

Building an effective pre-arrival and transition programme through online mentoring

Louise Jones

Alex Reilly

Presentation outline

- Introduction to Brightside and our experience
- Benefits of online mentoring for pre-arrival and transition
- Case study
- Learning and considerations for project design



Using technology to change lives

A UK based social enterprise, Brightside creates online mentoring relationships that help young people make life-changing decisions.

We offer the support and information young people need to achieve their ambitions.

We do this through giving them the opportunity to communicate online with student and industry role models, and providing content and materials to increase their knowledge and develop their skills.



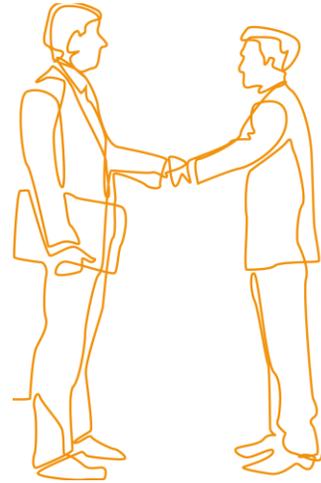
Our experience: since 2003...



We have supported over

100,000

young people through
online mentoring



We have worked with
over

150

different partners
including universities,
charities and leading
businesses



We now operate in every
region of England,
delivering projects
underpinned by our
Theory of Change



brightside

BRIGHTER FUTURES FOR ALL

IAG, social capital and a sense of belonging

- Young people currently have lots of I but not much A and G. They face a cognitive burden when trying to make sense of all their options and want more personalised information that helps them find the best options for someone in their circumstances.
- Disadvantaged students are more likely to have unrealistic expectations of the level of support they will receive and are more concerned about making friends.
- No experience of university in immediate family or community means it's 'not for the likes of me' – imposter syndrome on arrival

How can online mentoring help?

- **Personalised information** – Mentors help young people contextualise information
- **Managing expectations** – Mentors provide first-hand (and recent) knowledge and experience
- Brightside's pre-arrival and retention schemes are built on many of the principles that Aston University research identified:
 1. Supportive peer relations
 2. Developing knowledge, confidence and identity as successful HE learners
 3. A HE experience relevant to students' interests and future goals



How do we do it?

- Online mentoring interventions on safe, secure and moderated platform
- Structured mentoring projects at key transition points
- Clear boundaries & support networks
- Mentors signpost to relevant online content
- Mentors help students contextualise this content for their own situation
- Mentors provide ‘lived’ experience
- Mentors with ‘right now relevance’

Case studies

1. Post offer (pre-arrival)
[University of Plymouth Mentoring](#)
2. **Post acceptance into first term (pre-arrival and transition)**
SOAS
3. Post exam results into first term (transition)
[Nottingham Trent University](#)

SOAS Bridging Course

Post acceptance into first term



Need: SOAS aware that those most likely to drop out were also least likely to access the support in place for them pre-arrival (e.g. Bridging Course)

Aim: To increase retention rates of WP students & mature learners, and increase reach of the Bridging Courses

Target group: First generation students & mature learners who have accepted a place at SOAS

Mentors: Current SOAS students

Timeline: July – Dec (project entering its 4th year)



Project model



- SOAS offers one-week Bridging Courses to WP and mature students to help them make a successful transition to university (September)
- Brightside offers online Communities (forum-style discussions) which are live for 10 weeks over the summer before Bridging Courses begin
- Students receive Communities information in post-acceptance packs
- Communities are led by SOAS Student Ambassadors, who facilitate themed discussions
- Following results day, students are offered the opportunity to have an online mentor from September to the end of the first term



Engagement

	Year 1 (2016-17)	Year 2 (2017-18)
Number of students registered for Forums/Communities	82	95
% posted at least once	24%	29%
% logged in more than once	63%	64%
Number of students opted into Mentoring	45 (55%)	58 (61%)
% mentees sent 3+ messages	84%	71%

Experience



In year 2:

- **100%** of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Communities created a sense of community among current and potential SOAS students
- **65%** of respondents who had mentoring felt it **made the transition to university smoother** and **80%** agreed that their mentor had **helped them overcome challenges** in their first term

Impact



APP dashboard data is a useful proxy for comparing retention rates.

In 2015, the end of first year continuation rate for similar students* was **88%**

For students who had mentoring in subsequent years:

- In Year 1 (2016), mentees had a continuation rate of **93%**
- In Year 2 (2017), mentees had a continuation rate of **93%**
- In Year 3 (2018), mentees have a current continuation rate of **96%**
(this could change up to Sept 2019)

*SOAS students from IMD quintiles 1 and 2, which will include almost all the students eligible for this intervention



What do students say?

"I've found the environment very supportive and encouraging... the forums and the advice in them has been invaluable and comforting."

"It was a great opportunity to be able to get guidance and advice from a student which has already experienced university. It has made me feel more confident about my choice of course and I can't wait to start."

"Really helped me think about what I can expect and what I need to do"

"I thought I would be matched with someone doing my course as this is the information I wanted."

It would be useful to pair people with students doing the same course as them. Specifically nursing/mental health nursing as this is so different to other courses."



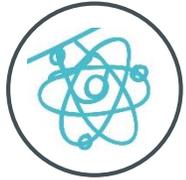
brightside

BRIGHTER FUTURES FOR ALL

Programmatic challenges

- **Sprawling target group**
How to recruit and prepare students/mentees for projects?
- **Who is responsible/interested/accountable?**
Consider the student journey with the institution
- **To pigeon hole or not to pigeon hole – how do you target?**
Consider the message to students offered or selected for the opportunity
- **Older target groups**
Have less incentive to create online relationships
- **Addressing the ‘imposter syndrome’**
Finding common ground

Programmatic learning



Accessing a pool of people for advice and different perspectives



A moderated / regulated platform can ensure brand quality and relevance, and help with reporting



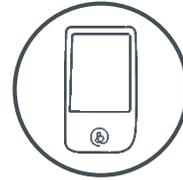
Pre-arrival support can be more ad-hoc than some other more structured projects



Having access to an honest and reliable perspective is reassuring



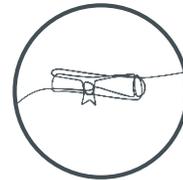
Collaboration between departments (services & academic) is beneficial



Finding common interest can build a sense of belonging – academic curiosity



Recruitment & marketing needs to be considered – what are the benefits?



Define what success is and then report on it



At what point do you 'let them be'?



brightside

BRIGHTER FUTURES FOR ALL

Interested in talking more about pre-arrival and transition projects?

Join us for a free event in London on 19th July!

<http://bit.do/brightsidemeeting>

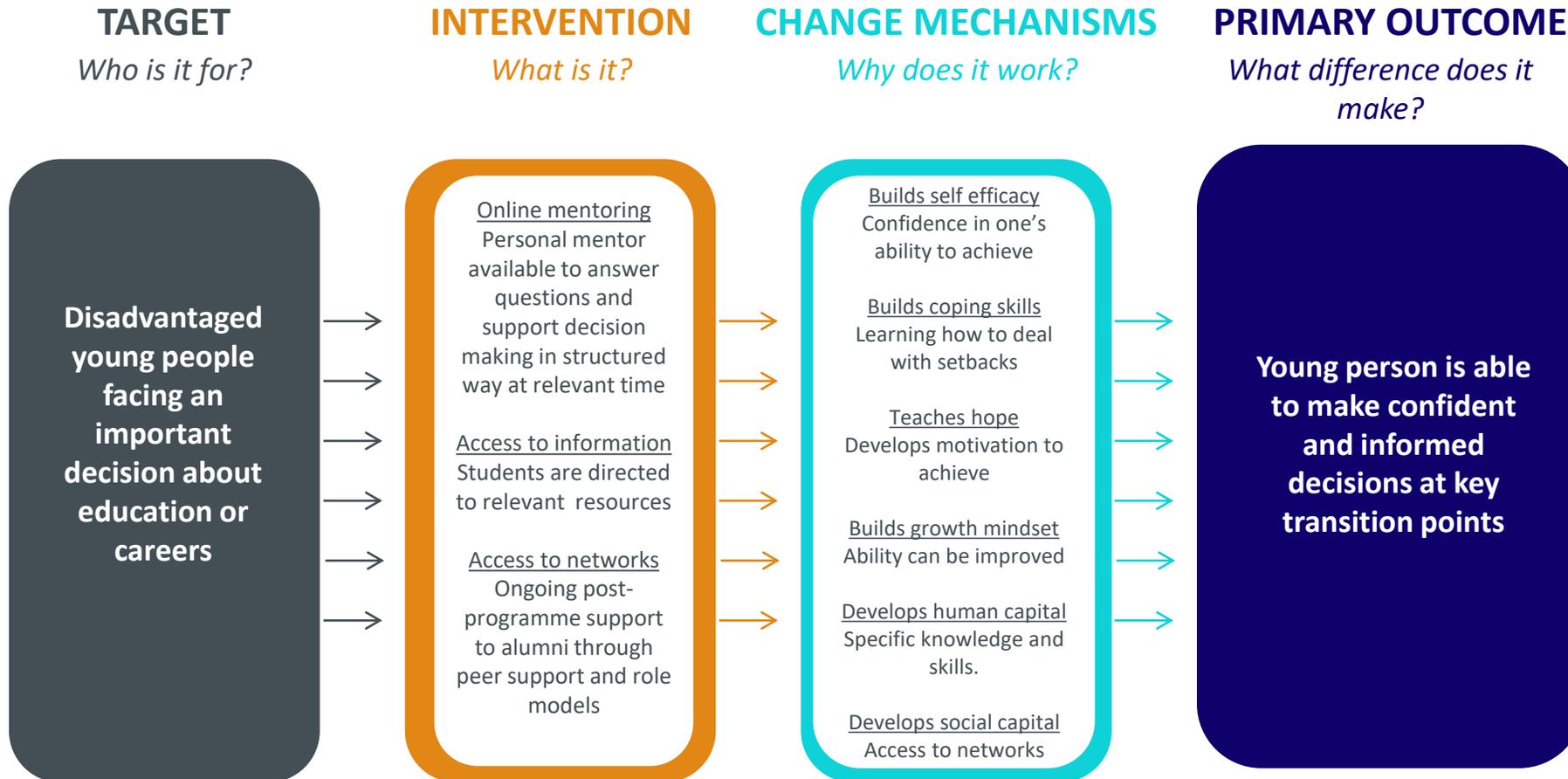
Any questions?

@bright_tweets

Louise.jones@brightside.org.uk

www.brightside.org.uk

Theory of change



Pre-arrival: Plymouth mentoring

**SUCCEED
WITH
PLYMOUTH
UNIVERSITY**

Need: Low enrolment rates post offer

Aim: To increase applicant to enrolment conversion rates

Target group: Year 13 students who had accepted a place at Plymouth University

Mentors: Current university students

Timeline: March – July 2017

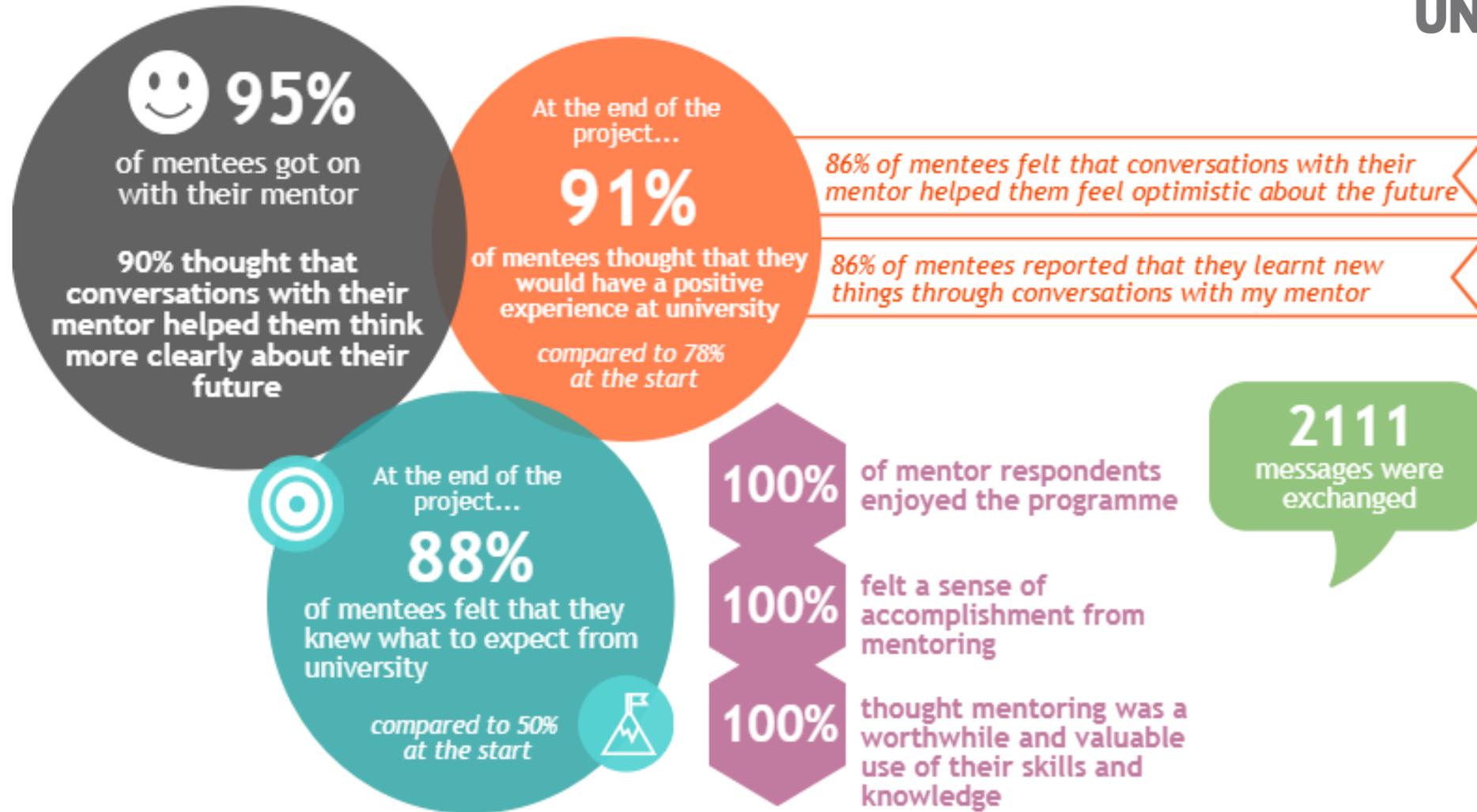
Project model

**SUCCEED
WITH
PLYMOUTH
UNIVERSITY**

- Mentees recruited through leaflets in 'welcome packs'
- Attended online webinar to find out more about opportunity
- Received weekly communications from Brightside alongside messages from their mentor
- Matched to mentors from same academic department (where possible)
- Mentors used a weekly topic guide to stimulate discussion
- Topic guide covered, building rapport, study skills, student life & student learning, actively addressing common barriers
- 12 weeks

Impact

**SUCCEED
WITH
PLYMOUTH
UNIVERSITY**



Transition: Nottingham Trent University

Need: NTU sophisticated monitoring dashboards means they know the demographic least likely to succeed and wanted to use this information to actively target these students

Aim: To stimulate academic curiosity and address transition challenge of discussing and critiquing subjects at higher education level

Target group: Year 13 students who had accepted offer at NTU

Mentors: PhD students from Art & Design School

Timeline: September – Dec 2018 (first term)



Project model: NTUADvance

- Target students were identified by NTU upon the acceptance of offers after results day and they were sent the opportunity to participate via post. Students who expressed interest were invited to the Brightside online platform.
- PhD students from the Art & Design department used their own research to create “showcases”, an accessible format that put across their ideas in an easily digestible way for new students. Showcases took many forms, such as videos, podcasts and online magazines.
- Showcases were released twice a week over a 7 week period, alongside core questions developed by the PhD students to stimulate peer discussion on forums
- Alongside the academic content, threads were created by Brightside to stimulate discussion around student life and signpost to NTU’s support services
- In December participants were invited to attend an event with the PhD students for further discussion



NTUADvance: interim findings

- 83 students opted in
- 62 were 'active'
- 258 posts were made
- The showcases were more popular than the student life threads
- Students returned to showcases for further comment
- 10 students attended the December event

