

Mentoring as a Support Strategy for Young People with Asperger Syndrome

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Aims and Objectives

- Provide background information on Aspire AS mentoring project
- Outline key factors in AS and mentoring
- Identify common obstacles
- Identify key success factors

Background to ASpire

- Outcome of local consultation on adult AS service provision – Brighton and Hove
- 2 years ESF EQUAL funding 2005-2007
- 3 years on-going Three Guineas funding 2007-2010
- 42 service users
- 21 mentors
- Waiting list – project at full capacity – 2 new referrals each week

What does ASpire do?

- Support adults (16+) through 1:1 mentor support
- Recruit, train and support volunteer mentors
- Provide social groups for adults with AS
- Provide skills courses for adults with AS
- Deliver AS awareness training to organisations

What is mentoring?

Can incorporate any of the following - sometimes with caution and when appropriate:

- Supporting
- Befriending
- Guiding
- Advocating
- Teaching
- Coaching
- Peer support (mentors with AS)

- Supports independence
- Empowers
- Supports skill development
- Enables
- Does 'with' not 'for'

Why mentoring and AS?

- Social relationship – isolated individuals
- 1:1 – suits many with AS
- Accepting and non-judgemental
- Goal-focused (not ‘emotion’ based)
- Long-term – trust, consistency, time
- AS – central to the work
- Flexible enough, consistent enough
- Allows modelling of social skills

Challenges

- Inability to maintain relationship – breaking appointments, anxiety, overload
- Slow progress – frustration for mentor
- Lack of recognition of own progress or input of mentor
- Unrealistic expectations of own abilities
- Lifetime of negative relationships
- ‘Stuck’ness – fear of change, motivation

Jack

Wanted a job

Charity shop – safe, first step, support for manager

College – bullying – awareness work with students and staff training

Part-time job – support with application, success – 2 years

Social groups – regular attendee

Apprenticeship – looking for placement

Outcomes for Service Users

- Confidence
- Lower anxiety levels
- Feeling of belonging – not alone
- Self-acceptance
- Efficacy – self-belief – less fearful/hopeless
- Access to social opportunities
- Employment/education

Project Outcomes

- University of Brighton evaluation research project:
- 75% service users reported increase in confidence
- 67% service users reported increase in social interaction

Success Factors

- Long-term relationship
- Consistent and regular contact
- Knowledge of AS (mentor)
- Willingness to engage (person with AS)
- Patience and endurance (mentor)
- Support for mentor
- Clear boundaries and expectations
- Regular review of the relationship

Final Words

'I am more friendly, smile, say hello. Asked waitress for another drink without anxiety. Talk to people in shops/cafes. General rise in confidence'.

'I don't argue in class anymore. If I have a problem I go to the tutor or mentor'.

'Being referred to job brokers has been hugely beneficial. I probably wouldn't have my job now without this support'.

'[My] knowledge [of AS] has increased considerably. I feel less weird as I have been able to compare myself with others with AS'.