

## Tales from the TSI Network

# Supporting **Volunteering For All**

*All across Scotland*

### *volunteer mentoring for young people in challenging circumstances – VASLan*



The Mentoring Project is Voluntary Action South Lanarkshire's (VASLan) volunteer mentoring project for 16-29 year olds, offering support to those who want to change their lives, seek employment and move away from negative experiences, such as mental health issues, isolation and re-offending behaviour. The Scottish Government supported the initiative in its first four years and it is now in year two of three-year funding by the Big Lottery and Robertson Trust. Mentoring

Project Officer, Ian McLaughlan, was brought in to work on the project from his previous role on the Wise Group's Routes Out of Prison project, where he worked with ex-offenders who were trained as life coaches to support repeat offenders serving prison sentences.

Although The Mentoring Project initially focused on employability, so many young people were presenting with health and wellbeing problems, with suicide issues sadly all too prevalent, that Ian saw the need to bring this into the support mix. Many young people wanted to change but needed more support and encouragement to do so.

Through The Mentoring Project, VASLan works intensively to help young people progress into work. While getting a job can play a crucial role in turning their lives around, the team know that volunteering is an ideal stepping stone to building confidence, improving quality of life, increasing skills and employability. The journey begins with an overview on volunteering and how they should conduct themselves, with various organisations invited in to talk about what volunteering means to them. Speed networking is used for various groups who are looking to recruit volunteers. They set up a stall at VASLan and when a bell is sounded the young people talk to them to learn about what they do and what they need. When the bell sounds again, they move on to the next group. At the end of the session, they can decide if they are interested in volunteering with any of the groups.



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VASLan then carefully matches the young person with a dedicated volunteer mentor. It is currently working with more than 40 aged 22 to 75 from all walks of life - students to criminal psychologists. They meet regularly with their paired mentee for a period of up to 18 months, building trust and confidence, discussing interests and offering guidance, and helping with concerns that may be preventing them from fulfilling their ambitions.

The mentors help them overcome the barriers and challenges they face, while improving their health and wellbeing and reconnecting them with their community by finding a suitable path to positive change.

The volunteer mentors are themselves offered continual support from Ian and his VASLan team, with comprehensive training covering everything from first aid to stress and mental health workshops. Ian knows how important it is for all the team to be on the ball, especially when it comes to suicide risks.

A key success for The Mentoring Project, is VASLan's encouragement of the young people to volunteer to share their own experiences with train the trainers, offering up their perspective to different groups across Scotland including schoolteachers, youth workers, educational psychologists, social workers, health workers and police officers. It's one of the highlights of training for the professionals and, for the young people, VASLan is with them every step of the way to ensure they never over share, remain safe and gain from the whole experience.

### **How Voluntary Action South Lanarkshire has helped David & Liam**

Training the trainers helps demonstrate how far these young people have progressed with VASLan. Ian feels it is great to see these far more confident young people able to step up and recount their journey, thanks to the volunteering experience.

As well as seeking future funding to take the project beyond 2020, VASLan is looking at the prospect of running the initiative as a social enterprise with the input of the young people themselves.

VASLan has received feedback from two young lads who have benefited from The Mentoring Project and being matched with a volunteer mentor:



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**David (25)** has been with The Mentoring Project for four years. He had been struggling with his health, suffering anxiety, depression and isolation issues, which made it difficult for him to socialise. VASLan started him with some group work and, to help get him out and about, he joined the walking club and was painting fences and cutting grass at a local park. Thanks to meeting a new circle of friends, his confidence grew and he became stronger in himself.



*“I was given a volunteering opportunity with a furniture project in Carlisle called New Beginnings. It provided furniture to the likes of homeless people who had been found new homes by social work, so amongst other things I helped with deliveries. I was also involved in a project, toys for Christmas, for people struggling with money.*

*“Now I’m doing a bit of peer mentoring myself as a senior lad. I feel that I’m making a contribution when I’m encouraging younger people and getting them along to volunteer at events. It makes me feel superb. I’m hoping to get work soon as a van driving assistant.”*

The Mentoring Project is delighted with David’s progress and the opportunity to help him overcome barriers, take away his isolation and get him involved in the local community. As a volunteer peer mentor, he is now giving something back.

Campbell, who mentored David, is an experienced mentor who has been volunteering with the project for the last four years. He works full time as a care worker in a nursing home for severely autistic people. They have developed a strong bond, which allows David to speak openly to Campbell about any issues he may be struggling with.



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**Liam (22)** has been with The Mentoring Project for a couple of years and although his attendance was intermittent at first, he eventually settled. When he first attended, he was unsure of what direction he needed to take in life, suffering anxiety with anger management issues caused by his own frustrations.



*“I began volunteering at Hillhouse Food Co-operative in Hamilton, setting up fruit and veg displays, tidying up and working the till. I was there from 10am to 4pm helping out each day. I was the youngest there until pupils from the high school came along. I became their mentor, showing them everything I’d learned. That was really cool.*”

*“It’s not only given me retail experience, but also really helped with my confidence, as I’m meeting all different types of people, including some customers who are living in poverty. I’ve got a lot out of it and, having had help with my CV, I’m now considering going to college. It’s really good to be helping out.”*

Liam is making good progress and has just started on a Prince’s Trust programme, a challenge he would have been unable to undertake six months ago. Saga who is 28 and works full time as an office administrator mentored Liam, or as he warmly refers to him, the tor-mentor!

VASLan is the place for  
volunteering in South Lanarkshire  
[vaslan.org.uk](http://vaslan.org.uk)

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