

## National Mentoring and Befriending Conference 2008 Conference Report

**On Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> May the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation hosted its annual conference at Manchester's Hilton Hotel. One of the highlights of this year's conference** was the unveiling of a major new report illustrating how Mentoring and Befriending relationships are playing a major role in bringing about social cohesion and reducing tension among communities.

Over 300 delegates networked and attended a wide range of open-forum workshops exploring a range of issues including safe practice, mentoring Looked After Children, volunteers and the law and peer mentoring in educational settings.

A universal conclusion was prevalent throughout the day - that whether the projects involved refugees and asylum seekers, the elderly, children or ex-offenders, these relationships - with set targets of achievement and outcomes - mentoring and befriending can make a real impact on a person's quality of life, sense of worth and self-esteem.

**Download the Social Cohesion Report at**  
<http://www.mandbf.org.uk/news/newsinfo/article/1618/40/>

### Meet the mentees and befriendedees that told their stories

Peter Collins, Chief Executive of the MBF formally opened the conference and - having stressed the fact that the day would be shaped by the delegates and their views - was joined on stage by a number of Peer Mentees, Mentees and Befriendedees talking about their own experiences. These were:

- Jonathan Burrell, Befriendedee, Imagine Befriending Service
- Tez Leach, Mentee, Adult Inclusion Team, Salford Foundation
- Dinneeka Hunni, Mentee, Stepping Stones, Education Leeds
- Niall McFadden, Bolton Lads and Girls Club
- Ndella Saho, RAMP

Ndella was first to speak and told a very moving story of how she came to Britain from Gambia in 2004 with her two children. Soon after their arrival, both her children were taken seriously ill and shortly after she learned of her husband's death from lung cancer. Under terrific emotional pressure and with no one to turn to, Ndella was referred to RAMP - The Renewal Refugee and Migrant Project in London where a mentor helped her to deal with many problems including housing and the illnesses affecting both her son and daughter.

***"My mentor was of tremendous help. Without her, things would have been very, very bad," she said. "Mentoring is very helpful not just to asylum seekers but to the wider community"***

Ndella told delegates at the conference how she has now settled in Britain, has many friends here and is now trying to obtain qualifications. In spite of an on-going question mark over her own immigration application, Ndella is now mentoring others including British people with housing and personal problems.

Next to the stage was Tez Leach who told an all-too-familiar story of bullying and how it led to his subsequent decline. Tez was an English boy who moved to a school in Ireland only to discover some the locals were very hostile towards the English! Tez was bullied mercilessly which led to him fighting back ... then drink and then drugs.

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Although at that point he moved back to England, he took all his problems back with him. With the help of the Princes Trust, Tez was mentored and given the confidence to leave the past behind him and get on with life again.

***"Mentoring has really turned my life around - without it I would still be drinking and taking drugs"***

Delegates then met Dinneka – who explained how she'd been really struggling in school – she had problems with her confidence and was scared of failure. The Stepping Stones Programme in Leeds gave her a mentor who went through coursework with her and showed her new activities.

***"I know I can do well now ... thanks to my mentor, I got 9 GCSEs and I'm now studying for 4 A'Levels ... Sociology, Psychology, English and Media Studies. Once my exams are over I even plan to become a mentor myself from September!"***

Jonathan Burrell from Imagine Befriending Service said:

***"I was severely OCD, it's a terrible illness that left me extremely isolated although, I was referred in 2000 and given a mentor to support me and build my confidence... and now I've been befriending people with mental health issues for the past 5 years ... having been on both sides this has given me good insight"***

Finally, the delegates were introduced to 14-year old Niall whose mum has MS. Niall is just one of 16,000 young carers in the UK.

***"My dad does the most and me and my sister help with the shopping, tidying and washing ...and I try to be around to help her answer the phone and things like that"***

Niall's mum Anne was worried that her son was missing out on his childhood but with the support of the Mentoring project at the Bolton Lads and Girls Club he has become much more confident and has learned to socialise much better at school. With lots of new friends, Niall is no longer lonely – in fact – quite the opposite ... the project has given him some really amazing opportunities including trying his hand at scuba diving and snowboarding.

### Interactive workshops

During the course of the day, delegates could attend a choice of over 30 different workshops covering a wide range of topics falling under three central categories:

- Policy, research and strategy
- Commissioning, partnerships and funding
- Programme development and management

Workshops were hosted at intervals throughout the day allowing plenty of time for reflection, chat, and informal meetings with like-minded project leaders between the more formal discussion sessions.

After the first of the morning's workshops delegates were invited back to the main hall to hear the keynote speaker at the conference Phil Hope MP, Minister for The Third Sector.

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To view workshop PPT presentations and synopsis go to:

- Workshop one - [www.mandbf.org.uk/index.php?id=238](http://www.mandbf.org.uk/index.php?id=238)
- Workshop two - [www.mandbf.org.uk/index.php?id=1267](http://www.mandbf.org.uk/index.php?id=1267)
- Workshop three - [www.mandbf.org.uk/index.php?id=1268](http://www.mandbf.org.uk/index.php?id=1268)

## Keynote address – Phil Hope, Minister for the Third Sector, Cabinet Office

In addition to working as a teacher and with young offenders, Phil Hope spent 13 years working with charities before becoming a minister and so fully understands the central role mentoring plays in communities as well as the challenges the projects are continually up against.

***"I have seen first-hand in my constituency the beneficial impact of mentoring and befriending, both for mentors and those they help. Mentoring and befriending schemes play an important part in preventing social exclusion and improving community cohesion. The Government actively supports schemes through programmes like the Cabinet Office's GoldStar"***

Phil Hope stressed to the delegates the profound and integral role they play within the Third Sector and in what the government is ultimately trying to achieve in terms of social inclusion, community cohesion, breaking down barriers, enhancing education and re-connecting individuals back to the community. Significantly he also reinforced the fact that,

***'Every single government department is using mentoring in some way to achieve their objectives'***

Why?

***"The professional one-to-one support is extraordinarily effective ... the relationship between a mentor and a mentee is quite unique and the voluntary aspect is a very important part of the process. Voluntary mentors impact on people in a special way ...creating a unique bond of trust that's often harder for paid professionals to achieve"***

Mr Hope continued:

***"Mentoring plays a larger role in society, providing community cohesion on the streets and in estates. We need to encourage intergenerational volunteering to help build social capital make sure everyone can feel included in their community...  
...The Third Sector is the glue that binds communities together"***

Phil Hope went on to explain about the introduction of a national programme for training up 2,000 Commissioners that would combine innovation with the impact of volunteering, creating new avenues for Public Sector Innovators with Third Sector Commissioners. He explained how two 'Festivals of Ideas' would be hosted to focus on 'Independent Living' and 'Working with the Excluded' with the ultimate goal of aiming to secure 3 year funding in future and making that the norm. That way, individuals would be able to invest in the certainty and stability of an organisation, whilst the organisations themselves would be able to plan ahead and really focus on long-term results.

## Panel discussion – Turning policy into practice

Following the keynote address, Phil Hope was joined on stage for a panel discussion by:

- **Peter Collins**, Chief Executive, Mentoring and Befriending Foundation
- **Jane Todorovic**, Deputy Director, Local Strategic Partnerships and Performance, Department of Communities and Local Government
- **Richard Turner**, Chief Executive, Friends United Network

The discussion was chaired by young mentee, Jahmal Thomas from Lets Go Global.

Following the keynote speech, **Peter Collins** reflected the general mood of the conference in applauding the government's proposals of providing sustainable, 3-year funding for projects in the future. He felt this would open up new opportunities for projects to create longer term relationships without people feeling worried about the influences of local politics.

Peter stressed that Commissioners should all be made aware of the Mentoring and Befriending programmes available to them locally and the impact they are already having within communities. Rather than reinvent the wheel, it would be crucial for the MBF to support them in sharing good practice and being proactive in educating Commissioners about the outreach work being undertaken and the networks already in place that help bring hard to reach people into the programme and access its services.

The aim would be to create national, blanket coverage of mentoring and befriending projects... to identify any gaps in provision and work out how to fill them!

**Richard Turner** took the mic and agreed that the training of Commissioners would be a good thing.

**Phil Hope** then discussed the idea of "best value" commissioning stating that if the cheapest option is being commissioned then they are doing it wrong. He further added that it should be about the needs of the user and what changes are sought. His final point highlighted the value of effective evidencing of impact.

**Richard Turner** picked up on this final point and agreed that evidencing impact is important, however expressed concern regarding the trend of evaluation data to benchmark projects against each other particularly when other factors are not taken into consideration.

**Jane Todorovic** concluded by urged local governments to think more strategically about the needs of their community and welcomed responses from the floor regarding ways in which this could be achieved.

## Testimonials

***"The conference has been a great opportunity to hear about good practice and to hear from Phil Hope. It's really interesting to learn about what the government's doing and to meet other professionals in the field"***

Nick Johns (Horizons Education Centre, Young People in Care)

***"Today has provided an excellent forum in which to consolidate ideas... just by sharing your own ideas with others always leads to fresh ideas ... so I'd say this is an invaluable experience for everyone"***

Jess Skelton (Friends United)

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***'It's so helpful to meet different people who are dealing with the same issues that you deal with on a daily basis.'***

Richard Turner (Friends United)

***"I like being around like-minded people who have the same problems so we can air them together... I still get something different out of this conference every time I come and this is my third year!"***

Marie Greenhouse (Salford University)

***"Today has been genuinely really interesting meeting all the different projects. The people here were really inspiring... I've been mentoring for 7 years but have still learnt things today I can take back and use. It's a really well organised event!"***

Chris Badman (Refugee Council)

***"The workshops were very relevant to me. We are all constantly looking and learning and waiting for some spark of genius! I was a volunteer in the criminal justice system for 6 years and am now a project manager in a community justice centre in Liverpool... it can be quite isolating working on projects, so just getting out of the office and meeting like-minded people has been great!"***

Gary Jackson (SOVA: Supporting Others Through Volunteer Action)

## Conclusion

As a fitting conclusion to the day, David Robinson, (OBE, Senior Advisor Community Links and Lead, Prime Minister's Council on Social Action) focused everyone's thoughts on celebrating success and recognising achievement pointing out that the real world creates real problems – that we can overcome.

***"We are driven by dreams and judged by delivery."***

David stressed how, even with the most basic resources, individuals really can make a difference if they stand up for an ideal and then – very practically – put it into action. All major acts start as one ideal; the vision of one individual.

Take a small idea. Pilot it. Put it into action. Then spread it out and spread it out. Individuals can make a difference in the first instance – it's the only thing that ever does!

***"If you don't like the headline, go out and make your own!"***

David gave the delegates four key pointers to achieving great things in life:

- 1) Small Learning
- 2) Aim High
- 3) Be Unreasonable
- 4) Copy

### Small learning

To illustrate the benefits of Small Learning, David shared the analogy of a dolphin learning to jump through a hoop. At first the dolphin swam through the hoop. Then, over the course of a year the hoop was gradually raised up, out of the water a fraction at a time. Each day, the dolphin jumped a tiny bit higher until the hoop was metres out of the water... at no point did the dolphin think he was doing anything extraordinary.

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## **Aim high!**

Identify with the best – and aim high. Share your enthusiasm and those around you will share theirs.

## **Learn when to be unreasonable**

A brilliant idea doesn't stop being a brilliant idea just because no one understands it or will fund it ... keep pushing – keep fighting your corner!

## **Copy**

The fusion of 2 ideas is a powerful thing. Innovation has value, *replication* is the key... the future is already here it's just unevenly distributed. We must learn from our experiences to identify the opportunities that will improve our future (and - as importantly - recognise the obstacles that may prevent us from seizing our opportunities!)

So, only by understanding our inadequacies, and the consequences of our failures do we begin to truly understand the importance of our success.

**“Seize every opportunity and never stop trying to do something better and something more”**