

# *Derbyshire Virtual School: Creative Mentoring Programme Final Report*

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# Contents

<b>Executive Summary</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Introduction</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>1 Context</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>1.1 Review of Recent Data on Children In Care</b> .....	<b>7</b>
1.1.1 Medium Term Changes in the Number and Proportion of Children in Care .....	7
1.1.2 Changes since March 2020 .....	9
1.1.3 The Profile of Children in Care .....	10
1.1.4 Placements .....	11
1.1.5 Outcomes for Children who have experience of the care system.....	12
1.1.6 The Social Care Workforce.....	16
1.1.7 The Position of Foster Carers.....	16
<b>1.2 Prominent Recent Issues Related to Children in Care</b> .....	<b>17</b>
1.2.1 COVID-19 .....	17
1.2.2 Cuts to Children’s Services and Rising Poverty/Inequality .....	17
1.2.3 Geographical and Social Variation in the Nature and Quality of the Care Experience .....	17
1.2.4 Changes in the ‘Market for Care Provision’ .....	18
1.2.5 Instability in Care Placements.....	18
1.2.6 Unregulated Care Placements .....	19
1.2.7 The Care Cliff .....	19
1.2.8 Sibling Separation .....	19
1.2.9 Care Review .....	19
<b>1.3 Creative Interventions with Vulnerable Young People</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>2 Methods</b> .....	<b>21</b>
<b>3 The Intervention</b> .....	<b>22</b>
<b>4 Findings</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>4.1 Prior Findings</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>4.2 Interim Findings</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>4.3 Process issues – developing the Group and Enterprise Project Model</b> .....	<b>25</b>
4.3.1 One-to-One Mentoring.....	25
4.3.2 Establishing Group ‘Hubs’ .....	25
4.3.3 Enterprise Projects and the WoW cohort.....	27
<b>4.4 COVID-19</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>4.5 Outcomes</b> .....	<b>29</b>
4.5.1 Observed and Self-Reported Outcomes .....	29
4.5.2 General Progress Assessments .....	31
4.5.3 Summary of Progress.....	33
4.5.4 Impacts on Progress .....	34
4.5.5 Exploring Differences in Progress .....	35
4.5.6 WoW Cohort.....	39
<b>4.6 What works in Creative Mentoring</b> .....	<b>43</b>
<b>4.7 Challenges</b> .....	<b>47</b>
<b>5 Conclusions</b> .....	<b>49</b>
<b>5.1 Summary of key findings</b> .....	<b>49</b>
<b>5.2 Replicating Creative Mentoring</b> .....	<b>50</b>
<b>5.3 Recommendations</b> .....	<b>51</b>
<b>6 References</b> .....	<b>53</b>

## **Index of Figures**

Figure 1: Children in Care, England to March 2020 .....	7
Figure 2: The profile of Children in Care, England and Derbyshire .....	11
Figure 3: Placement Information, 2020 .....	12
Figure 4: Outcomes for Children in Care and Care Leavers, 31 March 2020 .....	15
Figure 5: Summary of overall progress, all participants.....	33
Figure 6: Summary Progress Across the Eight Measures, all participants .....	34

## **Index of Tables**

Table 1: Looked After Children in England, East Midlands and Derbyshire 2015-2020, as at 31 March .....	8
Table 2: Placement Types 2014-2020.....	12
Table 3: Activities of Care Leavers Aged 17-21, at 31 March 2020.....	13
Table 4: Accommodation of Care Leavers by Age, as at 31 March 2020.....	14
Table 5: Kelly's categorisation of thematic benefits of CMP for Participants.....	24
Table 6: Eight Assessment Criteria.....	31
Table 7: Criteria and scale descriptors.....	32
Table 8: Characteristics of Participation.....	33
Table 9: Change in Overall Progress Correlated with Measures of participation .....	34
Table 10: Change in Mean Score by Quartile of Contributory Factor .....	35
Table 11: Carers' Views of Young People's Experience on the WoW project .....	40
Table 12: Young People's Self-Attributed Enjoyment and Skills Development.....	41
Table 13: Cross Sectional Comparison of Responses at the start and end of the programme.....	42
Table 14: Longitudinal change among participants.....	42
Table 15: Summary Progress Across the Eight Measures, WoW Cohort Participants. ....	43

## Executive Summary

### Context

The last decade have seen large increases in the number and proportions of children in the Care system in the UK. While there are large variations in these figures across Local Authorities, the increase has been experienced across most, including the East Midlands region and Derbyshire, where there has been a 40% increase in the number of children in care since 2015. There is no single reason for this increase, but several factors have contributed, including children and young people staying in care longer after their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday, an increased number of unaccompanied asylum seekers, and a combination of increased socio-economic pressures faced by some families and austerity-induced withdrawal of preventative family support and youth services. Poverty and inequality remain an important contributor to family stress and the likelihood of children requiring protection and being placed in care.

The last year has obviously dominated by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and control measures. In the initial lockdown period referrals for child protection dropped dramatically and then increased, with many expecting that the pressures on families during ‘lockdowns’ will have created a greater demand for care placements in the medium term, and potentially this may also have increased the complexity and degree of trauma experienced by those children that are now being placed in care.

Recent years have also seen important new trends in care placements. There is widespread concern about the use of out of authority placements, placements at greater distance from birth families and the use of unregulated and private residential homes. Longer-running problems also remain such as volatility in care placements, the availability of high-quality placements, sibling separation and concerns about the abrupt withdrawal of support on leaving care. Longer-term outcomes for children with care experience also remain a cause for concern, and programmes which boost engagement with education, progression to Further and Higher Education and into good quality employment are crucial to promoting better quality longer-term outcomes.

### Methods

The evaluation took place over a two-year period and drew on a Realist Evaluation philosophy, deploying mixed methods of data collection and analysis, including:

Participant-observation of one-to-one, group and project sessions; (2) Interviews with mentors and programme managers; (3) Informal discussions and a focus group with young people who participate in the programme; (4) Collection of self-reported wellbeing information through a questionnaire administered in person on a one-to-one basis at the beginning and end of a period of participation; (5) Semi-structured qualitative interviews with young people and their carers at the end of their participation in a series of enterprise projects; (6) Analysis of repeated assessments of young people across eight criteria.

### The Creative Mentoring Programme.

The Derbyshire Creative Mentoring Programme has developed iteratively over the last decade, but its core philosophy is to apply a form of ‘social pedagogy’ to support children and young people to overcome or manage the challenges that they experience and to find a useful outlet for their creative energy, broadly conceived. While delivered in the context of improving educational attainment, the CMP recognises that improving this is likely to need to involve ‘the whole person’. The CMP started with individual 1-2-1 mentoring and this remains central to the programme. Mentors use empathy, patience and a commitment to support mentees to follow the young people’s own interests, build their confidence and motivation and then to engage them in peer-group networks and activities. As the CMP has developed it has increasingly added group activities in the form of weekly ‘Hub’ sessions in different parts of the County and targeted at different groups of young people. In recent years there has also been a focus on ‘Enterprise Projects’ which are time-limited group-based projects to produce a work-related or entrepreneurial output via teamwork.

Part of the initiative for this evaluation was a two-year programme of activities based on 1-2-1 mentoring and repeated Enterprise Projects for a specific cohort – the World of Work cohort – of young people. This two-year component of the CMP was funded by the Careers and Enterprise Company. While the research was triggered by the need to evaluate the experience of the WoW cohort, the interconnected nature of the CMP, the applicability of the data collected to the whole programme and the availability of wider data on the full cohort meant that the evaluation has treated the WoW cohort as a distinct sub-group within a wider set of participants.

## Outcomes

Data on outcomes for young people was drawn from a variety of sources: the young people themselves, their carers and the professional team who work with them. The triangulated analysis suggested that the CMP is effective in supporting young people in relation to a series of outcomes such as confidence, communication, emotional stability and wellbeing, motivation and participation in social life and activities, teamwork and ambition. Qualitative and quantitative data from all groups suggests that the CMP is effective at supporting positive progress for the vast majority of participants. Notably, the degree of progress on quantitative data shows that the longer and more intensively young people participate the more they gain from the programme, and that those with the greatest initial need at referral to the programme benefit the most. WoW cohort participants had positive outcomes broadly in line (very marginally better than) with the wider group. We also observed 1-2-1 and group activities and found that they were supportive, empathetic and provided scaffolded adult support to move toward age-related peer group interaction. While outcomes were positive for the vast majority of participants, detailed interrogation of data produced in periodic assessments of the young people by a group of professionals revealed that progress was ‘bumpy’ in that sometimes young people would make progress, slip back and then make progress again. In discussions with young people, carers and professionals this was explained as a product of the complexity and sometimes volatility in the social relations and lives of this group of young people. In this sense, the broadly positive outcomes experienced by the young people involved is even more noteworthy, but it is also a point of learning for other interventions (and associated evaluations) aiming to copy from the Derbyshire CMP.

There are a variety of factors that are central in delivering the positive outcomes experienced by participants. These included a sense of ownership and control for the young people; a lack of overt functional goals and willingness to be flexible on the part of mentors; an ethos and behaviour of ‘unconditional positive regard’ in the way that Mentors relate to young people and a focus on long-term relationship building.

## Conclusions

We were able to conclude that the CMP does help young people to realise positive progress. This progress is highly dependent on the quality of the intervention and skills and experience of the Mentors and the commitment of the young people and their carers. The success factors are complex and detailed and in learning from the CMP, policy makers and practitioners will need to keep in mind the detailed aspects of the design of the programme. These are set out in some detail in Sections 4.6 and 5 of this report.

## Introduction

Children and young people who have experience of the care system have some of the worst long-term social outcomes of any group of young people. They have lower educational attainment, lower employment rates, higher levels of physical and mental health problems, are more likely to be homeless and to become involved in the criminal justice system as both victims and offenders. Policies to prevent these long-term negative outcomes have tended to focus in the main on the education system with the operational logic that keeping young people in the education system and closing attainment gaps will set them on a more positive life-course trajectory, helping to reduce the risk of these long-term outcomes. While there is debate about the success of these policies, the challenge of reducing risks of long-term negative outcomes is increased by the rising numbers of children in the care system.

Derbyshire Virtual School has been operating a Creative Mentoring approach for children and young people who are in care or have left the care system for over a decade. Creative Mentoring is an innovative approach to working with children and young people and informed by research on social pedagogy. It has been particularly targeted at children and young people who are experiencing difficulties with engaging fully with mainstream educational provision, are at risk of disengagement or who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). The approach has been the subject of repeated research and reflection and has evolved considerably over time. The service now encompasses several different delivery mechanisms; one-to-one mentoring, weekly group workshops in fixed settings ('Hubs') with relatively stable participants and shorter-term Enterprise projects which simulate employment related tasks.

This report is the final one as part of a two-year evaluation involving mixed methods of data collection to investigate the way that the CMP is operating as a whole, including a series of enterprise projects as part of the World of Work extension of the programme, funded by the Careers and Enterprise Company.

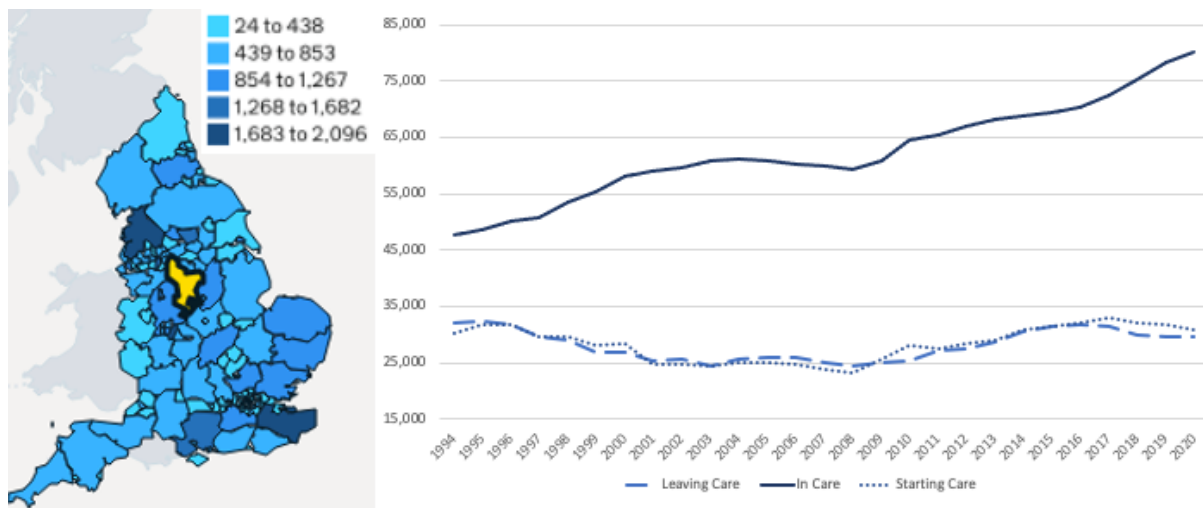
# 1 Context

## 1.1 Review of Recent Data on Children In Care

### 1.1.1 Medium Term Changes in the Number and Proportion of Children in Care

Nationally the referrals for child protection, assessments, the proportion of Child Protection Plans starts, care order applications (National Audit Office 2019) and the numbers of children in care have risen continuously over the last decade (see Figure 1), and this pattern is repeated in both the East Midlands and Derbyshire, respectively. In the county there is now 40% more children and young people in care than there was in 2015, far in excess of the national change (see Table 1). In the year up to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 there was further growth in the County and again this exceeded the national change. The rate of children in care in Derbyshire was 56/10,000. This rate varies widely across the country. There are more than 220 per 10,000 children in care in Blackpool, and just over 20 in Wokingham.

Figure 1: Children in Care, England to March 2020



Source: Department for Education, *Children Looked After at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020*, <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions#releaseHeadlines-tables>.

There is no single reason for the medium-term growth in numbers and proportions of children in care. Rather a number of overlapping factors are likely to sit behind these changes. There has been a growth in the number of older children entering the care system from 15% of the total in 2014 to 20% in 2020. The age profile of children in the care system has therefore changed; getting older over this period. Nationally, the growth in the numbers of children and young people aged over 16 has accounted for 41% of the overall growth of the care system since 2014. Increasing numbers of unaccompanied asylum seekers are a significant proportion of this increase in the over 16s in the care system. The vast majority of the rest of the growth is accounted for by the 10-15 age group. However, in Derbyshire the over 16s account for only 8% of the growth in children in care since 2018 (England: 37%), but the 10-15 age group account for 56% of the change. Less than 3% of children in care in the county were unaccompanied Asylum seekers, about half the national rate and the number and proportion has fallen in the County over the last three years.

Additional reasons for the increase in numbers of children in the care system may relate to wider socio-economic reasons. Benaton *et al.* (2020) report that a combination of rising poverty, which puts pressure on families and reduced preventative and family support

Table 1: Looked After Children in England, East Midlands and Derbyshire 2015-2020, as at 31 March

	numbers								rates							
	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	12 Month Change	5 Year Change	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	12 Month Change	5 Year Change
<b>England</b>	<b>69,470</b>	<b>70,410</b>	<b>72,610</b>	<b>75,370</b>	<b>78,140</b>	<b>80,080</b>	<b>2.5%</b>	<b>15.3%</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>3.1%</b>	<b>11.7%</b>
<b>East Midlands</b>	<b>5,110</b>	<b>5,170</b>	<b>5,360</b>	<b>5,620</b>	<b>5,820</b>	<b>6,110</b>	<b>5.0%</b>	<b>19.6%</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>5.2%</b>	<b>15.1%</b>
Derby	470	448	448	491	562	588	4.6%	25.1%	81	76	76	82	94	98	4.3%	21.0%
<b>Derbyshire</b>	<b>609</b>	<b>586</b>	<b>631</b>	<b>709</b>	<b>802</b>	<b>861</b>	<b>7.4%</b>	<b>41.4%</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>7.7%</b>	<b>40.0%</b>
Leicester	533	596	639	676	611	611	0.0%	14.6%	66	73	77	81	73	73	0.0%	10.6%
Leicestershire	471	469	510	554	584	654	12.0%	38.9%	35	35	37	40	42	46	9.5%	31.4%
Lincolnshire	633	630	696	656	611	622	1.8%	-1.7%	45	44	48	45	42	42	0.0%	-6.7%
N'hamptonshire	941	995	1,007	1,094	1,115	1,163	4.3%	23.6%	59	61	61	65	65	68	4.6%	15.3%
Nottingham	578	594	622	616	629	656	4.3%	13.5%	89	90	93	91	92	95	3.3%	6.7%
Nottinghamshire	839	816	769	790	869	916	5.4%	9.2%	51	50	47	48	52	55	5.8%	7.8%
Rutland	34	40	39	30	33	43	30.3%	26.5%	44	52	50	39	42	55	31.0%	25.0%

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/fast-track/295dd208-3e37-4b2f-af19-c16e6a9451c0>

Source: Department for Education, Children Looked After in England, including Adoptions, Permalink: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/5fa02589-3c05-4b82-a040-0a724f98b97d>



measures in the context of austerity has likely contributed to the problem. In addition, it is widely noted that the social work profession has been under some pressure for a period of time from discursive changes in government policy and media scrutiny following high profile cases, potentially making the whole system more risk averse. All of this combined is likely to provide additional reasons for the growth in children in care.

The main recorded reason for children being taken into care remains ‘Abuse or Neglect’ and this has increased slightly from 61% in 2014 to 65% in 2020. This data is somewhat problematic however. This is because while abuse or neglect may be the primary reason that a child is taken into care, there is good evidence that other factors such as poverty and family stress may be related to the presence of abuse and neglect. As Benaton *et al.* (2020: 338) states “the reality is that most families where a child is taken into care will be experiencing multiple forms of need”. The lack of recorded data on children and their families’ socio-economic conditions at the point of Child Protection proceedings or Care Orders being instigated is a major problem in identifying the true link between inequality and poverty on the one hand. These extreme cases of child welfare problems (Bywaters 2020) nevertheless affect well over 100,000 children in any given year.

A further positive change is notable; the ‘Staying Put’ arrangements introduced by the *Children and Families Act 2014*. This enables children leaving the formal care system on their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday to stay with their former carer until they are 21, recognising wider societal changes whereby young people on average make the transition to independent living much later than in previous generations. The data shows that nationally between 55-60% of young people who reach their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday in care remain with their foster carer, falling to 22% by the time they reach the age of 20. This may also have contributed in a limited way to the increased numbers in the care system overall as there have been small reductions in the numbers of 16- and 17-year olds leaving care. For example, the three-year average of 16- and 17-year olds leaving care in 2018-2020 was 400 (13%) lower than for the 2014-2016 period.

### 1.1.2 Changes since March 2020

The national data usually records children in care between 1 April and 31<sup>st</sup> March in an annual cycle. However, due to the COVID-19 crisis, monthly data collection has been published since May via the *Vulnerable Children and Young People Survey*. This data (Department for Education 2020c) shows that the numbers of children in care remained about 8% above that in 2018 for most of the period since May, suggesting that growth in the numbers of children in care stalled after the initial Lockdown. The rate of children and young people entering care during the period since May 2020 has been lower than the previous three-year average in every month. The numbers of children on a Child Protection Plan grew slightly to around 1% higher than the equivalent point in 2018.

For most of the period since May the number of referrals to Children’s Social Care Services has fallen, at some points quite dramatically. For instance, referrals from Schools in May and June were 82% and 71% down on the previous year, respectively. Referrals from schools remained lower throughout the year until 19<sup>th</sup>-25<sup>th</sup> October when they were 60% higher than in 2018, suggesting schools and other services stretched during the pandemic began making referrals for a backlog of cases during the October half-term. Referrals from individuals and health services were also lower than the 2018 figure. Referrals from the Police however were higher from the period May – September, suggesting that problems that might have been tackled earlier by preventative services were missed and children under extreme pressure manifested this in behaviour which then was picked up by the police as service of last resort.

At the same time problems with moving placements due to the pandemic and in accessing Courts has meant that fewer children are leaving care. This means that the numbers in the care system may have grown at the same time as a future growth being postponed into the future and an accumulation of more extreme problems and trauma.

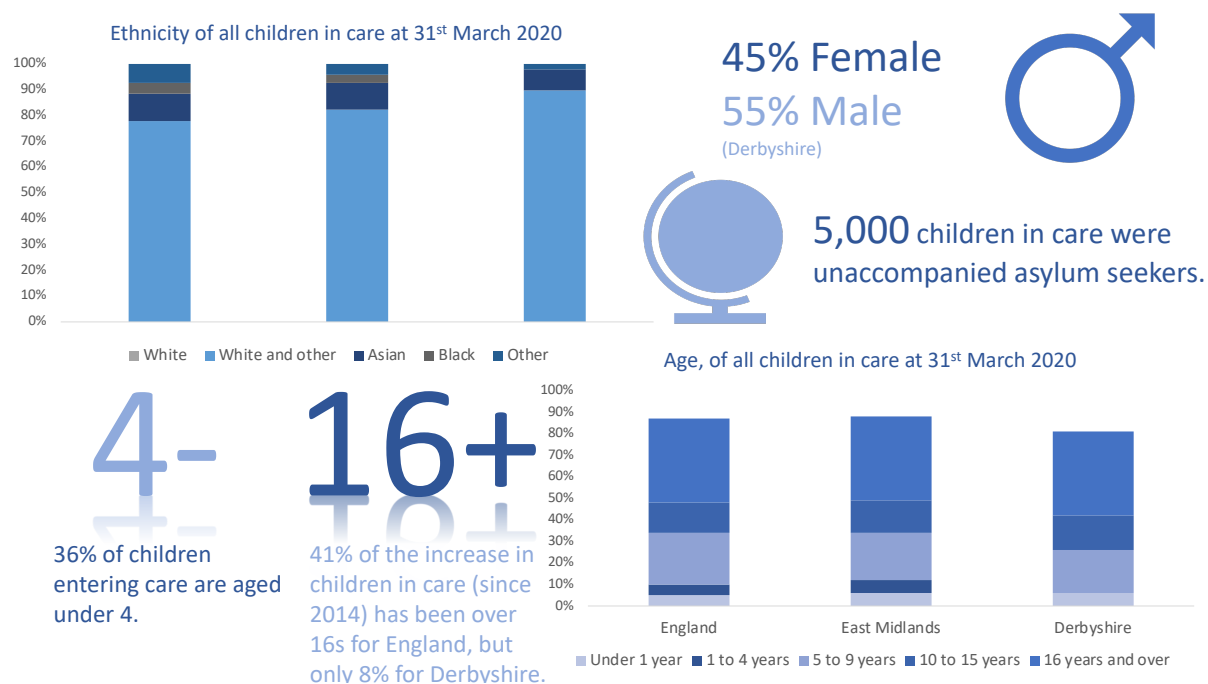
Adding weight to this interpretation, local authorities are reporting that there is an increase in the complexity of cases that they are dealing with because of reductions in the numbers of referrals. During this period, vulnerable families have been under greater pressure but have been less likely to receive an early referral, and the conversion rates from referral to contact with Children's Social Care has increased. Local authorities report (Department for Education 2020c, 14):

*“... increased care complexity ... involving: elevated mental health issues amongst parents and children, neglect and emotional abuse, parental issues relating to alcohol and mental health, cases involving non-accidental injury, increases in the number of new-born children that have been presented in care proceedings, increase in cases involving young people self-harming, referrals where the family are in acute crisis and escalations of risks in cases that are already open to children's social care.”*

### 1.1.3 The Profile of Children in Care

We have already seen that the age profile of young people in care has changed recently with a larger number of older children entering the care system in England at least. Ten to 15 year olds make up the largest proportion of children in care, overall. The gender profile of children in care is relatively stable at around 55% males and 45% females. The ethnicity profile of children in care varies between places. In Derbyshire the care population is more white than elsewhere in the country. Nationally, the ethnicity profile has remained relatively stable over time however, with Asian/Asian British children under-represented in care relative to the wider population and Black/Black British children being slightly over-represented. Five thousand children in care were un-accompanied asylum seekers, the majority of whom were male.

Figure 2: The profile of Children in Care, England and Derbyshire



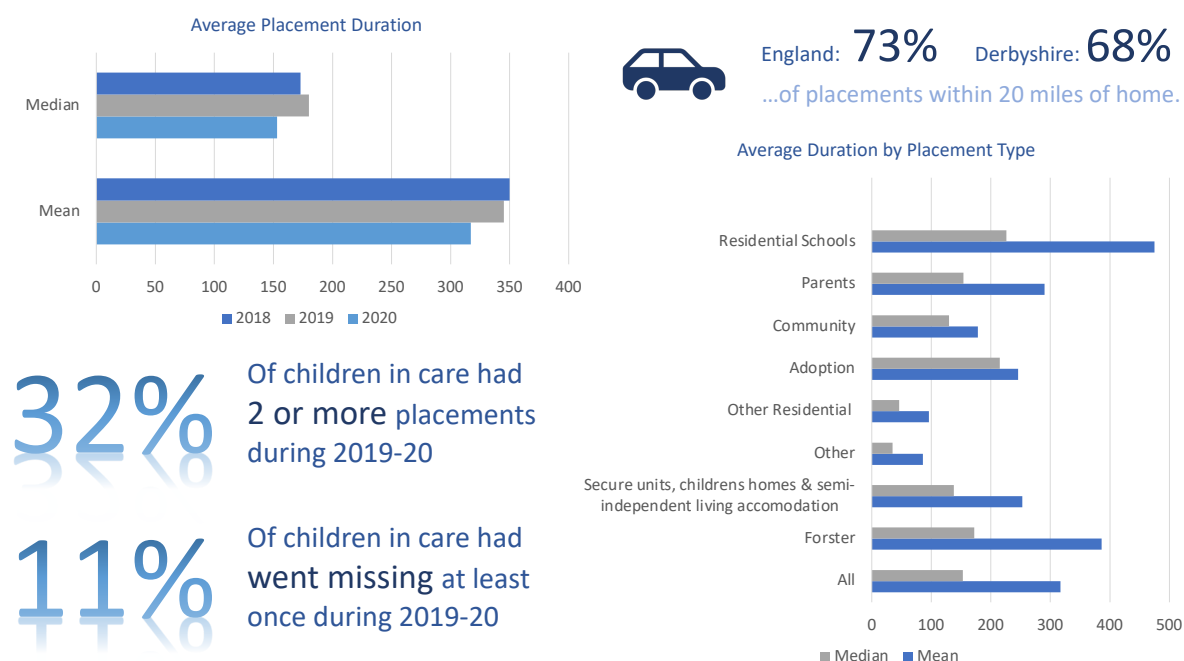
Source: Department for Education, *Children Looked After 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020*.

#### 1.1.4 Placements

Table 2 shows all new placements during the year for all children in care during the respective year (i.e., not just those who were in care on 31<sup>st</sup> March of that year) and includes multiple placements during the year. In 2020, 63.2% of new placements were to Foster care, less than 5% were to adoption and nearly 14% were to secure units, children’s homes and semi-independent living. The table also shows a decline in the number of adoption placements over time, with the three-year rolling average dropping from 7.5% in 2014-16 to 4.8% in 2018-20. Similarly, the number of placements to secure units, children’s homes and semi-independent living has increased marginally over that period 2014-16: 10.7%, 2018-20: 12.8%), as have placements to live with parents (5.8% to 7.9%). Data for Derbyshire based on children in care on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 shows that the pattern closely follows that at the national and regional level.

Nationally, just over 70% of placements are within twenty miles of the child’s family home, including about 20% which might be in another local authority but within 20 miles. In Derbyshire this figure has fallen recently, to just under 70%, reflecting the geographical spread within a large rural county.

Figure 3: Placement Information, 2020



Changes of placement have attracted much commentary over recent years with campaigning groups identifying this as a major problem contributing to instability in children’s lives. The average duration appears to have fallen in the year to 31 March, both on a mean (which can be affected by outliers at either end of the range) and on a median (less affected by outliers) basis. 32% of children in care in England had two or more placements in the year to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 and 11% had three or more. 12,430 children (11%) in care went missing during the year with there being an average of 6.5 ‘missing incidents’ for each one of them. For Derbyshire this was much lower at 4% and an average of 2.6 incidents per child who went missing.

Table 2: Placement Types 2014-2020

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total placements	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Foster placements	65.7%	67.0%	66.5%	65.7%	65.0%	64.0%	63.2%
Placed for adoption	7.8%	7.8%	6.8%	6.0%	5.3%	4.9%	4.4%
Placed with parents	5.5%	5.7%	6.1%	6.9%	7.6%	7.9%	8.2%
Placed in the community	4.8%	5.0%	5.8%	6.1%	5.9%	5.8%	5.2%
Secure units, children’s homes and semi-independent living accommodation	10.1%	10.7%	11.3%	11.4%	11.8%	12.6%	13.9%
Other residential settings	3.1%	3.1%	2.9%	3.1%	3.4%	3.5%	3.4%
Residential schools	0.7%	0.5%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%
Other placement	2.3%	0.3%	0.4%	0.5%	0.8%	1.1%	1.6%

### 1.1.5 Outcomes for Children who have experience of the care system

It is well understood that people with experience of the care system have much more negative long-term outcomes, on average, than other social groups. This extends to educational attainment, mental and physical health, engagement with the criminal justice system and homelessness (Hughes et al. 2017; Mannay et al. 2017; O’Higgins, Sebba, and Luke 2015;

Sebba et al. 2015), though it is a matter of debate about whether these are caused or only partly mitigated by the care system (e.g., Berridge 2007, 2017; Jackson 2007, 2010; Jackson and Höjer 2013). However, there is wide acceptance that this is both structural – the result of inequalities and failing institutions in wider society and the result of the individual effects of ‘Adverse Childhood Experiences’ (ACEs). ACEs have a negative impact on brain chemistry and functioning, affecting behaviour and subjective wellbeing (Bellis et al. 2014, 2018; Hughes et al. 2017). The negative experiences experienced by people with a care background have been categorised as ‘social harm’ (Benaton et al. 2020) in recent research; borrowing from criminology literature where this is used to understand negative outcomes that are either caused or could be mitigated further by state institutions (Pemberton 2016).

The literature on ACEs stresses that there are interventions that might help support young people who have experienced them. Interventions which help to develop self-control, perception, emotional health and social skills can have a positive effect on mental health and wellbeing, labour market and socio-economic status, physical health and behaviours and other political and relationship outcomes (Goodman et al. 2015). It is widely accepted that evidence that these sorts of capacities are normally developed inside families and educational institutions (Carolan and Wasserman 2015; Chin and Phillips 2004; Jaeger and Breen 2016; Jaeger 2007; Martin 2012; Roksa and Potter 2011) so if there is an interruption of either or both of these influences there is a further deficit over and above the effects of ACEs. Finally, the evidence suggests that both physical activity and cultural participation help to generate self-reflection, confidence and positive attitudes to other people (Dodsley et al. 2019).

Table 3: Activities of Care Leavers Aged 17-21, at 31 March 2020

	Aged 17	Aged 18	Aged 19	Aged 20	Aged 21	Aged 19-21
Total activity of care leavers	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
In higher education i.e. studies beyond A level	3%	3%	5%	6%	7%	6%
Full-time higher education i.e. studies beyond A level	3%	2%	5%	6%	7%	6%
Part-time higher education i.e. studies beyond A level	0%	~	~	~	~	~
Total in education other than higher education	34%	45%	29%	19%	12%	20%
Full-time education other than higher education	29%	40%	26%	16%	9%	17%
Part-time education other than higher education	5%	5%	3%	4%	3%	3%
Total in training or employment	12%	17%	24%	27%	28%	26%
Full-time in training or employment	7%	12%	16%	18%	20%	18%
Part-time in training or employment	5%	5%	8%	9%	9%	8%
Total not in education, training or employment	27%	31%	37%	39%	40%	39%
Owing to illness or disability	1%	3%	6%	9%	10%	8%
Owing to other reasons	23%	24%	25%	24%	22%	24%
Owing to pregnancy or parenting	3%	3%	5%	6%	8%	6%
Total information not known	24%	5%	6%	9%	12%	9%
Young person no longer requires services from LA	5%	1%	1%	2%	3%	2%
Young person refuses contact from LA	2%	~	1%	1%	2%	1%
LA not in touch	18%	4%	4%	6%	8%	6%

Source: Department for Education, 2020: Children Looked After at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020. Permalink:<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/datatables/permalink/b169759c-29f9-451c-8dcd-bed506f1bd53>

Taken together this indicates a contextual need for programmes like the CMP which target the development of social and emotional skills among children and young people who are most likely to have experienced ACEs, are vulnerable to long-term social harms and who are struggling to maintain engagement with mainstream institutional and life-course pathways, such as the completion of formal education and transition into Further and Higher Education, training or employment. Section 1.3 has a short discussion of evidence on how arts and creative activities can influence the development of self-control, emotional and social skills, helping to offset the impact of ACEs.

Around 6% of young care leavers progress to higher education; far less than the 40% of the rest of the population who now go to University, though it is usually thought that this figure is an underestimate of the total because some care leavers take time to make this step and progress to University at an older age. At age 18, 45% of care leavers are in another form of education and 17% are in training or employment. However, that leaves 31% of 18-year-old care leavers and 39% of care leavers aged 19-21 being Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).

Table 4: Accommodation of Care Leavers by Age, as at 31 March 2020

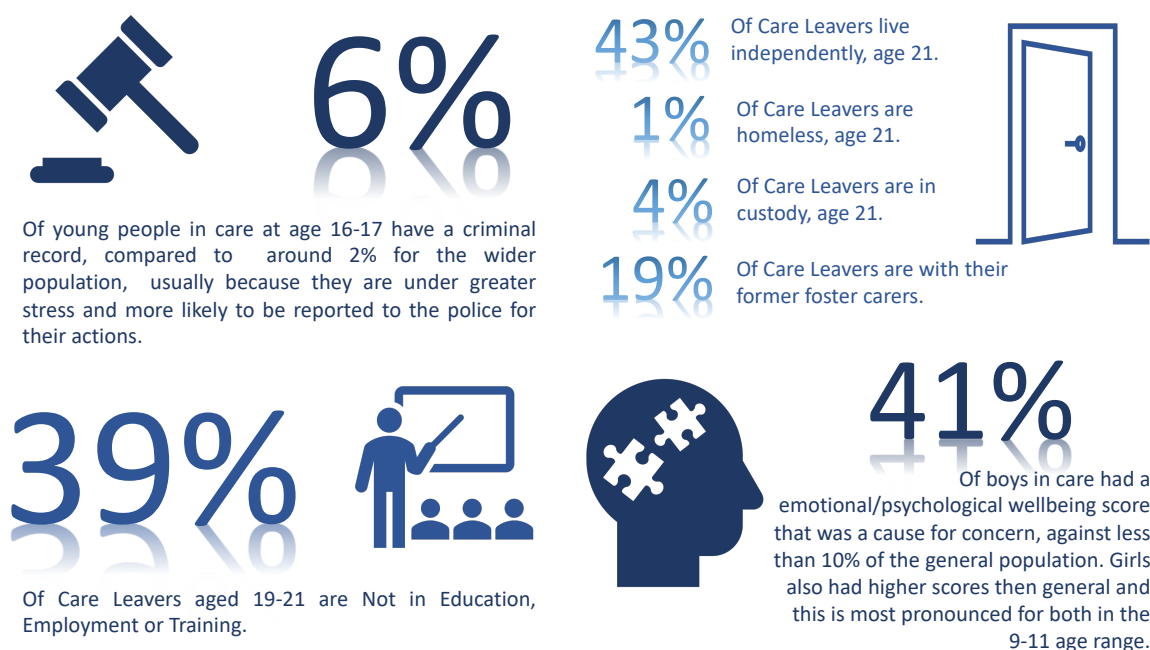
	17	18	19	20	21	19-21
Total care leavers	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
With parents or relatives	46%	11%	12%	11%	10%	11%
Community home	1%	4%	4%	4%	4%	4%
Semi-independent, transitional accommodation	6%	30%	21%	15%	10%	15%
Supported lodgings	3%	7%	6%	4%	3%	4%
Gone abroad	c	c	~	~	~	~
Deported	0%	c	~	~	~	~
Ordinary lodgings	c	1%	1%	1%	2%	1%
Residence not known	c	~	1%	1%	1%	1%
No fixed abode/homeless	c	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%
Foyers	c	3%	3%	2%	2%	2%
Independent Living	5%	11%	26%	37%	43%	35%
Emergency accommodation	0%	~	1%	1%	~	1%
Bed and breakfast	0%	~	~	~	~	~
In custody	9%	3%	3%	3%	4%	3%
With former foster carers	c	19%	12%	7%	5%	8%
Other accommodation	4%	4%	3%	4%	4%	4%
Total Information not known	24%	5%	6%	8%	12%	9%
Young person no longer requires services	5%	1%	1%	2%	3%	2%
Young person refuses contact	2%	~	1%	1%	1%	1%
Local authority not in touch	18%	4%	4%	5%	8%	6%

Source: Department for Education, 2020: Children Looked After at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020. Permalink:<https://exploreeducationstatistics.service.gov.uk/datatables/permalink/261d8ce5-adb1-4483-a152-9d5b15e546f5>

Data on the accommodation of young care leavers shows that between 80-90% of those aged 18-21 are in accommodation regarded as suitable, but that this is much lower for 17 year olds where there is a higher proportion who are out of contact with the local authority or living in unsuitable accommodation. On leaving care, young people move into a variety of accommodation (see Table 4). At age 18, 19% are with their former foster carers, though this falls to 5% by age 21. At age 18, 11% are with their parents or relatives, and where this is the case, they tend to still be there at age 21. The most prominent destination though is semi or independent living, with these two categories accounting for 41% at age 18 and 53% by age 21, with there being a transition from transitional accommodation to independent living. However, 1% (nearly 400 young people in 2020) are homeless and around 3% or around 1400 young care leavers were in custody in 2020. Though these figures are stable between years, they still represent a disproportionately negative outcome for care experienced young people.

The proportion of children and young people in the care system who have experience of the criminal justice system is small, but higher than the wider population, with this often being because they are more likely to be criminalised for the same behaviour. For example, young people who break something while emotional are rarely criminalised by their parents, but this is more likely where a young person is in care. Children in care are more likely to be subject to extreme emotional pressure. However, the proportion of young people in care who have a criminal record is falling, from around 5% in 2016 to 3% in 2020, though this is still around three times the rate for the wider population and it stands at 6% for 16-17 year olds in care, and 8% for boys in that age group (four times the rate for the wider population).

Figure 4: Outcomes for Children in Care and Care Leavers, 31 March 2020



Source: Department for Education, 2020: Children Looked After at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020.

Children in care are usually asked to complete a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire which assesses behaviour according to the emotional, conduct, attention/hyperactivity, relationships and pro-social behaviour criteria. For Britain, a large-scale general sample was tested using this in the late 1990s and around 90% of the population scored less than 17 for problems identified by the tool. The average score for children in care in 2020 was 14.1, rising from

12.8 among 5-year olds to 14.6 for 9- and 11-year olds. 38% of 5-16 year olds had a score which was over 17; considered a cause for concern, with this being most pronounced (above 40%) among the 9-11-year-old age group. There were a larger proportion of boys (41%) whose SDQ score was a cause for concern than girls (34%).

Government policy in relation to children in the care system has particularly focussed on educational attainment, with the logic that good attainment establishes a pathway into employment and better wider outcomes in later life. Using the ‘Attainment 8’ score at age 16 shows that children in care have an average Attainment 8 score of under 20 compared to 45 for other children. However, they are also more likely to have SEN than other children and this affects the average score. For children without SEN there is a 19-point gap. That said, researchers focussed on the attainment of children in care have often argued that the appropriate comparator group is not all other children but other children who have difficult home lives but are not in care. When compared with this group; ‘Children in Need’, children in care do better, and their progress improves so that there are smaller gaps between them and all other children, where they have been in care longer. Absence from school is much better for children in the care system than Children in Need, and on a par with all other children. In recent years permanent exclusions have improved for children in care, while those in need have got worse (Department for Education 2020b).

#### 1.1.6 The Social Care Workforce

The number of Children’s Social Workers has grown in recent years. Nevertheless, the NAO (2019) report that there are high vacancy rates and churn in social worker employment. 63% of social workers leave their local authority within five years of their appointment and there was an average vacancy rate of 17% across local authorities, with this ranging widely from 8% in Yorkshire and Humber to 27% in outer London. One consequence of this is the increased use of agency staff which contributes to higher costs and less stability in relationships.

#### 1.1.7 The Position of Foster Carers

The Fostering Network undertakes a survey of foster carers every three years. The 2019 survey (Lawson and Cann 2019) highlighted a number of issues and challenges facing foster carers: 48% were concerned about a lack of support from CAMHS with specific concerns about self-harm, violence, involvement with the police and children ‘going missing’, all of which were an issue for more than a quarter of respondents. The top reasons for foster carers providing care were to make a difference to children, to offer the opportunity for children to be part of the family and that they enjoy working with children, with 55% stating they would recommend fostering to others. Other challenges identified were around support from their nominated supporting social worker (with concerns about changing relationships), the child’s placing local authority, the availability of short-break and respite care, and out of hours support. 41% percent said they did not have a training plan in place, though this had improved recently. Other concerns related to the way that they are treated by social workers and education staff in particular and their ability to make decisions about the children’s lives. The survey identified that improvements to pay was the most frequently identified improvement. Recent research suggests that Foster Carers are sometimes not paid the DfE’s recommended minimum rate for each child and that rates vary quite widely across the country (The Fostering Network 2020).

The survey also identified the profile of foster carers. The majority of foster carers were in the 45-65 age bracket, 83% were women, three quarters had either one or two placements at the time of the survey, 57% do not have any birth children in the house but 37% have one or two



birth children in their household. About 40% of foster carers work for a private sector fostering provider and 60% work directly for the local authority or a local trust (OFSTED 2018).

## 1.2 Prominent Recent Issues Related to Children in Care

### 1.2.1 COVID-19

It is widely noted that all children and young people have found the COVID-19 crisis challenging, with higher rates of stress and lower wellbeing (Children's Commissioner 2020d). However, there are concerns that this has been particularly pointed for young people in care who may have had their social networks particularly disrupted and for those who might have otherwise been referred for a child welfare intervention but this has not happened because they were not at school or in touch with other agencies.

At the same time, during the lockdown period the government removed some service provisions and legal safeguards for children in care. These included rights to social worker visits, reviews of their welfare, independent scrutiny of residential homes and oversight of some adoption arrangements. The changes were challenged by children's charity *Article 39*, and the Court of Appeal ruled that the government had acted unlawfully in making these changes without consulting children's rights organisations.

### 1.2.2 Cuts to Children's Services and Rising Poverty/Inequality

Much concern has been raised over recent years about the role of public spending cuts on the withdrawal, scaling down or quality of services to support children and families (National Audit Office 2019). At the same time, growing poverty has increased risks and placed vulnerable children and their families under greater pressure. While there is a great deal of research on this topic, the problem was summarised by the UN Special Rapporteur on Poverty who noted that close to 40% of children were living in poverty, that poor families often live in unsuitable accommodation far from schools and social networks. Reductions in Child Benefit, restrictive rules on Universal Credit and Housing Benefit have disproportionately affected children in poorer families and downward pressure on wages has not been offset adequately by minimum wage changes or in-work benefits (Alstom 2019). But these are just the headline aspects of public spending cuts. Reduced provision of family support, youth services, children's centres and so on are all likely to increase pressures on families (Action for Children 2018; Smith et al. 2018). Some estimates suggest that funding for children and young people's services fell by £3bn or 29% in the period 2010-11 to 2017-18. This same work estimates that combined with the growth in need there is currently a £1.4bn funding gap between need and spending, and that this will increase to over £3bn by 2025 (Action for Children et al. 2019). In this context, inequalities are significant, and in some respects growing, with very negative outcomes for instance in relation to health and wellbeing (Marmot et al. 2020).

Bywaters and colleagues' excellent research shows that variation in demand for care (i.e., the numbers and proportion of children subject to Child Protection and Care Orders) between different parts of the UK correlates strongly with local variation in deprivation (Bywaters et al. 2016). In this sense, poverty is an important driver of the variation in demands on the care system across the country.

### 1.2.3 Geographical and Social Variation in the Nature and Quality of the Care Experience

It is widely noted that the proportion of children in care and the nature of their experience varies widely across the country. There are more than 220 per 10,000 children in care in Blackpool, and just over 20 in Wokingham. The Child Welfare Inequalities Project (Bywaters

2020) found that a large part of variation related to differences in deprivation and that ethnicity impacts on this. Children in the most deprived 10% of areas are over ten times more likely to be in care or subject to a Child Protection Plan than those in the least deprived 10%. It also found that even in affluent local authorities, there are variations in intervention rates that are affected by socio-economic inequalities.

Other spatial variations and inequalities relate to the impact of spending cuts on children's services with the North East, Yorkshire and Humber and London experiencing the worst affects. Reductions in spending are also most focussed locally in areas of disadvantage and need (Action for Children et al. 2019) and add to a range of other local variations which are mutually reinforcing such as the amount of spending per placement (National Audit Office 2019), placement stability, placement of children in out-of-area care, use of unregistered and private children's homes as opposed to foster placements, and the proportion of children who go missing in the year. While it is difficult to conclusively draw a link between these different aspects of variation it does appear that there may be some connection between local authority budgets and provision, the growth of the demand for care (Child Protection/Care Orders) and the placement of some children in out of authority, unregulated and private care provision, and in the degree of instability experienced. The nature of these connections needs urgent further investigation.

#### 1.2.4 Changes in the 'Market for Care Provision'

Local Authority residential placement capacity has not kept up with the increase in demand for residential care placements over the last decade (National Audit Office 2019). Several reviews have found that central government does not understand the drivers of growth in demand for care or variation in how it is provided by top tier local authorities, and that local authorities themselves often lack the capacity to effectively organise supply to meet this need (Narey 2016; National Audit Office 2019). As the care system has grown the vast majority of the increase has been met by private provision – in the case both of private residential homes and private fostering agencies. The Children's Commissioner (Children's Commissioner 2020c) has warned that we know very little about the market as it has developed, that what we do know suggests that increasing private provision is related to out of locality and unregulated provision and that significant profits, price increases (placing local authority budgets under even further pressure) and monopoly power may also be developing. While they are cautious not to make assumptions, they also highlight the growing role of Private Equity investors in the provision of children's care, mergers which lack transparency and the growth of large national and international providers in the market. The Children's Commissioner does not say this, but the increasing role of Private Equity ought to be a particular cause for concern. Private Equity investors lack transparency and typically attempt to take a time limited stake in firms and networks of firms which have property or other assets that can be restructured and sold, reduce staff pay, make quick returns and sell on at a profit within 5 years or so (Morgan and Nasir 2020).

#### 1.2.5 Instability in Care Placements

The Children's Commissioner and children's charities such as *Become* have repeatedly pointed to instability in care placements as a cause for concern. While the position in relation to this may be stable, they argue that too many children have frequent changes in care placement. The Children's Commissioner's annual Care Stability Index (Children's Commissioner 2020a) draws attention to the numbers of children with multiple care placements. One in four children in care have multiple placements within a period of two years. While instability is more common for older children, the numbers of younger children experiencing instability have

increased slightly and there is a sub group of children that experience very large degrees of instability, and are more likely to be moved out of their locality and into private and sometimes unregulated provision. Other research published by the Children’s Commissioner focusses on the experience of placement instability and the ways that this can generate isolation, increase exposure to both criminality and victimhood, mental health problems and emotional distress (Children’s Commissioner 2019).

#### 1.2.6 Unregulated Care Placements

Related to the growth in demand for care and the changing nature of the market for care provision, has been the growth in unregulated provision, particularly for older children in care, or for more complex cases (Children’s Commissioner 2020e). This was the subject of a Newsnight investigation and a subsequent DFE Consultation in the summer of 2020. Around 6,000 young people live in ‘independent’ or ‘semi-independent’ placements, a rise of 80% since 2010, a high proportion move straight into these premises or soon after entering care. More than 40% of these were Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers (Department for Education 2020a). Many of these placements are not subject to OFSTED inspection and do not meet the definition for ‘providing care’. They are mostly in the private sector and their use is highly uneven across the country, with greater use in London and the East of England and less use in the North East. Children’s charities such as *Become* (Become 2020b) argue that no provision in the ‘care sector’ should not provide *care* and that unregulated provision needs to be swiftly curtailed. The Children’s Commissioner points out that such placements are sometimes combined with infringements on liberty, sometimes with the approval of courts, but sometimes in arrangements of questionable legality and that they are associated with greater use of temporary and agency staff, instability in placements and driving up costs, with some costing as much as £5,000 per week (Children’s Commissioner 2020b). They also highlight wide variation in the quality of the care experience in these settings (Children’s Commissioner 2020e).

#### 1.2.7 The Care Cliff

Children’s charities continue to highlight the ‘Care Cliff’ on leaving care. Despite the *Staying Put/Close* policy which was intended to increase the numbers of young people staying connected to their Foster or Residential placement after reaching the age of 18, this has not fully been delivered. Care leavers often report lower well-being, loneliness, debt problems, housing instability and homelessness (Baker et al. 2018; Centre Point 2017).

#### 1.2.8 Sibling Separation

Become (Become 2020a) continue to focus on sibling separation in the care system. A recent BBC (BBC 2020) campaign also drew attention to this, finding that up to 12,000 young people in care were not living with their siblings. Become argue that this is an area that needs reform in the Care Review.

#### 1.2.9 Care Review

The Conservative Party manifesto had promised a Care Review and this is due to start imminently. All charities and organisations working with children have a range of demands for these including a focus on the issues above, raising children’s voice, improving matching and carer support and a national register of foster carers. The Care Review may be an opportunity for the VR films project to influence the system – perhaps with the film linked to a pledge card to generate requests for changes to the system to feed into the Care Review.

### 1.3 Creative Interventions with Vulnerable Young People

Research has suggested that creative interventions can have positive effects on some vulnerable social groups such as ex-offenders (Goodwin 2013; Kaptani and Yuval-Davis 2008; Kelly, Foster, and Hayes 2015; McHugh and Smithson 2017; O’Neill 2008). for children and young people who are care experienced (Mannay et al. 2017; Mannay 2019; Peeran 2016). Studies (Angell, Alexander, and Hunt 2015; Bamford 2006; McLellan, Galton, and Walberg 2014) show that artistic methods can facilitate safe spaces in which lived experiences and emotional responses to social exclusion can be surfaced (Ryan and Flinders 2018). Mannay and Staples (Mannay and Staples 2019) show that children and young people can use artistic and creative activities to explore the ‘complexities and uncertainties’ of their lives in ways that are not pressured or challenging. Mannay and others (Mannay et al. 2019) also argue that the arts and creative practice can be a useful way of researching the experiences of young people with care experience and translating these to a wider audience. Similarly, Benaton et al. (2020) find that arts and creative activities can be an appropriate vehicle for care and also to seek social and political change through the production of artistic outputs that seek social justice for care experienced people.

## 2 Methods

The evaluation of Derbyshire Virtual School's Creative Mentoring Programme (CMP) takes a mixed methods approach, guided by a Realist evaluation philosophy (Pawson and Tilley 1997, 2004). This approach seeks to understand the ways that interventions operate in a particular context. Realist evaluation considers the phenomenological evidence of the ways in which those involved in activities experience them and recognises that causal mechanisms are often not linear, simple or singular. Rather, the evaluation will look to unearth complex and multi-causal and co-evolutionary processes and outcomes. In this view, interventions are permeable and multiple perspectives (those involved in co-producing project activities, beneficiaries, wider stakeholders) are important to understand the ways that the projects interact with a range of other factors to produce specific outcomes. As such, it is not enough to collect data only on project inputs/activities and evidence in relation to intended outcomes, but to consider the wider range of evidence that might exceed and contextualise these. It is also important to observe the interventions in progress to experience the often subtle and contingent ways that they are delivered and received.

Data collection methods have included:

1. Participant-observation of one-to-one, group and project sessions.
2. Interviews with mentors and programme managers.
3. Informal discussions and a focus group with young people who participate in the programme.
4. Collection of self-reported wellbeing information through a questionnaire administered in person on a one-to-one basis at the beginning and end of a period of participation.
5. Semi-structured qualitative interviews with young people and their carers at the end of their participation in a series of enterprise projects.
6. Analysis of repeated assessments of young people across eight criteria, each with five point scales.

### 3 The Intervention

Mentors involved in the CMP share an explicit commitment to ‘Social Pedagogy’ (e.g. Kelly 2016; Parker 2018). Social pedagogy is an approach to whole child development that has emerged from professional practices in Northern Europe (Hämäläinen 2003; Hamalainen and Eriksson 2016; Kornbeck 2014). It is difficult to define precisely because it is widely argued to be context specific, emerging out of particular welfare traditions. Nevertheless, there are some common principles such as focussing on the child as a ‘whole person’ rather than merely specific aspects of learning; a non-hierarchical relationship between professionals and children; reflective professional practice; teamwork and collaboration between all professionals and adults involved in the child’s life and a focus on developing relationships to facilitate social inclusion (Petrie et al. 2009). As Hämäläinen (2003) defines it: “The basic idea of social pedagogy is to promote people’s social functioning, inclusion, participation, social identity and social competence as members of society.”

Children and young people are referred to the CMP service, often through schools, or through carers or social workers or Education Support Officers. This is often when they are struggling to engage or sustain engagement with school and it is felt a new or different approach is required. Participants have often been the subject of multiple other forms of help to sustain school engagement, which have failed or only been partially successful. This often means that participants are experiencing significant problems at the point they engage with the service. This can present an initial challenge in engaging the young people. This is captured metaphorically in a dance performance created by one of the Creative Mentors (CMs), Nathan Geering; there is a protracted stand-off where the CM effectively camps out all day while a young person waits on the other side of the door. In another account a different CM reports:

*“when I first start work with a young person, I sometimes get the feeling I’m being tested. I go with it, I metaphorically jump through hoops and balance on the tightrope, occasionally to the extent of feeling embarrassed or humiliated. I have come to the conclusion that if this is what it takes to pass the test and be accepted by the young person then I’ll do it.” (Parker 2018).*

CMs confront these challenges by searching for interests that the young people themselves are motivated by. This can involve CMs moving out of their own comfort zones and working over a significant period to build a supportive and meaningful relationship. The time and activities required to do this are outside of the norms for mainstream educational interventions. CMs often work with young people for several years, helping them to build capacity to re-engage with school or positive developments (e.g., engaging with training) and to sustain this once it has happened. Where successful, these relationships become very close and meaningful. They encompass creative activity, but the relationship is central and additional to this.

There is considerable overlap between the CMP and more established methods of supporting young people such as art and drama therapy (Parker 2018). For example, practices of shared art making, copying and exploration of feelings through making art or performances are similar in both. Making art or performances offers an opportunity to externalise troubling emotions or feelings and to discuss them in a way that defers attention from the individual (Jennings 1994; Meldrum 1994). However, the CM approach is purposefully not ‘therapy’ which has a specific goal. Rather CMs start by developing a positive and supportive relationship with the participant. The primary role of creativity is in exploring ways to build that relationship and find shared activities that support this. Creativity in the sense of artistic practice is secondary to this, and while the experience may well be therapeutic, it does not start out with a desire to ‘fix’ a particular problem.

This can be challenging for mainstream educational professionals because it may mean that overcoming the initial trigger for referral – problematic school attendance – appears less clearly visible as an objective and may take a considerable amount of time. The CMP is designed around the idea of working with the participant to help them unlock whatever challenges they feel is holding them back. Working in this way may lead in directions other than those directly related to school, training or employment. The logic underpinning the CMP is that participants have already exhausted more proximal barriers to school engagement and therefore this deeper process is necessary. In Kelly’s (2016) categorisation of thematic benefits this is working at the level of unobserved motivations and value systems rather than superficial behaviours (see below, Table 55). He describes CM as operating in a way that helps participants cope with and move beyond attachment problems through playful and accepting activity with a person who they can trust to have ‘unconditional positive regard’ for them. Both creative activity and positive relationships are central to the CMP.

Practical, creative activity is designed to help the young people focus on achieving something tangible to build confidence but also to challenge them to expand their cultural repertoire and skill sets, confronting challenges and overcoming problems, as a means of building resilience over time. Creative work can also support very specific objectives such as attaining an Art GCSE. CMs also often become involved in more prosaic activities – helping participants with life events, to attend training or accompanying them to official meetings.

As the approach has developed, more group-based activities have been added to the CMP. One-to-one mentoring is often used as a means of supporting young people to attend group activities as a means of progression toward more formal education or training. These sessions are also varied in their format. A number of Hubs provide weekly group based activities with slightly different themes, though all have some shared characteristics: they are regular and the same young people attend for a period of time with new people introduced only on a one by one basis and with care to ensure that this does not disrupt the group dynamic of existing participants. The groups often have a core focus but also allow individuals to pursue their own interests. Groups are of different sizes and some young people engage in more than one, with progression toward the bigger group projects.

A further development is more employment focussed Enterprise projects. Many young people who have benefited from one-to-one mentoring progress through the group projects to these Enterprise projects, and some young people who are assessed as having less distance to travel from disengagement or NEET status also benefit from these projects. These are typically time limited or have a dedicated endpoint and include simulating various work-based environments. They might involve making art for sale or developing a performance for a pre-determined show. Young people often have to work in a team and take specific individual responsibility for particular tasks as part of the team.

The World of Work project developed the Enterprise project idea further. Working with a specific cohort of young people over a two-year period, this involved the participants having access to a range of support services, including one-to-one mentoring and a series of enterprise projects. Recruiting a cohort all at once also meant that some young people became involved with less profound needs than is often the case with Creative Mentoring, though the WoW cohort also included young people with prior experience of one-to-one mentoring, participation in the weekly hubs and in previous enterprise projects.

## 4 Findings

### 4.1 Prior Findings

Kelly reviews ten previous evaluations of the CMP approach and finds that shared findings regarding the ‘impact’ of the scheme on young people, which he categorises according to Sinek’s model of motivations and value systems; the methods and principles by which these are realised or attempted; and the behaviours which result (see Table 5).

*Table 5: Kelly's categorisation of thematic benefits of CMP for Participants*

<b>Why: Motivations and values</b>	<b>How: Techniques and methods</b>	<b>What: Outcomes and behaviours</b>
- Towards self-actualisation	- Improved problem-solving skills	- Increased engagement and participation
- Improved self-concept, self-worth and self-esteem	- Increased enthusiasm and motivation	- Re-engagement in education, employment and training
- Increased pride and sense of achievement	- Increased sense of belonging	- Improved behaviour
- Improved agency and internalising locus of control	- Increased confidence	- Skill development/ mastery
- Improved resilience	- Developing trust in others	- Improved communication
- Improved emotional well-being		- Working collaboratively with others
- Enjoyment		- Improved attention control
- Increased ambition and aspiration		- Improved attitude

This provides a useful way of conceptualising the different components of the CMP journey for participants. As Kelly notes, the one-to-one mentoring process may start with the first column of underlying motivations and values, but the group Hubs give participants a safe and stable environment in which to develop the methods and techniques to reinforce the development of values and motivations. Enterprise projects offer a way of demonstrating Outcomes and behaviours. Different members of the WoW cohort experienced various aspects of this model.

### 4.2 Interim Findings

An interim report was produced in March 2020 looking at a partial dataset (in terms of participants and time). The data gathered and analysed at that time was used to generate the following interim conclusions:

First, it appears that the CMP does lead to positive experiences for young people while participating in the programme and for most it also produces positive outcomes, with data from several different sources supporting this.

Second, the development of the programme over the last two years to develop weekly Hub activities and ad-hoc but regular Enterprise Projects is both in line with evidence gathered on the programme in the past and provides a structured progression opportunity for young people as they move through the stages of development which underpin the CMP. This is also in line



with the Social Pedagogy principles of group-based activities and developing social integration.

Third, while CMs and programme managers expressed some concern that Enterprise Projects had not always been able to fully integrate some of core foundational principles of the CMP – such as participant centredness and participant ownership, this may actually be appropriate as a step toward full social inclusion in education, training or employment. The reality of each of those institutions is that most participants do not have full ownership or control of their working lives. So too time and resource constraints and the pressure to develop outputs within these are authentic elements of working lives. If anything, based on observation and where involving older participants, these elements of the Enterprise Projects might be enhanced to more fully operate as a stepping-stone between simulation and full participation.

#### 4.3 Process issues – developing the Group and Enterprise Project Model

##### 4.3.1 One-to-One Mentoring

Kelly (2016) undertook research to identify the attributes required of a CM, and reported unconditional positive regard, empathy and a commitment to the young person's welfare and interests as central to this. Selection of CMs to fit the needs of individual young people is clearly important in forging supportive long-term relationships.

It is clear that mentors are not just artists with an interest in young people and nor are they therapists with a creative interest. The CM role involves both artistic or creative skills and a considerable degree of empathy and concern for others, but also a willingness to operate outside of normal mainstream constraints as they are most often understood in the UK. This may be reflected in the location of activities for example, following a participant-led approach may mean undertaking activities outside, in unconventional locations such as going for walks in the hills or woods, or visiting gaming arcades or shops. It may also involve undertaking activities with young people that are not usually part of a professional engagement such as sports or entertainment. It may also involve supporting life-skills development such as helping a young person make gifts, buy essential items or learn to cook. All of this involves being flexible and participant centred in ways that go beyond normal professional relationships and extend into realms of personal life that might usually be thought of as a family domain.

Being able to operate in this way has risks for CMs. These include safeguarding for both parties but also risks associated with the mental health and well-being of CMs themselves. For example, Parker (2018) reports the possibility of suffering vicarious trauma or transference of negative emotions, as well as more prosaic concerns about emotional fatigue.

All this means that aspects of the CMP such as the initial selection and training and then ongoing training, mutual support, reflection and peer-learning are an essential, if less obvious, component of the programme. The network of CMs is tightly knit and frequent collaborative working, sharing, planning and reflection events are central to its operating logic.

##### 4.3.2 Establishing Group 'Hubs'

The move from one-to-one mentoring to group and enterprise projects has not been without challenges. As reported in a previous interim report, the challenges in moving to a group project or 'hub' model have included:

- ***Recruitment of sufficient young people*** to enable group-based projects. The challenges faced by some of the young people that are involved in creative mentoring means that they are often not ready or able to engage in more advanced group-based sessions.
- ***Sustaining engagement*** – even where young people are recruited the degree of difficulties that they face mean that sustaining this engagement is an ongoing challenge. On observational visits it was clear that creative mentors worked hard to ensure that this was the case.
- ***Moving from one-to-one relationship building to the production of outputs*** – was reported as a challenge and linked to the desire to provide a scaffolded approach to moving young people into or closer to employment, through engaging in group or social activities.
- ***Relationship challenges between YP*** – moving Creative Mentoring practice from a one-to-one activity to a group-based focus means helping young people to develop more complex working relationships with peers and employers. This is more challenging than one-to-one relations between a single mentor and young person.
- ***Working with other professionals*** – existing evidence about creative mentoring more generally suggests that the support of other professionals and carers is essential to achieving successes. Creative Mentors at each of the hubs reported that this can sometimes be a challenge, especially where it would be beneficial for other professionals to engage in creative activities that they may themselves lack confidence in or where young people require flexibility and encouragement to begin to engage in the creative and co-production process. This process can often be based on very small incremental stages of progress and sometimes failures or backward steps. While Creative Mentors were resilient to such developments, they felt that this was sometimes difficult for other professionals to understand or accept. Creative Mentors felt that understanding and accepting these set-backs was crucial to developing the trust and engagement of young people.
- ***Delivery of formal qualifications*** – formal qualifications such as the Arts Award often involve the completion of more academic written work or portfolios alongside the development of practical skills. Engaging the young people in this activity was deemed to be challenging by Creative Mentors working in the hub settings.

When the initial round of fieldwork was underway, group projects had only recently been introduced and several were struggling to become established. Specific challenges associated with logistics and travel in a large county without adequate public transport services and, in one case, a difficult location meant that that the Hub model has developed through trial and testing. By the time a second round of fieldwork was undertaken a year later, the group project model had developed considerably, and functioning hubs were operating in different parts of the county on each day of the week:

- Monday – Chesterfield, with a focus on music and digital arts work.
- Tuesday – Alfreton, a Young Mums group.
- Wednesday – Derby, Baby People group, with a focus on music, poetry, technology and street art.
- Thursday – Cotmanhay/Ilkeston, with a focus on mixed arts, formal skills and cookery.
- Friday – Wirksworth Eco-Centre, with a focus on ceramics, woodworks and crafts.

On observational visits to group hubs, it is clear that they combine a focus on building a group dynamic; with young people preparing a collective lunch for example. Individual development is encouraged and often young people will gain an arts award or other certification for the

practical or creative work they do, and in some cases they are supported to make progress while at the group with more academic qualifications such as GCSE English and/or Maths. Hubs involve aspects of collective shared activity but also individualised programmes of activity which progress within the group context. Most young people engage in only one, but several involved in the programme might progress to the 'Eco-hub' which runs on a Friday, is the longest running and has the largest attendance. Participation at the Eco-hub is therefore a progression activity for some young people.

Despite the initial challenges then, these group 'hubs' are now in stable and successful operation and offer a progression activity from individual mentoring.

#### 4.3.3 Enterprise Projects and the WoW cohort

Enterprise projects are the closest of the activities of the CMP to more mainstream provision focussed on developing behaviours aligned to work or training. They are typically time limited for several days, though they may be linked together, to achieve a predetermined shared goal, such as making objects for an exhibition or craft fair or a garden exhibit for a garden show.

These projects serve two groups of participants; a group that are typically older at first engagement or closer to mainstream education provision or the labour market than those who are targeted for one-to-one mentoring, or for those who have had a period of successful mentoring and are moving closer to mainstream engagement.

Between 2019-2021 Derbyshire CC were supported financially by the Careers and Enterprise Company to provide a participation in a series of Enterprise projects for a specific cohort of young people – referred to here as the WoW ('World of Work') cohort. The WoW cohort received 1-2-1 mentoring and were able to take part in a programme of intensive Enterprise projects. WoW cohort activities were the subject of observations for this report and a separate section below deals with feedback from this cohort specifically.

Observation of Enterprise projects reveals them to operate with similar underlying principles to one-to-one mentoring and similar activities to group Hub activities, though now the participant groups are less stable and time pressure is enhanced. They are therefore a very well-designed progression activity for those that have moved through one-to-one mentoring and group Hubs. Observing those who have participated throughout the programme at their induction and then in one of the recent week-long Enterprise projects certainly demonstrated the development of a group social dynamic and that the participants were more confident and forthcoming socially.

CMs involved in the programme also reported growth in confidence, communication skills and willingness to participate among those young people who had continued to engage in the programme over the course of the last eighteen months. However, they also reported that the enhanced time pressure was a challenge to their usual way of working and that this particularly constrained the participant-centred ethos. In having to produce a final product within a tight timeframe, there was a pressure to have predetermined goals or for mentors or others to take more of a lead in activities. This clearly sat uncomfortably with the underpinning values of the mentors and the CMP itself. Future Enterprise projects may therefore allow more time before the final product needs to be completed and have less ambitious goals in terms of outputs. However, this enhanced pressure and the increased compromises and likelihood of contingent success in terms of outputs is precisely what the scheme aims at in moving participants closer to mainstream engagement with education and training or work. So too is the reality of working

in a context of less individual freedom to determine activities and outcomes for the participants. As such the challenges associated with the activity are integral to its rationale.

Means of coping with these challenges might include:

- Longer lead times to the production of outputs, as being considered.
- Enhanced mentoring in advance and around participation to provide a supportive scaffold for the projects.
- Enhanced selection criteria to ensure all participants benefit from the projects.
- A conscious and pre-planned shift away from participant leadership. While this may be in tension with the emphasis on participant ownership, it may still satisfy ‘co-production’ values and be closer to an authentic employment simulation. Pre-planning the balance of co-production may help to ensure that this is in line with the values of the CMP, while helping participants to demonstrate the outcome behaviours in Kelly’s model.
- Consideration might be given to the ways in which individual responsibility and behaviours might be incentivised in the Enterprise projects to help participants understand and focus on playing their part in team-based activities. Again, this would authentically simulate more formal mainstream education, employment or training.

#### 4.4 COVID-19

COVID-19 and associated control measures have had a significant effect on the CMP. First, the ‘lockdown’ period has had a negative impact on some of the young people who participate in the programme, reducing social interaction and increasing pressures on mental and emotional wellbeing. Several Mentors spoke about the negative impacts of this on the young people they mentor, in some cases leading to serious problems such as damaging behaviour which is out of character, loneliness, social isolation and depression.

The lockdown period also impacted upon the delivery of the programme, interrupting face to face delivery. Some one-to-one mentoring has now returned to face-to-face delivery while it remains online for others. One-to-one mentoring was mainly online during the initial lockdown in spring 2020, but much more likely to be face-to-face during the second and third lockdowns. Some enterprise projects as part of the WoW cohort activities were delayed or cancelled and a planned set of experimental work placements did not go ahead. Group activities in some of the Hubs have continued or been reinstated.

The combination of the direct and indirect impact of the COVID-19 period had quite different impacts on CMP participants. Some young people disengaged from the programme. Some others who were at care leaving age had returned to their birth families. However, for some young people, school and wider social life is a stress factor in their life and removing that expectation during lockdown had been broadly positive, especially given that they were not out of the ordinary. Some other young people who had been able to continue attending school, had benefited from the smaller school cohorts to get more attention from teachers and to progress in their learning with less pressure. Carer engagement and support was a significant factor in whether young people were able to make positive progress.

Where Creative Mentoring had continued at a distance, the success of this depended on technology and skills. Some Creative Mentoring had continued successfully in relation to creative skills development. However, CMs reported that they missed the opportunity to develop relationships with young people. Being unable to use different venues or engage with

young people during transport to and from different venues had impacted negatively on relationship and trust building. Having to work online had also been a barrier to disclosure of problematic developments in the young people's lives because of an inability to have a private space for discussion and exploration. CMs also felt that it was harder to move from general conversation to undertake creative activities, especially where they might normally follow spontaneous interaction.

## 4.5 Outcomes

### 4.5.1 Observed and Self-Reported Outcomes

Aside from these experiences the research also focusses on evidence of outcomes. The research team has had shallow engagement with the programme over a period of around two years so far. This has allowed us to witness the development of behaviours and capacities over that period and therefore to weigh this alongside the outcomes that young people, Mentors and wider professionals report and provide examples of. In summary, the following outcomes were apparent.

***Sustained meaningful adult relationships*** – many of the young people we observed over the project appeared to develop considerably in maturity over the period, and more so than mere ageing would suggest. This was particularly manifest in the ability to sustain a meaningful adult relationship. It is not that this was observed universally, but where we were able to compare and comment, this was certainly the case. Aside from this, mentors frequently mentioned this as an outcome that they observed.

***Social Skills*** – Aside from the relationships with mentors, the young people also demonstrated wider social skills, such as those on display when engaging in shared meals and discussions. This was obviously a challenge in some cases where inappropriate social behaviour was still apparent at times – e.g., swearing etc – but it was also clear that progress was being made in most cases. In some cases, very advanced social skills were demonstrated, such that they could sustain an adult and professional conversation and select in and out of this mode of communication as appropriate. Young people reflected on how they had been able to develop these *via* participation in the programme.

***Confidence and self-regard*** – evidence of this came from multiple sources, including our own observations. Confidence is clearly contingent and variable across social spaces and time. One can be confident in one circumstance but not another. The different ways that the programme operates was important in developing multiple aspects of confidence, building from one context to another; starting with the relationship with the Mentor, developing through adult relationships, in relation to the achievement of specific practical tasks and then into peer-group activities and, for some, into educational or workplace settings. Like other outcomes it is not a universally even outcome for all participants, but it was a common feature of the outcomes reported by multiple parties, including the young people themselves. One Education Support Officer summed it up thus:

*“separate to the academic side of it, it has been amazing for some of their self-esteem, that other side, that social and emotional side has worked really well for some of my young people especially who were sort of just mute, were really shy, and who have come out the other end performing and you can really tell the difference ... from that work and that has just been amazing, because of that confidence that has built up over that time has helped them feel more capable to be in education... its worked wonders in that aspect”.*

***Peer relationships*** – scaffolded on top of one-to-one mentoring, the hub and enterprise projects introduce young people to supported engagement with their peers. This is a developing aspect of the programme and is not without challenges but there was evidence that young people developed relationships and friendships through these activities. Some felt that being in a group with other young people in care facilitated mutual understanding and removed expectations or pressures that might normally be present in school settings and that this facilitated peer relationships. This is though a challenging outcome as some peer networks facilitated challenging behaviours such as propensity to go missing, so careful management was clearly needed and evident. We also observed very tailored support to enable individual young people to develop friendships and peer social skills where this was identified as a clear individual need.

***Cultural and artistic knowledge*** – where young people had been taken on cultural visits – as was the case for example, for all participants in the most recent Enterprise projects – young people had accumulated expanded cultural and artistic knowledge. This is widely regarded as advantageous in the labour market and wider social status attribution (e.g. Prieur and Savage 2011; Scherger and Savage 2010).

***Practical, Artistic and Creative skills*** – young people were clearly able to demonstrate the development of a wide variety of practical skills. They had made artistic outputs ranging from pictures to sculptures, to jewellery and pottery, often of very high quality. They made performances, wrote stories and created music. They made woodwork objects such as boxes, benches and garden ornaments. In some cases, these were for personal use, in others they were gifts or for sale as part of one of the Enterprise Projects. But every young person who engaged with the research had created something which demonstrated the development of these ‘hard’ transferable skills. The quality of these and their ability to show them to others demonstrated both confidence and pride in their achievements, which was clearly evident to researchers.

***Development of life skills*** – Aside from ‘soft’ social skills and ‘hard’ transferable skills, participants also demonstrated the acquisition and development of key life skills. For example, they reflected on being able to negotiate more effectively with service providers, on having developed cooking, cleaning and domestic skills, clothes making, home maintenance, budgeting for bills and planning their future lives. One young person reported being supported to plan for forthcoming childbirth. Again, young people clearly attributed participation in the programme with the development of these skills.

***Development of formal skills and qualifications*** – Where young people had made considerable progress or were ready, they were also being supported with attaining formal qualifications through work to achieve arts award or GCSE Maths and English. They were also being supported in future educational aspirations, for instance, attending college or University open days.

***Outcome contextualisation and limitations*** - Aside from positive outcome stories many Mentors and other professionals with experience of the CMP and the young people involved were keen to emphasise that outcomes such as confidence building may be slow or proceed in small but very significant steps. This is because of the low baseline experienced by some young people and the ongoing instabilities and/or trauma that can impact on their lives. This meant that a young person who developed confidence against their own baseline may still lack confidence when compared with others of the same age group, but had still made progress. It

also meant that progress was not always linear and that there are times when young people make progress and then fall back. It is also the case that the full outcomes of this sort of work may not be observed in any measurable timeframe and only be realised in the medium to long-term. We observed relationships between some Mentors and young people who had participated early on which were still in place long after the young person had left care but were clearly important and effective several years later. Another professional remarked:

*“in the long-run it is beneficial, but it might not be that we see that for years.... In terms of future employment you might not see that until five years at least because we get children ... we’ve had young people who are pregnant, no GCSEs or A-Levels but a number of years later she has a nursing degree and is a nurse...but that isn’t always taken into account.”*

#### 4.5.2 General Progress Assessments

Young people are usually referred to a Creative Mentor in a Personal Education Plan meeting which involves a range of professionals involved with the young person, possibly including a teacher, Education Support Officer and Social Worker. At the point of referral they are assessed against eight criteria (see Table 6), each with a five point scale (see Table 7). This is then revisited at subsequent PEP meetings to agree a progress assessment since the last meeting:

*“When we refer for a Creative Mentor, it generally comes out of a PEP meeting. So, at the next PEP meeting I would have my eight measures of where we were last time and we agree as a professional team whether that has gone up or down or stayed the same as a professional team so that helps for it to be consistent, it’s our shared idea.” Education Support Officer.*

Table 6: Eight Assessment Criteria

Criteria	Descriptor
Participation	Taking part in activities
Engagement	The degree of attention, curiosity, interest, optimism and passion that participants demonstrate while participating
Confidence	The trust participants have in their own abilities, qualities and judgement.
Communication	The ability of participants to exchange information, ideas and feelings.
Motivation	Reason and strength to complete on a task without giving up, even when challenging.
Achievement	Any act of sustaining, accomplishing or finishing a task in a successful manner that is considered an achievement for the individual.
Teamwork	Ability to work alongside others to achieve a shared task or goal.
Ambition	The strong desire to do or achieve something with the determination to achieve success.

Overall, we were able to collate participation data in relation to more than 120 participants in Creative Mentoring and/or related group projects. Of these 84 had multiple assessments and complete participation data. Reasons why the remaining 40 plus participants did not have data were varied. Some had participated before the assessment framework was introduced or did not have baseline data recorded. Some were very new participants with only baseline and no progress assessments in place and some had multiple assessments but using different assessment frameworks making comparison difficult or impossible. There were a small number of cases where we did include participants in the analysis where they were assessed

with a hybrid scale where we were able to adjust the data satisfactorily to ensure comparability.<sup>1</sup>

Table 7: Criteria and scale descriptors

Criteria	Scale point descriptors				
	1	2	3	4	5
Participation	Does not participate	Infrequently participates	Sometimes participates	Often participates, but still with support	Participates independently
Engagement	Not engaged	Infrequently engages	Sometimes engages	Often engages, but still with support	Engages independently
Confidence	No self-confidence	Low self-confidence	Moderate self-confidence	Good self-confidence	Self-confident
Communication	Not Communicating	Infrequently communicates	Sometimes communicates	Often communicates, but still with support	Communicates well independently in different settings
Motivation	Not motivated	Infrequently motivated	Sometimes motivated	Often motivated, but still with support	Well-motivated, independently
Achievement	Not achieving	Infrequently achieving	Sometimes achieving	Often achieving, but still with support	Achieving well in different circumstances
Teamwork	No ability to work in team	Infrequently shows ability to work in team	Sometimes shows ability to work in team	Often shows ability to work in team, but still with support	Works well in a team in different circumstances
Ambition	No ambition	Low ambition	Moderate ambition	Positive ambition	Ambitious

Table 8 shows the age of participants and the extent of their engagement. Gender and ethnicity were not recorded in the data. The mean age of participants when they started the programme (at baseline assessment) was 16 with the youngest being 8 and a half years old and the oldest being 24 years of age. Mean duration in the programme was 12 months but we had baseline and progress data for participants in the programme for between 1 and 27 months. All participants were allocated an individual Creative Mentor but they also had access to group activities either on a weekly basis or an intensive set of activities during a school holiday. Some participants were able to participate in multiple group activities and some group activities are designed to build progressive confidence and maturity so that some participants progress from one type of activity to another. This means that some participants had attended no group activities and only accessed one-to-one Creative Mentoring, which is sometimes the case at the beginning of their engagement where this intensive support is in place prior to participation in

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<sup>1</sup> Several earlier scales had been used as the team developed their approach. One such prior framework had ten criteria where the first seven were virtually identical to that above and the latter three criteria could be amalgamated and a mean score derived to replace criteria 8 in the framework above. This affected about 20% of those included in the sample where the same framework was used for all assessments with these young people, so that we were sure that the data on progress was comparable.



group activities. Seventeen percent of our sample fell into this category. For those who had participated in group activities this ranged from one half-day session to 119 half-day sessions across as many as 11 different types of group activity. Mean half-day sessions attended was 26, though this was exaggerated by a small number of participants with very significant engagement; the median engagement being 16 half day sessions.

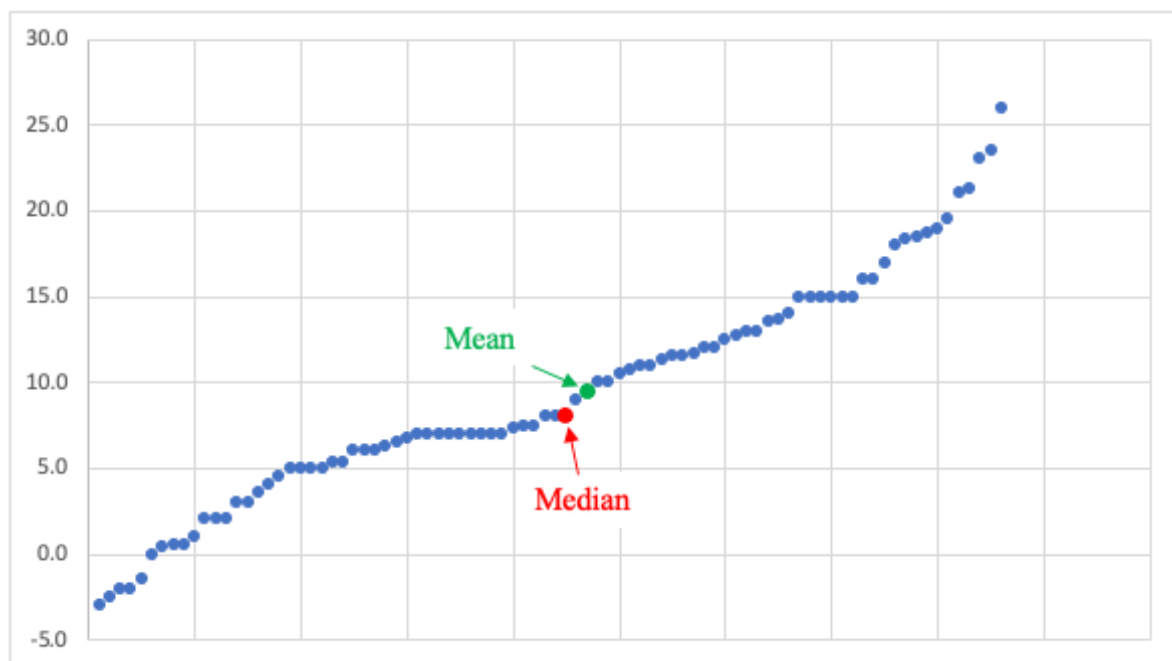
Table 8: Characteristics of Participation

	Min	Mean	Max
Age of Participants now (Years)	10.3	17.8	26.4
Age at Baseline (years)	8.5	16	24
Time in programme (Months)	1	12	27
No of Group Sessions (excluding those not engaging (yet) with group activities)	0 (1)	21.4 (26)	119
No of Group Activity Types (excluding those not engaging (yet) with group activities)	0 (1)	2.6 (3)	11

#### 4.5.3 Summary of Progress

Overall, most participants made good progress (see Figure 5). 89% of participants made at least one point of positive progress across the eight criteria. For these participants the mean progress was 11 points across the eight criteria. Where those making some progress had only made 5 points of progress or less, they tended to have been engaged for 7 months or less. The remaining 7% of participants who had not made progress, one had made no progress and 5 had been assessed as making negative progress overall.

Figure 5: Summary of overall progress, all participants



Progress was broadly even across all eight measures; median progress was 1 point on all measures and mean progress (impacted by either end of the distribution) was between 1.1-1.3.

Figure 6: Summary Progress Across the Eight Measures, all participants

Measure	Minimum	Mean	Median	Maximum
Overall	-3	9.4	8	26
Participation	-1	1.3	1	4
Engagement	-1	1.3	1	4
Confidence	-2	1.2	1	4
Communication	-2	1.2	1	4
Motivation	-1	1.2	1	4
Achievement	-1	1.1	1	3
Teamwork	-2	1.2	1	3
Ambition	-1	1.1	1	4

#### 4.5.4 Impacts on Progress

It is reasonable to assume that progress on these assessments is likely to be impacted by a range of factors, including the interest and motivation of the young people, the skill of the mentors and a range of wider factors in the young people's lives, including COVID-19 control measures, given that a large number of the progress measures were taken during or around the various lockdown periods, which are widely thought to have been particularly challenging for young people in care. Among the factors that we were able to measure statistically were age, time spent in the programme (duration in months), intensity of participation (number of half day sessions attended), variety in the types of activities that young people participated in (e.g., one-to-one mentoring, hubs, enterprise projects), age at baseline assessment and initial baseline scores. We tested each of these factors to identify whether they had a statistically significant relationship to overall progress. These tests suggested that baseline scores, duration of participation and intensity of participation have a statistically significant relationship to change in overall assessment of participants. Neither age at baseline assessment nor the variety of activities attended had any statistical effect on progress.

Baseline score had the strongest relationship to change in overall progress (see Table 9) being negatively correlated and accounting for nearly 25% of the difference in change in overall score. These two measures though are not properly independent and there are two different conclusions to be drawn from them. First, it might be that those with the lowest initial scores gain the most from participation. Alternatively, this may be a purely statistical effect, where a lower score based on a series of 5-point measures simply has more scope for improvement than a higher score.

Duration and intensity of participation both suggest weak to moderate effects in statistical terms. Duration of participation (months between baseline and latest assessment) accounting for around 14% of variation in overall progress, and intensity (number of half day sessions attended) accounting for around 10% of variation in overall progress.

Table 9: Change in Overall Progress Correlated with Measures of participation

	Baseline score	Age at Baseline	Duration of Participation	No of Programmes	Intensity of Participation
Pearson Correlation	<b>-0.490**</b>	-0.004	<b>0.376**</b>	0.172	<b>0.310**</b>
Sig (2 Tailed)	0.000	0.971	0.000	0.117	0.004
R <sup>2</sup>	0.24	0.00	0.14	0.03	0.10
Base	84	83	83	84	84

Looking in more detail Table 10 breaks down the possible contribution of these factors to overall progress by quartile. It confirms that the longer and more that young people participate, the more they progress. Those who had participated most made more than 12.5 points of progress overall (around 2 years and over 50 sessions). For duration of participation, it appears that there is a step change in the effects of participation somewhere between 7 and 14 months, with progress much more marked at 14 months of participation and above. For intensity of participation, it appears that there is a threshold of participation after which change in progress accelerates. This occurs at somewhere over 20 half day sessions. One possible conclusion to be drawn from this is that while one-to-one mentoring may be essential in enabling young people to access and cope with group participation, it is sustained group participation that helps them make progress against the assessment criteria.

Table 10 also demonstrates the effect of a low baseline score. Those in the lowest quarter of the sample in terms of initial baseline assessment (mean score of 13) made on average 13.09 points progress, whereas those in the top quartile initially (with a mean score of 28) made on average only 3.33 points progress. While, as above, it is unclear to what extent this is a statistical effect, it may suggest that this group get the least out of participation.

Table 10: Change in Mean Score by Quartile of Contributory Factor

Quartile	Mean Change in Overall Score (mean for that quartile)		
	Baseline Score	Duration of Participation	Intensity of Participation
Q1	4.9 (28)	12.6 (24)	12.5 (56)
Q2	8.8 (22)	10.7 (14)	9.6 (20)
Q3	11.4 (18)	8.5 (7)	6.6 (9)
Q4	12.3 (13)	5.6 (3)	8.7 (1)

#### 4.5.5 Exploring Differences in Progress

To try to unpick these patterns in the data we selected three young people from either end of the spectrum; one who had fallen back on the measurement of progress and two who had achieved very good progress. Speaking to their Creative Mentor, the young people and others we were able to build up a narrative picture of the circumstances and experiences underpinning this progress, or lack of it.

In the pen pictures below several cross-cutting themes emerge. The first relates to the severity and complexity that some young people face at the point they engage with Creative Mentoring. While not the case for all – especially those engaging with enterprise projects like the WoW programme from the state – for some young people a referral to Creative Mentoring comes after a series of serious adverse experiences. All the young people in the programme are in Care but some have experienced very serious additional trauma which resulted in them being in Care, and for some the causes of this trauma remain relevant as they begin to engage. The second, is the complexity of their lives. Many young people continue to experience changes of, or breakdowns, in their Care and educational placements. Third, the measurement data above relates to the period in which COVID-19 has disrupted their social networks, placed additional strain on residential and foster placements and interrupted support services, including Creative Mentoring. The mental health effects on the general population are particularly acute for this group of vulnerable young people. Finally, taking all this together and looking at the stories below, both cases where young people have progressed well against the measurement criteria and where they – at present – have fallen back exhibit similar characteristics. Progress is not linear but bumpy and point in time measurements do not capture the full complexity of the human stories that underpin them. Moreover, even where progress

is slow, there are cases where Creative Mentoring – and other services – may have helped prevented more negative developments.

**Pen pictures of selected young people’s experiences while in the Creative Mentoring Programme.**

*Some important details have been obscured or left out of these accounts. While it is important to explore ‘the real lives’ underpinning the numbers reported above, it is also important not to reveal identifying details, which is difficult given the specificity and uniqueness of each young person’s journey. The accounts below use pseudonyms and have been checked with the CMP team to ensure that the detail is also sufficiently anonymised.*

**Chloe – good initial progress but then fell back and disengaged during ‘lockdown’**

Chloe had experienced a highly traumatic family disturbance in her childhood and breakdowns in care placements, which had been psychologically damaging and had a major impact on her perceptions of self-worth. She had been in Care for some years and was already known to her Creative Mentor when she started the programme, as the latter had worked with Chloe on and off previously.

Chloe had a history of not engaging with services. At the start of her engagement with creative mentoring, for example, Chloe was not attending school. She struggled to form attachments to people, especially adults. She was given to ‘running away’, sometimes with alongside other young people in care, sometimes in the middle of the night. When this happened, carers and care workers did not know where she and her friends were, raising serious safeguarding issues. It was these serious incidents which led her to being referred to the Creative Mentoring Programme.

Chloe had previously found some solace in artwork at school (she made a partial return to school, in Alternative Provision), and this boosted her self-esteem. Art made her feel good about herself. She wanted to do GCSE Art and, after an initial fear that she might not even pass, she went on to achieve an excellent result!

There were other positive signs of progress during the creative mentoring period. Initially, Chloe couldn’t even look at the Creative Mentor, but that was overcome as time went on and, also, she found her voice. Instead of ‘reacting’ explosively to something she didn’t like, she learned to communicate her feelings more effectively. Above all, her self-worth grew, and her sense of humour began to emerge.

However, Chloe’s life became more complex in her mid-teens and her earlier positive progress slowed. This was then compounded by the effects of COVID-19 lockdown. Chloe’s measure progress dipped and then after March 2020 fell away significantly and she disengaged from her mentor. Chloe’s Creative Mentor has continued to send messages and cards, but she has not responded. For the moment at least, Chloe has disengaged from the Creative Mentor, though the latter remains convinced that she will be back in touch at some stage and, when she is, it will be important to give a positive response.

Chloe's case highlights the importance of the need for long-term intervention in relation to some young people, believes the Creative Mentor. Short-term mentoring can provide some benefits to some people, but for others with complex situations like Chloe, interventions need to be long-term if they are to have a chance of bringing sustainable benefits. Moreover, Chloe's story suggests that young people who have experienced complex traumas may not make neat linear progress, especially when impacted by negative external events. Measured progress currently looks negative, but this is in the context of serious contextual changes.

***Reece – engaged with one-to-one mentoring for just over a year and has made substantial progress in measured assessments.***

Reece, in his late teens, is a similar age to Chloe was living in a residential home when his Creative Mentor first met him. While he was attending a specially designed educational placement, he had been experiencing a stress-ridden time: a foster placement had broken down; he was not getting on with other young people in the residence and had a highly conflictual relationship with one resident in particular. He was extremely anxious, was diagnosed with ADHD and dyspraxia. However, he has benefited greatly from one-to-one mentoring. His self-confidence has been boosted, he has learned new skills, and he has made progress in his emotional and physical well-being, largely due to being able to channel his feelings into his newly discovered (through the Creative Mentoring intervention) love of playing a musical instrument.

Reece had been portrayed to the Creative Mentor as a young man with anger management problems, exhibiting potentially aggressive behaviour. But when they met and began their creative journey together, this was not the sort of young man that she discovered. Rather, Reece was a highly personable young man, keen to use his newfound relationship with his Creative Mentor as an opportunity to talk through some of the issues that had been causing him anxiety. It was an opportunity for him to open up about his feelings about different relationships, and how to work through connected issues successfully. This, in itself, was a highly positive element to Reece's engagement.

Moreover, Reece was keen to engage in series of activities on the programme, all of which appeared to have beneficial effects. Reece had a strong interest cars, transport and travel, which the Creative Mentor used as a hook to engage in discussions about careers and work. Reece was already studying photography at college, and the Creative Mentor seized the opportunity for an innovative intervention which might synthesise the two in a transport related photography project, including field trips.

The biggest leap forward for Reece was *via* his love of music. After initially experimenting with different instruments, he settled on one and the Creative Mentor sourced a musical mobile phone 'app' and then booked time in a recording studio to further stimulate his interest. Playing an instrument provided a mechanism for him to channel his anger and other challenging emotions. He was lifted by it, feeling much better physically and mentally. Now in foster care, the Creative Mentor suggested that Reece write a song for his foster carer with

who he had an initially strained relationship. With support he wrote lyrics and the Creative Mentor organised for singing lessons. He succeeded in writing, performing and recording the song, which helped to build his relationship with his foster carer.

Reece progressed well on the programme, gaining in confidence as he learnt new skills. He had a real sense that he was progressing, which is hugely positive. Playing music helped with his coordination and concentration. Developing the ability to express himself through music was a real positive that was facilitated by the creative mentoring. Communication, confidence, technical and creative skills have all helped to widen his future options, developing his transferable skills. Mentoring has moved from working to engage Reece through shared interests in creative pastimes to a developing focus on training and employability.

At this point in time Reece has made very good progress and has been able to benefit from creative and flexible support, tailored to his particular – and changing – needs. However, it is not a simple linear story. Along the journey outline above he encountered challenges that held him back for a while but, with flexible and creative support, he has been able to make good progress.

***Connor – engaged for about 18 months, beginning with one-to-one mentoring, the WoW programme and Hub group project attendance, achieving strong progress.***

Connor was 14 when it was first suggested that he should join the Creative Mentoring Programme. He had been experiencing a very traumatic situation, involving physical and emotional bullying at school, and on social media. Connor had entrusted a school friend with some information involving an extremely sensitive family issue which had resulted in him being separated from his biological sister and placed in foster care. Sharing this was clearly misjudged as the ‘friend’ disclosed the information to other young people, some of whom reacted to learning it by embarking on a prolonged bullying campaign that was clearly damaging to Connor.

Connor’s Creative Mentor reported that it took a long time to get past this issue, and his foster carers were reluctant to encourage him to engage until he had been able to change schools and extricate him from unhelpful social networks. It was therefore several months before Connor was able to engage with his Mentor. It had been intended that he would join the WoW project from the start, but he ended up joining late but with some one-to-one mentoring to help him engage with it.

Once engaging, the Creative Mentor reported that Connor was polite, participated, but never demonstrated any enthusiasm. He was very passive. His foster parents were pivotal in encouraging him to engage in the programme, but there were indications that he felt that he had been ‘parachuted in’ due to his late start. Part of that might be a consequence of the impact of the bullying that he had been subjected to: he had become very distrustful of other

young people. More than this, however, there was a ‘menu’ of activities on the programme and Connor felt that none of them were really for him.

In terms of developing social skills, however, some positive signs began to shine through during Connor’s Creative Mentoring journey. His Creative Mentor took him to a music event in early 2020. He responded well to this: to the social side, rather than the music. This was the first time he hadn’t ‘shied away’ from other young people. He made friends. He exchanged contact details with other young people. The Creative Mentor is optimistic that these are signs that he is going to begin to trust other young people again and that, for him, this is the really big thing. One-to-one Creative Mentoring helped him to engage with group-based projects which then helped him develop peer networks, develop trust and social skills.

Connor has secured a place in further education at college from September 2021.

#### 4.5.6 WoW Cohort

##### 4.5.6.1 Participant’s Experiences

All participants in the WoW cohort completed a self-completion questionnaire at the outset of the project which included the Careers and Enterprise Company’s Future Skills Survey full range of questions and a set of additional questions which were tailored to the specific experiences of children in care and the ways that the WoW project aimed to address these. Where possible we tracked those participants and gave them a reduced list of the same questions at the end of their participation. The end of participation questionnaire also asked for participants and their carers to self-attribute changes as a result of participation. The questionnaires were completed in person with help from the independent researcher to interpret questions in their own home at the outset of the project. A repeat exercise with a research by telephone was completed at the end of the project because of pandemic control measures being in place.

In total 29 completed the questionnaire at the outset and 18 young people completed the end of participation questionnaire. This means we have three different sets of data from these responses: (a) repeat cross sectional sample of all participants the beginning and end of the project, (b) a smaller group of 7 who completed questionnaires at both the beginning and end, and (c) a self-attribution sample of 18 young people and their carers at the end of the project.

##### 4.5.6.2 Carer Responses at the End of the Project

Twenty carers responded to the self-attributed telephone survey at the end of the project. The first survey item asked them the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with a range of statements about the young people’s experiences and outcomes from the project (see Table 11), with key findings being:

- 80% of carers thought that the young person they cared for enjoyed their participation;
- 70% thought that the young person had gained confidence through participating;
- 65% thought that the young person had learned new communication skills;
- 45% thought that the young person had developed awareness of career options;
- 55% thought that the young person was more employable because of their participation;
- 70% thought that participation had helped to improve the young person’s mood.

Carers were also asked open questions about their views of the project. A number of generally positive comments were made, and a number of core themes emerged from these comments. The first was about participant selection and ensuring that those targeted would benefit from the programme (these comments referred to young people who carers thought had/had not benefited) and that clear purpose might be outlined at the outset and that activities might be more tightly related to employment outcomes. Others suggested that young people had benefited from social interaction and one carer attributed this and support from their Creative Mentor to making a significant positive difference to the young person. One neutral comment related to distance to travel and explained that it had been difficult for them to engage because of the distances involved and that they do not have their own transport. One further comment related to the volume of activities that some young people in care are engaged in and suggested that it was difficult for her to identify WoW participation as distinct from these other activities and therefore to attribute change.

Table 11: Carers' Views of Young People's Experience on the WoW project

	Strongly disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Strongly agree	No Answer
They seemed to enjoy it	0.0%	5.0%	10.0%	15.0%	65.0%	5.0%
They gained confidence because of it	0.0%	10.0%	15.0%	20.0%	50.0%	5.0%
They learned new communication skills	5.0%	5.0%	20.0%	45.0%	20.0%	5.0%
They are more aware of career options because of it	10.0%	25.0%	15.0%	25.0%	20.0%	5.0%
They are more employable because of it	10.0%	15.0%	10.0%	40.0%	15.0%	10.0%
It seemed to help their mood generally	5.0%	0.0%	15.0%	30.0%	40.0%	10.0%

Some further open comments focussed on the role of WoW participation during the pandemic lockdown period, a period that is widely thought to have negatively affected young people in care, something that some carers also mentioned directly. The comments received suggested that relationships with Creative Mentors were positive during this period, where they continued but that some young people did not engage as effectively in virtual activities. One comment suggested that the carer was concerned that the relationship with the Creative Mentor may come to an end and that this would have a negative impact on the young person.

#### 4.5.6.3 Young People's Responses at the end of the Project

Eighteen young people answered the general self-attribution parts of the final survey. First, they were asked whether they enjoyed the activities they took part in and if they had learned new skills while taking part (see Table 12). Forty-four percent said that they had enjoyed these activities all of the time and nearly 80% said that they had enjoyed the activities always or most of the time. Seventy-eight percent said that they had learned new skills at least half of the time. Young people said that the things they had particularly enjoyed were the artistic and outdoor activities. They also said that they had enjoyed meeting people, including new people who shared some of their own experiences. Young people said that they had learned a variety of new skills, identifying these themselves unprompted:

- **Resilience:** 'I know for example, if I do something wrong, I can do it again, no problem.' And "patience, resilience, stick at things".



- **Practical skills:** ‘That I never knew how to use a hammer properly, not to use it on my hand! Start off school, hammer, drill then heavy machinery, jigsaw, router, blow torch...it took time.’
- **Personal effectiveness and transferable skills:** “Trust, communication, responsibility, team-work and helping everything out.” And “to socialise with others”.
- **Technical and creative skills:** “breakdance”, “writing lyrics”, “how to dance”, “editing software for animation and film, recording an art presentation”.

Table 12: Young People's Self-Attributed Enjoyment and Skills Development

	Did you enjoy the activities you took part in?	Did you learn any new skills while taking part?
Always	44.4%	33.3%
Most of the time	33.3%	33.3%
About half the time	11.1%	11.1%
Sometimes	11.1%	16.7%
Never	0.0%	5.6%

Young people were prompted to say how participation had impacted on various attributes. The majority felt that participation had helped their confidence (“Made me more confident in self, made me go out more and be more excited to do it, and to meet other people”), a small majority said that they had improved their willingness to take part in creative activities (“...it made me do things other than watch TV”), some people said that they had developed their communication skills (“...brought me out of my shell”). About half of the participants commented that they had developed their career awareness, but where this was developed it seemed significant. For example, one participant said:

*“Being more open minded about things. To start with it was acting is acting. I now know there is quite a lot more than that, there's the backstage stuff, behind the camera and also teaching jobs, that you can still be doing something that you love and making a difference to someone else's life. Thinking about different ways into the industry.”*

#### 4.5.6.4 Change Among Participants while Participating

Because participants completed questionnaires at the beginning and end of the programme we were able to look at change over time in a cross sectional and a longitudinal way. Such data is problematic however in two respects. The cross-sectional comparison compares responses from different people and the longitudinal element has no control group and the reality is that a large number of factors will have impacted how participants answered these questions, not least their increased maturity.

Looking at the cross-sectional comparison, the cohort that ended the programme were much more positive about most of the statements, particularly in relation to problem solving and being aware of cultural and artistic opportunities (see Table 13).

Seven participants completed a questionnaire at both the start and end of the project meaning that we are able to compare their responses, albeit with the qualifications and limitations noted above. Among these, positive change was apparent on all but one of the fourteen items surveyed at both the beginning and end of the project. Positive change was evident in particular in relation to liking school, confidence and problem solving, and ability to influence decisions affecting their lives.

Table 13: Cross Sectional Comparison of Responses at the start and end of the programme

	% Point change Agree/Strongly Agree
I am confident in taking part in arts or creative activities	+17.3
I am aware of the cultural or artistic opportunities available to me	+50
I am aware of job and career prospects in arts, cultural or creative roles	+23.3
I like school	+15.3
I always try my hardest at school	+17.3
I can work out my problems	+82.4
I can do most things if I try	+29.4
There are many things that I do well	+17.7
I have thought about whether University is right for me	-5.9
I have thought about whether moving straight to work is right for me	-23.6
I have thought about whether an apprenticeship is right for me	-11.7
I always understand the language used by teachers, doctors or other professionals	+5.9
I can influence decisions affecting my life	+30.5

Table 14: Longitudinal change among participants

	Mean Change in Individual Scores
I am confident in taking part in arts or creative activities	-0.43
I am aware of the cultural or artistic opportunities available to me	+0.86
I am aware of job and career prospects in arts, cultural or creative roles	+0.14
I like school	+1.57
I always try my hardest at school	+0.29
I can work out my problems	+1.00
I can do most things if I try	+0.29
There are many things that I do well	+1.00
I have thought about whether University is right for me	+0.86
I have thought about whether moving straight to work is right for me	+0.86
I have thought about whether an apprenticeship is right for me	+0.00
I always understand the language used by teachers, doctors or other professionals	+0.57
I can influence decisions affecting my life	+1.00
Most people can be trusted	+0.86

#### 4.5.6.5 WoW Cohort General Assessments

We were able to isolate progress data (as used in Sections 4.5.2 to 4.5.5, above) for 27 of the WoW cohort members. Though care needs to be used in interpreting this data due to the small numbers of participants, the picture is broadly similar to the wider cohort of young people participating in the CMP, though with a slightly higher average progress both on the mean (9.9 against 9.4) and median (8.5 against 8) measures. Again, like the wider cohort this data suggests that young people in the WoW cohort made good progress while participating. It also triangulates with the self-reported data above.

Table 15: Summary Progress Across the Eight Measures, WoW Cohort Participants.

Measure	Minimum	Mean	Median	Maximum
Overall	-1	9.9	8.5	26
Participation	-1	1.3	1	4
Engagement	-1	1.3	1	4
Confidence	-2	1.3	1	4
Communication	-1	1.3	1	4
Motivation	-1	1.2	1	4
Achievement	-1	1.1	1	3
Teamwork	-2	1.2	1	3
Ambition	-1.3	1.2	1	3.5

#### 4.6 What works in Creative Mentoring

Drawing on a range of evidence garnered from observations of all aspects of the programme, from repeated interviews and two focus groups (one at the beginning and end of the evaluation period) with Creative Mentors themselves and one-to-one interviews and a focus group with other professionals surrounding the scheme (Social Workers and Education Support Officers), the following aspects of Creative Mentoring were widely deemed to be supportive of positive outcomes:

***Ownership and control*** – CMs placed a great deal of emphasis on establishing the relationship with participants, based on the participants’ own interests. This meant that while they are all creative practitioners in their own right and the selection and matching process tries to ensure that there is a fit between the young people’s interests and the skills of the mentor, sometimes the young people decide they want to work on things that are outside of the mentor’s specialism. Mentors were generally comfortable with this and there was considerable evidence of seeking out opportunities to fit with the interests of young people.

***Lack of overt goals*** – Mentors spoke of not constructing overt goals in the initial period of working with young people. This was not that goals and objectives were absent – in most cases there is a framework of moving young people close to education, training or employment – but mentors felt it was important that these goals were not in the foreground. This was in line with the framework set out by Kelly above, Social Pedagogy principles and the expressed desire to place emphasis on participants own interests and desires. As one Education Support Officer put it:

“It’s without expectation ... in most areas of their lives people have expectations... when they are in school there is a certain expectation, when you are in care there is a certain expectation, within your home in terms of how you are going to be ... to have a relationship ... where it is without expectation is really useful”.

Mentors reported that young people often welcomed the different approach to art and creativity that they are able to offer. While in schools art GCSE for example focusses on assessing particular skills or competences, CMs are able to introduce creativity and art in a less structured way.

***Unconditional positive regard*** – This was something that mentors spoke about and was evident in observation of one-to-one and group sessions. It was part of the very evident difference between observing multiple CMP sessions (one-to-one, hubs and WoW enterprise projects) and mainstream education. That is not to say that mainstream teachers do not value or have positive regard for pupils, but mainstream education has clearer set expectations and processes, whereas the unconditional positive regard in CMP means that there is more scope to follow the

interests of individual young people and to tolerate minor infractions of normal educational norms.

***Relationship building and deep / long-term commitments*** – Creative Mentors, Carers, other professionals and young people themselves all emphasised effective relationship building as key to the Creative Mentor role. This aspect means that it is difficult to identify an ideal Creative Mentor engagement, precisely because the relationships established are all so different. In some cases, this was one of role modelling professional artistic skills and might be reasonably short term and akin to other professional engagements. In other cases, the relationship between Creative Mentors and individual young people extended far beyond what normally might be expected from a professional engagement both in terms of time commitment and in terms of the nature of the relationship. The nature of the needs of some young people meant that these relationships involve deep, personal and intimate support which might normally be more akin to that extended by a close friend or family member. This was always appropriate and transparent but is not an easy aspect of the programme to scale up (any particular Mentor is likely to have limits on how many such relationships it is possible to sustain and at times those relationships are likely to present significant emotional loads) and not every professional would be able to make those sorts of commitment.

***Celebrating success*** – Mentors were keen to celebrate success and often went to considerable lengths to document and keep records of this – sometimes for several years, so that they could remind young people of their achievements. This happened on occasions where the mentor was no longer working with the young person.

***Creativity and willingness to work outside of traditional norms*** – As with flexibility to pursue young people's own interests, mentors reported that engaging young people with experience of trauma or attachment challenges means that they often have to be creative in building up positive relationships. Several examples were provided which would be outside of the norms of professional services. In these instances, it was apparent that the willingness to transgress these norms was crucial to overcoming barriers to engagement.

***Flexibility*** - A further implication is that Creative Mentors need to be extremely flexible and creative in the process of supporting young people. There are examples where Mentors are able to focus on shared interests related to their own creative practice. However, the wider number of relationships we observed were broader than this, involved Mentors developing their creative practice in line with that of the young people or learning entirely new skills in an effort to build relationships. This extended to Mentors clearly trying experiences or activities that they themselves might not ordinarily choose to take part in. Creative Mentoring is not purely an extension of the Mentor's own creative practice into a teaching type role.

***Developing independence*** – CMs reported that they saw their role as partly about following young people's interests in a way that supports them to take decisions for themselves, rather than giving advice and direction.

***Advocacy*** - On other occasions CMs reported that they needed to become advocates for young people in the wider network of professionals associated with them. Several CMs reported that they needed to support young people to access resources or sustain access to experiences. Because some of the young people on the CMP have been seen as a problem for other services – for example where behaviour at school had led to school exclusion – Creative Mentors often have to work hard to demonstrate examples of young people having made progress.

***Emergent meaning and sustained shared thinking*** – In evaluations of children’s services and early cognitive development, ‘sustained shared thinking’ (Brodie 2014) is a technique of discursive pedagogy that has been shown to be effective. Many of the individual and group sessions observed had this character with a mentor encouraging a process of discussion and reflection on the activity underway and skills learned. This seemed to be central to the process of building confidence and a sense of achievement so that methods and techniques of engagement could be scaffolded on top of this. As an extension of this CMs reported that they often create photobooks or other mementos of their shared experiences with young people. Our observations also noted that there was a great deal of emphasis on repeating and reinforcing the positive experiences that they undertake with young people to create positive memories. CMs reported that this was an essential element of the CMP.

***Linkages between Programme elements*** – One of the strengths of the CMP that is only now fully emerging is the opportunities facilitated by the development of the Hubs and Enterprise projects. One-to-one mentoring is helpful in developing young people’s skills and capacities but CMs suggested that the ability to support young people to attend the Hubs and other group activities is crucial to allowing young people to ‘move on’ and also to develop young people’s social skills and networks; both with other young people and the wider network of CMs.

***Risks*** – Mentors also discussed risks associated with the CMP for them, and monitoring and managing these is important in the programme. These included the risk of transference of negative emotion, vicarious trauma, and burnout. Several CMs have left the programme, finding it a drain. But in all cases, they appeared to be supported effectively by facilitators and other CMs. Indeed, one CM has re-joined the programme after a break.

***Peer Support*** - There appeared to be a great deal of emphasis on peer support and networking and the establishment of group Hubs appears to have strengthened this further. Many of the CMs had developed strong relationships with one another. We observed and witnessed examples of skills sharing and peer advice of a social (how to engage this or that young person), technical (e.g., in terms of specific art forms) and emotional (talking through challenging experiences) nature, and this was clearly a very important part of the programme’s success. One Mentor who had been at (geographical) distance from these relationships reported that they felt professionally supported but didn’t have access to the same depth of relationships. It was not they felt excluded from them, but they did think not having the same access to such deep peer support was a disadvantage in being able to provide Mentoring in the same way.

***Access to Wider Professional Support*** – Creative Mentors had very strong support from staff in the Virtual School. This was clear from talking to Mentors themselves and to Education Support Officers and the lead officer coordinating the programme. The scale and nature of Virtual School organisation varies widely across the country and Derbyshire have a very well-resourced Virtual School. This was partly why Creative Mentoring existed in the first instance and meant that Mentors were able to draw on support, advice and assistance, such as formal and informal support from Virtual School staff and from the Local Authority’s educational psychologist. A large part of the success of the programme is the result of this support which means it is not a purely contract driven service. Similar to the relationships between Mentors themselves, there are relationships of mutual trust and positive regard which underpin the professional networks involved.

In one-to-one and group discussions participants in the different elements of the CMP revealed the following characteristics of their experience as being valuable in terms of delivering positive outcomes:

***Relationship and network building*** – More than any other aspect of the CMP, the characteristic that is primarily visible is the focus on relationship building, to begin with between mentor and participant, but where young people engage in the group Hubs and Enterprise projects it is clear that these are between young people also. Key aspects of the project replicate family life or life in friendship networks. For instance, in all aspects of the CMP, mentors and young people make and eat meals together. In group Hubs this is often a rotating shared responsibility, followed by a structured mealtime with all sitting around a table, reflecting on current events, developments in their lives, plans and experiences of activities they are undertaking. This helps to secure deep and meaningful relationships. This also means that when mentors support young people, for instance in official meetings or in planning for major life events (e.g., giving birth) they are trusted to offer support focussed entirely on the young person's own interests and not an official or organisational agenda. It also means that young people form networks that extend outside the spaces of the programme. While sometimes challenging, for the large part these appeared to be supportive networks which helped the young people cope with everyday life outside the programme.

***Ownership and control*** – participants clearly welcomed the scope to pursue their own interests, and to shape the content of mentoring and group activities. Sometimes this was related simply to being comfortable in the space, feeling a sense of control in the activity so that they could trust mentors and engage with the activity. In other cases, it was related to the achievement of functional tasks or outcomes related to their specific needs; such as developing tailored skills and capacities. In both cases, ownership and control was part of a ladder of engagement starting with acceptance and relationship building and moving through to the development and demonstration of positive behaviours. Ironically, this need for, and expectation of, control sometimes made data collection difficult. It means that young people do not expect to have their sessions turned into formal discussions, interviews or focus groups. This meant that collecting data often needed to rely on more informal (though always with consent) data collection while partaking in creative activities (e.g., drawing, clay modelling, pot-making, drawing, colouring in, cooking).

***Absence of pressure*** – many participants had challenging lives and backgrounds in which their own agency was severely constrained and in which they have to satisfy the needs of others. This is noted in wider research on young people in the care system and care leavers. The lack of overt goals – especially as associated with school – at the beginning of the CM process meant that young people felt they could engage with the process without worrying that they were being channelled toward a predetermined endpoint decided by others. This was therefore central to their feelings of ownership of the process.

***Feeling valued*** – Many mentors and participants work together for several years or iteratively engage with the programme. On a number of occasions participants mentioned that their mentor had kept pieces of art or photographs documenting their work together and then re-presented the young people with it at some subsequent point in time, in some cases several years later. Their recounting of these stories and responses to it (where the research team witnessed it first-hand) revealed the closeness of the relationships and the way that the young people genuinely appreciated this sense of being valued by others and the record of their own successes being retained. This may be particularly important because of the frequent changes

that young people in care experience whether this be in carers, social workers, and home life. In contrast, the way that mentors tried to maintain a record of their relationship and often had an ongoing or repeated engagement with young people was clearly valued by the young people.

***Calmness*** – While engaging in artistic activities with the young people while visiting one-to-one sessions or group Hubs there was a clear sense that the focus on the activity was calming and helped to give space away from turmoil or tribulations of wider life. Sometimes this was a marked contrast to chaotic lives, but in other cases it was just respite from more normal everyday lives. In both cases the young people spoke about the activity and space as being calming and that they came to rely on it for this effect.

***Mutuality of care*** – While not apparent in all cases and less so among participants only engaged in the Enterprise projects, a significant number of the participants clearly cared mutually for their CMs. This was a testament to the relationships that had been established and reflected a key element of an ‘ethic of care’; that this cannot be a one-way process by definition. That is not to say it was an equivalent relationship; it was clearly one of adults and young people with the different roles and responsibilities that this implies, but it was nevertheless clear that many of the young people cared for the adult mentors, and facilitators.

#### 4.7 Challenges

It was also apparent that the CM role can be challenging. Challenges came in a number of forms:

***Behaviour*** – some of the young people engaging with Creative Mentoring are experiencing, or have experienced, significant trauma and this results, for some, in very challenging behaviour. It may make initial engagement difficult or manifest in other ways such as running away or unsocial language and physical behaviour. This would be challenging in any event, but it is particularly so while sustaining unconditional positive regard and following the participants’ own direction.

***Complex lives*** – Many of the young people engaging with the programme have complex lives with changes of placement, changes in their care status, complicated peer-group relationships and a wide range of professionals involved. This means that sustaining engagement can be a challenge when young people’s weekly and daily routines are frequently interrupted.

***Relationships with other professionals, trust and information flow*** – Young people will have a range of professionals working with them. These will include foster carers and/or residential care staff, Social Workers, teachers, Education Support Officers, a Virtual Head Teacher, possibly a Leaving Care Worker and others. Some professionals lack awareness of Creative Mentoring and can be distrustful, especially if they are seen as potentially ‘spoiling’ young people who may have behaved badly with treats and positive experiences. The wide range of professionals involved and that they are not always involved in direct face-to-face meetings sometimes makes information flow a challenge. The CMP has instigated several recent changes to improve information flow between CMs and other professionals, but this remains a challenge and has been particularly challenging during the COVID-19 period.

***Plugging gaps*** – Each relationship between a CM and a young person is unique, and subject to the interests and experiences of the different personalities involved. The role is also partly shaped by the way that other professionals and carers operate with the young people. In some cases, this means that CMs plug gaps that exist for young people between the different

professionals and services. This sometimes means adapting to play more of an advocate role and on others it means helping in a way that might normally be associated with a carer or family role such as helping young people to set up their home when leaving care. While this can be positive, there are times when CMs may be 'going the extra mile' to plug these gaps might be difficult to sustain and also mean that other professional services withdraw even further.

***Impacts on the CMs own artistic practice*** – Sustaining the CMs own artistic or creative practice can be a challenge, because of the impact of being a CM on both time and creative energy. CMs also reported that they find the participatory aspect energising and rewarding and sometimes following young people's interests and ideas is stimulating creatively, in and of itself.

***Understanding when young people need to move on*** – The nature of the relationships developed between young people and mentors means that it can be a challenge to know when the right time is for young people to move on to the next stage. This often means supporting young people to access formal education, training or employment. This may sometimes mean retaining some contact one-to-one contact to support these transitions in a positive way.



## 5 Conclusions

### 5.1 Summary of key findings

The data presented above suggests that the **CMP does generate positive outcomes** for young people involved in the programme. This is evident in a range of different types of data and data that arises from different sources. The general assessment data provided by professionals at PEP meetings suggests statistically significant mild to moderate positive progress across in the overall assessment. That this effect is stronger the longer young people are in the programme and the more that they engage is indicative of a genuine positive impact. The data is also indicative (without being conclusive) that those young people with the most difficulties across the eight assessment criteria get more out of participation than others. It should also be noted that these effects were apparent when the wider context might be expected to have had negative impacts on some of the young people involved, and had certainly impaired the delivery of the programme, including for the WoW cohort. These effects are also reinforced by feedback from young people themselves, and feedback from carers and other professionals. Further, the stories of progress from Creative Mentors themselves was consistent with the statistical data. Finally, our observations of activities were in line with the picture of progress that emerges from the statistical data. We are therefore **able to conclude that young people who engage with the programme across all three elements gain social, emotional and practical skills and capacities from their participation.**

**The outcomes from the CMP are based on highly skilled, well supported and a mutually supportive network of CMs working with a well-resourced Virtual School.** Since practice and resources vary so widely across Virtual Schools and in care arrangements for young people in different local authorities, it is important that similar schemes elsewhere keep this in mind (with that in mind, a separate section below deals with some of the issues associated with replication of the Derbyshire scheme.

The elements of Creative Mentoring are laid out in detail above, but it is important to note that **much of what is successful about the programme rests on the skills and capacities of the CMs and their support network.** The Derbyshire programme is run by an incredibly committed and talented group of professionals. There is widespread recognition that creativity, broadly defined, is a way into relationship building and gaining the confidence of young people. For some young people that also involves developing core creative or artistic skills, but it is not necessarily a vehicle for artistic skills development or a way into an artistic career. This can be the case, and there were examples of young people developing strong artistic skills. However, everyone associated with the programme was clear that their focus was more on supporting young people. Creativity often referred to the means of engaging and relationship building as well as an enjoyable and unpressured social activity that could bring calm, reflection and enjoyment. It was also about recognising the contribution of transferable skills developed in creative or artistic activities to a wider range of careers and ensuring that young people have a range of rich and varied positive experiences. It is this sense of creativity that is dominant and most associated with the outcomes reported here.

**The Creative Mentoring role is complex and challenging. Peer and professional support are necessary** to ensure that CMs are able to cope with these challenges. It was clear also that CMs developed their own repertoire of skills through experience and that more experienced CMs were valuable in supporting their peers.

The development of the programme over recent years has seen a shift from one-to-one mentoring toward the use of that mentoring to support young people to attend weekly hub groups and also to engage in time limited Enterprise projects. **The links between different elements of the programme are valuable** and help to ensure there is scaffolded progression for participants.

As at the interim report stage we reported that there was some concern that Enterprise Projects (e.g., as experienced by the WoW cohort) might be developing the programme in ways that shifted the emphasis away from co-creation and participant ownership. We reported then that this may be appropriate as a bridge from intensive support to the reality of an authentic workplace scenario. We continue to think that these extension and transitional activities have merit for those participants who are at the right stage to benefit from this experience.

## 5.2 Replicating Creative Mentoring

Inevitably there is interest in replicating the Creative Mentoring Programme in other parts of the country. There are several important considerations in understanding whether and how the scheme can be replicated and/or scaled up:

The programme involves **very long-term relationships**. It is not always a case of setting short-term or time limited outcome objectives and moving young people on by specific deadlines. There is a **long-term and near open-ended commitment** among many mentors at the core of the scheme which helps to facilitate the unconditional regard and genuine commitment that appears to be quite central to the relationship building involved. **Mentors are deeply empathetic and supportive** of the young people. They do not give up or resort to sanction or exclusion in the way that might be the case in schools, even when the challenges they face are quite substantial. Such commitments and skillsets are not run of the mill, and while training is important, it is not that any creative practitioner can go through training and replicate the type of outcomes witnessed in this project. **Recruitment and selection will be extremely important** and will need to focus on **values and personal qualities** (e.g., of empathy) as well as skills and experience.

All this means that it is also **important that prospective mentors are fully aware of the commitments and challenges** that may come with being part of a CMP. They also need to ensure that the impact of mentoring on their own creative or artistic practice is fully factored in. Depending on the scale of mentoring taken on, the role may impinge on their own professional practice and it may be challenging to maintain a full independent creative practice alongside this work.

The Derbyshire CMP evolved organically and relationships between mentors, and between Mentors and Virtual School staff developed over a long period of time. This has several implications:

- There are deep bonds of trust and reciprocity between mentors.
- Mentors support one another, are happy to exchange information, advice and ideas.
- Mentors are happy to facilitate young people working with other mentors where they can see that this would benefit the young person, rather than being defensive over their ‘case load’.
- Protocol, training, induction processes, support and recruitment/selection criteria have developed over time to support the programme.

Some of these aspects will not be easy to replicate. Careful attention would be needed to **facilitating peer networks and positive relationships between mentors** and to ensuring that they have the **appropriate skills and training** in health and safety, safeguarding, dynamic risk assessment and **appropriate access to professional support** services such as educational psychologists.

In monitoring and evaluating Creative Mentoring, consideration is needed to ensure that the **non-linear and contingent nature of success in programmes like this is built into analytical frameworks and expectations regarding outcomes**. Some young people who ended up achieving good progress had at times slipped back, and for others, the full outcomes from participation would not be felt for several years. The complexity involved in some young people's lives meant that even where the programme is effective in supporting them, their overall progress may slip back because of wider events in their lives. In such cases, support may still be effective where it reduces negative outcomes. And outcome expectations need to be measured over an **appropriate and long-term time frame**.

It is also useful for any Creative Mentoring Programme to have **strong matching processes** to ensure that young people referred can pursue their interests with their mentors and to recognise that these may not always be artistic in nature. Finally, Creative Mentoring Programmes need to **plan for next steps with young people, recognising that this may mean transitions away from the CMP toward other activity** and also potentially combining this with less intensive but sustained one-to-one support while transitions are embedded. Several of the CMs involved in the Derbyshire programme have sustained relationships with young people for some time after leaving care and maintain looser but still supportive relationships. While some of this has occurred organically, planning for long-term transitions is essential if the CMP is to be replicated successfully elsewhere.

### 5.3 Recommendations

The Derbyshire CMP is characterised by restless trial and innovation, with frequent new developments. As such it is to be anticipated that the CMP will continue to develop and will no doubt look quite different in a few years' time. At present, the COVID-19 pandemic had interrupted the development and partly the delivery of the programme. At this point in time, the most important action will be to return to full normal delivery, albeit utilising aspects of online meeting and delivery that have proven helpful. As such there are only a small number of additional recommendations that flow from the findings above and all areas where further developments might be considered:

1. Reinstatement of regular peer support and sharing meetings between CMs. This is important to ensure that CMs are supported but also that CMs continue to develop by sharing experiences and successful practice.
2. The measurement of participant progress is essential to ensure that young people are achieving positive outcomes from the programme. Analysis of this valuable data should be regularly repeated. Further data analysis is also possible, using validated scales and tools. One such option is the SDQ questionnaire. Though there are important limitations in this tool, it is associated with a national dataset with age related benchmarks and appropriate control groups (children in care). It may therefore be used with young people on entry to the CMP and on an annual basis. This would enable comparison with a statistical control group to assess the impact of CMP relative to all other children and young people of a similar age and in a similar context. As an addition to the assessment of progress already undertaken this would be relatively light

touch, would overcome the limitations of the data summarised in this report and would provide further evidence of programme impacts. The assessments currently undertaken should be retained and completed at PEP meetings to ensure that the data is robust and reflects a range of professional views.

3. The WoW cohort was somewhat interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, Enterprise Projects remain an important development of the CMP and further work should explore the scope for the development of similar more authentic educational/training/work related contexts to act as a bridge between the CMP and transition to positive outcomes.

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