

## Who is this briefing sheet for?

Education providers concerned with developing, providing and funding education activities and curriculum relevant to the requirements of older people and facilitating their continued engagement with the group and with the wider community.

This is the forty-eighth in a series of briefing sheets, which aim to provide an introduction to a variety of lifelong learning issues

Also available:

- 47. Young adult learners, disaffection and social inclusion
- 46. Adult participation in learning
- 45. Older people and learning
- 44. Basic skills
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- 39. ICT in active citizenship
- 38. ICT mentors

Many earlier titles in the Briefing Sheet series are still available; please contact us for more information about these titles

Copies of this and other sheets are available from NIACE, 21 De Montfort Street, Leicester LE1 7GE.

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E-mail: [information@niace.org.uk](mailto:information@niace.org.uk)

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## Summary

There is an increasing recognition of the role older people can play in developing the personal capacity of others. At the same time such engagement enhances the confidence, well-being and sense of value of the older person.

In recent years there has been a range of different initiatives to encourage older people to work with people of other ages, races and with disabilities, many of which are labelled as mentoring programmes. These initiatives have ranged from simply volunteering to full utilisation of skills, experience and maturity. Some have been supported by an education and guidance programme to help older people better analyse what they have to offer, how, why and where.

This briefing sheet is an attempt to make sense of some of the definitions of “mentoring” illustrated by current and recent examples of initiatives which have involved older people. Guidelines are also offered for those wishing to develop educational programmes to encourage and enhance older people’s mentoring skills and aptitude.

## What is mentoring?

Mentoring can take place in many forms; the interpretation of mentoring is diverse and can vary from more formal coaching or tutoring, to informal advocacy and support. The National Mentoring Network sums up the broad nature of mentoring and its applications:

“There is no one universally accepted definition of mentoring. This is because the definition depends very much on why, where and with whom it is being used. There is, however, a generic core to all mentoring relationships whatever the setting, which is the support given voluntarily by one person to another.”

*National mentoring network website 2003*

The Government defines mentoring as:

“A one-to-one, non judgemental relationship in which an individual voluntarily gives time to support and encourage another. This is typically developed at a time of transition in the mentee’s life, and lasts for a significant and sustained period of time.”

*Active Community Unit, Home Office*

There are two types of mentoring:

- Natural mentoring - occurs in an informal way through friendship or other relationships
- Planned mentoring – through a structured or formal programme

Mentoring takes place in diverse settings from the voluntary sector to private businesses, examples of mentoring can be found:

- Within schools and other educational institutions
- “At risk” situations including school exclusion, drug abuse, offending or unemployment
- Ex-offenders
- Homeless people
- Young people in or leaving care
- Support for small businesses from larger companies
- New employees in organisations as part of a Human Resource programme

Mentoring differs from advocacy, which is a more representative role, to empower people to speak up for him or herself, or providing support to help people secure their rights. Mentoring offers encouragement to help people fulfil their potential or to work through difficult situations. It helps people with raising self-esteem and self-confidence.

**Issues for consideration:** there is no agreement on the definition of mentoring, in some areas it is seen as simply volunteering.

## Older people and mentoring

There is a range of diverse and innovative mentoring work being undertaken with older people, producing a lot of valuable information that could be disseminated and shared more widely. The term mentor is interpreted as someone who is able to facilitate another’s

growth and development, it is anticipated that the mentor can offer experience and will take a special interest in the mentee. Older people can offer specific advantages of life experience and skills to the mentee:

“Mentor: One who is experienced and seeks to develop the character and competence of a younger person; interaction occurs over an extended period of time”

*Newman et al 1997 Intergenerational Programs Past, Present and Future, Taylor & Francis USA*

Intergenerational activity helps to reduce the barriers that exist between older and younger generations and encourages greater social inclusion for young and old. Older people, who may be viewed as unable to connect with younger generations, or who young people perceive as having nothing to offer them, can help break down these misconceptions and stereotypes through the mentoring relationship.

**Issues for consideration:** accreditation for mentoring is optional, with the rise of mentoring programmes it may become prudent to formalise the skills that are needed to work with mentees to ensure the role is not exploited. In working with vulnerable people, the question of police checks and references may become more pressing in the future. For mentors they may find that in working with mentees that they also need opportunities to be debriefed and to switch off from what can be emotionally draining sessions.

## Accreditation and mentoring

The National Open College Network provides an accredited course in mentoring: the Prince’s Trust Mentoring Skills Programme. The course enables learners to support young people through the Prince’s Trust Volunteers’ Programme and to aid young people in transition after the programme has ended. The course is targeted at those with knowledge of the Prince’s Trust Team Challenge Programme, and for those who have either been a volunteer on the programme or have been involved in other roles as leader etc.

Though not aimed at older people, the course does indicate a growing awareness of the value of mentoring and the skills mentors will develop. For more information from the National Open College Network telephone: 01332 268080, website: [www.nocn.org.uk](http://www.nocn.org.uk)

## Examples of Mentoring Projects

### **NIACE Dysgu Cymru - Working with Older Learners Mentor Training Project**

This project, funded by the National Lotteries Charities Board Wales, ran from October 1999-June 2001. Its main aims were to enhance the confidence and strengthen the skills of older people to act as mentors to support and guide other older people through a learning situation. The measurable benefits of the project included:

- A successfully completed mentor-training programme
- Mentoring systems in place to enhance the capacity within communities in learning activities
- Increased participation by older adults in community-based learning activities in a variety of settings
- An accredited mentor training programme, assessed and published
- Collation and publication of a mentor/learners information handbook
- The desire of older adults to be involved in a learning activity
- Secure sustainable partnerships with learning providers

For further information contact Christine Glover, NIACE Dysgu Cymru. Tel: 0292 0370900.

Website:

[www.niace.org.uk/niacedc/Projects/Older-en.htm](http://www.niace.org.uk/niacedc/Projects/Older-en.htm)

### **Community Education Development Centre (CEDC) - Capacity Building for Older People Project**

CEDC has been piloting a project funded by the Department for Education and Skills, which helps older people to pass on their skills and knowledge to other older people. The thinking behind the project is that older people have a wealth of skills and knowledge, which they have gained from life experiences and from their hobbies and interests. CEDC has designed a set of materials, which provided these older people (known as peer trainers in the project) with the tools and understanding to enable them to share their skills with their peers. Should they wish to, the peer trainers can gain national accreditation as they progress through the programme. The project has been piloted in four locations in England in

partnership with voluntary and public sector organisations locally. Peer trainers are working in small group and one-to-one situations, helping other older people to learn new skills. The kind of skills being developed is amazing, ranging from IT, health and fitness and salsa dancing to photography, Irish language and Asian arts.

The project has had many interesting spin-offs. Many peer trainers have also become community catalysts and mentors, galvanising their peers into action, helping them to organise interest groups, and supporting them when they need to tackle health, benefits and other personal issues, such as isolation. For further details contact Chris Jones, Director of Economic and Community Regeneration at CEDC, email: [chris@cedc.org.uk](mailto:chris@cedc.org.uk). Website: [www.cedc.org.uk/economic/older.php](http://www.cedc.org.uk/economic/older.php)

### **“Someone Like Me!” Project - The Senior Peer Mentor Physical Activity Motivator Programme**

“Someone Like Me” was a partnership project, funded by the Department for Education and Skills (Access to Learning for Adults Division) between the British Heart Foundation National Centre for Physical Activity and Health at Loughborough University (BHF National Centre) in conjunction with Age Concern England’s Active Age Unit. The project set out to develop an educational programme for Senior Peer Mentors as potential agents of change in increasing levels of physical activity among older people by working with four local programmes:

- *Dudley Health Improvement*: Based on the Dudley Leap Over 60 project, led by Dudley Health Improvement, the Dudley programme has been working in particular with sheltered housing agencies and is linked to the Tandrust programme working with ethnic elders and Age Concern Dudley.
- *Kirklees Leisure Services*: Led by Kirklees Leisure Services, this programme is linked to the Kirklees PALS (primary health care exercise referral scheme) and uses Senior Peer Mentors as physical activity “buddies” building on the work of the Kirklees Active Older People’s Alliance.
- *West Yorkshire*: Led by the Harrogate and Craven Primary Care Trust, the programme is working with Age Concern organizations in West Yorkshire. The programme is seeking to

develop “Community Champions” and “Generations in Action” and working to reach isolated older people in rural communities.

- *Wigan Leisure Services*: The Wigan programme and partnership includes Age Concern Wigan and Wigan Social Services. The programme has targeted 9 recently developed local “Townships” and the Wigan Older People’s Panel.

Project activities have included the provision of training, education and support activities for small teams of local professionals; educational materials for older people relating to physical activity and health promotion; training, education and support activities for Senior Peer Mentors through a local coordinator. For further details contact Bob Laventure, BHF National Centre for Physical Activity and Health, Loughborough University. Email: [Bob.Laventure@ntlworld.com](mailto:Bob.Laventure@ntlworld.com) Website: [www.bhfactive.org.uk](http://www.bhfactive.org.uk)

### **Generations in Action - National Mentoring Network and Beth Johnson Foundation**

The Generations in Action project encourages retired people to pass on their skills and experience to young people mainly in schools. It aims to engage older people in working with young people in school with a view to improving standards and motivation through participation in mentoring activities and one to one reading support. The older volunteers act as mentors, and the project promotes social inclusion both for the students and volunteers: the younger people were identified specifically as needing extra support.

The four partnership organisations from Wigan, North Yorkshire, West Lancashire and Sandwell have been working with the partnership to create local third age programmes to increase local support for young people. The project was developed by Beth Johnson Foundation and has a particular interest in the gains for the older mentors as well as those for the mentees and the school community. It also evaluates if there was a change in how generations perceived one another. Outcomes from the 2003 summary:

- The older mentors cited satisfaction at helping young people progress, and their own sense of achievement and confidence had been enhanced
- The younger mentees also positively identified areas in the curriculum where they had improved. Importantly the displayed a

strong positive change in attitude towards older people in general

- The general mood in the classroom had changed, with a positive impact being observed by teaching staff when the mentors were present
- Most volunteers were working in schools, (80%) there was considerable variety in the volunteering being undertaken and volunteers feeling confident. This encouraged volunteers to move from working in schools to transferring skills to say work one to one with a youth offender.
- Through volunteering as mentors, the older people become more aware of stereotyping and ageism both for themselves as individuals and for older people more generally.

The project will continue and a final evaluation report will be produced by Beth Johnson Foundation. For more information on this and other intergenerational work visit [www.bjf.org.uk](http://www.bjf.org.uk)

### **Digital Unite – ICT Mentoring Project in Sheltered Housing - Hairnet**

Digital Unite is aimed at residents and staff in sheltered housing in London: it involves 3 housing associations, 10 sheltered schemes and up to 100 individuals. It is targeted at those individuals who would otherwise have little opportunity to access ICT. The project uses peer mentors from Hairnet to introduce new users to the Internet; each separate scheme gets a dedicated trained mentor. Digital Unite aims to work as a community without hierarchy: residents, staff and mentors are on equal footing; all experience is valued and valuable.

Residents will get to experiment with building their own web space with flexible, specifically designed online toolkits, find their voice and place in cyberspace as an identifiable group in ‘real space’ and be able to represent themselves to local and central government. It is hoped that out of the mentoring project a working group will emerge with residents and landlords and representatives from EROSH (Emerging Role of Sheltered Housing). In addition it is planned that this project will set a benchmark for national roll-out of ICT mentoring programme for sheltered housing. For more information contact Hairnet at website: [www.hairnet.org](http://www.hairnet.org).



## Useful Resources

**Consenting adults – making the most of mentoring.** (Video and Accompanying Booklet) Channel 4 Television, 1995. ISBN 1851441328

**Guidance materials for intergenerational mentoring project.** The Beth Johnson Foundation, 2002

**ICT mentors: a support skills resource pack for volunteers and programme co-ordinators in community and voluntary organisations.** Jackie Essom, NIACE, 2003. Website: [www.niace.org.uk/Research/ICT/ICT\\_Mentors.pdf](http://www.niace.org.uk/Research/ICT/ICT_Mentors.pdf)

**Inter-generational learning: a training manual.** Holm et al. CEDC, 2000

**Intergenerational issues and activities (briefing paper 9).** Iris Webb, Age Concern England, 1995

**Intergenerational programs past, present and future.** Newman et al. Taylor and Francis, USA, 1997. ISBN 156032421X

**It's never too late! A programme to prepare older people to pass on skills and knowledge to others.** CEDC, 2003

**Learning in later life; an introduction for educators and carers.** Peter Jarvis, Kogan Press, 2000. ISBN 0749433981

**Mentoring schemes: a practical guide to running successful schemes.** Hertfordshire TEC, 1999. Hertfordshire LSC produced a number of publications of mentoring including "The Mentors Handbook", "The Mentees Handbook" and "The Mentors Diary".

**Senior peer mentor support pack; a guide for the senior peer mentor physical activity motivator.** British Heart Foundation, 2002

## Useful Organisations

**Beth Johnson Foundation**  
Parkfield House  
64 Princes Road  
Hartshill  
Stoke-on-Trent, ST4 7JL  
Tel: 01782 844 036  
Website: [www.bjf.org.uk](http://www.bjf.org.uk)

**British Heart Foundation Centre for Physical Activity and Health**  
Loughborough University  
Loughborough  
Leicestershire, LE11 3TU  
Tel: 01509 223259  
Website: [www.bhfactive.org.uk](http://www.bhfactive.org.uk)

**Community Education Development Centre (CEDC)**  
Unit C1, Grovelands Court  
Grovelands Estate  
Longford Road  
Exhall  
Coventry CV7 9NE  
Tel: 024 7658 8440  
Website: [www.cedc.org.uk](http://www.cedc.org.uk)

**The Mentor's Forum**  
Tel: 01727 813 752  
Email: [mentoring@exemplas.com](mailto:mentoring@exemplas.com)  
Website: [www.mentorsforum.co.uk](http://www.mentorsforum.co.uk)

**National Mentoring Network**  
First Floor, Charles House  
Albers Street  
Eccles  
Manchester, M31 0PD  
Tel: 0161 787 8600  
Website: [www.nmn.org.uk](http://www.nmn.org.uk)

NIACE, the national organisation for adult learning, has a broad remit to promote lifelong learning opportunities for adults. NIACE works to develop increased participation in education and training. It aims to do this for those who do not have easy access because of barriers of class, gender, age, race, language and culture, learning difficulties or disabilities, or insufficient resources.  
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