

Induction Training Programme for Volunteer Mentors

The Scottish Care Leavers Mentoring Project

Background to the Induction Training Programme

The Scottish Care Leavers Mentoring Project was funded by the Scottish Executive between 2002 and 2005 and hosted by the Fostering Network. Its task was to set up pilot volunteer mentoring projects in partnership with local authorities and voluntary organisations and to evaluate their impact. Conclusions have been drawn from this process about what constitutes good practice in using mentors recruited from the general public as a complement to existing forms of support for young people making, planning to make, or who have made the transition from being “looked after” by the local authority back into their community.

In our experience, mentors are able to complement other supports available to young people because of their perceived independence from Social Work Services and the fact that they devote their own time to the role. Mentees benefit from making links with role models from their own community, as it assists them to develop their personal identity, skills, knowledge, ability and talents within a safe, supportive relationship.

However, while we sought to encourage a broad range of people from the local community to become mentors, it was not appropriate to immediately allow them to work with a young person. Mentoring vulnerable young people on a one-to-one basis, within community settings, is a highly skilled task. We have a “duty of care” to ensure that the experience is as safe and positive as possible for both mentor and young person.

This responsibility was fulfilled, in part, through the provision of high quality induction training for mentors prior to matching them with a young person.

We worked from the assumption that almost everyone has experience of being a mentor and of being mentored by others. Mentoring usually occurs in an informal, organic, way and is not likely to have been labeled by participants as “mentoring”. The task therefore was to connect people with the experience while placing it in a more structured, boundaried context.

This we achieved by offering people opportunities for personal development and increased self awareness - helping them to uncover their existing values, attitudes, beliefs, skills, knowledge, abilities and talents and relating these to the task we required them to undertake. At the same time we were able to assess their suitability for the role and ensure that they were adequately equipped to undertake the work.

The programme was run 7 times and completed by 74 members of the public with a motivation to mentor young people. The average satisfaction level with the course content and style of delivery was 95%.

The programme itself:

Although developed for work with “looked after” young people, the programme covers all the key areas for community based mentoring schemes and can be re-focused for work with other groups.

The roots of the programme can be traced back to the Mentor Training Pack produced by the Edinburgh Homeless Project. We sought to update the pack and supplemented it with materials from a variety of other sources. The most important change was that we re-structured the material with the explicit aim of maximising the opportunity for personal development for participants. In doing this we hoped to mirror in the induction process many of the features of a mentoring relationship - in an experiential way.

Given that the materials in the training programme had been drawn from a variety of sources and that we would not claim it to be completely original we have, wherever possible, attributed our sources, although some of the material is hard to attribute as it is used widely.

The support, guidance and feedback we have received from others has reinforced our desire to make the programme that we have developed freely available to others. It has evolved constantly as a result of feedback from course participants and ideas provided by colleagues. We encourage you to customise, develop and improve it as time goes on.

Style of training -

Although the word training has been used, the principles of adult education underpin a facilitative style of delivery. Our job was to facilitate active and self-directed learning by the participants, enabling them to take more responsibility for what they learned and how they learned it and for assessing what they have learned/gained from the experience.

Discussions and inputs centred on the experiences and perceptions of participants and started from an assumption that all the knowledge and skill required to be an effective mentor already existed within the group. The role of the facilitators was to create opportunities for the information to emerge and then be discussed in the light of the particular context in which the mentoring would be taking place.

Content -

The programme contains 30 hours of material divided into 10 sessions. Each session is between 2 hours 45 minutes and 3 hours 15 minutes long.

The programme can be delivered over 5 full days (2 sessions per day) or 10 half days/evenings. If using half days/evenings then we have found it useful to start the course with a full day as this allows for better group bonding.

Delivering the training -

In our experience the programme works best with 8-12 participants. We have run it with as few as 6 and as many as 16. More than 12 participants can make it harder to assess the suitability of individuals. Less than 8 can affect the viability of the group if some participants are unable to make it to a particular session.

We recommend that there be 2 facilitators at all times. This allows for a greater focus on group process and the engagement level of individual participants, as well as programme content.

We worked to the guideline that participants had to be able to attend at least 8 out of the 10 sessions. This was based on the premise that much of the learning on the course was from fellow participants. It also reflected the time demand on facilitators/programme co-ordinators of meeting people individually. Catch up sessions were organised for people unable to attend a particular session or day.

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