'Young Adult Offender Volunteer Mentoring' Project Evaluation

Commissioned by Nottinghamshire Probation Trust

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S1. Introduction

In early 2013, the Safer Nottinghamshire Board (SNB) through the Reducing Reoffending Delivery Board, provided Nottinghamshire Probation Trust (NPT) with funding to shape a number of 'reoffending reduction' interventions with young adult offenders[1].

Further to consultation with members of the Young Adult Offender (YAO) Project Group and Offender Managers working in the semi-specialist young adult team within the NPT, on ideas for using this funding a decision was made to use a proportion of these monies to design and deliver mentoring interventions for a small cohort of young adult offenders.

Broadly, offenders were considered in-scope of this pilot project, providing they fulfilled the following criteria:

1) Aged 18-25 (originally intended for 18-21 year olds, but due to operational considerations, this was later expanded to include 22-25 year olds)
2) County or conurbation residents
3) Referred by Offender Managers working in the semi-specialist young adult team
4) Undertaking a community order or under supervision as part of their licence conditions

The project was managed by the Mentor Co-ordinator within the REACH project, who in turn was supported by NPT's Employment, Training, Accommodation and Benefits Manager.

The project was a small scale scheme, which was funded at £1500 for the costs of recruitment and training of volunteer mentors but did not cover the coordination and management costs, which were added on to the existing commitments of the REACH scheme.

There were three key stakeholders associated with the project - volunteer mentors (VMs), mentees and Offender Managers from the 'young adult' semi-specialist team. The intention was for individuals to be referred if they were deemed to be in need of extra coaching/support to help them in their 'journey from crime'.

Importantly, this project has not been designed as a 'peer mentoring' pilot project. Instead, all mentoring interventions were to be delivered by volunteer mentors (VMs) recruited through the Nottinghamshire Community Voluntary Service (NCVS).

The intention of the pilot project was to match 25 young adult offenders with ten VMs. With the project formally ending in March 2014, nine volunteer mentors had been recruited, but

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[1] These funds were delivered across four distinct intervention strands.

had only been matched with five mentees. The implication of achieving just 20 per cent of the anticipated mentee/mentor 'matches', is that the 'three way process' between the mentors, mentees and Offender Managers was not operating as originally intended (see Aims and Objectives of the project).

This report details findings from an evaluation of the project, conducted by Dr Jatinder Sandhu and Dr Paul Hamilton from Nottingham Trent University.

S2. Aims and objectives of the research project

Against the background outlined in S1, Nottingham Trent University (NTU) were approached by NPT to provide a process evaluation of the 'young adult' offender mentoring (pilot) project. Specifically the research project was guided by the following objectives:

- An understanding of how Offender Managers, mentors and mentees have experienced the mentoring process, with a particular focus on 'what worked', 'what didn't' and 'what is promising';
- In relation to this overarching objective, the research project considered: i) the way in which the project's structure, aims and objectives were communicated to key stakeholders, in particular Offender Managers; ii) the 'matching' and referral process with key stakeholder groups; iii) reasons for referring or not: iv) how core outcomes/progress were monitored and reported (especially from an ICT perspective); v) identification of the mentoring project's aims and objectives (particularly with regards to the original consultation process with Offender Managers).

On the basis that the project being evaluated/audited is a pilot project with timescale and financial constraints, the intention is for this research to inform future larger-scale mentoring interventions that may be delivered within the new Community Rehabilitation Company (CRC) for Contract Package Area (CPA, no.10), post-June 2014.

In addition to the process evaluation objectives, the researchers sought to undertake an overview of the perceived efficacy of the programme. In other words:

- For those mentees who have been matched with a VM, what have been their experiences/perceptions of the mentoring intervention and has there been any evidence for: 1) a facilitation of desistance; 2), engaging with mainstream services; and/or 3) up-skilling.
- Implications for voluntary and sub-contractors/ partners for future delivery of mentoring.

Whilst the objectives outlined above would represent the preferred evaluation, given the funds/time available - and inherent difficulties of recruiting 'hard-to-reach' groups (i.e. mentees) - the evaluation prioritised issues of process and implementation.

S3. Methodology

3.1 Sampling

Purposive (or 'convenience') sampling methods (Jupp, 2006) were used for the five matched mentees and nine VMs who have delivered, used and engaged with the mentoring project (see S1). Mentees and mentors were initially contacted through a 'mentoring manager' gatekeeper who outlined details of the research to prospective participants and asked if they would like to be involved. Those who agreed were subsequently contacted by the research team to arrange a semi-structured qualitative interview (face-to-face or telephone interviewing). Five of the nine volunteer mentors were interviewed, but despite three mentees agreeing to be interviewed, none participated when the principal researcher made contact for the interview. Three additional attempts were made (two voicemails and one text message) to interview the matched mentees, but the researcher was unsuccessful in making contact. Despite Atkinson and Flint's (2001) claim that convenience sampling strategies provide 'a means of accessing vulnerable and more impenetrable social groupings', it remains that the process of negotiating and maintaining access to traditionally 'hard-to-reach' populations is unpredictable, sometimes politicised and ultimately not guaranteed to produce the desired results.

Purposive methods were also used to recruit Offender Managers and other relevant stakeholders. NPT identified a number of potential interviewees, including the following:

- County Adult Offender Prolific and Priority Offender (PPO) manager
- Senior Probation Officer
- Community Safety Team, Nottinghamshire County Council
- Mentor co-ordinator
- Employment Officer
- Criminal Justice System (CJS) lead at Nottingham Community and Voluntary Service (NCVS)
- Employment, Training, Accommodation and Benefits Manager, NPT
- Assistant Director, NPT, and;
- Six Offender managers

Although it was initially envisaged that the NPT/REACH project would be responsible for facilitating the recruitment of Offender Managers and other key stakeholders to the research, the reality of 'doing research' (Davies *et al*, 2001) proved to be more problematic. All potential interviewees were invited to take part in the research by email, but owing to non-response, another email was sent encouraging potential participants to contact the research team. This was followed up with personalised emails and telephone calls by the research team. Despite these attempts at negotiating access, of the 23 individuals identified as potential research participants, the NTU team was only successful in contacting and arranging interviews with 14 of them.

There may be several reasons for these non-responses. Firstly, several members of staff had planned to take annual leave throughout March, due to the new leave year beginning in April. Secondly, the highly pressurised workload of potential interviewees at a time of considerable change to the probation service (see S5.8 and 'Transforming Rehabilitation') clearly impacted on individuals' ability to engage with the research project. Compounding this, one Offender Manager noted that they had not made a referral into the project and consequently felt they had 'nothing to contribute'. This non-response was maintained despite reassurances from the research team that their contribution would be important in ascertaining the nature of the information they received about the project, together with their understanding of the process and mentoring more generally.

3.2 Methods/data collection processes

To best achieve the aims and objectives outlined earlier within the tight time/budgetary framework, the following methods were planned for the research:

- Telephone interviews with mentees and mentors
- Telephone interviews with the seven Offender Managers/Paid Mentor/Senior Probation Officer and other stakeholders identified above.
- Face-to-face interviews with the mentor co-ordinator, Employment, Training, Accommodation and Benefits Manager, NPT; Assistant Director, NPT,
- Analysis of Documentary evidence (reports and other documentation relating to the volunteer mentoring programme).

The interview schedules were tailored to reflect: 1) the method of data collection and; 2) the stakeholder group. A finalised version of the interview schedule was agreed and signed-off following consultation with the NPT (see appendix 1).

In order to gather 'rich' qualitative data, all participants were probed on each of the questions until they had no further responses to add and the researchers perceived that 'theoretical saturation' (Lewis-Beck *et al*, 2004) had been achieved. Interviews lasting between 20-90 minutes were conducted throughout March 2014.

3.3 Data analysis

All interview data were recorded on to a Dictaphone and recordings were then transcribed verbatim. Data from interview scripts were then input to an Excel spreadsheet. Inductive coding methods and thematic analysis of interviews and transcripts (Boyatzis, 1998) helped identify key themes for all stakeholders in the development of outcomes from the mentoring project. In thematic analysis the task of the researcher is to identify a limited number of themes which adequately reflect textual data. As such, it was possible to establish clear links between the research objectives and the summary of findings. This was a useful way of organising the data as it allowed themes relating to each of the research objectives to be identified and for a coding framework to be developed. Therefore, the

nature of the coding was inductive and was developed by directly examining the data (Boyatzis, 1998; Silverman, 2005).

Documentary sources were also analysed to ascertain details about the aims/objectives of the mentoring project, monitoring procedures and also the nature of information communicated to Offender Managers and other relevant stakeholders.

3.4 Ethical considerations

The research was subject to the approval of Nottingham Trent University's ethics committee and internal checks/procedures within Nottinghamshire Probation Trust. In order to encourage honest reflection during the interview process, anonymity was of paramount importance. Accordingly personal information, names and identities are not included in this research report. Instead, all participants have been ascribed pseudonyms (e.g. participant 1, participant 2 etc). Steps were also taken to ensure that all personal data, stored both manually or electronically, were kept securely and could not be accessed by unauthorised persons. The team also worked within the confines of current law over such matters as copyright, confidentiality and data protection.

Participant information packs, tailored appropriately for each group of participants were prepared by the researchers. These packs were designed in clear, jargon-free language, with a clear articulation of the purpose, aims, objectives of the research and the nature of participant involvement, together with details of how participants' anonymity and confidentiality would be secured. All documentation used in the study was, where necessary, adapted to meet the needs of the individuals (e.g. made available in large print format for participants with visual disabilities). In addition to written details, all participants received a verbal briefing prior to data collection commencing and were given the opportunity to ask questions before the interview began. Participants were also advised that they could withdraw from the research at any time or refuse to answer questions that would cause them discomfort. Participants were also required to sign a consent form prior to data collection activities commencing.

3.5 Methodological conclusions

Whilst the methods underpinning this research are not without limitations, this section has outlined the research team's commitment to methodological transparency and an alignment between research design and the core research questions. As O'Connell Davidson and Layder (1994: 223) point out, 'there are better and worse ways of doing research, and if it is undertaken critically, reflectively and competently, a more accurate picture of social reality will be produced'. The research team believe that the methodology outlined here is well-placed to counter any claims that the research findings lack reliability and validity.

S4: Academic context: mentoring and the importance of the 'relationship'

Whilst the term 'mentoring' is widely used in the CJS, it is recognised that mentoring can take a number of different forms. Consequently the concept is considered somewhat fluid (and contested). For some, mentoring is simply a '…one to one non-judgemental relationship in which an individual gives time to support and encourage another' (Mentoring and Befriending Foundation, 2008). Nevertheless, how this gets implemented 'on the ground' is inevitably open to interpretation.

Historically, the mentoring of 'offenders' is nothing new, but interventions have tended to be informal, ad-hoc and piecemeal. More recently there has been a greater interest from policymakers in formalising these mentoring processes - particularly for short-term sentenced prisoners. This interest has gained momentum since the current coalition government came to power, culminating in the changes proposed in the 'Transforming Rehabilitation' agenda (see 5.8).

The raised profile of mentoring within the CJS can be explained partly by the growing evidence that the relationship between an offender and the person(s) working with them – including mentors - is an integral aspect of facilitating successful rehabilitation (Ministry of Justice, 2010). However, up until the 1990s the study of 'relationships' was a neglected research area (McNeill *et al*, 2012). Fortunately, the evidence-base in recent years has gathered pace and we now know considerably more about the role of the 'relationship' in helping offenders desist from crime (Burnett and McNeill, 2005; Dowden and Andrews, 2004; Farrall, 2012 cited in McNeill *et al*, 2012).

If we accept the role of relationships in the broader desistance process, then the question arises as to how and why such relationships might 'make a difference'?

Firstly – and given the right conditions - it has been suggested that (mentoring) relationships can be integral to promoting successful engagement with resettlement-focused interventions (Farrall and Calverley, 2006; McNeill and Weaver, 2010).

There is certainly some recognition that peer and non-peer practitioners have an important role to play in supporting reformed offenders to not only reconnect with mainstream services, but importantly to remain *motivated* to desist from crime (Maguire and Raynor, 2006).

Research suggests that much of this depends on the 'type' of person that works in a mentoring capacity (Wood *et al*, 2009). Ultimately, as Webster (2012) observes:

> '…the lessons of offender autobiographies, the NOMS offender engagement project and the wider desistance research […] it is the essential human qualities of workers,

such as empathy and compassion, that offenders most value and that have most impact on their process of desistance'.

Despite this, reliable evidence about ''what' and 'how' mentoring 'works is sketchy. As the recent NOMS 'rapid evidence assessment' observes 'there is a lack of good-quality research evidence on the impact of mentoring projects with offenders' (Taylor et al, 2013:1), suggesting the necessity for a 'proposed toolkit which can be adopted by organisations delivering mentoring interventions to measure their activities and impacts' (ibid). Whilst it is not the primary intention of this piece of research to actively evaluate the impact of the (pilot) mentoring project, understanding the process in which mentoring gets delivered is an important component of building up the evidence-base of good practice.

S5. Key Findings

This section will address findings derived from analysis of interviews conducted with the participants outlined in Section 3. Specifically this section will discuss findings in the context of the main themes emerging from the data, namely:

- mentoring in the context of the CJS
- the strategic development and aims and objectives of the project
- management of the project
- the involvement of Offender Managers
- information communicated about the project
- the motivation, recruitment and training of mentors
- mentors' experiences of the project
- involvement of the community and voluntary sector (CVS)

The data relating to each of these themes is discussed in more detail below.

5.1 Mentoring in the context of the Criminal Justice System (CJS)

Some interviewees adopted a broad definition of mentoring, whilst others stated a more specific definition of the term. In the broadest sense, one participant noted that:

> 'Mentors are parents, grandparents, supportive friend – someone who is there where you need them to be. Anyone can be a mentor – it's someone who can provide that support, give advice at a crucial time in someone's life when they most need it" (Participant 1).

Translating this to the context of offending, most participants concurred to some extent with the view of Participant 3 who felt that mentoring is:

> '…a professional relationship with an individual (in this case a service user – young offender) to highlight and identify clear objectives to help a person work towards their goals and to empower and motivate them to achieve these' (Participant 3).

Discussions of 'empowerment' and 'motivation' have clear parallels with 'desistance theory', particularly the formation of personal narratives to restructure cognitive processes, identity and self-image' (Moore, 2012; Maruna, 2001). As Farrall (2002) points out, offending often stops when an individual sees themselves as moving from offender to non-offender status (Moore, 2012). Drawing on these cognitive processes to enable 'change', another participant argued that:

> 'Mentoring is about identifying a need, developing an action plan and working to motivate and empower individuals to meet/achieve those actions' (Participant 8).

To understand the way in which mentoring can impact on the dynamics of 'change', one interviewee noted how mentoring indirectly helps individuals to address offending behaviour through an acknowledgement that certain re-entry 'pathways' (SEU, 2002), including community engagement, social inclusion, housing and employment, are instrumental in achieving pro-social outcomes (Participant 13).

Importantly, all respondents appeared to 'buy-in' to the concept and value of mentoring in the CJS. One participant stated that mentoring was crucial as a tool for promoting the more active supervision of offenders (Participant 10). As one interviewee noted in reference to Probation Officer/Offender Manager caseloads:

> *'Probation Officers have a significant number of people on their caseload and can't always attend to the personal needs of the people…it is more about addressing the offending behaviour. Mentoring provides opportunities to address the indirect things that can cause the person back in to the cycle of re-offending. This is where mentoring is vital as it provides that additional more personalised support'* (Participant 13).

The suggestion here is that mentoring provides greater opportunities for 'one-to-one' interactions, at a time when probation officers acknowledge that too much of their time is spent dealing with 'computer activity, drafting correspondence and reports, meetings and dealing with other red tape' (Travis, 2011).

Moreover, one participant noted that traditionally mentoring had been advocated as a mechanism for offenders to develop trusting and supportive relationships. Recently, however, the perception from this respondent was that this had become less important (or achievable):

> *'People say 20 years or so ago, the CJS advocated these close individual relationships. These are crucial relationships that you build with individuals which give people those supportive and trusting relationships – which they may not have had before. It's a shame really cos we seem to have lost that need to develop and build relationships with offenders'* (Participant 2)

Understandably, an appropriate 'mentor match' was felt to be vital by some participants. As many academic commentators point out the ''relational basis' of supervision is key to its effectiveness' (Robinson and Crow, 2009). Ultimately it is argued that good relationships between probation staff and their supervisee will elicit a positive response to interventions from the offender (Wood *et al,* 2009). Consequently, mentors' abilities to 'relate to young people on their level' was felt to be integral to any CJS-based relationship (Participant 4), although one interviewee was quick to point out that mentoring is not about 'saving people' but about providing opportunities for mentors to "be there" for mentees.

Furthermore, mentoring - when done well - provides opportunities for mentors to support mentees through problems 'which in the long term may lead to re-offending' (Participant 6). Mentoring was also seen to be about providing that timely support and for the mentee to develop a "sense of confidence" in their mentor, so when in difficulty, they have someone to turn to' (Participant 5). Many respondents also acknowledged that for mentoring to achieve tangible reoffending reductions, the relationship has to be built on quality and consistent principles. This echoes the findings of Partridge (2004 in Robinson and Crow, 2009:143) in which a small sample of offenders indicated unanimity about the importance of:

> '...continuity of contact with the same case manager [...]. They reported being more likely to trust their case manager, address their problems and ask for help if they saw the same person over a period of time – indicating the importance of the [CJS professional] as a stable human link during [their punishment]'

5.2 The strategic development and aims and objectives of the project

On the basis that the stakeholders interviewed for this project appeared to understand the importance of mentoring as a 'reoffending reduction' tool, the way in which mentoring gets delivered 'on the ground' takes on added importance. Offender Managers/Probation Officers, key stakeholders and those directly involved in the development and management of the project were asked specific questions about: how the project started; whether lines of responsibility and management were clear and; about the specific involvement of particular members in the management and monitoring of the project.

Analysis of interview data confirmed that the mentoring project had evolved in response to money offered from the Safer Nottinghamshire Board to support three work-streams accountable to reducing re-offending. However, there was a certain amount of ambiguity amongst respondents (particularly OMs and POs), as to how the project came about and who had identified the need for it.

In seeking clarity about this operational issue, the NPT management team and several other respondents were able to offer some insights. In essence, the Young Adult Offender Project Group, consisting of semi-specialist senior probation officer, offender managers, employment officers and a paid mentor, the Young Adult Offender semi-specialist team (consisting of Offender Managers/Probation Officers) was consulted as to what resources they felt would be helpful - as part of a wider package of interventions - to reduce re-offending amongst young adults under their jurisdiction. Amongst other ideas, one suggestion was to develop a mentoring service targeted specifically for young adults (Participant 1). A widely-held belief amongst some members of the semi-specialist team was that specific support provisions for young adult offenders had been neglected, largely owing

to a policy of treating young adults and older adults with equivalence. When examining the attitudes and maturity levels of this cohort, however, there is some evidence that this policy may be somewhat 'misguided' for many of these young adults. This point is contextualised in the interview extract below:

> 'Young adults are treated as adults when in actual fact they still display attitudes and maturity levels of teenagers. In reality many of them are still teenagers. Just because they have turned 18 doesn't mean that they automatically mature. They don't have the same skills or resources as say a 25 year old adult does. Their needs are very different to that of a 25 year old' (Participant 13).

To address this apparent 'age-specific' need, an email consultation was initiated with the semi-specialist team to ascertain what interventions would be best suited to address this structural deficit. The upshot of this brief consultation exercise - for those who reported back – was that an 'age-specific' mentoring programme was identified as being a potentially beneficial intervention to address the specific needs of young adult offenders. Based on this feedback, senior NPT management agreed to scope and allocate some of the SNB funding for this mentoring project (Participant 2).

Generally speaking, participants interviewed who were directly involved in the consultation phase of the project were clear about the remit of the identified mentoring project, as evidenced in the quotes below:

> 'The perceived outcomes of the project were for mentors to engage, empower and support purposeful activity and for the mentee to fully engage with the process, to complete their orders, and engage in the purposeful activities' (Participant 1).

> 'The remit of the project was to identify young people failing their orders (some long term and some repeat offenders – in terms of supervision and unpaid work) and to see if the mentoring process could support them in a better way. It was envisaged that mentors would work individually with the young adult offenders to identify their needs, how they could be better supported and what purposeful activities they could be involved in. It was also envisaged that mentors would work alongside the OMs to see how they could support the mentees (e.g. purposeful activities/goals/ aspirations) in line with the OMs' objectives for the clients' (Participant 3).

> 'The project was a bespoke one – which would provide access to mentors solely for young people. Mentors were there to stop people spiralling out of control so they could (i) complete their orders and (ii) engage in purposeful activities' (Participant 2).

That said, some interviewees - mostly Offender Managers stated that they were largely unaware of the aims and objectives of the project. For instance, one participant stated that they did not have '*any knowledge or details about the project and I don't recall receiving information about the project*' (Participant 12)

Some participants – Offender Managers in particular, reported some confusion about how this project was any different from ongoing mentoring projects that were being delivered through REACH/NPT, or indeed how this mentoring intervention was aligned with the offender's wider programme of supervision. For instance one Offender Manager stated:

> '*I knew about the project and I knew it was targeted to young adult offenders, however wasn't sure how the project differed from other mentoring projects – what was specific about this project, I couldn't tell you as I don't remember receiving the information*' (Participant 10).

This view was validated by another participant who noted that:

> '*I was not aware of the distinction between this project and other mentoring projects. The difficulty is that there are so many schemes and programmes that we can refer young adult offenders into e.g. Princes Trust, ETE etc. The project needed to be clearer about its aims and objectives. i.e. what would make this service stand out more than others*' (Participant 11).

Linked to the failure of some participants to distinguish between the young adult offender mentoring project (see S1) and other mentoring projects, was opacity about the precise remit of the volunteer mentors. In other words, what their role entailed and what were the limits of their involvement. By way of illustrating this point, Participant 9 commented that:

> '*I didn't understand what they were able to do instead of the paid mentor which is based here. To be honest, if I felt one of my young adult offenders was in need of a mentor I would have first approached the paid mentor. It would have helped if we had a little bit more information about what the specific purpose of these mentors were, it may have helped us to understand the remit of their role*' (Participant 9)

5.3 Management of the project

As evidenced in S5.2 it appears that there was a certain amount of uncertainty from respondents about what the mentoring project sought to achieve (i.e. what measures were being used to define 'success') and what the project's key differentiating features were. Affiliated to this ambiguity, many respondents commented that they were unsure who was managing the project on a day-to-day basis.

For instance, it was clear from interviews with the NPT Employment, Training, Accommodation and Benefits (ETAB) Manager, the Assistant Director (NPT) and the mentor

co-ordinator that the Assistant Director was responsible for the financial management of the project and reporting interim and final results to the Reducing Re-offending Delivery Board. The Assistant Director was also responsible for managing the Young Adult Offending (YAO) Project Group, with the aim of supporting referrals by YAO semi-specialists into the scheme. This responsibility, however, did not extend to line management for frontline staff.

The ETAB Manager had very little day-to-day involvement with the project, with the exception of: 1) assisting with the recruitment and interviewing of volunteer mentors and; 2) some initial email correspondence in October 2013 with probation staff outlining the remit of the project and the mechanism for referring in.

The training, deployment and matching of volunteer mentors with mentees fell within the remit of the Volunteer Mentor Co-ordinator. When participants were asked who had ultimate responsibility responsible for the day-to-day management of the project, it transpired that this accountability had not been clearly articulated. In large part the apparent project 'drift' (including the low number of referrals and mentor/mentee matches) might reasonably be attributed to this lack of clarity concerning management reporting and accountability. Understandably, there was some confusion amongst 'non-management' respondents:

> *'I presumed the project was being managed through the REACH team – but don't know much about them. I don't know who the relevant contact person for this project was. I know the project was attached to the Probation Service, but can't tell you more than that'* (Participant 9).

> *'Well I knew [ANON] (Assistant Director, NPT) was leading on the development of project, as it was her who I had some initial contact with. However as for the day-to-day running of the project, who the contact person was or details as to where and how I could contact them – I couldn't tell you'* (Participant 10).

> *I am not really sure about who was managing the project, I don't ever remember receiving any communication about this, so am not able to say.* (Participant 11)

5.4 The involvement of Offender Managers

Interview analysis revealed contradictions amongst respondents about the extent to which Offender Managers would be involved in the project and how this would be operationalised. In the planning stages of the project (see below and Sections 5.5-5.6), and as validated by the ETAB Manager's October 2013 email, it was envisaged that Offender Managers would directly refer appropriate young adult offenders in to the service:

> *'The Offender Managers were supposed to identify young adult offenders who would benefit from this resource. I think we had expectations about the Offender*

Managers managing relationship between themselves, the mentee and mentor.
The extent to which this happened – I am not sure' (Participant 1).

In justifying the 'need' for the mentoring project, data was collated in the initial planning phase which identified the number of young adult offenders currently under supervision who fell within scope of the intervention. In addition to the criteria identified in Section 1, the ETAB manager communicated that referrals into the project would be particularly relevant in circumstances where an individual was/is:

- Failing their [community] orders because of non-compliance
- Needed support with motivation and low self-esteem
- Needed support attending external appointments
- Needed 'one to one' support with confidence building
- At risk of breaching licence
- Needed support with any life skills such as housing support, medical services

Having gone through this scoping exercise, a second planning meeting was conducted to scope the potential number of young offenders who may benefit from the programme. During this meeting it was felt that there would be sufficient numbers of 'in-scope' offenders – including those individuals not already engaged in mentoring supervision with the REACH project - to be referred into this project. One of the participants involved in the second planning meeting provides some detail in the extract below.

> *'In the second meeting planning meeting we had the system information, and we were able to identify a number of young offenders who may be able to benefit from the programme. We also identified the relevant Offender Managers'* (Participant 3).

Those who were involved in the initial scoping of the project, generally attributed the low number of mentee/mentor matches made down to the lack of referrals by Offender Managers, which one participant saw to be the result of a lack of ownership of the project from Offender Managers:

> *'There was no sense of ownership for the project from the Offender Managers, despite the volunteer mentor scheme being their idea'* (Participant 2).

As alluded to in the previous section, the Offender Managers that the research team spoke with, generally lacked 'buy-in' to the project. Under these circumstances, it unsurprising that Offender Managers did not feel that they 'owned' the project or its proposed outcomes:

> *'In terms of the Offender Managers there were lots of discussions about the need for buy-in from them. This just didn't happen. There needed to be buy-in from a senior level and from the Probation Officers/Offender Managers. There needed to be an instruction of engagement rather than the need for referrals being an option'* (Participant 3).

The lack of buy-in and ownership from Offender Managers was to some extent baffling for management, yet in the context of the disconnect between an 'idea' and the implementation of that 'idea' - the so-called 'implementation gap' between policy and practice (see: Vaessen and Leeuw, 2010) - this mismatch is perhaps more understandable. Several respondents recognised the need for practice to better reflect the needs and capacity of both the organisation and offender. Put simply more consideration needed to be given to the consultation phase and the ensuing delivery of any agreed programmes/interventions:

> *'It comes back to the original conversation, with the suggestion of volunteer mentors. Perhaps we should have investigated this a little more'* (Participant 2).

> *'As people [Offender Managers] asked for it, we assumed that they would use the mentors to identify what needed for'* (Participant 1).

Aside from communication issues regarding the project and confusion over managerial responsibilities, several reasons might be suggested for the lack of referrals from Offender Managers. One reason may be an Offender Manager's discomfort with an overlap between the mentors' relationship with the mentee and the Offender Managers relationship with the mentee. In many ways, these are legitimate concerns that would need careful management. As Underdown (1998) points out, the fewer professionals an offender sees in a 'supervisory' capacity, the greater the positive impact on outcomes (especially in relation to offending). Put another way, a consistent 'one-to-one' relationship with clarity about who is overseeing an offender's community order/licence conditions, appears to be instrumental in promoting motivation and compliance in the short term and desistance in the longer-term (Robinson and Crow, 2009). Whilst not dismissing the value of 'external' mentoring, this potential fragmentation at the very least requires appropriate consideration at the planning phase.

A second more practical reason that could be proposed is that the inclusion of a volunteer mentor may have work load implications, with a perception that this would inevitably involve more work for the Offender Manager.

Interestingly, however, neither of these two reasons was cited by Offender Managers for not referring. Instead Offender Managers put forward the notion that they simply lacked the confidence and knowledge to understand how to best use the mentors. This reason was very much inter-connected to the communication of information about the project, as discussed in the subsequent section.

Mentors were probed on the extent they communicated with their mentees' Offender Managers; of the six mentors interviewed most had no contact with their mentee's Offender Manager. This, of course, has potentially serious implications for 'joined-up' working and a commitment to the effective delivery of 'sentence plans' (in their loosest sense). The

importance of this information exchange between the mentor and Offender Manager was highlighted by one of the volunteer mentors:

'No I didn't meet with XXXXXX (mentee's) Offender Manager. I did have some communication with the Offender Manager through the Volunteer Mentor Co-ordinator. Every week I reported back to him who then fed back information to the Offender Manager. I was also kept informed from the Offender Manager side of things, e.g. if she (the mentee) had kept on top her appointments that week' (Participant 4).

In other cases there was a complete breakdown in the exchange of information between the Offender Manager and Mentor (or through an intermediary as identified above), as demonstrated in the extract below:

'In terms of the probation plan or things I was supposed to do with the mentee - nothing was communicated about that and I did not meet with the Offender Manager' (Participant 5).

Only one participant spoke about having contact with her mentee's Offender Manager and discussing where her efforts with the mentee were needed. The mentor's recollection of the meeting is detailed in the extract below.

'Yes we've met; I got her (Offender Manager) name and went in to the office. Then we both went in to talk to XXXXX (Mentee). We had a chat about what I'd be doing and what XXXXX (mentee) would most like my help with. We discussed numerous things – getting back into work and education and confidence building'. (Participant 6).

These citations clearly demonstrate the need for an implementation plan overseen by an appointed and accountable manager. It also flags that Offender Managers need to be more proactive in the process. This has potential implications in terms of delivering an appropriate audit trail of interventions (especially with reference to capturing this electronically), the potential for overlapped or 'mixed messages' to be communicated to the offender and ultimately the potential for a lack of supervisory coherence. In the final equation this may have reoffending implications.

This is in contrast to the experiences of a paid mentor, based amongst the team of Offender Managers, Probation Officers and Employment Officers, who described a more joined up approach to mentee intervention and support and better communication with the Offender Managers. In the extract below, the paid mentor describes her experience of working with Offender Managers, which are akin to those described by the Volunteer Mentor above:

'It's about communication. I always make sure I speak to the Offender Managers/Probation Officers. The offenders are aware that we talk; I make it

clear that if there are issues/concerns I will speak to the Offender Manager and let them know that there is a problem. This communication is vital so we all know what the other is doing and how it's contributing to the Offender's support and probation plan' (Participant 7).

5.5 Information communicated about the project

As articulated in Section 5.6 below, all volunteer mentors had been recruited and trained specifically for this project. Accordingly, most of the mentors interviewed felt that they had received sufficient information about the project and were clear about the aims, objectives and remit of their roles, which would be based on the mentees' individual and specific needs.

> *'I received adequate information about the project; I kind of knew what my role as a mentor would be'* (Participant 4).

That said, a few mentors commented that they would have liked to have received more detailed information about the project, before their training commenced.

> *'I received very little information about the project. More information would have been useful just to know what to expect. If I had a choice in working for REACH project and working for probation service, then I would have chosen REACH project – largely because there was more chance of being matched on the REACH project'* (Participant 4).

As noted in the previous section, Offender Managers felt that they received very little information about the project and felt somewhat unclear about who was managing the project and the remit, aims and objectives of the project. Of the four Offender Managers interviewed, one stated that they could not recall receiving any information about the project (Participant 12).

The remaining three Offender Managers interviewed for this project, recalled receiving *some* information about the project. These Offender Managers would have liked to have received correspondence at more regular intervals and greater details of the project, its aims and objectives and details of the referral processes. Participants acknowledged that:

> *'I don't remember receiving any information about the project' (*Participant 12)…*'it would have been good to receive information about the project as I certainly would have made some referrals in to the project'* (Participant 11).

Specifically, what was perceived to be most lacking from communication, was information about the referral process and more detail about the type of work the mentors could be involved in:

'I would have liked to have received information about the referral process. I would have liked to have seen the referral form, details of who and where to send it to' (Participant 11).

'Information about the boundaries of the volunteer mentors work would have been useful, the sorts of things mentors could do, the remit of their work etc' (Participant 9).

What is interesting about the observations from Participant 11 in the above extract is that this information *was* included in an email sent out by the ETAB manager on 11th October 2013. It may have been the case, as with the participant below that emails not directly linked to the Offender Managers workloads were not acknowledged or deleted.

'There may have been emails but it may have not registered due to my heavy caseload. I delete emails if they aren't directly related to my caseload' (Participant 11).

The above extracts raises issues about the mode, content and delivery of communicating programme developments such as the mentoring project.

Participants stated a number of means by which they would have liked information about the project to be communicated. The majority of Offender Managers expressed the view that email was not an effective method of communication, in large part because the Offender Managers have a heavy case load and do not always 'have the capacity' (Participant 12) to check their email in detail. More viable ways of communicating information about the project were suggested, including someone coming along to team meetings to introduce the project's aims, objectives and referral process. Complementing this, it was proposed that information be cascaded down through team leaders, whose responsibility it would be to periodically remind (and update) Offender Managers/Probation Officers of the project. One participant suggested that it would have been beneficial to publicise the project more widely, e.g. through posters and literature around the offices and on staff notice boards and a piece in the internal magazine *Click*:

'When you are walking around the offices you see the posters and it would remind you of the project, its aims and objectives etc. This would have been useful for us Offender Managers as we have such a varied caseload that we don't always remember what is on offer. We need little reminders of what interventions are useful. Also the poster publicity would show the young adult offender what interventions were on offer' (Participant 11).

One participant also suggested the importance of providing regular updates to Offender Managers/Probation Officers about the progress of the project, including – but not limited to - how many volunteer mentors have been recruited and matched,

the type of work they have been doing, outcomes and progress made against objectives.

5.6 The motivations, recruitment, training and matching of mentors

An advert recruiting volunteer mentors for the Young Adult Mentoring project was placed with the Nottingham Community and Voluntary Service (NCVS). This advert was cascaded to other CVS organisations in Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire too. Some volunteer mentors were recruited through information talks given at universities and colleges and some were recruited through an advert placed on the Nottinghamshire Probation Trust website.

The Volunteer Mentors conveyed a range of reasons for why they wanted to volunteer for the Young Adult Offender Mentoring project. Some were undertaking undergraduate degrees and as part of the course were required to undertake some voluntary work relevant to the field of work they were interested in.

> *I am doing a criminology degree and we are required to do 150 hours of voluntary work within the criminology sector. I chose probation as I would like to work with young offenders – so thought this would be a good experience.* (Participant 4)

> *Basically I'm in the final year of my Youth Justice degree at University and I want to work in youth justice, so I thought this would give me a good experience.* (Participant 5)

Another participant spoke of how she was motivated to apply for the Volunteer Mentor Scheme as she had been out of work for a while and wanted a change in career direction.

> *I wanted a change in career. I previously worked in a prison and then gave that up to become a full-time mum. I was interested in working in the probation service so I thought I would do some volunteering. I also enjoy helping people, so thought mentoring would be an excellent opportunity for me.* (Participant 6)

Other participants made reference to becoming involved in opportunities which would allow them to help people. For instance, in the case of one participant, she wanted to help support young offenders based on her nephew's experiences of the lack of support he received when he was released from prison. In the capacity of a volunteer mentor, she felt she could support other offenders who may be in need of support.

> *In my past employments, I always worked to help people. I have worked with young offenders in the past and have done a bit of preventative work with them, which I think is vital, based on my own experiences. I really wanted to be a volunteer mentor based on my own personal experiences. My nephew spent a lot*

of time when in and out of prison, but that support was just not there when he was released. In my own opinion, everyone's got something positive about them, the young offenders just need somebody to work with them and trust. Also having my own personal experiences with my nephew, I feel I can relate to the young offenders. (Participant 7)

The volunteer mentors went through a carefully thought out recruitment process. Those interested in applying to be a volunteer mentor were asked to submit 250 words detailing why they wanted to be a volunteer mentor and details of the skills they possess that they thought would be of use to their role as a volunteer mentor. The Volunteer Mentor Coordinator reviewed these and invited suitable candidates for an informal interview, lasting approximately an hour to an hour and half. In the informal interview participants were asked to complete a questionnaire about their aims and ambitions and their thoughts about youth justice, the police and the Criminal Justice System. Those who were successful at this stage of interview were invited to a second interview with the Volunteer Mentor Coordinator and the Employment, Training, Accommodation and Benefits Manager, NPT. During this interview participants were asked to take part in role play, to ascertain how they would deal with different situations and probed further as to their skills and abilities. In total fifteen people were interviewed and thirteen were selected to be volunteer mentors.

The Volunteer Mentor training was covered over four days and included topics such as lone working, communication skills, diversity and equality, safeguarding, motivational interviewing and drug awareness (including legal highs) training. Several other topics were included, specific to working with young offenders, such as influence of peers, gangs and perceptions of young people. Mentors were asked to evaluate the training they had received in terms of its usefulness in working with young adult offenders. The majority of volunteer mentor participants agreed that the training was very useful and commented on several aspects of it.

I found it really useful. There were a lot of things that I would have not have thought of before. I have teenager myself so things like motivational interviewing are normal for me. But other things such as body language and safety precautions such as sitting at end of table are things that I would not have thought of. (Participant 4)

The training was very useful. We learnt more about the practical side of working in this field. At Uni we learn about the theory side of this type work. So it helped to join up dots between the theory and practice. (Participant 5)

The role play stuff was very useful. There were lots of different cards each with a different person on- all representing different types of people in society. One was a Black Afro-Caribbean Male and another was an English male who was in a successful job. I had a card rich guy with his own car and house. Anyhow the task

made me realise how things are different for different people. It was really beneficial thinking through the things they had been through. (Participant 9)

Volunteer mentors were asked how the training could be improved. Generally speaking most stated that the training was more than adequate to cover their role as a volunteer mentor. However one participant suggested a 'top-up refresher' training every now and again, especially in relation to the drug awareness training. Two participants suggested bringing in young offenders (who had been mentored) and mentors to come and speak with the group of new recruits – to share their experiences and also provide the new recruits with the opportunity to ask questions.

Relevant participants were asked questions relating to the matching process (i.e. between mentee and mentor). It was clear from the interview with the Volunteer Mentor Co-ordinator that matches were carefully thought out. Generally speaking, the Volunteer coordinator attempted to match like for like gender, ethnicity and religion. However this was not always possible, depending on the diversity and availability of volunteer mentors. In cases where like for like matches could not be made, then a closest match would be made (e.g. if religious background could not be matched then level of religiosity would be matched). Other factors were also taken in to consideration when matching mentees and mentors. For instance, if the young offender had a history of violence against women then he would only be matched with a male.

5.7 Mentors' experiences of the project

Volunteer mentors were asked a number of questions to ascertain how they experienced being involved in the project. Questions were asked about their expectations of being a mentor, the types of things they did with the mentees, the support they received throughout the process and what they were planning to do with the newly acquired mentoring skills.

Most volunteer mentor participants stated that before they had gone through the training process they had a clear idea of what their role as a mentor would entail. Participants felt that they would be helping mentees with things such as:

- supporting the mentee to achieve the objectives outlined at the beginning of the process,
- helping mentees to acquire the tools to achieve objectives,
- helping mentees to help themselves,
- helping/supporting mentees to arrange and attend appointments
- completing benefits, housing and college application forms
- assistance in looking for work, preparing CVs and for interviews

- working in collaboration with Offender Managers/Probation officers and other agencies
- general support and guidance in regards to personal issues

Most mentors had a face-to-face meeting with their mentees on a weekly basis. In some cases phone contact was also maintained during the week, especially when the mentee was experiencing a personal crisis and needed the extra support and guidance. Telephone contact was also maintained in cases where the mentee had an interview or an appointment (to help them prepare, remind them of the appointment, and then after the appointment – to see how they got on). In all cases the mentoring arrangement was open-ended, until the mentee needed their support or until the mentee's order had finished. Mentors reported to have conducted many of the activities detailed above with their mentees. Some examples are provided below.

We'd normally start with an update on what he'd been up to, looking for jobs etc. We'd talk about general stuff, family friends etc. I'd been and opened a bank account with him. Then his benefits got stopped so I offered to talk to benefits people with him. He once brought a housing form along for us to fill out. Some weeks he didn't want to do anything in particular. (Participant 6)

I've completed housing forms. With some mentees I have helped them if they want to bid for properties. Generally speaking I make contact with them on a weekly basis and try to keep that contact open with them. (Participant 7)

I helped my mentee with looking for jobs, he wanted to get on to an apprenticeship scheme so I helped him look for relevant information also helped him with filling out forms for his provisional licence. (Participant 5)

As well as helping mentees with practical things such as looking for a job, housing and benefits, the mentors also recognised the importance of developing a trusting relationship with mentees and praising them and providing positivity when appropriate.

It is really important to develop that trusting relationship so they can come to you if they do have any problems; it's about catching that trigger that might lead to them re-offending. For instance, one of my mentees told me she was going to move out as she felt her grandma did not want her there. She was going to move in with the girl who she had originally committed the offence with. So because she trusted me, she told me and I suggested we talked to her grandma. As it happened the grandma did not want her to move out. (Participant 5)

It's important to provide that encouragement and praise, to tell him how well he is doing, e.g. for not drinking, or for going to his appointment. I may be the only person in his life at that particular moment who recognised the small, but ever so good steps he is taking. (Participant 6)

I'd always use the first couple of sessions and then the first half an hour of subsequent sessions to find out if there was anything they wanted to talk about, or wanted help with – just to get to know them and to develop that relationship with them. I do gym bonding sessions with them (mentees). It is good cos we can talk about things outside probation, what they doing in personal life and courses etc. It is still official and professional, but we can have a laugh, it is laid back and relaxed. It shows them that I do the same things as them and that they can relate with to you. (Participant 9)

Only one participant felt that their perception of mentoring had changed since going through the process of mentoring young offenders. The reason for a change in this participant's attitude towards mentoring was less about the types of tasks/activities they would be doing with the mentee, but more about the mentee's attitudes and confidence levels and the level of effort needed to keep the mentee engaged with the programme. These points are further contextualised in the quotation below.

I didn't think it would be this difficult, especially dealing with mentees' lack of enthusiasm, they can have a bad temper, they can't be bothered, their low self-esteem. I just didn't realise first off. I mixed with people don't really mix with. Yes my perception of mentoring has changed. I now know that to some extent you have to stalk people, be on their case, and chase them up, with some you have to chase every other day. If you leave them, then they don't turn up. All this being on their case constantly makes them think that someone cares. It could be that I'm the only the positive person they've seen all week. .So you need to build that trust and confidence with them, so they know that when they see me that they can confide in me, they know that I may be able to help. (Participant 6)

When asked how the mentors had personally benefited from being involved in the programme, participants responded in three main ways. Firstly, mentors commented that they had benefited from the personal satisfaction of knowing that they had helped and supported someone to achieve their personal goals and objectives (e.g. finding a job, increasing confidence, enrolling on a college course, finding their own accommodation and setting up a home) and also spoke of how mentoring had helped them to feel more empowered and confident.

Mentoring changed me in knowing that I have helped a person to achieve what they wanted to achieve. Also the satisfaction of knowing that you can help change others' lives and you most certainly have the power to change your own – so empowering, in a way you're benefiting yourself. (Participant 5)

I enjoy helping people, making a difference to people's lives. Because they have offended, families often turn their back on them, so they don't have that support from family, listening to them, not judging them. Personally the whole mentoring

experience gave me more confidence, being a stay at home mum, I kind of isolated myself, so it helped me, talking to people to again. (Participant 6)

It has helped me to look at things differently. This whole process makes you look at what you've achieved. It's a feel good factor, it makes you feel positive, which in turn more positive things happen in your own life. I feel empowered to achieve more and set my goals higher. (Participant 9)

Secondly, some mentors commented that they had benefited from the insights in to how difficult life can be for a young adult offender and the pattern of poor life management, lack of emotional development and the link to crime and offending.

It has opened my eyes to how difficult life can be if you don't have a basic set of skills and coping mechanisms. These are all things we learn and are not born with. With young adult offenders, they have never had to learn them. I can now see link between poor life management, crime and lack of emotional development. (Participant 4)

Thirdly, mentors commented on how valuable the programme had been in terms of gaining experience in the probation sector and working with young adult offenders.

Gaining experience has been a real personal benefit for me. I received a certificate which shows that I've done some voluntary work for the probation service. It is a bonus step to gaining job; it helps to put the experience down on my CV. (Participant 5)

I will carry on with mentoring. I want a career in probation. These days you find it so hard to do to get in to anywhere so it has been good to volunteer, to get experience. (Participant 6)

Most volunteer mentors stated that they would continue with volunteer mentoring, some with the Probation Service and others had applied for mentoring with other schemes (e.g. Princes Trust). A few participants who had undertaken mentoring specifically to gain experience of working with young adult offenders stated that they would go on to look for employment opportunities within the Probation Service.

5.8 Involvement of the Community and Voluntary Service (CVS)

The Nottingham Community and Voluntary Service (NCVS) were approached by NPT to see how they could be involved in wider delivery of probation services. The involvement of community and voluntary organisations in probation services delivery is extremely resonant at the moment, with the transformation of offender rehabilitation and the termination of

local Probation Trusts coming 'on stream' the end of May 2014. Briefly - and as articulated in the second 'Target Operating Model' (MOJ, 2014) - the reforms comprise:

- Opening up of the market to a diverse range of new rehabilitation providers, incentivised through PbR;
- A new public sector National Probation Service (NPS) which will be part of NOMS and which will manage offenders who pose the highest risk of serious harm and who have committed the most serious crimes;
- The extension of supervision after release to nearly all offenders leaving custody; and
- a new "through the prison gate" resettlement service across England and Wales.
- est. 265,000 (low/medium risk) cases moved to Community Rehabilitation Companies (CRCs) and 50,000 (most dangerous cases) to the NPS

Critics and criticisms of the proposed changes have been numerous (see for example, British Journal of Community Justice, Winter 2013 'Transforming Rehabilitation' special edition) and this report is not the forum to articulate these academic, philosophical and moral objections. Suffice to say for the aims and objectives of this research project, the Transforming Rehabilitation has been unhelpful in facilitating and promoting new 'probation-led' interventions. This may go some way to explaining some of the aforementioned 'buy-in' to the mentoring project. Equally, however, it is important that the NPT and other stakeholders do not hide behind the 'Transforming Rehabilitation' proposals to explain the shortfalls of the mentoring project. What this report has palpably demonstrated is that there are structural, managerial and process issues that remain relevant in spite of the TR agenda.

Involvement of the CVS in the mentoring project was something that came out of a wide ranging engagement between the CVS and the Probation Trust in Nottinghamshire. The NPT interim strategy for a volunteer and mentoring service (NPT: March 2013) included engagement with the third sector to develop a volunteer network which would be promoted by the voluntary and community organisations involved. Interim steps included exploring opportunities for work with the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Criminal Justice Board, Community Safety Partnerships and other relevant organisations to support the development of these schemes in the criminal justice system and in local communities.

In the quotation below, the participant interviewed from CVS describes how they became involved in the project.

> *One of the things I am looking at is how we can build links for community and voluntary organisations as suppliers of services to the Probation Trust and that comes in a number of forms – offender management, offender rehabilitation etc. So with the increasing contracting out for public services there is clearly a role for community groups and we were opening up that dialogue.* (Participant 14)

It was from these discussions that the CVS became involved in the Volunteer Mentoring programme. The involvement of the CVs was two-fold. Firstly to provide practical assistance to recruit volunteer mentors and secondly, to see how the particular programme could continue into the future. These points are contextualised with the extract below.

> *Well our involvement was twofold. Firstly to provide practical assistance to recruit mentors, we (the CVS) were actually one of the routes to attract people in. There was also a longer term exploration to see how the programme could be continued to be delivered, once the Probation Trust had ceased and that's focal to the Community Rehabilitation Companies.* (Participant 14)

In terms of providing practical support to recruit volunteer mentors, this was achieved through placing a carefully worded advert, prepared by the Volunteer Mentor Coordinator and CVS staff, with the CVS. This advert was placed on their notice boards and on the website. Of the 13 volunteer mentors recruited, five were recruited through the CVS.

Discussions around the exploration of how a volunteer mentoring programme could continue in to the future became rather stalled, largely due to the uncertainty of who the CVS need to be in talks with. There will undoubtedly be a transition phase from the period when the Probation Trust ceases to exist and the Community Rehabilitation Companies come into existence to manage the day to day delivery of probation services. The CVS have a vested interest in being part of these discussions, however until there is more certainty in regards to how provision of services within Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire will be managed and by whom there is limited scope for developing these discussions.

S5. Conclusions and recommendations

This report has set the context for and details findings from the Young Adult Offender Volunteer Mentoring Project Evaluation. The following conclusions and recommendations are presented to inform the future development and review of mentoring schemes to support offender management.

Conclusions

- The Young Adult Offender Volunteer Mentoring project was a small scale scheme, which was funded at £1500 for the costs of recruitment and training of volunteer mentors but did not cover the coordination and management costs, which were added on to the existing commitments of the REACH scheme.
- The need for the scheme was identified when the offer of Safer Nottinghamshire Board funding was received, through short notice consultation at the beginning of June 2013 with members of the YAO Project Group, including YAO semi-specialist offender managers, on ideas for using this funding to support work with young adult offenders.
- The idea of mentors was consistent with previous discussions of the Project Group on the gaps in services for young people. However the need was not tested otherwise, funds having to be used by the end of March 2014.
- The earlier YAO Project Group discussion had identified that some teams had paid or volunteer mentors but that these did not appear to be available to all. This was another motivation for investing in volunteer mentor provision.
- Although the number of referrals received in to the project was not as many as originally thought, the project has been provided a valuable learning experience for the a number of stakeholders.
- It is worth noting that other interventions paid for by the Safer Nottinghamshire Board funding, e.g. a Legal Drivers course and practical support for purposeful use of time, such as equipment or training, did not suffer from the lack of referrals experienced for volunteer mentors. This suggests that the nature of mentoring and its implications for the work of the offender manager and the offender management – offender relationship requires greater thought about how these relationships are implemented in the context of use of volunteer mentors.
- In cases where matches were made, mentors developed good relationships with their mentees and were able to provide guidance and assistance with a range of issues including helping mentees to search and apply for voluntary work, jobs, apprenticeships and college courses, look and apply for housing and benefits as well support to help develop confidence and deal with personal issues.
- Mentors also greatly benefited from participating in the project. For instance, those who had expressed an interest in working with young adult offenders and wished to pursue a career in this area were able to gain valuable experience.

- While the research has identified benefits, particularly for volunteer mentors themselves, the project fell victim to the common assumption that mentors are inherently 'a good thing', rather than being a carefully planned and implemented intervention. There was also an incorrect assumption that what had worked for REACH mentors could automatically be applied in the same way for this cohort of mentors.

- It is important to note that this research was a small scale study and findings are based on interviews with a small number of participants, thus the results are not generalizable to other mentoring schemes. However important lessons can be learned from the findings presented in this report.

- While the scheme was small scale and short notice the experience of it from a range of perspectives has provided an opportunity to learn lessons about the introduction of new intervention resources in general, and specifically about implementation of mentor schemes which rely for their effectiveness on offender management referrals.

- The learning points are potentially relevant to Community Rehabilitation Company intervention managers, commissioners of interventions, including partnerships, commissioners of mentor schemes, providers of interventions and specifically mentor schemes to support offender management, including those in the voluntary sector, and to CRC and NPS offender managers.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made to potential commissioners, providers and offender managers concerned with interventions in general and mentor schemes in particular. The learning points below relate specifically to *intervention management* and *working with offender managers and probation officers.* They are followed by a general recommendation about communication of the findings of this report to commissioners and providers of interventions and of mentor services in particular.

Intervention Management

As with any new programme, development of a new intervention requires careful consideration, consultation with key stakeholder groups, implementation planning and development of effective monitoring tools. The points detailed below, provide the general principles applying to initiatives of this kind, relevant to those who may be designing and planning to deliver similar interventions.

Strategic development of the project
- Strategic development of the project requires the development of clear and concise aims and objectives and monitoring and evaluation processes e.g. how is 'success' measured (i.e. in the case of the young adult offending project, it was merely the number of matches made between volunteer mentors and young offenders). It is worth noting here that detailed monitoring arrangements were being considered

(based on the REACH system), until the slow rate of referrals rendered this unrealistic.

- It is important to take steps to minimise the 'implementation gap' between policy and practice, which is predicated on clearly defined aims and more importantly a good understanding of any barriers (cultural, practical etc.) to implementation. The 'nuts and bolts' of implementation requires careful consideration and documenting at the planning stage.
- It is important to consider the wider issue of defining and challenging organisational silos that may prohibit joined-up working; this necessitates a commitment to greater 'knowledge transfer' and a 'risk assessment' of potential barriers to effective communication (see below).
- Management to implement ad-hoc interventions with a 'holistic' awareness about how this fits in with the overarching offender management 'business model' (with a critical focus on the 'reducing reoffending' agenda)

Engagement and communication

- It is important, from the outset (preferably planning stage and thereinafter), to engage Offender Managers/Probation Officers to 'sell' the programme in a way that those affected do not see it as a 'chore' or a 'tick box' exercise.
- It is important to take recognition of OM and PO workloads and to develop a realistic dialogue with them about how programmes can be delivered within existing workload challenges (e.g. that the project, if operationalised effectively, might have a positive impact on workloads in the medium-term).
- Part of the engagement process with Offender Managers/Probation Officers requires development and implementation of a communication strategy. Included within this is the need to take time to visit teams of OMs regarding new projects (and more vitally differentiation between projects/programmes which may at first seem to have some 'overlap').
- There is also a need for wider publicity around future projects. Depending on the scale of future projects this may include posters in Probation Offices (to remind Offender Managers/Probation Officers of the scheme) and as 'news' items in existing communication bulletins (electronic or otherwise).
- Staff should also be advised about how details/updates will be communicated and when. A clear time line should be provided and should this slip, staff should be informed the reasons for the delay
- Staff delivering the intervention/programme, in the case of this project – volunteer mentors, should be encouraged to disseminate positive outcomes. This helps with 'buy-in'.

Management, monitoring and evaluation

- It is important to have a person who is managing the project on a day-to day basis and better joined-up communication between different parts of the project and more generally the 'business'. Lack of clarity about who is managing the project may lead to confusion and may hinder the success of the project.
- Transparency and documentation of processes is vital – information should not be held locally (subject of course to usual security protocols). Where possible project files should be stored on shared drives for all relevant parties to access. It is also important for all interactions to be minuted and 'actions' set and then followed up after every meeting/communication.
- Exact procedures for documentation of processes will depend on the scale of the project, e.g. for small scale projects it may be appropriate to share relevant documentation over email. Alternatively better use of IT may help aid the process of information sharing (although it is recognised that this project did utilise existing IT infrastructure).
- Mechanisms for checking that individuals affected by any proposals are clear about what the project seeks to achieve and how the intervention will be rolled out. Additionally, someone needs to be assigned responsibility for it.
- Related to the previous point, how does the intervention under consideration align with the academic literature about 'what works' and how can this be reconciled with professional judgement
- Measuring and evaluating progress. Informal/anecdotal feedback is vital to the operation of probation, but probationers' progress should also be formally measured using existing standardised protocols.

Intervention Management and Offender Managers

- It is vital to empower frontline staff (i.e. Offender Managers and Probation Officers), not only so they are part of the process and provide input to the design of the mentoring programme but also so they lead the project from the ground (e.g. provide referrals).
- It is important to be aware of the potential for supervisory fragmentation when involving external mentors (especially when voluntary). Emphasis needs to be placed on relationships being based on principles of continuity, consistency, commitment and consolidation (see Holt, 2000).
- Linked to the above point, management of mentors' relationship with Offender Managers is inextricably linked to communication and effective planning processes. Thus provision of processes and mechanisms whereby Offender Managers/Probation Officers develop relationships/meet their supervisees' mentors is imperative.
- Offender Managers and Probation Officers should be made aware of the implications of non-engagement, namely hindering the successes of the project.

- Offender managers should be made aware that they will be required to participate in the monitoring and evaluation of the project – even if they haven't referred in to the service, providing reasons for why not, thus helping to identify further barriers which may be inhibiting referrals in to the programme.

Commissioners and providers of interventions
- It is recommended that the findings of this report are made available widely to commissioners and providers of interventions to support offender management and rehabilitation, and particularly to those considering the provision of mentor services

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