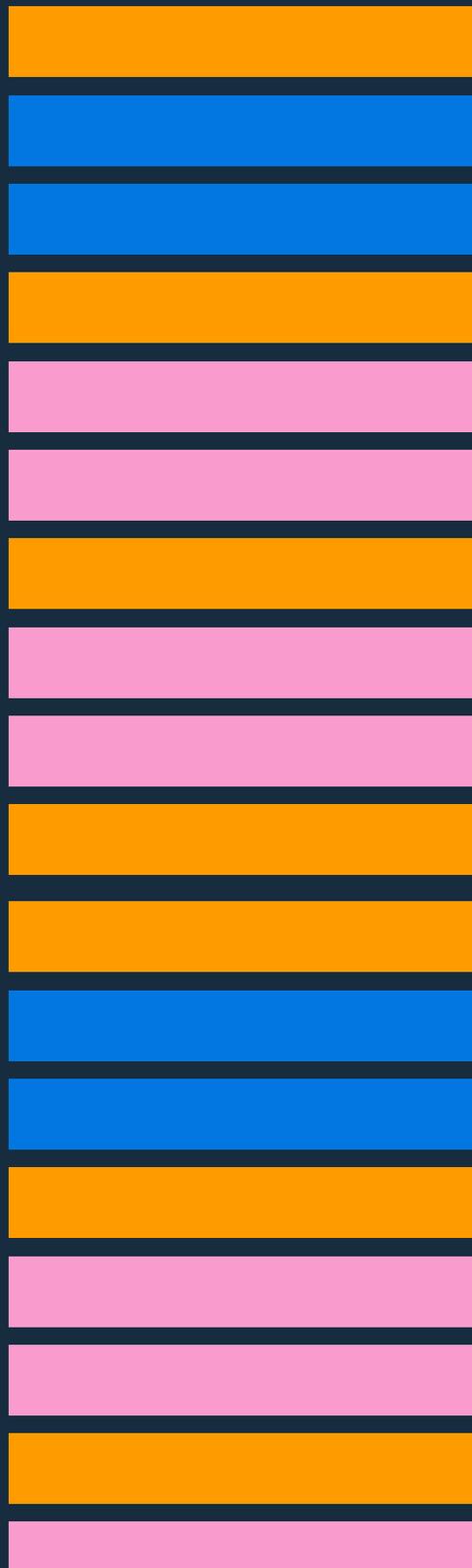Centre for
Public Impact
Founded by BCG

THROUGH OUR EYES: PEER PERSPECTIVES ON MENTORSHIP

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

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INTRODUCTION

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.

Between February and July 2025, the Centre for Public Impact led a peer-led evaluation of mentoring programmes supported through the New Deal for Young People. Over six months, we worked with 13 peer researchers, 6 of whom completed the full programme.

Peer researchers led every stage of this evaluation - from setting the research design, focus questions to leading the conversations and analysis and suggestions to improve mentoring programmes across London.

This report provides a high-level overview of the peer researcher journey, summarising each researcher's area of focus, key findings, and recommendations. Staying true to our storytelling approach, we've included powerful quotes–selected by the peer researchers themselves–that reflect the conversations and insights behind their work.

The report includes links to the creative outputs developed by our researchers, as well as recordings of their final presentations, where they reflect on both their research and their experience. We're incredibly proud of the thought, care, and effort that our researchers have invested in this programme and hope you find it as insightful and inspiring as we have.

THE PEER RESEARCH JOURNEY

This timeline shows how young people were involved as peer researchers in the NDYP impact evaluation. Through training, coaching, and storytelling, they shaped the evaluation design and process around what mattered most to them, leading to meaningful insights and shared ownership of the findings.

Peer Researcher Training #1
February 2025

In our first peer researcher training workshop, we brought together young people from NDYP-supported projects to build foundational skills in peer research. The session introduced participants to the purpose of peer-led evaluation, emphasising how lived experience can shape more meaningful research.

In the first half of the session, we looked at different data collection methods including interviews, surveys, and PhotoVoice and how each can offer unique insights into mentoring. Participants also examined how bias can show up in question design, learning how small changes in wording can influence the responses people give.


The group then worked together to identify the focus areas that would guide the design of the evaluation. These included:

- **The impact of mentorship on young people:** exploring how mentorship affects self-esteem, skill development, and future opportunities.

- **Mentorship from different perspectives:** exploring why people become mentors, what they gain from it, and the range of mentoring models available (e.g., one-on-one, group) and their effectiveness.

- **Barriers to mentorship:** exploring how mentorship opportunities differ across communities and what structural or personal challenges prevent young people from accessing them.

Peer Researcher Training #2
March 2025

The second peer researcher workshop helped young people build the skills to design structured and ethical research plans. Each participant chose a "researcher persona" to guide their approach:

The storyteller | The analyser | The advocate
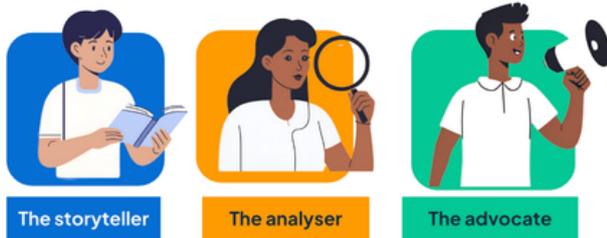
- **The storyteller:** Interested in capturing stories and creative expression. They love to listen, reflect, and be creative with how to express the world and it's small wonders.

- **The analyser:** A logical and methodical thinker who loves getting to the heart of a problem through data, patterns, and analysis.

- **The advocate:** Passionate about making a difference, likes working in a team, and using active listening skills to understand and amplify diverse voices in your community.

Participants revisited key research methods such as interviews, surveys, focus groups, and PhotoVoice. We shared suggestions for each persona to help them plan their research journeys.

Next, we introduced the four key parts of a Research Plan:

1. **Research Focus:** what they wanted to explore
2. **Research Method:** how they would gather their information
3. **Research Script:** the questions or prompts they would use
4. **Research Ethics:** how they would keep their work respectful, safe and responsible

Importantly, the session was designed deepened their understanding of ethical considerations, including consent, confidentiality, and safeguarding, as well as guiding them through designing effective interview scripts that reflected both their individual interests and the goals of the NDYP evaluation.

Peer Researcher Coaching [Research Plan & Interview Prep]
April 2025

In April, peer researchers received targeted one-to-one coaching to support them through key moments during their fieldwork.

The first coaching call provided an opportunity to collaboratively refine their Research Plans, agree on data collection methods, brainstorm interview or survey questions, and discuss their availability for interviews and other research activities.

Once their fieldwork was scheduled, we organised a follow-up coaching call focused on preparing for interviews–offering tailored guidance on interview techniques, adjustments to the script, a review of the contributor consent form, and helping peer researchers feel confident and ready to begin data collection.

These coaching calls were crucial in helping us navigate the different timetables, needs, and time commitments of each peer researcher, ensuring the evaluation process remained flexible and supportive.

Peer Researcher Interview Scheduling
April-June 2025

Between April and June 2025, CPI engaged with organisations through open calls and direct outreach to help connect peer researchers with people they could interview for their projects. We worked closely with partners to schedule briefing calls with both the organisations and the research contributors before confirming interview dates.

CPI and partner organisations put careful thought into the matching process to ensure that both peer researchers and contributors felt comfortable leading conversations and sharing their stories openly.

Alongside this, one peer researcher developed a survey to complement the interview data. This tool was co-designed, reviewed, and refined to make sure it was clear, engaging, and meaningful before being shared through partner organisations.

Peer Researcher Fieldwork

Quick Reminders for safe and confident interviews

1 Setting and Maintaining Boundaries

- Use your first name only. Do not share your phone number, email address, or social media accounts.
- All interviews must take place using CPI-managed platforms (such as Zoom links provided by CPI).
- If a contributor contacts you after the interview via social media or messaging apps, please let the CPI team know immediately. You can respond with:
  - "Thanks for reaching out. I'm only involved in this project through CPI – please contact them."

2 Starting the Interview

- Ask the contributor if they are comfortable with the interview being recorded.
- Remind them:
  - They can pause the interview at any time
  - They can skip or choose not to answer any question
  - They can stop the interview altogether
- These reminders are already in your script. CPI will be there to support you.

3 If a Contributor Becomes Upset

- You can say:
  - "Would you like to take a break?"
  - "We can skip this question or stop if you'd prefer."
- If something feels concerning or unclear to you, let CPI know. CPI staff will take the lead.

4 If You Feel Upset or Unsure

- Your wellbeing matters, you can pause the interview or ask CPI for support at any point.
- You can request a check-in, take a break from interviewing, or opt out of future interviews.
- If something unexpected comes up, feel free to say something like:
  - "I'm sorry, something has just come up that I need to take care of. Would you mind if we continued this interview another time?"

5 After the Interview

- Use the reflection tool to check in with yourself.
- You can ask for a debrief or follow-up conversation with CPI.
- Optional wellbeing calls are available throughout the fieldwork period.

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Peer Researcher Training #3
May 2025

In May 2025, we delivered the third and final in-person peer researcher training workshop at London City Hall. This session focused on helping young people analyse interview data and begin shaping meaningful stories from their findings.

Using pre-prepared quote packets–drawn from either their own interviews or CPI-led conversations–peer researchers carried out a hands-on qualitative analysis. They highlighted quotes that stood out to them by marking them with a star, then worked to identify emerging themes. Together, the group reflected on the similarities and differences across the stories and explored the key messages behind them.

The workshop included hands-on activities to build analysis skills and an introduction to how to creative storytelling formats help researchers plan their Creative Assets such as posters, infographics, and a short video in ways that felt personal and meaningful. The session also provided space for reflection, peer learning, and planning for next steps in June.

Peer Researcher Field Work
May-June 2025

Throughout May and June 2025, peer researchers carried out their own research. Most chose to do interviews–some spoke one-to-one with mentors or mentees, while others spoke with both together. One peer researcher decided to create a survey, which was shared with NDYP funded organisations by the Greater London Authority.

Everyone who took part in an interview was sent the questions in advance and offered a short coaching call with CPI staff, or the chance to join the session early to help them feel at ease. The interviews lasted between 30 and 45 minutes and were led entirely by the peer researchers. CPI staff were present only as observers, to support safety and safeguarding.

A total of **30 research contributors** took part in this research through interviews or in the survey. The distribution is shown below:

NDYP Research Contributors
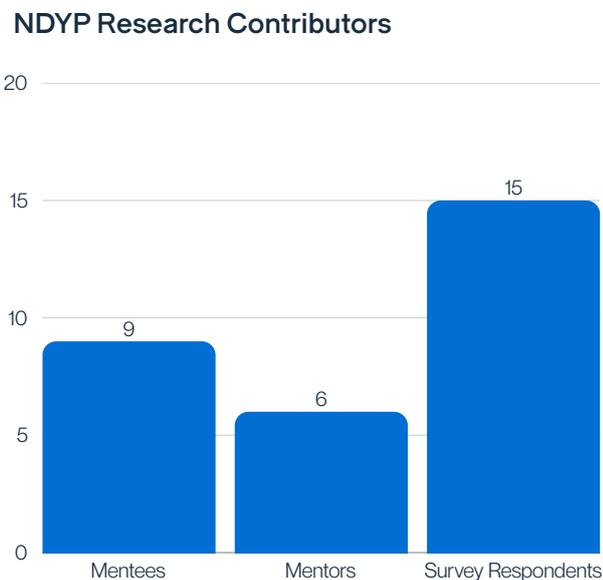
For many peer researchers, this was their first time conducting research. They approached it with professionalism and empathy, asking thoughtful and challenging questions that led to deeper conversations. We found that their curiosity and understanding of the process and systems in which mentoring programmes operate brought a level of insight that traditional evaluations rarely reach.

Peer Researcher Coaching [Creative Outputs]
June-July 2025

To round off their experience, peer researchers took part in creative coaching sessions to help them turn their insights into engaging and accessible outputs. These sessions offered practical guidance on designing posters and infographics to communicate key themes, as well as support with storyboarding and scripting short videos that tell their collective story in a powerful, youth-led format. The coaching focused on building skills in visual design, messaging, and accessibility–ensuring that the final outputs were authentic, impactful, and reflective of each young person's voice.

Final Presentations
July 2025

In their final wrap-up call, peer researchers gave short five-minute presentations to share their findings. These informal presentations gave each young person the chance to summarise their research in their own words, highlight their recommendations for improving mentoring programmes across London, and reflect on their journey as a peer researcher.

The session marked the end of six months of hard work and commitment. You can find each presentation linked within the peer researchers' individual summaries.

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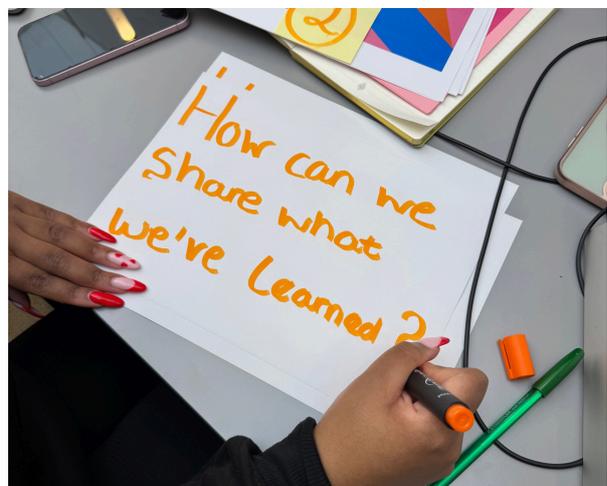
THE PEER RESEARCH JOURNEY

As a peer researcher, you'll commit at least 5 hours per month, with training and research activities taking place both online and in person. Below is an overview of what to expect:

1 TRAINING #1

Introduction to Peer Research

Sat, 22 February 2025

- Learn different research and data collection methods
- Practice interview skills
- Generate ideas for your research journey

2 TRAINING #2

Get Ready to Conduct Your Research

Sat, 29 March 2025 (online)

- Choose a researcher role and define a research question.
- Select a research method and explore ethical considerations.
- Write your interview script and research plan

3 FIELDWORK

Carry Out Your Research

April - June 2025 (online)

- Conduct interviews with mentees, mentors, and other stakeholders
- Receive support and coaching from CPI
- Begin analysing your findings independently

4 TRAINING #3

Analysing and Sharing Your Findings

May 2025 (in person)

- Identify key themes and recommendations as a group
- Explore creative ways to present your findings

5 CREATIVE PRODUCTION

June 2025

- Share your findings by creating podcasts, short videos, animations, reports, infographics, and policy recommendations.

PEER RESEARCH
SUMMARIES

CHELSEA

Research question: How do mentors understand and reflect on the impact they have on young adults through mentoring?

Research Focus

Chelsea's research explores mentoring from the mentor's perspective–focusing on how mentors understand and reflect on the impact they have on the young people they support. Her work looks at what it feels like to be a mentor, how the role influences their own lifestyle and personal development, and how they decide which opportunities to offer to mentees.

Chelsea also examined the support systems in place for mentors–such as training, resources, and services–and how these shape their confidence and effectiveness. Her research suggests that when mentors feel supported, they're better able to build meaningful relationships and create positive outcomes for the young people they work with.

Research Findings

Chelsea found that while each mentor's story was unique, common themes connected them. Many spoke about how sharing their own journeys helps young people see that success doesn't follow just one path and that it's okay to change direction. These stories remind young people they're seen, valued, and not alone. Her research also showed that mentoring helps mentors grow too. Many said they learn something every time and feel proud to see the difference they've made.

However, barriers remain. Mentors talked about how cost, cultural misunderstandings, and lack of trust can stop some young people, especially from working class or ethnic minority backgrounds, from accessing support.

> Take a look at Chelsea's:
>
> - Topic Guide
> - Creative Asset: Poster & Report
> - Final Presentation

They stressed that consistency and genuine commitment matter more than campaigns alone. Mentoring was also seen as vital for mental health, helping young people cope with challenges and build resilience. Different approaches, like music-based sessions, were suggested to reach more young people in ways that feel safe and natural.

One of the strongest messages in Chelsea's research is that mentoring shows young people they can shape their own journey, and that they don't have to do it alone.

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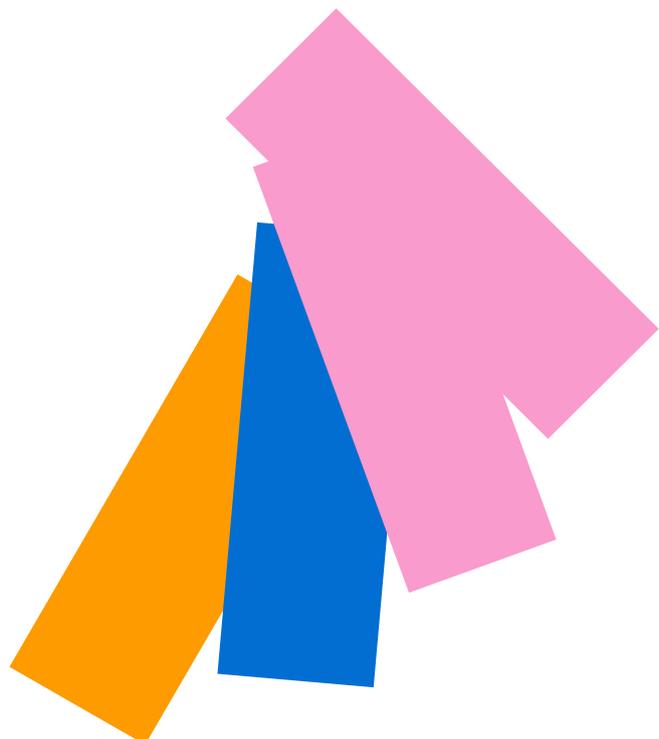
CHELSEA

" Quotes that stood out for Chelsea

We say there's opportunity [to get mentored], but access is still a problem. Especially for working class or ethnic minority kids. The doors just aren't open in the same way.

– Mentor, Streets of Growth

There's loads of awareness, social media and campaigns, but there's not always the support behind it. Young people will say, 'We've heard it all before.' What they need is people to actually turn up for them. Consistency. That's the bit that's often missing.

– Mentor, Streets of Growth

Every time I mentor someone, I learn something. Even now, I've been doing it for years. It makes me reflect, and it reminds me why I started. I've grown as a person through mentoring. It's not just for them. It's for us to.

– Mentor, Streets of Growth

Watching the way London has become very much a rich person's city... if you're coming from a less privileged background, it impacts you in a lot of different ways. The community is not as strong, it's not as positive, and therefore, the first people to be affected by that are the young people.

– Project Lead, Senior Mentor, HMDT Music (One Spirit)

Many of the young people we work with are in crisis. We're not necessarily mentoring them to help them develop a career path, although that may come later. The immediate requirement for mentoring is to help a young person cope and deal with their current situation.

– Project Lead, Senior Mentor, HMDT Music (One Spirit)

I just had a text a couple of days ago from a guy that I mentored in 2013. He's just had his second baby and he texted me to say: 'it's been a long time but I want you to meet the baby.' I haven't seen him for a couple of years, but he still contacted me 12 years after we first met. And that's a sign that you made a difference.

– Project Lead, Senior Mentor, HMDT Music (One Spirit)

JAYDON

Research question: How does having a mentor influence the way young people think about their future and navigate career opportunities?

Research Focus

Jaydon was interested in how mentoring supports young people's confidence, motivation, and sense of connection, and how these factors influence their career development and future goals. He aimed to explore aspects he felt were often overlooked, such as the role of mentoring in shaping social development and emotional wellbeing as young people and their importance in planning your next steps.

His research involved interviews with both current and former mentees, including those with workplace experience or going through transitions like gap years. By speaking with young people who were applying for had recently entered the workforce, Jaydon was able to reflect on how mentoring had influenced their personal growth, mental health, and early career decisions.

Research Findings

Jaydon found that while each story he heard was unique, they were connected by common themes. Many mentees spoke about the links between their career development, social lives, and mental health. His research highlighted how valuable it is for young people to have a safe space and someone they can trust, especially since not everyone has the opportunity, confidence, or right person to talk to. Mentees shared how mentoring helped them build practical skills like patience and resilience, which were important for personal growth. Jaydon also found that growth came from making mistakes, and learning along the way.

Take a look at Jaydon's:

- Topic Guide
- Creative Asset: Comic Book Strip
- Final Presentation

Mentorship also supported young people in building relationships, boosting their confidence, and navigating their career paths. One of the strongest messages in Jaydon's research was that mentoring helps young people realise they're not alone, others are going through similar challenges too, and it's okay not to be okay. Even those with more experience shared that they still benefit from having a mentor.

In his Creative Asset, Jaydon tells the story of a mentee on a personal journey, showing how mentoring can help mental wellbeing and that reaching out for support is a sign of strength. In doing so, he wanted to encourage more people to take up the opportunity as well as encourage graduate mentees to become mentors.

JAYDON

"

Quotes that stood out for Jaydon

Being a mentee is like being accepted for who I am. I've been accepted for what I am and not been judged about it. Because having someone to talk to about it is a big thing. Opening up is not easy.

– Mentee, 24

You can write about it, but like who are you writing to? People are like ' just write it down' or 'go to the gym', but what's that going to do to me? How can a book give advice or push me?

– Mentee, 24

My gap year has been a great experience because my mentor has been able to support me. She was able to help me with interview preparations and my uni application. After sixth form I wasn't able to receive any support from my school because I was not in education. I was completely on my own.

– Mentee, 19

It's so important to have someone to guide you and to have someone to be inspired by. Especially if they're able to give you constructive criticism or feedback. I think it's so important for you to grow and develop as a person.

– Mentee, 19

One of the big pieces of advice that I learned is don't be afraid to make mistakes. Like even for me, when I started mentoring, I was already a graduate and I thought, okay, I'm too old. Little did I know there was actually so much to learn. So even if people have a stronger educational background like me, you're still going to make mistakes because at the end of the day, you're just a human being.

– Mentee 25, Streets of Growth

So one thing I had to do a lot was learn to be patient. I can contribute, but I need to give other people the opportunities too. And that's one thing I've learned a lot: It's just being that little bit resilient.

– Mentee 25, Streets of Growth

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RICARDELA

Research question: How has mentoring impacted your current career goals?

Research Focus

Ricardela's research explores how mentoring supports young people's career development and future opportunities. She set out to understand whether mentoring offers practical, transferable skills that can be applied across different jobs and career paths.

Her focus was on the real-world value of mentoring and whether it helps young people build confidence, develop workplace-relevant skills, and gain clarity about their goals. For Ricardela, this matters because careers are a central concern for many young people, and mentoring has the potential to offer both guidance and direction. By highlighting its practical benefits, her research also points to how mentoring can become more appealing and accessible to those who might benefit from it most.

Research Findings

Ricardela's research found that mentoring has a clear and positive impact on young people's future career goals and skill development. Most participants reported that mentoring influenced their thinking about the future. Key skills developed included communication, confidence, teamwork, problem-solving, and leadership–transferable skills that young people recognised as useful across different settings.

While a number were unsure about specific skills they had gained , many described mentoring as a safe space that helped build motivation, reduce stress, and support goal-setting. The research also found that mentoring had practical value, helping some young people take their first steps into the workplace, manage exam stress, and access mental health and career support. Suggestions for improvement focused on providing more tailored opportunities, more career guidance, and stronger links to work experience and industry.
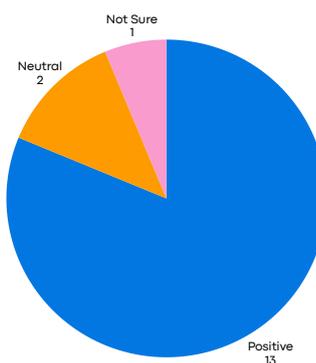

Take a look at Ricardela's:

- Google Survey
- Creative Asset: Infographic
- Final Presentation

Was there something specific you or the mentee hoped to achieve through mentoring?

Pie chart: Yes 7, Not Sure 6, No 3
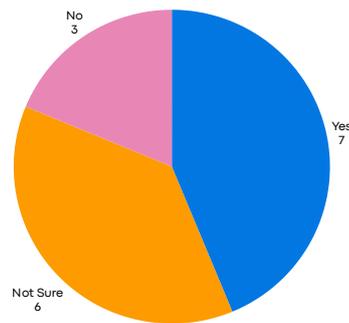
From your perspective, has mentoring had a positive, neutral or negative impact on your future career goals?

Pie chart: Positive 13, Neutral 2, Not Sure 1

Has mentoring had any practical value in real life?
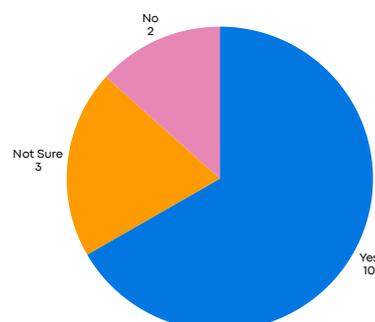
Pie chart: Yes 10, Not Sure 3, No 2

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SAVANNA

Research Question: How does mentoring affect young people's confidence, self-esteem, and ability to trust others?

Research Focus

Savannah set out to explore how mentoring influences young people's confidence, self-esteem, and ability to trust others. To do this, she carried out an interview with a young person currently receiving mentoring support and also analysed secondary data based on responses to her topic guide. Her aim was to better understand how different individuals experience mentoring and the impact it can have on their personal growth.

Research Findings

One of the key themes that emerged from Savannah's conversations was the importance of trust. Young people described their mentors as someone they could speak to openly, more like a friend than a teacher, but still with healthy boundaries. Unlike teachers, who have to keep things strictly professional, mentors were seen as supportive and personal, while knowing when not to cross the line. Several participants mentioned that it took time to feel comfortable, but once that trust was built, it became a key part of why mentoring worked. Mentors checked in regularly and followed up, which made the young people feel valued and cared for.

Confidence and self-esteem came up in many different ways. For some, mentoring helped them be more independent and believe in their own abilities. One young person shared how their mentor helped them stop people-pleasing and start being more themselves. Others spoke about learning to deal with rejection and realising that even when one door closes, another will open. Mentors helped them reflect on their own talents, traits, and goals, something that wasn't always easy to do alone.

Take a look at Savanna's:

- Topic Guide

Communication was another powerful theme. Mentors helped young people find their voice and express themselves more clearly. They learned how to navigate friendships and how to make decisions that were right for them, not just influenced by peer pressure. One participant reflected that their mentor had helped them understand that even small changes, like starting to go back to the gym or managing their emotions better, could make a big difference in their life.

Mental health was also a significant part of the conversations. Young people shared how mentoring had helped them regulate their emotions, calm down in difficult situations, and feel less alone.Having a mentor helped young people see how even small achievements felt big, like turning up to school more often or getting through a tough day.

Some also reflected on how the COVID-19 pandemic had disrupted their education and their mindset. They spoke about missing out on the chance to build confidence in school settings, particularly during the lead-up to important exams like GCSEs. Mentoring helped them rebuild that lost time and motivation, and offered space to reflect on what they needed moving forward.

SAVANNA

" Quotes that stood out for Savanna

When I first was applying for Sixth Form, I wanted to go to a specific one but I didn't get the grades. One thing my mentor taught me is that some things in life don't come to you, and they don't come to you because it's not meant for you. That helped me with my mindset of dealing with rejection, because if I had gone to that Sixth Form I wouldn't have pursued art as much. I actually ended up going to a creative college that got me into apprenticeships and mentorships. It helped me more into the industry rather than just getting really high grades.

– Graduate Mentee, 19

I feel like mentoring really helped with my self esteem, because it made me realise my own talents and traits, which, like eventually, after I stopped being mentored as much, helped me realise that because they showed me a pathway of self-reflection, I knew how to self-reflect on myself and focus on my own traits. So then, mentoring helped me be more independent as well.

– Graduate Mentee, 19

I think one thing that helped me is that my mentor had a lot of connections. I was not really academic and then COVID hit so I missed Year 9. I just didn't know anything. I couldn't catch up with anyone. And because I didn't have the grades nobody would ever choose me to go to events or be a student ambassador, and stuff.

But my mentor saw that I was really good at communication, and speaking so, she was like: Oh, do you want to speak at this event? And I did a public speaking event, and even though, like I wasn't really into public speaking, I realised that: Huh! I'm actually really good at it. So I kind of just started branding myself as a public speaker. So a lot of the time I speak, at events, and it just kind of taught me more about myself in some ways.

– Graduate Mentee, 19

VALENTINA

Research question: What prevents young people from accessing mentoring programmes?

Research Focus

Valentina's research explored the barriers that prevent some young people from accessing and staying engaged in mentoring programmes. Her aim was to better inform programme designers and funders, especially Local Authorities, about what is and isn't working in current approaches, and how resources could be redirected to create more accessible and meaningful support.

Take a look at Valentina's:

- Topic Guide
- Creative Asset: Video
- Final Presentation

Research Findings

Valentina found that barriers to accessing mentoring included basic financial challenges such as the cost of transport and food, the need to prioritise paid work, and unstable or distant housing situations. Poor visibility of programmes, especially the lack of outreach through channels young people actually use, like social media, also limited access. Becoming an 'adult' at 18 was a significant tipping point, often resulting in reduced support just as young people faced major life transitions.

For those who did manage to access mentoring, staying engaged was often difficult due to the complex realities of their lives. Moving between temporary accommodation, being released from custody, or dealing with unresolved trauma without appropriate support disrupted participation. Valentina emphasised that these aren't just logistical issues, they reflect a wider set of challenges that mentoring programmes need to be designed around.

Her research highlights that effective mentoring is not one-size-fits-all. The most impactful programmes were those that focused on specific groups and tailored their support accordingly. Valentina argues that mentoring should aim to fill key gaps in a young person's life in ways that prevent those gaps from reopening. This means going beyond surface-level conversations and providing consistent, long-term support.

Practical help like funding for transport and meals, emotional care from trusted adults, and space for young people to build trust at their own pace were key elements of successful programmes.

Valentina also found that mentoring works best when it combines conversation with practical, forward-moving activities–like setting routines, helping with qualifications, or guiding young people into work or training. Importantly, this support must be built on genuine care. Many of the organisations Valentina studied were supporting young people with high levels of trauma, which required mentors and staff to go above and beyond to show they truly cared.

Finally, a core message from Valentina's research is that mentoring should focus on quality over quantity. Young people are quick to sense when a relationship or programme lacks authenticity. Real change happens when programmes invest in long-lasting, meaningful relationships that recognise the realities of young people's lives.

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VALENTINA

" A transformative story chosen by Valentina

One of the girls found it difficult to engage because she was very outspoken and her trauma had caused her to present behaviour that was challenging. Working through that trauma informed lens acknowledges and understands that a lot of this behaviour is trauma, and the label is essentially a negative consequence to that.

Removing some of these barriers to engagement is also about having the skills and the awareness to come from a place that balances head and heart. I knew and understood that her behaviour was a sign of trauma, even though I didn't have access to her referral logs at the time. There were times that she would behave in a way that didn't create a safe space for others and rather than me bringing that up in front of the room full of girls, I would contact her outside and say, look, let's talk, yeah? Letting them know I'm keen to create a safe place for all of you girls in this meeting, we're a team but that behaviour could make others feel unsafe. So it's about your communication skills.

After our meetings, I would just check up on her. It's just about feeling like somebody's actually sincere enough to care.I think that a lot of young people can quite quickly tell when you are sincere, especially ones that have already had a breach in trust. To me it is more of a characteristic, rather than a skill. You can't learn that. Young people just energetically pick up on that.

She told me she didn't want to come back to do any of the workshops because she thought that everyone was talking about her and labelling her because of her challenging behaviour. I was able to engage her one on one and make her see that she can continue to grow into her ideal self with many opportunities available to her. I helped her see her bigger plan and that's how we were able to re-engage her.

Even though capacity is full at the moment because she's got into university, she's actually offered to come in as a volunteer for us. This is somebody that we thought was totally disengaged so I think that's a pretty good result.

- Sister System

UNIS

Research question: What do mentoring relationships feel like for young people, and how do they help (or not help) them grow?

Research Focus

Unis' research explored how mentoring relationships work–looking at both the personal experiences people have with mentors and how those relationships shape their lives.

He wanted to understand what mentorship really means to different people, how it shows up in their lives, and how it makes a difference. He was especially interested in hearing about different types of mentoring, whether formal or informal, and how that affects people's reasons for getting involved, staying involved, or stepping away.

Research Findings

The core message of his research is the power of connection through flexible mentoring. He found that this approach to mentoring supports human socialisation and relationship-building, boosting confidence and personal development. His findings emphasise the mutual benefits of mentoring – especially at a time when many young people are experiencing social isolation, low self-esteem, and reduced in-person connection due to digital overload.

Through his conversations, he discovered that the flexible and open nature of mentoring creates space for young people to build trust, express themselves, and develop vital social and emotional skills. These relationships often lead to increased confidence and meaningful personal growth.

Importantly, the benefits are not one-sided. Mentors described how working with young people deepened their understanding of the challenges youth face today.

Take a look at Unis':

- Topic Guide
- Creative Asset: Comic Book Strip
- Final Presentation

Mentors also shared how these relationships challenged their perspectives, improved their communication, and kept them connected to the issues shaping younger generations.

He hopes to reach both future mentors and mentees with this message. In a time when many young people are grappling with the effects of isolating online interactions, mentoring offers a vital form of human connection. Its flexible, relational nature helps young people grow in confidence and build the skills they need to thrive. And for mentors, it provides an opportunity to learn, grow, and stay meaningfully connected to a changing world.
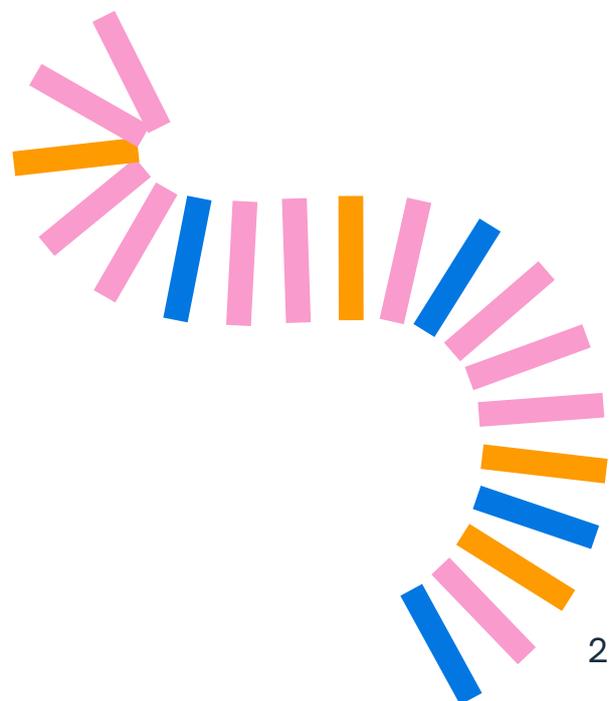
UNIS

" Quotes that stood out for Unis

I enjoy being a part of something that is super flexible and person-centred, whether a young person wants a structure or just a conversation on something that is important to them today. I like the sense of informality and like flexibility around it, instead of it just adding to another list of institutions.

- Deputy Manager and Youth Empowerment Facilitator, Cambridge House

One of my mentees told me they were socialised online. And I feel like that is a reality of a lot of young people. I feel like that creates a sense of lack of trust because you don't see the people that you're socialising with necessarily.

- Deputy Manager and Youth Empowerment Facilitator, Cambridge House

My thing is this, I'd like to feel that whenever the mentor-mentee relationship ends, I'll equip them with enough insight that they can then manage themselves in spaces and places that they previously couldn't.

- Mentoring Manager, Queens Park Rangers Community Trust

If I was to say something, he would always support me, no matter what I say, like, no matter what would happen. He would always support me a bit like a guard. You feel supported whatever is going on.

- Mentee, 17

I believe mentorship is personal development. If you think of personal development as a tree then there are different branches of development. So sometimes we're dealing with physical health. Sometimes we're dealing with mental health, sleep hygiene, or religion.

- Mentoring Manager, Queens Park Rangers Community Trust

All in all, my confidence has improved. It was a big thing in my life at that time when I came to this programme. And if you compared me to when I started, all of my confidence, as we said, it's improved a lot... and it's making me smile because it's a good thing, you know what I'm saying? I'm proud of it a lot, even to this stage. It's thanks to my mentor.

- Mentee, 17

RECOMMENDATIONS

PEER RESEARCHER RECOMMENDATIONS ORGANISED BY THEME	
1. Access & Inclusion	• Make mentoring accessible to all young people, regardless of background, by increasing funding and policy support for organisations reaching underserved communities. • Support a range of mentoring models, including creative and flexible formats like music-based or online mentoring, to meet young people where they are. • Extend mentoring eligibility to age 25, with flexible, longer-term programmes that prioritise depth and continuity over short-term impact.
2. Representation & Retension	• Promote diverse mentors so young people can see themselves reflected in those guiding them, which builds trust, confidence, and belief in their potential. • Encourage graduate mentees to become mentors, helping to create a cycle of shared experience and community leadership.
3. Mental Health Support	• Recognise that mentoring is about emotional support, not just academic or career outcomes–young people need to feel seen, heard, and valued. • Make space for vulnerability, reinforcing that it's okay not to be okay, and that asking for help is a strength. • Invest in mental health resources within mentoring programmes and highlight the link between trusted relationships and wellbeing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

PEER RESEARCHER RECOMMENDATIONS ORGANISED BY THEME	
4. Awareness & Engagement	- Raise awareness among parents and communities about the value of mentoring as a safe, supportive space where young people can grow and thrive. - Run outreach campaigns to reach young people without access to mentors and reconnect with mentors who may have stepped back.
5. Life Skills & Real-World Readiness	- Incorporate basic life skills—like organisation and employability—into mentoring programmes to better prepare young people for adulthood. - Respond to young people's evolving needs, listening without pressure, and offering support that adapts as they grow.
6. Systems & Structures	- Review how local services identify and support SEND young people, ensuring that high-functioning individuals with less visible needs aren't overlooked. - Train professionals across public services, including schools, to recognise and respond to a broader spectrum of needs—not just academic performance.

PROGRAMME FEEDBACK FROM PEER RESEARCHERS

Summary

Feedback from peer researchers on the programme was overwhelmingly positive, with participants describing it as insightful, enjoyable, and empowering. The experience offered young people the opportunity to develop practical research skills, explore real-world issues, and reflect on their personal and professional growth. At the same time, participants shared thoughtful suggestions to enhance clarity, energy, and engagement for future sessions.

Joining the Training Programme

The training sessions brought together young people from a range of backgrounds in a space that felt welcoming, calm, and inclusive. Participants told us that they valued how the facilitators created a respectful and affirming environment, where all contributions were recognised.

"I felt really comfortable in this environment, which is rare for me."

"It was a supportive space where I felt more comfortable to share my views gradually."

The training helped participants feel excited and motivated about the research process. Many highlighted the value of learning how to structure interviews, use feedback effectively, and present research in new and creative ways.

There was a strong sense of dedication and input from everyone involved, and participants appreciated how the work felt both meaningful and applicable.

"Teaching us skills like how to use feedback or conduct interviews" made the learning feel directly connected to the real-world research they were about to undertake.

Doing the Research: Fieldwork Experiences

For many peer researchers, conducting fieldwork was both a challenge and a breakthrough. The experience built confidence, strengthened communication skills, and deepened their understanding of others' lived experiences.

"(Conducting the interview) was actually nerve-wracking."

Despite initial nerves, researchers found the process rewarding:

"I enjoyed the interviews and doing research. I learned a lot about careers and experiences."

"It's really helped me learn how to conduct research, how to analyse from that research and follow through and stay committed to a project."

Participants reflected on the emotional and educational impact of engaging with diverse perspectives:

"I learned that listening to someone else's story can open up your eyes to the world and see how others feel."

This kind of reflective learning helped many researchers feel a stronger sense of purpose and connection.

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Skills in Action: Applying Learning

The programme successfully translated academic and creative learning into practice. As one peer researcher described:

"It's helped me put my knowledge and skills into practice... It's also helped me think outside of the box and improved my creativity skills."

Peer researchers developed and applied skills in a variety of areas:

- Research and analysis: Designing and conducting interviews, drawing out themes, and reflecting on findings.

- Digital tools: Using Google Sheets and formulas for data organisation and analysis, and creating presentations, comic book strips and posters in Canva.

- Communication and time management: Benefiting from supportive 1:1 sessions that were described as **"very convenient and never felt rushed."**

The flexibility of the programme was another key strength, enabling young people to participate meaningfully around their existing commitments.

"I would definitely do something like this again because it was fun, it was insightful and best of all, it was paid."
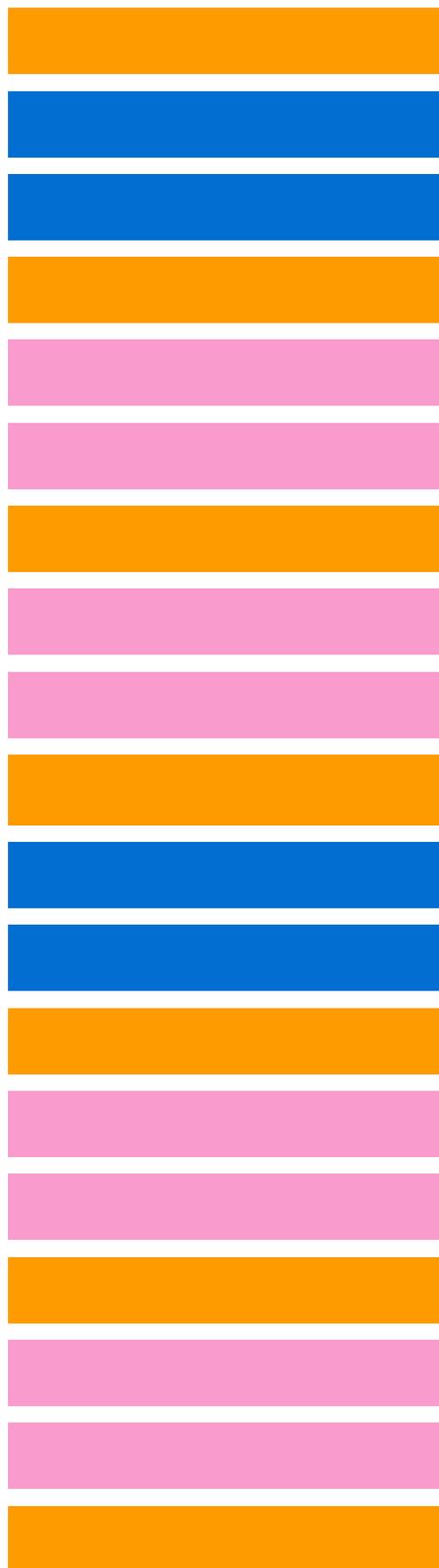
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- **MCR Pathways**
- **QPR in the Community Trust**
- **SayYes Mentoring**
- **Sister System**
- **Streets of Growth**
- **The Kemnal Academies Trust (TKAT)**
- **XLP**