DRAFT Tri-Borough 3/1/12

Peer Mentoring Scheme Handbook for Foster Carers

2012

Tri-Borough Fostering Service

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1. Definition (What is Peer Mentoring)

Peer Mentoring refers to approved foster carers in a structured one-to-one relationship with other approved foster carers. Peer mentoring is delivered by a more experienced foster carer (the mentor) to a less experienced foster carer (the mentee), outside of any line management relationship. Mentors offer support from a position of understanding as foster carers themselves.

2. <u>Aim</u>

To contribute to the Fostering Team's programme of support to foster carers, through a professionally managed scheme that offers one to one supportive relationships between more and less experienced foster carers.

3. Objectives

- To support the recruitment and retention of foster carers
- Provide a problem solving resource for foster carers in difficulty
- Personal Development for experienced foster carers
- Enhancement to the quality of care to children through increased skills, confidence and motivation of carers and thus:
- Improvement to placement stability

4. Benefits and Outcomes

For mentors

- gaining wider recognition of ability to support and develop others
- gaining increased personal satisfaction and developing networks
- developing enhanced reputation and status
- developing interpersonal skills
- updating ideas and techniques
- receiving payment and/or rewards
- personal development
- gaining professional qualifications

For mentees

- help adapting to a new role and/or fostering service
- assistance with familiarisation with the organisation
- gaining a greater understanding of role and tasks of a foster carer
- feeling less isolated geographically
- feeling less isolated for other reasons
- receiving feedback on performance
- receiving trusted advice and guidance
- developing new ideas, skills and knowledge
- gaining better communication links with the fostering service
- meeting training or development targets identified in Personal Development Plan

5. <u>Person Specification</u>

Person specification will address both personal qualities and specific skills and experience of foster carers and will also lay out our eligibility criteria.

It is intended that strict eligibility criteria do not inadvertently exclude carers from contributing to the scheme.

A. Eligibility Criteria

A foster carer peer mentor should be approved for period of two years and have cumulative active fostering experience of at least a year. Respite foster carers mentors should have been approved for three years and have a cumulative active fostering experience of two years.

B. Personal qualities

Typically, an effective mentor in any setting would demonstrate all of the following personal qualities:

- Enthusiasm
- Reliability
- Commitment
- Understanding
- Caring
- Flexibility
- Approachability
- Empathy
- Warmth
- Accepting
- Consistency

C. Skills and competencies

In addition to highly developed skills as a foster carer working with children, an effective mentor also needs to have or acquire sufficient skills and competencies in the following areas helping adults in relation to:

- Establishing and maintaining rapport.
- Active listening and communication and ability to give and receive information.
- Ability to maintain a non-judgemental approach.
- Encouraging others.
- Helping people to explore their needs, motivations, desires, skills and thought processes.
- Helping people recognise and draw on their own strengths.

- Helping people focus on the 'why' rather than the 'what' of events and situations.
- Helping people to set appropriate goals and methods of assessing progress in relation to those goals.
- Motivating people to develop new ideas, solutions, and strategies to achieve their goals.
- Taking a non-directive approach.
- Understanding of and respect for confidentiality.
- Effective time management.
- Understanding of own area of personal competence and ability to work within that.

6. <u>Role Description</u>

A. Purpose of the role

To provide an enhanced support service to foster carers, with the aim of developing the skills and understanding of the foster carers, and thereby sustaining placements and improving outcomes for children; and to provide the mentor with an opportunity for professional and personal development.

B. Summary of core responsibilities and duties

To contribute to the wider fostering task by:

- Providing one-to-one support to newly approved foster carers, or to other foster carers when placements become challenging, for a planned period of six months and involving monthly face-to-face contact.
- Maintaining contact with the foster carer mentee at the agreed times and dates.
- Providing telephone and email support to mentored foster carers.
- Helping foster carer mentees to identify appropriate goals and tasks and to work towards achieving these.
- Supporting up to two foster carer mentees at any one time.
- Attending regular training sessions for mentors (minimum one per year) combined with opportunities to network.
- Attending supervision sessions every six weeks with the Supervising Social Worker.
- Complying with fostering service policies and procedures, and in particular the confidentiality and recording policies relating to the peer mentoring scheme.
- Completing monthly timesheets and expenses claim forms.
- Promoting the peer mentoring scheme and participating in related events.
- Participating actively in evaluation of the peer mentoring scheme.

C. Additional tasks

In addition to the above, and by agreement with the mentoring scheme coordinator, to:

- Attend information sessions and other recruitment events.
- Participate in *The Skills to Foster* training courses.
 Undertake specific training tasks with identified foster carers.

7. Matching and Linking

Mentoring scheme co-ordinator or another designated individual will match foster carers to mentors. If the scheme is being run by a foster care association this will be done in collaboration with the fostering service. The matching process needs to ensure that:

- Members of the target group of foster carers are all offered mentors.
- Account is taken of any specific matching criteria that you think are key, such as ethnicity or gender.
- A record is kept of matches, so that these can be reviewed.
- Supervising social workers are made aware of potential matches and consulted.
- If matches are unsuccessful (and if appropriate) there is opportunity for the foster carer to be linked with a different mentor.

A. Matching mentors and mentees

With one-to-one peer mentoring, where the intention is a sustained relationship for six months or longer, there needs to be an emphasis on the 'fit' between mentor and mentee.

Some of the factors to consider are:

i. Ethnicity, culture and language

The pool of mentors needs to reflect the language needs of prospective mentees for whom English may not be their first spoken language to offer the option of a mentor of the same ethnicity as the mentee.

ii. Gender and relationship status

Some foster carers may feel more comfortable exploring emotional and personal matters with a mentor of the same gender, some with members of the opposite gender.

iii. Type of fostering

Another way of trying to match foster carers could be by type of fostering. For example, foster carers who foster teenagers, or children with disabilities. Foster carers working with specific issues for the first time - such as a young person who may be questioning their sexuality - may be matched with another foster carer who has already supported a young person in this situation. Clearly, it is easier to advise and guide a less experienced foster carer on direct care matters if you have done similar fostering, and you are more likely to have credibility with them.

iv. Geography

Geographical isolation is likely to be more of a feature in our friends and family foster carers most of whom are outside London, although it can also be difficult to travel within London. Our mentoring scheme can address isolation by putting people in touch through telephone and email contact, but if regular face-to-face contact between mentor and mentee is expected the logistics of distance, travel time and costs would need to be considered. We will want to link foster carers who live close enough to one another.

v. Personality and learning styles

It is important that the personalities of mentors and mentees are matched so that both are enabled to get the best from the relationship. The matching process should take into account the individual characteristics of foster carers as well as the rich experience they might bring with them to their new task of fostering. This could have been gained in relevant previous employment settings such as nursing, teaching and a range of care professions.

B. Ratio of mentors to mentees

It is suggested that a foster carer peer mentor will mentor a maximum of two mentees at any given point in time. This number is for guidance purposes and not a set rule as this can vary considerably depending on the mentee's needs, amount of face-to-face contact and travelling time, and expectations around recording and reporting back.

In the main, peer mentors will themselves have fostered children in placement, and a key element of their own supervision must be consideration of the impact on fostering of being a mentor and vice versa. Supervising social workers and scheme co-ordinators should remain alert to the possibility that a mentor may struggle from time to time to balance the roles of foster carer and mentor. They must ensure that support is available.

8. <u>Beginning a mentoring relationship</u>

The relationship between mentor and mentee is likely to be most successful if the mentee understands what to expect and feels confident in the mentor. The mentor needs to be protected as far as possible from unrealistic expectations. A basic written contract or agreement between the mentor and mentee can cover aspects such as:

- purpose of the relationship
- specific skills and knowledge identified as development goals for the mentee
- ground rules, including behaviour and personal responsibility
- •method/s and frequency of contact
- role of others, such as the mentoring scheme co-ordinator
- boundaries
- recording
- •confidentiality
- problem resolution.

Ideally, the mentoring agreement can be completed face-to-face, perhaps with the involvement of the scheme co-ordinator at first and as mentors gain experience this can be arranged by themselves. The mentor may first contact the mentee by phone or email, and in these instances the mentor should have a mental checklist of issues that can be discussed without a written agreement being signed. The mentor and mentee can each have a copy of the agreement.

9. Endings

Duration of relationship between mentor and mentee depends on purpose of the mentoring.

For a new foster carer Suggest 12 months

For a specific purpose eg computer skills Suggest 6 months

It is acknowledged that in the most extreme case, mentors will need to take a break from mentoring.

10. Conflict resolution

The mentoring agreement should include a process whereby disagreement or antipathy between mentor and mentee can be addressed if they cannot resolve it themselves. This might involve participation in a meeting with one or more SSW's. It is expected that the mentor and the mentee would try to resolve the conflict among themselves in the first instance.

It is also possible that either party may perceive a conflict of interest at some stage and this too should be subject to a resolution process. In either circumstance, it is possible that the parties may agree to bring the link to an end, in which case the scheme co-ordinator should consider whether there are any issues to be followed up and whether another mentor should be allocated. In all cases where there is disagreement or conflict, it is important that this is recorded.

If a peer mentoring relationship is not working because of a clash of personalities or approaches to problem solving, this does not mean that anyone has failed or let anyone else down. The co-ordinator should try to help the participants, perhaps through a three-way meeting, to identify the ways in which they clash and whether either can alter their approach or style, but ultimately it is best to end the relationship rather than have it 'limp on' in an unsatisfactory way.

11. Confidentiality and recording arrangements

A. Maintaining and keeping records

The mentoring scheme places minimal expectations regarding records of contact between mentor and mentee as it is believed that an informal approach is reinforced without written records and this distances the activity from the bureaucracy of social work services. We recommend, however, that mentors use the following minimum methods of recording:

• A written contract/agreement between mentor and mentee that clarifies basic expectations. (See appendix)

• A simple mentoring record sheet that allows mentor and mentee to note and recall any agreed actions and key discussions. (See appendix)

The main purpose of keeping a record of sessions and other contact between mentor and mentee is to assist both parties to summarise what has been discussed, agree what actions they will take and reflect upon progress in the relationship.

These records should be placed on a foster carer's files of both parties at the end of the mentoring relationship. Until this time, the records should be kept in a locked cabinet and any third party except the supervising social worker or the scheme coordinator should not have access to these.

The records must be provided for the purposes of claiming expenses.

B. Confidentiality

It is acknowledged that a mentoring relationship requires trust and an understanding around the issues of confidentiality between mentor and mentee. The mentee needs to feel confident that they can explore their true thoughts and feelings and that the mentor is sensitive to them and can respect boundaries.

It would be made clear to the mentor from the start of the relationship that they have a specific role with the mentee, covering areas such as understanding and adapting to fostering and the way the fostering service is run, encouraging involvement in the fostering community (for example attending support groups or training) and developing new ideas, skills and knowledge. They are not there as a substitute for access to the mentee's supervising social worker. At no time should a mentor feel as though they are being burdened with issues from the mentee beyond their abilities and role.

The essence of mentoring in foster care is a peer relationship, one step removed from the line management and supervisory accountabilities of the fostering service. But a mentor should still be clear about the ways in which they should manage and, if appropriate, pass on information if they have any concerns about the foster family, fostered child or young person or the child or young person's birth family.

In order for mentors to effectively manage the issue of confidentiality:

• The mentoring scheme has a written policy that both parties should respect confidentiality and will not disclose personal details or the content of discussions without the permission of the other party. (See appendix)

• The statement also clarifies the circumstances under which confidentiality can be breached. In line with broader children's services policies, this is usually situations of actual or potential risk to children, adults or the service.

• There is a requirement that any written information on the mentee, mentor, children, or other families is kept in a secure place.

• The mentee receives a copy signed by both parties of any recording relating to the contact between mentor and mentee.

• The parties formally sign a confidentiality statement, as part of the mentoring agreement, which covers some or all of these elements.

12. Allegations and other concerns

Allegations during a mentoring relationship

When allegations, serious concerns about standards of care, or complaints about a foster carer arise, one option is to appoint a mentor to provide nonjudgemental support to the foster carer under investigation. It is believed that a mentor is ideally placed to offer valuable support at a time when foster carers can feel particularly isolated.

However providing peer mentoring is not the same as providing independent support as recommend in the *National Minimum Standards for Fostering Services* (2011). This is a role distinct from the representation and advocacy. Peer mentors will not be expected to be the sole provider of independent support.

Conversely, if one of the mentors becomes the subject of an allegation it will be necessary to review whether any ongoing mentoring relationships should be suspended while the matter is investigated. A mentor is likely to feel exposed or compromised during the period of investigation and questions will also be raised about their suitability for the role that cannot be resolved until the investigation is concluded.

13. Support

The support will be offered in the form of:

- Supervision
- Support Group
- Training
- Finances

A. Supervision

It is advisable to separate out supervision of mentoring activity from general fostering supervision, as it is a distinct role and there is a danger it could become 'squeezed' by discussion about children in placement. However, for practical reasons many 'buddying' or mentoring schemes do not provide separate supervision and look to their supervising social workers to reflect on mentoring issues at during their supervision sessions. Furthermore, there is certainly an argument to say that where mentoring is part of the fostering role, for example, linked to a higher fee payment, the supervising social worker should be responsible for monitoring the foster carer in that role.

B. Training

i. Initial Information sessions

As part of the recruitment process, prospective mentors will be informed that they will be required to attend an initial mentoring awareness day prior to interview. The mentoring awareness session will serve as an introduction to the department's aims in setting up the scheme, a basic introduction to the role of mentoring and practical matters, including remuneration and next steps.

ii.Preparation training

Once selected, the preparation training for mentors will include the following elements:

- What is peer mentoring (its definition and distinct features)?
- The value of peer mentoring for foster carers.
- The role and responsibilities of the mentor, mentee and organisation, including boundaries and confidentiality.
- Stages in the mentoring process (from matching, through to introductions and setting ground rules, to ending the relationship).
- Outcomes and benefits of mentoring relationships for mentors, mentees and the organisation.
- Personal motivation to become a peer mentor.
- Key skills and qualities of being a mentor.
- Potential problems, obstacles and solutions problem-solving techniques.

• Supervision and support to peer mentors - including networks and resources.

Training will be provided by members of the Fostering Team with input from the LAC psychologist.

(See attached example of preparation course)

iii. On Going Training + Support Group

(See attached example of ongoing training course)

An annual support group can contribute to the robustness and further development of scheme by bringing together mentors, with or without key staff.

Such a forum can enable participants to:

- share experiences and offer mutual support and validation
- evaluate and develop the role of mentor
- undertake further specific learning and training
- bounce ideas around and problem solve
- hear about developments to the scheme and in the wider organisation
- induct new mentors

Groups would meet on annual basis and will be coordinated by the scheme co-ordinator or someone independent from the team.

C. Finances

It is proposed that mentors are selected from amongst the more experienced foster carers who wish to participate and that their tasks are viewed as an additional part of their fostering role but reimbursed for this by a small addition to their fostering fee.

It is further proposed that mentors are paid the extra fee at a rate of \pounds 50 per month + reasonable travel costs and child care expenses when they are matched with a mentee. The mentors will not be employees of the local authority on this basis.

14. <u>Coordination of the scheme</u>.

The primary tasks of the mentoring co-ordinator are to:

- Manage the scheme so as to provide a high quality service to both mentors and mentees.
- Be available to provide advice, support, and guidance to the mentors as well as the team at regular intervals.
- Provide induction and training or enable access to training for mentors.
- Receive referrals for foster carers who require a mentor, discussing with their supervising social workers and matching with a mentor.
- Promote the scheme and talk/participate at training events.
- Appoint mentors to support and advise new foster carers and inform the supervising social worker of the arrangement.
- Maintain an up-to-date list of mentors and mentees.
- Review and evaluate the service in line with good practice.
- Arrange for mentors to meet as a group on an annual basis.
- Ensure that mentors are invited to mentors' support groups and the minutes are filed in a safe place.

15. <u>Health and Safety Issues</u>

While the personal risks for foster carers meeting with and supporting other foster carers are likely to be low, both parties should take reasonable steps to keep themselves safe. Mentors/mentees are strongly advised to let someone else know when they are going out on a visit. Mentors/mentees are advised to carry their personal mobile phone with them while out and contact the police if they feel a risk to their safety.

It is acknowledged that the role of a mentor could be emotionally demanding and would need good support and supervision from their supervising social workers and scheme coordinators.

16. <u>Recruitment Process</u>

Application

For equality of opportunity, we aim to use an application form to register the interest of those who want to consider being mentors. (See Appendix) The form can capture basic information and be kept as a record.

Interviews

It is aimed to interview and appraise applicants against the role description and person specification and make a decision based on this to appoint them (See Appendix). The scheme coordinator would be one of the interviewers and ideally team manager/ practice manager would join them on the panel. A current mentor could be involved when the scheme is already running.

17. <u>Review and evaluation process</u>

Use of information from feedback

This needs to be collated and put in an annual report which should be used to improve the scheme and /or the work of the foster carers and any specific quantitative information on the following aims:-

- To support the recruitment and retention of foster carers (ie comparison of recruitment and deregistration figures from one year to the next)
- Provide a problem solving resource for foster carers in difficulty
- Career progression for experienced foster carers
- Enhancement to the quality of care to children through increased skills, confidence and motivation of carers and thus:-
- Improvement to placement stability (ie number of placement breakdowns compared with previous years

Mentors and mentees should also have a specific question in their Annual review report that seeks to summarise the service provided by the mentor and the benefits gained by the mentee.

For example:-

How far have mentor/mentee developed their skills? What benefits has the mentor relationship had for the foster child? How has the mentee developed their computer skills etc.

Appendix

i. Peer Mentoring application form

Name of applicant

Address

Telephone numbers

Email address

Supervising social worker

- 1. How many years have you been fostering? Please describe the type of fostering you do/have done.
- 2. How many placements have you had, and for how long?
- 3. Please list all training undertaken in the past two years.

Title of course and level (if appropriate)	Date of completion	

- 4. Do you have the CWDC Certificate of Successful Completion of the *Training, Support and Development Standards for Foster Care*)? Yes / No (please circle)
- 5. Have you any previous experience as a mentor or similar (sometimes called a buddy or befriender)? Please describe your experience.

6. Please state why you want to be a foster carer mentor.

7. Using the role description and person specification attached, please outline what skills and qualities you think you will bring to this role.

Signature

Date of application

ii. Peer Mentoring Confidentiality Policy

- 1. The mentor and mentee both respect confidentiality and will not disclose personal details or the content of discussions without the permission of the other party.
- 2. The only exceptions to this are in respect of information disclosed that relates to an illegal act or situations of actual or potential risk to children, adults or the service. In this situation the mentor or mentee will inform the other party that they cannot maintain confidentiality and explain the process of breaking confidentiality.
- 3. This commitment to confidentiality continues after the mentor and mentee have concluded their mentoring relationship.
- 4. Both the mentor and mentee are responsible for keeping copies of any records or action plans in a safe secure place.

Signatures

Mentee.....

Mentor.....

iii. Peer mentoring agreement

Mentoring agreement between (mentee) and...... (mentor).

This is a statement of commitment to a mentoring partnership

• We agree to protect each other's privacy and that personal information will be kept strictly confidential, subject to the fostering service's confidentiality policy.

• We will act in accordance with the fostering service's equal opportunities policies, practices and standards.

• We share responsibility for the conduct of this relationship, will not make unreasonable demands on each other's time, and commit to the winding down of the relationship when it has achieved its purpose.

• Either of us may dissolve the relationship. However, both mentor and mentee have a responsibility for discussing and trying to resolve the matter together as part of mutual learning.

• This agreement will be shared with the mentoring scheme co-ordinator, who we both agree will act as our mediator if required.

• The identified learning goals below will form the basis of an evaluation at the end of this relationship.

Matters for discussion/agreed learning goals

Practical arrangements for contact

Proposed duration of mentoring relationship and frequency of meetings

Agreed by all parties on (date)

Signatures: Mentee

Mentor

iv. Peer Mentoring record sheet

Duplicates of this sheet can be used to record meetings held between mentor and mentee and any actions arising from them. Please complete this sheet together at the end of the meeting. A copy should be kept by each of you.

Date of meeting..... Date of next meeting.....

Topics discussed

Comments/reflections

Mentee.....

Mentor.....

Actions

Mentee.....

Mentor.....

Signatures

Mentee.....

v. Feedback form for mentor

Please note that the information you provide will be used to improve the peer mentoring service.

Name of mentor:

Date feedback form completed:

- 1. What has been your experience of the mentoring scheme overall?
- 2. How has contact with your mentee/s taken place, and could anything have been done differently?
- 3. Are you clear about your role as a mentor? If not, how can this be improved?
- 4. How effective has co-ordination of the mentoring scheme been?
- 5. Have you found the support/training groups for mentors helpful, and how can we improve these?
- 6. Have you experienced any difficulties as a mentor?

7. How has this experience as a mentor helped you develop your own skills as a foster carer?

Please use this space to tell us anything else that you would like us to know; including anything you or we could do differently to improve the scheme.

Please return to the mentoring scheme co-ordinator.

Signature

vi. Feedback form for mentee

The information you provide will be treated confidentially but it will be used to help us improve the service for new mentees.

Name of mentee:

Name of mentor:

Date mentoring relationship started:

Date feedback form completed:

1. What was your experience of the mentoring scheme overall?

2. How did the introductions take place, and could anything have been done differently?

3. Were you clear about the role of your mentor? If not, how could this have been improved?

4. How often have you had contact with your mentor?

5. What have been the good things about contact with your mentor?

6. Did you experience any difficulties?

7. Do you think there is anything you or we could do differently to improve the scheme?

Please use this space to tell us anything else about your mentoring relationship that you would like us to know.

Please return to the mentoring scheme co-ordinator.

Signature

EXAMPLE OF PREPARATION COURSE

Course objectives

By the end of the course participants will:

- Understand what peer mentoring is and how it differs from other forms of support and training.
- Have considered the stages in the mentoring process.
- Have learnt and practised the essential skills of a peer mentor.
- Have identified strategies to look after themselves as mentors.
- Be familiar with the relevant policies and practice guidance including confidentiality.
- Recognise the need for continual review and evaluation of the mentoring scheme and their own practice as mentors.

DAY ONE

INTRODUCTION (including expectations) Introductions Course aim and objectives

THE BASICS OF PEER MENTORING What is peer mentoring? How mentoring differs from other forms of support General overview of mentoring skills and approaches Experiences of mentoring

OVERVIEW OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE/ FOSTER CARE ASSOCIATION Where peer mentoring fits into the other support services offered

DAY TWO

SKILLS PRACTICE Using case scenarios

PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF THE SCHEME Co-ordination Referral Matching Remuneration Monitoring and review THE ROLE OF THE MENTOR

how people learn and make changes Role and responsibilities of mentor Role and responsibilities of mentee

STAGES OF A MENTORING RELATIONSHIP The mentoring contract Duration of mentoring relationship Contact between mentor and mentee Ending the relationship Conflict and problem-resolution

SKILLS AND ATTRIBUTES OF A PEER MENTOR Building a rapport Active listening techniques Asking open questions Appropriate self-disclosure Realistic goal setting

CONFIDENTIALITY AND RECORDING policies Practice issues

SOURCES OF SUPPORT mentoring handbook Supervision Group support Ongoing training Accreditation

HEALTH AND SAFETY Looking after yourself Lone working

EXAMPLE OF ONGOING TRAINING COURSE

One-day follow-up training course for peer mentors COURSE OBJECTIVES

By the end of the course participants will have:

- Reflected on their experiences to date and identified lessons learnt.
- Explored skills for further development to enhance their role as a mentor.
- Practised new skills to improve their mentoring.
- Identified further learning needs and next steps for training and learning.

COURSE CONTENT

INTRODUCTION

REFLECTION ON PEER MENTORING EXPERIENCES

- What have we learned about peer mentoring?
- Specific experiences of mentoring
- Positives, negatives, challenges, concerns
- What more do we need to know?

ADVANCED MENTORING SKILLS

- Skills in practice
- Links to accreditation

SUPERVISION AND SUPPORT

- Co-ordination and supervision
- Peer support (one-to-one or group)
- Further learning, development and training needs

FEEDBACK AND EVALUATION