



## VOLUNTARY ACTION SHETLAND

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### OPEN Project

#### Introduction

Our Peer Education Network (OPEN) is a peer education project, which recruits and trains young people aged 16-25 to become 'peer educators'. OPEN's main purpose is to embed peer education across Shetland as a methodology of raising awareness and encouraging positive lifestyle choices - especially on issues concerning substance misuse, relationships, sexual health, and mental health; whilst promoting harm reduction at every opportunity.

OPEN operates as part of Voluntary Action Shetland (VAS), who seeks to respond to and support voluntary services in Shetland by meeting present and emerging needs, developing and promoting new ways of responding and encouraging people in Shetland to offer voluntary service to their community.

OPEN has established a strategic partnership with the local authority's Children's Services; to deliver peer education workshops to all secondary 1-4 pupils in Shetland, covering specific areas of the Health and Wellbeing section in the Scottish Government's Curriculum for Excellence.

OPEN's group of 15 young volunteers deliver the following peer education workshops in high schools: OPEN about Sexual Health; OPEN about Drugs; OPEN about Alcohol; OPEN about Positive Relationships; OPEN about the Sexual Health Clinic; OPEN Online (online safety and child protection); Mentally OPEN (mental health).

OPEN provides a multitude of development opportunities for its peer educators; identifying internal and external training opportunities for them to undertake, as well meeting weekly with the group to focus on their personal development, and workshop planning and preparation.

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**OPEN Peer Mentoring Project, funded by Life Changes Trust,  
Starting on the 1<sup>st</sup> October 2018-19 – one-year pilot programme**

**Overall Aims**

1. To establish the first peer mentoring programme in Shetland; working in partnership with Shetland Islands Council's Children and Families & Criminal Justice Social Work departments, and Shetland's Who Cares? Scotland advocate.
2. To provide mentoring and personal development opportunities for 4-6 care experienced young people, as well as 4-6 needy and/or vulnerable young people in the youth justice system; to increase their confidence, abilities, and life skills; enabling them to make informed, positive lifestyle choices.
3. To train 6 of OPEN's volunteers per year to become peer mentors; developing and enhancing their skills, knowledge and abilities, whilst providing them with support and personal development opportunities

**Estimated numbers of care experienced young people who will benefit**

Based on the current number of Looked After Children (LAC) and care-experienced young people in Shetland aged 14-26, OPEN anticipates that it will provide peer mentoring opportunities for 4-6 care-experienced young people per year.

In addition to this, OPEN recognises that young people who are not currently or were not previously LAC, often do not meet the criteria and eligibility to access support and opportunities from various services – but they can present as equally vulnerable and/or needy; such as those in the youth justice system, for instance.

Therefore, OPEN feels it imperative to provide the same opportunities to these potentially hard-to-reach groups, and the project estimates it will engage with 4-6 young people in this group.

**OPEN Mentoring Project - Summary**

OPEN aims to launch Shetland's first peer mentoring programme on October 1st 2018, which the project will pilot for one year; with the aim to successfully continue delivering the programme beyond this, providing funding can be secured. In order to achieve this, the project must firstly secure funding of £6,638 to cover the costs of one part-time Programme Co-ordinator post, which will be 10 hours per week.

OPEN intend to cover the additional costs incurred from running the peer mentoring programme from its current budget; such as staff and volunteer training expenses, travel expenses, materials and activities.

Young people aged 14-25, namely those who are care-experienced and/or in the youth justice system will be the primary beneficiaries of the programme.

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Additionally, OPEN's volunteers, who are aged 16-25, will also benefit from the training and personal development provided to them prior to them becoming a peer mentor – along with the continued support and supervision they will receive during their volunteering.

In identifying the current gap in provision locally to provide mentoring opportunities for needy and/or vulnerable young people, and in recognition of OPEN's unique position and experience in this field, the project felt that it was ideally placed to develop and deliver Shetland's first peer mentoring programme.

OPEN has since shared their vision with the local Children and Families Social Work team, the Criminal Justice Social Work team, as well as Shetland's Who Cares? Scotland Advocate. Together we will develop a referral system to recruit care-experienced young people who wish to engage as mentors and to identify suitable mentees for the project, and provide them with the opportunity to participate.

Similarly, Criminal Justice will act as a point of referral for young people who are in the criminal justice system, who they feel would take advantage and benefit from this opportunity. Young people will also have the opportunity to self-refer, and as well as this, OPEN will be promoting the peer mentoring initiative through local media and during its workshop delivery in all high schools in Shetland.

The Co-ordinator will recruit, train and support mentors in all aspects of their participation in the programme. They will be the first point of contact for young people interested in becoming Mentors, assisting in the application process and working through the selection process. The Co-ordinator will provide induction and an ongoing training programme for mentors, including external training providers as required. They will provide regular one-to-one support and supervision sessions with mentors, dealing with any issues or concerns, identifying mentors' training needs and providing support, encouragement and solutions.

The Co-ordinator will also be responsible for managing the process of mentoring relationships as well as planning the end of the mentoring relationship, with the discretion to re-match if required.

Successful applicants will be accepted onto the programme as mentors once they have completed their induction and issue based training with the programme, including a Disclosure Scotland check. The coordinator will support applicants throughout the recruitment and selection process, providing feedback and support for applicants that are not successful.

The Mentors will be responsible and committed to the programme, completing training and attending regular support and supervision sessions with the Coordinator. They will fulfil administrative tasks, such as, preparing for meetings with their mentees, completing meeting logs and monitoring forms as required by the programme. The Mentors will be

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committed to their relationship with their mentees, demonstrating good communication skills, punctuality and developing their interpersonal skills with a positive attitude. They will be responsible to develop an action plan with their mentees, identifying strengths and goals and ways for the mentees to achieve them.

The programme will require the Mentors to be flexible and able to adapt to meet the needs of the Mentees, while maintaining firm boundaries and ensuring their relationships are clearly defined. The Mentors will be responsible to work towards the exit plan for their relationship, working towards the mentees' goals with a view to working towards achieving their full potential after their participation in the programme.

OPEN will match mentees with mentors that are willing to share their experiences and enable them to learn from each other; increasing confidence and self-esteem, life skills and an ability to take control of their pathways – with peer support and guidance from the mentors. The programme will match mentees effectively with mentors that share interests and can relate to their circumstances with a positive attitude.

#### **OPEN Peer Mentoring Project - Background**

OPEN has researched and identified the need to develop a peer mentoring programme for care-experienced young people, as well as those in the youth justice system. This was achieved through our work with young people and partner organisations across Shetland, particularly around the issues raised by care-experienced young people and young people affected by substance misuse.

The research concluded that nearly all care-experienced young people felt that they would benefit from peer mentoring during their time in foster care or residential care, and that they would be able to discuss more personal issues with young people of a similar age or background, to that compared of key professionals supporting them with such issues.

To address this need and gap in provision, the project joined the Scottish Mentoring Network in 2017, to gain access to support, training and to learn from other areas in Scotland about how mentoring can be developed in Shetland. OPEN staff have completed Unit 1 of the Professional Certificate in Co-ordinating a Mentoring Programme, through the Scottish Mentoring Network and Napier University which has led OPEN to designing and proposing this initiative, staff will complete Unit 2 in Evaluation and Monitoring in the first 6 months of the Project.

***The mentoring project's mission statement is: "Strive to enable mentees to achieve their full potential and gain confidence to take control of their pathway, through providing guidance, support, and encouragement from mentors that are of a similar age or with similar shared experience in a safe and understanding environment."***

To achieve this, OPEN will:

- Involve young adults aged 14-25 in the development and delivery of our peer mentoring programme

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- Provide support and training for young adults to enable them to be confident and effective Peer Mentors
- Work in partnership with existing services to increase the number of young adults accessing the peer mentoring programme, identifying gaps in provisions and seeking solutions through mentoring
- Increase our involvement with the Shetland Partnership Strategic Group Structure to embed peer mentoring within their strategy
- Implement changes from the learning that comes with effective monitoring and evaluation procedures of the Project, building on good working practice and identifying new methods

OPEN has produced a good practise guide; outlining all the essential information, processes, and practises for a mentors to develop their skills, knowledge and abilities - enabling them to effectively guide, advise, and support their peers in a process of learning.

Additionally, the manual provides a comprehensive explanation of how OPEN's peer mentoring programme will operate and develop, whilst underlining key good practice guidelines for the coordinator, mentor, and partner services/individuals. To achieve this, OPEN staff selected a development team, who determined the purpose of the programme: to provide peer-to-peer personal development opportunities for care-experienced young people; in addition to setting its goal and outcomes, whilst taking into consideration the programme's essentiality and local reach.

The SMART planning process was employed to set measurable targets and outcomes, in harmony with the programme's mission statement and overall vision. These essential monitoring and evaluation systems provide operational structure and sources of specific information, which are imperative to the ongoing quality improvement and development of the programme's strategies, which the programme will need in its pilot year.

The staffing structure of the programme, as well as the roles and responsibilities of the mentor and co-ordinator, have been carefully constructed and are embodied in the project's values and high standards of good practise. These systems are paramount to the effective delivery of the programme, and its ongoing success beyond its first year.

The programme's recruitment and matching strategy has been especially devised to encompass all aspects of good practise in relation to its adopted application process, person specification and credentials, selection criteria for mentors and mentees, and mentor role description. These procedures will play a critical role in the successful relationship between mentor and mentee.

The programme offers a holistic approach to providing positive experiences for its participants; achieved through a range of interactive, informal, and participatory personal development exercises, group inductions, and continual internal and external training opportunities. Mentees will be provided with guidance and information that clearly explains

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how the mentoring relationship and its stages are conducted, and how they will be guided and supported in all aspects of their participation, which is detailed in their handbook.

OPEN advocates that young people be consulted at the highest level on issues that are relevant to young people in Shetland, which provides a two-way flow of communication between service providers and young people using their services, supporting young adults to influence the development of services and resources to meet the needs of young Shetlanders.

For instance, the Children and Young People's Commissioner, Care Inspectorates, and HMI Inspectors have all met and discussed issues with the project's volunteers - all of which OPEN have played a crucial role in organising and creating these opportunities for young people to have their voices heard.

OPEN are currently registered with The Saltire Awards, which provides recognition of the commitment and time that its volunteers give to the project. The volunteers collectively achieve an average of 20 hours volunteering per week during school terms. If you were to base this on the recommended Living Wage in 2018, this contributes approximately £7,300 in kind towards the running costs of the project.

OPEN wants to be able to deliver more recognised and accredited volunteering opportunities to the harder to reach groups, such as care-experienced young people and those in the youth justice system, and the project feels strongly that these kind of rewarding opportunities have the power to reshape young people's lives.

By the end of the first year of the programme, OPEN believes it will have made an enormous impact on the lives of 4-6 care-experienced young people, as well as the lives of 4-6 young people in the youth justice system. OPEN believes that every mentee will have improved their confidence, self-esteem, self-belief, and motivation; with a clearer idea of what they want to achieve in life, and the means of achieving this.

With the proposed funding of £6,638; to cover the cost of one part-time Programme Co-ordinator post (for Shetland's first peer mentoring programme), and on the basis that we will provide weekly mentoring and personal development opportunities for 4-6 care-experienced young people, as well as 4-6 needy and/or vulnerable young people in the youth justice system – this works out to be an investment of approximately £600 per young person for the whole year, which we feel is incredible value; given the impact we believe we can make on each young person's skills, abilities and overall outcomes.

The OPEN Peer Mentoring programme has been designed to act as a vehicle for change and personal development for our island's most vulnerable and needy young people, and the OPEN Project is committed to make this vision a reality.

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### **Designed by care experienced young people**

OPEN have always believed that young people ought to be at the forefront of its service; with the project's philosophy being that its young service users take a leading role in the design, development and delivery in aspects of its work.

OPEN believe that a peer mentoring programme will be the perfect vehicle for young people to share their experiences to one another, with the mentors providing guidance, advice, and learning opportunities to their mentees.

The project feels that in order for this to work successfully, the mentees need to be able to take ownership of such an initiative, and therefore will play a central role in choosing and designing the key issues of discussion and areas of development.

This will enable the mentees to achieve their full potential and gain confidence to take control of their own pathway. Guidance, support, and encouragement will be provided by mentors that are of a similar age or with similar shared experiences, which will be delivered in a safe, informal, and understanding environment.

The care-experienced young people that currently volunteer for OPEN were the first ones to mention that they felt Shetland sorely lacked an opportunity for care experienced young people to become involved in mentoring and engage in peer to-peer support.

OPEN believe in the skills, abilities and intuition of its young people, and the project is passionate to deliver this opportunity to young people in Shetland, and is committed to doing so

### **OPEN's skills and experience**

OPEN's two Project Co-ordinators (who job share one post), and one of its Peer Education Trainers are currently working towards their Professional Certificate in Co-ordinating a Mentoring Programme. The course is delivered by the Scottish Mentoring Network, and it will be accredited by Napier University as an SCQF Level 9 (degree level) qualification.

The first unit of this accreditation required OPEN's staff to produce a comprehensive good practise guide on how to successfully co-ordinate a peer mentoring programme. The extensive work and research that OPEN's three candidates have undertaken during this process puts them in an extremely advantageous and strong position to implement their shared learning and individual expertise once the mentoring programme commences, in support of the successful Programme Co-ordinator.

OPEN's representation at a strategic level has greatly increased since the project became part of Voluntary Action Shetland (VAS) in 2014. Since then, OPEN are now represented at many inter-agency strategic partnerships and forum meetings in Shetland.

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OPEN continue to develop and provide opportunities, support and training for other providers of young adult's services to develop peer education workshops and activities within their framework and remit. The project continues to add to its successful track record in establishing effective partnership work initiatives to provide support and training for young adults in Shetland; enabling them to address and deal with issues they identified as being important to themselves and their peers in their local communities.

The project has developed strong working relationships with key professionals in NHS Shetland and Children's Services. This is essential to be becoming recognised as a key player in current and future health and education strategies; maintaining the project's long term sustainability and local funding.

OPEN are members of:

- Shetland's Integrated Children's Services Plan – Tackling Inequalities Contact Group
- Sexual Health and Blood borne Virus' Strategy Group – NHS Shetland
- Novel Psychoactive Substances Working Group – NHS Shetland
- Alcohol and Drugs Forum – NHS Shetland, Police Scotland, Shetland Islands Council • Education Mapping Group – Shetland Islands Council and NHS Shetland
- Mobile Phone and Internet Safety Sub Group Committee – Shetland Islands Council's Adult and Child Protection Service
- LGBT Working Group – Various services and organisations

Currently, five of OPEN's volunteers have experienced mental health issues; four of whom are still receiving support with their mental health. One volunteer is also engaging with the Condition Management Programme.

Three of the volunteers were previously Looked After Children (LAC). One of whom is receiving ongoing support with their mental health. OPEN maintain a very close relationship with all relevant professionals involved in supporting our vulnerable and/or needy service users.

These numbers demonstrate that OPEN continue to attract and seek to engage with young people of all backgrounds, with various degrees of personal issues and challenges. Some of the volunteers are evidently vulnerable and need of support with a number of issues, and benefit majorly from the social element of the project and the support provided to them by staff and fellow volunteers. Additionally, OPEN have years of experience in working with care-experienced and vulnerable young people.

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