



The national body for
mentoring and befriending

MBF's response to Baroness Neuberger's request for feedback and views on volunteering in the criminal justice system

September 2008

Steve Matthews
0161 787 8600
steve.matthews@mandbf.org.uk

1st September 2008

About the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation

The Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (MBF) provides guidance and support to organisations and practitioners involved in mentoring and befriending. As the **national strategic body**, MBF also works to influence policy and practice in the sector and across government.

MBF currently represents over 3,000 projects in the VCS and public sector, this figure continues to rise as mentoring and befriending becomes increasingly seen as an effective way of tackling social exclusion.

As a **strategic partner of the Office of the Third Sector** within the Cabinet Office, MBF provides a co-ordinated national and regional infrastructure support including leadership, training, networking, resources and best-practice guidance to the mentoring and befriending community in England. It works in partnership with other voluntary sector infrastructure bodies and through its Regional Advisory Group structure, is able to involve and engage with mentoring and befriending providers and represent their views to government.

MBF sets standards of best practice for mentoring and befriending projects and awards the **Approved Provider Standard**, the national benchmark for **safe and effective practice**.

Our **vision** is of a society where the potential for mentoring and befriending to transform peoples' lives and communities is fully realised and where mentoring and befriending is seen as part of mainstream volunteering strategy.

For further information please see www.mandbf.org.uk

Response to the request

What is the extent and variety of volunteering that currently happens in the criminal justice system?

Thousands of volunteers work locally to support offender management in prison, through the gate and in the community. Although there are no really reliable figures available, it is estimated that there are over 10,000 volunteers involved in work in prisons and through probation areas, either directly or through partnerships with the VCS. The Mentoring and Befriending Foundation has identified that a substantial number of these volunteers will be providing support as mentors or befrienders to offenders in custody and on release as well as to young people at risk of offending.

Why should we promote volunteering within the criminal justice system? What is its value-added?

It is our view that significant investment in volunteer-based mentoring and befriending within the criminal justice system can add value to society, whether it is helping to reduce re-offending or preventing young people from engaging in crime. The National Evaluation of Youth Justice Board Mentoring Schemes 2001 to 2004 reported significant improvements in attendance and behaviour at school, literacy and numeracy, accommodation and family relationships amongst the young people being supported. Although limited evidence was found to support the view that mentoring helped to reduce re-offending rates, the evaluation concluded that if just one in ten young offenders could be prevented from re-offending through mentoring, the saving would be in the order of £100 million per year.

What can the Government do to reduce the barriers to volunteering within the criminal justice system?

One of the barriers to volunteering within the criminal justice system and in particular the growth of mentoring schemes to support offenders and ex-offenders is the capacity of the sector to provide good quality programmes. The National Offender Management Service (NOMS) has already highlighted the lack of co-ordination of volunteering activities with variable and inconsistent support being offered to volunteers. Mentoring and befriending

services, whether managed directly by local prison and probation services or through voluntary sector organisations, need to work to an agreed framework of good practice if they are to attract volunteers. The Government needs to encourage the dissemination of good practice and promote real examples of where volunteering and mentoring has worked.

One of the ways in which this could be achieved we believe is through the development of good practice guidance for funders, ROMS, commissioners, local prison and probation services to encourage closer working with voluntary organisations. This guidance should be benchmarked to external quality standards like the MBF's Approved Provider Standard and would help to promote a greater understanding of the potential for volunteer involvement in helping to reduce re-offending.

Can volunteering help to rehabilitate offenders?

Although there is a scarcity of robust evidence regarding the added value of volunteering and mentoring, there is no shortage of people who can give testament to the value of the volunteering support and in particular, mentoring support, they received. Take Gemma, for example, who was supported by the Leeds Youth Offending Mentoring Scheme. She believes the mentoring relationship was instrumental in assisting her to make significant changes to her lifestyle: *"I have stopped drinking, I hardly ever go out clubbing anymore, have not been in trouble with the law for a year and I'm dead chuffed about that. I have my own flat; it's all decorated, which Eve [my mentor] helped me do. Most things I have now, Eve helped me to get or do, like coming off drugs or stopping drinking, and she gives me support to do things like going to the doctors. I live a quiet life now really, Eve is a part of that and helped me to get away from people who were bad to be around. Now I see my family more and not people who are always in trouble."*

Clare, an ex-drug user who went to prison seven times for shoplifting found support from the New Hope Mentoring Programme. She is unequivocal about the benefits of having a mentor *"I would like to tell [the Prime Minister] how important it is to have someone to go to and someone to support you when you first come out of prison. Everyone who leaves prison like me should have access to a mentor."* She continues: *"I feel like a real citizen now*

and we are paying our bills. By next year, I want to be in college; and when I am over everything that has happened to me, I want to get a job. One day I would like to be a mentor, so I can help someone like me.”

How can the Government spread good-practice in volunteer management?

Mentoring offenders and ex-offenders presents logistical, safety and security issues. MBF promotes the importance of quality and best practice in all programmes. The Approved Provider Standard provides a benchmark for safe and effective practice in mentoring and befriending. It focuses, in particular, on the training and support provided to volunteers, the recruitment and vetting process as well as the systems for tracking and monitoring progress and managing risk. HMP and YOI Swinfen Hall runs a mentoring scheme with the support of the New Bridge Foundation. Mentoring is offered to offenders and to help a successful resettlement back into the community on release. Swinfen Hall actively encourages the organisations it works with to achieve the Approved Provider Standard and supports the value of APS as a benchmark standard.

Government needs to promote the importance of quality standards and procedures in mentoring for offenders and ex-offenders. It is not just simply about good practice in volunteer management. Better training and support for volunteers including access to nationally accredited programmes of training is needed. This requires a real commitment to volunteer workforce development and that volunteers add real value to society.

There needs to be a more robust process for identifying the lessons for policy and practice from research. We have already identified that there is a scarcity of evidence to support the impact of volunteering. Whilst we need to explore the opportunities for new research, VCS organisations also need to develop more rigorous systems of evaluation if they are to assess and measure the impact they are having. MBF is developing an impact measurement framework for different types of mentoring and befriending so that it can demonstrate to government the economic and social benefits of this type of volunteering.