Lean on me

New
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Mentoring for young people at risk
A guide for donors and funders

Commissioned by

The Pears Foundation

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Executive summary

What is mentoring?

Mentoring is the support of one individual by another within a relationship developed through regular contact over a period of time, in order to achieve a stated objective. The mentor is the individual who offers support, advice and encouragement. The mentee is the individual who receives the support, often a younger or more vulnerable person facing a period of difficulty.

Mentoring takes a number of forms. Traditionally, mentoring describes the relationship between an adult and a younger, more vulnerable person. Recent innovations have introduced new forms of mentoring. 'Peer mentoring' describes a young person providing support to another young person, often in their school. 'E-mentoring' describes support given through email and chat across the internet.

Who can mentoring help?

All young people need caring adults in their lives. Mentoring is thought to benefit young people through raising educational participation and performance, improving behaviour and coping skills, and increasing their ability to form successful relationships. Mentoring can have a beneficial effect on young people in disadvantaged situations, such as young people growing up in poverty, with difficult family situations, or with behavioural difficulties.

Does mentoring work?

Mentoring has a small but significant effect on the lives of young people. There is good evidence to support traditional mentoring but much less evidence to judge the effectiveness of peer mentoring or e-mentoring schemes.

Mentoring can be successful at engaging young people in education, employment and training; reducing anger and violence; and improving confidence and self-esteem. The effect of mentoring on reducing offending, increasing engagement in the community and improving academic performance is less well-established.

Taken as a whole, there is positive evidence of the benefits of mentoring, although compared to other charitable activities the quantity and quality of research is weak. Among the small number of studies, some show statistically significant results but others show that mentoring has little or no measurable effect. The overall impression is that mentoring does benefit young people but the effect is small. However, mentoring schemes complain that they find it difficult to demonstrate the effects of their work. Many benefits are intangible and do not lend themselves to straightforward measurement.

In contrast, the anecdotal evidence is very strong. In many cases, it is clear that mentoring has had a dramatic and transformative effect on young people's lives.

Despite relying on volunteers, mentoring is a relatively expensive activity. In some cases however, it is the only real way to reach the most disadvantaged children. This means that good mentoring schemes are a worthwhile investment for donors.

What makes mentoring successful?

Investment in training and support is a key part of good mentoring schemes. Regular contact between mentor and mentee over a sustained period of time is also important for a successful relationship. Good mentor selection, work with families and structured activities for young people and mentors are important too.

Mentoring can do harm as well as good. Short relationships can be disruptive for the young person and lead to a deterioration in behaviour.

To date, there has been limited research into why mentoring relationships may break down and the impact that this has on the young people involved.

Recommendations for donors and funders

Mentoring does not fundamentally change the circumstances in which young people live, but by providing a listening ear and a role model, it helps them to cope better with the challenges that they face. Traditional mentoring can improve engagement in education, employment and training, tackle anger and violence and reduce drug use. Peer mentoring may reduce bullying, improve attainment and integrate pupils better into school life. E-mentoring can provide young people with valuable guidance about their futures.

NPC recommends that donors and funders support traditional mentoring schemes which meet the criteria for what makes a successful mentoring scheme given in this report. The Mentoring and Befriending Foundation's Approved Provider Standard is a good indicator that charities are following at least some of these principles.

Traditional mentoring can be expensive, costing between £2,000 and £5,000 per year. But it can make a significant difference to the lives of young people at risk, where conventional services fail to reach them.

Contents

Introduction

Mentoring is an ancient concept. The word has its origins in Homer's Odyssey, in which a character called Mentor became the guardian and adviser of Telemachus, while his father Odysseus was fighting in the Trojan War.

Mentoring has since evolved into a structured way of supporting people. This report explores mentoring and its benefits for young people at risk. It begins by looking at one young person's experience.

Catherine's story

Catherine is a pupil at college in Merseyside. When she was younger, she struggled to deal with very difficult home circumstances and her behaviour was self destructive. Here she describes her own experiences of mentoring and being mentored.[9]

'In Year 8 and 9, I was a bit of a rebel. I didn't care about anyone but myself and I started to get into trouble at school and at home. I was hanging around and drinking. Coming home late—the usual stuff.

… Being mentored has helped me in so many different ways … It influences your everyday life and it affects how you socialise with your family and friends … We also looked at how I behaved in certain situations and how I could change.

… I did really well in my GCSEs and I am going to do three A levels and then study psychology at university. If someone had told me when I was thirteen years old that is what I would end up doing, I would never have believed them.

… I am definitely staying involved in the mentoring programme … If I can get just one young person to turn their life around as I did, then it will be worth it.'

The purpose of this report

Catherine's story shows that mentoring can have a significant impact on young people's lives. But does it work for every young person? What impact does it have on their educational performance, their relationships and their behaviour? What factors influence its success?

This report is a guide for donors and funders seeking to answer such questions. It is aimed at all types of donors—from experienced grant-makers to funders just beginning to explore the area—who are seeking to maximise the impact of their giving.

The report examines the evidence-base for mentoring young people. It makes recommendations to donors considering funding mentoring and highlights characteristics of successful schemes.

The structure of this report

This report begins by asking 'what is mentoring?' It discusses three approaches: traditional mentoring, peer mentoring and e-mentoring.

The second section looks at who mentoring can most help.

The third section looks at the evidence to support mentoring. What is its effect on education, behaviour and relationships?

The fourth section discusses what the evidence tells us about which schemes are most successful and what to look for in a good mentoring project.

The report concludes with recommendations for donors and funders wishing to support mentoring approaches.

Throughout the report, the discussion is illustrated with examples.

Mentoring helped Catherine improve her relationships and achieve more at school. Her experiences have helped her to encourage other young people who are struggling.

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Mentoring takes a number of forms. Traditionally, mentoring describes the relationship between an adult and a younger, more vulnerable person. Recent innovations have introduced new forms of mentoring. 'Peer mentoring' is a young person providing support to another young person, often in their school. 'E-mentoring' is support given through email and secure internet sites.

Mentoring has three key characteristics. These are:

Mentoring is goal-orientated: the relationship is established to achieve specific objectives, for example improving behaviour or attendance at school.

Mentoring is time-limited: the relationship is usually established with a definite beginning and end.

Mentoring involves regular, informal contact: mentoring is founded on regular meetings in an informal venue. The mentor and mentee gradually establish mutual understanding and trust.

Allied to the concept of mentoring, is 'befriending'. Whereas mentoring is a relationship with stated objectives, befriending implies a less formal relationship. Befrienders may focus more on offering support and creating empathy, whilst mentoring has a greater emphasis on achieving stated goals.

Mentoring and befriending are similar in many ways: both are non-judgemental, with the mentor or befriender focusing on the issues affecting the mentee.[11] Figure 1 summarises the distinction between the two approaches.

This report focuses on work at the mentoring end of the spectrum. This is because the evidence base is more developed: the goal-setting aspect of mentoring means that it more easily lends itself to evaluation. This is not to say that befriending is a less effective intervention. In certain circumstances, for example where there is need for a very delicate approach without the pressure of meeting goals, befriending may be more appropriate. However, there is less research about what it achieves.

Additionally, during NPC's research, experts expressed the view that having definite objectives helps maintain focus on improving mentees' lives. Another advantage is that mentoring has a defined endpoint. This helps maintain the focus on achieving goals and reduces the risk of the young person becoming dependent on their mentor.

These attributes make mentoring a more compelling choice for donors who want to be confident that their donation is achieving benefits for young people.
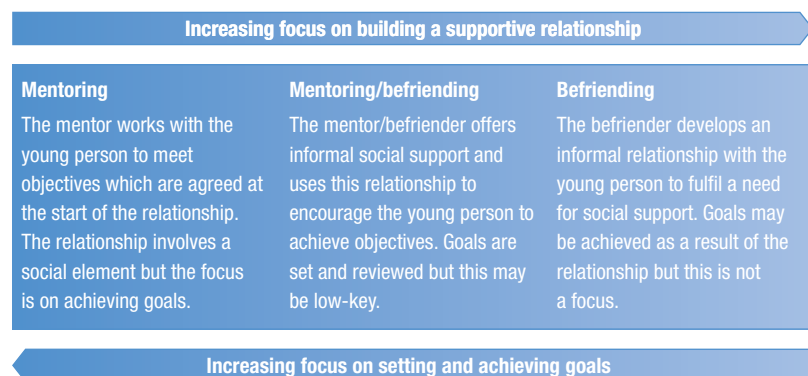
Traditional mentoring

Traditional mentoring describes a relationship between an adult and a younger, more vulnerable person. Mentors are often, but not always, volunteers.[8]

Mentoring schemes are run by charities and by statutory organisations, such as social services. They typically involve a process of selecting, training and matching volunteer mentors with disadvantaged children. Mentors come from all walks of life. They may be students or retired people, professionals or housewives. They may have been through similar experiences to their mentees or have led an entirely different life.

Mentees are selected on the basis of their potential to benefit. They may be referred to mentoring schemes by teachers or social services, or be selected because they meet certain criteria, such as displaying problem behaviour, under-achieving at school or having a difficult family situation. Although their circumstances and behaviour may be challenging, academics and practitioners are keen to emphasise that these young people often have considerable strengths but need support to fulfil their potential.[8]

Figure 1: The mentoring-befriending spectrum

Increasing focus on building a supportive relationship		
Mentoring The mentor works with the young person to meet objectives which are agreed at the start of the relationship. The relationship involves a social element but the focus is on achieving goals.	**Mentoring/befriending** The mentor/befriender offers informal social support and uses this relationship to encourage the young person to achieve objectives. Goals are set and reviewed but this may be low-key.	**Befriending** The befriender develops an informal relationship with the young person to fulfil a need for social support. Goals may be achieved as a result of the relationship but this is not a focus.
Increasing focus on setting and achieving goals		

Mentors and mentees establish the terms of the relationship in their early meetings and agree a number of specific goals. Mentors and mentees meet regularly, perhaps once or twice a week in an informal setting. Child safety is an important consideration and all mentors must be interviewed and Criminal Records Bureau checked.

An example of a traditional mentoring scheme is given in Box 1.

Peer mentoring

Peer mentoring schemes operate in much the same way as traditional mentoring schemes, except that the relationship is between two people of the same or similar age. Mentors go through an interview process and receive training.

There are two key differences between peer mentoring and traditional forms of mentoring. First, the benefits for the mentors may be as great as for the mentees.[4] Peer mentors may have a background of behavioural problems or under-achievement. Such young people might be selected as mentors as the responsibility can have a positive impact on their behaviour.

In some cases, peer mentors may introduce mentees to their own friendship groups, or encourage people from the mentee's year group to befriend them. However, this may not always be appropriate.[3, 9] In contrast, with traditional mentoring, mentors may reveal little about their own lives and do not share social networks with their mentees.

Peer mentoring often takes place in schools. An example of a peer mentoring scheme is given in Box 1.

E-mentoring

E-mentoring takes place over the internet. It involves two people engaging in conversation by email or through a secure and monitored internet site. E-mentoring is often a relationship established on specific goals rather than the whole of the mentee's life. For example, e-mentoring has been used to put potential applicants to university in contact with current students, helping them to understand better the demands of study.

Unlike face-to-face mentoring, the relationship can be developed across any geographical location and mentor and mentee may never meet. In remote rural areas, e-mentoring may be the only feasible option.

E-mentoring may also be used as part of hybrid schemes, alongside traditional or peer mentoring. Other variants include telephone and SMS-based mentoring.

An example of e-mentoring is given in Box 1.

Table 1 sets out some of the key characteristics of mentoring schemes.

> In peer mentoring schemes, benefits for the mentors may be as great as for the mentees.

Table 1: Characteristics of mentoring schemes

	Traditional mentoring	Peer mentoring	E-mentoring
Mentor-mentee relationship	Between adult and young person	Between two young people of similar age	Varies
Location	In safe environment: eg, café, community centre, school or mentee's home (if risk assessed)	In school or another safe environment	Over the internet
Time period	Often a year or more, rather than for the whole of the mentee's life	Typically one school year	Relationships may be long-lasting or last only a few days or weeks
Evidence of success	Good evidence base	Evidence base less developed	Evidence base undeveloped
Example of a charity that uses mentoring	Chance UK	Weston Spirit	Community Service Volunteers' e-mentoring scheme

Box 1: Examples of mentoring and befriending schemes

Traditional mentoring: Chance UK

Chance UK is a charity that provides a structured, year-long mentoring programme for children at risk of developing criminal behaviour in the London Boroughs of Hackney and Islington. One third of the children it works with have been excluded from school and a quarter come from households involved in crime. It supports 100 children between the ages of 5 and 11.

Chance UK trains and matches the volunteer mentors with children. After a year, measurable benefits to children include a reduction in emotional and behavioural problems and antisocial tendencies. Chance UK records these effects using a tool called the Goodman's Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). A score of 16 or above on the SDQ indicates that a child has behavioural difficulties. Every child that starts the programme has a score greater than 16. In 2005, Chance UK's internal evaluation showed that after one year, 45% showed a reduction to under 16 and 25% had reduced their score by 11 or more points.[6]

Peer mentoring: Weston Spirit/02 partnership

Weston Spirit is a national charity working with young people. It runs five school-based peer mentoring schemes across England. Around 50 sixth-form pupils in each school are trained and supported by the charity to offer support to younger pupils. A coordinator at the school matches mentors with mentees and provides ongoing support to mentors. Mentees are often more vulnerable pupils facing the transition to secondary schools, or young people being bullied.

This scheme is one of many taking part in a national evaluation. Initial findings indicate positive impacts on bullying, behaviour, attainment and attendance but these are predominantly anecdotal. Mentors also improve academically, become more confident and increasingly interested in doing something positive for their community.

E-mentoring: Community Service Volunteers

Community Service Volunteers (CSV) runs a range of schemes in which business people mentor young people in schools via the internet. For older pupils, these aim to improve time management, revision techniques, study skills, and offer guidance for choosing GCSEs, A levels and careers. Schools tend to pick young people who are self-motivated and are looking for extra help. In primary schools the schemes are aimed at boosting literacy and IT levels. There are 590 mentor-mentee pairs communicating through the charity's web portal at present. Relationships are planned to last for one year but sometimes peter out earlier. The scheme is currently being evaluated.

Befriending: Friends United Network

Friends United Network (FUN) provides befrienders to vulnerable children from isolated single-parent families in Islington and Camden. In four out of five cases, children are referred to FUN through social services whereupon the charity matches them with suitable befrienders and then regularly monitors the relationship that develops. FUN also organises five group events a year, such as picnics or ice-skating.

The average match lasts for four years, although many matches have lasted over ten years. Data collected in 2004 illustrates that FUN has a positive effect on the young people. 73% of children said that they felt more confident as a result of their befrienders and 55% said that it had meant that they got better grades at school.
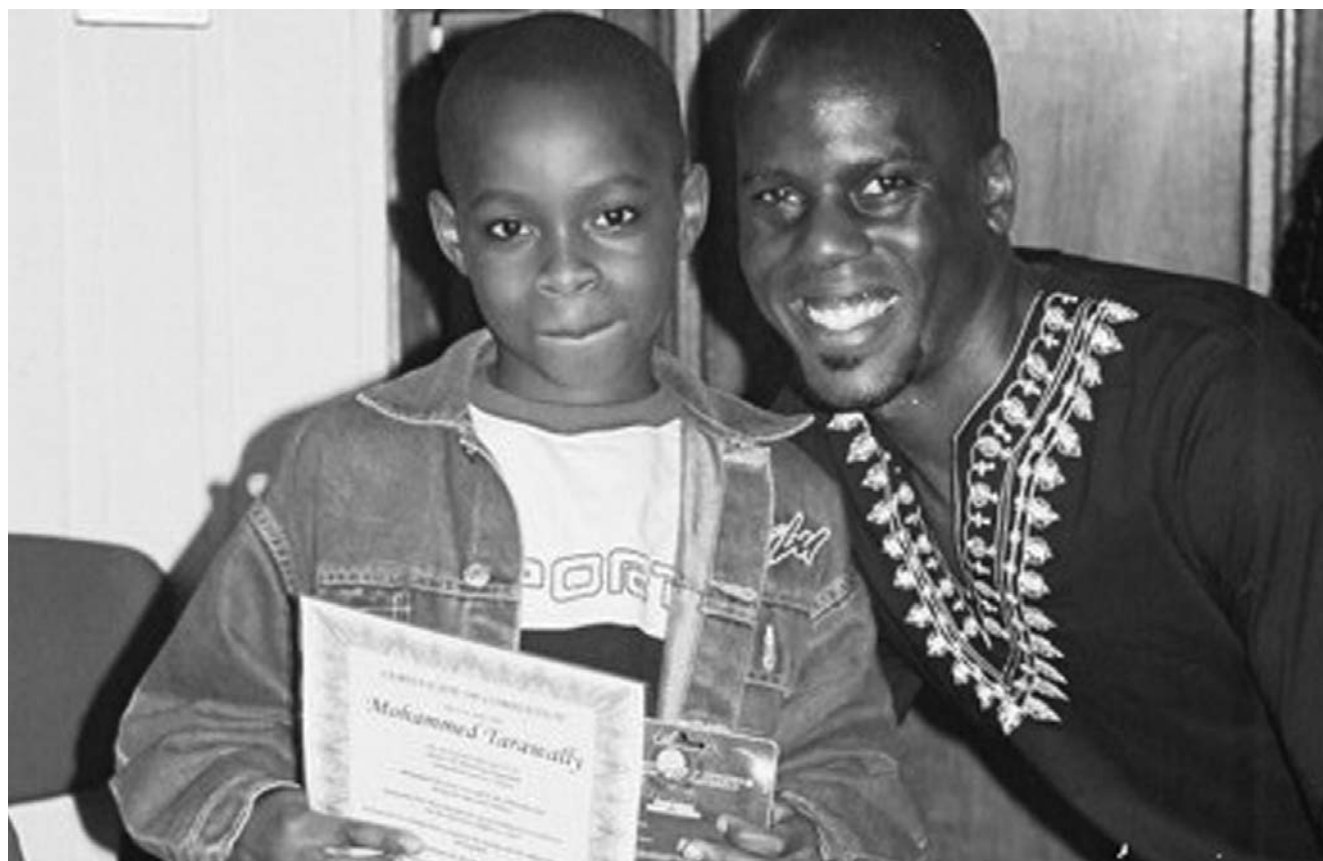
Who can mentoring help? 2

All young people need caring adults in their lives. Mentoring is thought to benefit young people through raising educational participation and performance, improving behaviour and coping skills, and increasing their ability to form successful relationships. Mentoring is particularly appropriate for those young people in disadvantaged situations, such as young people growing up in poverty, with difficult family circumstances, or with behavioural problems.

Perhaps most importantly, mentoring shows young people that someone cares about them.[8] Mentors are often volunteers and therefore offer support distinct from that offered by social services and other paid workers.[12] Mentoring gives young people respite from their problems, a sounding board and alternative perspectives. It can provide a positive role model and hope for the future.[8, 13]

Young people at risk

Mentoring schemes are targeted at young people at risk due to their behaviour or circumstances. This includes young people:

At risk of offending. Each year, 5,200 under-18s are sent to prison and a further 2,900 begin a community sentence.[14] Offenders often come from poor homes where parents pay them little attention; they tend to grow up in poverty and without any positive role model. The probability that a young person will offend is strongly related to a number of 'risk factors', including poorly educated parents and a history of convictions in the family.[15] A criminal conviction makes it much more difficult to get a job.[16]

In or leaving care. There are 45,000 children in foster care in the UK. Prospects for these young people are worse than others: they under-perform at school and beyond. Only 9% achieve the benchmark five A* to Cs at GCSE, compared to 53% for all pupils.[17] They face a difficult transition to independent living and are particularly likely to be unemployed and disengaged from education.[18]

From black and minority ethnic communities. Research has shown that black young people, particularly boys, have lower expectations and tend to under-achieve. At school, only 27% manage to achieve five GCSEs at grade A* to C and there is a far lower proportion in higher education than the national average.[19]

At risk of exclusion from school. In 2004, there were 10,500 exclusions from school in the UK.[20] Young people who are excluded have significantly reduced prospects in later life: they are more likely to have a criminal record, have lower levels of literacy and a greater chance of unemployment. 12% of excluded children were out of work at aged 19 compared to 5% of non-excluded children.[19]

Not in education, employment or training. There are 220,000 young people aged between 16 and 18 (11% of all people in that age range) who are not in education, employment or training.[21] This affects their prospects and quality of life and also incurs economic costs to both society and the individual.

Experiencing emotional, behavioural and social difficulties. This is a catch-all term covering behaviours including withdrawal, bullying, depression, school phobia, anti-social behaviour, substance misuse and angry, even violent behaviour. It may be a result of trauma, abuse or neglect.[22] 15% of children have such problems and as many as 25% of children living in urban areas.[20]

Box 2 gives examples of some young people targeted by mentoring schemes.

> Mentoring shows young people that someone cares about them … It can provide a positive role model and hope for the future.

Box 2: Examples of young people who could benefit from mentoring

'Dionne is a pupil at a school in the West Midlands, now preparing for her GCSEs in Year 11. During Year 9, Dionne's behaviour was so poor that on more than 20 occasions a letter was sent home to her parents. Incidents of poor behaviour included using a mobile telephone during class, going off site without permission and consistently disrupting lessons … She was assessed as working … well below her level of ability.'[4, 5]

'Caroline is a very bright Year 9 pupil at a large school. She was moved from one site to another as a result of her strange behaviour. This takes the form of wearing outlandish clothes, both in and out of school and adopting unusual hair and jewellery fashion styles. This has led to her becoming a victim of bullying, both physical and psychological.'[4]

'Sara was underweight with immaculate hair and makeup and was very anxious. She explained that she was very tense about moving in with a new set of foster parents [in a market town in the north east of Scotland] later that day…She had gained some standard grades and was doing a part-time course on health and beauty at the further education college … Her parents divorced when Sara was a baby. She later made contact with her father, but described this as a "disaster", finding him violent and misusing drugs … Sara claimed that she had taken on a lot of responsibility for her younger sister since her mum had difficulties in coping … She also believed that her mother was a bad influence over her and unable to set boundaries … Sara described herself as loud and abusive, as having a problem with alcohol, as having been abused and being anxious about her body … She has developed a reputation for fighting, partly because she had done kick boxing but also because she had difficulties in managing her anger and in dealing with relationships.'[8]

The government sees mentoring as part of its strategy to counter social exclusion, build better schools and encourage involvement in communities.

Benefits of mentoring

Mentoring may improve the life chances of young people at risk by offering benefits in the following areas:

- Educational improvements: changing attitudes towards school and further education, raising aspirations and encouraging better behaviour and attendance at school.

- Behavioural improvements: helping people to cope with their emotions, thinking through problems before reacting and reducing anxiety.

- Relationship improvements: helping young people to develop relationships or new friends, and helping them see other people from a new perspective.

Government funding for mentoring at-risk groups

The government sees mentoring as part of its strategy to counter social exclusion, build better schools and encourage involvement in communities.[23] A number of government departments offer funding for mentoring, often as one element of a broader programme, and will evaluate the schemes that they sponsor.

The main sources of statutory funding are:

- **Cabinet Office.** The Office of the Third Sector is providing £1m funding to the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation every year until 2008. It also funds nine mentoring projects at a cost of just under £900,000 as part of the GoldStar programme, which aims to increase volunteering among hard-to-reach groups.

- **Department for Education and Skills.** The department has invested £1.5m over two years in a peer mentoring pilot planned to reach over 7,000 young people. The main findings will be available in 2008. It has also given £1.5m over two years for a care leavers mentoring project. £60,000 per year goes on a business mentoring scheme.

- **Department of Culture, Media and Sport.** The department is designing a £2m scheme involving mentoring in cultural and sports contexts. This includes a two year £660,000 music mentoring programme, launched in November 2006 in partnership with the charity Youth Music.

- **Department of Communities and Local Government.** Between 2006 and 2009, the department is funding local projects in disadvantaged communities, including mentoring schemes. In 2007, £1m has been allocated for such projects.

- **Scottish Executive.** It funds various mentoring projects across Scotland. It also provides the Scottish Mentoring Network with an ongoing grant of approximately £70,000 per year.

Furthermore, the new charity, **v**, launched in May 2006 in the wake of the government's Russell Commission inquiry into volunteering among young people, combines private and public funding. Funds raised from companies, charitable trusts or individuals for volunteering schemes are matched by the government up to a maximum of £50m. In the first round of funding, over £7.5m has been allocated for schemes with a track record of youth volunteering, including peer mentoring schemes. The charity also runs advertising campaigns, offers advice on volunteering opportunities and has an online database of volunteering projects (see www.vinspired.com).

The **Big Lottery Fund** in England and Scotland also supports mentoring and befriending schemes, as do other grant-making trusts including **Comic Relief**, the **Camelot Foundation** and the **Paul Hamlyn Foundation**.
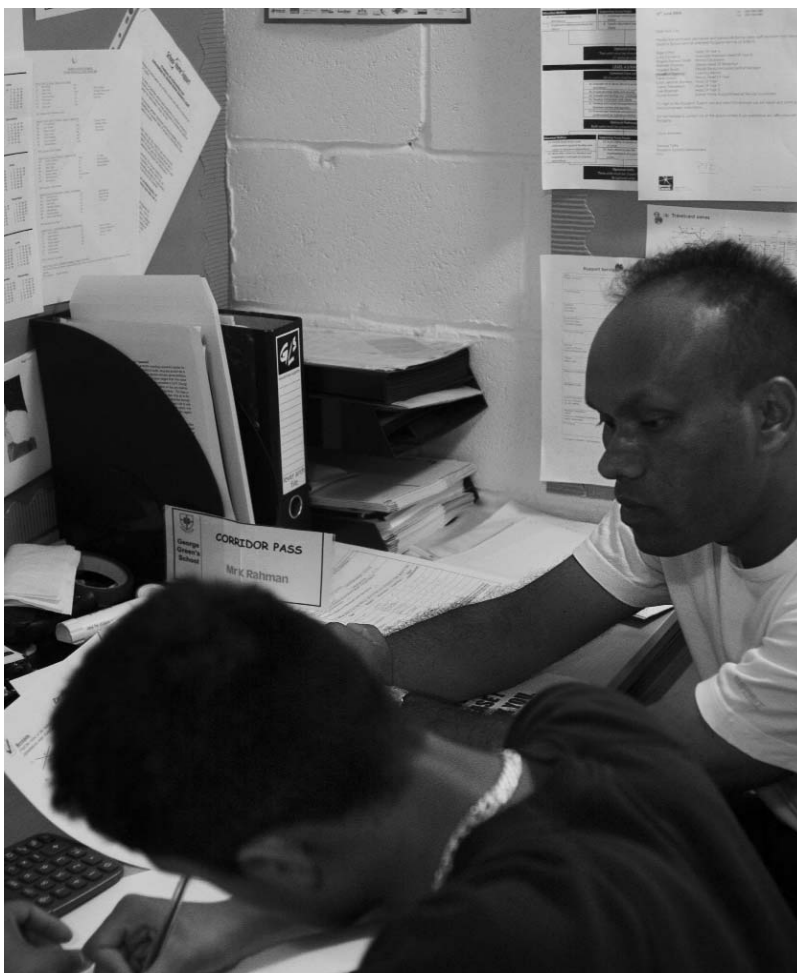
Photograph supplied by Kristian Buus

Does mentoring work?　3

Mentoring has a small but significant effect on the lives of young people.[2] There is good evidence to support traditional mentoring but much less evidence to judge the effectiveness of peer mentoring or e-mentoring schemes.

Taken as a whole, there is positive evidence on the benefits of mentoring, although compared to other charitable activities the quantity and quality of research is weak. Among the small number of studies, some show statistically significant results but some show that mentoring has little or no measurable effect. The overall impression is that mentoring does benefit young people but the effect is small. However, mentoring schemes complain that they find it difficult to demonstrate the effects of their work. Many benefits are intangible and do not lend themselves to straightforward measurement.

In contrast, the anecdotal evidence is very strong. In many cases, it is clear that mentoring has had a dramatic and transformative effect on young people's lives.

Despite often relying on volunteers, mentoring is a relatively expensive activity. But in some cases, it is the only real way to reach the most disadvantaged children. This means that good mentoring schemes are a worthwhile investment for donors.

Overall effects

Traditional mentoring

Traditional mentoring can be an effective approach for improving the lives of many disadvantaged children. Mentoring is successful at increasing the engagement of young people in education, employment and training; reducing anger and violence; and improving confidence and self-esteem. The effect of mentoring on reducing offending, increasing engagement in the community and improving academic performance is less well-established.

Mentoring has a small but significant effect.[2] It is most pronounced on improving attitudes and self-esteem, and outcomes related to this, such as improving school attendance. Young people who may particularly benefit from mentoring include those at risk, for example young people at risk of offending, young people leaving care and young people with behavioural difficulties.

This effect is as one might expect: mentoring cannot cure all the complex problems that young people may face. For example, it cannot change family circumstances but it can help young people cope better with their circumstances.[8] This effect is matched by young people's expectations: they do not expect mentoring to help them in all areas of their lives.[3] On the other hand, the expectations of mentors is often great. They may expect to help young people get, in the words of one mentor, *'totally sorted'.*[3] Good training is necessary to set expectations at a reasonable level.

Much of the detailed research on mentoring comes from the US. However, the findings of UK studies (which tend to be more qualitative) have been broadly consistent. This means that it is reasonable to apply the conclusions to the UK context.

Peer mentoring

Anecdotal evidence suggests that peer mentoring can ease the transition to secondary school, address bullying and improve attainment and attendance. More evidence is needed on its impact and on when it works best.

The research literature on peer mentoring is limited, mainly because it is a new approach. This will change in 2008 when the findings of the £1.5m government-funded peer mentoring pilot coordinated by the **Mentoring and Befriending Foundation** become available. In the meantime, indications are promising but mostly based on anecdotal evidence. In contrast to traditional mentoring approaches, there are no studies involving control groups or highlighting factors that affect success. What is known about the impact of peer mentoring is discussed in more detail below.

E-mentoring

E-mentoring also suffers from the lack of a strong evidence base.[24] Indications are that it can be effective, particularly where specific information is sought by the mentee. However, e-mentoring also has a number of disadvantages. The approach is remote and children who have limited literacy or IT skills struggle. This is discussed in more detail below.

Although the general research literature may be inconclusive about the benefits of peer mentoring, e-mentoring and befriending, NPC found that some charities could demonstrate the benefits of their schemes. Others need to get better at collecting and reporting data.

There is good evidence to support traditional mentoring approaches.

Mentoring can raise the aspirations of young people and expose them to new opportunities and knowledge.

Who benefits most?

Young people who are at risk due to their circumstances or economic deprivation benefit most from mentoring. Those who are at risk simply because of their behaviour do not benefit as much.[2]

There is some evidence that younger children benefit more than older children from traditional mentoring. This is in keeping with the fact that teenagers are influenced more by peers than adults compared to younger children.[25]

The effects of mentoring do not differ significantly with the sex, ethnicity or family structure of the mentee.[2]

Below we discuss specific examples of mentoring and its successes. We generalise to the extent that we can in each circumstance, highlighting some excellent projects.

Specific benefits

The focus of this section is on the benefits of traditional mentoring approaches. These benefits are considered in order of those for which NPC found the evidence most compelling:

- improved engagement with education and employment;
- reduced anger and violence;
- improved confidence and self-esteem;
- reduced drug or alcohol use;
- improved relationships with families;
- improved mental health;
- better transition to independent living;
- improved attainment in education;
- reduced offending; and
- increased engagement in the community.

Figure 2: The effect of mentoring on young people's participation in education, employment and training

Improved engagement with education and employment

There is evidence from several studies that mentoring helps increase young people's participation in education and employment.[2, 26, 27] Perhaps the most striking results are from a UK scheme and are shown in Figure 2.[1]

As Figure 2 shows, mentoring has a significant effect on whether young people continue in education, find work or whether they are unemployed. Young people who are mentored are more likely to be in education, employment or training after the programme than before the programme. Over the same period of time, young people who have not been mentored are much more likely not to be in education, employment or training. These findings are stark. However, they need to be considered with a little caution as the mentoring programme also included courses on literacy and presentation skills which may too have an effect on participation.[1]

Mentoring can raise the aspirations of young people and expose them to new opportunities and knowledge.[2] Frequently mentors are volunteers with a background in business who can help young people think through their options for the future and set expectations for their future work. For example, the charity **Weston Spirit's** peer mentoring scheme also involves staff from the mobile phone company, O2, mentoring the sixth-form mentors. A sixth-former, who took part in the scheme, said:

'Meeting Mike—my O2 UK business mentor— has been the best part. We really clicked from the start. I talk to him about how I am getting on in school; about my own peer mentoring with the Year 8 football team and about revision and exams. I had never really considered what life would be like when I started work and talking to Mike has given me some idea of what to expect. I plan to go to university and study engineering when I finish next year and we have talked a lot about what to expect; moving away from home, living independently and all that … I think I am much more confident about the future …' [9]

Reduced anger and violence

All the major studies into mentoring have found that it is successful at reducing levels of anger and improving self-control.[2, 25-27] For example, the charity **Chance UK** has a proven record of tackling behavioural problems. All children it works with have behavioural problems at the start of the mentoring relationships. 45% have no such problems at the end of the scheme.[6]
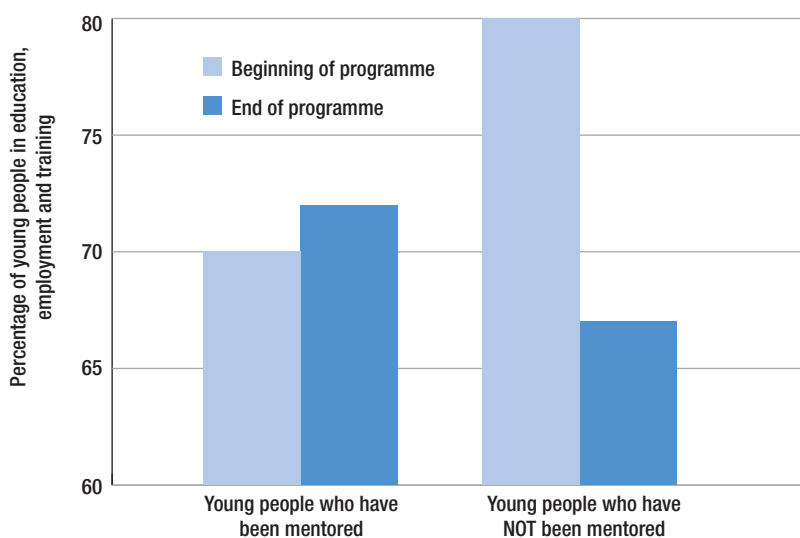
Improved relationships with families

Mentoring can help bring about a modest improvement in young people's relationships with their families.[1, 26, 27] Mentoring can provide a space to reflect on family issues and build skills to negotiate with parents. It can also help through providing respite from difficult family relationships.[8]

Improved mental health

Few evaluations mention the effect of mentoring on mental health and there is no hard data. However, interviews with mentees reveal that they most valued mentors' contribution in three areas strongly related to their mental health: self-confidence, emotional well-being and social skills.[3]

A case study shows how mentoring can help improve mental health. Tracey, a young single parent with agoraphobia, talks about how her mentor improved her mental health:

'At first she used to come round and talk to me. Take me shopping to try and get me to go out on buses instead of being too scared to go out … She helped me to keep my flat together to keep it clean and tidy. She took me to any appointments I needed to go to help me build up my confidence.'

By the end of the relationship, Tracey was able to travel independently and had joined a group at a local community centre. Tracey felt she was more confident and better able to look after herself.[3]

Better transition to independent living

A key aim of mentoring schemes helping young people leaving care is to improve their skills for independent living. In a recent study of young people leaving care, nearly half said that they had developed better independent living skills.[29] There is further evidence from other studies supporting this conclusion, although most do not give practical examples of improvements.[3, 30]

Improved attainment in education

Evidence on the effect of mentoring on school attainment is mixed. The most robust US-based study finds a small but definite effect.[2] In contrast, other studies show no effect.[26, 31] In the UK, one recent evaluation found small improvements in literacy and numeracy but questioned whether these would be sustained when the mentoring relationship ended.[25] Another, Project CHANCE, found no statistically significant differences between mentored and non-mentored children in terms of their appearance on the special needs register, reading age or test results in English, maths or science.[32]

Photograph supplied by Chance UK

Improved confidence and self-esteem

Confidence and self-esteem are the most widely discussed benefits of mentoring.[2, 3, 26] Those young people that have the lowest opinion of themselves in the first instance tend to benefit the most from mentoring.[26] In this quotation, one mentor explains the impact he thinks mentoring has on young people at risk:

'… Confidence, gives [the mentee] security. They don't feel as though they are different from anybody else … I try to make them feel normal and they will come out with things like oh this happened and this happened and I will say well this happened to me, this is what happened to me … it gives them a sense that they are not on their own … that they have people that care about them … and they get encouraged to do things.'[8]

Reduced drug or alcohol use

Some studies have found a significant reduction in drug or alcohol use among young people after mentoring.[2, 26, 27] Nearly half of the young people taking part in a Scottish drug relapse prevention scheme with a mentoring element said that mentors and staff were instrumental in preventing drug or offending relapse.[28] For example, one young person said:

'[My mentor] just seems to know me and when I'm going to do something daft, she has stopped me a few times now, I just thought they were being picky at first, but now I think I watch myself as well so I can stop myself doing something daft and getting in any bother.'[28]

Evidence of the effect of mentoring on school attainment is mixed.

Box 3: Peer mentoring case studies

The two case studies below expand on the experiences of two of the young people described in Box 2.

'**Dionne is a pupil at a school in the West Midlands, now preparing for her GCSEs in Year 11.** During Year 9, Dionne's behaviour was so poor that on more than 20 occasions a letter was sent home to her parents. Incidents of poor behaviour included using a mobile telephone during class, going off site without permission and consistently disrupting lessons … She was assessed at working … well below her level of ability.

Dionne was brought into the peer mentoring programme halfway through Year 10, representing a calculated risk on the part of the coordinator. She had already received another 10 letters home by that stage. Since being trained as a peer mentor, Dionne's behaviour has improved to the extent that she has only transgressed twice in a year … she is now expected to achieve 9 GCSEs at grades A-C. She is in the top 20 group of pupils in her year and is determined to got to college and eventually train as a social worker.'[4]

'**Caroline is a very bright Year 9 pupil at a very large school.** She was moved from one site to another as a result of her strange behaviour. This takes the form of wearing outlandish clothes, both in and out of school and adopting unusual hair and jewellery fashion styles. This has led to her becoming a victim of bullying, both physical and psychological.

Caroline was matched with an older peer mentor, a girl who herself had experienced problems integrating into school life. Caroline has now been introduced to a group of slightly older pupils, all of whom have managed to strike a balance between being 'different' and leading a happy school life. Caroline's parents have reported a radical difference in her outlook. She now has friends, both inside and outside school, and is also focused on achieving good academic grades at GCSE, thus helping her to move on to A-level courses in the sixth-form.'[4]

'… it gives them the sense that they are not on their own … that they have people that care about them …'

Adult talking about his experience mentoring young people

Reduced offending

Despite reducing anger and violence, there is little evidence that mentoring reduces offending. A recent Youth Justice Board study found that although offending decreased among young people that were mentored, the reduction was no greater than for a control group that received no mentoring.[25] Another study also found no impact on reoffending relative to controls.[1] While the Persistent Young Offender Project found a statistically significant improvement in how the mentored young people spent their spare time and their attitudes to education, crime and financial problems, the Dalston Youth Project and Mentoring Plus found no statistically significant changes in offending rates as a result of mentoring.[31, 33-35]

A Scottish charity, **INCLUDEM**, has a definite impact on offending, although mentoring is only one of the activities they provide young people at risk of offending. After two years, the reoffending rate for the 500 young people with whom they work is just 25%, compared to a typical rate of over 70% for other young people in the same age group. **INCLUDEM** mixes mentoring with daily contact with a

project worker, anger management courses, recreational activities and a 24-hour helpline. Only one in two participants has a mentor. The charity believes that mentors are particularly helpful at preventing or helping people through drug or offending relapses. They are able to spot the warning signs and enable young people to see that their behaviour is unacceptable. They can remind young people of what they have achieved and teach them to use their coping skills to stay on the right track.

Some young people say mentors have been instrumental in changing their behaviour. A participant in the scheme run by **Rainer**, an educational charity, said:

'*My mentor helped me turn my life around. He got me to look at myself. And I saw a complete idiot. I've stopped offending. It looks ridiculous. You can't get a decent job because you've got a criminal record. Now, I'm going to train to be a bricklayer.*' [36]

Increased mentees' engagement in their communities

Only one evaluation has attempted to capture the effect of mentoring on the way young people engage in their local community. The study found a positive effect in more than a third of cases.[25] This included taking up team sports, participating in clubs and social groups, and volunteering.

Peer mentoring

The discussion so far has considered traditional mentoring for which there is a body of evidence. In contrast, the effects of peer mentoring are less well-understood.

The **Mentoring and Befriending Foundation**'s pilot study of more than 800 young people in 12 schools found that peer mentoring benefited both mentors and mentees. However, as each school was responsible for their own evaluation the study did not produce measures that could be applied across all pupils. Overall, schools reported that mentees improved in motivation, self-esteem, attendance and effort.[37, 38]

Qualitative evaluation found further benefits for mentors and mentees. Schools felt that peer mentoring eased transition from primary to secondary school. It improved pupils' communication and organisational skills. Peer mentors gained from the training and formed new bonds with different members of their year, increasing cohesion in the school environment.[37]

Pupils are often more comfortable approaching an older pupil than a teacher. In particular, peer mentoring was found to be a useful approach in tackling bullying. An Ofsted report on the use of mentoring to tackle bullying commented, *'the strength and character of peer mentors met in the schools visited was impressive … What they generally had in common was a clear understanding of their role and … a capacity to listen, understand and empathise.'* [4] Mentors also became more responsible and displayed a greater awareness of the problems affecting others' lives.

Box 3 gives two examples of how peer mentoring schemes can benefit young people at risk.

Peer mentoring has also been used in other contexts, including by the **Shannon Trust** to improve prisoners' literacy skills. For more information, see NPC's charity recommendation at www.philanthropycapital.org.

More evidence on the effectiveness of peer mentoring schemes will be available when the £1.5m government-funded peer mentoring pilot coordinated by the **Mentoring and Befriending Foundation**, reports its findings in 2008. [38]

E-mentoring

There is even less evidence for the benefits of e-mentoring than for peer mentoring. In one scheme in the US, young people reported that e-mentoring increased their self-esteem, improved their literacy and made them more willing to consult with adults about their futures. [24] In the UK, an e-mentoring programme aimed at raising aspirations and improving attainment found that 15 out of 20 mentees said their attitude to learning had changed to a more positive one as a direct result of the scheme. However, 90% wanted more contact with their mentees in person. [39] This finding is mirrored by an evaluation of an e-mentoring scheme for small business owners—many said they would benefit from supplementing email contact with other forms of communication. [40]

E-mentoring clearly has advantages and disadvantages over face-to-face mentoring approaches. These are summarised in Table 2.

In conclusion, although the evidence is not clear, it seems reasonable to suggest that e-mentoring is likely to suit young people who have particular questions or who are seeking expertise on something specific, such as careers advice. It is probably less likely to be effective in circumstances where more complex issues need to be talked through. Some would challenge this notion. For example, research on an online support group for people with depression found that people communicated in ways that were characteristic of face-to-face communication. Furthermore, online counselling has been found to address many of the problems that clients bring to traditional therapy sessions. [24] In general, the effects of e-mentoring are not well-understood. More research is needed to make it a compelling investment for donors.

E-mentoring is likely to suit young people who have particular questions or who are seeking expertise on something specific, such as careers advice.

Table 2: Potential advantages and disadvantages of e-mentoring

Potential advantages	Potential disadvantages
Young people who are shy or dislike social contact may find it easier to communicate by email.	Some people may find it harder to communicate difficult issues by email. Written communication requires excellent literacy skills.
Mentors and mentees can spend more time thinking about what they ask and how they respond.	The immediacy of face-to-face dialogue makes the relationship more appealing. Visual contact allows people to use body language to communicate and build rapport.
E-mentoring can mean mentors are much more accessible than in traditional mentoring. With email, a response is possible more quickly at any point of the day.	Young people from poor families are less likely to have ready access to the internet. Facilities at school may not be sufficient to meet demand.
Travel to meet mentees can be time-consuming and expensive in traditional schemes. Coordinators can forget geographical considerations in matching mentors and mentees. Better matches may result.	Online relationships can compete with and even supplant other ties. Online relationships tend to be less deep, involve less of a sense of obligation and are more easily broken.
Differing ages, genders and ethnicities are less likely to be barriers via email.	The lack of a face-to-face relationship may mean that mentor and mentee do not challlenge their preconceptions about the other.

Investment in training and support is a key part of good mentoring schemes. Regular contact between mentor and mentee over a sustained period of time is also important for a successful relationship. Good mentor selection, work with families and structured activities for young people and mentors are important too.

Mentoring can do harm as well as good. Short relationships can be disruptive for the young person and lead to a deterioration in their behaviour.

How to spot a good mentoring scheme

This section looks at what the research evidence tells us about what makes an effective mentoring scheme. What are the most important elements of a mentoring scheme? How much should a donor expect to pay? And what are some examples of effective schemes?

All mentoring schemes are formed of common elements. All involve recruiting and training mentors, then matching mentors and mentees. Following this, all schemes must be monitored and mentors provided with ongoing support.

Mentoring schemes also have differences. Some use paid staff, others use volunteers. Some support the parents and families of young people, as well as young people themselves. Some use more structured activities to create a bond between mentor and mentee, while others leave it up to the mentor to decide what is best. These differences may account for variations in the cost of mentoring schemes. In addition, larger mentoring schemes are likely to be less

Good training is a critical part of all successful mentoring schemes.

expensive due to economies of scale but they may not have the benefits of some of the smaller, more intensive schemes.

One indication of whether a mentoring scheme is likely to be effective is whether it has achieved the **Mentoring and Befriending Foundation**'s Approved Provider Standard. This is described in Box 4.

The evidence presented in this section comes from studies on traditional mentoring approaches. At the end of the section we discuss how this relates to peer mentoring and e-mentoring.

Training and ongoing support for mentors

The more charities invest in training and ongoing support for mentors, the more they are able to help young people.[2, 25, 26] Training should educate potential mentors about the boundaries of a mentoring relationship. They should be taught how to handle situations such as mentees demanding immediate contact and attempts at sabotage by parents or social workers. Training should include role-playing, to give mentors a sense of the problems that they might encounter and how to react to them.

Charities should offer mentors supervision at least every six weeks. A combination of group and individual sessions are recommended to help mentors discuss solutions to problems and reinforce original training. Mentors believe that this support makes them better mentors:

'… taking part in the training and development has changed my practice completely … I am much better at establishing boundaries. I have achieved the fine balance of not being too close and not being distant … I am very focused on the goal.' [12]

Mentors should be able to speak to project coordinators whenever they need help. A high staff-to-mentor ratio allows for more support to be given. This has cost implications but helps relationships, as this quote indicates:

'I need to speak to Marion regularly to make sure I know where I am going and what I'm doing with the young person is helping to move them along in the right direction.' [12]

Building a relationship between the mentors and mentee may be difficult, particularly in the early stages. Box 5 gives an example.

Box 4: The Approved Provider Standard (APS)

The Mentoring and Befriending Foundation is the umbrella body for public, private and charitable mentoring and befriending initiatives in England. It is a charity that aims to promote the use of mentoring and befriending and improve standards.

The Foundation's Approved Provider Standard indicates whether mentoring schemes follow good practice in training, provide ongoing support for mentors and monitor whether goals are attained. It is a UK-wide award supported by the Home Office, the Department for Education and Skills and the Scottish Executive. At present, 390 schemes have the standard and a further 260 are working towards it. Around 75% of organisations are successful in achieving the standard at first attempt and support is available to organisations if an attempt fails. The Foundation provides additional guidance for peer mentoring and e-mentoring projects.

The Approved Provider Standard is now also in operation in Scotland, where it is delivered jointly with the **Scottish Mentoring Network** and **Befriending Network Scotland**.

As these practices improve results for young people, donors should support schemes that have this standard or are working towards it.

Good monitoring and evaluation

The best mentoring schemes use ongoing monitoring to help understand their impact and make improvements. Research shows that collecting information positively influences the results of mentoring.[2] There are a number of guides produced to help charities evaluate mentoring and befriending schemes.[41, 42] However, in general, mentoring schemes are not very good at collecting information, or on reporting the information they do have.

Two organisations NPC contacted stood out for their good monitoring and evaluation. **Chance UK** uses a behavioural measurement tool—the 'Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire'—at the start and end of every relationship to gauge progress. The **Birmingham Mentoring Consortium** uses a tool called 'Goal Attainment Scaling' to set targets and measure progress. This involves rating goals by their difficulty and importance. The scale captures progress towards the goal at key stages in the mentoring relationship. Some mentors and mentees found this process intruded on forming a relationship but most found that it provided a useful focus.[43]

Frequent contact between mentors and mentees

The more contact the young person has with their mentor, the more benefit they gain from the relationship.[2, 3, 25, 26] Furthermore, the frequency of contact between mentor and mentee and length of relationship must be in line with the mentee's expectations.[2] Good mentor selection and training can help ensure that mentors understand the commitment and have realistic expectations of what they might achieve.

Using structured activities to build relationships

Structured activities, such as classes or games, can be used to build a relationship of trust between the mentor and mentee. Rigorous evidence supports the conclusion that structured activities help.[2] For example, **100 Black Men of Birmingham**, a charity that offer mentors to young black men, runs regular classes and activities for mentors and mentees. Inspirational speakers come to talk and there are sessions on career development, relationships and etiquette. There is also a fun event on Fathers' Day. Mentees who have leadership potential can progress to The Leadership Academy, which helps participants gain business skills.[44]

The Bangladeshi programme that developed from the **Birmingham Mentoring Consortium** also runs activities. In one case, it ran healthy eating sessions where mentors and mentees prepared food together. This generated a lot of media interest. An evaluation noted that this programme and the external interest it generated were influential in raising self-esteem.[13, 45]

Box 5: Building a mentoring relationship

Building a mentoring relationship can be difficult. Young people who have had difficult relationships in the past, or who have behavioural difficulties, may try to test the mentor. A strong personality helps for dealing with this. One mentor interviewed for a study gave a striking example of the difficulties in building a bond. Her mentee had become very withdrawn and turned the radio very loud to prevent conversation. She said:

'I remember trying everything I had been taught during the training. And I got to the stage where I thought this isn't going to work. Nothing has worked. I have tried everything. What am I going to do now? … Everything's failed!'

'And I thought if you can't beat her join her, 'cos she was singing at the top of her voice … So I sang at the top of my voice because I didn't know what else to do. And she turned and looked at me as if I was mad. And then we both just started laughing and that was it. It broke the ice, whatever it was, it broke the ice. It built up gradually from there on in.'[3]

Good mentor selection

The better the relationship young people have with their mentors, the more they gain from it.[2, 26] Indicators of a good relationship include shared decision-making, engaging in social and academic activities and spending more time together. NPC found that the background of adult mentors differed markedly. Although there is not much research into what characteristics make a good mentor, one study has found that mentors working in a caring role or in a profession make particularly good mentors.[2]

Mentoring schemes should be choosy about who they select to become mentors. Not all adults make good mentors. For example, **Chance UK** used to accept the majority of people who applied to be mentors. By becoming choosier and thinking about the 'stickability' of the mentor, many more relationships stayed the course. They also found that it was important to encourage would-be mentors to inform key people in their lives about the commitment involved. Previously, they found that partners could feel hard done by when the mentors invested huge amounts of emotional energy in a stranger's life. In some cases, this affected the mentor's ability to meet their commitment to the young person.

Matching mentors and mentees by gender tends to produce better mentoring relationships. One study has shown that cross-gender matches do not last as long as matches between mentors and mentees of the same gender.[25] In particular, young women seem to find it harder to open up to male mentors:

'Well he's a man and I'm not too keen on speaking to a man as much as I am a woman. I don't know what it is. It depends on what kind of thing. Paul is pretty easy going but I don't know.'[12]

Mentoring can be a positive experience for the mentor as well as the mentee.

> **Box 6: Benefits for mentors**
>
> Mentoring aims to help young people at risk but it often has a significant impact on mentors too.[2] Potential benefits include:
>
> - the sense of doing something worthwhile;
> - a chance to gain insight into the realities of other people's lives; and
> - gaining insight into how young people think and building skills to support them.
>
> It is clear that there can be strains on mentors too. If things go wrong, mentors may blame themselves.[2] Even when things go well, mentors invest a lot of emotional energy in thinking about and supporting young people. This can be stressful as well as satisfying.[7]

'And she turned and looked at me as if I was mad … We both started laughing and that was it … It broke the ice.'

Mentor talking about the first meeting with a mentee

Photograph supplied by Kristian Buus

Social distance between a mentor and mentee can be a barrier to forming an effective relationship.[2] A good mentoring relationship is based on empathy and understanding. Two people from radically different backgrounds may struggle to build an understanding.

Mentoring can be a positive experience for the mentor as well as the mentee. Some of the benefits (and disadvantages) for the mentor are described in Box 6.

Involving families

Involving or supporting mentees' parents increases the impact of mentoring.[2, 8, 26] Parents offered additional support by mentoring schemes say that they value it: they appreciate being listened to without feeling judged. Charities offering this support see it as key way of ensuring that the impact on children is sustained.

Chance UK employs a worker dedicated to supporting mentees' parents. In one case, the worker supported a mother who was illiterate and relied on her children for help with correspondence. The worker helped her to get a disabled bus pass and answer official correspondence. The worker also helped the mother re-engage with a mental health service addressing her child's behavioural difficulties— previously she felt uncomfortable in the sessions, particularly when she was given written instructions and prompts. The worker also provided ongoing support on how to respond to her child's behaviour in a constructive way.

Initially, the mother was not sure how she felt about her son having a mentor. At times she was threatened by the new relationship. The worker was able to pass on her concerns to the mentoring manager at Chance UK. Now she is more positive and engaged and always makes sure she is at home when the mentor is due to visit.[46]

Driven by needs and interests of mentees

Relationships that are flexible about the goals, expectations and roles of mentors and mentees are more successful than those that are prescriptive about what they want to achieve.[25, 26] An in-depth study of relationships in the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America scheme—the US's largest and most well-established mentoring scheme—found that after nine months two thirds of prescriptive relationships had ended, compared to 10% of less prescriptive relationships.[26] Length of relationship and avoiding early terminations is a good indicator of success.

Some programmes are chiefly driven by their own goals: for example, the main concern of programmes funded by the Department for Work and Pensions is often to get mentees into jobs. However, focusing solely on this outcome does not always produce the best overall results for mentees.

It is important that the goals of mentoring are mutually agreed, not imposed, as this mentor's experience illustrates:

'There's no point in sitting there and saying, "These should be your goals". I realised very quickly that the young person has to want the goals. My job as I saw it was to support them on the goals they wanted.' [3]

Some programmes allow a set period of time for mentors and mentees to develop. **Chance UK** recommends that mentors work on building up trust for three months before starting to set goals.

What does not work?

Short relationships and early terminations

Short mentoring relationships, particularly those that terminate unexpectedly, do young people more harm than good.[2] The end of a mentoring or befriending relationship can be difficult for both mentor and mentee.

Indeed, if a relationship terminates unexpectedly, the effect on the young person can be worse than if they had no mentoring support in the first place.[2, 47] Young people on the Big Brothers Big Sisters of America scheme whose matches terminated within the first six months had bigger falls in their self-worth and attainment than young people who had never had a mentor.[47] Consistent with this, the same evaluation suggests that the greatest benefits were evident for youth in mentoring relationships that lasted one year or longer.[48, 49]

The breakdown of a mentoring relationship may be particularly difficult for young people who have been rejected by other people in their lives, as this quotation illustrates:

'… Susan, I wrote to her, but then she just disappeared. I hate people who just disappear, it is like anything in life, you put so much effort into it, and it is like why the f**k do you put so much effort into it and like they disappear … She left, just didn't keep in contact like she said. I hate when people say things they don't mean. And I am like, well, when are they going to stop, eh? Aww lots of people have let me down.'[8]

Matches may break up due to circumstances beyond the mentor's control (for example, sabotage by the mentee's family or friends or by other professionals, mentee moving, parental remarriage) or because of their own experience of the relationship. In the latter case, mentors may be put off by a lack of effort on the part of the mentee, by fear of being ineffective, or because they underestimated the personal investment needed to make the relationship work. In some cases, mentors may find that memories of painful experiences come back to them as they see mentees in similar situations.[47] Some of these risks could be lessened by good quality training.

Short relationships are not as damaging if the endpoint is anticipated and planned for.[47] One of the advantages of mentoring compared to befriending is that mentors and mentees have foreknowledge of the endpoint and can prepare themselves for it.

Box 7: Young people's experience of mentoring[1]

'When we first met up we had to write my CV and sort out my hostel and we did that and then I got a job for the summer, she sorted out all my school 'cos I weren't going to school and didn't go in for all my exams, and so she sorted that out for me … She's just helped me feel more organised, basically, I've told her what I want to do, and she just helped me to do it, and she's been there to push me the few steps I've needed to be pushed … If she weren't there I wouldn't be going back to school.'

'In my last school I was really, really bad and I got excluded four times … [for] hitting a teacher with a chair, punching a teacher in the head, fighting and throwing a chair through the window … I had a bad temper problem and I couldn't control it … I normally meet Janine [mentor] every Tuesday or Wednesday or Monday to talk to see what I have done at school, I show her the work, what I done and then we talk … [Mentors] help you control your temper and they take you out places and it helps you in school because they give you targets and that helps you get merits and smiles.'

Volunteer mentors versus paid mentors

Generally, volunteer mentors are more highly valued by young people than paid mentors. Young people feel that mentors who have given up their free time demonstrate a deeper commitment to their well-being and development.[8, 12] One mentor commented:

'Young people genuinely value the support of their (volunteer) mentor. They have so much in the way of professional input to their lives: staff from Social Work, the hospital, mental health services, school. Someone who is choosing to be in a relationship with him or her means a great deal. They say so themselves.'[12]

Mentees' comments reinforce this, for example:

'It's not because they take you out or anything like that. It's because they explain things in a better way than professionals would. They help you to cope with certain situations.'[3]

Some staff at charities organising mentoring schemes believe that young people are more likely to keep to commitments with volunteer mentors than with paid staff.[50]

However, it can be challenging to recruit and retain volunteer mentors, particularly for working with the most challenging young people or where a more intensive level of support is required.[8, 12]

Mentors that share some life experience with mentees can provide young people with a credible role model and a source of hope for the future.

Young people feel that mentors who have given up their free time demonstrate a deeper commitment to their well-being and development.

Paying mentors can help. Scottish charity **INCLUDEM**, working with young offenders, found that most of the mentors it was attracting were people who were looking for a job in the youth justice sector. Many moved on as soon as they got a paid position elsewhere. By paying mentors as part-time workers, the charity finds it can retain people for longer. Similarly, the **Birmingham Mentoring Consortium** finds that the student mentors that they pay are more reliable and committed than their volunteer mentors.

What we do not know

Matching

There is conflicting evidence on what basis schemes should match mentors and mentees. Mentors that share some life experience with mentees can provide credible role models and a source of hope for the future. Equally, mentors from different backgrounds are viewed positively, as they can offer insight into different career options.

Another issue programmes must consider is whether to match young people with mentors on the basis of their race. For young people from black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds, one study showed that BME mentors are more successful in improving family relationships than white mentors. But white mentors are more likely to improve literacy for any mentee.[25]

Charities have much experience in deciding whether racial matching is appropriate. The **Birmingham Mentoring Consortium** (now part of **Step:up**) offers mentoring for young people from BME communities. It uses racial matching for many mentees. The rationale is that mentors from the same community can give support on overcoming racism and through their success inspire mentees to overcome the barriers that they face.[13] Some mixed race children in single parent families have limited contact with people from their other parent's background and may have a very negative view of that culture. A mentor can change that. However, an evaluation showed that young people did not rate

matching to be as important as their mentors did.[45] On the other hand, interviews with young people from a different scheme found that they thought that gender, ethnicity, experience of care and parenthood were important considerations for matching.[3]

Mentoring can be valuable for people newly arrived in Britain. In an evaluation of a mentoring scheme for young people leaving care, a young refugee, Nat, described how his peer mentor helped him to accommodate his old and new cultures in his life:

'After my day was finished the most traumatising time was coming home and falling asleep alone, because I grew up with a lot of family naturally. I didn't know how to communicate with people of my own background. I was slowly being decultured 'cos of the pain inside.'

'She showed me how to communicate with my own people. I thought of myself as a sell-out to my own people initially … When I saw them and they are completely Europeanised and going to university and they do everything in the European way. Then I said it's OK. It is alright for me to adapt to this society.' [3]

Cross-race matches may build understanding and tolerance. **Chance UK** picked an Asian woman as a mentor for a racist and misogynistic child. As he came to like his mentor, his racist and sexist comments stopped.

Mentees with different needs

Little evidence is available about mentoring approaches for groups such as refugees, asylum seekers and people with mental health problems. This is because mentoring is a relatively new approach to some problems and few studies have been completed.

For example, mentoring is being used to help young refugees in the UK. Young refugees have often experienced trauma and may be dealing with the loss of a loved one. They are also adapting to a new culture and schooling in another language.[51] **Refugee Action** runs a scheme for young refugees and the **British Red Cross** has similar projects in Croydon and Birmingham. **Save the Children** has published a short guide on setting up and running such schemes.

Evidence for the approach is limited. One study on mentoring adult refugees shows a promising reduction in barriers to integration, including poor English language skills, isolation, low confidence and lack of knowledge of the UK job market.[52] The government has invested £3.6m in **Time Together**, a three-year expansion of a pilot mentoring project for adult refugees to 24

Box 8: A refugee from the Democratic Republic of Congo participating in a mentoring project coordinated by the charity Timebank

'Time Together helped me to settle down in my new country. Before finding out about the project there was a wall stopping me from settling down in this new life …

… My mentor Louise has helped me a lot to break down this wall that was stopping me from living life to the max. I wouldn't dare go in restaurants or in certain places where I felt they wouldn't accept me as a black woman. She has helped me get a self-confidence I didn't have before. She doesn't only help me but she helps with my two children as well. She has shown me that this country belongs to everyone …

Mentoring has also helped me know Scotland better, to be integrated in this new country and to help me prepare for my citizenship, which I will obtain next year.'

areas of the UK, coordinated by the volunteering organisation **Timebank**. In Box 8 one of the mentees from this project describes how the experience of having a mentor has benefited her.[53] Given the scale of government commitment, more evidence of effectiveness would be useful.

Costs of mentoring schemes

Even though most mentoring schemes use volunteer mentors, they are not cheap.

Table 3 gives an example of the costs of five different schemes. This shows that the cost is typically around £2,000 to £4,000 for traditional mentoring, depending on the structure of the scheme and what it sets out to achieve. The apparent high cost is due to the complexities of managing mentoring projects. This includes the process of recruiting and training mentors and providing ongoing support. The majority of these costs come from expenditure on staff.

These costs are a necessary part of any successful mentoring project. Donors should be wary of any project that is very low cost, as this raises doubts about the training and the quality of support given to mentors.

The differences in the costs in Table 3 reflect the individual characteristics of each programme. **Chance UK** is more expensive than the other mentoring schemes as it offers a higher staff-to-mentor ratio and provides more support to mentors. For many of the young people participating on the programme, **Chance UK** also supports their parents. **Rethink**'s mentoring scheme is cheaper than Chance UK's because it is less staff-intensive. Both are proven schemes, showing clear benefits for mentees.

Peer mentoring is less expensive than traditional mentoring. Again, the main cost is staffing but some of these costs will be met by schools. As peer mentoring can benefit both mentor and mentee, one could consider the cost to be £100 per mentor or mentee, rather than £200 per mentee.

However, peer mentoring is not suitable for pupils with the most complex problems. For example, peer mentors cannot be expected to deal with mental health issues, abuse within the home or offending behaviour. Traditional mentoring would be more appropriate here. Although peer mentoring is a promising approach, the evidence base is weaker than for traditional mentoring. Peer mentoring is a higher risk investment for donors.

E-mentoring is a much less expensive approach than traditional mentoring. It is also considerably cheaper than peer mentoring. However, its benefits are not well-understood. It seems unlikely that a relationship without personal contact would be able to achieve the same benefits as a face-to-face relationship on a range of complex problems.

Mentoring is expensive. But the costs to society of not supporting young people at risk are even greater. NPC calculates that the average cost to society of each young person excluded from school is over £64,000. This includes costs to the child in future lost earnings, and costs of crime, health and social services. Around one quarter of this cost falls on the young person and more than three quarters on tax payers. The same calculation shows that the average cost of a persistent truant is over £44,000, split in half between costs to the individual and costs borne by the rest of society.[54]

Table 3: Costs of mentoring

Mentoring approach	Scheme	Cost per user per annum
Traditional mentoring	Chance UK	£4,900 [*]
	Rethink	£1,900 [†]
	The Birmingham Mentoring Consortium (now part of Step:up)	£2,000 [**]
Peer mentoring	DfES peer mentoring pilot	£200 [††]
E-mentoring	Schools Network e-mentoring model	£150 [‡]
Befriending	Friends United Network (FUN)	£2,400 [§]

[*] *Cost from charity's accounts, based on an annual expenditure of £478,000, supporting 100 children. This includes support given to parents. The high cost reflects a high staff to mentor ratio of 1:20.*

[†] *Cost from the charity's annual budget for the project. This cost reflects a staff to mentor ratio of 1:40.*

[**] *Cost from the charity's internal pricing model. The cost includes a £1,000 bursary for the student mentors to compensate them for their work.*

[††] *Cost per mentee figure based on an overall programme cost of £700,000 per annum (including overheads), divided between 180 schools, each with 20 mentor-mentee pairs.*

[‡] *Cost based on data from Schools' Network e-mentoring start-up pack.55*

[§] *The cost to FUN of establishing a relationship is around £10,000. Each relationship lasts for an average of four years. Cost from charity's accounts, based on an annual expenditure of £203,000, supporting 84 children.*

Recommendations

Mentoring helps disadvantaged young people to cope better with the challenges that they face.

Mentoring can have a significant impact on young people's lives. It does not fundamentally change their circumstances, but by providing a listening ear and a role model, it helps young people to cope better with the challenges that they face. Traditional mentoring can improve engagement in education, employment and training, tackle anger and violence and reduce drug use. Peer mentoring may reduce bullying, improve attainment and integrate pupils better into school life. E-mentoring can provide young people with valuable guidance about their futures.

NPC recommends that donors and funders support traditional mentoring schemes which meet the criteria for what makes a successful mentoring scheme given in this report. Given the overall evidence on mentoring, NPC recommends that donors judge each project individually. The Mentoring and Befriending Foundation's Approved Provider Standard is a good indicator that charities are following at least some of these principles.

Photograph supplied by Chance UK

Mentoring is not cheap. But it can make a substantial difference to the lives of young people at risk, where conventional services fail to reach them.

Traditional mentoring

The research on traditional mentoring gives indicators of what type of schemes donors and funders should support. Funders should prioritise mentoring programmes that:

- respond to young people's needs, rather than impose their own goals;
- invest in training and support;
- monitor the impact of their work;
- foster regular contact and long relationships;
- provide structured activities for mentors and young people; and
- support or involve families.

Donors and funders should support schemes that have or are working towards the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation's Approved Provider Standard, as it looks for many of these attributes. This scheme also provides support to mentoring charities working towards good practice.

Donors and funders should support and encourage charities to evaluate their work. The process of monitoring and evaluation improves their effectiveness. Good data on results also helps donors and funders make better decisions. Furthermore, additional evidence could persuade government to invest more in the approach.

Peer mentoring

Peer mentoring is a promising approach. It can improve educational attainment, attendance and effort in class for both mentors and mentees. Anecdotally, it reduces bullying, improves mentees' communication and organisational skills and eases the difficult transition to secondary school. Peer mentors become more responsible and have a greater awareness of the problems affecting others' lives.

Compared to traditional mentoring, however, it is poorly understood. Case studies illustrate its promise but do not tell us what factors influence peer mentoring's success or help us understand when it goes wrong.

The government has invested a substantial amount in this approach. The results of the evaluation of their £1.5m pilot—which should be available in 2008—should expand our understanding of the benefits of the approach and how it can be made most effective. Donors and funders may want to wait for the results of this for two reasons. Firstly, a better understanding should guide funders towards more effective schemes. Secondly, donors may want to wait to see how government responds. If the impact on attendance, attainment and bullying is significant, the government might invest a substantial amount in this approach. Donors and funders should also remember that peer mentoring schemes can seek funding from **v**, the charity set up to engage one million new youth volunteers by 2010. **v** will make up to £100m of funding available to youth volunteering schemes if it meets its ambitious fundraising targets.

E-mentoring

E-mentoring breaks down barriers of geography and helps young people contact the adults who are best-placed to help them. But forming a relationship over email can be difficult. It may be best suited to young people seeking out specific advice, for example on careers. More research on when it is useful is needed.

Is it worth the cost?

As mentoring often relies on volunteers, many expect it to be a cheap approach. However, identifying mentees, training and supporting mentors is time-consuming and costly. On the other hand, the costs to society of not supporting young people at risk are even greater. NPC calculates that the average cost to society of each young person excluded from school is over £64,000. The average cost of a persistent truant is over £44,000.[54] This suggests that if mentoring can reduce the rates of exclusion or truancy by just a fraction, investment is justified in financial terms alone.

Mentoring is one way of helping the hardest to reach young people. In some instances it may be the only option, where young people refuse to participate in actvities in institutional settings or with social services.

In previous reports on helping young people at school and reducing truancy and exclusion, NPC has recommended that donors support two mentoring and befriending projects.

Photograph supplied by Chance UK

Chance UK, mentioned throughout this report, has a proven model of improving the lives of disadvantaged children in Hackney and Islington. **Friends United Network** also increases young people's opportunities and life chances by developing lasting relationships with befrienders. Another recommendation, the **Shannon Trust**, is an example of practical peer support (allied to mentoring) between adult prisoners learning to read. For more information on these charities and other NPC recommendations, see www.philanthropycapital.org.

Last word

Mentoring may not be a cheap way of supporting young people at risk. But it makes a significant difference to the lives of many young people, offering a supportive relationship where there may be none. It brings about benefits such as improved engagement with education, employment and training, better family relationships and reduced anger and violence.

Government is investing in mentoring. However, its support alone will not sustain all effective schemes. Donors and funders have an important role to play in funding schemes that help young people to make the most of their potential and prevent them falling into isolation, unemployment and self-destructive behaviour.

Additional evidence on the benefits of mentoring could persuade the government to invest more in the approach.

Mentoring is expensive. But the cost to society of not supporting young people 'at risk' is even greater.

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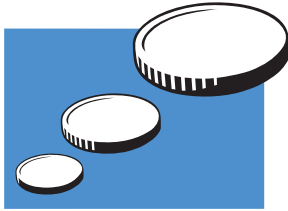
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The Pears Foundation

The Pears Foundation is a British-based foundation investing over £4m in charitable causes in 2006-2007. NPC's report *Lean on me* was commissioned by The Pears Foundation to examine the value of mentoring schemes to the personal development of young people.