An evaluation of NCVCCO's

'parent mentoring' project

Funded by a

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and aims of the project

This report details the results of an evaluation undertaken by Debi Roker of the Trust for the Study of Adolescence (TSA). The evaluation was of a pilot 'Parent Mentoring' project, managed by NCVCCO and run in collaboration with three partner organisations across England. The grants for the pilot project and the evaluation were provided by the Family Support Grant in the DfES.

The aim of the pilot project was to train 'mentors', to enable parents of secondary school age children to help and support parents of younger children, especially around the transition to secondary school period. The project was undertaken at three sites:
- Kinara Family Resource Centre, Greenwich (London)
- NCH Family Centre, March (Cambridgeshire)
- Forward Training (Hull).

The aims of the evaluation were as follows:

1) To identify the *impact* of parent mentoring schemes on mentors and mentees, in terms of parents' levels of knowledge and understanding, confidence, perceptions of support, and consideration of different options for dealing with difficult issues or situations with their children.

2) To identify the *processes* involved in setting up and running 'parent mentoring' projects. This included the successes of the projects, any difficulties and challenges that arose, and the main learning points that could be of use to others in the future.

Information collected

The broad design of the project was to (a) meet with and interview staff at the three sites on 3-4 occasions during the life of the project, and (b) conduct telephone interviews with the mentors and mentees at the beginning and end of their 'pairings'. However, the pilot projects did not take place entirely as planned at each site. Relatively few pairings took place at either Hull or March, and Kinara embedded their parent mentoring programme within a drop-in centre for parents (see later for details). However, other activities took place at all three sites, and a wide range of valuable learning took place. As a result, the evaluation plan developed and was amended as the site's plans changed and developed. The following data was therefore collected in the project:

Hull: Interviews were held with the two project workers at the Hull site on four separate occasions. Interviews were also conducted with the mentors who were trained by and supported by the Hull site workers. Three mentors were interviewed twice each during 2004, ie six interviews in total. During the timescale of the evaluation, no mentees were recruited to the study, so there were therefore none to interview in the evaluation.

March: The two project workers at the March site were interviewed on two occasions. Interviews were also conducted with mentors who were trained by and supported by the March site workers. Three mentors were interviewed twice each. Two pairings did take place during the course of the project. One of the mentees involved was interviewed as part of the evaluation.

Kinara in Greenwich: Interviews were held with both the project workers on two occasions. Five mentors were also interviewed - three were interviewed twice, and two were interviewed once. In addition the author visited the centre to attend the first 'anniversary' meeting for the parents' drop-in. Some mentees were also interviewed at this time.

In addition data was collected at 'all-project' meetings held twice per year throughout the project, and the Project Manager at NCVCCO was interviewed at the start and end of the project.

Main findings and learning points

Each of the three sites successfully recruited and trained mentors. This took considerable time, effort, and planning. However, difficulties were then found in using the mentors. At Hull and March it proved difficult to recruit mentees. During the life of the project no mentees were recruited at Hull, with three recruited at March. At Kinara, delays in securing Criminal Record Bureau checks led the workers to set up an alternative system, a drop-in service for parents. Some 'pairings' were made in this way. It was therefore not possible to formally assess the impact of pairings at any of the sites. However, a large amount of valuable learning was gathered from the three sites. These are detailed in the report and summarised below:

Development of projects and training of mentors

- Developing a parent mentoring project takes considerable time. This must be built into planning. In particular recruiting and training mentors, and identifying sources of mentees, takes a long time. A flexible and adaptable approach is needed.

- It can take a very long time for CRB checks to be completed. It is important to start the application process as early as possible, and have a fallback plan for what the mentors can do before the CRB result is received.

- Parents become mentors for a variety of different reasons, and advertising and recruitment must reflect this. Many parents are motivated by wanting to 'give something back'. However, others will also be attracted by gaining skills (and possibly qualifications) and having enhanced career prospects. It is important to 'sell' all the benefits of being a mentor.

- Advertising materials, flyers, and the like are best produced by the mentors themselves. They have already joined a parenting course, and been trained as a mentor, and so know what is attractive to parents.

- It is important to have a well thought through training programme for the mentors, and include social activities and fun in the training.

Advertising and recruiting of mentees

- If schools are used as a way of recruiting mentees, a good link with the school or a 'champion' within it is essential. This person needs to build relationships with parents, and encourage mentees to come forward.

- It is difficult to recruit male mentors. One way to address this is to invite mixed sex couples to take part, or to target mentoring programmes at fathers only.

- Mentoring should not be used for parents with a wide range of difficulties or severe problems, where statutory intervention is more appropriate. A clear finding was that whilst mentoring should not be used *in place* of statutory services, it could be used *in conjunction* with them. Clear guidelines and boundaries are needed so that inappropriate referrals are not made.

- Thought needs to be given to the format of the support provided, ie whether face-to-face or over the telephone. It was not clear from this project whether one format worked better than the other. However, it is important for future projects to consider the pros and cons of each method for the mentors that they are working with.

- An informal mentoring model could also work well – in this study many of the mentors became known in their workplaces, as people who could listen and give advice about parenting. This model could be formalised, for example so that parents are trained as mentors not to 'work' in a specific setting, but as the need arises in their social and work lives.

Mentor-mentee relationships and supervision

- It was suggested that some parents, particularly disadvantaged parents, might distrust other parents, and be particularly anxious about confidentiality. It is important to work with mentors and potential mentees to address these issues.

- Several of the workers, and the mentors, raised issues about professional boundaries. For example, to what extent should workers expect mentors to behave in certain 'professional' ways – for example using swear words, or smoking in front of service users. These issues must be agreed and provide part of written guidelines.

- Boundaries are very important in working with mentors – where certain issues arise (for example child protection issues) there must be clear boundaries and guidelines in relation to what mentors can and can't do.

Practical aspects

- If mentors are doing telephone interviewing, there should be dedicated telephones for this. This will mean that both mentors and mentees do not have to use their own telephones, and thus keep boundaries appropriate. It may be possible to secure some sponsorship for this.

- The word 'mentor' was not always used across the three sites. This was because some people did not feel comfortable with the term, and felt it implied 'expert'. Thus some sites used the word 'volunteer' instead.

Funding issues

- The funding provided in this pilot project was relatively small. This money was used mainly for practical expenses, such as travel, training materials, office expenses, and mobile phones. Thus no staff time was covered by these expenses – any future projects need to address this issue.

- Additional funding needs to be secured where possible, as most parent mentoring projects cost more to run than is originally estimated.

Being part of a broader programme

- The three sites involved in the Parent Mentoring project each said that they benefited from being part of a broader programme. This helped in terms of learning from others, and having 'milestones' to reach in the project.

- Being part of a broader programme can help organisations to develop useful guidelines for parent mentoring projects. For example the sites were keen to get guidelines for doing telephone work and counselling. This could be put together by a project co-ordinator.

Recommendations

Three recommendations are made as a result of this evaluation. These are:

- Despite the relatively small number of mentors and mentees involved in this pilot project, there was evidence of useful 'seeds' being planted. There was clear evidence from mentors, and the small number of mentees involved, that the project helped to provide information and support to parents. <u>It is therefore recommended that policy-makers and organisations undertake further work to develop and extend this type of parent support</u>.

- All three sites in this project trained their mentors in different ways, with different structure and content. However, there was clear overlap between the areas covered, and there was thus some 're-inventing of the wheel'. <u>It is proposed that a 'parent mentoring training programme' should be developed</u>, that other organisations could use, rather than having to create their own. This training also needs to be accredited.

- Due to the relatively small number of mentors and mentees involved in the current project, it was not possible to *prove* that parent mentoring is effective. Rather there were *indicators* that it was useful, both for mentors and mentees. <u>Further projects need to be offered on a larger scale, and build in evaluation</u>.

Debi Roker, TSA
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<u>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</u>

The author would like to express her gratitude to a number of people and organisations:

1.0 <u>BACKGROUND AND AIMS OF THE PROJECT</u>

This report details the results of an evaluation undertaken by the Trust for the Study of Adolescence (TSA). The evaluation was of a pilot 'Parent Mentoring' project, funded and managed by NCVCCO and run in collaboration with three partner organisations across England. This section details the background to the project and the aims of the TSA evaluation.

1.1 <u>Background to the parent mentoring project</u>

The aim of the pilot project was to set up mentoring schemes, to enable parents of secondary school age children to help support parents of younger children, especially around the transition to secondary school. There has been an increased number of projects in recent years, that use mentoring as a way of teaching and/or supporting people. Despite this increased prevelance, however, this form of support has not been widely used in relations to parenting. NCVCCO therefore successfully applied to the Family Policy Unit in the Home Office (now part of the DfES) to run a three year pilot project. The aim was to look at the effectiveness of mentoring as a form of support for parents of children and young people.

The Project Manager at NCVCCO designed the project so that three different sites in England would set up and run pilot parent mentoring projects. Sites were secured via the existing contacts of the Project Manager, and through advertising for partners. The three sites were as follows:

- Kinara Family Resource Centre, Greenwich (London)
- NCH Family Centre, in collaboration with the local Social Services Department, March (Cambridgeshire)
- Forward Training, Hull.

Note that the three sites are referred to in this report as 'Kinara', 'March' and 'Hull' for ease of reference. Some brief further information about each site is useful at this point:

➢ The 'Kinara' project (used as this is the name of the centre) is in Greenwich, south London. It is run by Social Services, and provides a variety of services, including group-based parenting courses and one-to-one work. It works closely with the Youth Offending Team.

➢ The 'March' project was based at an NCH Family Centre in rural Cambridgeshire. The centre provided a range of services for families in the area, working closely with Social Services and the local YOT. The 'parent

mentoring' project was a collaboration between NCH and the Families and Young People's Service in the local Social Services Department. Both NCH and Social Services provided the time of an experienced family worker. Note that part way through the Parent Mentoring project, the NCH centre was closed – see later for details.

➢ The 'Hull' project involved an independent training and counselling organisation called Forward. The company provides a range of services for families, including running a number of 'parenting teenagers' courses. Two of Forward's staff were involved in the Parenting Mentoring project.

NCVCCO provided some financial support for each projects. Each site was given a grant of £2,500 for each of the three years, ie £7,500 over the course of the project. This was intended to cover some aspects of the project only, and it was not seen as covering such things as the staff time needed to run a Parent Mentoring project.

The broad aim of each of the projects was to recruit and train a number of parents at each of the three sites, who would become 'parent mentors'. It was proposed that these would be parents of older young people (ie 12-15 year-olds), including those who had experienced problems in their own parenting and parent-child relationships. It was further proposed that the 'mentees', who would be recruited in a variety of ways, would ideally be those with children aged 8-12. Thus the ambition was to have parents of secondary-age children support those with primary-age children.

The emphasis of the Parent Mentoring project was very much on trying out different approaches and experimenting with different ways of working, in order to find out what works and what doesn't (or at least what is promising practice and what isn't). The three sites above were therefore selected in order to explore how parent mentoring schemes work in different settings – ie a Social Services centre (Kinara), a large children's charity (NCH) and a private organisation (Forward Training).

1.2   Aims of the TSA evaluation

TSA was commissioned to undertake the evaluation of this pilot project, with a grant provided by the Family Policy Unit (now part of the DfES). The evaluation was undertaken over 2.5 years, from September 2002 to March 2005. The pilot project was therefore underway by the time TSA was commissioned to undertake the evaluation.

There were two broad aims of the evaluation, as follows:

1) **To identify the *impact and outcomes* of parent mentoring schemes on mentors and mentees**. The aim was to identify whether the projects

impacted on parents' levels of knowledge and understanding, confidence, perceptions of support, and consideration of different options for dealing with difficult issues or situations with their children.

2) **To identify the *processes* involved in setting up and running 'parent mentoring' projects**. This included the successes of the projects, any difficulties and challenges that arose, and the main learning points that could be of use to others in the future. Thus it was considered important to secure feedback from all those involved – mentors, mentees, site workers, and the NCVCCO Project Manager.

Further information about the project, and how the information was collected, is given in the next section.

2.0 <u>INFORMATION COLLECTED IN THE RESEARCH</u>

When TSA was first contracted to undertake the evaluation of the 'parent mentoring' project, an evaluation plan was devised. This design aimed to address the two key aims above, ie identifying both the outcomes of, and processes involved in, the Parent Mentoring project. The broad design of the evaluation was to (a) meet with and interview staff at the three sites on 3-4 occasions over the middle two years of the project, and (b) conduct telephone interviews with the mentors and mentees at the beginning and end of their 'pairings'.

As the following chapter shows, the pilot projects did not take place entirely as planned at each site. Relatively few pairings took place at either Hull or March, and Kinara embedded their parent mentoring programme within a drop-in centre for parents. However, mentors were trained, and other activities took place at all three sites, and a wide range of valuable learning took place. As a result, the evaluation plan developed and was amended as the site's plans changed and developed. The following section details the data that was collected in the project (note that the content of the interviews and meetings is detailed later in this section).

2.1 <u>The three sites</u>

The information collected at the three sites was as follows:

<u>Hull</u>

Interviews were held with the two project workers at the Hull site on four occasions. Three of these were held at the workers' offices in Hull, with one conducted over the telephone. The interviews were conducted in April 2003, November 2003, April 2004, and December 2004.

Interviews were also conducted with the mentors who were trained by and supported by the Hull site workers. Three mentors were interviewed twice each during 2004, ie six interviews were held in total.

During the timescale of the evaluation, no mentees were recruited to the study, so there were therefore none to interview in the evaluation.

March

The two project workers at the March site were interviewed on two occasions – in April 2003 and November 2004. In between these dates one planned meeting was cancelled (because of the lack of progress since the previous meeting) and on another occasion the evaluator collected data from an 'all-project' meeting – see below.

Interviews were also conducted with mentors who were trained by and supported by the March site workers. Three mentors were interviewed twice each during 2004.

Three pairings did take place during the course of the project. One of the mentees agreed to be interviewed as part of the evaluation. This took place in October 2004.

Kinara

A number of visits were made to the Kinara site. Interviews were held with both the project workers in August 2003 and October 2004. In addition a separate visit was made to review the statistics for the parents who had visited the drop-in centre.

A number of the mentors at the Kinara site agreed to be interviewed. Five mentors took part in the evaluation in total. Three were interviewed twice, and two were interviewed once. All the telephone interviews were conducted between March and November 2004.

In addition the author visited the centre to attend the first 'anniversary' meeting and celebration for the parents' drop-in, which was held in April 2004. On that occasion some users of the drop-in centre were present, and the author spoke to them (briefly) about why they had come and what they felt about the service.

2.2   **Additional information collected**

Two additional types of data were collected, as follows:

First, four 'all-site' meetings were held in the project, attended by staff from the three sites, the Project Manager from NCVCCO, and the evaluator. These were held in July 2003, January and June 2004, and January 2005. Additional data was gathered at these events, in particular about the training and 'maintenance' of the mentors, and the various attempts of the sites to recruit mentees. In addition, there were various discussions held to compare the experiences of the project workers, and identify commonalities and differences in their experiences.

Second, a 'start of project' interview and an 'end of project' interview was held with the NCVCCO Project Manager in September 2002 and July 2004. Note that the end of project interview was held slightly earlier than planned, as the Project Manager left the organisation at that time.

2.3   Content of the data collected

The data collected explored the following areas. First, the following questions were asked of mentors and mentees:

Questions for the mentors

- How did you get involved in the mentoring scheme?
- Why did you get involved in it?
- What's happened so far? (eg training events, meetings)
- How do you see your role? What will you do as a mentor?

  (*and if a pairing was made with a mentee, the following questions were asked the following*)

- What sort of contact did you have (eg meetings, telephone)?
- How often were you in contact?
- What sorts of things did you talk about/discuss?
- What was your role in relation to these issues, what did you do?
- What things do you think worked well about the relationship?
- Were there any parts of the relationship that didn't work so well?
- Were there some things that were difficult, where you didn't know what to say/do or how to help? (what and why)
- Did you ever feel 'out of your depth'?
- How supported did you feel in the project?
- Would you recommend being a mentor to other people?
- How do you think it could be improved?

Questions for the mentees

- How did you get involved in the mentoring scheme?
- Why did you get involved in it?
- What's happened so far? (eg training events, meetings)
- What do you see happening in the project? What will the mentor do?
- What sort of contact did you have (eg meetings, telephone)?
- How often were you in contact?
- What sorts of things did you talk about/discuss?
- What was your role in relation to these issues, what did you do?
- What things do you think worked well about the relationship?

- Were there any parts of the relationship that didn't work so well?
- Were there some things that were difficult, where you didn't know what how to help? (what and why)
- What difference do you think the mentoring scheme made, overall?
- Will it make a difference to the future do you think
  (eg in relation to knowing where to go for help, having the confidence to ask for help)
- Would you recommend the mentoring scheme to other parents?
- Are there things that you think could improve the scheme for the future?

It should be noted that the interviews were fairly free-flowing, and the questions above formed the basis of the interviews, rather than being asked in turn. Each interview took between 15 and 60 minutes, depending on how much respondents had to say, and whether or not a pairing (or supportive role with another parent) had been established.

Second, the following questions were asked of the project workers at each visit:

- What has happened since the last visit (in terms of mentors and mentees)?
- What links and methods have been developed to recruit mentees?
- What activities have taken place in relation to mentors?
- What positive aspects / useful learning points would you identify?
- What has been challenging and/or difficult?
- What do you hope to happen in the project in the next 4-6 months?

The following section details the main results from the interviews and visits described here.

3.0 <u>MAIN FINDINGS</u>

The main results from the study are presented in this chapter. The results are divided into three sections, as follows:

- ○ Project workers views and experiences
- ○ Mentors and mentees views and experiences
- ○ NCVCCO Project Manager's views and experiences.

3.1 <u>Project workers views and experiences</u>

The results are presented in the form of the results from the meetings and interviews held at each site. Note that a separate NCVCCO report details the chronology of events and detailed history of the project at each site – readers are referred to this report for this information. Rather, this section details the reflections and views of the project workers at each site. It is primarily a descriptive section, with broader comments and recommendations for future practice given in the following chapter, Chapter 4.

<u>Hull</u>

<u>Background and progress of the project</u>

The two project workers became involved in this pilot project after a chance meeting with the Project Manager at NCVCCO. It was felt that there was a useful match between the interests and experiences of the Hull project workers and the aims of the Parent Mentoring project. This was because, in particular, the Hull workers had many years experience of running group-based courses for parents of teenagers. The workers considered that the Parent Mentoring pilot could be a new and valuable way of supporting parents, and were enthusiastic about taking part in the project.

Following the completion of a 'parenting teenagers' course run by Forward, a number of parents were identified as potential mentors to take part in the NCVCCO project. These mentors then undertook an additional course to train as mentors. The mentoring course was designed by the two project workers, in collaboration with the parents. Although seven mentors were involved in the training, a core group of three mentors were maintained throughout the life of the project.

The aim of the Hull project was to offer the parent mentoring service to primary schools in the local area, as a mentor-mentee telephone support service. The aim

was therefore to pair the mentors with parents of primary school aged children who were experiencing difficulties, or who had concerns about their child's move to secondary school. A wide variety of advertising materials and contacts were developed in order to promote the parent mentoring project. However, despite a considerable amount of effort by the project workers, no mentees were referred by local schools. A wide range of activities were developed, however, to keep the mentors engaged during this period – this included ongoing training events, social activities, and designing advertising materials for the parenting mentoring project.

Although by the end of the evaluation period no mentees had been involved in the project, it is still ongoing and alternative avenues to reach parents are being explored. The project workers, and the mentors, are hopeful that they will still be able to recruit mentees to the project. In addition, there have been a number of unexpected 'spin offs' from the project, and a great deal of positive learning. This is detailed both in the views of the workers (below) and the learning points described in Chapter 4 of this report.

Project workers' views and experiences

Regular meetings and interviews were held between the evaluator and the two Hull project workers. A number of useful learning and points for the future emerged from these interviews. These are summarised here.

One of the key themes that came through from the two workers was the amount of time and energy put into both the training of the mentors, and the recruitment of mentees. In terms of attracting mentees to the project, the brief description above does not do justice to the numbers of telephone calls, visits to schools, flyers prepared, etc that were involved to advertise the project. A key theme that emerged was the time that making and developing these contacts takes, even when some of the 'groundwork' has already been done via previous contact. As one of the workers explained:

> "… it really needs time, a long time to build up those links and relationships. It can't be done overnight".

Linked to this point, another theme that came through strongly was the need to focus on keeping the mentors involved. The three main mentors in the project did stay (and indeed still are) involved. Again this took considerable time and effort, involving the project workers in organising ongoing training and other events, to keep them motivated. For example:

> ".. we've been to the theatre, had dinner, kept them together as a group. That's been really important for morale, for keeping them going…"

One of the issues that emerged strongly from the interviews with the Hull project workers, was ways in which the project can be developed for the future. At the

time of the last interview, for example, the workers had started to diversify the project in new and interesting ways. This included having a parents' drop-in at a local health centre, which was proving promising. This two-hour drop-in, run every Friday morning, was already attracting parents. The original group of mentors may get involved in this in the future, and develop it more along the lines of the HOPE drop-in at Kinara – see below.

In addition, the mentors had increasingly found themselves involved in 'informal mentoring'. Thus the mentors had become known in their workplaces, and amongst their friends, as people that parents could talk to about parenting issues. This often happened during general work events, during lunchtimes, and in social settings. Whilst the project workers had not anticipated this being a part of the project, it did in fact seem to be tapping a real need. For example:

> *"… it's mentoring on the spot, addressing issues when parents have a problem and they feel safe to talk, it's great"*

> *"[mentoring has] become normalised in coffee breaks and lunch breaks, it's just part of general conversations and interactions".*

In addition to helping parents with problems, this informal mentoring also allowed the mentors to practice their skills and feel engaged in the mentoring role. Thus as well as establishing the drop-in (mentioned above), the project workers felt that it would be worth developing this more informal aspect of mentoring.

Some of the more general learning and ideas from the Hull project workers is incorporated in the next chapter of this report.

March

Background and progress of the project

The history of the March site's involvement in the Parent Mentoring project is detailed in the NCVCCO report. However, a brief summary is useful here in order to provide a context for the views and experiences of the project workers. The two project workers became involved in this pilot project after one of them saw an article by the NCVCCO Project Manager in a childcare magazine. They were keen to get involved in the project, because of their view that many parents wanted informal support and befriending. They had also run a number of parenting courses, and felt that the Parent Mentoring project idea would be a very useful development of their role.

The project workers in March secured a group of mentors, by approaching all those involved on a parenting course that they ran. Four individuals subsequently trained as mentors, although one later left the area, leaving a core group of three. The project workers designed their own training course for the mentors, which

took place over four half-day sessions. The topics covered included listening skills, boundaries, the needs of 8-11 year-olds etc. In order for the mentors to work at the NCH Centre, they needed to be taken on as NCH volunteers. This required them to have Criminal Record Bureau checks, a medical, and sign up to a code of conduct. This also gave them the full support of the NCH staff system.

During the mentoring training process, the group also explored how to advertise for and work with mentees. It was agreed in the early stages that the contact between mentor and mentee would be face-to-face – this was mainly because of the physical isolation of many parents who live in the rural area concerned. It was thus felt that face-to-face contact was a key part of the process.

Advertising material was also prepared by the mentors in collaboration with the project workers. This was sent to local primary and secondary schools, in an effort to get referrals to the service. However, during the evaluation period only two mentees became involved with a mentor. (One of these was interviewed by the author, and their views are detailed in the next section). Securing mentees was made more difficult because of the closure of the NCH project part way through the project. Further information about the views and experiences of the project workers in March are given below.

Project workers' views and experiences

Regular meetings and interviews were held with the two March project workers. A number of useful learning points for the future emerged from these interviews. These are summarised here.

Many of the comments made by the two March project workers reflected those of the Hull workers (above). Both of the March workers felt that the development and training of their mentors had gone well, and that the core group of mentors had a lot to offer:

> *"… they're the experts now, they really are. They're very good, they can really do this well"*

> *"… I feel really positive, very positive about them, they've got a lot to offer other parents".*

However, there was clearly disappointment over the lack of referrals to the project. It was considered that there was a variety of reasons for this, including: sudden changes at local schools (such as amalgamation), and the plans of some organisations to refer 'inappropriate' parents, such as those in crisis or needing specialist help. Towards the end of the evaluation period, however, three appropriate referrals were made, and mentors and mentees were paired. As one worker said, this was a very positive moment:

".. that made all the difference, we felt we'd taken off, something good had happened".

One of these three mentees has an ongoing relationship with a mentor, and the other two mentees have occasional contact when they feel they need it. The feedback from one of these mentees is given later in this chapter.

One other development took place at the March site towards the end of the NCVCCO project. The workers have been involved in setting up a new mentoring project in nearby Cambridge. This has involved recruiting and training a new group of mentors. The two groups of 'old' and 'new' mentors are now getting together at regular intervals to share ideas and experiences. It is considered that the learning from the March project will help to develop and improve how the project is run in Cambridge. As one of the workers commented:

"… we learnt a great deal from the first one, it's really helping the new one get off the ground".

It should also be noted that there have been other 'spin offs' from the first project for the mentors concerned. Some have become involved in other related activities, such as giving presentations to groups of parents, and doing volunteer mentoring at the local YOT. Significantly – reflecting the experiences of mentors in the Hull project above – several of the mentors have also been involved in informal mentoring. Thus they have provided informal advice and support, mainly to friends and their work colleagues. This is an important avenue for future work.

Kinara

Background and progress of the project

The history of Kinara's involvement in the Parent Mentoring project is detailed in the NCVCCO report. However, a brief summary is useful here in order to provide a context for the views and experiences of the project workers. The two project workers became involved in this pilot project as a result of an article written by the NCVCCO Project Manager. This mentioned the Parent Mentoring project idea, and invited applications for partners. The Kinara Centre has a long history of working with parents, and the workers were already involved in using parents as mentors. They were therefore keen to get involved in the pilot project.

Parents were approached to train as mentors who had attended one of the Centre's parenting courses. Five parents completed the training. An external consultant was used to run the mentoring training, using an already devised training manual. Another four parents were then recruited and trained from a second course. A key issue that arose early on for Kinara, was that for the mentors to work unsupervised with parents, they needed to have completed their CRB checks. At the time, this was taking up to a year for some parents. Thus it

was decided to engage the mentors in others activities. This included, for example, speaking to groups of parents about their experiences of attending a group-based course.

Crucially, the parents and the workers also set up HOPE (Hands On Parenting Extra), a drop-in service for local parents. This drop-in then became the focus of the mentors' work. It was staffed on a rota basis by the mentors, and attracted small numbers of parents on a regular basis. Some only came in once, and discussed an issue in relation to their parenting. Others came in on a regular basis, looking for longer-term help and support. The service was advertised widely, in GP surgeries, the police station, schools, shops, etc. However, numbers of parents visiting did decline during the course of the project, and it was also increasingly difficult to ensure that mentors were available to staff it. The service has thus now been reduced from weekly to monthly.

Project workers' views and experiences

Regular meetings and interviews were held with the two Kinara project workers. A number of useful learning and points for the future emerged from these interviews. These are summarised here.

Overall, the two workers felt that the Parent Mentoring project had worked well. They considered that they had adapted to the situations they found themselves in, for example setting up HOPE as an alternative to one-to-one mentoring. They also considered that the training had worked well, and that the parents involved in HOPE were aware of needs and boundaries, and able to refer on to them (as project managers) if any difficulties arose. For example:

> *"… we've spent a lot of time on key things, like child protection. They know the agreed rules, and they keep to them."*

The workers thus considered that the volunteers provided a very valuable service to other parents. They were able to listen, talk through options, identify additional sources of help and support, and follow-up where necessary. The workers thought it was particularly valuable that the parents were able to demonstrate that they had also had difficulties with their children and young people, but had 'got through it'. For example

> *"… it is reassuring for the other parent [the mentee] to know that, you know, here's someone who's been through it, who's been there themselves".*

The importance of parents' own experiences, and how they relate to other parents, is discussed further later in this report.

One of the other issues raised by the Kinara project workers, was the impact of being mentors on the mentors themselves. One described Kinara as

> *"… a victim of our own success – they've really developed and they move on, which is great of course, at one level…"*

This worker explained that, as a result of the training and experiences they have, the mentors often wish to move on. Thus one mentor, for example, secured paid work; others returned to study. As a result of this, many of the mentors were no longer able to commit to providing volunteer support at HOPE, or get involved in other work. The Parent Mentoring project thus enabled people to develop new skills and develop their personal and career plans. Whilst this was welcomed, it also had a knock-on effect on the project, in that experienced mentors were no longer available, and needed to be replaced.

3.2   Mentors and mentees views and experiences

The results of the information collected from mentors and mentees are given in this section.

Mentors

In total 11 mentors were involved in interviews, some on one occasion only, and some on two occasions. The mentors were drawn from all three projects, in March, Hull and Kinara. Their views and experiences are combined here, as there was considerable overlap in what was said. The main themes that came out of these interviews were as follows:

- **Why they became involved**

There was one reason in particular that parents gave for wanting to train as mentors – this was that, having experienced problems and difficulties themselves, they wanted to "give something back". As these parents described it:

> *".. I did, yes I felt, well, I've been through it, some really bad stuff, really hard times… and I wanted to show other people, say to them 'look at me, you can get through it, even when you're really despairing', so yes that's why, to give something back in a way"*

> *"… we had a really hard time with our son and I thought 'what a good idea', we didn't have anyone til we came on the course, so, yes, to help other parents"*

"… I thought I'd like to help other people not make the same mistakes I did, to learn from my mistakes".

In addition to wanting to give something back, however, parents mentioned some other reasons. The most common ones centred on wanting to develop new skills and abilities, that might lead on to new volunteering or employment opportunities. For example:

".. as well I did think, you know, it would look good when I was going for jobs, once I go back to work, you know on my CV"

"I think I've learnt a lot of skills, it will help me get a better job, to say I've done this".

- **What the mentor role involves**

The role of the mentor was described by the parents in a wide variety of ways. However, the most common descriptions centred on 'listening' and 'support'. For example:

" to listen, just listen and let people talk, letting them know someone cares"

"… supporting them is really important. You can't change things for them, but you can, sort of, help them through it, provide support"

"… be there for them, be a good friend really".

In addition, the mentor role was seen as talking through different options, and helping people to get other support if they needed it:

"… we talk things through, you know the kind of thing, 'well you could do this, or you could do that, but if you do this that might happen' sort of thing. Just going through options with people"

"I stress their strengths, and say 'stick with that'. I tell all parents they've done something right, or tried really hard at something… well, that's important".

"… we have a list of phone numbers and services, sometimes we just go through that, in that they need to speak to someone else".

- **Positive aspects about mentoring**

All of the mentors were very positive about their role, and felt that mentoring had a great deal to offer other parents. It was considered particularly valuable for

those parents who were alone, or unsupported, or 'at the end of their tether'. As explained above, the parents felt that they could provide a listening ear, but also help parents to look at alternatives and options. They were also able to signpost parents towards other forms of help and advice, where necessary. Crucially, however, they could show that other people get through it:

> *"I think of myself as a survivor (laughs)… yes I do, really, because I got through it. There were times [with my son] when I felt so low, but I'm still here now, and things are better, and I tell people that – that it will get better".*

- **Any difficulties and challenges in the role/project**

There were a relatively small number of challenges and difficulties in the projects that the mentors mentioned. Many of these have already come up in the earlier sections of this report. This included, for example, having to wait a long time for CRB checks to come through, and thus having to change the nature of the support offered. A key issue was also the difficulties involved in recruiting the mentees to the projects, and feeling that their skills and expertise were to a certain extent being wasted. For example:

> *"… yeah it has been frustrating… you know we're here (laughs) we're ready to go (laughs), we'd all really like to get on with putting it all into practice".*

In addition the mentors mentioned the difficulties of not getting too involved, and remaining detached. For example:

> *"… seeing someone cry, it's hard not to cry too, it really is".*

However, all the mentors (at all three sites) commented on how both the training they had received, and the back up from the project workers, enabled them to deal with difficult circumstances like this. The high level of support received by all six project workers was something that came up repeatedly in the interviews with the mentors.

Mentees

As described in the previous chapter, only one mentee was interviewed, from the March project. However, in addition some parents who visited the HOPE project at Kinara were also briefly spoken to, to get some feedback about their experiences. These results are detailed in this section.

First, the mentee who was interviewed had been involved with a mentor for five months or so. Her daughter had been truanting regularly, and relationships had

become difficult between them. She had been put in touch with the Parent Mentoring project via an outreach worker at her child's school. She was attracted to the service because she wanted to talk things through with someone, and decide what she could do to improve things with her daughter. Having been put in contact with one of the mentors in the March project, they began to meet regularly.

This mother was extremely positive about the mentoring scheme, and how it had helped her:

> *"[the main thing] … was just having someone there, to talk things through".*

In addition, this mentee commented on how helpful it was to talk through different options for dealing with her daughter and their relationship, and getting someone else's perspective on the issue. This mother added that, by the time of the interview, their had been no change in her daughter's behaviour. However, having the support of the mentor meant that she felt able to *"… keep battling on…".* As she explained it:

> *"I couldn't have survived without [mentor], she's become a really good friend".*

In addition, as was mentioned earlier, the parent knew that the mentor had been through similar experiences with her children:

> *"… she's been through the same, that's important, that she's been there, that was really important, she knew what I was going through".*

Overall, this mentee was extremely positive about the March project. She felt the service should be more widely used, as it could benefit many more parents. As she said:

> *"… a damned good scheme I think. I'd really hit rock bottom and [the mentor] helped me to keep going"*

> *"… more people should be told, advertise it everywhere."*

The mentee above was the only person who was interviewed who went through the formal mentoring scheme. In addition, however, there was some brief information provided to the evaluator by the users of the HOPE drop-in centre at Kinara. The three parents who provided feedback were very positive about the HOPE drop-in. They were attending the service for a range of reasons, but mainly because of a range of difficulties in their parenting – rude and abusive children, young people refusing to attend school, and custody issues that were affecting them and their children's behaviour. All three parents had visited the drop-in

before, and felt it provided them with useful information and support. As these parents said:

"… just to chat is important, you know, people listen…"

"Being a parent on my own, you know, it's hard, and can be lonely and here, like, I just don't feel so alone".

All three hoped that the drop-in would continue, and felt they would recommend it to other parents.

3.3   NCVCCO Project Manager's views and experiences

The final interview with the Project Manager took place in July 2004, slightly ahead of the end of the Parent Mentoring project, as she left NCVCCO that month. Her feedback about the project is detailed under three headings below, as follows:

- progress of the project
- challenges in the project
- the future of parent mentoring projects.

Progress of the project

The Project Manager believed that, overall, the Parent Mentoring project had gone extremely well. As she said:

"… it went very well, we weren't overambitious, and accepted we were just sowing seeds for the future".

She added that, although relatively few mentees had been involved in the projects, there were clear signs that numbers would increase as the projects progressed. In addition, she felt it important not to focus only on specific outcomes (ie the number of 'pairings' achieved), but on the other positive outcomes from the project, and the learning from it. This included, for example, the positive effects of the training and the project on the mentors.

One of the others things that she felt was particularly positive in the project, was that each site "progressed and developed" at its own pace, and in a way that suited the needs of parents locally. She felt it was important that any future projects should do this, and not seek to impose a certain design or model on the work. Flexibility and adaptability were essential in this type of project, she considered.

Challenges in the project

A number of aspects were considered by the Project Manager to have been challenging in the Parent Mentoring project. One thing, interestingly, was that at the very start of the project it was very difficult to find voluntary sector sites as partners. There was a general reluctance to take part in the project. It was not clear why this was. However, a few of the sites that were approached said that they worked with younger children, and didn't feel they had the expertise to work with parents of older children. Others felt the project could be too time-consuming, and that the amount of money available to support the project was insufficient.

As previously mentioned, the finances available to support individual sites were quite small. Each site received £2,500 a year for three years. At each of the sites this generally only covered the expenses of the project, for example parents' travel, refreshments, the training sessions, etc. There was not enough money available to cover any staff time. This is clearly an important issue for the future, in that if this type of work is to be mainstreamed then some staff time must be covered.

Another challenge, already raised in this report, was the difficulty in accessing mentees. The Project Manager felt that any organisation approached had to have a 'mentoring champion', someone who could really sell the project to other staff – and crucially to parents. This was, she felt, a key piece of learning for the future.

The future of parent mentoring projects

Overall, the Project Manager felt that the Parent Mentoring project had demonstrated the value and potential of parent mentoring schemes. For example:

> "… even with the small numbers involved it's clear it has an impact. I can really see this work developing in the future".

She was keen to see the project picked up by other organisations in the future, basing their work on the learning and ideas developed in the current project. She felt that a major review needed to be undertaken, to identify (a) the research evidence in this field internationally, and (b) any other projects in the UK that are currently providing parent mentoring. Learning from other projects, and bringing this together to inform new practice, was essential she felt. As an indication of the success of the current project, she suggested, was the large number of enquiries that NCVCCO and the three project sites had received. This demonstrated, she considered, the level of interest amongst practitioners in this sort of work.

The next, and final, section of the report details general learning points and recommendations from the evaluation.

4.0 LEARNING POINTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This final section of the report describes the main learning points from the study, and gives recommendations for future work. The main learning points from the study are described first.

4.1 Learning points

This section summarises the main learning points that came out of the project. Some of these have already been touched on in the results presented so far. Others are additional issues which have come out of the evaluation more broadly. The chapter is divided into six sections, as follows:

- Development of projects and training of mentors
- Advertising and recruiting of mentees
- Mentor-mentee relationships and supervision
- Practical aspects
- Funding issues
- Being part of a broader programme.

Each of these issues is explored separately below.

Development of projects and training of mentors

- Developing a parent mentoring project takes considerable time. This must be built into planning. In particular recruiting and training mentors, and identifying sources of mentees, takes a long time.

- A flexible and adaptable approach is needed to run a parent mentoring project. If one aspect doesn't work, it is important to persevere and try something else.

- It can take a very long time for CRB checks to be completed. It is important to start the application process as early as possible, and have a fallback plan for what the mentors can do if the CRB result is delayed.

- It is important to acknowledge that people become mentors for a variety of different reasons, and advertising and recruitment must reflect this. Many parents will be motivated by wanting to 'give something back' and making a difference. However, others will also be attracted by gaining skills (and

possibly qualifications) and having enhanced career prospects. It is important to 'sell' all the benefits of being a mentor.

- Advertising materials, flyers, and the like are best produced by the mentors themselves. They have already joined a parenting course, and been trained as a mentor, and so know what is attractive to parents.

- It is important to have a well thought through training programme for the mentors, which includes social activities and fun in the training. One option for the future is to produce a training pack for this, to prevent the re-inventing of the wheel.

Advertising and recruiting of mentees

- If schools are used as a way of recruiting mentees, a good link with the school or a 'champion' in the school is essential. This person needs to build relationships with parents, and encourage mentees to come forward.

- It is difficult to recruit male mentors. One way of addressing this is to invite mixed sex couples to take part, or to target mentoring programmes at fathers only.

- Mentoring should not be used for parents with a wide range of difficulties or severe problems, where statutory intervention is more appropriate. A clear finding was that whilst mentoring should not be used *in place* of statutory services, it could be used *in conjunction* with them. Clear guidelines and boundaries are needed so that inappropriate referrals are not made.

- Thought needs to be given to the format of the support provided, ie whether face-to-face or over the telephone. It was not clear from this project whether one format worked better than the other. However, it is important for future projects to consider the pros and cons of each method for the mentors that they are working with.

- An informal mentoring model could also work well – as has been described, many of the mentors became known in their workplaces as people who could listen and give advice about parenting. This model could be formalised – for eg so that parents are trained as mentors not to 'work' in a specific setting, but as the need arises in their social / work lives.

Mentor-mentee relationships and supervision

- As stated above, it is important to give consideration to the mode of support provided, ie whether it is face-to-face or on the phone. It may be

appropriate for future projects to offer a mixture of these methods, depending on the parents involved and their circumstances.

- It was suggested by several workers in the project that some parents, particularly disadvantaged parents, might distrust other parents or be sceptical of what they can provide. These parents might be particularly anxious about confidentiality. It is important to work with mentors and potential mentees to address these issues.

- Several of the workers, and the mentors, in this project raised issues about professional boundaries. For example, to what extent should workers expect mentors to behave in certain 'professional' ways – for example not using swear words, smoking in front of service users, or using unacceptable language such as 'half caste'. These issues must be agreed and become part of written guidelines.

- Boundaries are very important in working with parents – where certain issues arise (for example child protection issues), there must be clear boundaries and guidelines in relation to what mentors can and can't do.

Practical aspects

- If mentors are doing telephone interviewing, there should be dedicated telephones for this. This will mean that both mentors and mentees do not have to use their own telephones, and thus keep boundaries appropriate. It may be possible to secure some sponsorship for this.

- The word 'mentor' was not always used across the three sites in this project. This was because some people did not feel comfortable with the term, and felt it implied 'expert'. Thus some sites used the word 'volunteer' instead.

Funding issues

- The funding provided in this pilot project was relatively small. This money was used (at all three sites) mainly for practical expenses, such as travel costs, training materials, office expenses, and mobile phones. Thus no staff time was covered by these expenses – any future projects need to address this issue.

- Additional funding needs to be secured where possible, as most of the projects cost more to run than was originally estimated.

Being part of a broader programme

- The three sites involved in the Parent Mentoring programme each said that they benefited from being part of a broader programme. This helped in terms of learning from others, and having 'milestones' to reach in the project.

- Being part of a broader programme can help organisations to develop useful guidelines for parent mentoring projects. For example projects in this pilot study were keen to get guidelines for doing telephone work and counselling. This could be put together by a project co-ordinator.

4.2 Recommendations

Three recommendations are made as a result of this evaluation. These are as follows:

- Despite the relatively small number of mentees involved in this pilot project, there was evidence of useful 'seeds' being planted. There was clear evidence from mentors, and the small number of mentees involved, that the project helped to provide information and support to parents. It is therefore recommended that policy-makers and organisations undertake further work to develop and extend this type of parent support.

- All three sites in this project trained their mentors in different ways, with different structure and content. However, there was clear overlap between the areas covered, and there was thus some 're-inventing of the wheel' to a certain extent. It is proposed that a 'parent mentoring training programme' should be developed, that other organisations could use, rather than having to create their own. This training also needs to be accredited.

- Due to the relatively small number of mentors and mentees involved in the current project, it was not possible to *prove* that parent mentoring is effective. Rather there were *indicators* that it was useful. Further projects need to be offered on a larger scale, and build in evaluation.

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