

Taking the stone from my heart: An exploration of the benefits of a mentoring programme (PROMISE) for children at risk of significant harm

*Clinical Child Psychology
and Psychiatry*
1–16

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DOI: 10.1177/1359104518805227

journals.sagepub.com/home/ccp



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Abstract

This article reports on a multi-methods longitudinal evaluation of the PROMISE mentoring scheme which was developed in Somerset UK to offer a continuing relationship for vulnerable young people with a volunteer mentor. The overall findings indicate that mentoring was experienced very positively and contributed to both fostering a sense of trust and to reducing the insecure attachments of the young people. The findings are considered within a relational and attachment framework to offer a model of how mentoring achieves positive change. Implications for development of the service and encouragement for others to develop similar services are discussed.

Keywords

Mentoring, children at risk, attachment security, evaluation, research

Introduction

The PROMISE mentoring project has been running in Somerset UK since 1999. It includes over 170 volunteers who provide mentoring to young people who have experienced considerable disadvantage in terms of their circumstances. These children typically display extremely poor prognosis in terms of educational attainment, employment and general health and social well-being (Marmot, 2010). They are at high risk of needing mental health services and also of experiencing problems with the police and eventually of spending time in prison (Tarren-Sweeney, 2008, 2010). Apart from being morally unjustifiable, this situation can also incur an extremely high cost for services, for example, residential mental health and forensic placements (McCrone, Sujith, Patel, Knapp, & Lawton-Smith, 2008).

Children in the project have experienced physical, mental and emotional abuse or neglect, and most have a current or historic care plan in place. The scheme has been delivering support through

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weekly meetings between Mentors and Mentees, usually for a period of 2–5 years. This constitutes a substantial presence of a consistent and benevolent figure in lives of the children. A preliminary research study (Dallos & Comley-Ross, 2005) found that mentees found it extremely helpful. Likewise, general feedback from other professional working with the children suggests that the service has a substantially positive impact. However, there was a need to develop a more substantial evaluation including an attempt to identify some of the active ingredients contributing to the positive outcomes of the mentoring process.

The PROMISE scheme draws on a body of research and service experience which supports the idea that mentoring can offer the experience of a positive and supportive relationship which can help to compensate for the lack of such experiences in the children's lives (Evans & Ave, 2000; Rhodes et al., 1999). A review of 55 evaluation studies (Dubois and Karcher, 2005) showed that children at risk gained more than others. Furthermore, longer relationships were more effective than shorter ones (Grossman & Rhodes, 2002). Benefits to the mentee have been said to include the following: compensating for the lack of positive experiences (Evans & Ave, 2000; Rhodes, Haight, & Briggs, 1999; Zand et al., 2009), having a positive role model (Evans & Ave, 2000; Haensly & Parsons, 1993) and the opportunity for therapeutic outcomes such as insight, reassurance/relief and problem solutions as well as practical outcomes (Llewelyn, 1988). Importantly, it has also been suggested that mentoring can foster resilience, for example, Evans and Ave (2000), found the relationship could develop self-esteem and build a reservoir of successful and positive experiences that the young person could refer upon when later troubled.

Theories of mentoring

Despite evidence supporting the effectiveness of mentoring, there is surprisingly little in the way of theory or research to guide its application and inspire its future development. As with many therapeutic approaches, research has often concentrated on evaluation and outcome: whether it works – rather than on an exploration of the process of how it works. In a previous study, Dallos and Comley-Ross (2005) found that the positive experiences appeared to be clearly related to the nature of the relationship formed with the mentor. The children mentioned the importance of a sense of being valued and appreciated by their mentors and of being held in mind by their mentors, including a sense that their mentors would be thinking about them and of holding the mentors in their own minds – being able to imagine how the mentor might advise and guide them. They also felt the relationship was fostered by positive actions that 'spoke louder than words', such that the mentors showed their care and commitment this way. Engaging in pleasant and memorable activities assisted in the process of internalisation and generated positive feelings when they thought about their mentor.

A number of studies have supported these findings; for example, Renick-Thomson and Zand (2010) found that the quality of the mentor-youth bond significantly predicted youths' relationships with others at 8 and 16 months. Dubois and Karcher (2005) identified that more contact led to greater closeness and greater benefits, suggesting that the relationship created the opportunity for change. Langhout, Rhodes, and Osborne (2004) argued relative to controls, that youths who perceived their relationship as providing activities, structure and unconditional support derived the largest benefits from the relationship.

Attachment theory has been employed to consider the development of the mentoring relationship and alliance. Spencer, Collins, Ward, and Smashnaya (2010) showed that the negative experiences of fostered children prevented them from establishing a close relationship with mentors. They argued that their internal representations led to biased interpretations of social stimuli, leading them to exhibit dependence or hostility towards the mentors when they were distressed. A core assumption of the mentoring intervention is that developing a caring and close relationship cultivates protective factors and places the youth on a positive developmental trajectory. However, the

exact mechanism through which mentoring exerts its influence remains unclear (Renick-Thomson & Zand, 2010). One theory is that the mentor served as a secure secondary attachment figure, which enabled the competency in other relationships (Bordin, 1994). Renick-Thomson and Zand (2010) conducted a survey of 205 mentored children and found that the quality of the bond in the mentor-youth relationship predicted other socioemotional development, including relationship-based outcomes outside of the relationship such as friendship with and self-disclosure to other adults at 8 and 16 months. Likewise, Zand et al. (2009) argued an alliance resulted in better family bonding, better relationships with adults, better bonding at school and better life skills. Alternatively, relational theorists have suggested interaction and positive emotional experiences become internalised, altering internal attachment models. For example, internal models are modified in a more positive way (Rhodes, 2005). Mentoring may alter the youth's perception of their interpersonal relationships with other peers, adults and teachers (Renick-Thomson & Zand, 2010).

But while these proposals describe the strength of the relationship between different factors, they are not sensitive enough to explore how mentoring impacts on the children's ability to trust in the relationship and thereby illuminate the mechanisms in play. Dallos and Comley-Ross (2005) found that when absent, mentees felt mentors still thought of them and cared for their well-being, in contrast to other professionals working with them. They had internalised how the mentor might advise and guide them. This insight into a possible mechanism suggested this process is worthy of more extensive evaluation.

Aims of the study

The aims of this study were to explore the experiences of young people and how these changed over a year of PROMISE mentoring. Specifically, this study explores the following:

1. The personal circumstances and attachment needs in the sample;
2. How the mentor–mentee relationship changed and developed;
3. Changes perceived as resulting from having a mentor;
4. Changes in attachment security;
5. Changes in mental health and coping skills.

Method

Research design

A longitudinal design was employed with two data collection points, 1 year apart (T1 and T2). A multi-methods approach was utilised with attempts to integrate the data collected. Audit data provided a profile, and two semi-structured interviews explored the experience of the mentoring relationship. Responses to narrative attachment scenarios, the relationship questionnaire and the strengths and difficulties questionnaire produced a categorical frequency of profile that was compared across time, within subjects, and could be combined with the qualitative analysis to support the discussion (Burt, 2015). For the quantitative elements, a control group was not employed as it was inappropriate to not offer the service to children who might benefit.

Participants

The sample of 20 young people was an average of 14 years old at T1, with an age range of 9–19 years. Sampling was opportunistic in terms of inviting children who fitted the inclusion criteria, who agreed to take part in the study and verbal consent was given by the guardian. The children were given informa-

tion about the study and gave verbal informed consent themselves. Attrition was due to practical reasons, such as illness, moving away, or the end of the mentoring period. All excerpts are anonymised.

Measures

Audit data. The data were collected by two second authors in a mentor's structured report about participants, their family context, presence of abuse, mental health, education and offending behaviour.

Semi-structured interview. A half-hour interview was conducted at each time point, the former focussing more on the start of the relationship and the latter focussing more on its development and both focusing on the quality of the relationship. Following a thematic analysis framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006), each individual interview was transcribed verbatim, coded against the research questions into a coding frame, and inter-rater reliability was obtained through comparison, discussion and operational definition leading to calibration about coding decisions. Then themes were identified that embraced the children's experience of mentoring and development in their attachment orientation, and these were linked to quotations from transcripts.

Questionnaires provided categorical responses, which could be combined with the thematic analysis. In this respect, like a content analysis, they analysed frequencies, but the sample is not large or representative enough to provide enough power for a statistical analysis.

Narrative attachment measure. This assessed attachment insecurity and trauma and featured attachment scenarios depicted by photograph and vignette, examples are given in Figure 1 (based on the Separation Anxiety Test, Resnick, 1993; Wrigh et al, 2006). Dyadic scenarios depicted a same sex child with a friend moving away, mum taken into hospital, dad moving out and mum leaving, Triadic scenarios featured two friends ganging up against the third, both parents arguing over a school report in front of the third and a phonecall to the absent parent while the other listened. Responses were recorded and transcribed verbatim and scored for the presence of avoidant, anxious ambivalent responses, solutions to the dilemma, reflexive functioning and awareness of the triadic process (where appropriate). Scoring was done using a rating system (where 1=low and 9=high), and two researchers calibrated over six randomly chosen participants to achieve inter-rater reliability ($k=.8$). A mean score was calculated for dyadic and triadic scenarios for each participant at each time point. It was also indicated whether the scenario reminded the participant of similar relationship trauma, and the number of participants affected was recorded.

Relationship questionnaire. This assessed self-reported attachment security and asked the young person to make a choice from four attachment orientations which best depicted them in relationship with others (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). It provided a categorisation of the dominant attachment style (secure, anxious/fearful, preoccupied/needy and dismissing/avoidant).

The strengths and difficulties questionnaire. This measured self-perceived challenging and prosocial behaviour that the young people reported, providing an indication of their perception of their social behaviour, in the context of their circumstances and experiences (Goodman, Meltzer, & Bailey, 1998). Participant's scores are compared to a benchmark to quantify current need (none, some or high need) and also compared within subjects across time.

Procedure

Audit data were collected by two second authors prior to the main research study. Then either one of the first two authors conducted a half-hour semi-structured interview with a mentee in a local

	
<p>Triadic: Parents arguing over a school report</p>	<p>Dyadic: other leaving to go into hospital</p>
	
<p>Triadic: Phone call to absent parent</p>	<p>Dyadic: Friend leaving</p>

Figure 1. Examples of separation and triadic photos employed to elicit attachment responses.

community centre, followed by the narrative attachment measure (based on Resnick’s (1993) Separation Anxiety Test), relationship questionnaire (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) and strengths and difficulties questionnaire (Goodman et al., 1998). Each face-to-face meeting took about 1 hour to complete. The involvement with PROMISE continued throughout and the second data collection was repeated after a year by the first two authors.

Results

Audit data

Nine children had been with their mentor for 6 months or less, three for 7–12 months, six for 13–23 months, and two for more than 24 months. Most relationships had established before the start of the study, so it was impossible to assess the development of the relationship from a baseline position. Two had had more than one mentor for practical reasons.

While many children did live at home with a parent, 14/20 children had experienced an emotional/inconsistent, rejecting or neglectful relationship with their mother (and sometimes father), and the absence of a positive fatherly attachment was clear in nearly all cases. All the children had limited security in the place where they lived, or in the relationship with their caregivers. They came from families with considerable dysfunction, including substance abusers, offending behaviour, mental health issues, abusive or had physical health or learning difficulties. All the children had experienced at least one incident of neglect, physical and/or sexual abuse or caring for an adult with physical health or learning difficulties, and 7/19 children experienced two or more of these. Only two children had no

current or historic care plan in place. Some placements at home had entirely broken down and three children were currently living permanently away from their families in foster care or a children's unit. Most of those over 16 years old had already left home and were living independently. The impact of these difficulties was starting to emerge and 20% reported difficulties at school. Also, mentors reported that half the children clearly presented with a mental health issue, including high anxiety and anger (although this status was not provided for half of the children because some mentors did not wish to evaluate them in this respect). Two children exhibited violent or offending behaviour. A further child was reported to be so challenging that her behaviour was managed by the local authority.

Referring to the strengths and differences questionnaire (Goodman, 1997), 73% of children's self-reported challenging behaviour did not change significantly after a period of mentoring. It is important to note that 40% of the sample expressed a low need for intervention at the start of the study, and 66% of children recognised their high need at the end of the study. This possibly fitted with a profile of these children denying or minimising their needs and challenges and becoming more aware and able to express them. However, 66% showed a small improvement in their perception of their prosocial behaviour at the end of the study. This fitted with their qualitative interviews suggesting a sense of security and positive view or relationships being fostered by their mentoring relationship.

Qualitative analysis

Dominant themes depicting the mentoring relationship

Mentor as like a good friend – a supportive, reciprocal relationship. This theme contained the idea that the mentor was a source of emotional support and could be relied upon to be available when needed. It also involved the idea of the relationship being mutual and reciprocal – involving give and take from each other, being a team and working together and developing shared perspectives. First impressions were, in most cases positive, that the mentor continued to be friendly and approachable. The young people described the relationship in very positive terms overall and specifically in terms such as like a good friend, someone to do things with, someone to have fun with, like a member of the family and as having become a part of their lives:

Sarah: Oh, she just fits in really well cause she's just, she's like an auntie to me. She just feels really close to me.

Importantly, they did not see the mentor in professional terms and a number of the young people emphasised this. It was important for them that the mentors were volunteers who were not being paid and mentees felt that their mentor liked and cared about them. For many of them, this was quite a significant and evocative thought, which made them value their contribution to the relationship:

Danny: [He] thinks I am a Umm, a great guy.

Alison: I think that she's liked that my behaviour has changed and that I can be trusted with things and that I know that I can do things that I don't think I can do.

An important part of the relationship was a sense of a feeling of unconditional support, not being judged and being able to trust that the mentor would be able and willing to help and support them.

Helping to manage difficult feelings was an extremely important theme in that young people reported that the mentoring experience helped them to feel better:

Jessica: If like I need to talk to someone about depression she's the one to do it. Because then she doesn't judge me . . . She completely like understands everything. . . . I don't want to leave her to be honest.

At the second interview, Jessica described significant changes:

Jessica: I used to have depression and now I don't have it. I think mostly it's because I know she is there it takes the stone? From my heart . . . I don't always need help with anything, like I can manage by myself, I . . . knowing that she's there I can turn to someone and someone will definitely sort it out for me. It just makes me feel better.

How mentors achieved this was not just through words, but in offering a presence:

Victor: Without even, without saying 'calm down', he was someone who'll calm me down without even saying it, so. . .

The young people described that their mentoring relationship equipped them to be able to cope more effectively, so they felt more confident about being able to manage their own feelings:

Danny: In the moment, I would just play music, calm myself down, so I don't have a go at someone that [. . .] is just trying to help. . . . He does say it's helpful because if you think about it, it's not like I'm going out, you know, doing what I used to do. . . I'm just calming down.

Talking things through was emphasised as an important part of the two features above. The young people clarified that their mentors did not push them to talk about difficult topics, but communicated that they were available for them to talk if they wanted to do so:

Frank: Yeah, he's the sort of person I can talk to about things like what's happened in the house. It might be when I've been upset, he's a person to talk to.

Other aspects of the relationship that were perceived to be important were assistance with practical issues, such as helping with problems at school or college, or advice about managing finances:

Jane: Now, she's finding out for me about my income support. She's helping me, ringing people.

Mentoring as psychologically beneficial

Many of the young people described that they felt that they had become more confident as a result of the mentoring relationship. Frequently this was described in terms of the mentor helping them to try out new solutions or confront difficult situations:

David: Ohh, umm, when I was in year 11 he took me to a prom and umm, it was actually quite good fun. It was the first prom I ever had. I didn't really cope in large groups of people

when I was at mainstream so didn't get a chance to go to a prom with school. . . . now my confidence is pretty good so I can meet new people so I'm never getting nervous about it.

There were frequent references to difficulties in the young people's lives which were related to difficulties in managing feelings, but they felt that their mentors had helped them to deal with problematic situations, including conflicts:

Victor: I think [without a mentor], umm, my life would be a bit worse I think. Umm, mean I would have more arguments with my mother and my older brother. And, it would be more of a negative experience than a positive.

and

Lila: I used to be very horrible to other people and I used to take out my problems on other person. . . . And [she] helped me to get over that and she told me that I can't blame. . . . my problems on someone else.

Based in actions

Actions speak louder than words – an important theme was that the relationship was also about doing things together, having fun and helping the young person to get out, meet people, do things and reduce their sense of isolation and loneliness. It was important for all of the young people, and this included a variety of activities that were meaningful to them – going for walks, shopping, going to the cinema, going swimming and so on. These activities were seen as having a host of positive effects, but a frequent report was that it gave them a break from difficult situations and feelings. However, the activities were not some form of avoidance or escape but were seen as contributing to the young people's opportunities to participate in activities and that helped them feel better. This, in turn, helped them feel more confident and more positive about themselves. Engaging in pleasant activities was something that was predominantly missing from the lives of many of the children, especially compared to children from more stable families. These beneficial effects continued across the two-time points in the study. Importantly, engaging in activities and a change of setting was also perceived as helping them to think differently about themselves and their situation. It facilitated possibilities for engaging in conversations with their mentors about difficulties and challenges in their everyday lives.

Building trust

Without exception, the children reported that the development of the relationship featured becoming closer and developing more trust. It was, in fact, surprising that there was only one reported incidence of an argument, and this was fairly rapidly resolved:

Lila: Well, there was one when I went to a forest with her and the PROMISE group and we were playing a game and [she] told me to. . . she said we had to go and um, I said all we had to do was tag someone and she just. . . and we just had an argument and then I really upset her and then we said sorry to each other and we were fine.

Sometimes, they also communicated wariness in becoming too involved too quickly:

May: Well to start off with, like, a little bit of my space from her, but then as I got to know her . . . started to go lots of fun activities I then learnt how to trust her and since then I really have trusted her.

Interviewer: Could you tell me a bit more about trusting her?

May: I was bit scared when I actually in the car with her. I was like, oh my God! But now I know what we do and I trust. . . I trust her to take me out, to take me home, I trust her to walk with her, to look after me.

Trust was not perceived as resulting from any specific type of activity, but a relational and emotional approach which was supportive:

Interviewer: What helps you to think you can trust him?

Johnny: I can't really describe it. . . he's got banter, it's [. . .] someone that can talk to you, be serious, but have a laugh with. . . It's just the way he says things and how I say things, the way we talk to each other, it's good. Um, when they do come up [problems] He just chats to me about them and er, it just kind of makes them almost disappear. It doesn't actually go away but it just kind of makes, it puts my mind at ease.

Trust was also related more broadly to the idea that their lives would have been considerably worse without being able to rely on and trust the mentor:

Interviewer: Where do you think you might be if you didn't have a mentor?

Lila: Um, well I think I'd be quite in the middle of a lot of things because [she] is the one who's helped me with a lot of things and she trusted me and I trusted her.

This development of trust was an extremely strong and a universal component of the interviews. Without exception, the young people reiterated this, and it was combined with a sense of emotional openness with the mentor, along with a sense that the mentor would not let them down:

Interviewer: How often do you see him?

Daniel: Um, I see him once a week.: Er, he normally calls up, sometimes, to kind of see if everything's alright, and kind of, if anything changes just keep me in the loop and keep him in the loop. But if anything kind of happens, I kind of, I have my own of calming myself down.: I just listen to music, and if those problems come up again I just wait until I see him.

The development of trust was often expressed in terms of a sense that the mentor would be emotionally available, even outside of the 2 hours a week required by the project. It was clear that the mentors generally made themselves available outside of weekly meetings, but the young people did not generally make excessive demands and respected the mentor's needs and the boundaries of their relationships.

Importantly, the young people described ways in which the mentors helped them to contribute to the relationship, which helped build trust. This included the mentors communicating that they did not feel perfect themselves, or superior, but that they were ordinary people with imperfections and vulnerabilities. They allowed, and even encouraged, the young people to show them things, teach them skills, so helping them to feel more capable and competent as a result:

Kate: She like, tries to make me laugh like when we go swimming she like squeals cause the pool is cold. . . on the side of the swimming pool I can do a handstand for five seconds and then put my feet over and pull myself up . . . I'm training her to do that.

and

Robin: [about going on fair rides together] No cause she doesn't like going upside down, it makes her sick. She waved!

The stories of the development of the relationship indicate a developing sense of fun, trust, friendship and connection between the mentors and the mentees, which were indicative of the changes that occurred in thinking.

The mentor as part of me: internalisation of the relationship – mutual understanding and empathy

This theme contained how the relationship had developed, particularly in their sense of understanding about how the mentor saw things, which helped them internalise the relationship and promoted different ways of seeing and understanding themselves and their problems. For instance, they could imagine their mentor's advice and hear their voice, helping them better cope with negative emotions and understand other people's perspectives. Talking things through and being shown paths and solutions through problems helped abstract thinking develop. This is regarded as important as they could turn to their internal representation when the mentor was not physically present or available to help them. For example, they might be able to remember what advice the mentor has given them about difficulties. For some children, this part of the interview was a little challenging and they found it hard to express their thoughts, while others could express this clearly, and others indicated a more implicit sense of calmness or containment that they carried with them:

Interviewer: If you your mentor is not around . . . can you imagine what she would say?

Robin: Yeah I and remembered that, because I think, what did she say to me? I imagine that in my head, I hear her talking, so I run upstairs and I do what I do [e.g. punch a pillow]

In the following passage, the young person poignantly indicates a continuing connection, but not specifically about dialogue:

Samantha: Umm, well she umm, bought me a toy snake once.

Interviewer: Did she? Do you like it?

Samantha: Yeah I play with that most of the time.

In some cases, this question appeared not to connect with the young people:

Interviewer: Sometimes, people say even when they are not with their mentor they can kind of imagine what they might say and think. Do you ever find yourself doing that?

Nick: No.

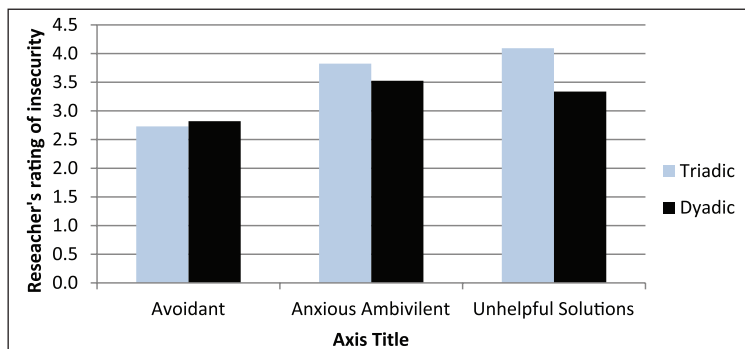


Figure 2. Attachment insecurity in dyadic and triadic scenarios.

Mentors appeared to differ on how they discussed the future with the young people and also how they recorded their time together. Many took photos and kept tickets and brochures, but some focussed more on keeping a record which could serve to maintain specific memories – for example, by using photos, notes, objects and memos of events to compile story books:

May: 'She's decided that we're going to make this photo book that we're going to put all our photos in and we're going to make one and when we don't see each other we're going to make two so she can keep and I can keep one so the memory always there'.

Overall, the young people varied in how explicit their internalisations were. It is also possible that what the young people most benefitted from was a more general sense of being able to stay relatively calm which short-circuited the negative escalations, for example, conflicts at home in which they had been involved.

Benefitting other relationships

Although supporting the whole family is not explicitly the mentor's role, they potentially have an impact on the caregivers and friendships. Furthermore, it is important to consider how others view the mentor and the relationship, for example, if they were to become hostile or negative because this could place the young person in a conflictual triadic position, which Figure 2 indicates is particularly stressful:

Interviewer: What does your mum think about her?

Tony: She thinks that I've changed a lot since I've been with her. Yep. Better not worse.

and

Tony: Very well, um. They talk but they, um, they have a nice talk and they, mum trusts her with me.

An enduring relationship: future/continuing influence of the mentoring relationship

The young people typically came to see the mentoring relationship as a very important part of their lives, and they intended to keep in contact informally when it formally ended and indicated that they were confident that their mentor welcomed this continuity:

Table 1. Attachment style self ratings.

	Secure	Anxious/fearful	Preoccupied/needy	Dismissing/avoidant
Time 1 (n = 20)	5.25%	11.55%	2.10%	2.10%
Time 2 (n = 18)	3.13.3%	4.22%	5.27%	6.40%

Interviewer: Would you like it to continue?

May: At least a couple more years [hardly audible]. . . Umm probably at least until I go Uni, . . . Hopefully longer than that. . . Yeah, I think about her and I think we're going to get on very well. . . Unh, until she wants it to go, because if it keeps going on the way it is, how I like it, it's going to go on well. . . . Maybe we'll do more things, maybe talk about things if anything happens, talk about growing me up how I've changed my body and other things.

Advice to other young people contemplating having a mentor. Without exception, the young people stated that they would recommend mentoring to other young people who might be in similar situations:

Rachel: I'd tell them to have a mentor. . . Cause they can help them . . . By talking to them about anything .. It's really good to have someone there. Open up. . . Don't hide anything. . . . because, um if they are not going to get to know each other, then they might not under. . . , like, it might not go so well.

Rachel also went on to suggest, in a realistic manner, that if the specific relationship did not work, they should try and find another mentor. This was an important indicator that young people understood the value of the concept of mentoring not just that it was specific to a relationship:

Rachel: 'So I think if like, if someone would have one mentor and they wouldn't like her, go and try and find another one'.

Quantitative data results

Relationship questionnaire

Table 1 suggested that on the first research contact, the young people saw themselves initially as predominantly anxious–fearful–wanting intimacy but fearful of rejection (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). This indicated most often a disorganised or complex attachment insecurity, which is often associated with prior traumatic relationship experiences (Crittenden, 2015). At T2, this pattern has changed considerably so that the number of young people categorising themselves as anxious/fearful had dropped from 55% to 22%. However, the percentage of young people categorising themselves as dismissing had risen from 10% to 40%. There had also been an overall drop in the proportion of young people who categorised themselves as secure. A chi-square goodness-of-fit test confirmed significance from an equal distribution; $\chi^2 (2, N = 18) = 4.96, p < .05$.

Narrative attachment scenarios

Children gave responses that were indicative of avoidant, or more often anxious ambivalent attachment styles to the attachment scenarios. At T2, there was little difference in the change scores and

data from T2 are presented in Figure 2. Dyadic scenarios produced slightly less anxiety generally compared to triadic scenarios. It seems that unhelpful solutions arose more readily in the triadic situations compared to the dyadic situations.

With regard to trauma, 93.7% of children indicated that one or more pictures reminded them of their own negative experiences at T1, while 87.5% said so at T2. Also, in consideration of type of scenario, at T2, 53% showed trauma in the triadic scenarios, while 64% did so in the dyadic scenarios.

The findings also indicated that children showed an increased ability (T1 $n=10$, T2 $n=16$) to understand what the other person might be thinking or feeling (person-accurate empathy) and increased faith that their needs would be met by the other person (reflective functioning). Mentees also produced more reasonable and helpful solutions to the attachment problems depicted at T2 ($n=16$) compared to T1 ($n=9$).

Discussion

This multi-method approach has provided evidence that the mentoring relationship is beneficial to children at risk of significant risk of poor mental health. This has been explicit and all of the young people expressed positive views of mentoring as helpful. The quantitative measures were less able to capture evidence of a group-based changes in attachment orientation and social behaviour, but some evidence has been provided which describe more constructive attachment styles.

Self ratings of attachment style suggested some change in the young people's sense of security, with a move towards a self-reliance and confidence that led them to feel less in need of support from others. Given the high number of anxious/fearful patterns at T1, this can be seen to represent a process of transition from more complex and disorganised attachment feelings to a more coherent, dismissive and self-reliant pattern. This interpretation was consistent with responses to the narrative attachment scenarios which indicated reductions in the extent that emotional attachment issues were anxiously avoided and reduced negative emotional responses to relationship dilemmas.

Regarding trauma, the results suggested that children's own experiences impacted to a lesser extent after a period of mentoring, which is consistent with the idea that children were changing in a positive way. However, percentages were still high and, while this may indicate validity of the situations depicted in scenarios, it may also illuminate the fact that this sample has experienced considerable instability, as supported by the audit data and strengths and difficulty findings.

It may be that mentoring was particularly helpful in helping to resolve the triadic relationship issues in the mentee's life; for example, the mentor might provide a constructive and helpful perspective of the position of other people in the young person's life, which helps them cope better with relationship dilemmas and be more resilient. This could suggest a key mechanism through which having a mentor is helpful to children who lack a stable attachment figure.

The findings indicated a positive impact of mentoring. The children were at high risk and extremely vulnerable; hence, evidence of lack of deterioration was a positive outcome. The combination of qualitative and quantitative data suggests that far from deteriorating in terms of emotional well-being and behaviour the children largely show considerable gains. Children indicated that they regarded mentoring as having helped them with emotional problems, coping with family conflicts, managing school or college, providing practical support and raising their self-esteem. They described that they perceived their mentors in positive terms and had grown to trust them and felt their mentors liked them and were warm, positive and caring towards them, and that positive relationships with their caregivers had been beneficial for them. These feelings cultivated a development of trust and a consolidation of the positive aspects of mentoring. All of the young people said they would recommend mentoring to others.

The children described benefits in terms of engaging in shared activities, having fun, shifting their mood, being able to talk about problems and providing practical help and there was an overarching sense that they could rely on their mentor if they needed help or support. It was also clear that 'actions spoke louder than words' in the development of trust. This relationship enabled constructive everyday life problem-solving skills and positive strategies for seeking support when facing future challenges.

The young people showed reduced anxiety about relationships after a period of mentoring, with fewer intrusions of previous trauma with indications of a change from highly complex and insecure attachment orientations towards a greater sense of self-reliance and confidence. However, there was an indication that, although they felt a secure and trusting relationship with their mentors, this had not fully generalised to the world in general, but this greater sense of self-reliance was a step towards feeling fully secure. Continued confidence in the relationship seems extremely important in consolidating progress towards trust and security.

The mechanisms by which positive changes occur require further research, but this study suggests that attachment theory offers a credible explanation, in that the mentors clearly provide a reliable sense of safety. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) argues that attachments are multi-layered experiences and come to be represented at both embodied and verbal levels. Hence, 'doing' and being with their mentors appeared to facilitate an embodied sense of trust. This appeared to be a prerequisite for the young people being able to develop more self-awareness, coherent ways of expressing themselves and an ability to effectively form plans and strategies for keeping themselves safe and happy. In effect, they appeared to be developing a more coherent inner world which allowed them to be able to develop a self-reliance. But importantly, they appeared to become more confident they could find support when needed. There were variations apparent in this process of change and while some of the young people appeared to be able to explicate this, others operated more implicitly or had yet to develop this capacity. Given the challenging experiences of the sample, it is perhaps not surprising that developing a generalised sense of trust will be a gradual process.

The limitations of the study are that there was not enough power to provide a statistical analysis of difference, so quantitative changes were merely descriptive. A very large sample, which was not available, may have enabled this analysis. Furthermore, in this vulnerable group, large change scores are not to be expected because attachment insecurity can cause enduring emotional damage (Bowlby, 1988). There was, however, powerful experiential change reported in the qualitative data, indicating embers of hope in the children.

Given that this group of young people had experienced severe problems and challenges in their lives, the benefits of mentoring were impressive and clearly indicated a need for the PROMISE scheme, and the development of similar schemes support securely attached relationships between disadvantaged children and supportive adults in the United Kingdom.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Sarah Parker for her assistance in developing the materials. Especial thanks also to Rod Salter who has been instrumental in developing the PROMISE scheme and in supporting this research financially and emotionally.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article: This research was funded by PROMISE to evaluate their mentoring project. PROMISE assisted with the recruitment of participants and provided a venue for data collection, but were not involved in the data collection, analysis, interpretation or writing of the report. They had no access to the study data,

but were involved in the decision to submit the report for publication. They did read drafts but made no substantive changes were made.

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