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Academic Paper

Evidence-based Good Practice for Youth Mentoring Programmes

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Abstract

Comfort (2023) identified the potential benefits of youth mentoring experienced by young people, using a qualitative methodology. This paper outlines the programme, mentor and mentee practices that were identified during the research. Following these practices will offer young people emotional support as well as new and potentially transformational opportunities. The practices will help develop the assets, or protective characteristics, innate in young people. They will help mentees activate their assets to access support and resources from the networks around them, allowing young people to gain the most from being mentored.

Keywords

Youth mentoring good practice, Social capital, youth mentoring, volunteer mentors, mentees

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Introduction

The National Council for Volunteering Organisations defines mentoring as:

A voluntary, mutually beneficial and purposeful relationship in which an individual gives time to support another to enable them to make changes in their life (National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 2011).

In youth mentoring, an adult (or mentor) supports a young person (or mentee) to bring about these changes. Comfort (2023) used a County Council case study to explore the mentoring experience of mentors, mentees, programme coordinators and those referring to mentoring opportunities (referrers). A paper outlining the findings is scheduled for publication in this journal, August 2024. This paper outlines the practices that supported mentees' development of protective assets and ability to benefit from relationships and networks around them that were identified during the research study.

Literature

Although there is limited exploration of young people's experiences and expectations of mentoring, from extant research, young people wish to strengthen their self-concept, self-confidence, communication skills and assertiveness (Clayden and Stein, 2005), emotional well-being, social and practical skills (Philip, 2008). These seem more important to them than more tangible outcomes, such as gaining a job, or academic achievement, changes more typically measured by research.

For Fergus and Zimmerman (2005), young people have or can develop **assets**. Assets are protective against risk and include a positive view of oneself, self-esteem, self-efficacy (confidence in one's ability to cope), and social and interpersonal competencies (Grotberg, 1995). Using their assets gives young people choices (Farruggia et al., 2011; Zimmerman, Phelps and Lerner, 2008; Phelps et al., 2007). Supportive adults can help young people become aware of and activate their assets (Worsley, 2015, Larson, 2006). Thus, young people seem to seek asset development from mentoring and the relationship with a supportive mentor could activate these assets.

The value of trusting relationships has long been acknowledged. For Coleman (1978) and Bourdieu (1986), resources in social connections can positively impact wellbeing and life chances. The 'social and economic resources embodied in social networks' (Putnam, 2000, p.19) are known as **social capital**. This can be bonding, providing emotional support and learning with practical application from those similar and close to oneself. Bridging social capital can give access to opportunities that would not otherwise be possible (Putnam, 2000). However, it is harder to access because although it requires looser relationships, these are with people less like oneself. Social connections can help develop assets, such as the capacity to trust, tolerance, and self-efficacy as well as creating applicable knowledge (Field, 2005). For Philip and Spratt (2007) and Philip (2008), social capital frameworks help explain mentoring's impact.

Accumulation of social capital requires trust, which is a central feature of mentoring relationships. Reliability, consistency, caring for and respecting the young person, having fun and involving them in decision-making (Sipe, 2002), empathy and 'attunement' to the needs of young people helps develop trusting relationships (Keller and Pryce, 2012). Spencer (2007) and DeWit *et al.*, (2016) indicate the importance of voluntary attendance by mentees. Compulsory attendance or attendance to satisfy a third party - parent or teacher - is unlikely to achieve the same benefits.

Goal setting should be sensitive to the young person's needs and rigid adherence to instrumental goals often results in mentee frustration, relationship breakdown and negative impact on emotional development (Colley, 2003; Raposa, Rhodes and Herrera, 2016). Giving the mentee's choice of agenda, meeting times and locations and being responsive as a mentor is more likely to lead to relationships that last (Rhodes and DuBois, 2008; Philip, 2008). However, expecting mentees to initiate contact and plan activities may lead to a relationship failing to establish (Keller, 2007), so some direction is required. Mentors sharing overcoming past difficulties are particularly appreciated by mentees in late adolescence (Spencer et al., 2016)

The positive opinion of their mentor has been found to boost a young person's self-esteem (Darling, Hamilton and Niego, 1994). Self-esteem can also be increased if the young person sees their mentor as a significant adult in their lives and they share interests (Philip and Hendry, 1996; DuBois et al., 2002; Spencer et al., 2016).

Communication helps build the relationship and mentoring usually takes place through conversations. Talking to a supportive adult helps young people reflect on personal experiences, develop self-awareness and responsibility for themselves (Gallagher and Morgan, 2016), problem-solve, explore feelings and attitudes, and plan (Clayden and Stein, 2005). Worsley (2015) found young people who talk to others about matters of concern demonstrate belief in their own abilities

and competence, or self-efficacy (Banciura, 1977). Goal orientated, or **active listening** is essential to successful relationships (Bennetts, 2003) and can be a therapeutic technique providing emotional support (Higley *et al.*, 2016; Donlan, Mcdermott and Zaff, 2017).

Deriving from the literature review, the research questions were:

- **RQ1:** What are the expectations of those involved in a youth mentoring process?
- **RQ2:** How do those involved experience youth mentoring?
- **RQ 3:** What is the role of the relationship in the mentoring process?
- **RQ 4:** How do any outcomes of youth mentoring relate to the development of assets and social capital in young people?

Methodology

Comfort (2023) used a qualitative methodology to explore youth mentoring practices in an English youth mentoring programme, identified by the pseudonym MyTime, as a case study. This programme was selected because it had been running successfully for over twenty years and had been founded in line with good practice identified by MENTOR, the US mentoring body. The fact that mentee satisfaction and feedback were the main measures used to judge programme success made it appropriate for this study. Additionally, as a vetted MyTime volunteer, the researcher was sufficiently trusted to be allowed to interview mentees (usually vulnerable young people), mentors, programme coordinators and referrers. MyTime's stated aim was:

'To provide additional one to one support to young people in [County] to assist them to reach their potential, by improving their skills and providing new opportunities.' (A. County Council, 2016)

The aim of MyTime thus focused on what could arguably be related to asset development and resources, or social capital, coming from the relationship.

The qualitative research methodology selected allowed exploration of an individual's mentoring experience and examination of underlying programme processes leading to the outcomes reported by mentees, mentors, coordinators and referrers, a benefit of a qualitative methodology noted by Flyvbjerg (2006). Thematic analysis of the findings allowed the identification of patterns and themes in the data, despite the individual nature of each experience (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Data were collected through three mentor focus groups, interviews, mentor and mentee diaries and a survey using open-ended questions to capture the views of mentors unable to attend interviews.

Three mentors and one mentee recorded their feelings before and after mentoring sessions in a diary. Semi-structured interviews were held with seven mentees, seven mentors, two mentoring coordinators, and four referring organisations. This range of data collection methods allowed the author to use participants' responses to direct the conversations and explore areas of interest (Hammersley, 2007; Creswell and Poth, 2017). Elicitation techniques were used to engage young people in the interviewing process and let them shape the direction of the conversation (Grant, 2018). They talked about their experiences of mentoring, their relationship with their mentor, changes that they ascribed to mentoring, what they did to benefit from mentoring and how and when mentoring should stop.

Three focus groups of ten mentors each allowed complexity and richness in data collection (Morgan and Krueger, 2013). These interventions explored what mentoring is, whether there is a 'good mentee' and the importance of the mentor liking their mentee. Semi-structured interviews with mentors included their mentoring experiences, what they did and why, how they saw their role and what benefits they believed mentees gained from mentoring.

Written sources of information produced for the MyTime mentoring programme were also consulted to allow a more rounded account of organisations (Grant, 2018). These included forms collecting a young person's stated aims for mentoring; mentee evaluation forms asking whether the programme had met their expectations and what they had gained; feedback forms at the beginning, middle and end of the relationship measuring mentee happiness with various aspects of their lives; and mentee nominations for their mentor to be 'mentor of the year' explaining how their mentor had helped them. Although not gathered for the research study, these documents provided insights into what mentees said they gained from mentoring.

Findings

The MyTime programme was judged favourably by its stakeholders. The funding County Council considered mentoring a useful tool. It valued the numbers of young people who were supported for three sessions or more, the evidence of mentee satisfaction, and the reduction of pressure on statutory services such as social services and/or the police. Referring organisations commented that mentees gained confidence and no longer gave cause for concern – a measure of success in their eyes.

Mentees talked about feeling more confident and better able to make friends. They reported an increased sense of agency: *'You can always do something that could help your situation out. You don't always just need to sit in the background with it.'* (Mentee 7). One young person reflected on the change that he thought mentoring had made *'...just like who I am. Just like me, you know'*, (Mentee 5).

Mentors spoke of seeing their mentees "blossom" or gain in confidence and attributed this to the mentoring process. One said the changes from mentoring were more fundamental than measurable outcomes: *'For me it's about having a better sense of self and improved resilience. That may translate into opportunities, performing better at school, etc. It likely will.'* (Mentor 6).

Mentors and the programme coordinators understood that mentees could not always express what they gained from mentoring. Indications for them that mentoring was beneficial included the young person voluntarily choosing to attend mentoring sessions. Indeed, one mentor who ruefully mentioned the seeming lack of progress with their mentee to a knowledgeable friend, was told that for a young person with autism to turn up regularly to sessions should be celebrated as success and was a huge achievement for mentor and mentee.

From analysis of the findings, Comfort (2023) identified three aspects of the mentoring process that were key to establishing good practice:

- Explaining mentoring to referrers and mentees
- How MyTime was set up
- Mentoring in practice

Explaining mentoring

The mentoring process needed to be explained to referrers so they could describe the service accurately and in an appealing way to potential mentees. This included that the mentoring process let young people work towards the goals they chose, and that meetings took place weekly in an enjoyable location, with an encouraging, supportive adult. Mentoring could offer young people an empathetic, listening ear, emotional support and encouragement at a difficult time. They could also help develop strengths (assets), such as communication and reflection skills; support the celebration of their successes and/or strengthen their support networks.

Providing guidance to referrers ensured that the young people recommended could be supported by volunteers with training and life experience, not mental health specialists or therapists. The programme triaged suggested cases, and as part of a County Council, was able to refer young people with severe mental health or family situations to other services. Referrers also needed to understand that even when a referral was accepted, mentoring could only proceed if the young person wished it to because a willingness and active participation benefits mentoring.

By explaining the mentoring programme clearly, a mentee could be better prepared to make the most of mentoring. Preparation included being made aware that they needed to contribute to the mentoring process themselves by, for example, thinking about what they would like to work on with their mentor and being open to new experiences and ideas. This takes effort. It was helpful to let them know the benefits they might experience which included feeling more confident and in control of their lives as well as strengthening existing relationships and developing new ones. Short video clips of young people and mentors talking about what happens during a session, with anonymised examples of how a young person benefitted, were also identified as helping to explain mentoring.

Mentoring Programme Good practice

Matching a young person's requirements of mentor gender, time and place of meeting helped mentees to feel their needs were being respected from the outset.

MyTime's flexibility of approach, broad aim and what mentors called a 'lack of agenda' was valued by mentors and mentees and gave considerable latitude to young people and mentors to decide what to work on. Mentees could explore what they wanted rather than what others thought was needed to change. They talked of being able to discuss anything with their mentor, 'no matter how small', suggesting that issues of concern to them were or might be dismissed by others around them. Mentees might want to find a job, but their concerns often related to friendships, difficult family situations, returning to school after exclusion/absence, confidence building, career options or even just getting out of the home.

Programme flexibility meant mentee goals could evolve as mentor and mentee got to know each other and the possibilities of mentoring better. Mentors talked of balancing a desire to help their mentee achieve their longer-term goals with responding to immediate situations, such as family difficulties or homelessness. The lack of curriculum meant each mentoring experience and relationship could become whatever was needed - emotional or more practical support or a combination - and both mentors and mentees commented on the unusual nature of the relationship. One mentor suggested the mentoring relationship could fill a current gap in the young person's life. Mentee 2 suggested mentoring supplemented existing relationships, describing her mentor as *'like my mum but not my mum'*.

Small amounts of funding were provided for food and drink which meant mentees looked forward to sessions. Additionally, providing out-of-pocket expenses meant that potential mentors were not discouraged by having to cover costs. Funding for a final event was also provided which helped emphasise the significance of the ending. It could be planned together and allowed the reflection and celebration of everything that had been achieved. This might be a pizza together, a visit to the cinema or a local attraction.

Findings highlighted the importance of selecting mentors for **specific characteristics** which included listening skills, a positive view of young people's capabilities and flexibility in outlook. Mentors said that mentoring allowed them to have a different relationship with a young person from their professional roles, one less focused on targets and more on getting to know the individual. Mentors felt it helped to be interested in other people and they were often drawn from helping professions, such as teaching, policing or counselling.

MyTime mentors and programme coordinators took an asset-based view that a young person had capabilities and interests that could be developed to help them achieve their goals rather than that the difficulties they faced arose from something 'lacking', a deficit view. An asset-based view placed less pressure on both the mentor and mentee by allowing time to explore what they would like rather than following a curriculum focused on 'improving' mentees.

The results also highlighted that a **mentoring training programme** should emphasise the mentor behaviours that will help young people benefit from the mentoring process and develop their ability to shape sessions as they wish. These include being reliable, and non-judgmental. When a mentor came with an open mind rather than preconceptions based on others' views, mentees were more likely to talk about the real issues they were facing. Training should emphasise that coming to the relationship with an open mind means mentees can start afresh. This can be helped by mentors' limited knowledge of their backgrounds.

Mentor training should be realistic, including the challenges of mentoring where the adult is not necessarily in control or knowledgeable about the topics under discussion. Although mentors were told at the training that they were *'sowing a seed rather than seeing it grow'*, as one coordinator expressed it, several mentors reflected that it was difficult not knowing whether there was a good outcome for a young person after mentoring but that this was something that they had to accept. Mentors needed to be prepared for not knowing what happened next.

The training should emphasise that the variety of mentee experiences and the nature of the support to address these requires mentor flexibility, resourcefulness and ingenuity. MyTime mentors helped mentees join a reptile owners club, develop photography skills or learned about computer games to understand them better.

Mentors too may find they have previously undiscovered assets. Many mentors were often concerned that the differences in outlook, age and experience might be barriers to their relationship with a young person. However, mentees commented on the benefits of this additional experience. Training should reassure mentors that differences could be a source of strength not a cause for concern, allowing mentor and mentee to find out about each other which in turn could lead to new experiences for both.

Mentors remarked with surprise upon the extent to which mentoring was a learning relationship, stating that they learned as much if not more than their mentee, about themselves and the world around them. If mentors believe initially that they are the expert, 'solving' the problems of the young person, they will quickly realise that they cannot do this and indeed it is not what young people necessarily want. The young person themselves was expert in their lives, in their interests and what would work in a way that the mentor could not be. Training can explain that a willingness to learn from and about the young person and to work with them rather than imposing solutions or ideas is therefore important. Mentees wanted to be listened to rather than told what to do, a more usual relationship with an adult.

'It is more or less the fact to listen to you. If they ask you to do something, like you forget about some things to tell them. Whereas if they just listen. It's really good, because then you can tell them everything.' (Mentee 5)

For mentors to support mentees effectively, they in turn needed help from the program which enabled them to ask for advice, be reassured or supported during challenging situations such as potential safeguarding issues. All MyTime mentors said that the support they received from coordinators enabled them to be effective mentors. Such support will be essential for other programmes so mentors can ask for guidance when they feel uncertain.

Mentoring in Practice

Research findings indicated that the mentors who helped mentees develop and employ their assets and benefit from the resources in the networks around them did the following:

Built trust

Mentors felt it was important to build and maintain trust with their mentees. Helping mentees to develop their ability to trust underpinned the way mentors interacted with their mentees. This included modelling respectful behaviours, such as being punctual and reliable. Several mentees commented favourably on this aspect of their mentors, suggesting such respect might be unusual. The positive impact reliability had on mentees helped to build trust and demonstrated the value of this behaviour in mentees' lives.

Being willing to challenge behaviours gently also, perhaps unexpectedly, built trust. One mentee who was constantly distracted by his phone wanted tips about gaining a job. His mentor encouraged him to reflect on the impression looking at his phone all the time gave, which caused the mentee to recognise and change his behaviour.

Take responsibility for the mentoring relationship

Although mentees said they regarded their mentor as a friend or like a family member, mentors never considered themselves as purely a 'friend'. They expressed a sense of duty towards their mentee to ensure that mentoring was a positive experience. This involved thinking about session content and structure, keeping notes about previous discussions and investigating issues in between meetings. Mentors spoke of actively 'shaping' a session with a beginning, middle and reflective end. Mentees implied that the mentoring relationship required less effort and uncertainty than friendships or family relationships. One mentee commented that he was more certain that his mentor liked him than his friends. This lowering of barriers to relationship formation was aided by mentors tolerating mentee behaviours that they might not in others, such as mentee unreliability about meeting up, or constant distraction by a mobile phone during a mentoring session. They also willingly shared experiences and contacts as they would with a close friend.

Created nurturing space

Mentors commented on the importance of identifying suitable places to meet. A community location, such as a café offered an enjoyable, neutral venue rather than a formal space such as school or office where the young person may feel ill at ease and where there was a power imbalance. Mentors used the resources in the places where they met to give mentees new experiences, such as choosing and paying for a drink or asking for help from an unknown adult, additionally demonstrating that they had more confidence than they thought.

Mentors offered sessions during the day, evening or at weekends which gave mentoring a flexibility often unavailable to professional services. Again, it indicated that the young person and their schedule were respected, rather than expecting them to adapt to the programme. Meeting in school could be problematic, particularly if the young person had a difficult relationship with school. MyTime forbade meeting in mentee's homes for safeguarding reasons and leaving a stressful home environment was an important benefit for some mentees.

Offered emotional and goal-focused support, depending on need

Mentees remarked favourably upon their mentor's kindness towards them, and particularly appreciated this when life was tough, suggesting the importance of a mentor's empathy and emotional support. The calm, nurturing and supportive environment of mentoring sessions let mentees reflect on what was happening to them, something that was often difficult in their complex and changing situations. Several mentees expressed their relief at being able to talk to someone,

'*get it all out*' and make sense of what was happening. Such reflection could also lead to identifying other opportunities for support or change. One young woman realised her low mood was a pattern not a one-off and was something she could talk to her mental health counsellor about. Another reflected in a letter to her mentor after mentoring ended that she had re-evaluated and repaired her difficult relationship with her brother, an unanticipated and positive outcome.

Some mentees sought practical advice such as deciding on university study or producing a CV. Mentors shared their life experiences, provided young people with useful information such as courses of interest and suggested advantageous personal contacts who could provide career advice or work experience. Mentors also modelled how asking for help or taking advice from others within their networks could bring benefits, establish connections and activate resources.

The MyTime format flexibility meant that mentors could offer mentees valuable physical and emotional support at times of transition such as looking around a new school. Mentees appreciated learning from the experience of their mentor or mentor's acquaintances. One mentee talked of her mentor as a '*role model*'. Mentors showed how to function as an adult in a complex world of ups and downs and shared their mistakes and struggles, fully recognising they did not always 'get it all right' or live a perfect life.

Helped mentees get the most out of mentoring sessions

Mentors were clear that mentoring sessions should be led by mentees and their needs, going at the young person's pace even if this was slower and less conclusive than mentors initially hoped. For many mentees, time for them to use as they wished was unusual and they needed their mentor's support to take advantage of the influence they had in the relationship. Mentors emphasised that a session was dedicated to their mentee, an opportunity to get what **they** wanted out of it, not a parent, teacher or the mentor. Most importantly, by being allowed to set the topics of discussion, mentees experienced control and agency from the outset of the relationship, a novel experience for many and this contributed to feelings of self-efficacy and agency. However, identifying topics to discuss was sometimes a balancing act. One mentor reflected that his enthusiasm for a mentee to take up sailing might have been his idea rather than what the mentee wanted and warned against allowing one's own views to colour discussions. Replicating this control in other programmes could give similar benefits.

Worked hard to interpret their mentee's needs

Young people wanted mentors to listen and work with them rather than telling them what to do, but they were not always confident communicators. Encouraging **communication** often required MyTime mentor ingenuity and included going on walks or cycle rides, bringing along their dog or pottering around with a car to spark conversation. Picking up on clues from the young person also helped to identify topics for conversation. One mentor chose to explore how the relationship between her mentee and mother was, based on the force with which she slammed the door when she got in the car. Another commented that how her mentee wrapped her coat around her indicated her discomfort in talking about particular topics.

Worked in partnership with their mentee

MyTime mentors and mentees pooled their life experiences and the mentee's particular circumstances to address issues in a way that would work for the mentee. Mentors recognised that young people were 'experts' about their own lives in a way they could not be and that working together was most likely to help mentees identify solutions and options to reach their goals. Adults might perceive an issue to be low performance at school whereas for the young person, difficulties at school might be a symptom of difficulties outside the classroom, with family or friends. One mentee, for example, video-ed girls at her school who were bullying her, a solution she devised following learning from her mentor that the best way to get teachers to intervene was to provide

evidence they could act on. Mentors identified practical ways that mentees could practise the skills (or assets) that they wanted to develop, such as practising engaging in small talk with a mentor which the mentee could repeat in their own environment and eventually achieve their aim of talking to strangers at a conference.

Working as a team, mentees and mentors identified the networks around the young person who they could approach to help them reach their goals. Mentees did not always realise the resources and support others such as teachers, therapists or relatives could offer. This support might help them deal with difficult situations such as bullying or might be resources in mentees' communities such as clubs to help them develop their interests and meet new friends. Learning how to ask for help also increased mentees' sense of agency.

Improved mentee self-esteem

Mentors who gave positive feedback about addressing a difficult situation successfully or doing well at school helped mentees recognise their progress and successes. Often mentees were not aware of their own achievements, particularly those in trouble at home or school. Mentor 3 commented: *'In life, you're told everything you're not doing right, not necessarily everything that you are doing right.'*

Mentors also challenged negative thinking by, for example, pointing out how courageous a mentee had been to agree to having a mentor, even if they felt they lacked confidence. Identifying and acknowledging mentee effort and success at home or school, helped mentees think better of themselves.

Took an interest in their mentees

Finding out about and developing mentees' talents and interests seemed to be more important to mentees and to building a trusting relationship than sharing interests. For some mentees, this was the first time either they had wanted to share their interest with an adult or someone had wanted to find out more about their passions which included graphic novels, computer games, animals and motorcycle maintenance, to name but a few examples.

Injected fun into mentoring sessions

Mentors and mentees mentioned how humour could lighten the mood of mentoring sessions, build the relationship and create an enjoyable atmosphere *'not take everything too seriously'*. Mentees described having fun with their mentor and that they enjoyed undertaking new activities together such as a bike ride, visiting a park, getting an ice cream together. Sharing experiences helped to build the mentoring relationship.

Worked towards positive endings

The MyTime mentoring programme considered relationship's ending as something positive to work towards and showed that a mentee had achieved the change they wanted and were ready to move on with their lives. Timings of endings were agreed between mentee and mentor and could include meeting less frequently for a while, or only if the mentee requested. The ending was usually celebrated with an activity and reflection on the mentee's achievements. This was not to say there was no sadness at the end of the relationship because both enjoyed each other's company. However, mutually-agreed endings where a young person achieved an outcome that they valued was seen as positive and the blueprint for other relationships.

Research Limitations

This research was carried out during the Covid-19 pandemic which had an impact on how interviews were conducted. Two interviews were planned with each of the participants, one to explore experiences and the second to clarify meaning. This included exploring ideas raised such as different types of relationships and the concept of a 'good mentee'. However, although the interviews with mentors proceeded either in person or online, the restrictions around Covid and disruption to young people's lives meant that not all second interviews could be held with mentees. This might have led to an erroneous interpretation of what young people told the interviewer.

There is debate around the extent to which qualitative research findings are generalisable. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2011) believe comparability and translatability are more appropriate for qualitative research. For Denscombe (2003), the more a case resembles others of its type, the more generalisable it is. By following Braun and Clarke (2021) who suggest that research which takes account of policy, historical and broader concerns increases applicability, this researcher believes general conclusions can be drawn from the findings.

Discussion

MyTime's practices seemed to result in developing young people's protective assets such as communication skills, self-esteem and strengthening ties with family and supportive networks, thereby increasing access to the resources within those networks such as emotional and practical support. An awareness of their assets and resources can increase young people's confidence and promote a greater sense of agency in their own lives which includes being able to ask for help. Additionally, the mentoring relationship can offer emotional support, learning and potentially transformative opportunities. Awareness of assets and resources leads to increased mentee confidence and improved sense of agency (Comfort, 2023)

DuBois *et al.* (2002) and Blinn-Pike (2007) reinforce that well-structured approaches and programme delivery quality have an impact on outcomes. MyTime's practices that seem to lead to positive outcomes distilled from Comfort (2023) are outlined below,

1. A programme with broad aims and a flexible approach is most likely to meet the wide variety of mentee requirements.
2. Matching mentee requests for mentor gender and timing and location of sessions is respectful towards the mentee and helps build a relationship.
3. Young people are often uncertain how mentoring might help them (Spencer, 2007) and may have low expectations. Mentoring programmes should explain their offer clearly to referrers and young people, outlining who it can support to reduce inappropriate referrals.
4. Programmes should aim to recruit mentors with a positive view of young people and their assets, who can support young people to identify the resources they have to address their own problems, rather than directing discussions. Mentors can consider differences between them and mentees as opportunities to find out more about each other and build the relationship.
5. Training should offer a realistic view of mentoring including its challenges and potentially inconclusive outcomes. Mentors learn as much as mentees and should learn from and work with them rather than seeing themselves as 'experts' able to 'solve' issues young people face.
6. Mentors should take every opportunity to increase their mentee's ability to trust them, being reliable, compassionate, measured and having their mentee's best interests at heart. The trusting mentoring relationship helps develop mentees' protective assets (e.g., self-esteem and communication skills) which gives mentees access to the relationship's resources.
7. Mentors who prepare for mentoring sessions and accept a young person as they are demonstrate good practice. However, preparation should also allow mentee and mentor to

respond to issues that arise at short notice whilst keeping long-term goals in mind.

8. Effort put into identifying suitable locations to hold mentoring sessions is time well spent.
9. Mentees benefit when mentors can provide both emotional and practical support, particularly when a young person faces difficult times
10. Bourdieu (1986) mentions that 'endless effort' is required to build relationships with useable social capital. Mentors should put time and effort into activating the social capital within the mentoring relationship. Practically, this means sharing practical life experiences, information and contacts relevant to the young person's circumstances to help them reach their goals.
11. Mentors (and coordinators) can usefully regularly remind mentees that mentoring sessions are a time to be used as they wish. Mentors need to ensure that mentees lead what is discussed, listening to what they think a mentee is asking for whilst not allowing their preconceptions to take over. Supporting mentees to gain control in this way helps develop their sense of agency.
12. Mentors should be prepared to put considerable effort into encouraging communication. Appreciating that not all communication is verbal and using mentee behaviour and appearance as cues will help them understand mentee needs that may not be directly expressed.
13. Mentees whose mentors help combine mentee and mentor assets, knowledge, experience and contacts are more likely to arrive at solutions that match their situation and goals
14. Identifying and celebrating mentee success helps mentees improve their self-image by thinking better about themselves and recognising their assets. The fact that their mentor is a significant adult in mentees' lives can make earning their good opinion particularly valuable (Darling, Hamilton and Niego, 1994).
15. Taking an interest in a mentee's hobbies and passions can both build the mentoring relationship and help mentees to value their knowledge and expertise, increasing their self-esteem.
16. Mentees welcome light-heartedness about their situation rather than feeling shamed and judged. Fun and enjoyment are important in mentoring (Spencer and Rhodes, 2014) and humour differentiates mentoring from other therapeutic interventions (Philip, Shucksmith and King, 2004).
17. Endings are important (Rhodes, 2004). Mentors should keep the end of the relationship in mind and work towards this with the agreement of the mentee. Tapering off support may help a young person see that they are able to manage without their mentor. Agreeing an activity to celebrate the relationship and its successes ends the relationship on a positive note.

The findings from this research deepen our understanding of the practices that help young people achieve their goals despite obstacles and challenges outside their control and how youth mentoring can help.

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About the author

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