

CASE STUDY 3

Forth Valley College



TIME4ME

Partners: Forth Valley College, The Robertson Trust
Focus: Mentoring programme for care experienced students

Description

Time4Me is a mentoring initiative, funded by The Robertson Trust, which targets young people (aged 15-26) considered at highest risk of not achieving successful and sustained educational outcomes. Established in 2018, the programme works with specific target groups including care experienced young people, young carers/young adult carers and young people from regeneration areas (SIMD20). Time4Me mentees are Forth Valley College students enrolled on differing levels of study, the similarity being they are all in a period of transition into the further/higher education environment. Mentees are generally referred by an organisation/individual they are currently known to (e.g. young carers' organisation, local authority, social workers) who recognise the need for targeted support and who deem Time4Me to be an appropriate support intervention for that individual. Sometimes, referrals to Time4Me are made by Forth Valley College staff once the student has started term and has been identified suitable for support. It is up to the individual to decide whether they wish to take up the offer of mentoring which has been a strength in promoting self-worth. For those in the target group, having a voice and taking ownership of the decision to participate is liberating and helps build trust in the programme as well as developing levels of self-confidence.



“ They ask if you are care experienced on the form ... but you never need to tell them one thing about your past unless you're ready to. Everything is on your basis, and you'd be surprised how many folk just sit and ask you a list of questions. They really do. I wasn't just fired into Time4Me ... the option was there. It wasn't forced on you. You can decide if you go.

Learner A, Forth Valley College

Time4Me mentoring is a targeted one-to-one activity that takes place for a recommended one hour a week, during academic term times. Mentors and mentees commit to that mentoring relationship for one academic year as a minimum and work on a voluntary basis. It was felt that the voluntary aspect of mentoring attracted committed individuals, not only keen to improve outcomes for their respective mentees, but who are also keen to enhance their own skills. Having a broad range of mentors from across various college departments and roles also

provides an opportunity for raising awareness and visibility of the project and encourages a sense of cross organisational cooperation. Currently, the role of the Time4Me coordinator allows up to 40 mentees to be supported by dedicated mentors.

Success factor: partnership working

Forth Valley College works closely with contacts, partnerships with organisations across three local authority areas – Stirling, Falkirk, and Clackmannanshire. College staff have also forged links with the Scottish Mentoring Network and other members of that network. The College leadership team promote projects and initiatives and use learning gathered to provide feedback.

“ Our Principal is quite outward facing and he’s keen that people come and visit us to see what we do and to see that we give government value for money ... so that we can then feedback challenges ... and he’s been doing quite a lot of that work recently. We think about what regional influence we have.

Anna Vogt, Forth Valley College

Time4Me actively engages with partnerships and contacts within the local community in addition to ‘in house’ knowledge as part of the strategic aim of fostering capacity building for the young person. When issues are divulged within mentoring sessions, mentors are able to draw on a broad range of experience from within college and actively signpost to internal support services. College partnership working and networking increase the provision of support services available, with college staff able to tap into a broader range of external agencies and contacts, broadening out the scope of support available. One mentor was able to draw on this expertise to help encourage support for their mentee and their family on disclosure of substance abuse.



“ We will signpost to Learning Support and to other agencies, that’s just what we do work with Social Work and Education for Colleges, and we work with those quite a lot, but we have support advisers who are the bank of other stuff going on. If my mentee came to me with a problem about accommodation, I would be able to go to support and guidance advisers and ask, ‘who are we best here to go and speak to?’ That’s how I found out about the Scottish Drug and Alcohol Abuse people, and they had conveniently been in the week before doing a presentation to the support and guidance advisers about what they do and how they work in the area. I’ve done that for quite a lot of my students if it’s around issues quite specific to things advisers like Neil, who knows a lot about domestic abuse, and people like him have a bank of people and they’ve built up relationships. We know that it’s safe and we can refer students onto this and it’s a good solid service.

Mentor A, Forth Valley College

Both the learner and the wider family were able to benefit from the support of an organisation supporting families affected by alcohol and substance misuse. The mentor was also able to engage the learner with a counselling service which has had a marked impact on the learner’s ability to maintain their studies.

“ My mentor got me in contact with Talking Rooms ... she got in touch with the mental health side of the College first ... and they arranged a counsellor through them first and I tell you, I've been to a lot of counselling and a lot of therapy, and the Talking Rooms are by far the best. I've never met someone who ever just got what I was going through in my life. You've never met them ... just spoken to them on the phone and I still managed to build up a relationship in one day and after just an hour's session. And that's where I really need to give Time4Me credit. It's not just about them ... they really do open up other doors, and help out and they can offer you this, and offer you that.

Learner A, Forth Valley College

Time4Me has enabled those at risk of non-completion to be positively supported in seeking help on their terms, with a service which works for them, leading to engagement with internal and external support networks, all of which develop soft skills and foster greater independence. For this learner, participation in the programme had been life changing and had equipped her for a future beyond college.

“ When I started it was my mentor who helped me get into student advice and things like that. When I was in year 2 of the programme, my mentor helped me apply for the Transition Fund, and that covered me for my driving licence, 35 lessons and a test along with it, so it was a lot of money, but I wouldn't have got that without her help. Through SAAS they helped me with things on my laptop, like MindMap and that can help me if I go onto uni so that support is still there, even if I leave here. I wouldn't have done any of this without Time4Me ... printers and scanners and those things too. The application forms are tough, and I couldn't have done it myself.

Learner A, Forth Valley College

College can not only be seen as a space for providing support to vulnerable learners but can be seen to be part of a wider community support 'eco-system'. Through extended support, solutions can be found to help sustain the learner beyond the confines of the College course and provide a valuable foundation for further study or employment.

Success factor: changing college perceptions and practice

A significant unintended outcome of the Time4Me project is a change in perceptions and practices within the College, influenced by the lived experience of individual learners. Highlighted within the formal evaluation of the project and drawn out within case study interviews, mentors felt they had professionally benefited from their involvement in the programme, citing new skills and levels of awareness which they had been able to transfer into existing or new roles.

“ Mentors valued the opportunity to develop a respecting and trusting personal relationship to make a meaningful difference to an individual student's life.

Project evaluation executive summary

“ I've got a greater understanding and appreciation of care experienced students and of students who are young carers. When I get my new course codes and I know what kinds of students I'm getting ... when I see care experienced, I now know lots of strategies to be able to communicate with that student and have an understanding of what they are actually going through as well.

Mentor B, Forth Valley College

Testimony of lived experience not only provided new perspectives for teaching staff, but also had an impact within the College Support Teams.

“ I got a lot of value out of that in terms of understanding where policies and procedures that I am implementing can impact. With barriers, you can be told about these things you can hear the stories but actually there’s something about hearing that completely personal point of view that adds another dimension to you understand the impact work has.

Anna Vogt, Forth Valley College

Where practices were seen to create additional barriers and further disadvantage for vulnerable learners, the project funding provided an initial solution and informed longer term and more sustainable practices.

“ What Time4Me did was to open a discretionary support fund and be able to bridge some of those gaps where policies don’t always work in the best interests of the student. Some of the things that happened in the first year made us go ... ‘whoa’. I had a 15-year-old exceptional entrant who couldn’t get PPE. They couldn’t get any money to buy PPE, but they couldn’t go into the workshop without PPE. There’s no mechanism in the College to fix that. So, in the meantime, we thought, ‘we’re going to fix that’. So Time4Me paid for that as it was a barrier to education.

Sarah Tervit, Forth Valley College

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic flagged up where policies and practices fell short of supporting students with complex needs and the Time4Me project was able to adapt and quickly respond, providing more immediate and practical solutions for vulnerable learners.

“ The laptops through Covid ... the procedure was that you need to come in and get ... but that doesn’t suit my mentee. I need to go there and take it to them. So that’s what I did for those who didn’t have money to come in. My mentee was looking after his mum and didn’t want to go out in case he brought Covid in to his mum. I was able to do that through my role. I could also feed that back and with us going onto hybrid learning, I was able to go back to IT and say ‘let’s look at this’. Let’s see how it works because people don’t always think about it. That can be a huge barrier. In terms of lifting people out of poverty, that kind of barrier is the difference between succeeding and not.

Sarah Tervit, Forth Valley College



Many colleges will have encountered similar challenges in responding to Covid-19 and the impact upon students. The structure and nature of the Time4Me programme meant that internally recruited mentors were exposed to the day-to-day realities through direct lived experience disclosed within mentoring sessions. The demographic of staff within the College, across all departments, was seen not seen as particularly diverse. Staff became more attuned to the complex and nuanced challenges of at-risk learners and began to rethink practice and procedures.

“ Covid has exposed more staff to students, whereas before they were probably more in the background. I.T. are used to dealing with I.T. and professional people in professional jobs. It was unfamiliar to them to deal with people who don't know how a laptop worked never mind how the system works in the organisation. We're not a really diverse staff ... even our age demographic is not that diverse. It's only when you engage with students that you start to see it differently.

Anna Vogt, Forth Valley College

This awareness extended beyond the Covid-19 response and has impacted day-to-day college practice. Commonly experienced scenarios are often re-evaluated to take into account the context of the target group.

“ I am picking up a sense of more understanding, even when I'm picking up the phone to funding, we know you can't say to someone living on your own that there's no money, and similarly with some lecturers there's that awareness that there may be more behind a student simply not just being in that class. That is what, for me, we're aiming at.

Mentor A, Forth Valley College



Success factor: capacity building for learners

Of huge significance for the mentees, has been the recognition of their own aspirations and an appreciation for the mentor taking time to understand them, impartially and without prior judgement.

“ It's really hard when you gone through the school system, and the minute you say you are a care leaver, they judge you. But with Time4Me, they don't care. They just want to help. It doesn't matter who you are.

Learner B, Forth Valley College

This has helped learners feel more comfortable and confident in making the transition to college and in staying the course of their studies. Mentors are trained to let the mentee drive the conversation, without prior agenda and this relaxed and safe space for discussion was welcomed.

“ Even when they talk to you, it's not like they say to you 'what do you want to talk about today?' or 'what's your problems?' ... they just let you ramble on and it free flows.

Learner B, Forth Valley College

“ There's no pushing on their side. If you say fine, then they don't keep pushing. You do things on your timescale. We used to meet in the office but now we go for a walk of go for a coffee or something ... and I find it easier walking and talking. I find it's better.

Learner A, Forth Valley College

Through the establishment of trusted relationships forged within the mentoring sessions, students have seen an increase in their confidence with learners developing a more positive outlook towards education than had been previously experienced.

“ A lot of our young people haven’t had a good experience of education, school refusers etc. ... and it’s trying to break that.

Sarah Tervit, Forth Valley College

A more positive engagement within the learning environment has encouraged positive interactions with support systems, increasing space for capacity building to be developed. Although many of the mentors come into the programme with particular expertise, Time4Me has been designed to enable the learner and build their capacity for growth and developing resilience. Mentors are trained not to be ‘fixers’ and to build confidence for the young person in taking affirmative steps for future success beyond the programme and college course.

“ An example of that is that one of our mentees needed to go to a particular support service. But her mentor manages that support service, so she has all the answers in her head and could probably just go in and fix that. But the student didn’t have the confidence to come up to the Hub and communicate what she needed. So, to help with that, the mentor didn’t do it for her ... but she went with her and said I am here. It’s about the mentee knowing someone is there and it’ll be ok. If she gets stuck, the mentor can jump in and help ... but it’s about showing the mentee that they need to do this. That mentee now interacts with those people and can do that independently. It’s building that capacity as you’re not going to have a mentor forever. We talk about what is going to happen after that.

Sarah Tervit, Forth Valley College

The programme provided a safe space for mentees to talk through any anxieties around their course choice or around more general issues affecting their ability to engage with learning. The mentors could identify and raise concerns around the potential for withdrawal and via the coordinator, alternatives learning opportunities could be explored and implemented.

“ When I met my mentee, she was incredibly stressed, her anxiety was through the roof, and she was basically on the wrong course. She wasn’t enjoying it, was completely withdrawn, and would have dropped off the radar completely. She also had quite a lot of people involved around her, and she didn’t know who she should turn too with a particular question ... there was just this massive list of people. Now, both me and Sarah, we supported her in withdrawing from her course and applying for a new one, which was a January start, and she’s still here. Now she’s absolutely loving it, she thinks this is the best course ever and she’s made plans for next year. She’s applied for a different course completely to what she had been doing before and her friendship group has improved dramatically. It’s been all about building confidence with her and giving her the skills to be able to tackle problems instead of being so overwhelmed.

Mentor B, Forth Valley College





Success factor: providing practical resources and support

Noted by the project coordinator, all the students referred are experiencing the impact of deprivation even if that is not the primary driver within the initial referral. Whilst every referral and mentee faced a unique set of individual circumstances, common points of risk were identified and were of concern for the project and formed part of the response to tackling poverty. Time4Me directly intervenes at noted key points of risk which predominantly centre around college closure times. The project responds by issuing care packages for the young people which provide practical support and are presented as gifts.

“ These times are highlighted as a point of risk. Christmas and Easter when people are alone ... Sarah and June, over the last few years, have created Care Packages that are useful ... but are also gifts. They’ve got a bit of food in them, a voucher. At Easter ... an Easter egg, at Christmas ... maybe a book or something that can occasionally be tailored to the individual based on how much they work. Then they all get delivered and that’s all funded through the Time4Me funding.

Anna Vogt, Forth Valley College

Often mentors may wish to provide their mentees with a gift and to maintain appropriate boundaries, it was decided that the mentors would get to deliver the care packages to mentees. Where students haven’t been in college and perhaps disengaging, the coordinator steps in to deliver the care package on behalf of the mentor. In scenarios where it was known that a mentee may benefit from a staff clearing out furniture for example, this is again discussed with the coordinator, and it is the project rather than the mentor who directly facilitates any such exchange. For the recipients, the care packages are highly valued and appreciated.



“ They go that step further. At Easter I got an Easter egg, and a wee pack ... and we got stuff at Christmas too. It was lovely. My wee boy was like ‘look what you’ve got mummy’ ... and it was nice.

Learner B, Forth Valley College

Through the mentoring sessions, mentors are also able to pick up on any crisis points, around issues of food poverty for example and can look to create a positive intervention through opening up a conversation.

“ Thinking about my mentee, she had just gone on placement, and she started talking about her feelings, she had been feeling really faint, and she was faint on the bus, and off the bus ... and as you start to unpick that, there’s clearly something going on ... even though it’s just wee things. You’re able to pick that up every week because you’re seeing them regularly and these are things that could otherwise have just got lost. You have that contact, and if you notice they’ve been talking about feeling faint over a couple of weeks, you can ask what’s going on with their eating ... are they eating enough and open it from there. Sometimes they’ve never had someone there pulling together those threads.

Mentor A, Forth Valley College

The mentoring sessions, in addition to providing resources for successful learning, also support and promote longer term and sustainable strategies for future success. The project discretionary funding can target poverty via facilitating the purchase of desks, chairs, or other resources to support the mentee's learning, however, mentees are also gently encouraged to reflect on 'who can help you with that?' and to engage with support and guidance advisers to help make a discretionary financing application and promote sustainable practices.

“ I think it's very kind of basic steps really. For example, with my mentee we're looking at a plan for her over the summer to help her manage her money, and to make sure that when she gets to August that she's ok till her SAAS comes in then. We do a lot of discussion about all the jobs she has on the go ... she actually has 4 jobs, and we'll have a look at her budgets and how she's managing everything.

Mentor A, Forth Valley College

Success factor: raising aspirations

Time4Me has created an environment in which the young people participating see a value in themselves and in continuing their learning. For the project coordinator, it's about saying 'look at this opportunity and look what you can do' as no one has maybe told the learners that they are good enough before. Many of the learners emphasise goals and ambitions that they have for the future and Time4Me creates an opportunity for these goals to be affirmed as valid and achievable.

“ Sometimes the hard part to foster is already there and you just keep working on that. With her, she is putting money aside and she doesn't want to be living where she's currently living ... and it's just chatting and thinking about that and looking at where she wants to be.

Mentor A, Forth Valley College

“ I actually came back for my little boy. I've got a 3yr old and I wanted to give him a better future. I've got a plan. I want to be a residential care worker cos I used to live in residential care ... so I want to go back and give them the support that I never really got, if that makes sense? I want to make it better for other children and for my wee boy, I don't want him to see that mum is just sitting in the house doing nothing. She's actually out working and she's at college ... actually at college. I've got a wee part time job just now and it's good to give him a better life and I'll stick at it.

Learner B, Forth Valley College

When the learner is able to build capacity, they in turn see that they have skills and strengths which builds a confidence in their ability to sustain their course, opening space to upwardly re-evaluate their aspirations. Whether aspirations are related to achieving goals within education or employment, Time4Me is about showing someone they can actually do what they set out to achieve or more. Taking part in the programme gave the learners real belief in their goals

“ She makes you realise that you really are worth it. That you have a dream, and you are worth it, so why not chase it.

Learner A, Forth Valley College





Barriers/challenges

The Time4Me project has been widely seen as a highly successful initiative and has been positively received by both mentors, mentees and within the wider college community. The success of the project has been largely accredited to the project coordinator, and this has been noted as an area of risk within formal evaluation of the project. This has been taken on board and the aim is to embed a more sustainable model which can be replicated should staffing changes occur.

“ It’s all about a recruitment process and recruitment choices. If Sarah’s post became available you wouldn’t look to recruit a Sarah Mark II, but you would look to recruit somebody that might use different skill sets but move through the College in the same way. Actually, what we do need is systemised processes that reduces the risk of somebody exiting and we can’t replicate the work she’s doing as it all hinged on her. We are doing a lot of work as a department to identify those areas of risk, as where you do become quite lean, and rely on an individual’s skills set rather than the service itself is a risk.

Anna Vogt, Forth Valley College

The voluntary nature of mentor recruitment relies heavily on good will and recent concerns over increased workload, time constraints and college restructuring may impact on the sustainability and consistency of existing and future mentor-mentee relationships.

Resisting the desire to ‘fix’ can be a personal challenge to resist for mentors, particularly as Covid-19 lockdowns impacted upon mentees. The mentor training and supervision incorporated within the project was however seen as robust and helpful in ensuring boundaries were maintained to facilitate a supportive environment in which mentees could develop individually tailored strategies and build capacity for future success.



It’s been good for me as it’s challenged me and by nature, I’m a fixer. I’ve not always found that a particularly comfortable part of the journey.

Mentor A, Forth Valley College



Next steps

The project remains part funded by The Robertson Trust with additional funding being supplied from the College’s arm’s length foundation. The next phase of the project is to look at any groups the College considers to be under served, perhaps resulting from a lack of a dedicated service. The College also plans to look at a more systemised approach to early interventions and in identifying learners for whom intervention may be appropriate.

“ There’s a transition element at the next phase of the project we need to get better at that. We also need to look at what resources we need to do that because everybody’s doing a wee bit here and there. No one really owns the transition, but can we systemise that so that it doesn’t require a person to facilitate it all.

Anna Vogt, Forth Valley College

Mentoring will continue and remains a peak intervention. The College aims to take forward and embed the learning gained from the project to continue to better inform sustainable practices and create positive outcomes for the most vulnerable learners.

“ Time4Me has given us so much in terms of learning. We have taken note of all these things and have tried to influence, as the Time4Me won’t be there forever and we’re not naïve about that. So it’s about what can we take from that learning to go back and to change some of our practices which aren’t access friendly and actually further disadvantage people.

Sarah Tervit, Forth Valley College