

This occasional newsletter is targeted at people and organisations interested in mentoring, befriending and mediation services for people affected by homelessness.

In this first issue you will find:

- a variety of short case studies to get a flavour of just what can, and sometimes can't, be achieved;
- an article on the spectrum of support offered through mentoring and befriending and the relationship with mediation.

Over the coming months the newsletter will be used to gather and make available information on existing projects, case studies, evaluations, training etc., highlighting national issues and discussing local solutions.

But first - **Why Social Networks?** The basic premise is that the lack of positive social networks, that is the personal networks of family, friends, colleagues and acquaintances we each individually have, is literally bad for you health. More specifically a lack of positive social networks:

- puts you at greater risk of homelessness;
- makes the transition out of homelessness even more difficult than it already is;
- often leads to failure to sustain a new tenancy; and
- leads to repeat episodes of homelessness – each more damaging than the last.

There is a substantial body of research supporting this premise and identifying the cost to the individual and to the public purse.

The Homelessness Task Force final report recommended that “all projects serving homeless people should pursue strategies to promote and support opportunities for positive social interaction”. The Scottish Social Networks Forum was established in response to the recommendations in the report to support the development of Mentoring, Befriending and Mediation as key measures in building and rebuilding social networks.

A practitioner article, Social Networks – why are they important to homeless people? is available on the Shelter website by using the link. <http://scotland.shelter.org.uk/files/seealsodocs/10639/social%20networks%2Epdf>

Developing Social Networks-Reducing Homelessness Seminars

Scottish Social Networks Forum in partnership with the **Local Authorities** held seminars in Inverness, Glasgow, Kilmarnock, Edinburgh and Dundee. They were an opportunity to look at the national issues and contribute to local solutions which will enable people affected by homelessness develop positive social networks. There were interesting inputs from key players both locally and nationally and lively discussion sharing ideas, exploring different approaches and considering how **mentoring, mediation** and **befriending** can provide the support needed to break the cycle of homelessness and social exclusion. A report on these very successful seminars will be prepared later in the summer.

Case Studies

While there is clear evidence that the breakdown of social networks can cause homelessness, it is more difficult to prove that mentoring, befriending and mediation are cost effective solutions. Future newsletters will look at monitoring and evaluation but already it is clear that mentoring, befriending and mediation are valued by clients and have had a major impact on the lives of individuals. The following **Case Studies** give a flavour of just what can, and sometimes can't, be achieved.

An opportunity missed?

Ann's parents didn't know that she had left home until the homelessness support officer arrived at the door. Until then they thought she had gone to school as usual but instead of going to school she had gone to the council and presented herself as homeless. Her parents could not believe it. Things had been bad – in fact they had been terrible. Constant rows. Ann just had no respect for the home or the rest of the family – especially not her step Dad – but to leave home without a word! The council gave Anne temporary accommodation and Ann and her family were offered and accepted Mediation.

From the start Ann made it clear that she was not going home but Ann's Mum wanted to ensure he daughter was OK and Ann and her two younger sisters wanted to stay in touch. Through mediation an agreement was made which enabled Ann to remain in touch with her family and continue to be supported by her Mum even though she had left home. But before the ink was dry feeling “forced” by the housing department, Ann returned home. The council acted for all the best motives – they had little accommodation to offer and felt temporary accommodation and hostels were the wrong place for a vulnerable young person. It also incidentally helped their statistics, one less on the homelessness figures – a positive outcome.



Perhaps if a new agreement had been mediated at that point to take account of the changed circumstances things would have been different. As it was, the council did not think a further referral to mediation was needed, mediation might rock the boat. But the forced reunion was doomed from the start and just three months later amid bitterness and acrimony the relationship broke down. The council now wanted mediation but both sides feeling very hurt rejected it. Ann is now estranged from her family – no support from her Mum, no contact with her sisters – in temporary accommodation provided by the council – even more vulnerable than before and the prospects do not look good. Research shows that without the support of family, 50% of young people leaving home end up homeless.

Could a better outcome have been achieved if the council had respected Ann's wish not to return home? Having returned home could a new agreement have been mediated and would it have made a difference? We'll never know.

Prevention is better than cure or a stitch in time

Community mediation was asked to help with a neighbour dispute. The son's behaviour was the problem – **music, rows, doors slamming and all the rest**. The parents and the neighbours got on OK, indeed you could say they were united against the common foe – the son's behaviour was impossible and the parents could not cope. Dad said that as soon as he was 16 John would be out the door and that would solve the problem for both households! The visit turned into an immediate kitchen table mediation. It turned out John was hacked off at school, was being bullied by young men in the street and was fed up of the favouritism shown his sister who could do no wrong. All that was really needed was to talk it out and be listened to. The follow up found the neighbours happy, the parents happy, their health improved and the dependence on sleeping pills and tranquillisers gone and John still at home and getting the support he needs from his parents.

Who would befriend me?

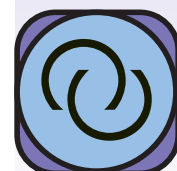
Repeat homelessness and substance misuse were part of Tom's lifestyle. It's not surprising then that he suffers from depression, was alienated from his family and suffered from isolation, loneliness and an overall lack of confidence and self esteem. However, when he was introduced to the befriending project, Tom was trying again to start again. He still felt suicidal but he had been clean for three weeks and was on a programme to help him stay that way and on medication to help with his depression. Tom had a lot of "professional" help to help him sustain his tenancy and stay off the drugs but his key worker thought he needed a "friend". Tom could not believe that anyone would want to befriend him – he was not worth it. He struggled with mixed feelings – either he didn't deserve it or he should be able to do it on his own but once he fully understood what was involved he asked for befriending support. Tom's befriender had a similar background to Tom and they quickly hit it off. Together they took part in activities that took Tom away from the drug scene and rekindled his interest in activities he had not had the confidence to do for years. Tom feels that he can talk to his befriender in a way and on a level that he can't with the "professionals".

"It helps me greatly to feel I can identify with my befriender and that he has had similar experiences to me." "I feel more positive and confident in myself. It's like being motivated to do one positive thing makes me feel more confident about tackling other issues and doing more things."

Tom is still clean and is no longer alienated from his family.

It's all voluntary

James became homeless when his friend died and after living away for many years, returned to the area where he had been brought up and where his older brother still lived. James was settled in a tenancy in the area but he had lost touch with all his friends and family apart from his brother who was well past retirement age. James was very isolated and negative. He relied solely on his brother for support. His Social Worker, recognising that his brother was feeling the strain, suggested that James would benefit from the support of a befriender to help him develop a more positive outlook, friendships and support and take some of the burden off his brother. James is not ready for this; he wants to continue as he is. The danger is that he will put so much strain on his brother that he will lose his support, be unable to cope on his own and end up homeless again. But in the end befriending is voluntary on both sides and unless both are committed to it, the relationship cannot work. The offer is still there if he changes his mind but perhaps this is a case where mediation might have been an option and might have led on to befriending.



Ready for Work but not yet Steady

Scottish Business in the Community (SBC), through their “Ready for Work” programme, offer training and work placements for people who are currently homeless and unemployed. Jack took advantage of this programme and was offered a full time position when he completed his placement. He took the position but unfortunately his accommodation remained the same. His friends in the hostel, because they knew he was working, would ask him for money, steal his belongings and wake him every night. He didn’t have a close relationship with his key worker and was embarrassed to discuss the problems with his work colleagues. This resulted in him leaving his job and the hostel. If Jack had had someone to turn to, someone to help him start to build a more positive social network, he might have been encouraged to explain the situation to his colleagues and been enabled to do something about it.

To address this issue SBC have added a new section to the programme - job coaching - where volunteers from business meet with the participants on a weekly basis to discuss how they are getting on, look at problems and help participants rebuild positive social networks. After all work is a “club” we use to build our social contacts. This is optional and is offered to the participants during the Action day.

Result!!!!

Securing a job was a dream come true for Darren, he has finally achieved this at Marks & Spencer – with a little help from Scottish Business in the Community.

Following a year and a half out of work as a result of depression, Darren 24 undertook a 12 week training programme with the Aberdeen Foyer. After successfully completing the programme Darren put himself forward for a two week work placement with Marks & Spencer’s as part of their Marks & Start programme at their Aberdeen store. During his placement which was run in conjunction with SBC Darren gained tangible experience and skills, as well as the self esteem and confidence to apply for a permanent role within the store and recently took up his full time post in the servicing and tiling department.

Darren said: “On leaving school I worked for four years in various local supermarkets, however I was diagnosed with depression and signed-off work for a year and a half. In this time I found it hard to get myself back on my feet and lost a lot of confidence. When eventually I felt well enough to work no one would give me a chance. Finally I was put in touch with the Aberdeen Foyer who provided supported accommodation.”

“The experience of the work placement and the support I was offered by the team at the store gave my self-esteem a huge boost and helped me find the strength to apply for a full time role. I went through the normal interview and screening process. Marks & Spencer has helped me realise my potential and put my life back on track. I have a new network of friends. I can now plan for the future and hopefully secure my own accommodation, something I have dreamt of for a long time”

Mentoring Befriending and Mediation – three different tools in the tool box.

While there is general agreement about the need for social networks when the issue is raised and explained, there is sometimes concern about how these three similar but very different initiatives can support that process and how they “fit together”. A workshop at the seminar in June 2003, Mending Social Networks, highlighted:

- different people - different support
- three different tools in the support services tool box

and highlighted the need for quality integrated assessments and an understanding of all the tools in the toolbox.

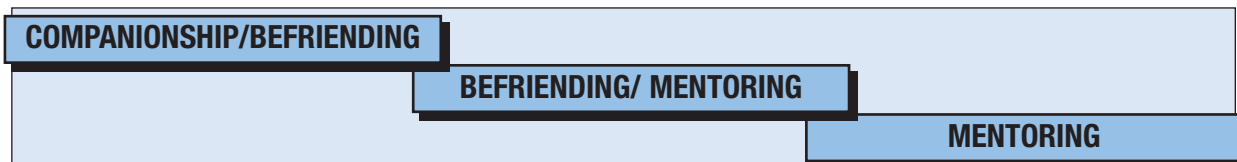
Mike Nicholson from the Befriending Network (Scotland) working with the Scottish Mentoring Network has developed and refined the Befriending / Mentoring Spectrum which recognises that there is tremendous variety in the aims and the management practices of befriending/mentoring projects and defines three main types of project.

Companionship/Befriending where the primary objective is to form trusting relationships over time usually in order to reduce isolation and to provide a relationship where none currently exists. The clients involved may grow in confidence and increase involvement in community activities but these are not set as specific objectives.

Befriending/Mentoring where the primary objective is to form trusting relationships leading to the setting of low-key objectives. Activities involved in forming relationships may take place over some weeks or months before objectives are set between the project, volunteer and client and subsequently reviewed.

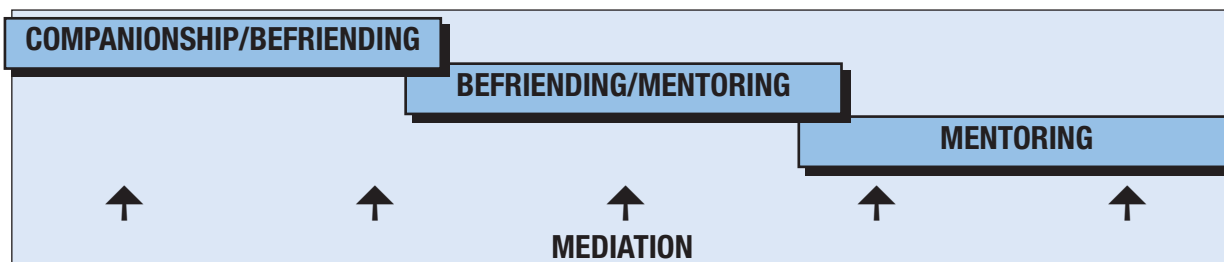
Mentoring where the role of the volunteer is to work with the client to meet objectives that are agreed at the start of the relationship. A social relationship if achieved is incidental.





All these relationships are essentially one to one and expected to exist over time, although the length of time can vary greatly. The mediator is by contrast a third party in the relationship and their independence inevitably limits the social relationship they have with either of the other two parties. It is essentially a crisis intervention to assist the people involved in a dispute to reach agreement. Again however there are a range of types of mediation - family mediation, community mediation, peer mediation, mediation and reparation – and many ways of delivering the service. Indeed development of the client's mediation skills so that after the initial crisis intervention they have the tools to resolve issues themselves.

Ewan Malcolm from the Scottish Mediation Network has suggested that the diagram might be amended to show mediation being brought in at points of crisis wherever they may arise on the spectrum.



Carol McNaughton in her final report on the PATHE Project, *Crossing the Continuum: understanding routes out of homelessness and examining 'what works'* for the Glasgow Simon Community identifies the role of social networks in homelessness:

- breakdown of social networks interrelating with other problems causing homelessness to occur
- isolation and the influence of social networks as a key barrier to resettlement
- help to develop social networks as part of the support package people require to develop sustainable routes out of homelessness.

She highlighted the interaction of hard and soft outcomes and demonstrated that “The development of ‘soft’ outcomes could be crucial”.

“The process of change that some of the participants went through in their pathways through homelessness has been encapsulated in this research as ‘phases of progression’ out of homelessness:

- **Phase 0 – Existence** (before beginning a route out of homelessness)
- **Phase 1 – Changes** – pulling apart the past
- **Phase 2 – Changes** – Re-building the future
- **Phase 3 – Taking control** – empowerment

The phases could be used to illustrate that a progressive route out of homelessness will not necessarily be linear. At each new ‘phase of progression’ the participants entered, the challenges they faced and barriers to progress they encountered may be experienced differently, and the level or nature of the support they required may be different.” (The full reports are available to download from the Simon Community web site at www.glasgowsimon.org.)

Which brings us back to where we started – quality assessments and knowing the range of tools. Not just whether Mentoring or Befriending or Mediation would be appropriate but fine tuned to the needs of the individual at that particular point in their lives. And although we try to separate and define the tools there are many overlaps and a ‘spectrum’ of services. Given the range of provision often nominally under the same title it is important that all parties in the relationship are clear what they can expect from each other and the purpose of the relationship.

The only problem now is that in most areas the tool box is half empty.

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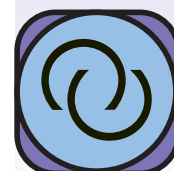
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