

ABERDEEN FOYER

**REPORT OF YOUTH COACHING
PILOT**

November 2011 – June 2012

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Foyer Federation recently explored the development of coaching skills for staff. Stimulated by this and the general increase in the use of coaching, Aberdeen Foyer commenced a project in November 2011 to test the use of coaching with young people in their supported accommodation. An experienced Organisation Development and coaching practitioner was engaged to undertake the pilot over a period of approximately 7 months.

Key aims of the project agreed at the outset were:-

- to undertake an agreed number of individual coaching sessions with a group of 6-8 Foyer tenants and to evaluate the impact of the coaching sessions for these individuals and
- to manage the project in a way which would provide the opportunity for learning at every stage and to facilitate the identification of conclusions regarding coaching for tenants and the identification of organisational conclusions.

It was hoped that it would be possible to assess the impact of coaching on the ability of young people to develop and implement plans and the development of self reliance and the ability to “move on”. As will be seen, feedback gathered as part of the review process contributes to these issues and hopefully also to the understanding of the continued development of ways to support young people in reaching their potential.

In addition it was hoped to help Aberdeen Foyer to explore whether a coaching culture in their organisation will bring about organisational and client benefits which would be of value.

Previous papers ie the Reports of Stage 1 and Stage 2 of the pilot, have recorded what took place and some early reflections. This paper will focus on feedback from the young people who experienced coaching, feedback from some staff members who were closely associated with the pilot and a discussion of this feedback along with reflections from the facilitator of the pilot.

2. OVERVIEW OF THE PILOT

Stage 1 – Planning

The planning stage of the pilot, November 2011 – January 2012, focussed on the involvement of stakeholders for a number of reasons:-

- To ensure that stakeholders were fully informed about the pilot and could identify areas in which they wished to become involved
- To ensure that the facilitator understood fully the organisational context within which coaching would take place.
- To develop relationships in order to build mutual trust and confidence in the belief that this would enhance the project’s impact.

Several workshops took place in the various Foyer housing locations and one to one sessions were arranged for anyone with a specific interest. Approximately 30 staff attended these workshops.

The involvement of young people was also viewed as a priority. It was achieved through a number of visits to housing sites with a member of the Health Team who was offering workshops and with a student undertaking research on nutrition. A quiz was used to engage the young people and food was made available to attract interest. Around 20 young people attended.

Stage 2 – Implementation of coaching

A total of 9 tenants have experienced coaching. Three young people were in Aberdeen at Trinity Court and 6 in Aberdeenshire locations.

The anticipated 5 coaching sessions for each young person have taken place in 3 cases. One of this group received an additional session since one session was curtailed. One young person who moved into their own flat prior to their 4th session decided to conclude their coaching at their 4th session as part of their own “personal moving on”. Another received only 4 sessions due to personal issues for him. Two young people have received only 1 session and have decided that they do not wish to continue. The remaining young person has been ill since her first session. She wished to continue but is now in full time employment and unable to attend appointments.

	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Length of time in Foyer Accom</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Number of sessions</u>	<u>Location of sessions</u>	<u>Current situation</u>
1	F	6 months	Fraserburgh	5	Flat	Has moved into own flat
2	F	6 months	Trinity Court	4	Flat	Has moved into own flat
3	M	6 months	Inverurie	5	Office area	Has moved into own flat
4	M	7 months	Inverurie	6	Office area	Foyer accommodation
5	M	5 months	Inverurie	5	Office area	In Foyer accommodation
6	M	4 months	Inverurie	4	Office area	In Foyer accommodation
7	M	6 months	Stonehaven	1	Office area	In Foyer accommodation
8	F	2 months	Trinity Court	1	Flat	In Foyer accommodation and now in full time employment.
9	M	1 month	Trinity Court	1	Flat	In Foyer accommodation.

3. FEEDBACK FROM YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people provided feedback on their experience of coaching informally in their final coaching session and via a questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed through the Housing Support Workers and on some occasions, they assisted with completion of the questionnaire. 5 young people provided questionnaire feedback.

The feedback outlined below brings together both types of feedback.

	<u>GOALS</u>	<u>ACHIEVEMENTS</u>	<u>USEFULNESS</u>	<u>OTHER COMMENTS</u>
A	Help me to make my mind up and figure out what I want to do.	I have achieved everything I set out to achieve. After speaking to Elaine, I learned new things and set out new goals.	It was most useful when it was helping me to think. Made me self-aware. You have to look at yourself – dig deep – learn things you didn't know.	
B	To sort my head out – be more outgoing and sociable, less worried about what others think. I feel "heavy" – I would like to feel lighter and happier.	It has certainly helped – it improved my confidence. Without it I don't reckon I would have been able to handle living in my own place as well as I have. My motivation is increased – to tidy up, do washing – I am worth making my space OK.	I believe I would have achieved the same without coaching but it would have taken twice as long.	It made me think a bit more and helped me to improve myself – I have spread my wings a bit – it's been like a bird hatching!
C	To be able to attend appointments on time, I wouldn't lose things and wouldn't need outside help.			
D	Expand my horizons			

<p>E</p>	<p>Make some progress in volunteering activity.</p>	<p>The thought of dealing with situations from interviews to large groups was more daunting than it would actually be in practice..... I managed the relatively monumental task of applying to college and in the meantime applying to volunteer.</p> <p>The change has been in my own attitude, the increased positivity I feel has enabled me to climb out of the rut I have been in so long.</p> <p>The psychological change from before makes up for the little amount of change I have practically made. However, I feel this is more valuable.</p>	<p>It worked very effectively mainly due to the analytical way in which it was conducted. I got positive feedback and good suggestions from Elaine.</p> <p>Coaching is useful if you are trying to move on – get a job.</p> <p>Essentially it broke down and gave me strategies to deal with social interaction, formal or otherwise.</p>	<p>It allowed me to speak and made me really think. Made me realise how little I need to do to set things off. I was taken aback by how easy a first step could be.</p> <p>It was practical and helped me to make a plan. I ended up positive and enthusiastic about doing something.</p> <p>Instead of looking at why I can't (counselling), the coaching helped me look at how I can.</p> <p>Elaine helped because she helped me to see things realistically and objectively while being empathetic.</p>
<p>F</p>	<p>I would like to be happy with myself – I feel stuck.</p> <p>To get a job – I feel stuck.</p>	<p>I didn't fully achieve what I wanted though I now feel I have some good tools to use. I am still feeling the benefits of the process.</p>	<p>It has and is still helping.</p>	<p>It's not a quick fix.</p> <p>I realised that telling myself something isn't enough.</p>
<p>G</p>	<p>Be able to cope with everything.</p>	<p>I believe so, I simply wanted to try a new approach to counselling to allow myself some time to explain and think on a larger scale about aspects of life that may have been causing me some concern.</p>	<p>I left the sessions feeling a little more "in the know" about what has been causing me stress and what's important at certain points in time.</p>	<p>It helped me to create a map in my head – by explaining to you how my mind works, it helped me to understand it better myself.</p> <p>There was no real change to much, just how I was feeling about certain issues, to give them some perspective.</p>

H	I'd like to get a job – what is it I am doing wrong? I wouldn't reject an opportunity to move on – in other words be in a new relationship.			
I	I'd like to get a job			

Notes

- a) Young person C did not complete a post-coaching questionnaire
- b) Young person D attended 1 coaching session then in discussion with the Housing Support Worker decided not to continue
- c) Young person H attended 1 coaching session and is now in full time employment
- d) Young person I attended 1 coaching session then decided not to continue since it “reminded him too much of counselling”.

e) Barriers

The insight which was shown in answer to the question “What got in the way of achieving your goals?” was interesting. Examples are :-

“Myself”

“Procrastination, self sabotage, inability to socialise. I sabotaged things before I even began because it was easier to stay in my bubble. I picked things such as getting stoned over progressing to achieve simplistic things such as buying food, electric etc”

“Drinking and being too sociable got in my way but I have minimised both.”

“I believe it was a straightforward question with a great deal of hidden depth depending on the person, goals etc. For me, it would have been my short attention span and lack of motivation. These both affected my thinking profusely.”

f) Would you recommend coaching to someone else?

Responses to this question were again positive – **“Yes. I loved the fact that it was so relaxed. This made me feel really comfortable. I especially liked to be able to choose the venue”.**

Similarly, **“Yes, if they needed to talk to someone about issues troubling them and they would prefer an alternative form of counselling to the normal”.**

A particularly insightful comment was **“Depends on their situation but if someone actually asked me I would have to tell them to try it out and generate their own opinions as it depends on the individual’s ability to open up and express themselves. Plus, by necessity you have to want to move on.”**

4. FEEDBACK FROM STAFF

Those staff who were most closely involved in the pilot ie. Housing Support Workers who had a young person that they had encouraged, and those in the Health Team who had been most closely involved were asked for their feedback. This was obtained through a one to one “interview” based on a semi-structured questionnaire. Four Housing Support Workers agreed to provide feedback and one member of the Health Team. A summary of comments is set out below.

a) General involvement of staff in the pilot

The organisation of the pilot in a way which facilitated the involvement of staff was appreciated. Staff said that the preparation and involvement was **“very thorough – we were very clear what was happening”**. As well as being kept informed those who were interviewed felt that they were encouraged to think about the pilot and that their **“thoughts were taken on board”**.

Staff described how they provided information and encouragement to young people, facilitated the making of appointments and an attitude of supportiveness without prying during the coaching process. The trust and confidence that was built through their involvement was commented on and flexibility and creativity were noted as positive features of the pilot. One Housing Support Worker saw a tripartite arrangement consisting of young person, coach and Housing Support Worker and suggested that if this were strengthened there may be more benefits. They suggested that **“the Housing Support Worker could be used to keep the benefits going”**. This person also said that **“Our involvement avoided/reduced the risk of no uptake of the coaching”** emphasising the importance of their involvement.”

It was noted by one staff member that while there was significant involvement throughout for staff who were “connected” to a young person engaged in coaching, by contrast in locations with no young people engaged there is a **“need to keep it on the radar. Maybe some meetings during the implementation would have been useful. If you didn’t have any young people involved eg Torry and Banchory, you will probably be wondering what is happening”**.

Some comments were made about the individual process for each young person. One opinion was that **“there could have been more collaboration on the process for each young person eg to think about best frequency, best day”**. Another speculated that it would have been better to provide more **“regular appointments and closer together”** but they acknowledged the importance of flexibility and an individual approach.

b) Coach and coaching style

The value of the process and the coach taking a flexible approach was noted repeatedly along with **“the willingness to see people outside hours and in their own flat”**. It was felt that there was a value to using an external coach **“who doesn’t know stuff about their tenancy, what’s happening for them and can be impartial with no baggage”**.

In the preparation phase of the pilot many concerns were expressed about confidentiality and the risk that this would prevent the transfer of important information about a tenant to Housing Support Workers. In the event this did not arise and one member of staff who had been involved in some of the discussions commented that it was **“interesting that communication didn’t arise as an issue”**.

Comments were generally very positive even though there was a feeling of uncertainty about **“what coaching actually consists of”**. A way of achieving more understanding of the process could be to arrange **“direct experience of coaching themselves or seeing a role play of a coaching session”**.

One person said **“It’s a good tool. I like the fact it has a beginning, a middle, an end – sets a boundary. The short sharp focus is good. But maybe it would be possible to offer more than one series of sessions to a young person”**.

c) Visible changes in young people

Staff noticed very few visible changes in the young people using coaching but the following observations were made. **“There was a significant shift in S - he was much more able to say no I can’t do that”**. Another was seen to have **“gained confidence to set out what he wanted to do”**. Regarding a third **“some goals were achieved eg making appointments, tidiness, some positive things”** but this member of staff said **“I can’t be sure coaching led to it”**

d) How to identify the young people who might gain the most from coaching

A key area explored in the interviews was what are the benefits of coaching and how can the young people who might benefit be identified. A consistency of view emerged though it was expressed very differently by each respondent. It related to the degree to which the young person had a sense of the future. This was expressed as **“an optimistic outlook”**, a **“willingness to grab the lifebelt”**, those **“with lots of ideas who need to channel them and want to do things”** and an **“expression by the young person that they want or need change”**. This final point led to a discussion about the possibility that a young person may want change but that they **“may need to explore this because they don’t know exactly what it is**

they want". The interviewee speculated **"perhaps we can do more to help them to understand – they say they want something, we offer a menu of things, they don't engage and we get frustrated! We need to work with them to help them work out what they want rather than offer a menu which doesn't feel right".**

The ability to make choices and the level of insight were also mentioned and this led to a discussion about being "stuck" and a view that the "stuck" young people may be the ones who would benefit the most. When asked what "stuck" means and how to recognise it some helpful ideas emerged:-

"Stuck is bored, demotivated, maybe in chaos"

"Stuck could be dependency (on benefits), their whole world is here and its small. They don't try things"

"Not trying to better themselves. Not learning life skills".

Benefits were outlined, some of which were conceptual and others which were specific and practical. On a conceptual level **"supporting their transition and their ownership"** was identified as well as working with **"their thought patterns rather than practical/activity"**. Helping to **"broaden horizons"** was also highlighted for those who **"get into a safe place here which is often calm after the chaos and if we are not careful they get stuck in the comfort of this safe place with no motivation to move forward"**.

On a more practical note, providing a **"step to make ideas real which might help to pinpoint what gets in the way (of progress). It might help them move from A to C – and get over the hurdle, B."** This reflected some of the feedback from young people which included mention of breaking things down into practical and achievable steps.

However, one comment was that **"everyone could benefit"** and this was related to offering **"one more person in someone's development which is potentially a good thing. Maybe on subjects that its not appropriate for me, as Housing Support Worker, to talk about"**.

e) What should happen next

All staff interviewed expressed a view that coaching should be included if possible in the range of interventions/services which are offered to young people. It would be a **"valuable option on the menu of things we offer. We need a variety of approaches and multi-disciplinary alternatives"**.

Another view was that **"It should be a regular service but we need to be selective about who receives it. It is complementary to Life Skills training"**.

The question of how and by whom the service should be provided was explored. While it was felt that there may be some advantages to training some Housing Support Workers to be coaches, some risks were identified. The possibility of role conflict and the difficulty of making coaching a priority in an operational service with all the urgency that can be involved were noted. The suggestion that a Housing Support Worker trained to be a coach might provide the service on a site other than their own may reduce some of the risk of role conflict but the issue of prioritising coaching would remain.

An additional view was that some training in coaching skills would be beneficial for Housing Support Workers. As well as adding more **"tools to their tool box"** it was felt that it may have another beneficial impact on confidence and motivation.

In relation to the conclusion of the pilot staff need to **"see a finish point and see some follow through"** and the report should be made available to all staff.

5. DISCUSSION OF KEY THEMES

It must be remembered that this pilot set out to take a rigorous approach but there was no intention that it would be a piece of research. The approach was one which involved reflection throughout in order to ensure that learning took place and this discussion of the data should be viewed in that light.

The area of coaching lends itself to an action learning approach where the initial testing results in learning which then informs subsequent testing and so on.

a) Involvement of staff

It is clear from the feedback that staff perceptions were of significant benefits arising from their involvement. During the planning stage of the pilot, opportunities were taken wherever possible to build relationships with Housing Support Workers with the intention of gaining as much understanding as possible of the environment into which the coaching would be introduced. Feedback makes it clear that staff felt that as a result there was mutual trust and respect which led to a willingness on their part to encourage young people to consider coaching and to facilitate their engagement in coaching.

Another advantage which flowed from staff involvement was their enhanced knowledge of coaching which enabled them to answer questions and identify those who may have an interest and respond to coaching. As one Housing Support Worker said ***“Our involvement avoided/reduced the risk of no uptake of the coaching”***.

It is interesting to note that the Housing Support Workers who expressed most interest in coaching and with whom the coach had the strongest relationships, were the staff who encouraged and supported the young people who participated in the coaching. It is therefore possible that others may have been interested but that their Housing Support Worker was less engaged. This must be remembered if coaching continues to be provided in order to ensure that there is equality of access to coaching.

Similarly, the engagement of managers should be considered. Their engagement after the planning stage of the pilot was minimal. If coaching is to continue as a service, the engagement of managers will be crucial to ensure that it is fully integrated into the range of activities available to young people.

b) Coaching process

Research has shown that a significant proportion of the impact from coaching and other related interventions results from the quality of the relationship between coach and client regardless of the type of intervention. Significant effort was therefore directed to achieving a balance between the content of the process ie the skills, tools and techniques which were deployed, and the relational elements.

Coaching content - A range of coaching approaches were used with the young people in the pilot. These included Cognitive Behavioural Coaching, the Solution Focussed approach, leadership development models, the Myers Briggs Type Indicator and some elements of Neuro-Linguistic Programming.

Relational elements - Attention was directed towards creating a relationship of equality with the young people. Treating them as adults, avoiding a sense of the coach being an authority figure, allowing young people to determine the agenda and respecting and valuing their views were features of the approach.

Wherever possible the young people were encouraged to make decisions whether relating to the agenda for sessions or the timing and location of sessions. Some found this difficult and had a tendency to defer to the coach for advice but this was resisted and with encouragement all improved in their willingness to take responsibility for their views and wishes.

Much of the feedback from young people related to the relaxed atmosphere of the coaching sessions and they concluded that this level of relaxation contributed in a major way to the benefits for them.

Practical considerations - All coaching sessions took place locally and appointment times, frequency and exact location were determined by the young people themselves. The feedback suggests that while this may present some organisational challenges it was a valuable aspect of the process.

For the purpose of the pilot it was decided that each person would be offered 5 sessions. Again, feedback indicates that setting a boundary in this way was useful rather than offering an “open ended” approach. There is little data to help to determine whether or not 5 sessions was the correct number to offer. However, in the view of the coach it would appear to be reasonable.

These aspects of process should be considered in the event that coaching continues. It was clear from the feedback that flexibility regarding practical arrangements was valued. The absence of feedback about skills and tools may indicate that the relational approach is important but this cannot be assumed.

c) **Identification of young people who are likely to benefit**

During the planning stage of the pilot a number of workshops took place and one of the activities which was included was the creation of a “map of a tenant journey”. The aims of this activity were both to develop a view of the whole journey undertaken by young people in the Foyer accommodation and to identify any obvious stage where coaching might best be offered. No obvious stage in the journey was identified so the pilot was carried out in a way which offered the opportunity for all young people to “opt in” to coaching. Feedback was sought from both those who completed their coaching sessions and those who did not and staff considered both groups for their feedback.

As noted in paragraph 4a), a key factor appears to be the degree to which young people have a sense of the future. This may manifest itself as a sense of optimism or expressions about desiring or needing change. One young person felt that she was in a state of readiness, she had reached the stage where she knew she had to **“do something about her life”**, when the coaching pilot was offered. Her view was that frequent review sessions with young people where coaching and other interventions might be offered would be one way of trying to capitalise on an individual reaching this state of readiness. This would imply an active promotion of coaching by Housing Support Staff reinforcing the need for staff to be well informed and engaged with coaching.

Two young people attended one coaching session and did not continue. One of these described the session as reminding him too much of counselling with more “looking back” than he wanted. The other was in a somewhat chaotic situation involving substance misuse and with his Housing Support Worker decided not to continue.

The level of insight of the young people who participated in the coaching and their level of recall of the content of sessions was greater than anticipated. Similarly, the self awareness and ability to articulate thoughts and feelings was notable. It is possible that there may be some relationship between these attributes and “readiness” to move forward.

d) Achievements resulting from coaching

It is not possible with any degree of certainty to attribute the changes young people described directly to the coaching process. However, there are indications that coaching is perceived to have contributed significantly to the progress of the young people who participated in several coaching sessions. The young people themselves believe it contributed and the coach shares that belief.

However, it is interesting that most of what is described as being useful is cognitive in nature rather than practical. This is contrary to what was anticipated by the Foyer at the outset

There was often a clear connection between the thought processes the young people described and their practical application. The most notable was the development of the ability to break a goal down into a plan made up of realistic small steps in pursuit of the goal.

e) Next steps

As has already been noted, there was a view from staff that coaching should continue to be offered. Similarly, young people said that they would recommend it to other young people with a caveat by some that it would depend on an individual's willingness and ability to engage.

Some staff were interested in the possibility of training to be a coach and if this were to be considered there are major issues to be explored. As well as the issues associated with cost there are feasibility factors relating to the length of training, the need for practical experience as part of the training as well as ongoing CPD and supervision. The provision of coaching through existing staff who would be required to combine an operational role with their coaching role would present some significant challenges. These could include role conflict for the staff member, role confusion for young people and the ability to ensure coaching would remain a priority in the face of urgent operational demands.

The possibility of the development of some coaching skills for staff was another suggestion and it was noted that this could support the creation of action plans, could help young people who find it difficult to articulate goals to be able to express their aspirations and to support the transition for young people from the early stages of needing support and safety to self sufficiency. An example of this is the use of weekly planners provided by staff which do not encourage ownership and independence.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The Youth Coaching Pilot delivered what was intended and the feedback from both young people themselves and staff indicates that coaching can make a valuable contribution to the progress of some young people in supported accommodation. The pilot has revealed some important factors which may help with the identification of the young people most likely to benefit.

A number of staff have expressed a great deal of interest in coaching and any opportunity for them to develop some coaching skills.

Based on these key messages it is recommended that consideration is given to continuing to include coaching in the range of services available to young people in supported accommodation and also to the development of coaching skills for appropriate staff.

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