



# ROLE MODELS INITIATIVE



# ROLE MODELS

Role Models is an initiative established by Nick Fletcher MP. The Centre for Social Justice wanted to bring this work to a wider audience and has published this outline of the initiative in the hope others might be inspired to replicate it in their own local area.

Nick Fletcher established the Role Models initiative in July 2020. It seeks to pair young people with mentors by working with, and alongside, local community groups. The programme is a different way of looking at disadvantage, separate from Government with a focus on responsibility and behaviour change, guided by positive and supportive adult figures.

## CONTENTS

- 3. Introduction
- 5. Aspirations
- 6. What is a Role Model?
- 8. Responsibility and value
- 9. Code of Conduct
- 17. Mentoring

# INTRODUCTION

In many parts of the country, the fabric that binds our society together seems to be breaking down. While this is often the perception, the fact is that there is still a tremendous amount of community spirit in our country.

Having lived in Doncaster all my life, I must say that I am incredibly proud of where I live. I went to school at Armthorpe Comprehensive, where I met my first real role model outside of my family home. The headmaster at the time was sometimes regarded as a controversial figure, but I knew him as someone who understood what a headmaster should be, what they should stand for, and what their role should involve. After leaving school, I met another role model in a Tae Kwon Do class, with the instructor being a fantastic mentor and someone who I looked up to.

When starting work, I met many excellent tradespeople who all have helped me be the person I am today. The most significant role models in my life, however, were my parents. My dad showed me, amongst many things, how to handle money. My mum told me to say “I can, and I will”. I did, and it worked. Strong figures in a child’s life are significant in their development, but such figures can do harm as well as good. Drugs and crime are apparent everywhere, and an unoccupied mind without a good role model can easily fall into this scene. The prominent figure in a child’s life can, unfortunately, quite easily be the local drug dealer, car thief or thug. In other words, not a good role model. If we genuinely want the best for our communities, we have to start with our young people and an initiative like this is where we can begin.

In my maiden speech, I made the case for the importance of role models in the lives of young people. I planned to take this further and establish my own community initiative, which I could run at an arm’s length and engage with when I was back up in my constituency of Don Valley. Unfortunately, the covid-19 pandemic put a temporary halt to my plans. However, undeterred, I finally launched the project in July and have been overwhelmed by the response thus far.

Since launching the project, my team and I have set up a website and a Facebook page that is independent from my online Parliamentary profile. The response I received on social media and from people



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looking at the Role Models website was very positive, with individuals emailing in to volunteer on the very first day the initiative was launched. So far, I have interviewed and vetted nine individuals who will be volunteering in three community organisations. I have yet to interview an additional sixteen individuals. The individuals who are signing up are true Role Models, and I am looking forward to seeing the work they can do with young people in my constituency.

The reaction from pre-existing community groups has been even more heartening. Three community groups in Doncaster have agreed to give Role Models placements. Equally, six community leaders, including a town mayor, have also endorsed the project. Moving forward, the individuals who are involved in the Role Models initiative will spend a period of three to six months in their community placements. After spending a significant amount of time with young individuals in such placements, the local community organisations will pair Role Models with young individuals who they believe need mentoring.

Doncaster Chamber of Commerce has already done some great work with their own mentoring scheme and have agreed to provide mentoring packages which will enable Role Model volunteers to guide young people to reach their goals and fulfil their aspirations – whether that be going to university, taking on an apprenticeship or simply staying away from a life of crime. The idea is to couple the Government's levelling up agenda with a tangible community programme which will help stop a cycle of poverty that we unfortunately see too often across the country because people lack good role models in their lives. The project thus far has made good progress, and I am looking forward to seeing how it develops further, six months from now. The following pages set out what the Role Model initiative is, its code of conduct, values, aims and strategy moving forward.

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# ASPIRATIONS

## Aims

- To offer consistent supplementary help to any community group that fits within the Role Model remit.
- To become part of the existing team and a loyal member.
- Once the Role Model has settled into the community group, to start mentoring any young person who wishes to be mentored.
- To explain to any young person that they are responsible and a valued member of society.
- To mentor a young person on the Role Models code of conduct.
- To listen to their dreams and to write them down as goals.
- To hold a young person to account and to offer support on a weekly basis.

## Goals

- To have a Role Model program in every town and village in Don Valley.
- To inspire other constituencies to see the value of Role Models and adopt the programme.
- To achieve all we want to achieve with no funds changing hands and with no buildings. Being successful just by utilising the wonderful people of Don Valley and existing community groups.
- To make a difference to the lives of young people by utilising our wonderful community groups in Don Valley and its fantastic residents.

In Don Valley, there are over 74,000 residents, and I believe 99% of the people who live here want the best for our young people and our towns. They just haven't had an outlet to help.

The initiative aims to address this. It aims to tell young people that they can achieve anything if they try. While the initiative has just begun, if 1000 individuals signed up to be Role Models over the years, I do not doubt that it would genuinely transform many left behind communities in Don Valley and beyond.

# WHAT IS A ROLE MODEL?

The Breakdown Britain series from the Centre for Social Justice puts a spotlight on the 'root causes' of disadvantage. This work was written at a time when huge cash transfers had taken place in the welfare system, but the long-term challenge of poverty remained. Our research into family trends recently found more than 2.7 million children have no father figure at home, representing almost 1 in 5 of all dependent children.<sup>1</sup>

In our schools too, young men will struggle to find male role models to look up to. One in four English primary schools have no full-time qualified male teacher, and 80 per cent of state-educated boys are in primary schools with three or fewer full-time qualified male teachers.<sup>2</sup> In response charities like Essex based, Lads Need Dads have sprung up to give young people, and especially boys, positive male role models to provide someone to talk to and look up to.

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1. CSJ calculation: 13.9m dependent children in the UK (2016), 22 per cent live in lone parent families (3.058m) of which 90 per cent live in lone mother families (2.752m)
2. [www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-14748273](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-14748273)





It isn't just boys, our research into gangs has found that in our most deprived areas gang membership is often a substitute for role models at home, with young people seeking out older children or adults and being drawn into the 'structure' of a gang. Our 2014 report, 'Girls and Gangs' found that "family breakdown, domestic violence in the home, (and a) lack of positive role models and low self-esteem (pushed) girls into the arms of gang members."<sup>3</sup>

The Role Model initiative takes a broad view on what constitutes a role model but is clear on the expectations. According to Nick Fletcher, "A role model is someone who cares for the future of their community and understands that the best way to do this is care for the people that live there. They are someone who respects themselves and knows the value of personal responsibility, and who doesn't blame anyone for their mistakes. A role model is someone who can be trusted, leant on and is consistent in their approach.

They are someone who knows what success looks like and that success is not always based on wealth. They are an individual who has a positive attitude, who looks forward while learning from past mistakes. Someone who knows failure is often part of the road to success and the person who has never failed has never tried. Above all else, they are someone who understands the power of what they say and what they do, and the influence that they have on the people around them.

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3. Girls-and-Gangs-FINAL-VERSION.pdf (centreforsocialjustice.org.uk) p6

# RESPONSIBILITY AND VALUE

The Role Models initiative stresses the importance of personal responsibility to young people, and the fact that being responsible makes you valued and being valued by those in society is a worthwhile pursuit. Taking responsibility at work usually increases your value to your employer which, in turn, increases the likelihood of promotion.

Outside of work, the family home is another place where responsibility makes a difference. A parent who takes responsibility for their children by putting them first is valued, not only by an endearing child but also by society. After all, society rightly recognises the critical role that responsible parents play. It is a fact that children who feel valued by their parents are less trouble and are more likely to become contributors to, rather than burdens on, the state. Equally, people who are valued and engaged tend to suffer less from mental health issues and generally live happier lives.

It is widely known that individuals with responsibility often live by a particular code. As the Role Model initiative promotes the benefits of personal responsibility, it is therefore essential that Role Models themselves sign up to a specific code to establish a standard from which the initiative can move forward.

*The Role Models initiative is to stress the importance of personal responsibility to young people, and the fact that being responsible makes you valued.*





# ROLE MODELS CODE OF CONDUCT

1

I will not use bad language

2

I will take responsibility for my actions

3

I will always respect myself and others

4

I will respect where I live

5

I will always speak positively of others  
in my town

6

I will always be kind

7

I will learn to forgive myself and others

# I WILL NOT USE BAD LANGUAGE

The first time a child swears at their parent(s) can be the start of a very slippery slope. It erodes both their respect for others and themselves. It is for this reason that an individual who signs up to be a Role Model must understand that everything they do and say influences those people around them, which is why a Role Model must not swear.

We all know that in a situation where children do not respect their parents, the most important people within their lives, they will soon struggle to respect their grandparents, teachers, coaches, employers and eventually, all authoritative figures.

Consequently, not using bad language is a simple yet important rule for Role Models to follow. The bonus from following this simple code is that in today's world, individuals who don't swear stand out more from the crowd in a very profound, yet positive way.



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# I WILL TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR MY ACTIONS



While the importance of taking personal responsibility has already been discussed at some length, it is an important code to reiterate. To take responsibility means we increase our value and become a dependable person in our society. We know personal responsibility is something that is sadly lacking in many peoples' lives. Yet it is only by emphasising the need for collective personal responsibility can there be a real difference made in left-behind areas such as Don Valley.

Personal responsibility has two main benefits. Firstly, it keeps peoples' lives on the right path, which in turn allows them to work towards their ambitions and future. Even more importantly, by encouraging personal responsibility, we all lift the burden which we place on society and the state. We also know when someone takes responsibility for his or her actions, they understand that blaming people for their mistakes is futile in pursuing their goals.

The Role Models initiative is therefore designed to educate young people that continually blaming society for their failings may give them an excuse, but it does not help them move forward. Instead, Role Models should mentor young people so they can learn to search for their answers and find solutions to problems that they will come across throughout their lives.

The Roles Models initiative should therefore press home that blaming others may give you an excuse but does not give you a viable future. Personal responsibility is vital and the missing piece of the jigsaw in building a better future for yourself and others.

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# I WILL ALWAYS RESPECT MYSELF AND OTHERS



We all know that respecting yourself and others is imperative. Role Models must, therefore, understand that if we are to help disadvantaged young people, they should be encouraged to get up and get dressed.

The Role Model initiative seeks to stress to young people that self-respect is vital to one's self-worth and mental wellbeing. Lack of this will only dampen one's spirits and will likely lead to a lack of respect being shown towards others. While we are all made uniquely different, we should treat all people the same way as we wish to be treated. By respecting others, we can address all types of bigotry to help build a cohesive society. A Role Model knows this.

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# I WILL RESPECT WHERE I LIVE

Keeping a tidy front garden may sound simple, but it takes time. This is the first, visible example of taking responsibility. It is the job of a Role Model to emphasise that looking after one's property is worthwhile immaterial of whether it is rented or owned.

Many Members of Parliament will recognise that the first piece of litter on the street is usually followed by another, and the same can be said for untidy gardens. Pride in our homes and our towns is therefore imperative if we want a promising future for where we live.

Likewise speaking up our towns is incredibly important. Individuals are less likely to invest in their own area or attract newcomers if there is an air of constant negativity. It is essential, therefore, that a Role Model speaks up where they live and quietly helps put right the things that need changing. 'Love where you live' has been said before, but a Role Model really needs to espouse that message.



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# I WILL ALWAYS SPEAK POSITIVELY OF OTHERS IN MY TOWN

Just as respecting yourself and others, respecting the people in your town is equally important to a Role Model. A Role Model should speak well towards and about the people who live in their home, on their local street, village or town.

After all, speaking positively about people is just as crucial as speaking positively about where one lives. We have all heard “if you’ve got nothing nice to say don’t say anything at all” and this still rings true.

Role Models speak well and do not gossip, as they understand that gossip only promotes a sense of superiority, which in turn breaks down collective societal bonds of communities.

Role Models know that speaking well of others, promoting the good about their community (rather than focusing on the bad), and resolving disputes calmly is far better than engaging in dangerous cheap negative talk.



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# I WILL ALWAYS BE KIND

Being kind seems to be talked about a lot these days, which of course is terrific. The Role Models website displays one of my favourite quotations: “In a world where you can be anything, be kind”. Yet again, this sounds easy, but often we put ourselves first instead of others which is not always the best thing to do.

Too often these days through TV, social media or even with exasperated parents, children witness acts of anger. Whether it is caused by a genuine reason, showmanship or fun, it is never good. Over time young people will pick up on this, think this is the norm and become numb to it. Yet a Role Model knows anger is damaging to children and so always strives to be kind.



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# I WILL LEARN TO FORGIVE MYSELF AND OTHERS

Forgiving ourselves can be very difficult and is probably something we need to do every day. We all get things wrong and then beat ourselves up, especially in the age of the internet where nothing seems to be forgotten. While sometimes this shows that you care, dwelling on past mistakes, in the long run, does not help peoples' mental wellbeing. As a Role Model should be positive and ambitious, they should understand to learn from their mistakes, know how to move on and forgive themselves.

Forgiving others can be difficult. As Members of Parliament, we often hear about people wanting justice, and it should be recognised that this is very important in serious cases. That said, Role Models understand that spending one's entire life being involved in petty disputes is not a worthwhile or positive way to spend one's time. Learning to forgive is both wonderful and liberating. It frees up your time to follow your dreams and makes you feel better about those around you.

A good Role Model, therefore, knows to forgive and forget.



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# MENTORING

Mentoring conducted by Role Models can take many forms and is different for every person, but the basics of what we should want to teach our young people is our own code of conduct. Much of the mentoring provided to young people will simply be informal and through conversations with them and Role Models. Consequently, as disadvantaged young people will observe how our Role Models speak and behave, it is crucially important that all Role Models are asked to sign up to the code.

There will be nothing too overwhelming for our Role Models to do, other than work with a young person once a week or month within an existing community setting. Their goal will be to try and guide, inspire and set goals with a young person. To champion what they want to do, celebrate their achievements when they succeed and pick them up when they fail.

*Role Models will guide, inspire and set goals with a young person. To champion what they want to do, celebrate their achievements when they succeed and pick them up when they fail.*



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