placed on the support available to mentors not only during training, but also ongoing support within the school. Herrera et al. (2007) stated that mentors who were in receipt of ongoing support reported feeling closer to their mentees, and were more likely to continue the mentoring relationship than those with less support.
In addition, an important factor in creating effective mentoring in education programmes is the opportunity for the young person to direct the activities undertaken in the sessions, as well as there being a focus on factors that the young person would like to make positive changes to. Moreover, activities that involve having fun and are of interest to the young person have been linked with creating longer matches and match satisfaction (Grossman & Rhodes, 2000).

One of the differences between school-based mentoring programmes and other forms of mentoring is that the summer holidays pose a unique barrier to the mentoring relationship. Due to the sessions being held predominantly within school grounds, summer holidays can become an extended period in which the mentoring relationship can be put on hold, or even stopped completely.

Research has found that the matches who did communicate over this period were more likely to continue the match into the following year, and reported greater improvements in the mentoring relationship than those matches that did not communicate over the summer period (Herrera, Grossman, Kauh, Feldman, & McMaken, 2007). The consensus is that contact within the summer months does not need to be one-to-one but can take other forms, for example group activities or providing mentor/mentee with ideas of activities that can be done over email/phone (Karcher & Herrera, 2007).

The final consideration for mentoring in education reported in the literature is the importance of terminating the match in an effective and sympathetic way. This is true of most mentoring relationships, and it has been suggested that ineffective terminations may be linked to the limited positive outcomes seen in short term matches (Karcher & Herrera, 2007).
7. Examples of existing mentoring practice for young people in Scotland

There are currently a number of youth mentoring services within Scotland, the majority of which recruit an adult volunteer to fulfil the position of mentor, with a young person as the mentee. Fewer organisations provide peer mentoring/support/education, and a small number of these specifically target care experienced children and young people.

The following summaries present examples of existing mentoring services within Scotland:

1. Move On

Move On offer a range of services directed at vulnerable young people, and those with experience of homelessness. They provide a number of programmes consistent with the mentoring approach. As part of their services, Move On offer a mentoring programme for 14-17 year olds currently in care who are enrolled at a Social Emotional Behavioural Difficulty School or for young people who are at a high risk of becoming disengaged from mainstream schools. The service aims to improve the outcomes for young people in their transition from being in care to adulthood, and prepare them for increased independence. The mentoring sessions offer young people the opportunity to do a range of activities that encourage positive self-image, increased self-esteem and confidence.

1.1 Looked After Young People and Care Leavers Peer Mentoring Service

This service combines a number of Move On services, such as the two detailed above, and further work they do with looked after young people and care leavers. The service is targeted at looked after young people aged between 15 and 18 years old, who are matched with a peer mentor aged between 18 and 25 years of age. The mentor is required to have experience of the care system and the match will continue for up to 18 months. Move On highlight that the mentor’s personal experience of the transition from care is an important factor in helping the mentee to manage their own transition.

1.2 Peer Education

The Peer Education employability service is targeted at young people aged between the ages of 16 and 26 who have in some way been affected by homelessness. The
service is administered through one to one mentoring and accessing volunteering opportunities – Move On trains young people to become ‘peer educators’ who then deliver workshops to peers on the topics of housing and homelessness.

The principal aim of the service is to allow young people a space to develop their softer skills, and progress on to accessing education, training and employment opportunities, as well as suitable accommodation. Move On allows young people to join the service at any time after an initial interview with staff, allowing a great deal of flexibility for young people.

2. MCR Pathways case study

MCR Pathways is an educational mentoring initiative, developed in the East End of Glasgow, which aims to transform the education, learning and career outcomes of disadvantaged young people – including care experienced young people - by providing secondary school-based mentoring that empowers and supports young people’s talents and overcomes the kinds of constraints that stop them from realising their full potential.

The current initiative has been developed in partnership with local secondary schools, the MCR Foundation (a private trust, which to date has provided most of the dedicated funding), Glasgow City Council Education Department, Strathclyde University, and CELCIS.

Starting in 2008, MCR Pathways has developed an effective model in partnership with one East End Glasgow School, which significantly improved attendance, attainment and achievement for participating young people, including an increase in the number of looked after young people staying on at school after they are 16 and into 5th year. The school was subsequently recognised as outstanding by the inspectorate and received a Scottish Education Award.

MCR Pathways has now been rolled out to 6 schools in the East End of Glasgow and initial evaluation is very positive. The partnership wish to roll out to 10 schools in the East End of Glasgow during 2015/16, and would like to secure funds to support Glasgow-wide roll out thereafter.

The initiative is committed to developing tools and guidance to support future roll out in any local authority area/school in Scotland (and more widely should there be interest.)

3. The Rock Trust

The Rock Trust provide a number of services targeted at young people between the ages of 16 and 25 who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless, within Edinburgh and the Lothians. The young people that they work with often include
those who are transitioning, leaving care or home, and those involved in offending, or substance misuse.

The Trust provides a number of services, such as a drop-in centre, a weekday service for those in housing crisis, group work, mediation and mentoring, all of which are reinforced by one to one work with key workers

3.1 Compass Project

The aim of the Compass Project is to provide support on four key issues: housing; finance; entering employment, education or training; and personal/social skills to support the individual to develop and sustain positive relationships.

The mentoring service is specifically designed to support young people to develop social skills and build relationships. The Rock Trust highlight the importance of making the right match and how this can be valuable in providing an exemplar relationship for working through any personal issues, building self-esteem and increasing confidence.

4. West Dunbartonshire Council

The Council currently runs a youth mentoring service that links an adult mentor with a young person aged 15 and over. The mentoring service is available to Looked After and Accommodated Young People, young people at risk of offending, and young people who have been identified as requiring additional support.

The service currently has 40 mentors working with approximately 50 young people within the community. In addition to the service aiming to help young people develop a positive self-image and increased self-esteem, it is also designed to reduce the sense of isolation and dependence young people may have on paid workers.
References


