Forth Valley College in Partnership with The Robertson Trust

Evaluation of Time4Me Mentoring Programme

Executive Summary

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1.   Introduction

Forth Valley College (FVC) in partnership with The Robertson Trust **commissioned an independent evaluation to measure the impact of Time4Me (T4M) programme** over its first three years of operation (January 2018 to June 2021). A key aim was to provide vital information enabling Forth Valley College to consider the future direction of the programme and options beyond the current funding period, including the feasibility of embedding the programme into mainstream student services provision.

The **5 key areas** of interest for the evaluation were to assess:
1. the quality and effectiveness of the current delivery model
2. the impact of the Time4Me Mentor Coordinator role
3. impact of Time4Me on individual participants (Mentors and Mentees)
4. impact of Time4Me on Forth Valley College
5. the wider social impact of Time4Me.

2.   Background Context

The **Time4Me programme is fully funded by The Robertson Trust**. Forth Valley College of Further and Higher Education operates campuses across the central belt in Alloa, Falkirk and Stirling. Founded in 1961, The Robertson Trust is the largest independent grant-making trust in Scotland.

Time4Me is a mentoring initiative which targets young people (aged 15-26) considered at highest risk of not achieving successful and sustained educational outcomes. The groups targeted for support are:
- Care experienced young people
- Young carers/Young adult carers
- Young people from regeneration areas (SIMD20)

The Time4Me **Mentor Coordinator is responsible for all aspects of project activity**. This post was new to the project and recruited specifically for project delivery.

3.   Evaluation Approach

A **mixed-method was adopted to allow both quantitative and qualitative data to be captured** and to enable as many relevant people as possible to contribute and have their say. In summary, the approach included:
- A review of existing data
- Consultation with key stakeholders:
  - *Group discussion with steering group members*
  - *Depth Zoom interviews with other stakeholders*
- Online surveys with the following:
  - *Mentees (current / past) = 16*
  - *Mentees (lapsed) = 5*
  - *Mentors (current / past) = 20*
  - *Stakeholders (Forth Valley College internal staff, referral organisations, social workers etc…) = 11*
- Depth interviews with programme participants:
  - *Mentees (current / past) = 3*
  - *Mentors = 4*
- Data analysis and report writing

4.   Summary Findings & Conclusions

Overall **Time4Me has offered a strong contribution to facilitating a successful transition into college** for a number of young people involved in the programme, while **enabling those students to develop their softer skills** which has often helped contribute to other positive outcomes.

4.1   The quality and effectiveness of the current delivery model

There appeared to be **adequate awareness of Time4Me** amongst internal staff members, particularly those working in support services. It was evident the Mentor Coordinator worked hard to promote the programme externally by building relationships with prospective referral agencies. However, external agencies felt that the programme could be even more widely promoted.

Word of mouth was seen as being the most **effective way of recruiting mentors to the programme**. Mentors felt that visible support for the programme from the college's senior staff and line managers enabled them to volunteer and fulfil their mentoring roles. **Time constraints** were the most likely cited barriers to being a mentor.

The **referral process was deemed effective** – with most participants (mentors and mentees) being clear about what they were signing up to.

In the majority of cases the **matching process** had been successful. The Mentor Coordinator was praised for their efforts to ensure suitable pairings by **taking time to build relationships** and getting to know the participants.

The **training and CPD** opportunities were both **welcomed and valued** by mentors.

The **structure** for the mentoring sessions (particularly early on in the partnership) **was seen as useful**. Within some partnerships a less formal approach was taken to the weekly sessions, which the mentors and mentees appreciated as it worked for them both; whilst others stuck more closely to the 'goal setting' activities. In several depth interviews it was stated that the partnerships had continued beyond the year and again this was seen as beneficial to both parties. There were very few negative experiences cited by participants of the programme.

COVID-19 forced adaptations to the delivery of the programme. The **efforts made by the Mentor Coordinator** to ensure the **continuation of the programme were appreciated** by all. However, not being able to have face to face contact for some mentees was problematic.

4.2   The impact of the Time4Me Mentor Coordinator role

There was an overwhelming sense that the Time4Me project wouldn't operate or be as effective without the Mentor Coordinator role and support staff managing and driving the programme. But it was also evident that the **personal attributes held by the current Coordinator** massively contributed to the **success of the programme**. In a sense, the role acted as the 'glue' between the parties involved in the programme and the rest of the college.

4.3   The impact of Time4Me on individual participants (Mentors and Mentees)

The programme had a positive impact on both mentors and mentees – with many of the short, intermediate and long-term outcomes (as defined in the Logic Model) being met.

Mentors valued the opportunity to develop a respecting and trusting personal relationship to make a **meaningful difference to an individual student's life**. Whilst for the mentees, a huge positive aspect was having **someone to understand them and be alongside them to develop strategies** to successfully navigate their transition to and continuation at college.

Over time, the young people had a **marked improvement in a number of softer skills** – particularly in terms of confidence, problem solving and communication skills, which many attributed to the input of their mentors.

The longer-term outcomes for the majority of young people related to **continuation within education**, whether in an original course, a shift in course at Forth Valley College, or a move to a new college. This was coupled with **successful completion of their course** for the majority of participants.

Several mentors felt they had **professionally benefited** from their involvement in the programme, with many citing new skills which they had been able to transfer into existing or new roles.

4.4   The impact of Time4Me on Forth Valley College

The programme has contributed to a number of the **strands within Forth Valley College's strategic plan.**

It was evident that some **useful connections** had been developed within the three local authority areas and also nationally with the Scottish Mentoring Network, all of which pose new opportunities for the college.

There had been new learning for both the college and programme staff members, which could help with the **embedding and sustainability of the programme and its mentoring approach**, should the external funding cease.

4.5   The wider social impact of Time4Me

The programme also appeared to **impact on some young people more widely** by facilitating their participation in volunteering, paid work and continuation of further education.

5.   Recommendations

From this evaluation there are a number of **key recommendations which Forth Valley College may wish to consider:**

1. Enabling mentors more flexibility to give their time to the programme, whilst still meeting their mentees' needs: the partnerships could be permitted to decide on the regularity and the timing when mentoring meetings take place.

2. Providing different options for involvement in the programme, such as: introducing a more focussed, intervention (of a shorter duration, such as 6 months); and continuing with the option of hybrid delivery, which has proved an asset for some participants.

3. Maintaining the role or functions undertaken by the Mentor Coordinator to ensure the continued smooth running of Time4Me or its successor programmes.

4. Exploring mentoring or similar interventions to a wider group of vulnerable student cohorts, such as those with 'mental health needs', 'parent returners', 'estranged students' and others 'at risk' of non-completion of college courses. The exact delivery model and intended outcomes may wish to be considered in detail with respect to their suitability for each of these student cohorts.

5. Working more closely with Curriculum Managers to increase their understanding of the Time4Me programme and how they can better work alongside the programme to support mentees to transition successfully into college.

6. Increasing recognition of the voluntary contribution made by mentors by celebrating or endorsing the new skills developed via their mentoring role. To build on this, the professional development of mentors could be fostered and tracked over the longer term.

7. Developing additional ways to capture and measure success, with less emphasis on student retention and attainment rates as measured by Forth Valley College and more evidence gathered relating to participants' experiences and wider positive outcomes.

8. Showcasing and promoting the successes and benefits of the programme (illustrated via case studies etc...) both internally - to staff and relevant students and externally – to referral partners, local organisations and prospective funders.

9. Inviting contributions from mentees to co-design evolving aspects of the programme and explore the possibility to take on a role as 'peer-mentors'.

10. Designing pathways through the college 'support eco-system' to offer mentoring in the most appropriate ways to support the successful transition of vulnerable students into the college environment, whilst aiming to foster ever increasing independence for those students.