COMMUNITY MENTORING
TOOLKIT

Working with socially excluded households

Introduction

Community-based mentoring was used as part of an action research project, *Debt on Teesside: Pathways to Financial Inclusion*, during 2011-13. The project, a partnership between Durham University, Church Action on Poverty and Thrive (a Teesside-based community organisation), was funded by the Northern Rock Foundation (see Banks et al, 2013). This toolkit has been developed from that work, with the aim of sharing learning and offering good practice guidelines for other organisations considering community-based mentoring with socially excluded households.

The *Debt on Teesside* project was designed with the intention of matching community mentors with low income households that were experiencing debt problems. The aim of the mentoring scheme was to stimulate behaviour change by supporting households to move away from high cost credit towards more financially sustainable alternatives. It provided an opportunity for households (mentees) to develop skills and confidence in relation to money management. Previous work by Thrive had shown that providing support to community volunteers to develop relationships with socially excluded households led to improvements in money management (Friends Provident, 2010).

There are many guides for developing mentoring schemes, particularly in the fields of education, health, enhancing skills and career advancement (see Kochan and Pascarelli, 2003). This toolkit is distinctive in that it offers specific guidance for setting up a community-based mentoring scheme to work with households experiencing social exclusion.

Box 1: What is community mentoring?
Community mentoring involves volunteers within a given community (this may be a local neighbourhood or a community of interest or identity) providing mentor support to people from the same community. This may be regarded as a form of 'peer support' as it involves volunteer mentors from backgrounds or community settings that are similar to those of participating mentees. Mentor sessions (one-to-one or group meetings between mentors and mentees) may happen in community settings, mentees' homes or via the internet or phone. The aim is to facilitate mentees' self-development, contribute to improving their social networks and motivate them to achieve their goals.

Box 2: What are 'socially excluded' households?
Socially excluded households comprise people who face barriers to inclusion in their communities and society more generally. These barriers may be based on: financial exclusion (low incomes, reliance on benefits, no access to bank accounts); lack of participation in employment, training, education or local/national decision-making forums; poor access to basic services; and limited social ties (lack of family support, limited social networks, no one to offer help in a crisis). Social exclusion is complex. As Percy-Smith (2000, p.12) comments, it can be seen as 'a process or a set of processes rather than a static condition and, moreover, a set of processes outside the control of the individual'.

Method description

Mentoring involves some people (mentors) developing relationships with and offering support to others (mentees), who are not family members or close friends. These relationships aim to encourage and guide mentees' self-development and learning. Mentoring is usually done on a one-to-one basis, although it can also take place in groups involving one or more mentors and several mentees in face-to-face meetings or virtual communications. This toolkit will focus on one-to-one mentoring that takes place largely face-to-face.

As Rolfe (n.d., pp. 3-4) comments: 'Two heads are better than one is the essence of a mentoring relationship'. A mentor can encourage reflection, be a resource for the mentee to gather information, act as a sounding board for setting goals, be a critical friend and support mentees in decision-making. Mentor support relationships provide an opportunity for mentees to engage in meaningful conversations that can impact on their thinking processes, attitudes and feelings and consequently their actions. This method of support can encourage mentees to improve their links within their communities and reduce social exclusion.

Mentoring sessions may cover a range of supportive and purposeful activities such as: setting goals; agreeing action plans; using learning logs; reviewing steps; building confidence; improving problem-solving skills and developing decision-making techniques. For participants (mentees) it can be an empowering and positive experience. It is important that the activities chosen encourage the mentees towards positive change and personal development, enabling them to manage their own learning.

Methods adopted need to take account of how host organisations (the organisations or accountable bodies that provide the resources and facilities to deliver the mentor project) recruit, train and provide assistance to community mentors.

How to do it

1. Setting up your scheme

a) Agreeing the type of mentoring that is appropriate for your project

Traditionally, mentoring is thought of as one-to-one, face-to-face support. However, mentoring can take a number of forms, which may often be a combination of the following:

- One-to-one or group mentoring
- Peer or non-peer mentoring
- Face-to-face or electronic mentoring
- Volunteer or paid mentoring.

Whichever combination you choose, there are both advantages and challenges to using community mentors when working with socially excluded households (see Box 3).

Box 3: The advantages and challenges of community mentors

Advantages: Community mentors have a greater understanding of their local communities or interest groups and generally have experience or knowledge of available services. So they are in a good position to signpost mentees to services and social activities. Ideally, community mentors have awareness and some shared experiences of the issues facing the people that they will mentor. This helps with the development of relationships and provides opportunities for self-development and reflection.

Challenges: If community mentors are from the same neighbourhood or community of interest as the mentees, they may come across them in their daily lives outside the mentoring relationship. This makes confidentiality and guarding against over-involvement particularly important.

b) Recruitment of mentors

The frequency and complexity of the mentoring sessions will determine how many mentors you need to recruit. Community mentors can be recruited via a range of methods: using existing volunteers within your organisation; working with partner organisations that may be in a position to allow some of their volunteers/project workers to offer time-limited support; recruiting new volunteers through approaching your local volunteer bureau or placing advertisements in local community centres, newsletters or on websites.

Recruitment should involve an application process, which invites applicants to list their skills, qualities and interests and includes a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check (the criminal records check in the UK). Mentors need to commit to an agreed time frame and be available for training and support sessions to enable them to carry out their roles effectively. The section of the toolkit covering 'skills and qualities of mentors' may help you design your application form. It is a good idea to interview applicants and explain that they will not be accepted as mentors until they have undertaken training, and agreed their specific roles and responsibilities.

For further advice on the recruitment of mentors, see the checklist produced by Volunteer Now (2009).

c) Training mentors

It is a good idea to have an introductory session for potential mentors to ensure they are fully aware of their roles and responsibilities before they decide to do the training. The host organisation should then provide appropriate training, including guidelines on how to conduct mentoring sessions and 'tools' so that the mentor is able to facilitate and deliver their own sessions with householders. It is important that those running the training use this as an opportunity to assess participants' suitability for mentoring. Training might include:

- Explain the purpose of the training and what will happen if potential mentors do not complete the training, or if at the end the host organisation decides that some people are not suitable to be mentors
- Background information about the organisation hosting the mentoring scheme (including the aims and objectives of the scheme)
- Background information on who the mentees will be, their needs and issues
- Relevant policies and services affecting the people who will be mentored (e.g. the benefits system, sources of financial advice)
- Roles and responsibilities of mentors
- Specific policies and procedures to be followed, including anti-discrimination, confidentiality, secure storage of any recordings made, personal safety and risk
- Introduction to guidelines for conducting mentoring sessions
- Good practice guidelines and exercises for developing relationships (e.g. carrying out an 'active listening' exercise, exploring one's own attitudes and prejudices, handling differences in gender, ethnicity, religion and so on)
- Using 'tools' (e.g. tasks and exercises for mentees to complete) in a mentoring session
- Developing skills in drawing out information from mentees, supporting them in planning and decision-making (e.g. through role play and practising)
- Recording and monitoring progress, including what the requirements are for recording each session, what this will be used for and how the whole scheme will be monitored and evaluated.
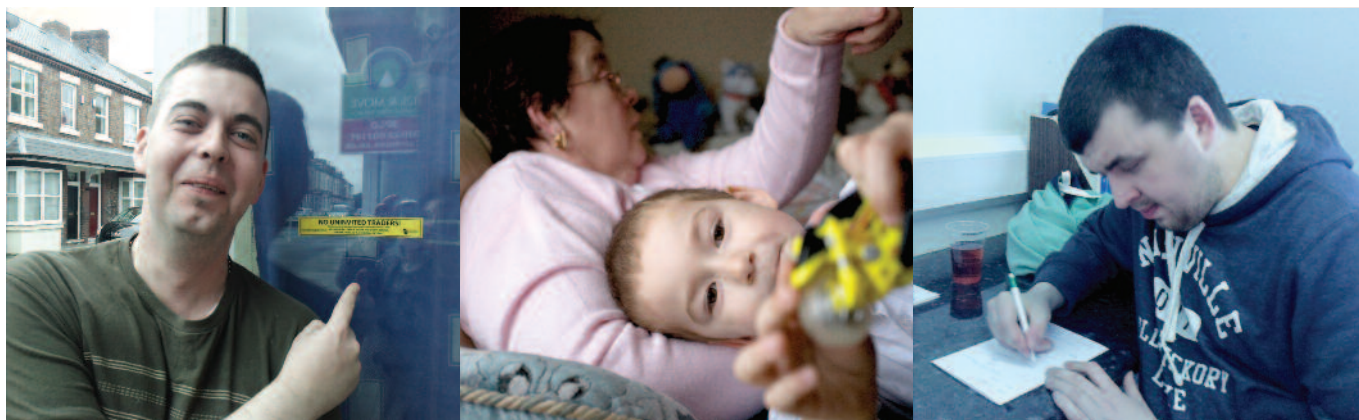
d) Allocation of mentors to mentees

Following the training, it is a good idea to meet with each prospective mentor individually to discuss any issues that need to be taken into account when allocating them to mentees (e.g. travel, personal circumstances, level of experience and whether they know the mentees). Mentors from the same communities or neighbourhoods should be allocated to people they do not know. There may also be gender and ethnicity issues to consider when allocating mentors. If someone is judged unsuitable, or perhaps not yet ready to be a mentor on their own, then this will need to be explained. If you have sufficient mentors, then it may be possible for them to work in pairs.

e) Recruitment of mentees

How mentees join the scheme will depend on the nature of your project. For example, the *Debt on Teesside* project asked local agencies such as social services and the Citizens' Advice Bureau to refer people to the project. However, the majority of households joined the project as a result of door knocking in neighbourhoods where low income and high levels of debt were known to be prevalent. Adverts and posters can be placed in the local press, community buildings and on websites. Whatever method is used to invite people to join the project as mentees, it is important to ensure that they are given full information about the project, including what commitment will be expected from them, how confidentiality will be preserved and what arrangements there are for changing or ending the mentoring relationship. A clear, short information sheet can be useful for this purpose.

It is also important to check at the start whether the households or individuals meet the eligibility requirements for your mentoring scheme. For example, the *Debt on Teesside* project worked with households that had low incomes, high levels of debt and a willingness to work on money management. When working with households facing severe financial, health or social difficulties, you also need to bear in mind that making and keeping appointments may not be easy, and some people may leave the project due to changing life circumstances. So if you aim to work with 50 people, for example, you may need to recruit 60-70 people to allow for drop outs early on in the process.

f) The mentoring sessions

The table below offers an example of how the mentoring sessions may be structured. It can be adapted to suit the needs of your own project.

Mentoring session	Aim of session	Material and exercises that can be used
First session	• Getting to know your mentee • Agreeing roles/responsibilities • Determining the mentee's concerns, what situations they find difficult and setting some realistic goals	• Ice breaker exercises – e.g. five things you have in common • Building trust exercises • Mentor/mentee agreement • Goals sheet • Confidence assessment sheet
Second session	• Developing your relationship • Looking at steps needed to achieve goals • Getting to know your community e.g. identification of resources and facilities	• Problem-solving exercises that are fun and develop thinking skills • Completing an action plan with agreed steps and actions • Fact finding exercise – e.g. mapping out local resources
Third session onwards	• Reviewing steps taken • Identifying barriers to taking steps • Problem-solving how to overcome barriers	• Referring back to the action plan and discussing steps taken

g) Ethics, safeguarding and support issues

It is important that appropriate arrangements are in place to safeguard both mentors and mentees. A full risk assessment should be carried out to determine procedures and practices to be followed. Safeguarding practices should aim to include: delivery of sessions (where mentor/mentee meetings will take place and if mentors are visiting people's homes, think about lone working and how you may be able to reduce risks); the implementation of DBS checks; how to ensure confidentiality and when to report serious concerns (e.g. suspected abuse of children or vulnerable adults); guidelines on boundaries and mentor-mentee agreements.

Even with protection and support mechanisms in place, unexpected challenges may arise. For example, as the mentor-mentee relationship builds and trust is established, mentees may disclose sensitive information about their personal lives or vulnerabilities, which the mentor may find distressing or alarming. Mentees may ask for help in areas of their lives that are beyond the scope of the mentoring scheme, or seek to develop a close personal relationship with a mentor.

On-going support for mentors – One-to-one support/supervision sessions for mentors should be factored into the project to review individual progress or difficulties. Regular mentor meetings allow mentors to support each other and provide an opportunity to raise issues and discuss any difficulties with delivery of sessions or potential safeguarding issues. Involvement from mentors in reviewing and improving delivery of the project will ensure effective management of your mentoring scheme.

Protecting your mentees – It is important that the mentor relationship is not exploitative in any way. Mentors should respond to mentees' needs and should not impose their own agendas. An agreement and policy should be in place covering confidentiality and mentees should be made aware of their rights and responsibilities. Mentees should be clear about what is expected from them and accept increasing responsibility for their own learning. The role of mentors is to facilitate this process.

Support to mentees – Ensure open communication at all times. At the start of any project an agreement on the focus and timeframe of the mentoring relationship, including the number of sessions and how they are to be delivered (within the framework of project) should be conveyed. This enables mentees to consider how they will manage after the end of the relationship. The location of mentoring sessions should be considered (e.g. whether at mentees' homes or in community centres), in order to reduce the risk of sessions being cancelled or missed.

Further information and guidance on issues of disclosure can be found in Case Example 1, *Ethics in Community-based Participatory Research: Case Studies, Case Examples and Commentaries* (Banks and Armstrong, 2012, pp. 25-29). For boundary issues see the handout prepared by the Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (2011).

2. Delivering your mentor support project – the mentoring 'life cycle'

Mentoring relationships have a life cycle, just like other relationships. Mentor support can involve a pre-arranged number of sessions or be held over a specific time period.

Initiating a relationship

It is good practice for the host organisation to initiate the relationship between mentors and mentees and arrange the first meeting at a suitable time for all. This first introductory meeting will provide an opportunity to discuss the aims of the mentoring project and allow queries or concerns to be raised. Providing mentor support to people who are socially excluded may mean that an initial, introductory session takes place in mentees' homes. To safeguard both the mentor and mentee, it is advisable that the host organisation oversees this and ensures appropriate practices are followed for future sessions (e.g. agreeing lone working guidelines; provisions for mentors to work in pairs; arranging sessions in community buildings).

Developing the mentor-mentee relationship

Building a rapport and getting to know each other are important if trust is to be established. It is also a good idea to set some 'ground rules', determine the boundaries of the mentors' and mentees' roles and responsibilities and agree clear expectations from both parties. Mentees should be encouraged to assess their situation and set some goals, thinking about the steps that need to be taken in order to reach their goals.

Mentor sessions

This is the time when the mentor and mentee meet up and the self–development part of the project is evident. Goals have already been defined and the focus now is set upon implementing an action plan and developing tools and skills to enable the mentee to work towards their goals. It is important to review progress at each session and assess what is working and what may not be going so well. The mentor should support the mentee to look at decisions made and help build confidence in problem-solving, accessing community resources and attaining goals.

Motivation

There may be times when the mentee lacks the motivation to continue with the mentoring programme. If this happens, the mentor should explore possible barriers to participation with the mentee. Some suggested questions to ask include:

- Are there any specific reasons why the mentee does not want to participate?
- What are the pros and cons of being part of the mentoring project?
- What are the positive and negative aspects of the mentee working towards change or things staying the same?
- How were things for the mentee in the past?
- Looking forward, what may happen if things stay the same?
- How would the mentee like to see their life in five years' time? What are their goals?
- On a scale of 1-10, how important is it for the mentee to make some changes?

Ending the mentor-mentee relationship

An effective mentor is one who is able to ensure that the mentee does not become reliant on them. It is beneficial to think about the 'exit strategy' and look at how the mentee may take their learning forward. If support is still needed, signposting/referring to other agencies/support services may be the preferred option. At the end of the mentor support, it is important to review any agreed actions, determine whether or not steps have been taken to achieve the mentee's goals and reflect upon the learning experience.

Monitoring and evaluation

In order to assess the effectiveness of your mentoring scheme it is important to collect information to monitor and evaluate individual mentees' progress and the effectiveness of the scheme as a whole. Information collected might include reports of each mentor-mentee session and data about mentees' circumstances at the start, middle and end of the mentoring relationship. It is important to agree what base line data needs to be collected and how this should be recorded (e.g. initial assessments in the form of questionnaires, proformas for progress reports). When working with socially excluded households, the data may include information relating to: access and involvement in local community initiatives; feelings of community involvement and sense of belonging; opportunities to be involved in local decision making forums; employment and volunteering opportunities; and the extent of social networks. Session reports are a useful way of monitoring the mentoring process because they help record actions and keep a focus on what the mentoring support is seeking to achieve. Mid-term and exit assessments or interviews also allow for data to be collected to monitor the effectiveness of your scheme over time.

Additional resources on the mentoring life cycle can be found in section 2 of *The Good Mentoring Guide* (Hussain, 2009, pp. 16–22).

Cost and time requirements

It is important that your organisation factors in full cost recovery of your mentoring scheme within your organisation's budget and/or any funding applications you may make. An effective mentoring scheme involves the delivery of many mentoring sessions and associated training and support. Costs may include room hire, refreshments and reimbursing volunteer travel expenses. There is also the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check (formerly known as Criminal Records Bureau, CRB), which is necessary when mentoring involves vulnerable adults and children. The costs and time associated with the DBS checks need to be factored in. For more information on DBS Checks see **www.gov.uk/disclosure-barring-service-check/overview**

Capacities and skills required

Capacities of the host organisation

Any organisation setting up a mentoring scheme needs to ensure it has the capacity to deliver, including:

- Qualified and experienced staff with the ability and resources to coordinate and support mentors and mentees
- Experienced trainers that can deliver training/support sessions
- Organisational commitment to adapt, manage and meet the needs of the project – making changes if needed
- Organisational systems for clear communication with all those involved in the delivery of the project
- Organisational resources to analyse and interpret the findings of the project
- Local knowledge regarding resources and services available and relationships with partner organisations that may add value to the project or may act as a referral route if needed (for additional or more specific support).

Skills and qualities of mentors

A mentor is a 'resource' and a 'support' that enables a mentee to move towards their defined and agreed aspirations. To enhance the role of the mentor and ensure the mentee is able to develop and achieve positive change, the mentor needs to have the skills to facilitate and support this learning.

Interpersonal skills

- Ability to listen actively, concentrating on what is being said during sessions and giving full attention to the mentee without any distractions
- Ability to communicate clearly and to motivate another person to succeed without putting pressure on them
- Ability to break down barriers, allowing a trusting relationship to develop. It is important to show the mentee that the mentor respects and has faith in them
- Ability to speak clearly, without using jargon
- Ability to relate to mentees in a non-judgemental manner
- Ability to ask a range of open and closed questions to gather information and encourage discussion
- Ability to see a situation from someone else's point of view

Knowledge

- Knowledgeable in the given subject area (social exclusion and its implications)
- Awareness of community resources and ability to access/signpost when and if necessary

Personal qualities

- Supportive, encouraging and motivating – prompting the mentee to generate options and evaluate the consequences of any decisions or actions taken
- Willing to draw on their own experiences when appropriate
- Confronting and challenging in a way that promotes positive responses
- Empowering, including providing opportunities for mentees to gain the confidence to make changes in their lives.

Things to bear in mind – top tips

Time and commitment – Ensure the host organisation has the capacity to deliver. Bear in mind the time needed to carry out follow up work before and after sessions. Remember, mentor projects are not simply an add-on to existing projects. It is important to ensure you have dedicated staff time to create, monitor and support your mentor project.

Start small – When starting your mentor project, think small and deliver a pilot project initially, supporting between 10 and 15 mentees. This will enable your organisation to review practice and make improvements.

Ensure long term investment – Long term investment is needed in mentoring programmes if they are to achieve change in people's lives.

Ensure the mentor scheme is open and accessible – Create opportunities and time (convenient to the mentees) to ensure mentees are able to take full advantage of the mentoring support scheme.

Create space for reflection – Factor in the time to offer meetings for mentors, including mutual support and time for reflection. This will add value to the delivery of your mentoring scheme and allow the opportunity to address any issues that may arise.

Build relationships of trust – Provide sufficient time to establish and develop relationships between mentors and mentees. It is important that relationships develop, trust is gained and sessions are meaningful in order to ensure the support will be effective in achieving agreed goals.

Work with mentees on their motivation to take part – Mentoring will only be effective if the mentees want to take part and have a commitment to developing their potential and bring about change. If they do not, then explore the reasons why, as this will inform the next steps and encourage mentees to decide whether or not to participate. It is important to invest some time looking at motivation and overcoming the barriers to participation.

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