



Shaathi Mentoring Project

2010

Evaluation Report - *Summary*



Introduction

The Osmani Trust has been delivering the Shaathi Mentoring Project (SMP) since 2002, funded through a wide variety of sources from the local authority to the Big Lottery Fund. SMP delivers a one-to-one person centred mentoring programme to children, young people and adults in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The socio-economic indicators in Tower Hamlets and inter-generational clash of ideas have created a situation in which many children, young people and adults have developed issues which are being addressed through mentoring.

SMP provides one-to-one and group mentoring to vulnerable, socially excluded and isolated individuals and groups of children and young people from the London Borough of Tower Hamlets (LBTH), aged 8-18 and those aged 15 – 21 for the Young Offenders Programme. The word Shaathi translates from the Sylheti dialect as ‘friendship’.

SMP’s mission statement reads:

“To improve the lives of children, young people and adults as well as to enable, educate and empower them to become productive, rational and responsible adults through the support of positive role models.”

Working (on average) with around 80 clients per year, priority is given to those in the following circumstances:

- **In care**
- **On the child protection register**
- **Suffering from family breakdown**
- **Who are known as offenders**

LBTH Social Services are the main referral source to SMP. Upon referral, SMP staff initiate a family consultation to assess the needs of the client. The client is then assigned to a mentor, through a meticulous ‘matching’ process and then the mentor and clients one-to-one relationship begins. Parallel to the actual mentoring are the ongoing group sessions for mentors and clients which are opportunities for the client to test their improved social skills and for the mentors to network with other mentors on the programme. Mentoring and group work are delivered separately, for both male and female clients.

Mentoring has been widely promoted as a mechanism for helping vulnerable young people (Moodie & Fisher, 2009)¹. Mentoring involves the commitment of time and specific efforts by a more experienced person to the development of a mutually beneficial, supportive and nurturing relationship with a less experienced person who is at-risk of short or long term psychological and/ or social problems (Moodie & Fisher, 2009).

Mentoring refers to the relationship between the mentor and another person. Although there are many limitations to mentoring (Colley, 2003)², the benefits of mentoring upon individuals and communities are numerous (SOVA)³:

- **Increased self-motivation**
- **Motivation**
- **Raise achievements and aspirations**
- **Fewer absence from schools**
- **Less drug and alcohol abuse**
- **Improved family relationships**
- **Improved employability**
- **Enhanced social and life skills**
- **Access to additional opportunities**
- **Enhance ability to invest in relationships outside of the mentoring bond**
- **A positive role model**
- ***“Reduce marginalisation and/or self-destructive behaviours in young people and to foster optimal development and the establishment of confident adult identities” (Moodie & Fisher, 2009)***
- **Assist young people to make a successful transition to adulthood (Coleman, 1990)⁴**

The scope and role of Nessa Consultancy

Nessa Consultancy was engaged in March 2010 to undertake a wide ranging independent evaluation of the effectiveness and impacts of SMP. The Evaluation set out to answer the following questions:

- ***Is project delivery consistent with SMP’s aims and objectives?***
- ***Has SMP moved forward since the last evaluation in 2004?***
- ***What impact does SMP have on both service beneficiaries and local community?***
- ***Does it meet the needs of its target group?***
- ***What are the strengths and weaknesses of the project?***
- ***How can SMP develop in the future and position itself at the forefront of policy making?***

This present evaluation has been commissioned to independently gauge the views and opinions of a sample size of ‘all’ connected with SMP in order to ascertain strengths, weaknesses, areas of good practice and also determine a strategy forward.

The research was carried out between March and July 2010 and involved a variety of qualitative and quantitative research methodology (focus groups, in-depth one-to-one interviewing, observations, postal and door to door questionnaires, email and telephone interviews) with a diverse range of personnel including children, young people, adults, their family members, mentors, staff, partner organisations and wider community members. In total, around 181 people were interviewed and consulted during the field research stage. Furthermore, over 225 hours of field research was carried out.



Headline Achievements of SMP

1. High level of satisfaction of clients, with over 95% of those asked having a positive relationship with both staff and their mentor
2. Over achievement of targets. Over 110 young people engaged in 2009-10, with 65% becoming participants
3. The majority of children and young people report that SMP has had a beneficial impact on them
4. Shaathi Mentoring Project is the only accredited (APS) mentoring provider specialising in BAME (Black, Asian, Minority Ethnic) groups and 1 of only 4 in East London
5. Mentors engaged in the SMP report a positive relationship with client
6. Successful implementation of recommendations of the 2004 evaluation including;
 - a. improvement in marketing materials
 - b. establishment of female programme
7. Development of sustainable referrals from statutory bodies, such as the local authority
8. SMP has developed in line with national and local policy framework such as *Every Child Matters*⁵ and *Tower Hamlets LAA*⁶

Key Findings – the benefits of mentoring children young people, adults and wider community

Selected extracts below are from a wide variety of respondents highlight both the importance and benefits of mentoring on both the mentors and young people.

Views from young people:

“I just hung around with the wrong people. Don’t get me wrong – they are still my boys. I just don’t do all the stupid stuff that I once used to. My mentor has made me visualise a dream and I know in order to get there, working hard and education is important”

“We do lots of wicked stuff together and he (my mentor) always asks me what I want to do. I feel important”

“[My mentor] he is very reliable. He is also honest with me and treats me like an adult. Because he has a lot of time for me, now I’ve also got a lot of time for him”

Views from family members:

“Mentoring has been good for them... they go on lots of trips Cafes, houses of parliament, seaside.... they were cheeky and mischievous before, however, the weekly mentoring sessions has improved their behaviour and also helped develop their personalities... they are far more confident now”

“they do lots of stuff together... eat food in cafes, play football and even go for walks in local parks.. Mentoring has not solved my sons temper tantrums but has definitely made him a lot calmer”.

“These boys were very shy and reserved... they were not naughty boys, just shy... the mentor assigned to them was great.. they really looked up to their mentor... they are far more independent and confident now. It is a shame that the mentoring had to finish ... they still talk about their mentor very positively”

Views from mentors:

“ My youth was a big enough experience for me to realise how much of a difference I can make to someone else’s life, being there for them and helping them reach their full potential. I believe no matter what difficulties you face in life if you have the right people around you, your life can change for the better. Maybe my mentoring can make that difference, and I hope it is.”

“I think my young person is doing well because I just listen to and understand his needs. One of the main things that is affecting him is some complex family issues. This is holding back his social life and draining him. I didn’t go all guns blazing and approach his family. As a fellow Bangladeshi, I understand the complex family patterns and responsibilities. I told him to be patient and try speaking to his family. He followed my advice and things seem to be a bit better now”.

“Trust is built over time, through patience,[and recognising] different needs, being open minded to things [and talking to and listening to them] so we can relate to them as much as possible”

Views from project staff:

“A varied life experience, someone who is open minded and non-judgemental, patience, an analytical mind which can identify issues early and someone who is aware of the cultural boundaries are some of the qualities we actively seek in potential mentors”.

“While things are improving with every generation, there remains a conflict between young people whose parents are less integrated into Western society..... Young people have all the pressures of growing up in urban London and without the release mechanism of family bonds, are beginning to suffer the same problems as other groups.”

Wider community consultation:

As part of a wider community consultation, 71 households were contacted through door to door surveys and postal questionnaires as well as three focus groups involving 17 members from the local community. This wider community consultation found:

- **89% of the respondents said that mentoring was an effective and “useful” way of addressing the needs of young people in Tower Hamlets who are experiencing a multitude of social problems;**
- **73% argued that having a neutral, professional and non-judgemental person available who ‘listens’ to the needs of young people can only benefit the social and emotional development of young people;**
- **14% suggested that mentoring can have a positive benefit in enhancing family relations, teaching lifeskills and also boosting confidence. This can also have a knock-on effect on schooling performance;**

“We have a distinct lack of accessible role models within the local community. There are many celebrity role models but they are not accessible to young people. We need more local heroes. That is why I like the idea of mentoring – using local successful people to act as role models and provide a friendly neutral ear to young people who are dealing with lots of different and complex issues”

(Nadira Hussain, Solicitor)

“I think mentoring is a good way to guide and support young people through difficult periods... exam stress, bullying in school, family issues, career decisions, relationship issues, adolescence, disappointments and much more... I’ve done mentoring myself before and it provides a neutral, friendly and positive space for the person being mentored – that can only be a positive development”

(Frances Herman, Nurse)

“I was a peer mentor at school and really enjoyed it. It made me feel responsible and also mature. The person I was mentoring was continuously bunking off and I had to make him realise that school actually was beneficial for him. To be honest, he had a lot of issues – all I did was ‘listen’. I think that is the main quality all mentors need to have – the ability to ‘listen’”

(Chris Smith, aged 18)

“Mentoring is an excellent idea. I’ll be honest, I know many children who can use mentors who they can talk to about deep personal issues. I, along with many parents that I know simply don’t have the time to spend with my children. That does not make us bad parents. I simply am exhausted after a 10 hour shift at work”

(Kalam Ali, aged 34)



Summary of Field Research

There are seven interesting areas of debate concerning mentoring which have been highlighted from the field research undertaken as part of this evaluation:

1. Firstly, there is the question of whether mentoring is a cost effective way of addressing the multitude of socio-political issues faced by young people in LBTH. As one of the respondents above suggested, *“How do we know that it is the mentor that is making the difference in their lives?... it could be a teacher or a football coach ...”*. Others have dismissed mentoring as a *“Waste of time, resources and money”* and suggest that there should be more investment in *“youth facilities and policing”* instead. These are important valid and points. However, it must be stated that these were within the minority of opinion expressed. The overwhelming majority of respondents viewed the dedicated presence of a *“role model”, “a friend”, “a big brother”* or a ‘mentor’ within the lives of young people identified as being ‘at risk’ was seen as very important;
2. This evaluation also reiterated another area of debate in the field of mentoring – whether mentors needed to be from the same cultural and ethnic background of the young person or whether the mentor could be from any background as long as he/ she was able to communicate, listen and motivate? There remains a schism in opinion related to this issue illustrated in the following extract:

“It is a must that the mentor comes from the same cultural, geographical and linguistic background of the person being mentored. There needs to be some insight, shared understanding, empathy and connection....” (Siddique Rahman, Teacher)

“I don’t think that the mentor necessarily has to come from the same background as the young person. As long as they can engage, are energetic and committed – anyone should be allowed to be a mentor to anybody” (Omi Kazi, Businessman)

3. Mentoring specifically for the younger generations of Bangladeshis (3rd and 4th generation) seemed to be effective as many of these young people were completely disconnected from their parental culture and language. As most mentors were also raised in Britain and were accustomed to the language, culture, lifestyle and modern technology – they almost acted as a mediator between the young people and their families. The role of the mentor in this situation becomes even more important as they try and work within issues of intergenerational conflict and tension;
4. The issue of mentor training is also one that needs to be examined as it has become apparent that some of the complex issues that the young people have require more specialist expertise. It must be reiterated however that mentors dealing with young people with complex serious issues were in the minority. The mentors whom we spoke to were adequately trained and inducted to be effective mentors. However, this is still an issue that needs to be examined and addressed;

5. Although the whole project revolved around the needs of the client, it must be remembered that the mentors also got a *“lot out”* of the mentoring experience. This is an important fact to consider. Mentors had a variety of reasons for joining the SMP. The vast majority wanted to *“give back”* something to *“their”* community, whilst there were others who became mentors for their career development, work experience or simply to *“feel better”* about themselves;
6. Although not surprising or innovative in itself, it became apparent that there were gender differences in the mentoring activities between the male and female mentoring projects. The females, in general, engaged in mentoring activities which were geographically sporadic and centred around international cuisine. The males, in general, were far more localised in choice of activity. Whilst it is incorrect to generalise as often there are overlaps, good practice lessons can be disseminated through closer collaborative work;
7. Most importantly, the qualitative field research found in general that mentoring was on the whole positively impacting the lives of everybody connected with the SMP (mentors, clients, staff members, volunteers, wider community). The one-one-person centred philosophy of the SMP is paying huge dividends in terms of helping clients who are disengaged, ‘hard to reach’, disaffected, alienated and socially marginalised reengage back into mainstream provision/ society.

Challenges

SMP, like most voluntary sector projects, operates with some ongoing challenges. Some of the issues the research identified are:

- Surviving in the new political and economic landscape
- Striving to become a market leader in mentoring
- Strengthening the Steering Committee
- Attracting mentors, children, young people and adults from different communities and social backgrounds
- Rolling out mentoring projects to other local authorities

Strengths

SMP has many strengths which will allow it to overcome the challenges it faces. Harnessing their strengths will mean a bright future:

- Cultural sensitivity - a key reason why Social Services refer their clients
- Achievements of Service Level Agreements (SLA) targets; 110 contacts with a 65% conversion to participants
- Highly committed and well trained staff
- Approved Provider Status has given SMP a framework and ‘touchstone’
- Buy-in from the community. Reputation and profile in Tower Hamlets makes SMP uniquely placed to deliver services other providers couldn’t
- Innovative and unique one-to-one person centred approach to mentoring
- Mentoring addressing the many complex and multiple socio-political issues experienced by young people from Tower Hamlets



Conclusive Remarks

In disseminating all the wider literature and theory available on mentoring and the specific field research conducted on behalf of SMP, our conclusive thoughts are as follows:

- **The SMP effectively prepares and equips a disaffected target group to cope with some of the complexities and realities of wider society. It helps them make a transition from disaffection to engagement;**
- **Mentors with an insight of cultural and gender related understandings stand a *better* chance of establishing a more positive relationship with the target group. This does not negate the fact that mentors from different backgrounds can *also* establish similar positive relationships;**
- **There is extensive evidence of user-involvement in the decision making and development of the project ie; client being consulted on the *type* of activity they would like to engage in, the establishment of a young people and mentors forum which sits underneath the Steering Committee, the individualised action plan etc. This is in keeping with the person centred approach to youth work that SMP advocates and also promotes a sense of ownership;**
- **Some of the more deeper issues that are explored within the mentoring relationship (a positive sense of identity, a deeper understanding and connection with culture, history, and heritage) helps many young people reverse their attitude from a negative to a positive one and also enhances confidence and self-esteem levels;**
- **The mentoring activities are a ‘space’ where young people can be expressive and explore options around their needs and requirements.**

Reference

1. Moodie, M & Fisher, J (2009). *Are youth mentoring programmes good value for money? An evaluation of the Big Brothers Big Sisters Melbourne Programme*. *BMC Public Health*. 2009, 9: 41, published online 2009 January 30. doi: 10.1186/1471-2458-9-41
2. Colley, H (2003). *Mentoring for Social Inclusion: A critical approach to nurturing mentor relationships*, London: Routledge Falmer
3. *Supporting others through volunteer action – (SOVA)*, www.sova.org.uk/service.php?value=MentoringandBefriending [Accessed 29th June 2010]
4. Coleman, J (1990). *Foundations of Social Theory*, US: Belknap Press
5. Artoni, F (2004). *Shaathi Mentoring Project Interim Evaluation Report 2004*. London, BLYDA
6. *Every Child Matters* (2003), <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/about/>
7. *Tower Hamlets Local Area Agreement* (2008), www.towerhamlets.gov.uk [Accessed 18th July 2010]

2010

Evaluation Report - *Summary*