

What Makes The Difference?

What Makes The Difference? (WMTD) is an ESF EQUAL funded project that aims to understand and help overcome the issues that lead to poor education, training and employment outcomes for many looked after young people in England.

WMTD is working across four themes, and will run until March 2008:

- Preparation and Planning
- Empowerment
- Education and Training
- Employment Opportunity

WMTD is a large partnership involving 60 organisations from national and local government, voluntary and independent sectors, with young people's charity Rainer as lead partner.

Underpinning all of WMTD's work is the empowerment of young people. We believe that only by listening to and fully involving young people in and from care fully in our work will we improve outcomes. In addition embracing this ethos gives young people the opportunity to learn new skills, develop confidence and self esteem to help them succeed in their future.

Acknowledgements

As with all of WMTD's work, our partners are crucial to the entire process. We would like to thank the following partner local authority Leaving Care services for the participation of their staff and young people in developing this model:

Gloucestershire, Surrey, Wandsworth, Blackburn, Tower Hamlets, Stockton –on- Tees, Brighton and Hove, West Berkshire and Bath and North East Somerset.

Thanks to Sophie Wellings of Rainer and James Cathcart of the Prince's Trust who both provided vital help in the research process as we developed the model.

We would like to thank Lynn Tulloch of the Shetland Befriending Scheme and Naomi Anders of Shelter for allowing us to include and develop ideas from their own publications. These are referenced in the text.

What Makes the Difference? Peer Support Model

Introduction

This model has been developed with colleagues and young people from our partner local authority leaving care services. We have also researched other models of peer mentoring, support and advocacy in order to establish a model that would work in a range of settings.

In October 2006, a day was held in London where workers from WMTD, partner organisations Rainer and the Prince's Trust, and partner authorities gathered to discuss peer mentoring and to explore ideas about how it can work in leaving care services.

From there, workers returned to their services to talk with young people and establish the kind of model of peer mentoring/support they would like in their service.

Feedback from this process has led to this model of peer support. It is borne out of service's experiences in peer support work and discussions with young people about the kinds of support they would like to receive.

Peer Support is also about providing the opportunity for young people to be involved in the development of the services they use. Empowering young people so that they are involved in partnership with adults and have the opportunity to learn new skills that enhance their life chances, is a crucial part of WMTD's model of Corporate Parenting.

The model differs from peer mentoring and it is not our intention to rename peer mentoring as peer support. We recognise the distinction between the two. What we have found is that peer support, as we define it, offers a more flexible approach to the supportive relationships, including offering advocacy in its broadest sense, between young people, does not require such extensive training and support as a traditional mentoring scheme, but enables young people to develop positive relationships and new skills as supporters and supportees with the full support of their leaving care team.



Peer support will operate well in a service that has existing or newly developing quality Service User Involvement. In a service with strong SUI there are, inevitably, growing numbers of young people keen to play an active role in the development and delivery of the service. The choice of opportunities should be as wide-ranging as possible and offer learning, development and skills to interested young people. In such services, young people who are involved and supportive of the development of the service may well be keen to take on a peer support role.

Current Work and Learning

Young people identify the opportunity to have another young person as a Peer Supporter as being very positive, but they are less favourable toward traditional peer mentoring or mentoring approaches. They are rejecting an approximation of another professional relationship, but seeking the opportunity to spend time with another young person who can claim some similarity of experience, and with whom they can work on very specific and often time-limited issues.

Young people in partner authorities are finding the benefit in developing relationships that are task-

orientated, rather than determined by a fixed model of a mentoring relationship.

In those authorities, the peer support is often coming from other young people who may be older and more experienced – particularly in the area of transition, for example – and who are working in the leaving care service already as SUI workers or youth workers. This model suits all the young people involved, expanding on already existing learning opportunities in the service. However, it should not exclude young people within the service who are keen to act as Supporters but who have not been involved in any prior User Involvement activity.

What Young People Say

- Young people don't want formalised, structured mentoring relationships with other young people
- Informal support through relationships with other young people is better
- Flexible support offered, task orientated, available when needed, purposeful
- Financed to support flexibility
- Support from peers provided by SUI trainees, young people volunteers and young people operating in teams as workers. Also by older care

leavers who are interested in supporting other young people and sharing experience

- Meeting specific needs of young people
- Backed up with appropriate training, support and monitoring from a designated member of staff
- Peer Supporters and supportees matched by staff or by mutual discussion where natural relationships have emerged

What is Peer Support?

A young person developing a trusting relationship with another young person that offers a range of support that enhances their experience in a time of crisis or transition and or provides a supportive befriending relationship around a particular issue. Peer Support can also involve informal kinds of advocacy.

Peer Support also:

Enables young people to support each other within the safety, structure and framework of the Leaving Care service

Provides learning opportunities to all

Involves young people in service delivery

Integrates young people's views and participation into service design

Why have a Peer Support scheme?

Working with young people, it is important to determine the aims and objectives of your peer support scheme. Think about some of the following:

- What will Peer Supportees be getting from the scheme?
- How will Peer Supporters gain from their involvement?
- How does the scheme fit in to the wider opportunities offered by the service?
- How will having a Peer Support scheme contribute to or enhance the levels of Empowerment of young people in the service?



What is the Peer Supporter's Role?

It is vital that in any service where a Peer Support scheme is being considered, young people who might be involved as Supporters or Supportees have an opportunity to contribute to the Role Description and Person Specification of the Peer Supporter. This will ensure that the scheme responds to the needs and wishes of those who will use it in either role.

The *Shetland Befriending Scheme* (www.shetland-communities.org.uk/scss/) suggests some of the following as Befriending tasks which could be a useful starting point for a discussion with young people about the Peer Supporter role:

- To build up a relationship
- To establish and maintain appropriate boundaries to the supporting relationship
- To be aware of, and to work within, the organisational framework
- To spend time/share activities with their young person
- To offer an accepting and understanding presence
- To be consistent
- To be accountable

- To respect confidentiality within the service's framework
- To acknowledge positive qualities and skills
- To help the young person to feel relaxed and secure
- To work within a non-discriminatory framework

With Peer Support as our work to date has shown, young people are interested in receiving help and support around specific issues or tasks as well as a "befriending" role so additional tasks might be:

- Provide relationships with young people that are flexible, short term or long term, dependent on individual needs of young people and supported by adults
- To identify - with the supportee - issues, concerns or tasks that they would like to work on in the relationship
- To agree on the goals or outcomes for the relationship
- To provide informal advocacy for the Supportee where it is requested and is appropriate
- Other tasks might reflect some of the practical aspects of Peer Support work such as:
- To act within the framework of confidentiality and child protection provided by the Leaving Care Service

The final decision on the precise details of the Role Description should be made by staff and young people in partnership. Hopefully, these ideas will provide a good starting point.

Person Specification

The details of the Person Specification should be agreed in partnership between staff and young people. The specification should reflect experience, skills, qualities and values that young people and staff would like to see in a Peer Supporter. For example, ideas about **experience** might include:

- Young person with experience of transition to independence
- Young person with experience of moving into education or training
- Young person who currently has a Service User Involvement role in the Leaving Care service
- Young person who is working within the service as a care worker or youth worker

Some ideas about **skills** might be practical as well as “soft”:

- Young person who is confident at budgeting
- Young person who is skilled at cooking
- Young person who is good at DIY

The *Shetland Befriending Scheme* has some ideas about **qualities**:

- Warmth, an ability to engage in relationships
- Good communication skills
- A level of self-awareness
- An ability to reflect on the befriending relationship
- An ability to use initiative and common sense
- Some insight into the potential significance and importance of the relationship
- Reliability, consistency, dependability
- A capacity for empathy and understanding
- Willingness to question own assumptions

And **values**:

- Accepting a person for who they are
- Respecting others as being of equal worth
- An ability to respect others' choices, lifestyle, and rights
- Not imposing own values and beliefs
- An ability to appreciate difference

These ideas might be useful to you in developing your ideas about the person specification.

Not all young people who would make great Peer Supporters will arrive with these experiences, skills,

qualities and values. Perhaps the most valuable specification is **Potential**. Good training and support for Peer Supporters can be a good way to draw out some of the other qualities and skills listed above. This would also reflect a positive ethos of providing opportunities for learning to as many young people as possible.

Peer Supporter Training

The Peer Supporter's role must be recognised and validated in some way. Some services seek forms of accreditation for their young people to work towards or for their training schemes. Others will provide certificates or awards through their authority's training section or department. Other sources of accreditation could come through the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation if services are keen to seek Approved Provider Status: www.mandbf.org.uk.

Training provided should meet the needs of the young people who will be acting as Peer Supporters. It might be that some of the training made available could be provided through the local authority training section, Child Protection and Health and Safety might be an example of this. Alternatively, your service should determine what

is an appropriate level of knowledge for the Peer Supporter to fulfil the remit of the policy and provide adapted training accordingly.

Key elements of the training programme are outlined below:

- Understanding the Peer Supporter's Role and Responsibilities
- Developing Communication Skills
- Developing a Supportive Relationship
- Setting goals with your Supportee
- Ending the Relationship
- Important Policies – Child Protection, Confidentiality, Anti-Discrimination

Decisions about what should be included in the training should be made with young people but these core elements should be included. Be prepared to run the training over a period of weeks to enable young people to adjust and absorb the role. Trying to cram all of the learning and discussion into one or two days will be counterproductive. In the longer term, you should be aiming to involve young people in delivering the training themselves with support.

Support and Supervision for Peer Supporters

The Peer Support scheme should be co-ordinated by a member of staff in the first instance. In the interests of developing wider Empowerment opportunities in the service, co-ordination and administration could be handed over to a Service User Involvement trainee or worker at a later date. Supervision should be handled by a staff member however and could involve the following kinds of support.

Group Support – Opportunities for Peer Supporters to meet together regularly to discuss their experiences working with their supportees. This could help resolve problems and provide the opportunity to share ideas in a supportive environment.

Individual Support – This should be made available to all Peer Supporters if they need it. They may need to discuss a sensitive issue such as a child protection concern or be worried about their own capacity.

Other kinds of support and could be offered through encouraging reflection on the role by providing diaries to the Peer Supporters. This will help them examine their work as a Supporter and think about their progress, skills and development needs as well as reflecting on the progress of their Supportee.

In addition, social time or activities for Peer Supporters will be helpful both as a reward and a form of support.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The group and individual support approaches should also form part of the monitoring and evaluation of the scheme. Opportunities for Peer Supporters and Supportees to share concerns should be made available. Feedback forms are useful for young people who are concerned about their confidentiality.

Record sheets for meetings are a useful way for the Peer Supporter and Supportee to track their progress and also for the scheme co-ordinator to keep an eye on how the relationships are progressing (See Appendix). These can also be useful to monitor the agreement between the Supporter and Supportee.

Policies, Protocols and Agreements

Through training, the Peer Supporters should be clear about the health and safety, confidentiality and child protection policies. Copies of these should be available to Peer Supporters in an appropriate format.

As well as Meeting Record Sheets, it is useful to have some form of agreement or contract between the Supporter and the Supportee, this will ensure that both are clear about the purpose of their working relationship and expectations and should detail the targets or goals of the Supporting relationship.

Supporting the Development of Relationships

By providing a simple form for Supporters and Supportees that details what they can offer and what they are looking for respectively, the process of matching young people will be made considerably easier. Supporters will be able to offer particular skills or experiences that they can share, Supportees can put down the kinds of support they're looking for or issues they want help with.

The first meeting of two young people should be chaired by the scheme co-ordinator. The young people should be introduced and given the opportunity to discuss their forms and get to know each other a bit better. The initial meeting should give them a chance to discover whether they feel they are compatible. If they agree that they would like to pursue a working relationship, they should meet to agree their contract with each other.

The role of the Co-ordinator is to trouble shoot any

problems and particularly to chair any meetings if difficulties in communication have arisen. The Coordinator should also help with the ending process if it is premature, unexpected or hasn't been agreed previously.

Overseeing the ongoing development of the Peer Support scheme and Empowerment

Running a Peer Support scheme in your Leaving Care service is an excellent way to develop your Service User Involvement and Empowerment work. Young people should be involved in all aspects of the planning and development of the scheme. Once the scheme is established, consideration



should be given to enabling SUI trainees or young workers to co-ordinate it, provide administrative support and run subsequent training programmes.

Planning your Peer Support Scheme

The following staged process is borrowed and adapted from the Shelter Peer Mentoring and Befriending Booklet (www.shelter.org.uk). This sets out some of the ideas discussed here in a process and may be helpful to you as you write your Peer Support workplans.

STAGE 1

Define the role of Peer Supporter within the Leaving Care service. Working with young people and staff, decide and define the remit of the Peer Supporter. Young people's involvement in the process is crucial to establish a service that is workable and that will be used.

Young people should be asked what they need from peer supporters, what are the main tasks, issues and concerns that they think a peer supporter could best help them with.

It is vital to define the limits of the role having had this discussion. The role is being taken on by

volunteer young people, it is not a professional remit and it should not be beyond the capabilities of the peer supporters. Expectations must be clear so that peer supporters and supportees understand what to expect. This will hopefully avoid any misunderstandings or problems.

STAGE 2

What are the Aims and Objectives for the scheme?

This is most easily defined as what the anticipated outcomes are for all participants. So for example, as well as defining the expectations of the peer supportees, consideration must be given to the outcomes for the supporters. These might be: accredited training, enhanced confidence and self-esteem or improved communication skills. In addition, they might be able to access other kinds of relevant training such as coaching skills.

The supported young people can expect to benefit from the support of another young person who is well equipped to work with them, for many the opportunity to develop a positive, beneficial relationship will be extremely valuable. The further outcomes for the supported young person will depend on the definition of support that is decided at the outset of the scheme.

STAGE 3

To ensure the quality of the scheme, monitoring and evaluation measures need to be in place. Supporters need to receive supervision to enable them to discuss issues they are finding difficult and to reflect on the relationship with their supportee. This supervision could be in a group rather than one to one although individual supervision should be made available for young people wishing to discuss sensitive issues.

Supporters need to have access to a worker to whom they can go if they have any issues or concerns regarding their support relationship or their supporter. They should also have access to feedback forms regularly to enable them to comment on progress. Other ideas include having a meeting recording sheet which both the young people could complete after each meeting, this would describe the activity and both parties' response to it.

In terms of longer evaluation, other kinds of feedback and evaluation forms should be in place to establish the success of the process and experience of the young people involved. The impact on the service should also be evaluated.

STAGE 4

It is vital that there is staff support for the scheme. At least one worker should have responsibility for overseeing the scheme in collaboration with a steering group that includes young people. A development stage could be handing over the running of the scheme to a young person with a Service User Involvement lead with some support from staff.

STAGE 5

Designing the training programme. This should be designed and delivered in partnership with young people. Full discussions with young people about what they think should be included is vital. There are some key elements that should always be included such as a child protection policy, a confidentiality policy and information on health and safety.

STAGE 6

There will need to be supporting documents developed as part of a scheme. These could include role descriptions, contracts and agreements, a copy of the scheme's agreed aims and objectives, contact record sheet, feedback forms and information sheets to aid the matching of young people.

STAGE 7

Consideration should be given to how young people will be matched. One suggestion is that all young people fill in a form, supporters giving information on what they think they can offer and what their interests are and supportees on what kind of help, assistance or other support they are looking for. The lead member of staff should match the young people and chair an initial meeting between the two parties to introduce them and ensure they have a clear understanding of their expectations.

The ending of relationships should be mutual where possible with, hopefully, the young supportee feeling that they have benefited enough from the relationship and that it is time to move on. If either party wants to end the relationship because of unhappiness then this must be dealt with carefully and supportively, possibly with some kind of informal mediation.

Conclusion

This model has been developed with leaving care services with care leavers in mind but it can be applied to any setting where young people would benefit from support from their peers. We have tried to simplify the model so that it can be adapted to

any setting and any circumstances.

The model offers young people an opportunity, with support, to shape, develop and deliver a service to their peers. In services where young people take these kinds of responsible, creative, collaborative roles everyone benefits. At WMTD we believe that young people's involvement in services is crucial to both the success of the service and all the young people it supports. We hope that you find this model useful.

There are two useful examples of peer support paperwork overleaf and for examples of good practice and tools relating to peer support, mentoring and Service User Involvement in general, visit our website www.leavingcare.org.



Appendix: Helpful Tools

Leaving Care Service Peer Support Scheme Meeting Record Sheet

Date:

Name of Supporter:

Name of Supportee:

Meeting at: (location)

Why we met today:

What we did:

What we achieved:

What we need to do next time:

Date and time of next meeting:

Signed (Supporter)

Signed (Supportee)

Job Description: Peer Mentoring Scheme Co-ordinator

- 1) Work in partnership with young people to design, develop and deliver all the elements of the peer mentoring scheme
- 2) Design a system for matching young people with peer mentors including chairing initial meetings between mentors and mentees
- 3) In partnership with young people, design and deliver an appropriate training course to support the learning of Peer Mentors
- 4) Ensure that the scheme has appropriate procedures for child protection, health and safety and confidentiality, that these conform with service policies and are monitored effectively
- 5) Provide appropriate individual and group support and supervision for young people acting as mentors
- 6) Provide appropriate support to young people who are being mentored
- 7) Agree with young people and provide a system that enables young people's complaints and concerns to be addressed and acted upon.
- 8) In partnership with young people develop an effective system for monitoring and evaluating the peer mentoring scheme, including contracts between young people, records of meetings and feedback routes.
- 9) Provide mediation support where peer mentoring relationships are at risk of breaking down
- 10) Ensure that all opportunities for young people to participate in the design and delivery of the scheme are explored.