Centre for Public Impact
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DOCUMENTING JOURNEYS OF MENTORSHIP

A transformative approach to evaluating the impact of the **New Deal for Young People**

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INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

The Centre for Public Impact is using a transformative evaluation approach to assess the impact of mentoring programmes funded by the Greater London Authority's New Deal for Young People Programme.

These case studies explore the transformative impact of mentoring programmes focused on:

- Mental health/ therapeutic support
- Skills/employment development, and
- Youth club-based activities.

Insights from young people, mentors, and organisational leaders highlight key successes, challenges, and actionable recommendations to improve and sustain mentoring initiatives. Themes of empowerment, resilience, and adaptability underscore the important role of mentoring in addressing young people's evolving needs.

The findings presented here were derived from interviews with mentors, young people, and project leaders, along with an analysis of thematic outcomes. Data collection methods included narrative storytelling, thematic coding of interview transcripts, and reflections from organisational stakeholders. To ensure confidentiality we have anonymised references to individual organisations, mentors, and mentees and obtained explicit consent for all information where organisations could be identified or are directly quoted in this report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation is structured around key questions and shares what we learned in each of the following areas:

Mentoring Approaches

Flexible mentoring methods, including trauma-informed practices, effectively address social isolation, mental health needs, and the balance between family expectations and personal aspirations.

Structured sessions and creative activities help close skill gaps, enhance employability, and prepare young people for real-world challenges.

Embedding mentoring in familiar environments and training former mentees as role models fosters trust, improves accessibility, and strengthens programme sustainability.

Activities such as dance, storytelling, and art enable young people to articulate emotions, develop communication skills, and find stability amid emotional challenges.

Trauma-informed approaches, holistic well-being models, and flexible mentoring options provide tailored support to address gaps in mental health services.

Structured frameworks, including phased models and dedicated mentor teams, ensure consistent, high-quality support to meet the growing demand.

The Role of GLA Funding

Funding from the New Deal for Young People has enabled the expansion of mentoring services in schools, increased one-to-one mentoring through stable staffing, and supported creative, community-based approaches such as arts, sports, and peer mentoring.

The Meaning of Mentoring

The core value of mentoring lies in relationships built on empathy.

Being a mentor means adopting a whole-person approach to support and guidance.

Being a mentee means having someone to guide and empower rather than dictate decisions.

Challenges to Mentoring Programmes

Increasingly complex caseloads require personalisation and adaptability, including varied mentorship approaches, navigating cultural and contextual prejudices, and addressing diverse psychological and physical safety needs.

The decline in access to public services and infrastructure poses challenges for mentorship programmes, such as:

Limited mental health support for young people.
Dependency on overstretched public institutions, leading to frustration and delays.
A lack of publicly owned spaces to conduct activities.

Short-term funding cycles hinder organisations' ability to plan and grow sustainably, leading to a loss of institutional capacity and knowledge while negatively impacting relationships with young people.

Mentors develop strong relationships and insights into young people's challenges but are often not best positioned to take direct action. Establishing effective channels for sharing information with relevant public services is crucial.

WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT MENTORING APPROACHES

Across London, the New Deal for Young People (NDYP) has supported a diverse range of organisations in reimagining how mentorship can address the pressing needs of young people.

Mentoring programmes have become an essential tool for addressing the complex and evolving needs of young people, particularly those facing systemic challenges, social isolation, or trauma. The long-term effects of the COVID-19 pandemic have amplified these difficulties, disrupting social interactions, education, and emotional well-being.

Many young people now face heightened stress from overcrowding at home, the rising cost of living, and financial instability, while the chronic underfunding of youth services and a lack of accessible mental health support have left critical gaps in care. These challenges are compounded by the increasing complexity of young people's lives.

Many require practical guidance to navigate transitions into adulthood, companionship to reduce isolation, and access to public services they may struggle to reach on their own. Schools and local authorities, under growing pressure to meet diverse needs with limited resources, are often unable to provide the personalised support that young people need to thrive. In this context, mentoring programmes have become a lifeline, addressing gaps left by underfunded systems and responding to the unique pressures of today's young people.

Building trust through tailored approaches, mentoring programmes adapts to individual needs and overcomes barriers to support growth.

Mentoring programmes have focused on creating strong, supportive relationships to help young people navigate personal and systemic challenges. For example, one organisation working with trans and non-binary youth has adopted a trauma-informed approach to ensure mentoring sessions are both flexible and accessible. With options for in-person, online, or text-based communication, these sessions meet young people where they feel most comfortable, particularly those experiencing social anxiety or isolation.

Similarly, an organisation supporting young people from marginalised communities transitioned from casework to one-to-one mentoring for those aged 16 to 25. This change has allowed for deeper conversations about balancing family expectations with personal aspirations, while also offering practical employability support like functional skills training. These approaches directly address the challenge of social isolation and unmet mental health needs, ensuring young people have a consistent and reliable source of guidance.

Mentoring programmes address skill gaps and build independence through structured sessions, creative activities, and real-world learning methods.

Programmes have placed a strong emphasis on equipping young people with the skills needed to navigate adulthood and achieve independence. **One initiative** has developed structured 12-week mentoring cycles in schools, followed by group activities such as creative writing, music, and football. These sessions not only address gaps in employability and life skills but also provide a safe space for social interaction, helping to counteract the long-term effects of the pandemic.

Another organisation uses storytelling and role-playing to teach financial literacy, decision-making, and conflict resolution. Through relatable, low-pressure scenarios, young people learn to reflect on their own behaviours and develop practical strategies for managing challenges. By addressing gaps in formal education and preparing young people for real-world challenges, these programmes are responding to the systemic underfunding of youth services and the growing complexity of young people's needs.

Mentoring leverages community and peer connections to provide accessible support and strengthen engagement.

Mentoring embedded in community activities has proven particularly effective in creating natural opportunities for engagement. One programme integrates mentoring into structured football sessions, offering consistent and accessible support in a familiar setting. These sessions are complemented by drop-in centres, where young people can access additional resources such as clinical psychologists and mental health services.

Another organisation has developed a peer-mentoring model, training former mentees to act as ambassadors and role models for younger participants. This approach not only strengthens community ties but also ensures the sustainability of mentoring programmes.

By leveraging the power of community and peer relationships, these initiatives address the challenges of overcrowding and limited access to public services, while also building trust and fostering long-term engagement.

Creative approaches help young people express emotions, build communication skills, and find stability.

Creative outlets such as dance, storytelling, and art have been used to help young people articulate their emotions and develop communication skills. One programme combines expressive dance with group mentoring, teaching children to identify and articulate their feelings in a supportive and consistent environment. Another initiative encourages self-reflection through creative exercises, such as drawing oneself as a superhero or creating personality-based art projects. These activities help young people reframe their challenges and recognise their strengths.In addressing the emotional struggles exacerbated by COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis, these creative approaches provide a therapeutic outlet and a sense of stability.

Mental health-focused mentoring addresses service gaps with tailored, trauma-informed support.

Many programmes have made mental health support a central focus, addressing the critical lack of accessible services for young people. Trauma-informed mentoring approaches offer safer spaces for discussing emotional and psychological challenges. For example, one organisation uses holistic well-being models that integrate physical, social, and emotional health, ensuring young people receive comprehensive support. Tools such as outcome star assessments help mentees set and track goals, offering structure and purpose in their development. Another programme provides flexible mentoring options, such as online and text-based sessions, to support young people with high levels of social anxiety. These initiatives play a vital role in filling gaps in mental health services, providing young people with consistent and tailored support that meets their specific needs.

Structured frameworks enable mentoring programmes to scale and meet growing demand effectively.

To meet growing demand, many organisations have adopted structured frameworks that ensure consistency and scalability. For instance, one programme transitioned from informal mentoring to a system with five dedicated mentors, each managing caseloads of 15–17 young people. Weekly supervision sessions and targeted workshops ensure high-quality support across the programme.

Another organisation developed a phased mentoring model, guiding mentees through stages of awareness, exploration, planning, and evaluation. This structured approach allows mentors to deliver purposeful and sustained support. By creating scalable systems, these programmes address the increasing complexity of young people's challenges while ensuring their services can grow to meet demand.

WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT THE ROLE OF FUNDING

Funding from the Greater London Authority has been instrumental in allowing mentoring programmes to meet the evolving needs of young people and address systemic challenges.

One of the most significant impacts has been the ability to scale services, particularly in schools, where demand for mentoring has grown. Many programmes have expanded their reach, offering structured cycles of support and ensuring more young people can access mentoring.

The funding has also increased the availability of one-to-one mentoring by enabling organisations to hire dedicated mentors and reduce reliance on short-term or sessional staff. This stability has ensured that young people receive consistent, high-quality mentoring throughout the year. In addition, GLA funding has supported the development of creative and community-based approaches, enabling organisations to expand programmes that incorporate arts, sports, and peer mentoring models.

Another critical outcome of GLA funding has been the ability to respond to broader environmental challenges. Programmes have adapted to address the long-term effects of the pandemic, overcrowding, and financial instability, offering tailored interventions that support young people's emotional resilience and practical development.

The funding has also allowed mentoring programmes to fill gaps in public services, providing companionship, behavioural therapy, and signposting to mental health resources.

Finally, GLA funding has encouraged reciprocal investment from schools and other stakeholders, as the demonstrated success of mentoring programmes has inspired additional financial support. This cycle of funding has strengthened the sustainability of mentoring initiatives, ensuring they remain a vital resource for young people across London.

WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT THE MEANING OF MENTORING

1. Quality relationships are built on empathy, with shared lived experiences facilitating deep connections and mutual growth between mentors and mentees.

At the heart of mentoring lies the relationship between mentors and mentees. Young people often form the strongest connections with mentors who share or deeply understand their experiences. Across supported organisations, mentors and practitioners observed that lived experience enhances relatability, making mentoring relationships more meaningful and effective. This connection becomes particularly vital during transitional periods, such as the move from primary to secondary school, when young people face heightened challenges. Mentors with similar lived experiences are better placed to empathise and provide guidance during these critical times.

> If you have a mentee who's experienced something similar to you in your personal life, you can use that as an example so this young person knows that I do understand. I might not have necessarily gone through it myself, but I'm able to relate to them in a different way. And I feel like that is a big help.
>
> - Youth Development Worker, **LifeLine Projects**

Additionally, mentors highlight the reciprocal nature of mentoring as a defining feature of its impact. Supporting young people teaches mentors resilience, empathy, and an appreciation for the significance of small, incremental progress. This mutual growth between mentor and mentee has emerged as a cornerstone of effective mentoring practice.

2. Being a mentor is a unique opportunity to focus deeply on an individual's story, context and needs to provide more rounded, impactful support.

Mentoring offers a unique opportunity to focus deeply on an individual's needs, enabling mentors to understand a young person's story and provide more rounded, impactful support. Many mentors, including those with backgrounds in youth work and healthcare, emphasised that this whole-person approach creates a profound sense of impact—not only on the mentee but also on their wider circle, including friends and family.

I felt the impact [of mentoring] was a lot greater than doing the youth work just because you could really focus on one young person and you knew pretty much everything about them. Whereas with youth work you're working with hundreds of young people that come in and out, and you might only get maybe about 5% of their story and then there's other things that happen but with the mentoring you really get a deep understanding of the young person.

As a casual mentor I feel as though I had a very, very big impact on them and I was able to see like a huge turnaround and even after the mentoring had finished you see the impact that it had on their lives and not just them but family and friends.

-Mentor, **Inspiring Young Enfield**

One mentor with experience as a drug and alcohol practitioner noted how mentoring illuminated the interconnectedness of substance misuse with every other aspect of a person's life. This awareness allowed for a more meaningful and comprehensive form of support, tailored to the mentee's unique circumstances and challenges.

When I saw an opportunity for a new project that focuses on the child as a whole, that attracted me to want to join a team where I can actually work with everything, as opposed to just the substance misuse.

-Mentor, **Inspiring Young Enfield**

3. Being a mentee differs from other youth services by meeting young people on their terms and creating a space for guidance over authority.

Mentees shared that misconceptions about mentoring can sometimes create initial barriers because it can been seen as similar to having an authority figure or guardian, which can feel intrusive or intimidating.However, organisations that successfully reframe mentoring as a supportive relationship based on shared interests and mutual respect often succeed in reshaping these perceptions. When mentoring is likened to having an older friend, it becomes more relatable and approachable. This reframing fosters trust and connection, helping young people fully engage with the process and derive greater benefits from the experience.

I learned to understand mentorship as a whole as something else. My mentor doesn't just help me or guide me, we talk about all sorts of things. We both support the same team, we talk about sports, and what we're doing in the day or during the week, so it feels like having an older friend, rather than someone who's telling me what to do and where to go. In my case, that was helpful.

- Mentee, **SayYes Mentoring**

WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH NEEDS

Mental health has become a shared focus across youth-focused organisations, each adapting its mentorship strategies to meet the emotional and psychological needs of the young people they serve. The pandemic exacerbated existing challenges, leaving many young people struggling to articulate their emotions or cope with daily stresses. In response, mentorship programmes have emerged as vital tools, emphasising trust and consistency to create safe spaces for emotional exploration. Across the board, organisations have integrated mental health support into their mentorship models, combining holistic and personalised approaches to address these pressing needs.

> Since COVID, if I'm honest, things have gotten far worse. A lot of young people are dealing with mental health challenges–they're not as motivated as they used to be. Some of them missed a lot of school time, and that's affected their confidence.

- Project Manager, **QPR in the Community Trust**

Tailored mentoring addresses diverse challenges and unique needs of young people.

Despite their shared goals, organisations vary in the specific challenges they address and the populations they serve Some work with young people facing identity-based stressors, offering trauma-informed care and flexible mentoring options tailored to individual needs, such as accommodating social anxiety. Others focus on youth in high-stress, trauma-exposed environments, addressing pervasive feelings of paranoia and mistrust with deliberate efforts to create safety and stability. There are also programmes that specialise in supporting young people with severe mental health issues, such as suicidal ideation or self-harm, providing them with tools to navigate systemic barriers and manage crises while maintaining active roles in their own care plans.

> I know that mentors and a lot of people who work in support services are not strangers to grief and loss of young lives, but in the last few years, the loss of life through suicide has increased a lot. The whole team, the whole youth service, has found that our work changed. It changed from just being support workers to crisis support

- Senior Mentoring Practitioner, **Gendered Intelligence**

Diverse strategies strengthen resilience and emotional regulation through tailored support.

The methods employed to build resilience and strengthen emotional regulation further highlight key differences. Certain organisations integrate creative or physical outlets, linking emotional well-being with activities like expressive movement or art. Others use structured assessments to craft individualised mentoring plans that emphasise self-confidence and self-awareness. Some pair mentorship with advocacy, equipping young people with the skills and resources needed to navigate complex mental health systems. Meanwhile, community-driven approaches incorporate practical support, such as attending appointments, delivering meals, and organising therapeutic group activities, ensuring mentees feel supported both emotionally and practically.

> Sometimes mental health is seen as a taboo subject, so we explain that it's more about their social and emotional learning, and what we're providing for them is going to help them, with their social skills and their physical health as well as their mental health.

- Streetz Ahead

> We have a drop in center on a Monday, where we have two clinical psychologists sitting in and everyone gets something to eat. They play PlayStation and can talk with a clinical psychologist if they want to, which they often do. Conversations just strike up and all sorts of things come out - and that's just how it is, that's our version of mentoring

- St Matthews Project

Mentors bridge gaps in mental health support by addressing systemic barriers and building holistic networks.

Despite their varied approaches, organisations face common systemic challenges, particularly in accessing professional mental health services. Long wait times, regional inequities, and the complexities of navigating healthcare systems are pervasive obstacles. Mentors often step in as advocates to help young people address these barriers, though they also maintain clear boundaries to avoid overwhelming their roles. Many organisations extend their impact by involving families, volunteers, and broader networks, creating environments of holistic support. These shared commitments to mentorship, resilience, and empowerment illustrate the diverse yet interconnected ways in which organisations are addressing mental health challenges and helping young people thrive.

WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT BUILDING SKILLS FOR THE FUTURE

For many young people, mentorship serves as a vital link to future opportunities, helping them navigate complex decisions about education, careers, and personal growth. Across organisations, practical skills development is paired with emotional support to ensure mentees feel both prepared and confident to pursue their aspirations. While all programmes aim to equip young people for long-term success, their approaches vary significantly based on the challenges faced by their mentees. Some focus on balancing family expectations with personal ambitions, while others emphasise academic success or transitional support during key life stages. These tailored approaches ensure mentorship remains relevant and impactful across diverse contexts.

> ‘I would say generally across the board, it’s about relationships. It’s about being somebody that is not a teacher, not here to tell you how to do things, not tell you off, accept you as you are. And we work with that wherever you’re at, it’s that nice sweet spot of a trusted adult that can support you but is not somebody that’s authoritative.
>
> - **High Trees Community Development Trust**

Mentorship programmes build practical and personal skills through tailored approaches and long-term engagement.

Mentorship programmes share a commitment to building practical skills, but the methods used differ in focus and delivery. Some organisations prioritise employability and financial literacy, using innovative tools like storytelling skits to make abstract concepts tangible, such as budgeting or financial planning. Others target academic growth, utilising platforms like Mathletics and Literacy Planet to deliver personalised learning experiences. For young people nearing critical milestones, structured frameworks like GCSE toolkits provide detailed study plans to help them prepare for exams. The duration and scope of support also vary, with some programmes offering short-term mentoring while others ensure continuity through workshops and long-term engagement. These differences reflect each organisation’s effort to address the unique needs of their mentees.

> ‘Mentees create a vision board with goals, academic goals but also personal goals that we’re reviewing with the mentors week by week
>
> - Mentoring Coordinator, **The Baytree Centre**

> In my workplace, we have our meetings online, and I was a bit uncomfortable speaking in a big zoom meeting. But through speaking - and understanding - with my mentor, it got a bit easier for me to talk in a bigger group. It also made it easier to talk about the struggles I am going through at work without feeling uncomfortable. I would struggle at first - I didn't feel comfortable asking for help at work - but after speaking with my mentor, where I could speak openly, it got easier to speak about it in the meetings where I could receive that help.
>
> - Mentee, **SAYes Mentoring**

Mentorship programmes adapt to developmental stages and evolving priorities to meet young people's needs.

The adaptability of mentorship programmes is a shared strength, but their focus areas differ widely depending on the mentees' age and stage of development. For younger mentees, many programmes prioritise foundational academic skills alongside activities designed to boost self-expression and confidence. In contrast, older mentees benefit from more specialised approaches, such as career readiness initiatives or in-depth guidance during exam preparation. Creative exercises also vary–some organisations encourage self-reflection through drawing and vision boards, while others use practical goal-setting tools to track progress. This flexibility ensures that mentoring sessions remain youth-led, allowing activities to evolve organically based on the mentee's changing priorities and circumstances.

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Mentorship builds confidence and broadens horizons through tailored career guidance and interactive learning.

While all programmes aim to build confidence and broaden young people's perspectives, the pathways to these outcomes vary. Some organisations focus on pairing mentees with professional role models in fields aligned with their aspirations, offering career guidance through online sessions or workplace insights. Others emphasise interactive learning, strengthening critical thinking and communication skills through book discussions, games, and presentations that tie academic subjects to mentees' interests. The depth of personal connection also differs, with certain programmes prioritising one-to-one mentoring to build strong relationships, while others balance individual attention with group-based activities.

> It's incredibly important that the young people choose what they want and that it's a space for them. Most of the time we would start off with some games, which personally, I like to use a lot of because these activities encourage confidence and thinking about yourself.
>
> **- High Trees Community Development Trust**

WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT CREATING SAF(ER) SPACES

Community spaces play a pivotal role in youth development, offering environments where young people can connect, explore their interests, and find a sense of belonging. Across organisations, mentorship within these spaces focus on both personal growth and community cohesion. While all programmes aim to create supportive environments, their approaches vary based on the unique needs of the young people they serve. Some programmes use creative activities like dance, football, or music as informal entry points for mentorship, making it easier for young people to engage without feeling pressured. Others focus on creating spaces that reflect the identities and lived experiences of their participants, ensuring everyone feels seen and valued. Regardless of the approach, these community-based programmes emphasise the importance of consistency and trust, ensuring young people feel supported every step of the way.

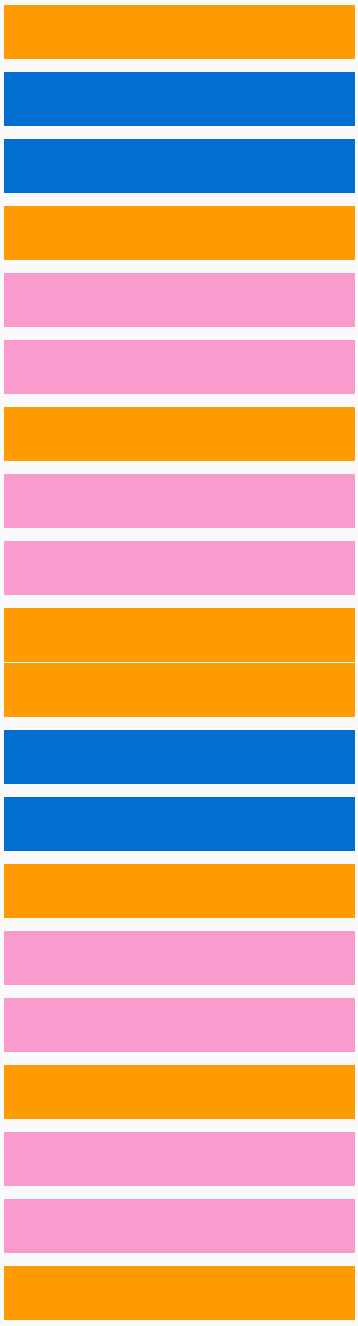
Shared activities create organic connections and build trust in community-based mentoring.

Mentorship within community spaces often begins with shared activities that allow young people to engage organically. Some organisations use creative platforms like dance to teach interpersonal skills such as problem-solving and independence, pairing these activities with group mentoring to encourage collaboration and leadership. Others rely on informal activities like football, music, or creative writing to establish connections in a low-pressure environment, where young people can build relationships with mentors while exploring their interests. For some, these activities serve as a gateway to more focused, one-to-one mentoring, where personal challenges and goals can be addressed. Additionally, immersive experiences, such as residential trips for young people exploring their identities, offer opportunities to develop deeper connections and build solidarity and resilience. These diverse approaches highlight how mentorship adapts to the context, using both structured and informal methods to nurture growth.

> “I try to get to know them as a person as an individual and not their current, living conditions, or what they’re going through. So, it’s literally just stripping everything back and getting to know you for you, what you don’t like, who your friends are, what you do on a day-to-day basis, and then just building relationships from that. So, it’s like little things like that and then we’re building that relationship, that rapport, and then eventually they get to a point where it’s like, ”Okay, I trust you enough now to open up.” A lot of the time they will say to me, ” yeah, this person spoke to me, but it’s like they weren’t here for me. They were just here just because they needed to be.”
>
> - Youth Development Worker, **LifeLine Projects**

Safe and inclusive environments build trust, agency, and connection for young people.

The creation of safe spaces is a unifying goal across organisations, though the definition of ”safe” differs based on the community being served. For some, it means providing physical spaces where young people feel secure and supported, with consistent scheduling and reliable mentors. Others expand the concept to include emotional safety, ensuring participants feel valued and understood through interactions that affirm their identities. By blending physical and emotional safety, these programmes create environments where young people can build trust, develop agency, and overcome feelings of isolation. Funding has played a critical role in sustaining and scaling these efforts, enabling organisations to expand access, develop tailored mentoring models, and meet the evolving needs of their communities. Together, these initiatives demonstrate the transformative power of mentorship within community spaces, leading to growth, connection, and resilience.



> ‘Trust, as a mentor, that’s the biggest thing because trust–they’re not going to trust you at the beginning. That’s just normal, and that’s fine. It’s about making sure that I am there for them. And it’s going to take time, obviously. I know in the first meeting, you’re not going to offload me straight away, and I accept that because I’ve done this for so many years. I’ve done it for five years. I know that’s not going to happen.’

– Prison Mentor, 28, **QPR in the Community Trust**

WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT CHALLENGES TO MENTORING

Mentoring programmes respond to increasingly complex and diverse needs of young people, requiring a high degree of personalisation and adaptability to be effective.

A Variety of Approaches & Models

Mentoring requires a high degree of flexibility to meet the unique needs of each young person. This adaptability is evident in the diverse and highly personalised approaches employed by different organisations. While the majority of mentors we spoke to had one-to-one relationships, with sometimes 12-15 cases at a time, other mentors tailor sessions to individual young people within group settings or provide one-to-one support to a young person in a group mentoring setting to provide additional help, ensuring that no one is left behind. Meanwhile, the increasing demand for online and hybrid mentoring models has opened new opportunities to engage underserved communities. These adaptations reflect a broader trend of tailoring mentorship to meet young people where they are—whether in person, online, or through culturally sensitive practices.

Navigating Prejudice

Systemic barriers like entrenched societal prejudices against the Gypsy, Roma, and Traveler community pose ongoing difficulties. Practical challenges, such as the need for girls to attend sessions with a caregiver or the discomfort families feel in spaces perceived as "not traveler-friendly," impact attendance and engagement. Incidents of discrimination, such as altercations involving community members, create ripple effects of anger and dejection, further complicating efforts to build trust. Despite these hurdles, organisations working with these young people have found ways to meet in spaces they find comfortable and adapt schedules to respect cultural priorities and community events. The approach reflects a deep understanding of the community's needs, building long-term trust and providing reassurance that support will be available when families are ready to engage.

For example, cultural barriers around mental health remain a challenge. In some communities, mental health is a taboo subject, making it difficult for parents to engage with programmes explicitly labeled as addressing mental health. To navigate this, some organisations have invested time in reframing its work to focus on social and emotional learning, emphasizing skills like managing emotions and building confidence. This subtle shift in messaging has helped reduce stigma and increase parental buy-in.

Psychological and physical safety

The post-pandemic era underscored the importance of creating physical and emotional spaces where young people feel safe.

For many, these spaces are among the few places they can fully express themselves, whether through conversation, laughter, or even shouting. Recognising this need has reshaped mentors' understanding of their role –not as authoritative figures but as facilitators of spaces where young people can just "be." This lesson reflects a broader shift toward seeing mentoring as a process that supports resilience and emotional release alongside goal-setting and skill-building.

> We really do avoid delivering mentoring online, probably for the reason that young people don't have anywhere private they can talk if they're in their home. That's another reason why school-based mentoring is so effective. There are cost of living issues and there's housing issues which are becoming more extreme, with lots of young people in really overcrowded housing which means they don't want to be there and they're going out as much as they can.
> **- CEO, LifeLine Projects**

However not every young person feels comfortable travelling to a physical space. A number of organisations have increasingly leveraged online platforms to reach young people facing geographic or social isolation. This had proven particularly effective for organisations supporting LGBTQIA* young people, who may hold multiple marginalised identities but might never have met another trans or non-binary person in their local communities.

Similarly, organisations working with young women have noted safety concerns of travelling in the dark after school. Online solutions in these cases have worked well to ensure that young people can still access these services, safely, in addition to reducing last minute cancellations or delays.

> I would say one of the challenges is the weather. Whenever it gets really dark, mentees do not attend as much because the mums are worried. Young people are also available at different times of the day or they are not able to commute all the way to the centre. So for those reasons the online sessions are working really well.
> **- Mentoring Coordinator, The Baytree Centre**

Mentoring programmes are negatively affected by broader public infrastructure decline and a lack of funding across the ecosystem of youth services.

According to one organisation, many young people now seeking mentoring would previously have qualified for support from services like CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services). However, increasing thresholds for access to such specialist interventions have left many ineligible for the help they need. Schools are similarly strained, accommodating students with higher levels of need than ever before. This strain is compounded by tight school budgets, the cost-of-living crisis, and overcrowding, making it increasingly difficult for schools to provide adequate support.

Another organisation highlighted the untenable delays in accessing CAMHS, where young people often age out of the service before receiving any assistance. NHS services, where available, are frequently described as a "postcode lottery"–inconsistent, difficult to navigate, and inaccessible even with the advocacy of a mentor. Similar challenges exist in securing supported accommodation, further compounding the difficulties faced by vulnerable young people. One organisation told us that over half of those receiving mentoring experience serious mental health issues, with some referrals now coming directly from CAMHS for follow-on support. These systemic gaps underline the critical role of mentoring in filling the widening void in services for young people.

Space Constraints

A common unmet need across organisations is the lack of appropriate spaces for mentoring. Some organisations share offices with other organisations and rely on a limited number of breakout rooms for one-to-one or small group sessions. When these spaces are unavailable, mentoring sessions are disrupted, highlighting the importance of careful scheduling and communication. Similarly, organisations working with schools often face space constraints, with rooms reassigned to other activities at short notice. These organisations have had to adapt by conducting sessions outdoors or in alternative locations, demonstrating the resilience and flexibility required to keep programmes running smoothly.

Short-term funding cycles affect organisations ability to plan and grow sustainably, creating a negative effect on trust building.

Funding availability

Organisations working on academic areas like GCSE preparation require adaptability and access to the latest educational software and resources to meaningfully support their young people. The lack of funding also means there is a limit in the resources available. Financial constraints also affect access to paid learning tools, such as assessments and platforms like Mathletics, which must be prioritised for those in greatest need. Despite these challenges, the programme strives to optimise resources and collaborate effectively, but long-term sustainability remains a pressing issue as they navigate limited budgets and increasing demands.

Short-term funding cycles

A common theme across all organisations is the scarcity of unrestricted, long-term funding along with funding delays as a barrier to sustainable growth. Furthermore, organisations that rely on consortium funding, often incur delays in payments. This creates stress for staff and affects the consistency of service delivery. Without such resources, the organisation must constantly reassess its programmes to stay responsive, often prioritising high-risk referrals while exploring new funding strategies. These challenges reveal how systemic funding constraints impact the ability of mentoring organisations to maintain consistent, high-quality services.

Staffing and institutional knowledge
The lack of long-term funding also undermines organisation's ability to retain staff and expertise. Short-term funding creates a cycle where organisations are constantly recruiting, inducting, and retraining staff every few months, diverting time and resources away from programme development. Without long-term funding commitments, organisations struggle to invest in staff development or offer opportunities for professional growth, such as specialised training or part-time degrees, which require multi-year commitments. This limitation forces the organisation to hire externally for skilled roles rather than cultivating expertise internally, capping the potential for growth and innovation within the team.

Navigating the Challenges of Collaboration and Increased Expectations in Mentoring

Sense of responsibility and accountability

For organisations working with young people with high levels of vulnerability, the scope of their work often extends beyond traditional mentoring. This can include assisting young people with critical life tasks, such as navigating incidents at police stations or applying for their first passport, highlighting how mentoring often intersects with broader systemic gaps in public services.

Mentors frequently find themselves taking on increased responsibilities due to the strong relationships they build with young people. Many mentors report having more frequent and meaningful contact with their mentees than other professionals, such as social workers or early health workers. However, unlike these professionals, mentors lack the authority or access to address systemic family issues or intervene directly. This imbalance requires mentors to advocate persistently on

A lack of communication and coordination further complicates the delivery of effective mentoring. Referrers sometimes close their involvement with a young person after making a referral, leaving mentors without essential background information. This can shift the focus of mentoring from supporting the individual to addressing broader family needs, as no alternative support exists. These gaps not only place additional pressure on mentors but also hinder their ability to deliver targeted, impactful interventions, underscoring the need for stronger collaboration across the ecosystem.

Collaborating across mentors and mentorship programmes

For some organisations working with consortium organisations also proves challenging, as many partners engage minimally,with much of the capacity taken up by administration that leads to deprioritising collaborative efforts. This lack of engagement hinders opportunities for shared learning and stronger service delivery. This is supported by the view of some mentors, who told us they didn't speak to each other enough despite many of their young people are experiencing very similar experiences and they would benefit from discussing together but there is not enough time or resources to come together.

WHAT WE LEARNED ABOUT RESPONDING TO CHALLENGES

The success of mentoring programmes depends on their ability to support mentors and mentees build trusting relationships.

Ensuring young people are consulted on their referral to the mentorship programme.

Fundamental to building a trusting relationship with a mentor is ensuring that referrals are made with the young person's understanding and consent. In cases where, referrers–such as social workers–submit referrals without adequately informing or consulting the young person, this has led to resistance or disengagement when the mentoring process begins. This lack of preparation forces mentors to spend valuable time convincing young people of the programme's benefits, delaying meaningful engagement.

Clear expectation and boundary setting.

One of the most consistent lessons across organisations is that trust-building is a long-term process requiring patience, empathy, and consistency. Mentors note that for some young people, it can take over a year of regular engagement before they feel comfortable enough to open up or take on challenges. Trust is fragile; without sustained relationships, progress can stall, and young people may disengage entirely. Organisations find time required to understand and address a young person's needs often exceeds the practical constraints of mentoring sessions. Mentors describe the challenge of navigating external systems, such as securing therapy referrals, which can be time-consuming and frustrating for both mentors and mentees. Clear, honest communication about these processes is critical to maintaining trust, even as mentors work within systemic constraints. This emphasis on honesty–paired with the acknowledgment of the risks young people face daily, from knife crime to the loss of peers–creates a foundation of empathy and understanding.

Creating a consistent and reliable environment

Mentoring is fundamentally a relationship-based practice, and building trust is essential yet fraught with complexities. Many young people come into mentoring relationships with histories of instability or unmet expectations from adults in their lives. Mentors emphasise the importance of consistency and reliability, as mentees often have little trust in adults due to past experiences. Something as simple as rescheduling a session can have significant consequences, potentially reinforcing feelings of neglect. Therefore, mentors work to rebuild trust by ensuring consistent communication, keeping promises, and creating safe spaces where young people feel valued and heard. Mentors emphasise the power of consistency, explaining how simply "showing up" over time demonstrates to young people that they are cared for and valued.

For some organisations, maintaining a predictable schedule–sessions at the same time, on the same day, in the same place–helps children feel secure and supported. This consistency builds trust and ensures that mentoring becomes a reliable part of their weekly routine, even as the content of the sessions adapts to their needs.

Engaging with a young person's wider ecosystem, including families and communities

In some cases, trust-building extends beyond the mentee to involve families. By keeping parents subtly informed while respecting confidentiality, mentors navigate the complex cultural and relational dynamics within the community. This dual focus ensures that both young people and their families feel supported, laying the groundwork for sustainable engagement.

Building in consistency, with inconsistent funding cycles

Organisations are acutely aware of the disruption that can be caused by staffing changes as a result of short-time funding cycles, and have explored creative ways to overcome this. One example of an organisation working with young people at risk of violence has been to integrate the concept of parallel "positive activities" as a way to sustain engagement and support for young people beyond the initial mentoring period. After the year-long mentoring relationship ends, young people are encouraged to participate in these activities, which provide ongoing contact with their mentor while introducing them to other youth workers. These sessions aim to maintain continuity, expand the young person's circle of trusted adults, and foster relationships with a broader network of supportive individuals. This approach helps young people realise that the qualities they value in their mentor–trust, care, and support–are shared by other adults, thereby strengthening their social networks and enhancing their resilience.

Building an infrastructure of care and learning around mentors

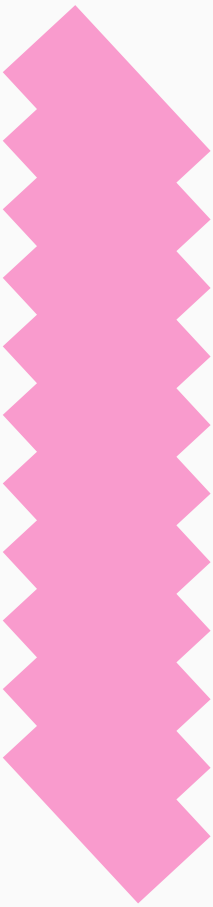
Project Leads and Mentors have consistently highlighted the critical role of training and supervision in maintaining their wellbeing and ensuring effective practice. The increasing complexity and severity of cases handled by mentors have, in some organisations, led to instances of burnout. To address this, many have prioritised building robust support systems, including training packages, dedicated resources, regular supervision, and access to mental health support phone lines.
Regular supervision provided a sense of assurance, not only in clarifying expectations around their roles but also creating a safety net, for them to seek help and advice when faced with challenges, reinforcing the idea that they were not alone in their work.

In some organisations, mentors also participate in group reflections, which have proven vital in cultivating a supportive and collaborative team environment. Weekly group supervision offers a structured space for team members to share their caseloads, address challenges, and exchange ideas. This practice fosters open communication, mutual learning, and constructive feedback, enabling mentors to draw on diverse perspectives and approaches to enhance their work.

Involving young people in the design and development of the programme

For some organisations involving young people directly in programme design has proven transformative. The creation of a Youth Advisory Board for one organisation has shifted its perspective, ensuring that their initiatives genuinely reflect the needs and priorities of the young people they serve. This collaborative approach not only improves the relevance of programming but also empowers young people to take ownership of their own development, demonstrating the potential of participatory mentorship models.

Other organisations have set up steering groups to increase engagement and ensure the long-term impact of the mentoring programme. By involving the entire mentoring team alongside past and current mentees, the group creates a collaborative space to share experiences, provide feedback, and shape the programme's future direction. A key focus is the sustainability of support beyond the initial mentoring period so the group emphasises signposting, workshops, and the development of young people as peer mentors and mentoring ambassadors. This approach not only strengthens relationships but also empowers mentees to take on leadership roles, extending the programme's reach and influence.



RECOMMENDATIONS

These recommendations are based on the insights gathered from the CPI-led case studies and interviews with mentors, project leads, and young people. They focus on strengthening the impact, sustainability, and accessibility of mentoring programs across London.

Establish Multi-Year Funding Commitments to Ensure Mentoring Programme Stability

Shift from short-term, one-year funding cycles to a minimum of three-year funding agreements to provide stability for mentoring organisations. This will allow them to plan strategically, retain experienced mentors, and scale their programs to meet increasing demand.

- Allocate long-term funding to mentoring providers to ensure program continuity and prevent service interruptions.
- Prioritise funding for organisations that develop structured, phased mentoring models to support young people over multiple years.
- Establish capacity-building grants to enable mentoring programs to hire full-time, in-house mentors rather than relying on volunteers.

Fund Trauma-Informed Mentoring to Address the Youth Mental Health Crisis

Expand investment in trauma-informed mentor training, mental health first-aid certification, and supervision structures for mentors. Mentoring programs should be resourced to provide safe, emotionally supportive environments for young people facing mental health challenges.

- Develop a specialised funding stream for mentoring programs that incorporate trauma-informed approaches and mental health support.
- Provide grants for flexible engagement models, including text-based, online, and hybrid mentoring, for young people experiencing social anxiety or emotional distress.
- Establish mental health training, supervision and support for mentors to reduce burnout and secondary trauma.

Fund Mentoring Infrastructure

Continue to strengthen the infrastructure for mentoring programmes as well as opportunities for sustained engagement to ensure that young people receive consistent and lasting support.

- Strengthen and expand existing frameworks for mentor training, materials, and activities to ensure quality and consistency across programmes.
- Support the creation of cross-organisational learning communities where mentors and organisations can share best practices, challenges, and solutions to enhance mentoring effectiveness.
- Maintain flexible funding structures that not only support direct mentoring but also complementary activities that keep young people engaged with an organisation and help them build relationships with youth workers and trusted adults beyond their mentors.

Invest in Saf(er) Spaces for Mentoring Programmes

Provide funding for dedicated, youth-friendly mentoring spaces to ensure stability and accessibility. Partner with local councils and schools to repurpose underused public spaces for mentoring programs.

- Fund community-based mentoring hubs in priority boroughs where youth services have been reduced.
- Partner with schools, youth centers, and local authorities to provide consistent, secure spaces for mentoring sessions.
- Support mobile and digital mentoring initiatives to reach young people who face barriers to attending in-person sessions.

Establish Career-Focused Mentorship Programs to Improve Employment Outcomes

Expand funding for career-readiness mentorship, including employability training, financial literacy, and industry mentoring. Establish partnerships between mentoring organisations and employers to provide internships and apprenticeships.

- Provide funding for mentorship programs that integrate career development, including CV workshops, mock interviews, and workplace readiness training.
- Incentivise employer partnerships to create structured internship and apprenticeship opportunities for mentees.
- Expand financial literacy education within mentoring programs to teach budgeting, savings, and independent living skills.

Explore Opportunities for Collaboration Between Mentoring Programs and Public Services

Encourage deeper engagement and joint up approaches between mentoring organisations and schools, social services, and mental health providers. Establish clear referral pathways so that mentors can escalate cases of young people in crisis to the appropriate support services.

- Fund inter-agency coordinators within mentoring organisations to liaise with public services and create formal referral systems.
- Develop joint training sessions between mentoring organisations and social service providers to improve collaboration.
- Pilot data-sharing agreements (while maintaining confidentiality) to streamline referrals between mentoring programs and youth services.

Expand Flexible Mentoring Models to Reach Underrepresented Groups

Fund hybrid, digital, and peer-led mentoring models to ensure mentoring programs are accessible to marginalised young people, including LGBTQ+ youth, neurodivergent individuals, and those from the Gypsy and Traveller communities.

- Provide grants for hybrid and online mentoring models to ensure mentoring is accessible for young people facing geographic, cultural, or social barriers.
- Establish peer mentoring programs by offering training and stipends for former mentees who transition into mentor roles.
- Support targeted outreach initiatives to ensure mentoring programs engage underrepresented communities effectively.

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- Streetz Ahead
- The Baytree Centre

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