

Mentoring

Jane O'Sullivan looks at the origins of mentoring and the work of the Dalston Youth Project.

The model of mentoring developed at the Dalston Youth Project has been acknowledged as an example of good practice in intervention work with 'at risk' young people. The original principles of this model have been adapted and applied widely to the plethora of new mentoring schemes which have recently sprung up.

Origins

This is a far cry from 1994 when DYP was first set up by Crime Concern and a number of partnership agencies as a response to concerns about youth crime in Hackney. The idea of using volunteer mentors as a way to help tackle problems of youth disaffection, exclusion and criminal behaviour was considered fairly innovative and greeted with a degree of trepidation by some local agencies. Mentoring was better known in either a workplace or educational setting.

DYP was at the forefront of developing one-to-one work with mentors supporting 'at risk' young people. The intensive year long programme for 15-18 year olds still follows the same basic structure as when the project started:

- A residential phase where relationships between, staff, mentors and young people develop. Goals are set by young people with support from the mentors.

Many young people we come across have never before had a significant adult taking a genuine interest in their hopes and aspirations. Mentors can and do make a huge impact on the young people's lives. The voluntary nature of the mentoring reinforces this.

- Young people are paired with mentors who guide and support them to achieve their goals throughout the year.
- Ongoing education/personal development component which consists of support and advice from project staff, as well as educational activities designed to stimulate and engage the most disaffected teenager and encourage them to get involved in learning.

- Training, supervision and support for mentors throughout the programme.

DYP continues to be successful in a number of ways. It manages to engage, on a voluntary basis, with some of the most disaffected young people in Hackney and make a difference. Eighty five per cent of a recently evaluated group were in college, training or work by the end of their year on the programme. Offending behaviour was reduced amongst almost all those

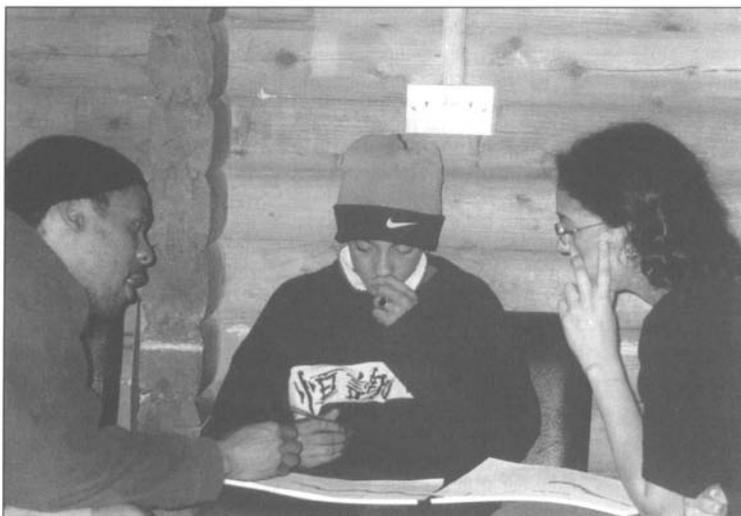
completing the programme. Arrests fell by 17 per cent compared with the twelve months previously. On the basis of self-reported offending, the project was cost effective. (Webb 2000)

We recognise that mentoring lies at the heart of the programme with a commitment by volunteers to make a personal connection with a troubled young person and support them as they make transitions into the world of adulthood. In some ways this is the most powerful part of the programme. Many young people we come across have never before had a significant adult taking a genuine interest in their hopes and aspirations. Mentors can and do make a huge impact on the young people's lives. The voluntary nature of the mentoring reinforces this.

Creating the right relationship

It is not always easy to categorise what makes a good mentoring relationship, but we have found that it needs to be one based on trust, empathy and commitment with a dose of realism. Good mentors know where young people are coming from and are therefore not seen as a 'soft touch'.

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Devon and Cornwall, writing in the most recent edition of *Policing Today*, states "Indeed we must resist the temptation of moving from an idea to a solution without thoughtful consideration and consultation on the journey. It should be taken as read that we fully accept the right of Government to set the overall strategy for the Service and give a clear direction in WHAT we do but the dangers inherent in a shift to centralism is the involvement in HOW we do it."

A clearer statement of concern is hard to imagine, given the constitutional relationships within the tripartite arrangements for the delivery of policing within all three jurisdictions in the UK.

Senior police managers are addressing the misgivings surrounding inappropriate and unreconstructed managerialism, as identified in CJM 40. That effort is not necessarily welcomed, nor does it always carry the day, but the service should not be condemned for failing to recognise the issues, when it has done more than most to flag them up to policy makers and to address the consequences within its own activities.

Colin Cramphorn is Deputy Chief Constable, Royal Ulster Constabulary.

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- Cramphorn, C. (1999), *Working Together for Safer Communities - Report of the Community Safety Conference*, Community Safety Centre, Belfast: Northern Ireland Office.
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We have learned lots of lessons over the years but there are some key issues. Mentoring is a structured relationship, unlike befriending or counselling, with the mentor helping the young person to work towards, and achieve, goals identified at the outset. For it to work, the mentoring needs to have a clear purpose, with the focus being on helping young people to re-engage with education or training, or helping them gain employment. At DYP the young people themselves have identified accessing further education or getting a job as being the best way to prevent them slipping into a career of crime (Webb 2000). This is why we emphasise the importance of the educational components of the programme and urge other projects to think carefully about how they can ensure that mentors have a framework in which to work. There are, however, pitfalls in relying, as we do at DYP, on the goodwill and commitment of volunteers. Sometimes partnerships don't work out, young people don't meet with their mentor or mentors disappear. By its very nature, mentoring can be hard to define and sometimes difficult to manage. Mentoring schemes need to be adequately staffed and managed so that volunteers receive the support and training they need. We have to be realistic about what can and can't be achieved by mentoring. We also have to acknowledge the

'hidden' successes that come from damage limitation. For some young people, involvement with a mentor may prevent their personal situation deteriorating.

Retaining the basic principles of our model of mentoring, DYP has continued to grow and develop new and innovative strands. Significant amongst these is DYP II. This is a programme for eleven to fourteen year olds, which works with local secondary schools to prevent exclusion and truancy.

We have also developed a peer mentor programme so that young people who have been involved with the project can themselves act as peer group mentors, effectively challenging some of the negative peer pressure that youngsters experience.

Clearly DYP has continued to evolve in a flexible and innovative way in responding to the challenge of working with youth at risk. Experience and expertise accrued through DYP's development stands it in good stead to continue to be a leading model of good practice.

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Reference:

- Webb, Janice (2000) *Dalston Youth Project Programme 7 Final Evaluation*, Janice Webb Research.

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