

Peer Mentoring Impact and Learning Report

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Introduction

The Life Changes Trust is a passionate supporter of mentoring for young people with care experience. We have been privileged to have the opportunity to both invest in and work alongside a number of projects where young people have the opportunity to explore their potential in the context of a voluntary relationship with a mentor. We have seen first-hand the life-changing impact this can have.

Why Peer Mentoring?

The Trust's investment in Peer Mentoring is recognition that not everyone has had access to consistent, supportive and positive relationships throughout their lives. When the Trust was in its early stages, young people with care experience told us that they would like to be supported by someone 'who has been there' and has 'shared experience' – someone who can genuinely walk beside them.

The Trust established the Peer Mentoring initiative as one means of increasing the opportunities for young people with care experience to have positive relationships. It is centred upon providing opportunities for stable and supportive relationships for young people with care experience to give them the skills they need to build loving, healthy, interdependent relationships in the future.

While there is growing evidence of the effectiveness of high-quality mentoring for young people, the evidence-base relating specifically to Peer Mentoring is less well-developed. In 2015, when the Trust decided to invest funding in Peer Mentoring, there were limited mentoring options dedicated to young people with care experience in Scotland.

Given the Trust's role in supporting learning and innovation, the opportunity to gather evidence on the effectiveness of Peer Mentoring for young people with care experience was an influential factor in deciding to invest in these projects. The Trust and the funded projects embarked on a learning journey together.

This journey has offered remarkable insight into the lives of both mentors and mentees, and has shone a spotlight on the benefits of the mentoring relationship to both.

The projects funded were small in nature, and worked very closely with mentors and mentees. Funding such projects was intentional as it enabled them to evolve and adapt in response to the needs and aspirations of young people with care experience. In turn, they have become more knowledgeable, and this knowledge has influenced other services provided by the organisations hosting the projects, and their wider networks.

How do we define Peer Mentoring?

Peer Mentoring provides a means of both giving and receiving support in the context of a voluntary relationship where the people involved have shared experience. Mentors can offer support, encouragement and, where appropriate, guidance and advice. Mostly, they offer a listening ear and a consistent presence in the life of the young person being mentored.

The Trust decided to take a flexible approach to defining Peer Mentoring and considered proposals where the mentors would be:

- » **young people with care experience aged 18 – 30 years old**
- » **adults with care experience aged over 30 years of age**
- » **young people aged 18 – 30 years old with experience of disadvantage**
- » **adults with a wider range of life experience, where these adults are part of a larger pool of mentors which includes those listed above**

The majority of the projects aspired to define their peer mentors as young people with care experience aged between 18 and 30 years old.

Trust funded projects

Following an open call for proposals, the Trust funded six Peer Mentoring projects from October 2015 – September 2018. The projects were initially awarded two years funding. However, in February 2017 an additional year of funding was offered to all 6 organisations in recognition of the learning they had gathered, and the challenges they had faced in setting up their respective projects.

The total funding awards made during 2015-2018 were:

Project	£	Local Authority Area
Barnardo's (South Ayrshire)	119,910	South Ayrshire
Move On	129,352	City of Edinburgh & Glasgow City
Rock Trust	123,000	West Lothian
Up-2-Us	88,651	South Lanarkshire
Y People	128,956	Glasgow City
Y Sort it	133,940	West Dunbartonshire

This report

The purpose of this report is to reflect on and share the learning that has been gathered during the funding of the Life Changes Trust Peer Mentoring projects for young people with care experience. The report will also highlight some of the impact that has been evidenced over the three years of funding.

To inform this report, we have drawn on a variety of sources, including monitoring reports, notes from learning meetings with individual projects and Network meetings that brought together all of the projects.

In Part 1 of this report, we will explore the impact the projects have had, highlighting key numbers and exploring the wider impact of positive relationships on young people with care experience. Part 2 of this report will focus on the learning we have gathered, specifically exploring the challenges of establishing a new project, the engagement of mentors and mentees, and the role of the Mentoring Coordinator.

Part 1: Impact

Through our investment in Peer Mentoring, the Life Changes Trust intended to learn more about the benefits of this type of support for young people with care experience. We also hoped to learn more about the impact of this type of support on both young people being mentored, and those in the role of mentor. The Peer Mentoring initiative set out to achieve the following outcomes:

- » **young people with care experience develop positive relationships**
- » **increase in confidence of young people with care experience**
- » **young people with care experience feel less socially isolated**
- » **young people with care experience access additional services**
- » **young people with care experience access personal development opportunities**

It should be noted that, although we explore the impact evidenced by the projects and their partners, these outcomes cannot be understood in isolation, nor attributed solely to the Peer Mentoring projects. It is important to remember that young people's lives can be complex and mentoring is often one part of a bigger picture.

However, overall, the funded projects did evidence strong progress against the outcomes above and demonstrated that mentoring can play a significant role in improving the lives of young people with care experience. In particular, the mentoring approach shows promising potential in reaching some of the most marginalised young people, as we will see within this report.

Key Numbers

Number of mentoring matches	192
Number of mentors with care experience	85
Total number of projects	6
Total Spend	£723,809

Project Outcomes

The power of positive relationships

Outcome: young people with care experience develop positive relationships

One of the goals of investing in Peer Mentoring was to begin to show the benefits of developing a positive relationship with someone who has a shared experience.

The Trust funded projects reported numerous personal accounts of the positive impact on young people of developing a mentoring relationship. One such impact that was evidenced by these projects was the role of mentoring in supporting mentees to develop other positive relationships in their lives.

Personal story

Polly was referred to [the project] as social work felt it would be good for her to have a positive role-model in her life. Polly is a fairly independent resilient young woman but would often get frustrated and angry and get involved in risk-taking behaviour. Alan, a peer mentor, and Polly have been meeting since June and have worked on a number of “soft” goals including space away from getting involved in conflicts in the unit and increasing confidence. The fact that Alan was giving his time to volunteer was very significant for Polly and it made a significant impact on her self-worth. Staff in the unit reported that in the time she was being mentored, Polly went from hanging around town and making herself very vulnerable to forming a very positive and loving relationship with a new partner and securing full-time employment. Polly is now leaving the residential unit to move in with her partner. This has coincided with Alan starting a full-time social work course and we will be meeting soon to decide what, if any, further support Polly would like to access from the project.



The relationship with Alan has helped Polly realise that she is worthy of good, healthy relationships. It's been brilliant for her self-esteem and allowed her to trust others.”

Residential Worker

In addition, those that care for the young people being mentored shared their thoughts on how being involved in the Peer Mentoring projects has impacted the young people they support, including how having a mentor has supported young people in other existing relationships.

“It’s good to see him genuinely trusting someone. It’s made him less resistant to me as his Social Worker too. He is less defensive and guarded.”
Social Worker

“She (mentee) has been going through a difficult time, but it’s helped her to know she has her mentor who cares about her and who she can talk to outside the unit – they get on so well!”
Residential Care Worker

The relationships formed were predominantly between mentor and mentee, but the triadic relationship between mentor, mentee and staff was also extremely important. In particular the Mentoring Coordinator was a vital resource for both mentor and mentee, and was integral in establishing positive mentoring matches. The importance of the Mentor Coordinator role will be discussed in more detail in Part 2 of this report.



Key Finding: being involved in a Peer Mentoring project can support young people to develop other additional positive relationships in their lives

In addition to the direct impact of creating and sustaining positive relationships, we have also chosen to discuss two of the indirect impacts; increased confidence of mentors and mentees, and reduced social isolation.

Increased confidence of mentors and mentees

Outcome: increased confidence of young people with care experience

The evidence we have gathered indicates that both young people being mentored and mentors themselves reported feeling more confident through their time being involved in the projects. This increase in confidence was demonstrated in a number of ways, not least through young people feeling ready to progress beyond the mentoring relationship.

The increase in confidence reported by young people being mentored and their mentors was of benefit in their mentoring relationship, as well as in activities outwith the mentoring project. For example, projects observed young people undertaking activities that they previously would not have done, such as travelling independently, participating in group activities and applying for training opportunities.



Personal story

Charlie is a 21-year-old young mum with care and homelessness experience who was referred to Peer Mentoring through the [organisations] housing support team. Charlie has a number of negative relationships with friends, a negative relationship with alcohol, anxiety and social isolation. Through Peer Mentoring Charlie wanted to do activities with her peer mentor that could include her young child.

In the past 6 months, Charlie has improved in confidence - for example self-travel, moving into an independent living flat through the Council, gaining part time employment, being more active in engaging in activity with her young child and attending activities she wouldn't have otherwise engaged in, such as a residential at Wiston Lodge and Soft Play with her child. She feels that the joint housing support and Peer Mentoring support she has received is "the best experience and support she has ever had to date."

Charlie's Housing Support Worker has noted a great increase in confidence with most noticeable improvement in Charlie being able to make positive relationships and engage in her community.

Charlie's mentor has also noticed an increase in confidence and feels that the relationship is near the end of their time together as Charlie has reached her goals and is exceeding expectations.

When we first began this journey, we hoped that we would understand more about the benefits of Peer Mentoring for young people with care experience. However, it became very clear early on that this type of mentoring can also have positive unintended outcomes for peer mentors.

Both mentors and mentees reported increases in confidence as a result of engaging in the projects.

“Another highlight has been the progression of peer mentors as they have started providing mentoring support. For example Olivia decided to become a peer mentor after past involvement with another mentoring project run by Y People’s as a mentee herself. A number of setbacks had meant she wasn’t working and had become quite isolated in her community, rarely going out. With the support and training that Olivia received as part of Ypeer, Olivia finished the training and started mentoring Louise. Olivia recently spoke about her mentoring experience at a Care Leavers Week event. This involved going up on stage and talking to a room of over 100 people! Olivia was recently recognised as a runner-up in the Young Volunteer of the Year category at the YMCA Scotland Awards.”



Key Finding: Peer Mentoring can support both mentors and mentees to increase their confidence

The projects consistently reported that this increase in confidence helped to reduce young people’s social isolation and supported them to take up other training and development opportunities. These outcomes will be discussed in turn.

Tackling social isolation

Outcome: young people with care experience feel less socially isolated

An additional outcome of the investment in Peer Mentoring was its role in reducing social isolation, and increasing social networks, for both young people with care experience being mentored and those taking on the role of peer mentors. Whilst reducing social isolation was often an indirect benefit of the mentoring match, in a number of instances reducing this isolation was a specific goal of the match.

Projects highlighted that a number of young people at the start of their mentoring journey struggled with high levels of anxiety which had become a barrier to getting out and interacting with other people.

For example, in one project there were 28 young people being mentored who chose to work towards the goal of ‘getting out of the house’ as part of their mentoring relationship. This is a stark reminder of the isolation that young people with care experience often face which can often be largely hidden, and the projects have shown that Peer Mentoring can be used as a first step in reducing this isolation.

“ Mark was unable to self-travel, and was suffering from severe anxiety and panic attacks. With the support of a peer mentor he has made full 45min bus journeys unassisted with the hope to make a trip into Edinburgh before the end of the year. This young person will also soon start driving lessons.”

Mentoring Coordinator

“ I got into college this week and start volunteering on Monday. I didn't want to go to the interview for volunteering but I did. I never thought I'd get either but I did. I've also been getting on buses for short journey's like to the Centre on my own. I can also cope better going to the Centre when it is busy. I wouldn't get on a bus at all before starting with the project. If I couldn't walk or get a lift I just wouldn't go.”
Mentee

“ ...I feel more confident going into shops I didn't go into before. I also got myself from one side of the town to the other. I used to feel everyone was looking at me when I walked down the street, I don't feel that as much now. I now do things that make me anxious rather than avoid them.”
Mentee

“ Stacey finds it hard to go out alone and access local community services but with the support of her project worker and peer mentor she has worked hard to overcome this, even making a weekend trip to meet a friend in Manchester. Stacey continues to be supported by her peer mentor and has been showing more confidence in seeking volunteer opportunities in her local community.”
Mentoring Coordinator

The projects also invested time and resource into providing group activities for their mentors and mentees to create additional social networks for the young people and mentors involved in the projects.

The projects used various activities to create a group element to their mentoring support. These activities included residentials, Christmas dinners and attending cultural events, including a Christmas pantomime. These group elements provided a safe space to build relationships with other people, and created a network for the mentors to access peer support.

Top tip: Supplement one to one mentoring meetings with group activities to provide additional support networks for both mentors and mentees



rock trust
ENDING YOUTH HOMELESSNESS

PEER MENTORS WANTED

Do you want to use your life experience in a positive way?

The Rock Trust's Peer Mentoring project in West Lothian matches young people aged 15 - 25 who have been affected by homelessness, with mentors who have had similar life experiences or have skills to share.

'Being a Mentor has helped me believe in myself and what I'm capable of doing.'

Training and expenses provided. Get in touch to find out more.

Contact Kirsten Muir 07812240175 or Sylvia Okocha 0781332423
peermentoring@rocktrust.org
t: 01506 591 860 m: 07813325292

The Rock Trust, 20 Grampian Court, Beveridge Square,
Livingston EH54 6QF



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Social inclusion games - Rock Trust

The most unique activity coordinated by a project, was the Rock Trust supporting 4 mentees to attend the Social Inclusions Games in the Netherlands. The event is a week-long camping trip for socially excluded groups from around Europe who come together to compete in different sporting activities. The aim of the Games is for those participating to feel more included in wider society through health and fitness.

The young people who participated in the Games reported feeling more confident, improved mental and physical health and further developed life skills. Areas of change included being in groups, travel, abstaining from drug abuse and making positive relationships.

The Rock Trust highlighted their belief that the mentoring relationship had a role to play in supporting the young people to take up this opportunity:



These opportunities to meet others in a group are often daunting prospects, as they often have limited positive contact with young people that they may consider as peers. We found that the support of a Mentor either alongside the young people or in preparation for the group events was key in helping them feel comfortable in taking the step to start building positive experiences and relationships with others their own age.”

Rock Trust



Key Finding: Peer Mentoring can be used as a first step in reducing social isolation, and increasing social networks, for young people with care experience

Peer Mentoring as a stepping stone

The projects gathered evidence of young people using their experience of Peer Mentoring as a stepping stone to access other opportunities. Both mentors and mentees capitalised on their experience of mentoring to find new opportunities, and we found that these were generally split across three categories:

- » **achieving personal goals**
- » **accessing additional services**
- » **accessing professional development opportunities**

Achieving Personal Goals

Outcome: young people with care experience access personal development opportunities

Some of the Peer Mentoring projects encouraged mentees to set personal goals as part of their mentoring match, and they would work towards these with the support of their mentor. Therefore, the focus of these matches was not only on creating a successful and supportive two-way relationship, but also on the person being mentored achieving a self-identified goal.

The personal story below highlights one individual mentoring journey, including setting and working towards personal goals, and how a successful mentoring relationship can be a catalyst for positive change.

Personal story

Charlotte started with our mentoring service 18 months ago. She was referred to us as she had low attendance at school and high anxiety. She was also the eldest in a large family and was often left to care for her siblings, which didn't leave much time for her to enjoy being a young person herself. Charlotte's home life became quite hectic and her mum wasn't coping too well so she moved into kinship care with her gran and grandpa.

Through the mentoring service, she chose singing lessons as her first goal and worked alongside her mentor and vocal coach who both discovered she had an amazing voice. Through weekly sessions her confidence increased dramatically and she decided she wanted to make new friends and improve on her skills by joining an employability course.

She chose a music-based programme and when she was asked to pick a charity to make a promotional video, she chose Move On. She arranged meetings with our staff and it was amazing to see her new-found confidence. She was involved with the planning and organising of a shoot at our warehouse to help promote all Move On services which involved working with numerous people, something she would not have had the confidence to do at the start.

Charlotte decided she was happy with how far she had come with her singing lessons and then wished to learn Mandarin. Her mentor sourced this with a lecturer at Glasgow University where they mastered the basics together before we decided that Charlotte was doing so well she no longer needed her mentor and we agreed to bring the match to a successful ending.



For the final celebration meal Charlotte decided she would like to go to a noodle bar and it was absolutely amazing to hear her order food and converse with the waitress in Mandarin. Charlotte is now at college and doing really well. Her Gran unfortunately passed away this year and Charlotte spoke of Move On being there for her and giving her the coping mechanisms to help deal with this. As she said herself in a thank you letter to her key worker:

“ Although this is the end, it doesn’t feel like it. I am very happy that I got this amazing chance.”

Accessing Additional Services

Outcome: young people with care experience access additional services

For many young people, being a part of the Peer Mentoring project was the first step in accessing other support services. The projects were often trying to support young people who were highly marginalised and reluctant to engage with any services, so the initial relationship building between staff members and prospective mentees was extremely important.

Once young people began their mentoring journey, and had built a relationship with both the Mentoring Coordinator and their mentor, the organisations were able to support them to access other services.

“ The fact that our young people have started off not being able to engage with a mentor, to building upon 1:1 sessions, to then come along to group/activity sessions and then feel able to make small steps towards linking in with other partner organisations and/or services, is a huge achievement.”

Mentoring Coordinator

The Trust funded Peer Mentoring projects were very proactive in identifying additional opportunities for both mentors and mentees. Examples of this additional support include accessing funding for clothing and driving lessons and supporting young people to access other relevant support services.

“ If there is a need or interest that our project is unable to fulfil on its own, we make links and create partnerships with other charities or agencies to enhance the opportunities available to the young people to develop positive relationships and social networks.”

Mentoring Coordinator



Key Finding: Peer Mentoring can be used as a first step in young people accessing additional support services

The practical support given by projects was supplemented by support from mentors. The projects shared stories of mentors who went above and beyond their remit as a mentor to support their mentee in other aspects of their lives, such as in the personal story below.

Personal story

Greg was referred to the project by his kinship carer. Greg works full-time but his grandmother felt he could do with the additional support of a positive male role model.

Greg often spends all his month's wages on a "weekend bender", leaving him short of money, getting in trouble with the police, involved in local violence and causing conflict at home. Colin, Greg's peer mentor, felt it would be good to support Greg around budgeting and giving him a positive activity to focus on at the weekend. Greg was keen to learn to drive and Colin and he felt this would give him a focus. They have been working on the various steps towards achieving this goal – getting his provisional license, booking his theory test, budgeting and so-on. There has also been work on softer goals, such as getting on better with his family and support through challenging situations.

“Greg asked me to support him at a court date as he was worried about seeing old faces who he often gets into trouble with. It was a long day but went well. It gave me the opportunity to remind Greg how well he is doing, that unlike his old crowd, he is working full-time and (mostly) keeping out of trouble. I was also able to encourage Greg to go on a family holiday which he wasn't keen to go on. Greg was let off the charge, with the judge acknowledging the progress Greg has made including his engagement with [the project]. We ended the day by going into town where Greg bought some trunks for the family holiday!”

Peer Mentor



No service has given Greg the support that Colin and [the project] have. It's been practical, helping him get the stuff together for his driving license but also just brilliant that he's given the time to be a good role-model.”

Kinship Carer

Accessing Professional Development Opportunities

Outcome: young people with care experience access personal development opportunities

Young people accessing training and employment opportunities was reported on extensively by projects. The increased confidence young people had to apply for such opportunities has been mentioned above. This section of the report will highlight the opportunities undertaken by young people participating in the project.

Projects invested in internal training opportunities that were designed to upskill volunteers to support them in their mentoring role, and to support them to look for alternative personal development opportunities. These training opportunities varied from project to project but included bespoke training, and more general training focussed on mental health and first aid.

From the reports submitted by the projects, it is clear that the experience mentors gain through volunteering is valuable to employers and higher education institutions. The projects reported many examples of mentors accessing alternative training and employment opportunities as a direct result of their experience gained from mentoring.

In some instances, mentors reported using their experience of volunteering to support applications for college and university. In one such case, a mentor applied for a NC level course and was fast tracked onto the HNC Youth Work course as a result of their experience of being a mentor. A handful of mentors also used their volunteering experience as part of their accredited Health and Social Care courses at college.

Projects highlighted examples of young people accessing employment opportunities after volunteering as mentors. In some instances, mentors even gained employment within the organisations running the Peer Mentoring project. This was the case across a couple of the funded projects and employment was often in other services the organisation provides.



Some of our mentors have been able to use their experience and training opportunities as an advantage when applying to complete further education and/or paid employment both within and outwith Barnardo's. We value our volunteers and know the level and commitment it takes to support someone in your spare time and as a result want to retain our mentors as much as we can."

Mentoring Coordinator

Although a number of the examples provided by projects were focussed on mentors, young people being mentored were also able to access training and were supported through their mentoring match to continue with their education.



Personal story

Sarah was referred to the project by her key worker, as she was struggling with upcoming transitions. Jen and Sarah hit it off immediately with the initial match meeting, normally only scheduled for 30 minutes, taking two and a half hours as the young women had so much in common! The initial meetings went very well with Sarah engaging well and keen to set mentoring goals. However, Sarah suffered some issues with her mental health and it was felt that Sarah should receive the support for these before resuming mentoring. However, we remained in contact with Sarah and conveyed the message that mentoring could be resumed when Sarah felt ready. Sarah requested this in the Spring of this year and Jen has supported her through starting college and beginning to think about leaving care. Jen has also encouraged Sarah to consider taking part in the next mentoring course offered by [the project].



My best Peer Mentoring experience has been when my mentee turned to me and said she'd like to be a peer mentor and give back to another young person."

Peer Mentor



Key Finding: Peer Mentoring can be used as a stepping stone to access personal development opportunities, including educational and employment opportunities

The impact of mentoring on mentors

Although the impact of mentoring on mentors has been detailed at various points in the previous sections, it felt important to explicitly state the unexpected positive impact of Peer Mentoring on the mentors involved in these projects. The impact was seen in many similar ways to that of the mentees, such as increased confidence, reduced social isolation, accessing training and development opportunities, and finding employment opportunities.

We were enthused to discover the impact of this type of mentoring on those in the peer mentor role and we believe Peer Mentoring could be considered as a means of providing support to young people with experience of disadvantage in the context of a reciprocal relationship - whereby the person mentoring offers support to their mentee, and in turn receives informal support and guidance from the organisation delivering the project. In Part 2 of this report, we will discuss the level of support offered to peer mentors in more detail.



Key Finding: Peer Mentoring can be used as a means of providing support to young people with experience of disadvantage in the context of a reciprocal relationship

Personal story

I had finished university in May of this year and after failing to make it into the Police, I wondered what my next step would be. I had no idea which direction I wanted to go in and thought about giving some volunteering a try and hope for inspiration.

I came across the Rock Trust and always liked the idea of becoming a support worker but unfortunately, I lacked the experience to gain employment. This was the perfect opportunity. The process was quick and easy and within a few days I had received a phone call asking if I was able to meet to discuss a volunteering opportunity.

I was then asked to attend the volunteer training and even though I was unable to make a day, they were very accommodating and made sure I still received the training. The training itself was interesting, enjoyable and interactive. It's not often that you get training like that. The members of staff were very approachable and informative and were there when needed. We were told that once all the training had been completed and we received our PVG, that it may take a while to be matched with a young person but I was fortunate to be matched with an individual pretty quickly.

Before starting my volunteering, I was low in confidence, stressed and unsure what the future held which was leaving me with low moods for days. I began volunteering and although nervous I could feel a sense of optimism and confidence returning. Volunteering with my young person has gone well, and when we meet I can feel the individual gaining in confidence and is more open with me now which is great for both myself and her.

I had only been volunteering for a short while when I had heard there was the possibility of a short-term contract working as a housing support assistant which I was fortunate enough to get. Volunteering had given me the opportunity to feel capable enough to apply for the job. Volunteering with the Rock Trust has given me a sense of pride and the opportunity to gain experience in a career within the support working industry.

The importance of shared experience

Outcome: young people with care experience develop positive relationships

The decision to fund Peer Mentoring projects for young people with care experience was a direct response to young people telling us that they wanted to be supported by someone with shared lived experience. By funding these projects we hoped we would learn more about what this shared experience meant to young people, and how projects similar to these can nurture relationships grounded on this experience.

Through funding these projects, we have found that young people with care experience valued having the opportunity to form a relationship with someone who has a shared experience to them. The benefits of the relationship being founded upon this experience were evident through personal stories from young people being mentored.



Personal story

Rachael was referred to the project as she had been recently placed within a residential unit following several breakdowns in a kinship then foster placements. Rachael was struggling within her new placement and Rachael's social worker felt it would help her settle if she could have one-to-one contact with a positive role-model with extensive experience of residential care. Rachael was matched with Emily who had many shared experiences, and they have been meeting weekly since November mainly focusing on activities in the community and giving Rachael a space to talk about what is going on for her. More recently they have been working on Rachael's reluctance to attend school and her keenness to gain some work experience in a hairdressing and beauty environment. With Emily's encouragement, Rachael has had the confidence to cold-call hairdressers and beauty therapists and ask about a work placement. This is something she says she wouldn't have dreamed about doing six months ago. In addition, we were recently delighted to receive a referral for another young woman who lives in the same residential unit as Rachael. The young woman asked her social worker to refer her as she has observed the relationship with Emily and Rachael.



She is aware that the mentors are previous care leavers and feels that a care-leaver will better understand her situation.”

Social worker

The projects also shared accounts of both mentors and mentees persevering with matches due to the shared experience with their match. In particular, the projects consistently highlighted the ‘stickability’ of mentors. Over the three years of funding there were a number of references to mentors actively pursuing with challenging matches due to their own knowledge and experience of what their mentee is going through.



I was really surprised, pleasantly surprised, that he stuck with his mentor as he usually struggles to make new friendships.”

Foster Carer

The majority of projects used a mentee-led matching process where the mentee had freedom to choose which mentor they would like to meet, based on a ‘matching form’ that contains personal information (e.g. likes/dislikes, hobbies) specific to the mentor. This method of matching gives the mentee a high level of choice and control in choosing their mentor and allows them to decide if they would like to be matched with someone who has a shared experience.

As was to be expected, the extent to which shared experience mattered to young people being mentored was very personal. We also found that the form of shared experience that young people wanted also varied. For some young people a shared experience of being in care was a defining factor in choosing a mentor, but for other young people they chose their mentor based on other forms of shared experience, such as experience of anxiety.

The following personal story is an example of how the shared experience of being in care had a positive impact on both mentor and mentee.

Personal story

A young girl came to the attention of Y Sort It through using our provisions on a regular basis. Whilst building relationships with the youth workers it came to light that the girl had issues in the family home.

As a result, she registered with the young carers service at Y Sort It and this meant Y Sort It's Young Carers team were able to monitor her situation. The home situation began to deteriorate and she came to the attention of social work.

At this stage the first round of mentors were able to start mentoring. A mentor who had been looked after at home and who had previously been accommodated was deemed a good match by the mentoring coordinator as well as the young carer workers. She was deemed a good match due to her personality and also that she had experienced parental drug misuse growing up – similar to the mentee. The two girls got on well and their relationship continues to go from strength to strength.

One particular contact highlights the benefit of this shared experience of care. It came to the attention of social work that the family home was bare of food and that the girl and her sister were in need of clothing. As a result, social work provided emergency funding for clothing for the girls.

The mentor and the young carer worker felt it was best if they take the girls out for the shopping as opposed to the social worker. The mentor in particular remembered how going for clothes shopping could be embarrassing as her social worker was an older male who wore his social work name badge making her feel stigmatized.



The four of them went for the shopping and made it an enjoyable half day out for the girls. This was also a good experience for the mentor early on as she had to provide advice and guidance. The mentor explained that the mentee asked for a designer piece of clothing and had to be discouraged as the money was for essentials as opposed to one expensive item of clothing.

The mentor was able to reflect on the contact by stating how she was able to empathise with the young person as she had been in a similar situation herself. The girls have now been meeting once per week for six months and have also gone to an overnight residential together with other youths from Y Sort It.

The girl's sister is also now being mentored and through Buddy Up and the Young Carers, we are able to provide support for the young people and their family.

In most cases, this 'shared experience' may have been an important reason for the mentoring match being made, but it was rarely the sole focus of the ongoing mentoring relationship. Each project had a different approach to deciding what the focus of the mentoring matches should be. For example, some matches were focussed on supporting mentees to achieve specific goals, and others were focussed on the mentee accessing fun activities, and exploring new interests.



Key Finding: young people valued being able to choose their mentor based on what 'shared experience' meant to them



Part 2: Key Learning

By gathering evidence from the Peer Mentoring projects, we have begun to understand how this type of mentoring can support young people as they transition out of care.

We hope that the learning we have gathered will be useful to those considering embarking on this journey. Our learning over the past three years has been centred on the following areas:

- » **the value of a voluntary relationship**
- » **the importance of the Mentor Coordinator role**
- » **challenges of establishing a new mentoring project**
- » **recruitment and referrals**

The value of a voluntary relationship

The projects shared learning about the value of the voluntary nature of the mentoring relationship to the young people being mentored. This perhaps reflects the reality for many young people within the care system of a number of adults in paid roles coming in and out of their lives at different times. For many young people in the Peer Mentoring projects, the voluntary nature of mentoring was an integral part of its success.



H helps me so much – she’s different than other workers because we can change plans and I can do fun activities. Also H goes above and beyond to help me even when it’s not her day to see me. I know she cares and it makes a difference because she’s not paid to see me, she just likes doing it. H gives me a different perspective on things and at points of crisis she steps in and helps me like a worker but different. I see H as good as a worker but its more comforting that she’s doing it because she wants to and not because she’s paid to. If it wasn’t for H meeting me on a Friday night, I would be doing unproductive activities.”

Mentee



The fact that our mentees are aware that they have someone in their lives giving up their time and energy to support them cannot be under-estimated with a key phrase repeated over along the lines of, “no agenda apart from being there.” Many services and carers have reported that the mentee’s most positive (or only) interactions are with the mentor.”

Mentoring Coordinator

The fact that mentors volunteer their time to build a relationship appears to be extremely important to young people with care experience and the voluntary nature of mentoring supported the formation of their relationships.

Mentor Coordinator resource

Over the life of the Peer Mentoring projects it became clear that the Mentoring Coordinator role had to be very flexible to meet the needs of the project.

Most of the Trust funded projects were delivered via relatively small organisations which deliver numerous other projects alongside their Peer Mentoring service. Therefore, in most cases the Mentoring Coordinator funded through the Trust award was the one dedicated member of staff for the project, supplemented with management support as needed.

Through monitoring reports and from discussions at project visits, we had the opportunity to explore the Mentoring Coordinator role in more depth. It is clear that there were three significant draws on the Mentoring Coordinators time:

- » **training of mentors**
- » **informal support for mentors**
- » **support for mentoring matches**

Training of Mentors

The majority of the projects referenced the need to remain flexible to the individual needs of new mentors when developing training packages. Training to be a mentor is an intensive process and due to the commitment required from volunteers, the projects have worked hard to deliver training flexibly in order to retain as many mentors as possible.

This flexibility was a necessity to retain mentors who were unable to commit to scheduled sessions and for those that were not at a stage where they were ready to participate in group training.

“Some of the mentors did not want to be trained within a large group, so to facilitate their learning and enable the mentors to get the most out of their training we considered more flexible approaches to the training delivery and we are now able to offer training on a 1:1 basis, 2:1 basis and smaller group training. This has been welcomed by mentors and the feedback has been positive.”

Mentoring Coordinator

“Ensuring the pace and level of delivery suits both an 18 year old who disengaged from formal education and a thirty year old university graduate with a full time job has meant lots of thought has had to go into the programme with lots of rewrites and flexibility required. One of the key ways we have kept the young people who have found it too challenging, too easy or too time-consuming at times has been by offering tailored one-to-one sessions. There has been feedback to us that this has helped people stay on board when they were finding it difficult to commit to the nine-week course.”

Mentoring Coordinator



This flexibility inevitably had an impact on the time of the Mentoring Coordinator and required them to balance being responsive to individual needs whilst also maintaining a focus on other aspects of their role.

“Due to many of our volunteers coming from life experiences which include disadvantage, we have found we often spend extended amounts of time supporting them with their emotional needs as well as the young people being mentored. This can be in the way of phone calls, one to one meetings, emails etc., which can take a lot of staff time especially in the way of making peer mentor meetings flexible for the needs of the young person and volunteer.

For this reason, we are working on the development of delivered training for volunteers to include the importance of stability and routine for the young person, staff and their self as a volunteer. Staff will also inform and allocate a specific mentor meet day during the week in which all concentration will be focused on volunteer training, interviewing and any additional support (this will be flexible however when volunteers feel in particular crisis).” *Mentoring Coordinator*

Due to the unpredictability of referral routes in the early days, projects found it challenging to strike the right balance between having enough mentors available to support mentees being referred but not too many that they would risk the prospective mentor disengaging due to a delay in matching them.

“It can be difficult to strike the balance between the number of mentors trained and the number required for matches. While we don’t want to have young people requiring matching with no trained mentors we equally don’t want to have too many trained mentors with no matches available. Our learning is to stay ahead of the curve, ensuring that regular training occurs maintaining a steady flow of mentors.”

Mentoring Coordinator

Informal support for mentors

Early on in the life of the projects it became clear that mentors often required additional support to be able to take on the role of a mentor. Providing this personalised support largely became the responsibility of the Mentoring Coordinator.

The projects provided holistic support and actively supported mentors experiencing mental health challenges, transition periods, financial constraints and isolation. The type of support required, and when it would be needed, was often unpredictable so being responsive to the needs of mentors was an important part of this role.

“Another challenge has been that even though we request mentor’s lives are relatively settled when they start to volunteer with us, it is impossible to predict when a young person may experience a crisis. In their time volunteering with us, some of our mentors have experienced health, financial, housing and relationship challenges and this has made their volunteering difficult.

“As well as supporting these individuals through these difficult periods (everything from offering our youth counselling service to just making a point of checking in with the individual a bit more frequently than normal) it’s meant that we do need to build in a back-up plan to ensure their mentee still receives support. This might mean the mentoring coordinator providing activities for a couple of weeks or it may mean giving the mentor some time out and introducing a new mentor to the mentee. All of which takes tactful management so the mentor does not feel they have let anyone down.”

Mentoring Coordinator

“The engagement of mentors has unfortunately been more of a challenge than the engagement of mentees. Often personal problems the mentors are experiencing affect their ability to communicate with staff and often young people. Having a balance between supporting the mentors and taking an understanding, flexible approach whilst knowing when to challenge their practice and/or end their volunteering with us is key to protect the wellbeing of the mentees whilst being sensitive to all person’s needs.”

Mentoring Coordinator

The range of support offered by projects was extensive and was beyond the level of support traditionally given to volunteers. At times projects also supported mentors to complete college, university and job applications. This support also extended to helping with coursework, and in one case helping a mentor to find willing interview participants for one of their essays.

Other examples of the type of support given were:

- » **when a mentor’s car was damaged the project supported her through the process of getting it fixed**
- » **supporting mentors through barriers around applying for Protecting Vulnerable Groups membership**
- » **supporting mentors through additional qualifications – e.g. online courses**

Top Tip: Make sure Mentoring Coordinators in projects are equipped with adequate skills and time to provide holistic support

Included in this level of informal support was the opportunity for mentors to access other services that the organisations provide, as well as various training opportunities. The opportunity for young people to get involved in a variety of services was beneficial in a number of mentoring matches and had a positive impact on the mentor's personal development.

As mentioned previously, the projects also focussed on providing group activities for their mentors and mentees to create additional social networks for mentors.

Top Tip: Holding activities or dedicated training for mentors can support mentor engagement, particularly when there are delays to a match being made or when there is a break in an existing mentoring match

Support for mentoring matches

In the majority of projects, the Mentoring Coordinator provided a high level of support for mentoring matches. This level of support was a significant draw on the time of the Coordinators and they had to balance this support with their other commitments to the project.

“Our mentors and mentees are diverse in age and experience so we have not offered a “one size fits all” package of training and support. This has meant that for some mentors and mentees the Mentoring Coordinator has accompanied the matched pair well after the initial matching process. This has been particularly important in a recent match between our youngest mentor and mentee. The mentee has absconded from her unit on several occasions and for everyone’s safety, it was felt that the Mentoring Coordinator should always be only a phone call away when the pair meet up. Happily, the mentee appears to respect the space she has with her mentor and absconding has not been an issue during the mentoring time. For other matches the mentor has only needed to meet with the Coordinator on a monthly basis to provide feedback and claim expenses.”

Mentoring Coordinator

The level of support required from the Mentoring Coordinator varied depending on the mentoring match, and whilst some matches progressed quickly and smoothly, others needed additional support. Projects often spent time working with young people referred to the project before they were matched with a mentor to ensure they were ready to make the commitment to the relationship.

“We have found that the preparatory work we do with young people prior to being matched, is key in helping us assess their ability and readiness to meet a mentor regularly. We have also identified the difference between someone who is not able to prioritise the mentor match, over someone who wants to but is struggling with the anxiety of meeting someone new. Ensuring the young people know it is voluntary and giving them the time they need to build up the confidence to meet a mentor on their own had provided positive results. With one match in particular, if we had not been flexible with his lack of engagement we would not have allowed him the time to work towards meeting his mentor, which he is now doing.”

Mentoring Coordinator

Top Tip: Be clear about the expectations of this role, and consider sharing parts of the support offered to mentoring matches across different members of staff

Challenges of establishing a new mentoring project

The projects began their three-year funding in October 2015. All but two of our funded projects, Move On and Y People, were new to providing mentoring projects when they received their funding from the Trust. Only one project, Move On, had experience of providing a Peer Mentoring service for young people with care experience.

The development time for the majority of projects was longer than initially anticipated, with projects taking between 6-8 months to establish themselves. This was largely due to the time needed to:

- » **recruit mentoring coordinators**
- » **create policies specific to mentoring**
- » **create bespoke training programmes for mentors**
- » **promote the new service**
- » **establish mentor recruitment processes and mentee referral routes**

This extended set-up phase was the primary rationale for increasing the project awards to three years. Once the projects had these fundamental pieces in place, mentor matches began to increase.

Our experience of the Peer Mentoring projects has indicated a wider challenge in terms of asking projects to set targets for funding initiatives that are relatively untested and under evaluated. The targets set by the projects at the time of submitting an application for funding varied quite considerably and some were much more ambitious than others.

Top Tip: For new projects build in additional set up time for the recruitment of new posts, the development of training resources and time for building referral routes in the local area

Recruitment and Referrals

Methods of recruitment for mentors

The recruitment of mentors was identified as a challenge for a number of projects during their first six months of delivery. There were distinct challenges in reaching prospective mentors with care experience who were ready to take on a mentoring role and in some cases this led to delays in project progression.

A number of projects also referenced the challenges of recruiting mentors who have left mainstream services and are living independently.



The main challenge is reaching the potential mentors who are most likely to be helpful to our target group of young people – they are not a visible group in that they have moved on from formal systems or opted out.

At this point it is also evident that the process is slower than anticipated and when potential volunteers are put forward it can take several meetings in order to establish whether they are right for this role or have the personal capacity to take it on.”

Mentoring Coordinator



To recruit we have regular discussions with the West Dunbartonshire Social Work through-care team and this has been fruitful in the sense several potential mentors have been sourced from them. However, we are finding it tough to reach those who are 24+, i.e. those who are now leading lives independently of social work input.”

Mentoring Coordinator

The projects worked hard to address this challenge and in the spirit of the Trust embarking on this learning journey with the projects, we supported them to review their approach and allowed them flexibility to adapt. A few of the projects reviewed their recruitment criteria to understand whether imposed age limits for mentors were preventing potential mentors applying.

“ We have also observed during this period that due to the upper age limit of 30 years being applied to mentors within our application we have had to decline valuable applications from mentors who are slightly older than this age.”
Mentoring Coordinator

Where beneficial this led to projects reviewing their recruitment methods, whilst in other cases they adapted their recruitment criteria, either by extending the age range or by expanding their definition of the ‘peer’ element.

Top tip: Work with mentees and mentors to develop alternative recruitment and referral routes. For example, one mentor suggested advertising mentoring opportunities on the Alumni Facebook group for her residential home

The successful methods of recruiting mentors varied between each project, largely due to the local area and the responsiveness of partners. The majority of projects generally had success in recruiting mentors through Widening Access teams in local colleges and universities. The projects also had success in recruiting young people previously involved in other services the organisation provides, and others used more creative methods such as advertising in the Metro.

Mentee Referrals

The rate and route of mentee referrals varied considerably across the projects.

During the first year the projects had varying levels of success in obtaining referrals from social work, with a few projects having great success and others having to put considerable effort into building and maintaining this referral route.

Common mentee referral routes:	
»	Local Authority Children’s Houses
»	Schools
»	Kinship carers
»	Throughcare teams
»	Youth organisations
»	Champions Boards

The projects who were new to providing a Peer Mentoring service for young people with care experience worked very hard to establish referral routes and were proactive in creating new local partnerships.

“The referral process had initially been slow and we therefore had to devise a separate plan, as well as speak to the other partners who received Peer Mentoring funding via the Life Changes Trust and focus our efforts. We have attended strategic meetings across the authority including the Violence Against Women and Girls meeting, made links with Who Cares? Scotland, linked into the Corporate Parenting Strategy Group, Youth Implementation Group and children’s advocacy service as well as having strong links with our Champions Board. We have also attended schools and colleges within the locality and raised awareness for young people who may wish to self-refer. We have linked with fostering and adoption services, social work services and our local family centre. Since linking in with all of the above and continuing to raise the importance of the service, the referrals have become healthier.”

Mentoring Coordinator

One project commented that referrals became easier once partners had seen first-hand the impact mentoring had on the young people they worked with. Being able to demonstrate this impact supported referrals as the project developed. As with mentor recruitment, projects also had success in recruiting young people as mentees who had been involved in other services the organisation provided.

One of the projects, Up-2-Us, responded to feedback from the young people involved in the project who were initially reluctant to start one to one mentoring which resulted in them offering a group mentoring model. Once young people felt comfortable with the group mentoring and had built a relationship with a prospective mentor, they would progress onto a more traditional one to one mentoring relationship.

Top Tip: Proactively identify local partners and relevant groups early on in the project to support mentee referral and mentor recruitment

Conclusion

As we draw to a close on the Trust's investment in Peer Mentoring, we want to thank the six funded organisations, and all of the staff, mentors and mentees involved in them, for their commitment and enthusiasm to their respective projects. Due to their dedication and hard work we now understand more about the impact of mentoring on the lives of young people with care experience and we hope to inspire others to begin their own Peer Mentoring journey.

Over the past three years, we have also learned about how to successfully set up these types of projects, and some of the challenges that can be experienced along the way. We now know that the level of support provided by these projects was above and beyond, and that the Mentoring Coordinators need the space and time to be able to provide this support. We hope that this learning will be of use to anyone in the midst of, or considering, setting up their own Peer Mentoring project.

The Life Changes Trust believes that Peer Mentoring can have a transformational impact on the lives of young people with care experience. The evidence in this report shows the positive impact this form of mentoring can have on mentors and mentees alike, including increased confidence, reduced social isolation and increased access to training and personal development opportunities. Most importantly of all, these projects have allowed us to highlight the power of positive relationships that are founded on an element of shared experience.

Getting in touch

If you have any queries or wish to share your views and ideas, you can contact us in a number of ways:

Phone: 0141 212 9600

Email: enquiries@lifechangestrust.org.uk

Website: www.lifechangestrust.org.uk

Address: Life Changes Trust, Edward House,
199 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow, G2 3EX