

Leaving Care Mentoring Scheme

Purpose of the report and Summary

Agree proposal for a leaving care mentoring scheme to provide informal support for a small group of young people as they approach independence and adulthood. The purpose of mentors will be to allow young people to have someone that is there just for them and helping them to achieve their goals or find direction as they reach adulthood.

Key Information and Questions for Board Members

- Within this leaving care mentoring scheme a successful mentoring relationship is an opportunity for a young person leaving care to develop a high quality connection with someone who can help them as they become an adult.
- It may not be a large number of young people leaving care who want this kind of support, some young people have had a lot of professionals working with them for a large part of their lives, however for those that wish to have an informal relationship with a mentor it can be beneficial in their transition to adulthood to help them access education, prepare for employment, or maintain their accommodation.

Background

Young people leaving care have a wide range of needs in order for them become independent in their living, whilst the Council has a responsibility to provide professional support from personal advisors, social workers and others, there is an opportunity to support young people approaching adulthood in more informal ways. Research by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Scottish Government, NSPCC and Mentoring and Befriending Foundation show that young people leaving care find valuable the opportunity for an informal relationship with a mentor or befriender, providing them with someone that is "just for me". Mentors and befrienders can use their life experience to help prepare young people prepare for leaving care in a variety of ways such as practical advice on maintaining accommodation, further education or building skills to enter employment.

At present, children in care are able to access an Independent Visitor, this person can spend time with a young person to access activities, develop social skills, or talk about things. This has many similarities with what a leaving care mentoring or befriending scheme would do, however the Independent Visitor Service is only available until the age of 18. We wish to propose a commissioned leaving care

mentoring service to allow young people a supportive informal relationship for beyond age 18. Reaching adulthood and independence can mean many changes for young people in care because of the differences in what is available for those under and over age 18, informal support from a leaving care mentor could help support a young person with this transition, as well as the support they receive from family, friends and the other professionals working with them.

The Joseph Rowntree assessment of Princes Trust mentoring schemes for young people leaving care found that 93% of young people felt they had positive outcomes, three-quarters achieved at least one of their original outcomes, and two-fifths had made plans for the future. Overall it was found that young people who had been mentored for over a year were more likely to have achieved goals and made some plans for the future. Mentors also felt that being a mentor for a young person had helped them increase their skills and confidence in working with young people.

Last year a volunteer scheme supporting young people leaving care (Friends 4 U) was piloted in Lancashire, however there were a range of difficulties in setting up a new scheme, such as staffing, awareness of the scheme and being able to match volunteers with young people leaving care. A small survey of care leavers (19 in total) showed that 63% were aware of the Friends 4 U scheme and that 36% would be interested in a volunteer to support them.

Whilst we do not expect large numbers of young people accessing a leaving care mentoring service it is anticipated that there would be a wide range of ways in which mentors can support and the benefits that can be achieved for the young people supported by the scheme. There are a range of possibilities in how this has been implemented, for example some schemes have chosen to focus on peer mentoring rather than traditional adult mentoring, other schemes have chosen to specialise their support such as transition to adult mental health services, homeless young people, attitudes towards young people in care or going to university from care.

We propose the development of a mentoring scheme to provide informal support for young people approaching leaving care, the focus of this scheme would be to help young people as they become adults and independent. This may be to achieve goals such as entering higher education, employment, securing accommodation or accessing health needs. These goals may be a formal part of a young person's pathway plan, however the leaving care mentor's role would be to support the young person in the softer skills to achieve these types of goals, or practical advice, and guidance. The activities a mentor could be undertaking may then range across helping to complete application forms or write a CV, looking at different college or university courses, help a young person get advice or information on services they need, how to manage money, helping buy things for a new home, helping understand how to deal with hostile or difficult situations, being someone a young person can talk to, support in social activities, or help them find direction. The benefits of a leaving care mentoring scheme are as much about developing a positive relationship for a young person as the achieving of specific goals and a successful leaving care mentor is not just another professional working with a young person in care but someone that is there for the young person. The most important aspect of the support is to provide a young person leaving care with a high quality

connection with another person who is not a worker or professional and can help them as they become an adult.

The extension of the current Independent Visitor scheme beyond age 18 has been considered however the requirements of a leaving care mentoring scheme will be to support the transition to adulthood and independence, so is therefore a different skill area that is not currently covered by this scheme and some young people will benefit from a relationship that will be longer term than that provided through the Independent Visitor scheme.

It is envisaged that the scheme would be available for young people approaching leaving care who wish to take up support to help them develop during the transition to adulthood and achieve independence. This service would need to ensure matching between how the young person would like to be supported and the skills of the mentors available. As being a volunteer mentor provides the opportunity for people to develop their skills in working with young people ideally the scheme would attract volunteers from those who wish to work with young people or to develop their skills, however volunteers do come from a variety of backgrounds. Young people who exit the scheme should be encouraged to consider whether they would wish to become a mentor too, if they were ready for that. The scheme would need to include good training and supervision for those that are mentors so that they are confident and equipped to provide the support that young people will need and be flexible enough to cover the range of areas in which a young person would wish for help in.

Estimates:

In Lancashire there are currently 233 young people in care aged 16-18, however not all would wish for a mentor, based on estimates between 36% (above) and approximately 8% of Lancashire children in care who take up the well-established Independent Visitors service, the take-up of the service may be around 20% of young people leaving care, this is approximately 40 in the current 16-18 age group.

The research so far with other local authorities was unable to determine exact costs for a leaving care mentoring scheme, however costs could be estimated from another supporting children in care scheme in Lancashire and the Friend 4 U project, these scaled costs suggest in the region of £40k per annum to cover managing volunteers, training and expenses for 40 cases per annum. These would be finalised in more detail as part of the contract agreements made.

Decisions required

What do you want the Board to do (note or approve) what outcome would you wish to achieve by presenting your report to the Board, how can decisions made by the Board help to meet the needs of Children and Young People.

- (i) Development of service specification and tender exercise for young people leaving care mentoring scheme that provides an informal relationship for young people approaching adulthood to compliment the current leaving care services. This is to support young people leaving care as they become adults and independent, at an approximate cost of £40k per annum for 40 young people cases

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