



Mohammad Hassan and mentor Abdul Munim enjoy a game of pool

# With a little help from their friends

## New scheme aims to keep youngsters out of trouble

By JULIA GREGORY

**YOUNGSTERS are getting a little bit of help from their friends to turn their lives around and stay out of trouble.**

Now an East End project is so convinced of the power of mentoring it is backing a film which aims to get more people involved in giving a helping hand.

The Shaathi Mentoring Project started in 2002 and offers friendship to around 40 youngsters aged between eight and 18 each year.

Shaathi means 'friend' in Bengali and the project based at the Brick Lane Youth Association (BLYA) in Vallance Road matches up adults and young people for mentoring relationships which lasts between four months to a year.

Young people are referred by social services, the police and schools to help them with specific skills. These range from building confidence and tackling to anti-social behaviour to breaking a cycle of truancy.

Some adults even get up early to collect their charge and take them to school every morning.

Jobrul Islam, senior manager at BLYA said young people are also amazed that an adult they have only recently met bothers to get up and take them to school.

Mr Islam encourages people to think about getting involved.

"Our mentors have lived, worked and studied in Tower Hamlets, so they have a good knowledge of the problems that affect young people."

Teenagers are matched to helpers with similar interests. They meet for two hours each week and also meet up once a month to enjoy a social event such as go-karting with other pairings.

Mr Islam said: "We're very proud that some of our

mentees have gone on to become mentors themselves. It's about recognising the qualities of the individuals and developing them."

Mohammad Hassan, known as Hassan, is a graduate of the scheme.

He joined when he was 15 and was unsure of it at first.

But within a week he found himself on an expedition in north Wales with his helper Abdul Munim, a project co-ordinator at BLYA.

Hassan said: "I love adventure sports so that was great. I loved it. We were walking up mountains and it really gives you time to think."

Mr Munim said: "We met on the Monday and on the Friday we were away on a challenge. You really get to know the other person and you rely on them to work with you."

Hassan said the relationship has given him a new outlook.

"After a while I saw that someone was trying to help me. It was not such a good time for me and we worked on general life skills."

Hassan went on to gain certificates in IT, mechanics and for building motivation and confidence.

He now has a job in menswear with John Lewis in the West End.

His long term aim is to set up a youth group and he hopes to get a place on a youth workers course soon.

"Before I came to this mentoring scheme I didn't really care about anyone suffering. Now I want to help people as much as I can. This scheme's given me confidence and belief in myself and I'm trying to change myself for the better."

Copies of the film about mentoring are available from the Mentoring and Befriending Association on 0161 787 8600, [www.mansbf.org.uk](http://www.mansbf.org.uk)

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