Department for Education

Evaluation of the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring programme: year 1 early findings report

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Ecorys and Coram

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Executive Summary

Introduction

In late 2023, the Department for Education (DfE) awarded funding to 27 Family Finding (FF) and 23 Befriending and Mentoring (BM) projects across 45 different local authority areas/boroughs or consortia. The programme aimed to help address the negative outcomes experienced by some children in care and care leavers by providing opportunities to build positive and supportive networks. Family Finding projects primarily sought to help children and young people to identify and (re)connect with the important people in their lives. Befriending and Mentoring projects focused on establishing new, supportive relationships outside of existing 'professional' support networks.

In spring 2024, DfE commissioned Ecorys and Coram to evaluate the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring (FFBM) programme. The evaluation was split into 2 stages. Stage 1 (initially from April 2024 to March 2025 and later extended to March 2026) sought to assess the early implementation of the programme, identify early evidence of outcomes and assess value for money. Stage 2, if commissioned, would run from April 2026 to March 2028. It would seek to assess the impact of the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects to understand 'what works, for whom, in what respects, to what extent, in what contexts, and how'.

Methodological overview

As part of Stage 1, the year 1 (2024/25) evaluation adopted a mixed-methods approach to provide early evidence about projects' first year of delivery covering:

- project implementation exploring how projects were set up, mobilised and delivered on the ground, including their successes and challenges
- reported benefits of the programme for participating children and young people
- initial costs of programme delivery.
- Evaluation activities involved developing a programme Theory of Change (ToC), interviews with programme partners and key stakeholders, collection and analysis of projects' Monitoring Information (MI) data, adapted Bright Spots surveys with children and young people,[1] qualitative case studies with 8 projects (4 Family Finding and 4 Befriending and Mentoring),[2] a survey of project delivery teams, and

[1] The evaluation sought to assess whether it was possible to explore early outcomes with children and young people who participated in the projects using adapted versions of Coram's Bright Spots surveys. Further information about the surveys is available at About the Bright Spots Programme - Coram Voice.
[2] Including interviews and focus groups with strategic staff, operational leads, practitioners, social workers and Personal Advisors, befrienders/mentors and children and young people.

analysis of local authority application forms and quarterly reports submitted to the DfE. The evaluation was supported by a small care-experienced consultants' panel who inputted into research tool development and analysis interpretation. In addition, the year 1 (2024/25) evaluation sought to provide a strong grounding for possible future evaluation in year 2 (2025/26) and at Stage 2 (April 2026 onwards).

It is important to note that the year 1 evaluation does not include an impact evaluation of the programme. This report focuses on sharing perceptions of the programme based on qualitative (interviews) and quantitative (MI, survey) data. There are limitations to the findings which should be considered when reading this report, including potential bias in the data collected. For example, the MI data collection asked some retrospective questions and there were gaps in the data received from local authorities. The sample size for the adapted Bright Spots survey was small (n=244) and not compared with a matched or weighted comparison group; furthermore, respondents had mostly not yet completed the project. For the qualitative data, only a small number of children and young people participated. As such, it is not possible to draw firm conclusions about the difference the projects made to children and young people. Further limitations are set out in the main report: Limitations of the evaluation.

Key Findings

Projects' design and delivery

Most FFBM projects (43 of 50) were delivered in collaboration with third party delivery providers. Most of the Family Finding projects were delivered with Family Rights Group. Befriending and Mentoring projects were delivered with a range of local, regional and national partners.

In line with the programme aims, projects sought to reach new or expanded groups of children in care and/or care leavers. Projects set out which groups of children and young people they wanted to support through the programme (for example, specific cohorts of children in care or care leavers, such as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, new parents). However, in practice, case study projects often took a more universal approach to recruiting and engaging children and young people.

Engaging children and young people

While interviewees explained referrals had started slowly, across the programme, by the end of December 2024, 2,115 children and young people had been referred to the projects. For Family Finding projects:

- 1,131 children and young people were referred

- the average age of those referred was 16 years
- most (62%) were children in care, the remaining 38% were care leavers.

For Befriending and Mentoring projects:

- 984 children and young people were referred
- the average age of those referred was 18 years
- most of those referred were care leavers (63%), the remaining 37% were children in care
- 41% were not in education, employment or training (NEET).

By end of December 2024, just over half of children and young people referred to Family Finding (51%), and just over three-fifths of those referred to Befriending and Mentoring (62%) were actively receiving project support. Some children and young people withdrew from the programme (17% for Family Finding and 10% for Befriending and Mentoring projects).

Across the programme only a small portion of children and young people had completed the programme by the end of December 2024 (11% across Family Finding projects and 2% across Befriending and Mentoring projects). The year 2 evaluation should provide further insights into whether children and young people completed the projects by end March 2025, when the initial funding period ended.

Case study interviewees noted that it took time to build trust with children and young people, and their engagement in the projects fluctuated over time, particularly for care leavers. The main factors that facilitated children and young people's engagement in the projects was willingness to take part, different professionals meeting and communicating with them prior to support starting, multi-agency working throughout the duration of support, and taking a child- and young person-led approach. Effectively matching children and young people with mentors was also key within Befriending and Mentoring projects.

The main barriers to children and young people participating in or engaging with projects included unsuitable referrals being made to the projects (referrals of children and young people who were ineligible or had not consented), thus children and young people not starting support. Additionally, children and young people's circumstances changed, or they had wider pressures and issues in their lives (particularly for care leavers) meaning engagement was difficult. A small number of interviewees across Family Finding case studies, specifically, reported that foster carers were not always on-board with the project aims and this hindered some children and young people's engagement.

Project mobilisation and implementation

Delivery teams (staff and volunteers) generally reported good progress had been made with project set up and delivery. However, they commonly noted that delivery timescales were relatively short due to the set up time needed (which varied between projects). Working together with established third party delivery providers and experienced staff helped projects to mobilise quickly.

Delivery teams highlighted the importance of developing a shared understanding and vision for Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring across project teams, children's/leaving care services and wider services (such as asylum support services or prisons). Effective multi-agency working supported all elements of delivery, including referrals, safeguarding, engagement, supporting children and young people, and (for Family Finding projects) working with wider family members. However, barriers to multi-agency working were reported. These included capacity constraints in children's services teams and wider services (see above) who were supporting some children and young people.

Most delivery teams survey respondents indicated that they had received training or support to help them in their role, and that training had been effective. However, some staff and volunteers (42% of Family Finding and 45% of Befriending and Mentoring respondents respectively) indicated they wanted further training, particularly around working with specific groups of children and young people (such as those in custody and unaccompanied asylum seeking children). Most staff also indicated feeling confident and satisfied to deliver their work.

Delivery teams reported that the voices of children and young people informed how the project was delivered; 83% of Family Finding and 67% of Befriending and Mentoring respondents agreed. Some case study interviewees said this was a key priority for the future.

Overall, delivery teams were satisfied with the progress they had made with project delivery and indicated project progress was 'ahead of' or 'in line with' their expectations (89% of Family Finding and 83% of Befriending and Mentoring delivery team survey respondents).

Reported benefits of the programme

The early findings presented here provide insights into how children and young people appeared to benefit from the programme during its first year of delivery based on the MI and qualitative data. Key findings include:

- MI data analysis found that compared with before the FFBM projects started, there was an increase in the number of connections/relationships children and young

people had with important people in lives. Of those receiving Family Finding support, Children and young people tended to (re)connect with immediate and wider family, professionals, including teachers and social workers, friends, foster families and others.

- In Family Finding Lifelong Links projects, most participants reported positive outcomes related to increased support network, stronger sense of identity, increased knowledge of their family, and repaired relationships. When comparing wave 1 and 2 MI data for LLL projects, participating children and young people reported an increase in their support network as the programme progressed.
- Perceptions gathered from the case study interviews suggested that Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects were contributing towards children and young people:
    - feeling part of a network or developing a greater sense of connectedness, for example by supporting them to manage and strengthen prior or existing relationships
    - having enhanced wellbeing, for example with creative befriending and mentoring projects supporting children and young people to express their feelings
    - having improved confidence and independence, for example through being supported to express their views and/or access wider support services
    - feeling less lonely for example by participating in group befriending and mentoring activities
    - having an enhanced sense of identity and belonging, for example by helping them to learn more about their past
    - having a greater sense of community for example through the mentor/mentee relationship and by connecting with other children and young people or mentors.
- Case study interviewees also reported observing other benefits for children and young people involved in the programme. These related to enhanced engagement with education, employment or training activities, reduced likelihood of children and young people getting involved in criminality and specific outcomes for new parents.
- There was evidence of positive outcomes among staff, as well as system-level outcomes/across local authorities. Staff suggested that being involved in the programme was rewarding, produced organisational learning, and, in some cases, reduced administrative burden in local authorities.

Children and young people's adapted Bright Spots survey findings

The first year of the evaluation tested the feasibility of the evaluation approach to outcomes measurement, which involved using adapted versions of Coram's 'Bright Spots' surveys of children and young people.[3] The purpose of the surveys was two-fold: firstly, to explore children and young people's perceptions of their lives and wellbeing . Secondly, the evaluation team wanted to explore the feasibility of using Bright Spots survey questions and comparing programme participants' data with that of historical Bright Spots survey data. This would help inform later impact evaluation designs, if Stage 2 is commissioned (see full report for further details).

As set out in the full report (Children and young people's adapted Bright Spots survey), the findings from these surveys showed some similarities and differences between the children and young people who participated in the FFBM programme and the historical Bright Spots surveys.[4] Although the adapted Bright Spots sample was small (sample n=244) and potential selection bias of the children and young people completing the survey limits its representativeness, the survey did suggest:

- Young people participating in either Family Finding or Befriending and Mentoring projects experienced higher levels of wellbeing compared to historical Bright Spots survey data, including being happier yesterday, more satisfied with their life, felt things in their life were more worthwhile, and were less anxious compared with historic Bright Spots survey datasets of children in care and care leavers.
- The majority of children and young people who responded to the survey indicated that they had a really good friend and an adult they could trust. There was very little difference between the proportions of FFBM programme participants when compared historical Bright Spots survey data. There were mixed views on whether children and young people saw immediate family (mum/dad/siblings) as much as they wanted.
- Most care leavers indicated that they had several groups of people in their lives who gave them emotional support. Almost three-quarters of children and young people participating in the Befriending and Mentoring projects reported a mentor/befriender as a source of emotional support.
- Most participants in Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects who responded to the adapted Bright Spots survey felt a sense of community. Most reported feeling safe and settled in their neighbourhood, safe in their local area,

[3] More information about the Bright Spots Programme and surveys: Bright Spots Programme, Coram Voice.
[4] It is important to note that these were not a matched sample.

and that they felt they belonged in their local area. Furthermore, most reported that they did not feel lonely.[5]

- A greater proportion of children and young people in Family Finding projects indicated not being in education, employment or training, compared to historical Bright Spots survey data. A greater proportion of those participating in Befriending and Mentoring projects reported that they were currently studying, also in comparison to the historical data.

Barriers and enablers to project delivery

Based on the qualitative data, the evaluation team identified a range of enablers and barriers to project delivery and achieving early outcomes. The main enablers to project implementation included:

- the flexible approach projects took to meeting children and young people's needs,
- having dedicated funding and ringfenced staff capacity to deliver the projects,
- high-quality ongoing supervision and support for staff.

Staff reported that they generally had access to the resources they needed to carry out their work, meet children and young people's needs, and access suitable spaces for working with children and young people. However, some project staff and mentors noted challenges with finding venues that met children and young people's needs (in terms of geographical location, privacy, or facilities).

There were some challenges associated with delivering the projects:

- The main challenge highlighted across projects was, at the time of data collection, the continued uncertainty around future project funding.[6] This led project leaders to make decisions which were less than ideal including not accepting new referrals, rushing to make referrals in a short time frame (causing capacity issues) or delivering the full support offer in truncated timescales, de-prioritising Family Finding for children and young people with complex backgrounds, and recruiting staff on short, fixed-term contracts.
- Accessing local authority systems was also a key challenge in some projects. Whilst overall, most delivery teams survey respondents indicated they could access the information they needed; respondents were less positive about this than accessing the other resources required to do their work.

[5] As these were new or amended questions for the adapted Bright Spots survey, no comparison with historical Bright Spots data was possible.
[6] DfE have subsequently extended funding to March 2026

The key priorities for future project delivery included embedding and expanding the projects, monitoring and evaluating progress and the outcomes achieved, and securing funding for project continuation.

Programme costs

The evaluation's early economic strand sought to provide an initial assessment of the value for money of the programme by calculating the costs and benefits of the programme. It was not possible to assess benefits of the programme at this early stage; therefore, the evaluation focused on year 1 programme costs. By the end of 2024, there was an underspend across the programme compared to anticipated costs. This may be due to this period covering set-up and early delivery of the programme so spending may 'catch up' later as further delivery gets underway. In addition, there was a delay in the programme starting which may have contributed to an underspend.

Learning to date and initial recommendations

The evaluation to date suggests that the projects have reached and supported new or expanded cohorts of care-experienced children and young people and have been well delivered. While current data suggests positive findings during the programme's first year, any change in children and young people's outcomes cannot necessarily be attributed to the programme. Future evaluation activity will seek to provide further evidence about the difference the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring programme makes to participating children and young people.

Based on evidence collected during the first-year evaluation of the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring programme, the evaluation team has the following key recommendations. The Department for Education should consider:

- committing funding to the programme, or similar projects, for multiple years to avoid the disruption of short-term funded projects for care-experienced children and young people and project staff and volunteers
- building on this evaluation and commit further funding to conduct a robust impact evaluation of the programme (for example, counterfactual or other impact evaluation approach, where feasible) to explore its impact on participating children and young people
- for Family Finding projects, supporting projects to provide sustainable, longer-term support to children and young people particularly where (re)connections did not commence or broke down
- share learning from Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects to support other local authorities that may choose to start similar projects now or in the future.

Local authorities and third party providers should consider:

- ensuring projects remain flexible in meeting the needs of children and young people and providing training and support to staff and volunteers
- ensuring local senior leadership buy-in to the projects and a willingness to develop a positive culture to supporting children and young people to (re)connect with important people in their lives
- promoting the projects to wider services, foster carers, and others supporting care experienced children and young people, nationally to support their knowledge and awareness of the projects to support children and young people to engage

The second year of evaluation will take place between April 2025 and March 2026. The next evaluation report is expected to be published in summer 2026.

Introduction

In late 2023, the Department for Education (DfE) provided funding to 50 projects across 45 local authorities in England to deliver the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring (FFBM) programme. The programme aimed to help address the negative outcomes experienced by some children in care and care leavers associated with a lack of trusting, stable relationships and/or a support network by providing opportunities for them to build positive and supportive networks. Specifically, the programme sought to:

- help children in care and care leavers to identify and connect with the important people in their lives
- improve their sense of identity and community
- create safe, stable, loving relationships.

Primarily, Family Finding (FF) projects aimed to help children in care and care leavers to identify and connect with the important people in their lives while Befriending and Mentoring (BM) projects focused on establishing new supportive relationships outside of children and young people's existing 'professional' support networks[7]. Overall, 27 Family Finding and 23 Befriending and Mentoring projects were funded across individual or consortia of local authorities.

Local authorities had to apply to be part of the programme. Funding criteria required local authorities to deliver a Family Finding and/or Befriending and Mentoring project as a new provision, or where it was an existing provision, to expand this to a new cohort of children or young people. Local authorities could deliver projects in house or commission third party providers to deliver the programme on their behalf. The programme was designed with flexibility so that local authorities could determine what provision would best meet the needs of their children and young people. As part of their application to DfE, local authorities had to consider how their provision would meet the specific needs of the cohort of children and/or young people they were targeting. This determined the delivery models, providers and partners that local authorities worked with (for example, where they worked with specialist organisations).

Overview of the evaluation

In spring 2024, DfE commissioned Ecorys and Coram to evaluate the FFBM programme. With a view to inform future policy and spending decisions, the evaluation aimed to assess the:

- practicability of implementing the FFBM projects

[7] Throughout this report the term 'mentor' refers to both mentors and befrienders.

- impact of FFBM projects for helping children in care (CIC) and care leavers (CLs) to identify and connect with the important people in their lives, improve their sense of identity and community, and create safe, stable, loving relationships
- value for money of the programme; including a cost-benefit analysis and cost efficiencies analysis to estimate the full social and economic costs and benefits.

To meet these aims, the evaluation was split into 2 stages. Stage 1 (April 2024 to March 2025 and later extended to March 2026) seeks to assess the early implementation of the programme, identify early evidence of outcomes and value for money. Stage 2, if commissioned, would run from April 2026 to March 2028. It would seek to assess the impact of the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring models to understand 'what works, for whom, in what respects, to what extent, in what contexts, and how'.

As part of Stage 1, the year 1 (2024/25) evaluation sought to provide a strong grounding for possible future evaluation at Stage 2. This included developing a programme Theory of Change (ToC), an overarching evaluation approach, designing robust research tools, collecting early implementation data, understanding the reported benefits of the programme, and capturing the costs of programme delivery. In addition, Stage 1 sought to assess early outcomes for children and young people participating in the programme using adapted versions of Coram's 'Bright Spots' surveys of children and young people[8]. The purpose of the surveys was two-fold: firstly, to explore children and young people's perceptions of their lives and wellbeing'. Secondly, to explore the feasibility of the approach to inform later impact evaluation designs. Findings from the feasibility study and implications for future evaluation work will be reported on separately subject to the commissioning of Stage 2.

Programme theory of change

Working with the DfE and the care-experienced panel of young people, the evaluation team developed a ToC for each programme strand: one for Family Finding and one for Befriending and Mentoring. ToC development was based on a desk review of local authority applications and existing evidence, as well as consultation with DfE and relevant stakeholders. Further details of how the ToC was developed can be found in Annex 1: Theories of Change.

The ToCs set out the goals that the overall programme was working towards, anticipated outcomes (and how these will be achieved), as well as considerations around what may affect progress. Annex 1: Theories of Change presents the ToCs in accessible tables (ToC diagrams

[8] More information about the Bright Spots Programme and surveys: Bright Spots Programme, Coram Voice.

Figure A1 and Figure A3) and diagrammatic form (Figure A2 and Figure A4) with an accompanying narrative. The narrative should be read alongside the ToCs which summarise the programme-level rationale, inputs, activities and outputs, outcomes, impacts, risks and assumptions and distinguishes the distinct pathways of Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring specifically, where relevant. The core (primary) intended outcomes for children and young people involved in the programme as set out in the ToCs are in Table 1 below.

This report focuses on the findings relating to the short and medium term for the core intended outcomes. Wider (secondary) outcomes, which are out of scope for this stage of the evaluation, can be found in Annex 1: Theories of Change. This includes longer term outcomes, and additional outcomes desired by individual projects.

Table 1: Core intended outcomes for children and young people participating in the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring Programme

Outcome	In the short-term, children and young people report…	In the medium-term, children and young people report…	In the long-term, children and young people report…
Enhanced relationships and networks	• having an adult who is interested in them • an increased feeling of being listened to and having someone they can talk to • having a really good friend or someone they can trust • increased satisfaction with how much, and in what ways, they see and interact with those important to them	• feeling more supported by, and part of a larger, support network (of family and/or friends) and community • increased satisfaction with how much, and in what ways, they see and interact with those important to them	• having more loving, healthy and sustained relationships
Improved wellbeing	• improved wellbeing	• improved wellbeing	• reduction in poor mental health
Reduced loneliness	• increased feeling of being listened to, having someone they can talk to, and having a really good friend or someone they can trust	• reduced feelings of loneliness	• reduced feelings of loneliness

Outcome	In the short-term, children and young people report…	In the medium-term, children and young people report…	In the long-term, children and young people report…
Enhanced sense of identity/ies and belonging	• knowing someone who has things in common with them (such as shared culture or values) • (re) connecting with people with who they have shared memories (Family Finding only)	• feeling that they are 'understood' by someone who has things in common with them • increased knowledge or understanding of their own story (Family Finding only)	• improved sense of identity and belonging
Greater sense of community	• increased participation in community, and knowing someone who has things in common with them such as a shared culture or values	• feeling more connected to a community and increased cultural ties	• feeling more connected to a community and increased cultural ties
Personal and social skills	• increased confidence	• increased confidence • improved social and communication skills, and increased confidence when meeting new people (primarily Befriending and Mentoring)	• improved social and communication skills, and increased confidence when meeting new people (primarily Befriending and Mentoring)
Wider services and opportunities	• being more aware of different opportunities that are of interest to them (for example, clubs, activities or groups) and reporting increased knowledge	• accessing more relevant services.	• accessing more relevant services.

Outcome	In the short-term, children and young people report…	In the medium-term, children and young people report…	In the long-term, children and young people report…
(BM projects only):	of/access to advocates for different services and support.		

Methodological overview

Year 1 evaluation activities consisted of 3 main strands, providing early findings on:

- project implementation exploring operational challenges, solutions and examples of good practice across the different delivery models
- reported benefits of the programme for children and young people involved and feasibility of future evaluation to assess outcomes and impact of the programme
- the costs of programme delivery for year 1.

The evaluation approach was supported by input and feedback from a care-experienced consultants' panel. A small panel of care-experienced young people (aged 16 to 25 years), supported by Coram Voice's Participation Manager, was invited to support the evaluation.[9] The panel acted as a critical friend and advised at key stages of the evaluation, including providing feedback on the ToC, research tools for children and young people, and supporting the interpretation of findings and co-producing recommendations.

Prior to data collection with local authorities and children and young people, the evaluation team carried out interviews with DfE and wider stakeholders to inform the theories of change and provide wider context for the FFBM projects.

The evaluation comprised several key activities to test the overall evaluation approach (prior to Stage 2) and provide an insight into reported benefits of the programme, early learning relating to implementation, and costs of the programme to December 2024. The first year of the evaluation also tested the feasibility of the evaluation approach to outcomes measurement.

This section summarises the evaluation approach and its methods (a detailed breakdown of the data sources is presented in Annex 2: Summary of data sources). Table 2**.** provides a summary of the methods.

[9] Challenges with recruiting and engaging young people meant the number of care-experienced young people who participated in the panel was lower than anticipated. The evaluation team held 2 live panel sessions (comprising 3 young people overall).

Table 2: Year 1 methods

	Early implementation	Reported benefits	Programme delivery costs
Focus for Year 1	Understanding projects' design, delivery and reach Project mobilisation and implementation	Early understanding of reported benefits for children and young people and delivery staff Feasibility assessment and development of data collection methods for outcomes assessment (year 2) and full impact evaluation (Stage 2)	Analysis of programme costs
Data sources	Monitoring information Delivery staff and volunteer survey Qualitative case studies	Monitoring information Qualitative case studies Adapted Bright Spots (children and young people's survey)	Quarterly monitoring returns

MI data collection

Across all projects, the evaluation sought to collect monitoring information (MI) about children and young people's demographic characteristics and involvement in the projects. The intention was to assess the feasibility of matching individual-level MI data to children and young people's survey responses, using adapted versions of Coram's Bright Spots surveys, to explore children and young people's outcomes. Further information about the surveys is presented in Adapted Bright Spots surveys (children and young people).

In collaboration with DfE and a small number of local authorities, the evaluation team developed 2 templates to collect MI data (one for Family Finding and one for Befriending and Mentoring projects) on a quarterly basis from each local authority. MI data was collected at 2 timepoints during the evaluation period; 'wave one' collected data from the start of delivery (approximately December 2023) to end September 2024 (aiming to 'backdate' children and young people's data to that point), and 'wave 2' collected data covering the period October to December 2024. The purpose of collecting the MI data was two-fold.

- To gather quantitative data about the children and young people involved in the projects including demographic information, extent of participation with the project, and some early outcome data.
- To enable matching of MI data to the adapted Bright Spots survey responses. This first stage explored the feasibility of matching outcomes data for each child or young person who responded to the survey with MI data collected. Each child and young person featured in the MI dataset was given a unique identifier to enable matching with responses in the adapted Bright Spots surveys.

The analysis in this report is based on MI data for 48 projects: 26 of 27 Family Finding projects, and for 22 out of 23 Befriending and Mentoring projects.

In this report, the quantitative analysis of the MI data focuses on descriptive statistics reported in the form of frequencies, percentages, sums and averages[10]. The analysis included statistical significance testing, where possible. Caution is advised when interpreting the data, particularly where there are small sample sizes, as these may not be representative of all local authorities or children and young people taking part.

Further details of our approach to the MI data collection can be found in Annex 3: MI data collection, cleaning and analysis.

Adapted Bright Spots surveys (children and young people)

Coram's original Bright Spots surveys were developed in collaboration with Professor Julie Selwyn at the University of Oxford and co-produced with care-experienced children and young people. As part of the original development process, Bright Spots Indicators were developed with children's experiences and voice at the heart of measuring subjective well-being. The FFBM evaluation team ensured the adapted versions of the surveys remained true to the development and ethos of the original surveys as far as was practical.

With that in mind, during the development of the adapted Bright Spots surveys, minor amendments were made to existing Bright Spots surveys to better reflect the intended outcomes of the FFBM projects as set out in the programme ToCs. The evaluation team undertook an outcomes mapping exercise for the adapted Bright Spots surveys. In agreement with the evaluation's care-experienced consultant panel, this led to amending a small number of questions and removing others that were less relevant to the programme. Further information about the changes can be found in Annex 4: Adapted Bright Spots surveys (children and young people). The evaluation used 4 adapted Brights

[10] Percentages used throughout the report have been rounded to the nearest whole number, which may lead to totals not equalling 100%.

Spots surveys, these were for children and young people aged 4 to 7 years; 8 to 11 years; 11 to 17 years; and care leavers (aged 17 and over).[11]

In year 1, the evaluation tested the approach of administering and matching the individual-level MI and survey data. The adapted Bright Spots surveys were administered online during October and November 2024 as a cross-sectional survey. The survey was optional; at the start of the survey, children and young people were asked whether or not they wanted to complete it. Not all children and young people who participated in the programme were invited to the complete the survey - project staff used their discretion on the appropriateness of inviting children and young people to complete the survey. Following data cleaning, 291 children and young people responded to the surveys comprising 134 responses from those involved in Family Finding projects and 157 involved in the Befriending and Mentoring projects.

The evaluation team matched a sample of 224 children and young people between the MI and adapted Bright Spots survey data. This matched sample came from 29 local authorities, including 14 Family Finding local authorities, 14 Befriending and Mentoring local authorities, and one local authority with respondents in both Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects. In the matched sample, 20 young people (9%) completed the 8 to 11 years adapted Bright Spots survey, 116 (52%) completed the 11 to 17 adapted Bright Spots survey and 88 (39%) completed the care leavers adapted Bright Spots survey. As only 3 responses were received for children aged 4 to 7 years, these have been excluded from the analysis to preserve the anonymity of the children involved (see Table 3).

[11] The adapted Bright Spots surveys used age to determine which survey a child or young person should complete. A link was generated automatically based on age when entered into the MI template. However definitions of Children in Care and Care Leavers cited in the programme guidance differed from this. Care leavers aged 16+13 weeks to 17 years were assigned the 11 to 17 survey, and children in care aged 18 years and over were assigned the care leavers survey. As a result, there were 7 care leavers who completed the 11 to 17 years Bright Spots survey and 9 young people in care who completed the care leavers survey. There were also 2 young people that the MI data says were guided to complete the 8 to 11 adapted Bright Spots survey but completed the 11 to 17 survey, and 3 young people who were guided to complete the 11 to 17 but completed the 8 to 11. This was permissible in the evaluation guidance sent to local authorities, based on the appropriateness of the surveys for individual children or young people.

Table 3: Adapted Bright Spots Survey responses

Survey	Number of FF respondents	Number of BM respondents	Total
Aged 4 - 7 years	1	2	3
Aged 8 - 11 years	10	10	20
Aged 11 - 17 years	52	64	116
Care leavers	46	42	88
Total	109	118	224*

*Excludes 3 responses from 4 to 7 year olds

Based on analysis of the MI data, the evaluation team concluded that the majority of children and young people in the matched sample had participated in the programme to some extent. Table 4 below sets out how 'participation' was defined in the MI templates sent to local authorities.

Table 4: Participation and non-participation categorisations

Participated	Not participated
Started programme and receiving support	Referred to programme but not started yet
Completed programme	Not engaged
Withdrawn from programme	
Participation paused	
Previously withdrawn but re-started	

For children and young people categorised as 'participating', the adapted Bright Spots survey was completed, on average, 149 days after they started receiving support (this ranged from 30 to 341 days), although a support start date was not available for all young people.

Historical Bright Spots data analysis

The evaluation team compared Coram's historical Bright Spots survey data with adapted Bright Spots survey data. This enabled the evaluation team to explore differences between the children and young people who had participated in the programme with historical Bright Spots data as a proxy for those who had not participated in the programme. The evaluation team will seek to explore this further via an improved approach to surveying children and young people in 25/26, for example through encouraging a higher response rate and adopting a baseline and endline approach.

The adapted Bright Spots data was compared against 2 historical datasets: data from local authorities involved in the programme and data from local authorities outside of the programme.[12] The rationale behind the selection of these groups was that historical data from the same local authorities could provide a proxy 'baseline' to compare against, while historical data from local authorities outside of the programme could act as a 'comparison' group. This was also intended to inform an impact feasibility study for Stage 2 of the evaluation, to understand whether a quantitative impact evaluation would be possible in the future.

Case studies

The evaluation team carried out qualitative case studies across 8 projects. The purpose of the case studies was to provide in-depth insights into how these projects were being implemented; their enablers and barriers to success; and lessons learned.

Case studies were split equally between Family Finding (n=4) and Befriending and Mentoring (n=4). A purposive sample, guided by DfE, was drawn to reflect a range of FFBM projects (further information about the sampling approach is available in Annex 5: Case Studies). Across the 8 case studies, the evaluation team interviewed 90 individuals. This included a range of one-to-one and paired interviews and small focus groups lasting between 45 and 90 minutes. Interviews with project staff or volunteers were conducted online, and interviews with children and young people were conducted online or in person depending on their preference. Fieldwork for the case studies was conducted between November 2024 and February 2025. Quotes from interviews and focus groups have been used throughout this report to illustrate findings.[13]

Table 5 provides a breakdown of case study participant groups.

Table 5: Case study interview sample

Case studies	Family Finding case studies (n=4)	Befriending and Mentoring case studies (n=4)	Total
Strategic staff	4	6	10
Project leads	8	8	16
Practitioners	14	3	17

[12] Whilst the children and young people in these groups did not participate in the DfE funded Family Finding, Befriending and Mentoring programme it is not possible to know whether they may be participating in other similar programmes.

[13] Quotes have been drawn from a range of participants to represent a range of experiences. To preserve participants' anonymity, all quotes have been amended to be gender neutral (for example, 'he/she' amended to 'they'). A small number of children and young people did not wish to be recorded and therefore no quotes have been used from these interviews. Where multiple quotes are used to illustrate a point from the same 'stakeholder type', quotes are from different interviewees unless otherwise stated.

Case studies	Family Finding case studies (n=4)	Befriending and Mentoring case studies (n=4)	Total
Social workers/ Personal Advisors	7	10	17
Befrienders and mentors	n/a	15	15
Children and young people	8	7	15
Total	41	49	90

Delivery teams survey

The evaluation included a survey of delivery teams (staff and volunteers) involved in FFBM projects. There was one survey for Family Finding and one for Befriending and Mentoring projects. The surveys explored how projects were operationalised locally and respondents' views about the vision and aims of their projects; training and support; working with others; reach and engagement; relationships with children and young people; outcomes; and progress.

The online surveys were sent to all local authorities for distribution to their staff and volunteers. Surveys were live between 5th November 2024 and 13th December 2024. After data cleaning, the Family Finding survey received responses from across 26 of 27 participating local authorities. The Befriending and Mentoring survey data received responses from 126 individuals across 21 of 23 participating local authorities. During data cleaning incomplete surveys were filtered out. Responses were received from managers, frontline staff or practitioners, befrienders or mentors and those in other roles. Over half of Family Finding survey respondents (52%) were frontline staff/or practitioners, whereas over half of Befriending and Mentoring respondents (52%) were befrienders or mentors. Further details about the demographic characteristics of the respondents can be found in Annex 6: Delivery teams survey.

It is worth noting that there may be differences in perspectives between delivery staff and volunteers involved in projects (such as mentors). The delivery team survey was designed to capture a range of perspectives about project delivery. Due to sample sizes, it was not possible to do subgroup analysis.

Analysis of local authority quarterly reports

In addition to MI data received from local authorities, the evaluation team analysed local authorities' quarterly reports. Quarterly reports were a DfE requirement and, for each local authority, collected information about project-level actual spend for the previous

quarter and projected spend for the coming quarter, progress against milestones, priorities for the coming quarter, and number of children and young people who started on their project in the previous quarter. Key data was extracted from the quarterly reports and analysed as part of the economic evaluation strand. Further details about this approach can be found in Annex 7:

Limitations of the evaluation

There are a number of limitations to the evaluation's analyses which should be considered when reading this report. These are outlined below.

- The evaluation does not include an impact evaluation of the programme at this stage. Stage 1 (year 1) evaluation activity will inform DfE's and the evaluation team's thinking around measuring outcomes, including the feasibility of carrying out an early outcomes assessment using adapted Bright Spots survey data and historical Bright Spots data in year 2, and impact evaluation in Stage 2 (if feasible). This report focuses on sharing reported benefits of the programme at this early stage.
- It is important to note a potential risk of bias in the MI responses due to the retrospective nature of certain questions. Some of the outcomes relating to before and after programme participation were completed at the same time by the project delivery teams. Results from the MI analysis cannot necessarily be attributed to the FFBM programme. Future work as part of Stage 1 will include a feasibility study to assess whether a full counter-factual impact evaluation, or alternative impact evaluation approaches, could be conducted in the future.
- The MI data presented does not include data from all local authorities that participated. While the MI covers most projects (48 out of 50), 2 projects were missing from this dataset. However, there were no noticeable commonalities between the projects that did not submit the MI data, suggesting that the data included in this report is broadly representative across the programme. In addition, in some instances, the data provided was incomplete or missing. This was due to the early phase of the child or young person's engagement, or some questions not being relevant for all children and young people. Consequently, for some questions the sample size was reduced. These cases are highlighted in the respective sections, and caution is advised when smaller samples are used as they may not be representative of all local authorities or children and young people taking part.
- The adapted Bright Spots sample was small (matched sample n=244) and reflected a small proportion of the 2,115 children and young people who had been referred to the programme by the end of December 2024. There was varying participation in the adapted Bright Spots surveys: in relation to Befriending and

Mentoring specifically, a large proportion of children and young people's responses originated from one local authority (n=73 of 116). Five local authorities had only one response. The small sample sizes and potential selection bias of the children and young people completing the survey limits the representativeness of the year 1 sample. As such the data from the adapted Bright Spots surveys cannot be assumed to be representative of children and young people's experiences across all FFBM projects.

- The adapted Bright Spots data for the programme was not compared with a matched or weighted comparison group. When comparing the adapted Bright Spots data with historical Bright Spots responses, children and young people in the FFBM programme sample had different characteristics to those in the historical sample. For example, a greater portion of FFBM children and young people were in residential care and were typically of a younger age. However, although they were younger than the historical samples, both samples were towards the upper end of the age bracket that the FFBM programme targeted[14].
- As outlined, the analysis of adapted Bright Spots survey data distinguished between children and young people who had begun participating in the programme and those who had not. The adapted Bright Spots survey was completed, on average, 149 days after children and young people started receiving support (this ranged from 30 to 341 days). However, whilst this tells us that respondents had participated in the programme to some extent, we do not know if they had reached a point of sufficient support at which outcomes would be expected to emerge.
- Engaging children and young people in the case study research proved challenging and resulted in fewer participants than intended. Overall, the evaluation team sought to interview up to 40 children and young people (up to 5 for each Family Finding case study with 1 focus group for each Befriending and Mentoring case study). Despite efforts to recruit and engage more children and young people, 15 took part. All children and young people who participated in the case studies we recruited by project staff. The evaluation team provided clear guidance encouraging the selection of a wide range of children and young people's experiences to mitigate against selection bias, it may be likely that those most engaged in the programme agreed to participate in the evaluation. Insights from children and young people who participated were invaluable and resonated with the views of social workers and Personal Advisors who were interviewed. While the qualitative data from children and young people is limited, the adapted Bright Spots surveys also provided the opportunity for a wider range of children

[14] It is worth noting that these differences would be adjusted as part of an impact evaluation of the programme (for example using weights), however this was not in scope for this stage of the evaluation and for this descriptive analysis.

and young people to share their experiences of the programme with the evaluation team.

- Due to the sample sizes of the survey and qualitative data presented in this report, it is not possible to draw firm conclusions about the difference the projects made to children and young people.

In this report, MI data and qualitative insights from case studies have been used to identify reported benefits of the programme for a sample of participating children and young people. Benefits presented in this report have been grouped thematically in line with the intended outcomes for the programme. Findings from the adapted Bright Spots surveys may provide additional insights into children and young people's lives in and beyond care, and so these have been signposted alongside the MI and qualitative insights from case studies.

Report structure

This evaluation report of the first year of the programme is structured as follows:

- Projects' design, delivery and reach summarises how projects were designed, which groups of children and young people they targeted, the referrals processes (including what worked well and not so well) and who participated.
- Project mobilisation and implementation provides an overview of how projects were set up and how they were delivered on the ground.
- Reported benefits of the programme provides initial descriptive evidence focusing on themes around the key intended outcome areas from the ToC, such as children and young people's networks and relationships, wellbeing and feelings of loneliness, and a sense of identity and belonging. It also outlines reported benefits for staff and the wider system.
- Children and young people's adapted Bright Spots survey findings presents data collected from children and young people on the programme, some data was compared with historical Bright Spots data. This sought to explore this approach for future evaluation work and identify potential patterns among those expected to benefit from the programme against those who did not participate.
- Programme costs reflects on projects' costs of delivery.
- Barriers and enablers to project delivery presents the main enablers and barriers to programme implementation and includes a summary of priorities for the future as identified by interviewees.
- The report concludes by drawing together conclusions, learning and recommendations in Learning to date and next steps.

The annexes contain the:

- full programme ToCs
- a summary of the data sources informing the evaluation
- detailed methodological information about the monitoring information (MI), adapted Bright Spots surveys, case studies, delivery teams survey, and value for money assessment
- additional data tables from the MI data, delivery teams survey and adapted Bright Spots surveys.

Projects' design, delivery and reach

Key findings

- Twenty-seven Family Finding and 23 Befriending and Mentoring Projects were funded across 45 different local authority areas or consortia that had applied to be part of the programme.
- Forty-three of the 50 Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects were delivered in collaboration with third party delivery partners. Twenty-three of the Family Finding projects were delivered in collaboration with Family Rights Group. Befriending and Mentoring projects were delivered with a wider range of partners.
- In line with the programme aims, projects sought to reach different groups of children and young people with a broad range of characteristics and needs. However, in practice, some case study projects took a more universal approach to recruiting and engaging children and young people.
- Although interviewees suggested referrals had started slowly, across the projects that provided MI data, 2,115 children and young people were referred by the end of December 2024. For Family Finding projects, 1,131 children and young people were referred and for Befriending and Mentoring projects, 984 children and young people were referred.
- Based on the MI data, the average age of children and young people referred to Family Finding projects was 16 years. Of those referred, 62% were in care and 38% care leavers.
- For Befriending and Mentoring projects, the average age of those referred was 18 years. Sixty-three per cent of those referred were care leavers, and 37% were in care. Forty-one per cent were NEET.
- Around half (51%) of children and young people referred to Family Finding and 62% of those referred to Befriending and Mentoring were actively receiving support at the time the MI data was submitted (end of December 2024).
- Interviewees noted it took time to build trust with children and young people and their engagement in the programme fluctuated over time, particularly for care leavers. The main factors that facilitated engagement in the projects were children and young people's level of motivation to take part, different professionals meeting and communicating with children and young people prior to support starting, multi-agency working, and taking a child- and young person-led approach. Effectively matching children and young people with mentors was also key.

- At the time of the MI data collection, 17% of children and young people had withdrawn from Family Finding and 10% from Befriending and Mentoring support.
- Barriers to engagement included unsuitable referrals being made to the projects (thus children and young people not starting support), and children and young people's changing circumstances and wider pressures in their lives, particularly for care leavers. For Family Finding projects specifically, difficulty getting foster carers on-board with the project aims and objectives could hinder engagement.
- Facilitators to engagement included children and young people's motivation to take part and project staff understanding their needs and goals. It was important that staff took time to meet with and explain the project to children and young people and that project staff worked with other professionals to support children and young people's engagement. Good relationships between children and young people and project staff and mentors were also an important facilitator to engagement, especially where the approach was child- or young person-led. For befriending and mentoring projects, ensuring children and young people were matched to appropriately was key.

Projects' design overview

Overall, across 45 local authorities,[15] 50 projects were funded through the FFBM programme. Twenty-seven were Family Finding and 23 were Befriending and Mentoring projects. Two projects were delivered with a consortium of 2 to 3 local authorities. Most local authorities applied to deliver a single project (21 for Family Finding and 17 for Befriending and Mentoring) however, 6 local authorities successfully applied to deliver both Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects (see Figure 2).

Figure 1 Summary of 50 funded projects

Family Finding projects 27	**Befriending and Mentoring projects** 23
Local authorities with only Family Finding projects 21 local authorities	**Local authorities with only Befriending and Mentoring projects** 17 local authorities
Local authorities with both Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring Projects 6 local authorities	**Local authorities with both Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring Projects** 6 local authorities

[15] Throughout the report, the term 'local authorities' refers to individual local authorities (including boroughs) and the 3 consortia projects.

Consortium of local authorities	Consortium local authorities
1 area delivered both Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring	2 areas – 1 delivered only Befriending and Mentoring, and 1 delivered both Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring

Across both Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects, most were delivered in collaboration with third party delivery partners.

- For Family Finding, 23 projects were delivered with Family Rights Group. Two projects were delivered with Daybreak, and 1 project with Pale Blue (Kevin Campbell and Elizabeth Wendell). Four Family Finding projects were delivered in-house by the local authorities. Some projects had more than one delivery partner.
- Twenty Befriending and Mentoring projects were being delivered in partnership with a wide range of national and local third-party delivery partners; national providers involved in 2 or more projects included Goal 17, Volunteering Matters and The Mighty Creatives. Of these, at least 4 projects were being delivered with a consortium of more than one third party. Only 3 Befriending and Mentoring projects were designed to be delivered in-house by the local authority.

In line with DfE guidance, projects were a mix of new (16 Family Finding and 15 Befriending and Mentoring projects) and expanded provision (11 Family Finding and 8 Befriending and Mentoring projects) to reach new cohorts of children and young people.

Target cohorts of children and young people

A key aim of the FFBM programme was to reach groups of care-experienced children and young people who had not previously received similar support. Most participating local authorities designed their projects to be inclusive of both children in care and care leavers (19 Family Finding and 11 Befriending and Mentoring projects), however a small number focused on either children in care (3 Family Finding and 7 Befriending and Mentoring projects) or care leavers (4 Family Finding and 5 Befriending and Mentoring projects).[16] Beyond this, local authorities sought to engage specific groups of children and young people, including:

- young parents
- unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC)
- those at-risk of exploitation or with repeat missing episodes
- those who have experienced multiple placement moves
- those with an identified mental health issue

[16] One Family Finding project application did not specify whether their project was focused on children in care or care leavers.

- those living outside of the county/borough which cares for them
- those already engaged in other specific support services
- those not in education, training or employment (NEET)
- those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)
- those living in supported accommodation or children's home
- those with a permanency care plan (Family Finding only)
- care leavers in custody or who were working with the Youth Justice Service (YJS).

Project typologies

The evaluation team reviewed local authorities FFBM programme applications and conducted a rapid evidence assessment (REA) to inform the development of typologies of the FFBM projects. Documents reviewed as part of the REA included evaluations of other similar programmes, and wider research on related topics. Developing typologies of the 2 strands supported the evaluation by:

- grouping FFBM projects by their similarities and differences
- providing a framework for highlighting nuances between activities, outputs and outcomes in the FFBM project ToCs (see Annex 1: Theories of Change).
- guiding the evaluation (for example, informing case study sampling, supporting analysis and reporting).

For Family Finding projects, the evaluation team identified 2 typologies: 'Type 1' projects adopting a Lifelong Links (LLL[17]) approach while 'Type 2' projects following other approaches (see Table 6).

Table 6: Family Finding typologies

Characteristics	Type 1: 'Lifelong Links' (n=23)	Type 2: 'Other models of Family Finding' (n=4)
Model	Following the Lifelong Links (LLL) model with Family Rights Group.	Projects follow different (non-Lifelong Links) models such as 'Family Seeing' and 'Family Finding'.

[17] See more detail about this model here: What is Lifelong Links? - Family Rights Group

Characteristics	Type 1: 'Lifelong Links' (n=23)	Type 2: 'Other models of Family Finding' (n=4)
Approach and activities	Centred around a Family Group Conference (FGC),[18] which is a key feature of Lifelong Links.	Embedded in wider local authority services (for example, Family Hubs or Therapeutic Support Services).
Staffing	Delivered by paid staff supported by a central LLL coordinator.	Delivered by paid staff.
Volunteers	Volunteers may be involved in delivery.	No volunteers involved.

Family Finding projects that were following the LLL model focus on 4 key outcome areas: whether children and young people have an increased support network; an increased knowledge of family, a stronger sense of identity, and/or repaired relationships.

For Befriending and Mentoring projects, 2 overarching typologies were developed: 'Type 1' were "relationship-centred" projects, and 'Type 2' were "goal-oriented" projects. Relationship-centred projects primarily focused on developing a positive relationship between the mentor[19] and mentee; 3 models of projects form this overarching approach. For the goal-oriented projects, the projects' primary focus was to achieve specific goals through the mentoring relationship (see Table 7).

Analysis of project applications showed planned duration of support provided through projects typically varied between FFBM projects. For Family Finding, the planned duration of support ranged from several months to 2 years, however many applications did not expand on the duration support would be offered for. For Befriending and Mentoring projects, applications suggested support would typically last between 6 and 12 months. Some projects did not specify a duration, and others noted that support would be offered indefinitely, as relationships and networks may be sustained beyond the programme lifespan.

[18] Family Group Conferences are meetings which bring together family, friends, and professionals directly involved with a child or young person, used to make decisions or plan for a child or young person's care.
[19] Throughout this report and for the purposes of this evaluation, the term 'mentor' refers to both mentors and befrienders.

Table 7: Befriending and Mentoring typologies

Typology	**Type 1: Relationship-centred (n=19): Relationship between mentor-mentee was primary.**	**Type 1: Relationship-centred (n=19): Relationship between mentor-mentee was primary.**	**Type 1: Relationship-centred (n=19): Relationship between mentor-mentee was primary.**	**Type 2: Goal-oriented (n=4): focused on achieving pre-defined goals.**
Characteristics	**Model 1: 'Peer' mentoring (n=4)**	**Model 2: 'Community-based' mentoring (n=13)**	**Model 3: 'Creative mentoring' (n=2)**	**Model 4: 'Goal-oriented' mentoring**
Matching with a mentor	Peer mentors (where mentors are also care-experienced).	Matching was based on characteristic similarities between mentor and mentee (for example, heritage, community, culture, religion).	Matching mentees with creative industry professionals.	Mentors may be matched on characteristic differences (for example, intergenerational) but not exclusively.
Delivery	Service provided in-house at the local authority or involved local community providers.	Service provider varied.	Service provided by a commissioned national organisation.	Service provided by commissioned national or local organisations.
Staff or volunteers	Volunteer-led (usually with a paid central coordinator). Some volunteers were paid.	Mix of paid staff (coordinators) and volunteer mentors.	Paid delivery staff (no volunteers).	Delivery involved volunteers and sometimes also paid staff.
Duration of support	Duration of support was flexible (usually a minimum of one year).	Duration of support varied, but relationship was not time limited.	Support was time-limited up to 7 months, with a set number of delivery hours per week.	Duration of support was usually time-limited up to one year.

Intended delivery overview

Across both FFBM projects, delivery started with recruiting and referring children and young people. These processes are described in Referrals to the programme. Once children and young people were identified for and/or referred to receive Family Finding support, case study and application form data suggested that project delivery typically intended to follow these steps:

- Recruitment and referrals: project was promoted, and children and young people were referred usually by their social worker or Personal Advisor
- Identifying connections: Family Finding coordinators worked with children and young people to identify potential connections
- Finding connections: Family Finding coordinators sought to find the people children and young people wanted to connect with and established whether connections could be made
- Reuniting connections: Family Finding coordinators arranged for children and young people and new-found connections to meet in a safe environment, for example via a Family Group Conference (FGC)
- Planning for the future: a plan for the future involvement of connections in the child or young person's life was developed collaboratively with all parties.

Although the duration, focus, and activities offered through the projects varied across different types of Befriending and Mentoring projects, case study and application form data suggested that delivery typically intended to follow these steps:

- Recruitment and referrals: project was promoted, and children and young people were referred from a variety of sources.
- Matching process: children and young people were matched with mentors.
- Introductory meetings: introductory meetings between mentors and children and young people took place to start building rapport and for mentors to understand children and young people's needs and aspirations, and objectives for the mentorship were set[20]
- Relationship building: children and young people and mentors met regularly, on a basis that worked for both parties; a relationship was built whereby children and young people could talk to their mentors about issues that mattered to them and learn from their mentors
- Feedback and reflection: mentors fostered a safe space to encourage self-reflection and provide constructive feedback through regular mentoring sessions;

[20] The matching process and introductory meetings are discussed in more detail in Facilitators to children and young people's engagement.

children and young people were supported to reflect on the progress they had made.

Before children and young people could be supported via the projects, projects needed to establish the foundations for delivery. This is discussed in Set-up and mobilisation.

Referrals to the programme

This section provides an overview of children and young people referred to the programme, and barriers and enablers to projects reaching target demographic groups of children and young people.

Referral processes

Across both FFBM projects typically took a referral approach to identifying and reaching children and young people to participate. Key approaches are summarised below.

- Social workers or Personal Advisors typically made Family Finding referrals, based on their knowledge of the children and young people with whom they worked. In some instances, a child or young person may have already spoken to their social worker or Personal Advisor about people they wanted to (re)connect with, and so Family Finding was seen as an opportunity for this to happen.
- Additionally, one Family Finding case study local authority took a more fluid approach to providing Family Finding support. In this instance, the Family Finding service was provided by social workers or Personal Advisors and did not have a specific referral process. Instead, they offered Family Finding to all children and young people they worked with by building on life story work offered as standard practice.
- Befriending and Mentoring referrals came from a wide range of sources. These included local authority services (particularly social work and leaving care teams), local authority-led projects already supporting care-experienced young people, self-referrals, and a small number came from social prescribers and external organisations.

Overall, 2,115 children and young people were referred to projects as of the end of December 2024.[21] In line with the local authorities' applications, the number of children and young people referred to projects differed.

[21] 'Referred' relates to all children and young people who were referred, their information was entered into the MI data and included all statuses of engagement and participation. For example, data relating to referrals also included those who since completed the programme, withdrew, or were participating at the time of writing.

- For Family Finding projects, 1,131 children and young people were referred;[22] this varied from 16 to 139 children and young people per project (1% and 12% respectively of all children and young people referred to Family Finding projects).
- For Befriending and Mentoring projects, 984 children and young people were referred, with the number of referrals ranging from 9 to 87 per project (1% and 9% respectively of all children and young people referred to Befriending and Mentoring projects).

Demographics of children and young people referred

The data also showed some key differences in the demographic characteristics of the children and young people referred to the FFBM projects. Children and young people referred to:

- Family Finding had an average age of 16 years, were mostly in care and attended school
- Befriending and Mentoring had an average age of 18 years, were mostly care leavers and NEET.

Of the children and young people referred to Family Finding projects:

- the average age of children and young people referred was 16 years with:
- 9% aged under 10 years
- 29% aged 11 to 15 years
- 36% aged 16 to 18 years
- 26% aged 19 years and over
- there was a near even distribution of children's and young people's sex, with slightly more males (50%) than females (49%) participating; 1% of participants were categorised as 'other'
- almost three-quarters of children and young people were of a White ethnic background (70%) with 16% from an ethnic minority background, 9% from mixed or multiple ethnic backgrounds and 5% from another ethnic background
- 44% of children and young people were attending school, while 25% were NEET; other children and young people were in further education (17%), employed (7%), or in higher education or other training (4% respectively)

[22] This includes the entire sample of individuals recorded in the MI templates at this stage. 'Referred to' can mean referred to the programme, started the programme, started but withdrew, etc. Further breakdowns on involvement and participation in Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects can be found below.

- more than half of children and young people (62%) were in care and 38% were care leavers.

Further detail about the demographic characteristics of children and young people referred to Family Finding projects is available in Table 8.

Of the children and young people referred to Befriending and Mentoring projects:

- the average age of children and young people referred was 18 years with:
- 3% aged under 10 years
- 13% aged 11 to 15 years
- 37% aged 16 to 18 years
- 47% aged 19 years and over
- slightly more males (57%) than females (41%) participated; with 2% categorised as ‘other’ participated
- most children and young people (62%) were of a White ethnic background, while one-quarter (25%) were of an ethnic minority background, 6% were from a mixed or multiple ethnic background, and 7% were from another ethnic background
- the largest proportion of children and young people were not in education, employment, or training (41%), while 21% were in further education, 17% were attending school, 8% were in higher education and 4% were in other training
- most of the children and young people referred (63%) were care leavers and 37% were in care.

Further information about the demographic characteristics of children and young people referred to Befriending and Mentoring projects is provided in Table 8

Table 8: Demographic characteristics of children and young people participating in FFBM projects

Characteristic	**Family Finding**		**Befriending and Mentoring**	
	N	**Mean/ Percentage**	**N**	**Mean/ Percentage**
	1127	16 years	979	18 years
Age group (years)	1127	N/A	979	N/A
Under 10	105	9%	25	3%

Characteristic	Family Finding		Befriending and Mentoring	
	N	Mean/ Percentage	N	Mean/ Percentage
11 to 15	327	29%	123	13%
16 to 18	401	36%	366	37%
19+	294	26%	465	47%
Sex	1130	N/A	952	N/A
Male	562	50%	542	57%
Female	555	49%	394	41%
Other	13	1%	16	2%
Ethnicity	1130	N/A	952	N/A
White	789	70%	590	62%
Ethnic minority background	177	16%	238	25%
Mixed or multiple ethnic background	105	9%	58	6%
Other ethnic background	59	5%	66	7%
Education, Employment and Training	1039	N/A	898	N/A
Attending school (age 4-16)	459	44%	150	17%
Not in education, employment, or training	255	25%	366	41%
Further education (age 16+)	172	17%	193	21%
Employed	68	7%	76	8%
Higher education (age 18+)	46	4%	76	8%
Other training (18+)	39	4%	37	4%
Care status	1112	N/A	977	N/A
In care	686	62%	366	37%
Care leaver	426	38%	611	63%

Source: Ecorys analysis of MI data

There are likely to be a number of reasons for the differences between the cohorts of children and young people referred to Family Finding or Befriending and Mentoring

projects. As outlined in Target cohorts of children and young people, some projects targeted children in care or care leavers specifically, whilst other projects were open to both. Additionally, as local authorities sought to reach new groups of children and young people, many targeted specific sub-cohorts of children in care or care leavers (for example, young parents, UASC) although in practice case study projects often reported taking a more universal recruitment approach

The MI data also explored the number of placements/housing arrangements children and young people involved in FFBM projects had in the last 12 months (see Table A 16). Data showed:

Enablers to achieving suitable referrals

Case study interviewees commonly suggested that referrals had started slowly, due to the need to establish new ways of working. This included bringing new staff up to speed and establishing referral processes. That said, interviewees shared several enablers, which supported local authorities to achieve 'suitable' referrals. 'Suitable' referrals are defined here as those involving eligible children and young people who had consented to be referred. Enablers included:

- Frequent promotion of the project across local authority teams, to establish a shared understanding of the project aims, referral processes, and eligibility criteria. This was seen as particularly important within the context of high staff turnover in children's services. Project staff promoted the FFBM projects at team meetings, provided drop-in clinics to answer queries, and sent information via local authority newsletters and email communications (which were perceived to have more impact when signed off by strategic and senior staff).

  > The workers have gone out and presented at team meetings, they've done drop-in kind of clinics to get the word out. – *Project lead*

- Having children and young people who had already taken part in the projects promote the support offer. Interviewees gave examples of referrals being generated through word of mouth between children and young people who told their friends and siblings about their positive experiences of being involved in the projects. One project used children and young people's stories in promotional materials to advertise their Family Finding project. Another project lead explained that, following children and young people spreading the word to other care-experienced peers, they adapted their eligibility criteria to avoid disappointing children and young people who were interested in the receiving support through the programme.

  > Getting that information out in that way, via the voice of young people, you know, it was really impactful actually … I think it's much more relatable when it comes from a young person. – *Project lead*

- One Family Finding project described having a cuddly toy as a mascot for the project, which sat on professionals' desks – this was seen as a successful way of introducing the project to children and young people who proactively enquired about the toy, thus providing a useful conversation-starter about the project offering.
- Using simple referrals forms and processes which were not onerous helped professionals engage. However, one interviewee, who was initially reluctant about having a more intensive referral process in place, argued that having a more involved process meant referrers had to fully engage with and understand the support offer and the benefits it could bring for children and young people. This, in turn, embedded a clear understanding of the project, leading to them making more suitable referrals.
- In case study projects with third party delivery providers, having a dedicated local authority member of staff embedded in the project team to support with making (suitable) referrals to the delivery provider, was a key success factor. This helped to overcome the third party's lack of access to local authority systems which held information about the referrals. The local authority staff member could liaise with social workers or Personal Advisors quicker than the third party because the third party did not have pre-existing relationships or access to staff calendars. A strategic lead highlighted the resource-intensiveness of this important role, noting it should not be underestimated.

  > The addition of somebody that had a specific role in supporting referral completion or to be part of some planning meetings or initial referral meetings, that has made a huge difference, I believe, to the referrals that have come our way. And I think it was a smart move. – *Project lead*

- Providing project information to children and young people in an accessible way, to gather fully informed consent. In one case study project, this included translating project materials into the most common first languages spoken by UASC. Another case study project described how practitioners were available by email and telephone to answer children and young people's queries before a referral was made. One practitioner explained how this was valued by children and young people:

  > My young person is near-enough nonverbal … so they use a lot of digital equipment to verbalise themselves. So obviously they're sending multiple emails … which other departments that I've dealt with … they just cut you off, they don't respond anymore, you know, ultimately they get bored of responding. And [Family Finding coordinators] kept on responding to it. – *Practitioner*

- For care leavers in particular, interviewees highlighted the importance of offering and re-offering the FFBM support. Interviewees believed that, due to some care leavers' rapidly changing circumstances, they may not choose to be referred at one time but may later change their minds.

Barriers to generating referrals

Case study interviewees highlighted several challenges that affected referrals to both FFBM projects. These included:

- Interviewees suggested there was not enough time within the project delivery timescales to build relationships with some partners who could help reach particular groups of children and young people – notably, prisons, universities, asylum support charities, and (where relationships were not already well-established) residential care homes. Professionals suggested that a longer project delivery timeframe would help to build relationships to access these groups.
- In one local authority, children and young people often declined involvement in the project as they were unaware of having been referred (by a social worker) and did not understand the project's aims and purpose. This highlighted the importance of communicating and re-communicating the referral process to referrers, to ensure children and young people were aware of the project before being referred.
- Some children and young people identified as eligible/suitable for support did not want to be referred. One interviewee suggested the role of the professional offering the referral may affect children and young people's willingness to be referred – for example, if a young person had a poor relationship with their social worker or Personal Advisor, they may be less likely to accept the referral due to mistrust. In these cases, interviewees suggested a professional with whom the child or young person had a positive relationship, could offer the referral.

Project participation and engagement

Based on the MI data and case study data, the following section sets out the extent to which children and young people took up FFBM support after being referred to a project, and what that support looked like for those who were engaged.

Participation in Family Finding

Once referred onto the programme, as Table 9 shows, more than half (51%) of children and young people went on to start Family Finding projects and were receiving support at the end of December 2024. Around one-sixth (13%) had been referred to the programme but had not started yet.

Once children and young people were referred, they typically waited an average of 28 days (or 4 weeks) between the referral and start of support.[23] This varied significantly across individual children and young people with a range from 0 days (the same day) to 327 days. Additional qualitative feedback collected through the MI template provided insights into why some children and young people had been referred but had not started receiving support. Reasons included delays and pauses due to therapy sessions, holidays, placement breakdowns, availability of family, high risk of trauma, or other external factors.

Based on the MI data, only a small proportion of children and young people (11%) had completed the programme and 17% had withdrawn (as of December 2024). As described in Project typologies, the intended duration of support of Family Finding projects ranged from several months to 2 years. The qualitative data showed there were some delays in setting up and delivering projects, which may explain why the proportion of children and young people who had completed Family Finding projects remained low. Future analysis of MI data would provide further insights into project completion to end March 2025.

Reasons for children and young people withdrawing from the projects is discussed in Challenges in engaging children and young people. It is noteworthy that a small number (1%) of children and young people re-engaged in support after withdrawing, thus illustrating the benefit of having an ‘open door’ and re-offering support to children and young people.

[23] Any referral dates before the 21/11/2023 were considered invalid and were removed from the data.

Table 9: Status of engagement with the Family Finding projects (as of December 2024)

Engagement status	n	Percent
Referred to programme but not started yet	144	13%
Started programme and receiving support	567	51%
Withdrawn from programme	194	17%
Previously withdrawn but re-started	9	1%
Participation paused	42	4%
Not engaged	32	3%
Completed programme	128	11%

Source: Ecorys analysis of MI data
N=1116

Analysis of the MI data also showed the proportions of children and young people who had progressed through each Family Finding support milestone (N=1000): [24]

- 17% of children and young people had not yet participated
- 18% had initially participated in the programme
- 22% had started identifying potential connections
- a small proportion (5%) had identified connections but decided not to go further at this stage
- over one-fifth of children and young people (23%) had already engaged with connections through the project.

The average duration of support for children and young people in the programme[25] was 112 days (or 16 weeks) although this ranged a great deal from 0 for example where children and young people began support but then didn't engage, to 376 days. Interviewees explained that support usually took place over many weeks and that this could vary depending on the needs of the child or young person. For example, one

[24] This data represents the furthest point in the programme reached by the child or young person, regardless of their current engagement. For example, a child or young person who began receiving support and had started to identify potential connections but had since withdrawn would have their status as 'withdrawn' on the latest MI data, and progress as 'started identifying potential connections'. As a result, the figures relating to progress may not directly correlate with current status.
[25] This metric was calculated based on the difference between the date support started and the date support ended. However, there were inconsistencies in the data and so these figures should be taken as a guide only.

interviewee suggested that straightforward cases usually took around 40 hours from start to finish, or around 6 to 8 weeks, but shared examples of cases that took over 120 hours. Interviewees suggested this was due to:

- the need to build relationships with children and young people (see Relationships with children and young people), their foster carers or other professionals involved with the child or young person, as well as their potential connections
- navigate complexities of safeguarding and gaining informed consent from all parties
- going at the pace children and young people felt comfortable with
- for UASC, relying on external family tracing services.

Delivery of Family Finding support

Identifying (re)connections

Support offered for children and young people who participated in Family Finding varied depending on their needs and starting point at the beginning of the project. Case study interviewees explained that some children and young people came to the projects with a clear idea of who they wanted to connect with. However, Family Finding coordinators used a range of tools to support other children and young people to consider who they may wish to connect with. These included network mapping, online genealogical data resources, circles of closeness,[26] and building family trees. Interviewees gave examples of children and young people wanting to connect with birth family such as parents, aunts, uncles, siblings and cousins, as well as friends from school, previous neighbours, and professionals including former Personal Advisors, residential home workers, teachers, mentors or youth workers. These approaches were considered effective, with most Family Finding delivery teams survey respondents (87%) reporting that their projects were effective in helping children and young people to identify potential connections (see Table A27). For some children and young people, identifying people from their past was as far as they wanted to take Family Finding, and they paused or withdrew their participation before re-connections were sought.

Finding (re)connections

Where children and young people did want to make (re)connections, project staff generally believed their projects did this well. Of delivery teams survey respondents, the majority (85%) indicated their project was effective in supporting children and young people to make connections; with only 1% indicating their project was ineffective (see Table A27). This finding was echoed by case study interviewees. Interviewees described

[26] Circles of closeness refers to a way of categorising relationships into circles representing varying levels of ‘closeness’ to oneself, ranging from core connections (an inner circle) to acquaintances to broader networks (outer circle).

a range of tools they used for finding connections for children and young people. These included speaking to other family members, finding people on social media, using other local authority records, and contacting venues where connections were known to be (including gyms and pubs).

Despite these positive views, interviewees shared some challenges with finding connections for children and young people. These included:

- Some family members were reluctant to share information about other family members, due to a lack of trust in professionals or fears about the repercussions of reigniting relationships. In one case, project staff described taking a joined-up approach with the support of other professionals known to the family, to advise them of the benefits of Family Finding for the child or young person, provide reassurance, and encourage them to share information about other family members. Project staff believed the reassurance from multiple professionals with different roles and relationships with the family helped overcome suspicions of listening to the Family Finding worker alone.
- One case study local authority did not allow staff to use social media (which was not permissible within organisational IT policies) to find connections. Whilst project staff did not believe this hindered their work, one interviewee explained that a child or young person had become frustrated that their worker was unable to follow a lead they were aware of on social media.
- For projects working with UASC, as noted in Working with wider partners, interviewees reported the capacity of wider agencies, such as family tracing services, made it difficult to find international connections. For this reason, project staff explained that UASC children and young people were more commonly re-connected with professionals, than family.

Making (re)connections

Once connections were found, project staff liaised with all parties involved to gain necessary consents, manage risks, and bring all parties and children and young people together in a FGC or other setting. Family Finding coordinators had mixed views on whether to make the first meeting ‘celebratory’ in nature or to hold a more formal meeting. Some project staff spoke about having cakes and balloons, which the children and young people interviewed said they appreciated. However, other project staff noted that this was not always appropriate, and a more formal meeting may be preferred. Overall, project staff agreed that understanding children and young people’s needs and preferences, and offering a choice of meeting, was key. Children and young people interviewed said they particularly liked having an activity to do on the day of the meeting. They argued this helped to dispel any awkwardness.

Follow-up support

Despite Family Finding typically including a final planning stage, several staff members interviewed across case study projects raised concerns about the support that was available for children and young people to help them sustain their connections. Where children and young people had been re-connected with professionals, project staff worried about the level of commitment professionals could offer to maintaining relationships within the context of wider pressures on their time.

Interviewees believed that follow-up visits would be helpful to see how relationships were being sustained and identify whether children and young people needed additional support with this. However, follow-up support was not routinely offered across all Family Finding case study projects. For example, interviewees from one project were concerned that the third party delivery partner's role ended once the group meeting had been held. In this case, social workers or Personal Advisors were required to do follow-up support, which interviewees were concerned about them not having the time or capacity for (as discussed in Working with children's social care).

Participation in Befriending and Mentoring

For Befriending and Mentoring projects, once referred, children and young people typically engaged. Based on the MI data, Table 10 shows almost two-thirds of children and young people (62%) had started the programme and were receiving support, while 18% had been referred to the programme but not progressed to being matched with or introduced to their mentor yet. The time it took to match children and young people with a mentor and start support varied considerably. Analysis of projects' MI data found that the average duration between a child or young person being referred and support starting was 45 days (or 6 weeks and 3 days). This varied considerably across individual children and young people with a range from 0 days (the same day) to 291 days.

Additional qualitative feedback was collected through the MI template, which helped explain why some children and young people had been referred but not started receiving support. The main reason given by those completing the MI template was due to children and young people not yet responding to invitations to match with a mentor or engage in the mentoring process. Other reasons included: waiting to confirm the child or young person's contact details, a lack of mentor capacity, and mentoring being paused due to lack of engagement from the young person. In the latter example, places were being held for these individuals should they choose to re-engage in the project in the future. In some instances, the data showed that the mentoring process was at an early stage whereby initial meetings were being set up. Consequently, potential future MI data submissions may show further progress in the programme.

Interviewees also described challenges which affected how soon children and young people started receiving mentoring support. These included:

- Some mentors were not ready to start providing support once matches had been made, linked to personal issues around providing support due to their own trauma. This was specific to mentors who were care-experienced or had experienced similar hardships as the young people being supported.
- Delays in getting an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check meant that some mentors who were already trained, matched and ready to deliver mentoring support, could not do so until their DBS was cleared. Some mentors mentioned that it took between 6 to 8 weeks for their DBS to be processed.
- One case study project faced challenges recruiting enough mentors (see Barriers and Uncertainty of future funding).

Only a small proportion of children and young people (2%) had completed the Befriending and Mentoring support. A small proportion of children and young people had not engaged in the support (1%) or paused participation (6%), while 10% of children and young people had withdrawn from the projects. Reasons for withdrawal are discussed in Withdrawals from support.

Table 10: Status of engagement with Befriending and Mentoring projects (as of December 2024)

Status	n	Percent
Referred to programme but not started yet	180	18%
Started programme and receiving support	606	62%
Withdrawn from programme	97	10%
Previously withdrawn but re-started	3	0%
Participation paused	60	6%
Not engaged	12	1%
Completed programme	22	2%

Source: Ecorys analysis of MI data
N=983

Analysis of the MI data showed the proportions of children and young people who had progressed through each Befriending and Mentoring support milestone (N=905):[27]

- over one-third (34%) of children and young people have not yet participated

[27] This data represents the furthest point in the programme reached by the child or young person, regardless of their current engagement. For example, a child or young person who began receiving support and had been introduced to their mentor but had since withdrawn would have their status as 'withdrawn' on the latest MI data, and progress as 'been introduced to their mentor'. As a result, the figures relating to progress may not directly correlate with current status.

- 8% have completed a needs assessment or planning session
- a small proportion (8%) of children and young people have been matched with their mentor
- 9% had been introduced to their mentor
- 36% of children and young people met with their mentor regularly.

The MI data showed the average duration of support for children and young people in the programme[28] was 108 days (or 15 weeks and 3 days) but this ranged significantly from 0 for example where a child or young person had started support but then not engaged, to 305 days. Over one-fifth (21%) of children and young people had weekly contact with their mentor in the past quarter, while relatively smaller proportions had fortnightly (9%), monthly (10%), or twice-weekly (3%) contact (n=906).[29]

Delivery of Befriending and Mentoring support

Once children and young people began participating in the projects, meetings with their mentors were typically face-to-face, although some projects offered remote/online support. Face-to-face was considered to the most effective way of supporting children and young people, with almost all delivery teams survey respondents (97%) reporting this to be the case. Views on remote/online support were mixed. Just over half (51%) of delivery teams survey respondents reported that online/remote support was effective, whilst 10% said it was ineffective, and one-quarter (25%) indicated online/remote support was not applicable to their project.

Meetings between mentors and the child or young person with whom they were matched were usually one-to-one. Interviewees described doing a range of activities during mentoring sessions, such as baking, arts and crafts, going to dance classes, the cinema, bowling, and art galleries. A small number of children and young people said they did not like it when their mentors focused too much on one hobby, which could make them feel 'pressured'. However, children and young people generally liked doing activities, and appreciated when mentors introduced them to new things they had not experienced before:

> We did a bit of painting, did a bit of research, and then went back to the painting so it wasn't too much for me; and it was a way that I could cope with it. – *Child or young person*

[28] This metric was calculated based on the difference between the date support started and the date support ended. However, there were inconsistencies in the data and so these figures should be taken as a guide only.
[29] This metric was not applicable for the majority of children and young people (57%) who were participating at this stage – this is to be expected as many had not yet engaged with support (see Table 8).

Some projects also offered group activities. The MI data showed that just over one-quarter (26%) of children and young people had taken part in group activities through the project. Interviewees gave examples of group activities whereby mentors and children and young people were brought together, typically in a community space, to do day trips or activities such as ice-skating. Where group activities were offered, delivery teams generally thought they were an effective way of providing support to children and young people. Forty-three per cent of delivery teams survey respondents indicated group activities were not applicable to their project while, 42% believed this was an effective way to support children and young people (see Table A28). This positive view was echoed by interviewees who suggested group sessions were well-attended and brought several benefits. This included:

- Opportunities for children and young people to connect with other people beyond their mentor – which children and young people interviewed liked:

  > It's just nice meeting all the other mentors… it's another thing worth going out for. – *Child or young person*

- Opportunities for 'group mentoring' in a peer mentoring model.
- Helping children and young people who may be less interested in one-to-one support to engage in mentoring in a range of ways. One interviewee provided an example of working with young parents who were less engaged in meeting one-to-one, however were motivated to join a group with other young parents. Subsequently, this led to increased interest in accessing the one-to-one aspects of the project too.

Participation in both Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring

As expected, most children and young people (around 9 in 10) participated in only a Family Finding or Befriending and Mentoring project with a small proportion of children and young people participating in both (2% of those in Befriending and Mentoring projects also were participating in Family Finding projects; while 6% of those in Family Finding projects also were participating in Befriending and Mentoring projects). There were a number of children and young people (4% and 11% for Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring respectively) where their participation in other projects was unknown.

Challenges in engaging children and young people

There were mixed views about how easy or difficult it had been for projects to engage their target groups of children and young people once they had been referred. Over half of Family Finding delivery teams survey respondents (57%) reported it was quite or very easy to engage their target groups of children and young people, however 17% said it

was quite or very difficult to engage their target groups (see Table A50). Similarly, around half of Befriending and Mentoring delivery teams survey respondents (51%) reported it was quite or very easy to engage their target groups of children and young people and 12% said it was quite or very difficult to engage their target groups (see Table A50).[30]

Case study interviewees noted that children and young people's engagement also fluctuated over time, depending on what was going on in their lives and changes in children and young people's circumstances (for example, moving out of area) or mental health (including feeling low, anxiety, and/or depression). Engagement was reportedly more varied for care leavers than children in care. Delivery teams interviewed suggested it was not that care leavers did not want to engage in the projects but that they were dealing with wider pressures and issues in their lives, such as maintaining training, education or employment commitments:

> I find it quite difficult when they've got college, full time college students and they're so busy. – *Practitioner*

Project staff also said it was difficult to initially build trust in the services, due to children and young people's lack of trust in some professionals. Overcoming this barrier is further outlined in Relationships with children and young people.

A challenge which emerged specifically for Family Finding projects was engagement with foster carers. Challenges in getting foster carers on board with Family Finding consequently became a barrier to some children and young people's engagement. A small number of interviewees across case studies suggested that some foster carers were fearful of children and young people's (re)connection with their birth family who foster carers themselves were reluctant to meet. A Family Finding practitioner noted the importance of speaking to children and young people alone without their foster carers present to ensure that the voice of the child takes primacy (as some, particularly younger, children gave different answers about whether they wanted to do Family Finding when their foster carers were there, for fear of upsetting them). Practitioners suggested that time was needed to build relationships with foster carers, and working together with different professionals to encourage foster carers to work with them to meet the child's needs, sometimes helped to overcome this barrier.

[30] Almost one-quarter of Befriending and Mentoring delivery teams answered 'not relevant to my role/unable to answer'; case study interviews suggested this may be due to the different roles on Befriending and Mentoring projects – some delivery teams were not directly involved with engaging children and young people.

> It's better for the child if everybody's working together ... one thing we always try to do with our foster carers and parents is get some kind of relationship going with them, because at some point of the journey they're kind of co-parenting the children as well. So, it's really important to get the foster carers on board with … what we're doing, and also for the parents to trust the foster carers because sometimes they've not had the best experience and feel like foster carers know their children more than they do. So, it's really hard sometimes getting those relationships going where people are talking to each other and those connections [make] everything so much better for that child. – *Family Finding practitioner*

Withdrawals from support

As outlined in Participation in Family Finding, 17% of children and young people withdrew from Family Finding support. Qualitative data collected through the MI templates suggested this was due to children and young people choosing to withdraw for a range of reasons. This included not wanting to see or (re)connect with family or friends; the child or young person's mental health and emotional wellbeing; the need for stability before engagement; referrals to other services such as family connectors; and, in one instance an adoption taking place. An interviewee also shared an example of a young person withdrawing from the Family Finding process because progress took too long (because their connections could not be found).

Similarly, as outlined Participation in Befriending and Mentoring, 10% of children and young people withdrew from the Befriending and Mentoring support. Where children and young people had withdrawn, the qualitative data collected through the MI templates suggested this was due to an unsuitable referral (for example, because children and young people were already receiving support from elsewhere, or were otherwise ineligible for the project support); or children and young people decided not to take part after hearing more about the projects.[31] Another reason for withdrawal, as was noted in the MI templates, was due to language barriers. The case study data suggested that some projects accessed specialist translation services to overcome language barriers (see Working with wider partners), however the extent to which this was adopted across projects is unknown.

[31] Examples of practice which helped ensure children and young people were informed about the support offer before being referred, are outlined in Achieving suitable referrals.

Facilitators to children and young people's engagement

Facilitators to children and young people's engagement are discussed below. The findings presented primarily draw on the qualitative case study and delivery teams survey data.

Children and young people's motivation to take part

Interviews with children and young people suggested that an enabler to engagement, was their positive view of and confidence in the project – they believed the support could help them with things that were important to them. For example, children and young people who took part in Family Finding projects said they engaged with the support because they wanted to see people who were important in their lives, including childhood friends or family members.

> Being pregnant at the time, I said, 'I want all my family to understand and be on the same page as me' and to know where they are with everything and to give me all the support that I need. – *Child or young person*

Children and young people taking part in Befriending and Mentoring projects commonly spoke of wanting 'someone to talk to' or wanting some 'extra help' and thought a mentor could help with this.

Delivery teams survey respondents and project staff interviewed echoed this view (see Table A51) – most Family Finding (91%) and Befriending and Mentoring (81%) respondents reported that the support offer being seen as relevant to children and young people was effective or very effective in engaging them.

> Both my young people, really, really wanted to find parents. So that matches with the level of engagement. – *Social worker*

Understanding of children and young people's needs and goals

Children and young people suggested that project staff understanding their needs and goals for Family Finding or Befriending and Mentoring, and 'sticking to their promises' in terms of what was delivered, built their trust in the project and helped their engagement. The delivery teams responding to the surveys echoed these views; 90% of Family Finding and 84% of Befriending and Mentoring respondents believed identifying needs, setting goals, and planning was effective/very effective in supporting children and young people's engagement (see Table A52). Planning was often carried out with other agencies (see Working with other professionals to support engagement).

Pre-support meetings and communication

The children and young people interviewed were generally happy with the information provided to them in advance of starting the Family Finding or Befriending and Mentoring

support. This was typically provided to children and young people by their social worker, Personal Advisor, or via their foster carer and included written materials and information, or meetings with project staff. Delivery teams survey respondents believed pre-support communications and resources helped children and young people's engagement (see Table A53). Eighty-eight per cent of Family Finding and 83% of Befriending and Mentoring survey respondents felt their project's pre-support engagement techniques were effective/very effective in facilitating engagement.

However, a Family Finding practitioner explained that, even when using child-appropriate visual tools and simple language, it was difficult to explain the Family Finding offer to younger children (for example, those under 7 years).

One child or young person described receiving a leaflet about the support a Befriending and Mentoring project could offer. As the leaflet explained the broad range of services provided by a third party delivery provider, they were confused about what the support they could access involved. This was quickly clarified for them, but they suggested clearer communication materials could be helpful as the existing materials may put other children or young people off from engaging:

> I thought that it was like in a group kind of thing. But I realised that it was only one-to-one, yeah umm, it was a big surprise. I was like 'oh, I thought it was in a group'. – *Child or young person*

Working with other professionals to support engagement

The majority of delivery teams survey respondents believed that working together with other agencies was an effective way to support children and young people to engage with the projects (see Table A54). Over four-fifths (84%) of Family Finding respondents and just under two-thirds (63%) of Befriending and Mentoring respondents found working with other agencies effective/very effective to engage children and young people.[32] Thirteen per cent of Befriending and Mentoring and 9% of Family Finding respondents believed this element of their project was neither effective nor ineffective and a small percentage of respondents (3% of Befriending and Mentoring and 2% of Family Finding respondents) found this element of their project ineffective.[33]

Children and young people valued having other professionals join them for initial meetings with Family Finding coordinators or mentors. For some children in foster care, practitioners found foster carers vital in helping children and young people engage in the projects, for example by encouraging them to take up the support. Some young people

[32] Further details about projects' approaches to multi-agency working can be found in Multi-agency working.

[33] Befriending and Mentoring projects were more often delivered by third party delivery teams. Case study interviews highlighted the role of local authority staff in liaising with wider stakeholders on the third party's behalf, which may account for the higher proportion of respondents (20%) who gave the response 'Not relevant to my role /unable to answer' (compared to 5% of Family Finding respondents).

relied on their Personal Advisors to act as the first point of contact with Family Finding project staff.

Project staff also described monitoring children and young people's engagement through multi-agency planning meetings (such as Personal Education Plan meetings or FGC planning meetings) and frequent catch-ups between the different professionals involved with a child or young person. These meetings were used as an opportunity to identify waning engagement, the reasons for this, and consider possible solutions.

> We work very closely together. We put in our own regular slots to touch base to track each cohort and where things aren't going very well. Perhaps where there's some missing episodes for the young person or some difficulties with [having] the correct mentor. We're then discussing how we can overcome these and try and put some action plans in place. – *Project lead*

Relationships with children and young people

The importance of a positive and trusting relationship between delivery teams and children and young people was noted in the case study interviews. This was deemed important to support children and young people to engage, but also for Family Finding, critical to effectively manage children and young people's expectations about the process and outcomes. For example, needing to share news that a family member did not want to reconnect, or if an identified connection had died.

> We have to have some really difficult conversations. And that's why that relationship-building in the beginning is so important because then it's able to have those open discussions, even though they are difficult, you've got that relationship and they're honest and open about these things at the beginning. – *Strategic lead*

Responses to the delivery teams survey suggested that relationships between delivery staff and children and young people were largely positive, based on staffs' views (see Table A55, Table A56, Table A57). Interviewees echoed this view, citing that whilst initially building trust with children and young people can be difficult due to a lack of trust in some professionals, once children were engaged, the relationships were positive.

Staff from other projects highlighted the benefits of FFBM projects being delivered by professionals who were not social workers.[34] This helped where children and young people had poor relationships with or perceptions of social workers. This view was echoed by a young person, who preferred to engage with services which they perceived as being separate to local authority's children's social care services:

[34] The evaluation team is aware of at least one project that was delivered by social workers.

> I found that in general, anything that is helpful but isn't attached to [council services] was helpful because it actually felt like someone was in your corner. – *Child or young person*

Family Finding coordinators and Befriending and Mentoring mentors described a range of techniques that helped to initially build trust with children and young people. These included talking openly, seeing the children and young people multiple times, doing fun activities together such as playing football, seeing a movie, going for a walk, or having a coffee or food together.

> Getting to know them is a really big part of what I do and that can take weeks and weeks to get to know a child enough for them to feel confident, to come out with me or be happy for me to talk about their story and where they've been. If they've been in care for a few years, it can be really hard for them to kind of just open up a bit about that. – *Family Finding practitioner*

The children and young people interviewed described the traits they liked about the Family Finding coordinators and Befriending and Mentoring mentors. They said they liked people who were talkative, open, and 'stuck to their word'. This was particularly important to children and young people who had been let down previously; one young person described using this as an initial 'test' for whether they continued to engage (meaning, that if the worker did not stick to their first promise, the young person said they would not have trusted them and would have withdrawn from the project).

> I have [Family Finding worker] and she's a really cheerful person, it brought the energy to it and made me actually want to work with [worker]. Whereas if someone came in looking all dull, you wouldn't want to work with them, because they don't look like they like their job. – *Child or young person*

> Every time we asked for something, they were like 'ok, I'll get it done'. – *Child or young person*

> We connected very quickly, and our relationship grew a lot over the sessions. – *Child or young person*

For Befriending and Mentoring projects, a successful relationship also hinged on effective matching, as discussed below.

Effectively matching children and young people with mentors (Befriending and Mentoring only)

In all Befriending and Mentoring projects, children and young people were 'matched' with a befriender or mentor. As set out in Project typologies, the emphasis of this matching

varied depending on the project type – for example, matching with a peer mentor, or based on similar characteristics or shared interests. Similarly, the matching process varied across case study projects interviewed. The key considerations for a successful match, as shared by those interviewed, were:

- Ensuring there were characteristic similarities such as being care-experienced, having other similar background experiences, or mutual interests or hobbies. Less common matching traits included location and gender preferences and what the child or young person wanted to achieve by the end of the mentoring. Across the 4 Befriending and Mentoring case studies, mentors appreciated receiving information about children and young people's backgrounds, their interests and needs, and availability for mentoring sessions. For some mentors, receiving this information before a match facilitated the start of a positive relationship once they started their mentorship.
- The role of the local authority project lead or mentor coordinator was crucial in understanding the individual children and young people referred to the projects (and those who were peer mentors, where applicable) to be able to suggest what would be important for a successful match. This often included liaising with social workers or other professionals who knew the children and young people well.
- Where children and young people were involved in the matching process, they valued the opportunity to have a say. Across the 4 Befriending and Mentoring case studies, 2 projects involved children and young people in the matching process, whilst the others did not. One project exchanged children and young people's and mentors' 'About me' profiles so both parties could express their interest in being matched. Another project had a forum to bring children and young people together with mentors to initiate contact in an informal setting where mentors could be approached and asked to 'match'.

Most Befriending and Mentoring delivery teams survey respondents said the matching process was effective (78% of 126). Just 3% reported it to be 'neither effective nor ineffective', and only 3% said it was ineffective (see Table A58). The delivery teams survey also asked mentors about the extent to which they believed children and young people could relate to them, as key stakeholder interviews suggested this was an important relational enabler to successful Befriending and Mentoring support. Of 66 mentors who responded to the question, most (n=54)[35] reported they believed that children and young people could relate to them, possibly suggesting matches had been well-made (see Table A59).

[35] Where the base size is less than 100, the frequency is reported as a number rather than a percentage.

Child and young person led approach

In addition, case study interviewees, including project staff, mentors, and children and young people themselves, described how taking a child and young person-led approach was critical to facilitating engagement:

> It's not about forcing them into a structured programme. It's about working with them in a way that feels natural and comfortable. – *Mentor*

This included:

- removing cost barriers for children and young people to travel to suitable places to meet their mentors or new connections; one project overcame this by paying for children and young people's travel or staff or mentor travel time
- fostering a welcoming environment and safe space for the child or young person, taking a trauma-informed approach to engagement and using child-friendly tools and activities to facilitate conversations with children and young people and put them at ease. This included: fidget toys, games, and mapping activities
- offering children and young people a choice of meeting new staff or mentors independently or bringing someone with them. One young person described that they initially felt nervous about having a mentor because they struggled with meeting new people and valued having their social worker with them in the initial stages:

  > I was a little bit nervous because with me, I don't really like meeting new people, and I find it hard to open up to new people… It was good to have my social worker there. We met in [local area] and we had a little catch up there and got to know a bit about each other. From the first time meeting [mentor], I just had this feeling in me that I just knew I was gonna like them. – *Child or young person*

- meeting children and young people in locations where they felt comfortable. For Family Finding, this was about where the first meeting with Family Finding coordinators took place (such as coffee shops or in children and young people's homes). For mentoring sessions, some children and young people preferred their mentors to meet them at home, whereas others wanted to gain confidence in getting outside more, so meeting their mentor in public places worked better to help reach their goals.
- taking a flexible approach to communication, whilst recognising that young people may not always reply or be ready to engage at all times. Indeed, mentors commonly explained that they would send a series of text messages to their mentees but rarely got a response, if there was a lot going on in the child or young

person's life. However, from their point of view, this was better than not communicating at all as it showed that they care.

> Even when my mentee was struggling and not replying much, I still sent messages a couple of times a week, just letting them know I was thinking about them. – *Mentor*

- adapting the frequency and/or length of one-to-one sessions to children and young people's preferences. Where this was not the case, it negatively affected children and young people's engagement. For example, in one project, mentors were contractually obligated to deliver a certain number of hours of support before the end of March 2025. Where children and young people were matched closer to the March 2025 deadline, there were examples of mentors increasing the duration and frequency of support to ensure all of their hours were delivered, which one young person said stifled their engagement as it was too 'intensive'.

For Befriending and Mentoring projects, offering group activities also helped improve engagement with mentors (discussed in Delivery of Befriending and Mentoring support).

Some interviewees highlighted that support may be most appropriate or valuable at particular points in a child or young person's care journey and/or for specific cohorts of children and young people (for example, UASC or those who were NEET). For example, one interviewee described the importance of Family Finding projects being introduced earlier in a child or young person's care journey so that the connections were in place before leaving care. This view was echoed by a care leaver who had participated in Family Finding and wished this had been introduced earlier in their care journey:

> I wish the social [services] had a way to keep that contact with people or Lifelong Links being available to younger people. So, when I was starting or something it's something that was available to try and build up to that, my connection with my siblings, rather than just cutting them off sort of thing, that may have been better. – *Child or young person*

Project mobilisation and implementation

Key findings

- Delivery teams generally reported good progress in project set up and delivery, however, they noted that timescales had been relatively short. Working together with established third party delivery providers and experienced staff helped mobilise projects quickly.
- Interviewees highlighted the importance of developing a shared understanding and vision for projects across teams and wider services. This supported all aspects of delivery underpinned by effective multi-agency working (including referrals, safeguarding, engagement, supporting children and young people along their journey, and working with families for Family Finding projects).
- However, there were some barriers to multi-agency working. These were due to capacity constraints in children's services teams and wider services (such as asylum support services), and difficulties liaising with prisons due to unclear communication channels.
- The majority of Family Finding (90%) and Befriending and Mentoring (87%) delivery teams survey respondents indicated they had received training to support them in their role. Project staff and volunteers considered the training they received was effective in helping them in their roles. As a result, staff felt confident and satisfied to deliver their work. However, some wanted further training around specific groups of children and young people (such as those in custody and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children).
- Overall, delivery staff were satisfied with the progress they had made with project delivery; 89% of Family Finding and 83% of Befriending and Mentoring delivery teams survey respondents indicated that project progress was ahead or in line with their expectations.

Set-up and mobilisation

As described in Introduction and Projects' design overview, criteria for funding required local authorities to deliver FFBM projects to new or expanded to reach new cohorts of children in care or care leavers. This meant that prior to receiving programme funding, some local authorities were already delivering similar services or support (or had in the past), whereas for others the programme was entirely new. This section outlines project stakeholders' views on project set-up and mobilisation based on data from delivery teams surveys and qualitative case studies.

Building on delivery teams' experience

Interviews with strategic and project leads across case study projects suggested that building on pre-existing experience, knowledge, and practice enabled projects to mobilise quickly and within tight timescales. Interviewees highlighted the value in capitalising on team members' established skillset by recruiting staff experienced in delivering similar support. For example, some Family Finding projects comprised team leaders with many years of experience in delivering FGCs. For Befriending and Mentoring projects, some mentors had previously worked with at-risk groups of children and young people. Additionally, a project lead mentioned they had opted to recruit internally for staff with relevant experience because this was faster than recruiting externally.

In case study local authorities where FFBM projects were new (rather than expanding existing delivery), interviewees highlighted the importance of the role of an experienced project lead. A project lead with existing connections and relationships across the local authority was deemed important. One project lead interviewed believed their previous experience of setting up and embedding new local authority services served them well to establish a new Family Finding project.

Contrastingly, the delivery teams survey showed that most respondents had no prior experience of delivering Family Finding or Befriending and Mentoring support. Just under one-quarter of Family Finding (23%) and Befriending and Mentoring (22%) survey respondents had previously worked or volunteered on a Family Finding or Befriending and Mentoring project for children in care or care leavers (see Table A18). Although across both FFBM surveys, managers were slightly more likely to have previous experiences than those working directly with children in care or care leavers. Interviews with delivery staff and mentors highlighted the importance of transferable skills for the role. For example, practitioners with prior experience of life story work or FGC believed this set them up well to deliver Family Finding. Furthermore, mentors suggested that skills from other professions such as teaching and youth work equipped them well for mentoring.

Shared understanding of project aims and vision

The delivery teams survey showed that FFBM projects had successfully developed a shared vision for and understanding of the projects amongst project stakeholders (see Table A20, Table A21 and Table A22):

- Nearly all (94%) Family Finding respondents agreed that the vision for their project had been communicated well across stakeholders. For Befriending and mentoring respondents 82% agreed that the vision had been well-communicated, 10% neither agreed nor disagreed, and just 2% disagreed.

- Nearly all Family Finding (98%) and Befriending and Mentoring (94%) respondents agreed that they had a good understanding of the aims and objectives of their project.
- Most (89% of Family Finding and 82% of Befriending and Mentoring) respondents agreed there was a shared understanding of the project aims among project stakeholders. Ten per cent of Family Finding and 12% of Befriending and Mentoring respondents neither agreed nor disagreed, and just 1% of respondents to each survey disagreed.

Echoing the ToCs, across FFBM projects, case study interviewees commonly reported that the wider ethos and strategic direction of the local authority positively influenced the extent to which a shared vision was established. For example, in one case study, staff interviewed indicated that their Befriending and Mentoring project supported their local authority's wider strategic goal to ensure all children, including children in care, were given the same opportunities for extra-curricular and creative activities. Strategic and project leads believed this helped achieve buy-in for the project across project and wider stakeholders (see Project participation and engagement).

In Lifelong Links Family Finding projects that had previously been piloted (and were facilitated by historical DfE funding) stakeholders believed a culture which placed importance on maintaining children and young people's connections from before they entered care, had already been embedded. They argued that across local authority services, the culture supported the family finding ethos, its broader vision, and aims and objectives. One stakeholder expressed that whilst this meant less change would be seen at the system level within the local authority, good awareness of family finding principles meant professionals across the local authority were already onboard with the approach and processes involved.

In other local authorities, stakeholders noted that their culture and values were well-aligned with family finding. Despite not having delivered family finding in a formal sense previously, they believed existing work sought to achieve similar goals for children and young people. For example, building on aligned approaches taken to working with children and young people (such as therapeutic, Family Valued[36] or Restorative Practice[37] approaches), life story work and network mapping.

> Our whole ethos has really moved towards, you know, family-based solutions and networks…being the answer. – *Strategic lead*

Interviewees believed a shared understanding of the project aims and vision aided high quality referrals (see Achieving suitable referrals). Indeed, in some case study areas interviewees cited high staff turnover and a lack of shared understanding as a barrier to

[36] Family Valued approaches adopt relational (restorative) practice.
[37] Restorative practice is a conflict resolution approach which focuses on bringing all parties affected by conflict together to strengthen relationships and repair harm.

suitable referrals. For example, interviewees from one case study project shared that social workers and Personal Advisors had explained a creative Befriending and Mentoring project to children and young people as ‘art therapy’. A project lead interviewed for another case study heard social workers explaining the Family Finding project was an ’opportunity to connect with professionals from the past’, perhaps highlighting a misunderstanding from the social workers, or a resistance to presenting the opportunity to reconnect with family.

For Family Finding, social workers and Personal Advisors said better understanding of the project aims and vision also helped to clarify their uncertainties and dispel early fears they had around the potential for it to destabilise placements.

Working with third party delivery providers

Strategic and project leads working with third party providers suggested that partnership working was important for effective project mobilisation and delivery. Overall, case study interviewees believed partnership working had been going well. This was helped by regular meetings to set up and refine new processes (such as referral pathways or access to systems), have ongoing communication, and track progress.

Where local authorities worked with third party delivery providers, they highlighted several key benefits which helped them mobilise their projects quickly within tight timescales:

- some local authorities and third party providers had good relationships from previous work together which facilitated partnership working
- access to tried-and-tested resources and training opportunities
- opportunity to tap into experienced staff members already onboarded and up to speed with delivering similar programmes
- local authority staff said they had learned from the delivery provider’s expertise, and where third parties were delivering new services or to new cohorts, they were able to learn from the local authority’s experience.

Multi-agency working

Multi-agency working is an essential element to all work with children and young people, particularly those in care or leaving care. The delivery teams survey data showed that around three-quarters (79% of Family Finding and 72% of Befriending and Mentoring) of survey respondents indicated that they liaised with other stakeholders involved in their project to do their role effectively (see

Table A44). Case study interviewees suggested project staff regularly worked across local authority teams, with third parties, and with external agencies. This section breaks down the views and experiences of working across these different services.

Working with children's social care

FFBM project interviewees said they needed to work closely with children in care and leaving care services to:

- identify, refer and recruit children and young people
- share information to understand children and young people's background and support needs
- risk assess project participation and safeguard children and young people
- provide ongoing support throughout children and young people's journeys on the projects
- where children and young people were living out-of-area, interviewees highlighted the need to build relationships with counterpart local authority staff to gather additional information about the child or young person and the area in which they lived.

Delivery teams survey respondents believed children in care/leaving care services were aware and supportive of the FFBM projects. Over three-quarters (78%) of Family Finding respondents indicated other children's care services were aware of the Family Finding project, and a similar proportion (79%) agreed they were supportive of them (only 1% disagreed with either statement). Just over half of Befriending and Mentoring survey respondents agreed other children in care/leaving care services were aware (52%) and supportive (54%) of the Befriending and Mentoring projects. Eight per cent of respondents disagreed other services were aware of the projects and 3% disagreed they were supportive of them. However, a high proportion of Befriending and Mentoring survey respondents indicated 'Not applicable/unable to answer' (21% and 22% to each statement respectively). Interviews with Befriending and Mentoring delivery teams suggested this may be due to project leads being in touch with wider services, whilst those working directly with children and young people (such as mentors and mentors' supervisors) may not have contact with local authority staff. See Table A45 and Table A46 for a full breakdown of responses.

Interviewees suggested that having senior and strategic buy-in for the projects supported the multi-agency working needed for effective project delivery. Interviewees said that strategic buy-in helped keep the projects on the radar of wider teams, who had responsibilities for identifying and referring children and young people to the project. This, coupled with regular communication and promotion of the projects, was important to counteract a lack of awareness or misunderstanding of the projects within the context of

frequent staff changes (see Shared understanding of project aims and vision for further discussion).

Joint planning meetings for Family Finding or Befriending and Mentoring projects also worked well to ensure all local authority services were kept informed of project progress and provided a forum to raise any risks. This included inviting Family Finding coordinators to care planning and FGCs or inviting mentors to planning meetings for Personal Education Plans.[38]

Whilst all FFBM case study projects worked closely with social workers around identifying and referring children and young people to the projects, and supporting them along their journey, one Family Finding project used social workers and Personal Advisors to deliver the Family Finding support directly. Taking this approach was underpinned by the desire to not introduce (another) new professionals into children and young people's lives. They wanted to embed Family Finding into a universal offer for all children and young people and build on existing foundations for Family Finding within the social work profession, such as Life Story work.

> We feel really strongly about … the number of people in and out of children's lives. So, we … thought, actually, what would be our preferred model [would be] was around supporting people who have existing relationships or, you know…not giving them another worker. So, using the worker that they were going to get allocated anyway. – *Family Finding project lead*

Challenges working with children's social care

Whilst overall there was strategic level buy-in and support for the projects, working with children in care/leaving care services presented several challenges on the ground.

The main challenge to working together with children's social care professionals were competing priorities and full statutory workloads, thus limiting capacity for anything else. For Family Finding projects, social workers and Personal Advisors highlighted the resource-intensiveness of robustly safeguarding children and young people in the Family Finding process. A small number of social workers interviewed from a social worker-led project suggested the time needed to safeguard children and young people was greater than anticipated, and they therefore had not been able to dedicate as much time to Family Finding activities as they had hoped. They suggested more capacity was needed in the team to fully realise the potential for Family Finding. For Befriending and Mentoring projects, mentors raised challenges communicating with busy social workers when trying

[38] A Personal Education Plan is a statutory requirement for all children and young people in care. It aims to both monitor and support a child or young person's educational progress.

to understand children and young people's situations which often changed, resulting in mentors sometimes feeling 'out of the loop'.

This highlights the need for dedicated capacity within social work for the additional time needed for Family Finding or Befriending and Mentoring projects. This also emphasises the importance of the underlying culture of social work in a local authority being aligned with Family Finding principles which could improve young people's relationships with and perceptions of social workers. This was crucial where social workers delivered Family Finding support directly to children and young people.

Overcoming capacity constraints in children's services.

Interviewees shared examples of how they had mitigated the challenges associated with the limited capacity in children's social care:

Examples from Family Finding project**s:**

- One local authority recruited a member of staff into children's services to aid multi-agency working between social workers and third party practitioners delivering their Family Finding project. The new member of staff facilitated joint working by booking meetings into social workers' diaries, providing information about the project, supporting with referrals, and joining initial planning meetings to reduce delays and burden on social workers by liaising directly with the delivery partner.

Examples from Befriending and mentoring projects:

- In one local authority, whilst children's services developed the application for the programme funding, the implementation of their Befriending and Mentoring project was transferred to the Virtual School. This was perceived to have the benefit of disassociating the project from any negative perceptions children and young people may have of children's social care.
- Another project, that was working with a third party provider and had expanded to a new geographical area, invested time in establishing data sharing agreements and building trust with local teams. The data sharing agreement between the local authority and the third party provider allowed the provider to have appropriate access to some of the local authorities' internal systems. This meant that once members of the children's social care teams had provided initial information, the delivery provider could access any further information needed. This reduced the burden on social care teams as they did not need to respond to requests for further information.

Working with wider partners

Across the case studies, delivery staff - and sometimes mentors - liaised with wider professionals already supporting children and young people. This included foster carers, housing officers, employment coaches, education professionals, youth offending teams, probation and the police. This was to:

- generate referrals (see Referral processes)
- join-up the support being delivered to children and young people, ensuring consistency whilst avoiding duplication
- understand children and young people's needs
- identify and signpost or refer into other relevant support which children and young people could benefit from, including mental health services, Family Hubs, and Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) services
- access specialist services when working with UASC children and young people. These included translation services and, for Family Finding, the legal advice and the international family tracing services.

In the delivery team survey, FFBM delivery teams indicated they were confident in recognising when and how to signpost or make a referral to wider support when children and young people needed it (80% for Family Finding and 85% of Befriending and Mentoring respondents). A similar proportion of respondents reported that they could 'easily refer or signpost children/young people when needed' (86% for Family Finding and 80% for Befriending and Mentoring). See Table A47 and Table A48 for a full breakdown of responses.

Despite survey respondents' confidence, case study interviewees shared some challenges in working with wider services:

- Two Family Finding case study projects explained that specialist asylum support and legal advice services had long waiting lists which made it challenging to get children and young people timely support. In another project, staff found an international family tracing service straightforward to access, suggesting the wider support available for UASC children and young people may vary across different local authorities.
- Due to the sheer number of professionals in a child or young person's life, a small number of mentors said they did not always know which professional to liaise with when they needed to discuss an issue about a child or young person or to gain consent to take children and young people out for the day.

Staff and mentor training and onboarding

The majority of Family Finding (90%) and Befriending and Mentoring (87%) delivery teams survey respondents indicated they had received training to support them in their role. Overall, project staff valued the training they had received which, they believed, had been effective.

- After being onboarded to the project, almost all Family Finding (84%) and Befriending and Mentoring (84%) delivery teams survey respondents felt well-prepared for their roles.
- Most delivery teams survey respondents also felt well-equipped to do their jobs. Almost all survey respondents agreed they had the skills needed to do their role effectively (95% for Family Finding and 92% for Befriending and Mentoring) and meet the needs of the children and young people they supported (92% for Family Finding and 90% for Befriending and Mentoring).

A full breakdown of delivery teams survey responses to questions about training and onboarding can be found in Table A34 to Table A40.

Case study interviews suggested that Family Finding training was typically provided by third party providers. Where the Family Finding project was delivered in-house, external training was also cascaded to wider staff members. Interviewees valued a variety of Family Finding training opportunities, which they explained went above and beyond regular continued professional development training opportunities they had access to in their roles. These are outlined below.

- Intensive 4-to-5-day training delivered by third party providers, which included guidance on using specific Family Finding tools (such as life story work, mapping, and Circles of Closeness tools).
- Three-day training programmes in FGC.
- Wider support from external agencies (charities) including specialist advice and guidance about having trauma-informed conversations with children and young people. It also included taking part in awareness raising sessions about particular topics, such as child exploitation or working with UASC. This was particularly valued by practitioners who had not previously worked with care-experienced children and young people.

Specific training for mentors

The evaluation team's development of the ToC highlighted the critical importance of training and support for mentors in Befriending and Mentoring projects, recognising that many mentors were volunteers (see Project typologies) and often came to the role with no prior experience of working with care-experienced children and young people. This is further discussed in Building on delivery teams' experience. Befriending and Mentoring

training was typically delivered by the third-party provider or, for in-house delivery, by the local authority project lead. Training for mentors included:

- trainings in:
- safeguarding children
- the role of a mentor (including setting boundaries)
- using internal communication systems and working with local authorities
- specific training for working with care-experienced children and young people, including:
- practical guidance around engagement (and overcoming the lack thereof)
- trauma-informed practices (including re-traumatic stress for peer mentors) and how to create ‘emotional safety’
- knowledge and practical guidance needed to support children and young people, particularly those with complex needs.

In several case study areas, mentors were given the opportunity to suggest aspects of training they would like to receive based on evolving relationships with children and young people. In at least one project, this was facilitated by a dedicated training budget for each individual mentor.

Overall, mentors interviewed were broadly satisfied with the training they received. They particularly valued practical hints and tips which could be applied to their work with children and young people.

> It certainly equipped me with all sorts of skills that I've been able to use when dealing with [young person]. – *Mentor*

Further training and support needs

Just under half of project staff and mentors involved in the evaluation across both FFBM projects expressed they could benefit from more training and support through the programme. Forty-two per cent of Family Finding delivery teams survey respondents, and 45% of Befriending and Mentoring respondents agreed with the statement ‘I could benefit from more support/training to do my role effectively’. This may be reflective of the fact most respondents were front-line practitioners or befrienders and mentors.

Table A36 provides a full breakdown of responses.

Interviews with Family Finding practitioners in 2 local authorities (one LLL and the other non-LLL) suggested that they would like more practical advice and guidance. One interviewee felt that whilst the (non-LLL) training they received was very helpful to give an

overview of the theoretical underpinning of Family Finding, they wanted more practical advice and guidance.

> I felt like the training was pitched not at my level. I'm on the ground doing this work, and I'm very practice based. – *Family Finding practitioner*

Another interviewee had previous experience of FGC, but wanted further on-the-job training (such as shadowing) to help them adjust to the more flexible and less structured LLL approach to FGC. Having ongoing peer support available was suggested as a way to help share knowledge of how best to apply the learning gained (see Ongoing supervision and support for further discussion).

Within Befriending and Mentoring case studies, project leads and mentors interviewed identified gaps in the training offer relating to key issues affecting care-experienced children and young people. These included more training about trauma, and about wider local authority service areas like housing, benefits and mental health. Some mentors said they would have benefited from refresher training. Some wanted training to be offered at a range of times and/or for recordings being provided where the live sessions could not be attended. Where training gaps were identified, there were examples of projects providing additional ad hoc training which mentors appreciated.

Across both FFBM case study projects, practitioners and mentors expressed a need for more training and support related to working with specific groups of children and young people. This included training about the prison system to aid work with children and young people in custody and the asylum system to aid work with UASC.

Incorporating children and young people's voices

Delivery team survey respondents were asked the extent to which the voices of children and young people had informed how their projects were delivered. The majority of respondents agreed that the voices of children and young people informed how the project was delivered; 83% of Family Finding and 67% of Befriending and Mentoring respondents agreed. Very few respondents disagreed (2% Family Finding and 3% Befriending and Mentoring). For further details see Table A33.

Case study interviews suggested that feedback was collected from children and young people anecdotally through the project delivery teams and via case notes. For some Befriending and Mentoring projects, feedback was collected and shared through written and online feedback forms which were used to tailor delivery to individual children and young people. At this stage, there was no evidence of project-wide changes being made in response to feedback. However, some interviewees said this was a key priority for the future (see Priorities for the future).

Progress made

Overall, project staff were pleased with the progress made in implementing their projects. Delivery team survey respondents across both FFBM projects indicated that project delivery was progressing in line with their expectations.

- For Family Finding projects, 89% of respondents reported project delivery was in line with (62%) or ahead of (27%) their expectations. For Befriending and Mentoring projects, 83% of respondents said delivery was progressing in line with (64%) or ahead of (19%) their expectations. Only 10% of Family Finding and 16% of Befriending and Mentoring respondents said progress was behind their expectations. Table A18 provides a breakdown of responses.

Additionally, the majority of respondents across both projects agreed they were kept informed about how the project was progressing. The majority (87%) of Family Finding and (85%) Befriending and Mentoring respondents indicated they had been kept well-informed about project progress and changes. See Table A19 for more detail.

Case study interviewees suggested that whilst project progress had been largely positive, strategic and project leads regularly cited the challenges of setting up and starting delivery within short timescales – see Uncertainty of future funding for more detail. They therefore saw current progress as being at a relatively early stage, with clear priorities to keep embedding and expanding delivery (this is further discussed in Priorities for the future).

Reported benefits of the programme

Key findings

The early findings presented here provide insights into how children and young people appeared to benefit from the programme during its first year based on the MI data and qualitative insights. Findings are grouped thematically around the intended outcomes set out in the programme's ToC, however at this early stage in the evaluation it is not possible to assess whether these outcomes have been achieved. Findings from adapted Bright Spots data is presented in Children and young people's adapted Bright Spots survey

Reported benefits for children and young people

- Based on MI data analysis, compared with before the FFBM projects started, there was an increase in the number of connections/relationships children and young people had with important people in lives.
- Of those receiving Family Finding support, children and young people tended to (re)connect with immediate and wider family, professionals, including teachers and social workers, friends, foster families and others.
- In Family Finding Lifelong Links projects, staff indicated that children experienced positive outcomes related to increased support network, stronger sense of identity, increased knowledge of their family, and repaired relationships – this was based on data collected via the Lifelong Links model.[39] When comparing wave 1 and 2 MI data, staff also reported an increase in the support network of participating young people as the programme progressed.
- Perceptions gathered via the case study interviews suggested that Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects were contributing towards children and young people:
  - feeling part of a network or developing a greater sense of connectedness, for example by Family Finding projects supporting them to manage and strengthen prior or existing relationships
  - having enhanced wellbeing, for example with creative befriending and mentoring projects supporting children and young people to express their feelings
  - having improved confidence and independence, for example through being supported to express their views and/or access wider support services

[39] For Family Finding Lifelong Links projects, data on whether the child/young person has increased support networks, knowledge of family, stronger sense of identity or had repaired relationships was included. Project staff were encouraged to draw on existing data collected through the Circles tool. Further information about this tool can be found here: Lifelong Links Circles - Family Rights Group.

    - feeling less lonely for example by participating in group befriending and mentoring activities
    - having an enhanced sense of identity and belonging, for example by helping them to learn more about their past
    - having a greater sense of community for example through the mentor/mentee relationship and by connecting with other children and young people or mentors.
- Case study interviewees also reported other perceived benefits for children and young people involved in the programme. These related to enhanced engagement with education, employment or training activities, reduced likelihood of children and young people getting involved in criminality and specific outcomes for new parents.

Reported wider benefits

- There was evidence of perceived positive benefits among staff, as well as system-level outcomes/across local authorities. Staff suggested that being involved in the programme was rewarding, produced organisational learning, and, in some cases, reduced administrative burden in local authorities.

This section provides initial insights into how children and young people may be benefitting from FFBM projects, in relation to the intended outcome areas set out in the ToC. Findings are based on the MI data (as reported by project staff) and qualitative insights into perceived impact from the 8 case studies conducted. Case studies were purposively sampled to cover a range of projects funded across the programme; however, it is important to note that sample sizes were small, and findings are not necessarily representative across the programme as a whole.

The data provides encouraging insights into the programme's first year in relation to the key outcome areas set out in the ToC (subject to the limitations set out in Limitations of the evaluation and Annex 3: MI data collection, cleaning and analysis and Annex 3: Limitations of the MI data). During 2025/26, a detailed feasibility study will be conducted to further investigate whether a robust impact evaluation of the programme is feasible and appropriate to implement in the future, subject to programme continuation.

Enhanced relationships and networks

The following section draws on findings from MI data and case studies about children and young people developing relationships and networks. Additional insights relevant to children and young people's relationships and networks can also be found in Relationships and networks and Relationships with the adults they live with.

(Re)connections with important people in their lives (Family Finding)

MI analysis showed that the number of connections/relationships with important people in children and young people's lives increased on average by 1.8, which was a statistically significant increase, after engaging with a Family Finding project. There was an increase of 0.2 connections, on average, compared to wave 1 MI data. This could suggest that the longer children and young people participated in Family Finding projects, the more opportunities they had to connect with more important people in their lives.

Table 11 Average number of connections/relationships at the start and after engaging with the Family Finding programme

Connections	Mean	Standard deviation	Min	Max
Before	3.3	3.3	0	21
After	5.1	4.4	0	23
Difference	1.8*	-	-	-

Source: Ecorys analysis of MI data
N=484 (=sub-sample of only those who have already participated with FF projects)[40]

'*' means a statistically significant difference at the 5% level or lower

Forty-eight per cent (n=739) of referred children and young people (re)connected with at least one connection, while 52% (n=739) made no (re)connections. Among children and young people who made (re)connections through Family Finding projects, these were with at least one of the following groups: family, friends, foster families, professionals, or other important people. This varied from (re)connecting with 1 to all 6 groups. As outlined in Table 12, analysis showed, of participating children and young people, that:

- over one-quarter had (re)connected with professionals, including teachers and social workers (29%)
- around one-quarter (re)connected with their immediate family, including stepfamily (24%)
- one-fifth (20%) of children and young people (re)connected with their wider family, including stepfamily
- around one-sixth (15%) of children and young people (re)connected with other important people in their lives

[40] This was defined based on their current programme status, as provided in the MI data. Children and young people with a status of "not engaged" or "referred to programme but not started yet" were excluded, therefore producing a sample of those that have already engaged with the programme in some form (started the programme, started but paused, started but withdrawn, previously withdrawn but restarted, and completed the programme).

- fourteen per cent of children and young people (re)connected with their friends.

Table 12: Types of connections/reconnections made through Family Finding projects

Types of connections/reconnections	N	n Connected/ Reconnected	Percent
Immediate family, including stepfamily	718	175	24%
Wider family, including stepfamily	663	130	20%
Friends	669	91	14%
Foster family	640	79	12%
Professionals, including teachers and social workers	700	200	29%
Other important people in their lives	633	98	15%

Source: Ecorys analysis of MI data
Note: N=sample size, n=frequency

Family Finding Lifelong Links (LLL) outcomes

Family Finding projects that were following the LLL model were asked to provide information on key outcomes that the LLL approach routinely collects from children and young people.[41] These outcomes related to 4 key areas: whether children and young people have an increased support network; an increased knowledge of family, a stronger sense of identity and/or repaired relationships.[42]

For relevant LLL projects, and where this data was already captured as part of the LLL process, project staff were asked to provide data on these outcomes in the MI templates so these could be captured as part of this evaluation.[43] As such, the samples for this data were smaller (between N=202 and N=249) than the overall sample of MI Family Finding data (N=940). Consequently, caution is advised when interpreting the following findings. The data showed that (see Table 13):

- almost three-quarters (71%) of children and young people have a stronger sense of identity

[41] See more detail about this model here: What is Lifelong Links? - Family Rights Group
[42] Samples for these questions were smaller than the overall Family Finding sample as not all Family Finding projects were following the Lifelong Links model, and not all routinely captured this data.
[43] Staff were encouraged to draw on information already captured through the Circles tool, which is completed by children and young people. This was then entered by a professional into the MI template. Further information about this tool can be found here: Lifelong Links Circles - Family Rights Group.

- over two-thirds (68%) of children and young people feel they have an increased knowledge of their family
- more than three-quarters (76%) of children and young people feel they have an increased support network
- over half (54%) of children and young people feel they have repaired relationships.

Table 13: Lifelong Links programme outcomes

LLL-related outcomes	N	n Reported they experienced this outcome[44]	Percent
Increased support network	249	189	76%
Increased knowledge of family	239	163	68%
Stronger sense of identity	244	174	71%
Repaired relationships	202	110	54%

Source: Ecorys analysis of MI data
Note: N=sample size, n=frequency

The evaluation team also analysed changes in the LLL programme outcomes for individual children and young people that were present in both wave 1 and 2 MI data. At wave 2, participating children and young people were more likely to report having an increased support network (3 percentage points difference compared to wave 1). This was a statistically significant difference.

For Family Finding projects, the qualitative evidence also suggested that children and young people had made new connections and strengthened existing relationships including with family members, professionals, teachers, previous foster carers, neighbours and friends. Project staff reported these relationships helped children and young people feel part of a network and develop a greater sense of connectedness. For example:

- Project workers reported that Family Finding had helped children and young people to strengthen existing (weak) relationships, for example, by setting a schedule of contacts for monthly phone calls or seeing a young person at regular intervals (for example, every 6 weeks) and facilitating invitations to Christmas events.
- Project workers also shared examples of ways they had supported children and young people to manage their relationships. This included practical steps such as

[44] This was a binary question (yes/no) which was marked by the appropriate adults in each Family Finding project filling out the MI return forms.

adding essential contacts to a WhatsApp group so that the young person has a 'one-stop shop' for support.

- Several projects helped children in care who had been placed out of area establish a support network in their original local area, which they often hoped to return to.

Children and young people interviewed explained that the Family Finding projects allowed them to solidify their network or rebuild relationships which had previously ceased.

> I requested for contact with my younger siblings because I hadn't seen them in years and my social worker ended up sorting out this project and I managed to see all 3 of them... we've gone and done ice skating over Christmas time and stuff like that and one of my little [siblings] helped me move into my new flat last week.- *Young person*

Some interviewees felt that having the formal structure of Family Finding gave social workers the confidence to allow contact between children and young people and their siblings. In some cases, social workers said they had been concerned about children and young people being reconnected with people from their past who may not be good influences, pose a risk to them, or bring up past trauma. However, Family Finding coordinators had a specific and hands-on role in setting up and managing the risk. In one case, a social worker said this meant a child or young person could connect with a sibling where this had not previously been possible, and the relationship had been maintained independently after Family Finding workers stepped away and the risk was assessed to be safe.

A minor theme in the interviews with Family Finding project staff was associated with helping children and young people learn about healthy relationships. The following quote illustrates the view reflected by others.

> My young person understand[s] the boundaries of what a healthy relationship is and what an unhealthy relationship is, because [their family members] will also challenge [them]. And they will say to [young person] … 'I don't think what you're saying will be … good for you'. – *Personal Advisor*

Project staff reported the positive effect that being connected to a network was having on children and young people's lifestyles. In several instances, having connections to a network supported children and young people to adopt more healthy lifestyles, including cooking more, and having more secure housing. This was often attributed to having someone to talk to after a bad day and help with future planning.

Project staff and social workers and/or Personal Advisors reported that, where children and young people had been reconnected with families, family members also provided

feedback about the value of reconnecting with the child or young person. Interviewees spoke of family members who had found the process of (re)connecting emotional and generally positive.

Additional qualitative (open text) feedback from the MI data provided some evidence about how children and young people had been able to re-establish relationships with family members and previous carers. In a small number of examples, positive assessments had led to some children or young people returning home.

(Re)connections with important people in their lives (Befriending and Mentoring)

For Befriending and Mentoring projects, MI analysis showed that the number of connections/relationships with important people in children and young people's lives increased on average by 1.02, which was a statistically significant increase. It is also worth noting that this is a smaller increase compared to the (re)connections across Family Finding projects (1.8 as shown above). This difference was expected as increase in (re)connections beyond that of the mentor or befriender was not a primary aim of Befriending and Mentoring projects, while it was an important aspect of Family Finding projects.

Table 14: Average number of connections/relationships before and after Befriending and Mentoring

Connections	Mean	Standard deviation	Min	Max
Before	2.7	2	0	8
After	3.7	2.4	1	18
Difference	1.02*	-	-	-

Source: Ecorys analysis of MI data

N=103 (=sub-sample of only those who have participated already with Befriending and Mentoring projects)[45]

'*' means a statistically significant difference at the 5% level or lower

In the MI templates, projects were encouraged to provide qualitative (open text) feedback and any other comments. Common themes identified in this data included (n=152):

- The importance of the mentoring relationships: many children and young people had already started building strong bonds with their mentors and achieving set

[45] This was defined based on their current programme status, as provided in the MI data. Children and young people with a status of "not engaged" or "referred to programme but not started yet" were excluded, therefore producing a sample of those that have already engaged with the programme in some form (started the programme, started but paused, started but withdrawn, previously withdrawn but restarted, and completed the programme).

goals. As some children and young people faced various challenges, including health issues, gaps in social care support, and/or disrupted home lives, mentors were reported to play a crucial role in providing support, helping to building confidence, and helping children and young people navigate these challenges. It was evident through the comments that mentoring support was being tailored to individual children and young people's needs.

- Reported early outcomes: such as achieving educational and career goals, making proactive choices in education, employment, and training, and building confidence and personal development. These reported outcomes were often attributed to the support and guidance provided by mentors.
- However, some challenges were also reported. These included instances where children and young people had disengaged from their relationship with a mentor, as well as children and young people facing individual challenges, such as mental health issues, housing instability and personal circumstances which impacted on their engagement with the programme. These issues impacted the timely provision of support and services to children and young people.

Relationships with mentors

As was intended, a central theme running through the qualitative data for Befriending and Mentoring projects was children and young people developing new relationships with their mentors. Children and young people interviewed generally valued the positive relationships they developed with their mentors. They liked that they could do activities with their mentors and that their mentor gave them "someone to talk to" or approach with questions or problems.

> My mentor has been a brilliant person. I know I can go to her with any issues and I can always speak to her…if I've got any issues or problems, I can go and tell her. – *Child or young person*

- The professionals interviewed reported that having a mentor provided a non-judgemental supportive relationship to children and young people.

> What [third party organisation] offer is... a real supportive, almost like an aunt or uncle type role... without fear or prejudice or judgement. – *Strategic lead*

- One project worker reflected on the value that having a mentor had on one young person who was incarcerated. Having this connection meant the young person had somebody to visit them and helped make them feel cared for.

> They didn't have anyone else visiting or anyone else getting in touch so it was quite powerful for them to think someone actually did care and sort of cared enough to come and see you in prison and they were kind of looking forward to having that peer mentor on the outside, when they were released, so that was a huge positive. – *Personal Advisor*

The children and young people's survey also suggested positive relationships between participants and their mentors. Further details can be found in Sources of support.

Children and young people's wellbeing

Qualitative case study data suggested that FFBM projects were contributing to enhanced wellbeing among some children and young people. When asked about Befriending and Mentoring projects, one mentor reported that a young person they supported had experienced reduced levels of anxiety and headaches which they believed was a result of receiving support through the programme. The following quotes illustrate the views shared by others.

> Basically, [mentor helps me with my] internal well-being, so like how to like manage emotions and keeping up with your well-being, keeping your emotions in check etcetera. - *Child or young person*

Project staff across case studies also believed the mentoring support supported children and young people with mental health and wellbeing in the interim before receiving formal therapeutic support.

> [The Befriending and Mentoring project is] definitely something that we've seen benefiting our young people. It is like the missing gap between going to CAMHS and having your social worker that you only see occasionally. I think, it's so important that we have that [mentor] to listen to the young person, to be there for that young person. - *Project lead*

- Children, young people and social workers explained that creative mentoring helped children and young people to express their feelings and preferences more positively and creatively. Some social workers noted this was particularly important for children and young people that worried about expressing opinions and getting them wrong or telling a professional about their interests in case professionals then put a lot of emphasis on this interest. This finding was also reflected by children and young people, who reported that, at times, they struggled to express and understand their emotions. Children and young people shared their views:

> The poems really helped me. I mean, some of the things I wrote I was like, am I really feeling like that? Like I'm genuinely shocked because it's like really hard for me to identify my emotions, but when I put it into words and poems, you know, it's easier. – *Child or young person*

The adapted Bright Spots survey also provided further information about children and young people's wellbeing (see Children and young people's wellbeing).

Improved confidence

In Befriending and Mentoring projects, children and young people felt that taking a person-centred approach helped them to grow their confidence and independence (see Child and young person led approach). One mentor reflected that mentoring invited children and young people to express their own opinions about what they wanted to do in the project in a safe environment – this, they believed, helped to grow children and young people's confidence to express their views.

> They're learning how to give an opinion and not be worried that that opinion might not be the right opinion, you know, young people quite often won't say things because they're scared of getting it wrong and being ridiculed. - *Mentor*

Befriending and Mentoring project staff, children and young people also shared that completing activities during mentoring helped to build their confidence in accessing services, attending appointments, and their own abilities. For some, this was through mentors going to appointments with the children and young people. One young person shared that this was because of their mentor's positive regard for their work:

> We were doing a watercolour winter scene for Christmas and I was like, "it doesn't look like yours, the trees aren't right, the colours are too light, like, it's not right." And [they] was like, "no, keep going, like if needs be, take a step back, look at it from a different angle, like, it looks amazing" which was lovely, and by the end of it, it did look lovely. [Mentor] told me to trust the process. - *Child or young person*

Across case study projects, both project staff and children and young people reported an increase in children and young people's confidence. In the Befriending and Mentoring projects, mentors frequently explained involvement in group activities as part of mentoring had supported children and young people's confidence. Whereas in Family Finding projects, social workers and Personal Advisors ascribed this to giving children and young people the opportunity to interact with people they were sometimes already somewhat familiar with.

> I think it's helped with my anxiety talking to people. - *Child or young person*

> Because some of the children struggle socially with making contact and meeting new people … this way, people are already familiar with, but they might not have had contact with for several years. But by doing this, it enables them to expand their social interaction with other people, let them feel more confident about going and doing something on their own. - *Social Worker*

Feelings of loneliness

The case study interviews with project staff, volunteers, and children and young people explored feelings of loneliness. Children and young people involved in two Befriending and Mentoring case study projects had undertaken group activities. Project staff, social workers and Personal Advisors spoke of children and young people having reduced loneliness from taking part in these group activities. Interviewees attributed this to an enhanced awareness of the support network available to them, or the community around them, through participation in these activities.

> Almost exclusively, the majority of those young people have increased their connections from starting to where they are now. - *Project lead*

Additional insights about children and young people's feelings of loneliness can also be found in Feelings of loneliness.

Identity and belonging

The case study data suggested that FFBM projects were contributing towards children and young people having an enhanced sense of identity. For Befriending and Mentoring projects, one mentor explained that mentoring children and young people was helping to develop their identities. They argued that as mentors were supporting children and young people to work through trauma, this helped them realise who they would like to be.

> Someone like [other mentor] and myself [who have] some background knowledge when it comes to, I don't know, behaviour and how to deal with that and trauma, and help them through a particular patch so that they can become who they would like to be. - *Mentor*

Family Finding projects also helped children and young people to explore their identity. Some children and young people reported that their confidence had grown as they understood more about their past, who they were, and where they had come from. Developing new connections through the programme helped answer questions about their lives that they had previously been unable to explore. Family Finding staff also noted the importance of having shared histories and how sharing memories could help children and young people process trauma.

> Family is really important to everybody, isn't it, you know? And sort of like identifying who you are and your sense of identity. That's really important ... particularly our care leavers who hadn't had that positive family role modelling as they've grown up. - *Strategic lead*

> Nan told us that she had no idea that the children had gone into care and, you know, and had she had known then she would have stepped up to take care of them. A young person could be thinking 'well, where were you when my parents couldn't look after me?' You know, 'why was I allowed to go into care and be cared for by people that I didn't know?'. So yeah, it's going to answer a lot of questions for people, isn't it, about their upbringing and their history and their family. – *Strategic lead*

One young person said that before being part of a Family Finding project, they found that other people assumed they had no family or support network. Participating in Family Finding had reminded them of the family and support network they did have.

In some cases, through the Family Finding projects, children and young people were connected with family members they had not previously known about. Sometimes this happened through a 'snowballing effect' whereby a young person was connected with one person who then gave contact details for another family member and so on.

> This opens up a whole new network to the young people because often they discover family members that they didn't know they had or, you know, close family friends that were friends with their parents and things like that. You've talked to a sibling and because they're the younger sibling, their older sibling knows a greater network. – *Practitioner*

Additional insights about children and young people's sense of identity and belonging are presented in Identity and belonging.

Sense of community

The case studies also explored children and young people's sense of community. Children and young people said they felt a greater sense of community through their involvement in the programme. This was echoed by project staff who participated in the case study research. In projects which specifically provided group activities, project staff and children and young people explained this provided mentees with opportunities to meet and connect with peers and/or other mentors and helped foster a sense of community. In some instances, this happened before being matched with a mentor. In one Befriending and Mentoring project, a dedicated building was provided for mentees and mentors to meet; this became a hub of their community where they could regularly interact.

> We do often go to the social booth, which happens on the week that the cafe isn't on... it's just another place to chill, essentially, and it's just nice... meeting all the other mentees, it's just nice to have that extra thing going on. - *Child or young person*

Practitioners also felt that forming new connections reduced children and young people's loneliness and isolation. For example, one Befriending and Mentoring project organised an ice-skating excursion with the aim of tackling loneliness and to support young people to socialise and make friends. Other activities included, walking groups, social events, gardening, renovating buildings, and fundraising activities like bag-packing and skills building. Some young people expressed a desire to get involved in on-going community activities.

> I feel like that is a good thing for young people to be getting involved in things and sort of getting to feel a part of something, feel a part of a bit of a community, if you like. – *Personal Advisor*

Children and young people reported that being involved in mentorship gave them more confidence to meet new people beyond the project. One child or young person noted that, through speaking with their mentor, their anxiety around meeting and talking to new people had reduced Another young person felt that despite having an increased confidence in meeting new people after participating in the project, they often lacked the opportunity to meet new people so were unable to put this into practice.

Other outcomes

- Through the case study data, there was evidence from several stakeholders that some projects were supporting young people's involvement in employment or education. For example, mentors from across different case study projects described helping young people with job and college/university applications. In one case study project, mentors described working with children and young people to develop strategies that could help them at school, for example, to help with exam preparation and, for one young person, overcoming non-attendance.
- Additionally, a common theme across both Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring case study projects related to the support children and young people got to access education, training or employment. For example, in one mentoring project, a mentor described connecting a young person with a 'care leavers hubs' run by the local authority which focused on EET support, and another mentor supported their mentee to return to college after disengaging.
- In a Family Finding project, practitioners signposted a young person to EET support. Connections made through the Family Finding project also helped young

people access employment, either by directly helping a young person apply to a role or by being a role model for a profession.

> Young people have been supported into education into jobs, so a network of professionals got a young person into a job where he's doing really well. - *Practitioner*

Engagement in criminal activity

Through Family Finding case study interviews, interviewees (project staff and children and young people) reflected on benefits beyond the outcomes articulated in the ToCs. While DfE defined outcomes at the programme level, there was flexibility at project level to tailor projects and outcomes to the specific cohorts they whom they worked. This meant some outcomes, though not intended by DfE for the programme overall, were intentionally pursued at the project level. These included reduced likelihood of children and young people engaging in criminality, and specific outcomes for new parents.

Staff from one project shared an example of a probation worker encouraging a young person to re-engage with Family Finding when their engagement had waned. This, project staff argued, was because the probation worker saw the positive impact the service had on the young person – including that they had reconnected with family members and moved into employment.

> They were heavily involved in all this stuff (criminality). And actually, things have totally changed. They've got a more positive attitude, not involved in criminality and they're actually in employment. – *Strategic lead*

> Speaking to their Personal Advisor, who also came along to the meeting, they haven't been involved in any criminal activity sort of since they've reconnected with their family. And obviously them having a job means that they're going to be more stable in terms of housing. – *Practitioner*

New parents

Project staff from 2 Family Finding case study projects gave examples of new parents benefitting from the projects. They explained that being connected to a broader network helped new parents develop a network of support (for example, through baby groups at Family Hubs), secure childcare opportunities (where new connections could support with this) and develop parenting knowledge and skills. Young parents interviewed agreed the project helped them, they explained:

> Everyone understands more about me and [my child]. - *Young person*

> I meet new mums and [my baby] meets new babies. - *Young person*

Peer mentors as role models

In one case study that adopted a peer mentoring model, mentors were often effective role models for children and young people. In some instances, this inspired children and young people participating in the project to take an interest in their mentors' career. A social worker also explained that some of the children and young people chose to become mentors themselves.

> A lot of young people are becoming mentors themselves, using their lived experience to support others. – *Social worker*

Perceptions of long-term benefits and sustainability

Case study interviewees commonly suggested it was too early to anticipate what future outcomes would look like, and that the sustainability of outcomes largely depended on children and young people's individual circumstances. That said, interviewees suggested that projects aimed to equip children and young people with the skills and networks to self-sustain outcomes beyond the lifetime of the project support.

In Befriending and Mentoring projects, several mentors believed their role was to create a support ecosystem around the mentee that would outlast the duration of the mentorship. This 'support ecosystem' included signposting children and young people to other services which could help them to manage other aspects of their life which could create instability, such as housing, employment and mental health support services:

> [Third party organisation] has made a massive difference, but ongoing stability—jobs, housing, mental health support—will determine long-term success. - *Mentor*

While it was still early days for delivery of Family Finding projects, stakeholders felt that, theoretically, benefits stemming from forming or solidifying connections should be self-sustaining. Project staff shared examples of children and young people maintaining contact with new connections after the Family Finding coordinators had facilitated initial meetings.

> It felt really important that they had those connections still and then I went up to do a couple of, like, post ending visits just to see how it was going. They were ecstatic. You know, they were now in sort of text-contact with someone and the other people were writing [to them], and 2 other people were planning to come from [country] twice a year, if they could, to go and see them. - *Practitioner*

However, interviewees across a number of Family Finding projects identified challenges children and young people may face in sustaining new connections (see Delivery of

Family Finding support). Maintaining contact beyond the programme may also be challenging for children and young people on low incomes whose contacts live a long distance away. Practitioners discussed mechanisms for supporting the sustainment of new relationships. These included having open dialogues with new connections from the outset, to outline the expectations for commitment over time, and writing ongoing support for maintaining relationships into children and young people's care plans. An example included a child or young person's care plan being updated to reflect their foster-carer and birth parent agreement to 'co-parent'. In another example, the care plan was updated to reflect an agreement that if the foster carers were to pass away, the young person would live with their new connection:

> We've had some fabulous examples. We've had a very young person … they wanted to remain in contact with their primary school teacher and now the families are absolutely, you know, they're with foster carers and the family of the primary school teacher, absolutely, you know, became friends. They were at the teacher's wedding, and actually, there is now that if anything was to happen to the foster carers, they've already had a kind of agreement between them, it's been signed up by the local authority, that [the teacher] would take this young person into their home instead. So that's that sense of that genuine love and commitment to somebody, that that young person will grow up with knowing these people love them and have, you know, completely committed to [them]. So, yeah, the various examples like that of just wonderful outcomes for individual young people. – *Strategic lead*

Despite this, some interviewees felt that connections with professionals were less likely to be sustained long-term than with family networks.

> We want it to be people that are proactive … able to support that young person, and willing to support that young person. We don't want a connection where, you know, right, actually, we put this person in place, and they say that they're going to be there for that young person and then they're not there. - *Personal Advisor*

Benefits for staff

This section summarises the reported benefits for staff, volunteers and social workers and Personal Advisers involved in the FFBM projects.

Overall, 84% of Family Finding and 91% of Befriending and Mentoring delivery team survey respondents indicated that were satisfied in their role (see Table A58). Almost all (94% of Family Finding and 90% of Befriending and Mentoring) respondents indicated

that were confident in their role (see Table A59). The evaluation also found qualitative evidence of positive benefits for staff across the programme.

In Befriending and Mentoring projects, these included that:

- Personal Advisors reported that mentoring had helped some children and young people to be more engaged with wider services, which made their work easier as children and young people were more open to and positive about engaging with them
- Personal Advisors and social workers valued that the children and young people they worked with, particularly care leavers who, they felt, were more underserved, were being more holistically supported. They said this alleviated stress, knowing they were not the only professional supporting a young person:

  > It takes the pressure off us. We can't always pick up the phone straight away, but they're there when we can't be. - *Social worker*

Benefits for mentors were also evident, including that:

- staff from a peer mentoring project suggested that being a peer mentor had helped the young people to develop their emotional intelligence in their peer mentor role
- mentors valued the continuous learning and training offer available to them – especially around young people's key transitions; they also valued having the mentoring organisation at the end of the phone for support
- some volunteer mentors made valuable connections with other mentors and organisations and developed professional networking opportunities
- mentors valued being able to support children and young people:

  > [It's] been extremely rewarding … Being able to support them and watch them grow in the last few months has been absolutely amazing. - *Mentor*

In addition, staff across Family Finding projects felt a sense of achievement from connecting children and young people with their network and found it drove them on in their work.

> What drives people in this work, to do the work, is seeing good outcomes and new connections being made; so I think it has value in staff morale, and you know, boosting their skill sets and confidence too. - *Project lead*

One staff member reflected that it was a positive experience to be 'on the other side of social work', where rather than removing a child from a family, they were reinvolving them in the family.

> It's really lovely when you can build in who's in their networks, and who might used to be in their networks and they've lost contact with, or keeping in touch with their previous foster carers. So, I really enjoy that aspect of this job. It's just quite unique as well because normally social services are kind of involved in removing the children, so we're the other side of the story. - *Social worker*

Interviewees commonly reported benefitting from training on Family Finding and feeling upskilled from the sessions. One social worker explained that opportunities for continued professional development were rare, so were pleased with being able to attend intensive Family Finding training over a number of days (detailed in Staff and mentor training and onboarding).

However, one social worker expressed an unintended consequence from the Family Finding project. They noted that it had a negative impact on their time and capacity due to the additional demands placed on them to emotionally support participating children and young people, make referrals, and record children and young people's progress.

System-level and broader outcomes for local authorities

Staff in some Befriending and Mentoring case study projects reflected that the projects provided some organisational learning around the importance of long-term support for care leavers facing transitions out of statutory support. An unexpected outcome for one local authority was that they were able to incorporate mentoring into their framework to reduce the risk of young people becoming victims of exploitation after transitioning out of the care system.

On a systems level, for one case study project delivering creative mentoring, the strategic lead reflected on that being part of the project has put the impact of creative arts on the local authority's radar. They are hoping to promote this to the Director of Children's Services for buy-in for ongoing creative projects and to neighbouring local authorities. Local authorities welcomed the addition of Creative mentoring as a new and novel 'tool'.

A small number of professionals interviewed across the 4 case studies believed the Befriending and Mentoring project had reduced burden on other teams, because it had positively impacted housing, youth justice, education and care-leaving teams. They suggested that some of the demands on these services had been reduced by decreasing the likelihood of mentees' tenancy breakdowns and addressing issues such as substance misuse and disengagement from education or employment. In terms of education, strategic leads reported that schools had worked directly with mentors to support some children.

> It has enabled young people to sustain and maintain their tenancies because of the increased support…If somebody has a safe place to live, you can build on that... but if somebody doesn't have that, the rest can't follow. - *Strategic lead*

Strategic leads felt that having a Family Finding project helped give new impetus to pre-existing work in Local Authorities. For example, one local authority felt that Family Finding aligned with its commitment to keeping children and young people with family where possible. By embedding Family Finding into practice strategic leads hoped that the impetus of Family Finding will be long lasting.

> We're committed to keeping children with their families. We're also committed to supporting children's return. You know, the fact that we've got a dedicated reunification team shows that really. That we, we really want children to return home whenever it's safe to do so. – *Project lead*

The project has helped to focus minds for social workers and/or Personal Advisors around how important having connections is for children and children and young people.

> What substitute is there for just actually feeling wanted and feeling like you belong? … Having a project that actually centres around that as its target outcome is absolutely critical, because it's got people talking about what makes a difference for young people. – *Social worker*

> [Before FFBM] it felt like it was a lot more down to the individual worker as to whether that felt important, whereas now it feels like it is for everyone. It's important and it's kind of that's the standard thing. – *Social worker*

Project staff reported there has been a culture shift around professionals having a personal relationship with children and young people they have been connected to – previously this would have been "taboo".

Children and young people's adapted Bright Spots survey findings

Key findings

As part of Stage 1, the year 1 (2024/25) evaluation sought to provide a strong grounding for possible future evaluation at Stage 2. The first year of the evaluation tested the feasibility of the evaluation approach to outcomes measurement, which involved using adapted versions of Coram's 'Bright Spots' surveys of children and young people. The purpose of the surveys was two-fold: firstly, to explore children and young people's perceptions of their lives and well-being. Secondly, to explore the feasibility of the approach to later impact evaluation designs (if Stage 2 is commissioned). This section sets out the findings from the adapted Bright Spots surveys from year 1. It should be noted, the sample size achieved was small (n=244) and there were varying levels of engagement from local authorities limiting the representativeness of the year 1 sample. Findings should not be attributed as outcomes or benefits of the programme.

Relationships and networks

- Across all groups, the majority of children and young people responding to the survey said they did have a really good friend and an adult they could trust. Most care leavers indicated that they had several groups of people in their lives who gave them emotional support. A large proportion (73%) of those participating in the Befriending and Mentoring projects reported a mentor/befriender as a source of emotional support.
- Most participating children and young people trusted the adults they lived with. Those participating in Family Findings projects were less positive about their relationships with the people they lived with. For example, compared to other groups of children and young people, a smaller proportion of those participating in Family Finding projects indicated that they trusted the adults they lived with 'All or most of the time'.

Wellbeing

- Young people on the programme reported higher levels of wellbeing compared to historical Bright Spots survey data. Participating young people were happier yesterday, more satisfied with their life, felt things in their life were more worthwhile, and were less anxious compared with historic Bright Spots survey datasets of children in care and care leavers.

Feelings of loneliness

- Most children and young people participating in the programme did not regularly feel lonely.[46]

Identity and belonging

- Across all groups, almost all children and young people reported that someone had explained to them why they were in care. There were little differences between those participating in the programme and historic Bright Spots survey data.

Sense of community

- Participants in Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects felt a sense of community. Most reported feeling safe and settled in their neighbourhood, safe in their local area, and that they felt they belonged in their local area.[47]

Participation in education, employment, or training

- Those in Family Finding projects were more likely to report not being in education, employment or training, compared to historical Bright Spots responses. Those in Befriending and Mentoring projects were more likely to report that they were currently studying.

Year 1 of the evaluation concluded that children and young people should be surveyed at 2 timepoints to seek to better measure programme outcomes. Year 2 evaluation activity will also support a detailed impact feasibility study for Stage 2, subject to funding.

This section is based on the adapted and historical Bright Spots data to understand how the characteristics of the cohort compare to the cohort who undertook historic Bright Spots surveys (see Methodological overview). Adapted Bright Spots survey data was compared with 2 historical datasets: data from local authorities involved in the programme (to use as a proxy baseline) and data from local authorities outside of the programme (as a comparator group). Despite some sample sizes being small (less than 100), the evaluation team has presented percentages to aid interpretation with comparator datasets.

As set out in Limitations of the evaluation there are some limitations to this which it is important to keep in mind when reviewing the findings set out in the following chapter.

[46] As these were new or amended questions for the adapted Bright Spots survey, no comparison with historical Bright Spots data was possible.
[47] As these were new or amended questions for the adapted Bright Spots survey, no comparison with historical Bright Spots data was possible.

- The sample size was small and there was varying levels of engagement from local authorities limiting the representativeness of the year 1 sample; further more all questions were optional and some respondents chose not to answer all questions.
- The adapted Bright Spots data for the programme was not compared with a matched or weighted comparison group and those in the FFBM sample had different characteristics to those in the historical sample.
- Although the evaluation was able to distinguish whether children and young people had begun participating in the programme, it was not possible to know whether they had reached a point of sufficient support at which outcomes would be expected to emerge.

Findings should therefore not necessarily be attributed as outcomes or benefits of the programme.

Year 1 of the evaluation also included assessing the feasibility of these methods for year 2 and considering the feasibility of a full impact evaluation for Stage 2. Year 1 activities highlighted the importance of establishing a baseline for children and young people for DfE. This may enable the evaluation team to better assess a change in outcomes related to the programme based on baseline and endline data (rather than a snapshot survey). In year 2 the evaluation team will collect survey data at two timepoints. This will further inform a detailed feasibility study ahead of a Stage 2 evaluation (subject to funding).

Relationships and networks

Views on connections with immediate family

Children and young people (aged 8 to 17) were asked: ‘Do you see your mum/dad/brothers and sisters…’ ‘too much,’ ‘just the right amount,’ or ‘too little. A greater proportion of children and young people participating in Family Finding or Befriending and Mentoring projects indicated that they saw their mum ‘too little’ compared to historical Bright Spots survey data. A greater proportion of those participating in Befriending and Mentoring projects also selected that they did not see their mum at all (see Table 15).

Table 15: Proportions indicating how much respondents in care (8 to 11, 11 to 17) see their mum

Group	N	Too much	The right amount	Too little	I do not see her
Participating FF CYP	51	0 (0%)	19 (37%)	17 (33%)	15 (29%)
Participating BM CYP	63	0 (0%)	19 (30%)	18 (29%)	26 (41%)
Participating CYP	114	0 (0%)	38 (33%)	35 (31%)	41 (36%)
Historic FFBM LAs	1,142	23 (2%)	476 (42%)	253 (22%)	390 (34%)
Historic non-FFBM LAs	2,899	98 (3%)	1,256 (43%)	686 (24%)	859 (30%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted and historical Bright Spots surveys

As shown in Table 16, compared to historical Bright Spots survey data, a smaller proportion of children and young people who were participating in Befriending and Mentoring indicated that they saw their dad ‘just the right amount’. While a greater proportion indicated that they did not see their dad at all.

Table 16: Proportions indicating how much respondents in care (8 to 11, 11 to 17) see their dad

Group	N	Too much	The right amount	Too little	I do not see him
Participating FF CYP	51	1 (2%)	13 (26%)	4 (8%)	33 (65%)
Participating BM CYP	63	0 (0%)	7 (11%)	7 (11%)	49 (78%)
Participating CYP	114	1 (1%)	20 (18%)	11 (10%)	82 (72%)
Historic FFBM LAs	1,108	15 (1%)	302 (27%)	155 (14%)	636 (57%)
Historic non-FFBM LAs	2,786	45 (2%)	740 (27%)	463 (17%)	1,538 (55%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted and historical Bright Spots surveys

When asked about the amount of time children and young people saw their siblings, there were no clear differences between the children and young people who participated in the programme compared to historical Bright Spots data (see Table A63).

Sources of support

The adapted Bright Spots surveys explored the sources of support children and young people had. This included asking about friendships, and whether they felt they could contact someone, and who, if they needed support.

Having a good friend

The surveys asked children and young people whether they have a 'really good friend'. Across all groups, the majority of children and young people responded that they did have a really good friend. There were no clear differences between FFBM programme participants compared to children and young people who completed historical Bright Spots surveys (see Table 17).

Table 17: Proportions indicating whether they have a really good friend

Group	N	n Yes (%)	n No (%)
Participating FF CYP	99	88 (89%)	11 (11%)
Participating BM CYP	106	88 (83%)	18 (17%)
Participating CYP[48]	205	176 (86%)	29 (14%)
Historic FFBM LAs	3,011	2,589 (86%)	422 (14%)
Historic non-FFBM LAs	6,437	5,644 (88%)	793 (12%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted and historical Bright Spots surveys

Having a trustworthy adult

Children and young people were asked: 'Do you have an adult [person, for care leavers] who you trust, who helps you and sticks by you no matter what?'. Almost all participating children and young people indicated they had an adult they can trust. There was very little difference between the proportions of FFBM programme participants when compared historical Bright Spots survey data. The data is presented in Table 18.

[48] 'Participating' refers to all children and young people who have progressed past the point of referral and begun taking part in project activities or receiving project support.

Table 18: Proportions indicating whether they have an adult they trust

Group	N	n Yes (%)	n No (%)
Participating FF CYP	100	90 (90%)	10 (10%)
Participating BM CYP	106	99 (93%)	7 (7%)
Participating CYP	206	189 (92%)	17 (8%)
Historic FFBM local authorities	3,000	2,634 (88%)	366 (12%)
Historic non-FFBM local authorities	6,436	5,735 (89%)	701 (11%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted and historical Bright Spots surveys

Worrying about feelings or behaviour

Children and young people (aged 8 to 11 and 11 to 17) were asked 'Do you ever worry about your feelings or behaviour?' and, if so, 'Are you getting help from an adult?'. Although small numbers, a greater proportion of those participating in FFBM projects reported worrying about their feelings and behaviour 'Sometimes' but a smaller proportion selected 'Hardly ever' or 'Never', compared to children and young people in the historical Bright Spots data (see Table 19).

Table 19: The extent to which respondents in care (8 to 11, 11 to 17) worry about their feelings and behaviour

Group	N	n All or most of the time (%)	n Sometimes (%)	n Hardly ever/never[49] (%)
Participating FF CYP	55	6 (11%)	32 (58%)	17 (31%)
Participating BM CYP	66	4 (6%)	45 (68%)	17 (26%)
Participating CYP	121	10 (8%)	77 (64%)	34 (28%)
Historic FFBM local authorities	1,234	117 (9%)	584 (47%)	533 (43%)
Historic non-FFBM local authorities	3,094	370 (12%)	1,506 (49%)	1,218 (39%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted and historical Bright Spots surveys

Of those that reported worrying about their feelings or behaviour 'All or most of the time' or 'Sometimes', a majority of children and young people reported getting help from an

[49] Hardly ever and never responses merged for comparability with historic dataset.

adult about these worries. The proportion reporting getting help from an adult was greatest for those children and young people participating in Befriending and Mentoring projects, as seen in Table 20.

Table 20: The extent to which respondents in care (8 to 11, 11 to 17) get help for their worries about their feelings and behaviour

Group	N	n Yes (%)
Participating FF CYP	38	28 (74%)
Participating BM CYP	49	46 (94%)
Participating CYP	87	74 (85%)
Historic FFBM local authorities	692	560 (81%)
Historic non-FFBM local authorities	1,850	1,533 (83%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted and historical Bright Spots surveys

Care leavers (only) were asked 'Who gives you emotional support?'. Most care leavers indicated that they had several groups of people in their lives who gave them emotional support. Although the numbers of care leaver respondents to the adapted Bright Spots survey was small, a greater proportion of participants involved in FFBM projects indicated that their leaving care worker (61%) was a source of emotional support, compared to care leavers in the historic Bright Spots dataset (42% to 46%). A higher proportion of participating children and young people mentioned their leaving care worker as a key source of emotional support (61%), compared to their Mum (20%), Dad (11%) or siblings (25%). Whilst there were no clear differences in the proportions of care leavers reporting mums, dads or siblings as sources of emotional support, a greater proportion of those participating in the Family Finding projects selected an 'other relative' as a source of emotional support. A large proportion (73%) of survey respondents participating in the Befriending and Mentoring projects reported a mentor/befriender as a source of emotional support. Other sources of support included partners, foster carers, their own children, pets, counsellors/mental health professionals, education professionals (such as teachers), residential home staff, and other care leavers (see Table A65).

Care leavers were also asked 'Do you have a person who...': 'Listens to you', 'Tells you when you've done well', and/or 'Believes you'll be a success'. Across all groups, care leavers were likely to report having people in their lives who did all these things for them (see Table 21). Amongst this small sample, all of those participating in Befriending and Mentoring projects who gave an answer reported having all 3 kinds of support.

Table 21: Whether care leaver respondents have someone in their life who listens to them, tells them they've done well, and believes they will be a success

Group	N	n Person who listens (%)	N	n Person who tells you you've done well (%)	N	n Person who believes you will be a success (%)
Participating FF CYP	44	41 (93%)	40	31 (78%)	39	32 (82%)
Participating BM CYP	40	40 (100%)	39	39 (100%)	38	38 (100%)
Participating CYP	84	81 (96%)	79	70 (89%)	77	70 (91%)
Historic FFBM local authorities	1,762	1,593 (90%)	1,756	1,515 (86%)	1,761	1,538 (87%)
Historic non-FFBM local authorities	3,332	3,048 (91%)	3,305	2,876 (87%)	3,300	2,902 (88%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted and historical Bright Spots surveys

Overall, this section demonstrates most children and young people involved in the FFBM projects had at least someone to talk to and who supports them.

Relationships with the adults they live with

To further explore children and young people's networks and relationships, the adapted Bright Spots surveys explored children and young people's relationships with the people they lived with.

The people children and young people lived with

Children and young people were asked 'Do you trust the adults you live with?'. Most responding children and young people trusted the adults they lived with. Compared to other groups of children and young people, a smaller proportion of those participating in Family Finding projects indicated that they trusted the adults they lived with 'All or most of the time' (see Table 22).

Table 22: The extent to which respondents in care (8 to 11, 11 to 17) feel that they trust the adults they live with

Group	N	All or most of the time	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
Participating FF CYP	55	36 (65%)	14 (25%)	2 (4%)	3 (5%)
Participating BM CYP	65	50 (77%)	14 (22%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
Participating CYP	120	86 (72%)	28 (23%)	3 (3%)	3 (3%)
Historic FFBM LAs	1,230	983 (80%)	195 (16%)	27 (2%)	25 (2%)
Historic non-FFBM LAs	3,079	2,473 (80%)	493 (16%)	54 (2%)	59 (2%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted and historical Bright Spots surveys

To further explore whether children and young people felt supported, they were asked 'Do the adults you live with notice how you are feeling?'. Consistent with findings presented in Table 23, compared to other groups of children and young people,[50] a smaller proportion of those participating in Family Finding projects indicated that the adults they lived with noticed how they were feeling 'All or most of the time' (see Table 23). A greater proportion of those participating in Befriending and Mentoring projects selected the adults they lived with noticed how they were feeling 'All or most of the time'.

Table 23: The extent to which respondents in care (8 to 11, 11 to 17) feel that adults they live with notice how they are feeling

Group	N	All or most of the time	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
Participating FF CYP	55	22 (40%)	26 (47%)	4 (7%)	3 (5%)

[50] When the phrase 'compared to other groups of children and young people', this refers to children and young people participating in the other strand of the programme (for example, Family Finding or Befriending and Mentoring) and children and young people from historic Bright Spots datasets.

Group	N	All or most of the time	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
Participating BM CYP	64	49 (77%)	13 (20%)	2 (3%)	0 (0%)
Participating CYP	119	71 (60%)	39 (33%)	6 (5%)	3 (3%)
Historic FFBM LAs	1,222	754 (62%)	384 (31%)	54 (4%)	30 (2%)
Historic non-FFBM LAs	3,069	1,860 (61%)	949 (31%)	171 (6%)	89 (3%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted and historical Bright Spots surveys

Children and young people were asked 'Do the adults you live with show an interest in what you are doing at school/college?'. Most children and young people that participated in the programme felt that the adults they lived with showed interest in their education at least 'sometimes'. Table 24 shows the data was broadly similar across all groups of children and young people.

Table 24: The extent to which respondents in care (8 to 11, 11 to 17) feel that adults they live with show an interest in what they are doing at school or college

Group	N	All or most of the time	Sometimes	Hardly ever	Never
Participating FF CYP	48	33 (69%)	12 (25%)	3 (6%)	0 (0%)
Participating BM CYP	64	47 (73%)	15 (23%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)
Participating CYP	112	80 (70%)	27 (24%)	4 (4%)	1 (1%)
Historic FFBM LAs	1,193	894 (75%)	243 (20%)	32 (3%)	24 (2%)
Historic non-FFBM LAs	3,037	2,265 (75%)	629 (21%)	82 (3%)	61 (2%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted and historical Bright Spots surveys

Children and young people (aged 11 to 17) were asked 'How often do you talk to the adults you live with about things that matter to you?'. Across all groups, most children and young people who participated in the programme talked to the adults they lived with regularly (see Table 25). A greater proportion of those participating in Befriending and Mentoring projects indicated talking to the adults they lived with about things that mattered to them 'Most days'. As shown in Table 25, a greater proportion of children and young people who participated in Family Finding projects indicated that they had such conversations 'hardly ever' or 'less than once a week.'

Table 25: How often respondents in care (11 to 17 years) talk to the adults they live with about things that matter to them

Group	N	Most days	More than once a week	Less than once a week	Hardly ever
Participating FF CYP	46	17 (37%)	8 (17%)	10 (22%)	11 (24%)
Participating BM CYP	55	38 (69%)	10 (18%)	3 (5%)	4 (7%)
Participating CYP	101	55 (54%)	18 (18%)	13 (13%)	15 (15%)
Historic FFBM LAs	930	404 (43%)	218 (23%)	143 (15%)	165 (17%)
Historic non-FFBM LAs	2,151	974 (45%)	492 (23%)	308 (14%)	377 (18%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted and historical Bright Spots surveys

Relationships with social workers/leaving care workers

To further explore the relationships children and young people who participated in the FFBM programme had, the adapted Bright Spots surveys explored their views on their relationships with their social workers/leaving care workers

- Almost all children and young people who participated in the adapted Bright Spots surveys knew who their social worker or leaving care worker was (96%, N=205). This proportion was slightly greater than those in the historical Bright Spots survey data.
- Just under half of participating children and young people had 2 or more social workers in the last year (44%, N=186). A greater proportion of those in Befriending and Mentoring projects indicated having one social worker/leaving care worker,

while a smaller proportion indicated having 2 or more social workers/leaving care workers in the last 12 months compared to historical Bright Spots survey data.

- Most participating children and young people trusted their social worker/leaving care worker either 'all or most of the time' (59%) or 'sometimes' (32%, N=193). Those in Befriending and Mentoring projects were less likely to report trusting their social worker/leaving care worker 'all or most of the time' despite increased stability suggested in the number of social workers/leaving care workers compared to historical Bright Spots surveys.
- Almost all adapted Bright Spots survey respondents reported knowing they could ask to speak to their social worker alone (98%, N=118). This was a slightly higher proportion compared to historical datasets.
- Most participating children and young people found it easy to get in touch with their social worker/leaving care worker (90%, N=177). Those in Befriending and Mentoring projects were least likely to report it was easy to get in touch with their worker 'all or most of the time' compared to historical Bright Spots surveys.

Children and young people's wellbeing

The adapted Bright Spots survey explored children and young people's overall wellbeing. The survey asked about their happiness, life satisfaction, feelings about things being worthwhile and extent of feeling anxious.[51]

Feelings of happiness and satisfaction

When asked 'How happy did you feel yesterday?' those participating in Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects reported higher levels of happiness compared to the historical Bright Spots data (see Table 26).

The mean score for young people participating in Family Finding projects was 6.2 and the mean for those in Befriending and Mentoring projects was 7.0. For children and young people participating in either Family Finding or Befriending and Mentoring projects, the mean score was 6.6. This was statistically significantly higher than those in historical FFBM local authorities (mean=6.3, p=0.04), but not those in historical non-FFBM local authorities (mean=6.3, p=0.08).

[51] These are the same questions that were used to measure subjective wellbeing by the Office for National Statistics (2020).
[51] In the ONS survey, children and young people selected a point on a 0 to 10 scale, for each of the following measures: happiness; life satisfaction; feeling things are worthwhile; extent of feeling anxious. Following ONS conventions, those scoring 0 to 4 were reported as 'low', those 5 to 6 as 'medium' and those 7 to 10 as 'high'.

Table 26: How happy respondents in care (8 to 11, 11 to 17) and care leavers felt yesterday

Group	N	n Low (%)	n Medium/High (%)
Participating FF CYP	95	18 (19%)	77 (81%)
Participating BM CYP	102	7 (7%)	95 (93%)
Participating CYP	197	25 (13%)	172 (87%)
Historic FFBM local authorities	2,951	635 (22%)	2,316 (78%)
Historic non-FFBM local authorities	6,347	1,351 (21%)	4,996 (79%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted and historical Bright Spots surveys

When asked 'Overall, how satisfied are you with your life these days?', the mean score for young people participating in Family Finding projects was 6.2 and the mean for those in Befriending and Mentoring projects was 6.8. For children and young people participating in either Family Finding or Befriending and Mentoring projects, the mean score was 6.5. This was statistically significantly higher than those in historical Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring local authorities (mean=6.1, p=0.03), but not those in historical non-Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring local authorities (mean=6.3, p=0.12).

Table 27: How satisfied respondents in care (11 to 17) and care leavers felt with their life

Group	N	n Low (%)	n Medium/High (%)
Participating FF CYP	86	17 (20%)	69 (80%)
Participating BM CYP	95	7 (7%)	88 (92%)
Participating CYP	181	24 (13%)	157 (87%)
Historic FFBM local authorities	2,668	656 (25%)	2,012 (75%)
Historic non-FFBM local authorities	5,441	1,236 (23%)	4,205 (77%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted and historical Bright Spots surveys

When asked 'Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?' young people participating in the programme had a statistically significant higher mean score compared to those in the historical Bright Spots survey dataset. The mean score for young people participating in Family Finding projects was 6.4 and the

mean for those in Befriending and Mentoring projects was 7.3. For young people participating in either Family Finding or Befriending and Mentoring projects, the mean score was 6.9. This was statistically significantly higher than those in historical FFBM local authorities (mean=6.4, p<0.01), and those in historical non-FFBM local authorities (mean=6.5, p=0.03).

Table 28: The extent to which respondents in care (11 to 17) and care leavers felt things in their life were worthwhile

Group	N	n Low (%)	n Medium/High (%)
Participating FF CYP	84	14 (17%)	70 (83%)
Participating BM CYP	94	2 (2%)	92 (98%)
Participating CYP	178	16 (9%)	162 (91%)
Historic FFBM local authorities	2,628	550 (21%)	2,078 (79%)
Historic non-FFBM local authorities	5,351	1,010 (19%)	4,341 (81%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted and historical Bright Spots surveys

Feelings of anxiety

When asked ‘How anxious did you feel yesterday?’, participating care leavers had a statistically significant lower score compared to historical non-Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring local authorities. The mean score for young people participating in Family Finding projects was 4.0 and the mean for those in Befriending and Mentoring projects was 3.5. For young people participating in either Family Finding or Befriending and Mentoring projects, the mean score was 3.7. This was not statistically significantly lower than those in historical Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring local authorities (mean=4.3, p=0.08), but it was statistically significantly lower than those in historical non-FFBM local authorities (mean=4.4, p<0.05). The data is presented in Table 29.

Table 29: How anxious care leaver respondents felt yesterday

Group	N	Very low	Low	Medium	High
Participating FF CYP	40	15 (38%)	4 (10%)	6 (15%)	15 (38%)
Participating BM CYP	40	9 (23%)	12 (30%)	9 (22.5%)	10 (23%)
Participating CYP	80	24 (30%)	16 (20%)	15 (19%)	25 (31%)
Historic FFBM LAs	1,745	440 (25%)	274 (16%)	403 (23%)	628 (36%)
Historic non-FFBM LAs	3,288	844 (26%)	450 (14%)	765 (23%)	1,229 (37%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted and historical Bright Spots surveys

In addition to the ONS measures of wellbeing, other measures of wellbeing were also explored through the adapted Bright Spots surveys. The FFBM evaluation team prioritised testing the ONS measures of wellbeing as they captured the overall wellbeing of children and young people through clear and measurable indicators, as such, the additional measures of wellbeing using the adapted and historical Bright Spots survey data is presented in Annex 4: Adapted Bright Spots surveys (children and young people).

Feelings of loneliness

Through the adapted Bright Spots surveys, children and young people aged 11 to 17 years were asked: ‘How often do you feel lonely?’ while care leavers were asked, ‘In the last few weeks how often have you felt: Lonely’. Most children and young people participating in the programme did not regularly feel lonely. As this question had not been asked those aged 11 to 17 in the historical Bright Spots surveys, no comparison with historical data was possible.

Table 30: How often respondents feel lonely (11 to 17 and care leavers)

Group	N	Often/always (%)	Some of the time (%)	Occasionally (%)	Hardly ever (%)	Never (%)
Participating FF CYP (%)	90	13 (14%)	25 (28%)	19 (21%)	22 (24%)	11 (12%)
Participating BM CYP (%)	94	7 (7%)	28 (30%)	36 (38%)	19 (20%)	4 (4%)
Participating CYP (%)	184	20 (11%)	53 (29%)	55 (30%)	41 (22%)	15 (8%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted Bright Spots surveys

Identity and belonging

To explore children and young people's sense of identity and belonging, the adapted Bright Spots survey asked: 'Has an adult explained why you are in care?'. Care leavers were asked 'Has someone explained to you why you were in care?'. Across all groups, almost all children and young people reported that they had this explained to them. There were little differences between those participating in the programme and historic Bright Spots survey data (see Table 31).

Table 31: An adult/someone has explained to the respondents why they are/were in care

Group	N	n Yes[52] (%)	n No (%)
Participating FF CYP	100	92 (92%)	8 (8%)
Participating BM CYP	106	101 (95%)	5 (5%)
Participating CYP	206	193 (94%)	13 (6%)
Historic FFBM local authorities	3,011	2,774 (92%)	237 (8%)
Historic non-FFBM local authorities	6,456	5,981 (93%)	475 (7%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted and historical Bright Spots surveys

[52] 'Yes I know all I want to', and 'Yes but I would like to know more' responses combined for comparability with historic dataset.

Sense of community

Feelings of belonging and being settled in local area

In the adapted Bright Spots survey, children and young people (11 to 17 years) were asked, 'Do you feel like you belong in your local area?'. Most participating children and young people reported a sense of belonging in their local area (see Table 32). As this was a new question for the adapted Bright Spots survey, no comparison with historical Bright Spots data is possible.

Table 32: Extent to which 11 to 17 year olds in care feel they belong in their local area

Group	N	Always (%)	Sometimes (%)	Hardly ever (%)	Never (%)
FF Participating CYP (%)	47	27 (57%)	15 (32%)	2 (4%)	3 (6%)
BM Participating CYP (%)	56	39 (70%)	15 (27%)	2 (4%)	0 (0%)
Participating CYP (%)	103	66 (64%)	30 (29%)	4 (4%)	3 (3%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted Bright Spots surveys

Care leavers were asked, 'How do you feel about where you live? In my neighbourhood, I feel settled.' A majority of participating care leavers felt at least somewhat settled in their neighbourhood (see Table 33). As this was a new question, no comparison with historical Bright Spots data is possible.

Table 33: Extent to which care leavers feel settled in their neighbourhood

Group	N	Always (%)	Sometimes (%)	Hardly ever (%)	Never (%)
FF Participating CYP (%)	43	21 (49%)	16 (37%)	5 (12%)	1 (2%)
BM Participating CYP (%)	39	23 (59%)	11 (28%)	3 (8%)	2 (5%)
Participating CYP (%)	82	44 (54%)	27 (33%)	8 (10%)	3 (4%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted Bright Spots surveys

Children and young people (aged 11 to 17) were asked, 'Do you feel safe in your local area?'. The majority of participating children and young people indicated that felt safe in their area at least sometimes (see Table 34). As this was a new question, no comparison with historical Bright Spots data is possible.

Table 34: Extent to which 11 to 17 year olds in care feel safe in their local area

Group	N	Always (%)	Sometimes (%)	Hardly ever (%)	Never (%)
Participating FF CYP (%)	47	28 (60%)	18 (38%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
Participating BM CYP (%)	56	45 (80%)	10 (18%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)
Participating CYP (%)	103	73 (71%)	28 (27%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted Bright Spots surveys

Care leavers were asked, 'How do you feel about where you live? In my neighbourhood, I feel safe'. The majority of participating care leavers felt safe in their area at least sometimes (see Table 35).

Table 35: Extent to which care leavers feel safe in their neighbourhood

Group	N	Always (%)	Sometimes (%)	Hardly ever (%)	Never (%)
Participating FF CYP (%)	43	20 (47%)	18 (42%)	2 (5%)	3 (7%)
Participating BM CYP (%)	39	22 (56%)	15 (38%)	0 (0%)	2 (5%)
Participating CYP (%)	82	42 (51%)	33 (40%)	2 (2%)	5 (6%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted Bright Spots surveys

Participation in education, employment, or training

Care leavers were asked, 'Right now, are you in education, employment or training?'. Although sample sizes of survey respondents participating in FFBM projects were small, a greater proportion of young people in Family Finding projects indicated not being in EET, compared to historical Bright Spots responses. Over half of responding care leavers involved in Befriending and Mentoring projects indicated that they were currently studying (see Table 36).[53]

Table 36: Whether care leaver respondents are in EET

Response	N	Yes I am studying	Yes I am working	Yes I am training	No
Participating FF CYP	44	12 (27%)	8 (18%)	1 (2%)	23 (52%)
Participating BM CYP	40	21 (53%)	6 (15%)	2 (5%)	11 (28%)
Participating CYP	84	33 (39%)	14 (17%)	3 (4%)	34 (40%)
Historic FFBM LAs	1,755	657 (37%)	336 (19%)	74 (4%)	688 (39%)
Historic non-FFBM LAs	3,325	1,249 (38%)	740 (22%)	135 (4%)	1,201 (36%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted and historical Bright Spots surveys

[53] Based on the MI data, Table 7 provides data on the EET status of children and young people who participated in the programme.

Programme costs

Key finding

- To the end of December 2024, there was an underspend across the FFBM programme compared to anticipated costs. This may be due to the initial economic assessment period including the set-up and early delivery of the programme, and spending may 'catch up' later in the programme as further delivery gets underway. Furthermore, there was a delay in the programme starting, which may have contributed to the underspend.

This section sets out findings from the evaluation's year 1 economic evaluation. As noted above, at this stage in the evaluation, it has not been possible to quantify the outcomes for the programme, and so this report only presents early findings relating to costs. It is expected that later evaluation activity, subject to the evaluation continuing and data availability, cost data will be used alongside estimated benefits of the programme, drawing on outcomes collected through the early outcomes assessment. The costs and benefits will then be used to determine the extent to which the programme offered value for money based on delivery so far.

Further information about local authorities' financial data, as reported through the quarterly reports, is provided in Annex 7:

Costs

The evaluation team examined the financial data provided through quarterly reports for each local authority. The data collected included anticipated spend, actual expenditure, and the number of children and young people projects reached for each period. It also included total funding and projected expenditure for future quarters. Further details can be found in Annex 7:

The central costs to DfE of administering the FFBM programme have not been included in the economic evaluation. This included costs related to the planning and set-up of the programme, and ongoing costs to administer the programme, mainly through DfE staff. These costs have not been included because DfE do not systematically calculate them.[54] This means that the overall cost of the programmes is likely to be underestimated. However, central programme costs are likely to be small compared to the costs of the full programme, which mainly compromises funding to local authorities. Therefore, in

[54] Only a small number of staff work on the programme and do not work full-time on the programme, and their involvement fluctuates throughout the delivery cycle, including for commercial and financial staff whose time spent on the programme would be particularly difficult to calculate.

practice, central programme costs are unlikely to make a substantial difference to a future assessment of value for money.

Funding and expenditure

Table 37 presents a summary of the early funding and expenditure for the programme, across quarters Quarter 3 2023-24 to Q3 2024-2. Data for the final quarter of 2024-2025 was not included in this analysis due to the timescales of the evaluation. Quarterly returns included anticipated spend for the next quarter, and this was the value used to calculate total anticipated spend including the final quarter of the financial year.

Though over £18.5 million of funding was allocated to date, local authorities were yet to spend that amount. A little over £12.5 million (68% of allocated funding) was spent, with approaching £16 million (85% of allocated funding) expected to be spent by the end of Quarter 4 2024/25 – an underspend of £2,785,492. Most of this underspend (£2,003,398, or 72% of the total underspend) was underspend from the first 2 quarters of the programme, in 2023/24. Underspends are not uncommon early in a programme and often spending may ‘catch up’ later, this will be explored in future evaluation.

Table 37: Headline funding and expenditure

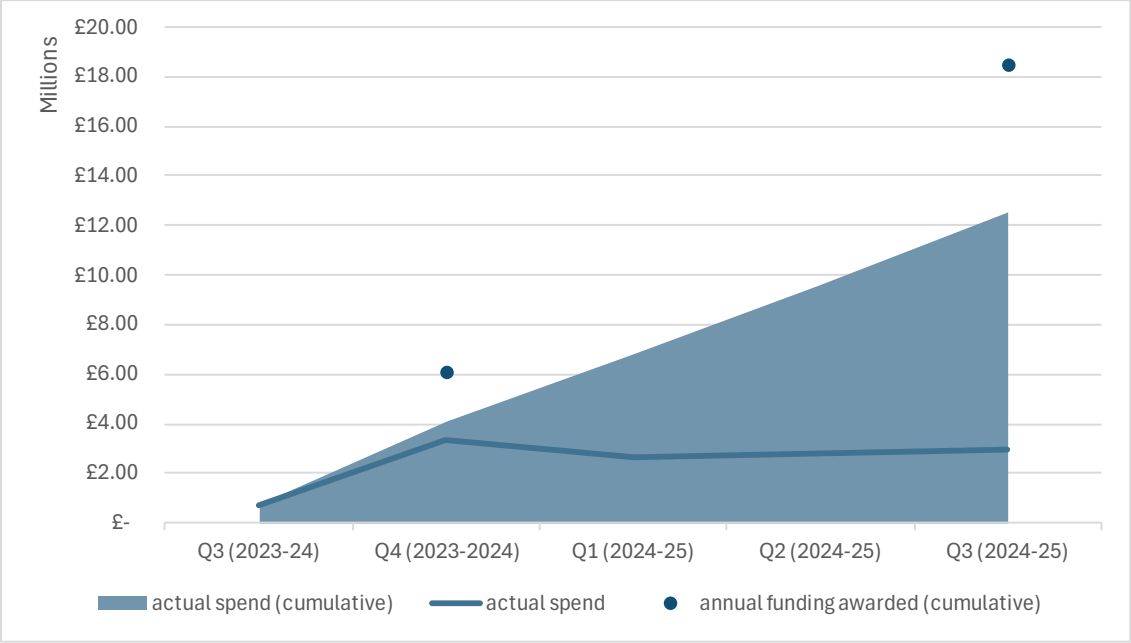
	Total funding allocated	Total actual spend (Q3 2023-24 to Q3 2024-25)	% of actual spend from funding allocated	Anticipated spend for Q4 2024-25	Total anticipated spend (actual spend + anticipated spend for Q4 2024-25)	% of anticipated spend from funding allocated	Children and young people reached
Programme total	£18,526,622	£12,530,706	68%	£3,210,376	£15,741,082	85%	2,115
Average per local authority	£421,060	£284,789	68%	£65,518	£357,752	85%	49

Source: Financial data from quarterly reports, allocated funding from DfE, CYP data from MI

Figure 5 and Figure 6 illustrate the actual and anticipated total expenditure, showing quarterly trends as well as the cumulative amount. They include the annual funding awarded for 2023/24 and 2024/25, visualising the current gap between actual and anticipated spend and funding allocated (see Table 37).

Figure 5 shows cumulative actual spend sitting below cumulative annual funding awarded. Actual spend (blue line) remains fairly consistent across quarters apart from a small and relative spike in actual spend in Quarter 4 2023/24.

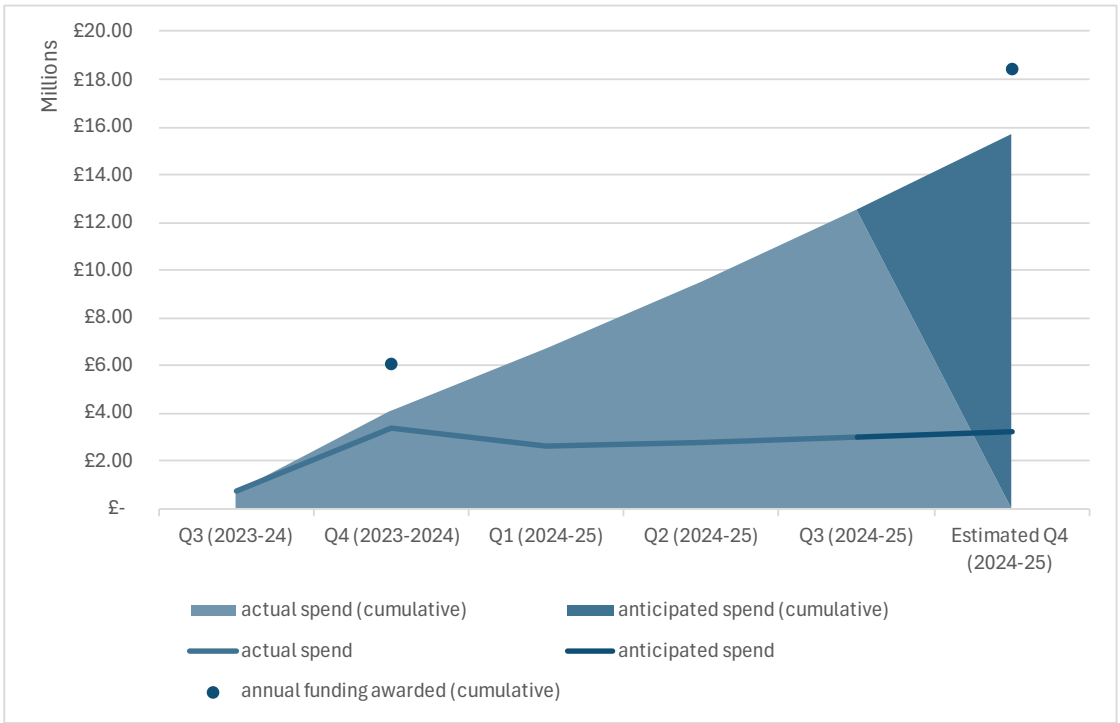
Figure 2: Actual expenditure compared to funding awarded, for all local authorities



Source: Ecorys, data from quarterly reports from local authorities

Figure 6 replicates Figure 5 and adds the anticipated spend for Q4 2024/25 (dark blue shaded area). Even with the anticipated spend included in the analysis, the actual and anticipated spend remains below the annual funding awarded.

Figure 3: Anticipated expenditure compared to funding awarded, for all local authorities



Source: Ecorys, data from quarterly reports from LAs

Reasons for underspends

The quarterly report data analysed showed that 15 local authorities reported £0 spend in the first quarter of programme delivery (Q3 2023/24). Where qualitative data was provided in the reports, local authorities commonly cited the delayed notification of award as the main reason for their underspend. This meant there was insufficient time to set-up activities or recruit participants at the scale initially planned. Similar trends emerged in qualitative (open text) responses from the MI templates, as well as case study interviews and feedback from the delivery staff survey. For example, one of the case studies reflected that it had an underspend due to initial delays, the need to identify training opportunities for staff, and utilising external staff. Across the programme, this underspend has not yet been caught up with in later quarters.

In addition to these early set up issues, some local authorities faced challenges with staff retention which affected expenditure. As set out in Uncertainty of future funding, local authorities highlighted the impact of (short-term) fixed funding on recruitment efforts, making it difficult to re-recruit when gaps emerged due to staff retention issues. This impacted on recruitment and retention of staff, limited the time to set up and mobilise support for children and young people, and prevented delivery becoming embedded. Other issues included:

- Delays with DfE's offer letters and/or grant awards impacted local authorities' timelines and capacity to implement within the timescale originally planned (in 2023)
- As may be expected, some activities did not occur in the quarter originally intended, and were rescheduled for subsequent quarters
- Similarly, logistical issues, particularly difficulties in recruitment, shifted expected spend from one quarter to another.

Across the case studies, interviewees highlighted some cost-efficiencies associated with programme delivery. These included being able to build on existing systems and structures, particularly when expanding previous or existing provision. Furthermore, recruiting staff with relevant experience was reported as creating some efficiencies. Conversely, there were some examples of projects having to meet unexpected costs to their delivery. These were largely related to administrative issues or were associated with engaging specific target cohorts of children and young people who needed additional time and input.

Costs per child or young person

This section summarises the costs per child or young person for FFBM projects.

Table 38 shows the number of children and young people referred per local authority in a Family Finding project ranged from 16 to 139, with a mean average of 44. Befriending and Mentoring projects ranged from 9 to 87 children and young people referred, with a mean average of 45.

Table 38: Number of children and young people referred per local authority

	Number of children and young people per local authority (Family Finding)	Number of children and young people per local authority (Befriending and Mentoring)	Number of children and young people per local authority (Both)
Minimum	16	9	9
Maximum	139	87	139
Mean average	44	45	49
Median average	32	52	47

Source: MI data

The evaluation team calculated costs per child using actual expenditures from the quarterly reports and the number of referred children and young people from MI data (Table 39).

Table 39: Average actual costs per child or young person

Average actual cost per child/young person (Family Finding)	Average actual cost per child/young person (Befriending and Mentoring)	Average actual cost per child/young person (Both)
£6,502	£6,676	£6,784

Source: Actual cost derived from quarterly reports

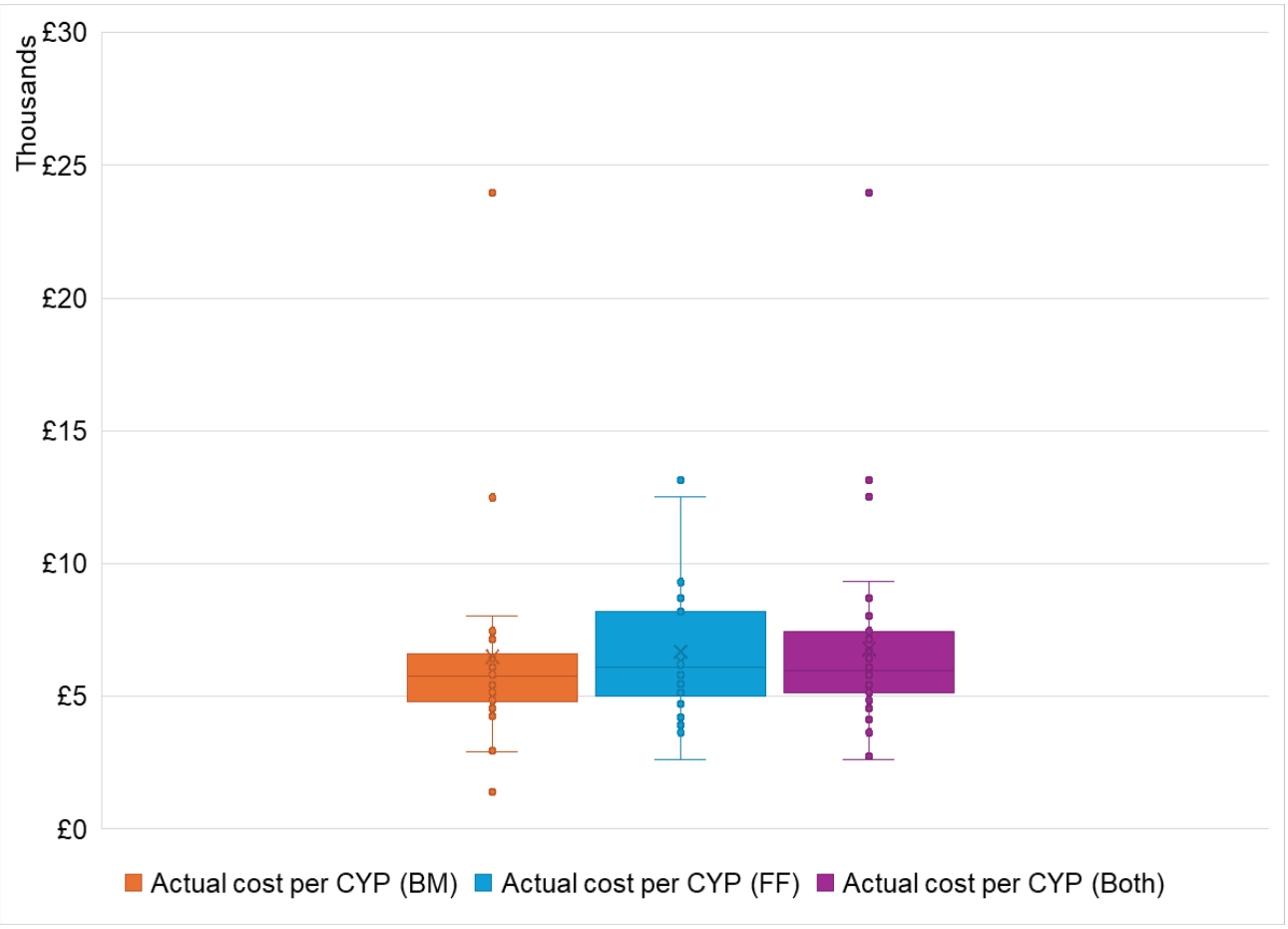
Overall, there is not much difference in actual costs between Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects.

The boxplot in Figure 7 compares the actual costs, including the spread and any outliers, for the FFBM programme. The line inside the box is the median (or the middle value of the data) and the box itself shows the middle 50% of the data, where the bottom of the box is the first quartile, and the top of the box is the third quartile. The extending lines

show the range of the data, excluding outliers. Outliers are shown as points outside of the whiskers (the lines that extend from the boxes at the upper and lower ends).

One project was an outlier and had a much higher average cost than other projects. Further exploration found that programme costs were as expected, however the number of children and young people engaged remained lower than anticipated leading to a higher cost per child/young person.

Figure 4: Boxplot of average actual costs per child/young person



Source: Actual costs from quarterly reports, CYP referral numbers from MI data

Barriers and enablers to project delivery

Key findings

- The main enablers to project implementation included the flexible approach projects took to meeting children and young people's needs; having dedicated funding and ringfenced staff capacity to deliver the projects; and high-quality ongoing supervision and support.
- Staff generally had access to the resources they needed to carry out their work, meet children and young people's needs, and access to suitable spaces for working with children and young people. However, project staff and mentors sometimes noted challenges with finding venues that met children and young people's needs (in terms of geographical location, privacy, or facilities).
- Accessing local authority systems was a key challenge. Whilst overall, most delivery teams survey respondents indicated they could access the information they needed, respondents were less positive about this than accessing the other resources required to do their work.
- The main challenge highlighted across projects was the uncertainty of future funding. This had led project leaders to make decisions which were less than ideal including not accepting new referrals, rushing to make referrals in a short time frame (causing capacity issues) or deliver the full support offer in truncated timescales, de-prioritising Family Finding for children and young people with complex backgrounds, and recruiting staff on short, fixed-term contracts.
- The key priorities for future project delivery were to embed and expand the projects, monitor and evaluate project progress and the outcomes achieved, and secure funding for project continuation.

Drawing on the case study research and delivery teams survey, the following section sets out enablers and barriers which supported with successful project delivery. This section also includes a summary of priorities for the future as identified by interviewees.

Enablers

Flexible approach to meeting needs

Staff interviewed across FFBM projects described how maintaining flexibility was critical when working with care-experienced children and young people. This helped them to meet a variety of, and often complex, needs (including new or emerging needs as well as changing circumstances), as well as to support sustained engagement. Interviewees highlighted specific examples where flexibility was needed to continue to support a child or young person:

- if they move to a different housing or placement arrangement
- to visit connections found through Family Finding
- to work outside of regular office hours where children and young people were in school, college or training, or if new connections found through Family Finding were at work during the week.

Furthermore, for children and young people in custody, Family Finding coordinators needed to work around set visiting hours. This could sometimes be challenging for social workers, where their workload capacity was a concern (see Working with children's social care).

Across both FFBM projects, most delivery teams survey respondents (95% for Family Finding and 80% for Befriending and Mentoring) indicated they had the necessary flexibility within their roles to meet children and young people's varied needs (see Table A26). This enabled them to be led by the children and young people they worked with – see Child and young person led approach for more detail.

Dedicated funding and capacity

Strategic and project leads valued having the programme funding and the dedicated capacity this afforded to deliver the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects. The delivery teams survey asked respondents to what extent they felt they had enough time to do their role effectively and whether there were sufficient people to deliver the project. Views were relatively similar across Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring, however Befriending and Mentoring respondents slightly less often reported having sufficient staff.

Just under three-quarters (73%) of Family Finding respondents indicated that they had enough time to do their roles effectively, and just over three-quarters (76%) reported there were sufficient people to deliver the project (see Table A24 and

Table A25). Strategic and project leads highlighted how programme funding had enabled them to secure dedicated capacity for Family Finding. They highlighted the importance of this dedicated capacity, since coordinators needed lower workloads to be able to do resource-intensive Family Finding work. Social workers valued this dedicated capacity for Family Finding, which they had limited capacity to do themselves:

> It's really an important area, isn't it? The family contact for young people in care. So actually, if there's somebody that's taking on that role, because you've got a school that takes on the role of education… nurse that takes on the role of health... So actually, it's another area of expertise – *Social worker*

Across the Family Finding case studies, interviewees noted the effect of social workers' and Personal Advisors' stretched capacity (discussed in Working with children's social care). In one case study, where social workers delivered Family Finding support, the local authority used the funding to bring additional staff into the team. However, despite best intentions, capacity constraints re-emerged when staff moved on because project leads were unable to recruit to fill the vacancies, due to the short amount of time left of the fixed-term contracts of those who had left (see Uncertainty of future funding).

Just under three-quarters (74%) of Befriending and Mentoring delivery teams survey respondents indicated they had enough time to do their roles effectively, and just under two-thirds (63%) agreed there were sufficient people to deliver the project (see Table A24 and Table A25). Interviews with case study local authorities explained there were some challenges recruiting their target number of mentors, which may explain the slightly less positive views on staffing sufficiency. This was mainly linked to the recruitment approach and the time-limited funding (see Uncertainty of future funding). Another factor affecting mentor recruitment was where mentors had signed up to the role but later decided not to progress with training or onboarding. Recruiting more mentors was often cited as a key future priority (see Embedding and expanding delivery).

Access to resources

The delivery teams survey found that overall, delivery teams indicated they had access to the resources needed to carry out their work with children and young people (see Table A29 to Table A32):

- Most (89% of Family Finding and 84% of Befriending and Mentoring) survey respondents indicated they had access to the resources they needed to do their jobs effectively.
- Similarly, most (84% of Family Finding and 84% of Befriending and Mentoring) survey respondents indicated they could access the resources needed to meet children and young people's needs.
- Just under three-quarters (73% of Family Finding and 71% of Befriending and Mentoring) survey respondents indicated they could access suitable spaces for carrying out their work with children and young people. Interviewees suggested that suitable spaces for working with children and young people were where they felt most comfortable (see Child and young person led approach). However, these spaces were not always accessible for children and young people who had no means of (or found it difficult to) travel. Furthermore, some children and young people preferred to meet in their own homes which sometimes lacked privacy. Additionally, children and young people noted a challenge associated with taking part in a creative mentoring project. They noted the lack of community spaces with necessary equipment for doing creative work, such as art.

- Just under two-thirds (63% of Family Finding and 61% of Befriending and Mentoring) survey respondents indicated they could access the information they needed to help the children and young people they supported. Whilst still positive, this was slightly less commonly reported to be accessible than resources and spaces. Possible reasons for this are explained in Working with children's social care.

Ongoing supervision and support

The evidence suggests that staff and volunteers who delivered support to children and young people felt well supported throughout project delivery. The majority of delivery teams survey respondents agreed that they were satisfied with the support and supervision available to them (86% for Family Finding and 87% for Befriending and Mentoring). Additionally, almost all respondents indicated they felt supported by their colleagues (95% for Family Finding and 85% for Family Finding). See

Table A37 and Table A38 for a full breakdown of responses.

Interviewees from Family Finding projects had benefited from close support and supervision within their team. They argued that dedicated local authority and external support through third party delivery partners was necessary given the emotional nature of the role and the need to have a space to talk about emerging issues for children and young people. Interviewees said regular supervision and support helped to keep Family Finding 'in focus', particularly when staff delivered Family Finding as part of their wider role.

Mentors said they were also often provided with regular supervision meetings. These meetings provided an opportunity to discuss children and young people's engagement, raise any concerns, and for supervising staff to identify when mentors needed additional support. Mentors also valued having someone available ad hoc to talk to after meeting with children and young people if needed, including in the evenings and at weekends. One Befriending and Mentoring project which adopted a peer mentoring approach had a dedicated wellbeing worker to support the care-experienced mentors.

> [We were] concerned about the trauma trigger for mentors, in that they are care leavers and a lot of the things that they are experiencing when they're spending time with the young people...could trigger experiences that are really difficult, that they have had themselves. – *Strategic lead*

Where they existed, interviewees valued peer support networks. These included, for example, WhatsApp groups developed informally amongst mentors, a group chat between third party mentors and local authority leads to provide a direct communication line for questions, and networking opportunities provided by the FRG for LLL workers.

Where these peer support networks did not exist, interviewees suggested this would be beneficial to add to the staff and mentor support offer.

Barriers

Access to local authority systems

Where projects were delivered in partnership with third party providers, in some cases, third party delivery staff were unable to access local authority systems. In these instances, access to these systems was deemed critical to support project delivery. For example, a Family Finding project required third party delivery staff to be on-site to access information about potential connections. However, this was not clear when staff were hired for 'hybrid working' roles and therefore created challenges for those who lived far away. This commonly meant a member of staff at the local authority was needed to provide substantial (and time-consuming) help bridging the access gap, particularly around referrals and liaising with social workers (see Working with children's social care).

Uncertainty of future funding

A key challenge highlighted by many interviewees across almost all case study projects was the time-limited nature of the programme funding. Most of the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring strategic and project leads interviewed were concerned about the uncertainty of project funding beyond March 2025. This uncertainty had led local authorities to make decisions that project leads felt were less than ideal. These included:

- not accepting new referrals of children and young people despite high levels of unmet demand
- rushing to refer children and young people within a short timeframe which created capacity constraints requiring hiring of additional staff to support delivery (interviewees believed this could have been avoided, if time allowed for a slower and more constant flow of referrals)
- de-prioritising children and young people with complex backgrounds to focus on achieving outcomes for children and young people with more straightforward connections to secure

  > What we've tried to do is progress the ones that we can put forward, so that we get those done within the timeframes. – *Family Finding practitioner*

- increasing the length of sessions between mentors and mentees to ensure mentors' minimum contracted hours for the mentorship could be met before March 2025; interviews with staff, children and young people suggested this was not always in children and young people's best interests

- recruiting staff and mentors on short, fixed-term contracts which project leads believed hindered people from applying and resulted in a relatively small pool of applicants.

In one Befriending and Mentoring project, short term contracts resulted in recruiting fewer mentors than planned. In a Family Finding project, when staff moved on, the local authority was unable to re-recruit for the remaining months of the fixed-term contracts due to applicants being put off by the lack of certainty of whether the role would exist after the fixed-term contract came to an end in March 2025 (when DfE funding was secured until). Existing staff interviewed said they lacked the capacity to deliver support to the planned number of children and young people.

Finally, a Befriending and Mentoring strategic lead also questioned the appropriateness of the financial year being set as the programme end date. This did not align well for children and young people who may be part way through the school year.

Priorities for the future

This section highlights case study interviewees' key priorities for the future.

Embedding and expanding delivery

Across FFBM case study projects, interviewees hoped to continue to embed the projects. In one Befriending and Mentoring case study project, the third party delivery provider explained that setting up contracts to deliver from scratch with a local authority they had not worked with before, coupled with training new mentors, had taken substantial time. This resulted in needing to match children and young people with mentors in the final 6 months of the funding period. In another Befriending and Mentoring project, the project lead suggested they would like to continue delivery, as their mentorships were in their infancy and mentors had not yet put their skills and experience into use beyond initial introductory meetings. This delay was linked to the need for a longer lead in time to effectively set up the project to ensure a sufficient quantity and quality of mentorships. In particular, they thought more time was needed for the staff and mentor outreach and recruitment processes, building relationships with mentors and children and young people, and for the matching process.

Other projects focused on ensuring that wider teams and professionals continued to be onboarded to support the projects, to aid a joined-up approach and extend the project reach. In 2 Family Finding projects, project staff aimed for all children and young people to be offered the support. In another local authority, wider structural changes including the introduction of a team to specifically focus on supporting care leavers with transitions. Interviewees were hopeful this would help further join-up wider services and support for children as they leave care, to complement the Family Finding project support offer.

Project staff also hoped to expand delivery. This included:

- Recruiting and training more volunteers as mentors, to be matched with children and young people in 2025.
- For Family Finding, adding a 12-month check-in to see how children and young people were sustaining connections beyond the project support. One interviewee suggested that a face-to-face check-in would be beneficial to see how children and young people had maintained their relationships, and whether any support was needed.
- Identifying other cohorts of care-experienced children and young people who could benefit from the support and transferring the model to work with non-care-experienced groups of children and young people.[55] For example, a strategic lead from a Family Finding project suggested working with young men in the youth justice system could be a priority for the future; this could provide positive role models for young men who are currently not being supported through the project.

Progress monitoring and evaluation

At the time of the case studies, interviewees suggested a top priority was to reflect on the past year of delivery and record the progress that children and young people had made. Whilst some projects had consistent and validated tools for measuring progress, others were starting to consider how to measure and assess the distance travelled by individual children and young people. Examples included:

- bringing together the staff and other professionals working with them to discuss what difference the projects had made
- introducing a new data system to streamline outcomes tracking across a range of domains
- analysing the reasons some children and young people had participated less or withdrawn from the service.

Project staff also discussed plans to introduce a way of tracking that all eligible children and young people had been offered the project support (so no one slipped through the net). Several project leads also wanted to collate children and young people's feedback on the project to support continuous improvement of service delivery and use experiential feedback as a way of promoting the projects for future cohorts.

> It's really about harnessing those voices... ensuring and holding people accountable to put those changes in place. - *Practitioner*

[55] This is beyond the scope of the current DfE funding which focuses on children in care and care leavers.

Future funding

Overall, interviewees wanted the projects to continue but were unsure of where to access sustainable funding beyond DfE's FFBM programme.[56]

> We would love the project to keep going... If the money is no longer available, how might we deliver some of this in the future? – *Strategic lead*

> Please DfE, will you fund this for another year? Because we'd just be devastated for this to have to end in March [2025]. – *Strategic lead*

In several case study projects, strategic leads raised concerns about fixed-term staff contracts coming to an end in March 2025. Some staff leaving were leaving posts in advance of that date due to a lack of reassurance about the future of their jobs.

Interviewees from one case study project expressed they were planning for potential funding gaps after the DfE funding, to avoid disruption for children and young people and staff. They explained this was critical to avoid the risk of sudden endings which can be highly damaging for children and young people. In this case, the third party delivery partner had secured a contract with a local authority to continue delivering the support beyond March 2025.

> What happens after this? Because obviously if the funding is going to completely disappear...we need to plan carefully for that. – *Project lead*

Looking further to the future, strategic leads described the need to pitch the benefits of funding future, similar projects to other commissioners to secure funding and sustain delivery. For one Befriending and Mentoring project, this included health commissioners who may be interested in funding interventions which support children and young people's mental health in the interim before receiving therapeutic interventions (due to, for example, long waiting lists or children and young people not feeling ready to take up therapeutic support).

[56] As part of their original application and DfE's success criteria, local authorities were asked to consider how their projects could be sustainable year on year to become embedded within their local offer.

Learning to date and next steps

Based on data available at this point in the evaluation, this report shows that the implementation of the programme has progressed well, and there are early indications that the programme may be of benefit to the children and young people participating. Future evaluation activity will seek to provide further evidence about the difference the FFBM programme makes to participating children and young people.

Programme reach

Between late 2023 and March 2025, the programme funded 27 Family Finding and 23 Befriending and Mentoring projects across 45 different local authority areas or consortia. A total of 2,115 children and young people were referred to projects by the end of December 2024. This highlights a clear need for and interest in the programme in supporting care-experienced children and young people to find and (re)connect with important people in their lives and/or develop positive relationships with befrienders or mentors. There was strong evidence that the FFBM programme was meeting its aim in supporting new target groups of care experienced children and young people.

Participation in the projects

Family Finding projects tended to reach a younger cohort of children and young people (with an average age of 16 years) and were more likely to involve children in care. For the Befriending and Mentoring projects, the average age of referred children and young people was 18 years and involved more care leavers.

By end of December 2024:

- For Family Finding projects:
- just over half of children and young people referred were receiving support, and a further sixth were awaiting support
- while some children and young people had withdrawn from the projects a small proportion had re-engaged suggesting that it may be important to provide children and young people with the opportunity to re-engage if they wanted
- 11% had completed their involvement in the projects.
- For Befriending and Mentoring projects:
- almost two-thirds of those who had started the programme, were receiving support and almost a fifth were awaiting support
- 10% of children and young people had withdrawn
- 2% had completed their involvement in the projects.

The evaluation data suggests that more children and young people referred to the projects could benefit from the programme's Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring support.

Set up and delivery

The evaluation found that project setup and delivery broadly went well, demonstrating effective project management and adaptability to meet the needs of children and young people. Additionally, there was a clearly articulated vision and purpose for the projects, which sometimes aligned with broader local authority strategies that provided support to care-experienced children and young people. In instances where projects built on earlier delivery, the ethos had sometimes already been established within the local authority with the FFBM programme funding seen as an important opportunity to expand support provision.

Key successes in project set-up and delivery related to building on strong foundations of partnership working, expertise and good practice, delivery teams' training and development, and the development of a shared vision for the projects. Where projects were able to draw on existing knowledge through having delivered similar programmes as a local authority, or having members of the team with prior experience, this aided local authorities to mobilise quickly and within tight timescales. However, this experience was not widespread, and most delivery teams survey respondents did not have prior experience of similar projects.

Overall, projects were well managed and relationships between local authorities and third parties were positive. Projects took a considered approach around whether to work with a third party provider. Challenges around delivery included overcoming capacity constraints in children's services, a lack of access to different data systems, and barriers to communication with wider external parties (namely, prisons).

Despite the positive findings, there were some challenges to delivery, including the time-limited nature of the funding provided in this programme. In some cases, this affected delivery with some support being condensed into tighter timeframes than was ideal for some children and young people. It also made exit planning for staff and children and young people difficult. Several further challenges were identified which in turn influenced decision making around recruitment, referrals and delivery of support to children and young people.

One of the main challenges identified by projects was receiving sufficient referrals, and in some projects, this was particularly slow early on in delivery. Building relationships with referrers and establishing effective referral processes were crucial to increasing referrals. Capacity constraints at local authority level was a challenge in this regard, although some

projects sought out ways to overcome this, for example through recruiting additional staff to facilitate multi-agency working.

Project stakeholders explained that project delivery teams have built good relationships with children and young people; however, it took time to build trust, and engagement in the programme has fluctuated over time. Factors such as mental health, personal circumstances, and relationships with social workers also influenced engagement levels.

The funded projects aimed to engage care-experienced children and young people from a range of cohorts and backgrounds. This evaluation has identified common challenges in engaging specific sub-cohorts, as well as early insights into effective strategies and best practices. Notably, projects required adequate resources and the capability to adopt a flexible approach to addressing needs, including new or emerging requirements and adapting to changing circumstances.

Training and support for delivery teams was considered a critical component for the success of both Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects. Most staff felt well-prepared for their roles after onboarding, and ongoing supervision was highly valued. There were calls for additional training focused on specific groups, such as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC).

Reported benefits

Based on a range of data sources, the evaluation found there may be some early indications of benefits for those participating in the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects. That said, caution must be applied when interpreting the data.

There were some key differences in the benefits for children and young people involved in different aspects of the programme, which is to be expected given the different aims of Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects. This report has not sought to compare Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring as like for like but instead highlighted how and in what ways different approaches may have contributed to positive change for children and young people.

Key findings from this evaluation for both Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects include:

- the number of connections/relationships with important people in children and young people's lives increased significantly among those participating in Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects.
- For those who participated in Befriending and Mentoring projects, this connection was largely assumed to be with their befriender or mentor or children and young people attending group activities.

- For those involved in Family Finding projects, there was evidence that children and young people had (re)connected with various important people in their lives, including immediate and wider family, professionals, including teachers and social workers, friends, foster families and others.
- there was some qualitative evidence that Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects contributed to children's and young people's sense of identity.

The evaluation found that FFBM programme also had positive benefits for staff and volunteers involved.

Evaluation

Year 1 of the evaluation has provided valuable insights into the implementation, reported benefits, and costs of the projects. To date, the mixed-methods approach has involved the collection and analysis of MI data, qualitative case studies, a survey of delivery staff and volunteers, analysis of quarterly financial monitoring reports, and adapted Bright Spots surveys with children and young people. These activities have provided insights to support ongoing development of future evaluation plans for the remainder of Stage 1 (2025/26) and Stage 2 (2026/27 onwards, if commissioned).

In 2025/26, the evaluation will continue to collect MI and qualitative data to build on the findings and methodological learning from the first year to expand our understanding of programme implementation and to examine evidence of outcomes. The year 1 adapted Bright Spots surveys will seek to collect baseline and endline data to better explore outcomes related to the programme. Additionally, the economic strand will explore whether a value for money assessment can be conducted. Finally, learning from both years of the evaluation will inform a feasibility assessment of whether an impact evaluation could be conducted in the future (at Stage 2).

Recommendations

Based on evidence collected and presented in this report, this section outlines key recommendations for the programme.

The Department for Education should consider:

- building on this evaluation and commit further funding to conduct a robust impact evaluation of the programme (for example, counterfactual or other approach where feasible) in Stage 2 to explore its impact on participating children and young people

- committing funding to the programme, or similar projects, for multiple years to avoid the disruption of short-term funded projects for care-experienced children and young people. This would:
- provide delivery teams, children and young people with more time to develop trusting relationships and to engage children and young people
- help create strong multi-agency working relationships to better support care-experienced children and young people
- facilitate the development of longer-term, lasting relationships between children and young people and their (re)connections or mentors to avoid the potential disruption and negative impact of relationships breaking down for children and young people
- enable the expected longer-term outcomes of the projects to be evaluated to inform future local and national spending decisions
- providing projects, particularly those that have no prior experience, with a set up phase with dedicated resource and time to establish and mobilise their offer prior to support being delivered to children and young people, this would enable, for example, staff to be employed or redeployed and mentors to get DBS checks to prevent delays in support for children and young people
- not requiring the programme to be delivered to the end of financial years; this does not fit well for children and young people, particularly those who are in education or training and may be part way through a school or academic year when the projects may cease
- for Family Finding projects, supporting projects to provide sustainable, longer-term support to children and young people particularly where (re)connections did not commence or broke down
- promoting the Family Finding approach to foster carers, and others supporting care experienced children and young people, nationally to support their knowledge and awareness of the projects to support children and young people to engage
- sharing learning from Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects to support other local authorities that may choose to start similar projects now or in the future.

Local authorities and third party providers should consider:

- utilising prior relevant experience of delivery and build on previous iterations of projects, where possible, to enable prompt project set up and mobilisation; where this is not possible learning across local authorities should be shared

- ensuring senior leadership buy-in to the project; this would build on and/or support a wider ethos and vision to supporting care-experienced children and young people across local authority children social care and wider services
- ensuring projects are set up to work closely with other agencies, particularly teams within the local authority who would be regular sources of referrals but that also face serious capacity constraints
- providing flexible referral routes into the projects, including from a range of agencies and from children and young people themselves (self-referrals) and perhaps, for Family Finding projects specifically, consider whether reference to 'family' in the name could be limiting for some children and young people[57]
- helping overcome challenges of engagement by providing time and support to help facilitate children or young people to participate or engage; this may include proving a range of information booklets; supporting with transport costs; and/or looking at what wider support they may need (including mental health support) either as a precursor or accompaniment to the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring project and providing further support to children and young people with additional challenges such as UASC
- ensure flexibility is built into the delivery model to help support children and young people in a way that best meets their needs and to sustain their engagement (or support re-engagement)
- for Family Finding, this includes providing children and young people with choices about how their family group conference/equivalent takes place (i.e. how informal/formal, where it takes place and what sort of environment)
- for Befriending and Mentoring, this includes giving children and young people a choice about who their mentor is
- for Befriending and Mentoring, providing mentors with dedicated support and training to support with children and young people; this may include providing information about which services or individuals mentors could contact when their mentee needs further support so this can be offered in a timely manner
- for care-experienced mentors or those with lived experience, further support may be required to support them in their role as mentor
- for those engaged with Befriending and Mentoring projects, ensure where children and young people develop skills and confidence through the project have further opportunities to practice those skills outside of their mentoring relationship; while remaining flexible to children and young people's needs, future iterations of Befriending and Mentoring projects could seek to embed a wider range of activities (possibly with care-experienced peers), or consider the types of opportunities

[57] A member of the care-experienced panel suggested 'Connecting with those you miss' as an alternative.

offered through the mentor relationship (for example, to support children and young people to meet new people)

- ensuring plans are developed to help ensure relationships developed through Family Finding are supported to become sustainable longer term; this may include practical support such as providing funding to cover travel costs or electronic devices to facilitate remote communication, as well as emotional support.

Annexes

Annex 1: Theories of Change

This annex sets out the background to the development of the theories of change (ToCs) for the Evaluation of the FFBM programme. It outlines the ToCs' development process, project typologies, rationale underpinning the programme and a narrative around the inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impact (for different groups).

Evaluation of the Family Finding, Befriending and Mentoring Programme: Theory of Change narrative

Working with the Department for Education (DfE) the evaluation team developed a Theory of Change (ToC) for each programme strand: one for Family Finding and one for Befriending and Mentoring. The ToCs set out the overall goals that the programme is working towards, what outcomes it anticipates achieving and how, as well as considerations around what may affect progress. This narrative should be read alongside the ToC diagrams. It follows the structure of the diagrams, summarising the overarching programme-level elements of the ToCs (rationale, inputs, activities and outputs, outcomes, impacts, risks and assumptions) and distinguishes the distinct pathways of Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring, where relevant.

ToC development

The development of the FFBM programme ToCs was based on:

- a desk-based review of successful local authority application forms to the programme
- a rapid evidence assessment (REA) of the research literature on Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring initiatives
- a ToC workshop with DfE stakeholders, Ecorys and Coram
- an initial interview with 2 DfE policy team members
- a ToC workshop with the evaluation's care-experienced consultants
- interviews with 10 key stakeholders involved in delivering or evaluating Family Finding or Befriending and Mentoring initiatives.

Project typologies

Based on the information gathered through the local authority applications and REA, the evaluation team developed typologies of the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects. Developing typologies of the 2 strands supported the evaluation in a range of ways. It helped group Family Finding or Befriending and Mentoring projects by

their similarities and differences; provided a useful framework for highlighting nuances between activities, outputs and outcomes in the ToCs; as well as guiding the evaluation. For example, it informed case study sampling and supported analysis and reporting.

For Family Finding projects, the evaluation team identified 2 typologies: 'Type 1' projects adopt a Lifelong Links (LLL) approach while 'Type 2' projects follow other approaches (see Table A1).

Table A1: Family Finding typologies

Type 1: 'Lifelong Links' (n=23)	**Type 2: 'Other models of Family Finding' (n=3)**
Followed the LLL model. Centred around a Family Group Conference, which is a key feature of LLL. Delivered by remunerated staff supported by a central LLL coordinator. Volunteers involved in delivery in a small number of projects.	Projects followed different (non-LLL) models such as 'Family Seeing' and 'Family Finding'. Embedded in wider local authority services (such as Family Hubs or Therapeutic Support Services). Delivered by remunerated staff. No volunteers were involved.

For Befriending and Mentoring projects, 2 overarching typologies were developed: relationship-centred projects and goal-oriented projects. Relationship-centred projects primarily focused on developing a positive relationship between the mentor and mentee; 3 models of projects form this overarching approach. For the goal-oriented projects, the primary focus of the projects was to achieve specific goals through the mentoring relationship (see Table A2).

Table A2: Befriending and Mentoring typologies

Type 1: Relationship-centred (n=19): Relationship between mentor-mentee was primary	**Type 1: Relationship-centred (n=19): Relationship between mentor-mentee was primary**	**Type 1: Relationship-centred (n=19): Relationship between mentor-mentee was primary**	**Type 2: Goal-oriented (n=4): Mentorship focused on achieving goals within pre-defined areas**
Model 1: 'Peer' mentoring (n=4)	**Model 2: 'Community-based' mentoring (n=13)**	**Model 3: 'Creative mentoring' (n=2)**	**Model 4: 'Goal-oriented' mentoring**
Peer mentors. Service provided in-house at the local authority or involved local voluntary/community sector providers. Volunteer-led (usually with a remunerated central coordinator). Some volunteers were remunerated. Duration of support was flexible (usually a minimum of one year).	Matching based on characteristic similarities between mentor and mentee (such as, heritage, community, culture, religion). Service provider varies. Mix of paid staff (coordinators) and volunteer mentors. Duration of support varied, but not time limited.	Matching mentees with creative industry professionals. Service provided by a commissioned national organisation. Remunerated delivery staff (no volunteers). Duration of support was time-limited to 7 months, with a set number of delivery hours per week.	Mentors may be matched on characteristic differences (for example, intergenerational) but not necessarily. Service provided by commissioned national or local organisations. Delivery involved volunteers and sometimes also remunerated staff. Duration of support was usually time-limited up to one year.

Rationale for the programme

American academics Garner and Yogman (2021) asserted that having safe, stable and nurturing relationships can serve as a buffer to adversity and can play a key role in building resilience that supports children to develop skills to cope with future adversity.[58] Crouch *et al's* (2019) US-based research also found that having a trusted adult during childhood can positively influence wellbeing.[59] However, many children and young people[60] leave care without stable relationships around them.[61,62]

The importance of positive relationships for care experienced children and young people has been evidenced. Wijedasa *et al* (2022) found that children and young people in care who had positive relationships with their carers, friends, and social workers were more likely to have better mental health, irrespective of the length of time they spent in care or the number of previous placements they had. These findings underpin the significance of maintaining stable and high-quality relationships for children and young people during their time in care.

The FFBM programme therefore seeks to help care-experienced children and young people to identify and connect with the important people in their lives, improve their sense of identity and community, and create and sustain consistent, stable, loving relationships. The overall aim of the programme is to improve care-experienced children and young people's longer-term outcomes, in line with the ambitions set out in Keeping children safe, helping families thrive.[63]

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[58] Garner A and Yogman, M. (2021) 'Preventing Childhood Toxic Stress: Partnering with Families and Communities to Promote Relational Health', *Pediatrics,* 148(2):e2021052582.
[59] Crouch, E., Radcliffe, E., Strompolis, M. and Srivastav, A. (2019) 'Safe, Stable, and Nurtured: Protective Factors against Poor Physical and Mental Health Outcomes Following Exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), *Journal of Child and Adolescent Trauma,* 12:165-173.
[60] By children and young people, this means care-experienced children and young people who are in care or considered to be care leavers, and who are the target cohort for the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring programme. This includes Children in Care (CiC) and Care Leavers (CLs) which some areas may refer to as Looked After Children (LAC) and Previously Looked After Children (PLAC).
[61] What Makes Life Good, Care leavers' Views on their Well-being Report - Coram Voice 2020
[62] The sources referenced have been lifted from the DfE's invitation to tender for the evaluation. Ecorys have not appraised these documents nor undertaken a full literature review but carried out a rapid evidence assessment of based on recommended documents.
[63] Keeping children safe, helping families thrive - GOV.UK

ToC diagrams

Figure A1: Family Finding Theory of Change diagram (accessible version)

Situation	Aims
Over their life course, care leavers experience inequalities in health, education and employment. Loving relationships are the foundation every child needs to thrive; studies have shown that safe, stable and nurturing relationships can serve as a buffer to adversity, build resilience that supports children to develop the skills to cope with future adversity, and positively impact future wellbeing. Yet many children and young people leave care without stable relationships or people in their lives to provide emotional support, and report feeling lonely.	The Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring programme seeks to help care-experienced children and young people to identify and connect with the important people in their lives, improve their sense of identity and community, and create and sustain consistent, stable, loving relationships. The overall aim of the programme is to improve care-experienced children and young people's longer-term outcomes

Inputs and activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
Inputs DfE funding administered through ringfenced grants. Where relevant, matched-funding or wider grant funding. DfE Set project scope, monitors service and facilitates cross-local authority learning. Governance by Local Authority Heads of Service/Service Directors. Existing provision provides foundational infrastructure, knowledge, resources and processes in local authorities expanding their existing provision. Local authority ethos provides cultural foundations for project delivery (such as relational practice). Existing staff to coordinate, manage and support operations. Access to experienced self-employed Lifelong Links practitioners.	Staff and volunteer vacancies are filled. Training sessions delivered to staff, including bespoke training for subgroups with specific needs (for example, UASC, care-experienced parents, children living out-of-county, children in custody or otherwise involved in the CJS/at risk of exploitation, different age groups). Staff are upskilled. Service promotion activities completed such as sessions for wider services, communications and advertising. Wider services within the local authority are aware of the Family Finding service, know how to refer	Short term Children and young people: report improved wellbeing report an increased feeling of being listened to report having someone they can talk to report having a really good friend, or someone they can trust report having an adult who is interested in them report an increased satisfaction with how much, and in what ways, they see and interact with those important to them report (re)connecting with people who they have shared memories/histories report increased participation in a community report knowing someone who has things in common with them (such as a shared culture/ values) report increased confidence are more aware of different opportunities which are of interest to them have increased knowledge of and access to advocates for different services and support Medium term	By 2027, every child in care and care leaver will feel that they have strong, loving relationships in place. Fiscal benefits to the state due to improvements in outcomes which are costly to the state.

Inputs and activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
Third party partners (where applicable) to deliver activities, offer expertise or support. Existing Family Finding evidence base: informs service design. FRG resources, expertise and support: materials, training, practice model accreditation and guidance. Activities Recruit additional staff (and volunteers in a small number of Type 1 projects only) as needed for new projects, and additional practitioners for projects expanding provisioner to new groups of children and young people. Train staff: train new staff and provide additional training to practitioners to meet the needs of new target subgroups. Develop links with wider local authority services.	children and young people into it, and support children and young people receiving the Family Finding intervention. Children and young people are aware of the Family Finding offer. Children and young people referred and engaged. Connections discovered and involved: wider family friends other connections Children and young people (re)connect with important people in their lives. Increased number of people in children and	Children and young people: report feeling less lonely and isolated report feeling more supported by and part of a larger support network and community report increased knowledge/understanding of their own story are more likely to report feeling they are 'understood' by someone who has things in common with them report feeling more connected to a community report enhanced cultural ties report accessing additional relevant services Long term Children and young people: report a reduction in poor mental health report having more loving and healthy relationships report having more sustained relationships report having an improved sense of identity/ies and belonging report improved sense of voice and agency Outcome for families and friends	

Inputs and activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
Promote new/expanded Family Finding service amongst wider services, to aid referrals, enhance multi-agency support, and enable wider services to support children and young people whilst receiving the intervention. Establish or advance referral pathways so children and young people may be identified and referred to the Family Finding service. Hold initial engagement activities to onboard referred children and young people. Establish understanding of needs of children and young people referred to the Family Finding service. Support children and young people to consider and identify potential connections who could be engaged in their network.	young peoples' support networks. Number of meetings held with new, high-quality connections. Number of 'plans' created and supported by children and young people, friends/ families and wider agencies.	Increased engagement in child's life (short-medium outcome) Increased involvement in meetings about the child (short-medium outcome) Outcomes for staff Staff and volunteers report: having gained new skills or knowledge[64] having a greater sense of purpose/job satisfaction[64] Outcomes for local authorities Family Finding service is embedded in wider local authority transformation/services.[64] Culture of involvement of children and young people and their family/friends network is embedded into local authority practice.[64] Practitioners support the process of engaging with wider children and young people's networks.[64] Staff report improved workplace culture and/or practices as a result of the project.[64] Wider Outcomes	

[64] Short-Long term outcome

Inputs and activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
Search for and engage identified connections. Hold meetings for children and young people and families to connect. Collaboratively develop 'safe plan' and integrate with care planning with agencies working with the children and young people and their discovered friends/family. Regularly review ‘plan'. Continuous improvement of service and practice. Monitoring of service: collecting information about service referrals, engagement and outcomes. Service accreditation: by FRG where this is desired/not already in place.		Children and young people report having an advocate.[65] Increased housing (care leavers) or placement stability (children in care) (reduced placement moves).[66] Increased likelihood of children in care entering kinship care or leaving care via reunification.[66] Children in care are more engaged with education. Care leavers are more engaged with further education, training and employment.[66] Project/cohort specific outcomes (such as, reduced engagement in the criminal justice system).[64]	

[65] Medium term outcome
[66]Long term outcome

Assumptions	Risks
That additional, supplementary funding is available (where this has been costed into the Family Finding project). Vacancies are applied for by suitable candidates and lead to successful appointment of new staff. Wider third party organisations/staff are available to deliver/support the resourcing of the project. Children and young people and their identified networks want to engage in the project. Wider needs of children and young people are adequately supported through wider services to enable them to participate and engage with the Family Finding support. Strategic alignment with wider policies, programmes and priorities, at the local authority and central Government-levels. Children and young people sustain relationships beyond the support. Programme is delivered long-term enough for outcomes to materialise.	Low number of children and young people referrals to projects. Lack of children and young people engagement/high levels of children and young people disengagement. Information not adequately communicated with children and young people. Children and young people are unable to take part due to barriers such as housing, mental health concerns, other reasons for it not being the 'right time' to engage. Local authority bureaucracy and governance processes may slow progress. Lack of suitable candidates apply to fill vacancies. Staff and volunteer retention (volunteers only used in small number of Type 1 projects). Wider contextual changes at the local authority level may impact receptiveness to innovation (such as, leadership changes; staffing; Ofsted rating; financial position of local authority). Short term funding: sustainability plans not in place impacts running of project if staff leave early/ongoing work with incomplete. Particularly acute if funding is withdrawn in March 2025 or little advance notice of ongoing funding is given. Evaluation is not long-term enough to capture/observe monetizable outcomes. New minister interest or change in wider policy context affects programme plans.

Figure A2: Family Finding Theory of Change diagram

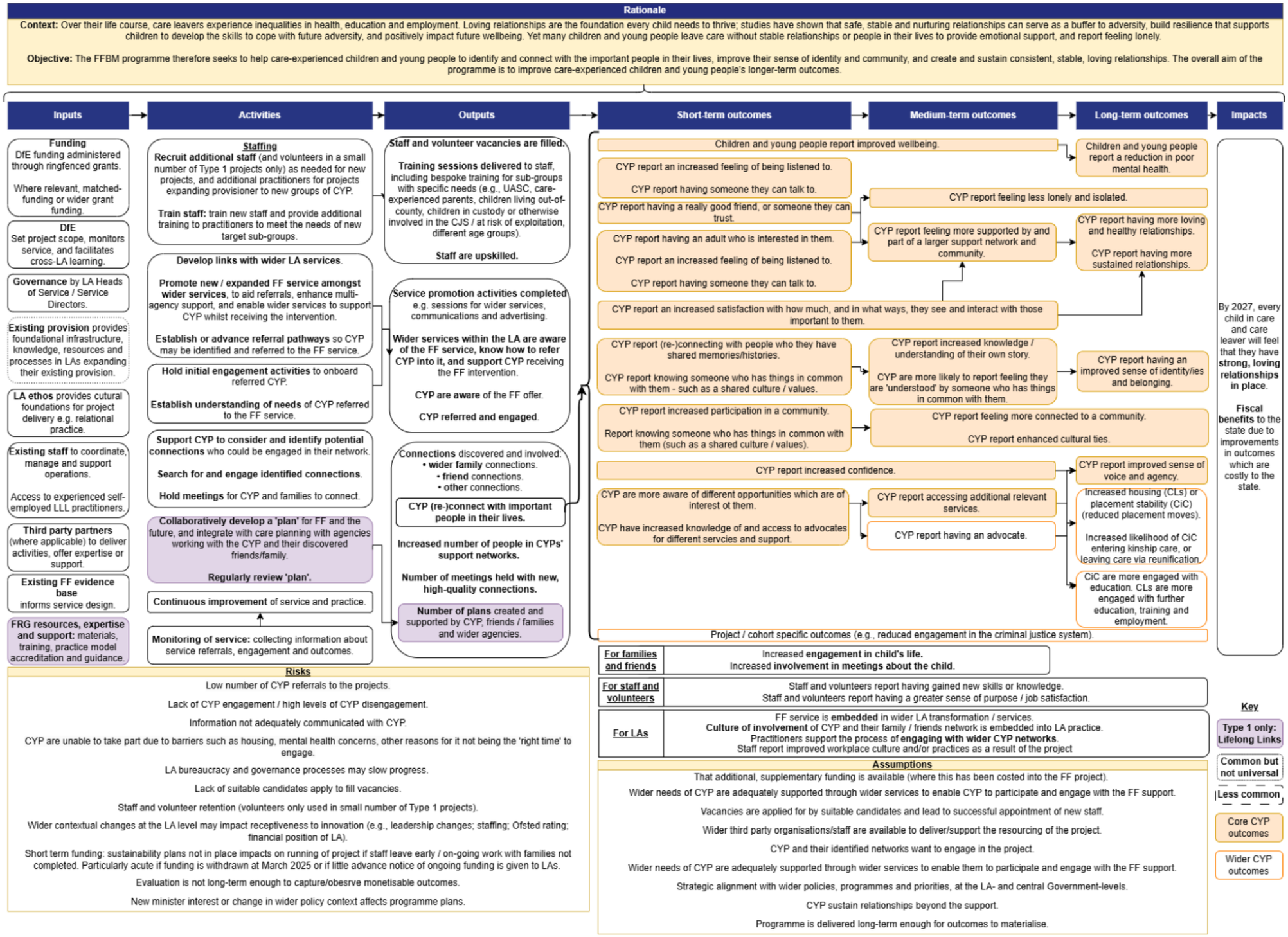


Figure A3: Befriending and Mentoring Theory of Change diagram (accessible version)

Situation	Aims
Over their life course, care leavers experience inequalities in health, education and employment. Loving relationships are the foundation every child needs to thrive; studies have shown that safe, stable and nurturing relationships can serve as a buffer to adversity, build resilience that supports children to develop the skills to cope with future adversity, and positively impact future wellbeing. Yet many children and young people leave care without stable relationships or people in their lives to provide emotional support, and report feeling lonely.	The Family Finding, Befriending and Mentoring programme therefore seeks to help care-experienced children and young people to identify and connect with the important people in their lives, improve their sense of identity and community, and create and sustain consistent, stable, loving relationships. The overall aim of the programme is to improve care-experienced children and young people's longer-term outcomes.

Inputs and activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
Inputs DfE funding administered through ringfenced grants. DfE Set project scope, monitors service, and facilitates cross-local authority learning. Governance: by local authority Heads of Service/Service Directors. Existing provision provides foundational infrastructure, knowledge, resources and processes in local authorities expanding their existing provision. Local authority ethos provides cultural foundations for project delivery (for example, relational practice). Existing staff to coordinate, manage and support operations. Third party partners (where applicable) to deliver activities, offer expertise or support.	Staff vacancies filled. Befrienders/mentors engaged and onboarded. Training sessions delivered to staff. Befrienders/mentors trained, including peer mentors. Staff and befrienders/mentors are upskilled. Staff and befrienders/mentors are supported in their role. Staff, volunteers and children and young people are aware of the Befriending and Mentoring offer. Children and young people engaged in the Befriending and Mentoring projects. Children and young people are matched to a mentor. Number of matches that sustain for 3, 6, 12 months or more. Support plans developed.	Short term Children and young people: report improved wellbeing and happiness report an increased feeling of being listened to report having someone they can talk to report having a really good friend, or someone they can trust report having an adult who is interested in them report an increased satisfaction with how much, and in what ways, they see and interact with those important to them54 report knowing someone who has things in common with them - such as a shared culture/values report increased participation in a community	By 2027, every child in care and care leaver will feel that they have strong, loving relationships in place. Fiscal benefits to the state due to improvements in outcomes which are costly to the state.

Inputs and activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
Work with local VCSEs to provide additional capacity, longer-term funding, or provide training to staff. Co-production children and young people inform service design. Existing Befriending and Mentoring evidence base informs service design (not mentioned for Type 2). Activities Recruit additional staff as needed for new projects, and additional practitioners for projects expanding provisioner to new groups of children and young people. May include care-experienced apprentices or roles ring-fenced for care-experienced young people. Train staff: train new staff and provide additional training to practitioners to meet the needs of new target subgroups.	Children and young people meet regularly and communicate with their befriender/mentor. May communicate via an App. Group sessions and activities delivered alongside the mentorship offer in some cases (Type 1 and Type 2 only). Children and young people participate in wider community activities. May be facilitated with funding provided for activities. Children and young people report having new, supportive relationships outside of existing 'professional' support Service is co-designed and children and young people voice informs ongoing delivery.	report increased confidence and report improved social and communication skills (such as, respect, two-way polite interactions, comfortable in interactions, informal advice giving and receipt) are more aware of different opportunities which are of interest to them have increased knowledge of and access to advocates for different services and support Medium term Children and young people: report feeling less lonely and isolated report feeling more supported by and part of a larger support network and community are more likely to report feeling they are 'understood' by someone who has things in common with them	

Inputs and activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
Recruit volunteers (not Type 3) to become peer mentors, community mentors, or goal-oriented mentors. Deliver training to new staff and befrienders/mentor. Support staff and befrienders/mentors through management and debriefs – may include clinical supervision. Promote new/expanded Befriending and Mentoring service amongst wider services, to aid referrals, enhance multi-agency support, and enable wider services to support children and young people whilst receiving the intervention. Establish or advance referral pathways so children and young people may be identified and referred to the Befriending and Mentoring service. Children and young people matched with a suitable		report feeling more connected to a community report an increase in cultural ties report increased confidence when meeting new people report accessing additional relevant services Long term Children and young people: report a reduction in poor mental health report having more safe, stable and healthy relationships report having more sustained relationships report having an improved sense of identity/ies and belonging report improved sense of voice and agency Outcomes for staff Staff and volunteers report having gained new skills or knowledge.	

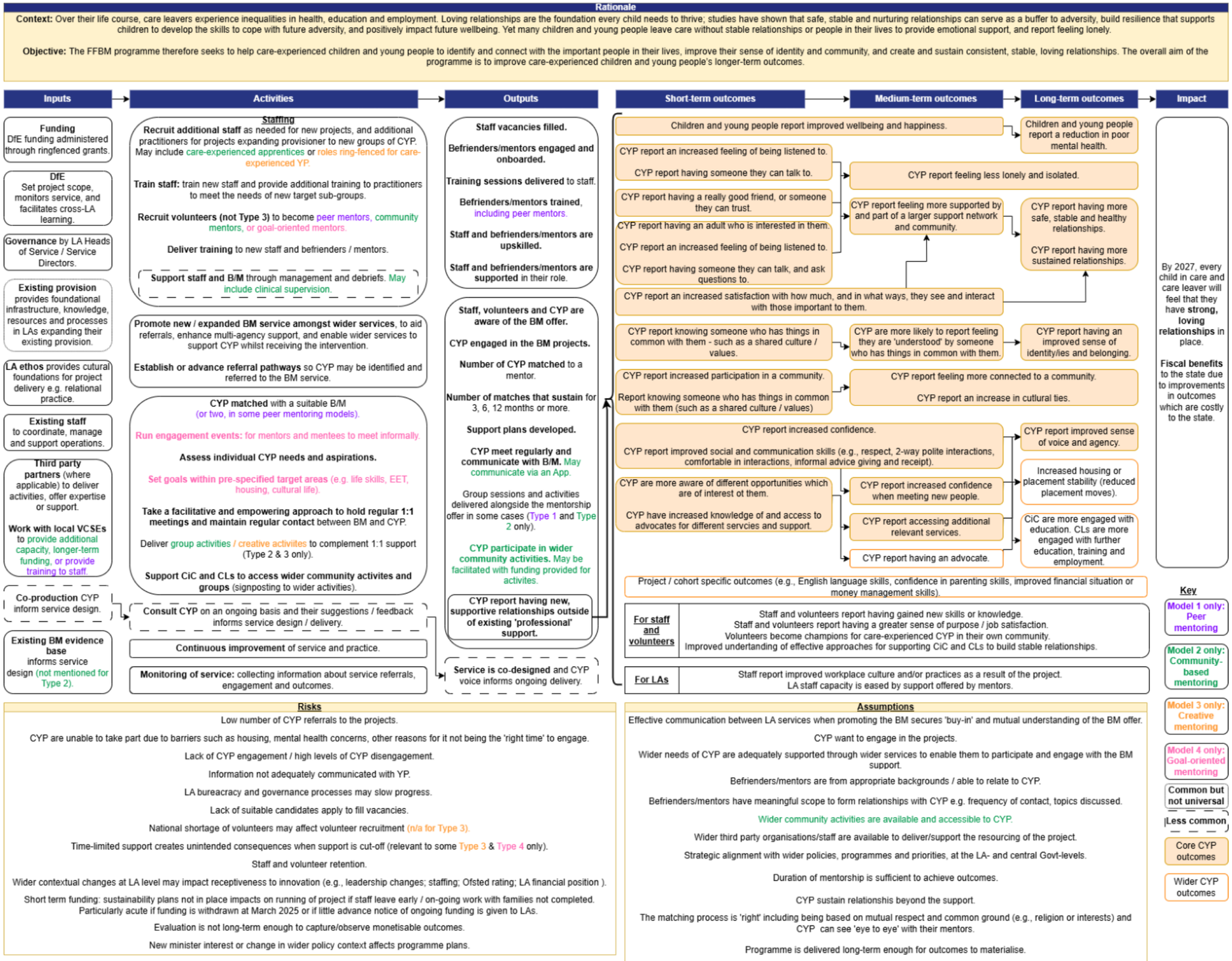
Inputs and activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
Befriending and Mentoring (or two, in some peer mentoring models). Run engagement events: for mentors and mentees to meet informally. Assess individual children and young people needs and aspirations. Set goals within pre-specified target areas (for example, life skills, education, employment and training, housing, cultural life). Take a facilitative and empowering approach to hold regular one-to-one meetings and maintain regular contact between Befriending and Mentoring and children and young people. Deliver group activities/creative activities to complement one-to-one support (Type 2 and 3 only).		Staff and volunteers report having a greater sense of purpose/job satisfaction. Volunteers become champions for care-experienced children and young people in their own community. Improved understanding of effective approaches for supporting children in care and care leavers to build stable relationships. Outcomes for local authorities Staff report improved workplace culture and/or practices as a result of the project. Local authority staff capacity is eased by support offered by mentors. Wider Outcomes Children and young people report having an advocate. Increased housing or placement stability (reduced placement moves).	

Inputs and activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
Support children in care and care leavers to access wider community activities and groups (signposting to wider activities). Consult children and young people on an ongoing basis and their suggestions/feedback informs service design/delivery. Continuous improvement of service and practice.		Children in care are more engaged with education. Care leavers are more engaged with further education, training and employment. Project/cohort specific outcomes (such as, English language skills, confidence in parenting skills, improved financial situation or money management skills).	

Assumptions	Risks
Effective communication between local authority services when promoting the Befriending and Mentoring secures 'buy-in' and mutual understanding of the Befriending and Mentoring offer. Children and young people want to engage in the projects. Wider needs of children and young people are adequately supported through wider services to enable them to participate and engage with the Befriending and Mentoring support. Befrienders/mentors are from appropriate backgrounds/able to relate to children and young people. Befrienders/mentors have meaningful scope to form relationships with children and young people for example, frequency of contact, topics discussed. Wider community activities are available and accessible to children and young people. Wider third party organisations/staff are available to deliver/support the resourcing of the project. Strategic alignment with wider policies, programmes and priorities, at the local authority and central Government-levels. Duration of mentorship is sufficient to achieve outcomes. Children and young people sustain relationships beyond the support.	Low number of children and young people referrals to the projects. Children and young people are unable to take part due to barriers such as housing, mental health concerns, other reasons for it not being the 'right time' to engage. Lack of children and young people engagement/high levels of children and young people disengagement. Information not adequately communicated with young people. Local authority bureaucracy and governance processes may slow progress. Lack of suitable candidates apply to fill vacancies. National shortage of volunteers may affect volunteer recruitment (not relevant for Type 3 projects). Time-limited support creates unintended consequences when support is cut-off (relevant to some Type 3 and Type 4 projects only). Staff and volunteer retention. Wider contextual changes at local authority level may impact receptiveness to innovation (such as, leadership changes; staffing; Ofsted rating; local authority financial position). Short term funding: sustainability plans not in place impacts on running of project if staff leave early/on-going work with families not completed.

Assumptions	Risks
The matching process is 'right' including being based on mutual respect and common ground (such as, religion or interests) and children and young people can see 'eye to eye' with their mentors. Programme is delivered long-term enough for outcomes to materialise.	Particularly acute if funding is withdrawn at March 2025 or if little advance notice of ongoing funding is given to local authorities. Evaluation is not long-term enough to capture/observe monetizable outcomes. New minister interest or change in wider policy context affects programme plans.

Figure A4: Befriending and Mentoring Theory of Change diagram



Annex 2: Summary of data sources

Table A3: Summary of data sources analysed and presented in this report

Data source	Fieldwork	Local authorities participated	Children and young people participated (N)	Staff or volunteers participated (N)	Total number of individuals (N)
Monitoring information (MI) data on individual CYP (up to end of September) collected by the end of October	1 quarter of "backdated" data	Family Finding: 24 out of 27[67] Befriending and Mentoring: 18 out of 23[68]	Family Finding: 733 Befriending and Mentoring: 669	N/A	1,402
Monitoring information (MI) data on individual CYP collected for October-December 2024	1 quarter of rolling data	Family Finding: 26 out of 27 Befriending and Mentoring: 22 out of 23	Family Finding: 1131 Befriending and Mentoring: 984	N/A	2,115

[67] At the time of writing, missing data from 3 Family Finding local authorities/consortia.
[68] At the time of writing, missing data from 5 Befriending and Mentoring local authorities/consortia.

Data source	Fieldwork	Local authorities participated	Children and young people participated (N)	Staff or volunteers participated (N)	Total number of individuals (N)
Adapted Bright Spots surveys of individual CYP	1 wave during September-October 2024	Family Finding: 20 out of 27 Befriending and Mentoring: 21 out of 23	Family Finding: 134 Befriending and Mentoring: 157	N/A	291
Delivery teams survey	1 wave, during November and December 2024	Family Finding: 21 out of 27 Befriending and Mentoring: 16 out of 23	N/A	Family Finding: 191[69] Befriending and Mentoring: 195	386
Case study interviews	1 wave, during November 2024 – February 2025	Family Finding: 4 out of 27 Befriending and Mentoring: 4 out of 23	Family Finding: 8 Befriending and Mentoring: 7	Family Finding: 33 Befriending and Mentoring: 42	90

[69] The figures presented in this table represent the total number of responses, including incomplete responses. There were 133 full responses for Family Finding and 126 for Befriending and Mentoring. Response numbers for each question have been noted under the relevant table.

Annex 3: MI data collection, cleaning and analysis

The evaluation comprises several key methods to provide data for the early impact, process and economic strands of the evaluation. The analysis in this report used a combination of quantitative and qualitative data collected through different data sources. Details of each of the methods used can be found below.

The purpose of collecting the MI was to gather quantitative data about children and young people involved in the projects. This supported the process and implementation evaluation strands to understand more about children and young people's reach and engagement with the projects, as well as supporting the evaluation team to explore the quantitative impact of the programme.

In collaboration with DfE and a small number of local authorities, the evaluation team developed 2 templates to collect the MI data on a quarterly basis from each local authority.[70] There was a template each for Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring. Where local authorities were delivering both Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects, local authorities completed both templates for the respective projects. The MI templates collected the following data to support the process evaluation:

- demographic information about children and young people involved in the project/s: month and year of birth; age; sex; ethnicity; education, employment and training status (EET); care status; number of placements in last 12 months
- data on children and young people's engagement in projects: date of referral; date support started; status and progress to date (based on date data entered); if the child/young person was referred but is not participating in the project, or withdrew, a short explanation as to why; date support ended
- also, for Befriending and Mentoring projects: typical frequency of contact with mentor and whether they participate in group activities

In addition, the MI templates collected the following data relating to outcomes:

- based on information known by the person completing the template, data on number of connections children and young people had at the start of the project and currently; whether the child/young person has made connections with immediate or wider family, friends, professionals (teachers, social workers etc) or other important people in their lives

[70] The first MI template was sent to local authorities in September 2024. Local authorities were asked to backdate the data for all children and young people who had joined the programme since it started. Subsequent MI data collection is due each quarter until March 2025.

- for Family Finding Lifelong Links projects, data on whether the child/young person has increased support networks, knowledge of family, stronger sense of identity or had repaired relationships[71]
- other information about whether the child/young person is participating in another Family Finding or Befriending and Mentoring project; whether they are receiving wider support outside of the programme and which would achieve similar outcomes; and any other (free text) comments.

The MI data presented in this report is based on 2 waves of MI data collection. Due to the time required to develop the MI template, local authorities inputted the first wave of data to reflect the entire project delivery period to the end of September 2024. The second wave of MI data collection contained data for October to December 2024, with data submitted in January 2025. The full dataset contained data for 48 projects.

[71] Staff were encouraged to draw on information already captured through the Circles tool, which is completed by children and young people. This was then entered by a professional into the MI template. Further information about this tool can be found here: Lifelong Links Circles - Family Rights Group.

MI data cleaning

The data cleaning process for each wave of the MI data followed the following steps:

- LA-level MI datasets were merged to construct 2 separate datasets: one for Family Finding projects and one for Befriending and Mentoring projects
- data was checked for completion and quality
- data was cleaned, where needed, for example by removing or recoding invalid inputs
- responses including “prefer not to say”, “do not know”, “[LA] do[es] not collect this information”, and “N/A” were treated as missing information, apart from cases where this was useful to report on
- new metrics were constructed (for example, dates were used to measure duration of certain processes such as number of days from the date of referral to the date the support started, duration of support, etc.).

MI data analysis

For this report, the quantitative analysis of the MI data focuses on descriptive statistics. This means initial numbers are reported in the form of frequencies, percentages, sums and averages. The analysis includes statistical significance testing, where possible, as well as early indications of outcomes. However, this initial analysis does not include a full impact evaluation of the Family Finding, Befriending and Mentoring programme, as such, outcome findings cannot be wholly attributed to the programme. Light touch analysis was conducted of the free text comments in the report. This included coding of comments to identify any common themes and trends emerging.

All data cleaning and quantitative analysis in this report was conducted using Excel and R (a statistical analysis software package).

Limitations of the MI data

The MI data analysis has presented with the following limitations:

- Missing data from some local authorities. As mentioned above, while MI covers most projects (48 out of 50) across Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects, 2 projects were missing from this dataset. For data to be included in this report, a cut-off date for inclusion was set for late January 2025. There were no noticeable commonalities between the projects that did not submit the MI data, suggesting that the data included in this report is broadly representative across the programme. Where projects were unable to return the MI data reasons included capacity and changes in personnel causing delays.

- Missing/incomplete data and small sample sizes. While, in most cases, the MI datasets contained sufficient sample sizes, there were instances where data was incomplete or missing, therefore reducing the sample. This was somewhat expected, especially for outcome data collected via the MI template. Some local authorities had not recorded any outcomes for some children and young people as they were just starting to engage with the programme. The same was true for other metrics which were specific to the Family Finding Lifelong Links model. Only some local authorities that were delivering Family Finding had recorded these metrics as part of Lifelong Links.[72] In other cases, the sample had to be reduced for analysis purposes, for example, to focus on a sub-sample of only those that had already engaged with the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring programme. These cases are highlighted in the respective sections, and caution is advised when smaller samples are used as they may not be representative of all local authorities or children and young people taking part.
- Retrospective nature of certain questions. The majority of the MI data is based on only 2 points in time; these are the same timepoints for all children and young people regardless of when they were referred to or began participating with a project. That said, it records the number of connections children and young people have “before” and “after” engaging with Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects. The accuracy of this data may vary, as the “before” data was not collected before children and young people started engaging in the project. The accuracy of this data is therefore dependent on whether the data was already recorded by each local authority and/or based on the knowledge and recollection of each coordinator filling in the data for individual child or young person.
- Missing/incorrect IDs. A key element of the MI template was the creation of individual IDs for each child and young person engaging with Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects. These IDs allowed for the MI data to be linked to the adapted Bright Spots survey data to provide a comprehensive dataset of children and young people participating the projects. In the first wave of data collection, while IDs were successfully created for most local authorities, it is worth noting that there were issues with 2 local authorities (one had missing IDs and one had incorrect IDs).[73]

[72] Based on feedback from local authorities and DfE, the Family Finding MI template included specific data fields for local authorities delivering LLL projects to align with data collected through the LLL delivery model via the Circles tool. This data was inputted by project staff and not collected directly from children and young people for this evaluation.
[73] In the case where the ID codes were missing, this was agreed in advance with the local authority due to data sharing restrictions.

Annex 4: Adapted Bright Spots surveys (children and young people)

The purpose of the surveys was two-fold: firstly, to explore children and young people's perceptions of their lives and subjective wellbeing, in and beyond care. Secondly, to explore the feasibility of the approach to inform ongoing Stage 1 evaluation in year 2 (2025/26), and later impact evaluation designs (if Stage 2 is commissioned). An adapted version of Coram's 'Bright Spots' surveys was used. The surveys were adapted specifically for this evaluation in line with original ethos of the surveys and involving care-experienced young people. The original Bright Spots surveys were developed in collaboration with Professor Julie Selwyn at the University of Oxford and co-produced with care-experienced children and young people. As part of the original development process, *Bright Spots Indicators* were developed with children's experiences and voice at the heart of measuring subjective well-being. The original surveys were developed from literature reviews, roundtable discussions with professionals, and focus groups and individual interviews with 140 looked after children and young people living in 9 different local authorities, and 31 care leavers.

For the adapted Bright Spots surveys used in this evaluation, questions were removed from and added to the existing Bright Spots surveys to better reflect the intended outcomes of the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects. Not all anticipated programme outcomes were reflected in the adapted Bright Spots surveys as there was not time to develop new questions with care-experienced young people during the evaluation timescales, in part due to pauses associated with the 2024 General Election. Any changes made were unique to each age-appropriate survey. For example, in the 11 to 17 survey a question around whether the respondent liked their bedroom in their current home was removed as this was considered less relevant to the evaluation, whilst questions relating to their feelings about the local community were added. Where possible, existing questions from Bright Spots surveys for different ages were used to draw on previous development work and best practice, and to aid with aggregation across ages. The evaluation's care-experienced panel of young people contributed to this process as paid consultants.

Four online adapted Bright Spots surveys were used to explore children and young people's perceptions of their lives and wellbeing. Paper surveys were also available and used in cases where the child or young person would not be able to access an online version (for example, due to being in a youth custody setting) or when the young person preferred this method. The 4 versions were for:

- children aged 4 to 7 years (17 questions)
- children aged 8 to 11 years in primary school (34 questions)
- young people of secondary school age 11 to 17 years (49 questions)

- care leavers (44 questions).

Each Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring project was asked to identify someone known to the child or young person (a “suitable adult”) to explain the purpose of the evaluation and the survey. Furthermore, suitable adults would give the child or young person any support they may need to complete the survey. Guidance was provided to local authorities to identify an appropriate adult and to explain their role.

Children and young people completed surveys during October and November 2024. This means that the survey captured data at various stages individual children and young people’s involvement with Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects. The evaluation team has explored children and young people’s level of engagement and progress through the projects by matching the survey data with the MI data. Across all 4 surveys, there were 340 responses in the raw data *before* data cleaning.

Data cleaning

Across all surveys, during data cleaning, 53 responses were removed as the children or young people had answered “No” they did not consent to participate in the survey. A further 16 children and young people’s responses were excluded as the consent question had not been completed.

Survey responses were checked for speed/rushed responses and “straight lining” (that being, where the same boxes/response options were selected, or a pattern was noted across different questions - this indicates responses may be false). No responses were excluded for speed and one response was excluded for straight lining. One response was excluded as only 3 non-demographic questions had been completed.

The survey data for each age group was split into separate Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring datasets. To facilitate this approach, as part of the process to engage children and young people in the surveys, suitable adults entered the child or young person’s auto-generated ID code (from the MI template) into the survey. Adapted Bright Spots survey responses were matched with MI data by matching individual ID codes. MI data from wave 1 was used as this was collected concurrently with the adapted Bright Spots surveys (MI information in wave 1 was collected between September-October 2024).

In 3 local authorities there were inconsistent uses of ID numbers which meant that data could not be matched. Twenty-one survey responses could not be included in the matched dataset as a result. A further 9 cases were excluded as ID codes had been duplicated and reused for different adapted Bright Spots surveys.

The ID codes used also indicated whether the individual was participating in Family Finding or Befriending and Mentoring. This information was supplemented by a survey question which asked directly whether children and young people were participating in

the Family Finding or Befriending and Mentoring projects (or both/neither). In a few cases, responses to the survey question did not correspond with the child or young person's ID code. In these cases (5 across all surveys), the evaluation team relied on the ID code entered by the suitable adult to categorise the child or young person into Family Finding or Befriending and Mentoring projects. In one additional case, a response was excluded as an error in the ID code meant it was not classifiable into either Family Finding or Befriending and Mentoring. In one further case, a known error in the ID code was corrected to assign the child to the correct dataset.

Eight cases were excluded as the demographic data collected via the adapted Bright Spots surveys did not match the demographic data in the MI. However, 4 cases where only gender did not match between the Bright Spots and MI data were retained, as the former were completed by children and young people directly and the latter by project staff who may have classified their gender differently. Similarly, cases were retained where only ethnicity did not match - for example a young person identifying as 'mixed' in Bright Spots classified as 'white' in the MI data. Additionally, cases were retained where age was given as only a year different between the data sources - allowing for children and young people aging between the different data collection tools being used.

A number of survey responses indicated that children and young people were participating in both Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects. These responses were included in both datasets (2 from the 8 to 11 years survey, 14 from the 11 to 17 years survey, and 13 from the care leavers survey).

As only 3 responses were received for children aged 4 to 7 years, these have been excluded from the analysis to preserve the anonymity of the children involved.

After cleaning and processing there were 224 Bright Spots responses with matching MI data. The data reveals an uneven distribution of responses between local authorities. Overall, after data cleaning and matching, there were 5 local authorities with only one response. In the MI data for Befriending and Mentoring, almost two-thirds of responses came from a single local authority (73 of 116). As such the data from the adapted Bright Spots surveys cannot be assumed to be representative of children and young people's experiences across all Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects. A breakdown of the survey responses by local authority can be seen in Table A4 and Table A5.

Table A4: Cleaned and matched data with Family Finding MI

Local authority	Matched responses
Local authority Q	17
Local authority D	15
Local authority L	15
Local authority I	14
Local authority K	11
Local authority AG	6
Local authority AA	5
Local authority A	4
Local authority J	4
Local authority W	4
Local authority X	4
Local authority B	3
Local authority C	3
Local authority AE	1
Local authority AJ	1
TOTAL	**107**

Table A5: Cleaned and matched data with Befriending and Mentoring MI

Local authority	Matched responses
Local authority K	73
Local authority U	10
Local authority G	6
Local authority V	4
Local authority M	3
Local authority AB	3
Local authority AC	3
Local authority AH	3
Local authority P	2
Local authority R	2
Local authority Z	2
Local authority AF	2
Local authority F	1
Local authority H	1
Local authority N	1
TOTAL	116

Matched sample

Adapted Bright Spots data was matched with MI data using IDs, to construct a comprehensive dataset, allowing to create further subgroups for analysis (for example participating and non-participating[74] children and young people based on programme status as shown in the MI data).

There was a matched sample of 224 young people who responded to the adapted Bright Spots survey and matched to the MI data. In this matched sample, 20 young people (9%) completed the 8 to 11 years Bright Spots survey, 116 (52%) completed the 11 to 17 adapted Bright Spots survey and 88 (39%) completed the care leavers adapted Bright Spots survey.[75] Children aged 4 to 7 years were excluded from the adapted Bright Spots survey due to the low number of respondents.

[74] The non-participating sample was very small (a maximum of 16 people depending the survey question), which meant it could not be used for meaningful comparisons, as there was high risk the sample was not representative of this particular group.

[75] There is some evidence of inconsistency in the age of young people who completed these survey versions. In the survey guidance, young people aged 16 or 17 and who have left care (sometimes referred to as 'relevant' children) were guided to complete the care leaver survey, and all young people aged 18 or over (being, 'former relevant') were guided to complete the care leaver survey. However according to the MI data, 7 young people who completed the 11 to 17 adapted Bright Spots survey were care leavers (aged

As shown in Figure A5, the age of the total matched sample clustered around 14 to 19 years with few very young or old young people completing the survey. The most frequently reported gender was male (n=115, 52%), with 105 (48%) female respondents. The majority of the sample were White (n=146, 66%), with a breakdown provided in Table A6. For 8 to 11 year olds, and 11 to 17 year olds, the most frequently reported living arrangement was with foster carers (n=15, 75%; n=47, 41%). For care leavers, the most frequently reported living arrangements were in a rented flat/house (n=34, 39%) and in supported accommodation (n=27, 31%). The majority of respondents to the 8 to 11/11 to 17 year old surveys had been in care for 3 or more years (n=69, 51%). A larger proportion (n=33; 39%) of care leaver respondents had spent more than 7 years in care, as shown in Table A8.

Figure A5: Age of total matched sample (N=219)

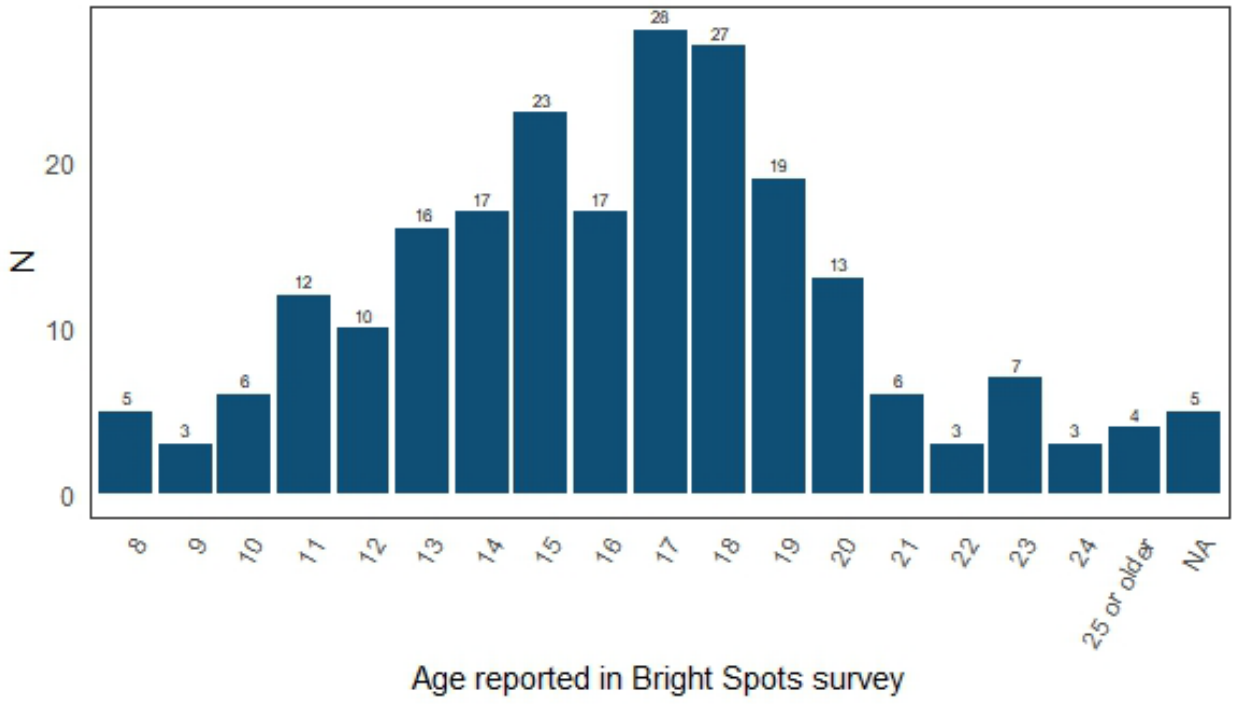


Table A6: Ethnicity of total matched sample (N=220, n=4 missing/prefer not to say)

Ethnicity	N	%
White	146	66
Black	23	10
Asian	11	5

16, 17, or age missing), and 4 young people who completed the care leavers survey were still in care and aged 16 or 17. As this analysis focuses on comparable survey questions across age groups, we have not removed these cases from the analysis.

Mixed	20	9
Other	20	9

Source: Coram analysis of adapted Bright Spots surveys

Table A7: Time spent in care for respondents to 8 to 11 and 11 to 17 Bright spots surveys (N=130, n=6 missing or unknown)

Time in care	N	%
Less than 1 year	22	17
1-2 years	39	30
3 or more years	69	53

Source: Coram analysis of adapted Bright Spots surveys

Table A8: Time spent in care for respondents to care leaver adapted Bright spots survey (N=84, n=4 missing or unknown)

Time in care	N	%
Less than 1 year	12	14
1-3 years	20	24
4-7 years	19	23
More than 7 years	33	39

Source: Coram analysis of adapted Bright Spots surveys

Participating matched sample

Children and young people's participation in the programme was defined according to the categorisation of the MI in Annex 3 p. 161**.** Of the matched sample, 207 children and young people 'participated' in the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring programmes. Sixteen did not participate, and participation data was not available for one young person (see Table A9).

There are complexities to this participation data. For example, 13 (13%) of those participating in Befriending and Mentoring programme were also participating (to some extent) in Family Finding, and one (1%) participant of Family Finding was also participating (to some extent) in Befriending and Mentoring. Given the sample sizes are small, we report findings for the combined Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring participant group, as well as separate Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring findings. For those categorised as participating, the adapted Bright Spots survey was

taken on average 149 days after they started receiving support (ranging from 30 days to 341 days), although a support start date was not available for all young people.

As projects were encouraged to share the surveys with all children and young people who were involved in programme, regardless of their participation status on their project, it is likely that those who had already begun participating were more easily engaged with the surveys. This is reflected in the participation rates of the matched sample.

Table A9: Participation rates of matched sample (N=223, n=1 missing)

Programme	N participated (%)	N not participated (%)[76]
Family Finding	101 (94%)	7 (6%)
Befriending and Mentoring	106 (92%)	9 (8%)
Total	207 (93%)	16 (7%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted Bright Spots surveys

Table A10: Participation rates of matched sample by adapted Bright Spots survey type (N=223, n=1 missing)

Bright Spots survey	N participated (%)	N not participated (%)
8-11	20 (100%)	0 (0%)
11-17	103 (89%)	13 (11%)
Care leavers	84 (97%)	3 (3%)
Total	207 (93%)	16 (7%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted Bright Spots surveys

As shown in Table A10, across all age groups, the majority of respondents participated in Family Finding or Befriending and Mentoring programmes. For the 8 to 11 adapted Bright Spots respondents, all young people participated in the programme.

Table A11: Number of adapted Bright Spots respondents by local authority and participation status

Local Authority	N participated (%)	N not participated (%)
Local Authority A	2 (1%)	2 (13%)
Local Authority B	3 (1%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority C	1 (<1%)	2 (13%)
Local Authority D	15 (7%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority E	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority F	1 (<1%)	0 (0%)

[76] This sample was deemed too small to make meaningful comparisons against other subgroups, hence not used in the final analysis.

Local Authority	N participated (%)	N not participated (%)
Local Authority G	6 (3%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority H	1 (<1%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority I	15 (7%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority J	4 (2%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority K	78 (38%)	6 (38%)
Local Authority L	14 (7%)	1 (6%)
Local Authority M	2 (1%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority N	1 (<1%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority O	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority P	2 (1%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority Q	17 (8%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority R	2 (1%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority S	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority T	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority U	8 (4%)	2 (13%)
Local Authority V	4 (2%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority W	3 (1%)	1 (6%)
Local Authority X	4 (2%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority Y	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority Z	2 (1%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority AA	5 (2%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority AB	3 (1%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority AC	2 (1%)	1 (6%)
Local Authority AD	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority AE	1 (<1%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority AF	2 (1%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority AG	6 (3%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority AH	3 (1%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority AI	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Local Authority AJ	0 (0%)	1 (6%)

It should also be noted that only 32 of the children and young people participating in Family Finding programmes were recorded as having engaged with connections. We might expect that such engagement may be necessary for realising some of the intended outcomes of the programmes. As such, we might not expect those outcomes to be achieved for most Family Finding participants, who may not yet have begun engaging with connections at the time their Bright Spots surveys were completed. This should be taken into account when looking at this data.

Historic Bright Spots survey dataset

To provide a recent comparison of children and young people' adapted Bright Spots responses, the evaluation team compared this data with data from Coram's Bright Spots surveys completed in local authorities in 2021-22, 2022-23, and 2023-24 (2024-25 was not included due to overlap with Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring evaluation). This historical data was used to compare against the adapted Bright Spots survey data, to identify potential patterns among those expected to benefit from the programme against those that were not participating in the programme.

In total, there were 11,198 Bright Spots responses in the historical dataset. Further, all respondents to the 4 to 7 survey were removed from the dataset, due to a lack of comparability with the current evaluation sample, reducing the sample to 10,366 responses.

Adapted Bright Spots data was compared against 2 historical datasets: (i) data from local authorities in the programme, and (ii) data from local authorities outside of the programme. These comparison groups are explained in more detail below:

- Historic Bright Spots data (2021-24) in local authorities in the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring evaluation.

For the purpose of this comparison, the evaluation team included only data from those local authorities where there were children and young people were expected to be participating in the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring programme. There were 8 local authorities in the historical data which were part of the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring programme (out of 43 local authorities in total in the historical Bright Spots datasets). This dataset comprised 3,044 responses.

- Historic Bright Spots data (2021-24) in local authorities not in the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring evaluation.

For the purpose of this comparison, the evaluation team included only local authorities that were not enrolled in the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring programme. There were 31 local authorities in the historical data and not taking part in the programme (out of 43 local authorities in total in the historical Bright Spots datasets). This dataset

comprised 6,512 responses. One of these local authorities is in Wales, 5 are in Scotland, and 25 are in England.

Overall sample sizes

Table A12: Overall sample sizes for datasets

Category	N
Matched adapted Bright Spots data and participated in Family Finding programme	101
Matched adapted Bright Spots data and participated in Befriending and Mentoring programme	106
Matched adapted Bright Spots data and participated in Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring programmes	207
Matched adapted Bright Spots data and did not participate in Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring programmes	16
Historic Bright Spots data (2021-24, 8-17 years and care leavers) in local authorities with participants in the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring evaluation	3,044
Historic Bright Spots data (2021-24, 8-17 years and care leavers) in local authorities not in the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring evaluation	6,512

Source: Coram analysis of adapted and historical Bright Spots surveys

Table A13: Overall sample sizes for datasets by age group

Category	n 4-7	n 8-11	n 11-17	n care leavers
Matched adapted Bright Spots data and participated in Family Finding programme	0	10	47	44
Matched adapted Bright Spots data and participated in Befriending and Mentoring programme	0	10	56	40
Matched adapted Bright Spots data and participated in Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring programmes	0	20	103	84
Matched adapted Bright Spots data and did not participate in Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring programmes	0	13	3	16[76]
Historic adapted Bright Spots data (2021-24, 8-17 years and care leavers) in local authorities with participants in the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring evaluation	0[77]	295	967	1,782
Historic Bright Spots data (2021-24, 8 to 17 years and care leavers) in local authorities not in the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring evaluation	0[78]	943	2,197	3,372

Source: Coram analysis of adapted and historical Bright Spots surveys

Comparison of characteristics

To understand comparability across the different datasets, the evaluation team compared demographic information of children and young people to identify any key similarities and differences. While considering the small sample sizes for the Adapted Bright Spots survey, a summary of the key differences between the children and young people who participated in the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring programme and the historic datasets is below:

- The evaluation participants were younger than those in the historical Bright Spots datasets, with a smaller proportion of young people aged 20 years and over.

[77] These cases were removed from the dataset for comparability with the current evaluation sample, where there were not enough responses from those aged 4 to 7to include in the analysis. There were responses from 177 children aged 4 to 7in the historic dataset.
[78] Prior to removal, there were 589 4 to 7-year-old responses in the historic dataset.

- A larger proportion of care leavers in the evaluation were parents, compared to those in historical Bright Spots datasets.
- A larger proportion of care leavers in the evaluation had a disability or long-term health condition, particularly those participating in Family Finding, compared with historical Bright Spots datasets.
- A larger proportion of young people participating in the evaluation lived in residential care and had experienced disruption (placement changes) than those in historical Bright Spots datasets.

Annex 5: Case Studies

Sampling

For all 8 case studies, using the project application forms, the following sampling criteria was used for selecting the sample:

- Programme and typology: Family Finding case studies (n=4) were split by typology with 3 case studies weighted toward Lifelong Links (LLL) approaches,79 and one case study dedicated to 'other' models. For Befriending and Mentoring case studies (n=4), one case study per typology was agreed.
- Cohorts: The LLL case studies (n=3) were sampled to include projects that have extended the model to work with different cohorts of care-experienced young people (for example, care leavers), as there is an established evidence base for LLL with children in care.80 For Befriending and Mentoring projects, through the different typologies, different cohorts of children and young people were included.
- Whether projects were building on existing delivery or were new: DfE highlighted a key criterion for sampling was to compare project implementation between those building on existing delivery (that is, expanding to new cohorts) or starting from scratch.
- Delivery partner: The evaluation team included a range of delivery partners, including local authorities that were delivering 'in-house' and those with external delivery partners.
- Geographical region: The evaluation team sought to include cases studies from across different regions to provide a geographical spread.
- Urban/rural: As rurality may have affected accessibility of local services and activities, particularly for Befriending and Mentoring projects, the evaluation team included local authorities that were predominantly urban or rural.
- Size of project: Projects with small and larger intended cohorts were included.

In line with the above considerations, the evaluation team drew a purposive sample of 16 case studies, allowing for flexibility should any local authorities decline involvement in or drop out of the case study evaluation strand. Ten local authorities were contacted to achieve a case study sample of 8 projects.

[79] It was DfE's preference to include more LLL projects as they represented the largest cohort of Family Finding projects involved in this evaluation.
[80] There are 2 external LLL evaluations ongoing focused on (i) care leavers in London local authorities, and (ii) focused on children and young people living in residential care. We therefore excluded projects involved in these other evaluations to avoid duplicating evidence and to reduce burden on local authorities.

Tool development

The evaluation team developed bespoke topic guides for Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring projects, as well as for each participant type. The topic guides were aligned to the research questions and informed by the and Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring typologies and programme ToCs.

The topic guides were designed to collect evidence of project implementation, including:

- project set-up
- training and support for the delivery team
- recruitment and selection of participants and whether they feel they had choice and control in project decisions (for example, whether to participate, which family members to connect with, mentor/befriender matching)
- what helped and hindered project engagement
- what was working well and challenges to delivery, solutions found and which challenges remained
- perceptions of early outcomes (and any unintended outcomes) for young people (and other stakeholders).

For interviews with children and young people, alongside the topic guides, the evaluation team developed age-appropriate participatory tools. These helped facilitate meaningful conversations with children and young people about their project experiences. These tools included bright and visual worksheets which were used by children and young people instead of or alongside a more structured interview. Participants were invited to write or draw on sheets and use a series of graphics and emojis provided.

The topic guides and participatory tools for children and young people were shared with the care-experienced consultants panel for feedback prior to their use.

Approach to interviews/focus groups

Interviews with adults lasted around 45-60 minutes and focus groups lasted 60- 90 minutes. Children and young people tended to be shorter (30-40 minutes) but this was led by the individual child or young person in each case. Young people received a £20 shopping voucher in recognition of their contribution. All professional interviews with staff and volunteers were conducted online. Young people and mentors/befrienders were given the option of in-person or online interviews, as such a range of face-to-face and online interviews were conducted. All discussions were audio-recorded with participant permission.

Analysis

The evaluation team adopted framework analysis for the case study data analysis; this was structured to the evaluation framework and key research questions. The evaluation team first conducted analysis at the case study level to allow for an understanding of the full picture emerging for each individual case study. Following this, analysis across Family Finding projects and Befriending and Mentoring projects was carried out to identify common themes across strands. Finally, analysis across the whole dataset was conducted to understand key trends at programme level.

Annex 6: Delivery teams survey: respondent characteristics

The evaluation comprised a survey of delivery teams involved in the Family Finding and Befriending and Mentoring programme. As part of the process evaluation, the surveys sought to collect information from staff/volunteers involved in delivery across local authorities to support the qualitative case study research.

The delivery teams surveys (one for Family Finding and one for Befriending and Mentoring) asked respondents about the vision and aims of their projects; training and support; working with others; reach and engagement; relationships with children and young people; outcomes; and progress. The surveys were live between 5th of November 2024 and 13th of December 2024.

After data cleaning and removing incomplete surveys, 133 respondents across 21 local authorities completed the Family Finding survey. The Befriending and Mentoring survey received responses from 126 individuals across 26 local authorities. Table A14 shows the distribution of respondents by role.

Table A14: What is your role on the project?

Role	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring	Total
Befriender/mentor	n/a	52%	25%
Frontline staff/practitioner	52%	23%	38%
Manager	28%	16%	22%
Other	20%	9%	15%

Source: Ecorys analysis of Family Finding, Befriending and Mentoring delivery teams survey data
Family Finding n= 133, Befriending and Mentoring n= 126

Table A15: Have you previously worked/volunteered on a Family Finding/ Befriending and Mentoring project for children in care or care leavers?

Role	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring	Total
Yes	23%	22%	23%
No	77%	78%	77%
No response	0%	0%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of Family Finding, Befriending and Mentoring delivery teams survey data
Family Finding n= 133, Befriending and Mentoring n= 126

Annex 7: Economic evaluation

Local authorities' financial data from their quarterly reports

Local authorities submitted financial data on the FFBM programme to DfE via quarterly reports for five quarters:

- Quarter 3 2023/24 (October-December 2023)
- Quarter 4 2023/24 (January-March 2024)
- Quarter 1 2024/25 (April-June 2024)
- Quarter 2 2024/25 (July-September 2024)
- Quarter 3 2024/25 (October-December 2024).

Local authorities completed and returned templates in Microsoft Word format. The templates were similar in structure across quarters but differed slightly to reflect the change in timescale. The data collected included anticipated spend, actual expenditure, and the number of children and young people projects reached for each period, as well as total funding and projected expenditure for future quarters.

The financial data has some limitations. The data collection process faced several challenges:

- some quarterly reports were not submitted at all
- some reports had missing or incorrect data
- some reports were submitted in formats that posed challenges to data extraction
- edits to some questions in the quarterly report templates hindered data aggregation
- the Quarter 2 (2024/25) template omitted the question regarding anticipated spend for the period.

Where feasible, the evaluation team manually corrected these issues and included as much of the provided data as possible without compromising the analysis quality. DfE validated the financial information used in Programme costs and this annex. While the quarterly reports included questions about anticipated spend per quarter, validation of these figures was not possible. Therefore, the evaluation team relied on verified annual allocated funding instead.

Annex 8: Additional data table – MI data

Table A 16: Number of placements/housing arrangements experienced in the last 12 months

Number of placements/housing arrangements	Family Finding (N= 763)		Befriending and Mentoring (N=584)	
	n	Mean/Percent	n	Mean/Percent
1	475	62%	382	65%
2	210	28%	149	26%
3	48	6%	41	7%
4	12	2%	6	1%
5	6	1%	1	0%
6	2	0%	3	1%
7 or more	10	1%	2	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of MI data

Annex 9: Additional data tables – delivery teams survey

Table A17: Based on your experience to date, to what is extent is the project progressing in line with your expectations?

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Project delivery is ahead of my expectations	27%	19%
Project delivery is in line with my expectations	62%	64%
Project delivery is behind my expectations	10%	16%
No response	1%	1%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A18: Have you previously worked/volunteered on a Family Finding or Befriending and Mentoring project for children in care or care leavers?

Family Finding			Befriending and Mentoring		
Previous experience	**Yes**	**No**	**Previous experience**	**Yes**	**No**
Manager (n=37)	30%	70%	Manager (n=20)	35%	65%
Frontline staff/practitioner (n=69)	19%	81%	Frontline staff/practitioner (n=29)	28%	72%
Other (n=27)	26%	74%	Other (n=11)	18%	82%
-	-	-	Befriender or Mentor (n=66)	17%	83%
Total (n=133)	23%	77%	Total (n=126)	22%	78%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A19: I am kept informed about project progress and changes

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	53%	37%
Agree	34%	48%
Neither agree nor disagree	10%	6%
Disagree	1%	4%
Strongly disagree	0%	0%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	1%	3%
No response	2%	1%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A20: The vision for the project has been well communicated to project stakeholders

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	56%	37%
Agree	38%	45%
Neither agree nor disagree	4%	10%
Disagree	1%	2%
Strongly disagree	0%	0%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	2%	6%
No response	0%	1%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
N=126

Table A21: I have a good understanding of the aims and objectives of the project

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	70%	63%
Agree	28%	31%
Neither agree nor disagree	2%	5%
Disagree	1%	1%

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly disagree	0%	0%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	0%	0%
No response	0%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A22: There is a shared understanding of the project aims among project stakeholders

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	58%	37%
Agree	31%	45%
Neither agree nor disagree	10%	12%
Disagree	1%	1%
Strongly disagree	0%	0%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	1%	6%
No response	0%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A23: The project is being well managed

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	38%	26%
Agree	38%	37%
Neither agree nor disagree	11%	12%
Disagree	10%	11%
Strongly disagree	2%	3%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	1%	11%
No response	2%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A24: I have enough time to do my role effectively

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	35%	28%
Agree	38%	46%
Neither agree nor disagree	15%	11%
Disagree	8%	10%
Strongly disagree	2%	2%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	3%	3%
No response	0%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A25: There are sufficient people to deliver the project

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	38%	26%
Agree	38%	37%
Neither agree nor disagree	11%	12%
Disagree	10%	11%
Strongly disagree	2%	3%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	1%	11%
No response	2%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A26: There is flexibility within my role to meet the needs of different children/young people

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	58%	43%
Agree	37%	37%
Neither agree nor disagree	2%	10%
Disagree	0%	1%
Strongly disagree	0%	0%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	3%	10%
No response	0%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A27: How effective is your Family Finding project in helping children and young people to identify and connect with family, friends, and wider relationships

	Identify family, friends and wider relationships	Connect with family, friends and wider relationships
Response	**Percent**	**Percent**
Very effective	56%	47%
Effective	31%	38%
Neither effective nor ineffective	3%	5%
Ineffective	2%	1%
Very ineffective	1%	1%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	8%	8%
No response	0%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 12

Table A28: How effective are the following ways of supporting children and young people

	Face-to-face meetings	Online and/or remote communication	One-to-one support	Group sessions
Response	**Percent**	**Percent**	**Percent**	**Percent**
Very effective	72%	14%	67%	18%
Effective	19%	37%	21%	24%
Neither effective nor ineffective	1%	14%	1%	12%
Ineffective	1%	9%	0%	2%
Very ineffective	0%	1%	0%	1%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	7%	25%	10%	43%
No response	0%	0%	2%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
N=126

Table A29: I have the resources I need to do my role effectively

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	39%	40%
Agree	50%	44%
Neither agree nor disagree	5%	8%
Disagree	2%	5%
Strongly disagree	0%	1%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	3%	3%
No response	0%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A30: I have the resources I need to meet the needs of the children/young people I support

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	39%	36%
Agree	45%	48%
Neither agree nor disagree	8%	6%
Disagree	2%	6%
Strongly disagree	0%	0%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	3%	5%
No response	0%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A31: I have access to suitable spaces to meet with children/young people

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	29%	32%
Agree	44%	39%
Neither agree nor disagree	9%	10%
Disagree	5%	9%
Strongly disagree	0%	1%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	14%	10%
No response	0%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A32: I have access to the information I need to best help the children/young people I support

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	42%	35%
Agree	44%	52%
Neither agree nor disagree	5%	5%
Disagree	3%	5%
Strongly disagree	0%	0%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	5%	4%
No response	2%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A33: The voices of children/young people have informed how the project is delivered

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	43%	30%
Agree	40%	37%
Neither agree nor disagree	11%	14%
Disagree	2%	3%
Strongly disagree	0%	0%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	3%	15%
No response	2%	1%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A34: After onboarding to the project, I felt well-prepared for my role

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	36%	40%
Agree	48%	44%
Neither agree nor disagree	8%	7%
Disagree	4%	4%
Strongly disagree	0%	1%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	5%	4%
No response	0%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A35: I have received training to support my role on the project

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	53%	47%
Agree	37%	40%
Neither agree nor disagree	2%	4%
Disagree	2%	4%
Strongly disagree	0%	0%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	5%	5%
No response	1%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A36: I could benefit from more support/training to do my role effectively

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	10%	12%
Agree	32%	33%
Neither agree nor disagree	32%	22%
Disagree	17%	23%
Strongly disagree	5%	6%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	5%	4%
No response	1%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A37: I am satisfied with the supervision and support available to me in my role

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	49%	45%
Agree	37%	42%
Neither agree nor disagree	8%	5%
Disagree	2%	4%
Strongly disagree	0%	1%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	4%	3%
No response	1%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A38: I feel supported by my colleagues

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	59%	48%
Agree	36%	37%
Neither agree nor disagree	2%	5%
Disagree	0%	1%
Strongly disagree	0%	0%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	2%	10%
No response	0%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A39: I have the skills I need to do my role effectively

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	50%	47%
Agree	45%	46%
Neither agree nor disagree	2%	2%
Disagree	0%	1%
Strongly disagree	0%	0%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	3%	5%
No response	0%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A40: I have the skills I need to meet the needs of the children/young people I support

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	50%	41%
Agree	42%	49%
Neither agree nor disagree	2%	2%
Disagree	0%	1%
Strongly disagree	0%	0%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	7%	6%
No response	0%	1%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A41: I am satisfied in my role

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	47%	50%
Agree	37%	41%
Neither agree nor disagree	8%	2%
Disagree	1%	2%
Strongly disagree	1%	2%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	2%	3%
No response	1%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A42: I feel confident in my current role

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	47%	40%
Agree	47%	50%
Neither agree nor disagree	2%	6%
Disagree	2%	1%
Strongly disagree	0%	1%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	2%	2%
No response	2%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A43: I could benefit from more support/training to do my role effectively

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	10%	12%
Agree	32%	33%
Neither agree nor disagree	32%	22%
Disagree	17%	23%
Strongly disagree	5%	6%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	5%	4%
No response	1%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A44: I liaise with other stakeholders involved in the project to do my role effectively

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	35%	30%
Agree	44%	42%
Neither agree nor disagree	11%	11%
Disagree	2%	3%
Strongly disagree	0%	1%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	8%	13%
No response	0%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A45: Other children in care/leaving care services are aware of this project

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	37%	23%
Agree	41%	29%
Neither agree nor disagree	20%	18%
Disagree	1%	6%
Strongly disagree	0%	2%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	2%	21%
No response	0%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A46: Other children in care/leaving care services are supportive of this project

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	38%	29%
Agree	41%	25%
Neither agree nor disagree	20%	21%
Disagree	1%	2%
Strongly disagree	0%	1%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	2%	22%
No response	0%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A47: I recognise when the children/young people I support require additional support outside of the project

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	41%	52%
Agree	39%	33%
Neither agree nor disagree	4%	4%
Disagree	0%	0%
Strongly disagree	0%	0%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	16%	10%
No response	1%	1%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A48: I can easily refer or signpost children/young people to wider support when needed

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	41%	33%
Agree	45%	47%
Neither agree nor disagree	5%	6%
Disagree	1%	6%
Strongly disagree	1%	1%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	8%	7%
No response	0	0

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A49: Delivery teams views on how easy or difficult it has been to reach the target groups of children and young people

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Very easy	41%	33%
Quite easy	45%	47%
Neither easy nor difficult	5%	6%
Quite difficult	1%	6%
Very difficult	1%	1%
Not relevant to my role/Unable to answer	8%	7%
No response	0	0

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A50: Delivery teams views on how easy or difficult it has been to engage the target groups of children and young people

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Very easy	13%	17%
Quite easy	44%	34%
Neither easy nor difficult	19%	13%
Quite difficult	14%	7%
Very difficult	3%	5%
Not relevant to my role/Unable to answer	8%	24%
No response	0%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A51: Delivery teams' views on how the relevance of the support offer to children/young people supports children and young people's engagement

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Very effective	36%	37%
Effective	55%	44%
Neither effective nor ineffective	4%	6%
Ineffective	1%	2%
Not relevant to my role/Unable to answer	4%	11%
No response	1%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A52: Delivery teams' views on how identifying needs and goal setting/ planning supports children and young people's engagement

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Very effective	37%	26%
Effective	53%	58%
Neither effective nor ineffective	4%	6%
Ineffective	0%	2%
Not relevant to my role/Unable to answer	6%	8%
No response	1%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A53: Delivery teams' views on how pre-support engagement meetings/communications/activities support children and young people's engagement

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Very effective	32%	31%
Effective	56%	52%
Neither effective nor ineffective	5%	5%
Ineffective	1%	2%
Not relevant to my role/Unable to answer	6%	10%
No response	1%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A54: Delivery teams' views on working together with other agencies to support children and young people's engagement

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Very effective	29%	22%
Effective	55%	41%
Neither effective nor ineffective	9%	13%
Ineffective	2%	3%
Not relevant to my role/Unable to answer	5%	20%
No response	1%	1%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A55: I believe the children/young people I support trust me

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	36%	44%
Agree	37%	40%
Neither agree nor disagree	8%	4%
Disagree	0%	0%
Strongly disagree	0%	0%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	19%	13%
No response	1%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A56: I believe the children/young people I support value our relationship

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	35%	44%
Agree	38%	39%
Neither agree nor disagree	6%	6%
Disagree	1%	0%
Strongly disagree	0%	0%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	19%	12%
No response	1%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A57: I am able to communicate effectively with the children/young people I support

Response	Family Finding	Befriending and Mentoring
Strongly agree	40%	42%
Agree	39%	44%
Neither agree nor disagree	4%	2%
Disagree	0%	0%
Strongly disagree	0%	0%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	18%	11%
No response	1%	0%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
Family Finding N= 133, Befriending and Mentoring N= 126

Table A58: In your view, how effective is the matching process between children/young people and mentors?

Response	Percent
Very effective	37%
Effective	41%
Neither effective nor ineffective	3%
Ineffective	1%
Very ineffective	2%
Don't know	3%
Not applicable/Unable to answer	12%
No response	1%

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
N=126

Table A59: I believe the children/young people I support can relate to me

Response	Percent
Strongly agree	23
Agree	31
Neither agree nor disagree	7
Disagree	0
Strongly disagree	0
Not relevant to my role/Unable to answer	5

Source: Ecorys analysis of FFBM delivery teams survey data
N=66

Annex 10: Additional data tables – adapted Bright Spots survey data

Table A60: How often care leaver respondents felt confident about their ability to handle their problems in the past month

Confident about ability to handle problems	Participating FF CYP	Participating BM CYP	Participating CYP	Historic FFBM LAs	Historic non-FFBM LAs
N	43	38	81	1,746	3,273
Never	4 (9%)	1 (3%)	5 (6%)	141 (8%)	236 (7%)
Almost never	5 (12%)	3 (8%)	8 (10%)	191 (11%)	365 (11%)
Sometimes	11 (26%)	17 (45%)	28 (35%)	719 (41%)	1,329 (41%)
Fairly often	18 (42%)	13 (34%)	31 (38%)	418 (24%)	789 (24%)
Very often	5 (12%)	4 (11%)	9 (11%)	277 (16%)	554 (17%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted and historical Bright Spots surveys

Table A61: How often care leaver respondents felt things were going their way in the past month

Things going your way	Participating FF CYP	Participating BM CYP	Participating CYP	Historic FFBM LAs	Historic non-FFBM LAs
N	43	38	81	1,737	3,265
Never	6 (14%)	0 (0%)	6 (7%)	153 (9%)	333 (10%)
Almost never	5 (12%)	6 (16%)	11 (14%)	254 (15%)	463 (14%)
Sometimes	17 (40%)	18 (47%)	35 (43%)	861 (50%)	1,581 (48%)
Fairly often	13 (30%)	9 (24%)	22 (27%)	343 (20%)	635 (19%)
Very often	2 (5%)	5 (13%)	7 (9%)	126 (7%)	253 (8%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted and historical Bright Spots surveys

Table A62: How often care leaver respondents felt difficulties were piling up and they couldn't overcome them in the past month

Difficulties piling up too high	Participating FF CYP	Participating BM CYP	Participating CYP	Historic FFBM LAs	Historic non-FFBM LAs
N	43	38	81	1,730	3,249
Never	7 (16%)	6 (16%)	13 (16%)	257 (15%)	502 (15%)
Almost never	10 (23%)	7 (18%)	17 (21%)	326 (19%)	645 (20%)
Sometimes	10 (23%)	19 (50%)	29 (36%)	729 (42%)	1,345 (41%)
Fairly often	14 (33%)	3 (8%)	17 (21%)	264 (15%)	473 (15%)
Very often	2 (4.7%)	3 (7.9%)	5 (6.2%)	154 (8.9%)	284 (9%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted and historical Bright Spots surveys

Table A63: Proportions indicating how much respondents in care (8 to 11, 11 to 17) saw their siblings

Group	Participating FF CYP	Participating BM CYP	Participating CYP	Historic FFBM LAs	Historic non-FFBM LAs
N	56	62	118	1,137	2,894
Too much	2 (4%)	0 (0%)	2 (2%)	116 (10%)	281 (10%)
The right amount	23 (41%)	33 (53%)	56 (47%)	531 (47%)	1,379 (48%)
Too little	16 (29%)	17 (27%)	33 (28%)	261 (23%)	729 (25%)
I do not see them	15 (27%)	12 (19%)	27 (23%)	229 (20%)	505 (17%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted and historical Bright Spots surveys

Table A64: How care leaver respondents spend their spare time (N Yes %)

Response	Participating FF CYP	Participating BM CYP	Participating CYP	Historic FFBM LAs	Historic non-FFBM LAs
N	44	40	84	1,782	3,372
Shopping	19 (43%)	22 (55%)	41 (49%)	804 (45%)	1,468 (44%)
Hanging out with people I like	27 (61%)	25 (63%)	52 (62%)	957 (54%)	1,775 (53%)
Clubbing	5 (11%)	6 (15%)	11 (13%)	226 (13%)	493 (15%)
Gaming	17 (39%)	11 (28%)	28 (33%)	633 (35.5%)	1,160 (34%)
Watching TV/films	27 (61%)	24 (60%)	51 (61%)	1,102 (62%)	2,020 (60%)
Using social media	27 (61%)	20 (50%)	47 (56%)	811 (46%)	1,571 (47%)
Pampering/ looking after myself	15 (34%)	8 (20%)	23 (27%)	378 (21%)	803 (24%)
Exercising/ sports	12 (27%)	15 (38%)	27 (32%)	559 (31%)	1,063 (32%)
Exploring outdoors	17 (39%)	16 (40%)	33 (39%)	418 (23%)	877 (26%)
Listening to/ playing music	29 (66%)	21 (53%)	50 (60%)	1,041 (58%)	1,848 (55%)
Volunteering	7 (16%)	7 (16%)	14 (17%)	141 (8%)	252 (7%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted and historical Bright Spots surveys

Table A65: Who care leavers receive emotional support from

Response	FF Participating CYP (%)	BM Participating CYP (%)	Participating CYP (%)	Historic FFBM LAs	Historic non-FFBM LAs
Friend(s)	29 (66%)	29 (73%)	58 (69%)	1,178 (66%)	2,197 (65%)
Leaving care worker	25 (57%)	26 (65%)	51 (61%)	748 (42%)	1,535 (46%)
Partner	12 (27%)	8 (20%)	20 (24%)	570 (32%)	1,094 (32%)
Brother(s) or sister(s)	12 (27%)	9 (23%)	21 (25%)	440 (25%)	878 (26%)
Mum	11 (25%)	6 (15%)	17 (20%)	456 (26%)	910 (27%)
Dad	4 (9%)	5 (13%)	9 (11%)	288 (16%)	501 (15%)
Other relative	14 (32%)	4 (10%)	18 (21%)	300 (17%)	563 (17%)
Foster carer(s)	6 (14%)	5 (13%)	11 (13%)	290 (16%)	551 (16%)
Your own child(ren)	2 (5%)	3 (8%)	5 (6%)	94 (5%)	166 (5%)
Pet(s)	9 (20%)	4 (10%)	13 (15%)	321 (18%)	609 (18%)
Counsellor/Mental health professional	4 (9%)	1 (3%)	5 (6%)	136 (8%)	299 (9%)
Education professional (for example, teacher, student support staff)	5 (11%)	4 (10%)	9 (11%)	127 (7%)	253 (8%)
Residential home staff	6 (14%)	1 (3%)	7 (8%)	101 (6%)	239 (7%)
Other care leaver(s)	4 (9%)	6 (15%)	10 (12%)	64 (4%)	138 (4%)

Response	FF Participating CYP (%)	BM Participating CYP (%)	Participating CYP (%)	Historic FFBM LAs	Historic non-FFBM LAs
Mentor/ befriender	5 (11%)	29 (73%)	34 (40%)	N/A[81]	N/A[81]
I don't have anyone	3 (7%)	0 (0%)	3 (4%)	126 (7%)	188 (6%)
Someone else	7 (16%)	2 (5%)	9 (11%)	147 (8%)	265 (8%)

Source: Coram analysis of adapted and historical Bright Spots surveys

[81] Question not in historic dataset.

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