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Assistance, support and monitoring? The paradoxes of mentoring adults in the criminal justice system.

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Abstract

Mentoring has recently taken centre stage as one of the primary criminal justice 'interventions' to reduce reoffending, having grown in popularity over the past fifteen years. Its rapid growth has been driven by claims of success within and outwith the criminal justice system, leading some to argue that it has been perceived as a silver bullet (Newburn and Shiner, 2005). This article challenges such claims on three fronts: first, mentoring is an ill-defined concept with weak theoretical foundations; second, the evidence base upon which claims of success are made is limited; and third, transferring mentoring into the coercive and punitive environment of the criminal justice system results in a departure from the very principles and values which are the basis of its usefulness elsewhere. The article utilises the findings from three empirical criminal justice research projects to question claims of widespread and effective mentoring activity with defendants and offenders, suggesting instead that 'interventions' described as mentoring serve as a vehicle to extend the reach of the criminal justice system. At the end of the article we suggest that desistance theory, specifically the Good Lives Model, provides a conceptual framework for taking mentoring in criminal justice forward.

Keywords

Mentoring, criminal justice, offenders, desistance, resettlement, bail support

Introduction

Mentoring has a long history but its growth in popularity has been most rapid in recent decades, and mentoring schemes feature in 'every corner of public policy' (Boaz and Pawson, 2005: 175) in the UK and elsewhere. In the criminal justice system, mentoring activity is now widespread and can be found at all stages of the criminal justice process and with all types of offenders (see St. James-Roberts *et al.*, 2005; Tarling *et al.*, 2004). Whilst often perceived as innovative, the principles underpinning mentoring have parallels with the 1980s tracking schemes for young offenders and the philanthropic traditions of encouraging community participation in assisting and supporting offenders which influenced the development of the Probation Service (Nellis, 2004).

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Recently, mentoring has developed into a mainstream criminal justice intervention becoming a routine criminal justice practice and an integral ingredient of the Government's 'rehabilitation revolution' (MoJ, 2010) supporting its strategic priority of reducing reoffending. In November 2012, the Justice Secretary announced that mentors are to be made available to *all* offenders leaving custody (BBC News, 2012). This followed Government-backed informal mentoring pilot projects, which commenced earlier the same year, which provided mentoring support (organised through the voluntary sector organisations (VSOs)) to prisoners resettling in particular geographic areas. This is in stark contrast to mentoring's traditional role on the periphery of criminal justice where it was provided as a supplementary service run largely by VSOs and funded from non-government sources. This 'cottage industry' represented one method through which VSOs plugged gaps in statutory services and specifically the space vacated by the Probation Service when it moved away from its traditional values of 'advise, assist and befriend' towards a managerialist agenda.

Mentoring's move into mainstream criminal justice service provision has been facilitated by (and in turn has supported) a number of government agendas. Mentoring exemplifies the perceived strengths of the voluntary sector, particularly in relation to community involvement in crime reduction initiatives and fits neatly into the marketisation agenda which aims to increase the involvement of VSOs (and the private sector) in offender-related services (MoJ, 2008; 2010; 2012; MoJ/NOMS, 2008). Alongside its inherent appeal and the 'feel-good factor' (Colley, 2002), mentoring also speaks to the Government's desire to make 'austerity cuts'. Whilst reducing public spending might not be the driving force behind the institutionalisation of mentoring, its perceived value for money adds to its appeal (Fletcher and Batty, 2012). However, its fiscal advantages are overstated because it is more costly than it first appears and more expensive than alternatives (St. James-Roberts *et al.*, 2005). Furthermore, appeals to economic imperatives obscure broader ideological agendas relating to the dismantling, or at least limiting of, the role and power of statutory criminal justice agencies and the professionals who work within them.

Mentoring's broad appeal has allowed criminal justice schemes to expand significantly over a short period of time. Whilst this might be conceptualised as at the very least a benign act, improving the services available to offenders and an apparent success for the reformist agenda, it is a double-edged sword. The institutionalisation of mentoring enables the state to appropriate or capture it and extends the reach of the criminal justice system (Hannah-Moffat, 2000; 2002). From this viewpoint, mentoring follows the well trodden path of interventions, including restorative justice, which when bolted onto, or incorporated into, a punitive and coercive criminal justice process, transform into practices which bear little resemblance to their original principles (Crawford, 2006).

The Government's recently announced plans to extend the provision of mentors to all prisoners focus on adults serving sentences of under 12 months who currently receive no supervision after release from the probation service but may be expected to participate in the Work Programme for prison leavers which has targets related to reducing reoffending (Wincup, 2013). The declared aim of the new mentoring policy is to reduce the very high reconviction rates of this group but official announcements suggest that mentoring's role goes beyond helping offenders stay out of trouble and incorporates a monitoring function. The policy clearly brings a group not currently subject to supervision under the gaze of the state. As Chris Grayling (BBC News, 2012) stated when announcing the initiative:

I want them [prisoners] to be met at the prison gate, *to have someone who knows where they are, what they are doing*, and can be a wise friend to prevent them from reoffending (emphasis added).

The statement highlights the paradox inherent in using mentoring within criminal justice. On the one hand, it might assist offenders to deal with long-standing problems but on the other hand, it provides a vehicle through which the formal criminal justice system can deepen its involvement in offenders' lives. In this way, the benign practices of mentoring with its roots in reformist and philanthropic agendas disguise a purpose which goes beyond working *with* offenders to address their offending behaviour and subjects them to greater levels of social control.

This article uses the findings of three empirical research studies to explore the practical operation of mentoring adult, predominantly male, defendants/offenders. The studies evaluated three pilot projects: two regional resettlement projects working with adult prisoners being released from custody (Hucklesby and Wincup, 2005a, 2005b; Hucklesby and Wincup, 2007), plus an evaluation of the regional Effective Bail Scheme (EBS) which provided bail support and accommodation as a condition of bail evaluated by one of us (Hucklesby, 2011). In all of these projects, mentoring was part of a package of interventions which aimed to assist defendants/offenders through transitional periods – either moving from prison to the community or awaiting trial. They all aimed to prevent or reduce offending during these periods and beyond through addressing 'social deficits' in defendants'/offenders' lives. Additionally, the EBS sought to ensure compliance with bail conditions and other requirements and was theoretically an alternative to custodial remands, although not always used in this way (Hucklesby, 2011). All three schemes were based loosely upon a social capital approach to mentoring whereby members of the 'law abiding' public supported defendants/offenders to remain crime free and build up and/or strengthen their links with society (Brown and Ross, 2010a). None of the schemes involved peer-mentoring where most commonly ex-offenders assist released prisoners to lead crime-free lives (Fletcher and Batty, 2012) for reasons we will explore later.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with mentors, paid workers and defendants/offenders from all schemes. The latter group included those who did not

wish to participate in mentoring and those who requested a mentor and were not matched with one. In total, 269 project participants were interviewed including 56 mentees (defined as defendants/offenders who had been matched with a mentor) and 65 mentors. Each evaluation also involved an analysis of paper-based or electronic records of mentoring activities.

This article uses the three pilot projects as case studies to examine how mentoring works in practice within criminal justice contexts, and to explore the implications of the findings for mentoring theory and practice. It is divided into three sections. Section one explores definitions of mentoring, highlighting some of their key features and considers how these are rendered problematic when adult defendants/offenders are the target group. Section two analyses the significant gap between claims made about mentoring and practice and explores possible explanations for this disparity. The article concludes by suggesting an alternative theoretical framework for mentoring which allows it to make a distinctive contribution to criminal justice by assisting mentees to establish 'good lives' free from crime rather than being a clone of existing interventions focusing on offenders' deficits.

Defining mentoring and its practice

In this section we demonstrate how the realities of mentoring adults in criminal justice problematise typical understandings of mentoring and its purpose. We question whether mentoring was actually taking place in our case studies and the extent to which the activity was simply an extension of the criminal justice system; in other words additional monitoring under the guise of a benign, and sometimes helpful, intervention.

Mentoring encompasses a range of theoretical models and diverse activities and there is no universal definition. There is, however, some consensus that mentoring describes a one-to-one relationship which is freely entered into and based upon trust and confidentiality. Mentoring is distinct from befriending in that it involves working to clearly defined goals and within set timeframes rather than developing a more informal and supportive social relationship. Mentors, typically volunteers, act as positive role models and draw upon their experience to provide advice and guidance to individuals in need of support over an extended period of time. In common with most criminal justice interventions, offender mentoring schemes are based upon a 'social deficit' model which views individuals as having significant problems or lacking the necessary knowledge and skills to become law-abiding citizens (Fletcher and Batty, 2012; Maruna, 2001). Consequently, mentoring projects concentrate on 'fixing' offenders' identified 'deficits'.

The lack of consensus surrounding what mentoring is, alongside the blurred boundaries between it and other activities, has led to a wide variety of approaches being labelled as 'mentoring' (Clinks and MBF, 2012). This enables organisations to identify their work as mentoring, whether or not in practice this is the service they

provide, allowing them to bid for funds to undertake an activity which is currently fashionable and attracting investment. At a time when the voluntary sector is facing considerable financial challenges, the ability to bid for funds is a considerable incentive to become involved in mentoring. There are significant dangers in this approach in that mentoring as a concept and practice becomes diluted and evaluations find little, if any, evidence of effectiveness. Furthermore, the vagueness and malleability of the concept allows it to be appropriated by governments and reconfigured to meet their own ends (Hannah-Moffat, 2000). Traditional understandings of mentoring are based on its ability to help, assist and support mentees. When first introduced in criminal justice contexts underpinned by risk-need paradigms, mentoring focused on addressing offenders' needs. Now, increasingly it is being moulded into an 'intervention' which focuses on managing risk, and specifically on reducing the risk of reoffending.

Blurred definitions and inconsistent practices are accompanied by an absence of a theoretical base and a lack of clarity about what mentoring is aiming to do. Whilst the typical stated aim of mentoring is to reduce reoffending (see for example, DuBois et al., 2002; Jolliffe and Farrington, 2007; 2008), there is limited theoretical understanding of how mentoring is supposed to achieve this goal (Brown and Ross, 2010a). Several authors make suggestions including Jolliffe and Farrington (2008) who propose that mentoring increases individuals' success by providing direct assistance and indirect support, dealing with specific problems, improving skills and reducing opportunities to offend and mix with criminal associates. Brown and Ross (2010a) hint at the less tangible factors of having someone to talk to, who takes an interest in their lives and provides general support and structure to offenders' lives. Equally important, however, are the increased opportunities for surveillance. Mentors are human monitoring systems who can find out about the movements and actions of offenders, remind them of the consequences of non-compliance and reoffending, and report back suspicious and risky behaviours to statutory authorities.

There is an absence of research evidence linking mentoring with reductions in offending. The lack of an empirical base reflects wide variations in the ways schemes operate, the contested nature of what constitutes evidence and the quality of what is available. These issues are compounded by much of the 'evidence' (often anecdotal) being published in the 'grey' literature from organisations involved in the delivery of services, raising issues of independence and generalisability (Wincup and Hucklesby, 2007; Jolliffe and Farrington, 2008). Several rapid evidence assessments (Jolliffe and Farrington 2007; 2008) and systematic reviews (Tolan *et al.*, 2008) have been conducted but these focus on young people at risk of offending. They draw similar conclusions summed up by Jolliffe and Farrington's (2008: 9) statement that 'mentoring is a promising but not proven intervention'. Evidence of reductions in offending are mixed (Jolliffe and Farrington, 2008; Lewis *et al.*, 2003) but several evaluations have identified other positive outcomes (see Tolan *et al.*, 2008).

Many of the perceived benefits of mentoring arise because volunteers are usually involved in its delivery (Brown and Ross, 2010a; Jolliffe and Farrington; 2008). Mentors in the schemes we evaluated were mostly volunteers. They served as an additional resource to undertake tasks which the limited number of paid staff were unable to do, adding to the criminal justice 'workforce' and extending the reach of the criminal justice system. Service users viewed mentors in largely altruistic terms and appreciated the willingness of volunteer mentors to give up their time freely without financial reward. Mentees also commented that volunteers allowed the relationships which developed to be more 'natural', 'informal' and 'relaxed'. This supports Brown and Ross's (2010b) view that one strength of mentoring is that it draws upon a relational model which connects offenders to other individuals and to society. Consequently, in theory at least, it provides an alternative to the managerial risk/needs model underpinning the work of the statutory sector and to the authority figures who populate it and have the power to bring about unwanted and punitive responses to unacceptable behaviour. Mentoring using volunteers brings a unique dimension to projects which are closely aligned to the traditional 'advise, assist and befriend' function of the Probation Service and connects defendants/offenders with civil society. We would not wish to devalue the importance of relational aspects of mentoring but at the same time, we question this rather idealistic view of volunteers' involvement in mentoring. We suggest that mentors are often also required to mimic managerialist criminal justice practices entrenched in the statutory sector, thus creating a tension between relational and managerial goals. The more embedded mentoring becomes into mainstream practice, the more likely it is to be driven by managerialist preoccupations and we uncovered evidence of this, which is discussed in the remainder of the article.

Despite the prevalence of mentoring being conceived of as purely something done by volunteers, in all of our case studies mentoring was also undertaken by paid staff. The mentoring coordinators employed by all three projects to administrate and manage the mentoring process were also heavily involved in mentoring activities with defendants/offenders. Tasks undertaken by them included meeting mentees whilst in custody, one-off meetings with mentees, meeting mentees at the prison gate and undertaking longer term mentoring relationships. These, often unplanned, activities were largely pragmatic solutions to some of the difficulties of using volunteers such as delays in security clearances, significant distances between where volunteers lived and locations of prisons, and volunteers' work commitments. However, other factors played a part including paid staff sometimes being reluctant to use volunteer mentors because they wanted to do the work themselves, questioned volunteers' competence, commitment or reliability, or where concerned that the risks involved could not be managed by volunteers. The widespread blurring of the roles of volunteers and paid staff made it difficult to distinguish between mentoring and more formal activities of criminal justice agencies, potentially negating some of the perceived advantages of mentoring. Furthermore, mentoring coordinators were responsible for performance management leading to questions

about whether relational or managerialist imperatives took precedence when they were acting as mentors.

We found evidence of clear managerialist practices in the projects we evaluated which arguably undermined the values upon which the mentoring schemes were based. For example, confidentiality is a key principle of mentoring and each scheme stated that they were committed to confidentiality (subject to certain exceptions which involved risk to others). However, mentors were expected to raise concerns about defendants/offenders with project staff. Furthermore, mentors were required to provide reports of mentor meetings to coordinators. These records were used to performance manage individual mentors and to evidence project outcomes. It was unclear what procedures were put in place to ensure that mentees understood that discussions with their mentors would be shared. The status of the EBS as a formal condition of bail rendered confidentiality particularly problematic. Breaches of bail conditions, whether or not they were directly related to bail support or mentoring, had to be reported to the courts. Such issues highlight the problems of grafting on an intervention based upon relationships of mutual trust to a coercive and punitive criminal justice system preoccupied with concerns about risk.

Voluntarism is also threatened when mentoring is used in the criminal justice process. Traditionally mentoring is viewed as a voluntary relationship but even outside of criminal justice it is difficult to find examples of where some form of indirect compulsion is not present (Colley, 2002). In the coercive environment of criminal justice, where sanctions for non-compliance are common and well known, it is almost impossible to view participation in mentoring (or any activity) as voluntary (see for example, Crawford, 2006). In our case studies, the principle of voluntarism was undermined in a number of ways. Informed consent is a necessary ingredient of voluntary activity but some defendants/offenders were unclear what a mentor was or what they were being asked to agree to. Structural features of the projects also militated against voluntary participation because mentoring was viewed as a core part of the programme. Two of the three schemes (one resettlement project and the EBS) aimed to engage all project participants in mentoring and had promised full participation in their funding proposals (see below). In these circumstances, project staff signed up every defendant/offenders to mentoring. The presence of inducements, whether real or imagined, is a further impediment to voluntarism. A number of defendants/offenders had mistakenly assumed that agreeing to engage with mentoring might lead to favourable outcomes such as early release from custody or a more lenient sentence. It is also feasible to assume that punishments might accrue from lack of engagement. In two projects (the EBS and one resettlement project) mentor meetings were sometimes scheduled alongside statutory appointments often for the practical reasons of boosting attendance rates and assisting in the management of risk. However, this practice blurs the boundaries between what defendants/offenders have to do and what they can choose to do, and similarly what is part of their bail conditions or sentence and what is not.

Arguably the status of mentoring as a voluntary activity was fully undermined by two of the practices of the EBS. Firstly, mentors sometimes replaced paid workers for statutory appointments to free up overstretched paid staff and to help manage large caseloads. Secondly, mentoring meetings were sometimes designated as statutory appointments so forming part of defendants' bail conditions and becoming a breachable activity, potentially resulting in arrest, court appearances and custodial remands. By taking on the role of enforcer, mentors were co-opted into the criminal justice 'workforce'. Once this line was crossed further confusion was likely to result with defendants being unable to distinguish between the differing roles mentors and paid staff performed.

Managerialist concerns not only moulded practice but also constrained it, preventing mentoring from operating in a way which is thought to be most effective. Almost universally, mentoring is defined by inequality of experiences between a less experienced mentee and the more experienced mentor who is viewed as a positive role model (Jolliffe and Farrington, 2007; Tolan *et al.*, 2008). Mentoring practices assume that relationships are more likely to flourish if mentors and mentees share similar experiences. Often, and increasingly in criminal justice, experience is defined in terms of sharing offending and desistance experiences. Peer mentoring whereby ex-offenders mentor offenders has appeal because it reduces the social distance between mentors and mentees, theoretically making the relationship more effective (Cabinet Office, 2009; Fletcher and Batty, 2012). For this reason, a range of initiatives have been put in place to use peer mentoring (for example, Princes Trust, 2012). However, despite widespread support, including from managers and other paid staff in all three of our evaluations, the additional practical obstacles to using ex-offenders as mentors prevented their use. Specific problems arose because of a lack of trust in ex-offenders resulting in criminal justice agencies being unwilling to risk working with this group and blocked access to prisons because of the perceived unacceptable security risks they posed.

Instead of using peer mentoring, all of the evaluated schemes took considerable efforts to match mentors and mentees, primarily on the proxy measures of gender and ethnic origin. However, the evidence base for matching in this way is unclear (Brown and Ross, 2010b; Calverley *et al.*, 2004) and little evidence exists suggesting that it increases the likelihood of successful relationships (DuBois *et al.*, 2002). Questioning the reasons for such practice is important because it results in considerable practical difficulties. Across all three projects, there was a mismatch between available mentors and mentees in terms of gender and ethnicity. Mentors were predominantly white and female. Problems were reported by each project resulting in some defendants/offenders not being allocated mentors especially when male mentees were viewed as posing unacceptable risks to women.

Mentoring defendants/offenders in practice

We have already stated that the primary aim of mentoring in criminal justice is to reduce offending and bring about desistance. On the EBS, it also aimed to increase compliance with bail conditions and increase court attendance rates (Hucklesby, 2011). We have also suggested that mentoring might achieve its aims in two ways: most explicitly by providing assistance and support to offenders to deal with their needs and more implicitly by increasing levels of monitoring as a mechanism for managing risk. In this section, we examine whether mentoring fulfils either of these functions using data from our evaluations.

Mentoring relationships are often assumed to be long-term open-ended commitments giving time for relationships to establish and to address the complex issues presented by mentees. In reality, formalised approaches to mentoring tend to impose time limits on the length of relationships mainly because of finite resources. For example, one of the resettlement projects restricted the number of meetings to twelve expecting them to span a three month period. Despite little evidence that longer mentoring relationships have a more significant impact on reducing reoffending than shorter ones (Jolliffe and Farrington, 2008), serious questions are raised about what can be achieved during this timescale when the problems faced by offenders are likely to be complex; what happens if support is required beyond the limit; and the usefulness of a one size fits all approach. By contrast, the other resettlement project's policy was to continue providing mentoring support indefinitely but this too has risks: relationships can become stale and unfocused and dependency may result. An exit strategy is vital to increase the likelihood that any benefits accrued will be sustained but this is difficult to achieve in the context of the remand process because bail periods are of an unknown length and can end abruptly (Hucklesby, 2011).

Theoretical time limits on mentoring relationships were usually redundant. Typically in our case studies, mentoring relationships were short-lived, if they became established at all. Our findings support the available evidence which suggest that few individuals benefit from the type of relationship with mentors which might lead to positive outcomes. Studies have found that most mentoring relationships do not get off the ground and even when they do they tend to have a natural lifespan and peter out rather than becoming a long-term relationship (Brown and Ross, 2010a, 2010b; Lewis *et al.*, 2003).

The picture which emerged from our evaluations was one in which the majority of defendants/offenders had little or no contact with mentors. For example, only 90 offenders out of a total of just over 4,000 who enrolled on one of the resettlement projects had any direct contact with a mentor, either in person or on the telephone and for three-fifths of those who had some contact, this was not face-to-face. A similar proportion (58 per cent) had contact with a mentor on only one occasion and only 22 offenders met a mentor on three or more occasions. In other words, less than one per cent of offenders enrolled on the scheme met with a mentor on more

than three occasions. Only a small number of individuals had developed what appeared to be meaningful relationships with mentors. In these circumstances mentees were generally positive about their experiences. For example, a mentee from the EBS said:

She does everything to help. She's gone out of her way to help. She's looking into volunteering work for me ... She's just helped me with everyday problems. She's just a good lass to talk to.

A similar picture emerged from the EBS although contact rates between mentors and mentees were higher, most likely because it was linked directly to court orders and the consequences of not complying were perceived to be greater (Hucklesby, 2011). Over four-fifths (83 per cent) of defendants were recorded as being referred for mentoring support, but only one-third of defendants had contact with mentors with two-fifths of these defendants having contact on only one occasion. Only one-third of defendants with mentors had contact with them on five or more occasions representing one-tenth of all defendants on the scheme.

Once contact has been made, the frequency and duration of meetings has an important bearing on their purpose and outcomes. Weekly meetings for several hours are regarded as a feature of a successful mentoring scheme (Farrington and Jolliffe, 2008). The EBS evaluation analysed the detailed records of mentoring activity which indicated that the actual time mentors spent with mentees varied considerably. The mean total amount of time spent with mentees was nine hours but the amount recorded ranged from five minutes to 140 hours. Mentoring time was concentrated on relatively few individuals with just under two-thirds (64 per cent) of defendants spending a total of two hours or less with mentors. Similar pictures emerged from the resettlement projects suggesting that only a few prisoners had prolonged intense relationships with mentors following their release and the majority of relationships never got off the ground.

Across the three projects it was difficult to describe many of the interactions which took place as mentoring; rather, they were more akin to befriending. Meetings between mentors and mentees rarely progressed beyond what Newburn and Shiner (2005) describe as mundane social interaction characterised by their ordinariness and lack of focus on instrumental goals. They involved activities such as visiting prisoners in custody, providing lifts to resettlement addresses, and meeting for informal chats. In theory all three schemes created action plans which should have guided interventions including mentoring activity but there was little evidence that they were used in practice, mostly because relationships were never established. The specific contribution that mentoring was supposed to make and its fit with other interventions was never outlined blurring boundaries and raising issues of duplication when other work was undertaken simultaneously by paid staff. There was little evidence that mentors were given responsibility for assisting their mentees with specific aspects of their lives or explicit tasks.

Taken together the findings suggest that mentoring schemes had limited contact with mentees. In these circumstances it is difficult to view the mentoring relationships as a mechanism through which support and assistance is provided to defendants/offenders which will have a quantifiable impact on their offending or their lives more generally. Equally, however, mentoring does not provide for intense monitoring of large numbers of defendants/offenders. Clearly there is a significant gap between the rhetoric and practice of mentoring and we discuss some of the possible explanations for this in the remainder of this section.

The projects we evaluated were all pilots. In the process of competitive funding bids they had made promises about the level of mentoring activity which would take place. Targets were set in terms of the number of defendants/offenders referred or matched with mentors. Levels of take up were the performance target and it resulted in staff concentrating on increasing the number of referrals rather than activity once individuals had been referred. Two of the projects had performance measures requiring them to refer *all* individuals for mentoring and for one scheme the target was linked to matched funding. This led to the number of referrals becoming an end in itself rather than a means to an end and lead to some questionable practices such as referring every defendant/offender for mentoring at the outset, even if it was clear that they would not be on the scheme long enough to receive mentoring support or were unsuitable for mentoring. The distorting effects of targets have been extensively commented upon elsewhere (see for example, Davies and Gregory, 2010) and their existence inflated the demand for mentors. The short-term focus on enhancing take-up rates through inappropriate referrals had a number of consequences. First, it led to a higher 'failure' rate, making efforts (although sometimes this involved little more than making a referral) to set up relationships which had little, if any, chance of success. Second, it created a situation where demand for mentors outstripped supply.

In different ways reconciling the demand for mentors with their availability was an ongoing challenge for all three projects, which at times, led to referrals being unfulfilled. Coordinators typically struggled to cope with the demand for mentoring but one faced the opposite problem of having mentors in place but less demand than anticipated. The difficulties did not stem from having too many or too few mentors: instead they were far more complex. Even with the appropriate number of mentors 'on the books' at any one time, it was difficult to allocate them all. First, training, security clearance, and Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks lead to a significant time lag between recruitment and mentors availability. Second, most of the volunteers had other commitments such as employment, education, and caring responsibilities which restricted their availability. For example, one project recruited a high proportion of students resulting in limited availability of mentors during particular times of the year (for example, during vacations) and a forced turnover of mentors as courses were completed. A third difficulty related to the wide geographical coverage of the projects, leading to a mismatch between the location of mentors and mentees

which was exacerbated where mentees were imprisoned away from their planned resettlement area. When combined with difficulties of matching mentors to mentees, the reasons why demand was unmet become apparent. This can have far reaching consequences for the credibility of projects because individuals' expectations can be raised and then not fulfilled. Mentoring agencies were very aware that mentees had been 'let down' by organisations frequently in the past and this influenced their search for reliable volunteers.

Many of the issues identified above are structural ones which, whilst not easily resolved, can be addressed, partially at least. The more thorny issue is confronting the reasons why so many mentoring relationships fail to start or break down and the contrasting task of identifying why some mentoring relationships work. Brown and Ross (2010b) focus on the latter coining the term 'readiness for mentoring' and identify characteristics of female offenders which make them more likely to have successful mentoring relationships. However, as they acknowledge, this process is compromised by the lack of information relating to the large number of women who did not engage with the mentoring programme they evaluated. It also raises questions about whether mentoring is viewed differently by, and provides contrasting things for, women and men given their different experiences of offending, punishment and resettlement (Carlen, 2002; Gelsthorpe and McIvor, 2007; Gelsthorpe and Sharpe, 2007). Brown and Ross (2010b) identify four conditions which make women more likely to engage with mentoring which resonate with our findings. These are whether women: have some idea of what mentoring is and what it involves; are at a stage in their lives when they view mentoring as something worthwhile; have lives which are sufficiently stable to sustain a mentoring relationship; and finally recognise that they do not have sufficient support to make the transition from prison to the community successfully.

In concordance with Brown and Ross (2010b) the complex problems individuals faced had a detrimental impact on the success of the mentoring relationship. During interviews, mentors were asked to reflect upon their most challenging cases and they frequently identified working with mentees who were homeless and/or drug users. For example, one resettlement project worked with a high proportion of homeless mentees which resulted in difficulties contacting them. It was also impossible to work on addressing goals specified in action plans until their immediate housing needs were met.

In our case studies, mentors and mentoring co-ordinators suggested that lack of motivation was responsible for early termination of mentoring relationships. Across all three evaluations, there was evidence of low motivation to engage with mentoring with some participants stating they did not want and/or need mentors so they had never met them or stopped seeing them quickly. This resonates with Brown and Ross' (2010b) findings which also suggest that motivation is a key aspect of offender readiness for mentoring. They argue that mentoring relationships are more likely to

endure when offenders reach a stage of their lives when their criminal lifestyle becomes burdensome and they are already contemplating desistance. In such circumstances, mentoring might be judged as highly beneficial to those actively seeking non-instrumental 'normal' relationships outside of the networks linked to their offending and opportunities to undertake law-abiding activities.

One potential explanation for the lack of motivation to engage is the degree of coercion – imagined or real – which featured in individuals' decisions to become involved in mentoring and which we discussed earlier in this article. A typically held view is that that voluntary participation results in higher motivation and more successful mentoring relationships. Findings from our three studies provide little evidence to support this view. Levels of engagement were low across all projects despite differences in the mechanisms used to recruit participants and the degree of choice they were afforded. The findings also identify how motivation to work with mentors can change over time, being under particular threat upon release from custody.

I just fucked off once outside. I couldn't be arsed and then I was on the run (Resettlement project).

I just lost my motivation. She called asking to meet me but I didn't want to ... She really wanted to help me but I just couldn't be bothered once I had gone back to my old ways (Resettlement project).

A lack of consent initially does not necessarily compromise mentoring relationships. It is possible that mentees might 'grow into' mentoring relationships, starting out with little idea of what mentoring might offer or being sceptical of its potential to help them yet end up reporting positive rewarding relationships with mentors. One defendant on the EBS explained:

... I didn't think I needed one [a mentor] but he was good when I met him. It was good to talk to someone else.

In sum, the findings relating to motivation square with evidence from quasi-compulsory drug treatment research which argues that there is no direct link between consent and motivation (see Stevens, 2010). However, this does not mean that increasing number of offenders should be corralled into entering mentoring relationships. For ethical and moral reasons, informed consent should be an important principle to uphold.

A key question is how motivation can be developed and sustained, even when working with 'involuntary clients' (Trotter, 2006), and one promising way forward for projects working with prisoners is to establish a mentoring relationship whilst the mentee is still in custody. There is some evidence that early establishment of a mentoring relationship may lead to more positive outcomes and is viewed as good

practice, although as we have seen above it is not infallible (Lewis *et al.*'s; 2003; NOMS South West, 2008). The solution typically arrived at by the two resettlement projects was for paid mentoring co-ordinators to visit mentees in prison passing them onto volunteer mentors once released. Whilst this practice assisted with the process of mentor matching and introduced mentees to the mentoring agency, it is unlikely to have had the same benefits for prisoners as pre-release contact with their actual mentor.

Taking mentoring forward

Mentoring is an intervention of the moment in criminal justice. Schemes have proliferated and the Government has signalled its intention to mainstream mentoring. The evaluations discussed in this article concur with previous evidence that, at best, this approach to supporting adult offenders is promising. Mentoring, alongside other interventions, can be beneficial for a small number of adult defendants/offenders but what typically takes place is more akin to befriending. More commonly, mentoring relationships do not get off the ground and when they do they are short-lived. The findings raise considerable questions about the ability of mentoring schemes to deliver on their promises, especially when provision becomes universal and institutionalised as part of the formal apparatus of the criminal justice system.

Institutionalising mentoring for defendants/offenders means that it must strive to achieve official aims of the criminal justice system relating to reductions in offending and high rates of compliance. Our evaluations suggest that the danger is that mentoring activity often duplicates work which is already, or should be, carried out by statutory organisations. Consequently, it supplements the state's involvement in the lives of defendants/offenders and extends it into new domains. Positively, duplication could be construed as reinforcement but potentially wastes scarce resources. More worrying is that mentoring is an additional component with which defendants/offenders have to comply. Currently, in most cases there are no immediate consequences following non-compliance but it is not clear what Government plans are in this regard and how failure to engage with mentoring programmes may be viewed by courts/probation officers/prison authorities in their future decisions.

The lack of agreement about the parameters of mentoring activity, what it aims to achieve and how it achieves such aims has enabled both the concept and practice to be captured by Government and moulded to its requirements. The policy and funding landscape has meant that organisations providing mentoring have had little choice but to shoe-horn mentoring into a formal criminal justice framework and to concentrate on demonstrating that they are able to recruit defendants/offenders into schemes based upon inflexible timetables and structures. Our findings clearly demonstrate that the regimented way in which mentoring was provided resulted in few positive mentoring experiences for defendants/offenders. Institutionalisation has required mentoring organisations to work within the confines of managerialist

practices and accounting procedures, thus moulding mentoring into an 'intervention' which loses the very attributes that may make it a useful addition to other activities.

In our case studies, mentoring conformed to the social deficit model rather than providing an alternative to the predominant theoretical model underpinning criminal justice. Our evidence suggest that current practices duplicate existing interventions stifling the attributes which make mentoring distinctive and potentially advantageous to individuals and to the criminal justice process as a whole. An alternative theoretical framework lies in the desistance literature which assists in understanding how mentoring might work (Brown and Ross, 2010a). Desistance is a process not an event which results in offenders changing their self image to law-abiding citizen (Maruna, 2001). It involves building up both human (the skills and knowledge that individuals possess through inheritance, education and training) and social capital (social networks and relationships) (Farrall, 2002, 2004). Mentoring is able to support the enhancement of both human and social capital and offenders' links with 'conventional' society, thus reducing social isolation (Brown and Ross, 2010a). In such circumstances, building up offenders' pro-social capital is likely to be a useful objective for mentoring whilst simultaneously supporting mentees to break ties with anti-social capital - people and places linked to their offending. In order to facilitate these processes, mentoring needs to be repositioned as a 'strength-based' approach (Maruna and Le Bel, 2003) rather than one which attempts to tackle 'deficits' in offenders' lives.

Mentoring is better placed to adopt a 'strength-based' approach than more formal mechanisms of criminal justice therefore adding value rather than duplicating existing services. It would recognise the resources mentees bring to mentoring relationships and work to enhance them by working *with* offenders rather than imposing actions on them (Burnett and Maruna, 2006). It could also work over time on more nebulous issues such as promoting self-esteem and developing social capital rather than on focusing exclusively on more measureable outcomes such as accessing employment (Brown and Ross, 2010a).

The Good Lives Model (GLM) (Ward and Brown, 2004; Ward and Maruna, 2007) builds on the strength-based approach to desistance. It provides an understanding of the internal and external conditions which are required for offenders to lead 'good lives' – 'ways of living that are beneficial and fulfilling to individuals' (Ward, 2002: 513-14). The GLM distinguishes between primary goods and secondary/instrumental goods. According to the GLM, individuals strive to have a range of primary goods - 'actions or states of affairs that are viewed as intrinsically beneficial to human beings and are therefore sought for their own sake rather than as means to some more fundamental ends' (Ward, 2002: 515) such as life, knowledge, agency and friendship. Instrumental or secondary goods are the means to achieve primary goods, which might include employment or education. For Ward (2002: 515) 'good lives' result when 'an individual possesses the necessary conditions for achieving

primary goods, has access to primary goods and lives a life characterised by the instantiation of these goods'. Internal (psychological) and external (social, cultural and interpersonal) conditions can foster or block progress towards leading 'good lives' and result in inappropriate and/or illegitimate means being used to achieve primary goods (Ward and Maruna, 2007).

Mentoring projects have so far concentrated their efforts on enhancing instrumental/secondary goods replicating much of the work undertaken by prisons and probation services (Farrall, 2004). Instead, they could make a unique contribution to criminal justice by assisting offenders to construct visions of 'good lives' free from offending. Mentors could explore with mentees which primary goods they aspire to and how to achieve them in pro-social, beneficial and personally meaningful ways which would enhance their well-being and reduce harm to others. In essence, mentors could help offenders to develop a life plan and begin to take steps towards realising it through building their internal capacity and skills and maximising external resources and social support. In practice, this means that mentoring schemes need to acknowledge the agency of offenders and encourage them to build upon their capabilities and strengths in the hope that ultimately it will lead to sustainable positive outcomes. In the short-term this may not produce tangible and measurable outcomes for mentoring projects (a potential problem in the current policy climate of marketisation and Payment by Results (MoJ, 2011)). Moreover, it is important to appreciate that time-limited mentoring interventions can only form part of a lengthy process of promoting desistance. Policy-makers and practitioners will need to be re-educated about what mentoring can be expected to achieve so that rather than being focused narrowly on reducing reoffending, it is understood as *part* of the solution towards helping offenders to desist and establish 'good lives'.

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