Title: Improving mentoring relationships – the role of the coordinator

Facilitator and room number: Sandra Brown; 1.102

Documented by: Alena Lohnert

Number of participants: 20

Sequence of content/methods/activities:

Firstly, Sandra Brown introduces herself and the Befriending Networks acting all over the United Kingdom.

The heart of the workshop were group discussions and exercises concerning four main topics:

(1) making the mentoring training the best it can be,

(2) establishing appropriate boundaries,

(3) creating and monitoring mentoring relationships,

(4) managing risks and keeping everyone safe.

Main learnings/advice presented by the facilitator:

Sandra Brown clarified the terms "Befriending" and "Mentoring" which are often used interchangeably. According to her definition befriending programmes concentrate mainly on the pure relationship of mentor and mentee whereas mentoring programmes are more oriented towards external goals. The vast majority of programmes don't act at the extreme end of the befriending-mentoring spectrum but see themselves somewhere in-between. In fact, the established relationship between mentor and mentee often enables the goals of the mentoring programmes to be achieved.

(1) Sandra Brown emphasised the importance of successful mentoring training to ensure a high quality standard in all befriending/mentoring relationships. In design and improvement of the mentoring training programme coordinators should consider content but also duration, timing, group size and delivery format of the mentoring training.

(2) She highlighted the fact that establishing boundaries is especially important when creating new befriending/mentoring relationships and that their communication is a vital responsibility of the coordinator and its organisation. On one hand, broken boundaries should be reinforced or end the mentoring relationship. On the other hand, they could initiate the reconsideration of the boundary, which may lead to changes.

(3) The matching procedure is a delicate task of the coordinator in which all decisions should be reasonable and documented. Sandra Brown has raised the question whether personal preferences of mentor and mentee should be taken into account and which personal preferences may be prejudices and, thus, should not be considered.

(4) Finally, Sandra Brown concentrated on the topic of risk management in her workshop. She explained that risk management includes the overall activity and processes of an organisation whereas the activity of risk assessment includes a concrete list of potential dangers concerning a specific activity. **Risk assessment**

increases the coordinator's consciousness and thus helps to trade potential risks against potential benefits.

Main outcomes from the activities and the discussion:

(1) **Since people have a great variety of learning styles, mentoring training programmes should provide different methods of information presentation.** These should be in balance with facilitation of the participants.

(2) **Group exercise showed the great importance of boundaries in a befriending/mentoring relationship. For all players they prevent wrong expectations:** thus the mentee avoids disappointment and too strong dependencies on the mentor whereas the mentor can foresee the investments and enters the mentoring relationship with the right attitude. For the organisation, defined boundaries contribute to quality control and ensure that every mentee receives an equal type of support. **Discussion showed that boundaries can be flexible and may change over time during the mentoring relationship.** Especially mentors may choose boundaries concerning their personal investment themselves assisted by their organisation.

(3) **The great majority of participating organisations take personal preferences of mentors and mentees into account.** Since all mentoring programmes work with children and young people, the parents' preferences normally have to be considered, too. Even though gender should not be systematically used in the matching procedure, this is the case for some organisation generally not matching man with young girls. **Sandra Brown pointed out that gender is not an adequate category in the matching procedure** due to the anti-discrimination law, which includes race, ethnical origin, gender, religion, philosophy of life, disability, age and sexual identity. All these categories should never be used as an argument in the matching procedure.

(4) **Risk management and risk assessment are systematically applied by none of the present organisation,** also because countries other than Scotland seem to be a lot less strict concerning risk assessment regulation. However, risk assessment should still be used internally to sensitise the organisation to potential dangers.

Results of the Workshop:

In a nutshell, the discussion showed that a systematic approach is important to all the discussed topics highlighting the mentoring training programme, the establishment of appropriate boundaries and the matching procedure. Additionally, the documentation of the course of action as well as the transfer of information to mentees, mentors and parents is a key duty of the coordinator.

Main statements highlighting the results of the discussion:

The real learning success is not the knowledge of new information but the transfer of learning including the access to the information, their reflection as well as the realisation of their relevance in a practical context.

The matching procedure should never be influenced by race, ethnical origin, gender, religion, philosophy of life, disability, age and sexual identity following the anti-discrimination law of each country.

Risk management is very important to ensure that the potential risks of an activity are smaller than its potential benefits.