

Move On Peer Mentoring Programme: Evaluation Report

April 2016

Final report – Executive Summary



Acknowledgements

The authors would like to express thanks to the members of staff within Move On for their support and advice during the project. We are also grateful to Move On's partner organisations who have enthusiastically participated in this evaluation.

Very special thanks go to the mentors and mentees from Edinburgh and Glasgow who gave up their time to share their Move On journey. Without their contribution this report would not have been possible.

Mentors say...

"The fact that he understands he's not alone in this world, do you know what I mean? There is people who are in the same boat as him who have changed their life about, who are daein all right now...he might be in this noo but it's not forever."

"It was magical: the people that were involved... people were very open about themselves, their experiences and their problems. Stereotypes were blown out of the water."

"People are accepted as soon as they come through the door. The staff are all friendly, supportive and not judgemental."

"Building confidence and achieving goals is important, but it is also about those 90 minutes where the mentee is the sole focus, the most important person in the room. That is unusual – I would have liked to have that."

Mentees say...

"If I go and meet him when I'm down I always come out with a smile on my face."

"They were open-minded. I had a choice and a say in things and I liked that."

"I've been in the care system since I was 8 and I've seen pals shipped off to Polmont and that and I'm determined not to do it. I'm determined to move on and make a new life for myself."

"I've learned how to grow up. At this time last year I was getting into a lot of trouble with the police and stuff, since Move On stepped in I've got none, no trouble. They stepped in when I needed it most."

"He tells me that he's been through what I'm going through the now and to stop being a fanny and to get a grip."

"Basically what she done was she helped me to develop my social skills, which is like the major part of it because I used to really struggle like speaking to new people, like even buying new things and stuff like that. I think she helped me a lot with that...I think I'm mostly ok now with communicating. There's still moments where I'm a bit hesitant or like I step back, but mostly I'm ok."

Executive Summary and Recommendations

Background

Established in 1997, Move On delivers services across Scotland to “unlock the potential of vulnerable young people and those affected by homelessness in order to improve their lives”.

Over the last decade, Move On’s mentoring and peer mentoring service has become an integral part of the organisation’s programme of work. The mentoring service matches vulnerable young people (including those who are care-experienced) with a volunteer mentor. Some mentors, known as ‘peer mentors’, have experienced the care system or other forms of disadvantage themselves and bring this life experience to matches with care-experienced young people.

The evaluation

In 2015, Move On commissioned The Centre for Research on Families and Relationships, based at the University of Edinburgh, to conduct an outcome-based evaluation of its pilot peer mentoring programme (which was funded by the Paul Hamlyn Foundation), and its relationship to its wider mentoring services.

The evaluation took place from August 2015 – December 2015. Early in the evaluation process it became apparent that the division between peer and core mentoring services is not always distinct. As a consequence, the evaluation report does not focus solely on peer mentoring, but rather seeks to draw out findings related to shared experience across the mentoring matches and to explore specific benefits and challenges of peer mentoring where this emerged from the data.

The evaluation team has taken an approach that acknowledges that projects and programmes do not occur in a vacuum but are part of many interacting factors which impact upon individual’s lives. The approach taken in order to address this complexity combines contribution analysis and pluralistic evaluation.

Two evaluation workshops brought together a range of stakeholders to develop a “theory of change” for Move On’s mentoring service. This theory of change informed questions asked in interviews with 12 mentees, 14 mentors, 10 members of Move On staff and 9 external stakeholders, including funders and referrers. In addition, three focus groups were conducted with groups of mentors.

Key achievements

The mentoring service is accredited by the Scottish Mentoring Network and was awarded a Quality Award by the Network as well as being named their Project of the Year during the evaluation period. Referrers and funders hold Move On’s mentoring service in high regard and see the organisation as a source of mentoring expertise.

Both mentees and mentors expressed broadly very positive experiences of their involvement with mentoring with Move On. All mentors and all staff spoke very positively about the mentor training and found it to be extremely valuable and, overall, enjoyable. That the young person chooses their mentor and that mentees set, and work towards achieving, goals are central to Move On's approach.

The activities undertaken by matched pairs depend upon the goals that they have set. The programme was especially valued by mentees, mentors, staff and partners for its flexibility and diversity. The programme has attracted mentors and mentees with diverse experiences and the style of mentoring, pace and goals was highly flexible.

Central to Move On's mentoring model is the "triangle of support", a triangular relationship between the individual mentee, individual mentor and Move On. Move On's mentoring service is flexible to the individual needs of the mentee; the triangle of support provides a structure within which this high degree of flexibility can safely exist. It is important that this structure is consistently strong in order to maintain the boundaries of the mentor relationship and protect all three actors in the triangular relationship.

All mentees and mentors were able to identify positive outcomes that they attributed to their mentoring relationship. These varied depending upon the needs of the individuals involved in the match, but included both 'hard' and 'soft' outcomes for both mentees and mentors. Some outcomes related directly to the goals set, but others were unexpected.

Recommendations

We recommend continuing to develop a coherent service across the two cities that recognises the value of all of the experiences and interests that mentors bring to the service to share with young people.

The evaluation found that the majority of mentors and mentees felt well supported by Move On most of the time but the levels of support described were not always consistent. The evaluation identified that challenging incidents may have been resolved more quickly if staff had been meeting more regularly with mentors and mentees. Whilst recognising the usually strong and effective support provided by Move On to mentors and mentees, we recommend that the minimum level and structure of support is clarified with mentees/mentors and adhered to across the staff team.

We recognise the challenge that Move On faces in balancing the need to provide a consistent service and responding flexibly to the needs of different individuals and matched pairs. We recommend that this challenge is openly and clearly discussed with mentors as part of the mentor training in order to avoid unrealistic expectations of the service.

Move On has rightly focused upon the needs of mentees, but there is some evidence that this has at times focused attention away from the support needs of mentors and from the benefits that mentoring can bring for mentors. We recommend starting a conversation about the importance of meeting mentors' needs in order to best support mentees.

One particular point of concern is the potential gap between mentors finishing training and being matched with a mentee. This is a period of potential vulnerability for mentors who are waiting to be 'chosen' by a young person. Therefore, we recommend that each mentor should be assigned a key worker after the training and that individual support be consistently provided as part of the support structure outlined above.

We are aware that Move On is currently undertaking a review of its monitoring systems and developing a new database for recording information. We recommend that the findings from this evaluation process feed into this review.

The Move On "theory of change" set out in this evaluation report provides a framework through which Move On can tell a narrative about the Mentoring Service. We recommend that Move On builds this framework into ongoing self-evaluation.

We understand that since the completion of the evaluation, Move On has appointed a Mentoring Co-ordinator to work between Glasgow and Edinburgh with a specific remit to improve the quality and consistency of Move On's mentoring services.