

Employability Learning Network Case Study *'Next Steps'*

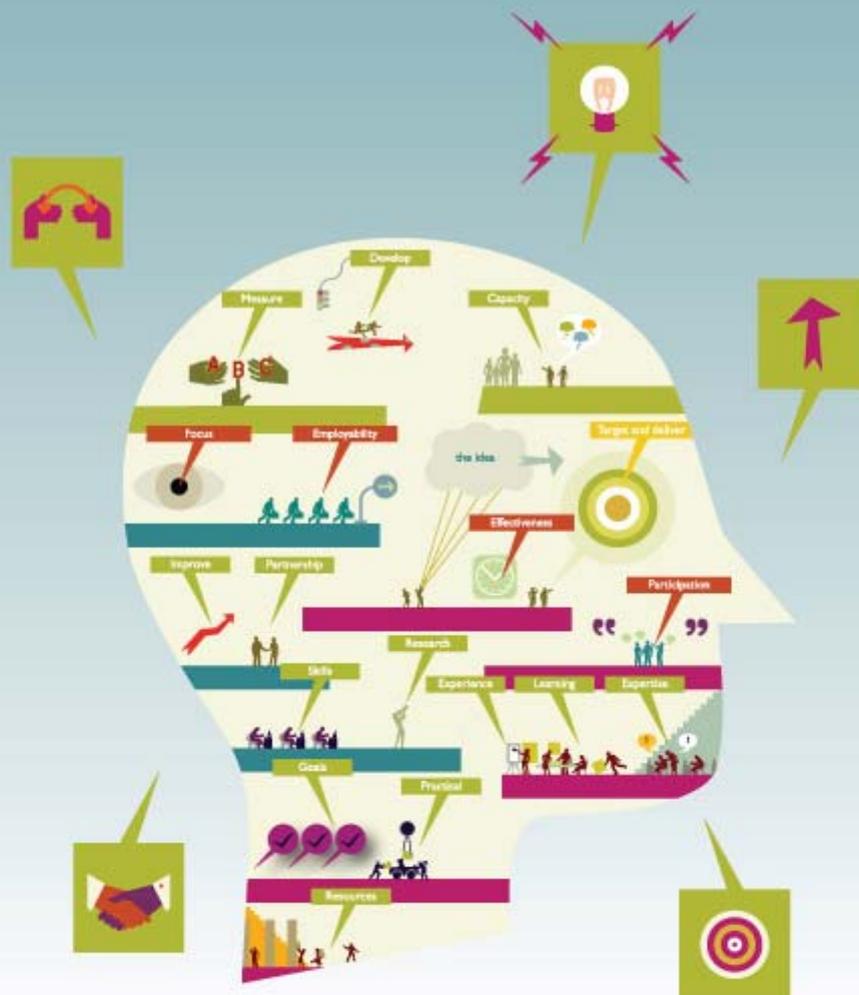
Contact Details :

441 High Street

Kirkcaldy KY1 2SN

Tel: 01383 559196

Email: nextsteps@lauder.ac.uk



Contact: Joanne Farrow

Employability Team, 5th Floor, 5 Atlantic Quay, 150 Broomielaw, Glasgow G2 8LU

Telephone: 0300 244 1337 | 07919 298 125

Email: joanne.farrow@scotland.gsi.gov.uk

What does the project do?

The Next Steps programme helps people recovering from drug or alcohol addictions to take control of their lives. To take part participants must be committed to moving forward in their lives and either be drug-free or on a stabilised prescription, such as methadone.

The programme offers a staged approach:

- a flexible pre-care stage of setting personal goals, confidence building and creative or IT courses.
- the main programme, which requires a commitment of five mornings a week for 12 weeks and includes confidence building, healthy lifestyle and independent living skills, coping with change, creative work, first aid, job access skills and social opportunities;
- aftercare tailored to each person's needs, which may include interview skills, further education, planning for the future.

Next Steps equips people to progress to work or education and links in with several local partners including social inclusion, community health and community safety as well as life long learning and community participation.

How do they use peer support and mentoring?

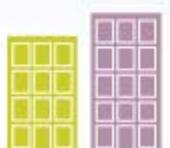
Within the programme, Next Steps uses peer support and mentoring through:

- **Peer educators** – who take part in the Next Steps courses and encourage all members of the group as needed.
- **Peer mentors** – to provide one-on-one support on an as-needed basis at key points in a participant's journey.
- **Peer advocates** – who go along to meetings with participants to provide moral support and to help them state their case.



These peer educators, mentors and advocates play several roles within the Next Steps course and follow-up support.

- Encouraging other participants on the course with activities they are less confident with
- Providing a new community for people who feel excluded from the community
- Mentoring when people go to college or work (community-based college and work placements are also helpful)
- Helping people stay away from drugs and alcohol when they go back to the same areas with lots of drugs
- Providing personal development opportunities and volunteering experience for their CVs
- Satisfying a common desire among participants to give something back



The part-time mentoring co-ordinator employed by Carnegie College also works on a variety of mentoring projects to boost employability and confidence among vulnerable people.

- One-to-one support for people with mental health problems
- A buddy project in local schools between senior students and transition pupils
- Mentoring between new businesses and established professionals

An ESF-funded project with young people at risk of offending who are paired up with service providers they are less likely to be using already, such as fireman. This has attracted HR directors and MDs to be the mentors.

How is their approach particularly valuable?

Tailored for progress

Next Steps' approach provides a flexible range of peer support and mentoring as participants progress and their needs change.

Blend of support

Mixing the support of staff, peers on an equal level, and mentors who can act as role models provides an effective blend of formal and informal support to move forward.

- "Mentors are similar to friends but with guidelines. They have personal knowledge of how bad shit can get, but because you know they have been through it helps you to keep moving forward. They are someone to look up to and possibly set a path for you to follow."
- "Support from my peers helps because we have experienced similar addiction problems and we can help each other through different areas of progression. A mentor is the light at the end of the tunnel. They went through and are now at the other side."

Building confidence and trust

Peer support and mentoring is a powerful way to help participants open up and trust other people and become more trustworthy themselves. This is especially important for people who have been hiding their addictions.

- "Having a mentor is really good as it allows me to build a relationship, which cultivates trust and confidence. I am not expected to hit targets within certain time frames or just take the first thing that comes up."

"I have had the opportunity to build trust back into my life for the first time in years. People are seeing the difference and are putting a little faith in me, and I am starting to trust other people. Not everyone is out for themselves." – Client

Credibility and a personal approach that resonates with participants

This helps to transform deeply ingrained views more quickly and wholly.

- "Knowing that the mentor or peers have been through or have experienced similar problems of their own, helps me understand my own. I trust that they are willing to share their experiences in order for me to explore mine. They understand my language. It does not feel so organised or clinical."
- "Everybody needs friends, support, someone to unload on and enjoy themselves with. A mentor can offer all that and be that kind of person, and they are there for *you*, not for themselves. When they talk back, you know it's from them and not a book or a procedure manual."



What training and support have they used?

Initially the training was focused on advocacy, but the project decided that mentoring and befriending training would suit participants' needs better. This accredited training gets updated every three years to maintain the accreditation and is also updated regularly as needed.

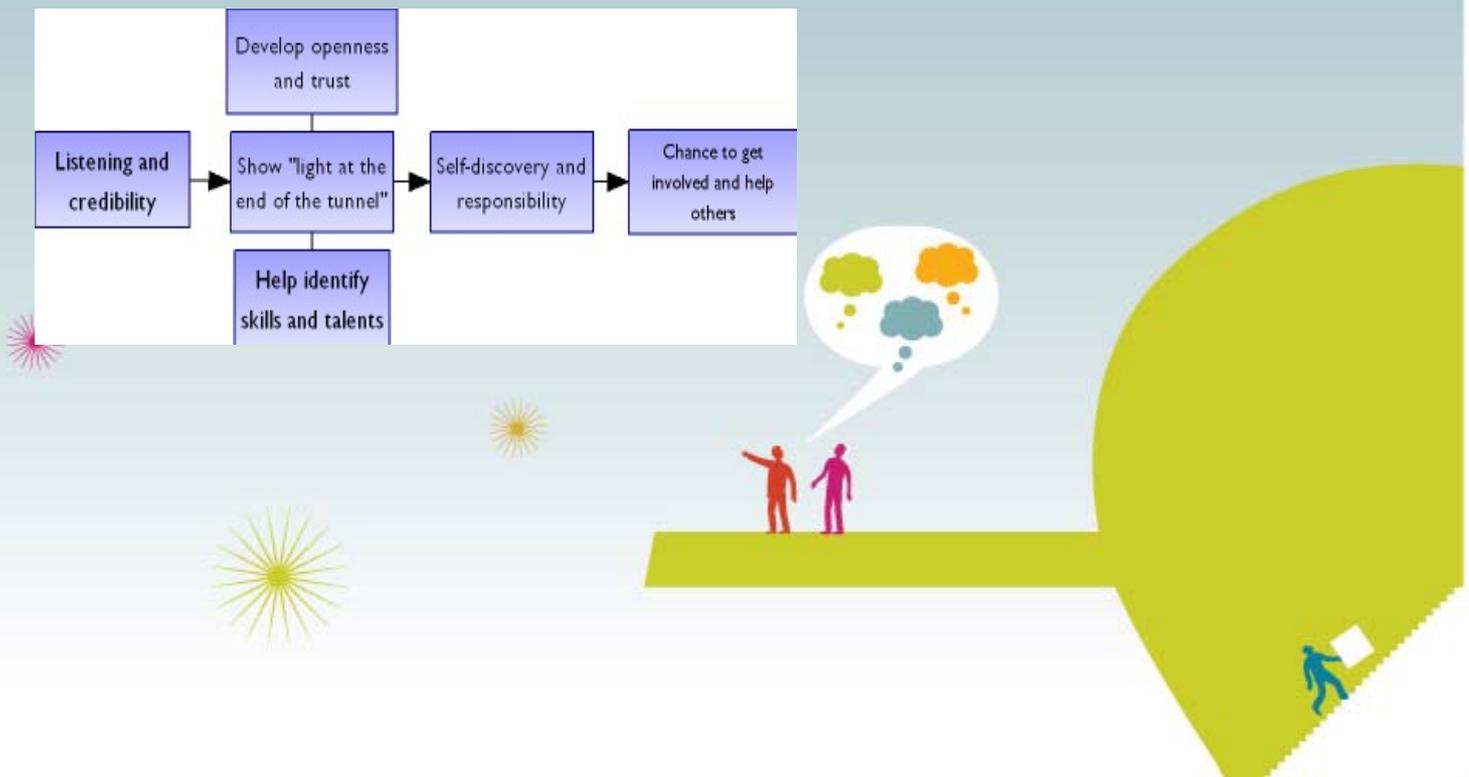
Mentoring is seen as a stepping stone to progress, and Next Steps works to ensure participants do not use their continued involvement with the project as a crutch.

- All mentors must have had six months of living without support from the project to ensure they are stable enough.
- They can only mentor for a maximum of six hours per week.
- They are encouraged to take part in courses run by the college.
- They are encouraged to apply for internal vacancies.
- As a mentor explains, "Supervision of mentors is very important. It can be formal – like weekly meetings, or informal, like chatting in the office with colleagues when you have a problem. You can write a diary and your supervisor reads it regularly to assess your work and spot the problems before they become too become serious."

What are the lessons from their experience?

- Mentors from the programme give the following advice:
- "One of the most important things is getting the right match; if people get paired wrong it could spell disaster."
- "You need to take your client and build awareness – make him or her aware of what he or she is going through, including their steps and achievements."
- "Provide guidance though every stage."
- "Emphasise that the mentor's role is more of a guide than a leader."
- "Self-esteem is very important... everybody has a skill; you just have to identify it."
- "Clients need to take responsibility for their actions."

The figure below highlights the process of client's development.



Are there any special considerations for their client group?

People who have dealt with addictions may have low self-esteem, reduced trust, and a range of health problems that can slow their progress. This means they need to move gradually at their own pace with the support and insights of the mentor, and listening is key at all stages. Mentors and clients explain why.

Listen

- “You need to relate to the client, especially when it is about mental health or addictions. Listen, show that you care.” – Mentor
- “Let the client do the work. The answer to all the problems is to be found in each client, you only need to help them find the answers. You need to listen and make them talk, and you’ll discover that the problem they are experiencing is only the tip of the iceberg. Talking helps, even by simply expressing the thoughts – it makes you think and clarify your feelings.” – Mentor
- “Listen to us, we know what we want. We just don’t know how to get it.” – Client

Take time

- “You need to let them progress at their own pace – Don’t push them! Simply show them the light at the end of the tunnel.” – Mentor
- “Applying too much pressure to us can set us back, especially as a lot of us are coming off substances or have additional health problems.” – Client
- “People need time for the self-discovery. Allow your client to clarify what they really want to do and what they are good at and help them find the right job for them that gives them satisfaction. This way you prevent problems arising later on, especially relapses.” – Mentor
- “At the beginning the mentor does 95% of the work and the client only 5%, but if all works well, at the end the client ends up doing all the work. You only need to do baby steps, don’t push; let them find their own pace. Most importantly, listen!” – Mentor

Thanks

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