

Chapter 5 pathway notes

Mentoring homeless young adults on the journey to independent living

Designing inclusive pathways with young adults: A pathway from the United Kingdom

Purpose

These pathway notes support chapter 5 of the book: *Designing inclusive pathways with young adults: Learning and development for a better world*. This chapter outlines the 'Young Adults with Purpose' (YAP) adult mentoring programme developed by the Nicodemus Trust, UK and the related developmental pathway offered in conjunction with the Global University for Lifelong Learning (GULL). YAP outcomes are certified by the Global University for Lifelong Learning (GULL) and organizations interested in the approach should contact the Nicodemus Trust via its website at www.nicodemustrust.org.uk/

GULL welcomes affiliation with any organization working with marginalized young people and the purpose of these pathway notes is to assist those who are using or developing a similar approach. For more details about how to affiliate with GULL please see: www.gullonline.org/affiliate

Pathway implementation

Nicodemus Trust (NT) began developing its adult mentoring programme 'Young Adults with Purpose' (YAP) in support of its work among vulnerable young people in Guatemala, Latin America. In 2012, NT saw a need to develop a similar initiative for the UK as a response to youth homelessness. NT's YAPUK initiative aims to provide social, relational, economic and spiritual support for young people on an unconditional basis. It also aims to equip and empower them so that when their own needs are met, they can help others in similar situations by becoming agents of change.

The NT with GULL pathway is designed to enable participants to experience a structured, self-directed development process over a 12 month period - at a pace that is manageable for each young person. This is an important consideration given that the starting point has to reflect their differing personalities, needs and aspirations. The over-arching goal is to facilitate mindset change that is characterized by a new and more positive perspective on life and, growth in confidence so that participants can sustain their own change.

Breaking the cycle of dependency

NT offers adult mentoring to homeless young adults to help them acquire the practical and active learning skills needed to prepare for independent living. NT has been developing its approach to mentoring young people in conjunction with Banbury Foyer, which provides support and accommodation for homeless 16-25 year olds in Banbury, Oxfordshire, UK. The UK Foyer network operates 120 centres in urban and rural communities throughout the UK and provides a safe environment for vulnerable young people who are not able to live at home. Foyer residents cater for themselves and they budget for these and other living costs (such as clothes and toiletries) from their fortnightly Government income support or Job seeker's allowance. All Foyer residents receive Government housing support which means that their accommodation costs are paid directly to the Foyer. NT's adult mentoring programme offers relational support to young people who want to secure a job and live independently so that they are not dependent on State-funded benefits.

Foyer residents are supported by a key worker who can provide expert guidance on budgeting and other aspects of independent living but not personal or relational support to the young person. When a young adult leaves the Foyer, the relationship with their key worker ends and so there is a gap between the support they are used to receiving and post-Foyer living. The gap in readiness to live independently is often most evident in terms of the development of relational and interpersonal skills. NT's 'Young Adults with Purpose' programme aims to address the relational gap and this is important because in some respects, the existing UK State provision shields them from these realities.

At the beginning, the participant is matched with an adult mentor who undertakes this role on a voluntary basis. A key objective of the relationship is to reduce dependency by facilitating self-directed personal and skills or technical development. The pathway is implemented over a 12 month period and GULL certification points are used to recognize the outcomes at stage 1 (professional Bachelor level 1 Entry) stage 2 (professional Bachelor level 2 Certificate) and stage 3 (professional Bachelor level 3 Diploma).

On completion of stage 3, the participant will have worked with an adult learning coach for at least 10 months and will have acquired the social and interpersonal skills needed to build on this by selecting their own learning coach and by creating a personal web of support to sustain their own self-directed development in conjunction with other young adults and their respective learning coaches.

Extracts from an interview with Josie Silva Clarke, Operations and Compliance Manager, Nicodemus Trust, UK

Why did NT establish an adult mentoring programme for young adults?

NT is involved in supporting young adults in Guatemala, Latin America and the mentoring concept was initially developed in this context because when former street children leave a sheltered home environment, they don't have support networks available to them. This means that many former street children – now young adults - end up back on the streets. So the concept of 'Young Adults with Purpose' emerged from the need to provide relational and other forms of support for young people in Guatemala. This is an important initiative because the support structures provided by the State in the UK do not exist in Guatemala and our concept centres on relational support – it doesn't seek to create dependency by making decisions on behalf of young adults.

How did the mentoring concept develop at the Foyer in Banbury?

NT's founders were volunteering at the Foyer in Banbury and among other initiatives, running a cooking club on Thursday evenings. This practical activity also facilitates relationship building and they became more aware of the need for this form of support. They were struck by the similarities between the challenges facing youngsters in Guatemala and the UK – although there are great differences in the provision of State support in both countries, the common need is for relational support and mentoring in the absence of family support. This was further reinforced when a young adult left the Foyer and because NT's founders had been volunteering with the Foyer, they were not permitted to make contact with this person for a period of 6 months. After that, they made contact and found that the youngster felt lonely, isolated and desperate for relational support.

How did NT recruit and train its adult mentors?

NT is a Christian-based charity and so our Foyer mentors were recruited via NT's church networks. Our initial briefing was attended by 20 people who were willing to volunteer and after stressing the nature of the commitment – a 12 month-long period – we eventually provided training to 10 volunteers. Prior to this, the volunteers were asked to complete an application form and provide two references. NT developed its mentor training programme in consultation with other organizations engaged in similar work and we sought to make the training as relevant as possible by drawing on statistics relating to youth homelessness – especially in Banbury and the surrounding area.

Our initial training input took place over two days and it provided an opportunity for mentors to ask questions and express any concerns about undertaking this work. For example, mature adults might find it difficult initially to relate to a 17 year old and his/her problems given that there is a generational and situational gap to bridge. We also covered NT's policies and discussed the ways in which support can be provided to volunteers.

Administratively, we undertook reference checks and mandatory State Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks.

Verifying outcomes

The NT with GULL pathway is verified by NT staff, volunteer mentors and by independent professionals working at the Foyer and with other agencies. After 12 months, it is anticipated that relational mentoring will have helped participants to:

- Make changes that are self-evident and can be verified;
- Transform their thinking, attitudes and behaviours;
- Prepare for independent living;
- Create their own support network by drawing on a learning coach of their own choice and a web of support provided by new friends and acquaintances from social, recreational and community contacts (in addition to support services provided by their key worker, mentor and other professionals);
- Participate in a range of community activities and interact confidently with individuals and agencies;
- Prepare to assist other homeless young adults at the beginning of their own development journey;

- Engage with and participate in training; education; paid or unpaid work placements; apprenticeship and employment;
- Reduce their dependency on others and on the State and become more self-reliant.

Josie Silva Clarke reflects on the potential for adult mentoring and action learning:

As NT reinforces the value of GULL's reflection cycle concept with its mentors and then receives and responds to their feedback, it will become easier to discern practical ways of facilitating and later verifying evidence of change. NT's goal is to unlock the potential in the homeless young adults it supports as they are not generally able to engage with conventional forms of education and training at the beginning of the process. This means that the NT with GULL pathway - based on adult relational support and learning from doing and reflecting - is key to the change process that is being facilitated. I believe that this can help participants to move forwards in a natural and holistic way and to deal with the numerous challenges they face.

These include: dealing with loneliness and isolation, learning how to learn, learning how to build relationships with other people, how to draw support from others, learning new skills and gaining confidence and satisfaction from making progress in social and sporting spheres. So for example, if our mentors can encourage their mentees to participate in sporting or recreational activities that they might enjoy, we think that this will help to nurture the mentor/mentee relationship and the mentee's self-confidence and assurance.

As our participants struggle at the beginning of the process and as everyone is different, the question is: How should we facilitate this and at the same time, gather evidence that the process is working? As a team, we brainstorm ways of gauging sufficiency of progress at each stage of the journey and we are seeking to establish a foundation that enables our participants to accelerate in the second half of the year. We also think that in developing NT's model for relational mentoring, there is likely to be a great deal of shared learning with and between the mentors and by drawing on their individual experiences. We are looking forward to discovering innovative and creative ways of helping vulnerable young people to discover their potential using GULL's lifelong action learning approach. For example, a significant advance for many of them will be learning how to how to make new friends or more friends and to sustain these relationships and/or engage with different groups of people. Loneliness, isolation and fear of the future act as serious barriers to low dependency on the State and so these forms of practical and personal development will represent breakthroughs on the journey to self-reliance.

In the medium term, NT with GULL's objective is to create and develop a model with in-built monitoring and evaluation so that the concept of 'sufficiency of change' and progression is easier to recognize and quantify. At that point, we'll be able to go to other organizations and say that we know that this works - here is how we gather and verify the evidence. We also need this approach in order to recruit new mentors so that the question isn't simply 'What can you give?' it's also about 'What you will gain' from the process. I believe that a bigger picture will emerge and that it will include perspectives on how our volunteer mentors benefit from serving young people as a mentor over a 12 month period. A part of the appeal here is that our mentors become skilled, self-directed lifelong learners by helping others. I hope that in due course, the mentees will be involved in acknowledging this development by presenting GULL certificates to their mentors in recognition of the fact that both parties (mentees and mentors) are learning, journeying and changing - together.

Ultimately the goal is to demonstrate that with modest funding, dependency on social services and the UK benefit system can be reduced. Above all, this will help to release the potential in vulnerable your people so that they can do much more for themselves.