

Friendship Works Service Evaluation

Final report

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Executive Summary

Research Partners were commissioned by Family Action to undertake an evaluation of their Friendship Works mentoring service between 2018 and 2022, covering participants involved between January 2017 and 2022. This final report presents evidence collected from service participants, staff, and stakeholders by the evaluation team, alongside monitoring information collected by Friendship Works.

Background

Mentoring and befriending services are an increasingly common way to support children and young adults (CYA) at risk due to their circumstances. This approach is based on the belief that developing secure attachments early in life benefits individuals and helps build their resilience. The evidence base around mentoring is less well developed than some other charitable activities, mainly because the benefits of these types of relationships are often intangible and difficult to measure. However, accounts show that there can be life-changing effects for those involved.

Friendship Works principles and structures

Friendship Works is a long-running programme that started in 1977. The service introduces a supportive relationship into the life of a vulnerable young person and provides access to new opportunities and experiences. The service recruits, screens, trains, and supports volunteer mentors whilst funding activities that the mentor and young person do together. Mentors and young people meet up at least three times a month over, ideally, at least two years. The service aims to build self-confidence and resilience so that CYA are better equipped to manage adversity now and in the future.

Friendship Works is based on good practice principles, such as providing a non-stigmatising non-judgmental approach, not using befrienders/mentors to 'solve' problems in the lives of young people but ensuring that mentors engage in a sustained, trust-based relationship with the young person they befriend. Matches between young people and volunteers are designed to accommodate individual preferences on both sides where possible.

The service uses highly trained caseworkers from relevant professional backgrounds to support and prepare participants and apply the service's rigorous assessment, monitoring, and safeguarding procedures. Caseworkers also act as a single named contact for the duration of friendships and speak regularly to participants, including via formal reviews at six, 12 and 24 months into friendships.

Service users

Since January 2017, Friendship Works provided us with data showing that 117 CYA have been supported through the service. Ordinarily, this figure would have been higher, but recruitment was limited to an extent by the pandemic. The service works with CYA who have a wide range of difficulties and challenges in their lives. All face multiple disadvantages and have experienced some form of trauma in early childhood - an experience that has delivered so much stress that the child finds it overwhelming.

The service has recently been asked to particularly focus its efforts on three target groups - young carers (these made up 41% of service users during the evaluation period), care

leavers (15% of service users during this time) and unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC, who were around 1% of participants over this period). The service's efforts to engage with UASC have been hampered by the pandemic (as this was a new avenue and was based on liaising with other, more experienced providers in this area, whose work was also affected by the pandemic).

The service is open to young people who are aged five to 16 years at the time of their referral, or who are aged 18 to 23 years if they are care leavers. In line with these criteria, CYA using the service ranged from five years to 23 years old, but on average were 13 years old when they first start meeting their mentor. 13% of participants had Special Educational Needs, 13% were categorised as Children in Need by social services, six per cent had a Child Protection Plan in place and three per cent were Looked After children. A diverse range of ethnic groups is represented.

Friendship Works aims to support CYA in dealing with their personal and family circumstances, including mental health issues, difficult peer relationships and/or emotional and behavioural difficulties, alongside factors such as school refusal and domestic violence and abuse. The pandemic has placed even greater pressures on the lives of young people, with lockdowns and restrictions leading to greater isolation and anxiety and a loss of structures and routine.

Activities supported by Friendship Works

The service supports a wide range of activities and CYA take an active role in decision making about what they do. Mentors support CYA to try experiences that they would otherwise not be exposed to and help them prepare for and cope with these new experiences where they find this challenging.

Activities are both 'day-to-day' interactions, such as going for a walk or to a café; having a chat; playing a game or having discussions about shared activities or interests (e.g. art, a film, or books), and 'special' activities including visiting museums or galleries, going to the cinema/theatre, family fun events, or day trips to theme parks, sports matches, or the seaside. CYA value both types of activity, and the vast majority (96%) feel that they do fun things with their mentor. Nine out of ten parents are both happy with the quality of activities their child takes part in (92%), and that their child has new experiences with their mentor (95%).

These activities are important not only as an outlet for young people and to cement the mentoring friendships, but also because they give CYA exposure to new and different experiences their families may not be able to provide, giving them a break from difficult everyday lives. These activities are safe and age-appropriate and provide interests and memories that they can then share with other adults and their peers.

The nature of friendships

Developing a trusted and stable relationship with an adult is the second major component of the Friendship Works service. The average duration of friendships is 25 months, but many friendships go well beyond this.

CYAs and their parents/carers view friendships extremely positively. Mentors are trusted individuals (perhaps the first person outside the family that CYA feel that they can trust), who communicate well with both CYA and families and make CYA feel special and feel

better about themselves, whilst demonstrating that they enjoy spending time in the friendship and listening to the CYA's point of view. CYA feel like they have a lot in common with their mentor and take reassurance and comfort from them. Our interviews suggest that all these factors are related to the CYA's feelings of self-esteem and self-worth.

Friendship Works during the pandemic

During the pandemic, Friendship Works continued to operate even when many other supportive services were withdrawn. The service quickly set caseworkers up to work from home so they could continue to support friendships. A remote working safeguarding procedure was introduced, alongside a resource hub for volunteers to support their work with CYA through digital means. Caseworkers stepped in to support vulnerable families, including helping them access a range of COVID grants and signposting them onto other services.

Mentors initially found it difficult to move to a remote friendship model but were clear that CYA could still get a lot out of the relationship. Mentors maintained lines of communication through writing letters/sending postcards or gifts, telephone calls, text messages and video calls. Some set up virtual 'clubs' where they cooked, painted, or watched films together. CYA continued to be involved in decisions about what they did, and the activities were designed as much as possible to continue to reflect their interests. Some relationships blossomed as CYA and their mentors shared the experience of lockdown and learnt more about each other, which deepened their connections. A minority of friendships were, however, adversely affected by the pandemic, with fewer interactions possible or desired and/or the loss of normal activities keenly felt.

Mentors overwhelmingly felt that the service needed to return to normal as soon as possible, albeit with the option for some remote connection if preferred/necessary going forwards. Mentors and CYA on the service had signed up for an 'in person' service rather than virtual support and this was largely their preference.

The views of mentors have been negatively affected by the pandemic, particularly their perceptions of potential CYA life outcomes (82% of mentors we surveyed in 2019 agreed the service had the potential to improve life chances, compared to 46% in 2022). This is, however, likely to reflect views on the economic backdrop to the service as much as perceptions about the service itself and suggests that there is even more need for mentoring now than there was when we began this evaluation.

The difference that the service makes

Assessing the impact of mentoring services can be difficult at any time. The mentoring relationship is a small part of the lives of CYA, remaining stable, but potentially against a backdrop of complex and changing personal circumstances. Add to this the events of a global pandemic, and it becomes even more difficult to isolate the impact of Friendship Works. However, we can triangulate data from a range of perspectives on how the service appears to help participants. All these sources agree that the service is a positive influence on CYA's lives, helping them develop personally and feel better about themselves.

"A young person I have on the programme at the minute has a very difficult home environment. I can't say what's got better for her since she's been on the programme because over that time things have got worse at home and her situation is now even

more difficult. However, I can say that she would undoubtedly be a much higher safeguarding risk without Friendship Works." (Stakeholder)

There was no difference in the analysis of service impacts by gender or by whether they were a care leaver, young carer or unaccompanied asylum seeker or referred for other reasons. The *scale* of benefits that CYA draw from the service, therefore, does not appear to be linked to their demographics. However, *how* the service supports individuals is linked entirely to their personal circumstances and needs.

Improved relationships and social skills

Around three-quarters of CYA feel that since meeting with their mentor they get on better with their family (77%) and that they get on better with adults other than their mentor (74%), whilst around two-thirds stated they now get on better with people their own age (65%). Most CYA believe that since being on the service they are better at talking to other people in general (77%).

Mentors also indicate that CYA have become better able to trust other people (70%) and negotiate with them (69%) since the friendship started, whilst around half of mentors have seen improvements in family relationships (48%). Parents have also seen improvements in the relationships and social skills of their children, and around three quarters have observed their child developing more friendships (72%). Parents and CYA also felt mentors helped CYA seek out positive friendships and step away from less healthy ones.

Enhanced life skills

CYA state that they have improved their skills in a range of areas, and their mentors agree. Most of both CYA and mentors indicate that the CYA's punctuality and reliability has improved (88% of CYA and 58% of mentors), as has their ability to weigh up decisions (79% of CYA and 72% of mentors), and their ability to plan travel and budgets (72% of CYA and 64% of mentors). CYA had respect for their mentors and the time they spent together; they started to increase their responsibility. Also, CYA were felt to be better at managing their feelings (60% of CYA and 52% of mentors thought this about the CYA they mentor) and keeping calm when things go wrong (65% of CYA) or keeping trying when things go wrong (60% of mentors thought this about the CYA they mentor). Just over half (53%) of mentors felt that their CYA were therefore likely to be better able to cope with life's challenges in the future.

Greater wellbeing

The majority of CYA have a more positive outlook on life since taking part in the service. Compared to when they first met with their mentor, four out of five CYA feel happier (80%) and are now more positive about their futures (76%), whilst around two-thirds feel more confident (68%) and more positive about themselves (68%). Mentors share this view as almost four out of five (86%) feel that CYA have improved their social and emotional wellbeing since the start of the friendship whilst two-thirds (66%) agree that the CYA is now a happier person.

Repeated administration of the Stirling Children's Well-being Scale (SCWBS)¹ to CYA on the service showed that they were able to maintain their outlook scores (from a mean of 23.8 rising to 26.7), even whilst their emotional state scores fell (from a mean of 22.9 falling to 20.2). These results might suggest that even though the individual circumstances and situations of CYA have not improved over time (indicated by their worsening emotional state), they are, on average, able to maintain or enhance their positive view of life (indicated by the improved or maintained outlook scores). Friendship Works appears to be (as evidenced by accounts provided during interviews) a supportive factor in helping them to maintain a positive outlook despite the challenges they face.

Development of self-reflection, self-belief, and self-worth

The service appears to have a positive influence on participants' feelings of self-belief and self-worth and their ability to reflect on their feelings and those of others. Almost nine out of ten mentors (84%) have seen the confidence of the CYA they befriended increase during the friendship, almost three-quarters (71%) have observed them develop a stronger sense of identity and become more empowered (69%), whilst two-thirds of mentors have seen increases in the CYA's self-esteem (66%) and self-worth (63%). Parents have also observed this type of change and almost two thirds (61%) feel their child is now less negative about themselves. CYAs also discussed positive impacts on their behaviour from being with their mentor because they did not feel so unhappy, had someone to talk to about their feelings and had an adult to model coping strategies to them.

Enhanced aspiration and life chances

There is some evidence that being involved in the service leads to CYA developing greater aspirations and expectations about their lives. Eight out of ten mentors (79%) feel that CYA raised their aspirations since the start of the friendships, whilst nine out of ten CYA indicate that they now have high hopes for their futures (91%). Just under half of parents feel that the mentoring relationship has affected their child's plans (44%). For older CYA, having a mentor meant that they could discuss their options and routes into careers they were interested in. Two-thirds of mentors feel that the service will help CYA to have better life chances (67%).

Effects not limited to CYA

It was clear from our discussion with mentors and parents that, although they are not the direct focus of the service, its positive effects reach wider than just the CYA involved. Mentors feel that they gain a lot from taking part, including developing a greater understanding of both young people and people from different backgrounds to their own. They also develop new skills through the training they receive and through friendships. Similarly, some parents had observed positive effects on their families through their child being more positive, better able to communicate and manage their feelings, and having outside interests to talk about. The time that the CYA spent away from their families could

¹ See <http://www.friendsforlifescotland.org/site/SCWBS%20Report.pdf> for further details of the development of the Stirling scale which is designed as a validated, holistic, positively worded measure of emotional and psychological well-being for use with children. Scores on each scale are out of a possible maximum score of 30.

also give parents time to spend with other children in the home or a needed break from parenting.

In addition, stakeholders indicated that the service added value to their work, with caseworkers seen as valued members of the multi-agency team in place to support the most vulnerable CYA. The unique relationship that caseworkers and mentors have with CYA and families is partly because they are not part of 'the system' of formal support. Despite this, agencies can share information with caseworkers about family and individual CYA circumstances confident that this will be dealt with confidentially and appropriately. Stakeholders refer CYA because they know that it will allow them to have fun and offer both them and their families a break. One stakeholder described the service as a 'family-level intervention' for this reason, whilst another saw its main impact as helping to prevent some of the damage that CYA's backgrounds could cause.

Conclusions

Friendship Works is an effective service leading to positive impacts for a wide range of CYA with strong, evidence-based structures and processes which prepare, train and support those involved well. CYA have fun with their mentors, taking an active role in deciding what activities they do and enjoying the time they spend together. Mentors are clear on their role and perform it well. The service is therefore well designed and managed and works as intended.

It is hard to measure the impacts of this type of service robustly, as this effectively asks us to show the value of a friendship. Despite this, we have drawn together evidence from a range of sources that demonstrates that Friendship Works makes a big difference to those involved, reducing further harm whilst also making lives better. Doing this over the long term only increases its effects.

Mentors bring a stable and supportive presence, positivity, and a different worldview into young lives, whilst also modelling appropriate behaviours. This leads CYA to feel happier and more confident, empowered, and develop a stronger sense of their own identity. This in turn can positively affect their other relationships and what they believe is possible for their lives.

This report should support the efforts of Friendship Works to attract future funding so that it can continue to support vulnerable young people. At present, the service runs on a relatively small scale but the need for this service is potentially much greater (and increasing). It is worth considering whether, and how, the service could be scaled up. Also, how to more effectively reach UASC who are likely to benefit greatly from the support of a friend to help them adjust to life in the UK. Developing a strategic vision for the future of the service is an important next step. This vision must consider whether and how to expand the service so that more young people and their families can benefit, whilst also ensuring the service's identity, core values and participant experience are not affected.

1 Background

This document presents the findings of an evaluation of the Friendship Works mentoring service. The purpose of the evaluation was to examine the process, effectiveness, and impact of providing long term mentoring using the Friendship Works approach, especially including a focus on how the service supports care leavers, young carers, and unaccompanied asylum seekers. The results of the evaluation will contribute to an evidence base around the model's effectiveness and inform future developments of the service.

This independent evaluation has been conducted by Research Partners on behalf of Family Action which runs the Friendship Works service. The evaluation was commissioned in November 2018 and concluded in March 2022 (having been extended to account for disruptions to evaluation data collection due to the COVID-19 pandemic). It covers the service delivery period between January 2017 and January 2022.

1.1 Why use mentoring to support young people?

Evidence suggests that children and young adults (CYA) with negative experiences in their lives often suffer from low self-esteem and social isolation². Attachment theory suggests that early relations are crucial for later social relationships and the development of capacities for emotional and stress regulation, and self-control. Securely attached children develop trust in others and self-reliance and have better outcomes than non-securely attached children in their social and emotional development, educational achievement, and mental health³.

The concept of resilience, which is that *"Some individuals have a relatively good outcome despite having experienced serious stresses or adversities – their outcome being better than that of other individuals who suffered the same experiences"* (Rutter, 2013)⁴ is also useful. Individual characteristics (including temperament, competence, self-efficacy, and self-esteem) are one element that supports resilience, but so too does family support and a supportive person or agency outside the family⁵. Children without a relationship with at least one other adult in which they feel worthy and loveable are unlikely to be able to demonstrate resilience in the same way as others⁶.

Formal mentoring is an individual-level intervention that has become of increasing interest to policy makers, charities, and schools in the UK as a way of supporting CYA who are at risk due to their circumstances⁷. The supportive relationships between mentee and mentor are the central route through which mentoring can benefit young people.

² NICE (2016, October) *Children's Attachment. Quality Standard (QS133)*

³ Bowlby, J. (1998). *A secure base. Clinical applications of attachment theory*. London: Routledge

⁴ RUTTER, M. 2013. Annual research review: Resilience - clinical implications. *The Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 54, 474-487.

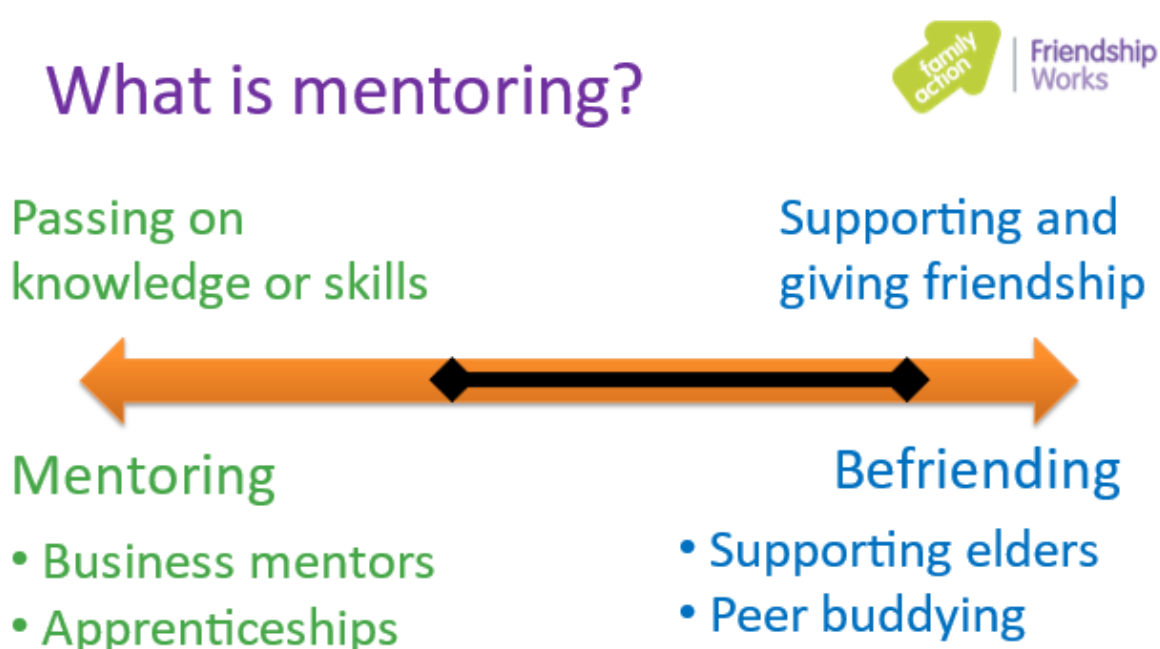
⁵ Ibid.

⁶ https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Nicola-Atwool/publication/228375717_Attachment_and_Resilience_Implications_for_Children_in_Care/links/54ef7fed0cf25f74d7227c91/Attachment-and-Resilience-Implications-for-Children-in-Care.pdf

⁷ Armitage, H, Heyes, K, O'Leary, C, Tarrega, M and Taylor-Collins, E (2020) What Makes for Effective Youth Mentoring Programmes: A rapid evidence summary. Research Report, Nesta. <https://www.nesta.org.uk/report/what-makes-effective-youth-mentoring-programme/>

Although the Friendship Works service is referred to as 'mentoring', the distinction between 'mentoring' and 'befriending' services is unclear generally. Figure 1 summarises the distinction between the two approaches made by Friendship Works. The black arrow on this slide represents where the service is considered to fit within the spectrum of mentoring. Friendship Works' model of mentoring is firmly rooted in friendship. The relationship is led by the needs and wants of the mentee, rather than any other target. This does not mean there are no boundaries in place, simply that the mentee makes choices about the direction of the relationship. In this way, CYA begin to feel accepted for who they are and within the safety of this knowledge can grow in confidence, often feeling safe enough to ask for guidance when they need it.

Figure 1.1: Mentoring and befriending services definitions



Source: Friendship Works service information

1.2 What makes a good mentoring scheme?

The elements of a strong mentoring approach typically include⁸:

- **A focus on the child.** Pressures from outside agencies to reach targets or shift emphasis are common, but the child should always remain at the centre.
- **Not using befrienders/mentors to 'solve' the child's problems,** rather working alongside them to build understanding and self-worth, which help equip the young person for their future life.
- **Having a non-stigmatising and positive approach.** A child should be involved in the service because the adults who care about them think they might benefit from a positive and consistent relationship with an adult. Engagement with the child and

⁸ Adapted from https://www.linkbefriending.org.uk/webs/96/documents/Guide-befriending_mentoring_publicationAug14.pdf and https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/What_Makes_for_Effective_Youth_Mentoring_Programmes.pdf

their parents/carers should stress that everybody needs a bit of support to achieve their goals and that providing new opportunities is a positive thing to do.

- **A community approach.** Opportunities are found and created in ways that are real, practical, and useful to the child so that the child is better equipped, even after the ending of the mentoring relationship, to navigate their way through life in their communities.
- **Having a shared background or similar personalities** between the mentor and mentee can help the relationship develop, and it is good practice to give the mentee some choice and agency in the matching process.
- **Screening, training, and support for befrienders and mentors.** Investment in training and support is a key part of good mentoring schemes.
- **Building a consistent and trusting relationship.** Regular and sustained contact between mentor and mentee over a sustained period is important for a successful relationship, and a high level of commitment from the mentor is necessary. The adult should 'stick around and keep their promises' to build rapport and establish a bond.

1.3 What does mentoring achieve?

There is good evidence that mentoring can be successful at engaging young people in education, employment, and training; reducing anger and violence, and improving confidence and self-esteem⁹. The effect of mentoring on reducing offending, increasing engagement in the community, and improving academic performance, is less well-established. Overall, the evidence base, compared to other charitable activities, is relatively weak in terms of both the quantity and quality of research available and the demonstrated effects of mentoring are relatively small. There is also little evidence on the effects of befriending services (especially those for CYA) or what features make them more effective.

The adage that 'absence of evidence is not evidence of absence' holds here. Mentoring schemes find it difficult to demonstrate the effects of their work. Traditional mentoring schemes lend themselves more easily to monitoring and evaluation than befriending services as they tend to have more defined goals, measurable set outcomes and a definite endpoint. Even so, many benefits of these types of relationships are intangible and do not lend themselves to straightforward measurement.

In contrast, the anecdotal evidence is very strong about the potential of mentoring to impact those involved. In many cases, mentoring has had a dramatic and transformative effect on young people's lives. Research has also linked stronger and longer mentoring relationships to more favourable outcomes on a range of measures¹⁰.

⁹ <https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.607.1869&rep=rep1&type=pdf> is an evaluation of the Little Brothers and Little Sisters programmes from the US

¹⁰ For example, Busse, H., Campbell, R., and Kipling, R. (2018). Developing a typology of mentoring programmes for young people attending secondary school in the United Kingdom using qualitative methods. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 88. 401-415 and Herrera, C., DuBois, D. L., and Jean Baldwin Grossman, J. B. (2013). *The Role of Risk: Mentoring Experiences and Outcomes for Youth with Varying Risk Profiles*. New York, A Public/Private Ventures project distributed by MDRC

1.4 The Friendship Works Approach

For over forty years, the Friendship Works service has been providing volunteer mentors to CYA aged five to 16 years or from 18 to 23 years for care leavers. The CYA that the service works with have a wide range of difficulties and complex challenges in their lives. However, what they all have in common is the experience of trauma in early childhood and all are facing multiple disadvantages. In social care, the term 'trauma' is used to describe any experience that delivers so much stress that a child finds it overwhelming. Any of the following circumstances and or needs could be experienced as traumatic by a child or young person: young carer, looked after child, mental health diagnosis, SEND, unaccompanied asylum seeker/refugee, care leaver.

The service does not accept referrals for CYA where there is evidence of ongoing abuse or court proceedings. It does not work with families or Care Leavers where thresholds of risks are met e.g. evidence of ongoing serious criminality or gang involvement. Similarly, referrals for profound or high-risk mental health conditions and ongoing serious substance misuse issues would not be accepted.

The service matches CYA with adult volunteer mentors who, through quality friendship, give CYA access to new opportunities, helping to build their self-confidence and develop the resilience needed to manage adversity now and in the future. The service takes referrals primarily for CYA who live in five Boroughs of London (Islington, Camden, Hackney, Tower Hamlets and Lambeth). The matches spend one-on-one time together doing free or low-cost activities of their choosing in the community for a minimum of three weekends a month over two years

The Friendship Works service is based on an Attachment-Resilience approach and adheres to all the good practice principles already described.

2 Evaluation details

The evaluation involved two strands. Firstly, the evaluation team worked alongside Friendship Works to develop and maximise the learning from the data they already collected as part of their service operation. Secondly, we collected a range of data directly from service users, staff, and stakeholders. For this report, we have examined and collected data regarding individuals involved in the service between January 2017 and January 2022.

2.1 Friendship Works existing data sources

Family Action collect a range of data on the Friendship Works service, some of which was anonymised and shared with the evaluation team. The data provided were:

- Details of the processes and procedures which support the service.
- The characteristics of CYA participating in the service and the duration of their matches. This data is taken from central records held about participating CYA and their mentoring matches. Information about 117 young people was analysed.
- The results of regular reviews undertaken with young people, mentors, and parents/carers (where appropriate/possible). The reviews take place after six months, then annually for as long as the match remains in place. Review records are completed by case workers. Review meetings are normally conducted by phone on a one-to-one basis. Caseworkers use a standardised paper form to guide and record the details of the discussion.

To support the evaluation, the results of the reviews were transferred over from a paper-based system to an electronic database in 2020 and 2021. Unfortunately, the results of all the reviews undertaken could not be transferred. Our analysis of these forms is therefore based on a sub-sample of the total number of matches made between 2017 and 2021. Review forms were available for 73 young people, 72 mentors and 58 parents, although the availability of data items within these reviews varied.

2.2 Additional evaluation activities

Additional data was specifically collected for the evaluation in several ways.

2.2.1 Interviews/focus groups

We interviewed a range of service participants to gather a rounded picture of the service. These covered how it was being delivered, the types of effects it was having and how these were being brought about, as well as suggestions for future development. Details of the individuals consulted for the evaluation are provided in Table 2.1. Some CYA were consulted more than once and consultations mainly involved in-depth one-to-one interviews (in person and remotely), although during the pandemic we also consulted mentors via a focus group.

Stakeholders were suggested by caseworkers and service staff to reflect those with first-hand experience of the service. They included social services staff, family supporters and others such as personal assistants who worked alongside CYA on the service and their families.

Table 2.1: Service users taking part in interviews and/or focus groups

CYA Mentees	Mentors	Parents/Carers	Caseworkers and service staff	Stakeholders
27	19	6	7	3

All interviews were audio-recorded and analysed using a Framework approach. Case studies presented in this report are based on interview data, although details have been changed to protect anonymity.

2.2.2 Online consultations of mentors

Two online consultations with mentors were conducted during the evaluation. These used an online tool for gathering collective intelligence¹¹. This asks individuals to provide an answer to an open question and then comment on the responses of others, as well as asking them more traditional rating type questions. In both cases, an email invitation was sent out to all active mentors with a link to a set of online questions.

Consultation 1 took place between November and December 2019 asking mentors to reflect on the impact of their mentoring work. 105 mentors were sent an invitation and 35 took part (a response rate of 33%).

Consultation 2 took place between December 2020 and January 2021. This focussed mainly on how mentors were adapting to the challenges posed by COVID-19 restrictions. 104 mentors were sent an invitation and 38 took part (a response rate of 37%).

2.2.3 Additional surveys

In January 2022 links to two final evaluation surveys were sent out by caseworkers to those currently involved in the service. The first was to CYAs, with an invitation to take part sent to CYA's email address or via their parent/carer. The second was sent directly to mentors. These surveys explored how mentors and CYA viewed the service and its impacts.

48 CYA were asked to participate and 25 completed a questionnaire (a response rate of 52%). 62 mentors were asked to participate and 27 completed a questionnaire (a response rate of 44%).

¹¹ Crowdoscope is a survey and discussion tool for real-time collective intelligence (see crowdoscope.com for more details)

3 The Friendship Works service

The model used in Friendship Works aims to build a positive friendship between a young person and their mentor to support the development of physical and emotional wellbeing and provide access to all the opportunities inherent in building resilience. The belief is that through long-term, quality friendship, giving young people access to new opportunities, and helping to build their self-confidence and resilience, CYA will be better able to manage adversity now and in the future.

In this chapter, we describe the key operational components of the service, including how it adapted to COVID-19 restrictions.

3.1 How the service works

CYA aged 5 to 18 are referred to Friendship Works by social services, schools and other agencies when it is felt that they would benefit from the development of a secure attachment and more adult support in their lives. In addition, families and CYA can self refer. The service works with CYA who have a wide range of difficulties and challenges in their lives. All face multiple disadvantages and have experienced some form of trauma in early childhood - an experience that has delivered so much stress that the child finds it overwhelming.

The mentoring relationship develops according to the needs and wants of the CYA rather than any externally set targets. Instead, the young person is accepted for who they are and, knowing this, can grow in confidence and feel safe enough to look to their mentor for guidance and emotional support. The CYA is matched with a mentor with whom they develop a friendship by meeting up to three times a month over two years. When the matches meet, they generally take part in activities together.

Friendship Works is non-judgemental and provides a safe space and support to help children to grow. It does not set out to 'fix' people or dictate to them how to be. A Theory of Change (ToC) was developed for Friendship Works at the start of the evaluation in 2019 to describe how it is anticipated the service will affect CYA, drawing on the expertise and inputs of services managers and case workers (see Appendix 1, figures A1.1. and A1.2). At its heart, this ToC has the following aim:

Children and young adults will have increased resilience and improved life chances allowing them to see and take opportunities that lead to better life outcomes.

The impact of the service on CYA was felt to be across six key areas :

1. Life Skills
2. Self-reflection
3. Wellbeing
4. Opportunity
5. Childhood
6. Relationships.

These areas are represented in the findings in this report. However, using the evidence compiled in this evaluation it would be worth revisiting this ToC to ensure that it remains in line with the programme's observed impacts.

3.2 Target cohorts

From March 2018 Friendship Works has additionally been targeting three specific cohorts of CYA:

Care leavers face a range of specific challenges linked to their having to cope with the demands of living on their own from a young age (e.g. managing finances, maintaining a home, and managing their lives independently, often without any support from family). Research consistently shows that care leavers are over-represented in studies on people in custody, homelessness, and other negative outcomes¹². Care leavers aged between 18 and 25 at the date of their match are eligible for support through Friendship Works.

Unaccompanied asylum-seeking and refugee children are some of the most vulnerable in our society, have often been through long and traumatic journeys to the UK, and have experienced exploitation or persecution in their home countries. They are also at risk of being trafficked or going missing whilst in the UK¹³.

Young carers can be negatively impacted by their caring role in several different domains, including health, education, and their social life, as well as impacts associated with the transition to adulthood, such as being NEET (not in employment, education, or training)¹⁴.

These factors contribute to the new target cohorts being likely to have poorer mental health and fewer life skills than their peers. The potential benefits of a mentoring relationship for these CYA are, therefore, significant.

3.3 Caseworker role

Friendship Works employs highly trained caseworkers with relevant professional backgrounds to support CYA, their parents, and mentors. These caseworkers ensure that the rigorous assessment, monitoring and safeguarding procedures of the service are implemented. The service is guided by a range of processes and procedures which ensure that all participants, their families/carers, and mentors joining the service are adequately prepared and supported. These processes are important in ensuring that the service meets its aims.

Each CYA is assigned their own caseworker who works with them and their mentor for the duration of their contact with the service. Caseworkers undertake the initial assessment procedures for CYA and their families as well as assessing and training mentors. They also provide ongoing support through regular supervision and scheduled review meetings with both CYA and mentors. Caseworkers are also available whenever additional support is required and are therefore essential to the service. Considerable efforts are made to train volunteers and to match appropriate volunteers with families based on the preferences of all parties. Once matched, caseworkers undertake formal reviews of the matches at three, six, 12 and 24 months.

¹² Department for Education (2016) *The lives of young carers in England*. Research brief. Department for Education Research Report 499

¹³ Department for Education (2017) *Safeguarding Strategy. Unaccompanied asylum seeking and refugee children*. Department for Education and the Home Office

¹⁴ The Children's Society (2018) *Young Carers' Wellbeing*. Briefing Paper

3.4 Assessment and matching

Following the referral of a CYA into the service, a well-defined process is followed¹⁵ as described below.

3.4.1 CYA and their families

CYA are referred to Friendship Works through a range of routes including self-referral or via their parent/carer, through social services, their school, a mental health professional or other organisations working with the family. CYA are assessed, with information on their circumstances being collected. Caseworkers assess risks.

Caseworkers then meet with the family and CYA. This is to gain a sense of the family dynamics, what the CYA's needs are, parent/carers' experiences of parenting/caring and how the CYA presents in different environments. Details of the CYA's wants and requirements from their match are discussed, along with expectations of the service.

The caseworker holds a further meeting with the CYA to get more information about their likes and dislikes, and background and to understand more about who a suitable match for them would be.

3.4.2 Mentors

Friendship Works has a rigorous volunteer recruitment process to ensure the safety of children and families¹⁶. Volunteers are recruited, trained, and supervised by caseworkers. Volunteers must make a substantial commitment to the service, meeting with their mentee at least three times a month for two years.

This process starts with a Volunteer Orientation Evening that explains the service and what is required of a mentor. This is followed by an in-depth interview procedure. This interview takes around two to two and a half hours and covers a broad range of questions about the individual, from their childhood and significant relationships to their current and past working situation and education, their values, availability, ways of coping with adversity and their experiences of being with/working with children. Based on this interview, the two caseworkers present evidence to a third caseworker about the potential mentor against a set of core requirements. These relate to their emotions, perceived commitment, relationships, and their approach to children. The training process generally results in around half of applicants being accepted into the service¹⁷.

Successful potential mentors receive two full days of comprehensive training, which includes opportunities to spend time with CYA involved with the service, family members and active mentors. The training aims to equip mentors with:

- a clear understanding of the role of a Friendship Works mentor
- a clear understanding of the boundaries and expectations of the role, including the place of supervision within the mentoring relationship
- increased awareness of safeguarding and child protection issues and the mentor's responsibilities within this area

¹⁵ See Figure A1 in the Appendix to this report for an overview of this process

¹⁶ See Figure A2 in the Appendix to this report for an overview of this process

¹⁷ In 2019, 49 potential mentors requested an interview and of these 27 (around 55 per cent) were accepted onto training.

- an understanding of the skills needed within the role and how the role contributes to building resilience in children.

During the training, caseworkers assess the mentors. Further discussions with the mentors and with other caseworkers about the mentor's suitability and development needs take place. Security and suitability checks are then conducted on potential mentors, including enhanced DBS, taking up references and a home visit.

3.5 Making the match

By the point at which a match is made between a CYA and mentor, the service has already collected a great deal of information about everyone involved. This is used to put together pairings that caseworkers believe will work, with individual preferences on both sides considered wherever possible¹⁸.

The mentor provides some information about the type of CYA they would like to work with and at this point, caseworkers begin discussing potential matches. All decisions about a match are taken by more than one caseworker. New mentors are given the details of two different potential mentees when the caseworkers conduct the final home visit to allow them to choose a CYA that they feel comfortable mentoring. Based on this decision, the potential mentor, the CYA's parent/carer and the caseworker meet up. If all parties are happy to proceed the next meeting involves the CYA. The CYA and mentor discuss their next meeting and potential activities they could do together. This is an informal meeting, which can involve playing games as well as chatting, and normally takes place at a local café.

The match can then move on to their first real meeting together, with advice from case workers to keep this local and simple. A small amount of funding is then provided for each matched pair's activities, which the mentor and mentee decide together how to spend. Many matches go beyond the prescribed two years as the mentors form lasting friendships with their mentees.

3.6 Reviews and supervision

Comprehensive supervision and monitoring take place with all matches. During the first six months, the mentor phones the caseworker weekly for supervision and to provide updates on how the friendship is progressing or discuss any problems. Caseworkers also seek child and parent/carer views on the friendship to ensure all parties are happy. If there are problems within the friendship the caseworker can speak with the mentor or support the family to have a conversation directly with the mentor to find a resolution.

At six months, caseworkers undertake reviews separately with the parent/carer the CYA and the mentor. This gives everyone a chance to feedback on any issues occurring in the first six months of the friendship or to highlight successes. Between six months and the end of the match, the mentor is expected to call their caseworker monthly for supervision. At any point, if there are difficulties, supervision can become more regular, or a face-to-face meeting offered. Mentors have access to 24-hour duty numbers with staff that are always available.

¹⁸ See Figure A3 in the Appendix to this report for an overview of the matching process.

Mentors are matched with CYA for a minimum of two years, meeting at least three times a month. For CYA to build effective and supportive relationships, contact must be both frequent and long term¹⁹. Family Action believes that the most significant impact of a mentoring relationship occurs after 12 months so this commitment is vital.

3.7 Friendship Works during the pandemic

The outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020 disrupted the service as it did everyday life on a global scale. In the UK, guidance was issued that everyone who was not considered a key worker was advised to work from home with activities outside of the home severely restricted. Also, schools and colleges were closed to most students. Households were not to mix, and most local services were closed. There were three periods of this national lockdown: March - July 2020, November – December 2020 and January – March 2021. Many charities suspended their support services over this time, most notably those that involved entering other people's houses or meeting up in person but Friendship Works continued.

3.7.1 Transitioning to a remote mentoring model

Friendship Works had to decide how to comply with new laws and national guidance, and how to keep its staff, volunteers, and users safe. Within the first month of the pandemic, Friendship Works pivoted to all staff working from home and had produced guidance for mentors on how to continue their friendships and manage these relationships during this difficult period. The service remained operational even with the many restrictions placed on it and adapted quickly to the new landscape.

When the first lockdown was announced the Friendship Works team:

- Notified all mentors to stop face to face contact
- Notified all CYA and adults of this change
- Realised that for many CYA and their families this was a time of increased risk (finances, wellbeing, isolation, access to services/support).

The focus was therefore placed entirely on transitioning existing matches onto a remote mentoring model. This involved devising remote working safeguarding measures for volunteers, as well as compiling a resource hub for volunteers to effectively work with CYA through digital means. Different strategies and resources needed to be used to meet the needs of CYA depending on their ages, levels of understanding and family environments.

Within a couple of weeks, the service had 'moved online' which in practice meant that:

- Mentors were in contact with their CYA and in many cases 'meeting' remotely
- Supervision and team meetings were online
- The Friendship Works team risk assessed CYA and families on their caseloads, and continued to update these assessments when public health guidance changes, or as protective or risk factors developed
- Families were 'welfare checked', some were given more direct support by Friendship Works caseworkers (listening ear, signposting, then grant applications)

¹⁹ Family Action (2019) Internal Evaluation Report: Long Term Matches

- Family Action set up a Grants scheme to cover basic costs for families, such as food and access to digital devices.

Matches continued to be made during the pandemic, with mentors being trained virtually. This has involved a two-day training transferring to online working. There have been benefits to this (reduced costs and time) and so some aspects may be kept. However, Friendship Works still sees it as vital to 'be in the same room' as mentors and CYA before matches commence.

3.7.2 Providing additional support to families in need

Caseworkers completed complex and detailed risk assessments for high-risk families where lack of access to vital support services was likely to increase the risk of harm to CYA. In addition, case workers took on an additional supporting role for some families' work by supporting them to access a total of 32 Family Action COVID grants, signposting them to other services, and offering additional phone contact to provide emotional support during a period of increased isolation.

3.7.3 A reactive service committed to continue when others did not

The Friendship Works team are proud that they reacted so quickly. They see that they acted as a protective factor for some vulnerable families (and not necessarily those that were most vulnerable previously). They were 'keeping an eye on' these families and CYA, often when other services had stopped. The team was a regular contact for many families, highlighting their needs to relevant authorities

One reason why the team were able to react so quickly and appropriately was that their structure means they have an in-depth understanding of the families they work with. They believe they are often the most trusted 'partner' the family has (as non-State and advocates). Caseworkers also understand the CYAs they work with and were, therefore, able to identify the likely risks for them of the pandemic restrictions and lockdowns. Finally, Friendship Works was committed to continuing to provide a service when others stopped. Caseworkers stepped in to support families and mentors supported the CYA to purposely maintain friendships.

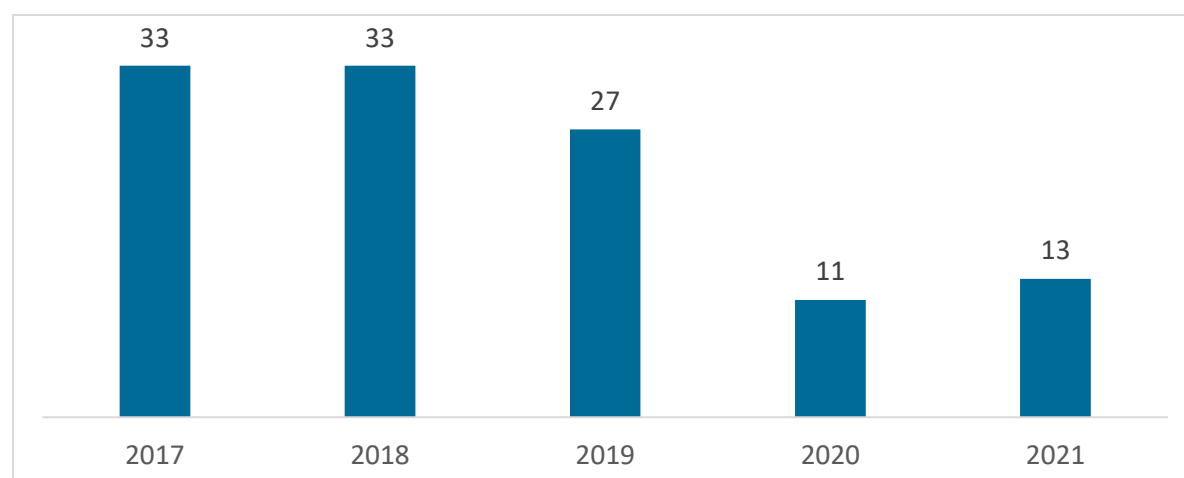
4 Service users and their needs

Friendship Works aims to support CYA who are dealing with some of the most difficult personal circumstances imaginable. To maintain the confidentiality of those involved, it is only possible to share certain aspects of their lives in this report. Nevertheless, even from these basic details, it is clear just how much they have been through on the journeys that led to them taking part in this service.

4.1 Levels of participation

Data provided by Friendship Works shows that the service supported 117 individuals by matching them with a mentor during the five years between January 2017 and January 2022. Before the pandemic, the service was consistently making 33 matches a year. Since the pandemic, this has dropped (Figure 4.3).

Figure 4.3: Number of matches made by calendar year



Source: Friendship Works records (Jan 2017 to Jan 2022), 117 records

There was a slight fall in match numbers between 2018 and 2019. This reflects a reduction in the number of volunteers coming forward which affected the number of matches it was possible to make during 2019. The number of volunteers increased again after the first lockdown in 2020 when the service restarted recruitment.

The sharp fall in numbers after 2020 can be directly attributed to the exceptional and unprecedented challenges caused by the pandemic. In 2020, no new matches were made between March and July across the entire service (the period of the first national lockdown). However, the service remained active, adapting its provision to the ever-changing situation. Twenty new volunteers were successfully recruited in this period, ready to start the process of matching when appropriate.

4.2 Participant demographics

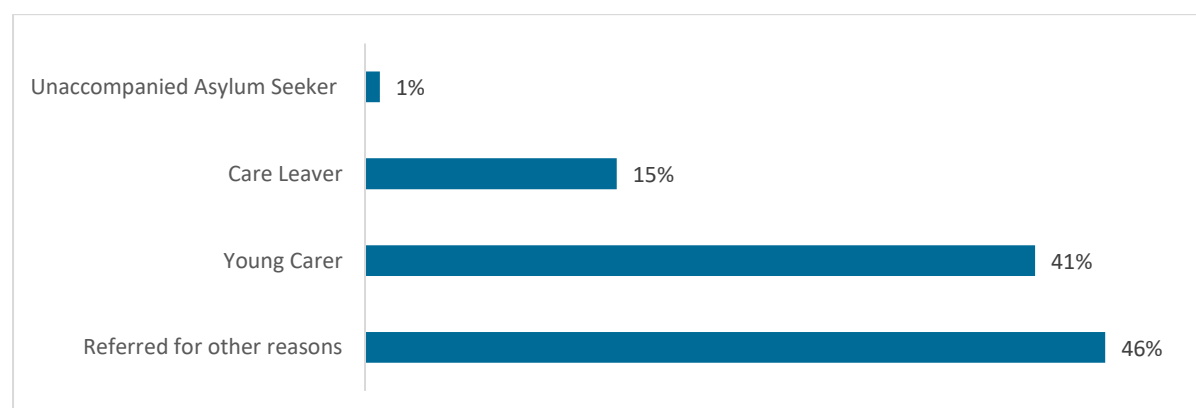
Between 2017 and 2022:

- The average CYA age at the date of the match was 13 years. The youngest CYA to be given a match was five years old at the date of their match, and the oldest was 23.

- There was a roughly even split between female and male participants (46% were female, 50% were male) whilst 3% of individuals self-defined their gender and 1% did not provide it.
- A diverse range of ethnic groups was represented amongst participants. At a broad level, 27% of participating CYA were black, black Caribbean, black African or black British, 27% were white, 16% were Asian or Asian British, 15% were from a mixed ethnic background, 9% were from another ethnic group and six per cent had an unknown ethnicity.
- 13% of participating CYA had Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), 13% were categorised as Children in Need by social services, six per cent had a Child Protection Plan in place and 3% were Looked After Children.

As already described, Friendship Works is open to all eligible young people but has recently been asked to also focus its efforts on three target groups. As Figure 4.1 demonstrates, the service has been successful in working with both care leavers and young carers. It has, however, been more difficult to recruit UASC onto the service. This remains an area of development and the Friendship Works team acknowledges the need to adopt new approaches and develop new partnerships with other agencies to further their efforts to work with this group.

Figure 4.1: Core characteristics of participating CYA



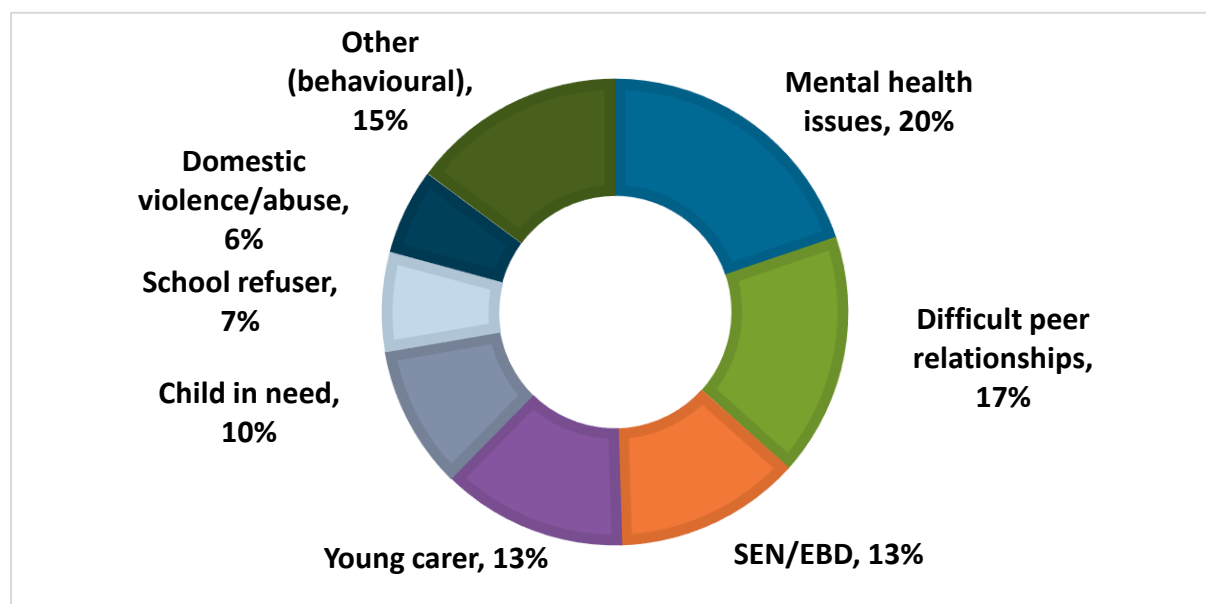
Note: 2 CYA are classified as both care leavers and young carers in this chart

Source: Friendship Works records (Jan 2017 to Jan 2022), 117 records

4.3 Risk factors associated with the referral of CYA onto the service

The reasons why CYA were referred to the service vary and are as complex and unique as the individuals being referred. The service maintains full and detailed records of each CYA's situation and the risk factors that have led to their referral. An analysis undertaken by the Friendship Works team demonstrates that these factors include mental health issues, difficult peer relationships, special educational needs and/or emotional and behavioural difficulties, alongside factors such as school refusal and domestic violence and abuse (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2: Key risk factors identified at the point of referral (%)



Source: Adapted from Friendship Works Long Term Match report (2019) using service data from 2017

The CYA consulted by the research team during the evaluation reported a range of different personal experiences and their circumstances were often complex and difficult. For example, some had:

- been in care (for a short or long stay)
- suffered parental neglect
- experienced online grooming
- witnessed familial suicide
- family members in prison
- carers with physical and mental health problems
- been homeless, or frequently moved home
- lived in poverty
- special educational needs and disabilities
- regular contact with police and social services
- left their country of birth, undertaken perilous journeys to the UK and witnessed trauma (including loss of family).

In addition, parental review data shows that two out of three parents agree or strongly agree that their child has been affected by bullying.

4.4 The additional strain caused by the pandemic

The last two years of the pandemic have placed additional pressures on many CYA. The young people we interviewed were highly articulate and reflective about their experiences of the pandemic, its restrictions and two national lockdowns. They spoke of their isolation and loneliness, as well as an increase in negative issues at home. They also spoke about how they had experienced other changes in their life, such as taking exams or moving to a different educational placement over this period. Often these changes had resulted in

increased pressure on them. Some CYA had also dealt with significant health issues in their family or bereavement over this period.

"I was just shut in my room, not seeing or talking to no one" (CYA)

"It was really upsetting to leave school so suddenly and for it not to end like I always thought it would" (CYA)

"I didn't speak to my friends from my old school, so I didn't have anyone to speak to" (CYA)

Online consultation with mentors at the start of 2021 showed that during the pandemic:

- 42% of mentors agreed/strongly agreed that their mentee needed more support with their mental well-being
- 41% of mentors agreed/strongly agreed that dealing with their own issues made it more difficult to manage the friendship
- 36% of mentors agreed/strongly agreed that their friendship had strengthened over the last year
- 30% of mentors agreed/strongly agreed that they had been a protective factor in their mentee's life.







5 Activities supported by Friendship Works

Friendship Works provides enriching and life-enhancing opportunities for CYA by offering access to a trusted adult with whom they can share new experiences. The service also provides a small amount of funding to support activities. The activities that CYA and their mentors do together are the cornerstone of their friendships and help to cement a positive relationship, particularly in the early stages. This chapter describes what mentors and mentees do together, how they stay in touch and interact and why activities are an important part of the Friendship Works service.

5.1 Activities before the pandemic

The activities that Friendship Works supported before the pandemic were hugely diverse, reflecting the broad range of interests amongst participating CYA. Figure 5.1 illustrates the favourite activities discussed by CYA and parents during caseworker reviews between 2017 and 2019. Prior to the pandemic, activities took place in person.

Figure 5.1: Activities undertaken by CYA with their mentors

Types of activity	Examples
 Days out	London Zoo, Chessington, Harry Potter world, visiting the seaside
 Eating out	Local cafes, favourite restaurants, trying new cuisines
 Cultural	Cinema, theatre, art gallery, museums
 Sporting	Trampolining, bike riding, swimming, ice skating, bowling
 Exploring London	Olympic Park, Chelsea stadium, HMS Belfast, Ripley's, shopping
 Events	Rugby matches, football matches, Comicon, Chelsea Flower Show



Source: CYA and parent review forms (between November 2017 and November 2019)

A key aspect of the friendships between mentors and mentees within Friendship Works is the autonomy that CYA have in determining what activities they do. During review meetings, CYA are asked who takes decisions about what they do with their mentors and the vast majority of CYA say that they have a role in these decisions. At the point of their six-month reviews, 79% of CYA state that they decide with their mentor what they do together, another six per cent say that this varies or that they take it in turns with their mentor to decide, whilst five per cent say that they make all the decisions themselves. Only one in ten mentees say that it is their mentor who decides what activities they do. By the time of their one-year review, just four per cent of mentees state that it is their mentor who decides. CYA are therefore asked to take increasing responsibility for generating ideas for activities to empower them and increase the autonomy they feel over this aspect of their lives.

During evaluation interviews, it was clear that CYA valued both 'day to day' interactions and 'special' activities. The former involved activities such as going for a walk or going to get a coffee; having a catch-up and a chat; playing a board game or discussing things they had both done (such as watching a particular film or reading the same book). 'Special' activities included visiting museums or galleries, going to the cinema and theatre, taking part in organised activities or family fun events, or day trips to see exhibitions, to theme parks or the seaside.

A survey of CYA²⁰ conducted at the start of 2022 showed that 96% of them feel like they do fun things with their mentor. In addition, over 90% of parents indicated in their caseworker reviews (at both six months and two years) that they were happy with the quality of the activities that their child takes part in with their mentor (92% by year two). A similar proportion (95% by year two) indicated that they believed their child had new experiences with their mentor.

Before the pandemic, mentors were very positive about their experiences with the service and about the support and preparation they received with their friendships. During their reviews with caseworkers, mentors were also generally positive about the ability of the CYA to try and cope with new experiences. Mentors were, however, aware of how challenging it can be for some young people to try new activities, particularly when they have underlying anxieties. During our interviews, some mentors described taking extra steps to prepare their CYA for new experiences (e.g. by showing them videos or online information about what to expect).

"He seems happy to do new things. I think lack of exposure and lack of funds are things that prevent him doing new things by himself." (Mentor in caseworker review)

"They are cautious and wary but not over-whelmed. She is willing to try new things but needs to feel she is safe and supported." (Mentor in caseworker review)

5.2 Maintaining contact during the pandemic

Most matches continued with good levels of engagement, throughout 2020 and 2021, even though the 'activities' that mentors and mentees did together had to move online during the national lockdowns imposed during the pandemic. Mentors were encouraged to use Skype, Facetime and Zoom to hold face to face meetings with CYA, to call their CYA or keep in touch by other methods (such as WhatsApp, text message or letter). Reviews and mentor support were also switched online. Caseworkers remained available to offer support and answer any questions.

Caseworkers advised mentors on how to support positive mental well-being for CYA over this time. Looking after everyone else's well-being was modelled from the top down. The Team Leader facilitated flexible working, suggested a break when things had been difficult, and sought external 'listeners' (i.e. people with who the caseworkers could discuss their situation, offering an informal debrief). Some mentors were concerned about their emotional burnout, not least because of challenges they had faced in their own lives during this time. Caseworkers worked with mentors to be a listening ear (on work and personal

²⁰ Based on 25 responses from CYA

matters), suggesting coping strategies, breaks, coping strategies to try, and how to keep perspective. Mentors then, in turn, could provide this to their CYA.

Caseworkers also collated resources to support remote activities and suggested ways to maintain friendships over this time. Mentors were often very creative about this and appreciated the sharing of practice between them. Mentors and mentees cooked together on Facetime (having a chat while cakes were in the oven), ran their own 'film clubs' where both watched a movie then discussed it together, set up their own 'art clubs' where the duo used the same art resources together whilst connected remotely and, had their own 'book clubs' where they read the same book/article then shared their thoughts in messages. In some cases, activities had been suggested that the whole family could engage in.

Whilst these techniques were used to engage the CYA, they also helped to elicit conversations. For some friendships, the inability to go out together and meet up in person meant that there was less communication between the mentor and their mentee. However, some friendships were able to develop new activities and interests and/or deepen their relationships and increase levels of mutual understanding. Some mentors had focused on having discussions with CYA about how they were and how they were feeling and coping.

All the CYA had missed spending time with their mentor in person over this period. They saw one of the major benefits of the service as being that they go out, or hang out, with their mentor. All CYA stated that they looked forward to having face to face contact with their mentors again. The lack of activities had also been difficult for some as it is often during these that natural conversations flow, allowing issues to be raised, or to be able to move on from certain discussions. Without the distraction of joint activities, CYA had sometimes found it hard to make conversation.

"It feels like we've connected a lot more because we're talking more. We're both quite open about things as well. I can say the silliest thing to her and she'll just laugh, and vice versa" (Mentee)

"I've actually missed just being out in the nature, really. We would take my dog out on very long walks, going to a park and just chin-wagging. Just being out in the fresh air, really. [I've done it by myself] but it just doesn't feel the same. I have no one to go cinema and bowling with, like I have done with my mentor. Even if it was open, I've got no one to go with." (Mentee)

"She's like a big ball of sunshine to me. I miss being outside and just going for a walk and having a talk. I miss the creative things we used to do because I usually search out really strange theatre productions we used to go to, and it was a little thing we did. I just miss planning that stuff. We were talking about it the other day. I miss just going to creative places because it just lights us both up inside. It's strange, really, but just generally going out for a walk in nature, because we actually walk her dog as well sometimes. I miss that as well in general, and just having a chat." (Mentee)

Despite many challenges, mentors and matches found their way through lockdown to identify the methods and frequency of contact that worked for them. For example, the way that the pair spent their time together, and how/whether they had important conversations. Sometimes family circumstances could act as a barrier to sensitive conversations, but mentors persisted nevertheless allowing CYA to discuss their issues.

Our survey of CYA conducted at the start of 2022²¹ showed that CYA still overwhelmingly felt like they got a say in what they do with their mentor (96%), that they get to choose things they find interesting to do (96%), and that they do activities together with their mentor that are new to them (96%). Mentors have therefore been able to continue the principles of their activities with CYA through and beyond the pandemic, even if they have been required to adapt their focus. Mentors described setting up the remote activities to reflect CYA interests in much the same way as before the pandemic as much as possible.

5.3 Returning to 'normal'

Although there had been some benefits of the changed approach, mentors overwhelmingly felt that the service needed to return to normal as soon as possible. They, and the CYA, had signed up for an 'in person' service rather than virtual support and the main benefits of the service for the CYA were felt to centre on getting out and having fun in ways that lockdown had prevented.

There was a view that some CYA and mentors could potentially benefit from participating in a more 'remote' mentoring model, depending on their needs and preferences, but that this should run alongside face-to-face mentoring rather than replace it. None of the mentors consulted felt that a 'remote only' service delivery approach would be of benefit to CYA currently on the service – the change of environment and benefit of developing a friendship in person was critical for these CYA.

5.4 Why these activities are important

The activities that mentors and mentees do together, whether online or in-person, are both an outlet for the CYA and a way to cement the mentoring relationship. However, there is a greater purpose to this aspect of the service. Exposure to new and different experiences provides a break from the CYA's everyday lives, gives them something to look forward to and look back on, and provides the basis for conversations and discussions with their peers and family.

5.4.1 New opportunities and exposure to new experiences

By the point of their six-month review, 90% of CYA stated that they had tried new things with their mentor. This increased to 94% of CYA by one year and 96% two years into their friendship. Similarly, around 95% of CYA stated that their mentor had helped them experience new opportunities at six months, one year and two years. Our survey of CYA showed that around three-quarters of respondents (72%) had developed a new hobby or interest since meeting their mentor.

Stakeholders spoke highly of this element of the service because it often provided opportunities the family could not. Stakeholders felt this was important in terms of building the CYA's cultural capital²², which in turn can lead to better educational and life outcomes²³.

²¹ Based on 25 responses

²² Cultural capital is the essential knowledge that children need to prepare them for their future success. It is about giving children the best possible start to their early education. (*Ofsted EY Inspection Handbook 2019*, p31)

²³ OFSTED has included cultural capital in its framework since 2019, for example.

The CYA we interviewed all reported that they had experienced new opportunities since having a mentor. These included visiting new places, trying new activities, spending time with a different adult, and meeting new people. This exposure was valued highly by the CYA. Mentors also reported how they deliberately chose activities that the CYA would not normally have access to with their parents/carers. This included activities that provide cultural capital, such as visiting museums and art exhibitions, as well as events that other families might typically attend together. Such opportunities had influenced the CYA we spoke to as they were able to list exciting things they had done with their mentor. In interviews, their parents also reported the same activities as having been influential.

"We went to the zoo where I've never been before. I really liked it and I really like animals"
(Mentee in interview)

"They've hired 'Boris bikes' and been down the canal and on a pedal boat. Those are things we've never done before. I could never do that with her. And she loved it, so I was glad she got to try" (Parent in interview)

"We have danced in the dark! We visited loads of restaurants and did story writing. We went into a clothes shop and pretended we had lots of money and picked out outfits – it was so fun!" (Mentee recorded during caseworker review)

The activities CYA took part in with their mentor gave them exposure to a different part of life but also provided the opportunity to see and hear different views. For CYA who spent little time outside the family home, this could also be useful.

"His family are very religious and I'm not. I don't think he's ever had the chance to discuss or even explore different ideas before, which I allow him the space to do. So he has talked to me about whether he thinks God exists, or whether it's wrong to be different or think differently. I don't give my opinion, just allow him to express his thoughts" (Mentor)

Similarly, going out and taking part in activities gave the CYA something to talk to their peers about and the potential for them to develop interests that they could share with other CYA. This was seen as a way of further enhancing their relationships outside of mentoring.

"Suddenly he can take part in the classroom chatter about the latest film at the cinema because he's seen it. Not just that but he's had a chance to discuss it with me and form an opinion about it, which I think he's now beginning to feel confident in expressing to others" (Mentor)

5.4.2 Access to age-appropriate activities

Another aspect of the activities and opportunities that Friendship Works supports is that the CYA involved are exposed to age-appropriate experiences. This is important because many CYA involved in the service have daily lives which are chaotic or challenging. The CYA involved in the service are required to deal with issues that a regular childhood would not expose them to (e.g. young carers). The few hours a week spent with their mentors provide a break and offer a time when CYA can forget about their situation, be more carefree and behave in an age-appropriate manner.

For these reasons, some parents we spoke to said that they hoped, when their child joined the service, that it would result in them having access to more age-appropriate activities. Parents were aware that their children were spending their time dealing with issues that

most children never have whilst at the same time not having the same opportunities as many of their peers. There were repeated reports from parents of how outside of the mentoring relationship CYA spent their time shut-in at home, watching TV, sleeping, only talking to their parent, or providing care and support for family members, rather than being out and having fun as children should be.

“Children are exposed to things they shouldn’t be in their homes. They carry the weight of the world on their shoulders. They are carers, they are living alone, they are dealing with strife. But on a Saturday afternoon, they can meet their Friend and be children. It’s the light relief they need. For some of them, managing without this would be impossible” (Stakeholder)

CYA were also conscious that their lives were different from others and had felt that they had been missing out. By providing activities and experiences CYA were made to feel more like their peers and more able to engage in the types of conversations that their peers were having.

“It’s very difficult when friends talk about what they’re going to be doing at the weekend, or after the holidays teachers asking how they’ve spent their time. [NAME] was never able to join in those things, and sometimes felt she had to make stuff up. But now she does have plans for something she’s going to be doing on a Saturday or what she’s done when she’s off school” (Mum))

6 Friendship Works friendships

The activities that CYA have access to as part of their involvement with Friendship Works are only one aspect of the way that the service aims to have a positive influence on their lives. The other main ingredient is the way that CYA feel about their mentors, and whether the friendship develops into a stable relationship, with their mentor becoming someone they trust and can rely on. This chapter examines the nature of the friendships developed through the service.

6.1 Friendship durations

Just under half of the friendships established since January 2017 were ongoing at the time of reporting (Table 6.1). The average duration of matches made through the service was 25 months, in line with the target duration of at least 24 months for friendships.

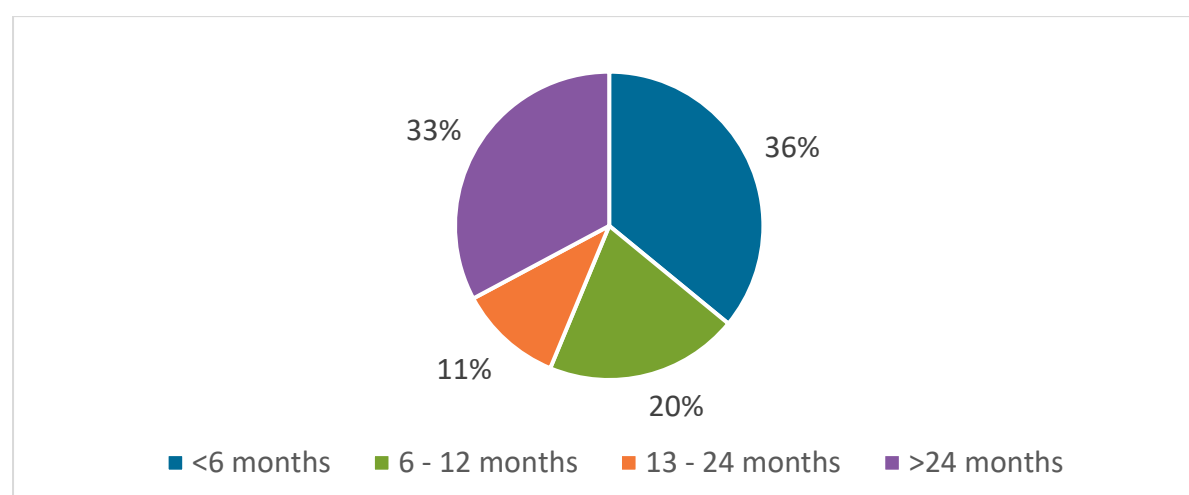
Table 6.1: Duration of friendships (mean no. of months)

Type of match	Match duration (months)			No. of matches
	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	
Ongoing	36	2	61	53
Ended	15	0	54	64
All	25			117

Source: Friendship Works records (Jan 2017 to Jan 2022)

This headline figure, however, masks significant variation (Figure 6.1). For example, the average length of ongoing matches was 36 months, indicating that many friendships go well beyond the initial period of commitment. Amongst matches that have ended, a third reached beyond 24 months, whilst most lasted six months or more (Figure 6.1). This may suggest that the service is getting better at maintaining long term matches for those that remain ongoing, compared to those completed in the past. One in five of those whose friendship ended within 24 months was set up with a second match by the service.

Figure 6.1: Duration of completed friendships



Source: Friendship Works records (Jan 2017 to Jan 2022), based on 64 completed matches

The average duration of friendships was statistically equivalent for those in the three new target groups when taken as a whole (i.e. care leavers, care experienced and unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people) compared to those referred for other reasons²⁴.

Exploring this further revealed that the average duration of all matches made since 2017 (both completed and ongoing) was 25 months whereas the duration of matches amongst young carers was 26 months. For the small number of UASC on the programme for whom we have data, the average match duration was 30 months.

An additional analysis was undertaken of all matches (both completed and ongoing) since mid-2018 when the first care leaver entered the programme. This showed that the average duration of all matches made since this date is 19 months, whilst care leavers have a very slightly shorter average match duration of 18 months.

Overall, therefore, the duration of matches made through the service is similar across the recently targeted groups, including care leavers, when compared to other participants.

6.2 How mentors work with CYA

Our evidence suggests that CYA and parents quickly develop a positive view of their mentor and the friendship. For CYA this view is not only maintained, but improves over time, particularly in terms of how much they feel that they can talk to their mentor, how special or important the friendship makes them feel, and how much they feel like their mentor likes spending time with them. Trust also develops quickly, and this is important for many of the CYA involved in the service. Our interviews suggest that all these factors have a beneficial effect on the CYA's feelings of self-esteem and self-worth.

During reviews with their caseworkers, CYAs are asked a range of questions about their friendship, including how they view their mentor. Our analysis of this data shows that CYAs feel that they can talk to their mentor about their feelings (by six months into their match, 86% of CYA agree/strongly agree that this is the case, increasing to 91% by the two-year point).

CYAs trust their mentors and see them as reliable:

- At six months 85% of CYA feel that their mentor always does what they say they will, and this rises to 93% by the two-year point.
- At both six months and two years into the friendship, 81% of CYA feel that their mentor is always there when they say they will be.
- At six months 86% of CYA feel that their mentor is someone they can always rely on, with this rising to 100% of CYA by the two-year point.

CYAs communicate well with their mentor:

- At six months 89% of CYA feel that their mentor always listens to them, rising to 93% by two years into the friendship

²⁴ The average duration of friendships for those who were classified as young carers, care leavers and/or unaccompanied asylum seekers was 24 months and 26 months for those referred for other reasons. Statistical equivalence determined using a one-way ANOVA.

- At six months 74% of CYA feel that they can always talk to their mentor, rising to 96% by the two-year point
- At six months 90% of CYA feel like they can always trust their mentor, with this rising to 93% by the two-year point.

Mentors make CYAs feel better about themselves:

- At six months 69% of CYA feel that their mentor always makes them feel special or important, this rises to 85% by the two-year point
- At six months, 77% of CYA feel like their mentor always likes spending time with them, with this rising to 85% two years into the friendship
- At six months, 88% of CYA always have fun with their mentor, with this remaining relatively stable by two years, dropping slightly to 85%. This slight drop off may reflect the fact that as CYA get older their meetings with mentors become less about having fun and more about seeking advice or support, for example with post-16 options.

Additional data from our survey of CYA²⁵ shows that the vast majority of CYA feel like they have lots in common with their mentor (92%), that they get on well with their mentor (100%), that their mentor is there when they need them (100%), and, that they can talk to their mentor about whatever they want (92%). In their caseworker reviews, the vast majority of CYA indicate they take reassurance or comfort from their mentor (95% at six months into their friendship and 96% by two years).

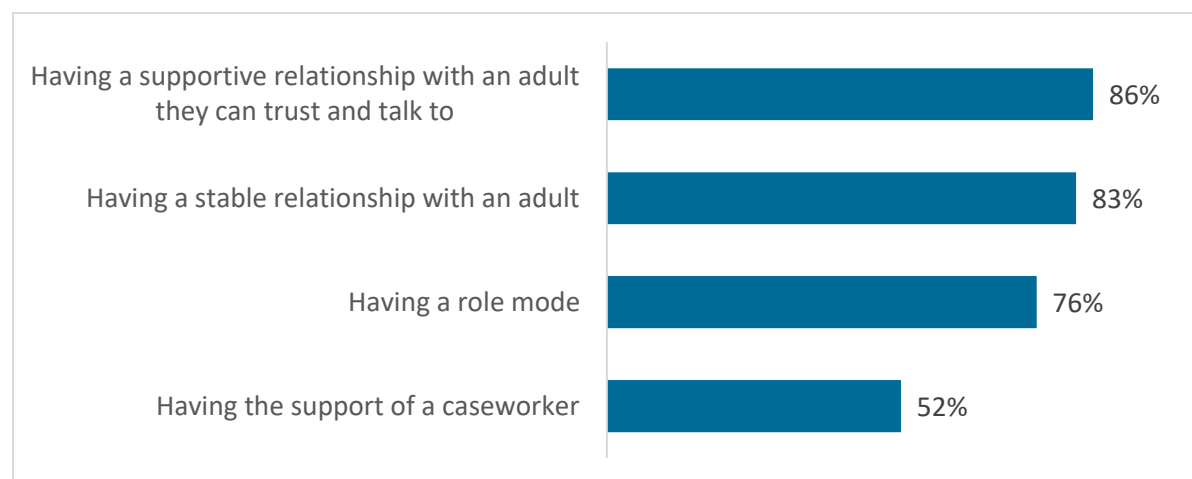
In our interviews with CYA, trust emerged as a key issue. Some had struggled with this in the past with the result that they were reluctant to share their feelings or experiences with others or rely on others for support. Mentors were often the first person in the lives of CYA (maybe outside of immediate family) who they felt that they could trust. It was also striking that CYA and parents not only trusted mentors but also everyone connected with the Friendship Works service. Some CYA, and parents, reflected on how learning to trust one person might make them more willing to try and trust others in future.

“I think it's been important for [my daughter] to see that she's got to know someone new and she [the mentor] is nice, so maybe not everyone's bad like she seems to think”
(Parent)

Mentors, in our survey, indicated that the most important aspect of their work with CYA (Figure 6.2) was that they offered a supportive relationship and were someone that the CYA could trust and talk to (86% felt that this was beneficial/very beneficial) and that their relationship was stable (83% felt that this was beneficial/very beneficial).

²⁵ Based on 25 responses

Figure 6.2: Mentor views on how beneficial different aspects of the service are for CYAs (% stating the item is beneficial/very beneficial)



Source: Survey of mentors (Jan to Feb 2022), based on 27 responses

6.3 Relationships with parents

Parents also have a positive view of the friendships as evidenced by their caseworker review data. This shows that at both six months and two years into the friendship all parents either agreed or strongly agreed that the mentor was respectful to them and other family members; easy to make or change arrangements with; and, someone they could talk to about their child if they needed to. All parents also agreed or strongly agreed that they were happy with the quality of friendship between their child and the mentor. In addition, six months into the friendship, three-quarters of parents agreed/strongly agreed that their child talked to the mentor about things that were important to them and eight out of ten agreed/strongly agreed that their child talked to the mentor about their feelings. Generally, mentors also indicate in their caseworker reviews that they have good relationships with family members, for example:

"I'm satisfied with our relationship – I can appreciate the challenges Mum faces. I feel she is good with me – she has been complimentary and considerate." (Mentor during caseworker review)

"Nice relationship, we want the same thing for T so we're on the same page. It's fine friendly and supportive." (Mentor during caseworker reviews)

However, some families could struggle to adjust to the changes that having a mentor in their child's life made. Several mentors discussed the issues they were having working with the parents of the CYA they had befriended who had their own problems and issues. For example, one mentor had run into difficulties with a mother who felt alienated by the burgeoning relationship the mentor had with their child. This led to the mother attempting to disrupt the friendship. Managing this relationship could be challenging and managing areas of conflict was one area where some mentors felt they could benefit from additional support.

6.4 The effects of the pandemic on friendships

Most mentors and CYA did not feel that moving to remote support had negatively affected their friendship because they already had well-established relationships. Many mentors and CYA found positives during this time such as the flexibility of remote communications, and more focused interactions without the distractions of activities. Some friendships became less transactional - the CYAs displayed more interest in their mentor and increased empathy for others. Remote contact meant that the CYA got an insight into the mentor's life and how they were managing the lockdown. A small minority of friendships, however, became more distant.

Some mentors had been required to deal with 'crisis' situations – serious incidents, safeguarding issues and worsened mental health for their CYA. Where this was the case, mentors had attempted to work through these issues with their mentees drawing on the support of caseworkers. Mentors also faced a range of personal challenges during lockdowns, such as their own anxiety levels and other stressors, which could also make maintaining friendships difficult.

A small number of mentors would have liked more support to equip them to manage their friendship under these very difficult circumstances. They had found it challenging to display creativity and maintain a positive approach to sustaining friendships. Those who struggled to adapt said they felt that Friendship Works had been too slow to react, despite how rapidly the service moved online. However, 90% of mentors (in our online consultation) agreed or strongly agreed that they received sufficient support from the team at Friendship Works during the pandemic.

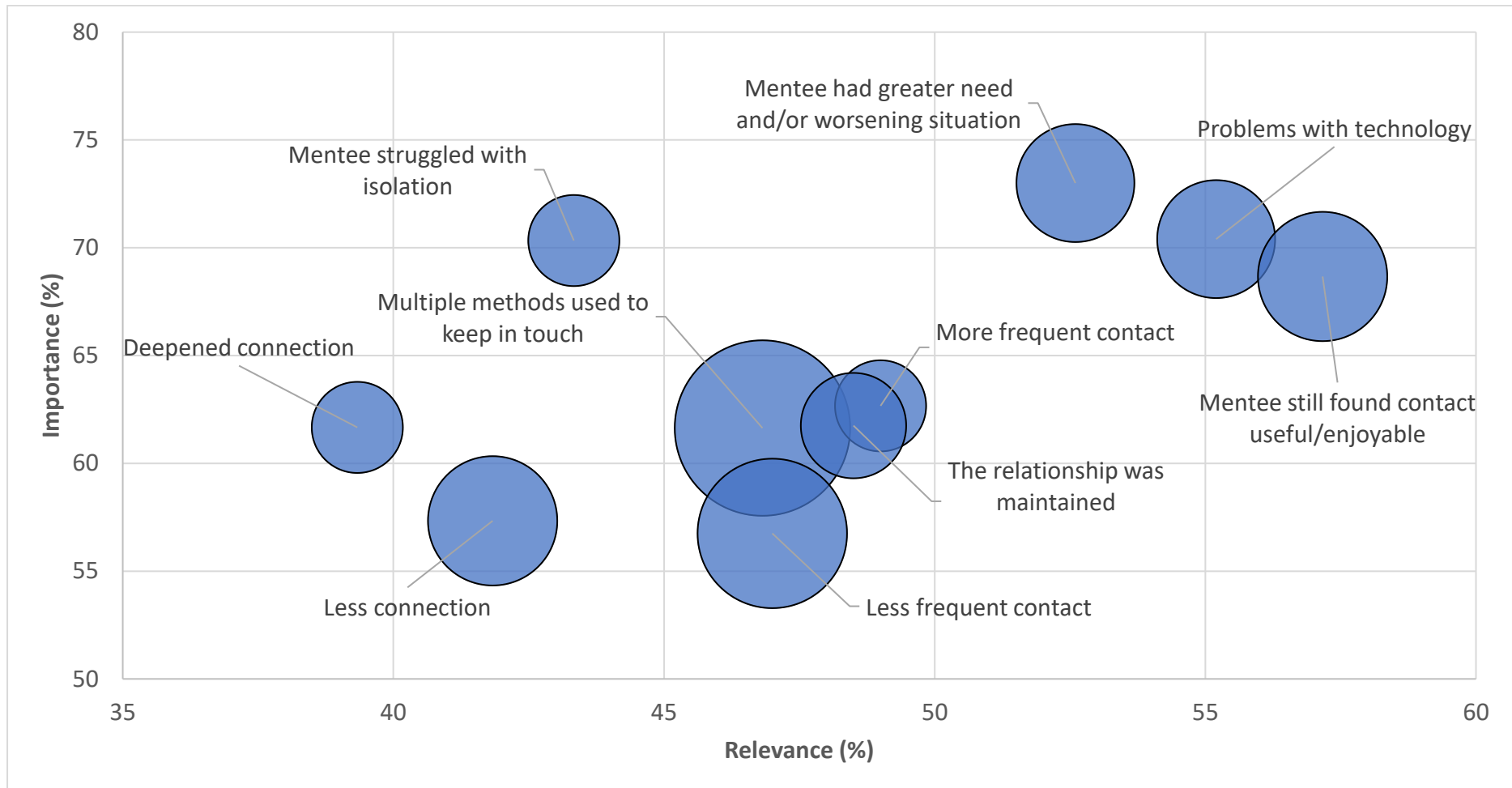
In our online consultation with mentors during the pandemic, we asked them about their experiences throughout this period. They were asked an open question:

Please tell us about your experiences of mentoring during the pandemic: What difference has mentoring made to your young person during this time? What challenges have you helped them with? What has been different about your friendship compared to normal?

After providing their own response mentors were also asked to score the comments of other mentors out of 100 in terms of how important they were to CYA and how relevant they were to their own experiences. We categorised the comments mentors provided into the main issues and then used their ratings to give each issue a 'score'. This score was based on how much mentors felt a) the issue reflected their own experiences (its relevance), and b) how important they felt that issue was for CYA involved in the service (its importance). A plot of these scores is presented in Figure 6.3. When reading this diagram consider that i) the bigger the bubble the more people mentioned that issue, ii) the closer the bubble is to the top right-hand corner, the more highly rated (and therefore the more relevant and important) mentors considered that issue to be. Figure 6.4 also provides a range of the responses provided by mentors that received the highest ratings.

Mentors discussed a range of different issues, with a split between those who discussed their relationships in the pandemic resulting in them feeling less connected to their mentee and those who felt more connected. The highest-rated issues were those which highlighted the greater needs of CYA at this time, difficulties using technology to support a remote relationship, but also that mentees still found contact with their mentor enjoyable and/or useful despite a move away from face-to-face meetings.

Figure 6.3 Mentor ratings of issues affecting friendships during the pandemic



Source: Online consultation of mentors, Jan to Feb 2021 (38 responses)

Figure 6.4: Responses from mentors about friendships during the pandemic (most highly rated quotes from an online consultation)

"I've found it really difficult to maintain a relationship. My young person prefers to meet face-to-face, and I don't know if she's got much out of things during the pandemic."

"It's not been ideal. He much prefers me to see him in person. I've tried to stay in touch and that's worked out OK for the most part but we're looking forward to getting together again."

"Contact has been over WhatsApp rather than in person but we've kept in touch well. Because we've been matched for three years, we had a strong foundation already in place."

"We've kept things going. We do much more by phone, but we stay in touch. I check in more often, but our meetings are much shorter."

"It has been more difficult to engage with my young person because they don't have access to a secure internet connection. But we have managed to stay connected over the phone. He needs a lot of support right now because he is going through a really hard time at home."

"Mostly we have spoken on the phone. we've done some activities by videocall - but these have been few and far between. I live quite far from my mentee and therefore the travel restrictions have meant that I haven't seen my mentee much as we have been told not to take public transport."

"Over the course of lockdown, we decided to hold weekly video calls. I gave the mentee the choice of frequency, but he was keen that it be weekly (even though our outings were only monthly). We have now resumed physical outings monthly. I have been impressed by my mentee's resilience - dealing with school remotely while not quite having sufficient technology. I have learnt the value in just being available to chat. Last week he said ""I can't remember the last time I laughed...""."

"Communication has been via WhatsApp, texting, or phone calls. Not being able to see my mentee has been a strange feeling. I've learnt that my mentee still needs that outlet and values our time together."

"It's been a challenging time, my mentee has felt really low and isolated at times and although phone calls have helped a bit, I've noticed an improvement in her mood when we have been able to meet face to face."

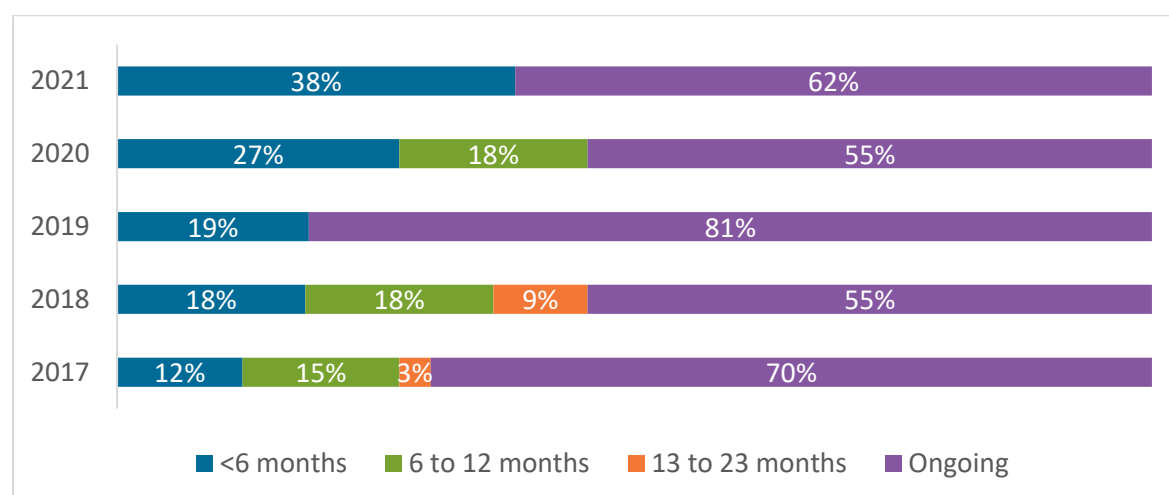
6.5 The end of friendships

The ideal situation for a friendship established through Friendship Works is that both parties stay in contact for at least two years. The process of ending a match is carefully managed as the end of friendships can be difficult for some CYA and/or their families. In cases where the mentor wants to stop meeting the CYA, at (or beyond) the two-year mark this is discussed in advance with the CYA and caseworkers are involved to support both parties through a

managed process of withdrawal. As already discussed, (see Chapter 5) the average length of friendships was two years or even much longer.

There has been an increase in the proportion of friendships ending in their first six months since the start of the pandemic (Figure 6.5). This is likely to reflect challenges for caseworkers in making matches remotely and difficulties in sustaining some matches via a remote delivery model. However, the greater needs and complex backdrop for those being referred during this difficult time are also likely to play a part.

Figure 6.5: Duration of matches by match start date



Source: Friendship Works records (Jan 2017 to Jan 2022), based on 117 matches (33 from 2017, 33 from 2018, 27 from 2019, 11 from 2020 and 13 from 2021)

During interviews with mentors, the main reasons they observed for these premature endings were difficulties engaging CYA during the pandemic - remote engagement methods simply did not suit everyone. It is therefore likely that the duration of friendships will return to normal now that COVID-19 related restrictions are removed.

Matches ending early were thought, by mentors and caseworkers, to be particularly likely for:

- CYA who find remote engagement difficult (as they have difficult home circumstances, lack of technology access, SEND)
- 'Newer matches' where the relationship had not been fully established before the pandemic
- CYA who see the main benefits from the service for them as the activities they access through it.

Case study 1 provides an overview of some of the reasons why friendships come to an end at two years rather than continuing. The circumstances of the mentor or mentee can change and/or the young person mature or develop so that they no longer need a mentoring relationship. In some ways this is as much a successful outcome as a longer-lasting friendship being in place - each friendship is different.

Case study 1 - the natural end to a friendship

Rhianne was matched with Emma six months before the pandemic. Rhianne's homelife was turbulent, she did not get on well with her Mum or older sister and was carer for her two younger siblings. Her school referred her to Friendship Works as she was disruptive and demotivated there, plus she found school difficult due to her additional learning needs. Everyone felt she would benefit from some time to herself out of the family home and a break from her responsibilities.

The pair bonded well. Despite the reports from her school, Emma found Rhianne to be a generous, thoughtful 14-year-old. They built a good rapport and spent their time together going to cafes to play board games or visiting museums and immersive events. Rhianne found their meetings fun and started to open up to Emma about her life.

When lockdown was announced it was clear Rhianne was going to struggle with being shut in her home environment. Emma tried to stay in touch, but Rhianne didn't like using social media or video calls and found text messages difficult because of her literacy issues. Emma sent games and letters to her house to try and engage Rhianne, but it was all very one-way.

Rhianne's issues at home worsened and she ended up leaving home, moving in with relatives and finally moving back in with her dad. There she had no responsibilities, there was no friction with her mum, and she spent more time with her friends.

Mentors were still not allowed to meet up with their mentee in indoor spaces once the lockdown eased. Emma and Rhianne met up outdoors, but Rhianne was often not properly dressed for being outside in Winter, so was cold and found the experience unpleasant. When she asked to meet in cafes Emma had to tell her that was not possible and Rhianne didn't like the fact that she could no longer make the decisions about their meetings. At this point she started reacting towards Emma as she did with the Social Workers she was now in touch with, rather than seeing Emma as a friend.

At the end of the two years of their match, Emma offered to continue meeting Rhianne, but Rhianne did not want to. Emma feels the match may have continued if they had built up a stronger bond before COVID-19 disruptions and if they could have met inside. She acknowledges that things had also changed in Rhianne's life, and she'd reached an age where she wanted to spend more time with friends. The relationship coming to an end may therefore not have all been due to the pandemic.

Despite the challenges involved, Emma enjoyed the experience and is looking forward to being matched with another CYA.

7 The difference Friendship Works makes

Friendship Works aims to be a positive influence on the lives of participating young people. In this chapter, we examine the available evidence on how the service affects those involved. However, assessing the impact of mentoring services is difficult. The mentoring relationship is just one small part of the CYA's lives and may be the only reliable and stable influence amongst personal circumstances that are constantly changing. As we have already discussed, overlaying these difficulties for the last two years has also been the myriad of effects of the pandemic on all aspects of life in the UK.

It is therefore important to have realistic expectations about the scale and type of impact the service can measure, what aspects of young people's lives it can influence, and the degree to which the impact of the service can be disentangled from other influences. Measuring 'hard' or longer-term outcomes such as educational achievement, reductions in criminal behaviour or economic prospects, lie beyond the scope of this evaluation, as does a robust impact assessment which would require a control or comparator group. Instead, we rely on the views and experiences of those involved in the service to gauge what they feel the service achieves.

7.1 Multi-faceted effects

How the service affects the lives of those participating is multi-faceted, with many areas of impact difficult to pick apart.

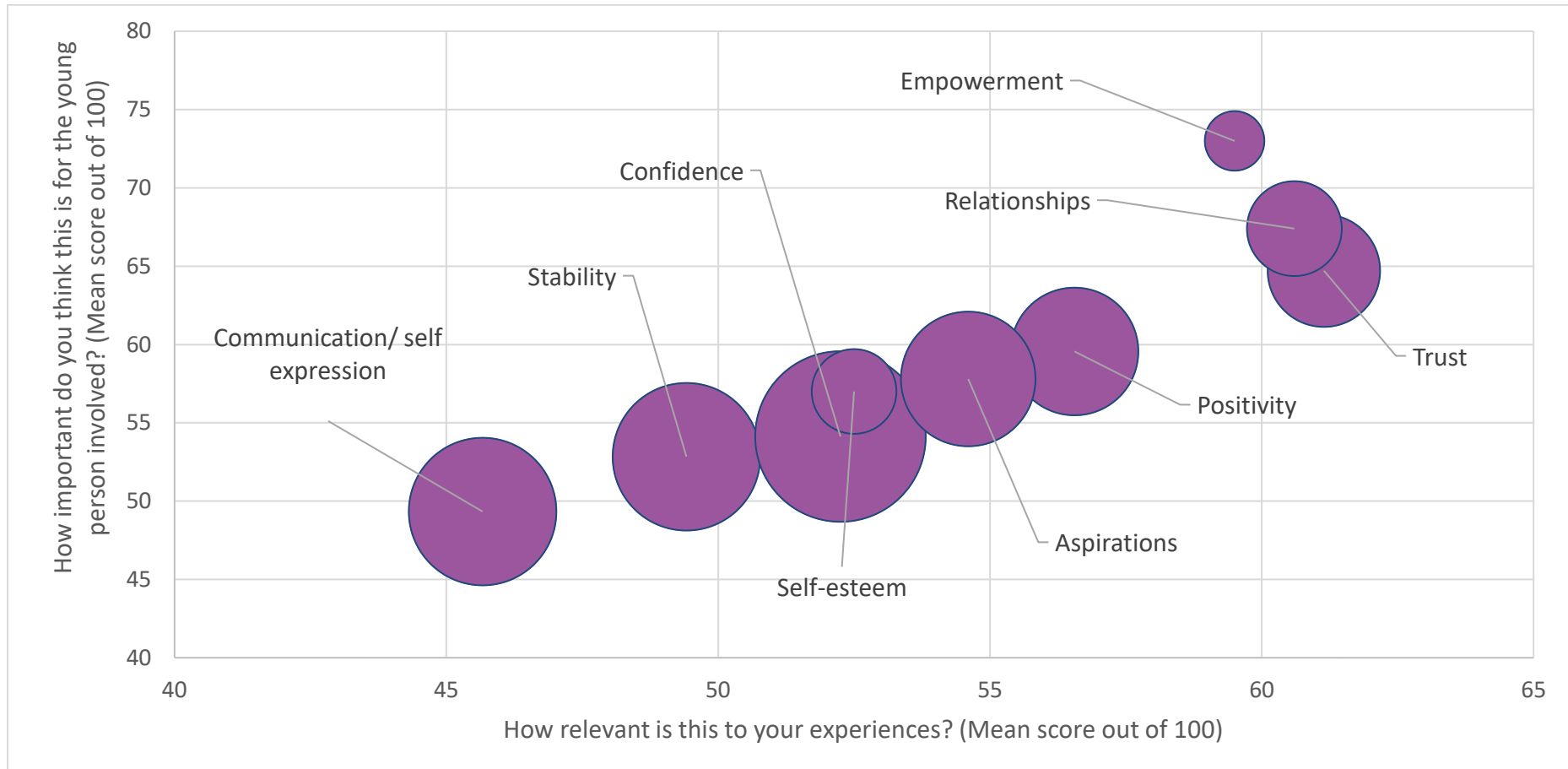
Online consultation of mentors at the end of 2019, asked them to reflect on what they saw as the impact of the mentoring process on the CYA they had worked with. They were asked to respond to the following question in their own words:

How do you think the mentoring process and relationship built through Friendship Works makes a difference in the lives of the young people involved? What affects them and why? What has changed for them and why do you think that's happened?

Responses were analysed to identify key themes. Mentors discussed the importance of them providing a stable and supportive presence, bringing a level of positivity into the lives of CYA, and offering them a new way to view the world through the experiences, opinions, and behaviours that they share. These aspects of the mentoring relationship led to a range of perceived positive outcomes for their matches. Mentors had observed that CYA demonstrated increased trust, confidence, self-esteem, and aspirations, also that due to the friendship they now had a greater ability to process their feelings, deal with challenges and express themselves. Mentors reported that this meant that the CYA were happier, had improved family relationships and had a stronger sense of their own identity.

Having categorised the comments mentors provided into the main issues, we then used their ratings to give each issue a 'score'. This score was based on how much mentors felt a) the issue reflected their own experiences (its relevance), and b) how important they felt that issue was for CYA involved in the service (its importance). A plot of these scores is presented in Figure 7.1. When reading this diagram consider that i) the bigger the bubble the more people mentioned that issue, ii) the closer the bubble is to the top right-hand corner, the more highly rated (and therefore the more relevant and important) mentors considered that issue to be.

Figure 7.1: Mentor ratings of the impacts they think the service has



Source: online consultation with mentors Dec 2019 to Jan 2020 (based on 35 responses)

This graph reveals that the most common issues raised were the impact of the service on CYA's confidence and communication/self-expression and the importance of a stable relationship for those involved. The highest-rated comments referred to:

- How the service was able to empower CYA
- The ability of the service to help CYA form and improve their relationships
- The trust that develops between the CYA and their mentor leads to a wider ability to trust others
- The role of mentors as a positive influence in the CYA's lives provides reinforcement and encouragement.

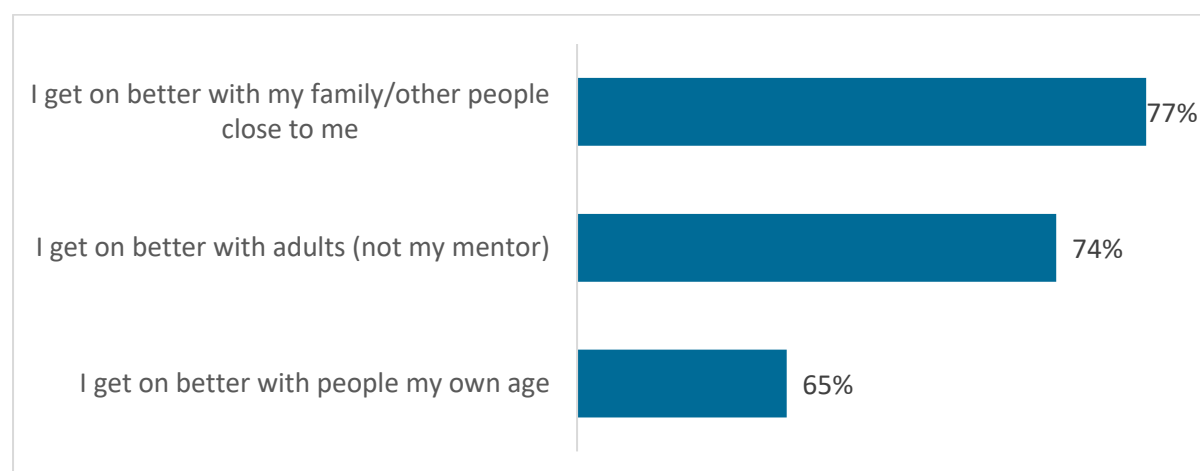
Thus mentors see a wide range of different impacts on the young people they work with. The rest of this chapter considers other evidence about some of these specific areas.

7.2 Relationships and social skills

Providing a positive relationship for CYA is central to the Friendship Works approach. Not only does this bring direct benefits from having a trusted and reliable adult in their lives, but it can also have a further positive effect on the CYA's other relationships.

There is evidence that the service does have an impact in this area, and certainly, many of the CYA involved have observed this about themselves. Evidence is available from CYA caseworker reviews, during which almost half of CYA stated that they now talked to other people more on their outings with their mentor (43% reported this after six months whilst 50% reported this after two years of their friendship). Similarly, in our survey of CYAs, two-thirds agreed or strongly agreed that they felt they had gotten better at talking to people. Further evidence from this survey demonstrates that CYA also feel that their relationships with others have improved since participating in the service (Figure 7.2). Around three-quarters of CYA feel that since meeting with their mentor they get on better with their family and that they get on better with adults other than their mentor, whilst around two-thirds stated feel they now get on better with people their own age.

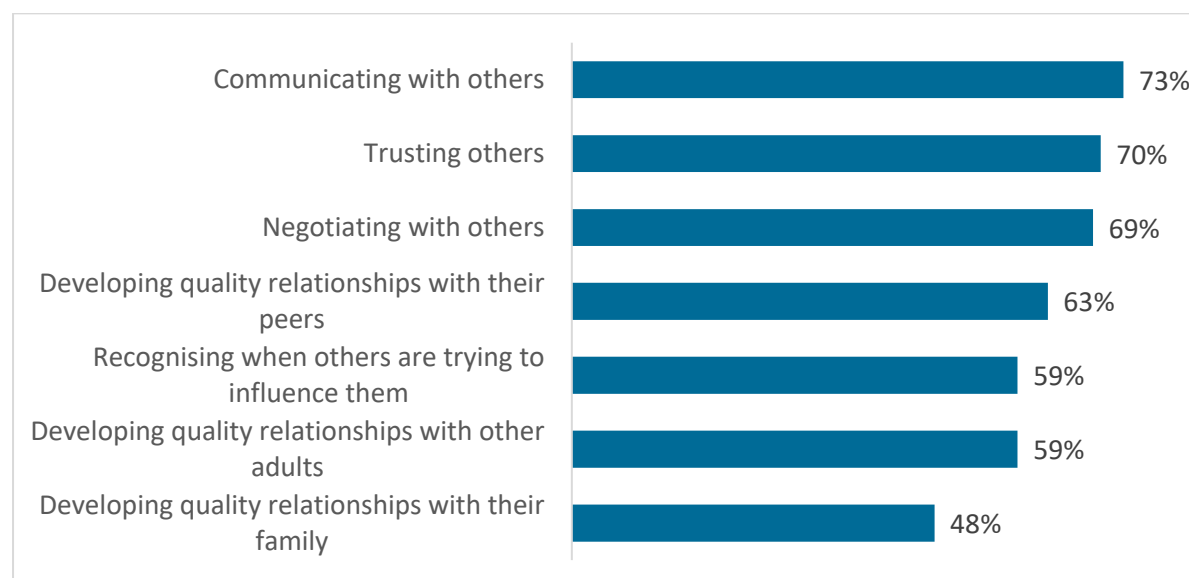
Figure 7.2: CYA views on changes in their relationships since they started meeting with their mentor (% agreeing/strongly agreeing with each statement)



Source: Survey of CYA (Jan to Feb 2022), based on 25 responses

This view is shared by mentors (Figure 7.3) with over two-thirds indicating in our survey that they felt the CYA they have befriended has become better at communicating with, trusting, and negotiating with others since they first started meeting. Six out of ten mentors indicated that they felt their CYA had become better at developing peer relationships, relationships with adults and recognising the influence of others. Just under half of the mentors felt that their CYA's family relationships had improved.

Figure 7.3: Mentor views on how their mentee's relationships have changed since they first started meeting (% agreeing/strongly agreeing that their mentees are now better at each item)



Source: Survey of mentors (Jan to Feb 2022), based on 27 responses

Parents also saw improvements in the relationships and social skills of their children from being involved in the service. Caseworker reviews with parents reveal that three quarters agree/strongly agree that their child talked to other people more than they used to after six months on the service and nine out of ten agree/strongly agree that their child could keep conversations going and listen to other people for longer after six months on the service. In addition, two-thirds of parents (65%) felt that, by six months, their child had more friendships out of school since having a mentor, with this figure increasing to almost three-quarters of parents by two years into the friendship (72%).

Similar themes emerged in our interviews with CYA, some of whom reported that they had become better able to make new friends and/or leave behind peer relationships that were a negative influence (e.g. because they exposed the CYA to risk-taking behaviours). Having a friendship with a trusted adult outside of the family also provided CYA with a different perspective on their lives. Advice from mentors was often more trusted than those of family or existing friends because it was seen as being without self-interest - the mentor was solely motivated by their positive aspirations for the CYA. Suggestions made by the mentor about developing positive friendships were, therefore, more likely to be acted upon.

"It's not something I've aimed for but as he's discussed some of his friendships with me I think it's become clear to him that they're not necessarily that healthy. And as he's

developed his self-belief a bit more it's been noticeable that he's been able to move away from them a bit more" (Mentor)

"A lot of my friends we would go out drinking and do very reckless things. The friends I have now we play badminton, Frisbee or get meals. Quite nice. Different friends" (Mentee)

"My mum used to tell me you shouldn't be friends with these people. They are bad for you. [The mentor] ended up telling me after everything happened that I shouldn't be friends with them again. I know if my mum told me that I would not listen. I see [the mentor] more like a friend that's trying to give me advice." (Mentee)

During interviews with CYA, they all reported that spending time with their mentors had improved their confidence and the parents we spoke to agreed. As CYAs became more confident they were then more willing to speak to people and try to develop new friendships. Several CYA also described how having a mentor had helped improve their communication skills so that not only were they more prepared to talk to new people, but they were also more capable of talking to people about their feelings or experiences.

"I would now try and talk to someone at school about how I was feeling" (Mentee)

7.3 Life skills

Another area of impact of the service is on life skills. Our surveys of both CYA and their mentors indicate that CYA had developed a range of life skills since participating in the service (Figures 7.4 and 7.5).

Nine out of ten CYA indicated in our survey that they feel like they have got better at turning up on time and being reliable, four out of five feel they have got better at thinking about the pros and cons of different actions, almost three quarters feel like they have got better at planning things like travel and money, three quarters feel they have got better at looking for the positive in a situation and two-thirds feel they are better at keeping calm when things go wrong. Caseworker reviews with CYA also show that 60% feel better able to solve problems, and 70% feel more confident making decisions, since taking part in the service. Most mentors had also observed, as indicated by our survey, that the CYA were now more competent in a range of skills from expressing their opinions (85%) to planning travel and budgeting (64%).

Whilst mentors and CYA are both positive about the impact of the programme on life skills, there was a particular discrepancy concerning perceived planning abilities. These, and other variations between the mentor and CYA view are, we believe, likely to be related to:

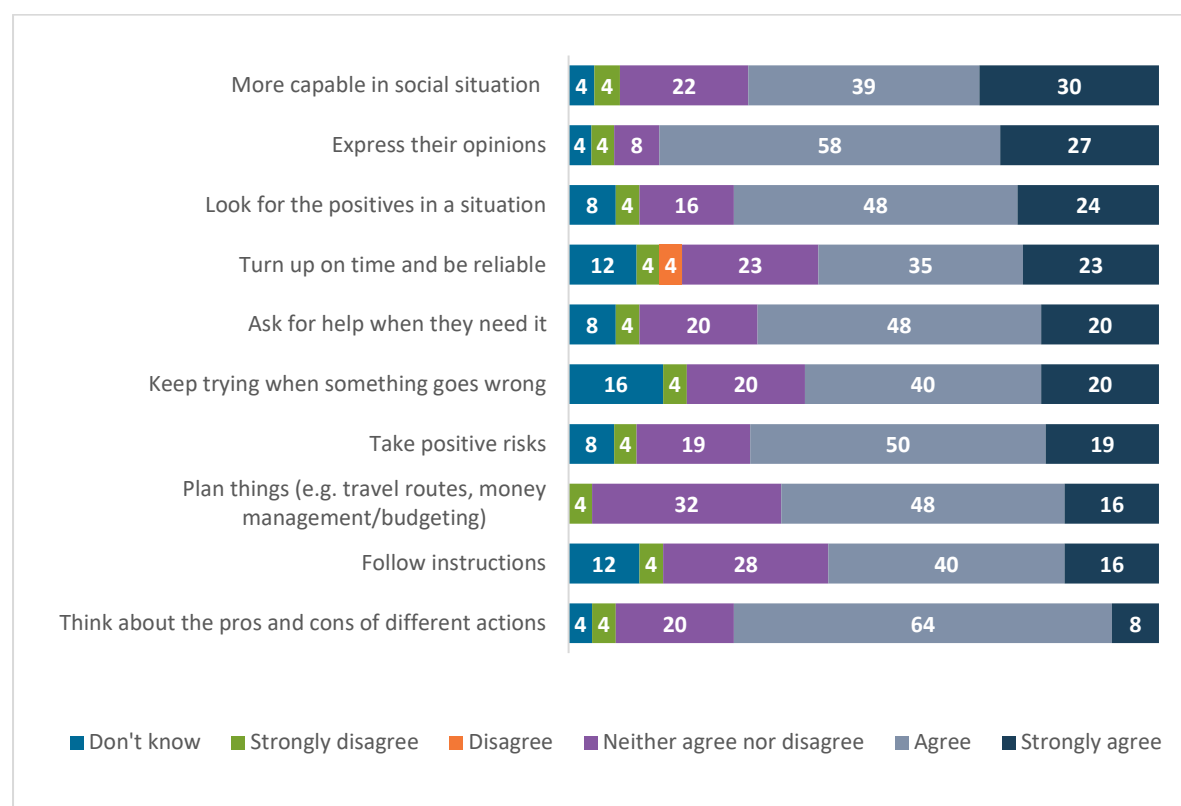
- CYAs still often lead chaotic lives and/or SEND. Friendship Works does not aim to fix this, so it is perhaps not surprising that mentors do not observe as much improvement in their mentees in terms of organisational skills as the mentees describe.
- Mentors only see their mentees in one aspect of their lives. It may be that CYAs are displaying greater organisation when not with their mentor. In interviews, CYA describe feeling more responsible and having a good role model thanks to the programme which is likely to be reflected in their positive survey responses.
- Sampling issues. The mentors and mentees are not matched so mentor views may be about a wider range of CYA than those who responded to our survey. This could

mean that the CYA providing data felt that their life skills had improved but across a wider range of CYA this may be less likely to be the case.

Interviews with mentors and CYA suggest that going out into the world with a trusted adult is at the root of the life skill changes that have occurred. By observing how their mentor interacts with other people, CYA have positive behaviours modelled. Similarly, being challenged to interact in new and different ways and environments, but with support, have all positively affected CYAs.

Perhaps due to the development of these life skills, 53% of mentors, when surveyed, felt it was likely/very likely that the CYA they had befriended would be better equipped to deal with life's challenges after taking part in the service.

Figure 7.4: Extent to which mentors agree that because of their involvement in Friendship Works and their friendship, the young person they mentor is better able to demonstrate certain life skills



Source: Survey of mentors (January to February 2022), based on 27 responses

Figure 7.5: CYA views on the changes they have experienced to their life skills since first meeting with their mentor (% saying 'yes' to each statement)

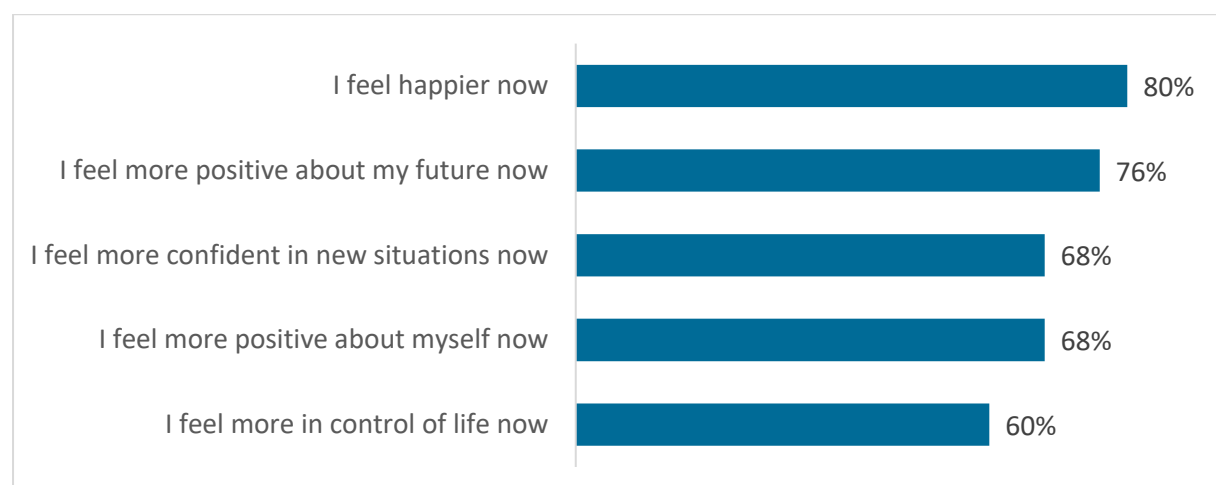


Source: Survey of CYA (January to February 2022), based on 25 responses

7.4 Wellbeing

A range of evidence suggests that Friendship Works has a positive impact on the well-being of CYA involved. Survey data demonstrates that the majority of CYA feel that they have a more positive outlook on life since taking part in the service (Figure 7.6). Compared to when they first met with their mentor, around four out of five feel happier now and are more positive about their futures, whilst around two-thirds now feel more confident and more positive about themselves. Mentors share this view. In our survey of mentors, 86% agreed or strongly agreed that CYA have improved their social and emotional well-being since the start of the friendship and 66% agree or strongly agree that the CYA is now a happier person.

Figure 7.6: CYA views on the changes they have experienced to their well-being since first meeting with their mentor (% saying 'yes' to each statement)



Source: Survey of CYA (January to February 2022), based on 25 responses

Another source of data is caseworker reviews. Service protocols require caseworkers to assess the well-being of each CYA during all reviews using the Stirling Children's Well-being Scale (SCWBS). This tool was developed as a holistic, positively worded measure of emotional and psychological well-being for use with children aged between eight and 15 years. It measures children's well-being and emotional development using a robust 12 item scale. Analysis of the Stirling Scale traditionally splits responses into two main scales (each with a possible maximum score of 30), one which draws together items relating to the CYA's emotional state and a second which draws together items relating to their outlook.

The average score (out of a possible 60²⁶) for all CYA with complete SCWBS scores²⁷ (38 individuals) was 45 at the six-month stage of their friendships (in line with the scale's recorded norm score of 44²⁸).

Complete SCWBS data were available for 27 CYA at both the six-month stage and a later point (at two years if this was available, or 1 year if not) in their friendship. Our analysis of data for these individuals showed that there was an overall fall in average well-being scores between six months and the later time point (from 45.5 to 43.3 on average). This was driven by a reduction in the scores provided for emotional state (from 23.8 to 20.4 on average). In contrast, the average score provided for CYA's outlook increased slightly (from 22.6 to 23.0).

These results show that even though the individual circumstances and situations of young people have not improved over time (indicated by their worsening emotional state), they are, on average, able to maintain or enhance their positive view of life (indicated by the improved or maintained outlook scores). Friendship Works appears, as evidenced through the testimonies of those we interviewed, to be a supportive factor in helping CYA to maintain a positive outlook despite the challenges they face.

7.5 Self-reflection, self-belief, and self-worth

Another area that the service aims to influence is how CYA feel about themselves. There is evidence that the service has a positive influence on participants' feelings of self-belief and self-worth and that it improves their ability to reflect on their feelings and those of others.

Mentors indicated in our survey that they believed that the CYA they have befriended had developed more confidence, a stronger sense of identity, become more empowered, increased their self-esteem, and developed a greater feeling of self-worth (Figure 7.7). Mentors also feel that CYAs have enhanced their ability to manage and cope with their emotions and those of others (Figure 7.8). For example, just over two-thirds of mentors agree or strongly agree that the CYA have improved their ability to understand their own

²⁶ Based on 38 responses.

²⁷ 'Complete' in this context means that individuals received a rating for all items on the Stirling Scale at two time points.

²⁸ The norm is the mean score recorded for the scale when it was originally developed with children and young people. This norm is based on the responses of school children from across schools in the Scotland who can be considered to represent a 'normal' population of CYA. See <http://www.friendsforlifescotland.org/site/SCWBS%20Report.pdf> for further details of the development of the Stirling scale and associated norms.

feelings and explain their feeling to others since being on the service. These improvements may also be linked to CYA's ability to cope with challenges.

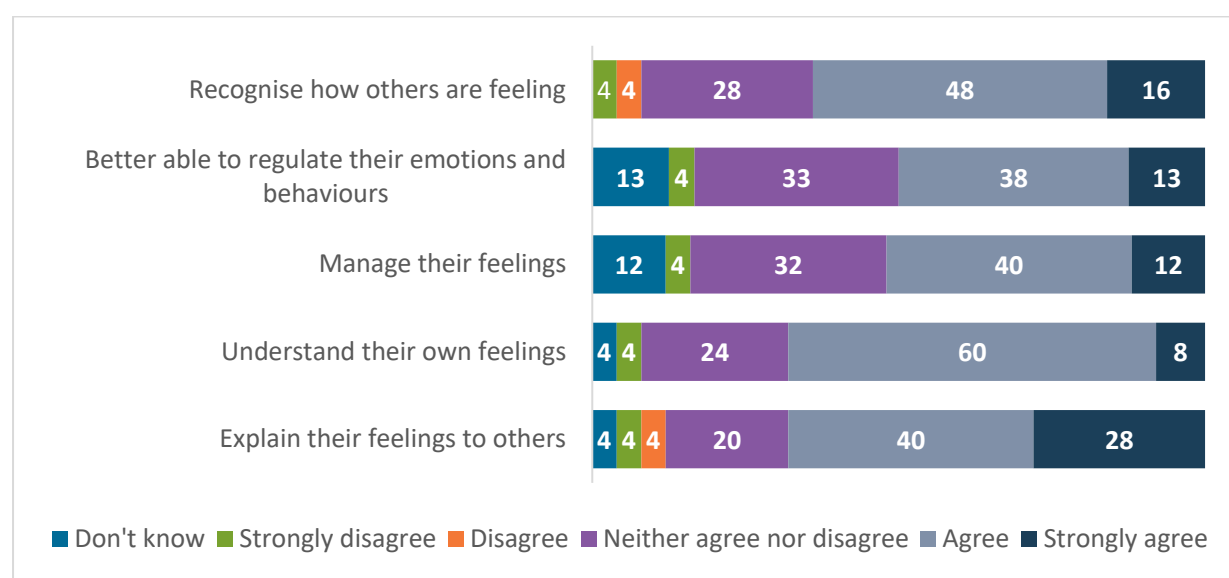
Parents also observed impacts on how their children felt about themselves. Data from caseworker reviews shows that by six months into the friendship, three out of five parents (61%) agreed or strongly agreed that their child was less negative about themselves than they used to be.

Figure 7.7: CYA development of self-worth and self-belief. Extent to which mentors agree that, since the start of their friendship, the CYA they had befriended had...(%)



Source: Survey of mentors (Jan to Feb 2022), based on 25 responses

Figure 7.8: CYA enhancements to their ability to manage feelings. Extent to which mentors agree that, since the start of their friendship, the CYA they had befriended were...(%)



Source: Survey of mentors (January to February 2022), based on 27 responses

CYAs identified these benefits during interviews, saying that their mentors give them a sense of self-belief and help to build their confidence. CYA also spoke about how having a mentor had had a positive impact on their behaviour. Many of them discussed how they were more able to deal with issues that arose, didn't feel so unhappy all the time and that the ability to talk to someone had made them calmer and less stressed.

"Talking with [the mentor] calms me and that makes me better for the rest of the week"
(Mentee)

"She taught me that when I get angry I need to take deep breaths and I do that. It gives me stress relief. It calms me down" (Mentee)

"When I talk things through with [the mentor] it makes me see sense and gives me reassurance. She listens and so it stops me having the problems I did before and damaging my head" (Mentee)

Although mentors often attributed the development of self-belief and self-worth in mentees to them getting older, mentees were quite clear that being part of the service was a significant contributor to this. CYA began to feel that they might have worth because someone was listening to them, investing time in them, treating them well and taking them out to have fun.

"She doesn't have to spend time with me. She doesn't have to like me. But she does and she says that's because she thinks I'm nice and interesting and we have fun together".
(Mentee)

"Having a mentor has made me feel more positive in myself because I suffer from anxiety disorder and every other mental health that I've been diagnosed with. Meeting [my mentor] has helped me to see the positivity in myself and boost my self-esteem in things that I thought I couldn't do". (Mentee)

7.6 Aspirations and life chances

Another area Friendship Works aims to influence is the life chances that young people have access to. There is some evidence that being involved in the service leads to CYA developing greater aspirations and expectations about their lives. Mentors, CYA and parents all indicate that this is the case.

In our mentor survey, 79% agreed/strongly agreed that, since the start of their friendship, the CYA they befriended had raised their aspirations. In their reviews with caseworkers 91% of CYA state that, six months into their friendships they have high hopes for their future. In parent reviews, around half (44% by two years into the friendship) say that having a mentor has influenced their child's decisions about their future.

During interviews, older CYA spoke about how having a mentor had made them assess their futures, next steps, and choices. Mentors were having conversations with them about the value of education and factors to consider in making choices around school, college, and university. In addition, when asked about their future, CYA often cited the activities they had done with their mentors as having inspired them.

"I'm definitely doing better with my courses. I made a mistake in school and sixth form in thinking it's about your class. It's really not. I wouldn't show up and I'd go with my

friends on different fun days out and skip class. Now it's all about getting the best grade possible so I can get into the best school possible.” (Mentee)

Case study two highlights how mentors can support CYA to identify and take life chances.

Case study 2 - Supporting a positive future

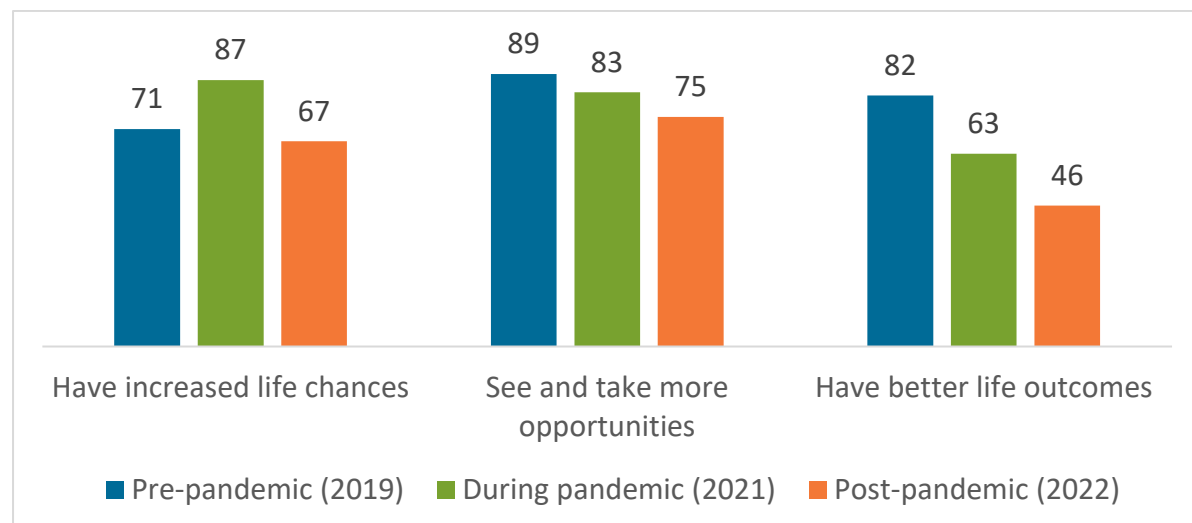
One match made during lockdown involved Alice, a 24-year-old care leaver, whose state services had been withdrawn. Alice had a good friendship network already but had requested being matched to someone with whom they could explore gender and issues they were experiencing around being a transgender lesbian. Alice was also taking their first steps into a career and so wanted the support of an older person, with similar life experiences who they could talk to about work and gender and try out new activities.

The service matched them with Rowan, a female mentor from the LGBTQ community. Rowan played the role of a wise, older friend. They'd meet up with Alice to play board games, chat and arrange occasional days out. The mentor plugged a specific gap that Alice had identified in their life by acting as a sounding board. Through their friendship, Alice started to access therapy and raise issues about their care history. Rowan also helped Alice understand the application process for jobs and then start to take positive steps into work.

The two online consultations with mentors, and our later mentor survey all asked the same three questions about the potential of the service to affect the future lives of participating CYA (Figure 7.9). This reveals two main points:

1. Mentors are positive about the potential of the service to improve CYA's futures. Our latest data shows that two-thirds of mentors feel that the CYA they have befriended will have increased life chances, three-quarters that they will see and take more opportunities and just under half that they will have better life outcomes having taken part in the service.
2. The views of mentors appear to have become less positive over time. The three data points do not include data from the same individuals, so we are not tracking responses over time as we might do ideally. However, this data suggests that mentor views have been negatively affected by the pandemic, particularly their perceptions of CYA life outcomes (82% of mentors we surveyed in 2019 agreed the service had the potential to improve life chances, compared to 46% in 2022). This is, however, likely to reflect views on the economic backdrop to the service as much as perceptions about the service itself.

Figure 7.9: Mentor perceptions of the potential of the service to affect the future lives of participating CYA (% indicating they agree/strongly agree that, as a result of the service, CYA will...)



Source: 2019 data is from an online consultation with mentors (35 responses), 2021 data is taken from a second online consultation with mentors (38 responses), 2022 data is taken from a survey of mentors (25 responses)

7.7 Impacts by target groups

An analysis was conducted on the CYA review data to determine if there were any observable differences in the outcomes reported in the reviews and individual CYA characteristics. The number of reviews with complete data for these outcomes items was limited so it was only possible to test for differences according to gender and whether individuals belonged to one of the three core target groups (i.e. care leavers, young carers or unaccompanied asylum seekers) or not. There were no statistically significant differences in terms of either of these characteristics. The *scale* of benefits that CYA draw from the service, therefore, does not appear to be linked to their demographics. However, *how* the service supports individuals is linked entirely to their personal circumstances and needs.

Interviews with caseworkers, for example, provide insights into some of the potential impacts on different types of young people. In particular, service staff have identified some emerging trends for care leavers. They have observed the:

- importance of practical help for this group
- role of the service in helping care leavers overcome loneliness and social isolation due to the loss of support networks after the transition into adulthood
- importance of a relationship-based service in supporting the specific needs of care leavers
- service can reduce risks and increase protective factors²⁹.

²⁹ Protective factors are characteristics associated with a lower likelihood of negative outcomes or that reduce a risk factor's impact.

The care leavers we interviewed felt that the service helped them by giving them a role model and someone they could turn to when they had questions (given they don't have trusted family to consult). This was especially useful as they transitioned to independent living.

"The other day, I was in a really bad way. I was trying to sort out my bed. I was trying to change it and the double sheet just would not fit on the mattress. I already felt crap anyway and I started crying. I spoke to [my mentor] and said, 'I've had a mental breakdown because I couldn't sort out my bed, seriously,' and she just started laughing, so it made me laugh. It didn't make me feel bad, the fact that she was laughing. It made me feel better because I know that it's a silly thing, and she made me see that" (Mentee, care leaver)

"She's been helping me get ready for when I'm going to be living on my own. It's taken me a very long time to get a flat, but finally, it's happened. [My mentor] was helping me to get ready for that. I didn't have that extra support in care." (Mentee, care leaver)

"When you're 18, 19, 20, early 20s, it's a difficult age. You're losing friendships, you're making new friendships, you're losing family, you're making new family and stuff like that. It's really tough, to be honest, and having someone extra that's not a professional and not family, not in your social network as such, it was just really helpful for me to go out, to do things." (Mentee, care leaver)

Amongst the young carers we spoke to, the impact they discussed most commonly was how the service allowed them to be children, giving them a break from home and their responsibilities, and adding some fun into their lives.

"Home involves a lot of responsibility for her. Mum struggles with her mental health and there are three young children in the house that [mentee] has to look after. So although at first, she found it hard to leave them for an hour or two I know from our discussions that she now sees that this is her time, that it's good for her to come out. And my, we do have fun! It's so lovely to see her being able to let go a bit and be an 11-year-old girl" (Mentor)

Although the service has not worked with many unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, it clearly has the potential to support their needs. One individual that we spoke to had received support from their mentor and caseworker to organise their paperwork and manage the process of getting housing, applying to college, and gaining asylum.

"We went through prospectuses together and I talked to him about courses and where might be good to do them. I value his advice. I have no one here to give me that...He has been a help to me with the process of going to court, understanding what is happening, understanding all the paperwork, helping me fill it in correctly, and getting legal advice" (Mentee)

7.8 Impacts during lockdown

As already discussed, (see chapter six), the pandemic has affected friendships in both positive and negative ways. In terms of the specific impacts that mentors have had during the pandemic, there are several areas in which their support appears to have been critical.

The pandemic meant that the mentor and young person had a new, shared experience and that they faced the kinds of issues and struggles the pandemic raised together. In some

cases, the pairings learnt more about each other as a result. The loss of other friendships during this period compared to the continuation of their contact with mentors also made some CYA we spoke to particularly grateful to have a mentor during this time.

During the pandemic mentors were reported by CYA to have:

- prevented isolation
- supported CYA with friendship issues
- helped with the transition to college/new school/work
- given mature advice on how to manage situations
- helped CYA to fill their time
- allowed discussions of private issues and problems
- been a constant person checking up on the CYA.

Case study three describes the importance of the support they received during the pandemic.

Case study 3 - The importance of support during the pandemic

Aisha has had a mentor for 18 months. She is a careleaver who lives on her own. Her mental health issues mean she tends to isolate herself from others and the pandemic and lockdown worsened this. She maintained constant contact with her mentor over this period. Aisha details what benefits having a mentor has brought to her since the start of the pandemic:

"You're always in this dark cloud, especially when you have mental health difficulties. And that was like a thousand times worse when it seemed like the whole world was ending in lockdown. All that on the news, all these rules and me just here with no one. I never really had friends before, and I'm always isolated. I just spent weeks by myself, not going out, not talking to anyone. When I was in a very low state, she was just so supportive when I was feeling down. At least I knew she was there and I could contact her. It was mainly for emotional support. She has been very supportive, as a friend would because this is the first friend I've actually had in my whole entire life. It feels like I have someone there. Having her there was important to me because I don't have anyone else to speak to. I'm a very isolated person, so it has had a big impact on my life.

"I suffer from social anxiety sometimes. There are times when I just don't want to go out and I can't do it, I'm just there shaking. I think going outside is something I wouldn't have done without my mentor, to be honest with you, because the first couple of times it was quite hard for me because I'm not used to going outside. We started off with walks, and then it built up to bigger places. She saw that I had anxiety attacks whilst I was with her, but she handled it really well. It took me time, but having that coping mechanism and working with her through that has helped me to go outside. I don't think I would have done it without her.

I think it's important for everyone to go outside and have a walk. It's helped me to go outside and have a walk, even if it's just around the corner to the shop. It's just helped. It's not as scary as I thought it was. I've also enjoyed a lot more things as well, going outside and seeing really other, different people. It gives me inspiration and ideas."

7.9 Impacts on mentors

Mentors are not the direct focus of the service. However, case study interviews found that mentors reported several personal benefits from their involvement in the service.

Generally, mentors had similar motivations for becoming a mentor, including the desire to:

- volunteer and 'give back'
- be part of a community
- spend time with young people
- help young people facing difficulties – in some cases because they had faced such difficulties themselves - or because they appreciated their own more fortunate circumstances
- be a positive force in the life of a young person.

"I knew I wanted to do some volunteering, to give back. I wanted to do something worthwhile that would help others. I loved the sound of the Friendship Works programme as I knew not all young people had backgrounds as fortunate as mine"
(Mentor)

Initially, mentors were attracted to Family Action and the Friendship Works service because it was a well-established organisation that worked with CYA facing disadvantages. Mentors themselves enjoyed the opportunity to get out and about in London and spend their time engaged in worthwhile activities. Many appreciated the opportunity to spend time with a young person and get to know them. Caseworker reviews with mentors provide examples given by mentors of what they feel they have gained from their friendships with CYA. The resulting comments include:

"A great sense of fun and a new friend. I feel really invested in K's life and it makes me very happy to have completed the two-year commitment, but I couldn't manage not continuing to see K in some capacity." (Mentor caseworker review)

"A personal relationship with a very interesting young man who I think I can help. Although outings are hard work, I do enjoy them. He's engaging and he can be entertaining and interesting and bonkers." (Mentor caseworker review)

"Definitely made me more aware of people's experiences. Before I was so naïve about how isolated people's experiences are. Gained a really good friend in my life, we know each other really well." (Mentor caseworker review)

For some mentors, the experience had provided them with clarity on, or the chance to further develop, their existing skills and experience of working with CYA. A number had solidified their plans due to their experiences through the service, including one deciding to become a foster carer. Some mentors felt that they had become less judgmental, better active listeners and more able to support another person's development. All these things they saw as useful life skills.

When asked what they felt were the key changes they'd experienced personally (in caseworker reviews), the key themes that emerged from mentor's comments were that they had:

- increased their patience, acceptance and understanding of young people and their needs

- developed an enhanced ability to communicate with young people and with people from different backgrounds to their own
- developed new and different skills through the friendship.

7.10 Impact on families

Although Friendship Works has no explicit objective to impact families, the parents we interviewed and their CYA provided examples of how the service had positively affected the whole family and its functioning.

Parents reported in interviews that their child/children were now having fun and were happier individuals as a result. The CYA also had more to talk to their family about after outings with their mentor. Similarly, CYA were now more able to express themselves (even if this was only with the mentor), providing an outlet for their emotions and leading to fewer negative emotions and behaviours in the home. In addition, simply having time away from the home meant that parents and children had a break from one another, with a positive impact on that relationship. Parents with more than one child could also use the time that the mentored CYA spent away from home to spend time with and focus on the needs of their other children.

“She was always with me, always under my feet, always following me round asking questions. I couldn’t even go to the toilet. But now on Saturdays, I have some free time. I’ve even started being able to go out and see my friends now” (Parent)

“I’m not with Mum all the time and getting on her nerves. But also, I’m better at dealing with her because I have someone else to talk to, so we don’t argue so much” (Mentee)

“All of our time was having to be spent on [the CYA], which meant we didn’t have time for our other kids. Now [the CYA] is getting a bit better and slightly less dependent, we can give more focus to the others” (Parent)

“It’s been a Godsend. It’s just relieved the pressure on us a bit, giving us a bit of breathing space as well as her. She now has another person to talk to and to entertain her so not all the pressures on me” (Parent)

7.11 Impact on other services/providers

Stakeholders indicated that the Friendship Works service provided ‘value added’ to their work. Caseworkers were viewed as highly regarded members of the multi-agency team due to their commitment and professionalism.

Stakeholders detailed how Friendship Works staff often have different relationships with CYA and their families than the professionals engaged in their support. As a result, they can offer invaluable insight into the family, their issues, support needs and preferences. They are also able to facilitate a better understanding of what is happening in the lives of CYA. Friendship Works staff are seen as trusted by the families and CYA and so issues are discussed with them in a different way to other members of support staff working with them. This also means that the Friendship Works link person could be best placed to explain things to the CYA and family.

Stakeholders described how Friendship Works caseworkers are privy to all the information about a CYA’s case. However, they respected and valued the fact that this was not shared with mentors. They felt it was important that the service staff were completely informed

but that this knowledge did not cloud the mentors' opinions of the CYA or family they were working with, or mean that they became preoccupied with addressing these issues with the CYA.

Stakeholders felt strongly that the value of the service was that it afforded CYA a break from their home life and the chance to have fun. This was the overriding reason for making referrals to the service. This meant they are referring CYA who have difficult home lives, issues with peers and friendship circles, and who are experiencing emotional and mental health difficulties.

In terms of the benefits they felt the service led to, they saw this opportunity for a break as key, not only for the CYA but also for the rest of their family. Where families were struggling or experiencing difficulties it was often seen as very useful for the parents to have some respite from their full caring responsibilities, by the child being regularly given a safe way to leave the house. Parents were able to trust that their child was being well cared for and having fun, so could have time not worrying about them

"I would say the programme is clearly a 'family level' intervention, not just a child level one as the benefits are clearly felt by parents too, not just for the young person. That's an important factor for me making a referral" (Stakeholder)

Case study 4 – Providing family-wide support

Jan is a single mother of four children. The eldest has behavioural issues and gets into trouble at college and in their community. The middle two both have additional needs – one has communication and mobility issues, meaning they need full-time care and the other has severe Autism, meaning they need watching round the clock. The youngest child has emotional and wellbeing issues. Because of the children's issues the family rarely go out.

All four children have been allocated a mentor each through the Friendship Works service. Each child meets their mentor at the weekend. Sometimes they coordinate so that they are all out at the same time, other times they stagger their outings.

This means that on the occasions when all are out at the same time Mum has time to herself to relax and recharge and get on with the things she needs to without having to care for her children at the same time.

On the times when only some of her children are out with their mentors, Mum feels she has the opportunity to give more attention and time to her other children, who she feels miss out when all of the children are together. It also allows some quieter times in the house, and reduces conflict between the children.

Having mentors for the children therefore benefits Mum, making her better able to parent her children, but also to feel less guilty about 'failing' them because she cannot give them these experiences all the time. The service provides fun for the children that they would not otherwise have access to. This leads to reduced stress within the house and reduced emotional and behavioural issues for all of the children.

Stakeholders also cited the access to increased cultural capital and support for making friendships as key effects of the service.

"I know that the young people I refer to the programme will see their worlds expand"
(stakeholder)

However, they, like the CYA themselves, described how measuring the benefit of the service was difficult. They saw that the aim of the service was in no way to 'fix' a CYA's issues or make them better, but very often to prevent more harm or damage caused by the CYA's circumstances.

"A young person I have on the programme at the minute has a very difficult home environment. I can't say what's got better for her since she's been on the programme because over that time things have got worse at home and her situation is now even more difficult. However, I can say that she would undoubtedly be a much higher safeguarding risk without Friendship Works. She would have no one to talk to, no friends and all of the reasons she was referred to the programme in the first place would have worsened. I can confidently say without the programme I think she would be much more likely to be self-harming, frequently school refusing, getting into more trouble at school and with her peers, and probably would have disengaged from learning altogether. Her confidence and self-care have improved while she's been on the programme and we are much less concerned about risks associated with her emotional wellbeing than we were pre-mentor" (Stakeholder)

7.12 Can the service work with more CYA?

The main comment from those we consulted regarding how the service could be improved was that it should try to work with more CYA. Caseworkers, stakeholders and CYA saw a massive need for this type of service, which is growing all the time, particularly post-pandemic.

"I think it's so beneficial for people who have certain difficulties and needs, and I think they should continue with this sort of thing. I think it'll just help people like me in the future as a whole. It's just such a good thing. It's positive because it just helps. We learn so much from each other, and it helps us build our self-esteem as people going through difficulties. I just think Friendship Works is such a great service, and I think anyone else who joins is just going to have the same experiences. It's just positive. It's very positive."
(Mentee)

Stakeholders felt that the service could potentially be more effective at marketing itself, but could see that increased referrals would put pressure on the service. Mentors felt that the service could recruit more volunteers and suggested ways to do this, for example, through employers/employee engagement services. However, mentors could also see the importance of attracting the 'right' people with the ability to provide the type of support needed and offer the long-term commitment required for the service.

Overall, therefore, there was support for the service to grow, extend its reach and work with more CYA. What was less clear in our discussions was how that should be achieved.

8 How the service brings about change

Having shown what the service does and for whom, it is important to understand *how* respondents believe the service is having these effects.

8.1 The service and approach

A range of key elements of the service and its approach were identified as instrumental in its impacts.

8.1.1 Based on solid principles and support

During interviews, mentors highlighted how they believed that the success of the service is due to its thorough evidence base, the high levels of competence of the Friendship Works staff, and the structure of the service. All mentors spoke highly of the level of support available from service staff and highlighted how this support allows them to perform their role as mentors better than would otherwise be the case.

“They are so clear to set out expectations through the whole process. The supervision is the key as we’ve never done it before, and we need to discuss issues and check we’re on the right track” (Mentor)

“The intention from this thoughtful organization is clear and positive” (Mentor)

“The consistency sounds like nothing. But it’s that that helps maintain an effective mentor role and a productive friendship with the young person” (Mentor)

From the initial induction and interviewing stage, through to the ongoing supervision and support, mentors appreciated the role of the Friendship Works team. Caseworkers are appreciated and seen as someone who checks the friendship is working well but without interfering. Mentors spoke very highly about the strength of their relationship with the caseworker. Mentors felt well trained, well informed about their CYA and well supported throughout the friendship.

“The CYA I work with has dreadful things going on at home, that initially, I thought there was no way I could deal with. But [my caseworker] was excellent and not phased by it at all. She reminded me of what we’d covered in training and what my role was – to be friends with [the CYA]. She talked me through all the issues that [the CYA] was raising with me. She gave me really practical advice and made me feel that I was able to perform a really important role for this young person” (Mentor)

“The caseworkers are invaluable. Their knowledge, expertise and experience is what makes this programme work so well” (Mentor)

8.1.2 Mentors are well-trained with a clear role

Mentors felt that the information and training they received were of high quality. They had found it useful that the training covered aspects of CYA development and examples of how to provide successful activities and deal with potential issues that the friendship may encounter. The service information was realistic and this was considered important.

“They seem very good at identifying early who’s not right for it which is really good as it does require commitment for the young people’s sakes” (Mentor)

“The training and information are completely comprehensive” (Mentor)

“What was so good about the training and working with the Friendship Works team is that you are provided with the tools to navigate your way successfully through the two years” (Mentor)

Both service users and stakeholders described how clearly the service defined the mentoring role and felt that this was a key strength of the service. Mentors were very much 'on message' understanding that their role was not to directly try and help 'fix' the CYA's problems or change the CYA.

CYA were very clear that their mentor was different from the many other adults that they interact with. Although they often described their mentor as 'my mentor' they spoke very clearly about them being a friend; different from any friends their own age, but still a friend. They generally did not have this kind of relationship with other adults they came into contact with. CYA felt able to confide in their mentors and were secure that mentors had their best interests at heart.

8.1.3 Friendships are long term

Mentors and caseworkers were convinced by the arguments for a two-year service as it takes time to build a proper friendship and make sustainable differences. Mentors also thought it was right that the service highlights the high level of commitment required to be a mentor from the outset.

Stakeholders agreed that the long-term nature of the service made it unique and was an obvious benefit of the service, leading them to select it for young people over other possible support. They reflected how CYA referred to the service will often have turbulence in every other area of their lives, that they will likely be undergoing multiple transitions and the stability and reliability of having this one person consistently in their lives is therefore extremely important.

8.1.4 Matching is effective

Mentors frequently referred to the matching process as part of why friendships worked well. They appreciated the amount of work and research that went into getting the matches right and felt that this allowed more productive friendships to develop.

“I think the profile thing is a really good idea because you actually get a sense of who they are at the start, and you are able to see for yourself if they're genuine or not if you think you can get along with them. That's really helpful as a whole for anyone who's wanting to be matched up with someone.” (Mentor)

“I've worked for other mentoring programmes and the matching is nowhere near as thorough, so there's a high chance you don't get on with the CYA or have anything in common. And it just seems that that doesn't give the best experience to either the mentor or young person. Friendship Works is so much better than that. They put so much work into getting matches right” (Mentor)

8.2 The friendships

In our online consultation with mentors, we asked how they felt the service works and has its impacts. Figure 8.1 presents an analysis of the comments provided by mentors. It

identifies several key themes. Their view was that the success of the service for CYA rested on them providing stability, which led to the development of trust; support, which allowed the mentees to gain confidence; positivity, which helped to build self-esteem; and access to experiences, which led to enhanced aspirations. A range of other impacts was felt to flow from these gains, such as CYA feeling happier, being able to deal with their feelings more effectively, feeling better able to express themselves and ultimately being better able to deal with challenges as a result.

The view of participating CYA largely mirrored this opinion. They were grateful to be part of the Friendship Works service and felt that mentors and staff go out of their way to offer support that they are lucky to receive. The service is viewed as being professionally run, efficient and well-organised. They spoke glowingly of their mentors, but also the whole of the Friendship Works team, particularly their caseworkers, who were seen as trusted friends in the same way as their mentors.

The CYA identified how important the mentor is to them, and the reasons they have such an impact on their life (Table 8.1). Similarly, case study five presents one young person's account of the reasons why they value their mentor.

Figure 8.1: Mentor views on how the service works and its impacts



Source: online consultation with mentors Dec 2019 to Jan 2020 (based on 35 responses)

Table 8.1: CYA views on how the service works and its impact (from interviews with CYA)

What mentors offer CYA	Illustrative quotes from mentees
<p>Mentors can be the only friend CYA have.</p> <p>Mentors are not paid to be with them, or someone who's only interest in their welfare is because they are a professional working with them. They choose to spend time in the friendship.</p>	<p><i>"I think the struggle I've had with professionals is that they've only just looked at me as a diagnosis and not who I am as a person. Having a mentor, it's so nice to know someone is genuinely trying to get to know you, and not what you are defined by the labels that are given out to us."</i></p> <p><i>"She is the only person in my life who is not paid to spend time with me. She actually wants to spend time with me, rather than all the other professionals who have to."</i></p>
<p>Mentors are someone to have fun with, who CYA look forward to spending time with.</p>	<p><i>"I jump up now on a Saturday morning and get myself ready because I know I'm going to have fun."</i></p>
<p>Mentors can be trusted and are separate from their home life. CYA can express themselves freely and fully with their mentor and discuss issues openly.</p>	<p><i>"I'd talk to her about anything, and I have done. From friendship problems and stuff when I was a teenager, to Uni and getting work experience, to women's rights and things going on at home. I talk to her about all the things that are in my head."</i></p>
<p>Mentors are reliable, dependable, and stable, doing what they say they will and turning up when they should.</p>	<p><i>"Even when I know he has other things going on in his life, he always makes time for me if I need to speak. I know I can turn to him."</i></p> <p><i>"I've been in mental health units a few times over the last few years and [my mentor] has stuck by me through it all."</i></p>
<p>Mentors are older with life experience they can share and act as role models. They are someone who offers a different view on life and exposes them to different experiences.</p>	<p><i>It's a nice, slightly older person I can go to with a bit more life experience to suggest ideas. He only wants me to do well and it's like the older brother that my older brother never was."</i></p> <p><i>"I always think 'what would my mentor do here?'"</i></p>
<p>Mentors offer reassurance, support self-belief and model resilience</p>	<p><i>"She's helped me to believe in myself, which has made me very emotional."</i></p>
<p>Mentors are accepting and non-judgemental.</p>	<p><i>"When I go into units or stuff like that and if I'm open about it and I go, 'Yes, I'm a care leaver,' I get judged straight away, and it's horrible. You can go to Friendship Works and no one will judge you"</i></p> <p><i>"Even though my mentor's not been through anything like that [being in care], it's just nice to know someone's taking the time to sympathise with the things you've gone through, instead of being judged so quickly for that. That's why I think Friendship Works is such a good thing for people like us, because it's hard to talk about that in the real world, our experiences and our difficulties, without being judged. We just want to be human too."</i></p>

Case study 5: how and why friendships make a difference

Joe is a care leaver living independently who has had a mentor for 2 years. Joe listed the many ways they believe their mentor has helped them.

1. Having a real friend.

"Lots of professionals are involved with me but Jane is different. Out of everyone that I talk to, me and my mentor have got a really good bond. I'm able to open up to her about anything. I can be more open than I can with the professionals...basically, see her as a friend. I don't really see her as a professional."

2. Lifting spirits and focusing on positives

"When I'm in a really low mood and I think no one cares about me, or no one's helping me, my mentor goes, 'Yes, but look at how far we've come.' Then we reflect on from when I first met her to now. That does actually help a hell of a lot. Even though you're sad because of how you feel, just having that person around is so positive."

3. Feeling able to trust someone

"It's having that security around what you've said. Even with normal friends I'm still so careful with what I say, but with the mentor I know that it's going to be safe."

4. Having a reliable person in their life

"I have an attachment disorder, so people leaving, people just walking out of my life really does get to me more than most people. Jane knows that. I was worried about coming to the end of the two years and she could see that. I was already panicking about that, so we just sat down and had a meeting about it."

5. Building self-esteem

"Jane's really helped with my confidence and self-esteem. Say if I don't feel comfortable with saying something to anyone, or something's really bugging me, I can just say it to Jane and it won't change the way she thinks about me or things like that."

6. Being accepted

"I'm transgender, and I love the fact that Jane's accepted me for who I am. It just makes me feel so much better about myself. If she has a question to ask about transgender, she will happily ask me. I'm not saying she's really questioned me on who I used to be and stuff like that. She let me open up in my own time about that, and that's what I love. Not her just bombarding me with, 'Who did you used to be? What did you used to look like?' and stuff like that. She let me open up in my own time."

Asked to reflect on the Friendship Works service, Joe said:

"I've had 2 different types of mentors, and this is just something else. The person that they matched with me didn't have any similarities. With [this mentor] there are a lot of similarities. That is the key thing about having mentors, it's having the similarities."

"I think the reason why people do mentoring is because they have a very empathetic and sensitive nature, which I do admire. There are not really many nice people out there in the world. It's just so lovely to know there are genuine people out there."

9 Conclusions

Friendship Works is an effective service leading to positive impacts for a wide range of CYA. Its structures and principles are evidence-based, reflecting service traits known to lead to effective delivery. Our evidence is that mentors are clear on their roles and well trained so that they do what they are supposed to do (and for which strong evidence of effective practice exists), supported by professional and competent caseworkers. Also, this doesn't feel like an 'intervention' to CYA or something that is 'done to' them - they get to choose things to do with their mentors that they are interested in, and they have fun on outings, things that enrich their lives.

There is an inherent difficulty in measuring the full range of impacts the service has on all participants. Simply put, how do you show the value of a friendship? Despite this, our evidence makes clear that there are positive effects for some of the most vulnerable CYA in our society, their families, the mentors involved and wider stakeholders. The service has been shown to make a big difference to the individuals involved and its value is as much in reducing (further) harm as it is in making CYAs lives better. Additionally, being a long-term service is important as there is evidence that its positive effects increase over time.

The service's effects are multi-faceted. Mentors bring a stable and supportive presence, positivity, and a different worldview into young lives, whilst also modelling appropriate behaviours and facilitating access to fun, age-appropriate activities the CYA would otherwise not experience. This leads CYA to feel happier and more confident, empowered, and develop a stronger sense of their own identity. This in turn can positively affect their other relationships and what they believe is possible for their lives.

The service has clear benefits for UASC, such as having a friend in their lives to talk to when they might otherwise be completely alone. Also, having someone to help them get to know the city they are now living in and adapt to the customs of an entirely new country. Mentors are also well placed to support UASC to navigate our social processes and systems allowing them to achieve their potential. The service should therefore establish ways to increase referrals of, and the take-up from, this cohort, which has been low to date.

Given the data compiled about how the programme works, it would be worth revisiting the Theory of Change developed at the beginning of this evaluation. This would ensure that this document is evidence-based and continues to reflect the aims and achievements of the service. Similarly, it would be beneficial to examine the monitoring data collected by caseworkers during their reviews, and other service records, which should ideally be linked to the new Theory of Change. In this way, the service will be best placed to monitor its achievements and continue to develop the evidence base about its impacts and delivery.

At present, the service runs on a relatively small scale but the need for this service is potentially much greater (and increasing). It is worth considering whether, and how, the service could be scaled up. The challenge is to do this whilst also maintaining the high standards of preparation, training and support that are provided, and the quality and appropriateness of matches made between mentors and young people.

To reach new target groups and scale-up, there is a need for a clear strategy to take Friendship Works forward. This should consider key enablers for growth such as internal capacity and capability, the external environment, including funders, and a strategic vision for the service. It is important to maintain intervention fidelity (and monitor this) whilst

sustaining the core of the service (e.g. volunteerism). Scaling up is not about developing the service - we already know this works and that Friendship Works has strong policies and procedures in place that are effective. Expanding provision is about managing the structures upon which the service is based to ensure consistency and quality as numbers increase.

A further task is developing a convincing argument for funders about why there is a need to not only continue to fund this important service but also potentially expand it. We hope that the evidence in this report will support the team in making these arguments so that they can continue to offer long-lasting, life-changing friendships to vulnerable CYA who need them.

Appendices

Figure A1. 1: Friendship Works Service Aims

Friendship Works

THEORY OF CHANGE

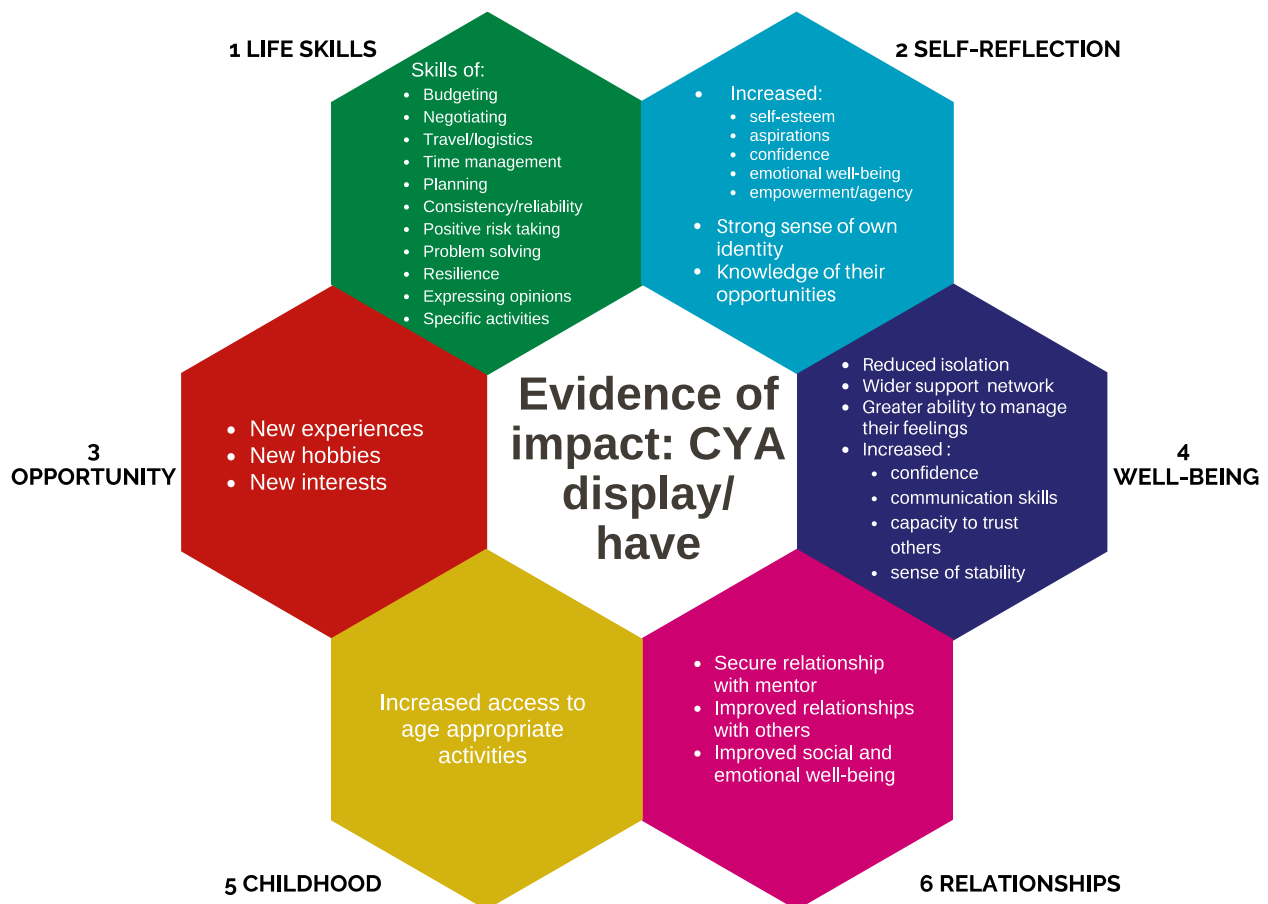
Programme Aims:

Children and young adults will have increased resilience and improved life chances allowing them to see and take opportunities which lead to better life outcomes

Longer term impact seen across 6 key areas:



Figure A1.2: Friendship Works indicators of impact



Friendship Works process diagrams

Figure A2:1 Process from referral to mentoring match (CYA and their families)

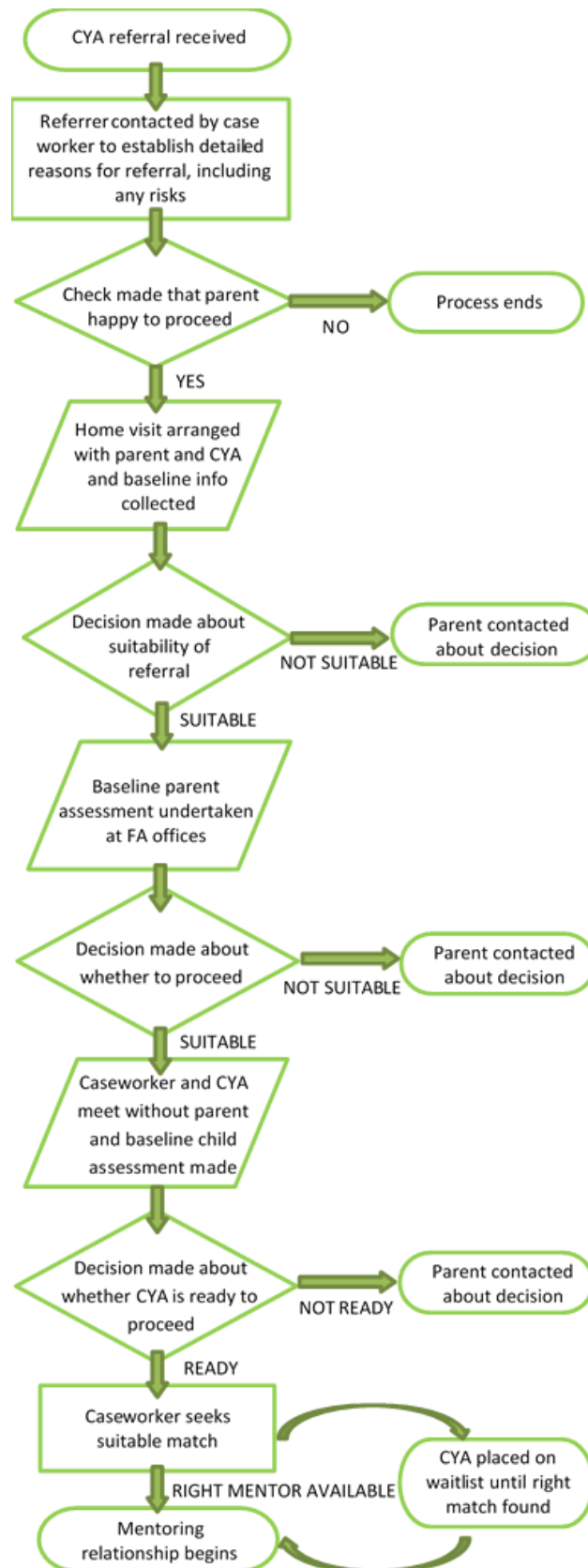


Figure A2.2: Process from referral to mentoring match (mentors)

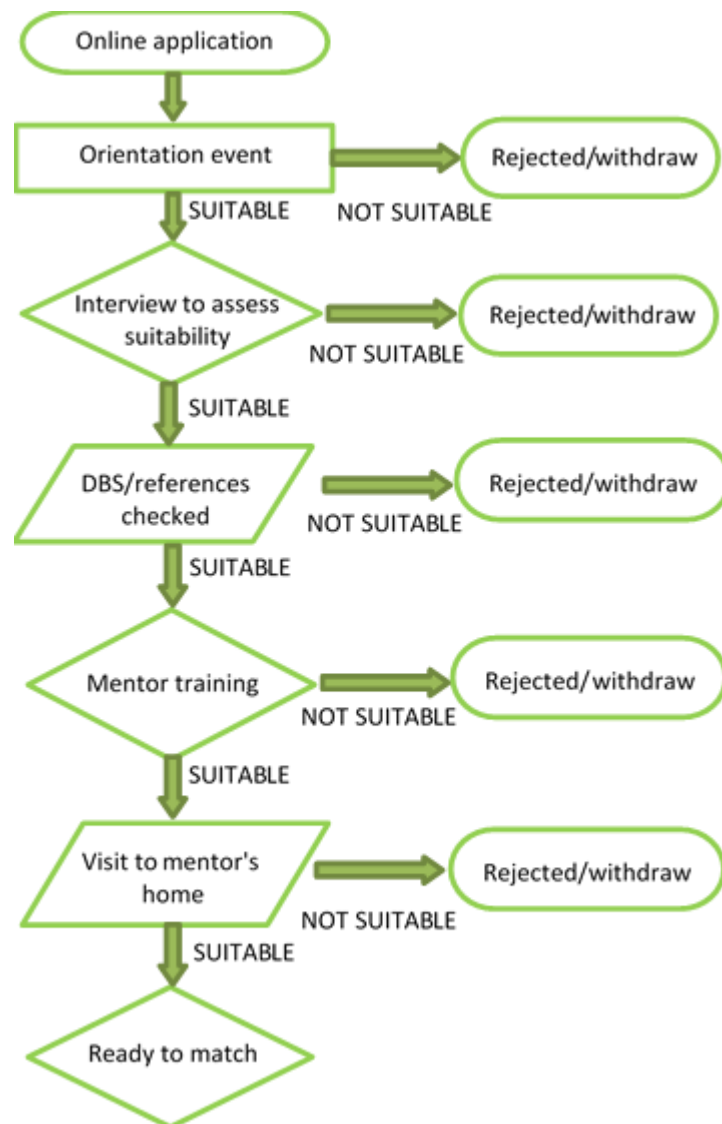


Figure A2.3: Matching process

