



## Mentoring and Befriending in Action: Shaathi Project

**People from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) communities are among those targeted by the Government in its 'Volunteering for All' strategy which aims to reduce barriers to volunteering for excluded groups.**

Finding volunteer mentors is certainly no problem for the Shaathi mentoring project in Tower Hamlets, part of the larger Brick Lane Youth Development Association (BLYDA). "We get lots of people who want to mentor," says Jobrul Islam, Senior Manager at BLYDA, "and we have a trained pool ready and waiting, though we are constantly looking for new volunteers."

"We work with BME boys and girls aged 8 to 18, with referrals from Youth Offending Teams, schools, the Met Police, parents, and social services. Our goal is to empower local young people by providing advice, information, education and practical support, one aspect of this support is through mentoring.

Our BME mentors have lived, worked and studied in the borough so they have a good knowledge of the problems affecting the young people. Having a similar background certainly helps. They provide mentees with

positive role models and help them contribute towards the community's life in a positive rather than anti-social way. We help them build confidence and self-esteem so that they make a productive and constructive use of their time and not get involved in crime. We help and support them but it's up to them to make the fullest use possible of the experience.

**"They're not just 'service users' or 'clients' to us, they're like our own brothers and sisters - and our future leaders."**

Among those who have benefited from her time at Shaathi is Nazma (name has been changed here to protect identity), a 13-year-old Bangladeshi girl who is in foster care with her three siblings. She was referred to Shaathi by her social worker in August 2005 who was looking to find her a good role model and to explore strategies to combat Nazma's challenging behaviour.

Jobrul says that mentoring sessions simply opened new doors for Nazma and Nazma herself says "Since starting the mentoring programme, I have made new friends and have visited so many places with my mentor. It's been really helpful in changing my outlook on life and as a result my self-confidence and esteem has increased. The one-to-one sessions were excellent - they allowed me to talk to someone about my personal issues."

"The whole process is also very rewarding for the mentors," says Jobrul. "They really like the opportunity to meet other mentors to swap experiences and ideas, what has worked well and which dead ends not to go down. We're also very proud of the fact that some of the mentees have gone on to become mentors themselves."

Visit [www.blyda.org](http://www.blyda.org) for more details

## Mentoring for Care Leavers The U Choose Project

Young people are at the heart of our society and a key challenge is how to help those in care achieve their fullest potential. Harriet Sergeant quotes some disturbing statistics about the 6,000 young people who will leave state care in 2006:

- 4,500 will have no educational qualifications
- Within two years, 3,000 will be unemployed, 2,100 will be mothers or pregnant and 1,200 will be homeless
- Only 60 will get to university

In October 2006 the Department of Education and Skills published a Green Paper, 'Care Matters: Transforming the lives of children and young people in care'. One of their proposals was to ensure that every young person in care has access to an 'independent advocate' - in other words, a mentor.

A mentoring project which has been particularly successful is the U Choose Project in Belfast which works with young people who are 'looked after' in any number of ways, such as in foster care, mental health accommodation or who are living at home in kinship care.

U Choose Co-ordinator Mairead McAllister says: "Our mentors really help the young people develop and they enjoy the individual time that they get as well as learning new skills."

"While it's about having fun, it's also about developing key areas such as social skills and independence. Some children who come in at the start of the year can't hold a conversation or maintain eye contact. We had one girl like that who by the end of the year was a real social butterfly!"

"Our aim is to support them to make transitions and choices in their lives, to put them in the driving seat, giving them emotional and practical support. The key issue is trust."

Visit [www.voypic.org](http://www.voypic.org) for more details of the U Choose Project.