



TABLE OF CONTENTS

01 29

03 33

05 37

11 41

15 43

19

THE CASE FOR EARLY INTERVENTION

The Long-term Impact of The Kids Network Mentoring

2021

FOREWORD

Graham Allen is training to be a Kids Network volunteer. He was MP for Nottingham North 1987-2017, Builder of Early Intervention City Nottingham, author of 'Early Intervention: The Next Steps', and creator of The Early Intervention Foundation.

The work that leads me to volunteer for The Kids Network has deep roots. In 1987 at my first advice surgery as a newly elected MP for my tough Nottingham North constituency, a young mum with her baby Sharon came in and asked me for help to sort out her housing and benefits problems, happily I was able to help. 17 years later another young mum came to my surgery carrying her new baby and asked for exactly the same help. Yes, the young mum was the baby Sharon I had seen all those years before. This focussed for me the need to break the intergenerational cycle of deprivation and dysfunction by Early Intervention which became the driving force of my work, creating an Early Intervention City, writing the 'Early Intervention: The Next Steps' report for government, and setting up the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF).

I could never have imagined given the improved understanding of the impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) that we would still be waiting for meaningful comprehensive action to make these programmes available throughout the UK. We still need to change the national philosophy and practise from late reaction to early intervention and back it up with the investment-to-save from government & philanthropy at all levels. Meanwhile

the brilliant examples of what works, not least The Kids Network, shows what should be taken to scale.

Because Early Intervention addresses causes, not symptoms, it is cheaper and more effective than belated and only ever partial late intervention, indeed, it produces extraordinary savings - estimated at £17B recurring each year saved including on the costs of courts, policing, rehab, domestic abuse and sexual abuse, low educational attainment, broken relationships and health and social programmes.

We need to do more to intervene early and address the issues before they intensify, by providing all babies, children and young people with the social and emotional bedrock essential for their future development and their ability to make effective life choices. Secondly, we must pre-emptively fund the supporting public and charitable services not on an occasional basis but as a strategy - The Kids Network should exist not just in every London borough, but every town and city of the UK.

Children are the future of our society, and investing in them now makes sense practically, financially, and morally. It's the best investment we can make.

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This report comes at really appropriate time for Kids Network. It now has the track record and understanding of its mentoring systems to form a credible evidence base. As a funder it is really useful to see an honest appraisal of the social impact of an intervention and this report raises some interesting opportunities for operational changes and further study, including on the different sustained benefits for boys and girls. It's clear that through its mentoring, The Kids Network is making a real difference to young people's lives and this report is a useful way of demonstrating that

Chris Llewellyn, Director of CriSeren Foundation

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London Youth members like The Kids Network are playing a pivotal role in early intervention in vulnerable young children's lives, particularly young people of colour who have been hardest hit by the pandemic. It is great to see a mentoring programme that is not only child-focused in local communities where the needs are greatest, but critically is also child-led.

This is surely one of the reasons why this Impact Report reflects enduring, and positive outcomes in confidence and well-being for so many of the mentees on The Kids Network 2020 programme, skills they can carry forward into secondary school and beyond

Rosemary Watt-Wynes, CEO of London Youth

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A mentor can have a hugely positive impact on a young person, they provide a greater sense of belonging and can greatly improve emotional and academic outcomes. The evidence is clear that early intervention with mentoring works and it plays a key factor in helping avoid mental health issues and behavioral problems later in life

Chelsey Baker, Founder and CEO of National Mentoring day

If you wish to have a copy of these documents or discuss any of the issues in this article email grahamwilliamallen@outlook.com

INTRODUCTION

Founded in 2016, The Kids Network is a London-based early intervention charity, supporting children through mentoring to feel happy and confident about themselves and their futures. We support children at a crucial time in their lives, in the lead up and often during the transition from primary to secondary school. We do this by providing them with a volunteer mentor from the local area, who spends one-to-one time with them in the community.

We exist because child mental health rates have reached crisis point, with those who are most affected facing the most barriers to accessing the support they need, when they need it. Yet, 50% of lifelong mental health issues can be diagnosed before the age of 14, and intervening early can mitigate against the effect of ACEs.

This report examines the reasons early intervention is essential, delves into the sustained impact of The Kids Network mentoring programme, and explores the success factors of our intervention. The findings make a compelling case for this intervention, showing the programme has a proven track-record of supporting children's confidence, their wellbeing, their decision making and more.

Every child who needs a mentor should be able to access one, because, as this report shows, the impact can be life changing.

We look forward to connecting with you so that, together, we can ensure children receive the support they deserve, when they need it.



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It helped me stay positive, and I have stayed positive every time I am sad, and I think of the positives or I just ignore the negatives and that really helps me when I am upset now

Boy, 12

THE CASE FOR EARLY INTERVENTION



The case for early intervention in protecting and building the well-being of children runs through three key themes:

- The need for early intervention,
- The cost of non-intervention,
- The effectiveness of mentoring interventions like The Kids Network.

The Need for Early Intervention

The need for early intervention – defined as identifying and providing effective early support to children and young people who are at risk of poor outcomes – for children with Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), or who may have other social or emotional needs, is becoming more important and increasingly well evidenced. A major review of evidence identified elevated risk factors in over 40 different negative impacts on children who have experienced difficult childhood experiences, including higher risk of poor health, low school attainment, and behavioural problems within childhood, as well as long-term negative consequences into adulthood including mental health problems, drug misuse, and suicide attempts[1]. In 2020, The Early Intervention Foundation concluded that **“Over the past 20 years, ACE studies consistently confirm that the greater the number of ACEs experienced before the age of 18, the greater the chance of poor adult outcomes”** [2]

The Cost of Non-intervention

The consequences of unsupported ACEs and other difficult childhood experiences are seen most starkly in the prevalence and impact of low mental health in children. Around 10% of children in the UK aged 5 to 16 have diagnosable mental health difficulties[3]. Due to the sensitivity of early brain development, these can have long-lasting effects on academic, social, emotional, and behavioural outcomes in later life if left unchecked[4]. Moreover, it has been estimated that around **50% of all significant mental health problems begin by 14 years**, usually preceded by a range of smaller non-specific emotional-social difficulties in life[5], and yet 70% of children and adolescents who experience mental health problems have not had appropriate interventions at a sufficiently early age[6]. Promoting and protecting the children from poor mental health is not only what every child deserves, but failure to do so has knock-on effects on a child’s later life. Poor mental health in children has been shown to have negative effects on qualifications, employment, relationships and physical health in later life[7].

The financial cost of non-intervention in mental health is also increasingly well-documented. Across England, the National Health Service (NHS) spends over £12 billion on mental health, and around £670 million was spent on mental health services for children and young people[8]. Yet one study estimates the cost of poor mental health in the UK in 2018/19 to be £120 billion[9].

Specifically for children, the individual costs of both treatment for mental health problems and the consequences of untreated mental health problems are significant. The Children’s Commissioner estimated the cost of a child referral to a community Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) was £2,338, and to an in-patient CAMHS unit was £61,000[10]. The UK government also estimated that a child who grows up to have a period of Not being in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) – a possible result of poor mental health – has a direct cost of £65,000 to public spending, and almost double that to the wider economy and community[11].

The Effectiveness of Mentoring Interventions like The Kids Network

In response to this, mentoring has been shown to be one of the solutions that can consistently and effectively help children to overcome the difficult circumstances and deliver a wide range of positive outcomes across their lives. A major evidence review on 73 evaluations of mentoring programmes with children found that the evidence “supports the effectiveness of mentoring for improving outcomes across behavioural, social, emotional, and academic domains of young people’s development”, that “mentoring has the capacity to serve both promotion and prevention aims”, and that the “benefits of participation in mentoring programmes are apparent from early childhood to adolescence”[12].

Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT) evaluations of the largest mentoring programme in the world – Big Brothers and Big Sisters of America demonstrate clear outcomes in behavioural and academic outcomes[13][14]. A similar study of Big Brothers Big Sisters in Ireland demonstrated that **young people with a mentor felt more supported, showed more prosocial behaviour, and had a greater sense of hopefulness for the future than non-mentored children**[15].

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When a child has a mentor, they are accountable to another (person) who can guide and navigate them. This not only provides consistency and reliability but furthermore a secure base that can anchor them through change

Mina Minozzi, Child Development Consultant

Finally, there is evidence that early intervention programmes have positive and material economic benefits for society. A 2016 evaluation of one European mentoring programme estimated that for every £1 invested in the programme, between £3.70 and £7.99 worth of positive outcomes are generated[16]. In 2013, Pro Bono Economics found that such was the lifetime costs of non-intervention in the lives of children with low well-being, a UK mentoring programme only had to be successful in their support of 3 in 100 children to return a positive return on investment[17]. Finally, another in-depth resilience building programme for children in the UK reported return on investment of £5.05 for every £1 spent after the first year of the programme[18].

Summary

This brief overview of the existing evidence makes it clear the range of social, educational, behavioural and emotional outcomes along with societal and economic benefits that can be achieved through early intervention for children experiencing ACEs. By giving these children the support they need at a pivotal time in a child’s development, The Kids Network’s early intervention mentoring programme is well placed to be part of the solution.





LUKE'S STORY

As a 11-year-old, Luke was struggling. He had experienced prolonged bullying at school, and therefore had dropped out of school. As a result, he was angry at both school and parents, there were concerns about his mental health, and he was being supported by social services. In his own words, “I wasn’t a big talker, I wasn’t confident. I didn’t have any friends.” His mother puts it more starkly: “He went through a horrific bullying, but he wasn’t opening up to people. He wouldn’t express himself – he was sad, angry, and lonely.”

Wanting to give Luke the support he needed and prevent these turning into long-term difficulties, Early Family Help referred Luke to The Kids Network and he was matched with Jordan, a personable 25 year old tutor, and they began their digital mentoring programme. At first things were very difficult and he did not want to talk to his mentor. However, over time Jordan recognised the same experiences Luke was going through in his own childhood, and used their joint interests in science and Marvel superheroes to build a connection.

Using The Kids Network resources, the turning point was allowing Luke to express his emotions and learn to manage them. “His mentor was patient and helped him so much. Luke is very particular in his interests and Jordan had the same thing which made a great

relationship. Jordan really listened and made Luke see what he enjoys” says his mother.

Luke, now 12, no longer requires a support worker. As a result of the mentoring with Jordan, Social Services saw such an improvement that they closed the case. Luke is also now settled into a new school, and speaks of the impact Jordan had on his emotional well-being and ability to cope with difficult experiences: “Jordan helped me stay positive, and I have stayed positive every time I am sad. I think of the positives or I just ignore the negatives and that really helps me when I am upset now.” Luke’s mother affirms this change in Luke: “He now knows he can always speak to someone if he was struggling. Jordan helped him so much.”

This emotional resilience has translated into a newfound freedom with those around him: “I feel more confident, and happier. I have friends now, I’m friends with the majority of kids in the class. We talk to each other, we message each other, it’s really fun just to talk to them. Jordan really helped me with making friends.”

Luke’s aspirations now stretch beyond his own life: “If I can help other people that are upset or down from bullying or something like that. I would really like that. I would really like to help people in the same way that Jordan helped me.”

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Jordan helped me stay positive, and I have stayed positive every time I am sad.

THE KIDS NETWORK'S LONG-TERM IMPACT EVALUATION PILOT

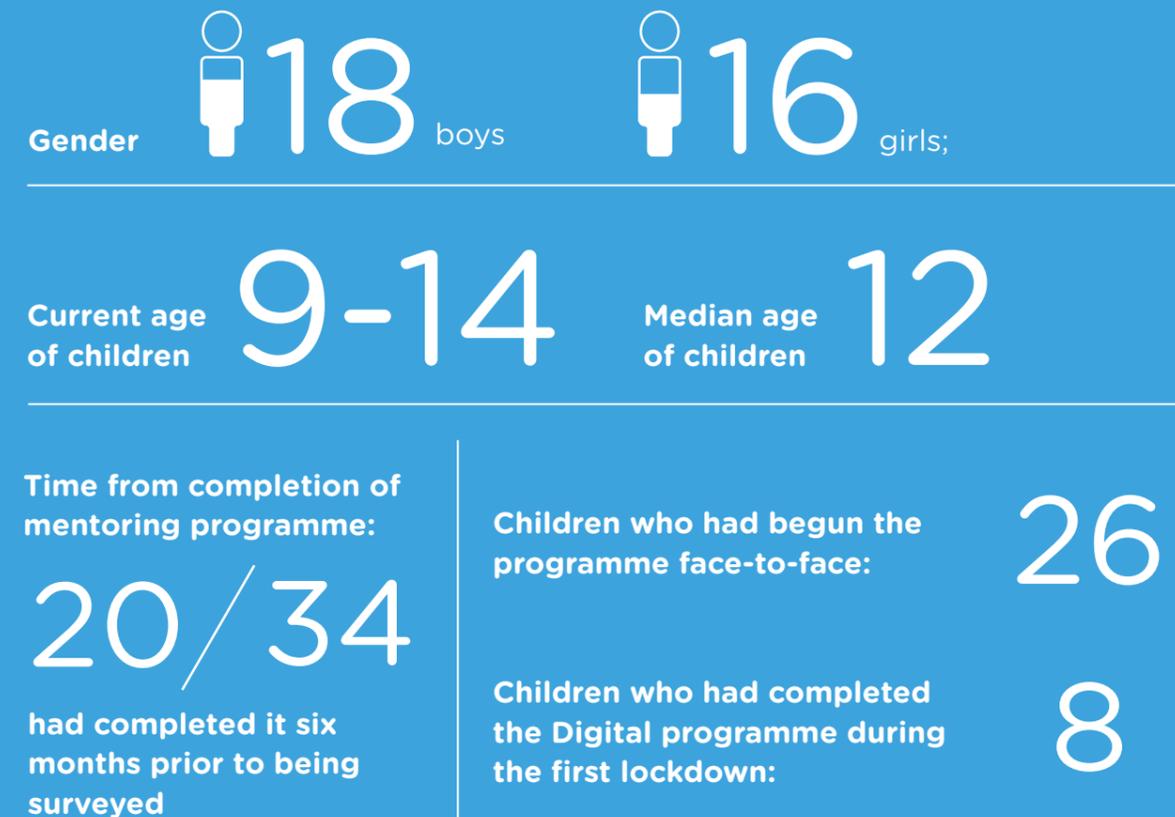
In January 2021 The Kids Network partnered with Eido Research to discover evidence of the sustained positive impact of our mentoring programme and its role in early intervention within children's lives.

74 children were identified who had completed the programme at least six months ago, for whom we had permission to follow up with. The primary source of data was their caregivers who would have a full view of any change from initial referral to the programme to sustained changes observed in the time period since the mentoring. Through semi-structured interviews, The Kids Network staff explored whether the children were

experiencing sustained positive outcomes from the mentoring, and if so, how the mentoring had enabled these.

In February and March 2021 a total of 34 caregivers were interviewed (46% response rate). The main reasons others could not be interviewed included language barriers, caregivers not having time due to Covid-19, the child's caregivers had changed, or the caregivers' contact details had changed.

We surveyed caregivers whose children were all of different demographics



To ensure a child-led voice within the evidence The Kids Network staff successfully spoke to 19 of these children directly using a more simple and creative method, with permission from their caregivers. This asked them about their reflections on their mentor, and how it had helped them over the time since completing the mentoring programme. The research also asked a range of teachers about their perspectives on the programme's impact. The evidence from these children and teachers was used to support and corroborate the independent systematic analysis of the caregivers' interviews by Eido Research.

Impact of Covid-19 on evaluation

It is important to acknowledge the role of Covid-19 in the time period of this evaluation. Some of the mentoring that was evaluated was done completely during the physical and social restrictions put in place during the pandemic, and other mentoring relationships that began in person ended with online and phone support. In all cases, the period of time being assessed for sustained outcomes of The Kids Network mentoring included seven months of lockdown restrictions, and for those who finished the mentoring six months ago, the entire period fell in this time.

This affected the work in two ways.

- ◆ First, The Kids Network had hoped to follow up with a larger group of children directly through creative workshops in schools, however school closures made this impossible to do.
- ◆ Second, and harder to quantify, is the effect the lockdown may have had on the sustained impact of the mentoring. Evidence from caregivers directly referenced the increased anxiety and isolation of lockdown reducing children's well-being and quality of relationships, and there is emerging wider evidence that Covid-19 may have amplified ACEs[19].

These dynamics may have reduced the reported sustained impact of mentoring. On the other hand, if the mentoring had increased children's confidence, resilience and coping strategies the lockdown experiences might have heightened the reported sustained impact through giving more acute opportunities for it to show itself. Therefore, it is impossible to know how the results of our evaluation would have been different if the children involved had experienced life as 'normal' in the time after the mentoring.



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Before, I'd not speak to my friends much, but my mentor made me realise I could speak with my friends more

Girl, 11

THE NEED FOR THE KIDS NETWORK'S PROGRAMME



We asked caregivers and other stakeholders what the challenges or situations their children were facing at the time they began The Kids Network mentoring, and why it was important or needed in the children's lives at the time.

Lack of Self-Confidence

By far the most common challenge caregivers spoke about to explain why they wanted their child to have a mentor was a lack of self-confidence that was leading to negative feelings or a withdrawal from life experiences. This aligns to evidence from the teachers' perspective where 51% of all children are referred for low confidence. The caregiver of one 11-year-old boy said, "[He] had lack of self-confidence and self-belief, that was the biggest challenge".

A lot of caregivers spoke about the particular social consequences of this low confidence, often manifesting in shyness in expressing themselves to others, finding it hard to make friends, and being bullied. One caregiver of a 12-year-old boy said "[my child's] low social skills meant it was difficult for him to make friends. I was hoping that the mentoring would help him to engage more and come out of shell." Another, of a different 12-year-old boy said "[my child] had a lot of anxiety and didn't like being sociable or meeting new people."

Poor Mental and Emotional Health

The second most common need was children who were specifically struggling with poor mental and emotional health. This also aligns with schools' perspective: 51% of children referred by teachers had difficulty managing feelings.

A caregiver of a 10-year-old girl said "she struggles socially and with her emotional health. She over communicates at home - I have the same tendency. But she was not able to communicate with others" and another 12-year-old boy was referred directly from CAMHS: "He was seen by CAMHS, they suggested The Kids Network

mentoring could help."

This need was expanded on by the Deputy Headteacher of a school who oversees the partnership with The Kids Network programme in her school by making clear the importance of the intervention at this stage in a child's life: "**I think mentoring is extremely important at this stage in children's school life because it is a time where there is a lot of anxiety.** They are thinking about leaving a safe setting of primary, moving into secondary. They know that their parents are feeling that as well, so sometimes, they hold onto those fears and those anxieties. Having

a mentor gives them a safe space where they can talk about their feelings.”

Another teacher we spoke to made the case that this overall sense of anxiety within the lives of children is only increasing as a result of Covid-19 restrictions and their effects: *“I have also seen a heightened increase in the amount of anxiety that we are seeing within the children as well, Covid-19 is almost like a bereavement in the sense that they have lost so many opportunities in life, so many things that they are used to doing.”*

A third school leader said that The Kids Network was a vital non-therapeutic referral they could make for children who needed further support: *“Other than referrals to therapeutic*

interventions, there are few provisions other than The Kids Network we can refer children to that allow for a relationship to evolve and develop over such a long period.”

Caregivers naming poor mental and emotional health as a major need for The Kids Network mentoring aligns to the rise in both prevalence and awareness of pressure on children’s mental health[20]. For The Kids Network, it is likely that this need is created by the specific ACEs the children are facing such as family breakdown, lacking 1:1 time with an adult, bereavement, domestic violence, cramped or impermanent accommodation, and family with special needs or mental health issues.



Difficult Home Experiences

The final major theme caregivers spoke about was difficulties at home putting pressure on the children. This also aligns to evidence from referrals that 44% of children have difficult family and home experiences.

From the caregivers’ perspective, in some cases this was the child not getting enough attention. One caregiver of a 11-year-old boy said *“I have two children and my youngest is disabled so [I] take care of him a lot and [my 11-year-old] doesn’t get enough of my attention.”*

For other children the difficult home experiences were around family sickness. For example a caregiver of a 9-year-old-girl reported that *“we had a baby who was born extremely poorly, at the same time [my 9-year-old] didn’t get her secondary school. [She] went*

through a rough patch and it was very difficult.”

In other cases, the child’s home situation was extremely difficult. One caregiver said: *“I became unwell, I had seizures and was bed bound. [My child] has become a young carer for myself and also looks after his sister. My husband also works a lot and he started taking his anger out on us.”*

This final theme underlines the value of mentoring as an additional resource for children that the majority of children simply do not have. Whether from extreme examples of being a young carer or family illness as above, young children growing up in hardest to reach communities or experiencing Adverse Childhood Experiences are not able to access powerful support like that of a mentor or older trusted adult.

Summary

This evidence demonstrates the breadth of challenges facing the children supported by The Kids Network aged from as young as 8, confirming the intensifying challenges children face, which have now been compounded by Covid-19. 21]. More significantly, the three overarching themes identified, along with other reasons from The Kids Network’s referral data, are established risk factors to children developing mental health and behavioural problems in the future[22][23]. This evidence from The Kids Network underlines the significant opportunity for early intervention in these children’s lives from a consistent and stable mentor to support them through it.

The importance of the timing and early intervention was best summed up by one caregiver:

“It was going so pear shaped between my son and I when The Kids Network mentoring started. The mentor came in at the age where we can still correct things, and that helped massively. The mentor saved our lives”.

THE LONG-TERM IMPACT OF THE KIDS NETWORK'S PROGRAMME



The Approach We Took to Data Collection

As the first long-term impact evaluation of our work, the research took both an open-ended and structured approach to asking caregivers whether they saw evidence of the impact of the mentoring at least six months on. First, caregivers were asked if their child was still experiencing benefits from the mentoring or not at all. Second, caregivers were asked to describe in their own words any sustained impact they had seen. Third, caregivers were asked a series of follow up questions about specific outcomes the programme is designed to deliver.

Caregivers were asked whether they had seen sustained impact in their children across the outcomes below:

- ① Increased sense of hope for their future
- ② Increased independent decision-making
- ③ Increased self-confidence
- ④ Increased happiness
- ⑤ Increased ability to manage emotions
- ⑥ Increased skills for their future
- ⑦ Increased positive choices for themselves
- ⑧ Improved relationships with others
- ⑨ Increased pride in themselves
- ⑩ Increased excitement to go to school

For the children spoken to, the evaluation used a more creative exercise, thinking about themselves before they spent time with their mentor, then how they were now six months or more since the mentoring ended, what they had learnt with their mentor, and whether they still used what they had learnt.

Overall Impact

Overall, the strong majority (86%) of caregivers were clear that their child was still positively benefitting from the mentoring experience. 21 of the 34 caregivers (62%) said their child was “very much” still benefitting, and a further 8 (24%) said “quite a lot”. Only 5 (14%) caregivers were “not sure” if the benefits had remained after six months.

The caregiver of a 11-year-old boy summarised the long-term impact like this:

“The mentoring helped get him to understand to be self-confident and proactive with decisions he makes. He’s still carrying that through...The mentoring was the start point for him and he’s grown from that foundation. The fact that it was support to get him going, led him to where we are today.”

The rest of this section outlines the most common outcomes spoken about by caregivers, children and other stakeholders themselves.

Areas where mentoring has had a long-term impact

We asked caregivers whether they had seen continued evidence of impact on their child at least six months after the end mentoring in the following areas. This data shows the results across all 34 children.



Increased Confidence and Well-being

The most common long-term outcomes reported by caregivers were increased confidence and increased emotional well-being. This is particularly important because it was the most common reason caregivers gave for wanting their child to be referred to The Kids Network mentoring.

Children explained this sustained outcome in their own words. One child said that his mentor *“has changed my life; he has made me more confident”* (Boy, 11).

For both of these outcomes 32 of the 34 caregivers (94%) said that they’d seen sustained evidence of this six months and longer after the mentoring.

This was confirmed by the caregivers’ own words. In particular, caregivers frequently spoke about the combination of confidence, self-expression, and emotional well-being.

Some caregivers spoke about confidence in relation their child’s ability to express themselves more powerfully. One caregiver of an 11-year-old girl reported *“now she can speak by herself, she’s confident by herself, and speaks about anything that she wants. Before mentoring, anything I asked her, she couldn’t say anything, now she speaks about anything she likes.”*

Another caregiver went further and linked this increased self-expression to her child’s ability to overcome her difficult experiences: **“She can express herself and has become truer to**

herself. *She was suffering with some trauma, relating to witnessing violence outside, and with the help of mentoring she overcame it”* (Girl, 11).

From the children’s perspective, this self-expression was driven by the ability to better understand, respond to and communicate their emotions better. This was particularly clear in specific coping strategies and new attitudes to handling adversity and difficult experiences.

One 12-year-old boy said his mentor *“helped me stay positive, and I have stayed positive every time I am sad, and I think of the positives or I just ignore the negatives and that really helps me when I am upset now”*. An 11-year-old girl spoke about the coping strategies she learnt from her mentor: *“I learnt how to be calmer. We learnt [about] counting 1-2-3, and to think of a happy place. I still do it now.”*

From caregivers’ perspective, self-expression was linked to the ability to speak about what they were finding difficult and asking for help. A caregiver of a 12-year-old boy put it this way: *“[My child] now knows he can always speak to someone if he is struggling. The mentor helped him so much,”* and another said that *“[my child] is more confident and doing well at school. She doesn’t feel left out anymore and it’s because of her mentor. She expresses herself more and learns how to articulate herself when things are bothering her. She has learnt how to tell us how we can help her.”* (Girl, 9).



This mentoring programme has been great for our children to provide them with positive role models, someone to give them opportunities that they wouldn't have and other life experiences. It creates opportunities to recognise their own skills and strengths which can be different from others in school. This programme is great to increase confidence and self-esteem in the children and once this grows they're not held back in other ways as they're willing to have a go and try new things that may never have.

Bernie Mukasa, Deputy Headteacher, Argyle Primary School

Increased Independence and Decision-making

Another sustained outcome was children's independence and continuing to make more and better decisions for themselves. Overall, 29 of the 34 (85%) caregivers said this was still true six months after the mentoring. This was confirmed multiple times by caregivers' own words, and it included both specific improvements in emotional and practical independence.

Describing the emotional independence her child has retained since the mentoring ended, one caregiver of a 9-year-old girl said *"I find her less needy with me, which is good. [The mentoring has] given her that boost to grow her confidence."*

In terms of practical independence, one caregiver spoke about the new things that their child can now do on her own: *"[My child] is more confident about going about and buying milk and bread" (11, Girl).*

There was also evidence of this sustained decisiveness creating a greater sense of hope in the future

for children. One caregiver said *"he is more assertive, knows where he's going, happier" (Boy, 12)* and another reported that *"it broadened his horizons more, and he has taken up extra-curricular activities that were helped by his mentor" (Boy, 12).*

Teachers also reported this impact in classrooms. One teacher made the clear link between confidence and its result on independence within the school context saying *"this mentoring programme is great to increase confidence and self-esteem in the children and once this grows, they're not held back in other ways as they're willing to have a go and try new things that may never have."*

This evidence points to a key role played by the mentors in giving the children new experiences during the mentoring, which led to increased confidence, self-expression and independence. This laid the foundation for the children continuing to know what they enjoyed and wanted in their lives after the mentoring had finished.

Improved Relationships

Children and caregivers also spoke strongly about the sustained impact on relationships with others.

Children themselves spoke about the effect on their friendships as being important. One 11-year-old girl said that *"the mentoring made me confident about speaking to my friends, before I'd not speak to my friends much but my mentor made me realise I could speak with friends more"*, and a 12-year-old boy said *"I feel more confident, and happier. I have friends now. My mentor really helped me with making friends."*

When prompted, 74% of caregivers said they had seen evidence of improved relationships, and spoke very clearly about this in their own words. It appeared to be another sustained outcome that arose from self-confidence and communication. One

caregiver said *"[my child] has more confidence communicating with friends, and she's more aware and conscientious with them. It makes such a difference" (Girl, 9).*

Caregivers spoke of sustained improved relationships within and outside of the family. One reported that *"she became better at sharing; she would come home and share things with her little sister and was more kind to her" (Girl, 10)*, another, that *"he's got better relationships with friends and family when he goes out" (Boy, 10).*

This long-term outcome is particularly important in the context of early intervention because of the existing evidence of the influence of positive relationships between children and those around them in feeling supported and resilient through difficult situations.

Increased Pride and Increased Excitement for School

Finally, two outcomes that were reported frequently by caregivers when prompted were children being more excited to go to school (82% said 'yes') and prouder of themselves (85%).

Looking at examples from children and caregivers' own words, it may be that children's pride in themselves and excitement to go to school were a secondary effect of the improved confidence and relationships they had described.

One 12-year-old boy reported that *"my mentor did help me with a lot of things. Like moving to high school - making*

me feel more confident with it", and an 11-year-old girl said *"I talk to a lot of my friends, and when I am in class, I put my hand up constantly and I ask questions if I don't understand it."*

This sustained positive influence on school in particular was referenced by caregivers as well, including helping transition between primary and secondary. The caregiver of an 11-year-old boy said *"the transition from primary to secondary school and this went very well, part of it is due to the mentoring he had. He found it hard thinking of the change. His mentor provided support for him, helped him manage his anxiety.*

He went to secondary school with a positive attitude” (Boy, 12).

Another caregiver of a 9-year-old girl linked the experience of school to improved relationships with friends from the mentoring, saying *“she’s a lot happier at school, she used to not want to go and now she has lots of friends.”*

Both school transitions and school engagement have been identified as key factors in a child’s life for well-being and as predictive of future educational outcomes. Therefore, it is extremely positive to have evidence that The Kids Network mentoring is providing children with the increased confidence and independence that is improving their school experience.

Summary and Significance

This initial evidence - from caregivers and children themselves - demonstrates that early intervention through The Kids Network mentoring programme is delivering sustained outcomes across a range of emotional and behavioural areas in confidence and well-being, independence, self-expression, improved relationships and school engagement. These outcomes both closely mirror the main needs presented by caregivers for why they wanted their children to be receive a mentor and are in line with previous evidence around effective mentoring.

Some of the nuances and interrelationships among the most common outcomes - increased confidence, leading to self-expression and independence, leading to improved relationships - also align to evidence on the root importance of developing a child’s self-confidence. Existing evidence on the effects of improved confidence in children suggest that programmes that explicitly focused on improving self-confidence were more effective in delivering behavioral, personality, and academic outcomes.

The evidence for these links and other ‘success factors’ that makes The Kids Network mentoring an effective early intervention model is explored in the next section.



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My mentor has changed my life; he has made me more confident

Boy, 11



Alesha was a 10-year-old girl who enjoyed hanging out with her friends, but inside school she was shy and withdrawn: “In year 5, before I met my mentor, I felt a bit shy, I wouldn’t talk as much when people were having a conversation, and I wouldn’t get involved.” Her caregiver had also noticed this, saying: “She was struggling in confidence, to speak to someone. She wasn’t able to speak about how she feels.”

When Alesha thought about the future it was, in her words, an open question as to “whether it would be happy or sad.” In 2019 she was referred to The Kids Network and matched with a mentor, Cecile.

Initially Cecile noticed the reality of the situation as well, “I noticed early on that she came across as being very low in confidence. This was the biggest challenge we needed to overcome together. However as soon as Alesha and Cecile began spending time together, things began to change. In their year together, they met three to four times a month, and Alesha and her mentor went on lots of activities around the city. These experiences clearly had a big effect on Alesha and when asked about the best part of the mentoring

she said: “Talking with each other and doing things I never thought I would be doing. I loved going on the London Eye, going ice skating, and going kayaking.”

These experiences slowly but surely built Alesha’s confidence and happiness. Describing the impact of her mentor six months on from completing the mentoring she said “My confidence changed [when I] met my mentor. My mentor made me feel confident, brave, and bold. She made me feel more calm and excited about the future.” Her new found confidence translated across all areas of her life, including school and homelife. “I’m more confident in school. When I am in class I put my hand up constantly and I ask questions if I don’t understand it” says Alesha.

Her caregiver put this this way: “Now she can speak by herself and she’s confident by herself. Before mentoring, anything I asked her, she couldn’t say anything, now she speaks about anything she likes.”

The future for Alesha is no longer about whether or not she will be happy, but instead she says: “Now in year 7 I am thinking about what I am going to achieve in my future. I want to pass my tests, and be good in life in the future.”

ALESHA’S STORY

”

My mentor made me feel confident, brave, and bold.

HOW THE KIDS NETWORK CREATES LONG-TERM IMPACT



To understand what caregivers and children thought caused the mentoring to have the long-term impact they were reporting, they were asked what characteristics of the child's mentoring experience had enabled these positive outcomes. Overall, caregivers and children testified to three common success factors.

Fun and enjoyment experienced by the children

The first success factor was the high level of fun reported by children in the time spent with their mentor. One of The Kids Network's values is 'fun' and therefore the mentoring programme was designed and continues to be refined to promote fun and enjoyment. Caregivers were clear this was a major cause of the sustained outcomes experienced by the children.

One caregiver said "every second he spent with his mentor, he was always so so happy about it. There are things I didn't notice before that have now become part of him" (Boy, 12), and another reported "just having the chance to chat to his mentor, he really enjoyed it!" (Boy, 11).

Another caregiver spoke directly to the link between enjoyment of what

they did and the result for the child: "I think she became even more expressive with others and her social confidence increased. They did a lot of role play which she really enjoyed. **The sessions were very child led and focused on her which really helped her**" (Girl, 10).

This shows that even though the children were gaining critical outcomes around confidence, independence and well-being, one of the central causes of these outcomes sustaining over time was the enjoyment they experienced. This enjoyment led to children retaining strong memories of what they did, thus maintaining the outcomes over time. In the words of one caregiver whose child completed the mentoring 18 months ago, "She has loads of fond memories with her mentor and she still talks about her" (Girl, 9).

Experience of new activities and places

The second success factor in sustained outcomes was The Kids Network's mentoring model enabling children to experience new activities and new places.

Children spoke frequently of this

themselves. Speaking about the best things they did with their mentor, a 10-year-old child said "we went out on adventures, baked and loads of other things. I learnt to cook and draw. Also reading - we used to read together", and another 11-year-old girl said "before

my mentor I didn't go to many places apart from the park, with my mentor I got to go to a lot places." A third 11-year-old put it this way: **"The best thing was talking with each other and doing things I never thought I would be doing in the future."**

Some caregivers linked these new experiences of exploration to the core enjoyment of the mentoring: *"She really enjoyed the time she had with her mentor, and the places she explored. She always came back so happy"* (Girl, 10).

Other caregivers directly linked the new experiences to specific sustained outcomes in independence and better relationships. *"The mentoring allowed him to gain more independence. The mentor would help him explore activities he didn't even know he liked"* (Boy, 12) reported one caregiver. Another caregiver said that *"[my child] went out more so he was more socialised with the outside"* (Boy, 11).

Two teachers contrasted this approach with other 'teaching' based early interventions. One said that *"the relationships we've seen form through The Kids Network are unique opportunities for children. It's not focused on 'teaching' but is one where children can, over time, be supported to explore their interests and gently*

Influence of a trusted adult from outside day to day life

The third success factor was having a trusted adult from outside the child's normal life become a regular and consistent relationship. This had a

encouraged to widen their horizons", and another said "the strengths of The Kids Network mentoring model compared to others used at our school are that it doesn't focus on school work or the curriculum, its focus is on the betterment of the child, learning what to do and how to succeed in all aspects of life not just school."

This demonstrates the central importance of The Kids Network mentoring enabling children to have new experiences and to try new things that they would otherwise not have. It affirms the earlier evidence of the need for this mentoring. Many of these children come from family situations where they need additional support, space and time to try new activities they had not taken part in before.

This evidence – and the evidence above of the experience of fun from the children – also underlines the uniqueness of The Kids Network model. Whereas other mentoring, and school-based intervention programmes may have a focus on curriculum, teaching-based work or other content-focused approaches, The Kids Network's model focusses on the importance of enjoyment and new life experiences. The evidence here suggests this is a vital causal factor.

number of components including the person being a role model for the child to look up to, the mentor being 'theirs' and not shared with anyone else, and

the person being from outside their usual social sphere.

One caregiver of an 11-year-old boy said that by *"talking to someone who is a bit more ahead of them in life made him feel like he's a bit older. It showed him that he can talk to other grown-ups and discuss what's important to him. **The mentor was a good role model for him, being able to talk to this person who was also a professional.**"*

Another caregiver of a 10-year-old girl spoke of the importance of the mentor enabling the child's relational and social confidence increase, leading to sustained outcome: *"It was good involving other people in her life, and she was so shy before. She wouldn't play with kids. But now she is very confident, and says what she wants."*

A Deputy Headteacher we spoke to

affirmed the same dynamic: *"Sometimes it is easier for the children to talk to somebody who is removed from the family setting and is not their parents", and another school professional reported that "children with a The Kids Network mentor feel like an adult outside of school and family circle is properly interested in them and what they think and are interested in – it builds confidence and self-esteem."*

This success factor both ties into and expands the previous one. The experience of new trusted adults is a new experience in itself, and becomes a confidence-forming experiences in a child's life. Having a mentor who is new in their life, has new experience to share, and is present for a whole year appears vital in enabling the sustained outcomes around confidence and new relationship skills.

Summary and significance

This evidence has found that there are three main mechanisms that caregivers, children and other stakeholders understand to be how The Kids Network's model creates sustained outcomes for children: by providing fun and enjoyable experiences, by providing new experiences of activities and places, and by providing a new trusted adult into the child's life. These three are significant because they tie closely to two major protective factors for children with ACEs and other difficult childhood experiences[32][33][34]. This suggests that not only are the sustained outcomes delivered by the mentoring acting as protective factors, but the causes of those outcomes are also doing the same.

EXPLORING PATTERNS IN THE DATA



To explore where early intervention might be most effective in our model, we explored any initial patterns in whether sustained outcomes were more or less frequent.

We were able to look at three areas: gender of the child, age of the child, and time since completion of the mentoring. To use as much of the data in this analysis as possible, we totalled how many of the ten prompted The Kids Network outcomes the caregiver said they had seen evidence of. This gave each child an overall outcome score between 1 and 10.

As 34 caregivers participated in this initial pilot, these sub-groups have a small number of caregivers in each. Therefore these patterns are tentative and give The Kids Network avenues to explore further in the future.

Gender

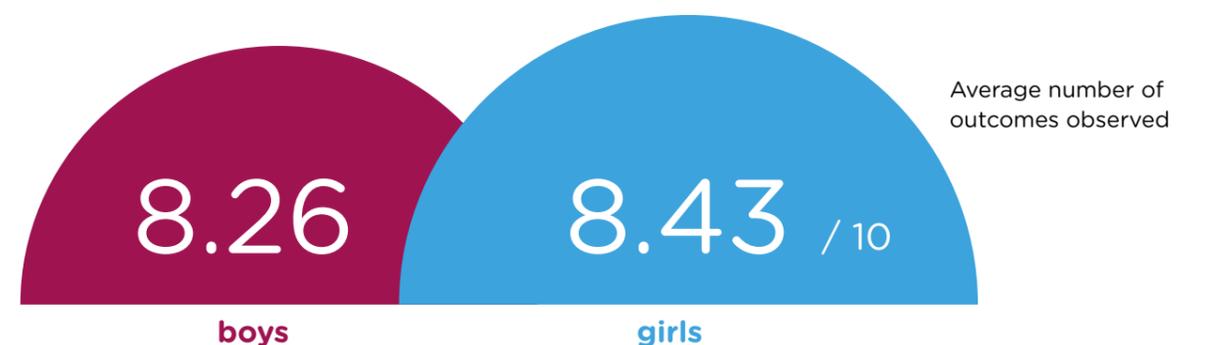
The analysis of the initial trends between boys and girls gave a variable picture. On the one hand, when asked about ten specific sustained outcomes, it appears that caregivers of boys and girls reported largely the same average number of sustained outcomes (8.3 for boys, and 8.4 for girls). However, when the caregiver was initially asked about the overall level at which their child was still benefiting from the mentoring, 74% said “very much so” of boys, and only 47% said the same of girls.

One interpretation of this difference is that the mentoring experience delivers and sustains positive impact across a breadth of different areas

of life relatively equally for boys and girls, however for girls the depth of the sustained benefits may ‘wear off’ more quickly.

One explanation of this might be the well-recognised higher pressures experienced by girls in society, that also increase into secondary school. It may be that this results in a faster reduction in the benefit of mentoring as these pressures have an impact. If this pattern is correct, it might be argued that girls and boys are in equal need of mentors overall, but that there could be a greater need for sustained mentoring through a girl’s early life, more so than for boys.

We asked caregivers whether they had seen continued evidence of impact on their child at least six months after the end mentoring. The graph compares average scores between caregivers of 18 boys and 16 girls.



Age

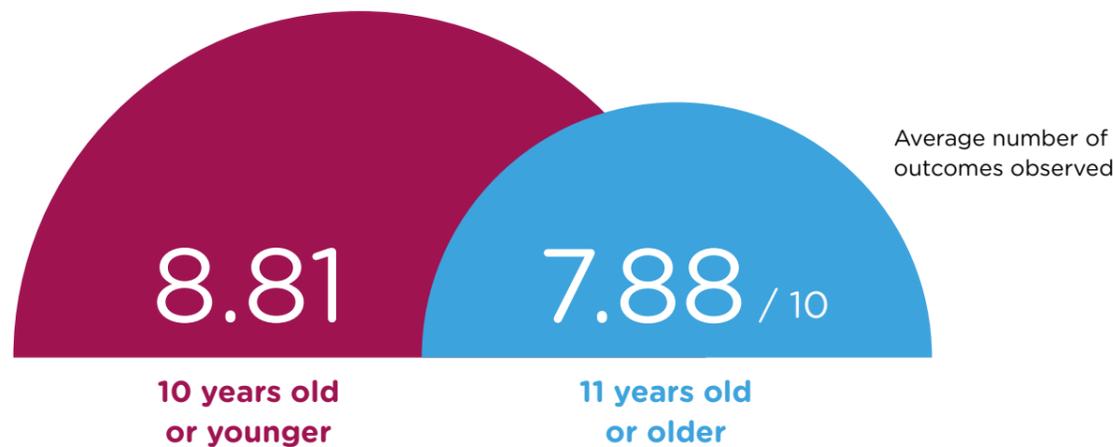
For age, it appears that children who are younger when they begin mentoring (aged 10 or younger) were reported to be experiencing a larger number of sustained outcomes than those aged 11 or older.

This breadth across the 10 prompted outcomes matches the 'depth' of outcome reported by caregivers. 71% of caregivers of children in the younger

age bracket said they were still 'very much' benefitting from the mentoring, compared to only 55% of caregivers of those who began the mentoring at an older age.

This initial evidence suggests that even within a model of early intervention mentoring, the sooner a child can be given a mentor, the more sustained the impact may be.

We asked caregivers whether they had seen continued evidence of impact on their child at least six months after the end mentoring. The graph compares average scores between caregivers whose child was 10 years old or younger (17) and 11 years old or older (17) when they began mentoring.



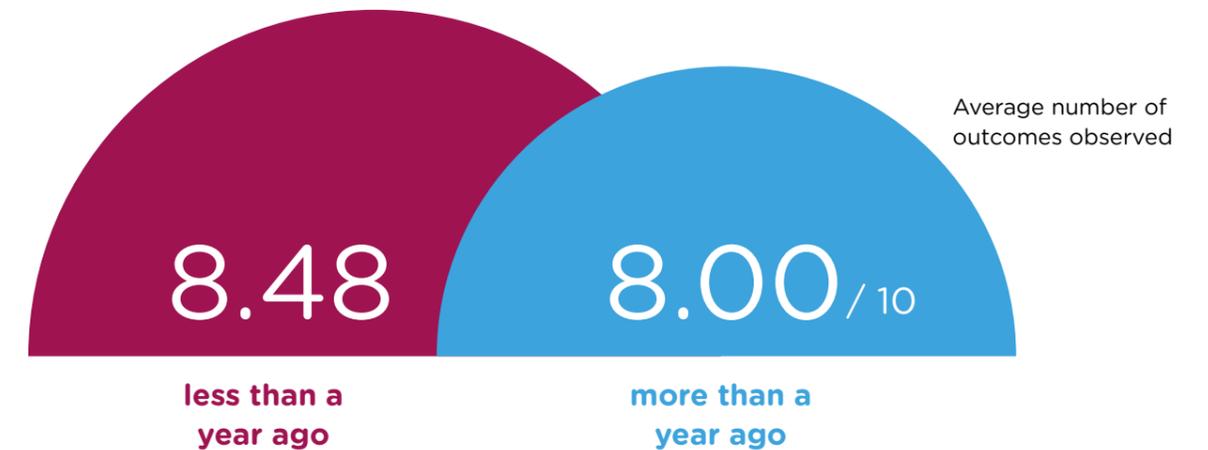
Time since completing the programme

We also looked at the time since the child completed the mentoring. From this initial data there appears to be some possibility of a drop-off in the breadth of sustained outcomes from those who completed the mentoring more than a year ago (8.0 out of 10 outcomes) compared to those less than a year ago (8.5). This pattern was the same in the data on initial caregivers' overall view on whether the child was still benefitting: 40% of those children who finished more than a year ago were said to be 'very much' still benefitting, whereas 71% of those who finished less than a year ago were still 'very much'

benefitting.

This initial data suggests that whilst there is an understandable decline over time, there is evidence of a sustained impact of the mentoring for over a year after the end of the sessions. This is what we'd expect from the evidence gathered throughout this report, and the secondary evidence cited. The outcomes The Kids Network mentoring is creating - confidence, self-expression, improved relationships - are those that can sustain themselves over time by creating further positive childhood experiences.

We asked caregivers whether they had seen continued evidence of impact on their child at least six months after the end mentoring. The graph compares average scores between caregivers whose child completed the project less than a year ago (24) and more than a year ago (10).



SUMMARY OF THE PILOT EVIDENCE



Overall, the analysis of The Kids Network's first ever long-term impact evaluation has demonstrated a number of key themes.

- First, it is clear from the caregivers' perspective that the mentoring programme began at a clear and necessary point in children's lives where many were experiencing ACEs and other difficult childhood experiences. It was an early intervention programme giving children the support they needed when they were experiencing low confidence, well-being, and social relationships but before those experiences had led to more significant negative behavioural, social or health outcomes.
- Second, it is clear that the most common sustained outcomes were those that matched the same needs of the children at the start of the mentoring: increased confidence, self-expression, well-being and improved relationships with friends, family and school. As other research has suggested, these are all key protective factors for children experiencing ACEs and creating experiences of life that lead to positive outcomes.
- Third, this evidence suggests that The Kids Network's mentoring creates sustained outcomes through the generation of fun and new experiences with a trusted adult mentor. These are also established protective factors and experiences in a child's life. It suggests that this model stands in contrast to some other models of early intervention. The Kids Network's model allows for child-led sustained behaviours and habits that the children want to continue after the mentoring has finished. It also seems clear that having a trusted adult that is both 'theirs' and outside the immediate family context is an important factor in creating these outcomes – something we would expect given the evidence for trusted adults as a protective factor for children with ACEs.
- Finally, an initial analysis of patterns within the pilot data suggests that outcomes may endure differently between boys and girls, sustain for longer for those who begin mentoring at a younger age, and are maintained for at least a year.



ADUKE'S STORY

Aduke moved to the UK to live with his mother in summer 2017, having to leave North America when the relative he lived with moved to another country. However, living conditions with his mother were difficult. He had two infant siblings and his mother's mental health struggles meant she was not always able to care for him as she wanted. The result of all of this for Aduke led to difficulty building relationships with reliable adults, a struggle to express his emotions relating to the changes he had been through, and a need for emotional support. His caregiver summarised it this way: "He's seen a lot of loss in his life."

Therefore, aged 12, Aduke was withdrawn from relationships around him and struggling with self-esteem. He reflects that he didn't have many good friends, and as he thought about secondary school, "I was wondering whether I'd make friends there or not."

Aduke was then matched to his mentor Harsha. Aduke and Harsha's mentoring relationship was not dramatic yet it was exactly what Aduke needed. When asked, now 14, about the best part of the mentoring, Aduke said: "Going to the science museum and we had some vanilla ice-cream made from liquid

nitrogen." It was the day-to-day things they did together that helped Aduke develop his passions and interests inside and outside school: "Before having a mentor I didn't like English but I used to talk to Harsha about this and he helped me. Now I'm better at English - I can write stories a bit more now. Harsha helped me with this" says Aduke. "I'd always wanted to be a YouTuber and Harsha helped me with that - me and him made a series together."

The effect of this time on Aduke was simple but life-changing. His caregiver says: "His mentor gave him something to do every Saturday, and [they did] stuff he likes doing. It made him a lot more outgoing. Now he's got a stable network of friends at school and he's confident in himself."

"My mentor helped me for the better - with a lot of things. Definitely helped me with my YouTube skills and moving to high school. He made me feel more confident with it. Every child should have a mentor."

”

Now he's got a stable network of friends at school and he's confident in himself

THE KIDS NETWORK'S CALL TO ACTION

At The Kids Network we are leaders in early intervention. Our report showcases that early intervention can increase children's wellbeing in the short term, but it also has positive long-term impact on their mental and physical health, their attainment, and beyond.

We all have a joint responsibility to ensure any child who needs a mentor can access one.

This is rightfully a priority within the Mayor's New Deal for Young People. As experts in amplifying children's voices and delivering a mentoring service that works, The Kids Network will be central in achieving the mission to ensure every child has access to a dedicated mentor and to quality childhood activities.

We urgently need more financial backing to ensure our most vulnerable children have access to the support they need at this critical development stage.

It costs The Kids Network £1,300 per child to deliver this highly impactful support. Funds which, if invested early, can save society funding further down the line. In the short term, it can reduce the need for NHS or CAMHS interventions. In the long term, it can prevent costs incurred as a consequence of untreated mental health, which can negatively impact qualifications, employment, relationships and physical health.

As we navigate through the pandemic, we know the need for our service is higher than ever, and children need to be at the centre of every recovery conversation.

As thought leaders and experts in delivering an intervention that creates long-lasting impact, we would welcome a conversation with you about how we can work together and create sustainable partnerships to help children live the lives they deserve.

This is our case for early intervention, join us on this journey and let's start connecting for change.



For funding opportunities please contact Jessica Parish
(j.parish@thekidsnetwork.org.uk).

For partnership opportunities, please contact Amy Campo McEvoy
(a.campomcevoy@thekidsnetwork.org.uk).

INDEX

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