

Community peer mentor scheme

Empowering change and giving a voice to individuals affected by significant life events.

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Key details

Does it work?	Untested – new or innovative
Focus	Prevention Diversion Reoffending
Topic	Operational policing Violence against women and girls Vulnerability and safeguarding
Organisation	Durham Constabulary Durham Police and Crime Commissioner
HMICFRS Peel Report 2023/25	https://assets-hmicfrs.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/uploads/peel-assessment-2023-25-durham.pdf
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Region	North East

Key details

Partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Police Community safety partnership Criminal justice (includes prisons, probation services) Government department Health services Local authority Private sector Voluntary/not for profit organisation
Stage of practice	The practice is implemented.
Start date	April 2016
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adults Children and young people Communities Families General public Offenders Victims

Aim

The aim of the community peer mentor scheme is to support vulnerable and isolated people affected by significant life changing events. The scheme is intended for individuals, including victims, survivors, perpetrators, or those who through unfulfilled needs become reliant on the emergency services.

By offering non-time specific support, bespoke to each client, the intention is to encourage individuals to empower change.

Intended outcome

The intended outcomes of the community peer mentor scheme are to:

- reduce the severity and frequency of calls to emergency services, reducing vulnerability and empowering change
- reduce the overall demand on frontline policing and other frontline emergency and statutory services
- support honest and appropriate conversations of how best to offer support

Description

Gaps were identified in the force in relation to support that could be offered to vulnerable individuals. Force data supported this, revealing that a minority of the public create a disproportionate amount of demand on services. An alternate approach was required to understand how individual's lived experiences affected this.

To resolve the gap, the community peer mentor scheme was launched in April 2016. The activities undertaken by paid staff and volunteers are based on the needs of the client and use the following approaches:

- Goal Reality Options Way Forward (GROW) model
- Honesty Empathy Autonomy Reflection (HEAR) principles

All staff and volunteers are Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checked and undertake level 1 adult safeguarding training which includes the following inductions for the:

- GROW model
- HEAR principles
- general data protection regulation (GDPR)

Training

The force delivers a rolling programme of training and support for mentors, including face to face, online and remote training. Additional learning opportunities are provided to the volunteers to help them build their CVs, experience, and knowledge to improve their employability. This is especially

important as some individuals, owing to their lived experiences, do not have CVs and can lack confidence in their own ability.

Training includes (but is not limited to):

- recovery coach training for all types of addictions
- mental health awareness
- roles and responsibilities as a volunteer
- accredited safeguarding
- mediation training

Durham Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) have funded the scheme since 2016. Additional funding has been received from the Home Office's round 4 and 5 of the Safer Streets fund (£170,000) and Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys (TEWV) NHS Foundation Trust as part of the Community Mental Health Transformation programme (£88,000).

Since implementation, 546 people have joined the force as volunteers. 32 were previously clients and six members of staff had previously been mentors.

Evaluation

The evaluation was completed and conducted in 2018, led by academic Dr Dawn Scott. The evaluation had several aims.

- To establish how the community peer mentor scheme has supported and improved the lives of those affected by anti-social behaviour (ASB), neighbourhood disputes, crime, and other life changing events who have become reliant on emergency or statutory services.
- To understand how the training for volunteer the scheme has helped prepare those individuals for the role.
- To explore how the mentors have personally benefited from the training and the volunteering opportunity.
- To understand the type of support provided and the ease of access or difficulties encountered.
- To explore what works well within all training cohorts, and how the project could be improved.
- To explore client outcomes.
- To explore the views of professional referrers regarding the scheme.

Data collection

To achieve these aims, various methods of data collection were used.

- A semi-structured postal questionnaire was sent to a sample of active and closed case clients who have been, or who are, victims of ASB, neighbourhood disputes, crime and or other life changing events. These are individuals who have engaged with the project.
- A semi-structured postal questionnaire was sent to a sample of active community peer mentors including some temporarily on sabbatical.
- A semi-structured questionnaire was sent to the primary referrers to the scheme.

When asked whether the initiative met people's expectations, most stated 'yes', reflecting a positive outcome for the client and referrer. Some stated support was 'still in progress' so they were unable to comment fully on the outcome.

The evaluation revealed:

- a reduction in numbers of reports and incidents with neighbours
- a reduction in demand on police resources
- an increased level of support
- an improved quality of life
- overcoming housing issues
- training underway as a community peer mentor.

Overall impact

The initiative has had numerous positive impacts on the people who have taken part. These include:

- supporting 38 people move home
- 227 people stated it had helped build confidence or reduce self-esteem issues and 202 supported to reduce their isolation within the community
- 30 people where helped back into employment owing to our support

In addition, the scheme has also supported:

- 20.8% of clients with paperwork and admin

- 66.3% of clients with confidence issues
- 36.1% of clients to better engage with their community
- 79.2% of clients with wellbeing support
- 32.5% of clients to engage with mental health services
- 29.4% of clients with crime prevention advice

In 2022/23, 131 out of 489 people did not contact the police, indicating the support has been effective in improving people's lives.

Learning

- Anxiety can prevent engagement. To reduce anxiety, it is important to give the individual a voice, be their advocate and keep them calm. The support and training offered promotes this and encourages professionals to treat vulnerable individuals with dignity and respect.
- Initially it was decided that there would be time limited support, however very quickly this was established as a barrier. This was changed to being a 'non-time limited support', so long as the individual has the will and want to change.
- Initially the intention was to stop the calls made by vulnerable individuals to the police and other services. This created a barrier, unreal expectations and on review, potential danger if individuals would not call in an emergency. Therefore, advice was reworded to 'reduce the severity and frequency of contacts with services'. This was a safer, more realistic, and achievable outcome.
- It is essential to recruit people with recent and lived experience. To do so, the force approached services such as the Job Centre to help identify potential volunteers. The force now has volunteers who are survivors of domestic or sexual abuse, homelessness, prison leavers and perpetrators, in addition to volunteers in recovery from substance misuse, gambling, and mental health. These amazing people have helped to improve people's lives and have enabled better interactions.
- In accordance with the PCC, the scheme is viewed as being independent of the police. Any attempt to establish such a scheme needs to have the view of the public that there is a level of independence.
- Any scheme must have strict and established recruitment processes to ensure that offenders do not become mentors. Mentors do not have access to any police systems or estates.
- It was established early on that service users can find it confrontational when they are asked to meet in a public place or asked to come to their home. This could raise anxiety and increase the likelihood of disengagement. Therefore, rapport is initially built over the phone as well as via text

or email.

- Staff need to be recruited from different backgrounds so that they can bring their unique lived experiences.

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Tags

Crime reduction Community engagement