



## Mentoring in NOMS

To support Volunteers' Week (1-7 June) and the valuable work volunteers do, the following articles consider the evolving role of offender mentoring at NOMS.

### Mentoring in motion

Mentoring as a form of intervention is already widely available in the criminal justice system. There are many different approaches but, generally, they all aim to support and help offenders to stop offending and improve their positive life outcomes.



Innovation: Bettina Crossick (l) and Madeleine Rudolph

Bettina Crossick, NOMS Lead – Mentoring, Volunteering and Service User Engagement, says: “Mentoring is not new – many probation areas have a long history of recruiting volunteers who befriend and provide support to offenders to support the work of probation officers and assist in the resettlement process. Likewise, the voluntary sector and faith sector organisations have been involved in offender mentoring for many years.

“But now NOMS is starting to use mentoring as a specific intervention alongside more conventional offender management outcomes, to help reduce reoffending, build on the principles of localism and encourage local communities to take responsibility for their offenders. We want to extend mentoring and volunteering and build on the government’s Big Society vision.

“This may mean offenders assisting other offenders, or other members of the public assisting offenders. For example, North Wales Probation’s Waves programme (Wales Alliance of Volunteers Engaging with Services) involves mentoring by ex-offenders and public volunteers, while at HMP Spring Hill, an open prison, the emphasis is on prisoner-to-prisoner mentoring around drug and alcohol misuse.”

Mentoring can be seen as a learning relationship between two individuals where one passes on their knowledge to the other over time. It can take many forms ranging from a structured and formal approach usually for specific development and guidance such getting an offender “job ready” to more general and unstructured support sometimes known as befriending.

The numbers of people already involved are impressive:

- More than 1,500 organisations work with offenders and their families
- Around 7,000 volunteers are involved in the criminal justice system (Clinks 2010)
- About 100 schemes in the voluntary and community sector offer mentoring or befriending services to offenders in prisons or on probation (NOMS Interventions Directory, October 2010)
- A further 1,000+ interventions offer “support” which may include informal mentoring
- Many other organisations will be offering mentoring services, often local initiatives created by local people, which offenders can and do access

Two well-established mentoring/peer support schemes will be familiar to many on the frontline:

### **The Listeners**

The largest and best-established prisoner peer support scheme is the Samaritan-trained Listener scheme. Listeners act as Samaritans inside the prison, providing a confidential, emotional support service to other prisoners, with particular concern for those who may be suicidal.

Bettina says: “Listeners are selected prisoners, trained and supported by Samaritans, using their usual guidelines. They listen in confidence to their fellow prisoners who may be in crisis, feel suicidal or who need a sympathetic ear.

“The Listeners assist in preventing suicide, reducing self harm and generally help alleviate the feelings of those in distress. Samaritans are involved in selecting, training and supporting Listeners in all the schemes in operation.”

The first Listener scheme was set up in HMP Swansea in 1991. Today, Samaritans train and support Listeners in a large number of establishments in England and Wales.

### **The Shannon Trust**

This trust was founded in 1995 to help tackle poor literacy in prisons. It runs peer-led literacy programmes where prisoners teach non-reading prisoners to read using a manual (Toe by Toe), a synthetic phonics learning system designed for people who struggle with traditional learning methods.

The charity targets prisoners who are disaffected with formal education. The programme relies on volunteers as the link between the prison and Shannon Trust, and runs a train the trainer course.

Bettina says: “The value placed on peer-delivered learning is growing throughout the Prison Service and NOMS. Toe by Toe is widely recognised, across the prison estate (including by the Prison Officers’ Association), as a highly effective programme for improving basic reading skills and engaging reluctant learners, while offering excellent value for money.”

“Building on current successes like these projects will be key to developing our approach to mentoring. We are entering an exciting period of development. Promising evaluations show mentoring has positive effects such as shifting attitudes and increasing rates of employment – so, we have plenty of ideas to work with.”

For further information, visit [Volunteers' Week](#).

# Informal ways to mentor

In partnership with CLINKS, which supports voluntary and community organisations in the criminal justice system, NOMS is piloting informal mentoring schemes with Catch22 and Sefton Council for Voluntary Services (CVS), to work with, and build on, existing volunteer provision within local communities in Nottinghamshire, Merseyside and Liverpool.



One-to-one support: Vital to helping an offender change

Based on what we know from research into desistance from crime (the point at which people stop offending), this project is designed to improve the rehabilitation prospects for offenders, and expand the offer of informal mentoring to greater numbers.

Bettina Crossick, NOMS Lead – Mentoring, Volunteering and Service User Engagement, says: “The aim is to offer all offenders in the pilot areas a volunteer mentor from their local community to help them reintegrate back into society and thereby reduce their likelihood of

reoffending. We call this relationship ‘light touch’ or informal mentoring. It is not time bound or outcome focused, but has a purpose and is relevant to the needs of the offender.

“Our ambition is that eventually all offenders in our system will be offered the opportunity of an informal mentor. This project aims to complement, not duplicate, other mentoring interventions which have been developed over recent years. It will add to the scope of mentoring provision by offering something that is not currently nationally available for most offenders in the criminal justice system.”

NOMS received over 80 applications to pilot this project and, in partnership with CLINKS, selected Catch22 and Sefton CVS to develop two different models of informal mentoring.

As Richard Nicholls, Programme Director, Clinks explains: “This is a project that is really needed, an initiative that focuses on people and the relationship between offenders and the community. Evidence shows this relationship is the key to help an offender change, so to mobilise community resources to support offenders is crucial. People who engage with the criminal justice system are more likely to be supportive of offenders, which is vital to their resettlement.”

“We are looking forward to this exciting collaboration,” says Bettina. “Catch22 is proposing a model in which they will act as a broker between prisons and Nottingham Probation Trust, and sources of mentoring support in the local community. It is also proposing to incentivise local providers by making a payment per successful mentoring meeting. Catch22 has a strong track record of delivering and supporting services, particularly to young offenders.”

Chris Wright, Chief Operating Officer, Catch22 says: “Mentoring is about respect and trust. Offenders are more likely to desist where they are respected for their

willingness to change and trust those who are helping them to do so. While the personal relationship between the mentor and the person they are mentoring is critical, the social context is equally important. Helping offenders build and restore supportive networks that keep them away from crime and generate new opportunities are invaluable.

“Catch22 is delighted to be involved in piloting a new approach to offering informal mentoring support to offenders on release.”

Meanwhile, Sefton CVS is planning to build on its existing partnerships in Merseyside and Liverpool. Sefton CVS has a broad experience of mentoring schemes and already enjoys a good understanding of the criminal justice system, for example, through its work with HMP Kennet in Maghull.

“We have a lot of experience in delivering mentoring projects within the local community and we are passionate about the significant contribution mentoring can make to improving the quality of life for individuals,” says Neil Frackelton, Civil Society Lead, Sefton CVS. “We welcome this opportunity to extend our services to working with ex-offenders, and with our partners we hope to make improvements to the lives of the people of Merseyside.”

It is expected that 400-600 offenders will be mentored by this informal mentoring project. The planning phase is well underway, overseen by a project advisory group chaired by Ian Porée, Director – Commissioning and Commercial, and the project went live on 1 June.

Evaluating these pilots is very important for future development. Bettina says: “M&E Consulting, a small independent research organisation has been appointed to monitor and evaluate the implementation of the two pilots, and compare and contrast the different approaches.

“We expect that the evaluation will provide recommendations on the most appropriate methods for a national roll-out of the scheme, including costs. The long-term key aim of this programme is to re-engage offenders into mainstream society so that they become independent, participatory individuals who, in turn, will help to break the cycle of offending among their peers.”

“Overall the informal mentoring approach also sits well with the Government’s goal to create the Big Society. The project will encourage members of the public to volunteer to take part in an initiative that could improve their local community by reducing crime. We aim to ensure that mentoring is developed and delivered as an intervention which provides good value for money.”

# Motivated to mentor

Mentoring schemes exist in many guises, so NOMS is exploring a range of ways to support offenders back into the community. Among the mentoring approaches showing promising results are those that involve peer-to-peer support and faith-based schemes that draw upon the goodwill of local communities.

Here, two experienced champions of mentoring – based in Wales and the South West – discuss the challenges and benefits of such schemes:

## **Jo Marston, Senior Probation Officer, Wales Alliance of Volunteers Engaging with Services (Waves)**

The Waves Peer Mentor Scheme in North Wales has been running since 2009. It evolved out of a service-user group of ex-offenders who met to comment on the service they were receiving from Wales Probation Trust. They were so motivated by this process that they wanted to give more back and share their experiences with other offenders facing similar problems.

Jo Marston, the Senior Probation Officer who set up the initial user-group says: “The aim from the start was to have the group self-run. So I chaired meetings in the beginning, but I’ve gradually withdrawn. Our peer mentoring and volunteering is now entirely coordinated by ex-offenders.”

“When someone is convicted, particularly for the first time, they may have little or no idea where to turn for support. Our peer mentors work alongside our staff to offer a complementary perspective and support.

“For example – more than 80 per cent of offenders here have Welsh as their first language. But accredited programmes can only be delivered in English so we have people who struggle. A couple of members of the group sit in and help them with the language barrier and support them outside the group on practical issues.”

Thinking about what is unique about peer mentoring, Jo says: “I think it’s incredibly powerful to draw on these experiences – to have someone who’s walked in your shoes talking to you about how they fixed their own similar problems.”

While peer mentoring aims to help the person being mentored, it can also help the mentor. Jo says: “We got about 15 mentors, and we find that once they start mentoring they stick with it. The only ones we’ve lost have gone on to more positive things.

“For example, two of our former mentors have trained to deliver accredited programmes. I think that’s what I’m most proud of – our mentors who’ve gone on to work for the Probation Service.”

Looking ahead, Jo says: “We are getting a room in the office specifically for the peer mentors. As an offender manager (OM) you can easily spend part of your weekly meeting with an offender talking about housing problems or filling in forms rather than focusing on the offence-related work. This new room will allow the OM to direct an

offender straight to a peer mentor for the practical issues, while they can focus on the supervision.”

### **Cathy Jerrard, Chair, South West Community Chaplaincy**

Cathy Jerrard chairs the Peninsula Initiative, a South West Community Chaplaincy project which operates a network of mentors largely from faith communities to help men (and young men) on release from prison in Cornwall, Devon and South West Somerset.

She has no doubt that faith-based mentoring is a positive thing: “I think it’s essential – when people are in prison, the chaplaincy is often the first port of call for them when things aren’t good. What we can do is carry on some of those links that have already been started with prison chaplains after they’ve left prison.



Faith-based: Cathy Jerrard,  
Chair, Peninsula Initiative

“We know a lot of people have a huge desire to turn their lives around when they get out. But the obstacles can be so incredibly big. If we can get alongside them and help with some of the practical stuff; support them in accessing services that are there for them and stop them falling through the net, then we can help them and help the community to be a safer place.”

Due to the project’s large geographical area, a lot of energy has gone into building up a network of support clusters – groups of one, or more, local faith communities, that complement services like housing providers, education and training or drug and alcohol support. Each local faith community acts as a hub to accompany individuals along to the Jobcentre or to their probation appointment and provides a mentoring service.

Part of the synergy is that everyone benefits. Cathy says: “Faith communities are very rich in resources with lots of people who have time to give and a heart for people and they often have premises that can be used as meeting places – it’s a great match, a great thing for faith communities to be involved with.”

Last year the Peninsula Initiative worked with 79 ex-prisoners – 44 adults and 35 young people from HMP Portland and HMP & YOI Ashfield. Cathy says: “These are people for whom we can really say we have provided meaningful intervention. We are just starting on a formal evaluation of our faith-based mentoring for ex-offenders; as we go on we will be able to measure much more accurately the difference our work is making.”

Looking ahead, Cathy says joining up faith-based mentoring projects across the country is a goal. “We want to provide a comprehensive service. We already have 18 projects signed up to Community Chaplaincy Association – but we know that there are more projects out there, either just starting up or already doing this work. Our goal is linking-up and getting more people into that network.”

For further details, go to [www.swcc-pi.org](http://www.swcc-pi.org) and [www.communitychaplaincy.org.uk](http://www.communitychaplaincy.org.uk)