

# RAISING ASPIRATIONS



COMMUNITY  
MENTORING  
PROGRAMME

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## WHAT IS RAISING ASPIRATIONS?



**S**omerset Community Foundation, in partnership with Crispin School, launched the pilot phase of the Raising Aspirations mentoring programme in the autumn of 2011. It was set up in response to evidence that too many young people in Somerset were not fulfilling their potential.\*

In consultations with schools, youth workers and public sector colleagues, there was a consistent view that young people in Somerset either had particularly low aspirations, or they lacked the necessary advice and support to fulfil their aspirations. Building on evidence that mentoring can play a pivotal role in supporting young people to achieve more at school and in their adult lives, we worked with researchers at the University of East London to devise and test a community-based approach to mentoring. In subsequent years, researchers at University of the West of England have monitored and evaluated the programme which we hoped, if successful, would become widely adopted across Somerset and beyond.

In 2015 the second phase of the pilot was launched with Taunton Academy and Courtfields School, building on the lessons we had learned from Crispin School. While overall academic attainment across Somerset schools at GCSE level has generally improved in the intervening years, there still remains concern that too many students are underachieving. We have developed this report to highlight how the Raising Aspirations mentoring programme can promote the positive development of young people and to act as a guide for schools who are thinking of implementing a mentoring programme.

#### Key fact

**\*In 2009, Somerset had the poorest GCSE attainment in England (5 GCSE grade A\*–C) for students eligible for free schools meals.**

# THE MENTORING MODEL

“I used to care so much what people thought of me that I would take time off sick from school as I was so worried. Mentoring has given me so much confidence, encouraged me to put myself forward for things and try things I’ve never done before.”

CRISPIN SCHOOL STUDENT

**R**aising Aspirations is a community mentoring project that matches volunteers from local businesses with young people from Year 7 to Year 11 for one-to-one mentoring within the school environment. The programme is focused on encouraging students to develop their self-belief and aspirational life goals by building a relationship of trust and respect between mentor and mentee.

The programme is open to all students at the participating school. Following an assembly or presentation from a tutor, students fill out an application form and get parental/carer permission before being accepted for the programme. Ideally the mentoring starts in the Spring Term of Year 7, but there has been some impact on students who start the programme in Years 8 or 9.

Students are given the opportunity to have a mentor who will come to the school for a one-to-one session once a month, during term-time only. Each session lasts anywhere between 30 minutes and an hour, usually in a room or space where confidentiality can be assured. Mentors are asked to commit for at least 3 years, but around 40% of mentoring relationships have lasted up to 5 years in our Raising Aspirations programme.

## RECRUITMENT OF MENTORS

**T**he aim of mentor recruitment is to attract a pool of local volunteers with a diverse range of interests, backgrounds and careers from within the community around the school.

Successful methods of recruitment have included direct approaches to local businesses, editorials in local press, contacting Rotary Clubs and similar ‘service organisations,’ approaching church networks and simply putting posters up around the local town and in libraries.

All mentors should have good listening skills, the ability to relate well to young people, and a positive belief in young peoples’ skills and abilities. We run a careful application process that includes face-to-face interviews with prospective mentors, in which we ensure applicants are right for the programme and understand the commitment that is involved. Character references and DBS checks are also taken.

## MENTOR TRAINING

“To be a mentor you have to be very good at listening, mindful, observant and calm. All of which are key attributes which tie in nicely with my job. The training was very useful and I have learnt the importance of giving back my career path experiences to my mentee.”

MENTOR AT CRISPIN SCHOOL

**T**he Raising Aspirations approach to mentoring was designed as a ‘non-directional’ coaching framework. It is based on the ‘GROW’ model to give structure to the mentoring relationships and to keep the conversations focussed on the student’s needs and wishes.

All mentors are required to attend training, which includes safeguarding training provided by the school. The training was developed in-house with support from the University of East London and is supplemented by an information pack. This includes a code of conduct, safeguarding information, the rationale for the programme and the GROW coaching model. Mentors are also offered a ‘refresher’ training session once they have started their mentoring.

It is important to note that Raising Aspirations mentors are not trained to address more serious social problems that some students might experience. Within the half day training mentors are briefed on the boundaries of their role as a mentor, and in some cases, it might be necessary for the school to refer students to other forms of mentoring or counselling.



- G** **GOAL:** What do you want to achieve?
- R** **REALITY:** What is happening now?
- O** **OPTIONS:** What could you do?
- W** **WAY FORWARD:** What will you do?

“It is a new challenge coaching people so young, but there will be personal reward if you can make a helpful contribution to the development of the young student you are mentoring.”

MENTOR AT CRISPIN SCHOOL



# MATCHING MENTORS TO STUDENTS

**T**he success of the programme relies very much on careful matching of mentors to students who share their outlook and interests and who would benefit from their support. It has been our experience that not every student who applies for mentoring will be matched with one in that academic year. Therefore schools need to be mindful of which students will benefit most from a mentor.

Once mentors and mentees are matched, they meet monthly for up to 1 hour on a one-to-one basis. The first meeting with the student is carefully planned and usually involves a tour of the school as an 'ice breaker' activity.

Once the mentoring relationship is underway, there is a clear pathway for mentors to be able to communicate feedback, raise questions and address worries they might have about the students to a dedicated staff member at the school. Where necessary, challenges and issues that are brought up during the mentoring sessions are taken up by the pupils' tutor or year head. There is always a clear pathway for reporting any safeguarding concerns.

"My mentor helps me to be more confident in myself...tells me to keep my head up high."

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

"Sometimes I feel like I'm wasting my parents time if I want to talk about something, but I can talk to my mentor."

"Mentoring is the best thing about The Taunton Academy. That was the succinct assessment of the students to Ofsted Inspectors. They also describe mentoring as a 'safe place where they can explore and achieve their goals'. We have seen students flourish with their mentors. Mentors are people who our students trust and they help our students to achieve their goals, to learn and grow, to live life in all its fullness."

REVD MIKE HASLAM, THE TAUNTON ACADEMY

## SCHOOL COMMITMENT

**R**aising Aspirations benefits students and the school as a whole through closer and more tangible links with their local community, but it also requires proper resourcing. Participating schools need to commit to the programme at the highest level, and any mentoring programme must be supported by the Board of Governors if it is to be sustained.

Each school has a staff ambassador who ensures that the mentoring programme is embedded in the culture of the school. They also ensure that the programme runs smoothly. Somerset Community Foundation has developed a tool-kit which can be made available to schools that are committed to delivering Raising Aspirations, which includes a timetable of activities and will support effective delivery of the programme.

"Raising Aspirations has made a huge difference to all the students involved. It has noticeably improved their confidence and ability to talk to adults. This without doubt will help them in future interviews and careers. It has also helped the school build valuable links with local businesses in the community."

The staff ambassador / pastoral lead is supported within the school by an administrator who arranges monthly appointments with mentors and ensures sessions run smoothly. They keep data on appointments so if a mentor is not meeting as regularly as required this can be followed up in a timely manner. It may be possible to recruit a volunteer to support some of the administration underpinning the mentoring in the school office.

It is important to remember that the mentors are volunteers and will want to be engaged by the school. We recommend that the school arranges at least one mentor-only event each academic year to facilitate shared ideas and experiences from mentors. This also allows mentors to ask the school questions about the organisation or how to run sessions. At any time during these meetings the mentees' confidentiality is paramount and mentors do not share specific details about their mentee and mentees are not identifiable.

At any time a mentor or mentee can voluntarily pull out of the programme and this does happen for a variety of reasons. Around 70% of mentoring relationships will last at least 3 years. When a mentor leaves the scheme, we endeavour to find another mentor for a student or ask a current mentor if they have capacity to mentor more than one student. If a student withdraws, the school should debrief them and understand the reasons for pulling out.

## SEPTEMBER

The scheme is introduced to staff and tutors.

The scheme is launched to parents and young people at Yr 7 information evenings with parental application forms.

The school conducts one-to-one meetings with prospective mentors.

Approximately 20 mentors recruited and invited to training.

## OCTOBER

Young people are recruited to take part using parents evenings, tutor groups and talks to individually targeted groups.

DBS applications are made and references are taken for shortlisted mentors.

## NOVEMBER

Mentoring training days take place.

Approximately 20 young people recruited to take part and parental permission is gained.

## DECEMBER

Mentor - mentee matching takes place and first appointments are set for January.

## JANUARY

First mentoring meetings take place.

Demographic, attainment and attendance data on mentees and control group recorded by school for evaluation purposes.

## FEBRUARY

Mentors check in with the school ambassador after their first meeting.

## MARCH-MAY

On-going support is provided to mentors as appropriate.

A mentor-only event takes place to exchange ideas and experiences.

## JUNE

Promotion and recruitment for new mentors begins.

## JULY

One to one meetings with prospective mentors take place at the school.

Feedback is taken from all mentors and mentees for school evaluation.

A celebration event is held for mentors and mentees.

# A YEAR OF RAISING ASPIRATIONS

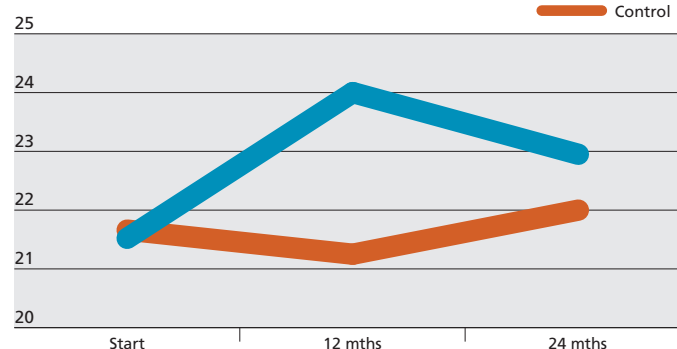
# MAKING A DIFFERENCE

When we started Raising Aspirations there was a lack of firm evidence of the impact of mentoring on students, although there was considerable anecdotal feedback from schools that had run long-term mentoring schemes in Somerset and elsewhere. We wanted to understand the difference the mentoring could make and we commissioned the University of East London to design and monitor the impact of the programme. Latterly, we worked with the University of West of England to provide us with a robust assessment of the difference the scheme was making.

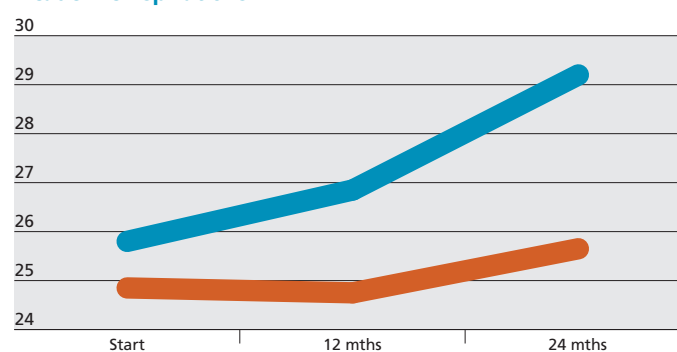
Our researchers have recorded qualitative and quantitative data, the latter based on comparisons with carefully selected control groups of students. It is too soon to assess the impact of Raising Aspirations on academic attainment at GCSE level, let alone the long-term difference it makes in a young person's life. However there is clear evidence that the scheme does positively impact on key building blocks for success including: the students' skills and belief in their future, the students' academic aspirations and their perceived social support beyond family and friends.

The quantitative data indicates that most impacts are realised in the first two years of the mentoring relationship. For the purposes of this report we have highlighted the areas where Raising Aspirations has had a significant impact over these two years.

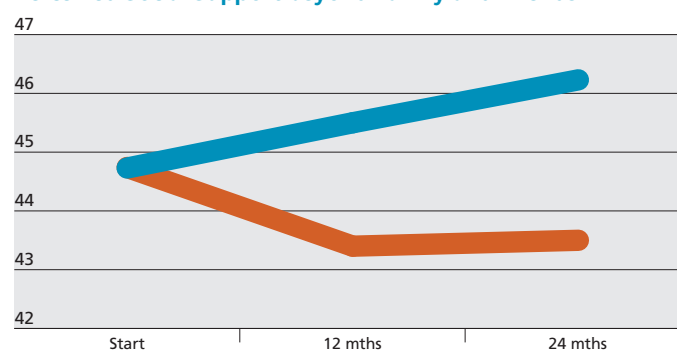
Skills and Beliefs in their Future



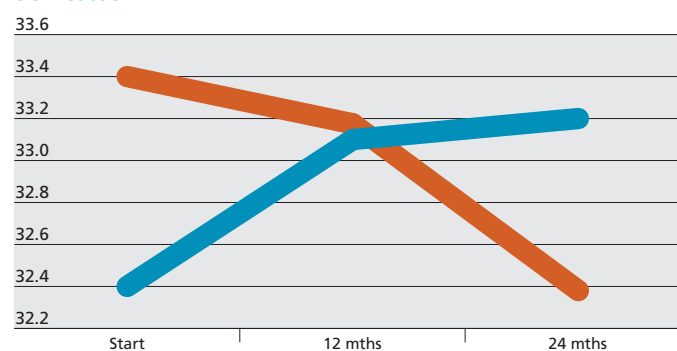
Academic Aspirations



Perceived Social Support beyond Family and Friends



Self-esteem



If you would like further information about this data, please contact Justin Sargent at Somerset Community Foundation.

## IMPACT OF THE PROGRAMME ON DIFFERENT GROUPS



"Mentoring has been a life changing experience. It has moulded us into confident people. Thank you."

**CRISPIN SCHOOL STUDENT**

"I kept giving up because I didn't have any confidence. My mentor gives me a reason to go and do these things."

"My mentee has become more open and a good deal more confident. His mother wrote a note to the school to this affect; she was impressed by the change in her son."

**COURT FIELDS SCHOOL MENTOR**

"It's really helped my confidence ... it's really helped me get perspective."

A key question for our evaluation has been how the mentoring impacts on different groups. The evaluation therefore looked at the impact of mentoring on students 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). Our evaluation has shown that young people who were at risk of under-achievement at the start of mentoring experienced a particularly high increase in their own skills and beliefs, aspirations, and perceived social support after two years of mentoring support.



# KEYS TO SUCCESS



**RAISING ASPIRATIONS** has a demonstrable and tangible impact on both the students and on the mentors themselves. We encourage every secondary school to give serious consideration to setting up the programme. Listed here are the top ten 'keys to success' to implementing the programme:

## 1

Schools must take ownership of and commit to the programme at the highest level (including Governors) from the outset.

## 2

External support may be required to recruit, train and support mentors. The GROW approach to the mentoring conversations is essential and might require specialist training.

## 3

Schools must recognise the mentors as their volunteers and ensure they feel part of the school community.

## 4

Schools must not forget to thank the mentors!

## 5

Mentor-only meetings help to generate ideas, process feedback and enable the establishment of a self-supporting community of mentors.

## 6

Schools must recruit a manageable number of mentors. We recommend 10 – 20 mentors as a manageable number for most schools.

## 7

Schools will need to commit sufficient administrative support. While volunteer support for this scheme may be one way to increase capacity, it will still need 'back office' oversight.

## 8

Mentoring sessions need to be held once a month, should follow the GROW model and the frequency should be monitored to catch any faltering mentoring relationships at an early stage.

## 9

The mentoring relationship has an optimum time of two years, and a review date should be built in to agree whether to continue with the relationship or finish after two years.

## 10

Evaluation of the scheme should be carried out by the school and aligned to the school's own measurements for student attainment in order to message the value of the programme to staff, parents and mentors.





#### Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Ninesquare Trust and Taunton Deane Borough Council for funding these pilot projects. Without their aspiration for young people in our communities, Raising Aspirations would not have started.

Dr Christian van Nieuwerburgh helped design the programme and Dr Chris Pawson, from the University of the West of England, has led the research into its impact. Stephanie Colver provided invaluable advice at the start of the project (and has now introduced it to Barnsley!).

Jocelyn Blacker, Tessa Hibbert, Jenny Perez at SCF, and all the staff at Crispin School, Court Fields School and Taunton Academy, together, ensured the vision became reality, supported in turn by Peter Wyman, Mark Saxton and Martin Kitchen on the SCF Board.

Most importantly we would like thank all the mentors and mentees for committing their time and energy to this life-changing programme. We hope you have all benefitted and, in turn, that will help more young people in future years.

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