



## **Guidance for Social Work professionals**

The importance of all Local Authority professionals working together with the local project coordinator to achieve strong coordination of this programme cannot be overstated. St George's University of London (SGUL) research team have produced this short note for social workers and other professionals in the local authority to convey the aims of the Carmen study, the crucial role of local authority professionals within it and the benefits to young women for taking part.

### **The Carmen Study**

The Carmen study is funded by the National Institute for Health Research, Health Technology Assessment programme. There are three local authorities involved in the project, Ealing, Lambeth and Essex. The aim of the study is to develop a peer mentoring intervention to reduce teenage pregnancy in looked after young women and to assess the feasibility of evaluating the intervention. SGUL will look at whether giving a young woman in care, extra support from another young woman who has been through the care system is helpful and has positive effects on their general wellbeing, social life, relationships, attitudes to sex and thoughts about early pregnancy.

A project coordinator has been identified in each of the Local Authorities who will manage local recruitment of mentees and mentors and will provide local coordination and management of the project throughout the intervention.

SGUL are aiming to recruit 48 young women in care between the ages of 14-18 to become potential mentees. Each local authority should recruit 16 potential mentees. Half the young women who consent to take part in the study will be randomly assigned to receive a peer mentor. The other half will become research participants and continue to receive their usual care. The reason for this is the need to compare the experiences of young women who have mentors with those who do not. To act as mentors, SGUL are recruiting twenty four young women, aged 19 to 25, who have themselves been through the care system. Each local authority should recruit 10-12 young women to be trained as mentors, with a view to 8 of them consenting to be a mentor.

## **Recruitment Criteria**

### **Mentees**

#### **Essential criteria:**

- ❖ A female
- ❖ Aged between 14 and 18
- ❖ Currently Looked After

#### **Desirable criteria:**

- ❖ Age 14-15 (prior to transition to independence)
- ❖ In a foster home or residential placement (non-independent living)
- ❖ Has had 3+ placements (on the basis that they represent the most vulnerable group)

### **Mentors:**

Literature on mentoring illustrates that mentors with good interpersonal skills such as empathy and the ability to empower others are more able to create relationships which are associated with higher self-esteem. During recruitment, Local Authorities should take responsibility for decisions about who would make a good mentor. To help with the programme evaluation, local authorities should document how mentors were chosen.

#### **Essential Criteria:**

- ❖ Aged between 19 and 25 who have experienced the care system and are therefore familiar with it
- ❖ High in relational qualities/interpersonal skills such as empathy, engagement, authenticity and empowerment.
- ❖ Agreement between the mentors' values and the programmes' values so that they will act as appropriate role models. (i.e. the mentor's attitudes towards teenage pregnancy and promoting healthy sexual behaviours should be consistent with the programme's desire to reduce teenage pregnancy. This does not automatically exclude mothers)
- ❖ Fully committed and able to meet the needs and demands of the role.
- ❖ Safe to work with children and vulnerable young people with a cleared Criminal Records Bureau check.

### **What is the role of social workers?**

To enable the project coordinator to reach the recruitment targets, the input of social work professionals is crucial. We are aware of the demands on time of social work professionals and therefore the role of a social worker in the

project is not designed to be time consuming. The central element of the role is to identify participants and communicate with the project coordinator.

The role is as follows:

- To identify young women to act as mentees (age 14+) and mentors (age 19+) and informing the project coordinator.
- Where time permits, to accompany young women to information meetings delivered by the project coordinator and discuss the benefits of the project with the young woman.
- Attend consent meeting if young woman chooses to have an adult with them.
- Contribute to decisions regarding matching mentors to mentees after consent.
- Act as a support and inform the project coordinator should any issues arise concerning young women during the intervention.

### **What are the benefits?**

During the recruitment to the study we will ensure that young women have things fully explained to them so that they understand the choices they make about participating. Whether acting as a mentor, a mentee or as a participant in the research who receives care as usual, young women will be given opportunities to achieve. We will ensure that every young woman who participates feels cared about, valued and respected as an individual.

### **Benefits for Mentors**

- With support from the project coordinator, mentors will be given the opportunity to improve the life chances of a young woman who is currently in the care system.
- Mentors will gain experience of participating in a research study.
- Mentoring will provide them with new skills, knowledge and experience.
- Their training and experience as a mentor will be accredited through ASDAN if they choose (Award Scheme Development Accreditation Network). It can also be added to their CV.
- They will receive £40 a month in Love2Shop vouchers in recognition of their time and commitment.
- They will be given an amount of money (up to £40 a month) to participate in activities with their mentee. The mentor and mentee can decide what activities they would like to do.
- All mentors will be interviewed at the beginning and end of the year, for which they will receive a £10 Love2Shop on each occasion. Some mentors will have an additional in-depth interview, to explore their experiences of mentoring in more detail, for which they will receive an additional voucher payment.

### **Possible benefits for young women who receive a mentor**

- They will gain experience of participating in and contributing to research that may benefit other young people in care in the future.
- They will have a supportive relationship with someone who is volunteering to help them.
- Their mentor will be someone who has been through the care system themselves so is likely to understand some of their experiences.
- They will get to participate in activities with their mentor, and can choose what they would like to do.
- They will receive a £15 Love2Shop voucher for interviews conducted at the beginning and the end of the one year intervention. Further payment will be given to a sample of mentees who are chosen to take part in more in-depth interviews.
- They will receive newsletters during the project to keep them updated, and will also receive a final report on the results of the study.

### **Benefits for young women who do not receive a mentor**

- They will gain experience of participating in and contributing to research, which may benefit young people in care in the future.
- They will get to participate in something that is interesting and a bit different.
- They will receive a £15 Love2Shop voucher for interviews conducted at the beginning and the end of the one year intervention.
- They will receive newsletters during the project to keep them updated, and will also receive a final report on the results of the study.

### **How will SGUL ensure the safety and mentors and mentees?**

Both mentors and mentees will be made aware that if they have any concerns, at any stage, they should contact the project coordinator. The following is a list of other safeguards to protect the welfare of peer mentors and mentees who participate in The Carmen Study. All mentors will be made aware of relevant safeguards during the training sessions and will receive a copy in their training pack. (See the appendix for topics covered in training)

## **Matching**

- When the researchers meet the mentors and mentees to seek their consent to participate in the research, they will be asked if there any exceptions to those they would be able to work with. Following this, project coordinators and social workers will have input into decisions regarding the matching of mentor and mentee pairs.

## **Initiating the mentor-mentee relationship**

- The initial contact between mentors and mentees will take place in a three-way meeting with the project coordinator. The purpose of this meeting is to provide them with initial support and define the aims, roles, responsibilities, length and boundaries of the relationship.

## **During the relationship**

- To ensure professional boundaries are maintained, mentors will be instructed to contact their mentee using the mobile phone and email address provided by the research team. They will be asked not to contact their mentee on social networking sites such as Facebook. Mentors will also be advised that whilst they are permitted to save up money to spend on activities with their mentee, monies should not be spent on material goods for the mentee.
- Once a mentor has arranged a meeting with their mentee, they should inform the project coordinator of the proposed date, time, estimated length, location and activity planned. If necessary, the project coordinator can discuss concerns they have and suggest alternatives. After the meeting the mentor should notify the project coordinator that it has gone as planned. If the project coordinator does not hear from the mentor after an appropriate amount of time, they should phone them to check on their welfare.
- Mentors will be reminded to have their mobile phone on at all times during meetings with their mentees. Their phones will contain the numbers of services they may need to contact in an emergency, including the police and social services emergency duty team.
- The emergency duty team will be made aware of the project from the outset, including the names and details of all young people involved in it.
- Mentors will complete a diary on their mobile phone each week that will be sent directly to the research team. Although they are advised to contact their project coordinator if they are having any difficulties or concerns, they can also raise these in the diary so that the researchers are aware and can pass the information on to the project coordinator. The diary will also give them an opportunity to reflect on their relationship with their mentee.

## **Support from project coordinator**

- Mentors will have monthly support group meetings with their project coordinator to allow them to reflect on their relationship with their mentee, and also provide an opportunity to feedback any concerns or issues that have arisen. The meetings will also allow the project coordinator to be aware of, monitor, and troubleshoot any difficulties raised by the mentors, both in terms of their relationship with their mentee and also in terms of their own wellbeing. The project coordinator will ensure the mentees' social worker is kept fully informed of any issues or concerns regarding their welfare.
- Mentors will be encouraged to contact their project coordinator if any difficulties arise that they are unable to cope with or that cannot wait until the next meeting. If the mentor has any safeguarding concerns they should contact the project coordinator immediately. If the project coordinator is unavailable the mentor should contact the mentee's social worker. If either of these professionals is unavailable (e.g. outside of working hours) and they have immediate concerns, mentors should contact the police or social services emergency duty team. During training it will be emphasised that mentors should contact appropriate professionals, rather than trying to deal with problems alone.

## **Early termination of relationship**

- Ensuring a mentor who attends training is offered a mentoring match is an important ethical consideration. Where a relationship breaks down before three months into the intervention, the aim will be to offer both the mentor and mentee another match.

## **What is covered in the training?**

Potential mentors will receive 3.5 days of training delivered by the National Children's Bureau in preparation for the role of mentor. Potential mentors do not consent to take part in the study until they have completed the training, therefore the training is an opportunity for them to reflect on becoming a mentor and ensure they are fully informed of the expectations and responsibilities prior to participating.

Potential mentors will be equipped with the knowledge and skills to assist them in their role as a mentor. However, the mentor is not responsible for sexual health advice. The emphasis of the training will be on signposting and empowering the mentee to attend services.

The training will cover the following topics:

- ❖ The role of the peer mentor and building the peer mentor team.
- ❖ Understanding personal reflection and its importance to peer mentoring.
- ❖ Ethics and accountability.
- ❖ Exploring professional boundaries.

- ❖ Exploring confidentiality in the peer mentoring relationship, including exceptions.
- ❖ Safeguarding children and child protection.
- ❖ Examining features of healthy and unhealthy relationships.
- ❖ Emotional and legal aspects of sexual relationships.
- ❖ Awareness of types of contraception available and where to get help/information, including for sexually transmitted infections.
- ❖ Recognising the challenges and impact of teenage pregnancy and parenthood, including where to get help/information.
- ❖ Keeping safe and minimising risks.
- ❖ Empathic listening skills.
- ❖ Building trusting mentoring relationships and dealing with difficulties in the relationship.
- ❖ The mentors' role in the research project.
- ❖ How to gain an ASDAN award.