



Centre for
Public Impact
Founded by BCG

SMALL MOMENTS, BIG MEANING

What We're Learning So Far from a Transformative Evaluation
of the NDYP





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Introduction

The [Centre for Public Impact](#) (CPI) is a not for profit organisation that works with governments, communities, and public service partners to reimagine how change happens, with people, not just for them. As the learning partner and evaluator for the Greater London Authority's New Deal for Young People (NDYP), CPI is supporting a citywide effort to understand what high quality mentoring looks like in practice, and how it contributes to the wider system of support for young Londoners.

Mentorship does not sit in isolation. It is often a key point of connection in a young person's life, helping many access mental health support, creative outlets, and opportunities for stable employment. Commissioned to move beyond traditional metrics, CPI's role is to explore how mentoring creates change within the complex systems that shape young people's lives. To do this, we are taking a transformative approach to this evaluation, recognising the deep structural inequalities that many young Londoners face, particularly around education, employment, and mental health. These structural challenges place mentorship within a complex and fractured support system for young people in the city.

Rooted in Donna Mertens' transformative paradigm, this approach recognises that young people's experiences are shaped by power, systemic inequalities, and intersecting aspects of identity such as race, class, gender, and ability. Effective evaluation cannot be a one size fits all approach. It needs to reflect the reality that every organisation and young person brings a different set of experiences, challenges, and strengths. This means understanding mentoring not as a fixed offer, but as something shaped by need, trust, and history, and designing the evaluation to reflect that complexity. It's necessary to pay attention to local context, recognise the importance of trusted relationships, and understand how different parts of a young person's life such as education, housing, mental health, and safety are connected. Mentoring often works in the spaces between these systems, so the evaluation must be able to see and learn from those connections.

This interim report is part of an evolving learning journey. It offers a snapshot of what has taken place so far, including key activities, emerging insights, and stories of practice from across London's mentoring ecosystem. It reflects what we are learning about how mentoring works, when it works best, and what it takes to deliver it in ways that are safe, meaningful, and connected to wider systems of support.



Who Has Been Involved So Far?

So far, this journey has brought together a wide mix of people who hold mentoring in place every day: young people, mentors, project leads, and delivery partners working in communities across London. Young people have not only taken part but have shaped the work as peer researchers and storytellers, helping to identify meaningful questions and uncover insights that might otherwise stay hidden. Mentors and practitioners have shared what it really takes to build trust and sustain relationships in places where young people too often are overlooked or unsupported.

Across the 39 organisations involved to date, we see what this looks like in practice. Mentoring works best when it's woven into a wider web of support. Just over a third of these organisations combine mentoring with mental health and therapeutic work, helping young people build emotional safety and confidence. Others deliver mentoring alongside creative activities, local community programmes, youth clubs, or pathways into skills training and work experience.

The young people involved bring a wide range of lived experiences, including those affected by violence or exploitation, care experienced young people, young girls and women, and Gypsy Roma and Traveller communities. Together, these stories show that mentoring is more than a trusted relationship. Its real value often lies in what relationships help unlock: safer spaces, practical skills, and stronger connections to education, employment, and community life. This mix of people and perspectives will continue to shape how we learn about mentoring as part of a broader system of support for young Londoners.

Our Journey

Over the past year, the evaluation has moved through a series of phases. These have included co-design workshops, case study interviews, and a peer research strand that places young people directly in the role of co-researchers. Each activity has helped deepen our understanding of what mentoring looks like in practice, what it makes possible, and how it is experienced by those delivering it and those taking part.

So far, the evaluation has delivered:



- A **Share and Learn** session, which built a shared understanding of this transformative evaluation. In this session, we presented our model and received enthusiastic interest from mentoring organisations to take part in the evaluation and future workshops.
- A **co-design workshop** with delivery partners and mentors, which brought together organisations, mentors, and project leads to co-design evaluation tools and approaches that centre young people's voices.
- A **first round of case study** interviews across multiple organisations, where we conducted 14 in-depth interviews across 9 days — amplifying rich stories from mentors, mentees, and programme leads within NDYP-funded projects.
- A published set of **Stories of Success**, where we compiled these stories into an overall piece on the role of mentoring in addressing young people's evolving needs.
- Three rounds of **peer researcher training**, equipping 10 young people to lead research through tailored roles, ethical planning, and skills in interviewing and analysis — advancing a co-created evaluation.
- A **peer led fieldwork** phase where young people conduct interviews and develop thematic insights, which inform a second round of co-produced case studies.

The peer research strand has become a defining feature. Young people have been trained in interviewing, analysis, and ethical research methods, and are now leading conversations with mentors, delivery staff, and their peers. Their involvement is shifting not just what the evaluation uncovers, but how it listens. Insights are emerging that might not surface in traditional settings, and young people are visibly growing in confidence as they take on roles that carry both voice and responsibility. This shift is also enabling organisations and the wider system to reflect more deeply on how youth-led methods, like peer research and storytelling, can strengthen practice, build trust, and connect mentoring to broader systems of support.

These phases have also deepened our understanding of mentoring itself. What has become clear is that mentoring is most effective when it sits within a wider offer that includes access to creative spaces, mental health support, skills development, and opportunities for work. Mentoring helps young people build trust and confidence, but also acts as a bridge into other forms of support that help sustain positive change.



The evaluation is now exploring how mentoring connects to broader outcomes, including wellbeing, participation, re-engagement with education, and pathways into work. It is also surfacing systemic questions about how mentoring is positioned within the wider landscape of youth support, and what conditions make it possible for mentors to do their work well without carrying unrealistic expectations or risk alone.

Where Are We Going?



What's Working Well So Far?

So far, we're seeing that activities, relationships, and stories are bringing ideas like reciprocity, care, and context to life. These early signs suggest that this transformative approach is showing mentoring not as an isolated offer, but something deeply connected to broader systems of support.



Youth voices are leading the way

Throughout this evaluation, young people have stepped in not just as participants but as lead researchers and storytellers, showing a clear appetite for shaping what the evaluation explores and how it listens. This reflects our core principle: that meaningful learning happens when power and knowledge are genuinely shared. By creating space for young people to lead, and supporting them with the time, skills, and care they need, we are already seeing deeper, more honest insights emerge. This commitment to safe, open spaces for reflection and storytelling is helping surface truths that often stay hidden in traditional evaluations and ensures that young people's insights directly inform recommendations for improving mentoring across London.

Organisations are engaging honestly

This approach has been met with strong engagement from delivery organisations too. Many partners have welcomed the chance to see how a transformative approach works in practice, especially the way it combines qualitative and quantitative insights to capture complexity. Organisations have told us they value having space to name uncomfortable or unspoken dynamics that might otherwise remain hidden. For many, this has sparked new ideas about how they might use storytelling and peer led methods in their own practice, and how mentoring can link to other supports like mental health, skills, or community connection.

Storytelling is bringing learning to life

Storytelling has proven to be a powerful way to make this learning real and grounded. The richness of the qualitative data is already surfacing patterns that lead to clear, concrete recommendations, and showing how mentoring not only builds trust but connects young people to wider opportunities in education, work, and wellbeing.

Working closely with partners one to one has helped us build a growing library of stories that hold these insights in a way that feels alive and relatable. Joint interviews between mentors and mentees, for example, have created moments of shared understanding that would not have happened otherwise. Many described these conversations as the first time they really reflected on their relationship, often continuing long after the interview ended. Mentors have spoken about receiving unexpected feedback from young people, while project leads noted that if storytelling became their main reporting method, it would make reporting both more meaningful and more manageable.



What Has Changed?

Our journey has not been linear. We've stayed open and flexible, learning from what young people, mentors and partners are telling us. What began as a fixed plan has evolved into a more responsive approach. This approach continues to ask what's needed now, and what it means to build deeper, longer-lasting support.

Participation has shifted to ownership

Our evaluation has moved from a model where young people simply contribute to the design to one where they lead the research itself. This shift to a peer led approach reflects our commitment to centring youth voices and sharing power in practice. Now, research questions, data collection, and analysis are shaped by those at the heart of the work, adding new layers of insight and meaning that might otherwise be missed.

Peer researchers require holistic support

This shift has required more capacity than we first planned for, but it has also deepened the evaluation in ways that feel true to our values. Supporting young people to lead in trauma-informed and inclusive ways has meant adapting timelines, offering tailored coaching, and staying responsive as needs change. For example, peer researchers have received one to one coaching to refine questions, build confidence, and plan fieldwork. The team has invested time in scheduling interviews with care, holding safeguarding conversations with organisations, and helping peer researchers analyse both qualitative and quantitative data. This has included developing creative outputs and final presentations together.

Organisations require trust and understanding

Relationships with delivery partners have evolved too. Many organisations are keen to try peer led and transformative approaches but need more time and trust to feel comfortable. Building this trust has required more touchpoints and honest conversations than we anticipated. In response, we have focused on developing stronger relationships with a smaller group of organisations so everyone has the time and space they need for meaningful participation.

Tools and resources have shifted

Some plans for resources have shifted as well. Following the steer from GLA, we stepped back from developing the MQF toolkit, which is now led by Rocket Science. Instead, we are



exploring a new storytelling resource that builds on our peer research workshops and supports organisations to grow their capacity. We are also working with Bloomberg Philanthropies to make sure any new materials build on what already exists and do not duplicate other efforts.

What Are We Learning?

We're beginning to see important patterns emerge. Mentoring isn't just a one-on-one interaction, but deeply connected to wider systems of support. These early insights are helping us understand what makes participation meaningful, and how this work links to outcomes like wellbeing, skills, and safer pathways into the future.

Reciprocity matters

A strong theme emerging is that real participation must be reciprocal. As an external evaluation partner, we recognise our responsibility to make sure involvement is genuinely valuable for young people and organisations alike, not just a tick box for reporting. For young people, this means fair pay, professional references, and space to shape the work. For organisations, it means aligning methods with what is genuinely useful, for example, offering bespoke storytelling workshops they can build on. Making this work purposeful rather than extractive has required care, flexibility, and a commitment to keeping things simple and realistic.

Participation needs infrastructure

It is also clear that peer led research needs more than a well designed training plan. It requires real infrastructure, time, and trauma informed support that meets young people where they are. Many young people need sustained, tailored guidance as they step into research roles, which shows why planning for extra capacity and flexibility is so important. There is a strong appetite to hear directly from young people, but doing so safely and meaningfully remains a careful balancing act.

Representation challenges remain

Ensuring diverse participation remains a challenge. Some young people are less likely to put themselves forward, which means self selection bias can limit whose voices are heard. Even when they do take part, personal circumstances like health needs, academic pressures, or safeguarding can affect how fully they stay involved. Many organisations are helping reduce these barriers, but there is still more to learn about why some young people



disengage or leave programmes without fully benefiting. Better feedback loops and light touch tools could help surface these insights and make it easier to adapt.

Fieldwork requires flexibility

Fieldwork must stay responsive and ethical. Even details like who does an interview, when it happens, or how long it lasts can matter deeply. For example, asking young people for five or more hours of involvement each month needed careful framing and ongoing check-ins to respect their time and wellbeing. Scheduling around summer breaks, academic pressures, and sensitive topics has shaped our methods to keep this work safe and meaningful.

Mentoring stretches across systems

This work is also surfacing how many organisations want to better understand what drives lasting change. While mentoring is valued for its relational and flexible nature, it is often stretched to fill wider gaps stepping into roles more commonly linked with mental health support, safeguarding, or advocacy. This raises questions about boundaries, role clarity, and the support mentors need to do their work well without being overextended. These insights show that our evaluation is evolving to capture not just the quality of mentoring relationships, but how those relationships link young people to wider systems of care and opportunity.

Small moments hold big meaning

Finally, what is emerging most clearly is that mentoring takes many forms, and its impact is often found in small but significant moments. For some young people, a single intentional conversation with a trusted adult can be transformative. These moments remind us that this work must remain flexible and open-ended enough to reflect the realities of young people's lives, and that our role as evaluators is to find authentic ways to capture this complexity, even when it doesn't fit neatly into metrics. Supporting organisations, and encouraging funders and commissioners, to value and make space for these relational, qualitative outcomes will be just as important as the evaluation continues.



Methodology and Approach

This evaluation is built on the idea that learning does not just happen behind closed doors, but in conversation, in relationships, and through reflection. From the start, we have designed this work to be participatory and trauma-informed, using methods that help people share honestly and see how their experiences connect to bigger systems of support.

So far, we have used a mix of approaches to gather insights that feel grounded and real, and to build trust so that what people share goes deeper than surface-level responses. Storytelling interviews — including one-to-one and joint conversations between mentors and mentees — have created moments for people to pause, reflect, and name things that rarely come out in day-to-day practice. This has brought out relational, qualitative evidence that traditional evaluations alone often miss.

Our workshops have helped delivery partners and young people shape the questions we ask, test ideas, and spot patterns together — strengthening the quality of insights and giving organisations more confidence to reflect openly. A defining feature has been our peer research strand, which supports young people to step into roles as interviewers, analysts, and storytellers, making sure their voices guide both what we learn and how we learn it.

Taken together, this approach reminds us that mentoring's true impact sits in relationships and moments of trust — things that can't always be measured with metrics alone. Supporting organisations, funders, and commissioners to value these qualitative insights alongside hard numbers will be key to sustaining this learning as the evaluation continues.

Principles Guiding the Work

Three principles keep this work grounded, safe, and able to hold the trust needed for honest, sustained engagement:



- **Trauma informed and care centred:** We create space for people to share difficult or sensitive stories with confidence that they will be heard with respect and care. Being trauma-informed and care-centred means having strong safeguarding measures in place, including practical steps that help everyone feel supported. From risk assessments and supervision to emotional check-ins and clear reporting processes, these measures build trust and help young people share stories and stay engaged over time.
- **Participatory and relational:** Everyone involved, young people, mentors, project leads, helps shape how the evaluation unfolds. This shared ownership and relational approach has been key to sustaining people’s interest and participation, and to supporting organisations to reflect more openly.
- **Whole person and context aware:** We look at the bigger picture of each young person’s life and how their education, mental health, housing, and safety needs are connected and how trusted relationships help navigate those systems. This means we do not just ask “Did it work?” but also “What did it open up?”

Tools and Processes

To put these ideas into practice, we use a range of tools:

- **Conversations:** Individual or joint sessions with mentors and mentees to surface reflections that often remain unsaid in day to day programme work.
- **Peer Researcher Pathway:** Young people can step in as storytellers, community advocates, and analysts, choosing what they want to lead and how they want to share it, with training, coaching, and supportive check-ins all the way through.
- **Co-design and Reflection Workshops:** Time for delivery partners, mentors, and young people to shape questions, spot patterns, and test recommendations together.
- **Creative Outputs:** Findings are shared in different ways, from infographics to animated short films, stories are being created to be engaging, accessible, and true to the people who shared them.

Together, these tools and principles are helping us see how mentoring opens up safer spaces, new skills, and pathways into education, work, or community connection. By combining storytelling, peer research, and shared reflection, this approach helps us hold the complexity of young people’s lives in view, and understand how trusted relationships



help young people navigate fractured systems, connecting many to the spaces, skills, and opportunities that make real change possible.

The insights that follow show what this looks like in young people's lives: how trust, storytelling, and connected support work together to open doors that might otherwise stay closed.



What We're Hearing: Emerging Themes and Insights

Behind every insight are real young people, mentors, and partners whose stories are reshaping how we understand mentoring and support across London. These stories, captured in two rounds of case studies, bring to life what this work looks and feels like in practice, showing the challenges, successes, and learning as it unfolds. You can explore both rounds here:

- [Round One Case Studies](#)
- [Round Two Case Studies](#)

Their voices and experiences ground what we're learning, showing us what's possible when we listen deeply and stay open to what emerges.

At its heart, these insights show that mentoring works best when trusted relationships connect young people to wider opportunities: safe spaces to belong, pathways to learn new skills, mental health support, creative outlets, and chances to shape their own futures.

Each theme here blends what we're hearing in peer-led interviews with what case study work is surfacing in practice. Together, they show that change is not just about individual confidence or one positive relationship — it is about how that relationship sits within a bigger system of care and opportunity.

When young people feel seen and heard, when they have space to trust, to heal, and to imagine new possibilities, and when those possibilities are linked to real steps forward, the outcomes are stronger and last longer.

Across these themes, we see how mentoring, woven into wider supports, can unlock compounded change: giving young people not only the chance to grow, but the tools, networks, and safe spaces that help them thrive.



Confidence, Trust, and Belonging

How mentoring builds self-esteem, helps young people feel seen, and strengthens social connection. This trust and connection create pathways into other safe and empowering spaces.

For many young people, mentoring has offered a rare place to feel seen and heard without judgement. These relationships are not transactional but transformational. It is the trust and consistency that help young people open up, rebuild confidence, and believe they deserve spaces where they feel safe and valued.

One young person put it simply: *“It helps me to have somebody to talk to about what’s going on in my head. Especially as I’m a young guy from South East London... you’re going to be judged a lot and it’s hard to open up.”* Another shared: *“Being a mentee is like being accepted for who I am.”*

For some, small shifts in confidence have grown into bigger moments of connection and belonging. One young woman who had struggled with anxiety described how mentoring helped her do something she hadn’t done for years: say hello to someone new. That first step, from social anxiety to self-expression, became a bridge to new friendships, group spaces, and a growing pride in who she was becoming.

Others spoke about how mentoring gave them the space to reflect and heal after instability or trauma. One mentee described how hard it was to trust adults at first but over time, the bond she built with her mentor showed her what a safe, affirming connection could look like.

These stories show that building confidence, trust, and belonging through mentoring is rarely an endpoint. When young people build trust and belonging here, they feel ready to step into other safe opportunities in school, community activities, or new friendships. Mentoring works best when acting as a doorway into wider systems that celebrate who young people are and what they can grow into.

Shaping Aspirations and Life Direction

How mentoring helps young people reimagine the future, set goals, and feel more in control of their choices. It shows how trusted support can make big ideas feel real by connecting them to concrete steps like training, volunteering, or placements.



A consistent thread across both the peer research and our case studies is how mentoring helps young people look beyond where they are now and imagine what might be possible next. For many, having someone who listens without judgement, asks the right questions, and holds them accountable can be the turning point from feeling stuck to feeling ready to act.

One young person described it clearly: *“I was in a stage of my life where I was jumping from place to place and I needed to work out how I planned to set myself up for the long term... That’s where I was able to have someone actually just sit down to learn and understand me and what I’m trying to do with my life.”* For this young person, mentoring created space not just for reflection but for planning and taking action.

Others spoke about the practical ways mentors shape life direction, especially during moments of transition like finishing school, changing courses, or stepping into work for the first time. One young person shared how her mentor supported her through the decision to leave university, and then helped her prepare for interviews and rewrite her personal statement for a fresh start: *“She gave me that reassurance that everything will be okay, especially because I decided to take such a big step forward to drop out of uni, which is not particularly, like, traditional.”*

These stories highlight that aspirations only stick when they connect to real pathways — whether that means re-entering education, exploring global careers, or trying out new directions through volunteering or creative projects. As one young person put it: *“There’s lots of things in life and nothing is impossible and he’s opened it up for me. Everything is growth, it’s about how you come off that struggle to get to your destination.”*

What stands out is that mentoring does not just help young people dream bigger. It helps them see practical, reachable steps towards those goals. When mentoring sits alongside other opportunities, like training, work experience, or placements, young people feel more able to take control of their choices and trust their own direction. This is what makes life aspirations feel not just possible but achievable, with the right support around them.

Emotional and Mental Health Support

How mentoring acts as a stabiliser, offering consistency, emotional regulation, and a safe space to process difficult feelings that might otherwise block wider participation in school, sport, or community life.



A strong pattern across both the peer research and our case study interviews is that mentoring can play a deeply therapeutic role for young people. Many describe how having someone who shows up consistently, listens without judgement, and makes space to talk about hard things like anxiety, family trauma, or self-doubt helps them feel safer and more able to take part in other parts of life.

Young people spoke about mentors as “*someone who checks in on you when nobody else does*” and “*someone on your side no matter what.*” This sense of emotional stability is not just comforting in the moment. It builds the confidence to re-engage in education, try new activities, or rebuild trust with family and peers.

From the case study work, we see how this unfolds in practice. One young person who had struggled with disruptive behaviour at school spoke about finally having someone they could open up to about grief at home, a conversation that helped them feel ready to go back into lessons with a sense of support behind them. Project leads and mentors echo this, describing how a trauma-informed approach means letting young people lead the pace so they feel seen, safe, and respected. One mentor put it simply: “*The difference happens when you are consistent. They feel understood and that builds emotional resilience.*”

In many programmes, mentoring sits alongside creative activities, sports, or therapeutic workshops, giving young people other outlets to express themselves and process emotions safely. These layers work together. The trust built within the mentoring relationship unlocks the confidence to step into these wider opportunities, which in turn reinforce belonging, wellbeing, and hope for the future.

These stories show that emotional and mental health support is not an optional add-on to mentoring. It is the foundation that steadies young people, helping them navigate difficult circumstances and giving them the stability they need to move forward into other spaces ready to learn, connect, and grow.

Mentor Relationships and Mutual Growth

What makes mentorship work is empathy, clear boundaries, and relatability, and when trust grows it creates space for growth for both the mentee and the mentor.

Across both the peer research and our case study work, it is clear that the quality of the mentor relationship sits at the heart of what makes mentoring meaningful. Young people consistently describe their mentors as trusted adults who support their whole selves, not



just one part of their lives. For many, that trust comes from empathy, lived experience, and the balance between care and healthy boundaries.

One young person said simply, *“I feel like I have someone in my corner who actually understands me.”* Another reflected, *“He does not judge me, he knows where I am coming from.”* These moments of relatability make it easier for young people to open up, share struggles, and think about what they want to change or grow towards.

Importantly, this trust is not a one-way street. Mentors shared how this work shapes them too, building their understanding of local needs and changing how they show up in other community spaces. One practitioner put it well: *“We are not here to fix people. We are here to walk alongside them. Sometimes the learning is just as much for us as it is for them.”*

These insights show that mentoring is more than advice or guidance. It is a whole-person relationship that reaches beyond individual change. When young people feel genuinely understood and supported, they feel more confident stepping into other opportunities. When mentors grow alongside them, they bring this learning back into families, communities, and local leadership.

Access, Barriers, and Enablers

Understanding what makes mentoring, and other positive opportunities, easier or harder to reach means looking at the structural, cultural, and practical barriers that young people face, and what trusted support can do to help them navigate these challenges.

From both the peer research and our case study work, it is clear that while many young people see the value of mentoring, getting through the door is not always easy. Practical issues like transport costs, safeguarding protocols, or school and family responsibilities can all stand in the way. One young person shared plainly, *“If you do not have the money to get there, you cannot go.”*

Others spoke about cultural stigma and trust. For some, asking for help or opening up to someone outside the family can feel risky or uncomfortable, especially when they have faced judgment or dismissal in the past. As one young person put it, *“People think you should just deal with things yourself. So you keep it to yourself.”*

In these moments, a mentor’s role as a trusted guide can make all the difference. Several young people described how mentors helped them navigate services or speak up for what they needed, acting as a bridge across systems that can feel complicated or unwelcoming.



One young person said, *“My mentor went with me when I had to talk to school. I do not think I could have done it alone.”*

Delivery partners and mentors also highlighted how important it is to create spaces where young people feel they belong and are not judged for what they are carrying. This means doing more than just offering a service. It is about removing barriers at every step, from flexible session times to inclusive language and trauma informed practice.

These stories reaffirm that mentoring alone is rarely enough. It works best when it sits within a system of support that includes mental health care, skills training, and practical help to reduce the barriers young people face every day. When this happens, mentoring becomes something that helps young people navigate systems, unlock opportunities, and find real pathways to belong, learn, and grow.



Insights on Transformative Evaluation

The transformative approach to this work is showing that *how* we learn is just as important as *what* we learn. While the earlier insights make clear that mentoring works best when it sits within a wider system of support, what is emerging now is a clearer picture of what it really takes to design and hold an evaluation that does not flatten that complexity but honours it, and helps shift it.

So far, we are seeing that a transformative approach depends on a few things that work together: trusted relationships, fair and visible reciprocity, spaces for stories to spark change, and a commitment to keep seeing the wider system. This work shows us that:

Trust is an active practice, not just a value.

Building genuine trust between young people, researchers, and delivery partners has needed more time and relational care than we first planned. Safeguarding, one to one coaching, and flexible timelines have all helped peer researchers feel safe to lead. This has made it possible to surface stories and insights that would otherwise stay hidden.

Participation needs the right infrastructure.

Young people stepping in as researchers, analysts, and storytellers has added depth and honesty to this evaluation, but it also requires real support. Coaching, accessible training, and fair pay are all essential. Without this, peer research risks becoming tokenistic instead of transformational.

Reciprocity makes participation meaningful.

One of the clearest lessons is that involvement must be two-way. Young people and delivery partners need to see how their insights and time lead to tangible benefits such as practical tools, professional references, or changes to how programmes run. This turns data collection into a relational learning process that benefits everyone.

Small moments carry big meaning.



Many of the most powerful insights have emerged not from formal surveys but from moments of storytelling, reflection, and honest conversation. Designing evaluation activities that feel safe and human, like the peer research evaluation strand or joint mentor-mentee interviews, helps these moments surface. As we continue this work, we'll continue to create space to notice and document these moments, recognising that they often hold meaningful truths.

Impact grows when the process connects to systems.

Holding evaluation transformatively means seeing it as part of a wider system of opportunity. Stories must feed back into practice, funding, and policy — not just sit in a report. This keeps learning alive, supports collective ownership, and helps trusted relationships flourish in the spaces between services.



Learnings For GLA

The evaluation so far has shown that mentoring programmes are most effective when they are embedded within a broader ecosystem of opportunity for young people. As the stories we have gathered are testament to, building trusted relationships are an incredibly powerful catalyst for change, but to have lasting impact, they must do more than open doors; those doors need to lead somewhere meaningful.

When support is connected, layered, and intentional, young people are more confident in taking steps forward and those steps are more likely to lead to lasting outcomes. This kind of compound impact requires thoughtful design, sustained relationships, and systems that work in concert rather than isolation.

We have heard how organisations and individual mentors do this by, for example, brokering introductions to employers, building Youth Advisory Boards to provide leadership opportunities, and embedding pathways to qualifications within their mentoring programmes. However, we believe there is an opportunity to further support these organisations and the ecosystems around them to pool resources, share learning, and coordinate efforts.

The following strategic areas of exploration outline concrete ways the GLA could build on these insights embedding this learning more widely across its youth-facing programmes and supporting a more joined-up, relational approach to youth development.

1. Mapping the System to Understand Fragmentation and Opportunity

This evaluation has shown that mentoring programmes often step in where other services fall short – offering relational, person-centred support in the gaps between statutory and community provision. But while this bridging role is valuable, it also reveals that youth services are often fragmented, with limited coordination between schools, organisations and public services that support the same young people.

A potential area of exploration for the GLA could include leading or supporting a systems mapping process that brings together the current cohort of mentoring organisations, along with statutory and community partners, to understand how services interact – and where they don't. Rather than focusing only on individual journeys, this approach would map the wider system to reveal patterns: where



collaboration is strong, where duplication or disconnection exists, and what structural or procedural blockers stand in the way of joined-up support. By surfacing these dynamics, the mapping process can support more strategic commissioning, foster stronger referral networks, and help GLA ensure that mentoring sits within not outside a more integrated, youth-centred system of care.

2. Journey Mapping to Centre the Lived Experiences of Transition

Key life transitions, such as leaving care, finishing school, or navigating exclusion, are moments when young people are most exposed to risk and least well served by current systems. These aren't just administrative thresholds; they are emotionally charged, high-stakes periods where young people face fragmented services, shifting relationships, and uncertain futures. Mentoring can provide vital continuity and connection during these times but only when support systems are built with a deep understanding of what these journeys actually feel like.

A potential area of exploration for the GLA could include commissioning or supporting a journey mapping process that works directly with young people currently navigating these transitions. This would surface detailed insights into where they encounter breakdowns in support, what emotional and practical needs go unmet, and where relational approaches like mentoring are most impactful. Unlike systems mapping, which provides a macro view of how services interact, journey mapping tracing individual's lived experience over time and exposing the often invisible barriers and turning points that shape their decisions and outcomes. These insights could inform programme design for organisations that work specifically with young people in these moments of transition as well as help GLA target interventions at the moments they matter most.

3. Designing Programmes as Ecosystems of Opportunity

While mentoring isn't always explicitly framed around employment, we've seen how it consistently supports the development of transferable skills, such as communication, resilience, and problem-solving, that are essential to work readiness. However, these benefits are often not linked to formal skills or employment pathways, meaning young people may struggle to build on or progress from their mentoring experiences.

To address this, organisations should be supported to connect mentoring with other development opportunities from the outset to ensure that trusted relationships act as bridges into new spaces, rather than endpoints. This could include integrating mentoring into youth leadership initiatives, networking opportunities, or early-stage work experience



and shadowing placements, creating a more coherent and developmental journey for mentees.

A potential area of exploration for the GLA is to leverage its convening power to better connect mentoring with the broader ecosystem of services focused on employment and skills development. This could involve supporting organisations to design clear referral and progression pathways that link mentoring programmes with training, education, and employment opportunities. The GLA could also incentivise collaboration and create opportunities for networking between mentoring providers and employment-focused initiatives, helping to create smoother and more supportive transitions for young people into the world of work.

4. Connecting Mentoring to Activities and Community Spaces

Community-based spaces, such as sports clubs, dance and music studios, offer non-stigmatising environments where young people can build trust naturally and authentically. These settings provide young people with multiple ways to engage, express themselves, and develop new skills, creating rich opportunities beyond traditional one-to-one mentoring conversations.

Embedding mentoring within these activity-based contexts does more than just connect young people to employment or training opportunities; it situates them within broader communities and networks of trusted adults and peers. This approach fosters a sense of belonging and continuity, offering safe spaces young people can return to over time. It also helps expand their capacity to trust not only their individual mentor but other adults and systems, reinforcing resilience and social connection. Moreover, activities give young people alternative ways to demonstrate their emerging skills, leadership, and confidence in a public or group setting — often an important complement to more private mentoring relationships.

A potential area of exploration for the GLA is to explore ways to strengthen relationships between mentoring programmes, creative activities and community spaces. This could involve GLA convening its network of partners to map existing initiatives and identify opportunities to embed activity-based approaches within mentoring programmes and vice versa. Supporting collaboration across youth, cultural, and community sectors may broker partnerships across the ecosystem that ensure these programmes are sustained, accessible, and embedded in young peoples' environments.



5. Supporting the People Who Hold the System Together

Trusted adults and peer leaders are the backbone of effective mentoring — yet their vital work is frequently undervalued, under-resourced, and emotionally demanding. Many mentors take on multiple interconnected roles: they are guides, advocates, translators, system navigators, and emotional supports. This relational and bridging work requires significant time, skill, and emotional labour, often going unseen in traditional funding and programme models. Furthermore, we know that there is an appetite to connect across organisations, engage in more peer learning, and shared reflection — but limited infrastructure or capacity to make this happen consistently. Supporting those who hold mentoring ecosystems together is essential for sustaining quality relationships and fostering innovation.

A potential area of exploration for the GLA is supporting the creation of a London-wide community of practice for mentoring. Such a network would enable practitioners to co-develop tools, share insights, test new approaches collaboratively, and establish shared quality standards. This collective space would help embed continuous learning and fuel innovation across the mentoring landscape in London.

6. Embedding Transformative, Participatory Approaches to Learning and Evaluation

Traditional evaluation methods often fail to capture the slow, relational progress that mentoring enables and can feel extractive or disconnected from the lived realities of young people. When we centre an evaluation on the experience and interest of the young people involved the learning becomes richer and more relevant. We believe there is an opportunity to move toward a more reflective, participatory learning culture across GLA-funded youth programmes. This includes embedding elements of co-design, and storytelling as core evaluation practices — not one-off engagements. It also means revisiting existing evaluation requirements and building tools that are trauma-informed and relational, recognising that change often happens in small, nonlinear steps.

A potential area of exploration for the GLA is streamlining evaluation requirements to reduce duplication and free up capacity for deeper, more reflective learning approaches. Providing practical training and financial support to help organisations use participatory MLE approaches. Scaling what works by developing a practical toolkit based on this evaluation's process, codifying the participatory, trauma-informed methods we've used into adaptable templates, principles, and resources. Creating learning cohorts or peer networks where GLA-funded organisations can build confidence, exchange ideas, and embed transformative evaluation practices in their own work.



Realities and Challenges in Practice

Throughout this evaluation, we've remained in close conversations with peer researchers, organisations, and our internal team. Their reflections have surfaced critical insights into the practical challenges of running a transformative evaluation. These reflections highlight the ongoing, relational labour required in participatory evaluation. They also point to a core learning:

Youth participation means more than opening the door to young people – it requires us to continuously adapt our approach to create spaces where young people feel genuinely welcomed, empowered to speak up, and inspired to lead.

Flexibility, care, and trust are what ultimately sustain meaningful involvement.

Feedback on Peer Researcher Training

Clarifying purpose and expectation setting

What we heard: Young people consistently asked for clearer context: *Why does this research matter? Who will see it? What will it change?* Initially, this wasn't always clear, and some participants struggled to see the point of their involvement.

What we did: We began each session with a clear, consistent introduction explaining the purpose of the evaluation, the potential for impact, and who would access the results. This upfront framing helped build motivation and a sense of shared purpose.

Keeping sessions engaging

What we heard: Young people told us they needed more movement, interaction, and opportunities to connect with one another.

What we did: We embedded icebreakers, energisers, and games into sessions. When in person, simply getting people moving around the room made a notable difference.



Interactive quizzes and informal peer introductions also helped boost energy and foster connections. These adjustments made training feel less like school, and more like a shared, interactive process.

Food, refreshments, and small incentives

What we heard: Peer researchers highlighted the importance of having food available, especially during longer sessions.

What we did: Compensating peer researchers for their travel time, providing lunch, snacks, and drinks signalled that their time was valued and helped remove barriers to participation. Several young people said these small things made them feel looked after. This was especially important given the travel times that young people were making to our in person sessions, which averaged around 1.5 hours each way.

Real-world application

What we heard: A number of young people asked for more practical examples of how research skills could be useful in real life. They wanted to see how interviews, data analysis, and storytelling might apply to jobs, education, or community work.

What we did: In future iterations, we plan to include short case studies and examples from previous projects to ground abstract concepts in familiar realities.

Responding to Barriers to Participation and Access

Calendar scheduling and competing demands

Attendance fluctuated throughout the training period. We noticed a consistent drop in engagement on Fridays and during periods of academic pressure, such as exam season. Despite their interest, two of the peer researchers made the decision to step back from the programme due to GCSE and A Level exams. This underscored the importance of scheduling around youth availability and avoiding assumptions about capacity—even among those who are highly motivated.

Hybrid and flexible formats

We developed the peer researcher programme using a blend of in-person and online activities. While hybrid options increased accessibility for some, we encountered real challenges with sustaining engagement online. Few young people felt comfortable turning



on their cameras. Verbal contributions were limited, and it was harder to gauge how people were feeling or whether they were following the material. One-to-one sessions proved more effective than group video calls, and ultimately reinforced the importance of offering multiple modes of communication.

On the other hand, we also found that when working with organisations to schedule interviews, our online scheduling tool, Calendly, was efficient and well-received. This points to the need for flexibility depending on the audience: young people often prefer informal and relational contact, while organisations may respond better to structured tools.

Access to safe and private spaces

Some peer researchers could not participate in sessions or interviews from home due to a lack of privacy, noisy environments, or shared family spaces. This was a clear barrier. We responded by offering the use of a neutral external office space when needed. Two out of the six participants used this option, this made participation viable and more comfortable.

Trust-building and consistent support

Engagement improved dramatically when young people had a consistent relationship with a specific person on the team. Several participants noted they felt more confident when they knew who to contact if something came up. In response, we assigned a named point of contact to each peer researcher and built in one-to-one coaching check-ins throughout the programme. This also helped us detect shifts in behaviour or engagement early on—allowing us to respond with care, flexibility, or space as needed.

Tablet and mobile-first engagement

Nearly all peer researchers accessed the programme using phones or tablets rather than laptops or desktops. While this allowed for flexible participation, it made collaborative tasks, like working on shared documents, more difficult. We also noted that many young people do not use email and digital calendars in the same way adults do, which impacted communication and scheduling.

Youth-friendly digital tools

We experimented with tools like a project website and shared drives to keep everyone informed and allow for them to easily work on their materials when we weren't in training. However, technical barriers emerged: several young people used school-linked email accounts that blocked access to third-party platforms. We quickly realised that having



everything written down and linked in email was the easiest way of keeping them focused on the right documents. We also embedded alternative access methods, including paper versions of key materials in all of our in person settings so that young people could work on them.

Language and tone

A key learning was the importance of using accessible, youth-friendly language. Formal or academic jargon often created distance and undermined engagement. We reviewed all training and guidance materials to ensure they were age-appropriate, clear, and relatable. Feedback from one of our partner organisations working with young people from vulnerable backgrounds, highlighted how certain terms, like “interviews,” carried negative associations, particularly due to young people’s past experiences with statutory services. While this wasn’t true for all the organisations we worked with, making small adjustments—such as referring to interviews as “conversations” and using “Topic Guides” instead of “Interview Guides”—was a simple yet impactful change. This shift in tone helped foster a more open, comfortable atmosphere and encouraged deeper participation.

Training materials

Many peer researchers were stepping into this kind of role for the first time, engaging with complex and often sensitive topics within a short space of time. This made the design of our training materials critical. We needed to strike the right balance: offering just enough information, presented in a way that felt clear, accessible, and engaging for a diverse group of young people aged 16 to 21.

Given the range in age, confidence, and prior experience, we focused on creating tools that could be easily followed independently, with minimal facilitation. The materials were not static — they were continually refined in response to feedback from the group. We adapted layout, language, and content to make them more user-friendly, and found that collaborative tools (like shared digital documents) worked best. These allowed us to support young people in real time, while also giving them ownership and flexibility in how they worked.

Coaching support

While well-designed materials were important, they weren’t enough on their own. The most effective support came through one-to-one coaching relationships. Building personal



rapport made a real difference — especially during moments of self-doubt, overwhelm, or disengagement.

Each peer researcher had a named point of contact who checked in regularly, offered encouragement, and adapted tasks to meet their needs. These relational touchpoints helped reduce pressure, sustain motivation, and respond quickly to any emerging challenges. Over time, they also helped build the trust and psychological safety needed for young people to share openly, take risks, and grow in confidence.



Limitations and Biases

Focus and Scope

In **Case Study 1**, our evaluation lens was intentionally focused on “Stories of Success”—examples that highlighted transformation, growth, and the positive impact of mentoring relationships. This approach helped to illustrate the potential and value of mentoring in concrete and compelling ways. The primary stakeholders we engaged with were project leads and mentors, meaning that our access to young people’s perspectives was often indirect and filtered through adult interpretations. While challenges to mentoring programmes surfaced, the emphasis remained on outcomes that aligned with the programme’s intended benefits. As a result, this particular round of case studies offers limited insight into the more complex, ambiguous, or difficult experiences of young people within mentoring relationships—particularly those who may have disengaged or whose outcomes were less clearly “successful.”

In **Case Study 2**, the approach was deliberately different. By giving peer researchers ownership over their research design, we gained access to deeply personal and authentic insights, particularly into the nature of mentoring relationships and what young people value. Their chosen research questions covered a broad and diverse range of focus areas, reflecting their individual interests and lived experiences. This was a major strength of the methodology, but it also introduced challenges around consistency and scope. For example, some peer researchers wanted to conduct their research with specific age groups—such as mentees aged 11–16—which posed practical and ethical constraints, particularly around safeguarding and consent. In such cases, we were unable to facilitate the interviews they had hoped for. Additionally, in pairing peer researchers with research contributors, we worked closely with organisations to ensure safeguarding and compatibility, taking into account the emotional readiness, facilitation skills, and support needs of everyone involved. This careful curation was important for ensuring a positive experience but may have limited the spontaneity or openness of some exchanges.

Moreover, because many of the peer researchers had themselves benefitted from mentoring, their research often began with the assumption of mentoring as a positive and effective youth service. While this gave their work a strong sense of commitment and purpose, it also meant that critical perspectives were sometimes less prominent or harder to relate to. Taken together, the breadth and independence of their inquiries resulted in



rich, varied findings but also made it more difficult to draw out a single, unified message across the case study. The diversity of questions, topics, and formats reflects the strength of peer-led research, but it also points to the importance of embedding these findings in the broader evaluation process to better support synthesis, comparative analysis, and structured reflection across projects.

Self-selection bias

Across both Case Study 1 and Case Study 2, our findings and reflections are shaped by inherent self-selection bias—an important consideration when interpreting the evidence and insights.

In **Case Study 1**, organisations self-selected to participate and share their stories. As a result, we had no influence over which projects were included or which individuals were invited to contribute. Access to mentors and mentees was brokered through the organisations themselves, meaning that only those selected or encouraged by their project leads had the opportunity to speak with us. This introduced a degree of selection bias, whereby stories that were seen as more positive, polished may have been prioritised – or at the very least more confident to raise their hand and be a part of the process.

In **Case Study 2**, self-selection played out differently but had a similar effect on whose voices were heard. The peer researchers who stayed engaged throughout the programme were typically highly motivated and already involved in youth-led or leadership initiatives. Their ability to participate consistently reflected, in part, their existing confidence and time availability. In contrast, young people facing more significant structural or personal barriers such as mental health issues, limited digital access, or lack of a physical space to conduct research, were less likely to sustain participation. For example, we noticed that participants with SEND needs often required additional scaffolded support (such as breaking tasks into manageable steps and more frequent check-ins) to remain engaged. While we made adaptations where possible, more thought and infrastructure would be required to facilitate wider outreach and retention.

Technology and authenticity

In **Case Study 1**, all interviews were conducted online. This approach offered practical benefits: it was a convenient way to engage with organisations across different locations and allowed us to easily record and transcribe conversations. However, it also came with notable limitations. Participants, particularly when mentors were joined by their mentees, had to find private, quiet spaces for the interviews, which wasn't always straightforward. In



some instances, conversations took place in schools, requiring staff to secure separate rooms, which we know was a challenge for certain programmes. Building rapport, especially with young people, proved more difficult in virtual settings so mentors were encouraged to be there. While adults were generally more comfortable navigating online conversations, some young people found the format formal or unfamiliar. The act of scheduling a virtual interview also added a layer of formality that may have discouraged some from participating and scheduling a call with us.

In **Case Study 2**, we delivered the peer research programme through a hybrid model that included both in-person and online training. Peer researchers consistently feedback that in-person sessions were more effective for building trust, connecting with facilitators, and engaging with the material. Once relationships were established, however, our online tools, particularly for scheduling and coaching, proved effective. We also used shared Google Documents throughout, which most participants adapted to quickly. That said, digital access remained a barrier. One participant left training due to difficulties connecting online. His mentor later shared that he felt “slightly discouraged to take part” as a result.

An additional observation was the use of generative AI by peer researchers during their independent work. Some used AI tools to create visuals, storyboards, or written summaries, which helped level the playing field by reducing skill-based disparities. However, this also raised concerns about authenticity—particularly when it became difficult to distinguish the young person’s voice from the AI-generated content. To address this, we introduced a final presentation format in which each researcher explained their findings and process in their own words. These experiences raise important considerations for future participatory projects, especially as digital tools become more embedded in research processes. Ensuring that technology supports rather than compromises voice, agency, and authenticity will be critical moving forward.

Finding the Right Medium to Share the Work

In **Case Study 1**, we aligned our “Stories of Success” with the templates provided by the GLA. While these templates were accessible, the length and richness of the stories often exceeded the space available on one slide, spilling over multiple pages. This raised questions about whether a written format was the most effective way to communicate the depth of experience and transformation captured in these narratives. It also prompted us to think about what alternative formats might better serve both the GLA and the audiences we want to engage with, and how we can bring stories to life in more dynamic or digestible ways.



In **Case Study 2**, the goal of producing a creative asset was twofold: to help young people consolidate their analysis into a tangible product, and to offer a medium through which they could express their work in personal, meaningful ways. The challenge was not with the idea of creative outputs themselves, but rather with the conditions under which they were introduced. In the first round of peer researcher training, participants shared a wide range of imaginative and thoughtful ideas for how they wanted to present their findings. However, limited capacity and resources meant we were unable to support many of these ideas, and young people had to work within a more restricted set of options. This was further compounded by tight timelines and competing demands—such as exam periods—which sometimes led to complex insights being condensed into simplified formats that didn't fully reflect the richness of their research.

In response, we began to shift towards a more collaborative approach, co-producing assets during coaching calls. This allowed for more iterative support and greater alignment with each young person's vision, and proved to be both more engaging and more manageable. Looking ahead, we are exploring additional ways to creatively consolidate and share findings by for example, linking asset production to in-person events or developing more streamlined adaptable templates that provide structure while still allowing room for personalisation and reflection. Our aim is to balance creativity and depth, ensuring that the outputs remain meaningful for participants and valuable for those engaging with them.



Recommendations, Questions, and Considerations

Based on what we're hearing so far, these recommendations capture how we can continue to hold this evaluation in ways that feel safe, relational, and true to our values. They reflect what's working well and where we see opportunities to refine our methods, deepen organisational learning, and make participation more sustainable for everyone involved. We will keep testing these ideas together in the final phase, and adjust as we learn more from young people, delivery partners, and our own practice.

Refine engagement methods: from individual interviews to small focus groups

In the next phase, we recommend shifting from one-to-one interviews to small focus groups, ideally in collaboration with one or two partner organisations. This approach maintains the primacy of youth voice but reduces the overall burden on peer researchers and participants. Small group settings may feel more natural and discursive, helping to surface richer insights and build peer-to-peer validation. Trained facilitators or co-facilitators could model trauma-informed questioning, while ensuring quieter voices are still heard.

Introduce 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) methodology

To deepen organisational learning, we propose introducing the Most Significant Change technique with selected delivery partners. This participatory method invites young people to identify and reflect on key turning points, shifts in identity, relationships, or confidence that mentoring has enabled. It supports storytelling and qualitative insight, while also building the evaluative capacity of delivery organisations. Sharing this approach through co-design workshops and inviting partners to play a validation role when we meet in October could help embed MSC as a tool for internal learning beyond the life of this evaluation.



Consider light-touch peer involvement to avoid overextension

We've heard clearly that sustained peer involvement must feel voluntary, reciprocal, and not extractive. For the final evaluation phase, we recommend pausing any new recruitment unless there is clear value and interest from young people themselves. Instead, we will explore lighter-touch roles, such as participating in focus groups and sensemaking sessions, so peer researchers can focus their time and energy on shaping the final round of analysis and recommendations.

Pilot feedback loops for young people who disengage

Building on what we've learned about self-selection bias, we suggest testing light-touch ways to hear from young people who chose not to take part or stepped away. This could include short reflective conversations through trusted partners, anonymous feedback forms, or simple check-ins that help us understand what made participation harder to sustain and what could change in future.

Cost for time and relational capacity

This approach has shown that transformative, participatory evaluation requires more time for coaching, safeguarding, and trust-building than traditional methods allow. We recommend planning for these hidden costs in future phases and funding models, and designing funding cycles and reporting requirements that flex to match the rhythms of young people's lives, such as exam periods, holidays, and key transitions, so teams are properly resourced to hold relational work safely and realistically, without putting additional strain on staff or young people.

Protect reflection over polished outputs

We have seen that producing highly polished creative assets under tight deadlines can risk oversimplifying complex insights and reduce space for deeper sensemaking. We recommend keeping final creative outputs proportionate and grounded, so they continue to support honest reflection and learning rather than become an end in themselves.

What We're Curious About Now

These emerging questions reflect what we are learning about holding this evaluation in transformative ways, and what it might mean for the wider ecosystem that sits around mentoring. We see these as prompts for ongoing conversation, sensemaking, and shared design as the final phase unfolds:



How can funding cycles align better with the time relational work requires?

Meaningful, trauma-informed participation needs more time than traditional timelines often allow. Could the GLA explore how future funding cycles or reporting requirements might flex to better match the seasonal rhythms of young people's lives – for example, exam periods, summer breaks, or transitions?

What role could the GLA play in tackling structural barriers to access?

Self-selection bias and hidden barriers mean some young people are still under-represented within both mentoring services and this evaluation. Could the GLA test ways to reduce practical barriers – such as travel costs or access to safe spaces – at a systemic level, so these supports are not left to individual organisations to solve alone?

How do we ensure youth insights inform not just programme tweaks but policy shifts?

Many of the stories shared through this evaluation highlight wider issues around education, housing, safety and mental health. How can the GLA use these insights to advocate for joined-up action beyond mentoring, so mentoring is not asked to fill systemic gaps alone?

How is the overall funding strategy for this mentoring ecosystem evolving?

Could the final round of evaluation offer real-time insight to inform future resource allocation or programme design, especially as we learn more about the hidden costs of relational work and the value of sustained peer involvement?

In what ways can we further support the GLA to embed youth-generated insights into action?

We may have an opportunity to connect the work conducted by peer researchers with mentors by sharing their findings in an upcoming co-design workshop to validate and expand on these insights. Engaging a wider group of mentors and project leads could help us identify systemic or cross-sector changes reflected in the findings. This could also be explored with the GLA through a dedicated Learning and Reflection session to bring staff and partners into direct dialogue with youth insights.

What infrastructure could help keep learning alive beyond this evaluation?

How might we design simple, light-touch infrastructure, digital, relational or operational, that makes it easier for mentoring providers and youth partners to keep sharing learning,



storytelling and feedback once this evaluation phase ends? What role could the GLA play in connecting organisations so learning does not sit in silos?

Risks and Considerations

These risks and considerations reflect what we've learned so far about what can undermine participatory, trauma-informed evaluation if not handled with care, and what we need to stay mindful of in the final phase.

Balancing rigour and responsiveness

There is an inherent tension between producing a robust, deadline-bound evaluation and holding space for authentic, participatory work led by young people. Building trust and sharing power takes time, and it rarely happens in neat, linear phases. Extended contracting timelines and stretched staff capacity have also impacted the programme's ability to progress as planned. Practical steps like finalising consent for case studies and responding to an evolving scope require careful navigation, clear communication with the GLA, and realistic pacing. Throughout this process, we have aimed to be transparent with the GLA about the realities of leading a trauma-informed, participatory evaluation — including the added complexity of working without a dedicated in-house safeguarding specialist. The GLA's openness to this dialogue and willingness to be flexible has been crucial. It has allowed the work to remain grounded in what feels real and meaningful to young people, rather than rushed. This shared understanding strengthens the integrity of the evaluation and ensures it honours the lived experiences at its heart.

Preventing extractive engagement

A clear risk in this work is that peer involvement can tip into feeling extractive if young people do not have genuine choice or do not see real value in giving more of their time. We recommend pausing any new recruitment or engagement unless young people are actively co-creating the terms and feel that the benefit is mutual. One option is to reframe the final phase around low-pressure creative or reflective spaces, where young people can sense-check insights, shape how stories are shared, and decide if or how they want to stay involved.

Building pathways to action

Another critical risk is that youth insights are gathered but not acted on — sitting in reports rather than driving practical change. To prevent this, we suggest sharing learnings with



delivery partners in an upcoming co-design workshop to test how the findings and themes can inform programme design, funding decisions, or future support offers. This shared reflection helps ensure the evaluation feeds back into the wider ecosystem of mentoring, rather than becoming a one-way extractive process.

Staying alert to representation and bias

The evaluation surfaced clear gaps in representation. There is a risk that self-selection bias or practical barriers mean that the voices we hear are not fully reflective of those who face the greatest challenges. This needs to remain visible in how we interpret findings and design future evaluation phases. Where possible, we should test ways to reach young people who have disengaged, and stay curious about who is not in the room – and why.

Compensation processes and constraints

Finally, compensating young people for their time and effort is an important part of making this work fair and participatory. However, this raises practical risks around employment liabilities and administrative barriers, which we have mitigated through volunteer consent forms, that outline the roles and responsibilities of young people during the peer research period.



What's On The Horizon?

Looking ahead, we have planned a set of workshops to build on what we're learning so far, test new participatory tools, and fill any gaps before the final phase of the evaluation. These upcoming workshops will help us deepen our collective understanding of how stories can be shared ethically and meaningfully, and ensure that young people's voices continue to shape the insights that follow.

Online Storytelling Workshop for Organisations – September 2025

This online workshop will support organisations working with young people to reflect on how they collect, frame, and use personal stories, especially in the context of evaluation and learning. Grounded in equity design principles, the session will explore how storytelling can centre young people's agency, avoid reinforcing stereotypes, and show the wider structural, relational, and personal contexts that shape their experiences.

Participants will try out tools like the Hero's Journey and Journey Mapping to better understand young people's pathways through their services, including barriers at intrapersonal, interpersonal, structural, and societal levels. The workshop will also include a hands-on introduction to the Most Significant Change (MSC) evaluation method. Project leads and mentors will co-define domains of change, share examples of the most significant shifts they've observed, and vote on the stories that best represent meaningful impact.

Throughout, participants will be encouraged to think critically about the ethical responsibilities of storytelling, asking whose story is being told, for what purpose, and under what conditions. They will also reflect on how their organisation's impact sits within a wider social landscape, and how to ensure stories are collected and shared in ways that uphold the dignity of the storyteller and avoid blame.

Most Significant Change Workshops – September 2025

We will run a series of MSC workshops with young people to gather a wider range of mentoring experiences to inform our final case study. These workshops will prioritise organisations whose young people have not yet contributed and help us respond to any gaps in our insights so far.



Through guided activities, participants will revisit the main themes that peer researchers have surfaced such as confidence, skills, relationships, and resilience and use these as starting points to share stories about the most significant changes they have experienced through mentoring. Groups will then choose the stories they feel best represent wider trends or powerful evidence of impact. CPI will use these stories to develop journey maps that highlight key insights and turning points in young people's mentoring journeys. These will be shared back with project leads and mentors for validation in the final co-design workshops before being included in the final report.

Case Study, Round 3 – October 2025

Our final round of case studies will explicitly focus on engaging and amplifying voices that we have not yet heard from in this evaluation. We will work with underrepresented organisations and young people to understand their experiences and reflections on mentorship in London.

During this period, we aim to use storytelling as a tool for both young people and organisations to reflect on mentoring. This final phase will highlight the tools, insights, and approaches that support them to share their stories and explore the role of mentorship within a wider system of support.

Co-design Workshop – November 2025

In November 2025, the final virtual Co-Design Workshop for NDYP stakeholders will focus on three key objectives. Firstly, the session will review the stories collected during the evaluation and consult on the emerging recommendations. Secondly, it will provide an opportunity to validate and expand upon the insights and inquiries raised by the peer researchers. And finally, participants will test and refine draft tools, templates, and guidance developed for the Storytelling Toolkit. Feedback gathered during this session will be crucial in shaping the final version of the Storytelling Toolkit and informing the actionable recommendations to be presented to the GLA.

Mentor Quality Framework Storytelling Toolkit – January 2026

The storytelling toolkit will be a key legacy of this evaluation. Designed to strengthen the existing [Mentor Quality Framework](#) (MQF), it will help organisations show what quality mentoring looks and feels like in practice. While the MQF supports organisations to assess their work, this toolkit will support organisations to bring those assessments to life –



highlighting how quality is experienced by young people and staff, and helping build trust and understanding across teams, funders, and partners.

Storytelling strengthens the MQF's role as a tool for learning and growth. It helps organisations, especially smaller ones, demonstrate, improve, and communicate their impact in a practical and ethical way. By connecting real stories and experiences to the MQF standards, organisations can show what quality mentoring looks like day to day.

We'll develop the toolkit over the course of the evaluation. Through online storytelling workshops, we'll identify the needs of NDYP organisations, draft the core structure and content, and test the tools in our Co-Design workshop in November. We'll then refine and finalise the toolkit, ready to share as a practical resource for the sector.

Final Report - January 2026

Our final report will bring together the learnings from every phase and deliverable of this evaluation, providing a comprehensive overview of our journey. It will cover all activities undertaken and materials produced, showing how these elements enable a systems lens, centre learning, and contribute to capacity building. The report will be designed to help stakeholders revisit and embed these transformative evaluation practices beyond this project. It will also present headline findings that detail the programme's social and economic outcomes for young Londoners, explain how these were achieved, and identify effective interventions and their associated costs to inform and influence the wider sector.