

Building a society for all ages

Consultation response from the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation

October 2009



The national body for mentoring and befriending

Introduction

The Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (MBF) welcomes the Government's strategy for a 'society for all ages' and recommends more investment in, and piloting of, a range of mentoring and befriending interventions so that they are able to form a key part of the solution towards ensuring that older people and carers are fully supported into the future.

Volunteer mentors and befrienders are ideally placed to support the expansion of services that provide personalised early interventions. Research shows that it is the voluntary and regular nature of the relationship that is crucial to successful outcomes as it is more highly valued by those being befriended or mentored than relationships formed with professionals (*Assisting friendships, combating loneliness: users' views on a befriending scheme*, Ageing and Society, Vol 23, 2003)

Our recommendations relate to the strategy areas where mentoring and befriending can have most impact and are backed up below with reference to research evidence and case examples.

About the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (MBF)

MBF provides support to organisations that use mentoring and befriending as an intervention to improve outcomes for a wide range of people. As a national body and strategic partner of the Office of the Third Sector, MBF also works to influence policy and practice in the sector and across government. MBF's vision is of a society where mentoring and befriending can empower all people to reach their full potential.

The organisation is committed to promoting voluntary regulation of mentoring and befriending projects through the **Approved Provider Standard**, the national benchmark for safe and effective practice. MBF's mission is to support the expansion of quality mentoring and befriending provision across all sectors. Based on our ongoing mapping of mentoring and befriending activity we currently reach over 3,600 projects in the voluntary, education and statutory sector.

Because we work with government and organisations in the sector, we are in a position to contribute to your strategy in a number of ways:

- Open dialogue with organisations and projects working with older people
- Put your ideas to our consultation panel for older people to generate ideas about how mentoring and befriending interventions can help bring the strategy to life
- Provide a response to consultations by liaising with all sectors working in this area using mentoring and befriending as an intervention and support strategy.
- Provide support, resources and training to commissioners, funders and providers around how one-to-one interventions can be a useful tool to enable everyone as they grow older to access the right support

We are holding a **national conference** in London on 4 November 2009 to explore how we can move towards a society where the benefits of one-to-one activity are realised for all.

Policy makers, funders, commissioners and mentoring and befriending leaders will be in attendance to discuss how we can move this agenda forward.

MBF recommendations on key strategy areas:

OLDER PEOPLE AT THE HEART OF FAMILIES

Digital inclusion

MBF supports the proposed expansion of digital inclusion projects to help older people gain access to new technology and recommends the Timebank 'Digitall' model which uses young people as mentors to support older people as a good one for expansion. Another good example is an intergenerational computer project run by London-based Sixty Plus, which sends young volunteers into isolated older people's homes once a week to provide tailored computer coaching. It aims to increase older people's access to information and communication technologies using the skills and experience of young volunteers.

Improving the well-being of carers

As an increasing proportion of people spend time in their later years providing care for family and friends it is important that relevant support is planned and the expansion of befriending and mentoring schemes to support carers, including young carers, is one element of support that could be beneficial in relation to increasing their well-being.

Recent research with young carers identified the provision of befriending schemes to provide access to an adult who is not an authority figure was beneficial in enabling young carers to follow an interest or enjoy time outside the home without guilt (Research briefing 24, SCIE, 2008).

A 2007 longitudinal study of befriending of carers of people with dementia recommended that questions on social networks be incorporated into carers' assessments to help identify a need for social support interventions. MBF recommends that such a question be incorporated into all carers' assessments in order for befriending interventions to become recognised as part of the support package available to all carers.

We would also recommend a national mentoring pilot to explore how mentoring could help combat barriers that carers can typically face in returning to paid employment based on some of the successful mentoring models currently working with other groups of unemployed adults.

ENGAGING WITH WORK AND THE ECONOMY

Changing attitudes towards older workers

We welcome the introduction of the Flexible New Deal and its mentoring element as part of the government's strategy for helping people over 50 back to work. The inclusion of mentoring ensures that the support is personalised and flexible. MBF can put you in touch with mentoring programmes that support a wide range of people back into employment for further exploration of mentoring models that could be expanded upon for this age group.

In Wales, a mentoring programme has been shown to be a valuable intervention to support people over 50 back into work and to become economically active. This could be a model used to develop similar interventions in England. Prime Cymru uses volunteer mentors matched with individuals to offer advice and to help shape ideas and support in overcoming

any barriers to returning to work. Read about Prime Cymru's successful mentoring stories at <http://www.prime-cymru.co.uk/html/templateA.asp?P=38>.

BETTER PUBLIC SERVICES FOR LATER LIFE

One stop shop

The proposal to launch a new 'one stop shop' to bring together services for people planning ahead is welcomed. MBF strongly recommends that mentoring and befriending services are developed and included as part of this.

Mentoring and befriending as early intervention tools

Mentoring and befriending interventions are key in bridging the gap for those people with poor physical or mental health who are in between services or socially isolated. In particular, befriending services for older isolated people can act as a preventative intervention to enable the individual to remain active and stay independent for longer thus reducing their reliance on health and social care services. A study 'Out of sight, out of mind' (Age Concern, 2008), recommends that for older people living alone, more investment into befriending schemes and peer telephone clubs should be given to help support many isolated older people.

As part of an early intervention package of support, befriending outcomes can include improved mental health, less loneliness and isolation and improved links with the community and social networks. Specific health promotion mentoring schemes such as the POPPs pilots have shown how beneficial they can be to improving older people's attitudes towards healthier lifestyles. MBF recommends an increase in funding for these lower level need interventions.

One example of a successful befriending scheme that is proving value for money is Portsmouth Salvation Army's Good Neighbours Befriending Scheme which supports 200 housebound older people using 90 volunteers and two members of staff. Their service, funded by Portsmouth City Council, has a large impact on health outcomes by contributing to reduced bed blocking, winter deaths, falls in the home and combating loneliness and isolation to improve mental health. The scheme costs £80,000 per year set against a domiciliary care cost of over £310,000.

Also, the befriending project 'Live at Home' in Northampton is another example of a highly effective support service for socially isolated older people and one which has been replicated across the country. Under the umbrella of MHA Care Group, a national charity, this project along with 50 sister befriending projects, currently provide support through regular visits, outings and social events. The aim is to increase confidence and social inclusion for the older person.

BUILDING COMMUNITIES FOR ALL AGES

Strengthening community bonds

Mentoring and befriending activity can usefully support the strategy's aim of strengthening bonds within communities and a good example of this is intergenerational mentoring and befriending programmes which encourage the sharing of experience and knowledge between older and younger people and helps build stronger communities. Whilst welcoming the Government's recent 'Generations Together' programme to encourage intergenerational activity, MBF calls for much greater investment in order for its impact to be fully realised.

One of the outcomes of intergenerational mentoring and befriending programmes is the success they have in challenging stereotypes of both young and older people, helping to remove stigma and create better relationships within communities.

St Thomas More RC High School runs an annual Media Studies Intergenerational Project which brings together sixth form students with older volunteers from North Tyneside Cultural Services to produce a DVD. The students bring their knowledge of modern technology to the programme and the volunteers bring their expertise and confidence in social engagement. The aim of the project is to develop mutual respect for each other's generation, dispelling myths and stereotypes that each generation may have of the other. This programme has shown outcomes of improved confidence and social skills as well as giving participants the opportunity to present positive impressions of their own generation. One volunteer says *"Some younger people must have a bad impression of older people because there are some miserable older people. It's helping us (older people) to get a better image. We get older, but our minds don't get old. I still think young, like a 16 year old."* The project is helping to break down barriers and open up dialogue between the different generations so that each has a better understanding of the other.

FURTHER INFORMATION

[Transforming Lives: examining the positive impact of mentoring and befriending](#), MBF 2009

[Mentoring and Befriending: A case study approach to illustrate its relevance to cohesion and cross cultural issues](#), MBF 2008

A set of [Research summaries](#) listing key findings and links to research studies and evaluations that demonstrate the positive impact of mentoring and befriending within different sectors

[MBF case study bank](#) demonstrating outcomes of mentoring and befriending interventions

CONTACTS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION

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