



Raising Aspirations mentor and mentee, 2015

Raising Aspirations Year 3 evaluation report 2014-15

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Somerset Community Foundation launched Raising Aspirations in 2011 to improve the educational and employment aspirations of young people in Somerset.

The programme operates at Crispin School in Street and is being independently evaluated by researchers at the University of the West of England.

This report outlines the impact involvement in the scheme is having on pupils' confidence, their levels of self esteem, and their feeling of being supported by adults other than immediate family and friends. These are crucial indicators of how likely young people are to aspire to achieve in their future life.

About Raising Aspirations

Raising Aspirations 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 the attainment levels of students from poorer backgrounds were, on average, half as good as other pupils¹.

The programme's objective 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

¹ Somerset County Council (2013) Somerset Children and Learners Needs Analysis

one to one mentoring for children at the school.

"[Your mentor will) encourage you...like for ages I was convinced I could not do what I wanted to do....I used to be too terrified to do it....not know what they think.....but now it's not an issue"

Mentee, 2015



Raising Aspirations mentor and mentee, 2015

Over the course of a three year evaluation Dr Chris Pawson of the University of West of England (and formerly Dr Christian van Nieuwerburgh of the University of East London) is assessing the impact of the programme on the participants. Specifically, the research is tracking their aspirations and achievements over the years approaching their GCSEs.

Results

Interviews with over 40 mentees revealed the value that pupils put on their relationship with their mentors which they say makes them feel more confident, adds to their self esteem, and feel generally well supported.

“I am really comfortable around my mentor, and we are like friends. If I have a problem I can say it.”

“We just chat for about an hour. It’s like talking to a friend really.”

“I think it’s really nice talking to an adult. It’s very easy.....very comfortable.”

Mentees felt that their mentor was dedicated to them, and that they do not feel anxiety about burdening them in any way.

“My mentor seems genuinely interested and wants to be there talking to me. They do really help you to feel like you’re wanted...and it kind of helps because she has good ideas about what to do.”

The trust mentees have in their mentors also emerged from the interviews, and it is clear that this trust plays a significant part in the more successful partnerships:

“I’m the sort of person who I have some people I can speak to, but sometimes I go home after a bad day and feel I can’t speak to my Mum, but I do now...mainly to do with my mentor...like even though I haven’t known my mentor for very long, she is someone I can trust, and that I can speak to”.

“You talk through your problems, if you have any, and they help you through it.... no matter what it is”.

Mentees report that they particularly enjoy hearing examples that help them to identify with their mentor, and hearing

about how their mentor has overcome challenges that resonate with the mentee.

“I talk to my mentor about what I struggle with, like maths, and putting my hand up in class. My mentor encourages me to put my hand up, he says you could be right”.

From mentees’ feedback, it is clear that their lives have been enriched by the experience in a range of diverse ways. For some the experience has broadened their horizons and raised aspirations, and for others there has been significant personal development in domains which will hopefully now provide the building blocks for future aspirations and success:

“I used to be a mean person at school. We talk about things like that. How I can be better at home and at school...be a better person”.

“They encourage you to go out and get things....outside of school. Go out of school and meet new people”.

“Mentoring works out how we can achieve as much as we can”.

Quantitative research

After 24 months of the programme, our evaluation report in 2014 showed that mentees were experiencing improved levels of self esteem and aspirations compared to a control group of pupils from similar backgrounds.

Results of this year’s evaluation, however, revealed that the increase in the first two

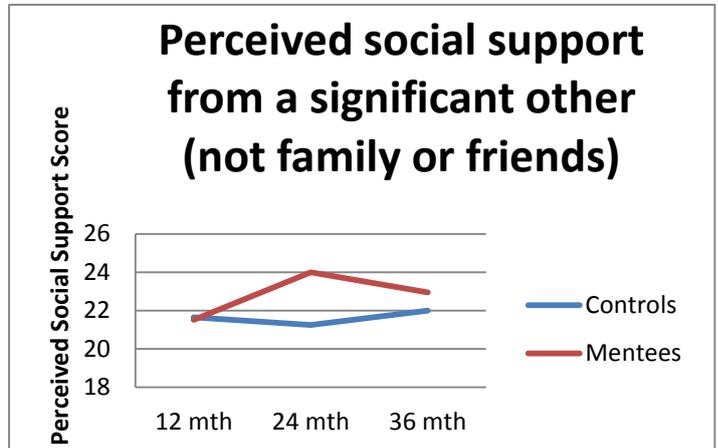
years was not sustained by mentees after 36 months of mentoring.

It is important to note, however, that the self esteem; skills and beliefs, and sense of satisfaction with life of all students in the school fell over this period. It is hard to know why this is but focus groups indicate the major reasons are the difficulties of adolescence, pressure from exams and choosing options, and peer group problems.

The first two years of the evaluation found a significant difference between the mentees and their peers and so our hypothesis is that mentees will have been equipped with resilience needed to bounce back from these very natural set backs. We will be testing this hypothesis over the coming year.

Despite the narrowing of the gap between mentees and control group, mentees still ended the third year of the programme with higher scores in self esteem, skills and belief and satisfaction with life than they would have done, had they not taken part.

Significantly, mentees continued to experience a greater sense of social support beyond friends and family than their peers.



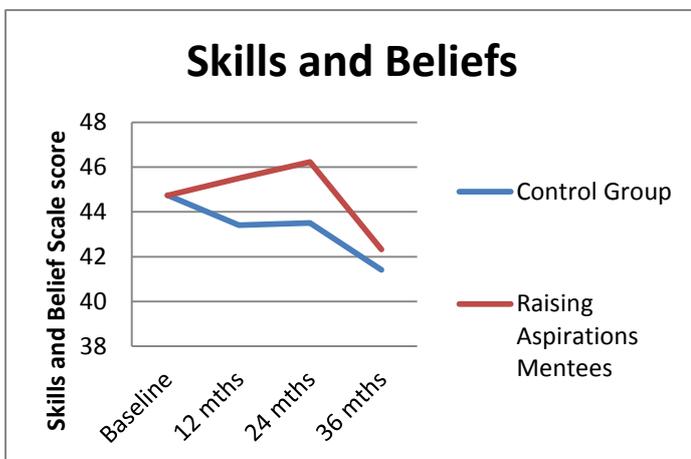
We know from research by Bergin and Bergin (2009)² that attachment influences students’ school success and social competence. So we can conclude that this sense of connection and support is an important indicator for students’ success in the future.

Implications for the future

Other independent research has shown that longer term mentoring (more than 12m) has a greater effect on outcomes for children than short term interventions (Bernstein et al, 2009)³. So in looking at why the impact of the programme has declined after three years, our hypothesis is that something has changed in the way the project has been delivered. Focus

² Bergin, C. and Bergin, D. (2009) Attachment in the Classroom. Educational Psychology Review, 21, 141-170.

³ Bernstein, L., Rappaport, C. D., Olsho, L., Hunt, D., & Levin, M. (2009). Impact Evaluation of the US Department of Education's Student Mentoring Program. Final Report. NCEE 2009-4047.



groups suggest some factors which could be having an effect. These include the frequency of the mentoring meetings, which in 2014-15 had dropped to less than once a month (during term time) on average across all participants, and the quality of the relationships between mentor and mentee. These factors need further exploration in the coming year to understand if they are making a difference to outcomes for pupils.

We recognise that sustaining mentoring relationships over five years is aspirational but it is very encouraging that 60% of Raising Aspirations mentors continue with the scheme for at least three years, and we anticipate that 40% of partnerships will last the full five years.

We recognise that close attention must be paid to ensuring mentors and mentees maintain a regular, close relationship to get the greatest benefits for students and mentors.

“I did activities I wanted to do, but kept giving up because I didn’t have any confidence. My mentor gives me a reason to go and do these things.”

An evaluation against the original identified need for an improvement in academic attainment and aspiration cannot be undertaken until the remaining mentees have concluded their GCSE studies. This will be reported on later this year when the results become available.

Conclusion

The one to one mentoring support from a trusted adult offered through Raising Aspirations is highly valued by our mentees, who feel that their self esteem and academic aspirations have benefitted. It has a directly positive and lasting impact on their perception of the support available to them outside of family and friends and this is an important indicator of high aspirations for the future.

Results of data collection shows that, whilst the first two years of evaluation indicated very positive outcomes across a range of domains for children being mentored compared to their peers, this impact appears to be lessening at 36 months. Focus groups with mentees suggest this could be as a result of less well developed relationships between mentors and mentees.

The quotes from young people throughout this report demonstrate that mentees who are experiencing effective support by their mentors feel the experience is very rewarding, and is offering something distinct to the support provided to them by family and friends. Feedback from mentors is that their experience of the scheme is equally enriching.

A final evaluation report looking at the impact of the scheme over a four year period will be published in Autumn 2016.

Thank you to the Ninesquare Trust for their continued support for the programme.