

Evaluation of the SOVA Nottingham Children's Mentoring Project

February 2011

"Having a mentor adds another champion in the vulnerable child's life: someone outside the family who offers an exclusive relationship to the child. Together a mentor and child share many different activities, but the underlying significance is the enjoyment of just being together. The relationship supports the determination, resourcefulness, and tenacity of the child. It encourages the child to have higher hopes for the future and to believe it is possible to reach them after all."

*Kitty Baisley,
President of Big Brothers Big Sisters International
http://www.bbbsi.org/about/presidents_message/*



What Really Matters is Carolyn Caldwell and Angela Hayes. Our work is to create processes for, and host, strategic conversations that create the possibility for transformational change in organisations and communities.

In this evaluation report our intention is to offer useful learning to the range of people and organisations responsible for commissioning, delivering and overseeing children's services in Nottingham. As residents of the city and former strategic managers of services for children and young people in the City Council and elsewhere, we have brought to this evaluation

- our experience and expertise in creating and managing services for children
- our commitment to every child in the city reaching his or her potential
- our passion for learning and growth
- our skills in working with complex systems: bringing together stories, experiences and key insights from different parts of the system, and creating space for wisdom to be shared and understood.

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Five things you should know about SOVA Nottingham

1. Between September 2009 and October 2010 **152** children started a mentoring relationship with an adult volunteer.
2. Over **80%** of the children who received mentoring achieved one or more of their personal goals.
3. Between April 2009 and December 2010 the project offered a three-day training to **239** volunteers.
4. Between September 2009 and December 2010 the volunteers worked for **15,154** hours, valued at over **£120,000**.
5. **65%** of the volunteers were unemployed and/or students.

Executive Summary

The SOVA Nottingham Children's Mentoring project started in April 2009 as part of the Nottingham 'Early Intervention City' programme strongly endorsed by Graham Allen MP. Its intention was to provide six months of mentoring for children aged 8 - 12 by adult volunteers; its target, in the spirit of 'early intervention', was to work with children who were experiencing difficulties in their life and at risk of getting entangled in criminal activity or anti-social behaviours such as drug or alcohol misuse.

By January 2010, when it had a formal launch event, the project was growing a strong profile with schools and other children's services in the city. We found that a range of professionals who work with children - teachers, practitioners in the Multi-agency Local Teams of the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and other parts of children's service - had high regard for the project.

The successes of the project were underpinned by the leadership for the team which was consistently whole-hearted, trustworthy, and child- and family-focused. It combined the informal and voluntary - mentoring by volunteers - with a strong professional ethos and practice. The team was responsive and referral processes simple and user-friendly; volunteers were well-trained and well-supported; high standards of safeguarding practice and compatibility with the Common Assessment Framework were all in place.

All children need unconditional regard from a trusted adult, individual attention, play and enjoyment, and a chance to 'be themselves'. Mentoring provided this, with the additional bonus that the mentors were volunteers who were actually choosing to spend their time with their mentee.

Children welcomed the chance to spend time out of the family home with an adult 'just for them'; most of them flourished from the individual attention and opportunities to take part in activities - things like going to football matches, ice-skating, seeing a film, which to some children are part of everyday life. Parents and carers were pleased to see their children learning new skills and appearing more settled in their life as well as being excited and joyful about the mentoring sessions; the parents also welcomed a regular break which gave them time to focus on other children in the family, or simply an invaluable breathing space.

In the summer of 2010 the funding to the Early Intervention programme was cut, and projects were forced into a position of competition with one another for continued funding. Decisions had to be made quickly and one of the main factors on which projects were judged was whether they could provide robust evidence of their work having a direct impact on children's lives, through such measures as improving school attendance, reducing criminal activity.

At this early stage the SOVA project was unable to provide such validation and because it had not reached its targets for the number of children who received mentoring, the cost per mentoring relationship was high. The decision was made that it would close at the end of December 2010.

Subsequently a partnership was developed between SOVA and the Family Intervention Project (FIP), to add mentoring to the FIP's offer to the children and families with whom they work. This targeted, and much-reduced, mentoring service has been funded for the three months to the end of March 2011; its creation reflects the recognised value of mentoring as part of an integrated package of support to families.

The response to the closure of the SOVA Nottingham project that we heard from professional practitioners working with the city's children was disbelief and anger. The service was highly valued for a range of reasons and there is no other service in Nottingham that offers primary-school children and their families this level and type of support in that critical period when things start to go wrong but have not reached rock-bottom.

So this report describes a service that was highly valued being withdrawn from the offer to vulnerable children in our city, and raises questions as to how inclusive early intervention services can be evaluated in the short- and long-term without detracting from the very essence that makes them successful.

Hearing the views of the children, the parents, the referrers, the volunteers and the team who together contributed to this evaluation has reinforced our commitment to the city's children and confirmed our belief in the potential of whole-hearted human relationships to strengthen vulnerable children.

Our grateful thanks and warm wishes go to everyone who took part in this evaluation: the children, the parents, the volunteer mentors, the partners and the SOVA team. Also to Emma Lamberton and Julianne Christou for their support with the process.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Summary of Findings

1.1. The Purpose of the Inquiry

The SOVA¹ Nottingham mentoring project started in April 2009 as part of the Nottingham Early Intervention programme. Through the work of Graham Allen MP, Nottingham had a high profile as 'Early Intervention City' and this was one of a series of projects within an overall approach across the age-range 0 - 18.

In the summer of 2010 the funding to the programme was cut and decisions had to be made about how this would be managed. One of the consequences of this was that a decision was made in September 2010 that the mentoring project would close at the end of December 2010.

This evaluation was commissioned by SOVA in November 2010 because it was felt important to have an independent process that explored the project's achievements, its legacy and the learning - for the City and for SOVA - from the experiences of this project. We began the inquiry with the key question

*What has been the impact and value of the Mentoring Project
- to the children, the volunteers, and the City?*

It was our intention at the outset not just to look at inputs and outputs, but to provide a deeper and broader examination, including looking at how the whole system worked and the contribution that different stakeholders made, or might have made, to the project. What this report offers is the story of the project based on the experiences of a sample of stakeholders: the staff team; the Steering Group; the referrers; the volunteer mentors and most importantly the children (also referred to in this report as 'mentees') and their families. We also offer some facts and figures about the project to put it into context, to help the reader make sense of the story and understand the learning we have identified.

As social researchers we recognise that one element of a robust evaluation of such a project requires exploration of outcomes through a longitudinal study of the children and comparison with a similar cohort of children who did not receive mentoring. In the time available it was not possible to undertake such a study although we are aware of such research whose findings underpin the principles and ethos of this project.

1.2. The methodologies

As an organisation our working practice with any strategic inquiry is to bring the 'whole system' together to explore the questions that matter. In this research we had hoped to gather a cross-section of adult stakeholders to gather to hear each other's perspectives, offering a space for collective wisdom to emerge rather than hearing

¹ <http://www.sova.org.uk>

separate stories. This was not possible in our time-scale due to a range of factors, including an Ofsted Inspection of Children’s Safeguarding, the extraordinary weather, and the difficulties faced by the City Council and its employees in the face of the severe financial cuts and potential job losses.

We interviewed a range of different stakeholders and also used questionnaires for mentors and parents. The following contributed directly to this evaluation:

Stakeholder group	Numbers
Children	23 attended the mentees / mentors group session
Parents	4 attended group sessions 7 returned questionnaires
Mentors	20 attended the mentees / mentors group session 4 were interviewed 9 returned questionnaires
Strategic partners	6 were interviewed
The SOVA team	7 team members took part in the group session

Our work is based on the principles of Appreciative Inquiry - the ‘glass-half-full’ approach which seeks to build on the best, rather than starting with the identification of problems. This fits with the ethos of the project in that mentoring too seeks to build on the strengths of a child and support his or her resilience and resourcefulness. Appreciative Inquiry focuses on exploring the conditions that created moments of excellence and periods of exceptional competence and performance in organisations and services – times when people felt most alive and energised. It emphasises collaboration and participation of all the voices in the system, approaching change as a journey rather than an event. Learning from what works and gives life is more effective and sustainable than learning from problems and pathologies: thus in seeking the experiences of the various stakeholders in the SOVA project we sought to find out what they saw as the best of the project as well as what could have made it even better.

1.3. Summary of findings:

Strengths of the project

From the evidence gathered in our evaluation of the SOVA Nottingham project, we offer seven themes as a synopsis of its strengths. The first of these, the team approach, was pivotal and created the conditions for the other six:

1. Creating the conditions for success

The team consistently led an approach that was:

- whole-hearted
- trustworthy
- child- and family-focused

As such it was highly valued in the range of children's services in the city.

2. Essential building blocks

Every Child Matters aims for all children to have the support they need to

- be healthy
- stay safe
- enjoy and achieve
- make a positive contribution
- achieve economic well-being.

These aims require certain building blocks of experience to be in place in every child's life, with some predictability and regularity.

Some of the key ones are: enjoyment; play; anticipation; a chance to change from being part of a problem to simply being a child.

Mentoring offered an opportunity for children to experience some of these, which are fundamental to wellbeing. For some children this was something that was new to them.

3. Child-centredness

Essential to a child's confidence and self-esteem are: unconditional regard; individual attention from a trusted adult; the self-worth that comes from having an adult who chooses to spend time with you simply because of who you are and encourages you to 'be yourself'.

The mentoring programme, offering several hours of individual attention each week from a volunteer who was making a positive choice to spend time with their mentee, uniquely provided these.

4. Solution-focused

The project offered an approach to children and to families that was appreciative and solution-focused, creating the conditions for children to develop strengths and skills in line with the goals they themselves had chosen, and building on the skills that already existed in families.

5. Unlocking community resources

The mentoring encouraged children to make use of the resources in their community: public transport; sports facilities; activities such as Cubs and youth services. In addition the service recruited local people as volunteers, creating social wealth in some of Nottingham's poorest communities such as NG7.

6. Complementary to other services

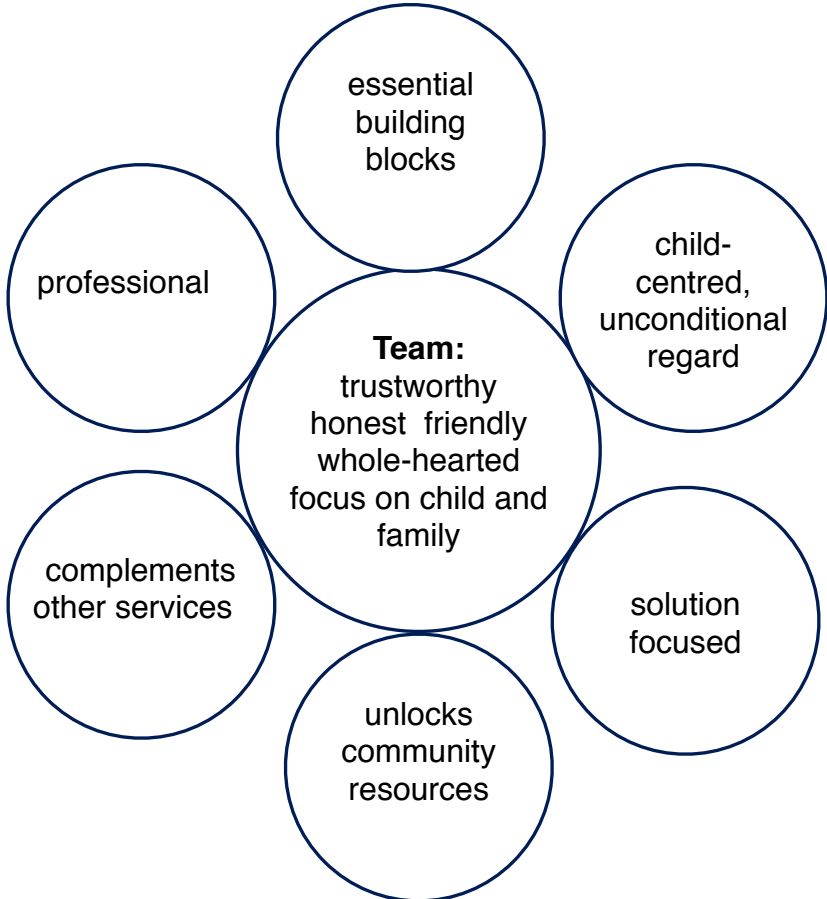
The fundamental building blocks provided for children by the mentoring programme enabled other support services to be more effective with families. In some families

mentoring was seen to work well as part of an integrated and co-ordinated 'package' of support to a family - e.g. in one family there might be one parent who has individual support to enhance their mental health, another parent who gets support from a carers' organisation, a younger sibling attending a SureStart centre - and one or more children being mentored - although in some families it was the only service they received.

A more subtle but equally important factor in the SOVA project was that their approach - friendly, supportive, child-centred, whole-hearted - inspired parents to trust professional services sometimes for the first time. This had the potential to create a shift that opened new doors for statutory services to engage with the family and thus increase the effectiveness of those services.

7. Professional service

The SOVA project was universally described as 'professional' in the sense of being responsive, helpful and inclusive, which in itself seemed to offer hope and open up possibilities for families and professionals alike. This was backed up by robust and straightforward processes and procedures, some of which received local and national recognition as 'good practice'.



These seven features define a service that was uniquely valuable, providing opportunities for children to enjoy and achieve in a way whose power cannot be under-estimated

Project Limitations

We found three key limitations of the project, as follows :

1. Agreement between SOVA and the Crime and Drugs Partnership at the outset to quantitative targets that were ambitious, and potentially unrealistic for a new project run by an organisation new to Nottingham

The competitive tendering process resulted in a contract with a performance management framework that measured primarily by quantitative outputs - e.g. numbers of referrals; numbers of mentee / mentor relationships (see Chapter 3). The project quickly fell behind with these in the early months as they focused on establishing the project, recruiting staff and volunteers and publicising their offer to potential referrers.

This had a cumulative effect and by the 4th quarter of 2009 - 10 the project was seen to be under-performing; the lower numbers of referrals and mentoring relationships created a higher unit cost per mentoring relationship, rising significantly from an expected £900.

In particular the e-mentoring was quickly found to have a low take up from this age group and was felt to be an unsuitable offer. There was no renegotiation of these targets and they became a critical factor in decision making.

2. The design and application of an evidencing tool to measure impact in the short term

The project was one of the early intervention pilot projects and hence was expected to demonstrate rigour in measuring impact. The holistic and inclusive nature of this project - one of its major strengths - mitigated against an ability to measure its direct impact on children's lives in the short term as there were so many different reasons for referrals, entrance points and additional factors to take into account.

The project team sought to create evidence of their impact through evaluation mechanisms that reflected the holistic and multi-dimensional nature of their work and captured its essence of child- and family-centredness. This resulted in a framework with three disadvantages: it became retrospective, it remained incomplete and it was difficult to extract information from it.

3. Delays at the 'matching' stage, finding a suitable mentor for each child

Comments about delay in matching a mentor to a child came up frequently in the evaluation. A number of factors contributed to this, including lengthy delays in obtaining CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) checks in the summer of 2010 due to impending changes in the national arrangements for 'vetting'.

During the project 32 children withdrew from the process before they were matched: many of these had everyday reasons such as changed family circumstances or moving out of the area, but it may be that delays contributed to their withdrawal. There was also a gender imbalance - 75% referred children were boys; 72% volunteer applicants were women - that made it difficult to provide the 'male role model' requested for some of the boys at referral.

Chapter 2: The Context and Story of the Project

2.1. Starting with the children..

Chapter 3 contains a detailed profile about the children referred to the project: if there was a 'typical' child it would be a boy aged 9 referred for support with confidence and social skills and/or anger management. Some referrers specifically requested a male mentor as a 'positive role model'.

What follows are brief stories of three mentees:

Child A was a 10 year old boy referred for support with behaviour. He had become involved with older boys engaged in criminal behaviour, and there were concerns about his behaviour at school and at home, and his poor school attendance.

His targets were

- to attend and enjoy school
- to engage in law abiding and positive behaviour in and out of school
- to develop positive relationships and choose not to bully or discriminate
- to be physically healthy

He had 16 mentoring sessions over 18 weeks, consisting of activities such as bowling, cinema, tennis, swimming and fishing. The mentee had a positive and authentic relationship with the mentor and this was sustained through a period in the middle where the boy's behaviour again became a problem. Towards the end of the relationship school attendance and family relationships improved.

Child B was a 13-year-old boy. The referrer sought help for him to build up his self-esteem and confidence, and access positive activities to support and encourage him to use his spare time in a productive way. The mentee had a cannabis habit at the start of the mentoring.

He had a challenging home situation where there were complex needs - e.g. alcoholism and domestic violence.

He set the following personal targets:

- to engage in law abiding and positive behaviour in and out of school
- to become more physically healthy
- to choose not to take illegal drugs
- to attend and enjoy school

He was matched with a male volunteer, and accessed activities such as bowling, golf range, snooker, cinema and street dancing. In total they had 23 mentoring sessions.

The mentor quickly established a good mentoring relationship and trust with the mentee so that he could talk about his family life and school and how this affected him. After six sessions, the mentee confirmed that he had been keeping out of trouble and was back in school attending each morning. He later went back to school full-time and doing sport three times per week with a family member. Towards the end of the mentoring, he confirmed that he was no longer smoking cannabis and was enjoying the sporting activity

The last few sessions of the mentoring sessions ended well and the mentor felt that the mentee's confidence and self-esteem has improved. However, he expressed concern about the mentee's schooling and noted that he should be supported as much as possible to help him with his emotional needs.

Child C was a boy aged 9 who had been in and out of foster care several times due to complex family crises. The referrer sought support for him with self-esteem, to assist him in being more aware of his behaviour, and to develop hobbies and interests.

His personal targets were:

- to achieve personal and social development and enjoy recreation
- to be safe from bullying and discrimination
- to be physically healthy
- to be mentally and emotionally healthy

It was at times difficult to sustain the mentoring relationship because his living arrangements were unpredictable, but he developed a positive relationship with his mentor and during their 21 sessions he enjoyed playing football, bowling, going out for a meal, cinema, museums and Drayton Manor Park.

2.2. Mentoring and Befriending as part of Early Intervention

What is 'Early Intervention' and why is it important?

The publication **Early Intervention: Good Parents, Great Kids, Better Citizens**², written jointly by Graham Allen MP and Rt. Hon. Iain Duncan Smith MP, describes Early Intervention as

'a social policy based on the belief that it is cheaper and more sensible to tackle problems before they begin, rather than spend ever-greater sums on ineffective remedial policies'.

This publication seeks for all political parties to agree a framework for Early Intervention as a long-term approach to improved parenting and better citizens, seeing Early Intervention as a way of breaking inter-generational patterns of under-achievement in many communities.

'Early' in this context can have two distinct meanings: either early in a child's life - intervening when a child is very young (for example the Sure Start approach), or early in the sense of heading off family problems before they become entrenched, whatever the chronological age of the child(ren) concerned.

Graham Allen MP has recently (January 2011) published a follow-up report: **Early Intervention: the Next Steps** in which he makes recommendations to the Government that there should be cross-party commitment to Early Intervention *'to provide a social and emotional bedrock for the current and future generations of*

² *The Centre for Social Justice, 2nd Edition 2009*

babies, children and young people by helping them and their parents (or other main caregivers) before problems arise.' He proposes that only those programmes with the most rigorously proven success should be implemented, and suggests the formation of an 'Early Intervention Foundation' and 15 'Early Intervention Places' to pioneer this approach.

What is mentoring and how is it different from befriending?

The Mentoring and Befriending Foundation³ define mentoring and befriending as very similar activities, both involving the development of one-to-one relationships based upon trust and confidentiality. The relationship is often voluntary and has the goal of providing practical assistance. Involvement can be a very rewarding experience and is an opportunity to not only achieve and develop new skills but also to engage and put something back into the community. Mentoring tends to have a stronger emphasis on goal-setting and time limited work, and less on the development of a social relationship, in comparison to befriending which aims to provide a supportive social relationship where none exists. and has less emphasis on goal-setting.

Mentoring and Befriending Standards

The Mentoring and Befriending Foundation offer a set of national standards for mentoring and befriending services as a recognised benchmark for service providers. To achieve the Approved Provider Standards (APS) a service must demonstrate that:

1. The mentoring project or service has a clear rationale or purpose.
2. There is an effective organisational and management structure in place to support the project.
3. The competence of staff involved in the project is developed and maintained.
4. There is a clear process for the identification and referral of service users which takes in to account their needs and suitability for the service.
5. Service users are fully briefed and prepared for their involvement in the project.
6. There is a rigorous and robust recruitment and selection process in place for potential mentors.
7. There are appropriate arrangements in place to safeguard the involvement of participants in the project.
8. Mentors receive adequate preparation and training so they can offer effective support to service users.
9. There is a clear and consistent process in place for matching service users with mentors.
10. There is ongoing supervision and support provided for mentors to help them develop in their role.
11. The progress of relationships is regularly and routinely monitored to determine whether they are functioning successfully.
12. The overall effectiveness of the mentoring project is evaluated to improve its service and outcomes.

³ <http://www.mandbf.org.uk>

SOVA as a national organisation has a good reputation for the quality of its mentoring services, so although SOVA Nottingham did not complete the process for APS Accreditation, its practice was underpinned by SOVA’s own values and strategic aims.

2.3. The journey and milestones of the Project

Date	Milestone	
Pre-April 2009	The Crime and Drugs Partnership (CDP) invite tenders to deliver a mentoring service for young people across Nottingham, as part of the ‘Early Intervention’ programme. (The original tender information suggested that the service would be for teenagers, but when short-listed agencies attended for interview it became clear that the intended age-range was primary-school children.) SOVA win the tender.	
April 2009	1 April: the mentoring project starts with temporary staff from SOVA Derby	
May 2009	Appointments of permanent staff begin: four staff are appointed including a Volunteer Co-ordinator, a Volunteer Support Officer, and the Administrator	Qtr 1
	Emphasis on volunteer recruitment: first training for volunteers delivered	
June 2009	Publicity day at Victoria Centre: 50 contacts made	
July 2009	Project Manager starts	
August - Sept 2009	Contacts build with schools and other agencies to start the flow of referrals	
Sept 2009	Referrals really start when school term starts	Qtr 2
	Second volunteer training	
	First mentee / mentor relationships established	
October 2009	Quality of safeguarding practice recognised by SOVA nationally	

Date	Milestone	
November 2009	5 Nov: Steering Group meets. Reported 528 enquiries about volunteering, 62 volunteers trained and 35 children referred	Qtr 3
	24 Nov: Promotion in Broadmarsh Shopping Centre	
	Data-sharing Protocols highlighted as 'best practice' by Nottingham City Council	
December 2009	e-mentoring starts	
January 2010	8 Jan: launch of project at the Galleries of Justice. Supported by Graham Allen MP.	Qtr 4
	21 Jan: Steering Group meets. Reported 94 volunteers now trained, plus 40 more by end of month. The need to provide evidence of impact was noted as a high priority.	
	Consultant from 'Early Intervention' programme starts work with Project Manager on measuring impact	
February / March 2010	3 staff, including the Administrator, leave - big impact on small team	

Date	Milestone	
April 2010	First Volunteer event at Royal Children pub	Qtr 1
	Consultant proposes materials for measuring impact - SOVA thought these unsuitable for the project thus causing delay in implementing a system	
April-July 2010	No administrative support to team	
May 2010	17 May: 2 Volunteer Support Officers start	
July 2010	Mid-July: threat of project closure. Target of 70 matches in the next Quarter agreed with Commissioning Officer	
	14 July: Volunteer event	
	19 July: New administrator starts	

Date	Milestone	
	<p>24 July: Steering Group meets. Noted delay in matching mentors to children. CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) clearances delayed due to national changes in CRB systems, accompanied by 'rationing' of application forms for CRB checks while the changes take place. Noted that the Early Intervention programme likely to end on 31.03.11, with discussion about future sources of funding; also scaled-down project costings to be developed.</p>	Qtr 2
	<p>28 July: Parent / children Focus Group is held</p>	
	<p>Project secures a place on the Health and Environmental Partnership</p>	
August 2010	<p>VSO volunteer leaves</p>	
September 2010	<p>De-commissioning of project is announced</p>	Qtr 3
	<p>04 Sept: Consultation Day for mentees at Wollaton Park</p>	
	<p>Last cycle of training for volunteers begins</p>	
	<p>Final volunteer recruitment event at South Notts College</p>	
October 2010	<p>Redundancy notices received by staff team</p>	
	<p>Last volunteer event at Salutation pub</p>	
	<p>Worker from Government Office East Midlands attached to project for 2 days p.w.</p>	
	<p>Oct / Nov: trips arranged for young people to Notts Forest FC and Notts County FC</p>	
	<p>Project Manager becomes 'third sector' rep for the Children's Partnership Board and Integrated Processes Board</p>	
November 2010	<p>This evaluation is commissioned</p>	
December 2010	<p>Funding is found for secondment of a SOVA worker to the Family Intervention Project (FIP) - part of the Early Intervention Programme - from January to March 2011, to create a mentoring service for children in families with whom the FIP is working</p>	
	<p>31 December: the project formally closes; the FIP service continues</p>	

Chapter 3: Facts and Figures

3.1. Profile of Children

Who was referred?

247 children - 186 boys (75%) and 61 girls - were referred by 49 different agencies.

Of these, 152 (62%) received mentoring; 62 (25%) were waiting to be matched in October 2010 when it was announced that the project would close at the end of December.

72% of the children who received mentoring were boys, and 28% girls.

How old were they?

Age at referral varied from 5 to 16. The most common age for a child to be referred was 9 years (23%) and 28% of the group of children who received mentoring were aged 9 years.

The age-band 9 - 11 years accounted for 63% of the children referred and over 75% of the children matched with a mentor.

Age (yrs)	No. referrals	%	No. matched	%
5	1	0.40%		
6	1	0.40%		
7	5	2.02%	1	0.69%
8	22	8.91%	10	6.94%
9	57	23.08%	41	28.47%
10	51	20.65%	32	22.22%
11	48	19.43%	36	25.00%
12	31	12.55%	13	9.03%
13	15	6.07%	12	8.33%
14	6	2.43%	3	2.08%
15	9	3.64%	4	2.78%
16	1	0.40%		
Total	247		152	

Which ethnic groups did they belong to?

72% of the children referred were White British; the next highest ethnic group was dual heritage White British/Black Caribbean; these two together included over 80% of the children referred.

76% of the children who received mentoring were White British; the next highest groups were dual heritage White British/Black Caribbean, 7%, and Caribbean 6%.

Where did the children live?

The children who received mentoring were spread across the city, as shown below. In its early days the project tried to provide mentors from a different area of the city to help preserve the family's confidentiality and avoid casual 'bumping into each other'. This policy was reversed in the light of experience, which indicated that the relationship was more likely to succeed if it was easy for the mentor to get to the mentee's house and to be aware of local resources, bus routes and so on.

Home postcode area	Number	%
NG5 Sherwood, Arnold, Bestwood, Carrington, Top Valley, Rise Park	42	27.63%
NG8 Aspley, Wollaton, Whitemoor, Bilborough	32	21.05%
NG7 New Basford, Forest Fields, Hyson Green, Radford, Lenton	19	12.50%
NG6 Bestwood Village, Bulwell, Old Basford	19	12.50%
NG3 Carlton, St Ann's, Mapperley	17	11.18%
NG2 Sneinton, The Meadows, West Bridgford	10	6.58%
NG1 City Centre	2	1.32%
NG9 Stapleford, Lenton Abbey	1	0.66%
NG4 Carlton, Netherfield	1	0.66%
NG11 Clifton	7	4.61%
NG16 Eastwood, Kimberley, Nuthall, Watnall	1	0.66%
NG18 Broomhill, Sherwood, Mansfield	1	0.66%
TOTAL	152	

Who referred the children?

Of the 46 referring agencies, 61% were primary schools and 10% secondary schools.

Primary Schools	28	60.9%
NCC Children's Services	4	8.7%
Secondary Schools	6	13.0%
Voluntary Sector	3	6.5%
Housing agencies	3	6.5%
Health	1	2.2%
YOT	1	2.2%
TOTAL	46	

Of the children who received mentoring, just over a half were referred by primary schools and about 30% were referred by other children's services including the MALTs (Multi-Agency Locality Teams), the Targeted Support team and the Family Intervention project.

Why were they referred?

The referral process invited two reasons for referring a child for mentoring. Anger management was the most common first reason for referring children (nearly 20%), with domestic violence second (15%). The most common second reason was 'confidence and social skills' (26%) followed by anger management (17%).

Taking the two reasons together, confidence and social skills was the most common, occurring as first or second reason for over 20% of the children. This was followed by anger management / violence (18%), and family relationships (13%).

	1st reason for referral		2nd reason for referral	
Confidence and Social Skills	36	14.6%	65	26.3%
Anger Management / Violence	49	19.8%	42	17.0%
Family Relationships	29	11.7%	34	13.8%
Domestic Violence	38	15.4%	9	3.6%
School Attendance / Exclusion	24	9.7%	16	6.5%
Offending / Antisocial Behaviour	22	8.9%	12	4.9%
Health / Mental Health Issues	16	6.5%	9	3.6%
Staying Safe from Harm	7	2.8%	15	6.1%
Drugs and Alcohol	5	2.0%	17	6.9%
Bullying	5	2.0%	10	4.0%
Unknown	6	2.4%	8	3.2%
Abuse / Neglect	7	2.8%	5	2.0%
Special Educational Needs	1	0.4%	4	1.6%
Bereavement	2	0.8%	1	0.4%
TOTAL	247		247	

The group of 152 children who received mentoring closely mirrored these proportions, with anger management as the most common first reason for referral (18%) and domestic violence second (16%), and ‘confidence and social skills’ the most common second reason (23%) followed by anger management (18%).

3.2. Profile of Volunteer Mentors

The project was contacted by 960 potential volunteers. They came through a wide variety of sources, the most common being through a Volunteer Fair or finding volunteering opportunities on the Internet, with local Volunteer Centres also playing an important role.

How did they hear of the project?	Number	%
Volunteer fair	155	24.1
Web : Other	120	18.7
Local Volunteer Centre	92	14.3
Other	72	11.2
Web : SOVA Vol Appl Form	72	11.2
Word of Mouth	53	8.2
CVS	52	8.1
Leaflet or Flyer	10	1.6
County Volunteer Centre	7	1.1
Local Newspaper Advert	6	0.9
Poster Advert (not newspaper)	4	0.6
Not recorded	317	33
TOTAL	960	

From these original enquiries, 286 (30%) interested people completed application forms: 206 women (72%) and 80 men. Their ages ranged from under 18 to over 56, with almost half being under 25.

Age	Number	%
under 18	1	0.4
18-25	140	49
26-35	85	29.7
36-45	31	10.8
46-55	19	6.6
56-65	10	3.5
TOTAL	286	

In total, 239 people (25% of the original contacts) were trained although not all of these became active mentors.

Which ethnic groups did they belong to?

Of those for whom ethnicity is recorded (233), the majority were White British, although there was a greater diversity than the children referred.

Ethnicity	Number	%
White British	126	54.1
Caribbean	29	12.5
White and black Caribbean	17	7.3
African	14	6
Indian	12	5.2
Any other white background	9	3.8
Pakistani	5	2.2

Do not wish to say	5	2.1
White and Asian	4	1.7
White Irish	4	1.7
Any other black background	3	1.3
Any other mixed background	3	1.3
Bangladeshi	1	0.4
White and black African	1	0.4
TOTAL	233	

What was their employment status?

About a quarter of the volunteers were in full-time employment and almost another quarter were students and a third quarter registered as unemployed. Only 2 reported themselves as 'retired'.

Employment status	Number	%
Full time employed	74	25.9
Student	63	22
Registered unemployed	62	21.7
Part time employed	26	9.1
Part time & Student	19	6.6
Unregistered unemployed	16	5.6
Houseperson / Carer	10	3.5
Do not wish to say	8	2.7
Self employed	6	2.1
Early retired	1	0.4
Retired	1	0.4
TOTAL	286	

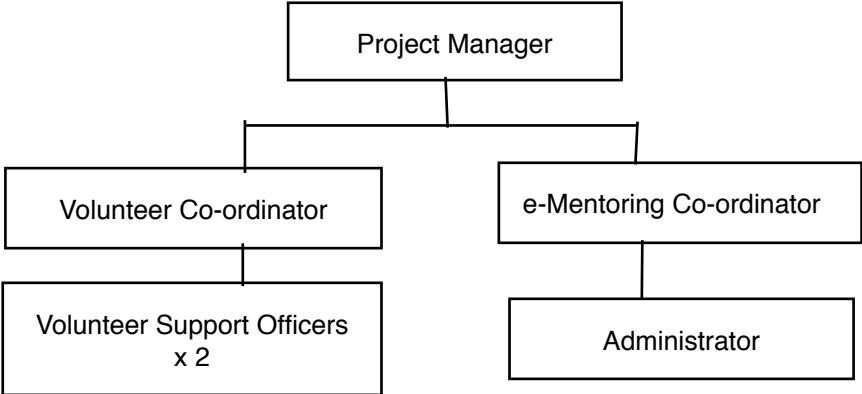
Where do they live?

795 (about 90%) of the potential volunteers came from Nottingham City and its immediate surroundings. The rest were mostly in the East or West Midlands although there were also contacts from Northumberland, London, Kent and Gloucester.

Within the City the spread was as follows:

Home postcode area	Number	%
NG7 New Basford, Forest Fields, Hyson Green, Radford, Lenton	167	17.5
NG3 Carlton, St Ann's, Mapperley	132	13.8
NG5 Sherwood, Arnold, Bestwood, Carrington, Top Valley, Rise Park	117	12.3
NG8 Aspley, Wollaton, Whitemoor, Bilborough	97	10.1
NG2 Sneinton, The Meadows, West Bridgford	85	8.9
NG9 Beeston, Stapleford, Lenton Abbey, Chilwell	54	5.6
NG6 Bestwood Village, Bulwell, Old Basford	51	5.3
NG1 City Centre	47	4.9
NG4 Carlton, Gedling Village, Netherfield	45	4.7
TOTAL	795	

3.3. The team structure



The initial structure of the team was as above. This was changed after a short time, partly because the response to e-mentoring was so low that it did not require a dedicated co-ordinator post, and partly to create a more integrated team in which all the members were involved in both the face-to-face and e-mentoring aspects of the service.

A flatter structure was also created, so that the Project Manager managed all team members: two Co-ordinators, two Support Officers and an Administrator. In this structure it would be possible for Co-ordinators to get some supervisory experience by managing, for example, a VSO volunteer.

3.4. Outcomes for mentees

Feedback questionnaires

After some work with the Nottingham Early Intervention Evidence Group, the project devised its own means of measuring the impact of the mentoring. This is based on five aspects of how the child is perceived:

behaviour	confidence	attitude	engagement	relationships
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in each of five different contexts:

school	friends	parents / carers	siblings	other agencies
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At the end of each period of mentoring, the mentee, their parent/carer, the volunteer mentor, the school and the agency who referred the child were all invited to complete a questionnaire indicating two 'scores' on a scale of 1 - 5 for the child: firstly their score prior to the start of the mentoring and secondly their score when it ended. There had been an intention to attempt to follow up children six months later, but this was not possible due to the closure of the project.

Some headlines from the returned questionnaires:

Questionnaires were returned concerning a total of 109 children - 76% of the mentored cohort.

None of these had a 'complete set' of five questionnaires from the different respondents: the most received for one child was 4; most commonly (about half the cohort) a single questionnaire was returned; about a third had two questionnaires.

On average, the data shows an improvement in behaviour, confidence, attitude, engagement and relationships across the whole cohort.

42 children scored themselves. Of these,

29 (69%) rated their behaviour in school as improved, with an average increased score from 3.4 to 6.7;

29 (69%) rated their confidence in school as improved, with an average increased score from 4.7 to 7.6;

30 (71%) rated their attitude in school as improved, with an average increased score from 3.9 to 7.5.

20 mentees were scored by their school. Of these,

13 (65%) rated the child's behaviour in school as improved, with an average increased score from 4.0 to 5.7;

14 (70%) rated the child's confidence in school as improved, with an average increased score from 4.6 to 6.7;

12 (60%) rated the child's attitude in school as improved, with an average increased score from 4.0 to 6.5.

40 children were scored by their parents / carers. Of these,

25 (62%) rated the child's behaviour with their parents as improved, with an average increased score from 4.7 to 6.7

26 (62%) rated the child's attitude with their parents as improved, with an average increased score from 4.5 to 6.1

Personal Goals

In addition to the evaluation scheme described above, each mentee identified some personal goals for the mentoring and agreed these with their mentor in their initial session. These were reviewed every week and records kept for each child.

Over 80% of young people felt they had made progress against one or more of their personal goals during their mentoring.

3.5. Outputs

The project was measured by the commissioning body - the Crime and Drugs Partnership - against the following overall targets, which were set at the beginning of the commissioning process and agreed when the tender was awarded.

Measure	Target 2009-11
Percentage of the cohort who complete mentoring rate the support received through the project as 7/10 for helpfulness	70%
Number of referrals in to project	409
Number of face to face mentor relationships established	360
Number of e-mentoring relationships established.	106
Percentage of young people referred from the Youth Offending Service not committing an offence during mentoring period.	20%
Percentage improvement in school attendance by cohort referred to project through EWOs	40%
Percentage of young people cohort with increased confidence / improved social skills.	60%
Percentage of young people cohort with enhanced knowledge/ understanding of healthy lifestyles.	80%
Number of volunteer mentors completing training	237
Number of volunteer mentors gaining accreditation	155
Number of positive media stories generated	25
One Nottingham outputs	
CN2 The number of individuals supported to get involved, or develop their involvement, as volunteers or active citizens	200
CYP6 The number of young people, in priority groups / areas, engaged in targeted intervention programmes	337
ES1 The number of people, from the priority groups / areas, accessing specialist advice, volunteering, training or education, through specifically targeted assistance.	300

The information for reporting on subjective changes for the mentees - i.e. increased confidence, healthy lifestyles - came mostly from the mentors, through the records of their mentoring sessions and the records of their supervision and support. Where possible these were backed up by the end-of-relationship questionnaires.

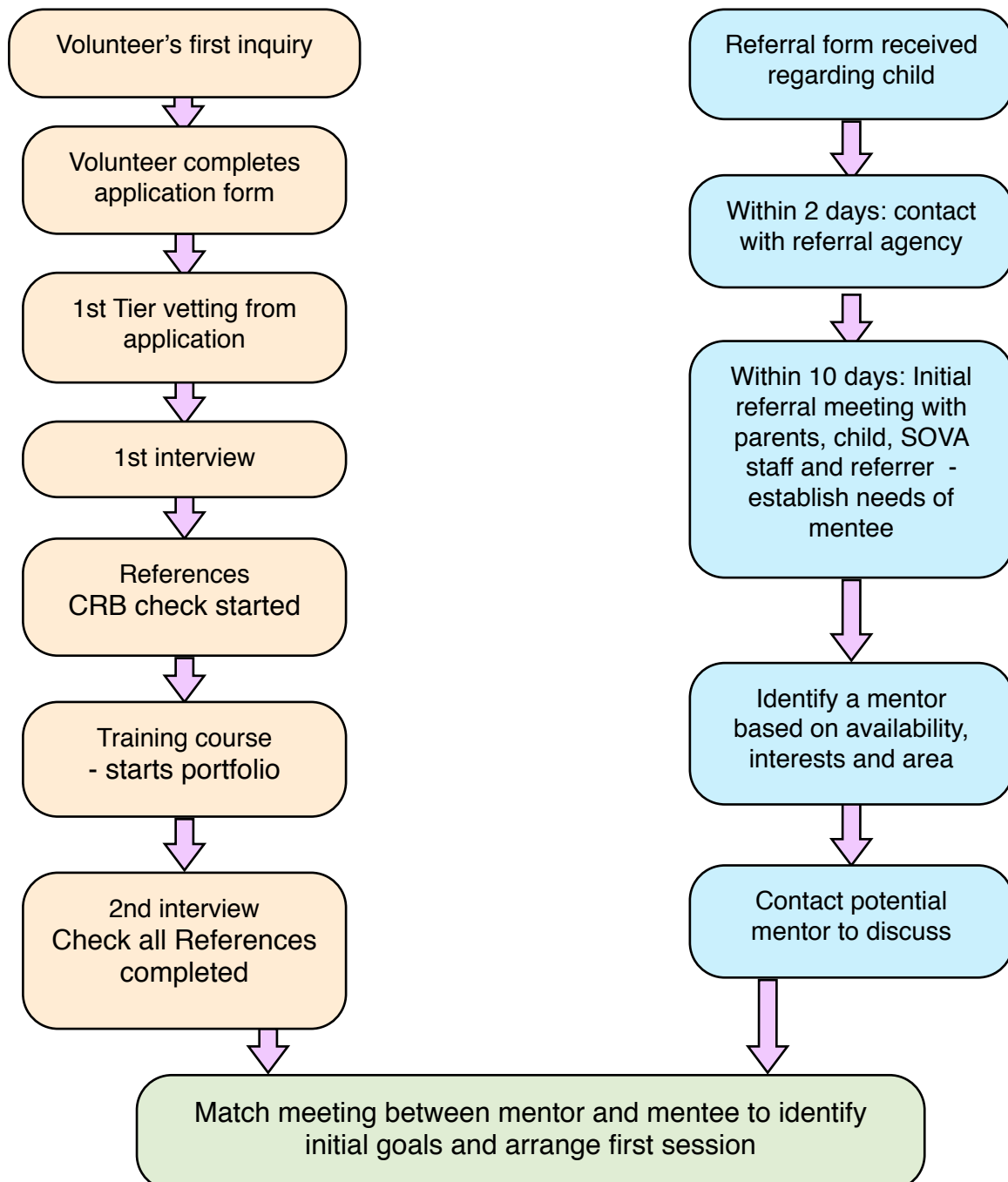
The output targets relation to referrals and relationships established were spread over the expected period of the project and SOVA quickly fell behind in meeting them as they sought in the early months to recruit the team, establish a presence in Nottingham, create a profile for the proposed service, recruit and train volunteers, and gain the trust of referrers and families. As a consequence of lower uptake of the service, the unit cost per mentoring relationship rose.

This had a cumulative effect and by the 4th quarter the project was seen to be significantly under-performing. In particular the e-mentoring was quickly found to have a low take up, and was not felt to be a suitable offer to the younger age group.

There was no renegotiation of these targets and these became a critical factor in decision making when budget cuts in the Early Intervention programme became imminent during 2010.

Chapter 4: How did the project work?

The following diagram summarises the steps to bring mentor and mentee together. Prospective mentors could choose to drop out at any stage during the preparation process; engaging with the service is also voluntary for children and families.



After the first session of mentoring, mentor and mentee were contacted, and there was continuing contact with SOVA staff throughout the six months of mentoring.

Mentors were consistently encouraged to be child-centred and to explore the resources in the child's own community. They received continuing support from the team in different forms, including regular one-to-one support and supervision sessions underpinned by the SOVA practice guidelines; group events for volunteers which were widely publicised by e-mail, phone and texting. Immediate advice was also available from the team - for example, if a mentor was seeking inspiration about places to go or activities to do with a mentee. Mentors also continued to maintain their portfolio with the aim of becoming accredited through the Open College Network.

The referral agency were not contacted again other than receiving the evaluation questionnaire at the end of the mentoring, although children involved with other services might be subject to regular reviews (eg through the Common Assessment Framework) to which SOVA contributed.

Chapter 5: Experiences of children and their parents

The 'target group' for the project, as stated earlier, was

'young people between the ages of 8 and 12 years who are experiencing difficulty in their lives and may be at risk of offending or engaging in anti-social behaviour.'

Who are these children? - we described three of them at the beginning of Chapter 2. They are children struggling with the circumstances of their lives, whether this is a condition of their own such as Asperger's Syndrome; mental illness in a parent; exposure to a drug culture in their neighbourhood; domestic violence in their family home... or a wide range of other situations. Some are unsure of themselves, not confident in their abilities, wary and shy or angry and aggressive. Many are boys who have not had a positive male role-model in their lives and are not sure what it means to be a happy healthy man in the 21st century.

First and foremost they are children who deserve every opportunity to get on in life, to be supported by the adults around them to find positive ways out of tough situations, so that they have the best possible chance to become the next generation of successful parents and citizens.

5.1. What children said

To hear the voices of children, this section starts with some quotes from the feedback questionnaires completed by children at the end of their mentoring experience:

"Now I think before I do things - keep out of trouble."

"I feel more calm having a mentor because I get my own time."

"My behaviour and my personality have changed. I work hard and ignore people winding me up. My friends like me more."

"If I could change one thing I would want a mentor for 2 years."

"I have started at Cubs and am spending more time with friends. I tell my parents when I have a problem. I'm feeling more confident."

"I try to talk to people about problems more now. Falling out with friends less. I enjoy school more."

Evaluation event for children and their mentors

In order to ensure that children were involved in this evaluation, we sought feedback from children currently in a mentoring relationship through a group event which they attended with their mentors. This was held at the Ten-Pin Bowling Centre in Nottingham city centre, where the group had a meal and went bowling after our session with them.

In the spirit of the SOVA project we aimed to keep the event child-centred and to create enjoyable and appreciative ways to hear their voices.

23 children and 20 mentors attended.

Children and mentors were offered opportunities to give feedback in different ways through shared activities:

- by each mentor introducing their mentee, and vice versa, to another pair - saying something they are really good at;
- by scoring from 1 - 10 (1 = disagree ☹ and 10 = agree ☺) some simple statements about the project
- by creating a small tableau (in groups of four) of the 'Best' of the SOVA project;
- by a circle game where anyone could come into the centre and say one thing they would change about the project, and anyone who agreed also stepped in.

Introductions:

There was a lot of warmth and laughter during the session when mentors and their mentees came up with each other's talents and skills as they introduced them to another mentor / mentee pair.

A lot of them described sporting skills - football, ice skating, P.E., badminton, basketball, ten-pin bowling, swimming - and others highlighted creative skills like singing, dancing, drawing, cooking, reading, making collages and taking photos. There were also people in the group who were good at maths, using computers, and video games.

A skill that came up several times was '*making me laugh*' and '*being funny*', along with '*being herself*' and '*being polite*'. One mentee described her mentor as '*always being there for me*' and another '*taking me out*'.

Do you agree with...

Both children and mentors joined in this game. The numbers shown in the table below are the number of people who positioned themselves at the different points on the 1 - 10 scale.

There was a lot of movement in this game and the mentors and mentees are not separated out in the counting. We observed in the second and third statements that a few children deliberately chose to be 'different' and place themselves away from the crowd, so there may be some skew in those groups.

The most significant finding was that the overwhelming majority of the combined group feel that they have learned a lot and gained in confidence from mentoring.

☹️ 1									😊 10
This project has given me more confidence									
3						2	2		36
I have learned a lot from mentoring									
3					3		4	3	30
I feel better about myself because of the mentoring									
5				9					29
Through mentoring I have done things I have never done before									
19	2				10		2	2	8
Mentoring has helped me at school or in work/my career									
4			7		3			3	26
It has been good for my family as well as me									
		11			5				27

What's the best of the project?

Most mentees identified activities: several mentioned ice-skating, as well as going to football matches, swimming, walking, taking pictures, 'learning to fix my bike' and watching new movies. Finding out about new places was also featured.

Improving behaviour and 'learning to control my anger' were mentioned, whilst another two children focused on school subjects: maths and reading.

The mentors were also included in this activity, and they highlighted their own learning from their mentees. This included 'new adventures', 'stretching myself in new ways', learning about football teams, and even learning to like McDonalds!

One thing I would change...

Below are the topics that were raised by the group. Those marked with an asterisk * were raised by mentors, the rest by the children themselves.

The one thing I would change is...	How many agreed?
The project would be longer	26
Having more group activities	21
Having the chance to play more sport	9
Not being let down by my mentor *	10
Having mentors working in schools *	34
Having less MacDonalds! *	4
Having more MacDonalds!	10
More sharing of ideas, e.g. suggestions from other mentors of places to take mentees *	24
Having better ways to find out about the project *	2

SOVA's Consultation Day

The SOVA team had also held a Focus Group in July 2009 attended by 3 children and 3 parents, and a Consultation Day in September 2010 attended by 5 children.

The consultation day asked children about the activities that they had taken part in, and as well as those mentioned above, these mentees had been to the City's parks, and other tourist attractions such as Nottingham Castle, the Galleries of Justice and the Caves.

They all believed mentoring had helped them to get on better at school, but had not made much difference to how they get on with their friends. Only one commented on a difference to how he got on with parents/carers.

All thought they were more confident in school since the mentoring, and two felt more confident with their parents.

When asked about their behaviour, three felt they behaved better in school, and two thought they were better with their brothers and sisters. With their friends and their parents they saw little change in their behaviour. All thought the mentoring had been good for them, and all agreed that having a mentor has made them deal differently with problem situations.

When asked what was the best thing about having a mentor, they said::

"Lots of fun...

Get out of the house...

Stops me from getting into drugs...

Kind - treat you like a young person...

Do things you don't normally do...

Go wherever you want"

5.2. What parents said

Four parents - representing 10 mentees - attended group sessions, and another seven returned questionnaires.

Their feedback is on the whole extremely positive, and all would recommend the SOVA project to another family.

What did parents see as the best of the project?

The primary emphasis of their responses was the importance for the children of having an independent adult to talk to and do things with. Both aspects of the relationship - someone 'to speak to about things' - and the opportunity to do activities of choice and learn new skills were seen as equally important.

Parents noticed their child(ren) growing in confidence and 'coming back happier' from having an adult who had time to focus wholly on them.

Several parents recognised that the mentoring sessions gave the child a chance to talk about things that were going on at home and to get advice or a different perspective from someone they trusted and respected. This was seen as particularly important when there were difficulties between the parents.

One parent described mentoring - where children lived a different experience and were able to re-define themselves - as more helpful than the one-to-one counselling they had also been offered. They now had new interests and more positive things to focus on than the 'problems' at home.

There was also recognition of how mentoring offered children a choice: 'doing what he or she wanted to do'. Activities could be simple - for example walking, going to the cinema, the ballet or the theatre - or more specific such as fostering a talent at a particular sport such as ice-skating, badminton or indoor cricket. One parent spoke of the importance of her

"The benefits my son has received have been excellent and I would recommend it to anyone. ... He seems much more motivated especially in sport and his behaviour at home has got much better since his mentoring began. J (mentor) has been brilliant."

"SOVA came along and gave him his own space, he didn't have to tell me what happened. She gave him attention, he felt special, she listened. And it gave me time to spend with his younger sister."

"My wife suffers from chronic illness, both physical and emotional. SOVA got the children out of the house, into 'fresh air' - provided someone they could speak to properly. It helped with their confidence."

"It gives them time away on their own. Kids need their own space, need someone to show them a different path. Sometimes they listen to other people more than to their mum."

son being able to enjoy his childhood, and the mentoring providing opportunities for that.

The benefits of travelling by public transport for building self-confidence and offering affordable options for the future were noted.

Parents spoke too of the benefits for themselves of simply having a break, which was important. For some this offered opportunities for them to focus their attention on other children in the family. One single mother with four children who had each had their own mentor had really welcomed the individual focus on each of her children.

"A lot of people do judge, but there was none of that with SOVA."

One parent felt that this was the first time she had been offered real help. Three also welcomed the non-judgmental approach of the mentoring scheme in comparison with some other children's services they had experienced: they found the SOVA staff friendly and helpful, and felt listened to and understood for the first time (*"She listened. and didn't think I was 'psycho-mother'!"*).

"My children got excited beforehand, looked forward to their sessions."

"It also gives the carers a break from the children which sometimes carers are desperate for."

What did parents think could have made the project better?

More than half of the parents could not think of any improvements to the project. Comments included: *"Everything is spot on"* and *"Completely satisfied with all aspects of support given"*.

"He seemed stronger inside of himself after the mentoring."

Suggestions for improvements included a longer mentoring period (*"Six months is not enough..."*) and two parents mentioned the time taken to 'match' one of their children with a mentor which caused some rivalry when another child in the family was able to have mentoring sessions sooner.

"It's dead normal, like having another aunt or uncle who has time for you."

One parent had had some difficulties with a mentor whose timekeeping was poor (this was subsequently dealt with by the SOVA team) and one suggested that there should be more 'enforcement' to make the child attend the mentoring sessions.

"My daughter absolutely loved it! She went to the ballet, out for a meal, swimming and to the library. It was a very special time for her."

Would parents recommend the project to another family?

The answer to this question was a resounding 'yes' from all parents, recognising and welcoming the benefits to the child as well as to themselves. A parent of four children who had all had mentoring spoke of the opportunity to spend time with the others when one child was out, and a 'blissful breathing space' when all four were out with their mentors at one time.

SOVA's Focus Group

The SOVA team organised a Focus Group of parents and children in July 2010. The views expressed were similar to those described above: expectations (e.g. impartial support; trusting relationships; children not to be bored; to do fun activities) had largely been met.

They felt that 6 months was not long enough; delays were mentioned several times and one person had experienced poor communication with staff.

They gave numerous examples of how the family had benefitted: freedom for children to show emotions; friendships; more tolerant; self-confidence; given tools to cope with situations. The benefit of a positive male role model was mentioned several times.

When asked what they would like to see from SOVA in the future, a 'catch-up' contact six months after the mentoring had ended was suggested; also to get together with other families involved in mentoring; and a long-term mentoring programme in schools.

Chapter 6: Experiences of the volunteer mentors

Four mentors participated in telephone interviews, and another nine responded by questionnaire.

Their feedback on the project is, on the whole, very positive, and many expressed their disappointment that the project had come to a close.

6.1. How did mentors find out about the project?

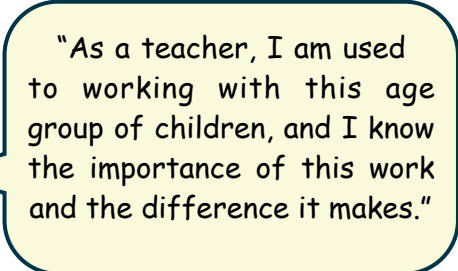
Mentors found out about the project through different sources, with the most common being the Internet and word of mouth. Of those mentors discovering the project on the Internet, three specifically referred to Do-it, the national online database of volunteering opportunities. For those mentors who found out via word of mouth, two received recommendations from those already working as volunteer mentors for the project. Other ways in which mentors discovered the project included a local Voluntary Action Centre, an information stall at a local volunteering event, and the Nottingham City Council staff intranet.

6.2. What attracted mentors to the project?

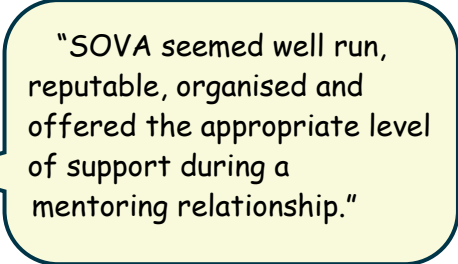
The predominant factor in their responses was the opportunity to gain, or expand on, relevant experience. Some wanted the chance to discover if working with children was a career path they would like to pursue, whereas others, having decided on a career involving work with children, wanted to build on their qualifications with practical experience. The project provided the opportunity to meet, and talk to like-minded people, and find out if they were following similar routes in their careers.

The project also appealed to those with existing experience of working with children, providing some mentors with the chance to work with a different age group than they had previously, and the opportunity to use their skills to help a worthwhile cause.

Being able to help children was important for many mentors. They spoke of supporting children who may not have had as many opportunities as themselves, and of giving children some guidance in their lives.



"As a teacher, I am used to working with this age group of children, and I know the importance of this work and the difference it makes."



"SOVA seemed well run, reputable, organised and offered the appropriate level of support during a mentoring relationship."

The location of the project appealed to mentors as it meant that they could 'give something back' to their local community and it was easy for them to travel to. One mentor commented on how the project fitted easily in to their lifestyle.

Some mentors spoke of the reputation of the project, and how they had ‘heard good reports’, which attracted them to it. Two mentors commented on how reading about what the project stood for, and its mission and aims, convinced them it was something they wanted to get involved in.

6.3. How did mentors feel about the way they were trained and prepared for their role?

Mentors’ feedback on their training and preparation is, on the whole, very positive. Mentors spoke of the three-day training as being in-depth, well structured and thorough, covering a wide range of topics including health and safety, the difference between a friend and a mentor, and how to be prepared for potential ‘worse case scenarios’.

“The training helped me approach my mentoring relationship naturally, but a little more at ‘arms length’ so gave me the confidence to feel I was equipped with whatever came up.”

Although some mentors commented on how they still felt apprehensive as ‘training can never prepare you for the real thing’, others said the training smoothed out their anxieties, allowed their questions to be answered and helped to give them the confidence they would need to work with a child.

“The training was orchestrated in a way which met the needs of lots of different learners and offered plenty of opportunity to mix with the group.”

Mentors commented on how the training was enjoyable and motivational due to a competent training team. They referred to the practical and interactive nature of the training, which included completing a handbook and participating in group activities.

“It has been a joy to see how much the mentees enjoyed themselves during mentoring sessions, even if we just did activities such as playing football or badminton.”

Other mentors acknowledged how the training was on a par, or superior to similar training they had previously received. One was impressed that the training offered official accredited recognition.

One mentor raised a concern that, with hindsight, the whole training and preparation process could have been more robust in meeting the needs of what mentors are required to do. Another mentor suggested that the training could have included shadowing an active mentor on a couple of sessions to assist with new mentors’ preparation even further.

6.4. What were the best things about the project for the mentors?

For a large majority of the mentors, working, and building a relationship with their mentee(s) was one of the best things about the project. They enjoyed helping to have a positive impact on the life of a young person, and knowing that they had made a difference.

Mentors referred to the activities they took part in with their mentee(s). For some mentors, it was not only a new activity for their mentee(s), but was something they had not tried themselves before. It was rewarding for the mentors when they could see how much their mentee(s) enjoyed their experience.

"I can see that things were very difficult for my mentee at first but he developed and he opened up to me and we soon built a relationship."

It was satisfying for mentors when they recognised the longer-term benefits and improvements for their mentee(s) as a result of their sessions together. One mentor reported on how, through activities such as photography, her mentee discovered that she was creative, and conversations opened up about her education and her future. Other mentors spoke of how their mentees stopped fighting, started to reach targets, and had improved attendance and behaviour at school.

"The best thing was seeing my mentee develop. I took him to different activities, and he developed his skills, things he would use again. When we first met, he was only going to school once or twice a week, and that slowly increased. He knew his behaviour had to be good to come out with me, and he really started to improve at school."

Another one of the best things about the project for mentors was meeting and interacting with other volunteer mentors and SOVA staff. One mentor praised the staff as being extremely helpful, especially when advice or guidance was required.

Mentors enjoyed the opportunity to meet and work with a new group of people, and associate with others in a similar position of working as mentors to increase their experience. Three mentors spoke of how the project gave them the experience of working with children that they were looking for, resulting in increased industry knowledge and improved confidence with young people.

"The project has given me more confidence in working with younger children, and in being able to communicate and interact on their level. It has made me more determined to work with children. I want to make a difference and help others."

6.5. What difference has the project made to mentors' lives?

Mentors responded that the project had made a positive difference in their professional and/or personal lives.

In terms of their professional lives, mentors reported that the project had given them experience and new, transferable skills that would help with their career progression, and make them more attractive to employers. Mentors commented on how the project had 'opened new avenues' for them in building a career working with children.

"I am now more affirmed in the direction I want my life to go and feel that my understanding of vulnerable children has deepened and the passion I already had has grown considerably."

Some mentors also spoke of how the project has encouraged them to take on further volunteering opportunities, as they have found the chance to help others rewarding and enjoyable.

In terms of their personal lives and development, mentors recognised that the project had provided them with increased confidence, especially in respect of working with young people, and in their own strengths. One mentor described having a deeper understanding of self and others now, whilst another commented that the experience had taught them to be 'more reflective'. Another mentor spoke of how involvement in the project has given them the confidence, after years of consideration, to enquire about fostering.

"I now want to apply for more volunteer work... Gaining more experience will help me acquire new skills, qualifications and understanding, especially working with people from different backgrounds, beliefs and races."

Mentors said that their experience had given them a greater insight into children and young people – how vulnerable they can be and the challenges they face, and present. Some felt that the project had increased their awareness of how to deal with children, and activities they like to do. Others commented on how the experience made them feel more appreciative of their own lives.

"It definitely opened my eyes. I didn't realise there were children that close to home who needed help - and also how easy it is to give them that help."

6.6. What did mentors feel could have worked better in the project?

The most common response regarding improvements to the project was the inclusion of group activities that would allow all of the mentors and their mentees to interact with each other. Suggestions included a trip, for example a day at Alton Towers, or a sports day, that would give everyone in the project the chance to get to know one another.

One mentor specifically referred to the idea of activities with mentees and their siblings who also had mentors, and another suggested mentor-only meetings for the sharing of advice and ideas of mentee activities. Another mentor commented that a list of low cost activities sent to mentors on a weekly basis by SOVA staff would have been extremely beneficial.

One mentor suggested that the project could have worked in partnership with local groups, for example, with free sports projects, to give children sustainable hobbies to help build their social skills, confidence and anger management. Another mentor said they believed the project would have been more successful if mentors could link in to the schools their mentees attended.

Three mentors discussed how they would have liked to be able to spend more time with their mentees, and their wish for the mentoring to be a longer-term process. One mentor raised a concern that their mentee was insecure about things coming to an end, and was worried how they would cope with losing support from someone significant in their life. However, this mentor went on to say how SOVA staff had been providing support on how to handle this situation.

"My mentee had been to 12 different schools, lived all over, and had no consistency. She benefited from having someone to build up trust with and would benefit from having the same person support her through her first year at secondary school, as this is the time that consistency is crucial and she will need that if her chaotic home life continues."

The need for increased support and training was another issue raised. One mentor felt that more support during the first few months of working with their mentee would have been beneficial. Another spoke of the need for training with a 'greater depth' of what mentoring was about, and that stressed the importance of the quality of the mentor-mentee relationship.

Other mentors commented on improvements to the practicalities of the project. One raised an issue with the expenses system, explaining there was a delay to be reimbursed.

Another observed that the SOVA office was always very busy and felt that, whilst staff were efficient at their jobs, the team might be more effective with additional staff members to help manage the large number of volunteers.

In terms of the logistics of the mentee relationship, one mentor commented on how their mentee was only available for mentoring sessions after a certain time, by which point many activities in the area were closed, limiting where they could go. Another mentor lived more than two bus rides away from their mentee, resulting in a long journey to each session.

6.7. How important do mentors feel a mentoring service is, as part of services for children in Nottingham?

All mentors agreed that a mentoring service is extremely important for children in Nottingham. Many spoke of the importance of children having a positive role model at a crucial time in their lives, and that a mentor gives them someone to look up to.

They felt that mentoring provides children with someone to talk to in confidence about any issues and provides them with guidance and support.

"It can be hard for children to talk to a next of kin sometimes. I think it's much easier for them to open up and talk to an outsider."

Some commented on the importance of a mentoring service in having a positive impact on children's behaviour and school life. One mentor, a teacher, said that the SOVA project had a good reputation in the school they worked in, and could see that it was making a significant difference.

"A mentoring service is very important for children who need extra support to achieve their goals, to improve their behaviour, to develop confidence and self-esteem."

Other mentors highlighted the impact a mentoring service can have on parents. One discussed how they had spoken to their mentee's parents who had expressed how useful they had found the service, and how they felt it was essential within Nottingham. Another mentor noted that many families have more than one child, and parents can be very busy. A mentoring service can ease the burden on parents and give children their own time to be themselves freely.

"A mentoring service provides a well-balanced, optimistic, encouraging and focused slice of life to children who often come from chaotic and unconventional homes and need extra support."

Mentors also felt that a mentoring service is invaluable in providing children with new experiences. It 'opens their eyes' to activities, in their local area, that they may not have had the opportunity to try before. One mentor commented that many children in Nottingham come from low socio-economic backgrounds, and mentoring gives them experiences that their families may possibly not have considered, or been able to give them. Another mentor noted that, through new experiences, some of which are free, children can discover what they enjoy, what they are good at, and learn new skills. This can be reported back to parents, to help children continue with their new hobby or skill, when mentoring has been completed.

"SOVA is a necessary and welcomed service for the children of Nottingham, who would otherwise have no alternative outlets."

Two mentors observed that even if a mentoring service is short-term, as is the case with the SOVA project, bonds with children can be established, and differences, even if only small, can be made to their lives.

"Our young people massively need SOVA's services. SOVA has a huge number of volunteers, who feel so passionate about helping our young people, that they are happy to give up their time and effort for no money."

Many mentors concluded by expressing their disappointment that the SOVA project had come to an end. Concerns were voiced over the 'void' that the project would leave behind, as it had made a valuable contribution to 'improving the lives of vulnerable children', and at present, there would be nothing to replace this support.

Mentors commented on how they had enjoyed being part of the project, and were proud to have had a positive influence on children's lives.

Chapter 7: Experiences of the SOVA team

At the start of this evaluation we met with the SOVA team to explore their hopes for the process, their views on what had been the best of the project, what the project has meant to them, the story of the project's life (chronicled in Chapter 2 above) and the learning.

7.1. What did the team hope for from the evaluation?

They hoped that their work together would be accurately described and celebrated; that the complexity of the project would be reflected and honoured; that this would open possibilities for future funding of a similar service; that there would be learning to strengthen future commissioning of children's services to meet the needs of Nottingham's vulnerable children more effectively.

"Mentoring offers support during chaotic times and offers grounded, consistent opportunities for role-modelling and information, which hopefully bring about an improved way of being."

7.2. What does the project mean to different members of the team and what do they most value?

For the children they worked with, team members had seen mentoring opening new doors, new ways to see the world, another way of life and raising children's aspirations. As mentors themselves, some of them had shared their own life experiences, offered a role model and created opportunities for children.

"Mentoring gives kids a bit of fun and time for themselves, time to take stock of what's going on. It has a knock-on effect to family, friends and community."

They valued the impact of mentoring on the children: they had seen children become stronger, more confident, surer of their own worth.

"For example, a young person had never been to the library and was taken by mentor for a first-ever library visit. At his next visit, he was ready and waiting to go again, and had looked after his books in a chaotic home life. That somehow changed the family relationships."

As a team they had a common passion for their work and were proud of their service being child-centred, non-judgmental and professional. Within the team is a wide range of expertise and experience and sharing these have created a strong and highly-skilled team.

They valued good relationships and believed the project to be authentic and whole-hearted. Much of their good work with parents, they believed, went unacknowledged and unmeasured because the stated purpose of the project was to offer a service to

children. They believed that the trust they had developed with parents and the honest conversations they could have were essential to the success of the project and reflected their own relationships with each other in the team.

7.3. What did they see as their successes and challenges?

The team believed they had:

- contributed to changing children's lives
- created a profile for the service which has had a big impact in the city
- demonstrated the value of mentoring as a positive option for supporting families, particularly as part of a multi-agency package of support to a family
- played a constructive role in 'Common Assessment Framework' meetings with other agencies
- built and sustained good relationships with referral agencies
- served as a bridge between different services.

They believed they had done this in the face of the these challenges:

- SOVA having no presence in Nottingham previously, so no existing foundations on which to build relationships and trust
- wariness from other professionals as to whether volunteer mentoring, particularly for this younger age-group, would be safe - so having to prove themselves and gradually build confidence in the service
- a short time-scale in which to build referrals, particularly during school summer holidays
- a general mistrust of e-mentoring for the younger age-group.

7.4. With the benefit of hindsight, how could the project have been even better?

The team identified various learning points.

Some of these were to do with the flow of referrals: more than one person thought it would have been better to have stayed with the original age-range of 8 - 18 rather than focusing completely on younger children, and there was a suggestion of opening the service to a wider geographical area than the City boundary. More promotion work to raise the profile of the project was also suggested, alongside greater investment in recruiting more volunteers to keep waiting times shorter.

In relation to the service offered, ideas included:

- more involvement with families, both offering a more holistic service with formal support to parents, and enabling them to fully understand the ethos and purpose of the mentoring
- more work with volunteer mentors to ensure even better commitment to the ethos of reliability, and support around the quality of relationships. This included more group meetings of volunteers

On a wider perspective it was felt that things could have been better if

- more realistic targets had been re-negotiated when the age-group of children was changed
- there had been better Government support for the Early Intervention programme
- better communication had been achieved with funders and other agencies.

Chapter 8: Experiences of partners

8.1. Referrers

Six professional practitioners were interviewed: between them they had referred about 25 children to the project. Some of them also knew other children who had been referred by colleagues. The referrers worked in MALTs (Multi-Agency Locality Teams) (2), schools (3) and in the Targeted Support team in Children’s Services; they were all practitioners with a wealth of experience of working directly with children in Nottingham.

Their views of the mentoring service were overwhelmingly positive and there was strong agreement that the decision to close the project left a huge gap.

How had they found out about the project?

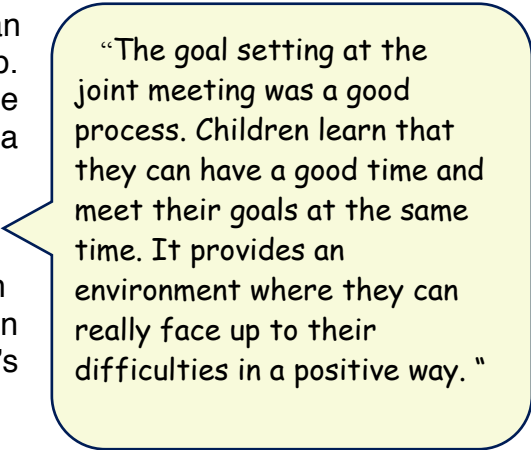
One of them had been to the Launch Event at the Galleries of Justice and had immediately thought of children she knew who would benefit from mentoring; two others were in teams who had had a presentation at their team meeting by SOVA staff, which one described as *‘impressing us all’*. The others had heard of the project either through information that came to their workplace, and / or had had the service highly recommended by colleagues through their professional networks.

What was their view of the project’s processes?

All the referrers agreed that it was easy to make a referral. They found the referral forms straightforward to complete, and one worker remarked that the forms were *‘well-thought-out’*, giving good space for recording concerns about the child and also information that would be useful in finding a mentor to match with the child.

Most referrers had had a prompt response from the SOVA team, although one, who had done an on-line referral, said she had had to chase it up. Five commented that the joint meetings with the family were arranged speedily and were a positive process for all concerned.

There was general agreement that this was a ‘well-run’ project: professional and helpful, with a child-centred approach. One person highlighted her satisfaction with the project’s safeguarding processes.



“The goal setting at the joint meeting was a good process. Children learn that they can have a good time and meet their goals at the same time. It provides an environment where they can really face up to their difficulties in a positive way.”

What was their confidence in the support offered?

Confidence in the project grew as more professionals had positive experiences with their referrals: all the practitioners had referred more than one child. SOVA quickly got a good reputation so that professionals recommended it to each other in their networks.

Most of the practitioners referred children with behaviour 'problems' and/or an underlying lack of self-esteem and confidence that was impacting adversely on the child and those around them.

How had they been involved while the mentoring was going on?

Most of the referrers had no direct involvement with the mentoring once it started. One referred the child for mentoring at the end of a piece of time-limited work with the family, so he did not expect to have any further contact. The referrers who are school-based did hear from the child how things were going if the child chose to tell them. Two of them wondered if they could have been more involved, and one commented that it would have been really helpful to have the mentor at the CAF (Common Assessment Framework) meetings, although she realised that this was not feasible for volunteers.

"I chose not to be too involved - I decided that it would be best not to meddle in the process but rather let mum take more of the initiative. She is the one at home and she is the one that will have to do it."

What were the best things about the project?

The combination of a professional service delivered by committed volunteers seemed to work for families, children and referrers. Referrer perception is that families responded very positively to the non-statutory nature of the service and felt able to be more participative and open.

"This mentoring project is the base of everything we believe in - we are trying to get positive meaningful support that will address individual needs, support family life and build strong values and positive relationships."

Referrers noted the positive impact of the one to one experience for children with an adult away from the family for at least 2 - 3 hours a week. Opportunities for the child and family that were emphasised included:

"Anecdotally there were some lovely things about the project... mentoring is great for some children, having a person you can talk to when you're worried or concerned."

- time for them (the child)
- being listened to

- trying new things
- finding what they enjoy and are good at
- learning about boundaries
- learning about values and how other families function
- being out and doing things positively in their own neighbourhood / city
- having goals
- giving the parents space for themselves or to concentrate on their other children
- offering the family ideas of how to support and see the potential in their own children.

Four referrers commented on the child-centredness of the service, which they found to be a unique quality in the range of provision in Nottingham. It created a relationship in the child's life based on honesty, empathy and unconditional regard - for some children possibly the only such relationship in their life at that time. Professionals recognised that the statutory services they worked in could not do this, and very much welcomed a complementary service that could.

"It made a big difference that the people offering the service were volunteers. They are doing this out of a commitment; they don't really have to be there with the child and this matters."

Several referrers commented on how important it was that the mentors were volunteers - that they were choosing to commit their time and energy to the child.

"The fact that the mentors are volunteers is very important. Parents and carers are much more participative more honest and open about how they are feeling."

Without exception they reported that mentoring was a positive experience for children. One teacher described children looking forward to mentoring as a highlight of their week, seeing it as something special that they wanted to be part of and seemed to gain great benefit from.

"Children learn that there is a world out there. It is so valuable - the shared experience is much more valuable than a person visiting and talking to a child in school for an hour. They have a confidante - they form a relationship and are able to speak to them."

What could have made it better?

All the referrers said there was nothing fundamental that they would change about the project - it did exactly what it was intended to do, and did it well.

Three referrers noted the length of time it could take to find a mentor for the child, and thought it would have been helpful to have had more volunteers. For one child it was recognised that the wait was largely due to the specific request for a male mentor.

These comments were balanced by the appreciation of a service delivered entirely by volunteers, and the special qualities that this offers.

“It could not have been better in any way. Funding it would be better.”

One referrer said it was a shame that the project stopped at age 12.

The impact on children and families

Some referrers gave examples of the children they knew that the project had helped. In one of these examples, where several children in the same family had each had their own mentor, the mentoring was part of an integrated package of support to the family who she described as having ‘*made great strides*’. Two of these children had applied to be peer mentors in the primary school mentoring programme.

Another referrer described a real improvement in one of the two children she had referred: she lived with her grandparents and had welcomed an adult outside the family who would spend one-to-one time with her and listen to her. As a result of the mentoring she had now become a peer mediator at school. The other child, a boy, seemed to enjoy the mentoring and stabilised temporarily at school but he has complex difficulties and has since been referred to statutory services, which the referrer judged not to be so helpful.

“Sitting in a room with a child for an hour talking to them is OK but it doesn't really do it - these children were able to experience all kinds of things in a safe and positive environment.”

What was the strategic importance of mentoring as part of Nottingham's children's services?

It can be seen from the examples of children that for some of them the mentoring service was not truly ‘early intervention’ in the sense of ‘tackling problems before they begin’. For these children the problems in their lives were well-established and deep-rooted. This is not to say that mentoring could not help them: as the referrers described, it was the only service in the city providing such a child-centred service. Mentoring had started to build resilience in children, tackling the fundamental issues such as well-being and self-esteem that can prevent children from engaging fully in education and positive relationships.

“The options for referral are becoming very limited. Although SOVA had referral criteria, it was wide and broad and tackled the fundamental issues of low self esteem and the behaviour and attitude that goes along with that - i.e. it was fundamental stuff.”

Referrers identified the mentoring service as complementary to their own work in the statutory sector. For mental health services, for example,

being able to refer a child to SOVA had enabled them to work through their waiting lists more quickly. All referrers had appreciated the professional and helpful response from SOVA: one of them said she had ten more children she wanted to refer and was *'gutted'* when she heard that the project was closing.

"SOVA is a really important contribution to Early Intervention. It feels like a waste of money to start something, invest in it and finish it before the 2 years are even up. It is a crime."

Although we did not ask this question, every referrer started the interview with unprompted expressions of disbelief, dismay and outrage that the SOVA project had been closed., using words like , *'gobsmacked'* *'such a great shame'* and *'heart-wrenching'*.

"It's a disaster. I hope they are able to pull something out of the woodwork to keep the project. There is nothing else in Nottingham like it, it was a really valuable resource for Nottingham."

8.2. Strategic partners

The 'accountable body' for the project was the Crime and Drugs Partnership (CDP), and beyond this was a dual accountability structure - through the CDP Board and the Early Intervention Board directly to 'One Nottingham' (the Local Strategic Partnership) and also through the Early Intervention Board to the Nottingham Children's Partnership Board, which oversees all services for children, young people and families in the city and is itself accountable to 'One Nottingham'.

A multi-agency Steering Group was established for the project, chaired by the Commissioning Manager from the CDP. It met quarterly, with membership including representatives from SOVA, from different parts of the City Council's Children's Services including Education Welfare, the Common Assessment Framework team and the Curriculum and Strategy team, and from the national Mentoring and Befriending Foundation

Six members of the Steering Group were interviewed.

What did they see as the best of the project?

All of them identified its unique offer to primary school children in Nottingham, which will be missed by families and professionals alike.

Two people mentioned the hard work by the team in engaging such committed volunteers; another highlighted how effectively the team engaged with schools to create a flow of referrals for the service. One month when 76 children were matched with mentors was seen as one of the highlights of the team's achievements.

The positive work done on Safeguarding protocols and adapting the referral form to fit the City's Common Assessment Framework was also mentioned.

It was felt that the project had been successful in engaging with some children on the 'cusp' of poor outcomes, and that the ethos of mentoring provides a positive response to children who may need a little more structure in their lives. There was general agreement that it was a shame that the project did not have longer to establish itself and evidence its success clearly.

What did they see as the learning from the project?

A number of issues were identified concerning the early planning and preparation for the project in Nottingham and how better conditions for its success could have been created. It was acknowledged that when this service was being commissioned (in 2008), strategic commissioning in Nottingham was in its early days and there was still much to learn about realistic targets.

"I personally think it (the project) added the extra dimension that statutory services can't offer.... in my team (Children's Services) we were really shocked about the decision for it not to continue - it was just finding its feet and there was a lot of call for it, especially in schools."

Ideas for improvements at the commissioning stage included:

- building in a partnership with a particular agency (eg the Youth Offending Service) to identify an initial cohort of young people so that referrals would flow earlier. Alongside this it was suggested that sticking with the original upper age-limit of 18 might have helped.
- devising an evaluation process from the beginning that would provide hard evidence of 'success'
- recognising that e-mentoring is not a suitable offer for children of primary-school age. One manager suggested that even for older young people this has not been evidenced as successful because electronic communication is thought to be too detached and distant to build the sort of relationship that is fundamental to successful face-to-face mentoring
- starting smaller with a less costly service, with a provision for it to grow if there was evidence of a high need and an effective response

"The project targets expected a cost per mentoring relationship of £900, this was way too ambitious. The team did infinitely more right than they did wrong, but the performance figures were way off target so there was no robust evidence of effectiveness when cost savings had to be made".

One manager expressed the belief that in future, the only projects that would be commissioned would be those that had a strong evidence-base and a robust evaluation strategy, and were well-targeted and focused on specific behaviour

changes. There was an acknowledgement that this would mean losing some good work, but in the current climate it is necessary to demonstrate what makes an impact.

It was also felt that there was learning for SOVA:

- in agreeing to very high targets, they had under-estimated the start-up time in a city where they had no existing work and no professional networks
- they had not fully recognised the operational differences between mentoring services for teenagers, of which the national organisation has much experience, and a service for primary school children. This was particularly relevant for e-mentoring, which was subject to concerns amongst other professionals working with children about the risks to pre-teens of electronic social networking.

Chapter 9: How to evaluate the impact and value of mentoring?

9.1. Evaluating the impact of mentoring

Measuring prevention

Evidencing and measuring the impact, and thus the success - or otherwise - of any 'early intervention' project aimed at young people who 'may be at risk of' some form of undesirable outcome is widely acknowledged to be a challenging exercise. Many of the people we spoke to about the mentoring project mentioned this, including professionals who referred young people.

There are three main factors that impact on measuring early intervention:

- a) it is seen to be most effective as part of an integrated range of services and in this context it may be difficult to isolate the outcomes of a specific service within a 'package' offered to a family;
- b) for an intervention to be truly 'early', the 'risk factors' in a family need to be spotted early on, preferably before the children actually start to show negative outcomes. This makes it meaningless to measure reduction of such outcomes; the aim is for them never to occur;
- c) the best clear evidence that a particular service has reduced the incidence of a negative outcome at some time in the future for a particular group of children would require long-term study of a sample of children alongside a comparator control group.

Graham Allen MP, in his recent report **Early Intervention: the Next Steps** (2011) emphasises the importance of a rigorous approach to evidencing whether any early intervention really works. Based on work by the Social Research Unit, Dartington, he proposes a four-dimensional framework for standards of evidence. The four aspects are:

Evaluation Quality - has the intervention been evaluated to a high quality, such as randomised controlled trials?	Impact - does the intervention impact on a child's health and development, particularly their social and emotional competences?
Intervention specificity - is the intervention clear about what it is trying to achieve, for whom, when and where?	System readiness - can the intervention be integrated into wider public services, supported by a strategy to realise potential economic benefits?

The Annexes to the report provide some analysis of the evaluation quality, impact and cost-effectiveness of a number of specific interventions, selected within this

framework as examples of 'what works'. None of these are mentoring programmes, although there is a mentoring element to one of them.

Specificity: defining a project by 'problem'

By focusing a project on specific 'problem behaviour' (e.g. reducing offending, or improving school attendance) with correspondingly narrow referral criteria, it is simpler to set targets and measures. For example, SOVA and the Children's Society jointly run a mentoring project in Birmingham, focused on young people aged 16-18 moving into independent living accommodation, either as care-leavers or as unaccompanied young asylum seekers. This is a well-defined group of young people, dealing with the specific challenges of starting adult life without any family support. Measurable outcomes related to this group are relatively easy to create.

By contrast, the SOVA Nottingham mentoring project was described⁴ as *"providing mentor support to young people between the ages of 8 and 12 years who are experiencing difficulty in their lives and may be at risk of offending or engaging in anti-social behaviour."*

Thus the Nottingham Mentoring project defined itself not in terms of 'problems' but with a broader and more positive function of 'supporting young people experiencing difficulty in their lives'. Paradoxically this child-centred and holistic approach immediately creates barriers to evidencing the impact of the project, because quantifying and measuring the outcomes of such support is infinitely more complex, and wise judgements cannot be made on statistics alone but need to take into account the views of the people concerned - mentees and their families, mentors and other professional 'stakeholders'.

Sadly this inability to provide statistical evidence of mentoring being a worthwhile investment led to its premature closure, despite the considerable evidence that we have found that the mentoring service was of great value to children, parents and other professionals in Nottingham working with children.

Evaluation of other mentoring projects

Chance UK⁵

In 2008 Goldsmith's College London reported on children referred to the Chance UK mentoring programme, which like SOVA Nottingham was aimed at 5 - 11 year olds with behavioural difficulties at risk of developing anti-social or criminal behaviour later in life. Over a 5-year period they used the Goodman's Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) with the children at the beginning and end of a one-year mentoring programme. Their methodology included using the initial SDQ score as a threshold indicator to decide whether the child should join the mentoring programme.

⁴ <http://www.nottinghamcity.gov.uk/index.aspx?articleid=8422>

⁵ <http://www.chanceuk.com>

Each child was rated at the end of the mentoring period by a parent, a teacher and the mentor.

The Goldsmith's study⁶ analysed the scores for a sample of 100 children over 4 years (2003 - 2007), and also undertook some more detailed longitudinal studies of a small number of children. Their main finding was a substantial improvement in SDQ scores across a year of mentoring: about half of the children had fallen below the threshold for needing mentoring. These improvements were evidenced across the whole group, unrelated to age or to the gender of the mentor or mentee.

In a separate study Richard Rose and Kyffin Jones from the University of Northampton⁷ describe the evaluation of the impact of another mentoring scheme similar to the SOVA Nottingham project, the key difference being an older target age-range of 11-14. *'The young people who participated in the service were identified as at risk of failure of becoming disaffected either within school or in respect of family or local community relationships. The scheme aimed to provide these individuals with support from trained adults who are not seen to be associated with formal institutions or organizations such as schools or social services.'* Their evaluation interviewed a small sample of each of the various 'stakeholder groups' and also looked at quantitative data in relation to school attendance. It found a high level of satisfaction with the mentoring scheme and evidence of a positive impact upon the attitudes and behaviour of the young people involved.

Rose and Jones go on to say that *'the essence of the support was to sustain a dialogue between the mentor and mentee, which was remarked upon by most of the respondents with skills of patience, listening and a non-judgemental demeanour highlighted. This individualization of support, free from more clearly defined roles and responsibilities enabled the support to be optimised and for meaningful relationships to be developed. A relationship is a highly individualised concept and for some mentors and mentees, the positive relationship gained with a key adult was itself the final goal of the programme whereas for others the relationship was the conduit to address other goals and achievements—some of which were academic in nature.'*

9.2. The Children's Society National Mentoring Initiative

The Children's Society, in its publication on the National Mentoring Initiative' (Dec 09) mentions its work with New Philanthropy Capital, *'to develop a set of well-being indicators that can be used across the sector to measure outcomes and enable more effective comparisons between interventions.'* It goes on to say that *'The National Mentoring Initiative has developed an extensive evaluation methodology, with the support of the University of York. The intention is to measure the impact of the intervention on young people's lives both during and beyond the lifespan of the mentoring relationship.'* This programme has offered mentoring support to over 100

⁶ http://www.chanceuk.com/userfiles/Goldsmiths_Evaluation_-_full_report.pdf

⁷ R. Rose and K. Jones (2007) : *The efficacy of a volunteer mentoring scheme in supporting children at risk* - Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties 12: 1, 3-14

young people at secondary schools in South and East London, working on self-confidence, career paths, school attendance and achieving goals.

Wellbeing index

The Children's Society published a summary of their extensive work on a Wellbeing Index in 2010⁸. Their short index identifies ten important aspects of children's lives:

1. Family
2. Friends
3. Health
4. Appearance
5. Time use
6. The future
7. Home
8. Money and possessions
9. School
10. Amount of choice

Young people can be asked to rate their happiness with each of these aspects of their lives on a scale from zero to ten. So for example a simple form of evaluating the impact of mentoring might be to ask a child to rate their life on these ten indicators at the beginning of their period mentoring, and again at the end.

9.3. The SOVA Evaluation model

The evaluation framework introduced by the SOVA team in July 2010 is described earlier in Chapter 3. It used post-mentoring questionnaires, attempting to gather considerable detail from five different parties (mentee, parents/carers, mentor, school and referrer) about the progress of each child.

The questionnaires asked for 'before and after' scores (on a scale of 1 - 10) for the child's behaviour, confidence, attitude, engagement and relationships, each in the context of school, parents/carers, friends, siblings and other agencies.

The framework has the potential to gather a great deal of detailed information about each mentee; what has actually resulted is incomplete information, because questionnaires have not been returned or are not fully filled in.

The advantage of such a system of evaluation is its potential to provide a great deal of detail for each child within a holistic framework. Measuring five aspects of a child's progress in five different settings through feedback from five respondents provides information that would require specialist software to undertake meaningful analysis of the cohort.

⁸ Gwyther Rees, Haridhan Goswami and Jonathan Bradshaw (2010): *Developing an Index of children's subjective wellbeing in England - Summary* - The Children's Society

It also means that the questionnaires become quite long and require a level of commitment which might act as a deterrent to some respondents; in some cases they are also being asked for information they would not have at first hand - e.g. asking the mentor to comment on behaviour with parents and siblings.

Possibly a simpler format would have been for the mentoring plan - made with the child at the beginning of the mentoring - to select one aspect of behaviour and context for the mentoring to focus on, and to measure only those. This would however tend to mitigate against the whole point of the mentoring relationship being child-led, and detract from the 'time and attention for the child' aspect of mentoring which children and parents have highlighted as one of its best features.

The timing of the introduction of this framework meant that many respondents were being asked to give information retrospectively. It was noted in the 'Project Milestones' earlier (see page 16) that an evidencing system had not been agreed with the Steering Group in April 2010, by which time many mentoring relationships were already underway and some were completed. The project team introduced their evaluation system in July 2010, so from then onwards it was possible to complete the 'before' questionnaires at the beginning of the mentoring; for mentoring that had started prior to July 2010, however, the participants were asked to complete the questionnaires retrospectively.

There are inherent difficulties in this, the most significant being a low return rate, particularly for referrals submitted early in the project's life. The result is that firstly, the picture for any child is incomplete, with feedback from different combinations of people. Secondly there are some children for whom there is no feedback at all. We also found in our interviews of referrers that some agencies (e.g. the Children's Services 'Targeted Support' team) referred a child at the end of their own time-limited involvement with the child and family. So those workers would not be in a position to complete a 'post-mentoring' questionnaire.

In creating feedback mechanisms for mentoring, seeking a number of perspectives is a rightful intention, particularly in a project which seeks to offer a 'holistic' child-centred service. A 'before and after' measurement is also essential. In looking to the future it seems essential to have the measuring system ready to start alongside the start of the first relationship; to create measuring instruments that are user-friendly and timely; and to seek commitment from other agencies to giving their feedback as an integral part of the mentoring process, just as essential as completing the referral form. A partnership between SOVA and the Children's Society to explore the applicability of the Wellbeing Index in this context might be fruitful.

9.4. The Economics of Mentoring

What can mentoring achieve for young people?

Policymakers in the UK who support mentoring as a wise investment in a child's future largely base their evidence on research carried out in the US in 1994-95 on an

organisation called Big Brothers Big Sisters⁹, which has been recruiting adult volunteers to mentor children since 1904. It began as two separate initiatives, one for boys and one for girls who were appearing in the Children's Court in New York City; the separate services joined up in 1977, and Big Brothers Big Sisters now operates in all of the 50 States and in 12 other countries including Australia, Canada, Germany, Ireland and the Netherlands.

The research study followed 950 children, half of them receiving a mentoring service and the other half remaining on a waiting list. The Children's Society¹⁰ report the findings of this study which were that *'young people receiving mentor support are 46% less likely to begin using illegal drugs; 27% less likely to begin using alcohol; 52% less likely to play truant from school; more likely to have improved family relationships, school performance and behaviour.'*

What should mentoring cost?

In the same document the Children's Society suggest a financial analysis that costs a mentoring intervention - which they see as lasting 12 months - at £2,500 per young person. They quote the New Philanthropy Capital study *'Lean on Me, Mentoring for Young People at Risk (2007)* funded by the Pears Foundation, as estimating the average cost to society of each young person excluded from school to be over £64,000 and that of a persistent truant as £44,648.

In our interviews we heard the SOVA Project described several times as 'expensive' in comparison with some of the other work in Nottingham's Early Intervention programme. On a purely financial basis. therefore, its early closure provided more substantial budget savings than would have been possible by closing a smaller project.

This concept of 'expensive', however, takes no account of the social wealth created for the City in terms of:

- a cohort of children who are more confident in themselves as they enter secondary school
- a group of families who have had a 'breathing space' to help them in a difficult period
- volunteer hours (to the value of over £120,000)¹¹ given freely
- the creation of a workforce of 239 trained and skilled mentors, the majority of whom were not in paid work
- how the mentors subsequently made use of their experience as a path to professional work with children
- mentors and young people using resources in Nottingham - cinemas, the Ice Arena, buses and so on - thus supporting the local economy
- the reported increased effectiveness of statutory services because of the trusting relationships that the SOVA team were able to create with families.

⁹ <http://www.bbbs.org>

¹⁰ Children's Society (2009): *National Mentoring Initiative - an Overview*.

¹¹ Hourly rate from Aspiren (2010): *227 million reasons to celebrate the Third Sector in Nottingham*

The new Economics Foundation's 'Social Return on Investment' framework¹² would be a useful tool for measuring the whole value of a project such as this.

The SOVA project - targets and unit costs

The cost of the project was £281,700 in 2009-10 and at the end of December 2010 when the project closed, the actual spend for the financial year was £208,000, giving a total spend from April 2009 of £489,700. The original budget for the full financial year in 2010 - 11 was £299,000, anticipating a total cost for the project of £580,700.

Using the Children's Society estimates above, this equates to the costs of fewer than 8 children excluded from school, or 11 persistent truants.

The cost of a project like this is 'front-loaded': around half of the budget is staffing costs, and the project is time-intensive in terms of the recruitment and training of volunteers, matching and setting up mentoring relationships, and the ongoing support to mentors. The targets set at the commissioning stage anticipated that the cost per child of mentoring would be half of the mentoring relationships being e-mentoring, which has lower overheads.

The unit cost per relationship decreases as time goes by and more relationships are established. With 152 children in mentoring relationships the cost per head works out at just over £3,200; if the project had run to the end of the year with the full costs described above and a further 70 children matched in the last quarter, this would have been a cost per relationship of £2,615.

¹² <http://www.neweconomics.org/projects/social-return-investment>