

## The Public Health Practice Evaluation Scheme (PHPES)

Addressing the challenges faced by 'front line' practitioners

# Evaluating youth mentoring for young people at risk of exclusion from secondary school



**Despite public interest and the availability of many mentoring programmes, the evidence base for youth mentoring programmes is weak.**

### Background

Mentoring schemes are increasingly being used as a way of working with vulnerable and marginalised groups to reduce social isolation and improve health and wellbeing.



Youth mentoring has been suggested as a way to improve a young person's health, well-being and educational outcomes.

There is growing interest in mentoring programmes by policy makers and practitioners but the evidence base for youth mentoring programmes is weak and no randomised control trial has yet been undertaken in the UK.

A study was undertaken to assess the acceptability of conducting a larger trial to determine the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of a youth mentoring programme named Breakthrough Mentoring.

Building the evidence for cost-effective public health practice

### Our practitioner partners

The PHPES scheme enables people working in public health, who are introducing innovative initiatives aimed at improving health, to work in partnership with NIHR SPHR to conduct rigorous evaluations of their cost-effectiveness.

NIHR SPHR researchers worked with public health practitioners from South Gloucestershire Council who were involved in the management and running of the Breakthrough Mentoring programme. The team also worked with other researchers from the University of Bristol.



*Breakthrough Mentoring* is a youth mentoring programme provided by South Gloucestershire Council, delivered during school time by paid adult mentors. It is tailored to the mentee's interests and is activity-focussed.

The **aims of this research** were to:

- To conduct a feasibility study, pilot randomised control trial (RCT) and process evaluation to investigate the feasibility of undertaking a definitive RCT of the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of the Breakthrough Mentoring programme with referrals of students from secondary schools.
- To understand how mentoring can impact on secondary school students at risk of exclusion from school.

## Key issues

- Youth mentoring is used with vulnerable young people to help improve their health, well-being and educational attainment
- Despite growing interest in the use of mentoring, the effectiveness of youth mentoring programmes in the UK is limited

## Key research questions

- Is it possible to identify, recruit and randomise eligible secondary school students to intervention and control groups?
- Are the intervention and research procedures acceptable to young people, schools, mentors and parents?
- Is it possible to undertake a large-scale randomised control trial (RCT) of the Breakthrough Mentoring programme?

## Method

NIHR SPHR researchers, along with South Gloucestershire Council and the University of Bristol, undertook a feasibility study evaluating the Breakthrough Mentoring programme.

Twenty-one young people aged 11 to 16 years, seen at risk of exclusion from secondary school, participated in the pilot RCT.

Participants were randomly assigned to receive the Breakthrough Mentoring programme (n=11) or to a care as usual group (n=10).

The outcome measures for the evaluation included self-reported questionnaires, including the Strength and Difficulties Questionnaires, which were completed at baseline, 6, 12, and 18 months.

Interviews were conducted with participants, parents, teachers, mentors and key stakeholders on their views of mentoring and the research. A cost-effectiveness analysis was also undertaken.

Qualitative data were analysed thematically and descriptive analyses of quantitative data were produced.

## Key findings and learnings for practice

- Participants were happy to complete the questionnaires, take part in interviews and were accepting of the study design.
- Students indicated that having a mentor unconnected with the school helped them to give voice to and deal with difficult feelings
- Some reported negative experiences of the way that the mentoring relationship ended
- The follow-up response rate of participants and 12 months was 100%, and 86% (n=18) at 18 months
- The process evaluation showed that the study design and intervention were acceptable to parents, mentors, schools, and commissioners

## What next?

Further research is required to characterise youth mentoring in schools in the UK.

The study team will further look at how the effectiveness of mentoring can be best measured and this work will inform the decision of whether or not a definitive trial is considered.

## References/resources

**Website:** <http://www.bristol.ac.uk/social-community-medicine/projects/breakthrough-mentoring/>

**Publications:** Beattie AM, Busse H, Kipping RR, Gunnell DJ, Hickman M, Macleod JAA, Hollingworth W, Berridge D, Metcalfe C, Campbell RM. Youth mentoring for young people at risk of exclusion from secondary school: a feasibility randomised controlled trial (2016). *The Lancet*.

**ISRCTN registry number:** ISRCTN97394558

## SPHR Contact/Find out more

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### About PHPES

PHPES projects are:

- **generated by front line practitioners,**
- **designed to provide transferable, robust evidence on the impact of local practice for local practitioners,**
- **developed and delivered in collaboration with NIHR SPHR academics building evaluative capacity in public health practice.**

### About NIHR SPHR

The NIHR SPHR aims to build a high quality evidence base for cost-effective public health practices. We work with local practitioners and members of the public, carrying out a wide range of research projects and programmes with a school wide focus on alcohol, ageing well and health inequalities