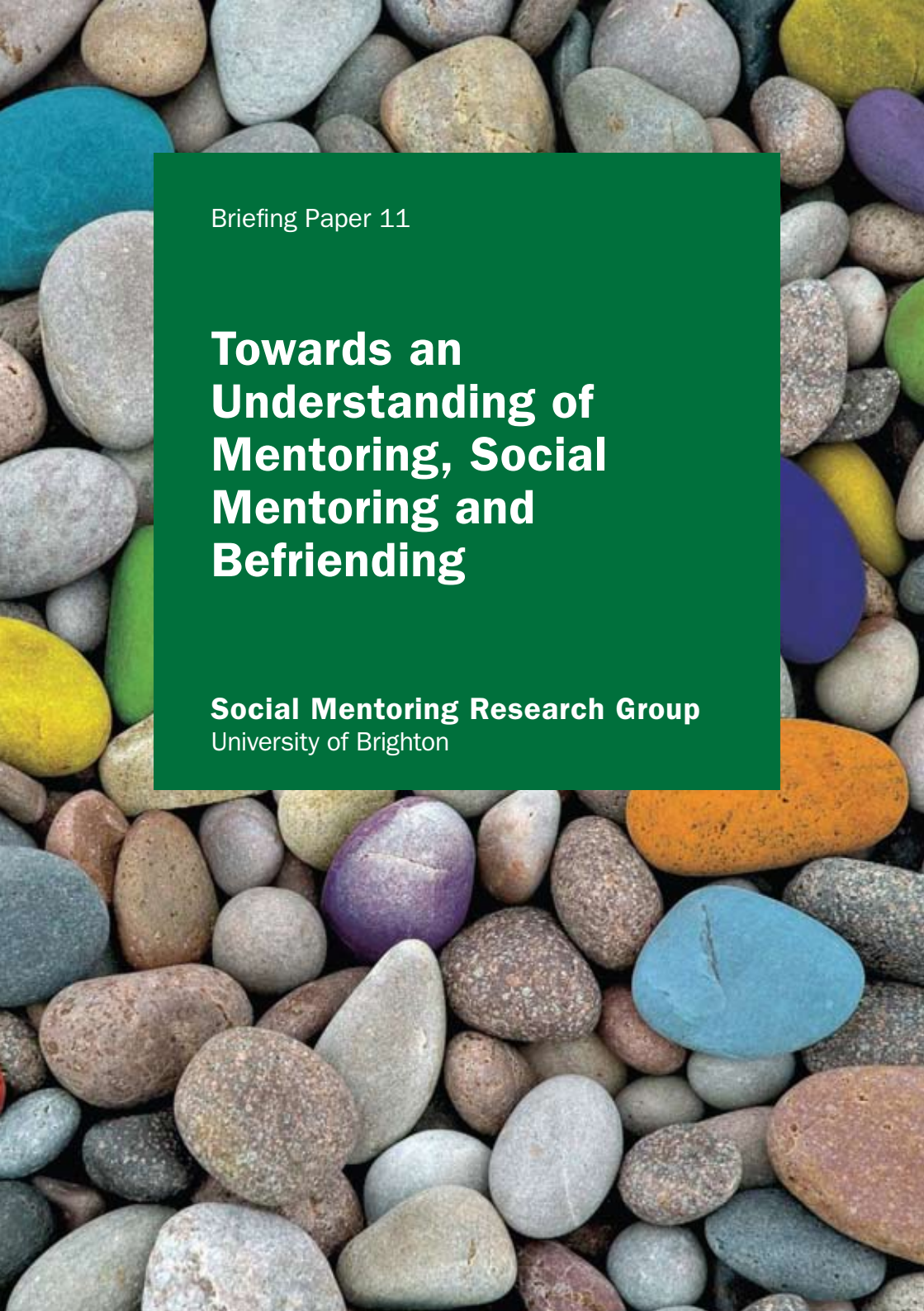

Briefing Paper 11

Towards an Understanding of Mentoring, Social Mentoring and Befriending

Social Mentoring Research Group
University of Brighton

The Equal funding stream is part of the European Union's 'Lisbon Strategy' to deliver more and better jobs and for ensuring that no one is denied access to them. The initiative tests and promotes new means of combating forms of discrimination and inequalities in the labour market and for those seeking work. It acts as a test-bed for the European Social Fund as a whole.

Equal Brighton & Hove is a city-wide initiative that supports adults into training and employment by providing Equal funding to over 35 projects delivered by a partnership of more than 50 organisations. The projects work with 11 identified target groups that experience difficulties accessing conventional routes to learning and work, offering them a range of services, from training and qualifications, to work placements and information advice and guidance. The overall aim of Equal Brighton & Hove is to increase the employability of disadvantaged local people and to break down the barriers they face to employment, and to provide a skilled labour pool for employers within the city.

The final phase of the Equal Brighton & Hove programme, Action 3, builds on the research expertise amongst the University of Brighton and the University of Sussex, and the key messages identified by the Equal Core Team. It aims to identify good practice in local projects and partnerships, to disseminate this as widely as possible, and to mainstream these approaches to influence strategy, policy and practice locally, regionally, nationally and across the EU.

Introduction and Background

This inquiry into social mentoring arose from the results of a pilot project called 'Navigating Health in the Community, (NHIC) initiated in 2003 to investigate the gaps and opportunities in the Brighton & Hove area for mentoring services for people with Asperger's syndrome. This project was initiated by a local campaigning group called Assert and was sponsored by the University of Brighton/ Community University Partnership Project (CUPP) and based within the Institute of Postgraduate Medicine. This initiative culminated in four related developments:

- A report prepared by Jones (2004) and edited by Gill (2005) which confirmed the gap in support services for individuals with Asperger's syndrome and noted the rich diversity of mentoring activities; identified the need to clarify the concept of social mentoring and identify the scope of such activities in the field.

- A social mentoring project called ASpire, www.aspire.bhci.org was set up under the Brighton & Hove Community Initiatives programme to provide mentoring support for young people and adults with Asperger's syndrome to assist, among other things, with retention and progression within education, training and employment programmes.

- In 2005, a Social Mentoring Network was established at the University of Brighton and a programme of regular seminars was organised to bring together academics, managers and practitioners from a range of local voluntary sector mentoring agencies to share experiences, promote understanding of the nature of mentoring activities, identify and encourage best practice.

- In 2006, funding was secured through Brighton & Hove Action 3 and the Social Mentoring Network organising group formed the nucleus of a Social Mentoring Research Group (SMRG). This group's composition mirrored the earlier NHIC partnership but was broadened and strengthened by the addition of representatives from the School of Nursing and Midwifery (UoB), University of Sussex, South East Region Mentoring and Befriending Foundation and a representative number of Action 2 voluntary sector mentoring projects.

The broad aims of the Social Mentoring Research Group were to examine the benefits of mentoring for young and older adults, share learning, identify examples of innovative practice and disseminate this knowledge to a local and national audience.

Methodology

An electronic search was conducted to ascertain the scope of mentoring, social mentoring and befriending as reflected in the published literature. A search using CSA Social Sciences search engine revealed an unexpected picture. Using mentoring, social mentoring and befriending as search terms, mentoring yielded 734 hits; social mentoring 0; and befriending 37 hits. This was supplemented by a hand search and review of a selected range of published texts on mentoring within the past 10 years. It was also coupled with a review of notes and minutes developed from the two-year social mentoring network programme seminar presentations, and from the discussion themes which emerged from one local and one national social mentoring conference.

Key Findings

A rationale for mentoring practice

The growing awareness and rationale for the value of mentorship and its role in effecting positive outcomes in people's lives arose initially from a longtitudinal research study in the field of public health. Werner and Smith (1982) researching the first 18 years of a cohort of young people from poor multi-ethnic families in Hawaii, identified 21 major risk factors rendering them vulnerable to negative/maladaptive outcomes such as mental ill health, delinquency and long-term unemployment.

However, despite a high loading with risk factors, this vulnerability did not, as might have been expected, deterministically translate into negative outcomes in all cases of the 'at risk' cohort. The researchers discovered that two-thirds of the cohort, despite their high degree of vulnerability and against the odds, exhibited sufficient resilience to achieve successful outcomes as mature, healthy, well-adjusted individuals in their community.

Whilst the researchers identified a range of positive factors, one crucial factor stood out. The individual's relationship with a 'significant other' appeared to increase resistance to stress, conferred a level of protection and promoted a degree of resilience. The young people in question demonstrated an ability to identify, seek out and gain support from informal mentors either from within their peer group, immediate or extended family, neighbourhood and community. Similar patterns and effects have been identified elsewhere, Rhodes et al (1992), Rhodes (1994), Katz (1997).

The scope of practice

For the past two decades mentoring projects have expanded in the USA, UK and in many other developed countries on an impressive scale. Mentoring has emerged as a key policy intervention in responding to the needs of a diverse range of individuals and social groups across a wide range of policy contexts, from business enterprise; primary, secondary, tertiary and professional education; health and social care; community development; vocational training and employment. It engages and benefits individuals throughout most stages of the human life cycle ranging from children of school-going age to adults in the post-retirement stage of life.

Mentoring: a question of definition

The term 'mentoring' defies precise definition and is open to a broad range of interpretations. It appears to be one of those concepts which is sufficiently elastic so enabling it to be defined broadly or narrowly as is required. Part of the difficulty in defining the term is that mentoring activities operate across a wide range of contexts, are geared to the needs of a diverse range of beneficiaries and generates a wide range of operational models reflecting a diverse range of functions. Historically the literature which has attempted to define mentoring and its variants appears to have come from the fields of business, education, health and social care. For some examples from business, see Alleman (1986), Murphy (1986), Zey (1984), and Phillips-Jones, (1982); from education, see Klopf and Harrison (1981), Dalz (1983) and Anderson and Shannon (1987). For examples from the health and social care field see the Scottish Befriending Development Forum (1998) and Russell, Dexter and Bond (1992).

Towards a clarification of the term 'Social Mentoring'
Since our literature review identified a preponderance of the use of the term mentor (734) over the term social mentoring (0) with befriending registering a significant presence (37), we have attempted to explore the relationship between the term social mentoring, mentoring and befriending. According to Colley (2003) there are four broad categories to which mentoring activities may be allocated; Industrial; Learning; Engagement and Positive Action mentoring. Whilst mentoring is predominantly operationalised within education, employment and vocational training, Colley suggests befriending is a looser version of mentoring which operates in the field of health and social care.

The first two, Industrial and Learning mentoring are characterised by their focus on recruiting positive role models to motivate and inspire targeted individuals to greater achievement or to strengthen and enhance their learning experiences and outcomes. The focus is predominantly on learning enhancement and career progression and these approaches have become an integral element in business/ commercial organisations; primary, secondary and tertiary education; pre- and post-vocational training and employment; initial/continuing professional education and in teacher training.

The second two, Engagement and Positive Action mentoring, target individuals from minority or socially disadvantaged groups who are in danger of becoming, or, are already in a marginalised position in society. The focus is on empowering individuals through the mentoring relationship to effect a shift of status from a position of social and/or economic exclusion to inclusion in the mainstream.

In her critical review of Engagement Mentoring Colley (2003) describes befriending as a much looser form of mentoring and we view it as a close relative of the latter two categories as it also seeks to target vulnerable and disadvantaged groups such as individuals with mental health problems or physical disabilities to effect a *change in social status* from exclusion to inclusion. Our view is that Engagement, Positive action mentoring and Befriending are examples of 'social mentoring' whereby the preceeding term 'social' in the title highlights and emphasizes the 'social action' function, which seeks to *bring about a change in social status*, from social exclusion to inclusion in

mainstream society. Social mentoring may therefore be viewed as a broad umbrella term spanning and subsuming the latter three.

The common ground

A feature common to both mentoring and befriending is that the mechanism of engagement is based on a one-to-one attachment relationship where two people come together to form a bond. The mentee brings to the relationship a set of expectations that particular needs may be met and the volunteer mentor brings to it a desire to meet the mentee's expressed needs. They go on to develop a person-centred, confiding relationship in an atmosphere of positive regard.

The mentor/mentee relationship does not however, operate in isolation and operates within the framework of an organisation. Typically, organisations in this complex field of practice have developed a common approach and model for practice known as a volunteer linkage strategy, (Froland et al 1981). This approach is characterised by the creation of an organisational structure which facilitates the recruitment, preparation/training and matching and ongoing support of motivated volunteers with targeted individuals. This organisational framework should ideally, have sufficient coherence and integrity to provide shape and direction but paradoxically, be sufficiently informal so as to facilitate and promote the establishment, development, and enhancement of customised confiding relationships at the mentor/mentee interface over a specified period of time.

Colley (2003) suggests that mentoring organisations may be located along a continuum based on the formality or informality of their organisational structures with those at the extreme formal end of the spectrum tending to be more directive and prescriptive with the attendant risk that their instrumental function (reflected in prescribed hard outcomes and organisational targets) may dominate the practice culture. 'Social mentoring' organisations on the other hand are more often located along the informal end of the spectrum tending to be more informal, open ended and less directive. Organisations at this end of the spectrum are more likely to value and emphasize the importance of the expressive function (to enhance the individual's level of self-esteem, bolster self-confidence, strengthen identity and promote a positive sense of well being) and less likely to be dominated by

concerns regarding prescribed outcomes and organisational targets.

Conclusions

It seems reasonable to conclude that despite the complexities involved in defining the terms used in this field of practice and given the diverse range of activities which it represents, the term social mentoring emphasizes the social in relation to the mentoring role. It highlights the 'social action' component of mentoring which attempts to impact on the social status of the individual and is often focused around the empowerment of vulnerable and/or disadvantaged groups in society.

This is to distinguish it from industrial and learning mentoring activities which take place in businesses, educational and professional programmes and which provides learning and career enhancement for a target group with very different needs. Social mentoring has most relevance in resource depleted contexts whereas mentoring by comparison operates most commonly in resource adequate or rich contexts. Befriending as the looser form of social mentoring is located at the extreme end of the social mentoring spectrum where it operates most effectively in promoting a sense of personal and social well-being thereby improving the quality of life for vulnerable individuals.

The challenge for welfare entrepreneurs in the case of social mentoring is to replicate these naturally occurring supportive relationship bonds within artificially contrived relationship networks which are often policy determined, centrally funded but locally organised through organisational systems, so as to reproduce faithfully the optimal benefits of informal mentor relationships. This is to ensure their availability to individuals who for a variety of reasons, may not be able to identify, actively seek out, establish and sustain such gift relationships unaided. The challenge for administrators in more formal institutional settings where mentoring is an add-on enhancement element of organisations is to promote and preserve the person-centred quality of the attachment relationship by ensuring that it does not become subservient to and displaced by organisationally driven bureacratic processes and agendas.

Recommendations

Whilst a balance between formal structure and informality is necessary, the literature on good practice suggests that to preserve and reproduce the optimum benefits to the individual of the mentoring attachment relationship, organisational frameworks for mentoring activities should as far as possible tend towards the informal end. Below is a selected list of good practice indicators which apply.

As far as possible *commissioners of services* should strive to:

- ensure that policy prescriptions are formulated in broad terms, leaving operational detail to the provider organisation
- ensure that provider organisations have a fair degree of autonomy, sufficient room for manoeuvre and interpretation of their brief
- ensure that qualitative evidence relating to soft processes and outcomes have equal value and status alongside hard data in any prescribed evaluation strategy.

As far as is possible *provider organizations* should strive to ensure that:

- they promote intentionality and voluntarism in relation to the mentor and mentee relationship
- they encourage practice which is person-centred rather than organisation centred
- the locus of decisions about goals are internal to the mentor/ mentee relationship
- the time frame is boundaried but flexible and open to negotiation
- the voluntary mentor/mentee relationship should, over time, be permitted to develop into natural social relationships
- evaluation should be on the basis of the beneficiary and mentor's perceptions and judgments
- soft processes and outcomes should be valued above hard (bureaucratic) processes and outcomes
- regular support and supervision for the mentor should provide space for critical reflection on the vicissitudes of the mentor/mentee relationship.

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Additional information

This paper is one in a series of Briefing Papers produced by University of Brighton researchers as follows:

Briefing Papers

Sharp, G., Tolley, J. and Watson, J. (2007) *Pre-apprenticeship and Pre-work Training for Re-engaging 16-25 year olds not in Employment, Education or Training*

Sharp, G., Tolley, J. and Watson, J. (2007) *Employer Engagement in practice: a case study*

Tolley, J. (2007) *Our First Footings: Participatory action research and pre-apprenticeship training*

Social Mentoring Research Group (2007) *Towards an Understanding of Mentoring, Social Mentoring and Befriending*

To accompany the first three papers listed above a 7-minute DVD is also available to organisations working in education, training and/or social inclusion. Entitled *Our First Footings* the DVD outlines young people's experiences of pre-apprenticeship and pre-work training

These papers are part of a series relating to the Equal Brighton & Hove Development Partnership that also includes briefing papers written by the Centre for Continuing Education at the University of Sussex on *Corporate Social Responsibility; Partnership Practices; Employer Engagement; Innovation; Empowerment; Diversity and Barriers to Employment.*

Please see details overleaf of how to obtain copies of any of these reports and papers.

This briefing paper was published by the Community University Partnership Programme at the University of Brighton.

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Community University Partnership Programme
University of Brighton
Room 229, Mayfield House
Falmer
Brighton
BN1 9PH
UK
T +44 (0)1273 643004
F +44 (0)1273 643496
E cupp@brighton.ac.uk
www.cupp.org.uk

For information about the Equal Brighton & Hove Development Partnership, please see

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