

# Devon County Council

LinkAge Plus

## Deep Outreach (Mentoring service)

This pilot is a new style of service for older people who have experienced some kind of down turn in their lives, often leading to loneliness, isolation and actual or a risk of social exclusion. The initiative built on the promising early evaluation results of the Upstream mentoring service (3) in Mid Devon. LinkAge Plus funded a controlled trial of mentoring in two areas - Exeter and Crediton (Age Concern Exeter Link2 service and Upstream). This is being taken further with Partnerships for Older People Projects (POPP) money from the Department of Health who have categorised the service as 'early intervention'.

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## Objective

- Improve the LinkAge Plus model for deep outreach.
- Make recommendations to Devon County Council and its partners on how inclusion in society can be improved for people aged 50 Plus who are in need of help.
- Discover if there are common training needs, or skill sets for mentoring and ensure these are available.
- Deliver a mentoring service to 650 people in Exeter and Mid Devon and contribute to the delivery of a controlled trial of the effectiveness of mentoring.

## Activity

- A study by Peninsula Medical School is taking the form of a controlled trial of effectiveness with baseline and six month follow ups of the psychological status of mentor service participants volunteering to be part of the study, and 'controls' from areas where the service is not available. (This will subsequently be supplemented by an economic evaluation funded wholly through *My Life My Choice*, which should be available in April/May 2009.)
- Publication of the Community Mentoring Manual (2).
- Intensive contract monitoring and relationships with providers to ensure lessons are learned.
- Focus Groups, consisting of the two mentoring teams used in the pilot, sought to ascertain the learning outcomes above and find solutions to barriers to the re-integration of participants into society.

## Achievements against objectives

- We have successfully achieved our objectives of offering the service in the two localities and achieved the target of providing the service to 650 people ahead of schedule.
- We have a number of examples where people's lives have turned around using this approach. In some cases deep personal and family distress have been successfully addressed leading to improvements which seem to be sustained and which have sometimes led to people becoming net contributors as volunteers.
- We can identify common skills, processes and methods (which are defined in the manual) it seems that the types of case offered and taken up by mentor services vary with the professional background and skills of the workers. So, in Exeter, where the

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staff have Occupational Therapy backgrounds and there are recognised mental health competencies in the staff, statutory services are referring numbers of people with significant mental health problems. The service offered by Upstream is theoretically the same as that offered in Exeter; however, at first sight the participant group served appears different.

## Wider achievements

Mentors have been working with the 360 degree wellbeing check 'Getting the Most Out of Life' to assist with keeping a holistic framework regardless of referral source or presenting problem.

## Resources

£200,000 over two years plus research costs.

## Key lessons learned<sup>1</sup>

- This service seems to be highly acceptable and enjoyable to participants.
- Mentoring works with individuals to enable them to realise their potential and life enjoyment, and at the same time with the local community, usually in small groups, to improve inclusion and promote healthy and enjoyable activities for wider groups of people. These groups and activities are often highly innovative in the local context.
- Mentors can work successfully with people who have resisted statutory services and are fearful of them. Building trust is supported by:
  - being part of the voluntary sector, not part of statutory services which are still seen by some as being likely to 'put them away';
  - taking time;
  - personalisation – building personal goals, often incrementally, not fitting people to existing or obvious solutions.
- Involving participants in activities to bring them out of isolation is restricted by a lack of transport options in both urban and rural locations.
- Because of the nature of the case mix being handled by the Exeter group, along with the increasing complexity and input required by people they are working with, the mentors' required input is increasing. This will tend to reduce the number of cases that can be handled within a particular time with a given resource. This kind of variation in 'case mix' needs to be considered in evaluating the service.
- In both cases, there is a risk of the services being undervalued by the statutory services. Both models potentially exclude some who could benefit from mentoring.

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<sup>1</sup> NB All of these comments are subject to further consideration in an evaluation report to be published Autumn 2008 and in two research reports, due early 2009, on effectiveness and economics of the approach. These comments represent the opinions of the Devon pilot based on intensive management of services provided to 650 persons, participant feedback and staff views.

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Our conclusion is that services need a balanced skill set and balanced case mix, leading to the widest possible benefit from the service.

*Quote: 'We've had several success stories with referrals to Link 2. These referrals are people who don't really fit into anything else, who live chaotic lives and need a service that will stay with them and go that extra mile to help them engage in activities. Link 2 has been very helpful.'* (Exeter Core Team)

## Further information

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Ref to website:

(1) Community Mentoring: [http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/socialcare/older\\_people/linkageplus/community-mentoring.htm](http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/socialcare/older_people/linkageplus/community-mentoring.htm)

(2) Community Mentoring Manual: [http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/socialcare/older\\_people/linkageplus/community-mentoring/tools-for-providers.htm](http://www.devon.gov.uk/index/socialcare/older_people/linkageplus/community-mentoring/tools-for-providers.htm)

(3) Upstream evaluation: <http://www.upstream-uk.com/Evaluation.html>

## Related documents

LinkAge Plus Devon - Report on the learning outcomes of the Deep Outreach programme – to be published October 2008.

LinkAge Plus Devon - Summary of Deep Outreach Focus Groups Learning Issues.