

Information for Volunteer Child Mentors

How our Child Mentoring Programme works

Children are referred to Children and Family Action by primary school teachers and, to a lesser extent, by social services and other agencies. If a child meets our referral criteria, we visit the child and his or her parents/carers at home to carry out a further assessment, and to discuss the family's incentive for participating in the mentoring programme. Only when there is unequivocal willingness to participate on the part of all concerned do we agree to accept a child for mentoring.

Once accepted, a child is matched with an adult volunteer mentor. The choice of mentor takes account of the child's interests, needs and circumstances, and other relevant factors pertaining to either the child or mentor. A Children and Family Action staff member briefs the child, parents/carers and mentor separately about any relevant issues before arranging an introductory meeting. After that, the mentoring begins.

Mentor and child meet once a week for a year, either on weekday evenings or at weekends. Each meeting lasts between two and four hours and usually takes place at a public venue such as a library, community centre, sports hall, museum or park.

During the first three months, the mentor focuses on building a trusting relationship with the child. The following nine months are spent helping the child reach agreed targets. The mentor's role is to help the child recognise and improve his/her behaviour without exploring the root cause of that behaviour. The focus is on building the child's inner resources and resilience so that s/he can better deal with situations that once would have triggered an anti-social or inappropriate response.

After the first three months, mentor, child, parents/carers and staff member meet to review progress and to agree targets for the next phase. The mentor also meets the staff member once a month for supervision and support. Additional support and training are offered throughout the year.

Mission statement

Our mission: to identify primary school children with behavioural difficulties who are at risk of developing anti-social or criminal behaviour in the future; to improve their lives by offering them individually tailored, one-to-one mentoring with a carefully screened, trained and supervised adult volunteer; to offer support and guidance to the children's parents/carers.

Our objectives: to introduce more stability into the children's lives; to reduce the isolation the children and their families may be experiencing; to directly address the difficulties experienced by each child; to support the children as they find the motivation and life skills they need to move forward; to channel the children's disruptive energy into projects that encourage a sense of personal achievement; to engender in the children a sense of self-worth.

Here at Children and Family Action we follow all appropriate safeguarding guidelines and practices. We also:

- Work to build and strengthen supportive partnerships with individuals and agencies involved in a vulnerable child's life
- Find the resources needed to provide a successful mentoring programme
- Recruit and train a reservoir of trustworthy, committed and compassionate adult volunteers upon whom we can call
- Evaluate our mentoring programmes and their effects, and make changes where appropriate
- Promote equality of opportunity and have non-discriminatory policies and practices.

How Mentors are selected

Our selection process is straightforward, and as follows:

- The applicant completes and returns our volunteer application form, and applies for a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) enhanced disclosure, without which s/he cannot work on a one-to-one basis with children.
- Once the completed application form has been processed, the applicant is given a place on our next available training course.
- Assessment takes place during a three-day (21-hour) training course (spread out over three weekends) and afterwards at an interview with two Children and Family Action members of staff. (The course gives prospective mentors the opportunity to acquire the skills and confidence needed to begin mentoring a child.)
- When assessing prospective mentors, we look for particular personal qualities ahead of experience and training. These qualities include a clear and friendly style of communication, a strong sense of responsibility, the ability to get on well with children, common sense, a capability and willingness to work enthusiastically within the boundaries of our solution-focused approach, excellent listening skills, a sense of humour, self-motivation, and commitment.

If after careful consideration you think you would like to become a positive role model for a child, please complete the application form and return it to us. Our address and fax number are on the form. If you would like to chat things over with our volunteer recruitment officer, or to find out how to apply for a CRB enhanced disclosure form, please call Carole Johnson on Tel: 01964 615340

Equal opportunity statement

At Children and Family Action we are committed to ensuring that no applicant or volunteer is disadvantaged in any way that cannot be justified according to the needs of our mentoring programmes and their beneficiaries.

What volunteer mentors do

What a mentor and child do together during a session depends largely on the interests and personalities of the pair, and on the goals agreed during the relationship. Activities might include art and craft projects, reading aloud, educational games, visits to museums and galleries, sports, and outdoor pursuits. What is essential, however, is that all mentors agree to work directly with their allocated child for at least two hours a week for one year, and to:

- Ensure the child is kept safe whilst in their charge treat the child with respect
- Introduce the child to positive life experiences
- Help the child understand the consequences of his/her actions
- Encourage responsible behaviour in the child
- Prompt the child to identify goals s/he wishes to achieve
- Help the child improve his/her social skills
- Remind the child of positive changes, however small
- Plan, review and keep a record of every mentoring session
- Attend monthly supervision and support sessions with a Children and Family programme manager
- Inform the programme manager promptly of any concerns arising during the mentoring
- Involve the child and parents/carers in decision-making about the work being undertaken
- Liaise with the child's schoolteacher or social worker, if necessary, under the direction of the programme manager.

Expenses

We are happy to refund reasonable out-of-pocket expenses for work undertaken as a children and Family Action volunteer.

The Kind of children we help

The children that meet our referral criteria are usually difficult to manage, unable to concentrate on their schoolwork, and/or have problems making friends and following instructions from adults. Many also have to contend with neglect, inadequate parental supervision and an unstable home-life.

The long-term benefits of mentoring

Mentoring can have a positive long-term effect on the behaviour of a child. Independent evaluations report that Chance UK's mentoring programme can help improve children's self-confidence, concentration and academic progress, and help them to relate more satisfactorily to others, understand better the consequences of their actions and develop a stronger sense of responsibility.

Chance UK's most recent evaluation shows that after completing the mentoring programme:

- 45% of children no longer qualified as having a behavioural difficulty
- 89% had measurably improved their behaviour
- 82% had more interest in class and were willing to ask questions
- 64% were better able to communicate with others
- 73% had improved concentration
- 64% had better anger management and self-control

Mentoring can make an immense difference to the life of a volunteer, too. Aside from the tremendous personal satisfaction of taking on a challenge and becoming someone a child can look up to, mentors often say that their time with us has enhanced their interpersonal and communication skills, increased their social awareness, improved their time management, and helped them develop leadership skills.

'From being a mentor I gained supervisory experience and leadership skills. A month after finishing the mentoring, I was promoted to a junior management position and now I line manage two people.'

Katherine, Defra employee and former mentor

Some volunteers tell us that the mentoring has helped them consider what kind of parent they would like to be and/or whether they are ready to become a parent.

Others have gone on to forge entirely new careers for themselves as a result of the mentoring, and now work in youth offending teams, and as teachers and youth workers.