

# Raising Aspirations

**A school based mentoring scheme, matching young people at risk of under achievement with mentors from the local community.**

**Year 2 Report: October 2014**



A Raising Aspirations mentor and mentee 2014

Somerset Community Foundation launched Raising Aspirations in 2011 to improve the educational and employment aspirations of young people in Somerset. An independent evaluation of the programme at Crispin School in Street shows that, after 12 months young people had improved levels of self-esteem; increased self-belief, and an increased perception of the support that is available to them from family and significant others. After 24 months of mentoring, these outcomes translated into higher aspirations to achieve academically, compared to their peers.

This report provides further details of the success of the programme and its direction in the future.

## About Raising Aspirations

The Raising Aspirations programme was established to find solutions for young people in Somerset whose attainment in national qualifications lags behind their true potential. In 2013 Somerset was ranked 111 out of 152 local authorities for overall GCSE results, and there is particular concern for students from poorer backgrounds whose attainment is, on average, half as good as other pupils<sup>1</sup>.

The specific objective of the programme is to raise the aspirations and attainment of young people attending Crispin School in Street. Somerset Community Foundation recruits and trains volunteers from local businesses and the community to provide one to one mentoring for children at the school.

*“For me, knowing that my mentee has the support of someone totally independent is probably the biggest thing. I think the element of making them believe anything is possible and helping to guide them through the process of how they might achieve it is very strong”. Raising Aspirations Mentor (Project Manager)*

Over the course of a three year evaluation Dr Christian van Nieuwerburgh of the University of East London and Dr Chris Pawson of the University of West of England are evaluating the impact of the programme on the participants. Specifically, the

<sup>1</sup> Somerset County Council (2013) *Somerset Children and Learners Needs Analysis*

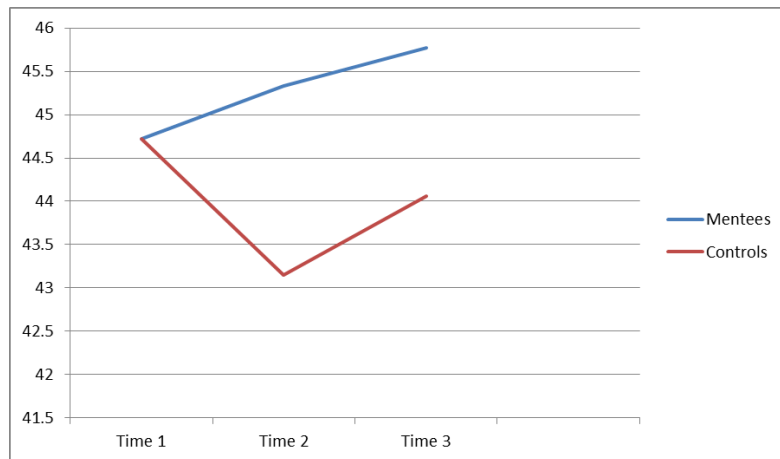
research will be tracking their aspirations and achievements over the years approaching their GCSEs.

## Results

The following section provides a summary of the evaluation of the impact of the programme on mentees.

- Skills and Beliefs

### *Skills and beliefs of mentees vs control group at 24 months (T=3)*

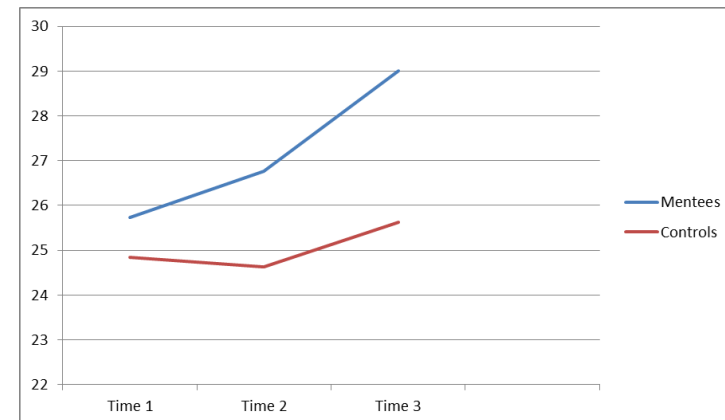


Mentees were asked to rate their own skills and their belief they could succeed in the future. The evaluation found a significant increase in skills and positive belief during the first twelve months of the mentoring intervention, conversely, the control group experienced a decline over the first year relative to the average for

all other year 7s and 8s. The mentees' positive self-image continued in the second year of mentoring.

- Academic Aspirations

### *Academic aspirations of mentees vs controls at 24 months (T3)*



Mentees also experienced a greater increase in academic aspiration compared to the control group. In the first year of the programme both mentees and the rest of Years 7 and 8s all saw an increase in aspiration, but in the second year this fell for the control group. However the mentees' aspirations continued to rise such that by 24 months they were evidencing a significant increase that was not evident amongst the controls.

- Self Esteem

Pupils taking part in the Raising Aspirations programme seem to have held lower self-esteem than the control group at the outset of

the programme. However, the data reveals that the mentees saw an increase in self-esteem compared with the control group. 50% of mentees experienced a greater than 2 point rise in self-esteem over the first year of the programme compared with only 33% of controls over the same time period.



A mentor and mentee at the annual tea party

- **Perceived social support**

Over the course of the first year of the Raising Aspirations programme mentees experienced a significant increase in their perception of support from their family and perception of support from significant others. There was no significant increase in the perceived support experienced by control participants on either measure.

- **Impact of the programme on different groups**

A key question for the evaluation is how the mentoring impacts on different groups. The evaluation therefore looked at the impact of mentoring on mentees who commenced the programme with few

recorded social and developmental difficulties compared with those who were rated as ‘borderline’ or ‘abnormal’ on the Strengths and Difficulties scale (Goodman, 1997). This is a helpful metric to identify children who are more likely to struggle with under-achievement.

Analysis shows that young people who were at risk of under-achievement experienced a particularly high increase in their own skills and beliefs, aspirations, and perceived social support as a result of the two years of mentoring support. This is a key finding that we will be exploring further in the third year of the evaluation.

*“Mentoring a student at Crispin School is a really rewarding experience because I feel as if I am really helping my young person to grow and become more confident. I feel I can make a difference by giving them a different perspective on life and their future and help them to consider their choices and decisions. It’s a great programme and I would urge anyone that has a spare hour every month to sign up”. Ali Russell, IT Training Manager and Mentor.*

## **Conclusion**

This report clearly show that one to one mentoring support from a trusted adult resulted in an increase in mentees’ self-esteem; their perception of the support available to them; and their academic aspirations. There was a particularly significant increase for those children identified at the start of the programme as vulnerable to under-achievement.

**Thank you** to Ninesquare Trust and Crispin School for their continuing support for the programme.