### The Brightside Trust: a dynamic E-mentoring tool

A mentoring tool to support and enhance face-to-face mentoring

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The project won the *fpa*’s national Pamela Sheridan Award in 2004 for outstanding work in sex and relationships education.

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**The Brightside Trust** is a new and innovative charity whose mission is to provide relevant, up-to-date and accessible information, resources and training to young people, parents, teachers and relevant agencies to help young people understand their bodies, their sexuality and their relationships, and realise their potential. Our first project is designed to help students who are educationally under-represented by the National Statistics on the socio-economic groups from which they come, and their allied health professionals gain access to degree courses in these subjects.

The Brightside Trust has developed a dynamic online mentoring tool to support and enhance face-to-face mentoring relationship. We recognise that mentoring is an important means for offering personal contact and encouragement to students aiming to take a career path such as medicine, which often lack the support of their peers and/ or family. However, there are a number of issues and obstacles currently facing higher education widening participation programmes using mentoring schemes. These include time-pressured mentors and geographical distance between mentors and mentees. Our e-mentoring software has been developed specifically to address these issues.

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**Bright Journals**

Our e-mentoring website, Bright Journals, is intended to facilitate access to their own private area where they can communicate via journal style postings known as weblogs. Weblogs are an ideal format for an e-mentoring software as the journal entities are interactive allowing mentoring partners to enter into direct dialogue with their mentors/mentees. In addition, Bright Journals has a number of features designed to facilitate the mentoring relationship, including:

- Online mentor training
- An impressive resources literary providing individual information about medicine, healthcare, students and healthcare careers, university life, exam revision and links to useful journals and other relevant sources of information.
- SMS text alerts to inform mentors and mentees when their mentoring partner has added to their journal.
- Forums for mentors and university coordinators to discuss best practice.
- Timed prompts to facilitate and target conversations, i.e. in November the mentors will be automatically prompted to ask their mentees about UCAS form application.
- News broadcasts about topical health subjects and institution-specific events.
- A sophisticated monitoring system to allow coordinators to check the level and quality of communication between mentoring partners.

**Bright Journals** is currently being used by higher education institutions and about to be launched in additional 7 institutions.

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**Evaluation**

Interim evaluation of the software by those already involved revealed that 75% of students participating felt that their experience was beneficial, 78% thought that the website was easy to use and 72% felt that e-mentoring was an excellent way to get to know their mentoring partner. In addition, over 54% of the mentees surveyed felt that the e-mentoring scheme had reinforced their desire to attend medical school. The two most popular choices for extra support included opportunities to speak face-to-face with mentor and topic suggestions. The following quotes are from mentors and mentees currently using Bright Journals:

- "I have found Bright Journals really useful in keeping up to date with the latest scientific and medical news." Mentor.
- "The whole experience of building up a friendship over the internet seemed very fun, besides I thought it would be great experience to put on my UCAS form. It has made me think about my future degree in medicine, and I have been given helpful tips about the choice of university and the course."
- "I strongly believe that it can have beneficial effects on my mentees’ aspirations since this scheme is not only a way to make them fully understand what medicine involves and thus allow them to make an informed choice about their careers." Mentor.
- "I'm really happy that..."

**Potential**

From the feedback so far, we are in no doubt that e-mentoring has the potential to foster increased contact opportunities with our students and mentors in non-intrusive ways. It also offers a sense of community to individuals who feel isolated by their goals and aspirations from their immediate peers.

- "It's a great communication tool, and I'm very happy to use it!" Mentor.
- "I would like to see a demonstration of the website please visit www.brightjournals.org and click on demo.

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**The Great Yarmouth Young Men’s Project** was set up in June 2001 as a teenage pregnancy initiative to address the sexual health of young men and to develop support for young fathers. Working in partnership with a wide range of agencies the project delivers sex and relationships education (SRE) to boys in 5 high schools in Great Yarmouth and is one of the core services at school based health clinics in 4 of these schools. Those boys who are not in mainstream education receive input from the project. The project works closely with other agencies such as the Youth Offending Team and the Youth Service. The project operates as a group and through delivery at colleges and training providers.

**Consultation**

The project began with consultation with young men and young women, individually, in groups and at a young person’s conference. The young people included those in mainstream education, those who were excluded or at risk of exclusion from education and those who experience exclusion from education, as well as young offenders, young fathers and young mothers. The consultation method and evaluation of the programme of SRE.

Two separate seminars were held to enable pupils to discuss the nature and design of the SRE, and the SRE was based upon the results of the consultation. Consultation was also conducted with staff from schools, colleges, sexual health services and other agencies who were, or who could be, working with young men.

The consultation revealed that young men felt their needs were not being met by the sex and relationships education they received at school and that they felt excluded from sexual health services within Great Yarmouth. Consultation remains an ongoing process as part of the formative evaluation of the work of the project.

**Programme of work**

A programme of work was developed and delivered in single sex groups to complement the mentors and mentees in non-intrusive ways. This programme has been a significant proportion of the young people attending the school based health services. At one of the schools an average of 50-50 between young men and young women.

At the other schools the figures have been more variable as young men have made up a high proportion of attendees, at one school rising during the autumn term to make up 60% of young people attending. Not only are the young men attending the service but their contact and communication with staff has been open and confident.

**Evidence**

Some of the most significant evidence of the impact of this programme has been anecdotal. What is clear is that young men are talking about the impact of this project and in it is causing a buzz amongst young men in Great Yarmouth: "This stuff kicks ass!" The particular discussion the content outside the session, they talk with their year groups, and they talk across year groups. The young men are also talking across different schools, which they have been known to be able to tell me (correctly) which school I will be working in next. Professionals from other agencies are finding that young men are instigating discussion with them regarding the impact of this project.

**Talking and listening**

Through the SRE young men receive information regarding their sexual health but this itself is not enough to see accessibility of health services. Accessibility is being achieved in a variety of ways usually identified by the young men themselves. Working in close partnerships with agencies, making visits to local services, reassurance over confidentiality, positive, non-judgemental attitudes from staff, effective local promotions all play a part in this.

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**The future**

The Young Men’s Project was set up by Great Yarmouth PCT with only short-term funding for 3 years. It now receives mainstream funding. From the feedback, it is currently engaging in identifying ways to roll out the work across the rest of Norfolk. The project also provides support for young fathers and alongside other services is delivering antenatal support for young men. But that’s another story...