“It’s a unique experience and will really enrich your sense of being a human being. It is very liberating to just do something for the sake of it and not for any material gain. Being a mentor has being an inspiring and humbling experience. It has made me feel stronger.”

Mentoring and Befriending: A case study approach to illustrate its relevance to cohesion and cross cultural issues

MBF Strategic Development Group Report
April 2008
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Foreword by Phil Hope  
Minister for the Third Sector, Cabinet Office

I welcome this constructive new report from the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation. It is a useful addition to the growing body of evidence that one to one voluntary engagement, particularly mentoring and befriending, helps people who are socially isolated, or new to the community, to contribute to making those communities stronger.

The report offers a range of examples of mentoring and befriending programmes working hard to strengthen local communities. It recognises that community is first and foremost about individuals, and how they interact and support each other. Through mentoring and befriending, individuals can gain understanding and respect, improve people’s lives and create environments that allow all individuals to flourish.

The Office of the Third Sector encourages the expansion of good quality mentoring and befriending programmes in helping to develop cohesive communities and reaching out to people whom government often cannot reach. I recommend that all who are involved in working in the community read this report and consider how they too could use mentoring and befriending to reduce social isolation and promote cohesion.

Phil Hope MP  
Minister for the Third Sector
Executive summary

We have endeavoured to examine all the aspects of community cohesion that affect our everyday lives and influence the way in which we interact with each other. Whilst the case studies and research draw from a range of experience from intergenerational work, young offenders, education, there is a considerable amount of work around new immigration that cannot be ignored.

Mentoring and befriending happens, in the main, at a time of transition for the recipient and the most obvious and major time of transition is when a new immigrant arrives in the country. However, the experiences and practices involved hold true for all sectors and these should be used as an illustration for how mentoring and befriending can support community work in all its aspects.

We offer a short introduction to the concepts of integration and cohesion and believe that they are not just abstract concepts but are, first and foremost, about people.

We agree with the guidance on community cohesion (2002) that suggests there are certain indicators evident in cohesive communities:

- There is a common vision and a sense of belonging for all communities;
- The diversity of people’s different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued;
- Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities;
- Strong and positive relationships are being developed between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and within neighbourhoods.

‘Draft Guidance on Community Cohesion’ (2002) (ref 18) – refers to the reference list at end of this report – format used throughout the report

We examined the approach taken in the Commission on Integration and Cohesion (COIC) report (ref 8) and believe that it provides an accurate picture of life in our society. We, therefore, present the work of mentoring and befriending programmes using the definition of integration and cohesion developed by the COIC report.

We have also used the key factors in understanding the level of cohesion and integration in our local communities as identified in the COIC report to provide a range of evidence to illustrate the broad reach of mentoring and befriending in all sectors. These are detailed later in the report.

We have offered many examples of research and case studies that support this view and we make a number of recommendations that will help develop a more consistent and widespread use of mentoring and befriending across all communities.

Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (MBF) Cohesion Strategy Group
- Steve Leach, MBF (Chair)
- Chris Badman, Refugee Council
- Tamsin Alger, TimeBank
- Kerry Burtill, TimeBank
- Juan Varela, Northern Refugee Centre
- Liz Wilson, MBF
- Wendy Ohandjian, Friends Volunteers
- Hailu Hagos, RAMP, Newham
- Jo Watts, St Mary’s Community Centre
- Rachel Nicholson, MBF

Recommendations

The recommendations we make are outlined here in brief and more fully in the summary at the end of the report.

The government needs to:

1. Openly endorse mentoring and befriending as a key positive impact in the development of a more cohesive society
2. Confirm mentoring and befriending as a key strategy for all government departments to develop
3. Promote mentoring and befriending to other services, e.g. local authorities, policy makers, direct government workers
4. More proactively influence the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) agenda throughout the commercial world
5. Recognise the importance of the voluntary engagement element of mentoring and befriending and promote it within local, national and government strategies
6. Endorse the idea that all programmes should be working to a benchmark standard of good practice
7. Fund more effectively and strategically one-to-one individual mentoring and befriending support in all the areas identified in the COIC report
8. Establish more widely immigration and early intervention support programmes using one-to-one mentoring and befriending support mechanisms in the initial phase of settlement
9. Acknowledge and fund the need for more specific research in the field to develop better services and more focused strategies and how mentoring and befriending can support this across all sectors
Introduction

Background and rationale

This report has been produced by the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation, with support from strategic partners and programmes in the field of mentoring and befriending, to advise the Cabinet Office, policy makers and stakeholders on current work in the field linked to the government’s priority area of community cohesion.

This report will:
- Highlight examples of current work by mentoring and befriending programmes through case study examples
- Highlight some of the wide-ranging research in the field of community cohesion
- Provide guidance in the effective use of mentoring and befriending in improving community cohesion and understanding

Through this approach we will demonstrate how the work of mentoring and befriending programmes in local settings clearly supports and strengthens cross community links and understanding through the very direct one-to-one support offered by its services.

The role of mentoring and befriending

Discussions on how to overcome the barriers to community cohesion has led central government and other agencies working in the field to consider a range of options to engage communities and build bridges across the racial and cultural divides.

Many interventions have been discussed, from language classes, inter-generational initiatives, cross-cultural programmes through to citizenship exams, however, two of the most widely used interventions have been mentoring and befriending to promote civil, political and economic integration.

Mentoring and befriending are very similar activities with some differences of emphasis. In general, they both involve the development of one-to-one relationships based upon trust, confidentiality and mutual involvement.

The main difference is usually the emphasis placed on working towards goals. Mentoring tends to focus more on goal setting and operates within a clearly defined timeframe whilst befriending tends to develop more informal and supportive social relationships over a longer period of time.

Mentoring and Befriending definitions
- “Befriending is a process whereby two or more people come together with the aim of establishing and developing an informal and social relationship... Ideally the relationship is non-judgmental, mutual, purposeful and there is commitment over time.” (Home Office)
- “Mentoring is a one-to-one, non-judgmental relationship in which an individual voluntarily gives time to support and encourage another. This is typically developed at a time of transition in the mentee’s life, and lasts for a significant and sustained period of time.” (Home Office)

Mutual benefits for mentor and mentee

Case study 1 – St Mary’s Mentoring and Befriending Project, Sheffield

Lucy L is a white English-born volunteer mentor who is helping Shamaila.

...there was a lot of bad press about Muslims. I felt it was important to communicate better with people to prevent misunderstandings, problems and bridge gaps between cultures. I have had no problems communicating with Shamaila.

Shamaila’s confidence is greater, her English is clearer. She said she would like to work in a shop or a pharmacy. Shamaila likes being with people. She’s very clever, bright. ... (the relationship has) opened my mind to what’s different, it’s made me more confident talking about cultural issues. I’ve gained confidence in my conversational skills, talking to people from different backgrounds and breaking down potential barriers.”

Asylum seeker adding value to a local community

Case study 2 – Selva, Imagine Befriending Service, Liverpool

Few people can have contributed more to their communities than volunteer befriender and asylum seeker Shivakuru Selvathurai. Since arriving in England in 2001 he has devoted his life to volunteering. He averages around 40 hours of volunteering commitments every week and has been decorated with prestigious volunteering awards.

He says: “Every night I go to sleep thinking how many people I helped today.”

Selva found Imagine, a Liverpool-based befriending service for people with mental health issues, where he offers befriending support to a British man with a severe mental health problem.

Selva’s story embodies the underlying reason that many asylum seekers and refugees decide to become befrienders or mentors. The option is often one of very limited opportunities on offer to help people in his position to integrate into an unknown and often prejudiced new environment.
‘Empowerment and self determination achieved with mentoring support’

Case study 3 – Safia and Karen, St Mary’s Mentoring and Befriending Project, Sheffield

Karen and Safia were matched in January 2007. Initially they found that they had many similarities; they both had children attending the same secondary school, their children were growing up and wanting to become more independent. Safia talked of her relationship with Karen:

“I told Karen about where I live in the maisonettes. I keep my doorstep clean but where all the rubbish goes it was a mess. I think that they make me live here because I am a Somali and that the place is a mess because I am Somali.

Karen said I could get together with some other people that live where I live and could talk to the council about it. I talked to my neighbour and we spoke to the council. The rubbish area is now kept clean; I think sometimes it is up to me to make things change.”

Research briefing 1: Time Together: Self-evaluation

Every refugee taking part in Time Together completes the same integration questionnaire at the start and at the end of their mentoring relationship, enabling them to assess their own level of integration. Mentors are also required to complete monitoring and evaluation forms. This helps TimeBank measure the impact that mentoring is having on refugee integration, (using Home Office indicators), and enables them to collect quantitative data.

The statistics below are based on self-evaluations completed by 79 mentees and 91 mentors from around the UK.

- 96% of mentees felt they understood more English
- 85% of Time Together mentees who were seeking employment felt that they had made progress during their mentoring relationship
- 88% of mentees said they had more friends from different cultural backgrounds
- 96% of mentees felt they had a better understanding of UK culture and people’s behaviour
- 86% of mentees who took part in the programme felt they knew more about how to access further education courses
- 96% of mentees felt they knew their city better
- 90% of mentees felt at home in the UK
- 57% of mentees volunteered during the programme

Power in Partnership Report (Ref.27)

Research briefing 2: Effectiveness of mentoring programs for youth

Interesting findings show that when programs follow ‘best practices’ their effects are significantly enhanced particularly when strong relationships are formed between mentor and mentee. The research showed a positive effect of mentoring programs on all five types of outcomes examined; emotional/psychological, problem/high-risk behaviour, social competence, academic/educational, and career/employment.

“It appears based on this research that multiple features of relationships, such as frequency of contact, emotional closeness, and longevity, each may make important and distinctive contributions to positive youth outcomes. A further noteworthy result is the support found for the prevailing view that mentoring programs offer the greatest potential benefits to youth who can be considered at-risk.”


They are key tools that can be used in a wide range of situations across all sectors and thus is at the heart of the drive to improve cohesion in our society. The Time Together research opposite illustrates the broad impact mentoring can have improving community cohesion.

The main characteristics of mentoring and befriending put these interventions in a unique position in supporting and strengthening community cohesion in all areas of our society.

- The direct one-to-one nature of the majority of mentoring and befriending support means that it is tailored to individual need
- It is an entirely voluntary relationship on both sides
- It provides a very personal and agreed way of learning
- Community is about individuals: at the heart of mentoring and befriending is the individual
- The work is carried out by real people living in the same communities using skills and experiences developed in those communities. This makes it easier for people to volunteer as it uses their skills and experiences and more importantly, values those skills and experiences developed over time or in the very communities that need them
- The sustained nature of the support means that individuals are empowered to make choices and changes over the long-term as can be seen in the case study opposite (case study 3)
- It is, at its best, a natural process based on an equitable relationship which is mutually beneficial (case study 2)

- The support process is able to quite naturally cross gender, culture and nationality boundaries (case study 1)

An important caveat needs to be highlighted. It is not being argued that mentoring and befriending is able to bring about strong community cohesion on its own but that mentoring and befriending programmes promote understanding on a one-to-one basis, mutual support mechanisms and thus alongside a range of other initiatives will help strengthen community cohesion and understanding.

“...the cultivation of mentoring relationships within comprehensive, multifaceted interventions offers the greatest promise.”

DuBois and Silverthorn (2005) p523 (Ref.13)

One of the great strengths of developing mentoring and befriending relationships is the voluntary nature of the process. Although both mentors/befrienders and, more often, mentees/befriendees may receive encouragement to get involved, the basis of the relationship is that both parties choose to take part.

It is important that this voluntary engagement - the mutual choice element of mentoring and befriending - is recognised and promoted within local, national and Government mentoring strategies and that mentoring and befriending are not seen as a ‘one-size fits all’ solution to, for example, enable refugee integration, where everyone new to the country might be expected to agree to being mentored.
Integration and cohesion

It is useful to remind ourselves that the concepts of integration and cohesion are not just abstract concepts but are, first and foremost, about people.

"Integration and cohesion are all about people and not just policy. The people in local neighbourhoods who have to work to build stronger communities and adapt to changes in the local mix. The people in both settled and new communities who take pride in their contribution to society – and in particular, the young people who often feel disenfranchised by these debates."

Darra Singh, OBE Foreword to the Interim Statement by the Commission on Integration and Cohesion (COIC) February 2007 (ref 8)

The importance of cohesion to any stable political community cannot be over emphasised and is central to the vision for the future of multi-ethnic Britain.

"Britain certainly needs to be 'One Nation' – but understood as a community of communities and a community of citizens, not a place of oppressive uniformity based on a single substantive culture."

The Parekh Report (4.36 p.56) the report of the Commission on the Future of Multi-Ethnic Britain October 2000. (ref 9)

The government's radical agenda is to expand the national debate on cohesion to all aspects of our society and thereby influence policy in a wide range of sectors; housing, policing, industry, education etc. However it has to be recognised that at the heart of the cohesion agenda is the need to deal with racism and encourage respect for diversity.

Indeed, concern has been expressed regarding the very policies used by government for the dispersal of asylum seekers and argues that even for the very good reason of utilising available cheap housing, sending asylum seekers to excluded urban areas is in itself exclusionary and discriminatory.

(Phillimore & Goodsen (2006), Clements (2001), Bloch (2000)) (Refs 21, 6 and 4 respectively)

There is also evidence to suggest that the life of asylum seekers, e.g. in reception centres is contributing more to mental health deterioration than experiences in the asylum seeker’s country of origin.

Research briefing 3: Social cohesion in diverse communities

The research showed that we need to work with settled communities as well as the new ones if we are to break down the barriers to social cohesion. However whilst deprivation and disadvantage play an important role in community cohesion this is not a simple cause and effect relationship and is influenced by a wide range of factors including age, gender, stage of life and migration history as well as ethnicity and religion.

"The analysis of social cohesion in our two case study areas reinforces the importance of the twin elements of social cohesion: eroding disparities, inequalities and social exclusion on the one hand, and nurturing the social infrastructure of neighbourhoods, social relations, interactions and ties on the other."


Case study 4 - 'Friends' Volunteers Befriending Programme, Coventry

Friends Volunteers provides holistic family support to New Community members who are referred by a range of professionals and agencies.

Families must have a child under 13 to access the services they need and any language barrier is overcome with the help of volunteers, also from the New Communities where possible plus local people. This provides a dual support system – one bringing the language skills and cultural knowledge, the other important knowledge of the community and its services.

The beauty of the programme is that the volunteers support the referred families and in return are supported in gaining skills that lead to further education or employment.

The programme has been voted the winner of the Day Care Trust’s ‘Partners in Excellence’ Award for Equality and Inclusion, and has been listed as a model of good practice in the Joseph Rowntree Foundation publication for services for Refugees and Asylum Seekers.

Friends Volunteers holds the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation’s Approved Provider Standard.
Whilst this paper is primarily concerned with direct support to local communities to improve community cohesion and understanding, it must be recognised that other strategies need to be considered to ensure that support is developed in partnership with other government agencies to present an approach that takes in the whole range of issues that can support a sustainable process of integration.

The Parekh report (ref 9) argues for the primacy of common values as the basis for establishing a sense of belonging across all community and cultural areas of our society. This is echoed in the report from the Runnymede Trust Conference:

‘…the challenge for cohesion is to re-imagine Britishness – to create the post-nation state. The cohesion agenda needs to respond to the question whether a sense of belonging is possible without a sense of nationhood based on ethnicity, culture or religion.’

Rob Berkeley (2002) (ref.3)

The Commission for Racial Equality (CRE) (now part of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, EHRC) suggests there are three essential elements of a cohesive society; equality, participation and interaction.

- **Equality**: everyone is treated equally, has a right to fair outcomes, and no-one should expect privileges because of who or what they are
- **Participation**: all groups in society should expect to share in how we make decisions, but also expect to carry the responsibilities of making the society work
- **Interaction**: no-one should be trapped within their own community, and in the truly integrated society, who people work with, or the friendships they make, should not be constrained by race or ethnicity.

CRE response to the establishment of a Commission for Integration and Cohesion October 2005 (ref. 11)

Whatever your local circumstances, building cohesion between communities is a necessary step towards improving people’s quality of life and their opportunity to achieve their potential. Viewed from the outside, a cohesive community is one in which people will want to live and invest.

A theme that runs through the COIC report is the importance of putting together local initiatives to resolve a variety of local integration and cohesion issues. This is further demonstrated by **case study 4**.

“We recognise that experiences differ substantially amongst individuals, between communities and across different localities. However, what we all have in common is a desire to build a strong society where civility and courtesy are the norm, where people are at ease with change, and are committed to being good neighbours and active citizens. A society where opportunities for advancement are there for the taking and prosperity is more evenly distributed.”

Our Shared Future 2007 pp3 (ref 8)

This report shows the connection between the local mentoring and befriending programmes, their recognition of particular local needs and the development of projects, and the overall national strategy in developing cohesive communities. The report links the research in the field to case studies and examples of where local programmes are delivering a service that is resolving local concerns as well as fulfilling the broader aims.

The new approach to integration and cohesion including the new definition (outlined in the next section) allow us to consider the legal and structural issues as well as the individual support and attitudinal issues. This will enable us to illustrate, more effectively, how the work of mentoring and befriending programmes fulfils the local identified need but also sits squarely behind the national strategic objectives.
The COIC definition

There are six main aspects that define an integrated and cohesive community:

1. There is a clearly defined and widely shared sense of the contribution of different individuals and different communities to a future vision for a neighbourhood, city, region or county. Case study 5 illustrates a positive aspect of intergenerational contact.

2. There is a strong sense of an individual’s rights and responsibilities when living in a particular place - people know what everyone expects of them, and what they can expect in return.

3. Those from different backgrounds have similar life opportunities, access to services and treatment. Case study 6 shows how the knowledge and experience of the mentor helps people from new communities access services to become independent and support their families.

4. There is a strong sense of trust in institutions locally to act fairly in arbitrating between different interests and for their role and justifications to be subject to public scrutiny.

In particular trust has been seen to be critical to the success of the mentor relationships for disadvantaged youth and there is a need in programmes to mirror the natural mentoring process in this respect. Ascher (1988) (ref 1)

5. There is a strong recognition of the contribution of both those who have newly arrived and those who already have deep attachments to a particular place, with a focus on what they have in common.

6. There are strong and positive relationships between people from different backgrounds in the workplace, in schools and other institutions within neighbourhoods. Case study 7 shows the success of mentoring which crosses barriers of age, ethnicity and life opportunities. It is clear from these few stories that the range and depth of mentoring and befriending programmes in many sectors is of profound importance in reducing social isolation and increasing cohesion for many people by providing one-to-one support. Mentoring and befriending has an impact at the individual level, where perception and beliefs are challenged and encourages behaviour change. In order to show how mentoring and befriending underpins the work across all sectors to improve cohesion and integration we consider all these factors and offer supporting evidence and case studies of where mentoring and befriending is working positively and successfully to combat the negative impact of these factors on community cohesion and integration.

Ascher (1988) (ref 1)

‘Supporting older people in a highly transient community’

Case study 5 - Older Active People (OAP) programme, West Yorkshire

In the area that OAP serves local older people experience the very significant difficulty that they are living in a highly transient community. The impact of large numbers of students living in the area has disrupted community life, so that there is a lack of neighbourliness, mutual help and support. OAP set up the One-to-One scheme to introduce socially isolated older people to local students and young professionals.

“I enjoy the company very much as I am alone more often than not and I certainly wouldn’t want anyone to stop visiting me. Having visitors gives me something to look forward to”. Hilda 103-year-old member of Older Active People.

“I became a volunteer because I wanted to relate more with my local community and felt that the older generation was a section of society I wouldn’t ordinarily interact with.”

‘Employment – a key factor in resettlement’

Case study 6 - Nic and Godefroid, Refugee Council Programme, London

Godefroid is a refugee from Rwanda, who fled during the genocide in his country. In Rwanda he worked as a doctor specializing in public health and infection. He joined the mentoring programme after being in the UK for over five years, as he was finding it difficult to find a job relevant to his previous experience. Nic worked as a policy officer at an NGO working in social justice, where one of her areas of interest was health issues.

Nic and Godefroid worked to identify different jobs that might be suitable and, crucially, identified the possibility of work opportunities outside London. Nic supported Godefroid to put together an application for a post working in HIV awareness. When he was shortlisted, Nic helped with interview practice and preparation.

Godefroid was appointed to the post of health adviser, with funding to complete his PhD in addition to his salary and has successfully relocated from London and is rebuilding his career.
Key factors affecting cohesion

The key factors in understanding the level of cohesion and integration in our local communities have been identified in the COIC report as:

1. Deprivation
2. Discrimination
3. Crime and anti-social behaviour
4. Level of diversity
5. Immigration
6. Fair allocation of public services
7. Globalisation; the influence of the wider world on local communities

We will now look at each of these factors and draw on research and current case studies to highlight the role of mentoring and befriending in tackling these issues to improve the lives of individuals in our communities.

1. Deprivation

"Deprivation remains a key influencer of cohesion, but the fact that some areas have high deprivation and high cohesion shows that local action can build resilience to its effects."

COIC report pp26 (ref 8)

A recent large-scale study in the USA concluded that young people from disadvantaged communities or those at-risk appear most likely to benefit from participating in mentoring programmes.

"From an applied perspective, findings offer support for continued implementation and dissemination of mentoring programs for youth. The strongest empirical basis exists for utilizing mentoring as a preventative intervention with youth whose backgrounds include significant conditions of environmental risk and disadvantage."

DuBois (2002) pg190 (ref 12)

Evaluation forms from the TimeBank study (ref. 27) indicate that 87% of mentees felt more integrated into UK society than when they started the relationship.

It should be reiterated that mentoring does not in itself change deprivation but it reduces isolation and helps improve access to services.

2. Discrimination

"If the discrimination experienced by some groups within our society continues, we will not be able to achieve the goals we set out in the report for building integration and cohesion."

COIC report pp27 (ref 8)

Prejudice – pre-judgement is reduced through direct contact and increased understanding between individuals and communities, mentoring and befriending works by promoting one-to-one contact and cross cultural understanding. It works on improving attainment rates in schools, linking with those in disadvantaged or isolated communities and on working to improve access to employment, all key factors in the level of discrimination felt in local communities. Case study 8 is an example of how an interfaith approach reduces isolation for women from different cultures.

3. Crime and anti-social behaviour

4. Level of diversity

5. Immigration

6. Fair allocation of public services

7. Globalisation; the influence of the wider world on local communities

We will now look at each of these factors and draw on research and current case studies to highlight the role of mentoring and befriending in tackling these issues to improve the lives of individuals in our communities.

Case study 7 - St Mary The Virgin Church in Wales primary school, Cardiff

This primary school takes positive steps to make sure that every member of its diverse population feels integrated. Many pupils are from Somalia and around two thirds of its population are of the Muslim faith. This is a scheme which sees older, multi-ethnic volunteers forming friendships with pupils and acting as role models.

The programme focuses on the personal development of pupils and also looks at improving and maintaining attendance and general motivation. Judith, the co-ordinator, says that one of the main ways in which this is achieved is by listening in a non-judgemental way to each youngster.

Positive feedback has shown the scheme is working well, especially where the relationship between mentor and pupil has been sustained over a long period of time.

Case study 8 - St Mary's Mentoring and Befriending Project, Sheffield

St. Mary's works with the local Asian Community offering English classes, sewing, childcare qualifications and advocacy. The development of the mentoring and befriending scheme provided an opportunity to create relationships where people can confirm their own cultural identity whilst recognizing and valuing the culture of others.

The client groups cross many faiths and cultures including Asian / Pakistani origin Congolese, Chinese, Bangladeshi, Somali, Moroccan and Iranian.

The aims of the mentoring and befriending scheme are to: encourage people to develop ordinary relationships which break down the subtle and implicit misconceptions and barriers that exist between people of different cultural, ethnic and faith backgrounds.

The scheme also aims to foster relationships and develop the self-esteem, confidence and skills of women from minority communities to reach their potential in relation to employability and social inclusion.
The perceived rise in crime and anti-social behaviour is the result of a number of interlocking factors but a lack of understanding and contact between local people of different age groups and cultures is one of them.

One programme is trying to address this issue in Tower Hamlets: the Brick Lane Youth Development Association has mentees referred from the Youth Offending Teams as detailed in case study 9.

Mentoring and befriending programmes address these issues, particularly amongst the young and uses one-to-one contact to change hearts and minds. Unsurprisingly, there has been a great deal of research in this area across many countries. Research briefing 4 and 5 demonstrate this further.

Mentoring programmes can be used to provide young people with positive role models and help them realise that they can contribute to the local community in a positive rather than anti-social way.

The Case study 10 demonstrates how mentoring and befriending can tackle isolation through the sensitive matching of shared interests.

Research briefing 4: Mentoring and community intervention in the USA

This study assessed the contribution of mentoring towards improving compliance with a community-based intervention for court-referred adolescent male Persons in Need of Supervision (PINS). Male adolescent PINS who utilized mentoring were ten times more likely to remain in the community-based intervention during the initial six months.


Research briefing 5: Keeping young people engaged (KYPE)

The findings suggest that according to the young people, the main benefit of working with a KYPE-funded PA or mentor was the one-to-one support offered. The data suggests that three specific practices were deemed as crucial to the success of KYPE: the need for a well-planned, cohesive implementation strategy and longer term funding, the provision of intensive, one-to-one holistic support for young people; and integrated services and positive networks of inter-agency communication.

Cooper, Sutherland & Roberts. (2007) (ref 18)

‘Role models for young people in Tower Hamlets’

Case study 9 - Brick Lane Youth Development Association, London

The Brick Lane Youth Development Association (BLYDA) in Tower Hamlets is an independent voluntary youth organisation and its goal is to empower local young people by providing advice, information, education and practical support.

BLYDA has set up the “Shaathi Mentoring Project”. Older members of the community are recruited as mentors. The project is about forming real, long lasting friendships. The young ‘mentees’ are all aged 8 to 18 and come into the scheme via referral from Youth Offending Teams, schools, the Metropolitan Police, parents and social services.

Positive role models try to steer mentees away from a life of anti-social behavior. Shaathi is a Best Practice project and holds MBF’s Approved Provider Standard.

J is a 13 year old Bangladeshi girl who is currently in foster care with her three siblings. “Since starting the mentoring programme I have made new friends and have visited so many places with my mentor. It’s been really helpful in changing my outlook on life and as a result my self-confidence and esteem have increased. The one to one sessions were excellent. They allowed me to talk to someone about my personal issues.”

Jobrul, a mentor, says: - “We’re very proud of the fact that some of the mentees have gone on to become mentors themselves.”

‘Filling the gaps that statutory services do not reach’

Case study 10 - Community Resource Team, Hackney Befriending Scheme

Established in 1996 this scheme provides friendship and companionship for isolated, lonely and housebound older people aged 50 years and over living in the London Borough of Hackney.

One client is a 70 year old male who is single and lives alone. He is a Methodist and is Afro-Caribbean. He has acute sight problems, high blood pressure and uses a stick to walk. The client was matched with a 47 year old, male volunteer who is a Christian and UK Black.

“I feel I have gained a friend who shares some of my interests. I also feel I have been a source of information for the volunteer and that he has learnt more from our discussions regarding our different cultures, backgrounds and countries of origin” says the client.

The befriender says: “I feel my skills have been greatly improved through the training and counseling I have received from the scheme.”

In addition his relationship with the client has become deeper and he feels they have ‘bridged the gap’ by an increased awareness and respect of each other’s background and culture.
4. The level of diversity

This is an area in which early intervention, support and understanding can have a great positive impact on improving cohesion in communities and reducing conflict through adaptation and acceptance.

One of the unique elements of the services in case studies 11 and 12 is the way that they encourage diversity and integration between cultures.

5. Immigration

Early intervention and support are key factors in reducing tensions and segregation between settled and new communities. Current examples of initiatives in this area are the Danish government’s implementation of a mentoring programme in which older Danish Muslims act as mentors to Muslim youth to promote democracy. The other example is in the UK with the launch of Mosaic in 2007, an initiative using successful Muslim leaders to engage young Muslims to raise their expectations and develop their talents. Again one-to-one contact is a key aspect of this and it also reduces mental and physical health issues.

“although as a nation we can see the benefits of immigration, some people are concerned about its impact in their local area”

COIC report pp33 (ref.8)

“For those who have left everything behind, the flight from persecution is just the beginning. Building a new life from scratch and settling into British culture with all its complexities requires the tailored services and one-to-one support in which our voluntary organisations excel.”


It is important not to underestimate the resourcefulness of new immigrants: many are resourceful and highly motivated and can access friends and family and use the experience of fellow country people and other refugees to make sense of their new community and access resources.

However, there are many who are alone and vulnerable and are unable to access support from their group resources. This is where cross-cultural one-to-one support can be vital in countering isolation and further exclusion.

Whilst the below study focuses on advocacy it is easy to make the connection between all one-to-one work with new immigrants and for advocacy in the article read mentoring and befriending.

Mentoring and befriending offers precisely this one-to-one voluntary engagement that helps counteract prejudices. In recognising the barriers to cohesion and positive settlement it offers understanding and experiences to people through the development of a one-to-one relationship which challenges these false perceptions, as shown in case study 13.

Research briefing 6: Approaches to advocacy for refugees and asylum seekers

“Refugees in Britain have exceptionally high needs for guidance and support on a range of issues such as housing, social services and health care...Good quality, effective and timely advocacy support is therefore essential.”

Cambridge, P & Williams, L (2004) (ref.5)
The recent mentor evaluation carried out by Time Together found that 97% of mentors felt that their volunteering enabled them to either challenge negative myths about refugees or reinforce their already positive image of refugees.

"Time and again, mentors talk about the one-to-one nature of the relationship. It is this ability to establish real connections between cultures, based on friendship and a shared commitment to learn from each other, that is at the heart of the success."

Mentoring for Migrants (2007) (ref.19)

It is extraordinary to note that today’s conventions regarding asylum and refugees are based upon events that took place barely 50 years ago; when Hungarian refugees fleeing in their thousands to Austria and the surrounding countries produced one of the most remarkable support efforts of modern times. 37 different countries opened their borders to over 180,000 refugees with 100,000 of these settled within 10 weeks. A remarkable story of community spirit spreading across national boundaries but one wonders where the impetus, will and empathy have gone. The question is whether in our supposedly more prosperous and adaptable world such a remarkable effort in such a short space of time would ever be possible again.

"...50 years is 'a blink of the eye in human history'. In the world of refugees a huge amount has been achieved over the past half century – but as the response to the Hungarian crisis reminds us, a certain degree of spontaneity, altruism and pure generosity of spirit seems to have been lost along the way."
Refugees (2006) p2 (ref.23)

A testament to the fortitude, resilience and skills of these early refugees is the incredible way in which these people, who left with nothing, were still able to make remarkable contributions to the societies they settled in. Such experience:

"...is also a powerful antidote to the common view that refugees are a burden on their host society."
Refugees (2006) p13 (ref.23)

One such refugee featured in the journal ‘Refugees’ was Andras Grof, changing his name to Andrew Grove, who became the chairman of Intel the multinational computing conglomerate.

"...he is disheartened by the generations and generations going through the same struggles... as if they were the multitudes of Hungarians replayed and repeated."
Refugees (2006) p13 (ref.23)

It is important to note that the ‘generosity of spirit’ mentioned above is still out there and mentoring and befriending programmes give the many people who wish to contribute the means to do so in their local communities.
‘Independent support made all the difference’

Case study 15 – Charlotte and Mohammed, RAMP Mentoring project, Newham

When Charlotte, a British mentor, was matched with Iraqi asylum seeker, Mohammed, he was living in a time of extreme uncertainty; his claim for asylum had been rejected and he was appealing against the decision. He had taken on the role of sole carer for his niece Aysha, and these responsibilities, coupled with meetings with his barrister, meant that his English lessons had been disrupted.

Charlotte, a former English tutor, helped develop this by reading books with him, watching films in English and encouraging him to read to Aysha in English instead of Arabic.

Charlotte explains: “Mohammed’s English has definitely improved since I first met him – with persistence, patience and understanding our communication has got much better and we understand each other very well.”

Helping clients with practical issues such as communication with the Home Office, language support and accessing training and education is a large part of the RAMP Mentor’s role. But mentoring at RAMP is also about having fun and Charlotte describes visits to The London Eye, London Zoo and the beach together.

Following their appeal, Mohammed and Aysha have now been granted ‘indefinite leave to remain’. He says that having someone independent to talk to about his problems has made a real difference.

Research briefing 7: Mentoring at-risk Latino children and their parents

This study revealed positive gains on social skills for the mentored children as reflected in self ratings and mothers’ ratings on the Social Skills Rating Scale.

“A major finding is the change in mothers toward an increasingly positive perception of their children... on even more impressive finding is that by the end of the program, mothers of mentored children saw substantial decreases in all three problem behaviours (externalising, internalising, hyperactivity).”

The researchers did comment on the need for people involved in these cross-cultural programmes to adhere to the principles of community practice, including empowerment and multi-cultural competence.

Conclusion

In this report we have considered just some of the many different ways in which mentoring and befriending can be seen to have a positive impact on community cohesion. It enables people to take an active part in local cross community work. It is also an important tool in professional and self-development.

Mentoring and befriending is an early intervention process that leads people who participate into supporting other services or engagement directly into the local community. It is about developing local community resources; shared experiences and skills across communities. The major strength of using mentoring and befriending in strengthening local cohesion and reducing social isolation is the flexible and individual nature of each relationship.

It allows for both mentee and mentor to grow and develop, gaining something from a relationship that is not pre-defined but one that changes, expands, contracts and is fundamentally maintained through the interpersonal interaction and individual perception of both parties.

Therefore, the monitoring and evaluation process becomes crucial, particularly the post relationship evaluation of the success of the relationship. Given the shifting sands of the process it could be argued that identifying which relationships have been successful can only happen after the relationship has ended.

A key aspect is that voluntary engagement is a major factor in its success; compulsory programmes will not work. It should also be noted that confidentiality is of crucial importance and lack of confidentiality is often given as the reason for formal relationships failing.

It is therefore important to understand right from the outset in a mentoring or befriending relationship what will be reported back and what will remain within the one-to-one relationship.

The most productive relationships involve sharing experiences and considering how others interpret the world around them. One example of this is from a programme in Sheffield that works with employers who give their staff time out to volunteer and participate in the mentoring scheme. Participation is absolutely voluntary and the employers believe they are doing more than paying ‘lip service’ to promoting diversity and community participation. The idea that staff get time to understand people from different cultures also helps them forge better relationships with customers, clients and colleagues. Some of the mentors also believe that they have developed skills in the mentoring programme that they can take back to their workplace.

Research briefing 8: Learning by mentoring

“Results revealed that mentoring taught prospective teachers about the world of children, increased their sensitivity to children at-risk and to children as individuals, and improved their ability to cope with difficult situations.”


‘Cross-cultural support for isolated people’

Case study 16 – Time of Your Life Scheme, London

The ‘Time of Your Life’ scheme operates in Brent, London, in a community where 30 languages are spoken but few cross-cultural links are in evidence. Clare is a mentor to Rene and explains more about their relationship.

“Our friendship started almost a year ago after a leaflet came through my door. It’s cross-cultural and because I am from the Caribbean – although I’ve been here for more than 40 years – and Rene is English, we were matched because we have similar interests. I have access to a car so I take her shopping. She likes sitting in a café, so we drink coffee and chat. When I visit her we talk about the many similarities about growing up in England and Jamaica.”

Clare adds: “It’s good to learn about someone from a different background because we get to understand each other much more. I wasn’t brought up in Britain, so we always talk about the differences.”

Rene clearly values her relationship with Clare: “… whenever Clare has a few minutes I have a few minutes... if she phones and asks me to chat, I say: ‘Yes please’.

“When I started talking to her I realized we were thousands of miles apart when we were young, but we were brought up the same way.”

‘Mentoring developing confidence to return to education’

Case study 17 – Michael and Faduma, Time Together programme, London

Michael and Faduma were matched by Time Together (run by TimeBank) in April 2006. They met for a year as part of the mentoring programme, but they have remained in touch and meet regularly as friends.

44 year old Michael mentored Faduma, a 31 year old woman from Somalia who lives in Shepherd’s Bush with her three year old son. Michael gave Faduma the confidence to move into the local community. It is about developing local community resources; shared experiences and skills across communities. The major strength of using mentoring and befriending in strengthening local cohesion and reducing social isolation is the flexible and individual nature of each relationship.

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“Mentoring Faduma has shown me that refugees are hardworking, intelligent people who desperately want to work. They are real people with real stories and real lives.

“Faduma has come a long way since I met her. She is a lot more confident now, and on her way to having some qualifications, and she seems to be enjoying life more. She was a single mum living in Shepherd’s Bush, struggling to make ends meet. I feel I’ve helped her to lead a happier life, and she has helped me by opening my eyes to other cultures.”
As we have seen an important factor in the effectiveness of mentoring and befriending programmes is how close they are to the elements of good practice as identified in numerous research studies. To ensure that we continue to encourage good practice and the development of service delivery we need to make sure that we advocate for these elements of good practice and develop clear guidelines for all programmes to follow.

The Approved Provider Standard (APS) developed by MBF is the benchmark standard in the field of mentoring and befriending and therefore all programmes in the field should be working towards it. It is a national award supported by the Cabinet Office and Department for Education and Skills that aims to provide programmes with a badge of competence and safe practice in mentoring or befriending. This will become even more crucial as the need for such programmes across many different areas is necessary and it may well be appropriate to link national and regional funding streams to the attainment of such a benchmark.

APS aims to ensure the consistency and quality of mentoring and befriending programmes by focusing on the key management and operational areas of the programme including programme aims and management structure, procedures for identification and referral of clients, recruitment, selection and training of volunteers, monitoring of relationships and programme evaluation.

Mentoring works – an example of the cost effectiveness of youth mentoring in the research briefing 10 clearly demonstrates one element of this - but we need to ensure that good practice prevails in all our services. In order to do that we need the government to fully endorse APS as a bench mark standard for all mentoring and befriending programmes – see study on effectiveness of mentoring programmes and the effect of adherence to guidelines on their success.

Rhodes and DuBois (2006) (ref. 24) examine a number of characteristics of youth mentoring programmes that make them effective, mutual trust, understanding and respect, a focus on the needs of the client, the frequency of contact, mentoring not done in isolation but as part of a process that connects with key people in the client’s social network.

“When youth experience mentoring relationships that reflect the characteristics, these relationships may harbour remarkable potential to realize the type of transformative influence on long-term health and adjustment that have been central to arguments for expanding mentoring initiatives. Yet, when these features are lacking, it is equally apparent that mentoring relationships may fall well short of their potential benefits, and even do harm.”


This is clearly relevant to the wide spectrum of mentoring and befriending programmes and illustrates the need to take a strategic response across all sectors and ensure that basic good practice is clear and available to all programmes. We have to promote more actively the need for programmes to work to a minimum standard in order to ensure that clients get a service that is effective and can be monitored and evaluated against agreed criteria.

“In most instances, it would be better not to implement a mentoring (or befriending) program than to pursue a low cost plan which neither adequately prepares participants nor informs them about the intent or impact of the effort.”

Kram & Bragg (1991) (ref 17)

Research briefing 10: Cost/benefit analysis of youth mentoring

The Mentoring Partnership of Minnesota (MPM) and the Minnesota Youth Intervention Programmes Association (YIPA), organisations that serve more than 190,000 Minnesota youth annually through more than 500 community-based organisations presented a first-ever formal economic estimate of the cost of youth mentoring and youth intervention programmes in April 2007.

‘Minnesota can expect a $2.72 return on every dollar spent on effective mentoring programs in the state, and an average return of $4.89 for every dollar invested in youth intervention programs, according to conservative estimates outlined in the two studies.’

Whilst this research is based in the USA it is strong support for more investment in youth mentoring in particular but in mentoring and befriending in general as the basic elements of effective programmes are the same for youth and adult mentoring, one-to-one voluntary engagement.

Rhodes & DuBois (2002) (ref.12)

“Program effects are enhanced significantly... when greater numbers of both theory-based and empirically-based ‘best practices’ are utilized...”

DuBois (2002) (ref 12)

Whilst this refers to an employee mentoring programme we would argue that this also applies to the whole range of mentoring and befriending initiatives.

It is clear that if we are to promote mentoring and befriending more effectively and access scarce resources we will have to provide the evidence for its success in achieving clearly defined outcomes. This does not necessarily mean the easily measured or ‘hard’ outcomes, for example how many hours support was offered for, but the significant outcomes that are harder to monitor and evaluate such as the increase in confidence and self esteem generated by the support.

What we need is hard evidence of ‘soft’ outcomes as well, for example, individual confidence scores before during and after the support process, and this will only be achieved through high quality, independent longitudinal research that looks very closely at all aspects of programme performance and is able to evaluate key performance indicators.

Whilst it is crucial that we provide effective services that work to benchmark standards let us not ignore the simple truth that what is powerful and life changing in the mentoring and befriending process is the one-to-one relationship that develops over time. This is true whatever the sector or purpose of the programme.

“Once a young person trusts a mentor they respect their opinions, values, challenges and guidance that the individual represents. Mentoring is always beneficial in attaining both soft and hard outcomes. Mentors need to commit sustained amounts of time, energy and focus on a young person’s needs and development... social development will take years. But short-term goals or breakthroughs, in difficult circumstances, can be achievable.”

Ann Stockreiter Rapport Winter 2007 issue 7 pg7 (ref 22)

Perhaps it is fitting that the final word on this should go to Gordon Brown, the Prime Minister, as this will, hopefully, encourage people involved in programmes across the country to really believe that what they do is valued at all levels. Also for the government departments committed to engaging proactively with the third sector it will show how important it is that we work together to develop cohesion in our communities in order to provide the maximum impact and change where needed.

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Recommendations

The government needs to:

1. Openly endorse mentoring and befriending as a key positive impact in the development of a more cohesive society.

2. Confirm mentoring and befriending as a key strategy for all government departments to work together on the development of cross department initiatives.

3. Promote mentoring and befriending to other services, e.g. local authorities, policy makers, direct government workers in order to ensure strong links with other services and the provision of a ‘seamless’ service and also to encourage the people delivering the services to be volunteers which will help directly inform their work and policy making.

4. More proactively influence the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) agenda throughout the commercial world.

5. It is important that the voluntary engagement element of mentoring and befriending is recognised and promoted within local, national and government strategies and that mentoring and befriending are not seen as a ‘one-size fits all’ solution.

6. We need to fully endorse the idea that all programmes involved in mentoring and befriending should, at the very least, be working to a benchmark standard of good practice and that the MBF Approved Provider Standard is the one that is easily accessible to all voluntary and community programmes delivering a mentoring and befriending service. This is acknowledging that there are many different models out there delivering a fantastic mentoring and befriending service but that there is a need to ensure all programmes deliver the core competencies which all who use the service have a right to expect.

7. More effective and strategic funding of one-to-one individual mentoring and befriending support in all the areas identified in the COIC report (ref. 8). It is crucial for the long-term nature of the mentoring and befriending relationships necessary for effective services that programmes are resourced to deliver a sustainable service. This also acknowledges the long-term nature of the work needed to improve community cohesion.

8. Establish more widely immigration and early intervention support programmes using one-to-one mentoring and befriending support mechanisms in the initial phase of settlement to reduce the tension and segregation between settled and new communities.

9. Acknowledge and fund the need for more specific research in the field to develop better services and more focused strategies considering how mentoring and befriending can support this across all sectors.

Most research evidenced in this and other reports is from the USA and there is a real need to fund more UK based research in order to understand the UK issues and implement good practice within our services. There is also a need to consider small communities and small programmes as we have no mechanisms in place to gather this important data. This should include encouraging the new Third Sector Research Centre to support much needed research into the effectiveness of mentoring and befriending.

In the USA a nationally recognised research centre has been given a $2.9 million federal grant to evaluate whether early mentoring programmes reduce the likelihood of academic failure, delinquency and early parenthood in at-risk children.

“This gives us an opportunity to examine scientifically the positive results we experience anecdotally on a daily basis,” said Orin Bolstad, a clinical psychologist and Friends of the Children board member. “If successful, the results of this landmark study will promote our model to a new level nationally, allowing us to serve many more at-risk children.”

The Register-Guard (2007) (ref. 26)
References

22. Rapport, the magazine of the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation, Winter 2007, Issue 7
“It’s a unique experience and will really enrich your sense of being a human being. It is very liberating to just do something for the sake of it and not for any material gain. Being [a] mentor has being an inspiring and humbling experience. It has made me feel stronger.”

Mentoring and Befriending: A case study approach to illustrate its relevance to cohesion and cross cultural issues

MBF Strategic Development Group Report
April 2008