

# Capacity Building Project



## GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDIES

### Case Study 4

**The Organisation:**

HAMS (Haverhill Advocacy and Mentoring Service)

**The Challenge:**

To give volunteers the opportunity to undertake accredited training

**The Response:**

Accrediting HAMS' mentoring training with the Open College Network

**Examples of Good Practice:**

1. Flexible training that meets the needs of different volunteers
2. Reflection on the content and quality of the organisation's training programme through assessment of learners
3. Creating an income stream for the organisation

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## **The Organisation:**

**HAMS (Haverhill Advocacy and Mentoring Service)**

Established in 2001, HAMS is a registered charity that aims to advance education amongst children and young people. HAMS fulfils this mission principally through the provision of a mentoring service and by encouraging self-advocacy amongst parents. The organisation's mentoring service involves training volunteers to work as mentors in schools in the Haverhill area and out of school in the HAMS Workshop. The programme targets children and young people who are struggling in school for a wide variety of reasons, and aims to help them reach their full potential through one-to-one mentoring support. Mentors meet regularly with the children or young people and help them in a number of ways, for example, working to address unacceptable behaviours, helping with their school work, listening to their anxieties, promoting self-esteem and improving motivation. There are currently 40 adult volunteers providing one-to-one mentoring to 52 pupils across 18 schools in the Haverhill area. In addition to this, 63 young people offer peer support to younger pupils to assist them make a positive transition from primary to middle school.

## **The Challenge:**

**To give volunteers the opportunity to undertake accredited training**

HAMS hoped that by offering their volunteers accredited training, they would be able to make volunteering more attractive to people and recruit and retain more volunteer mentors. Developing accredited training was also seen as a way to generate more income for HAMS. From its inception, HAMS' strengths were in mentoring skills and working with children. Initially, HAMS did not see itself as a training organisation. Staff had limited experience of running training for adults and no experience of accrediting training programmes. HAMS needed an accreditation process that was simple and they needed professional guidance and support.

HAMS had already developed a mentor training course which they were happy with. This course was successfully preparing volunteer mentors for their role as HAMS mentors. In converting the course to an accredited training programme, HAMS wanted to ensure that the integrity of the existing course was not compromised nor any of its content lost. There were also concerns that offering accredited training might be a disincentive for those potential volunteers who lacked confidence or had previously had bad experiences of mainstream education. Flexibility in the training was therefore needed, giving people a choice between accredited or non-accredited training.

## **The Response:**

**Accrediting HAMS' mentoring course with the Open College Network**

The Open College Network (OCN) offers a comprehensive system for quality assuring local learning programmes as well as offering national qualifications. OCN training is based on units within the National Qualification Framework. Locally designed units and units from the national qualifications can be combined to meet individual needs, enabling learners to progress to national qualifications if they wish to. This unit-based approach enables organisations to customise and design their own training courses while remaining part of a national framework. OCN also offers advice, staff development, curriculum support and quality assurance.

HAMS contacted the Open College Network (OCN) about accrediting their existing mentor training, electing to seek accreditation of the course as a local learning programme. HAMS started by accrediting its mentor training course at level 2, and has gone on to accredit this course at level 1 and to develop a further level 2 programme that is based on practical work experience of mentoring. In this programme, 30 hours of volunteering as a HAMS mentor is counted as meeting the requirements for another unit within the National Qualification Framework.

HAMS had to apply for registration with OCN, which was not a difficult process, although organisations are expected to meet certain standards. There is also a registration fee and fees for registering learners, which HAMS has had to take into account in its training budget and its fundraising activities. The whole process, from first contacting OCN to approval of their first local programme, took approximately two months and HAMS found the support provided by OCN staff invaluable.

## **Examples of Good Practice:**

HAMS has taken on the challenge of accrediting its volunteer training and in doing so, has demonstrated good practice in the training and management of its volunteers. Its training programme remains flexible enough to meet the needs of different volunteers and the new assessment exercises support better decision-making around the suitability of volunteers for mentoring. Assessment also provides HAMS with valuable feedback on the effectiveness of their training. HAMS has not rested on this success but is also generating income by developing and marketing additional training programmes.

### **1. Flexible training that meets the needs of different volunteers**

The flexibility of HAMS' training programme means that HAMS is able to meet the learning needs of different volunteers. Now that the training offered by HAMS is accredited, learners can gain a recognised qualification. Two credits at level 2 can be achieved, through the completion of a simple portfolio of assessments to show understanding of the subjects covered. For any learners wanting to start at a lower level, HAMS can also offer a credit at level 1 using simpler assessment exercises.

All HAMS volunteers are required to complete the HAMS mentor training to prepare them for their role as mentors. Volunteers attend six two-hour sessions and volunteers wishing to get the qualification attend a seventh session where they receive assistance with the preparation of their learning portfolio. The qualification is a product of the organisation's existing training and is not a requirement for becoming a HAMS mentor. All volunteers are required to complete the training but they are free to opt out of the qualification simply by not attending the seventh session and not completing the assessment exercises. Most volunteers elect to complete the assessments for the level 2 unit.

### **2. Reflection on the content and quality of the organisation's training programme through assessment of learners**

HAMS have found that since running accredited courses, their own reflection on the quality and content of their mentor training has increased dramatically. Prior to accrediting its training, HAMS made judgments about whether volunteers were suitable as mentors without any formal assessment process. Now that training is accredited, simple assessment exercises are undertaken by the learners and this gives HAMS a more accurate way of assessing the suitability of volunteers. Exercises are assessed by the course tutor and the assessment process is overseen by an internal moderator. The internal moderator does not have to come from within the organisation, as this is often not possible in a small

organisation. HAMS was able to use an experienced trainer from SAVO as its internal moderator. External moderation was also provided by OCN.

The assessment exercises provide HAMS with useful feedback on the effectiveness of its training. The trainers have been surprised to find from the assessment exercises that some learners had not understood some of the key principles that were essential for effective mentoring. In response to this type of feedback, subtle changes can be made to the training programme to improve learning outcomes. HAMS have found this type of feedback on the training to be more useful than evaluation forms as it provides more objective data for evaluation purposes.

### 3. Creating an income stream for the organisation

Following the accreditation of HAMS' mentor training, further generic mentoring courses were developed and marketed to other voluntary groups. HAMS now have six accredited courses, three for their own volunteers and three generic courses. The mentoring courses are currently marketed to other groups working with young people, but because of their generic nature they are also suitable for a wide range of voluntary organisations or for the statutory sector. The generic courses are now generating income for HAMS, which is crucial for funding the core operating costs of the organisation.

## Sharing the Learning:

By accrediting its training programmes with the OCN, HAMS is able to provide its volunteers with a recognised qualification for the training they undertake while volunteering, as well as generating income for the organisation. The process of delivering accredited training encourages HAMS to reflect on and continuously improve the training they provide. HAMS have demonstrated that even small voluntary groups can provide quality accredited training for their volunteers.

#### Lessons Learnt

The OCN offers accreditation of local learning programmes.

Accreditation of a local learning programme is made easy through the support and guidance of OCN staff.

OCN accredited training is flexible enough to meet the needs of a variety of learners. There are also flexible routes for learners to progress to national qualifications.

Assessment of learners provides training providers with feedback, which is useful for reflecting on the quality and content of your training programme.

Being an accredited training provider provides opportunities for generating income for your organisation.

#### Questions To Consider

- Do you have a successful training programme for your staff or volunteers?
- If so, would your staff or volunteers benefit from having their training accredited?
- Does your organisation need some assistance from experienced people who can make the accreditation process easier?
- What are the needs of your learners?
- Would they like to choose whether they undertake accredited or non-accredited learning?
- Would they like to progress to further training?
- Do you reflect on the quality and content of the training you provide?
- Would undertaking simple assessments help you to judge the effectiveness of the training?
- Do you have a training programme that could be marketed to other groups as a way of generating income?