What is mentoring and befriending?

An overview which includes our definition, delivery models and methods and the role of volunteers.
What is mentoring and befriending?

This information sheet provides an overview of mentoring and befriending activity including its purpose, characteristics, models/methods of service delivery and its benefits; including the role of volunteer mentors and befrienders.

Definition

Our definition of mentoring and befriending is:

*A voluntary, mutually beneficial and purposeful relationship in which an individual gives time to support another to enable them to make changes in their life.*

The diagram below illustrates the different aspects of mentoring and befriending including its purpose, the range of delivery models and methods used as well as the key characteristics involved:

### Purpose

- **Specific/targeted** e.g. help find education, employment, training; reduce re-offending; reduce substance misuse etc.
- **Change attitudes/behaviour** e.g. reduce stress, increase motivation, build confidence, develop coping strategies.
- **Expand opportunities** e.g. develop personal skills, improve attainment, identify career opportunities etc.
- **Supportive** e.g. build trust and resilience, social networks, reduce isolation etc.

### Models

- **One to one**: one person mentors or befriends another.
- **One to many**: an individual provides support for a number of people either in a small group or individually.
- **Group**: a group of people come together with shared aims and objectives to learn, share and support each other.

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### Characteristics

- Whatever the setting or purpose, mentoring and befriending share the same characteristics:
  - **Building** relationships and trust
  - **Agreeing** the purpose and intended outcomes
  - **Helping** through regular contact and support
  - **Reviewing** progress
  - **Managing** relationship endings

### Methods

- **Face-to-face**: the participants meet in person face-to-face.
- **Telephone**: the use of telephone and telephone conferencing e.g. 'tele-befriending'.
- **Electronic**: using email and the internet to deliver support e.g. 'e-mentoring'.
A supportive and purposeful relationship

Mentoring and befriending makes a real difference to people who, often at a time of transition or change, find that they need the dedicated support of another person to help them navigate their way through. It covers a range of supportive and purposeful activity involving the development of a relationship in which one person, who is not family or close friend, gives time to support and encourage another to make changes in their life.

Mentoring and befriending is found in a range of settings – within community, statutory and business – and can take place on a one-to-one basis such as an adult mentoring a child or within a group such as telephone befriending social groups. Whatever the setting, mentoring and befriending shares the following key characteristics:

- Building relationships and trust.
- Agreeing the purpose and intended outcomes.
- Helping through regular contact and support.
- Reviewing progress with individuals.
- Managing relationship endings.

Both forms of support aim to build supportive relationships over time and both include social elements within them. The main difference between the two is the emphasis placed on goals. Mentoring focuses more on goal setting within a time-limited process whereas befriending tends to develop more informal, supportive relationships, often over a longer period of time.

What is its purpose?

Many people who have experienced the support of a mentor and befriender tell us that it marked a turning point in their life by helping them to build new networks of support, increase their self-confidence, develop new skills, broaden their horizons and ultimately change their life for the better. You can read about some of these life-changing stories in our case study bank.

We have grouped the four main purposes for mentoring and befriending below and projects may include one, some or all of these as part of their aims and outcomes for the project:
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Who benefits?

Anyone can benefit from the support of a mentor or befriender, whatever their age or circumstances, and there are many mentoring and befriending services that offer support. Often, a service is set up to support a particular group of people who have requested or have been identified as needing support. This includes:

- **Socially isolated people** such as older people and people of all ages with mental health problems needing support to re-engage with others and their communities.

- **Children with challenging behaviour** or from **disadvantaged backgrounds** perhaps lacking a positive role model or wanting to widen their experiences.

- **Unemployed people** wanting to build up their self-confidence and develop new skills to enable them to re-enter work.

- **Offenders and those at risk of offending** wanting guidance to help them make a new start, often from those have been through similar experiences.

- **Young people in care** looking for support as they move to independent living.

- **People who are homeless** who need support to help them access.

- **Refugees and migrants** striving to build a new life in an unfamiliar country and society.

- **Students** who are being bullied and struggling to improve their attendance or results.
What is mentoring and befriending?

A few examples of research findings into mentoring and befriending with a range of clients are outlined on the next page and illustrate how beneficial it can be.

A study into offender charity St Giles Trust’s ‘Through the Gate’ programme demonstrated that re-offending rates were cut by 40% when prison leavers were given intensive, one-to-one support by peer support workers (many of whom were trained, reformed ex-prisoners). The programme was found to offer ‘outstanding value for money to society’ and that with every £1 spent, there was a return of £10 in terms of the savings associated with reduced re-offending.1

An evaluation of the national anti-bullying peer mentoring pilot 2008-2010, which was managed by MBF, found that 63% of the ‘most bullied’ students who went on to be mentored experienced a reduction in bullying victimisation by the end of the year. Also, for students most at risk of being bullied, their general life satisfaction increased. 2

A longitudinal study of Timebank’s refugee mentoring project found that in 73% of the pairs, integration was successfully enhanced through offering of practical help and advice, building confidence and contributing to English language improvement. Moreover, in seven of these pairs, mentors had no less than a life-changing impact on their mentees by greatly enhancing their integration and 90% of mentees felt at home in the UK following their mentoring relationship.3

74% of homeless people considered one-to-one support or mentoring to be a critical success factor for moving into long-term employment.4

The findings from a study of Britain’s Muslim youth challenge both British society and the Muslim community to do more to connect with young people and their talents. The importance of investment in mentoring, role models and peer-led support came out strongly, including initiatives that help bridge intergenerational gaps within the Muslim community. 5

The evaluation of POPPs, a national programme funded to develop services for older people aimed at improving their health, well-being and independence found that a wide range of POPP pilot sites, including befriending and mentoring provision, improved the quality of life for participants. 6

2 Evaluation of the National Anti-bullying Peer Mentoring Pilot ‘Children’s Society, 2010
4 ‘Work Matters’, St Mungo’s/Demos, 2010
5 ‘National Evaluation of Partnerships for Older People Projects’, Dept of Health 2009
6 ‘Seen and not heard: voices of young British Muslims’, Islamic Foundation, 2009

As well as being beneficial to the service user, mentoring and befriending is also a rewarding experience for the volunteer mentors and befrienders too. It offers them a chance to develop new skills, increase their confidence, gain new insight into issues facing other people and a sense of achievement through helping someone else achieve their goals.
What is mentoring and befriending?

Where and how does it take place?

Mentoring and befriending projects are found in a variety of settings - in community settings (run by community/voluntary organisations and local authorities), in educational settings (in schools, colleges and universities), and in business settings (where mentoring is used to support professional and personal development).

Delivery models and methods:

Often, the delivery of mentoring and befriending is based on a one-to-one relationship with face-to-face meetings. However, this has evolved to include a range of flexible models and methods developed in response to the needs of service users and finding the most appropriate way to deliver the support to them. Mentoring and befriending can be offered as a stand-alone package of support or as one element of a multi-intervention approach.

A summary of the range of delivery models used in mentoring and befriending is below:

- **One-to-one**: one person mentors or befriends another.
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A summary of the range of delivery methods used in mentoring and befriending is below:

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Take a look at our case study bank to see how projects have put these delivery models and methods into practice.
What is mentoring and befriending?

Mentoring and befriending happens both formally and informally, but to make a real difference it needs to be supported by good training, supervision and management. The Mentoring and Befriending Foundation supports the setting up of projects across all settings – so if you are thinking about commissioning or setting up a new service or want to see how you can develop your existing service further then take a look at our website for all the services and support we provide.

Who can become a mentor or befriender?

Mentors and befrienders are mainly volunteers who come from the local community and are of any age, from diverse backgrounds and with a variety of life experiences. Sometimes, those who have worked with a mentor or befriender and have experienced the benefits for themselves are inspired to become a volunteer mentor or befriender themselves. It is important to have a broad mix of mentors and befrienders to enable the best possible match with mentees and befriendedes.

The volunteer mentor and befriender role will vary from project to project but will tend to include some of the following elements:

- The building of a supportive and trusting relationship which involves getting to know each other.
- Listening to your mentee/befriendee and discussing anything that is worrying them.
- Clarifying what your mentee/befriendee wants to gain/achieve/change in their life.
- Planning with them the steps needed to reach their goals.
- Encouraging your mentee/befriendee to think and talk about their hopes for the future.
- Talking about any relevant experiences and problems they have overcome.
- Discussing and reviewing progress with your mentee/befriendee on a regular basis.

Although a mentor or befriender may do some or all of the above, they are not a substitute teacher, parent, social worker or counsellor. However, mentors and befrienders work very effectively alongside professionals as part of an integrated package of support for individuals.

If you are interested in becoming a volunteer mentor or befriender search the Project directory on our website for projects in your area and contact them directly to find out about any volunteer opportunities.
What is mentoring and befriending?

The Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (MBF)

MBF aims to increase the effectiveness and quality of mentoring and befriending as methods of enabling individuals to transform their lives and/or reach their full potential.

MBF does this by providing training, quality assurance, information, advice and guidance, organisational consultancy and network membership for people interested in mentoring/befriending.

Find out more about our range of services and support at www.mandbf.org.