



Volunteer Tenancy Mentoring - Evaluation Activity Summary

Steve Allman | October 2018

yourownplace

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Evaluation Activity

Your Own Place has commissioned an external evaluator, Steve Allman, to evaluate the Volunteer Tenancy Mentor project.

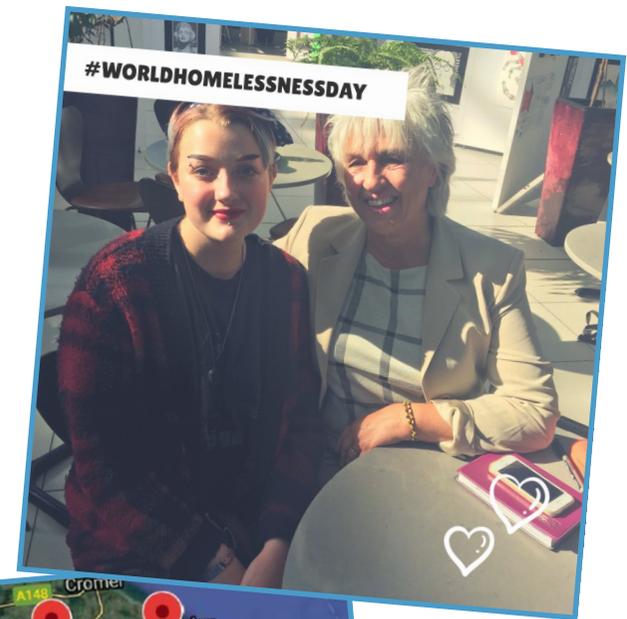
The evaluator is working with the social enterprise for the duration of the project and will complete a full report when the project ends in 2019. Here's a summary of our activity so far:

- Tools have been reviewed and recommendations made, including simplifying surveys and developing additional questions for employers.
- New tools have been tested, particularly with mentees and mentors. Email/online surveys have proven to be an effective methods for enabling mentors to share their views on the project's impact and SMS surveys have recently been sent to young people who have been matched with a mentor.
- New methods for engaging mentees have been developed and, whilst some have been more successful than others, face to face continues to be the most effective method for engaging young people supported by the programme.
- The evaluator has met mentees at a number of events including the Evaluation Workshop, Your Own Place Advisory Board and Networking Event.
- In partnership with Your Own Place, the evaluator has reviewed the Theory of Change and produced a new project-specific ToC which has been received positively by key stakeholders.
- The evaluator delivered a workshop for staff to evaluate the referral process for mentees and made recommendations for improvement, including developing a project-specific referral form and reducing the number of actions that referrers were required to undertake.
- Mentors have been engaged in the evaluation at training, where we learned more about their motivation and gained a greater understanding of their skills and experience. Mentors have also been interviewed at various events including the workshop and network event.
- Selected referrers to the mentoring programme have taken part in telephone interviews with the evaluator and shared positive experiences of the programme and its impact.
- Selected businesses, including Adnams and Norwich City Council, have taken part in telephone interviews and helped to develop our understanding of what motivates companies to become involved in the programme and what are the positive outcomes for the business, in addition to the positive outcomes for the mentees who receive their support.
- Your Own Place has maintained consistent contact with the external evaluator, often on a weekly basis, and together we continue to develop and refine our methods to ensure that we gain useful feedback on the project's impact, challenges and potential opportunities.

Key Achievements

By October 2018, the Volunteer Tenancy Mentor project has achieved a number of outcomes:

- 380 hours of mentor support available each month.
- 95 mentors recruited and trained in Norfolk and Suffolk
- 53 young people (mentees) referred to the project
- 21 locations covered by mentors.
- 15 training sessions delivered



Mentees Say...

Jess

"When I first met Rachel, my mentor, my initial thought was that she's shorter than me, so I shouldn't wear heels when we next meet up! It was the start of a beautiful friendship, we get on well and enjoy eating cake and talking about our dogs, as well as the more serious stuff when we need to."

When they're not busy eating cake and talking about dogs, Jess says that Rachel has made her feel more confident about addressing some of the challenges in her life.

When Jess was told that her benefits would be reduced following a Looked After Children review and that she would unexpectedly have to pay for additional living costs, Rachel was the first person Jess felt that she could trust and she helped Jess to work out a realistic budget.

It wasn't good news for Jess's self-confessed clothes-buying addiction, but it did mean that she would have enough money left over for food

and other essentials. Jess says Rachel also helped her to build up the confidence to speak to her family about it, which would have been hard otherwise. We asked Jess what it is about Rachel that makes her feel supported:

"She just has such a positive aura about her", says Jess, " I've spent my whole life not trusting people so I tend to pick them apart quite quickly, it's a self defence mechanism. Not with Rachel though, I like how she listens to me, how she talks to me and how she never makes me feel pressured to do anything I don't want to do, but I know she's always there if I need her."

Matthew

"Financially, I'm useless! Lewis, my mentor, helped me to become more confident with my money, figure out where I should be spending it and I even started to save money! It makes such a difference having someone I can call or text just to say I need to sort this out, how do it do it?!"



Lisa

“Having a mentor feels like someone putting their hand on your shoulder and saying it’s going to be alright; it’s like having a big weight lifted.”

When Lisa first started meeting up with Sue, her mentor, they used to meet in cafes but now Lisa has her own place and they can have a cuppa in her sitting room, which she much prefers. Lisa says that the support she’s had from Sue has helped her to feel much more independent.

“When I first moved out of the YMCA and into supported housing, it was very stressful. I was suddenly on my own in a strange place, but I always felt better after having a chat with Sue.”

Lisa says that Sue has been a consistent, reliable source of moral and emotional support, saying she moved into an empty flat but, with support from Sue and others, it has slowly turned into a home. Lisa feels she can ask Sue for help with anything and that she’ll be there:

“Young people are always going to turn into adults, they’re always going to grow up and move out, but they don’t teach you anything about that at school. You want to be independent, but you have no knowledge or experience of how to do it.

To start with, I was worried about everything, especially how to pay bills, I’d never had to do that before! But having Sue explained it all really clearly and helps me manage what I need to keep myself going, which makes it less stressful.”



Mentors Say...

"The training opened my mind to how young people perceive the world. For example, we did an activity about a young person "wasting" their money on a new jacket, but to them it wasn't a waste because it really increased their confidence, I hadn't thought of that. Since then, I've been matched with a young person and that story has stuck with me and made me empathise more."

SUE

"Young people sometimes worry that they're not talking about the right things when they meet their mentor, but then you realise that there isn't a right thing or a wrong thing. It's flexible, we choose to be there so that young people can choose to talk about whatever they might need help with."

GRANT

"My mentee is very organised, very confident, but finds it difficult to ask for help. When he needed a few DIY jobs doing at home, I sensed he wouldn't someone to take over and maybe undermine his independence, so I lent him my tools and he did a great job it for himself."

CHRIS

"I'm a lot more mindful as a result of doing the training with Your Own Place. Now I'm matched with a young person, I'm constantly thinking to myself don't just tell her what to do, or what to say; leave a pause to give her space to work it out for herself."

MARIA



Referrers Say...

"Your Own Place is unusual in that their support is person-centred and young people get a lot of say in what happens. It can be nerve-wracking for young people moving out for the first time, but having a mentor to provide support and encouragement can help them to move forward."

*JAMES LAMONT, HOUSING ENGAGEMENT WORKER,
YMCA NORFOLK*

"The project is very focussed on young people and the feedback I get is that young people feel that they're being taken seriously. I'm not aware of any other services that offer similar support."

*YVONNE DURIE, TEAM MANAGER, NORFOLK COUNTY
COUNCIL*

"My colleagues have referred young people to the project and we get positive feedback. The advantage of mentoring is that it's free and can help young people with a wide range of issues including housing, debt advice and low-level legal issues."

LESLEY BURDETT, SHELTER NORWICH HUB MANAGER



Businesses Say...

Adnams

Adnams, the historic Southwold-based brewery, has a proud track record of supporting local communities, particularly those on the Suffolk coast where the company is based.

Volunteering during working hours is commonplace, with Adnams employees helping with gardening and education projects, in addition to being supported to volunteer in their own communities as football coaches, first responders and lifeboat crew.

Young people leaving care are not a group that the company had traditionally supported, so when Your Own Place presented an opportunity to support them as peer mentors, Adnams were keen to understand how their employees might use their skills and experience to provide support.

Sadie Lofthouse, HR Director at Adnams, explains;

"We felt the training in it's own right would be of real value to our team. It certainly increased our understanding of wider society, the challenges some young people are faced with and it opened our eyes as to how we could help."

In addition to supporting mentoring, Adnams has very generously provided additional opportunities for Your Own Place to raise awareness of the needs of young people; the company invited the organisation to share its stand at the Suffolk Show in May 2018 and its CEO, Andy Wood, very kindly gave a talk in October 2018 in support of Social Saturday, a national event in support of social enterprises.

The logo for Adnams Southwold features the word "ADNAMs" in a large, bold, blue, serif font. Below it, the word "SOUTHWOLD" is written in a smaller, blue, sans-serif font. A small blue dot is positioned at the end of the "SOUTHWOLD" text.

Norwich City Council

Norwich City Council has always been supportive of Your Own Place. The authority, quite literally, provided the social enterprise with a roof over its head by gifting them The Training Flat and has been equally enthusiastic about the mentoring project, putting 16 employees through the training so far.

The Council has 15,000 properties across the city and Tenancy Services & Income Manager, Grant Lockett, who's joined as a mentor himself, says that supporting the project enables the Council to enhance its offer to tenants and enables its staff team to develop their understanding of the challenges they may face

"In Housing, a lot of our work could be perceived as transactional. However much we might want to help people, there are processes to follow and statutory obligations to meet. However, the mentoring project gives us an opportunity to consider the needs of our clients in a broader sense and spend a little more time exploring what successful outcomes might look like."

Grant says he's received positive feedback from his colleagues who've taken part in the training, as well as those who have been matched with young people. Grant believes that a key incentive is that mentors join the programme because they want to, not because they have to.

The Council demonstrates its commitment to the programme by allowing staff to undertake the training during working hours and there's a growing informal peer network within the office. Grant, who's recently joined the Your Own Place Advisory Board, feels that the programme has had a positive impact on his organisation:

"It helps that we can support each other and there is a bit of an informal network, but I don't think we'd ever formalise it as there's a danger people would switch into "work mode", which isn't what mentoring is all about. People in our sort of jobs can get a reputation for being quite hard, we're often having to tell people what they don't want to hear, but mentoring is a great opportunity to remind us why we got into these sorts of jobs in the first place and it's definitely softened us all up a little bit."



NORWICH
City Council

Acknowledgements

We'd like to thank everyone who took the time to contribute to this summary evaluation, but particularly the young people who chose to share their personal perceptions of the project.

Nesta

The project has been made possible thanks to a grant from NESTA, a social innovation funder which backs new ideas to tackle big challenges.

www.nesta.org.uk

Your Own Place

The Volunteer Tenancy Mentoring project is just one of the projects delivered by Your Own Place to support young people in transition.

www.yourownplace.org.uk

Steve Allman

Steve Allman is an independent evaluator who supports charities and social enterprises to evaluate impact and develop strategy.

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