Intergenerational Mentoring Project

Final Report

Beth Johnson
FOUNDATION
looking at ageing in new ways

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report describes the processes used by the Beth Johnson Foundation to develop a particular approach to school-based, intergenerational mentoring across the community of high schools in the city of Stoke on Trent. The commitment and hard work of all involved in the development of this project have played their part in ensuring its success and we wish to thank all of them.

We would particularly like to thank the Head Teachers at each of the partnership schools for welcoming the Foundation's project into their school and facilitating its development; the senior staff who so willingly and generously took on the additional responsibility for co-ordinating the project within their school; all the older men and women who took a leap of faith and 'went back to school' to become the core of the project – the volunteer mentors – and last, but by no means least, the Year Seven students who embraced the project, welcomed our older volunteers into their school, into their class groups and friendship groups, and became ambassadors and champions for the project in their school.

Thanks also go to the other agencies who supported the project for their advice, support and encouragement, particularly those who served as members of the project's Advisory Group – their clear thinking, steadfast support was invaluable.

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FOREWORD

In recent years the Foundation has become increasingly engaged in considering the role of older people within their communities. This work has been developing at a time when major changes have been taking place within society. In particular our thinking has been informed by the significant demographic shift that is occurring, the changing and less cohesive structures of communities, and the need to address ageing in more positive ways.

One area that has grown in importance is our perception of the increasing distance and mistrust between many young and old people. Our work nationally and internationally on intergenerational practice has been to explore ways of addressing this. The mentoring project described in this report is a practical illustration of the benefits of engaging young and old people together constructively for their shared benefit.

This project and the accompanying evaluation have been important in helping us develop our thinking and understanding. We now welcome the opportunity to share that learning with a wider audience, to help others see the benefit of approaches like this in building more cohesive communities.

This project also forms part of the Foundation's wider approach to intergenerational work through project work, consultancy, partnership and the establishment in 2001 of the UK Centre for Intergenerational Practice. For information about this work visit our website at www.centreforip.org.uk or email us at generations@bjf.org.uk.

Alan Hatton-Yeo
Director
Beth Johnson Foundation

INTRODUCTION

This report discusses an intergenerational programme carried out by the Beth Johnson Foundation over the three-year period July 1999 to September 2002. It was a school-based mentoring project based on the outcome of two pilot demonstration projects – independently evaluated and assessed by Dr Steve Ellis of Manchester Metropolitan University (Ellis 1998 & 1999).

Funding for this project came from a National Health Action Zone Innovation Award. It was designed to facilitate the development of a sustainable intergenerational mentoring scheme across the reception year (Year Seven or Y7) in a minimum of ten high schools in the city of Stoke on Trent and to be piloted in at least two other education authorities (a copy of the Project Outline is included in the Appendix).

The project specifically recruited older people – men and women over 50 – to work as volunteer mentors alongside young people at a time of significant transition: their move from primary to secondary school. Significantly, mentoring took place within the classroom setting and mentors spent half a day each week with their young partners or 'mentees' for the period of one school year.

The aims of the project were to promote educational, social and health benefits for both the younger and the older participants and, through the process of engaging the two generations, to benefit the wider community by addressing the negative impact of social fragmentation across generations, while at the same time providing positive models of ageing for the young people.

During the first year of the project, a study of older adults involved in school-based initiatives (Granville 2000) was commissioned by the Foundation and looked at the impact of their involvement. The purpose of the study was to develop the Foundation's understanding of the experience of older volunteers working in intergenerational school-based activities. It focused on the older person's perspective of volunteering in projects that specifically brought older and younger generations together.

An external evaluation of the impact of the project is being undertaken by Dr Ellis. His final evaluation report will be available from the Foundation in February 2003.

This report focuses on the processes used to meet the project targets of developing:

- A model of good practice that could be integrated into the majority of high schools in the city of Stoke on Trent.

- A model that could be sustained by schools beyond the duration of the project's funding.

- A model capable of being promoted to, and taken up by, other LEAs.

It is not intended that this report be used as a 'how to' document, since in the Foundation's experience programmes benefit from developing on the basis of identified local need. Rather, the lessons learned during each stage of this three-year project are presented here for consideration by all who were involved in the project or who are interested in intergenerational approaches to school-based mentoring. Guidance materials – including a comprehensive volunteer mentor training manual – have, however, been produced, to assist those interested in establishing similar models and are available from the Foundation.

SETTING UP THE PROJECT

Recruiting schools

It is important to note at the outset that this School-based Year Seven Intergenerational Mentoring Project was able to proceed very quickly to an operational phase due to four important factors. Firstly, the new project was developed from two pilot projects where valuable experience was gathered and lessons learned. Secondly, tools and systems that were developed during the pilot work informed and facilitated the development of the new Y7 project. Secure core funding enabled the Foundation to undertake some of the crucial preparatory work before project funding was released from the funding body. Finally, there was continuity of staff from the previous project to the new, ensuring that the experience gathered by project staff was available to the new project.

Process
In July 1999 letters were sent to the Head Teachers of all 17 secondary schools (known locally as high schools) in the city of Stoke on Trent, outlining the project and confirming that the project's co-ordinator would contact the school to discuss their interest in joining the scheme. A letter of support from the Director of Education was included with the Foundation's letter.

Follow-up calls were made to the schools and meetings were held with those that expressed interest in joining the project. Based on school readiness, agreement was reached with schools as to when they would start. The optimum number of volunteers needed for each school was discussed at these initial meetings. This number varied from school to school, based on the size of intake. One of the project targets was to recruit enough volunteers to allocate one to each Y7 class in the school – the project thereby having the potential to influence a whole year group.

Schools were asked to confirm in writing not only their commitment to working in partnership with the Foundation but also their understanding and acceptance of their roles and responsibilities within this partnership. Significantly, this included the allocation of a senior member of staff to the task of project co-ordination in the school.

Several schools expressed interest in joining the programme at the start of the new school year in September 1999, and several more expressed interest in joining in September 2000. The remaining schools agreed to contact the Foundation at a later stage as they wished to have more time to process the information. There were no restrictions imposed as to which high schools the project could work with or the order in which schools should join, and so the Foundation was free to respond to the interest and enthusiasm of individual schools. Two schools from other authorities sought out the Foundation, having read or heard about its work on intergenerational approaches.

Following the initial meetings various approaches were used to inform whole school teams about the imminent launch of the project in their school. Presentations were made at staff meetings; project outlines were given to all staff; information about the project and advice on working with volunteer mentors was written into staff handbooks.

Lessons learned

- Based on previous experience of working with schools, and an understanding the amount of paperwork Head Teachers have to process, schools were not asked to respond to the project's introductory letter, but to wait to be contacted. This approach gave schools time to read the letter and discuss the project at senior management team level. It ensured that project staff could obtain the timely response needed to move forward with the project – end of the school year being only three weeks away!

- It proved to be important to reassure schools of the track record of the Foundation and its approach to developing and managing innovative projects. Therefore, a letter of support from the Director of Education was enclosed with the Foundation's letter to schools. This approach, along with the verbal recommendations of Head Teachers involved in previous pilot work, resulted in seven schools expressing an interest in joining the project as soon as possible, more than could be accommodated in the first year.

- Towards the end of July was not a good time to start the development work for this school-based project, particularly as it needed to have screened and trained volunteer mentors ready to be placed in schools early in the new academic year. However, as with most externally funded projects, the start of this new work was dictated by confirmation of funding. The bulk of the preparation work, to ensure the project could be operational at the start of the new academic year, therefore took place during the summer break.

- It proved beneficial to the development of partnerships that initial meetings with schools involved a senior member of the management team, if not actually the Head Teacher – someone with the authority to commit the school to the partnership.

- The project benefited from having, at the outset, clearly defined roles and responsibilities for the partnership agencies – the Foundation and individual schools – and these were talked through at initial meetings. The allocation of a senior member of staff to the role of managing and facilitating the project in school proved to be one of the most significant factors in the successful development of the project in a school. (To download details of the roles and responsibilities of the project partners, included in the guidance documents produced by the project, visit www.centreforip.org.uk and follow the 'quick link'.)

- Typical comments from schools about the processes used in establishing the project include:

  "Well planned and managed professionally."

  "Enabled the project to get off to a good start."

  "Manageable in terms of time and resources."

Recruiting volunteers

Process

Significant numbers of volunteers were required to meet the project target each year, and recruitment was approached strategically and based on best practice. The strategy is listed below and illustrates the range of approaches used. These approaches will be very familiar to those involved in volunteer recruitment. There are no magic wands or short cuts to this process – time, resources, good publicity materials and persistence are all needed.

Recruitment strategy:

- Recruitment budget written into the project funding bid.

- Publicity material developed and professionally produced with the involvement of older people and school staff.

- Distribution of good quality publicity to places popular with target audience – active older adults.

- Media coverage – including radio interviews and articles in newspapers, community and business magazines and journals.

- Development of a rolling programme of presentations and talks to targeted community groups and organisations.

- Staffed displays in community venues such as market halls, shopping centres, libraries, community centres.

- Use of both local and national recruitment agencies – for example, volunteer bureaux, Age Concern, RSVP.

- Involvement of older people/experienced mentors in the process – including word of mouth recruitment.

- Involvement of partnership schools in the process.

- Development of a network of 'advocates' to support the process, such as local Community Workers, local Councillors, members of the project's Advisory Group.

- Involvement of local Health Centres, community health workers and GPs in the process.

Having expressed an interest in joining the project, potential new recruits were sent or given an information pack. This pack included an outline of the project, an indication of the skills and qualities needed for mentoring, an application form and a summary of the Foundation's policy on working with volunteers, which stated that volunteer expenses would be paid, and that training would be provided.

Having returned completed application forms, potential volunteers underwent a selection and screening process, which included a face-to-face interview, provision of two written references, criminal record check and completion of a short training programme. Only after successfully completing this process did volunteers go forward to the school induction and mentee matching process.

This particular approach to intergenerational mentoring, with volunteers supporting students in their transition to secondary school, required large numbers of volunteers to be ready to be matched with mentees as early as possible in the new school year. Therefore, recruitment activity was focused towards this deadline, tapering off completely by the end of each autumn term.

Lessons learned

- The project benefited from time allocated to the recruitment process. To enable large groups of mentors to complete the whole process – up to the point of school induction – before the beginning of the school year in September, recruitment activity benefited from starting early in the year, typically in May or June.

- Involving experienced volunteers in the recruitment process was one of the most successful approaches, their enthusiasm for the work being infectious and empowering to others who perhaps lacked confidence in 'going back to school'. This approach played a particularly helpful role in the project's success in recruiting men. The number of volunteers involved in the project built year on year – 20 in year one, 49 in year two and 64 in year three – and each year one-third of these volunteers were men.

- It may sound simplistic, but the most successful approach to recruitment was to ask people if they would like to get involved.

  Research carried out by Pringle (1993 p.19) suggested that

  "…the most widely-quoted reason why older people – indeed, any kind of people – say they do not volunteer: nobody ever asked them to. Placed alongside the 1990 MORI survey, which discovered that more than three-quarters of volunteers over the age of 55 first became involved because of contact with a friend (36%), relative (25%) or colleague (15%) who was already a volunteer, the implication is clear."

  Asking people is therefore the best approach and especially when experienced volunteers do the asking.

- The recruitment of volunteers, while benefiting from the involvement of experienced mentors, was led by the project's co-ordinator. This again proved beneficial to the process, as potential new recruits felt reassured to know it would be the co-ordinator that they would meet again during the selection, screening and training process.

  When discussing the factors that make a high quality mentoring programme, Michel (2001 p.3) suggests,

  "It should not be underestimated how important the co-ordinator role is to new or existing volunteers. We know volunteers build a rapport with the co-ordinator through the recruitment and training and they commit to the co-ordinators and project managers rather than the project itself."

- While successful in the main, these processes resulted in the recruitment of only two volunteers from the city's minority ethnic communities. Experience gained during the project suggests that this was not to due to the unwillingness of older members of these communities to get involved with mentoring but more to do with the specific 'environment' of this particular mentoring intervention – the high school. The level of literacy skill among the current cohort of older members of some of the communities in Stoke on Trent was also felt to be a contributing factor.

- Having a comprehensive information pack to send or give to people interested in joining the project was an effective and efficient use of limited staff time. This approach ensured that administrative staff could begin to process enquiries in the absence of project staff and it cut down on the amount of time spent explaining the detail of the project to large numbers of individuals.

- Typical comments from older adults during community-based recruitment activity:

"Is this really for people like me – old people?"

"The only time anyone has stopped and asked me about something before was when they asked me if I needed help with funeral planning!"

Training volunteers

Process
A training and induction programme was provided for volunteers. It consisted of 12 hours of training provided by the Foundation – facilitated by the project's co-ordinator, experienced volunteers and education practitioners.

Individual schools provided a further three hours of induction for the volunteers being placed in their school, which included the mentor/mentee matching process.

The volunteer training manual mentioned in the Introduction to this report includes details of the induction and matching processes. Copies of this document can be downloaded from the CIP website, www.centreforip.org.uk, and by following the 'quick link'.

Lessons learned
- The training programme that was offered to volunteer mentors evolved over a period of time and benefited from the testing of different approaches. In earlier pilot projects external trainers had been involved, and existing training for parent volunteers working in schools was adapted and used. Over time project staff and volunteers were able to work together to develop a training programme that was specific to the needs of older adults involved in mentoring.

- The older adults involved in this project, many of whom had not undertaken formal training for many years, if at all, enjoyed the informal, interactive style of the training and particularly enjoyed opportunities to share good and bad experiences of their own childhood and school days and discuss how they could draw on their experience to help them in their new role as mentor.

- All the volunteers appreciated the training that was offered and particularly welcomed the sessions that involved experienced mentors and school staff explaining school life today. Of particular value to volunteers were the sessions on the role of significant adults in the lives of young people, confidentiality and child protection.

- The range of topics covered at the initial training sessions was kept to a minimum with the aim of not over-burdening new recruits with information. However, volunteers welcomed sessions on additional topics later in the school year. These included dealing with difficult behaviour, active listening skills, and responsibilities when in a class with a new supply teacher.

- On completion of the training programme, it proved beneficial to get volunteers introduced to their school and their mentee quickly, thereby avoiding the danger of volunteers losing momentum and confidence and perhaps withdrawing from the project.

- Typical comments on the training programme were:

  "Professional yet informal – I was made to feel important and was given appropriate information."

  "Particularly enjoyed the session about school then and now and the bit on surviving being a mentor – made me feel if she can do it so can I."

  "Had no idea there was so much to helping children – but feel less worried now about going back to school – in fact I'm really looking forward to getting going."

Selecting mentees

Process
Before choosing the children to be involved, schools circulated information about the project to all Y7 parents and indeed to the wider school community. This took several forms:

- A letter from the Head Teacher to parents whose children would be joining the school.

- Information included in the school prospectus.

- Articles in the school newsletter.

- A display in the school at the new intake parents' evening.

In the first year of introducing the project to a school, time was given to identify the children to be involved, with final selections being made by the first half-term break.

To assist schools with choosing the children to be involved in the project, the following criteria were developed by school and project staff:

- Pupils finding it difficult to settle into the secondary environment.

- Pupils with high levels of ability but demotivated and needing encouragement and support to get the best from school life.

- Pupils lacking the literacy skills necessary to access the curriculum, resulting in frustration and/or lack of motivation.

- Pupils with weak social skills and/or inability to function as part of a group.

- Unfocused pupils who were easily distracted or who distracted others.

- Pupils with poor organisational skills.

- Pupils who found it difficult to talk to parents and teachers and who might respond to the quiet support of an older adult.

- Pupils with low self-esteem and lacking in confidence.

- Pupils with a need to feel valued and important within a large year group – may have come from a small primary school or been the only child to move from their primary to a particular high school.

- Pupils lacking in family support and/or regular contact with a significant older adult.

- Pupils who would not qualify for other forms of regular support in school.

A range of school staff was involved in choosing the children to be matched with mentors. Typically this included some or all of the following staff members: Head of Year Seven, Special Needs or Learning Support Co-ordinator, Senior Learning Mentor, and the co-ordinator of the project at the school, which was most often a Deputy or Assistant Head Teacher. Information from primary schools was also used to inform staff during their discussions about which children to match with an intergenerational mentor.

In the second and third years of the project operating in a school, staff began the selection process earlier in the school year, making time for discussions with colleagues at the feeder primary schools about which children they thought might benefit from the intergenerational mentoring project. In one or two cases, experienced mentors went with school staff to explain about intergenerational mentoring to pupils and parents at feeder primaries.

Once pupils had been identified, they were asked whether they would like to be involved and written parental consent was requested. No child was forced to get involved and it was explained to children that they were free to withdraw at any time from the project.

Lessons learned
- The identification of children to be mentees needs to be completed as soon as is practically possible to ensure that those experiencing, or likely to experience, difficulties with settling into secondary school can receive support when they most need it – right at the start of term. If this choosing process is delayed for too long, there is also a danger of losing volunteers, who have by now completed their training and are *"…waiting in the wings and raring to go."*

- While it is challenging for schools to have to choose children when they are only just beginning to get to know the new intake, in the vast majority of cases the resulting mentoring partnerships flourished, and benefits for the children were recorded – suggesting that appropriate choices were made.

- There were a few cases where partnerships broke down during the year. With the benefit of hindsight, it was possible to see that these children had very complex problems and needed different types of support and help. In these cases, more appropriate help was provided for the children and new mentees were chosen and matched with the mentors. It was interesting to note that in some of these cases it was the mentor who identified their young partner's particular needs and brought these to the attention of school staff.

- An important factor in the successful development of the project in schools was the care and attention staff gave to discussing the project with the chosen children and their parents and/or guardians. Reassurance was given on the reasons for choosing children, the potential benefits of their being involved and that children could withdraw if unhappy.

Matching mentors and mentees

Process

By the time schools had chosen the children to be involved in the project, the Foundation had recruited, selected, screened and trained the volunteer mentors to be placed in schools.

To assist with the matching process, and prior to the matching session, mentors provided school co-ordinators with a written profile of themselves – helpful information such as family background, special skills, experience and knowledge, what they had enjoyed most about school and why they wished to be a mentor.

Mentors were then invited to the induction and mentor/mentee matching session at their chosen school. Typically, at these sessions the Head Teacher welcomed the volunteers and talked about the school. The school's project co-ordinator discussed the range of children to be involved in the project, shared the school's concern about the children and what the school hoped mentors would be able to achieve with and for the children – for example, help improve self-esteem, help them to stay focused or to be more organised, make them feel special, help them to build trusting relationships or to stay calm or to experience success. An agreement was reached between the adults as to which mentor would work with which child before the children joined the induction/ matching session.

Once the children had joined the meeting they spent time getting to know their mentor and taking them on a tour of their school. Over drinks and biscuits the 'intergenerational partners', with help from school staff, agreed which half-day they would work together throughout the year, when the partnerships would begin, and where partners would meet each week, at the start of the chosen morning or afternoon, before going off to lessons together.

Lessons learned

- In the main, the process of induction worked well (again, this process is described in detail in the project's guidance materials) and played a significant role in the high numbers of mentoring partnerships that were successfully maintained throughout each academic year – typically 96 per cent each year.

- Where this process worked best, schools had taken time to explain intergenerational mentoring not only to the children who were to be involved but also to the whole year group. Some schools introduced the project and its new volunteers at a year group assembly, stressing the importance of having these 'special volunteers' in school.

- Where mentors experienced difficulties with settling in to schools and establishing relationships with their mentees, this could be traced to misunderstandings among the children as to why volunteers were there and what they were there to do. In some cases mentors felt they had to explain the project themselves and in one or two cases lack of information appeared to play a part in mentees being teased by their peers and relationships breaking down.

- In the main, mentors felt they understood why their young partners had been chosen to be supported by a volunteer; however, many felt a little more detail could have better facilitated the development of their relationship.

GETTING GOING AND KEEPING GOING

First day back at school

Process
The first session in any mentoring relationship is an important one. For the volunteer mentors involved in this particular approach, they were not only apprehensive about their new relationship with the young person but also about their first day back at school after 30, 40 or even 50 years. Many of the volunteers were therefore understandably nervous despite the training, induction and matching meeting with their young partner before the first session.

Typically, mentors and mentees met in the school's reception area before the start of lessons. Mentors 'signed in' to ensure that administration staff knew they were on the premises, and young partners then guided them to lessons.

Volunteers spending the morning at school usually took their break in the staff room and their young partners were responsible for guiding them to the staff room and collecting them afterwards. School co-ordinators kept a watching brief for the first few sessions to ensure that everything went according to plan.

Lessons learned
- A major factor in the smooth running of the project in a school – particularly the meeting of mentors and their young partners at the beginning of their mentoring session – was the active involvement of the school's administration team. These staff were the ones most often on hand when mentors arrived at school, and their greeting and support helped volunteers to feel welcome and valued members of the school team. The administration staff knew which children were in school and, if mentees did not collect mentors at the start of a session, they were best placed to assist mentors to find the Y7 group they were attached to or to get messages to the member of staff responsible for co-ordinating the project in school. If changes to the school day or to timetables impacted on mentoring sessions, again the administration team were most likely to be aware of these and could therefore be of assistance to volunteers.

- Working as a volunteer mentor in a school requires a certain amount of self-confidence and resilience. The older adults on this programme were capable, resourceful people and not in need of 'hand holding' while fulfilling their mentoring role. However, care and attention by the school co-ordinator to ensure first sessions went smoothly – or at least acknowledgement, if things did not go to plan, that they would be better next time – played an important part in the successful development of the project in schools.

- Typical comment about the first day back at school:

  "My first day! I was made to feel at home in class straight away. All the pupils seemed fine with my presence. I felt accepted – good for my first day!"

Maintaining mentoring partnerships

This section of the report focuses on the lessons learned while supporting the development and maintenance of intergenerational mentoring partnerships in high school settings. As an introduction, the following comments seem to capture the essence of intergenerational relationships from the mentors' perspective:

"After just a few short sessions, I have a better understanding of learning and my mentee has let it be known how much more she is enjoying school. She says she looks forward to Tuesday mornings in particular and is really improving in her work. For me, I have starting living again since being involved in this scheme. I have not felt better for several years. I actually have 'achievement' again in my life and my 'marbles' are recovering!"

"These last few weeks have been quite traumatic in my personal life. But when I got home from school, I realised that during the morning I did not think about this. So far this morning the children have helped me more than I helped them. So this project is definitely a two-way thing."

"We talk and listen to one another; 100% respect and understanding – this is what intergenerational mentoring is all about."

Process

Unless there were particular problems, mentoring partnerships typically continued throughout Year Seven with mentors and their young partners meeting for half a day each week. If mentors were unable to attend for any reason, such as holidays or illness (usually the only reasons for missing sessions), the mentees were always informed. If mentees were unable to attend for any reason, mentors typically joined their regular class and worked alongside other children, thereby maintaining a link with all the children in the class and the subject being studied.

Throughout the year, many mentors joined in the extra-curricular activities at their school – seeing these activities as an opportunity to build their relationship with the mentee by being alongside them in less formal settings. These activities included school trips, school performances, special discussion groups and assemblies, and staying for lunch with their mentee when invited.

To ensure the smooth running of the project and to facilitate the development of mentoring relationships to the satisfaction of all involved, project staff facilitated a meeting each term with the project team at each school. These meetings provided an opportunity for school staff to give feedback to volunteers on the effectiveness of their mentoring intervention and to share ideas on how best to support and encourage the mentees. The meetings also provided a forum for any difficulties or concerns about the project to be discussed and solutions found. Regular meetings proved to be an effective means of providing opportunities for the sharing of learning and exchange of experiences about intergenerational mentoring.

At the end of each term, school staff discussed with teaching staff and students the impact of the mentoring intervention and the outcomes of these discussions were shared with mentors in the form of a written feedback sheet. These short reports provided encouragement to mentors by giving them an insight into how their intervention was perceived by teachers and most importantly by their young partners. An example of the feedback sheet appears in the project's guidance materials mentioned elsewhere in this report.

Project staff also organised regular meetings (typically one per term) for all volunteers involved in the project, providing further opportunities for mentors to discuss the development of intergenerational relationships and to gain a sense of belonging to a wider

movement of intergenerational activity. Additional training sessions were also offered at many of these meetings on issues pertinent to mentoring interventions.

Mentoring relationships were brought to a close at the end of the academic year with a celebration event.

Lessons learned
- Effective and proactive support for mentors ensured that potential difficulties with the development of individual relationships and/or the development of the project within a school could be quickly spotted and serious problems avoided. This approach resulted in a high level of satisfaction with the project by both volunteers and school co-ordinators, so that large numbers of volunteers returned to the project for a second and third year and many more schools applied to join the project.

- It takes time to imbed a new volunteer project into a school and this was an important lesson to learn. High schools typically have a limited amount of experience in the management of school-based volunteer programmes and it therefore takes time, and support from staff with experience of volunteer management, for schools to develop skills in building good working relationships with volunteers. In this particular case, the volunteers were also from a generation of people not usually present in schools on a regular basis. There is no doubt that whole-school support for such a project has a positive effect on the development and maintenance of mutually respectful intergenerational mentoring relationships and, typically, it took a year for this whole-school support to be achieved.

- The day-to-day support of subject teachers and their approach to facilitating the mentoring process in their classes also played an important role in helping intergenerational relationships to develop. A 'light touch' seemed to work best, with teachers providing occasional words of encouragement to ensure that mentors knew that they were making a difference and that their voluntary contribution was worthwhile. Attention to and comment on the mentoring process also helped mentors and mentees to feel pride in the relationship. As one mentor put it: *"My mentee was praised today and I feel like I was being praised too. I came home feeling elated – I am making a difference."*

  It is interesting to note the teacher's observations on the process: *"Pupils form better relationships with these older mentors* [than with younger mentors] *– the two generations accept each other more readily and build bridges rather than barriers."* And *"I hope this goes on for ever – I could never manage without my mentor in the class – our school would be the poorer without these older adults."* And *"Mentors stay calm and focused on the children – they don't get caught up in the general disruption."*

- When this project began, there was concern that young people would not accept the older volunteers into their classes, being embarrassed by their involvement and attention. While there were children who on occasion were uncomfortable with the process, this issue did not prove to be a major obstacle to the development and maintenance of successful mentoring relationships. In great part this was achieved by discussing the issue during mentor training and identifying strategies for coping with any negativity that mentors might encounter. One of these strategies focused on being approachable and accessible to all the children in the class who might seek help. Typically, while maintaining their primary mentoring relationship, volunteers built

mutually respectful and supportive relationships with all the children in the class and enjoyed *"closing the age gap."* Indeed, mentors enjoyed the opportunity provided by the project to build relationships with large numbers of young people. Making themselves available as a resource to other children, while maintaining their primary focus, resulted in pupils quickly adopting the older volunteers as 'one of them' and accepting them into peer and friendship groups.

- The following comments give further insight into the mentors' perspective on their relationships with the children:

  "Today has reinforced my opinion of children – there is some good in all of them. Most want some attention and recognition. A kind remark or maybe a compliment goes a long way – more than criticism. I hope they will carry the positive through the rest of their lives."

  "I find that this class of 11 and 12 year olds are very much brighter than my generation. They are also a very caring bunch of children. This gives me hope for the future of our country."

  "Getting to know these children has given me something extra in my life and the best thing is the acceptance of a class of 11 and 12 year olds who treat me with respect and treat me as a friend."

  "Today I realised how much I have learned about being a mentor. I hope I have given as much to my mentee and his classmates as he and his classmates have given to me."

- One of the concerns that many volunteers had at the beginning of their involvement was that they would not be 'clever' enough – that they would know little of the subjects the children were learning about, having been away from school for so many years. What mentors and project staff quickly learned was that the children enjoyed and welcomed an opportunity to 'teach' their mentors all about their lessons. In fact, this proved to be one of the most important elements in the successful development of mutually beneficial mentoring relationships – there being an exchange of roles, sometimes mentors being the learner and the child having the chance to be the teacher. As one mentor put it: *"Most weeks I feel as if I am learning more from my mentee, I feel as if he is my little mentor!"* And a teacher commented: *"Mentors don't have to know best in lessons. The relationship perhaps works best when the children are better at certain things."*

- Schools found it helpful to develop a range of approaches for thanking mentors for their voluntary contribution and ensuring they felt valued by the school. This included simple thank-you cards, afternoon tea with the Head Teacher, mentions in school newsletters, free refreshments at school and VIP invitations to school events. While mentors gave their time freely and expected little reward, these activities were appreciated and had a positive impact on volunteers' relationship with school.

- As the end of the academic year approached, it was found to be helpful to celebrate the year-long relationship in some way. One of the most successful approaches taken by schools was awarding 'Certificates of Achievement' to mentoring partnerships at school awards ceremonies – typically older and younger partners collected their 'graduate' certificates together. It was also important at this time to reassure some of the children that while their mentoring relationship was coming to an end, their friendship with the older person at school could continue if they wished it to.

- The area that proved most difficult in terms of disrupting the development and maintenance of mentoring relationships was supply staff. Mentors struggled to maintain relationships in classes that experienced a stream of supply staff, some of whom had little or no understanding of who the mentors were and what they were there to do. In some cases this had a negative effect on the relationship between mentors and their young partners.

- Mentors were astonished and saddened by the deterioration of the children's behaviour when a new supply teacher was present. This is, unfortunately, a problem for many schools and provokes concern among the permanent staff who have to contend with the impact on their students day after day. Coping with the disruption was certainly a challenge for these classroom-based mentors and one with which they will no doubt continue to struggle. However, despite these difficulties, mentors continued to help children to stay focused and to concentrate on their work among the chaos that sometimes reigned. To address this difficulty, written information on best practice in working with intergenerational mentors was provided for supply staff.

TRANSITION TO A SCHOOL-MANAGED MODEL

Process

One of the main project aims was to establish a model that could be imbedded into schools and sustained by them beyond the duration of project funding. This was achieved through a partnership approach, with all stakeholders working together towards this target in the following ways.

Regular meetings of school and project co-ordinators were held to discuss the development of the model. Typically, one meeting was held each term with staff in individual schools and an additional meeting each term brought together all the school co-ordinators involved in the project.

The project maintained close links with the Mentoring Co-ordinator, who is based within the Education Department in Stoke on Trent, to ensure that good practice emerging from different mentoring models could be shared and replicated.

A project Advisory Group was established and met on a quarterly basis to provide support, guidance and inspiration and to facilitate the project achieving its stated aims.

Volunteer mentors were provided with opportunities to contribute to discussions about the development of the model at their regular meetings at school, at project-wide meetings and by becoming involved in the project's Advisory Group. Young people's comments about mentoring were regularly gathered and fed into discussions.

The outcome of all these meetings was the development of the model described in this report and the production of a comprehensive set of guidance documents and volunteer training manual designed to support schools with managing the model long term. A further result was the establishment of a support network for schools operating the project – a forum for raising concerns and sharing best practice.

Lessons learned

- Utilising the strengths of the two partnership organisations – schools and the Foundation – in the development of the project has resulted in the majority of schools being successful in imbedding the model into the life of the school and making it an integral part of the additional support for pupils, good practice in the day-to-day management of mentoring models now being common practice in many schools. However, the long-term implications of taking on sole responsibility for the marketing of the project and the recruitment and training of volunteers will be a major challenge for individual schools.

- Involving all stakeholders in the process of testing the model and establishing a framework for discussing its development proved to be a beneficial approach as each group had a distinct contribution to make.

- Involving mentors in the support of the project proved beneficial in some schools, as these new staff could take on some of the day-to-day supervision and co-ordination of volunteer mentors – a role that had been suggested by the Department for Education and Skills when these new school posts were launched with Education Action Zone, Excellence in Cities funding.

- Developing the model from earlier evaluated projects played a significant part in the success of the project and resulted in only minor adjustments being made to the original model throughout the three years of the project. One measure of the success of the project is its growth: 13 schools are now operating the model – 11 in the city of Stoke on Trent and one each in Staffordshire and Derbyshire – and the number of volunteer mentors continues to increase.

CONCLUSIONS AND THE WAY FORWARD

The main target for the project was to develop a model of good practice that could be integrated into high schools in the city of Stoke on Trent and sustained by them beyond the duration of the project funding. A further target was to develop a model capable of being promoted to, and taken up by, other LEAs.

The project successfully recruited the majority of high schools in the city of Stoke on Trent to the project, as well as recruiting schools from two additional authorities. Guidance documents were produced to assist with promoting the model to other LEAs. Significant numbers of older adults were recruited to the project. The majority of intergenerational mentoring relationships, on average 96 per cent per year, were maintained throughout Year Seven.

As to the target of sustainability, all 13 schools currently involved in the project are committed to maintaining the model beyond the duration of the current funding. However, it is difficult to predict at this stage how successful they will be in the long term if unsupported. While procedures for supervising volunteers and managing the model in schools are now in place, the ongoing marketing of the project and the recruitment and training of new volunteers will be a challenge for individual schools. (In other areas of the country it is the LEA and key agencies such as Education Business Partnerships that provide this range of external support for schools operating voluntary mentoring schemes.)

Some challenges remain, but the project has succeeded in meeting targets and in great part this can be attributed to two key factors. Firstly, the development of trusting relationships – without trust between partnership agencies, between school staff and volunteer mentors and between mentors and their young partners it would have been impossible to develop the project or to meet targets. Secondly, the project used a community participation approach that provided opportunities for older adults to play an active role in their communities by engaging with young people in new ways, an approach that built on older community members' skills and competencies and provided opportunities for them to play an active role in the development of the project.

And the future?
While not wishing to pre-judge the outcomes of Dr Ellis's evaluation of the impact of intergenerational mentoring on the lives of younger and older participants, the Foundation and its school partners recognise that the support and experience of independent adults can help children to make more successful transitions to high school, to participate more positively in school life and to develop a more positive self-image. The Foundation also recognises that to limit negative experiences it is important to identify children as early as possible. The Foundation was therefore interested in exploring the possibility of building a network of intergenerational mentoring support across primary and secondary school partnerships.

As there was strong support for this type of development from all stakeholders – school staff, community members and key staff with responsibility for health and education – the Foundation put an outline proposal, an 'expression of interest', to the Children Fund (Stoke on Trent) early in the spring of 2002 with a more detailed proposal being submitted a month later.

This funding bid was successful and the Foundation is now working with key partners to build on its experience of intergenerational work by establishing a comprehensive mentoring programme based on two high schools, their feeder primary schools and their surrounding communities. The new work will provide support and mentoring to pupils seen as at risk of failure or who are experiencing particular difficulties. The scheme will continue to focus on supporting pupils to make successful transitions from primary to secondary school, with mentors being actively involved in the preparation for this change and then moving with pupils, if appropriate, or passing them to new mentors in the secondary school.

As with the previous projects, the new work will be led by the Foundation and run as a community initiative with the aim of imbedding it into the school system and building strong links with the community to support the work of schools. The mentors will be recruited from the communities around the school and will normally be aged 50 or more, but there will be flexibility to enable people in their late 40s to participate. Different models of mentoring support will be established in consultation with the school groups but a major focus will be on pupils with poor self-esteem and attendance patterns.

This new two-year funding from the Children's Fund (Stoke on Trent) will also provide the Foundation with an opportunity to continue to contribute to some aspects of training for volunteer mentors and to maintain a quality assurance role with schools operating the Year Seven model.

APPENDIX

Project Outline – School based (Year Seven)
Intergenerational Mentoring Project 1999 - 2002

Background
The Beth Johnson Foundation has a long tradition of concentrating on innovative and developmental work that has potential to develop, influence and challenge the role and status of older people in society. Currently the Foundation is bringing an intergenerational approach to the issue of ageing as it is convinced of the potential of this approach in bringing together the two groups in society who are most likely to experience marginalisation and exclusion – namely the young and the old – to influence and change society for their mutual benefit.

Based on the outcome of two pilot demonstration programmes, independently evaluated and assessed by Manchester Metropolitan University (Ellis 1998 & 1999), the Foundation is developing, for the first time in the United Kingdom, a sustainable Intergenerational Mentoring scheme across the reception year in the majority of high schools in one Local Education Authority.

Funding for this three-year project comes through a national Health Action Zone Innovation Award.

Description of the project
The development of a sustainable intergenerational mentoring scheme across the reception year (Year Seven) in a minimum of ten high schools in the city of Stoke on Trent through a phased development programme over a three-year period: a model of good practice that can be integrated into and sustained by the high school community of Stoke on Trent and capable of being promoted to, and taken up by, other LEAs.

The project is aimed at what is perceived as the most significant transition in a school pupil's educational career, the move from their primary school, with its distinct culture and ethos, to the more demanding and daunting secondary system.

The project will promote educational, social and health benefits for both the younger and older participants and through the process of engaging the two generations will benefit the community and provide models of positive ageing for young people and the wider community.

Expected outcomes
The expected outcomes for pupils, older volunteers, participating schools and the wider community are as follows:

For pupils who are at risk of failure or marginalisation the scheme will promote self-confidence, self-esteem and a successful transition to high school. It will support improved school attendance and attainment and assist the establishment of patterns of success and the reduction of disruptive behaviours. By exposure to positive role models of ageing the project will address the issue of ageism and aim to challenge the negative stereotype of older people that many young people hold.

For the older volunteers, purposeful involvement in meaningful activity will promote a sense of personal identity and self-worth and fulfil the need of older generations to nurture the young and pass on their experience of life to them. The project will give older people a positive experience of young people and aim to challenge the negative feelings that older people often experience about the young.

Schools will be provided with the additional resource of skilled volunteers supporting new pupils across the reception year. The presence of older people in the classroom will have a wider impact than just the prime mentoring relationship and will help to create a softer atmosphere where pupils feel able to seek out support. The model will also enable participating schools to address the new requirement of teaching citizenship and will promote models of ageing that emphasise the potential value and contribution of older people to society.

For the wider community the project will develop a sustainable community-based initiative that brings younger and older people together through the medium of the school. It will play a part in addressing the negative impact of social fragmentation across the generations and will go some way to addressing the 'rootlessness' that has such a negative effect on so many young people.

Project outline
The project will specifically recruit older people, men and women over 50, to work as volunteer mentors – defined as a trusted friend and wise adviser – to young people in their first year of secondary school.

Mentors will be partnered with a particular young person and spend half a day per week for a school year working alongside them in the classroom, giving support and encouragement. Class teachers and the whole school community will support these special intergenerational partnerships.

Volunteer recruitment, screening, training and ongoing support will be undertaken by the Foundation's project staff. School partners will select the pupils to be involved and provide induction for mentors and pupils as well as ongoing monitoring of pupils' progress.

Innovation
The project will further develop intergenerational work as an agent of social change that addresses the marginalisation of both young and old from and by Society. It will develop a classroom-based model of mentoring, which at the time of writing is unique in the United Kingdom, to combat failure and exclusion.

The project will also promote the concept of active ageing, with its related health benefits, for older people whose primary focus will be to provide a service to the young. It will also place the issue of teaching about ageing and being older, in a positive and non-discriminatory way, on the curriculum development agenda for the Local Education Authority and schools.

Timescale
The project will begin in October 1999 with the identification of the first four participating schools. The process of volunteer mentor recruitment, induction and training for the first group of schools will be completed by the first half term of the school year, thereby

enabling teachers to concentrate on getting to know new pupils. Mentors will begin their school placements following the first half term. Three or four new schools will be recruited to the project in each of the subsequent two years.

Sustainability
During the first three years of the project the Foundation will hold lead responsibility for the recruitment and training of volunteers, their initial support in placements and the overall administrative co-ordination of the project. By the end of this period it is intended that the Foundation's role will be an arm's length one contributing to some aspects of training and holding a quality assurance role.

The project will run in partnership with Stoke on Trent LEA and the intention is to imbed the scheme to enable it to continue as a school-based initiative, supported by the LEA, at the end of the project stage. During the project, mentor recruitment packs, guidance manuals, training manuals and an evaluation system will be produced to enable the scheme to be not only integrated into the LEA but also promoted and taken up by other LEAs. The costing of the scheme will address a realistic appraisal of the resource implications for schools and how these can be met.

Two further issues to be addressed by the project will be to consider the organisation, on a consortium basis, of training and support for participating schools and to explore the potential for volunteers to exercise an increasing role in the overall management and support of the scheme.

Dissemination
As a demonstration project, the scheme will be given high publicity and this will be achieved in a number of ways, including:

• Regular reports and papers through the National Mentoring Network and other interested groups.

• Articles in both specialist (educational, intergenerational and gerontological) and general interest publications.

• Communication to local communities and interested groups.

• Presentations to appropriate conferences.

• Seminars.

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