



Department  
for Education

# **Partners in Practice No Wrong Door evaluation**

**Evaluation report**

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## Key messages

This report presents the findings of an independent evaluation of North Yorkshire County Council's extension of its No Wrong Door Programme, funded by the Department for Education's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme. The programme was extended from young people within or on the edge of the care system to two additional groups. These were pupils with Social, Mental and Emotional Health needs at risk of exclusion through the Back on Track project and care leavers through the Leaving Care project. The approach was mixed-method and included a process, impact and economic evaluation.

The quantitative impact analysis found no evidence of a positive impact of Back on Track on pupils' absences and exclusions. For Leaving Care, although the effect was not statistically significant, the increase in the proportion of care leavers in suitable accommodation and in Education, Employment or Training was larger in North Yorkshire than in similar local authorities. These insights must be seen in the context of data limitations for both projects and these are discussed in the main report.

Participants in qualitative interviews including project staff, young people, their families or carers and organisations that supported them (including schools, businesses, educational institutions) suggested that the programme had a range of outcomes for young people that could not be captured by the quantitative evaluation. Young people reported feeling better able to function at home, school and as independent adults. Some of the organisations, families and carers that engaged with the programme also felt more willing and able to support young people as a result.

The qualitative interviews also highlight the delivery practices and systems that can apply to successful projects in the future. It was important to have enough lead-in time to recruit for specialist roles. There was encouraging practice where new teams were supported to join up with existing services and where there was strong leadership to drive the project. In addition, organisations, families and carers (support networks) were more likely to support young people if they were enabled by the multidisciplinary team to understand young people's needs and how to address these. Finally, early intervention was key, before any problems that the children and young people faced became entrenched.

The findings suggest that the support offered to young people and their support networks should have four key features to best meet their needs. These were: (a) a holistic understanding of a young person's needs through involvement of a multidisciplinary team; (b) a person-centred approach involving the tailoring of support to the young person; (c) consistent and high intensity of practitioner support; and (d) improving the young person's relationships with their support networks.

# Executive summary

## Introduction

This report presents the findings of an independent evaluation of North Yorkshire County Council's (NYCC) extension of its No Wrong Door (NWD) Programme, funded by the Department for Education's (DfE) Children's Social Care Innovation Programme (Innovation Programme).

## The project

As part of the Innovation Programme funding, NYCC extended its NWD programme, which provided an integrated service for young people in care or on the edge of care, to two additional groups under the following projects:

### Back on Track SEMH (Social, Emotional and Mental Health) project

- Provided support to **pupils (Y7-Y9) with SEMH needs who were at risk of exclusions**. Therapeutic support from a multidisciplinary team and a dedicated key worker was offered.
- The support aimed to help young people better manage their SEMH needs, increase attendance at school and reduce exclusions. Back on Track staff also worked with families and school staff to help secure greater stability at school and home for young people.

### Leaving Care project

- Provided support to **care leavers** around training, education, housing and health provision. The support was provided by a multidisciplinary team who worked in collaboration with the NYCC Leaving Care caseworker team.
- Activities include helping care leavers access accommodation, training and employment opportunities; identify and restore connections with family and friends and help manage their SEMH needs. The Leaving Care team also work with businesses and educational institutions to help drive their willingness to invest in care leavers.

## The evaluation

NatCen Social Research conducted an independent evaluation of the NWD extensions to assess their impact on recipients, identify factors that influenced implementation and assess their cost effectiveness. A mixed-method approach was used and included a process, impact and economic evaluation.

For Back on Track, the impact evaluation compared the 2018/2019 unauthorised absences and fixed-term exclusions of the 47 SEMH pupils who had received support in



2017/2018 to the outcomes of similar pupils that attended NYCC schools prior to the project. Multivariate distance matching<sup>1</sup> was used to identify a comparison group of pupils in 2014/2015 academic year, which served as a counterfactual. The impact of Leaving Care was estimated by comparing the differences between predicted (modelled) and actual outcomes in North Yorkshire and the group of comparison local authorities in 2019. Comparative Interrupted Time Series (CITS) was used to predict the 2019 figures of the two outcome measures – proportion of care leavers in suitable accommodation and Education, Employment or Training (EET). The expectation was that the 2019 care leaver outcomes in North Yorkshire would be better than predicted by the baseline trends, and that the outcomes in comparison LAs would follow the baseline trajectories.

The process evaluation involved 49 qualitative interviews with project staff, young people, their families or carers and the organisations that support them. These included schools, further and higher education institutions and local businesses involved in the projects.

## The findings

### Back on Track

Summary of impact: The impact analysis found no evidence of a positive impact of Back on Track on unauthorised absences and exclusions for the 47 pupils with the available data. The economic evaluation also concluded that it is not possible to attribute any fiscal benefits to the intervention in terms of interactions with the youth justice system, Child in Need numbers, Child Protection Plans or high cost placements.

The qualitative research with project staff, young people and their parents or carers indicated positive outcomes in children's functioning at home and school through improvements in resilience, confidence, aspirations and relationships.

Delivery experiences: Improvements in team coordination were facilitated by the project staff being brought under one coordinator since 2017. Having professionals from across different disciplines led to a rich understanding of the casework and allowed the team to share thoughts on progress and learning.

However, the project experienced a number of delivery challenges. The slow progress of initial recruitment and high staff turnover led to increased workloads for existing staff and limited opportunities for joint working or providing consistent support for young people. Resourcing issues were exacerbated when Back on Track extended the eligibility criteria in 2017/18 to a new group of young people - children on the verge of permanent exclusion. This further increased the team's workload and affected their ability to respond

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<sup>1</sup> Multivariate distance matching is a statistical technique that is used for identifying a comparison group of individuals or units according to a range of relevant characteristics.

to the needs of the Year 7-9 children recruited at the start of the school year, who were at risk of fixed-term exclusions.

The fact that the team was understaffed meant that Back on Track activities within schools were often limited to working with individuals rather than developing a whole school approach. Moreover, schools' awareness and buy-in to the project was affected by three factors: project staff had limited lead-in time to establish relationships with schools before the start of the school year; school policies were often at odds with Back on Track's approach; and external pressures, such as school funding and staffing issues.

According to project staff, family engagement in the programme was crucial for improving outcomes for individual children. Some parents, however, struggled to support their child's needs and education, often due to previous negative experiences with school.

## Leaving Care

Summary of impact: Although no statistically significant effects were found, the Comparative Interrupted Time-Series showed tentative signs of a positive change in care leaver outcomes in North Yorkshire. Both in terms of the proportion of care leavers in suitable accommodation and in EET, North Yorkshire's 2019 figures were higher than suggested by the baseline trends. Meanwhile, no positive deviations from the pre-intervention trajectories were observed in comparison LAs. However, more reliable conclusions on the impact of Leaving Care project can only be made after more time has passed since its introduction.

Qualitative interviews identified a broader range of outcomes for both care leavers and those supporting them. Care leavers reported feeling more confident and able to function independently as adults; a finding also supported by the project staff that worked with them. This included care leavers feeling better able to manage their SEMH needs and developing key life skills, such as budgeting. There were also early signs that businesses, educational institutions and, in particular, foster carers felt more willing and able to support care leavers because of the support given to them by the multidisciplinary team (the Opportunity Team – OT).

Delivery experiences: Key factors that helped delivery were a strong leadership team and effective joined-up working between the OT and the wider local authority. This joined-up approach helped to develop a shared way of working with care leavers. Integration was helped by an accessible referral process, joint case management between the OT and caseworkers and the OT sharing a physical space with the wider local authority.

Key delivery challenges included needing more OT staff to manage the volume of referrals and engaging some of the individuals and organisations that could potentially

support care leavers. For example, smaller businesses and other organisations that did not have the capacity or track record of working with care leavers.

## **Lessons and implications**

The qualitative interviews highlighted the delivery practices and systems that contributed to successful project outcomes. It was important to have enough lead-in time to recruit for specialist roles. There was encouraging practice where new teams were supported to join up with existing services and where there was strong leadership to drive the project. In addition, families, carers and organisations that supported young people (support networks) were more likely to do so if they were supported by the multidisciplinary team to understand young people's needs and how to address these. Finally, early intervention was key, before any problems that the children and young people faced became entrenched.

The support should also have four key features to best meet the needs of young people and their support networks. These were: (a) a holistic understanding of a young person's needs through involvement of a multidisciplinary team; (b) a person-centred approach involving the tailoring of support to the young person; (c) consistent and high intensity of practitioner support for the young person; and (d) improving the young person's relationships with their support networks.

# 1. Overview of the project

In December 2015, North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC) became one of seven local authorities designated by the Department for Education (DfE) as a Partner in Practice (PiP) authority. The PiP programme brings together professionals to share best practice and improve the children's social care system. As part of the PiP programme, the local authority extended its No Wrong Door<sup>2</sup> (NWD) programme to two additional groups:

- Back on Track SEMH (Social, Emotional and Mental Health) project addressed the pupils (Y7-79) with social, emotional and mental health issues at risk of school exclusions; and
- Leaving Care project provided support for care leavers aged between 17-25 in the transition to adulthood. This included help around training, education, housing and health provision.

The two projects were introduced to help address inequalities in outcomes experienced by young people in these circumstances by incorporating elements of the NWD model. Some of NWD's key components include having a multi-agency team trained in Signs of Safety and restorative and solution focused approaches, ensuring young people have a consistent relationship with a key worker and that their aspirations are at the forefront of practice (Lushey et al. 2017).

SEMH needs and exclusions were a designated priority for NYCC due to the increase in the number of Education, Health and Care needs assessment plans (EHCPs) since 2016, which has been greatest in the areas of communication and interaction (particularly Autism) and social, emotional and mental health (NYCC, 2018). In addition, there was also an increase in the proportion of the school population in North Yorkshire being fixed-period excluded at least once with an increase from 2.3% to 2.48% between 2016/17 and 2017/18 which is above the national average of 2.33% (NYCC, 2019). Similarly, the Leaving Care project was introduced to help address the inequalities experienced by care leavers, who are less likely to be involved in education, training or employment and are more vulnerable to social exclusion in later life. For example, the latest data from the Department for Education (2019) on looked after children in England shows that for 19 to 21-year olds, 39% of care leavers were NEET compared to around 12% of all young people aged 19 to 21 years.

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<sup>2</sup> NWD is an integrated service for young people in care, edging to or on the edge of care) providing a range of accommodation options, services and outreach support from health, education and the police. The NWD operates from 2 hubs in North Yorkshire: Scarborough (the east hub), and Harrogate (the west hub).

## Project aims and intended outcomes

Table 1 below summarises the aims and intended outcomes of the Back on Track and Leaving Care projects. The Theory of Change model for the projects is presented in Appendix 1.

**Table 1: Project aims and outcomes**

Project	Aims and project details	Intended outcomes
Back on Track	Overall goal: To enable young people to develop a sense of belonging to society; be more motivated to grasp opportunities and realise their potential to live “healthy and happy lives”; and reduce their dependency on statutory services.	<p>For pupils with SEMH needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduction in the number of sessions missed due to unauthorised absences and fixed-term exclusions.</li> <li>• Improved engagement at school and at home.</li> <li>• Improved resilience, confidence and emotional regulation.</li> <li>• Raising children’s aspirations and drive to reach their potential.</li> </ul> <p>For schools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Achieve timely intervention and referrals for early help and</li> <li>• Earlier access to therapeutic support.</li> <li>• Improved capacity and ability to meet SEMH needs of pupils.</li> </ul> <p>For families:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improve communication between the child and family.</li> <li>• Improve parents’ confidence in adopting and implementing strategies learned around giving the child a sense of belonging.</li> </ul>
	Changes to approach: The project initially worked with primary school children with patterns of fixed-term exclusion transitioning into secondary school (the ‘preventative arm’). There was a change in eligibility criteria to also include children on the verge of permanent exclusion (the ‘responsive arm’). Following a review, the responsive arm was discontinued, and the project returned to its original eligibility to work with children in Y7-Y9.	
	Size of cohort and staff: Initially the project was set up to work with 148 children. The 2017/2018 cohort included 78 children. The 2018/2019 cohort included 47 children. Fully staffed Back on Track team consists of 11 FTE but is currently under capacity.	
Leaving Care	Overall goal: To prepare care leavers for life with a view to: help them realise their potential (around accommodation, education, employment and health); increase their positive contribution to society; and reduce their dependency on statutory services.	<p>Increase in number of care leavers in suitable accommodation, as well as education, employment and training (EET); improved resilience and self-esteem to be able to manage their needs; and improved social networks through stronger:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informal support networks (family, carers and friends).</li> <li>• Formal support networks (businesses and educational institutions) being more “invested” in care leavers by providing more support to this group.</li> </ul>
	Size of cohort and staff: at any time, approximately 400 care leavers and children leaving care were able to access the support. The team was monitoring the outcomes for the cohort of 109 care leavers (99 of which were over 18). The fully staffed team consist of 14 FTE.	

## Project activities

The NWD extension projects were set up in 2016. The Leaving Care project started their direct work with care leavers in April 2017 and the Back on Track team started working with young people in schools in September 2017. The Back on Track project ran for two academic years. Following a review, the Back on Track project ended in July 2019 and the Leaving Care project was mainstreamed into the existing local authority service provision. The section below provides an overview of Back on Track and Leaving Care activities.

### Back on Track

Children eligible for Back on Track were provided with targeted therapeutic support coordinated by a dedicated key worker and a multidisciplinary team. The team consisted of the project coordinator, speech and language therapists, family practitioners, family school liaison workers, an educational psychologist, a clinical psychologist and an occupational therapist. The support offered by the team was tailored to the young person and focused on helping them better manage their SEMH needs and secure greater stability at school and home.

Back on Track also focused on shaping a young person's context by implementing a whole family approach and coaching families to better support the young person. Within schools, the project staff worked with specific 'school champions' (who acted as the project's single point of contact) and school staff to build their capacity to better identify and support young people with SEMH needs. As outlined in the Theory of Change, this support intended to help young people in the following ways:

- Strengthen relationships. Focusing on building relationships and creating a strong support network for children with SEMH needs to allow the young people to feel more stable, secure and able to develop relationships at school and home.
- Build aspirations through validation. Providing children and families with the opportunity to be listened to, especially as families may have been moved between different services in the past and thus not have received consistent support.
- Establish connections between a child's home and school environment. Bringing families and schools together to foster a positive and transparent relationship. Enabling families to feel able to support their child to engage in education and advocate for them.

## Leaving Care

The Leaving Care project offered enhanced support for care leavers provided by a multidisciplinary team (the Opportunities Team - OT) who worked in collaboration with the dedicated NYCC Leaving Care caseworker team. The OT consisted of a number of specialised staff including an OT Manager, senior caseworker, Opportunity Brokers, an Opportunity and Accommodation Manager, speech and language therapists, Life Coaches (psychologists), a Staying Put Coordinator (working with foster carers and young people) and the Family Group Conference Coordinator.

The OT's activities included facilitating opportunities related to accommodation, training and employment; helping care leavers identify and restore connections with family and friends (for example, through the Family Group Conferencing model); supporting care leavers to help manage their social, emotional and mental health needs; and helping care leavers to 'stay put' in their foster home or to develop the practical and emotional skills needed to live independently. As outlined in the Theory of Change (Appendix 1), this support intended to help young people in the following ways:

- Building identity and aspirations through validation. Helping care leavers to feel positive about their identity as a care leaver and develop their aspirations and sense of what they can accomplish.
- Building confidence, resilience and skills to function independently. Helping care leavers to manage their emotional and mental health and develop key life skills to be able to function as an independent adult.
- Supporting care leavers to form and maintain relationships. The OT and caseworkers doing this by modelling a supportive relationship for the young person.

Leaving Care also focused on shaping a young person's context by working with the formal (businesses and educational institutions) and informal support networks (such as parents and carers) available to young people. This was done with a view to improving their awareness of the needs of care leavers and their willingness and ability to invest in care leavers.

## 2. Overview of the evaluation

### Evaluation questions

The evaluation addressed five key questions:

- Q1. What impact have the NWD projects had for children with social, emotional and mental health issues and for care leavers?
- Q2. What factors have influenced the implementation of the NWD projects?
- Q3. What are the barriers and facilitators to the effectiveness of the NWD projects?
- Q4. How do the costs and cost savings of implementing the NWD projects compare with 'business as usual'?
- Q5. What is the cost effectiveness of the NWD projects compared with 'business as usual'?

### Evaluation methods

The evaluation included a process, impact and economic evaluation. There were 5 components, outlined in Table 2 below. A more detailed discussion of the methods can be found in Appendices 2 through to 5.

In line with the accepted practice of quasi-experimental evaluations, the impact analysis of NWD projects focused on key measurable outcomes for young people. For Back on Track, impact analysis looked at unauthorised absences and fixed exclusions. For Leaving Care, the impact analysis looked at the proportion of care leavers in suitable accommodation and in EET. The process evaluation involved qualitative interviews. These were one-off encounters for the majority of participants except for 4 key strategic staff in both projects, who were interviewed at different time points. In addition to understanding the quantitative impacts, the process evaluation can help explain the achieved outcomes as well as capture any broader outcomes or changes resulting from projects.



**Table 2: Evaluation methods**

<b>Stage</b>	<b>Questions addressed</b>	<b>Methods used</b>
Scoping stage (June - July 2018)	Setting up the evaluation: Evaluation team familiarisation with the project, refining the Theory of Change and exploring the data needed for the impact evaluation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Familiarisation interviews with 4 strategic staff responsible for setting the direction of the project and 4 staff coordinating delivery</li> <li>Theory of Change workshops with each project</li> <li>Data scoping discussions between NatCen's impact evaluation lead and NWD data manager</li> </ul>
Formative process evaluation (Oct 2018)	Q2 and Q3: Recording the implementation of the project to enable ongoing lessons to be fed into the development process.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Depth interviews with coordinating and delivery staff (5 coordinating and 5 operational leads)</li> </ul>
Summative process evaluation (May - Aug 2019)	Q2 and Q3, but also touched on Q1: Exploring the progress and barriers and facilitators to delivery; as well as exploring both intended and unintended perceived outcomes.	<p>A total of 39 depth interviews with staff and recipients of both NWD projects</p> <p>Back on Track – 16 interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic and delivery staff – 7 interviews</li> <li>School staff – 3 interviews</li> <li>Pupils and parents– 6 interviews</li> </ul> <p>Leaving Care - 23 interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic and delivery staff– 13 interviews</li> <li>Partner organisations (businesses and educational institutions) – 4 interviews</li> <li>Care leavers – 6 interviews</li> </ul>
Impact evaluation (Oct - Dec 2019)	Q1: Evaluating the impact of the Back on Track and Leaving Care projects.	<p>Multivariate Distance Matching (MDM)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Outcomes of SEMH pupils who benefited from the project in 2017/2018 academic year compared with the outcomes of similar pupils prior to the project. Analysis of the number of sessions missed due to unauthorised absences and fixed-term exclusions.</li> </ul>
		<p>Comparative Interrupted Time-Series (CITS)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comparing the differences between predicted (modelled) and actual (observed) outcomes in NY and the group of comparison local authorities in 2019. Analysis of the percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation and Education, Employment or Training (EET).</li> </ul>
Economic evaluation (Feb 2020)	Q4 and Q5: Estimating the net additional savings to the state generated by each pound invested in the North Yorkshire NWD projects.	<p>Cost-benefit analysis (CBA)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Bespoke tool used to generate return on investment estimates for each project of the NWD project.</li> </ul>

## Changes to evaluation methods

Our approach was designed to be informed by early scoping work and to be responsive to accommodate the real-world practicalities of undertaking the evaluation. The changes made in response to these factors are described below.

### Impact evaluation

Back on Track: In the original proposal, 2 alternative approaches for assessing the impact of Back on Track were suggested. The first option involved comparing the outcomes of pupils receiving the Back on Track support (the 'participant' group) with the outcomes of pupils from a comparable local authority (statistical neighbour). However, this option was deemed unfeasible as the baseline data was incomplete at both local authority and individual levels. The evaluators therefore decided to focus on the second option, which entailed drawing the comparison sample from the NYCC area. The outcomes of SEMH pupils who benefited from the project in 2017/2018 academic year were therefore compared with the outcomes of similar pupils in North Yorkshire prior to the project.

### Process evaluation

Timing of formative data collection: The original proposal planned to collect limited evaluative data (6 interviews with key staff) at the end of each of the first 3 years of the project. However, given that the evaluation was commissioned later than anticipated (in 2018, rather than 2017) and to meet DfE's requirement to produce a report in March 2020, it was agreed to complete a single formative evaluation in 2018 involving interviews with 10 staff.

Mainstage data collection: The original proposal envisaged undertaking 80 data collection encounters (interviews or focus groups); in practice, 38 depth interviews were conducted. There were two main reasons for this: firstly, it was possible to achieve diversity in the staff sample with fewer number of interviews than anticipated. Secondly, there were challenges recruiting from recipient groups across both projects, including parents, carers, pupils and care leavers (discussed in the Limitations section).

## Limitations of the evaluation

### Process evaluation

Engaging enough and a diverse range of young people and their parents and carers was a key limitation for evaluating both projects. This was because of project circumstances and the nature of the recipient groups. For Back on Track, there were fewer young

people than anticipated for whom data was available in the 2018/2019 academic year (47 as opposed to 148 originally planned). This made recruitment for the qualitative interviews challenging, as the study needed to recruit a high proportion of the eligible population. For Leaving Care, the study found it difficult to engage care leavers in the research; though the reasons are not clear.<sup>3</sup>

For these reasons, the study had to rely on young people and their families or carers who had opted into the study through gatekeepers, such as caseworkers. Although this approach helped to secure the views of these participant groups, it may have limited the range of participants in the study, and hence the diversity of views. This includes the possibility that only participants who were most engaged with or had the strongest views on the project participated in the study.

The study found similar challenges engaging external organisations, such as schools and businesses for both projects. Again, the reasons are not clear, but it may reflect similar challenges experienced by both projects in engaging busy organisations. This meant that the diversity of views among the organisations interviewed might be limited, as those more engaged or holding stronger views on the programme may be more likely to opt in.

## **Impact evaluation**

The main limitation of the Back on Track impact evaluation was project specific and not related to the evaluation design. There were 47 Back on Track pupils for whom all relevant data were available. The small sample size reduced the chances of obtaining statistically significant findings and had a negative effect on the reliability of impact estimates. Furthermore, while some Back on Track pupils started receiving support at the beginning of the 2017/2018 academic year, others were referred to the project at a later stage. Finally, the introduction of 'responsive' arm made it harder for the project to achieve its desired outcomes as the project activities were not designed for pupils who were already in crisis.

The main limitation of the impact evaluation of Leaving Care is related to the timeline of this evaluation and low availability of post-intervention outcome data. At the time of reporting, the outcome figures were published for only one post-intervention year (2019). While Comparative Interrupted Time-Series (CITS) requires considering the difference in post-intervention outcome trends between the intervention and comparison groups, data limitations made this impossible in this instance. Estimating the impact using data from only one post-intervention year increases the risk of accidental or spurious findings.

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<sup>3</sup> Project staff reported similar challenges engaging care leavers with other research because of a range of personal reasons, such as confidence and SEMH issues (see Chapter 3).

Therefore, the findings presented in this report are tentative and preliminary. Provided that the Leaving Care project will be carried on in the foreseeable future, the same evaluation approach could be used to provide a stronger and more reliable impact estimate in five years' time.

Another limitation of the Leaving Care impact analysis is related to the evaluation design and the type of data used. As indicated in the evaluation methods section, local authority-level data on this group were used to assess the impact of the project. These data were limited to care leavers that fall into the age bracket of 19 to 21<sup>4</sup>. Two limitations directly follow from this: (1) the analysis provided here does not account for the care leavers who were younger than 19 or older than 21; (2) while all care leavers in North Yorkshire were eligible for the integrated support provided under Leaving Care, it is highly unlikely that all of them received the same amount of support. Therefore, the evaluation estimated the impact of offering the NWD support to care leavers rather than the impact of receiving it. This is considered methodologically acceptable given that the Leaving Care project was aimed at the whole population of care leavers in North Yorkshire.

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<sup>4</sup> Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT) defines 'care leavers' as young people whose 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup> or 21<sup>st</sup> birthday falls in the year for which a particular statistic is reported.

### 3. Key findings

- **Back on Track** – The impact evaluation found no evidence that the project had a positive impact on pupil absences and exclusions in the intervention group. However, qualitative interviews with staff, young people, parents and carers pointed to a wider range of perceived outcomes, particularly improvements in how children functioned at home and school.
- **Leaving Care** – The impact evaluation indicated that there were tentative signs of an increase in the proportion of care leavers in suitable accommodation and in Education, Employment and Training (EET). However, this should be treated with caution due to limitations in the available data. Qualitative interviews with staff, young people and the formal and informal support networks available to young people (such as employers) pointed to a range of other perceived outcomes. These focused on perceived improvements on care leavers' wellbeing, such as being able to function as independent adults.

Where positive outcomes were observed across both projects, staff and young people attributed this to one or more of four features of the support. These included a holistic understanding of the young person's need facilitated by a multidisciplinary team, person-centred support tailored to the young person, consistent and high intensity support from case or key workers, and systemic practice involving the formal and informal support networks available to young people. For Leaving Care, an additional feature was promoting a positive identity as a care leaver.

Across both projects, four factors affected delivery (i) project scope, (ii) leadership and coordination, (iii) resourcing and (iv) team working.

This chapter draws on the evidence from the impact evaluation (Multivariate Distance Matching and Comparative Interrupted Time-Series) and the qualitative process evaluation interviews to identify the range of perceived outcomes and the reasons underpinning these.

In explaining outcomes, this chapter outlines the four key features of the support that were particularly important in meeting the needs of young people. These features were anticipated to be important by the Theory of Change for each project (Appendix 1) and so were a part of the project design, and included:

- A holistic understanding of a young person's needs. That is, understanding the needs of the young person as whole and how these overlapped, rather than a focus on specific needs (for example, their performance at school) in isolation. This

often involved drawing on the expertise of a range of practitioners who were able to recognise these layered needs, in the context of multidisciplinary team working.

- A person-centred approach involving tailored support based on an understanding of these holistic needs.
- Consistent and high intensity support for the young person. This often involved the case or key worker providing close and intensive support to the young person, sometimes alongside a member of the multidisciplinary team.
- Systemic practice. That is, improving the young person's relationship with their support networks, such as families and more formal networks, such as employers.

This chapter also summarises the delivery factors that affected whether these practice features were realised. These were related to project scope, leadership and coordination, resourcing and team working.

## Back on Track

### Young people

#### Observed outcomes

The observed outcomes of Back on Track project were measured by analysing data on unauthorised absences and sessions missed due to fixed term exclusions. This was complemented by qualitative interviews which explored the project's wider outcomes – perceived changes to children's wellbeing and functioning at home and school (see Theory of Change in Appendix 1).

The impact evaluation found no evidence that Back on Track had a positive impact on unauthorised absences and sessions missed due to fixed exclusions for the 47 pupils with the available data. Both impact estimates show a small negative effect. The SEMH pupils who participated in the Back on Track project in the 2017/2018 academic year had 13.7 unauthorised absences<sup>5</sup> more in the following academic year than they would have had without the project. Also, Back on Track participants missed 1.4 more sessions due to fixed exclusions in the following academic year than they would have missed in the

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<sup>5</sup> School census variable on total unauthorised absences was used, defined as a number of sessions missed due to unauthorised absence during the academic year. All maintained schools are required to provide two possible sessions per day, morning and afternoon, to all pupils. Schools must meet for at least 380 sessions or 190 days during any school year to educate their pupils (Department for Education, *A guide for absence statistics*. Available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/787314/Guide\\_to\\_absence\\_statistics\\_21032019.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/787314/Guide_to_absence_statistics_21032019.pdf)).

absence of the project. However, these results are not statistically significant. This means that the statistical evidence is not sufficient to conclude that the true impact is non-zero.

The main findings are provided in Table 3 below:

**Table 3: Estimated impact for Back on Track pupils**

<b>Outcome (2018/2019 academic year)</b>	<b>Impact estimate (difference between the intervention and comparison groups)</b>	<b>Average outcome for the intervention/comparison groups</b>	<b>Intervention/comparison pupils</b>	<b>Statistical significance</b>	<b>Confidence interval: lower bound</b>	<b>Confidence interval: upper bound</b>
<b>The number of unauthorised absences<sup>6</sup></b>	13.7	37.3/23.6	47/470	0.128	-3.94	31.37
<b>The number of sessions missed due to fixed exclusions</b>	1.4	5.4/4	47/188	0.295	-1.22	4.03

Post-matching diagnostics showed that intervention and matched comparison pupils were similar according to all characteristics included in the impact evaluation – school year, gender, Free School Meals (FSM) status, Special Educational Needs (SEN) status and pre-intervention absences and exclusions. However, certain important pupil characteristics could not be captured (e.g. psychological wellbeing, family problems, substance misuse). It is therefore possible that the unobserved differences between the Back on Track pupils and the matched comparison group affected the results of this analysis.

The quantitative data also indicate that a significant proportion of the Back on Track pupils did not start receiving the project’s support in the beginning of the 2017/2018 academic year. The short support period may account for the lack of positive impact on absences and exclusions.

The qualitative interviews explored the project’s wider outcomes in relation to children’s social and emotional needs. The project staff valued that the evaluation looked at measures beyond quantitative data on exclusions, as they noted the risk of missing other positive changes which the project intended to achieve.

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<sup>6</sup> In the last few years, there has been an overall upward trend in the average number of unauthorised absences in North Yorkshire. Since pupils were matched across years, the comparison group’s outcomes were adjusted to take into account this overall trend. For more details on this procedure, see Appendix 2.

Young people who took part in qualitative interviews reported positive changes to their wellbeing as a result of sessions with their key worker. This included feeling happier and more open to talking about their emotions. Children also reported being more willing to socialise with their peers or siblings and enjoying school more, completing assignments on time or missing fewer classes.

It just brightens my day up more. I feel like my head isn't as clouded and I can think more. (About being able to speak about their emotions) – *Young person*

These observed changes were mirrored in the interviews with parents and carers who observed a range of positive outcomes on their children's wellbeing as a result of the Back on Track support.<sup>7</sup> They provided examples of how project staff equipped their children with strategies to better manage their emotions, improved how they communicated at home and helped reduce their anxiety towards school.

There's no bad marks for behaviour at all really, so it's all improved. He's trying harder in lessons, and all the teachers have said he's a much nicer child to be around now! I think that's definitely only been since Back on Track's got involved. – *Parent*

While parents praised project staff for the progress that had been made in improving their child's relationships in school and at home, they acknowledged that it was not a quick fix as children encountered some difficulties in sustaining it.

## **Understanding outcomes for young people**

The Back on Track model, as described in the project Theory of Change (Appendix 1), details how the support provided was intended to lead to positive outcomes for the children in the project. It included a person-centred approach, a consistent and high intensity of practitioner support and a systemic model of support by involving the family and school. The section describes how these features were realised and the extent to which they shaped the children's outcomes.

### **Person-centred support**

Back on Track Staff attributed the positive progress with individual children to the person-centred approach taken by the project. This involved tailoring the support to meet the individual needs of the child (for example, running sessions in the setting preferred by the child – at home or in school) and using a strengths-based approach. An important part of

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<sup>7</sup> As described in the limitation section of the evaluation, parents who were more engaged in Back on Track were more likely to opt-in for the interviews. As a result, perspectives of families who were less aware of Back on Track support have not been captured.



this was the use of the Thrive Approach<sup>8</sup> - a model which helps identify a child's emotional needs and the practical strategies to meet them.

Back on Track staff observed, however, that their approach had more success among some groups of children. During early implementation, the project's target group of pupils was expanded to an additional group of children on the verge of permanent exclusion. This group was added to those children who already experienced fixed-term exclusions. Staff felt that the Back on Track delivery model worked less well with this additional group, as the therapy model was based on supporting children before they reach a crisis point.

The addition of new cases limited the time that staff could spend with individual children and hindered the amount of progress with the original 'preventative' arm. When the eligibility criteria returned to its original scope and the 'responsive arm' closed, staff were able to focus on working with the intended target group and some more progress with them as a result.

### **Consistent and high intensity of practitioner support**

The key worker was the point of contact for the family and coordinated the support. Children and their families saw the key worker as someone they could trust and who would listen to them. Receiving consistent support from the key worker was especially important for those families who had negative experiences of being moved between different services in the past.

School staff confirmed that children who received consistent, intensive support from the Back on Track team felt happier and had an improved sense of self-esteem. There was, however, a contrasting view in schools where the support was not delivered as consistently or frequently as intended. In those schools, staff observed that children's exclusions continued despite the support and their self-esteem was undermined when Back on Track staff cancelled or could not attend planned meetings. These schools expressed the view that the limited time the Back on Track team spent at schools was not sufficient to prevent exclusions or improve attendance due to the complexity of the issues faced by pupils. School staff were aware that at times the lack of consistency of support was due to staff shortages in the project team.

### **Systemic practice**

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.thriveapproach.com/>

Staff framed systemic practice in terms of the importance of addressing the relationship between the child, school and family in order to meet young people's social and emotional needs.

Project staff and parents described the relationships between families and schools as lacking in trust because of exclusions or limited communication between schools and parents in the past. Parents described how their previous contact with schools was often limited to parents' evenings or calls from schools about absences and exclusions.

To address this, Back on Track staff brought families and schools together to foster a positive and transparent relationship. The project staff arranged meetings between schools and families which focused on communication and enabled school staff and parents to understand one another's perspectives. Project staff also invited other agencies to the meetings, including social work, to build a more holistic picture of the child's existing support and how it can be improved.

Then you're changing all of it. You're not just changing a tiny part. –  
*Delivery Staff*

Although developing these relationships between the child, school and family was seen to be important by staff, they acknowledged that it rested on how engaged the family and school were in this process. This, in their view, created a stronger basis for change for the child. However, they observed that even where there was willingness, some parents struggled to support their child's needs, often due to a culture of not accessing education and previous bad experiences with the school. This view was also expressed by school staff who felt that impacts on the child were limited if the family was not engaged.

## **Informal networks – parents and carers**

### **Observed outcomes for parents and carers**

Back on Track aimed to work with parents and carers to improve knowledge of their child's needs and open channels of communication between family members. Staff emphasised that often family relationships could be poor and addressing this is an important part of being able to change the bigger picture.

Staff reported that as a result of their work with families, parents were more knowledgeable about their children's SEMH needs and more confident in using appropriate strategies consistently to help them (such as encouragement to attend school). Parents reported that the educational psychologist played an important role in providing them with this information and helping to change the way their child responds to everyday situations and emotions.

As a result of the support, project staff and parents also described seeing improvements in the wellbeing of the whole family. This included parents and carers reporting:

- Improvements in relationships between family members as a result of their child being better able to manage their emotions and communicate. In turn, this meant parents felt happier and less stressed about their child's situation.
- Improvements to their wellbeing. For example, parents reported re-joining activities, such as going to church or volunteering, which they previously enjoyed and had to pause as a result of problems with attendance at school.
- Being more aware of support. The Back on Track project played a role in signposting parents to support that they were previously unaware of. For example, this included help with accessing support they were eligible for, such as financial support and specialist support at college.

### **Understanding outcomes for parents and carers**

Similar to working with children, staff adopted a strengths-based or solution focused approach when working with parents and carers which included setting manageable goals. As mentioned in the previous section, the success of engaging with families depended on their willingness to engage with Back on Track staff. In some cases, Back on Track staff had very limited contact with the family and only focused on the direct work with the children. This occurred where delivery staff felt it was more appropriate to work with the child directly and did not perceive whole family work to be beneficial or necessary.

### **Formal networks - schools**

#### **Observed outcomes for schools**

One of the intended outcomes of Back on Track support was to change schools' approach towards children with SEMH needs. Staff felt that it was important to improve schools' understanding of complex social, emotional and mental health needs so that they could better support pupils rather than use punishments and exclusions. The project used a two-fold approach to achieve this: introducing the NWD principles to schools through collective staff training and one-to-one work with school staff to work together to address the needs of pupils. School staff reported some examples of joint meetings with Back on Track staff to discuss the needs of the child. In particular, schools praised the input of the educational psychologist, for example by providing feedback for the education, health and care plan reports. Despite some positive cooperation, project and school staff felt that there was limited progress in achieving wider impacts in schools, the reasons for which are explained below.

## **Understanding outcomes for schools**

Project and school staff outlined multiple factors explaining the limited progress for this strand of work – some of which relate to the Back on Track approach to working with schools and others to the schools' internal culture, outlined below.

### **Back on Track's initial approach to working with schools**

The project staff reflected that Back on Track initially employed a 'bottom up' rather than 'top down' approach – focusing on direct work with individual pupils and school staff rather than developing a more strategic whole-school approach. In their view, there was a lack of initial groundwork in schools to build understanding around SEMH needs and the principles behind the work of the Back on Track team. As a result, staff and schools pointed out that awareness of the project amongst school staff was low, which affected their levels of engagement and buy-in. It was suggested that establishing relationships with senior management in schools and organising training sessions with staff about project principles at the start of academic year would have helped to address these issues.

### **The visibility of Back in Track staff in school**

School and project staff reported that Back on Track's work in schools was predominantly carried out with individual pupils rather than on a whole-school basis. This was due to project staff working across multiple schools and locations, which limited how much time they could spend in any individual school. This impacted Back in Track staff's ability to build relationships with schools and individual staff. This created communication challenges and there were occasions when teachers were not notified that a Back on Track key worker was coming in or not aware of what the support involved.

In response to these issues, staff adapted their approach and improved communication which schools said they appreciated. One example of this was establishing a single point of contact between the school and the Back on Track team.

Project staff suggested that being based in schools would have helped develop closer relationships with schools. They also suggested that it might have been beneficial to initially target a smaller selected group of schools who are already engaging in best practices around SEMH needs, and then gradually instil change amongst schools which are harder to engage.

### **Schools' level of engagement with the Back on Track activities**

Back on Track staff described some schools as reluctant to engage with the training provided by the multidisciplinary team or defensive of their own approaches used around exclusions. In schools which were more involved, project staff observed some signs of

positive change in the school's approach to SEMH pupils, such as efforts to better understand individual pupils' needs.

### **Schools' culture and context**

In some schools, existing school policies limited their flexibility to change and take on board new ways of working. For example, some schools had agreed to have a more considered approach to the exclusions of SEMH pupils, but this sometimes conflicted with internal school exclusion policies and so was not always followed.

Staff also felt that some schools wanted to take more immediate action rather than adopt an approach which required more sustained work over a longer period. Similarly, it was also recognised that schools faced many pressures, including funding, staffing or adhering to inspection frameworks, which could affect their response to receiving external support. Staff also reported that some schools where SEMH needs were high lacked the leadership and resources needed to implement changes.

### **Cross-cutting delivery factors – Back on Track**

This section brings together and summarises the delivery factors which cut across the project's work with both young people and their support networks. These factors largely relate to the project's design and functioning of this team.

#### **Scope and coverage**

The lack of stability in the project's scope (introduction of the additional 'responsive' arm discussed earlier) was viewed by staff as a key challenge to delivering activities as intended. The team's geographical spread also slowed down the progress of the activities. The project worked with schools across the local authority, which meant they spent a substantial amount of time travelling between appointments. It also limited how responsive and flexible staff could be to the ongoing needs of the children. For example, schools reported that their Back on Track worker could not come in to support a child at short notice.

#### **Coordination**

Initially, delivery was divided into two regions, with each region having a different project coordinator. This model had the advantage of coordinators managing smaller teams; however, there was also the view that this affected joined up working and learning across the two teams, who would tend to work separately and focus on their own area. However, since September 2017, the project team were brought together under one coordinator. Staff commented that this has led to improvements in communication, information sharing and team working. Nevertheless, when the two sides of the county merged, the

differences in ways of working and expectations became clear, highlighting the importance of having an integrated approach to coordination from the beginning.

## Resourcing

Project staff responsible for coordinating Back on Track identified difficulties around recruitment and retention of the team as key challenges for the project. The initial recruitment progressed slower than anticipated because the project required skilled candidates for highly specialised roles, such as occupational therapists. This was attributed by staff in coordinating roles to the unique nature of the positions, based in school and home environments rather than traditional clinical settings.

The issue of slow recruitment was compounded by a high level of staff turnover. Delivery staff described that the team was understaffed throughout the duration of the project, which was exacerbated by the recruitment freeze across the local authority in the second year of the project. This meant that some of the posts, such as the Family Liaison Worker for the West of the county were not filled.

Having a small team limited the project's capacity to make adaptations to the team's roles and responsibilities. From the start of the project, the team worked in a dual role as key workers (which involved building a relationship with a child and their family and being their first point of contact) and as a specialist within the team (such as a speech and language therapist). There was a view that this dual role created pressures for workloads within the team, with specialists having to juggle therapy responsibilities in addition to their key worker roles. Following a review, there was an intention to restructure the team to allow for more therapy-based work. This change, however, was not implemented because of the resourcing limitations.

## Team working

Project staff acknowledged how having professionals from across different disciplines brought a rich understanding of the casework. Multidisciplinary team meetings were valued by staff as an opportunity to come together as a team and share thoughts on progress and learning.

However, given the team's heavy workloads there were limited opportunities for joint working. This issue became even more apparent when the team became smaller due to staff leaving and not being replaced.

...as we became a smaller and smaller team people became far more isolated in that because they tended to work individually rather than as part of a multiagency team around the child, through necessity. – *Delivery Staff*

The fact that the team was based in different offices across the county also had implications for communication and multidisciplinary case management, as it limited opportunities for informal conversations or case discussions in person.

## Cost Benefit Analysis

Until the end of February 2020, the following overall (including the set-up) costs were incurred by the Back on Track project:

**Table 4: Costs of the Back on Track project**

2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	Total
319,989	486,488	396,936	1,203,413

The economic evaluation of Back on Track has considered two sets of outcome indicators. The first set contains the two indicators covered by the impact assessment. The impact evaluation found no evidence that the Back on Track project has resulted in a positive impact on unauthorised absences or exclusions. As such, the economic evaluation concluded that Back on Track has generated no fiscal savings to the state via these indicators. In short, if no impact has been observed, then it is inappropriate to attribute any fiscal benefits to the intervention.

The second group of indicators were identified in the course of the discussions with NYCC in March 2019. These additional outcomes were seen as being related to the project’s theory of change and were therefore expected to be positively affected by the intervention<sup>9</sup>. For each of these indicators, cohort-level data were made available to the evaluators by NYCC which showed the number of young people supported by Back on Track that were:

- Known to the youth justice system;
- Classified as a Child in Need;
- On a Child Protection Plan;
- In a high cost placement.

The data covered three years: 2016/17 (a pre-intervention or baseline year), 2017/18 and 2018/19, during which Back on Track was operational. The data were also separated into a Year One cohort (2017/2018) and a Year Two cohort (2018/2019). A simple pre- and post- comparison was conducted for the 4 indicators above.

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<sup>9</sup> These additional outcome measures were not included in the impact evaluation due to data limitations.

Against each of the 4 indicators, and in both cohorts, the number of young people was higher in 2018/19 than it was in 2016/17. For example, more of the young people supported by Back on Track were in a high cost placement in 2018/19 than in 2016/17, more had become known to the youth justice system and more had become classed as a Child in Need.

In absolute terms, the numbers were small: in each cohort, there were typically fewer than 10 young people in any given category in each year, and almost without exception there were fewer than 20. Nonetheless, some of the proportionate increases were large. For example, 2 of the young people in the Year One cohort were in a high cost placement in 2016/17, but this rose to 10 young people in 2017/18 and to 19 young people in 2018/19. Two of the Year One cohort were known to the youth justice system in 2016/17, whereas in 2018/19 this had risen to 6 young people.

Using the data described above, the evaluators were unable to attribute fiscal savings to Back on Track via interactions with the youth justice system, Child in Need numbers, Child Protection Plans or high cost placements. The absence of a comparison group for these indicators makes it difficult to gauge the preventative effect of Back on Track. In other words, it could be that the increases described above would have been larger still were it not for the intervention. However, there is little evidence to support such a claim, either through the impact assessment or the qualitative research undertaken for the evaluation. It is more likely that the rise in the number of young people against these 4 indicators reflects the importance of a 'responsive' arm of the Back on Track project, which was focused on the young people who were already in crisis. Growing numbers of BoT pupils who were known to the youth justice system or were in a high cost placement show that the project was increasingly oriented towards helping the young people who were most in need.

The conclusion, as with the first set of indicators, is therefore that there are no grounds for attributing fiscal savings to Back on Track via interactions with the youth justice system, Child in Need numbers, Child Protection Plans or high cost placements.



# Leaving Care

## Young people

### Observed outcomes

The key outcomes measured by the Leaving Care impact evaluation focused on the proportion of care leavers in suitable accommodation and in Employment, Education or Training (EET) as a result of the project. As with Back on Track, this was complimented by qualitative interviews which explored the project's wider outcomes, particularly on the care leavers' general wellbeing.

The impact evaluation indicated that there were tentative signs of an increase in the proportion of care leavers in suitable accommodation and in EET when compared to similar local authorities. The CITS analysis showed that in 2019, the proportion of care leavers in suitable accommodation in North Yorkshire was 7.2 percentage points larger than it would have been if the project had not been introduced. Furthermore, in the same year, the share of care leavers in EET was 7.1 percentage points larger compared to the counterfactual scenario.<sup>10</sup> However, these results were not statistically significant. This means that the statistical evidence was not strong enough to conclude that Leaving Care had a positive impact on the 2 outcome measures included in the evaluation.

**Table 5: Estimated impact of Leaving Care project on care leavers**

Outcome	Impact estimate	Statistical significance	Confidence interval: lower bound	Confidence interval: upper bound
Percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation	7.2 p.p.	0.234	-4.81	19.21
Percentage of care leavers in EET	7.1 p.p.	0.318	-6.9	21

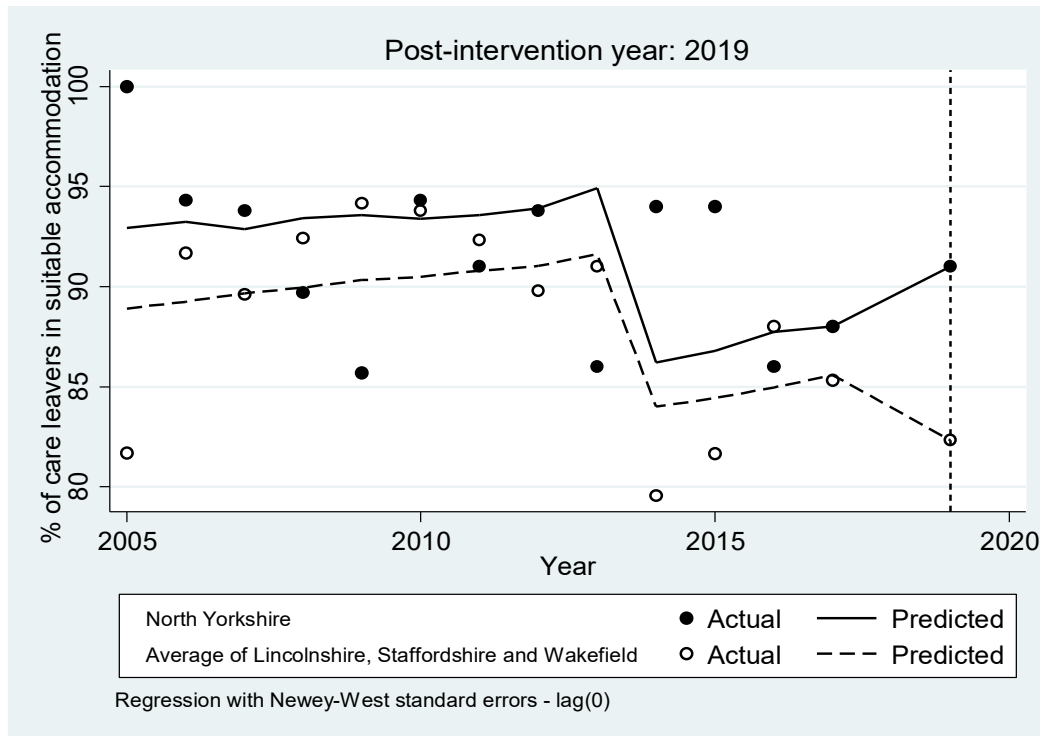
As shown in the graphs below, the pre-intervention trajectories of the predicted (modelled) values of both outcome variables were very similar in North Yorkshire and comparison local authorities.<sup>11</sup> The fact that the differences in the predicted outcomes remained very similar throughout the whole pre-intervention period shows that comparison local authorities are a good counterfactual for North Yorkshire. For both outcome variables, North Yorkshire registered a positive deviation from the predicted

<sup>10</sup> While the Leaving Care project offered support for young people from the age of 17 to 25, both indicators used in the impact evaluation pertained only to those care leavers who had their 19th, 20th or 21st birthday in the relevant year. Therefore, the impact evaluation did not cover the whole population of supported care leavers.

<sup>11</sup> As indicated in the Evaluation methods section, the time trajectories of the outcome variables were modelled according to their baseline level and trends and the key socioeconomic covariate – employment rate. The sudden fall in the values of both outcome indicators in 2014 reflects a change in the way these measures were calculated. The change in methodology was also factored in in the CITS analysis.

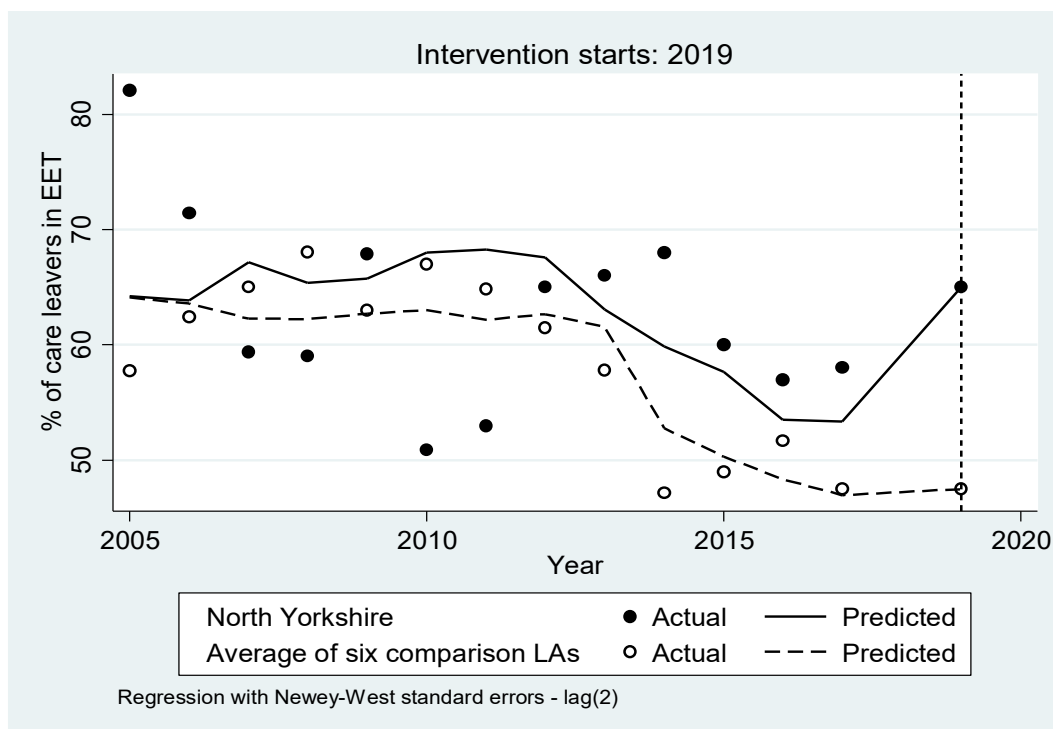
trend in 2019. Meanwhile, the comparison local authorities either did not show a marked change from the modelled trend (percentage of care leavers in EET) or were worse than predicted (percentage of care leavers in suitable accommodation). In the graphs below, this is illustrated by divergent trajectories of solid and dashed lines in 2019.

**Figure 1: Comparison of NYCC and average of comparison local authorities (% of care leavers in suitable accommodation)<sup>12</sup>**



<sup>12</sup> The dots refer to the actual data; the lines refer to modelled trends. The graph shows a rise in NY curve in 2019 (the solid line), meaning that the proportion of care leavers in suitable accommodation was higher than predicted by the baseline trend. Meanwhile, the data on comparison LAs shows a negative deviation from the baseline trend in 2019.

**Figure 2: Comparison of NYCC and average of comparison LAs (% of care leavers in EET)**



However, the positive change observed in North Yorkshire in 2019 should be treated with caution for 2 main reasons. Firstly, the analysis presented here generated the impact estimates from one post-intervention year. When only one time point is considered, the possibility of obtaining spurious findings increases. Secondly, the predicted outcome values (lines in the graphs above) do not offer a good representation of the actual data. Crucially, the discrepancy between the predicted and actual outcomes in the pre-intervention period had a negative effect on the model’s capacity to predict the 2019 outcomes, and hence decreased the reliability of the counterfactual. High fluctuations in the observed outcomes was one of the key reasons why the findings were not statistically significant.

Insights from qualitative interviews provide additional information on the types of EET opportunities that young people benefited from.<sup>13</sup> Staff and care leavers talked about vocational training, such as apprenticeships, to helping young people start or continue with further or higher education. Similarly, employment opportunities mentioned ranged from volunteering and temporary work placements to help care leavers gain experiences and skills, to permanent employment. It was also clear from the interviews with care leavers and staff that the project helped young people to develop their career aspirations – an outcome not captured by the impact evaluation.

<sup>13</sup> As described in the limitation section of the evaluation, care leavers who were more engaged in Leaving Care project were more likely to opt-in for the interviews. As a result, perspectives of young people who may not have benefitted may not have been captured.

Another observed outcome mentioned by both staff and care leavers was accommodation stability. They reported that the project helped care leavers source temporary and permanent accommodation, such as sourcing new accommodation opportunities in the private sector or exploring how the young person could stay put with current foster carers post-18.

Project staff provided additional insights into the range of individuals that benefitted from project activities. It was acknowledged that not all young people started from the same place and there were differences in their confidence, motivation, level of ability and life circumstances. This included placement stability and whether they had additional social, emotional or mental health issues. For example, OT staff mentioned care leavers not attending job interviews or switching off from the family group conferencing because they became “bored” of the process. However, there was also the view among staff that regardless of where the young person was, the tailored support offered by the project helped to push them a little closer to thinking about EET, even if it was to support them to think about their aspirations.

Staff and young people also described perceived improvements in wellbeing not captured by the impact evaluation, mirroring the Theory of Change intended responses discussed in Chapter 1. These included care leavers feeling more confident and able to function as independent adults as a result of developing key life skills, such as budgeting, and being more aware of and able to manage their SEMH needs.

### **Understanding outcomes**

In explaining the range of outcomes, staff and care leavers highlighted the importance of the project providing young people with support to help them become independent adults (through developing their skills, confidence and resilience), validating their identity and aspirations, as well as helping them form and maintain relationships.

Staff felt that early intervention was important before issues (whether related to SEMH needs, confidence or not being able to find suitable employment or accommodation) became entrenched and thus more complex to address. Further, staff pointed to the importance of the four features of the support mentioned in the chapter introduction in helping people develop these skills and their sense of self. There was also another feature, around developing a positive identity as a care leaver, unique to this project. These five features are discussed briefly in turn below.

### **A holistic understanding of the young person’s needs**

As noted in Chapter 1, the OT was multidisciplinary and included a range of practitioners working together. Project staff reported that having input from a range of professionals was important in ensuring that care leavers’ often overlapping needs were considered together and not treated in isolation. This helped to provide the young person with early support on a number of fronts, rather than just on a specific issue. For example,

employment support was often considered alongside other types of support the young person needed and which contributed to employment issues, such as communication and managing SEMH needs.

### **Person-centred support**

As with Back on Track, the focus of the care leaver support was on understanding the young person's needs and tailoring support accordingly. Examples of this approach given by both care leavers and project staff included the OT staff using plain language to communicate with an autistic care leaver and giving young people the time they needed in sessions to get their viewpoint across. Being listened to and taken seriously helped validate care leavers' aspirations.

She was easy to talk to and that, so she'd just sit down and listen to me and then try and help me. – *Care leaver reflecting on the support they got from an Opportunities Team member*

One important aspect of this person-centred work was to help care leavers to develop both the practical and emotional skills specific to their situation that they needed to function as independent adults. For example, both care leavers and staff reflected on how life coaches had helped them to understand, manage and feel in control of their SEMH needs. Similarly, care leavers said that the tailored advice and guidance they received from accommodation brokers helped them feel confident and more in control when dealing with difficult landlords.

The qualities of the multidisciplinary team were important in informing this person-centred approach. Care leavers noted that the OT had the necessary qualities that enabled them to work this way, summarised below.

- Approachability. Including willingness to spend time listening to the young person's needs and having an informal, relaxed approach.
- Reliability. Care leavers valued staff turning up on time for meetings with them, remembering to action agreed points from the meetings and attending important events with the young person, such as a court appearance.
- Being invested in the young person's success. A key part of this was OT staff not giving up on care leavers. Examples of this given by care leavers included staff keeping in touch and offering continued support to young people even when they were in EET or finding alternative employment opportunities where one had not worked out.

### **Consistent and high intensity of practitioner support**

Another key feature of the programme was the provision of a caseworker who provided consistent and intensive support to the care leaver. Staff and care leavers reported that

this support modelled a trusting relationship for the care leaver and helped the young person develop a rapport with their caseworker.

...she [opportunity broker] just helped me in so many different ways... She helped me get my job and then even when I lost it, she was still there trying to make me get a job. – *Care Leaver*

### **Promoting positive identities**

Project staff reported a range of activities offered by the project to help care leavers develop a positive sense of identity as care leavers and to promote a sense of achievement, with a view to developing their confidence and self-esteem. These included care leaver conferences hosted by NYCC at a prominent local university, which celebrated care leaver achievements, as well as giving them a chance to visit their local university or work placements.

### **Systemic practice**

Systemic practice was also seen by staff to be important for leaving care and related to helping young people connect with formal and informal networks, discussed below.

## **Outcomes for formal and informal support networks**

### **Observed outcomes**

Project staff commented on a range of positive outcomes for both formal networks (such as education, training and accommodation organisations) and informal networks (family, friends and other social networks) which supported care leavers.

These outcomes related to networks being more willing and able to support care leavers. Examples of formal networks that were strengthened by the project included employers, landlords and further and higher education institutions, who staff reported as being more willing and able to take on care leavers, whether for work placements or housing. One such example was a local university worked with the local authority to expand their care leaver offer.

However, project staff felt that progress in fostering positive outcomes with formal networks was limited by varying willingness and capacity of housing providers, educational institutions and employers to engage with the project. This could have potentially affected the diversity of organisations the project was able to work with. For example, project staff reported that it was easier to work with larger businesses because they had greater capacity to offer opportunities to young people, such as training or shadowing, and often had existing programmes in place which facilitated this (such as corporate social responsibility schemes).

In relation to informal networks, project staff said that foster carers felt more confident being 'stay put' providers and continuing to house care leavers post-18. Project staff felt the support they received from 'Stay Put' Coordinator was critical in enabling this. This support included the coordinator having early conversations with foster carers to identify barriers to them becoming staying put providers, upskilling them to better understand the young person's perspective and needs and exploring ways in which foster parents can help the young person develop independence.

Staff reported limited success in connecting care leavers with their families and other support networks. There was the view among project staff that the strand of work dedicated to this, the family group conferencing model, worked less well for care leavers. One view was that this was because the model was too prescriptive, having several steps that the young person, the caseworker and their family needed to go through. Project staff saw this approach to be unsuitable for care leavers, who often lacked the drive or attention to go through these steps because of their circumstances and competing priorities (e.g. housing or emotional issues). Furthermore, staff noted that the model's focus on reconnecting with relatives missed an opportunity to consider how to reconnect care leavers with their wider support network.

In addition to changes to these formal and informal networks, project staff also noted changes to the local authority offer to care leavers as a result of the multidisciplinary teams' efforts. This included helping to focus service delivery on understanding and meeting the young person's aspirations, as well managing day-to-day issues.

...it [the local authority service] ...probably [required] more tweaking than anything because the service was already good, but definitely that notion of, if a care leaver's working or at college, then your job's not done, your job's then to push them on to the next step... – *Opportunities Team member*

It also included improving service delivery in various ways, such as providing dedicated employment and accommodation support through the OT, caseworkers feeling more confident to address mental health issues faced by care leavers and giving the local authority better access to other external services (such as local NHS mental health services) through tapping into the OT's expertise and professional networks.

### **Understanding outcomes for support networks**

Project staff reported three key factors that encouraged both formal and informal networks to be more willing and able to support care leavers, outlined below.

#### **Developing relationships with housing providers, businesses and educational institutions**

The OT reported spending considerable time developing relationships with employers and educational institutions, which helped to build rapport between the team and these

networks. This made it easier for the OT to have open conversations about care leavers to address any potential stigma, identifying barriers these organisations faced in supporting care leavers and collaboratively working to address these. For example, a local higher education provider said they appreciated the continued contact they had with the OT in helping them develop their care leaver offer, including being able to speak to the team informally at short notice.

### **Supporting formal networks that had taken on care leavers**

Once relationships had been established, the OT maintained organisations' interest and willingness to take on further care leavers by providing continued support. This support took various forms, ranging from simply providing organisations with a single point of contact they could approach if they were having issues with a referred care leaver, to carrying out basic health and safety checks for housing providers that had taken in a care leaver.

### **Upskilling caseworkers and support networks**

The multidisciplinary team worked with foster carers, employers, housing providers and caseworkers to help them feel more able to support care leavers. For example, the OT worked closely with both housing providers and, as noted earlier, foster carers to inform them of the issues care leavers face and provide guidance on how to address these. Similarly, caseworkers reported feeling better able to deal with young people's mental health issues because of the formal and informal guidance given by life coaches.

## **Cross-cutting delivery factors – Leaving Care**

This section brings together and summarises the delivery factors that cut across the project's work with both young people and their support networks. Given the importance of the OT, these factors largely relate to the functioning of this team and how it worked with the wider local authority team and external stakeholders.

In discussing these factors, this section draws on qualitative interviews with staff.

### **Scope and coverage**

The project evolved over time, evident in the introduction of new roles to help delivery, such as the Senior Case Worker role designed to assist with coordination of care leaver activities. However, unlike Back on Track, it had a stable scope insofar as its target recipients (care leavers aged 17-25) did not change during the course of the project. For example, the project did not target care leavers at an earlier age or extend it to those older than 25 after the project had started. Staff reported that this had positive implications for resource management as it avoided the added strain involved in meeting



the needs of new and additional types of recipient's mid-delivery. Having a stable scope also provided a platform to establish processes, such as referral routes to the OT.

## **Resourcing**

As the project matured, one view among project staff was that it would be beneficial to have a larger team of opportunity brokers and life coaches. They felt this additional resourcing would make it easier for the OT to deliver person-centred support and cope with the volume of referrals and direct work with young people that was sometimes asked of them.

## **Leadership and coordination**

Both strategic and delivery staff reflected positively on how the leadership team helped to provide drive and clarity to delivery. Most notably, staff felt that the OT Manager had a clear understanding of the project aims, was passionate about the issues facing care leavers and had a clear vision of how the project should operate. For example, OT staff and caseworkers both commented on how the manager had helped to drive the vision of referrals as being a 'conversation' between the OT and staff in the wider local authority service. This was seen by staff to have made the process of referring care leavers accessible and informal.

## **Team working**

Project staff commented on the importance of the OT working together and in a joined-up way with the wider local authority service in helping to influence positive outcomes. In particular, staff saw joined-up working as important in delivering holistic support (that is, considering the whole picture of a young person's needs). Their views indicated that there were 4 factors that facilitated this: clear communication between teams, an effective referral system, joined-up case management and clarity in roles.

OT staff reported early resistance by some caseworkers to refer to the OT because they did not recognise the value of the service or felt it was a critique of the previous structure. In response, the senior management team improved communication practices by, for example, organising face to face meetings between both teams to explain and reassure caseworkers about the OT's role and providing more information about the range of services offered by the team.

As noted, the project management team also introduced measures to ensure a simple and efficient referral process. This was made possible by having the majority of the OT based in each of the four wider local authority care teams. This meant it was possible for teams to get to know one another through daily formal and informal interactions.

Joined-up case management between the OT and caseworkers was also important in bringing the expertise of the different teams together to support care leavers. More

formally, the OT regularly engaged in “case mapping” meetings (discussing needs of specific care leavers) with caseworkers in each locality. These meetings were described by caseworkers as helpful for sharing information and good practice and providing a platform for peer support between the OT and caseworkers.

...the communication works really well within the Opportunities team. I think that's down to them being *in* with the teams [sharing space within local authority teams], rather than them being a separate team. – *Caseworker*.

Both formal and informal interactions were seen by project staff to also help develop a shared culture across the local authority. This helped to provide consistent support for care leavers as these interactions encouraged dialogue among practitioners about ways in which to support care leavers and meant staff had a shared understanding of principles which should inform service delivery, such as using a Strengths-Based framework (which focuses on what a care leaver can do).

Another factor that helped to facilitate good working relations was having clear roles between the caseworkers and the OT in terms of how to support care leavers. However, mirroring Back on Track, one less defined aspect was the extent to which OT staff interacted directly with young people. Staff had mixed views on this: on the one hand, having OT staff contacting young people directly reduced the pressure on the caseworkers and allowed for young people to benefit from the specialist's expertise. On the other hand, OT staff mentioned the challenges that liaising directly with young people had on their capacity to focus on their specialist role, for example by taking on some of the coordination responsibilities typically fulfilled by the caseworkers. Although these two approaches were used flexibly as the project matured, views were still mixed on whether this issue has been fully resolved.

## Cost Benefit Analysis

Until the end of February 2020, the following overall (including the set-up) costs were incurred by the Leaving Care project:

**Table 6: Costs incurred by the Leaving Care project**

2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	Total
442,070	511,271	642,761	1,596,102

Due to the limitations described earlier and in Chapter 2, the impact evaluation did not provide firm evidence for the positive impact of the Leaving Care project. While the impact evaluation indicated that the Leaving Care project resulted in an additional 7.2 percentage points of care leavers in suitable accommodation and additional 7.1

percentage points in EET, these impact estimates were not statistically significant, and a cost benefit analysis has therefore not been attempted. The economic evaluation has instead considered how many young people the project would need to prevent from becoming NEET in order for it to break even.

The estimated average annual cost to the Exchequer of a young person being NEET is £4,952 (ACEVO, 2012). However, this only covers the fiscal cost while that young person is NEET, whereas in practice NEET is also associated with later forms of disadvantage and poor welfare outcomes, including periods of unemployment post-18, lower job security, lower rates of pay and physical and mental health issues.

Coles et al (2010) estimated the public finance costs of 16 young people who had experienced one or more NEET episode between the age of 16 and 18, up to the point where those young people turned 25. Grounded in real and researched biographies, their sample included two care leavers: Neeha, whose total public finance cost was £188,182, and Frederick, whose was £140,038. The mean across the two young people is £164,110.

Noting the heterogeneity of care leavers and the large differences in their public finance costs, this provides the basis for an illustrative break-even assessment of the Leaving Care strand of the project. Data supplied by the project team shows the overall expenditure of £1,592,102. Assuming that the project set-up costs amounted to 10% of the total costs<sup>14</sup>, the running costs of the Leaving Care project were equal to £1,432,892. Therefore, the Leaving Care strand would break even at the point that it prevented 9 young people (rounded up from 8.7) from becoming NEET. However, this estimation assumes that the affected care leavers are between the age of 16 and 18. If older care leavers are considered, the total public finance cost of a NEET episode is expected to be lower and the Leaving Care project would need to prevent a higher number of young people from becoming NEET to break even.

Leaving Care also aims to help young people remain in suitable accommodation. However, assigning a financial value to this is challenging. The counterfactual is that a young person would not have been in suitable accommodation, but that could cover a wide array of circumstances and consequences. For example, the young person might have experienced episodes of homelessness, spent time in hostels or other temporary accommodation, or stayed with friends. For some young people, the counterfactual could have resulted in additional costs to the state, for example if they had been moved into local authority-funded supported accommodation. For others, however, there may not have been any additional costs to the state at all.

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<sup>14</sup> The evaluators did not have information on the size of the set-up costs. 10% of the overall costs is a standard assumption used in cost and benefit analyses.

Empirical evidence on this topic is sparse and as such the break-even calculations do not include savings associated with suitable accommodation. It is, however, possible that if Leaving Care is effective in this regard, savings to the state could arise through fewer evictions, lower housing benefit payments and/or an array of associated outcomes including crime and employment.

It is also important to note that these are unlikely to be the only categories through which the Leaving Care project generates savings to the state. It was designed to also achieve other outcomes, such as that young people have 'high aspirations for themselves' and develop 'positive and sustainable relationships'. Neither of these are outcomes that would typically feature in an assessment of fiscal savings, but they could, over time, have fiscal or economic benefits, or both. For example, a young person with higher aspirations might stay in formal education for longer, might go to university or might undertake an apprenticeship at a higher level than would otherwise have been the case. A young person who is able to make and sustain positive relationships might engage in less risk-taking behaviour or have fewer mental health issues than if they lacked a support network.

## **4. Summary of key findings on 7 practice features and 7 outcomes**

Evidence from the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme Round 1 Final Evaluation Report led the DfE to identify 7 features of practice and 7 outcomes to explore further in subsequent rounds (Sebba et al. 2017). This chapter summarises insights relating to these practice features, based on the qualitative interviews with staff, networks and young people.

### **Strengths based framework**

Both projects used a strengths-based framework by focusing on young peoples, families' and carers' strengths, goals and achievements as well as solutions to any challenges they faced. For Back on Track, strengths-based practice focused on working with families to identify what they could do to help their child attend school and feel better equipped to manage their emotions. The meetings between families and the Back on Track key worker focused on looking at positives, what was working well at home and at school and helping the young person build a positive model of themselves. In staff's view families in crisis need to be able to recognise their strengths to move forward.

For Leaving Care, the strengths-based framework was largely reflected in activities designed to validate and sharpen the care leaver's sense of self and aspirations, which both staff and care leavers felt contributed to young peoples' prospect of being in EET. At the core of the support was working closely with the care leaver to understand their needs and source opportunities which matched their interests. It was important to enable the young people to make a choice rather than taking a decision for them, for example whether they would like to pursue further education or gain work experience.

### **Systemic theoretical models**

Both projects focused on relationships around the young person to make their social context supportive of their needs. Back on Track focused on creating supportive school environments for pupils with SEMH needs and strengthening relationships between families and schools. They did this through improving communication and facilitating an understanding of each other's perspectives, for example meeting with parents and teachers together to open up communication and make sure everyone feels listened to and validated. Leaving Care applied this approach to strengthen the connections between care leavers and formal support networks, such as businesses and educational institutions. Across both projects, staff encountered challenges establishing relationships with support networks who had limited capacity to change. This included schools whose

existing policies were not compatible with NWD principles or organisations who lacked existing mechanisms such as corporate social responsibility programmes.

## **Multidisciplinary skill sets and group case discussion**

The input of a multidisciplinary team was central to how both projects operated. Staff reflected positively on the benefits of the early intervention of different skilled practitioners working together to support the young person. Staff were particularly positive about the benefits of bringing expertise across different specialisms together to provide solutions to address the needs of young people, for example, during group case discussions.

However, the extent to which practitioners were able to work in a multidisciplinary way was shaped by several factors including staffing and recruitment, communication, level of integration of the team within the local authority and clarity in roles.

## **Whole family focus**

For Back on Track, interviews with staff highlighted the importance of working with the whole family to understand and improve the child's situation at home and school. Staff reported seeing improved communication between families and an overall reduction in levels of stress as relationships between family members improved as a result of this approach. For Leaving Care, an example of where this worked well was with foster parents through the staying put scheme. It worked less well for identifying family networks for care leavers who may have been estranged from family members and where highly prescriptive approaches, such as the Family Group Conferencing, were used.

## **High intensity of practitioner**

This was a key feature of both projects. For Leaving Care, this was an important way in which caseworkers and the wider OT modelled supportive relationships for care leavers and identified the support they needed. For Back on Track the role of the key worker ensured that children and families had a consistent source of support and point of contact. Key learning relates to clarity in roles, the degree to which the multidisciplinary team should be undertaking direct work with young people and the challenges encountered in managing cases as well as delivering therapeutic work.

## 5. Lessons and implications

- **Evaluation approach** – Qualitative approaches can add value to quantitative impact analysis as they can help explain numeric findings and shed light on a wider range of perceived impacts.
- **Factors contributing to positive impacts** – The evidence indicates that the support offered to young people should address the often complex and interacting needs of the person, be person-centred in nature and involve consistent and high intensity support from practitioners. Early intervention was also felt by project staff to be key, before issues become entrenched for the young person.
- **Improving delivery** – The interplay of people, processes and partnerships with the support networks available to young people were all significant in the achievement of successful outcomes. Having strong leadership to provide vision and guidance and ensuring there is lead-in time for a multidisciplinary team to be in place were important. When engaging the formal and informal support networks available to young people, it is important to ensure these individuals and organisations feel supported by the intervention teams.

This chapter draws on the insights from the qualitative interviews for both projects to outline the lessons for the evaluation, the delivery of the project and the factors that contributed to outcomes. It then discusses the conditions necessary for projects to be embedded, developed further and applied more widely.

### Evaluation insights

As noted, the quantitative impact analysis for both projects provided a focused picture of impact for reasons to do with the project and evaluation limitations. In this regard, a first key insight for evaluators is the importance of undertaking mixed method evaluations. The qualitative interviews with project staff, support networks and the young people themselves highlighted a range of perceived outcomes that could not be captured by the quantitative evaluation. These included outcomes for the young people, such as being able to function as home, school and as independent adults, and their support networks.

### Improving delivery: practices and systems

An important insight for project developers relates to delivery practices and systems. The interviews highlighted the importance of the interplay between the people delivering the interventions, the processes that make practices possible and the partnerships that are established and maintained.

## People – leadership and coordination

- Strong leadership is important for ensuring clarity of vision and direction for intervention. It is therefore important to ensure the leadership team is in place at the start of an intervention, prior to the recruitment of other staff, to help the team shape an intervention. Further, a shared vision and sense of team identity can be fostered by having a single coordinator, which is especially important when working across a large area like NYCC.

## Processes – resources and how teams work

- Having a fully recruited multidisciplinary team is key. However, lead-in time may be required to ensure specialist roles can be recruited for.
- How teams work and the qualities they bring are also important. Two key insights are important to note.
  - Where teams are new or existing staff are employed as part of the development of a new service, it is important that they are supported to develop positive working relationships with the teams they are working within. This can help referrals to these new services, as well as offering timelier and more joined up support to young people across an organisation.
  - Multidisciplinary team working can be successfully applied if team members are provided with: (a) clear roles which are reviewed to respond to any changes to the project; and (b) tools to facilitate joined-up working such as a having a shared physical space, regular team meetings and technology facilitating remote working.

## Partnerships – engaging support networks

- The formal and informal support networks available to young people are more willing to be engaged with a project where they feel supported. This includes, for example, a project offering continued support to these networks once they have agreed to engage with young people.
- However, developing effective partnerships can be resource intensive, especially initially and this should be built into project planning.
- It is also important for projects to be responsive and having an evolving approach to working with partners. This was evident in the following examples. The Back on Track team reported adopting a more collaborative approach to working with schools. In Leaving Care, the OT adapted the way they worked with businesses to source opportunities and began to use a more bespoke approach, tailored to specific care leavers needs.



## **Improving outcomes**

The final set of insights from the qualitative process evaluation were around factors that contribute to positive outcomes for young people and their support networks. The findings suggest that the support should also have 4 key features to best meet the needs of young people and their support networks. These were: (a) a holistic understanding of a young person's needs through involvement of a multidisciplinary team; (b) a person-centred approach involving the tailoring of support to the young person; (c) consistent and high intensity of practitioner support for the young person; and (d) improving the young person's relationships with their support networks. Further, interviews with project staff indicate that early intervention with young people was key, before issues became entrenched.

These implications draw on the Theories of Change for both projects and 7 practice features and 7 outcomes.

## **Scalability and conditions necessary for the project to be embedded**

Both projects offered insights into the conditions necessary to scale-up different types of interventions. Back on Track provided an example of a school-based intervention, which experienced challenges catalysing cultural change in a new context, schools, without any lead-in time or external support. Key learning for similar interventions is to build in longer lead-in times to engage schools, securing wider support in the local authority and working across a smaller area and number of schools.

Leaving Care provided an example of a new service being delivered alongside an existing one for care leavers. This points to the importance of having an already well-developed existing service for an intervention such as Leaving Care to work well.

## Appendix 1. Theories of Change

The project had initially set out a logic model for both NWD projects prior to this evaluation, which described the inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes. The evaluation team revisited the model for each project for two reasons: (a) to reflect any developments and changes since the logic models had been finalised; and (b) to build a Theory of Change from the initial logic model which clarified the planned activities, mapped the outcome pathways that would lead to desired impacts and provide an understanding of how planned work would lead to intended results.

### Back on Track

Figure A1 summarises the Theory of Change for Back on Track. There were two main outcome chains within the Theory of Change for this project:

- **Shaping the context:** This outcome chain focused on shaping the home and school environment so that children and young people (CYP) could be supported emotionally and materially.
- **Shaping the person:** The focus of this outcome chain was on working with children and young people (CYP) so that they moved from a position of needing direct support to developing the personal insight and capacity ('life skills') needed to manage their own social, emotional and mental health needs.

### Leaving Care

Figure A2 summarises the Theory of Change for Leaving Care project. There were two main outcome chains within the Theory of Change for this project:

- **Shaping the context:** Improving the formal support networks (relating to education, training, employment and accommodation organisations) and informal support networks (relating to friends and family) available to care leavers (CLs) to ease their transition to adulthood.
- **Shaping the person:** The focus of this outcome chain was to shape the CL so that they can access the immediate support to seamlessly transition from care and equip them with strategies to help them develop the life skills and sense of self to function independently from statutory care services.

Figure 3: Back on Track Theory of Change

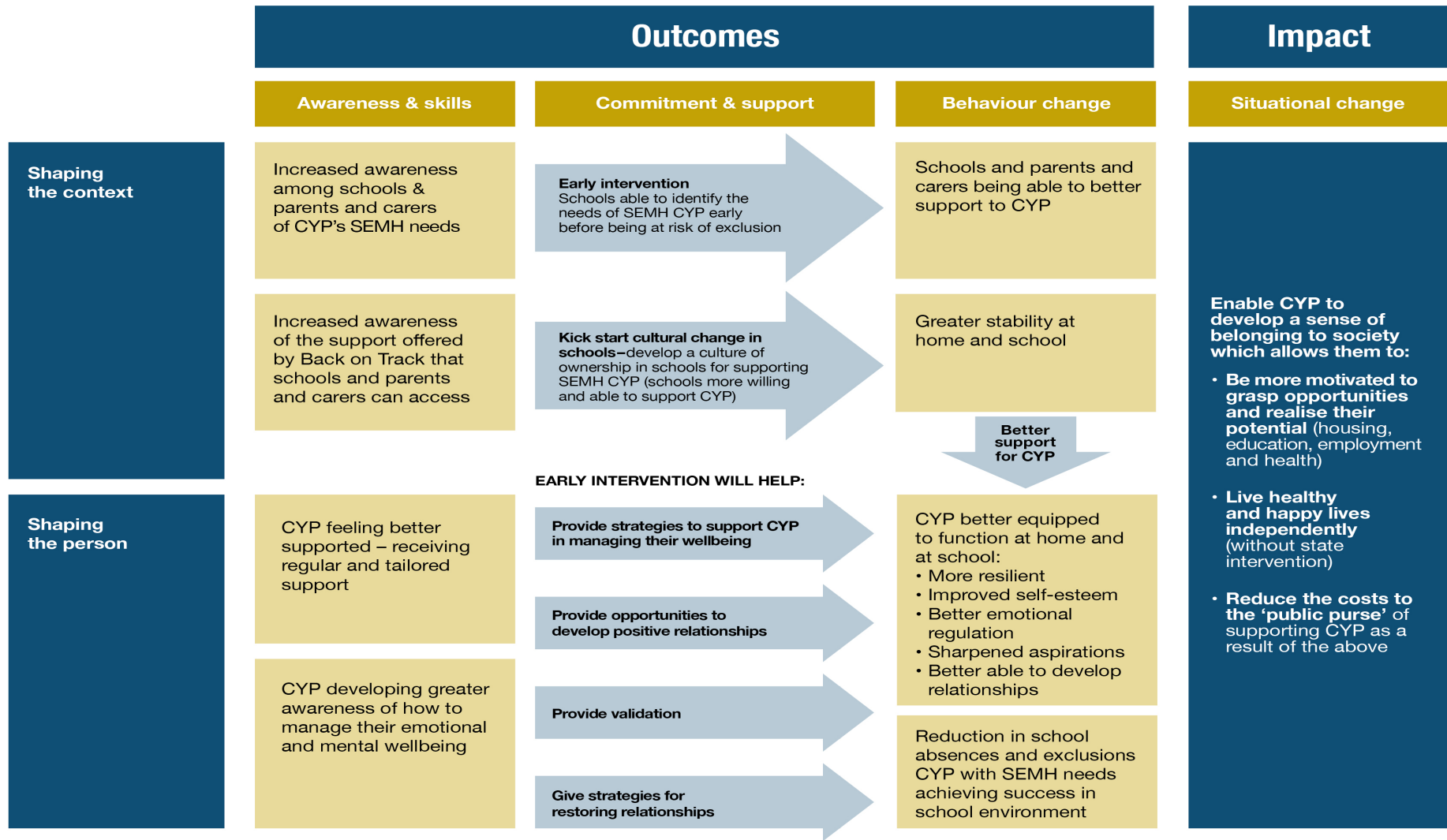
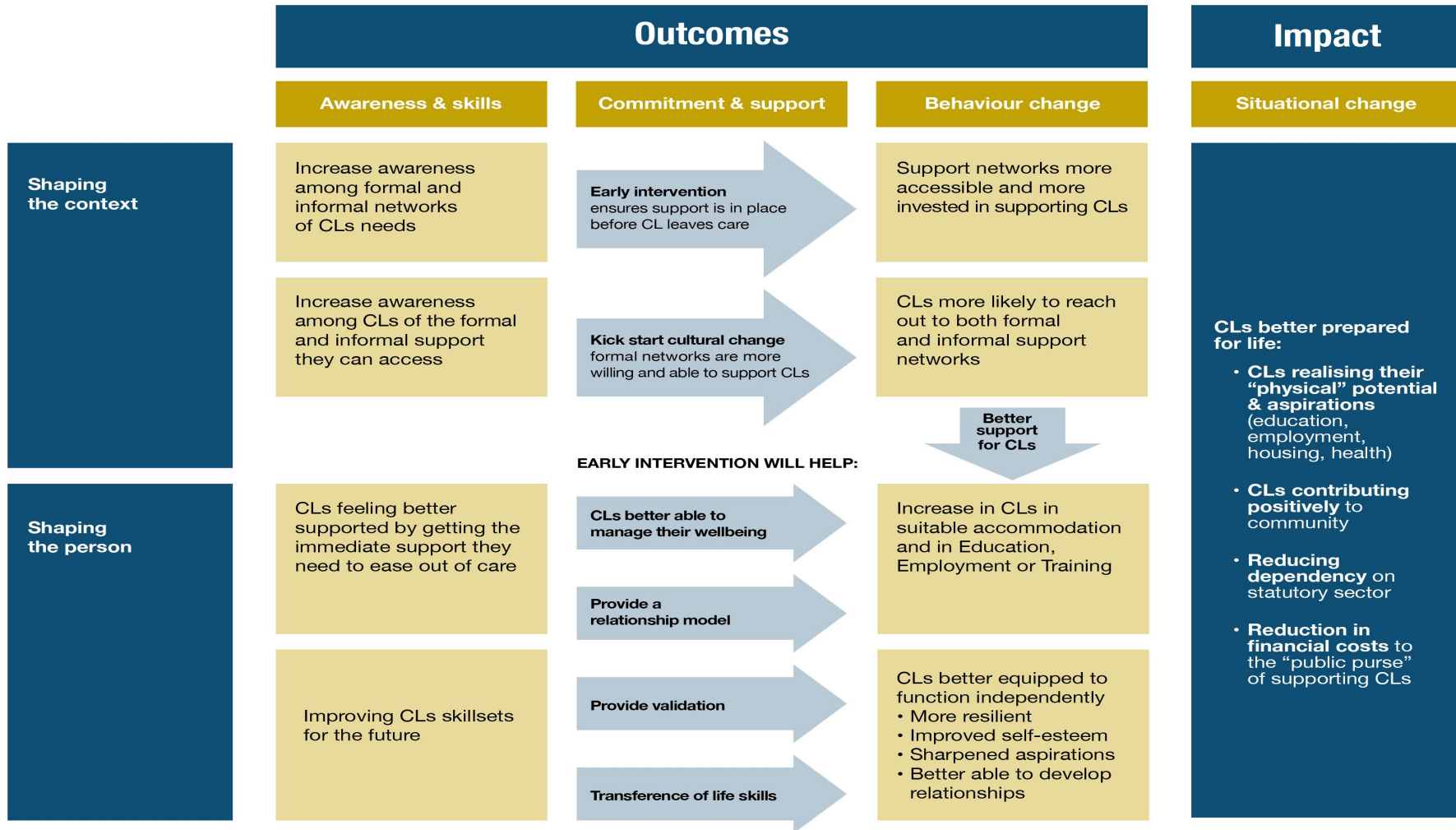


Figure 4: Leaving Care Theory of Change



## Appendix 2. Impact evaluation of Leaving Care

The impact analysis of the NWD project to care leavers was carried out at the level of local authorities. Two local authority-level outcome variables were used – proportion of care leavers in suitable accommodation and proportion of care leavers in Education, Employment or Training (EET). The data covered the period from 2002 to 2019.<sup>15</sup>

Comparative Interrupted Time-Series (CITS) was used to evaluate the impact of the NWD project to care leavers. Using the CITS approach, the evaluators identified the local authorities that were similar to North Yorkshire in terms of the baseline level and trends of the outcome variables and the key socioeconomic covariate – employment rate. Two sets of comparison local authorities were identified – one for each outcome variable. For the suitable accommodation variable, the following three comparison local authorities were identified: Lincolnshire, Staffordshire and Wakefield. In the impact analysis of proportion of care leavers in EET, the following six comparison local authorities were identified: Leeds, Lincolnshire, North Tyneside, Northamptonshire, Staffordshire and Wakefield.

The impact of the NWD project to care leavers was estimated by comparing the differences between predicted (modelled) and actual (observed) outcomes in NY and the group of comparison local authorities in 2019. The impact estimate was generated by calculating the difference between observed and predicted outcomes in North Yorkshire and subtracting the deviation observed in the group of comparison LAs. The expectation was that the 2019 care leaver outcomes in North Yorkshire would be better than predicted by the baseline trends, and that the average outcomes of the comparison local authorities would follow the baseline trends (the deviation would be close to 0).

The information on the variables used in the impact evaluation of Leaving Care project is provided in the table below.

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<sup>15</sup> The 2018 data were excluded from the analysis as they could not be categorised as either pre- or post-intervention. Covering the period from 1 April 2017 to 31 March 2018, the 2018 figures were not expected to show any considerable effects of the Leaving Care project.

**Table 7: Leaving Care impact evaluation data**

Variable	Outcome/matching variable	Time range	Data source
% of care leavers in suitable accommodation	Outcome	2002-2019	2002-2008: Local Government Association, <i>LG Inform</i> website.  2009-2019: Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT)
% of care leavers in Education, Employment or Training (EET)	Outcome	2003-2019	2003-2008: Local Government Association, <i>LG Inform</i> website.  2009-2019: Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT)
Employment rate (aged 16-64)	Matching	2005-2019	ONS Annual Population Survey
Geographical region	Matching	-	Local Authority Interactive Tool (LAIT)

**Identification of comparison local authorities.** For each outcome variable, a separate set of comparison local authorities was identified. To avoid the selection of local authorities with contrasting geographical and labour market contexts, comparison local authorities were drawn from Yorkshire and the Humber, North East and East Midlands. Along with the local authorities from these three regions, North Yorkshire’s statistical neighbours<sup>16</sup> from other regions were also considered as possible comparisons. The local authorities which had missing outcome data at any time point of the time series were excluded from the analysis. From the pool of potential comparison local authorities, the evaluators identified those which were similar to North Yorkshire according to the baseline level and pre-intervention trends of the outcome variable and the key socioeconomic covariate – employment rate. For matching local authorities, Stata’s *itsamatch* command was used. The following sets of comparison local authorities were identified:

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<sup>16</sup> The list of North Yorkshire’s statistical neighbours is available in LAIT.

- 1) % of care leavers in suitable accommodation: *Lincolnshire, Staffordshire and Wakefield*;
- 2) % of care leavers in EET: *Lincolnshire, Staffordshire, Wakefield, Leeds, Northamptonshire, North Tyneside*.

**Comparative interrupted time-series.** The CITS analysis was run using the *itsa* command in Stata. Prior to running the analysis, the autocorrelation structure of the two outcome variables in North Yorkshire was explored. Using Stata's *varsoc* command, the maximum lags were identified (0 for % of care leavers in suitable accommodation; 2 for % of care leavers in EET). These maximum lags were specified in the *itsa* model.

The 2018 data were excluded from the analysis as they could not be categorised as pre- or post-intervention. The 2014 change in the definition of care leavers in LAIT was also factored into the CITS analysis.

**Sensitivity analysis.** *itsa* command is based on an OLS regression model. This kind of model is usually used to predict continuous variables with unrestricted values. However, in this analysis OLS regression was used with proportions data, which are necessarily bounded between 0 and 100. To check whether this did not have a distorting effect on the findings, the CITS analysis was additionally run with logit transformations of the data. The findings were very similar – a positive non-significant impact was identified for both outcome variables.

## Appendix 3. Impact evaluation of Back on Track

Pupil-level school census data were used to estimate the impact of the Back on Track project. The data covered the time period from 2013/2014 to 2018/2019 academic year. The impact evaluation assessed the effect of the Back on Track programme for pupils who received support in 2017/2018 academic year (Cohort 1). Multivariate distance matching was applied to identify a comparison group of pupils in North Yorkshire in 2014/2015 academic year, which served as a counterfactual. Two outcome measures were used in the impact evaluation – the number of sessions missed due to unauthorised absences and the number of sessions missed due to fixed exclusions. Both were measured in the academic year following the receipt of the Back on Track support (2018/2019, compared to the comparison group’s outcomes in 2015/2016).

**Table 8: The logic of the Back on Track matching process**

	Data used for matching	Matched cohorts	Outcome data
Intervention group	2016/2017	2017/2018	2018/2019
Comparison group	2013/2014	2014/2015	2015/2016

The 2017/2018 Back on Track cohort was matched with a similar group of pupils in 2014/2015 academic year using pre-intervention data. All matching characteristics were measured in the academic year prior to the start of the Back on Track project (2016/2017, corresponding to 2013/2014 in the comparison group). Pupils were matched on those variables that affected both pupils’ participation in the programme and the outcomes of interest. Pupils were matched on school year, gender, SEN status, FSM status and the number of unauthorised absences or the number of sessions missed due to fixed exclusions (depending on which outcome variable was analysed).

Multivariate Distance Matching (MDM) was used to estimate the impact of the Back on Track programme. Pupils were matched on a distance metric that measures the proximity between individuals in the multivariate space of X (a set of matching characteristics). The Mahalanobis distance metric was used, measuring the distance between observations in terms of standard deviations of the covariates (while taking into account the correlation structure).

In addition to the matching procedure, a post-matching regression adjustment was used to minimise the possibility of obtaining biased impact estimates. Regression adjustment took into account any residual differences in pre-intervention characteristics between intervention and comparison groups when calculating the impact estimates. In this



evaluation, regression adjustment was additionally used for those pre-intervention characteristics that were not included in the matching model. In the analysis of unauthorised absences, regression adjustment was applied for the number of sessions missed due to fixed exclusions and the number of permanent exclusions in the pre-intervention year. In the exclusions' analysis, regression adjustment was used for eliminating any bias arising from unequal number of sessions missed due to unauthorised absence and the number of permanent exclusions, as well as any residual differences in the average age of pupils between the two groups.

The matching was performed using the nearest neighbour algorithm. For each pupil who benefitted from the Back on Track programme in 2017/2018 academic year, a certain number of most similar comparison pupils was drawn from the total population of NY pupils in 2014/2015. The number of nearest neighbours used varied depending on the outcome measure, with ten nearest neighbours identified in the analysis of unauthorised absences and four in the exclusions' analysis. A lower number of nearest neighbours in the exclusions' analysis was used because it allowed to achieve a better post-matching balance on baseline characteristics. In both cases, matching without replacement was performed, meaning that the same comparison pupil could not be matched with more than one intervention pupil. Matching without replacement allowed to increase the number of comparison pupils used in the analysis. Finally, each baseline characteristic was assigned a certain weight to reflect different degrees of pre-matching imbalances and ensure that the optimal post-matching balance was achieved.

The comparison of covariate balance before and after matching is provided in the tables below.

**Table 9: Back on Track impact evaluation: covariate balance before and after matching (absences)**

Outcome measure: The number of sessions missed due to unauthorised absences						
	Before matching			After matching		
Pre-intervention characteristic	Intervention group	Comparison group	Standard deviation	Intervention group	Comparison group	Standard deviation
Number of sessions missed due to unauthorised absences	11.44681	1.067981	.5601378	11.44681	11.1383	.0166501
School year	5.787234	4.853426	.3483897	5.787234	5.795745	-.0031752
Gender	.8085106	.511572	.6573874	.8085106	.8042553	.0094208
SEN (given an Education, Health and Care Plan)	.1702128	.0181656	.5339973	.1702128	.1808511	-.0373622
SEN (support)	.5106383	.121276	.9153376	.5106383	.5042553	.0150055
FSM status	.3829787	.0825881	.7542699	.3829787	.3723404	.0267124

**Table 10: Back on Track impact evaluation: covariate balance before and after matching (exclusions)**

Outcome measure: The number of sessions missed due to fixed exclusions						
	Before matching			After matching		
Pre-intervention characteristic	Intervention group	Comparison group	Standard deviation	Intervention group	Comparison group	Standard deviation
Number of sessions missed due to fixed exclusions	9.723404	.0934189	.90775	9.723404	9.760638	-.0035098
School year	5.787234	4.853426	.3483897	5.787234	6.015957	-.0853333
Gender	.8085106	.511572	.6573874	.8085106	8244681	-.0353279
SEN (given an Education, Health and Care Plan)	.1702128	.0181656	.5339973	.1702128	.1755319	-.0186811
SEN (support)	.5106383	.121276	.9153376	.5106383	.5265957	-.0375138
FSM status	.3829787	.0825881	.7542699	.3829787	.3723404	.0267124

One of the biggest limitations of matching pupils across years is that it does not consider the natural change in the values of outcome variables. Using the school census data, the evaluators identified that since 2013/2014 until 2018/2019 there was a gradual increase in the average number of sessions missed due to unauthorised absences per pupil among Year 8 pupils in North Yorkshire. The evaluators looked at the figures among Year 8 pupils because most of the 2017/2018 Back on Track cohort was in Year 8 in 2018/2019 academic year (the year of outcome measurement). For this reason, a simple comparison of pupils' unauthorised absences in 2015/2016 and 2018/2019 between the intervention and matched comparison groups would have generated biased impact estimates. To avoid this, the evaluators adjusted the 2015/2016 numbers of unauthorised absences to reflect the observed time trend. The adjustment was done by multiplying the 2015/2016 figures on unauthorised absences by the ratio between the average number of sessions missed due to unauthorised absences per Year 8 pupil in 2018/2019 and 2015/2016 (1.28). No such adjustment was performed for the exclusions' analysis as there was no clear time trend in exclusion figures among Year 8 pupils in NY.

Another limitation is shared by most evaluations that use propensity score matching. While pupils were matched on the key pre-intervention characteristics, the dataset did not include data on some important variables that affect absences and exclusions (psychological wellbeing, family problems, substance misuse, for example). The fact that the evaluators could not match pupils on all relevant pre-intervention characteristics is a substantial limitation of the matching procedure and decreases the reliability of the impact estimates.

## Appendix 4. The qualitative approach: Scoping, formative and mainstage process evaluations

As noted in Chapter 2, a qualitative approach was used at the scoping, formative and mainstage process evaluation stages. This approach enabled the evaluation to gather in-depth insights into participants' experiences of coordinating, delivering or receiving support from the projects from their own perspective. In doing so, they provided an understanding of the reasons underpinning delivery and impact.

Depth interviews were used as they allowed participants to fully articulate and contextualise their responses and for researchers to explore individual experiences and journeys. In many cases, interviews were also practicable to deliver as they could be slotted in to staff and young people's busy schedules in a way that, for example focus groups, could not.

The sections below outline the approaches to sampling, recruitment, interviewing and analysis across these stages of the evaluation.

### Sampling

Selecting participants purposively (a marker of quality in qualitative research) to maximise learning around delivery and outcomes was a key principle that informed the sampling across scoping, formative and summative process evaluation stages (Ritchie et al. 2014). Staff in particular were selected based on their delivery experience and role to ensure a breadth of perspectives were captured. Accordingly, the perspectives of those coordinating the projects (such as strategic staff and operational managers) and staff involved at grass roots delivery (such as caseworkers and multidisciplinary staff) were captured across the different stages of the evaluation.

However, a purposive sampling approach could not be used for external partner organisations (such as schools and businesses) or for young people, because of the challenges outlined in Chapter 2. A more opportunistic approach was therefore used, which relied on participants opting in through key gatekeepers, such as caseworkers and the multidisciplinary team, with limited screening from the research team. As noted, this may have limited the range of participants interviewed for these groups, and hence the diversity of views.

The breakdown of the achieved sample is presented in Chapter 2.

## Recruitment

The evaluation team worked closely with the project to ensure that our recruitment approach was ethical and practicable, minimising the burden involved for those helping with the recruitment process. To achieve this, the recruitment approach had three key features:

- Drawing on project staff as trusted 'gatekeepers'. The evaluation team worked closely with the project to identify key project staff that would act as a single point of recruitment contact for staff and young people. This ensured potential participants were initially contacted about the study by a known and trusted source. These gatekeepers included caseworkers and key workers (for young people), the project management team and operational managers (for staff).
- NatCen providing gatekeepers with drafted recruitment materials to pass on to potential participants. The materials provided clear information about the study, what participation entailed and explanations of limitations around confidentiality and anonymity. For example, that young people would remain anonymous unless the evaluation team had a reason from the interviews to believe that they were at risk of harming themselves or others. The provision of these materials minimised the burden on project staff but also ensured key study information was conveyed consistently to potential participants.
- Consent was an ongoing process. Although it began with gatekeepers contacting potential participants, consent was checked in throughout the recruitment process. This included NatCen conducting follow-up calls to potential participants that had opted-in to check they had understood the study information and that their participation was voluntary, as well as the start of interviews. This enabled the participant to opt-out of the study at each stage, a hallmark of ethical recruitment.

## Interview delivery

The interview delivery approach reflected the need to generate high quality insights ethically and to minimise burden on participants.

The depth interview length varied between 30-60 minutes to accommodate the needs of different participant groups. Interviews with project coordinating staff tended to be between 45-60 minutes, whereas those with delivery staff tended to be shorter at around 30-45 minutes to minimise burden. Interviews with young people tended to also be

shorter, at 30-45 minutes, to ensure young people were able to engage with the discussion.

Interviews were conducted either one-to-one or, for young people, in pairs. The mode of interview delivery varied between participants group to maximise accessibility and to ensure discussions could be conducted sensitively. All staff interviews were conducted over the telephone, reflecting the need to slot interviews in busy staff schedules. Conversely, the majority of interviews with young people were conducted face-to-face to ensure they could be delivered sensitively. For example, face-to-face delivery was important in allowing interviewers to pick up on non-verbal signs of potential distress. All interviews with young people were conducted in spaces they felt safe in. These included homes, schools and events organised by the projects.

To encourage a rich and safe discussion of the issues, interviews were delivered by experienced NatCen researchers. Interviewers were skilled in ensuring expectations about the interviews were made clear from the outset, able to manage challenging dynamics during interviews and able to facilitate a rich discussion within the timeframe.

As mentioned, a key strength of qualitative research is its ability to explore participants' perspectives in their own terms in a systematic way. To do this, interviewers used topic guides tailored to each stage of the evaluation and each type of participant. The guides outlined key issues, probes and prompts to help interviewers explore participant's experiences and views. Having topic guides helped to ensure that there was consistency in coverage between interviewers, while also allowing participants to raise issues spontaneously. There were numerous guides developed for this study, which the evaluation team would be happy to share on request (Appendix 5 provides an example of staff guide for Back on Track and care leaver guide for Leaving Care).

Incentives in the form of high street vouchers were only given to the young people participating in the interviews, to thank them for their time. The level of voucher incentive for young people reflected their age, with the younger Back on Track pupils being given £10 and the older care leavers being given £15. Staff were not given incentives as they were participating in the evaluation as part of their everyday role on the projects.

## **Data management and analysis**

All interviews were audio recorded with participants permission and then transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were anonymised and then managed and analysed using the Framework approach - a systematic approach to data analysis that is widely used in

social policy research (Spencer et al. 2003). This approach involved organising and summarising the data into matrices so that participant views could be understood and compared across the sample. Each summary in the matrices was linked to the verbatim transcripts using the qualitative software package NVivo, ensuring that the findings were grounded in participants' accounts.

Verbatim quotations and examples from the interviews are used throughout this report to illustrate themes and insights where appropriate.

The aim of this report is to capture the range and diversity of views on both projects. Numbers of participants expressing particular views are not reported, as any numerical inference is likely to be misleading or inaccurate because qualitative samples are not designed to be statistically representative of the wider population. Instead, qualitative studies are designed to gather in-depth data on experiences and perceptions from participants' perspectives.

## **Ethics**

Ethical approval was sought and obtained from NatGen's Ethics Committee (REC). This ethics governance procedure is in line with the requirements of the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC, 2015) and the Government Social Research Unit Ethics Framework (GSRU, 2005).

## Appendix 5. The qualitative approach: study materials

For brevity, the full range of study materials cannot be reproduced here but have been provided to the Department for Education. The examples below are of topic guides used with delivery staff (for the Back on Track project) and with young people (for the Leaving Care project). The original formatting of the guides is retained.

### Back on Track delivery staff guide

The topic guide is arranged in a table format listing the key phases of the discussion, the topics to be covered at each phase and the follow-up probes and prompts that can be used. Key features of the guide include:

- The topics are not worded in the form of questions – this encourages interviewers to be responsive to the concepts, language and terms used by participants.
- It does not include many follow-up questions like Why? When? How? as it is assumed that participants' contributions will be fully explored throughout in order to understand how and why views are held.
- Probes and prompts are for guidance only and are therefore not exhaustive. These are presented as bullet points in the topic guide.
- The timings: The timings we have provided for each section are indicative only; we anticipate these will vary between interviews.
- Fonts:
  - Text in brackets indicates instructions to interviewers.
  - *Text in italics* conveys worded instructions for facilitators to use with participants – i.e. these instructions will be read out.

Phase	Topic	Probes/prompts/notes
1. Introduction	Introducing the interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose of discussion: The aim of this work is to explore and understand the views of key staff involved in current implementation and delivery of Back on Track to reflect on its progress and help inform learning.</li> <li>• The funder and value of the study: The study is funded by the Department for Education.</li> <li>• What we will do with the findings: We will use the findings in two ways: (a) For the evaluation, the insights will feed into the final report; (b) for North Yorkshire County Council (NYCC), we will feedback insights from the interviews at an aggregate level to help inform future learning.</li> <li>• Reassurances:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <u>About the discussion</u>: We are interested in hearing your views; there are no</li> </ul> </li> </ul>



Phase	Topic	Probes/prompts/notes
		<p>wrong or right answers. This is not a quiz but an opportunity for reflection.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <u>Confidentiality</u>: We will not identify you, including in our outputs. However, because of the small number of interviews, it is possible that your views may be identifiable. We will revisit this at the end of this discussion.</li> <li>○ <u>Voluntary participation</u>: You do not have to answer anything you do not want to – free to skip questions or withdraw at anytime</li> <li>● Permission to record: Explain you would like to record the interview as this means that you do not have to scribble everything down. The recording will only be accessed by the immediate research team and not shared without anyone else</li> <li>● Any questions</li> <li>● Verbal consent: At the start of the recording please go through the verbal consent form with the participant (see Appendix A)</li> </ul>
<p><b>2.</b> Participant background</p> <p><u>Aim</u>: Ease participant into the discussion and confirm which activities they are involved in</p>	<p>Key contextual information</p>	<p><u>Briefly</u> ask about their role and responsibilities (Interviewer: For participants who weren't interviewed in previous phases on the evaluation)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Participant's role</li> <li>● Their specific role in relation to Back on Track (BoT) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The specific BoT activities involved in</li> <li>○ How long been in role</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>(Interviewer: For participants interviewed previously check whether their role and activities involved have changed or not since we last spoke to them)</p>
<p><b>3.</b> Key features of Back on Track</p>	<p>Back on Track - key features of approach</p>	<p>To explore key features which characterised their approach to BoT/activity</p>

Phase	Topic	Probes/prompts/notes
<p><u>Aim:</u> To understand what they see as the key principles or features of their project/activity – i.e. what is the potent ingredient!</p> <p><u>Additional info needed:</u> '7 practice features and 7 outcomes</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What principles/ delivery approaches are pivotal to their activity/ies</li> <li>• Why these considered important</li> </ul> <p>(Interviewer: Allow participant to respond to the above spontaneously before introducing prompts based on the key principles of practice highlighted '7 practice features and 7 outcomes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengths-based practice framework</li> <li>• Using systematic approaches to social work practice</li> <li>• Enabling staff to do skilled direct work</li> <li>• Multidisciplinary skills sets working together</li> <li>• Undertaking group case discussion</li> <li>• High intensity and consistency of practitioner</li> <li>• A whole family focus</li> </ul>
<p><b>4. Thoughts on progress and barriers/facilitators</b></p> <p><u>Aim:</u> Explore delivery experiences, particularly understanding what helped or hindered delivery and whether this impacted the ability of the activity to make a difference</p> <p><u>Additional info needed:</u> key issues identified in the formative evaluation</p>	<p>A. Thoughts on progress</p> <p>B. Barriers/facilitators and improvements</p>	<p>Explore perceptions of progress of the BoT/ activities</p> <p>(Interviewer: Ask about each of the activities they are involved in)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore how well the activity has <u>progressed</u> since the start/since they have been involved in it</li> <li>• <u>Changes to the activity</u> over time <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Reasons for change</li> <li>○ Impact of change</li> <li>○ Learning from change</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Explore what factors influenced (helped/hindered) delivery of BoT/activity and suggestions for improvement</p> <p>(Interviewer: Ask about each of the activities they are involved in – you can also draw on the key features discussed earlier in section 3)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What has <u>worked well/less well</u> (and why)</li> <li>• Whether it <u>has affected</u> delivery (if so, how and views on this) and/or impact</li> </ul>

Phase	Topic	Probes/prompts/notes
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What can be done/should have been done to address challenge</li> </ul>
	C. Further prompts	<p>(Interviewer: Ask participants for any other barriers/facilitators related to the project as a whole. If not mentioned prompt about)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes to the scope of the activity</li> <li>• How the team works together (including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Communication</li> <li>○ Roles</li> <li>○ working in a multidisciplinary team</li> <li>○ Coordination</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Working with external delivery partners/sites</li> <li>• Resourcing</li> </ul>
<p><b>5. Perceptions of impact</b></p> <p><u>Aim:</u> Understand whether the activity/project has had an impact – if so, why and on whom</p> <p><u>Additional info needed:</u> The Theory of Change for project</p>	A. Perceived impacts -specific activities	<p>Explore perceptions of impacts of BoT/activity</p> <p>(Interviewer: For each of the activities the interviewer is involved in, explore views on whether activity/ies has achieved impact. Then probe for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Type and range of impact</li> <li>• On who <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Impacts for children</li> <li>○ Impacts for parents/carers</li> <li>○ Impacts for schools</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Reasons for impact/lack of impact</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What was it about the project/outside of it that contributed to it (Interviewer: prompt 7 plus 7 features and any other key features they identified earlier on)</li> <li>○ Whether the project worked better for some groups than others, and why?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
	B. Further prompts	<p>(Interviewer: Where participants haven't mentioned ToC AND the impact evaluation indicators spontaneously in 5A, prompt around some of the key intended outcomes)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impacts for children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ reduction in sessions missed</li> </ul> </li> </ul>

Phase	Topic	Probes/prompts/notes
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ more placement stability (school and home)</li> <li>○ success in school</li> <li>○ more engagement at school and at home</li> <li>• Impacts for parents/carers <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ increased confidence to adopt strategies learnt to offer child sense of belonging</li> <li>○ improved communication between parents &amp; child</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Impacts for schools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ timely in-school intervention and referrals for early help</li> <li>○ early access to therapeutic support</li> </ul> </li> <li>• improved capacity &amp; ability to meet SEMH needs</li> </ul>
6. Summary of key learning	Lessons learned	<p>Interviewer: This section is optional, skip if no time or not appropriate to cover</p> <p>To explore their views on key lessons for the programme itself and wider lessons</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One thing which they would change about the project/activity</li> <li>• One thing that they would keep about the project/activity</li> </ul>
7. Close	Thank you and close	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thank them for their time and for the helpful discussion</li> <li>• Stress the value of discussion in helping to shape the evaluation.</li> <li>• Check whether there is anything which they would not like to be included in the write up of the findings</li> </ul>

## Leaving Care – care leaver guide

Topic	Probes/prompts/notes
A. Introducing the interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose of discussion: NatCen Social Research have been asked by the Department for Education to speak to young people, businesses, and staff who are part of the Leaving Care programme. They want to find out what worked well and what could be improved to help young people transition out of care.</li> <li>• What we will do with the findings: We will write a report based on what young people, businesses, and Leaving Care workers tell us. We will not use your name or anything you said in the report if it means other people can tell it is you.</li> </ul>

Topic	Probes/prompts/notes
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reassurances: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <u>About the discussion</u>: We are interested in hearing your views; there are no wrong or right answers. This is not a quiz but a chance to tell us what you think could help improve the programme.</li> <li>○ <u>Confidentiality</u>: We will not share your views with anyone else, including your caseworker or your wider network and we will not identify you in anything we produce, such as reports.</li> <li>○ <u>Caveats to confidentiality</u>: However, because of the small number of interviews, it is possible that your views may be identifiable. Also, we may talk to someone if something you tell us indicates that you are at risk of harming yourself or others. We revisit this at the end of this discussion.</li> <li>○ <u>Voluntary participation</u>: You do not have to answer anything you do not want to – free to skip questions or withdraw at any time.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Permission to record: Explain that you would like to record the interview as this means that you do not have to scribble everything down. The recording will only be accessed by the immediate research team and not shared without anyone else. If they are happy, let them know you will need to confirm this at the start of the interview.</li> <li>• Any questions</li> </ul>
B. Capturing consent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remind them that you agreed to confirm they are happy to take part- please go through written consent form with participant prior to switching the recorder on</li> </ul>
C. Participant background  <u>Aim</u> : Ease participant into the discussion to establish rapport	<u>Briefly</u> ask about their background and interests <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant’s age</li> <li>• What their current daytime activity is</li> <li>• What their current living situation is <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Whether they live alone or others</li> <li>○ Tenure</li> <li>○ How long since left care</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
1. Leaving Care support staff – experiences (10 minutes)	
8. Mapping staff support  <u>Aim</u> : Ease participant into discussing Leaving Care and establish who they get support from	<u>Briefly</u> ask about who they work with – caseworkers and other Opportunities Team (OT) staff (Remember that Care Leavers (CL) will likely not know the term “Opportunities Team” or the different roles that staff have, so just try to gain an understand of who they work with) <p><u>Who does the CL get support from</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Caseworker/PA</li> <li>• Other staff</li> </ul> <p><u>Intensity of support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How often do they see these individuals</li> <li>• For how long each time</li> </ul> <p><u>Continuity of support</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How long have they been getting support from each member of staff</li> <li>• Whether they have worked with the same caseworker/PA or had others</li> </ul>
9. How these relationships are working (5 minutes)	Ask about how these relationships are working <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How they would describe their relationships with staff and what works well/less well</li> <li>• Relationship with caseworker</li> <li>• Relationship with each other member of Leaving Care (LC) staff</li> </ul>

Topic	Probes/prompts/notes
<p><u>Aim:</u> Understanding the quality of relationships with staff</p>	
<p>2. Support and activities – experiences (15 minutes)</p>	
<p><b>A.</b> Leaving Care Support – a short mapping exercise</p> <p><u>Aim:</u> To understand the LC activities that the care leaver is engaged with to inform discussion about impact</p>	<p>Map the different support the care leaver has received (There may only be one or two areas of support/types of support that CL get support in. It may be helpful to visually note these down (e.g. on the piece of paper) for the participants to reflect on. It may also be necessary to revisit points that were touched on in previous sections.)</p> <p><u>The type of support received:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accommodation and/or staying in foster home</li> <li>• Training/education</li> <li>• Employment</li> <li>• Building connections with your wider network</li> <li>• Resolving issues (e.g. with housing or employment)</li> <li>• Any other skills or experience that have helped with transition out of care</li> </ul> <p><u>For each type of support, get a sense of what this involved</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What support actually involved</li> <li>• Who was involved in the activity (caseworker/PA, employers, wider network)</li> <li>• Case worker/PA’s input/approach to LC support (e.g. signposting support, referrals to other members of staff)</li> <li>• Intensity - frequency, length, and duration</li> </ul> <p><u>A general sense of whether support has changed over time</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In what way</li> <li>• Any impacts</li> </ul>
<p><b>B.</b> Views and experiences of activities</p>	<p>Explore participants’ views on their experience of <u>each</u> type of support they have received. (Allow them to answer spontaneously before prompting on what worked well/less well. Revisit anything that was touched on in previous sections.)</p> <p><u>Interactions with LC staff</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relationship with caseworker/PA</li> <li>• How each type of support was delivered (including consistency, intensity and who delivered it)</li> <li>• What could be improved</li> <li>• Factors that influenced experience of support to pick up on <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Leaving-Care-related factors</li> <li>○ Business-related factors</li> <li>○ Factors related to wider network</li> <li>○ Individual-related factors (e.g. care leavers’ level of engagement)</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>3. Support and activities – impact (10 minutes)</p>	
<p><b>A.</b> Perceptions of impact</p>	<p>Explore whether support and activities have made a difference and why</p>

Topic	Probes/prompts/notes
<p><u>Aim:</u> Understand whether the support has had an impact – if so, why and on whom</p>	<p>(What <i>overall difference</i> has LC made to the care leaver, then what difference has each type of support has made to the participant. Allow participant to comment spontaneously before picking up on specific impacts.)</p> <p><u>Impact on feeling supported, access to resources, and developing skills</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• If the CL feels the programme has had no impact, explore why</li> <li>• If the CL feels the programme has had an impact, map the range of impacts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <i>Shaping motivation and aspirations</i> - e.g. helped them realise their potential</li> <li>– <i>Whether feel better supported</i> – including CL having better awareness of support, having appropriate support to meet educational and accommodation and other aspirations</li> <li>– <i>How independent they feel</i></li> <li>– <i>Suitable accommodation</i></li> <li>– <i>Seeking education, employment, or training</i></li> <li>– <i>How they feel about themselves</i> - feelings around: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Confidence</li> <li>▪ Self-esteem</li> <li>▪ Resilience</li> <li>▪ Making a difference to their community</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><u>Impact on relationships with wider network</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding and support from wider network</li> <li>• Relationships with wider network</li> </ul> <p><u>For EACH type of impact, explore reasons for impact/lack:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaving-Care-related factors – including what which specific activities led to impact and why</li> <li>• Business-related factors</li> <li>• Factors related to wider network</li> <li>• Individual-related factors (e.g. care leavers’ level of engagement)</li> </ul>
<p>4. Final reflections</p>	
<p>A. Summary of key learning</p>	<p>To briefly reflect on their overall views of the programme</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One thing they would keep about LC (and why)</li> <li>• One thing they would change about LC (and why)</li> </ul>
<p>B. Thank you and close</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thank them for their time and for the helpful discussion</li> <li>• Stress the value of discussion in helping to inform future learning.</li> <li>• Check whether there is anything which they would not like to be included in the write up of the findings</li> <li>• Hand out the voucher OR ask for address for mailing voucher</li> </ul>

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