

# Family support mentoring builds respect

One of the main strands of the Government's Respect programme is to improve ways of supporting families in trouble. New projects around the country are now exploring how mentoring can do just that. **Alex Johnson** reports

The battle to beat anti-social behaviour has never been more actively fought. Poor parenting skills, school exclusions, deprived communities and drug abuse can make teenage (and pre-teenage) years a nightmare for all concerned. The answer to dealing with these problems may come down to one of the most talked about subjects in modern times: family life.

Naturally, the Government's plans focus very much on providing activities for children and young people. These include establishing a national youth volunteering service and sports mentoring programme as well as continuing to support existing mentoring projects. Indeed, family mentoring is an innovative way of tackling these problems. Tracy Groves, mentor manager for the Anglia Care Trust, which runs two mentoring projects for young people and families, explains.

"We started the Family Support Mentoring project last September with referrals from the Anti-Social Behaviour Network," she says. "We focus on the eight to 13 age group, working on early intervention before there is any major trouble, catching children whose needs are not met by Sure Start or Connexions. The changeover from primary to

secondary education is a particularly key time and risk area.

"Mentoring is done on a one-to-one basis as only one member of the family usually has an ASBO (Anti-Social Behaviour Order) or needs mentoring, though all the family members need support. So, while it's about getting young people involved in positive activities to keep them out of trouble and identifying those at risk of offending and keeping them out of harm's way, it's also family-focused. This means that when the mentor's meetings start to gradually become more infrequent, the mentee continues with the activities they have chosen."

## The need for commitment

These activities are varied and always young person-led, but the common link is that they all require involvement in the local community, whether in the Scouts, kickboxing training or on car mechanic courses. And they all aim to build confidence and self-esteem in the mentees as well as foster appropriate and improved behaviour.

Intensive family support officers are available if needed and there are links with the local housing team, so issues such as families at risk of losing their tenancy can be worked through together. There are also links with other services such as providing appropriate adult help for young people detained at police stations.

In terms of training, all volunteers must sign up to 100 hours of mentoring under a Volunteer Agreement as Tracy is keen to emphasise the need for commitment. Volunteer recruitment has not been a problem, with the 16 training places per intake



Poster designed by Tracy Groves, Anglia Care Trust

Recruitment ad: cleverly placed into football programmes

oversubscribed, partially thanks to a thoughtful marketing strategy that included adverts in Ipswich Town FC's match day programmes to increase male mentor numbers. Mentors are also being trained to work across the various schemes.

"This means that mentors not only have a wider knowledge and experience but it's also good for volunteer retention as people have something else to move on to if they need a new challenge," explains Tracy. "The project falls within one of the Government's Respect Action areas and its Family Intervention Project (FIP). The mentors are in place to underpin the FIP co-ordinators and FIP key workers' work."

**"Mentoring is done on a one-to-one basis as only one member of the family usually has an ASBO or needs mentoring, though all the family members need support"**

Treating the family as a unit is a central plank of other schemes around the country, including The Soul Project in London. The Community Interest Company,

specially designed for social enterprise, regards a strong family bond as critical to the positive development of children and encourages families to spend large amounts of quality time together to grow stronger. Consequently, it provides a range of services, activities and events for families such as soft play areas to a scheme called Mentors for Families to support families who are not receiving help from other services.

### **Inspiration from New Zealand**

Some of the inspiration for family mentoring projects comes from New Zealand. The concept of Family Group Conferencing originated in Maori communities to deal with problems that the traditional juvenile justice system failed to resolve. Instead, there is a strong emphasis on the traditional role of the family and community in addressing anti-social behaviour.

This model directly inspired the Family Mentoring Service, which was developed jointly by Barnardo's, Hampshire County Council and the Portsmouth Diocesan Council and which is being piloted in Havant and Gosport. It was established following a visit to New Zealand by a local councillor and county council officer and was initially headed up by Felicity Keeping, who emphasised the goal of tackling family difficulties

at an early stage before problems become chronic.

Andy Gay, children's services manager at Barnardo's in London and the South East, is running the project until a full time manager is appointed. "We've had some problems getting it going but we do have volunteers in place, more about to start training, funding for the next year and referrals from social services who are very keen on the project," he says.

"Our target is that in six months there will be 20 volunteers matched with mentees. At the moment we're looking at individual mentoring sessions but we might work with families in other ways, such as within a group, depending on circumstances. The project is very flexible. We'll look at what a social worker can't do and then see how we can help. I'm very excited about the possibilities."

The Government is keen to keep the issue of anti-social behaviour high on its agenda, recently nominating 40 special 'Respect zones' around England, where it hopes determined positive action will bring sustainable benefits for everyone in those communities. It's also clear that mentoring could play a big part in improving chances of the overall programme's success and the lives of young people and their families.

### **CASE STUDY: How mentoring benefits the whole family**

CS lives with his mother, younger sister and brother and has contact with his father and stepmother at weekends and during the school holidays. He attends mainstream school after a previous exclusion. He enjoys attending but has had trouble controlling his anger and aggressiveness.

To help CS, the Family Mentoring Support drew up an action plan that included:

- arranging a mentor as soon as possible
- organising swimming lessons

- applying for cinema and bowling tickets for other children in the family to prevent the perception that his bad behaviour was being rewarded

CS successfully completed several anger management sessions with his mentor and was rewarded with a go-karting trip. His behaviour improved throughout the sessions and his parents have committed to supporting his ongoing swimming lessons. While CS has been enjoying positive activities, his mother has enjoyed quality time alone with his brother and younger sister.