



YMCA MILTON KEYNES
& NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Youth Mentoring

Report 2024/25



Here for young people
Here for communities
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Youth Mentoring

1. SUMMARY

1.1 This report is an evaluation of YMCA Milton Keynes’ Youth Mentoring during financial year 2024/25. This evaluation demonstrates that the Youth Mentoring is helping us achieve two of the aims identified in our Youth Work Theory of Change.

1.2 Findings:

Aim 1: All young people have access to a positive adult role model who is committed to their success

- I. **YMCA mentors presence and quality make a tangible difference:** Young people describe their mentors as “good listener” and “positive person” and hugely value the reliability of their mentor compared to other services.
- II. **Role model exposure increased:** Young people with a positive role model (in addition to their mentor) increased by 33% (from 6 to 9) during their mentoring journey.
- III. **Improved engagement with community activities:** Increased involvement with community activities (from 8.7% to 39.1%) will provide new lasting role models once mentoring ends.

Aim 2: Thriving individuals have their emotional needs positively met and are realising their full potential

- I. **Emotional literacy and regulation improved significantly:** Half of participants directly credited mentors with helping them understand and manage their emotions.
- II. **Mental health and confidence improved dramatically:** All young people said their confidence had increased or their anxiety had decreased. This is supported by self efficacy scores.
- III. **Material outcomes followed emotional growth:**
 - Young people felt more able to face interviews, social situations, public speaking and exams.
 - 83.3% reported that they were more likely to engage in employment, education or training
 - Likelihood to engage in substance use decreased 69.2%
 - Likelihood to engage in crime decreased 71.4%

These outcomes are achieved by developing social competencies which are essential in school, employment, and resettlement settings such as probation services or housing transitions.

- IV. **Holistic YMCA service means over 18s can be housed on our Campus:** This can enable young people to escape vulnerable situations or provide a springboard for a new start.

Sustainability of the project

- 1.3 This project depends on core funding of the volunteer coordinator role to provide high quality training and supervision to our growing pool of volunteers, which in turn ensures a consistent, quality service is provided to our young people. To upscale the project we need additional core funding to increase capacity of our volunteer coordinator role to manage more volunteers.

Recommendations

- I. **YMCA Youth Mentoring is universally valuable:** The diverse reasons for referral demonstrate that YMCA Milton Keynes Youth Mentoring is transferable to a wide range of individuals who would benefit from mentoring for prevention or early intervention. It has been proved effective for referrals from a comprehensive range of settings: health, children’s services, primary and secondary schools. The positive impact on young people that have completed their year of mentoring indicates that the scheme can reduce the need for more expensive interventions by professionals. The service would also be suitable for young people supported by Youth Offending, Probation and Prison Services. For young people with high needs or increased level of risk, the service needs a staffed model, as it is not ethical to use volunteers. Paid youth workers are still far more cost effective and flexible than professionals in statutory services.
- II. **Offer wherever young people lack social competencies:** YMCA Youth Mentoring leads to material outcomes through developing social competencies that are essential in school, employment, and resettlement settings such as probation services or housing transitions.
- III. **Develop role model exposure further:** Refine strategies that cultivate long term support, such as engagement in community activities, and train mentors to ensure a greater proportion of young people recognise the role models in their life.
- IV. **Expand mentor availability earlier in life:** Many young people wished mentoring had started sooner. Track young people who did receive mentoring in school. Including tracking those moving from primary to secondary, to see if impact continues once mentoring ends.

2. INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 This report is an evaluation of YMCA Milton Keynes' Youth Mentoring during financial year 2024/25. YMCA Milton Keynes is a local charity which provides a wide range of services to help local young people belong, contribute and thrive.
- 2.2 This mentoring project fits within a wider body of work guided by our Youth and Community Theory of Change which is designed to eradicate violence affecting young people. Specifically this project contributes to the long term outcomes:
 - I. All young people have access to a positive adult role model who is committed to their success
 - II. Thriving individuals have their emotional needs positively met and are realising their full potential
- 2.3 Violent crime is the most common crime in Milton Keynes, with 52.8 incidents per 1000 people. This rate has risen by 77.2% in the last 5 years¹. In addition, Milton Keynes University Hospital has seen a 20% increase in children presenting at A&E as a result of mental health². This local backdrop demonstrates the need for action. YMCA Milton Keynes' position within the VSCE sector and outside statutory services mean we can provide support to young people in a flexible, informal way, enabling staff and volunteers to create rapport and trust with a young person over time. Young people come up with their own action plan and lead the way on how they want to be supported.
- 2.4 The YMCA Milton Keynes Youth Mentoring scheme began in 2021. Initially commissioned by the Thames Valley Violence Reduction Unit, it provided mentoring services to young people referred from the Emergency Department at Milton Keynes University Hospital. Due to the success of this project, we were approached by the Youth Offending Team in 2023 to mentor high risk young people on their caseload. YMCA Milton Keynes was keen to support this project, however the high risk nature of these individuals meant it would be inappropriate for the mentor role to be filled by volunteers, but there was insufficient funding for the role to be filled by paid youth workers trained in supporting young people with complex needs and de-escalation techniques.
- 2.5 Our referrals in 2024/25 came from a variety of sources:
 - I. Early Help Team within Children's Services at MKCC;
 - II. Emergency Department at Milton Keynes University Hospital;
 - III. Primary and secondary schools who have engaged with our Mentoring Service.

¹Vital Signs MK, 12th Edition 2025, page 9, Milton Keynes Community Foundation.

²Senior Sister for Children's Emergency Department at MKUH, Bacardi Cranston, <https://www.mkhcharity.org.uk/special-room-in-childrens-ed-gets-a-makeover/>

- 2.6 This evaluation was funded by BLMK Integrated Care System Research and Innovation Hub. The report was supported by Seana Friel, Research Fellow at Tilda Goldberg Centre for Social Work and Social Care at the University of Bedfordshire. Seana has guided and supported us to improve our data collection, upskill our staff and provide expert input.
- 2.7 We have improved our quantitative data collection and used qualitative data to undertake a thematic framework analysis of the project. The aim of this report is to demonstrate the impact of YMCA's Youth Mentoring Project through robust monitoring and evaluation.

3. METHODOLOGIES

Interviews & focus groups

- 3.1 1:1 interviews with young people were conducted by YMCA staff who had not previously been involved in the young person's mentoring journey. Nine young people were invited to a 1:1 interview to discuss their experiences of the Youth Mentoring programme, eight chose to participate. Two males and five females were interviewed, aged between 13 and 31 (average age 21). The range of ethnicity was similar to the ethnicity of those referred to the service although the asian population was not represented. Four people were white, two were black and one was mixed race.
- 3.2 Two focus groups with mentors were held, which were attended by a total of three mentors, other invited mentors had other commitments. Focus groups were led by an independent interviewer.
- 3.3 We conducted Framework Thematic Analysis of the data, which informed how this report is structured.

Feedback questionnaires

- 3.4 All young people using the Youth Mentoring service are asked to complete opening and closing questionnaires which assess community participation and self-efficacy, to measure change over the course of the mentoring programme. The self-efficacy questions were designed through a scale adapted from General Perceived Self-Efficacy Scale (Schwartz and Jerusalem's, 1993). Twenty three young people completed their closing questionnaire in 2024/25, next year we anticipate a larger sample size. Thirteen were male, ten were female. The range of ethnicity was similar to the ethnicity of those referred to the service although asian wasn't represented. Thirteen were white, three were black and three mixed.
- 3.5 The closing questionnaire also asks additional questions about their experience and provides free text option to comment on the impact mentoring had. All 23 respondents answered this free text question.
- 3.6 In addition, ten primary school children were given a shorter feedback form. Feedback quotes from these young people were also analysed.
- 3.7 All data is for financial year 2024/25.

4. OUTPUTS

Participation

- 4.1 We saw:
 - I. 182 referrals
 - II. 87 young people supported
 - III. 27 volunteer mentors & 2 staff members
- 4.2 There is high demand for our service, we were only able to support half of the number of referrals that we received last financial year. Our main source of referrals, the Targeted Early Help Team at MKCC, say they could easily double the number of referrals they make per week if we had capacity.
- 4.3 Young people referred to our service are between the age of 8 and 34 – the average age is 16.
- 4.4 Reasons for referral are varied, and usually multiple. Despite this, these young people either do not meet the threshold for state-funded intervention, are on long waiting lists for support from professionals or despite their “Early Help” intervention being complete they remain in need of support.

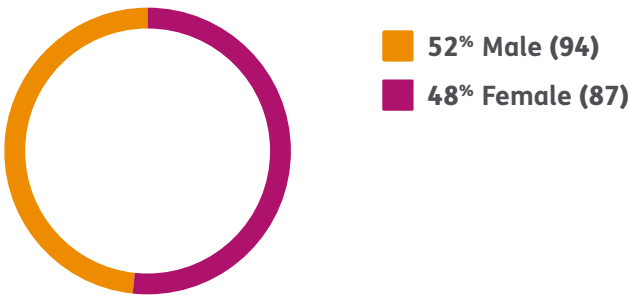
Reasons for referral



This data applies to 90.0% of referrals (163 people), we were not given the reason for the referral for 19 people (10.0%).

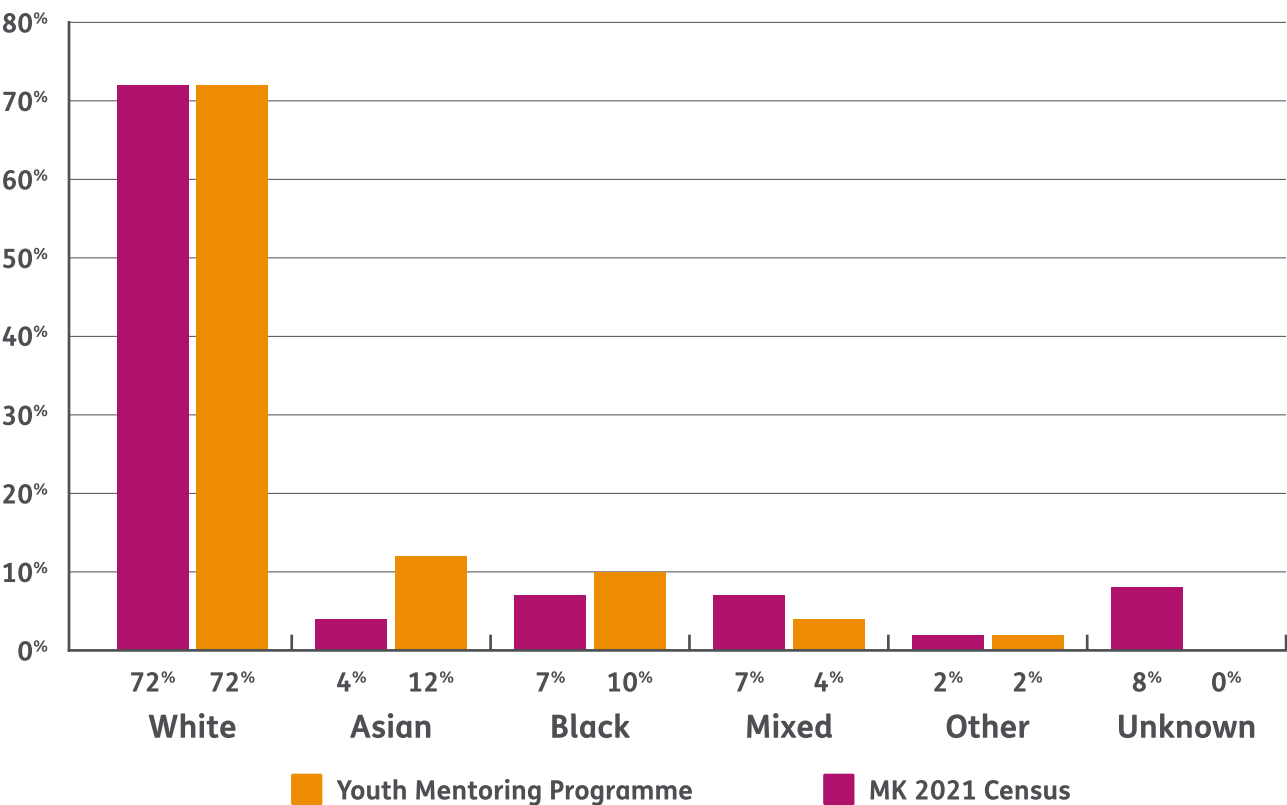
4.5 The gender split is almost equal.

Gender



- 4.6 Ethnicity is similar to Milton Keynes census data, although the census doesn't report those for which ethnicity is unknown or prefer not to say. We have included this data because we anticipate that most of these people will be from one of the ethnic minority groups.
- 4.7 It is noted that referrals from the asian population were lower than the population of Milton Keynes, and also that no one of asian heritage had completed the mentoring scheme in 2024/25 or attended the focus group. We will monitor this in 2025/26.

Ethnicity



Engagement

- IV. 256 youth mentoring sessions delivered
- V. 4 young people attended an event hosted by YMCA England and Wales which offered young people a platform to share the issues they are facing – to inform a manifesto to be presented to the government.

Achievement

- VI. 100% (23/23) of self efficacy scores either increased or stayed the same. The average increase was 18.8%.
- VII. 83.3% (15/18) young people reported that their likelihood of engaging with employment, education or training had increased after engaging with mentoring. The percentage likelihood of engagement increased by an average of 26.1%. Five participants that were already highly likely (10/10) to engage with employment, education or training were excluded from this analysis.
- VIII. 69.6% (16/23) said their mental health had been better in the two weeks before their mentoring ended, with a further 26.1% (6/23) reporting that it was the same, and only one person (4.3%) reporting that it had got worse.
- IX. Of those that reported some alcohol or drug use, 9/13 (69.2%) reported that they were less likely to use alcohol or drugs by the end of the mentoring scheme. Three reported no change and one reported that it was more likely. Fourteen young people considered themselves highly unlikely to use alcohol or drugs, so these were excluded from the analysis.
- X. After participating in the mentoring service, 9/23 (39.1%) engaged in a community activity, such as youth club or a physical activity. At the start of their mentoring, this was only 2/23 (8.7%).
- XI. Of those that completed the mentoring scheme in 2024/25, only 7 considered themselves to have any likelihood of engaging in crime. Of these 7, 5 felt less likely to engage with crime (71.4%), 1 reported no change and 1 felt more likely to engage in crime. Sixteen young people considered themselves highly unlikely (1/10) to engage with crime at the start of their mentoring, so these were excluded from the analysis.
- XII. At the start of the scheme, the cohort reported having a total of 10 positive role models. By the end of the mentoring scheme, they had a total of 22 role models between them. However, this was primarily because those with a role model increased the number of role models they had in their life, 6 young people reported having at least 1 positive role model, increased to 9 by the end of their mentoring.

Satisfaction

- i) 8.3/10 (23 mentor relationships completed)

5. OUTCOMES

Mentor Impact & Reflections

- 5.1 Young people were overwhelmingly positive about their mentor, that their mentor provided them with so much help, and recognised the value of having someone to talk to - *“Mentoring really helped me when I felt like I had nobody. But I did have someone in the end, through mentoring.”* Young person – 1:1 interview feedback, age 19.
- 5.2 They recognised traits such as *“good listener”* and *“positive person”*. For some, one of the benefits was the consistency of service, the mentor *“Doesn’t ever let me down”* Young person – 1:1 interview feedback, age 16.

“*I have not been let down, even once, by my mentor. I have never had that before from... anyone.”* – 1:1 interview feedback, age 24.

One young person hadn’t found their mentor particularly helpful – unfortunately there wasn’t an appropriate alternative available. Despite this they had still found the mentor friendly and the experience valuable overall.

- 5.3 When asked what they would change, the majority said they wouldn’t change anything, although some mentees wished they had received the mentoring when they were younger. *“I wish this had been offered at sooner - I wouldn’t be like this in my 20s”* Young person – 1:1 interview feedback, age 21.
- 5.4 All of the young people interviewed would recommend the scheme to others. The majority reported feeling nervous about the scheme to start with, feeling unsure about what to expect. Advice for other young people was overwhelmingly to *“Give it a chance, even if it is scary”* Young person – 1:1 interview feedback, age 13.

“*I would recommend it 100%. Even if you are not sure what you could get out of it. I was able to get a lot”* – 1:1 interview feedback, age 19.

- 5.5 Mentors recognised the value of supporting a young person, because it can have long term impact over that person’s lifetime. They valued seeing the positive changes in the young people they supported *“Great to see the positive impact you have on a person – improved school attendance or just positive feedback... more engagement in sport and focus on GCSEs”*. Mentor – focus group feedback.
- 5.6 Mentors reported feeling positive about the culture of the YMCA and described their role as providing a safe space for young people to talk without being judged. They all recognised the importance of safeguarding and setting clear ground rules, but otherwise allowing the mentee to feel in control of the session.
- 5.7 Advice from mentors was summed up by one of our young mentors, who is only 21 himself *“it’s a bit heavy at times, but in the long run it’s definitely worth it”* Mentor – focus group feedback.

Confidence and Communication

- 5.8 Every young person we spoke to said their confidence had increased or that they felt a lot less anxious. Many young people recognised a huge increase in their confidence, for example *“I can talk on the phone now but would never before”*. Others recognised that their improvement in confidence was helping them achieve more, for example one young person said having a mentor had *“made me see ‘I can do more than I think’ – it has given me the confidence to try”* Young person – 1:1 interview feedback, age 31. Mentors recognised this impact of the service too, for example *“She was really nervous about an exam.... she just kind of freaked out and couldn’t do anything and just sat there. Then she thought, ‘No, come on, doing something is better than just freaking out and doing nothing.’ ... and she actually completed the paper”*. Mentor – focus group feedback.
- 5.9 This was echoed in the feedback from young people who have finished the mentoring scheme in 2024/25, *“It has been good for someone to understand how I feel and it has helped build my confidence”* Young person – survey feedback, age 15.
- 5.10 It is further supported by the self-efficacy questions, 87.0% (20/23) reported an increase in their ability to get their point across, 13% (3/23) reported no change. Likewise, 87.0% (but from different respondents) reported an increase in their ability to handle whatever comes their way. The average increase was 20%.
- 5.11 Young people also reported feeling more relaxed talking to people, one reported, *“My mentor helped me build the skills to meet new people”*. Young person – 1:1 interview feedback, age 19. Others reported having the confidence to go to interviews.
- 5.12 One young person at primary school told us *“I felt like I needed to change before the sessions now I feel happy and don’t need to change”* Young person – survey feedback, age 9.

Emotional Literacy & Regulation

- 5.13 Half of the young people told us that their mentor had helped them to understand and regulate their emotions. For example one young person said their mentor *“showed me an emotional wheel and helped me identify feelings... it doesn’t always need to be anxiety – could be anger, stress”* Young person – 1:1 feedback, age 26. Another said *“I have learned to regulate my emotions. When in lessons I can calm down before reacting”* Young person – 1:1 interview feedback, age 13.
- 5.14 *“[My mentor] has helped me to be more calmer and not get really angry all the time when I’m arguing with my sister.”* Young person – survey feedback, age 10.
- 5.15 This is supported by the self-efficacy question *“If I am in trouble I can usually think of a way to deal with it”* – 78.3% (18/23) reported an increase following their mentoring, with the remainder staying the same. There was an average increase of 15.6%.
- 5.16 Of the young children of primary school age, 7 out of 10 children saw an increase in attendance over the course of their participation in the mentoring scheme.

- 5.17 One young person of primary school age, who’s attendance showed consistent improvement, from 79.14% in January to 82.89% in May said *“I like my sessions because it has helped me get better at talking to others about what I think is fair and not fair and it has helped with my social anxiety and it has helped me with asking for help when I need it and speaking in front of people and a lot of other things too!”* Young person – survey feedback, age 11.

Connection & Trust

- 5.18 Some young people reported improved relationships, with family or becoming more trusting of professionals. For example one young person who was struggling at home told us *“Relationship with mum has improved, I am less reactive, things don’t escalate”* Young person – 1:1 interview feedback, age 13. Improved trust was also mentioned *“I feel more confident trusting professionals”* Young person – 1:1 interview feedback, age 16.



Jake’s Story:

Jake* is a 16-year-old who left school with no GCSEs after years in care, strained relationships with foster carers, and feeling let down by teachers. With no trust in professionals and no engagement in education, Jake was referred to our mentoring scheme. Through consistent, trauma-informed support, his mentor offered him a safe space to process his experiences and begin rebuilding trust. Over time, he opened up about wanting to learn again—on his own terms.

His mentor arranged a visit to an alternative education provider and worked closely with both the setting and Jake’s residential home to ensure a joined-up, sustainable approach. With everyone committed to consistency and emotional safety, Jake gradually re-engaged. He now attends regularly, is preparing to retake his English and Maths GCSEs, and has started work experience. Most importantly, he has begun to trust professionals again and see a positive future for himself.

* name changed to protect identity

Practical Life Support

- 5.19 Half of our young people were grateful for the practical help their mentor gave them with applications or paperwork – applications for college, jobs, volunteering and housing – including supporting them to apply to the YMCA for accommodation. All of which the young people say they would not have been able to do alone *“[My mentor] helped me do things I wouldn’t have done otherwise. Helped me apply for jobs”* Young person – 1:1 interview feedback, 24.



One young person whose mentor helped them to access college said *“I wouldn’t have done it alone. I think I’ll be able to get a proper trade and make money because of this project”* Young person – 1:1 interview feedback, age 16.

Through achieving these material outcomes, the young people developed essential social competencies they didn't think they had before.

- 5.20 In 2024/25, two young people referred from the Youth Mentoring programme moved into YMCA accommodation, since the mentoring scheme began we have housed seven mentees. This holistic approach is a huge benefit of our mentoring service – if we are concerned about a young person we can offer them housing quickly, for others it provides a springboard for a new start “the YMCA has given me accommodation, a social life, a job and hope in the future” Young person – survey feedback, age 22.

Dylan's Story:

Dylan* was referred to the youth mentoring service at 17, he was struggling at home, sleeping on his mum's sofa, with concerns he was at risk of exploitation and risk-taking behaviours following some issues in the community. Dylan shared he was struggling with having no contact with his two year old daughter, so was matched with a volunteer mentor who specialises in supporting young fathers.

As a direct result of the community-based support he has received, when he turned 18 Dylan moved into YMCA accommodation. Here he benefits from holistic wraparound services including regular mental health and structured employment support. In addition, his keyworker has continued support to navigate the complexities of the UK Court system in relation to family law and parental responsibilities. Through this combination of support from his mentor and keyworker, Dylan has been successful in achieving interim contact with his daughter.

* name changed to protect identity

- 5.21 This is supported by self-efficacy data, 91.3% (21/23) reported feeling more confident or the same in their ability to solve problems, with the score increasing by 19.6%.
- 5.22 Half of the young people told us about the value of the signposting they received – this ranged from being signposted to other organisations, invited to join YMCA activities and meeting YMCA residents to being given a book or suggestion for podcasts.

Amber's Story:

Amber* experienced severe social anxiety and had not left the house in over three years when she was hospitalised following a suicide attempt. Later diagnosed with autism, she was referred into our mentoring scheme when her confidence and hope were at their lowest. Through consistent, compassionate support, Amber's mentor helped her build trust, recognise her strengths, and take small but significant steps toward re-engaging with the world.

With her mentor's support, Amber secured a volunteering role and joined a specialist autism support group for adults diagnosed later in life. Her confidence grew steadily, and in her volunteering role she began taking on more responsibility, eventually running catering functions independently. Most recently, Amber spoke at a national YMCA conference, addressing a large audience of strategic leaders—an incredible milestone that reflects just how far she has come.

* name changed to protect identity

6. CONCLUSIONS

Aim 1: All young people have access to a positive adult role model who is committed to their success

6.1 Insights:

- I. **YMCA mentors presence and quality make a tangible difference:** Young people describe their mentors as “good listener” and “positive person” and hugely value the reliability of their mentor compared to other services.
- II. **Role model exposure increased:** Young people with a positive role model (in addition to their mentor) increased by 33% (from 6 to 9) during their mentoring journey.
- III. **Improved engagement with community activities:** Increased involvement with community activities (from 8.7% to 39.1%) will provide new lasting role models once mentoring ends.
- IV. **Not all young people are being reached:** Individuals with more complex needs, such as those who are supported by the Youth Offending Team or Probation and Prison Services would need to be mentored by a trained youth worker, rather than a volunteer.

Aim 2: Thriving individuals have their emotional needs positively met and are realising their full potential

6.2 Insights:

- I. Emotional literacy and regulation improved significantly: Half of participants directly credited mentors with helping them understand and manage their emotions.
- II. Mental health and confidence improved dramatically: All young people said their confidence had increased or their anxiety had decreased. This is supported by self efficacy scores.
- III. Material outcomes followed emotional growth:
 - Young people felt more able to face interviews, social situations, public speaking and exams.

- 83.3% reported that they were more likely to engage in employment, education or training
- Decreased likelihood to engage in substance use (down 69.2%) and crime (down 71.4%)

These are achieved by developing social competencies which are essential in school, employment, and resettlement settings such as probation services or housing transitions.

IV. Holistic YMCA service means over 18s can be housed on our Campus:

This can enable young people to escape vulnerable situations or provide a springboard for a new start.

- 6.3 In summary, young people are referred to us for a wide variety of interlinked reasons, demonstrating a high level of need despite either not meeting the threshold for support or being on long waiting lists for professional services.
- 6.4 The early data from young people who have finished their mentoring journey or who participated in the 1:1 feedback interviews demonstrates mentoring can have a significant improvement in key areas such as self-esteem, confidence and emotional regulation – leading to material outcomes such as better engagement with education, reduction in substance use and reduction in likelihood of engaging in criminal activity.
- 6.5 Overall these changes led to significant personal development for many of our mentees, with young people demonstrating essential social competencies they didn't have before the mentoring scheme. This is supported by our young people telling us they have been very satisfied with the scheme, and so many saying they would encourage anyone to give it a go.

Sustainability of the project

- 6.6 This project depends on core funding of the volunteer coordinator role to provide high quality training and supervision to our growing pool of volunteers, which in turn ensures a consistent, quality service is provided to our young people.
- 6.7 In 2024/25 we were only able to offer mentoring to around half of the young people who were referred to the service. In addition, our primary referrer, the Targeted Early Help Team at MKCC, has told us they could easily double their referrals to six per week if they knew we had capacity. To upscale the project we need additional core funding to increase capacity of our volunteer coordinator role to manage more volunteers. In addition, we need to increase our marketing to enable us to reach a wider audience of potential volunteers.

Recommendations

- I. YMCA Youth Mentoring is universally valuable: The diverse reasons for referral demonstrate that YMCA Milton Keynes Youth Mentoring is transferable to a wide range of individuals who would benefit from mentoring for prevention or early intervention. It has been proved effective for referrals from a comprehensive range of settings: health, children's services, primary and secondary schools. The positive impact on young people that have completed their year of mentoring indicates that the scheme can reduce the need for more expensive interventions by professionals. The service would also be suitable for young people supported by Youth Offending, Probation and Prison Services. For young people with high needs or increased level of risk, the service needs a staffed model, as it is not ethical to use volunteers. Paid youth workers are still far more cost effective and flexible than professionals in statutory services.
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- III. Develop role model exposure further: Refine strategies that cultivate long term support, such as engagement in community activities, and train mentors to ensure a greater proportion of young people recognise the role models in their life.
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**Here for young people
Here for communities
Here for you**

YMCA enables people to develop their full potential in mind, body and spirit. Inspired by, and faithful to, our Christian values, we create supportive, inclusive and energising communities, where young people can truly belong, contribute and thrive.