

MBF consultation response
***New Horizons: Towards a shared vision for
mental health***



The national body for
mentoring and befriending

October 2009

General comments

The Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (MBF) respond positively to the Department's vision for increasing well-being and good mental health for all and in particular your life-course approach. Like you, we view poor mental health as something that affects us all to differing degrees throughout our lives. The nurturing of good mental health is important and should start young and the maintenance of mental health must be recognised as being of as much importance as physical health.

We strongly recommend that mentoring and befriending interventions should be part of the package of support on offer to people if the New Horizons vision is to be fully realised. A mentor or befriender stands beside an individual and creates a safe environment where that person can look at their life holistically, choosing where they want to start and progress in tackling areas that they want to improve with the aim of enhancing well-being and mental health.

In our response to the consultation questions below we highlight a range of research evidence and case studies that add support and weight to our recommendations but we also call for further investment in research and piloting of innovative projects to help demonstrate the full impact and potential of mentoring and befriending interventions as part of the commitment to the vision for improved mental health. For example, Befriending Network Scotland is currently conducting a pilot around enhancing well-being through befriending using the Warwick Edinburgh well-being scale. http://www.befriending.co.uk/news_more.php?id=13 and a wider range of pilots would be welcomed.

MBF provides support to organisations that use mentoring and befriending as an intervention to improve outcomes for a wide range of people including organisations that use these interventions to empower people affected by poor mental health. 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.

MBF 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. Because we work with government and organisations in the sector, we are in a position to contribute to the New Horizons vision in a number of ways:

- Open dialogue with organisations and projects working with people with mental health issues to help bring the vision 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 including those with mental health problems to access the right support

For further information about MBF please visit <http://www.mandbf.org.uk>

Response to specific consultation questions:

Are the guiding values described in section 1 the right ones? Please explain your view giving examples, if possible

The four underpinning guiding values outlined in New Horizons MBF feels are the right ones and link strongly with mentoring and befriending activity particularly in the areas of improving social inclusion, enabling individuals to reach their full potential, individuals becoming more in control of their lives and valuing the benefits of relationships where mentoring and befriending can have an impact.

Social inclusion

Social exclusion has been shown to be a risk factor in developing poor mental health and an example of one group of people at particular risk of this are isolated older people, a group set to rise in numbers in the future therefore essential for New Horizons to plan support for improving their mental health now.

- A 2007 policy brief *Successful Ageing and Social Interaction* found that social interaction was significantly associated with good mental health quality of life. The report suggests that improving social interaction amongst the oldest old is potentially a far less costly challenge than providing health services for improving physical quality of life
(*International Longevity Centre, UK, 2007;*
http://www.ilcuk.org.uk/files/pdf_pdf_41.pdf)
- Research published in 2008 recommends more investment in the kind of befriending schemes and peer-to-peer telephone clubs to provide much needed support for many isolated older people. Befriending was also recommended for people with dementia and that an increase in these type of services is needed to help people retain their well-being

(*Out of sight out of mind, Age Concern, 2008,*
http://www.ageconcern.org.uk/AgeConcern/Documents/Out_of_sight_out_of_mind_Feb08.pdf)

- Research with social care practitioners working in generic services for older people in South London advocated that expansion of social, recreational and psychological interventions be provided in response to depression in older adults
(*Mental Health & Ageing, Health Services Research Dept, Institute of Psychiatry, London.* <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/16214698>)

Another group of people where befriending could be of use is young carers who can be socially isolated due to their caring responsibilities. Social Care for Excellence research found that young carers identified the provision of befriending schemes to provide access to an adult who is not an 'authority figure' to enable them to follow an interest or enjoy time outside the home without guilt.

(*Research briefing No 24, Social Care Institute for Excellence, 2008.*
<http://www.scie.org.uk/publications/briefings/files/briefing24.pdf>)

Case study example: Hillingdon Mind befriending scheme

Hillingdon Mind matches trained volunteers with members of the public who are experiencing mental distress with the main aim to reduce that person's social isolation and to help them to return to leading an ordinary life.

Margaret Thompson, one of Hillingdon Mind's befrienders, was matched with Victoria Barnes who suffered from agoraphobia.

"I was a severe agoraphobic for eight years" explains Victoria. "I used to spend 24 hours in my own living room. For many years I only went out once a year with friends for Christmas dinner. When I met Margaret I didn't have any self esteem or confidence. But when I found someone who believed in me, it was like winning the lottery."

Over the course of their befriending relationship, Victoria gradually built up her trust in Margaret. And with Margaret's help, Victoria can now drive a car, which she hasn't done since she was 17. Victoria's most vivid memory of her time with Margaret was returning to a place where she suffered child abuse years earlier. *"I feared I would relive the bad experience, panic and run away. But I didn't. It was a wonderful day. I replaced that bad memory with a good one."*

"Befriending is more about being there than knowledge" says Margaret, "I could offer friendship which was more valuable than expertise". Margaret views what she does as filling a gap that is often left by social services.

MBF's inspiring documentary follows the fortunes of five very different mentoring and befriending relationships, including Margaret and Victoria's. View it here - http://www.mandbf.org.uk/news/friends_in_deed/

MBF strongly recommends that the Department consider sustained financial investment for mentoring and befriending service provision, research and development as part of ensuring that the New Horizons strategy is successfully implemented to the benefit of people with mental health problems.

What should the Government do to promote more personalised services for people with mental health problems and their families? It would be helpful to hear about what works in your area, and if appropriate, what does not and what could be done in the future

One-to-one mentoring and befriending interventions are unique examples of highly personalised forms of individual support. Both involve the development of a relationship in which one individual, who is not family or a close friend, voluntarily gives time to support and encourage another. Because of their focus on one-to-one support, mentoring and befriending projects are well placed to meet the needs of individuals in their local communities and support people with mental health problems.

They offer flexible, tailored packages of support to individuals and aim to empower individuals to make informed choices, increase their confidence and well-being, raise aspirations, build resilience, enhance social inclusion and as early intervention models they are well placed to provide cost benefits and reduce reliance on statutory services further down the line.

The proposed joining up of existing services to provide integrated packages of care around the needs of individuals through the personalisation agenda is something that mentoring and befriending projects lend themselves particularly well to. They are often commissioned as part of a holistic package of support for individuals in a range of settings.

We suggest that Government makes a recommendation to commissioners within PCTs and local authorities for the development and provision of mentoring and befriending services as part of an integrated programme of support opportunities for individuals with mental health problems and that these should be standardised as a mainstream form of support.

- A discussion paper from the charity Counsel and Care explored how services for older people could be developed with them having more choice, voice and control over them. Befriending services were included as one possible early intervention to improve health, independence and well-being

(‘Real choice, real voice’, 2007,
<http://www.counselandcare.org.uk/assets/library/documents/RCRVfinal.pdf>)

Early intervention

A literature review published by Joseph Rowntree Foundation in 2000 looked at the effectiveness of low intensity support services, including befriending services and found that many users felt their overall sense of well-being – including self-esteem, confidence and attitude to life had improved. A striking finding was the way that users consistently valued the support of a worker or volunteer, often in preference to other more formal service interventions such as social work. Befriending was highlighted as a service that could impact on health.

(Summary: <http://www.jrf.org.uk/sites/files/jrf/640.pdf>)

MBF believes that mentoring and befriending are best utilised as part of a spectrum of support and that effective interventions should take account of the individual’s personal situation and build an appropriate package of support around their needs.

Which areas can you identify where innovative technology can help people with mental health problems, and their families? Examples of what works well and could be used in the future

Mentoring and befriending activity has been at the forefront of using technology to develop models to meet the needs of different groups of people. These have included e-mentoring programmes and tele-befriending schemes. The full potential of these models has yet to be realised and more investment could enable them to be utilised more comprehensively. These models can be particularly beneficial forms of support for people with mental health problems as the example below illustrates.

- An evaluation of a distance befriending service for adults with mental health needs in the Scottish Highlands recommended that consideration be given to extending the scheme. The service offered befriending by email, letter and telephone to those with mental health needs who were unable to access face to face befriending because they live in rural or remote areas or had difficulty leaving their homes.
(Befriending at a distance, University of Stirling, 2005)
- A user-led evaluation for Royal National Institute for the Blind (RNIB) Talk and Support which provides tele-befriending (weekly social groups over the telephone) to groups of six to eight people, facilitated by a trained volunteer found that the weekly exchange of humour, advice and social chit-chat was a positive experience for most participants and that tele-befriending was capable of making a significant difference to the lives of many people with

sight problems.

This tele-befriending model could be piloted or replicated with mental health users, particularly those most isolated and lacking links with the community or anxious and in need of mutual support and to encourage strategies for coping. 80% of people in the study said that being part of a group made a positive difference to their lives, particularly in terms of the emotional and practical support tele-befriending offered.

In your view, where are the current gaps in research evidence supporting the development of New Horizons?

There are a number of gaps in research evidence around the mentoring and befriending field that could support the future development of New Horizons. In 2007, MBF commissioned a review of published research to explore the evidence about research and practice in youth mentoring and befriending in the UK. It recommended areas for future research including:

- More investigation into the impact of mentoring and befriending on families, peers and communities
- Evaluation strategies should take account of longitudinal aspects of relationships between young people and mentors or befrienders. Recognition of both short-term and long-term implications could assist in planning interventions.
- Examination of the ways in which mentoring and befriending relate to other forms of intervention, and other forms of support within young people's social networks may yield valuable insights.

In addition, further research into the benefits of befriending interventions for carers would be beneficial as a study in 2008 recommended further research into this area (G Charlesworth, 2008, <http://www.hta.ac.uk/fullmono/mon1204.pdf>)

What do you think are the most important steps that Government can take to reduce inequalities that affect our mental health? And why?

BME groups have been shown to suffer a higher proportion of mental health issues and research in relation to refugees and asylum seekers in particular has shown the benefits of mentoring and befriending to support vulnerable people and develop their well-being and social inclusion.

- Research into the mental health needs of asylum seekers and refugees in London revealed that they are likely to experience poorer mental health as well as higher levels of exclusion and vulnerability than native populations. It

recommended health providers offer mentoring and befriending to support mental health

(Medicine, Conflict and Survival, Volume 23, Issue 3, August 2007, pages

198-212 *Sample*: Interviews with 21 refugees and asylum seekers *Abstract*:

<http://prod.informaworld.com/smpp/content~content=a779758128~db=all~order=page>)

Mentoring and befriending has also been shown to be effective in providing part of the support needed to break the cycle of homelessness and social exclusion, a group of vulnerable people that often suffer from poor mental health. Findings from a series of seminars in 2005 highlighted the importance of positive social networks in the prevention and successful resolution of homelessness and identified mentoring, befriending and mediation as key measures that could be used in (re)building social networks. Early interventions could help to break the costly cycle of homelessness and there is an opportunity to link with mainstream services and projects providing mentoring and befriending to support people affected by homelessness and built it into their support package. MBF recommends creatively looking at what scope exists to develop existing services in this direction.

(www.scottishsocialnetworks.org/documents/Summary%20Report.pdf, 2005)

MBF also welcomes and supports the recommendation from **The Bradley Report** for the establishment of a mentoring programme for offenders with mental health problems or learning disabilities on leaving custody to support them in returning to the community.

- An action research project at HMP Liverpool, Mentor 2 Work, aimed to design and deliver peer mentoring training to offenders with mental health problems in conjunction with offering support to gain employment on release using a Supported Employment model. In the main, the project proved very successful and provided positive outcomes for those offenders involved (*Network Employment Service / SOVA/ Impact*).

MBF is managing a pilot project in the North East of England funded by the Learning and Skills Council which is evaluating outcomes for offenders and developing good practice. The pilot involves the following organisations: NACRO, Depaul Trust, Northern Learning Foundation and Northumbria Coalition Against Crime and the results from the pilot evaluation are due in March 2010. We recommend that the learning gained from this pilot is replicated across England.

In your view, what more should the Government do to combat stigma?

Intergenerational mentoring and befriending programmes can increase outcomes for all participants of increased understanding, friendship and confidence and therefore programmes involving mental health users would be an ideal mechanism for

challenging stigma attached to this particular group and also for contributing to less social exclusion.

MBF recommends more piloting of intergenerational work in this arena and supports the findings of Bill McGowan and Claire Jowett who wrote about challenging stigma and combating social exclusion through befriending in 'Care, Community and Citizenship' published by Policy Press in 2007.

They discuss the emerging evidence-base they found for the promotion of positive mental health through befriending and conclude that despite a compelling body of evidence emerging in support of befriending as an important 'midstream' public health and social care intervention, there remains a general lack of sustained financial investment for service provision, research and development. They also assert that "befriending does tackle discrimination and exclusion in small but highly significant ways to improve the quality of every day life for vulnerable individuals in need."

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