

Pilot Evaluation Report:

Evaluation of the Drive Forward Foundation's Supporting Care Leavers into Employment Intervention

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- Youth Futures Foundation is an independent, not-for-profit organisation established with a £90m endowment from the Reclaim Fund to improve employment outcomes for young people from marginalised backgrounds. Our aim is to narrow employment gaps by identifying what works and why, investing in evidence generation and innovation, and igniting a movement for change
- The pilot and feasibility evaluation of the Supporting Care Leavers into Employment (SCLiE) was funded as part of an 'Accelerated towards impact' development grant by the Youth Futures Foundation. As such it focused on understanding how and whether the programme worked in achieving its desired impacts.
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1. Executive summary

1.1 The project

This is the final report of the pilot evaluation of the Drive Forward Foundation (DFF) Supporting Care Leavers into Employment (SCLiE) intervention.¹ The SCLiE programme was funded through a development grant as part of the Youth Futures Foundation's (YFF) What Works Programme One. Development grants are provided to promising programmes that are not yet at sufficient scale or evaluation readiness to undertake an impact evaluation. The next step in the evaluation journey for the programme is to move to a full impact evaluation,² as recommended by the feasibility assessment.³

The SCLiE programme supported care experienced young people (CEYP) between the ages of 16 and 24 to access employment, education or training (EET). CEYP are systematically disadvantaged in the employment sector. They are over-represented in unemployment statistics and under-represented in employment, education and training. For instance, in 2019/20, thirty-nine per cent of care leavers aged 19-21 were not in employment, education, or training (NEET) compared to 12 per cent of the wider population.⁴ The SCLiE intervention provided an individualised support package to CEYP that aimed to address their needs and support them to develop the skills and networks necessary to achieve sustainable, fulfilling employment.

CEYP taking part in SCLiE worked with a careers specialist (CS) who provided them with tailored support. Aspects of this support included:

- CSs held one-to-one meetings in which CEYP were signposted towards employment, and employment related, opportunities.
- CSs matched CEYP with professional mentors.
- DFF provided access, where appropriate, to ring-fenced job opportunities.
- DFF hosted events such as corporate networking events, ran skills-building workshops, and hosted social events.
- CSs referred CEYP to counselling and other services.

¹ A definition of care leavers for this report is provided in the Background section

² An impact evaluation is a type of evaluation which seeks to find causational evidence that a programme has an impact on the outcomes of interest. This is normally carried out via a randomised controlled trial of a quasi-experimental design.

³ A feasibility assessment was carried out to understand if it would be worthwhile, practically possible and acceptable to conduct an impact evaluation.

⁴ Home for Good (2020) Statistical Report Winter 2019-20. Available online at: <https://homeforgood.org.uk/statistics>

- CSs helped CEYP navigate different systems and organisations that they encountered.

The pilot evaluation of SCLiE took place between July 2021 and March 2024. It was a mixed-method evaluation, using quantitative and qualitative data to understand the association between the programme and the outcomes of interest, the potential mechanisms of change, and the ways in which the programme was delivered in practice. The pilot evaluation involved:

- A mobilisation phase of the pilot evaluation where a programme theory was developed around a Theory of Change⁵ and journey mapping.⁶
- A main evaluation phase testing whether the programme worked in achieving the aims set out in the mobilisation phase.
- A feasibility study considering the programme's readiness for impact evaluation.
- Findings from the pilot evaluation have so far been provided in the evaluation plan, which covered the mobilisation phase, and the final feasibility report, which provided the feasibility findings. This final pilot evaluation report presents the findings of the evaluation.

1.2 Findings

SCLiE's programme theory, centred around tailored support for CEYP, is consistent with the literature about working with this cohort: providing holistic, flexible and ongoing support that considers care leaver's needs, and enables them to be decision makers (although the available evidence of effective practice is limited). The pilot evaluation found that the programme was delivered as intended in practice, and the mechanisms set out in the Theory of Change were perceived as plausible by staff and participants.

Challenges with matching pre/post surveys and the limitations of the management information restricted our ability to quantitatively assess the association between engaging in SCLiE and the primary or secondary outcome measures.⁷ However, there were signs of promise, particularly related to the number of participants at the endline who were in education, employment and training.

The feasibility study found that DFF had the capacity and willingness to be involved in a further phase of impact evaluation of SCLiE. We were able to recruit a good-sized sample for the evaluation and had a respectable response rate for the pre/post surveys (response rate of 76.7% for baseline, and an attrition rate of 68% from baseline to endline). This is a

⁵ A Theory of Change is a way of explaining how a given intervention is believed to lead to the intended outcomes for the intervention

⁶ A method taken from market research, which seeks to understand the journey of an individual through a service.

⁷ The primary outcome was employment, education and training status. The Secondary outcomes were work readiness, social connectedness, self-efficacy, resilience and mental wellbeing.

positive sign for the next stage of the evaluation as it demonstrates that DFF has the potential to reach a significant number of CEYP, and that a sizeable proportion of the cohort they work with are willing to engage in an evaluation.

For the next stage of evaluating SCLiE we propose a non-waitlist randomised controlled trial (RCT)⁸ impact evaluation, using administratively collected outcomes. This would address the key challenges that affected the pilot evaluation's ability to comment on the association between the programme and the outcomes of interest. It would also allow us to produce causal evidence on the impact of SCLiE for CEYP.

Table 1: Summary of study findings

| Research questions | Findings |
|--|---|
| <p>Research question 1: What is the association between engaging in SCLiE and the primary measures?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Challenges matching pre/post surveys and problems with the quality of the management information limited our ability to assess research question 1 fully. However, a higher proportion of participants surveyed at the endline are in EET than when they joined SCLiE (as estimated across several baseline variables). Due to the quality of the data it is difficult to say whether this is meaningful. |
| <p>Research question 2: What is the association between engaging in SCLiE and the secondary measures?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The subset of questions we used from the work readiness and resilience validated scales seem to appropriately capture the overall outcome in this cohort. These two scales, and the mental wellbeing scale also appear to be reliable measures for the specific cohort of CEYP. The associations between engagement with SCLiE and the secondary outcomes are largely not statistically significant. |
| <p>Research question 3: Why are the outcomes of interest improved or not improved by</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> While we were not able to conclusively assess if the outcomes of interest were improved, we were able to speak to CEYP and CSs to understand the perceived impact of SCLiE. |

⁸ A randomised controlled trial (RCT) is an evaluation method where participants are randomly assigned to two groups: one that receives the intervention and one that does not. Their outcomes are then compared to understand what the impact of the evaluation was.

| | |
|---|--|
| engagement with the programme? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key aspects of SCLiE that DFF and participants felt led to improved outcomes included the 1-2-1 sessions between CEYP and CSs; DFF's sector connections and ringfenced opportunities; the focus on well-being and the offer of counselling. |
| Research question 4: To what extent was the programme delivered as intended? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The programme was delivered as intended. The organisation's belief in participant-led services which give CEYP agency translated into practice, leading to a flexibly delivered service. • The five broad phases described in the participant journey were present in the delivery in practice. These were: referral to DFF; initial assessment and relationship building with a CS; continued communication with CS; engagement with different activities, events and opportunities according to the participant's needs; and finishing the programme. |
| Research question 5: how are relationships built and supported by the programme? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is clear that leadership staff, CSs and participants value relationship building and invest time and resources into developing connections. • The relationship between CEYP and CSs in particular is prioritised. • DFF has a positive reputation and strong relationships with referrers, external partners, and other delivery services, contributing to the effectiveness of SCLiE. |
| Research question 6: How are staff involved in the programme trained and does this help them work effectively with applicants? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A wide range of training is available for CSs, intended to ensure they can support the needs of the CEYP they work with. While there were some areas for improvement, on the whole, staff felt they received the training they needed to effectively support CEYP. |

2. Introduction

This is the final report of the pilot evaluation of the Drive Forward Foundation (DFF) Supporting Care Leavers into Employment (SCLiE) intervention. The SCLiE programme was funded through a development grant as part of the Youth Futures Foundation's (YFF) What Works Programme One. YFF's What Works Programme aims to build robust evidence of what works to support young people from marginalised backgrounds into good jobs. Development grants are the phase before an impact grant, where an intervention would be funded to conduct a pilot of a full impact evaluation of their programme. Development grants are provided to promising programmes that are not yet at sufficient scale or evaluation readiness to undertake an impact evaluation.⁹ The next step in the evaluation journey for the programme is to move to a full impact evaluation, as recommended by the feasibility assessment.¹⁰

This section sets out the background for SCLiE, what the programme is, and the research questions for the evaluation.

2.1 Background

SCLiE aims to support care leavers and to address the barriers care-experienced young people (CEYP) can face in achieving stable and meaningful employment. 'Care-experienced young people' does not have a widely accepted definition but generally refers to young people who are either currently looked after by a local authority (looked after children/young people) or were looked after at any point before they turned 18.¹¹ This includes the narrower group of care leavers, legally defined under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 as those who were in the care of the Local Authority for a period of 13 weeks or more spanning their 16th birthday.¹²

CEYP face higher barriers to employment and training. In 2019/20, thirty-nine per cent of care leavers aged 19-21 were not in employment, education, or training (NEET) compared to 12 per cent of the wider population.¹³ Looked after children have worse educational outcomes than their peers and experience large attainment gaps in all key stages of

⁹ An impact evaluation is a type of evaluation which seeks to find causal evidence that a programme has an impact on the outcomes of interest. This is normally carried out via a randomised controlled trial of a quasi-experimental design.

¹⁰ A feasibility assessment was carried out to understand if it would be worthwhile, practically possible and acceptable to conduct an impact evaluation

¹¹ "Care Experienced Students" Available at: <https://www.ucas.com/providers/good-practice/emerging-cohorts/care-experienced-students#the-differing-picture-around-the-uk>; "What does King's College London mean by care-experienced?" <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/study/social-mobility/projects/prospective-students/pre-entry-care-experienced>

¹² "What is a Care Leaver?" <https://www.careleavers.com/what-is-a-care-leaver/>

¹³ Home for Good (2020) Statistical Report Winter 2019-20. Available online at: <https://homeforgood.org.uk/statistics>

education, compared to children who have not been looked after. For instance, compared to non-looked after children, at key stage 1 looked after children had much lower attainment in writing (28 percentage points) and maths (27 percentage points); and at key stage 4 the average Attainment 8 score for looked after children was 18.8 compared to 44.4 for non-looked after children (Attainment 8 measures the average achievement of pupils in up to 8 qualifications.)¹⁴ The participation of care leavers in higher education is also significantly lower than average, even when attainment and challenges associated with childhood trauma are accounted for.¹⁵

CEYP are also at higher risk of struggling socially and emotionally. Of looked after children who completed a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire in the year ending 31 March 2019 (approximately 41,000), 39 per cent had scores that were a cause for concern for their emotional and behavioural health, and a further 13 per cent were assessed as borderline between 'of concern' and normal scores.¹⁶

Mental health issues are also prevalent amongst care leavers. In 2017, Barnardo's reviewed the cases of 274 care leavers and found that 46 per cent had mental health needs.¹⁷ This corresponds with the experiences of looked after children in schools. In 2018, 55.5 per cent of looked after children received special education needs (SEN) support or had an education, health and care plan (EHCP) at school –social, emotional and mental health needs were the most common type of primary need in this group.¹⁸ Furthermore, a National Youth Advocacy Service survey suggests mental health issues amongst CEYP may have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, finding that 80 per cent of care leavers who responded felt increased loneliness and anxiety in 2020.¹⁹

¹⁴ Department for Education (2019) *Outcomes for Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England, 31 March 2018*. Available online at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/794535/Main_Text_Outcomes_for_CLA_by_LAs_2018.pdf.

¹⁵ Department for Education (2019) *Outcomes for Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England, 31 March 2018*. Available online at:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/794535/Main_Text_Outcomes_for_CLA_by_LAs_2018.pdf.

¹⁶ Department for Education (2019) *Children Looked After in England (including adoption), year ending 31 March 2019*.

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/850306/Children_looked_after_in_England_2019_Text.pdf

¹⁷ Smith, N. (2017) *Neglected Minds: A report on mental health support for young people leaving care*. Available online at: <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/sites/default/files/uploads/neglected-minds.pdf>

¹⁸ Department for Education (2018) *Outcomes for children looked after by local authorities in England*. Available online at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/outcomes-for-children-looked-after-by-las-31-march-2018>

¹⁹ National Youth Advocacy Service (2020) *Young Lives in Lockdown, May 2020*. Available online at: <https://www.nyas.net/wp-content/uploads/NYAS-Coronavirus-Survey-Report-Young-Lives-in-Lockdown-May-2020.pdf>

CEYP are also more likely than others to face aspects of multiple deprivation. For example, in 2011, 25 per cent of people experiencing homelessness in England were care-experienced,²⁰ and in 2019, 27 per cent of people in prison had spent some time in care.²¹

Whilst these statistics demonstrate the average experiences of CEYP, it is important to note that young people with experience of children's social care are individuals with distinct histories. For example, while most CEYP become looked after due to abuse or neglect, some are looked after because of illness or family dysfunction.²² Similarly, while most (72 per cent) looked after children are in foster care, this group have diverse experiences, with 10 per cent of fostered children in England having three or more placements whilst in care.²³ So, whilst it is true CEYP are systematically disadvantaged, their experiences and outcomes are diverse, and they are not a homogenous group.

The DFF's SCLiE programme aimed to address the employment gap between CEYP and non-CEYP against this background of intersecting disadvantages. This evaluation was conducted in a way that was sensitive to these contextual factors.

2.2 Programme

DFF's SCLiE intervention aimed to address the barriers CEYP can face in finding employment. Although the available evidence into effective practice is limited, the approach taken by SCLiE appears broadly consistent with what is reported in available literature as likely to be effective: holistic, flexible and ongoing support that considers care leaver's needs, and enables them to be decision makers. A rapid evidence review was conducted as part of the mobilisation stage of this evaluation, which can be found in Appendices

Appendix A: Evaluation Plan.

The intervention supported CEYP, between the ages of 16 and 24, who were seeking employment. Through SCLiE, DFF provided an individualised support package to CEYP that aimed to address their needs and support them to develop the skills and networks necessary to achieve sustainable, fulfilling employment.

In the SCLiE programme, CEYP worked with a Career Specialist (CS)²⁴ who provided tailored support to them. Aspects of this support included:

²⁰ Reeve, K. & Batty, E (2011) *The hidden truth about homelessness: Experiences of single homelessness in England*. Available online at https://www.crisis.org.uk/media/236816/the_hidden_truth_about_homelessness_es.pdf.

²¹ HM Prison & Probation Service (2019) *Toolkit for Supporting Care Leavers in Custody: 2019*. Available online at: <https://www.nicco.org.uk/userfiles/downloads/5d356df6f345a-toolkit-for-supporting-care-leavers-in-custody.pdf>.

²² Home for Good (2020) *Statistical Report Winter 2019-20*. Available online at: <https://homeforgood.org.uk/statistics>

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Previously known as an Employment Consultant (EC)

- CSs built a relationship with the CEYP and held one-to-one meetings in which CEYP were signposted towards employment, and employment related, opportunities.
- CSs matched CEYP with professional mentors.
- DFF provided access, where appropriate, to ring-fenced job opportunities.
- DFF hosted events such as corporate networking events, ran skills-building workshops, and hosted social events.
- CSs referred CEYP to counselling and other services.
- CSs helped CEYP navigate different systems and organisations that they encountered.

For more detail on the support CSs provided to CEYP, the Theory of Change (Figure 7); and participant journey (Figure 8) are discussed below in Section 5.2.

Further information about delivering the programme can be accessed via the [DFF website](#).

2.3 The evaluation

Research questions

Below, we give the guiding questions for the evaluation. These were informed by the preliminary work conducted for the evaluation plan (which can be found in Appendices Appendix A: Evaluation Plan).

1. What is the association between engaging in DFF's support programme and the rate of being in employment, education and/or training among participants?
 - a. Does this association vary depending on the type and frequency of engagement with the programme?
2. What is the association between engaging in DFF's support programme and participants':
 - a. Work readiness?
 - b. Social connectedness?
 - c. Resilience?
 - d. Mental wellbeing?
 - e. Self-reported sense of self efficacy?
3. Why are the outcomes of interest improved, or not improved, by engagement with the programme?
 - a. What mechanisms drive improvement in the outcomes of interest?
 - b. How do different aspects of the programme influence the outcomes of interest?
4. To what extent was the programme delivered as intended and where do variations of the planned implementation occur?

- a. To what extent does the ToC represent the programme as implemented?
 - b. What are the barriers and facilitators for the implementation of the programme?
 - c. What are the barriers and facilitators for participation in the programme, and are these different for different groups of participants?
 - d. What factors external to the programme influenced its implementation (e.g. context)?
5. How are relationships built and supported by the programme:
- a. Between participants and staff/volunteers (CSs, mentors, counsellors, and others)?
 - b. Between participants (e.g. via networking sessions)?
 - c. Between staff/volunteers (e.g. via training or collaborative working)?
 - d. Do these relationships contribute to the effectiveness of the programme?
6. How are CSs, mentors, counsellors and other adults involved in the programme trained and supported, and does this training and support help them to work more effectively with participants?

2.4 Components of the evaluation and reporting to date

The pilot evaluation was made up of three main stages:

1. Mobilisation phase: during this stage we carried out a rapid evidence review of effective practice and developed a programme theory for SCLiE. To develop the programme theory, we worked with DFF staff and past SCLiE participants to develop a Participant Journey Map and Theory of Change. The findings from the preliminary work can be found in the Evaluation Plan in Appendices
2. Appendix A: Evaluation Plan.
3. Main evaluation phase: during the main evaluation we addressed the research questions listed above to understand how SCLiE is run in practice, and whether there is evidence of promise for the programme's impact on CEYP. Our key methodological approaches were a pre/post survey with participants; qualitative research carried out with participants and DFF staff; and analysis of management information collected by DFF. This report sets out the findings from the main evaluation phase.
4. Feasibility study: alongside the main evaluation we conducted a feasibility study, to consider whether the SCLiE programme was ready for further evaluation. This was informed by the fieldwork for the main evaluation phase, and workshops with DFF staff.

The next step in the evaluation journey for the programme is to move into the preparation stage for a full impact evaluation, as recommended by the feasibility assessment.

2.5 About this report

The report follows the following structure:

- **Methods:** in the methods section we explain how participants were recruited for the evaluation and the different data collection methods that were used in the evaluation. Data analysis and evaluation limitations are also addressed.
- **Findings:** in this section we discuss the demographics of the evaluation cohort, and then provide an outline of the programme theory for SCLiE. We go on to consider the operation of the model in practice, discussing research questions 3, 4 and 5, and evidence of promise for SCLiE, addressing research questions 1, 2 and 3. Finally we consider the programme's readiness for further evaluation.
- **Conclusion:** this provides an overview of the key findings of the pilot evaluation, and what this means for the next stages of evaluating SCLiE.
- **Error! Reference source not found.:** these include important previous documents, such as the evaluation plan.

3. Methods

Below we outline the methods used for the pilot evaluation.

3.1 Theory of Change development

During the mobilisation stage of the pilot evaluation, a Theory of Change (ToC) was developed by King's College evaluation team staff in collaboration with key staff at DFF and reviewed by YFF. This is outlined in detail in the Evaluation Plan which can be found Appendices

Appendix A: Evaluation Plan. Figure 7 below depicts the updated Theory of Change, which was reviewed in light of the results of main pilot evaluation phase. This was developed alongside a participant journey, presented in Figure 8.

3.2 Participant selection

The target group for the evaluation followed DFF's inclusion and exclusion criteria for the SCLiE programme:

- Either currently in local authority care or are care leavers,
- Aged 16-24 years old,²⁵
- In London,
- Not in employment, education or training (NEET) or at risk of becoming NEET, and
- Have the right to work in the UK.

During the recruitment window, all participants eligible for SCLiE were included in the evaluation. DFF planned to recruit a total of 200 CEYP for the evaluation, with recruitment of participants occurring on a rolling basis. From February 2022 to November 2022, 236 participants were recruited by DFF, and were included in the evaluation (for more information about inclusion in the evaluation see Section 0 below.

After receiving the final dataset for the evaluation, we decided to include in the analysis some participants older than 24 years to maximise the use of the available data, considering the issues encountered during matching, as discussed in Section 0

An information sheet was provided to all participants. This informed participants that the evaluation was taking place and explained what they could expect, the data that would be collected about them and how it would be used. The process if they wished to opt out of

²⁵ DFF's criteria includes CEYP up to age 26, however those over 24 were not included in the inclusion criteria due to the cohort YFF works with. However, as discussed later, some CEYP over 24 were included in the analysis.

the evaluation was also explained to them at this stage. In addition, the evaluation was explained in detail to participants by the CS before they completed the baseline survey.

3.3 Data collection

DFF supported King's in collecting data for the study. Table 2 shows the data collection methods used for the main stage of the evaluation, with the assigned data collector. The methods used in the mobilisation phase are detailed in the evaluation plan (see Appendices

4. Appendix A: Evaluation Plan Appendices

Appendix A: Evaluation Plan)

Table 2: Data Collection

| Data Item | Data Collector | Research question addressed |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Pre/post survey | DFF (pre) King's (post) | RQ 1 & 2 |
| Management information | DFF | RQ 1 & 2 |
| Staff interviews | King's | RQ 3, 4, 5 & 6 |
| Participant tracking interviews | King's | RQ 3, 4, 5 |
| Pulse survey | King's | RQ 3, 4, 5 |

Pre/post survey

All participants were asked to complete a pre-participation (baseline) survey at or around the time of enrolment into the programme. They were also asked to complete the survey six months after they started the programme and again nine months after they started the programme. DFF estimated that an average participant is on the programme for approximately six months. This approach therefore allowed us to capture the outcomes of most participants by the time they had finished engaging with DFF and were likely to have reached an outcome.

CSs led on collecting the baseline survey measures during their one-to-one sessions with participants. The aim of this was to reduce burden on participants. They also provided a link to the online survey at the six-month time point for participants to complete.

The endline data collection was undertaken via an online survey, by phone or in person by the evaluation team to ensure coverage and consistency. CSs assisted data collection by promoting completion of the endline surveys, for instance sharing the link and sending prompting emails when a participant had not completed the survey.

Participant tracking interviews

Alongside the pre/post survey, we aimed to recruit 20 participants shortly after enrolment and undertake a half-hour semi-structured interview with them. We aimed to speak to the same participants again towards the end of their support journey, for 30-45 minutes to understand the participant journey of a diverse sample of young people who have engaged with the service in varied ways.

We initially recruited young people to be involved in qualitative fieldwork from the main sample of evaluation participants. From this sample we purposively sampled to include a range of experiences and views of the intervention. As participants joined on a rolling basis, recruitment for interviews was an ongoing process across the entire programme recruitment period. We recruited 11 participants for initial interviews in this way and conducted follow-up interviews with three of these participants. Recruiting young people to take part in interviews was challenging, which is why we were not able to meet the original target with the evaluation cohort. It is difficult to be sure of the reason why participants did not respond to King's or refused consent to take part in the interviews. However, discussions with DFF staff suggested it may be due to CEYP's reluctance to talk to adults from professional organisations due to previous bad experiences; or CEYP's schedules which make it hard to predict when a good time is to get hold of them.

Due to these difficulties with recruiting, towards the end of the fieldwork we also approached young people who were not part of the original evaluation cohort for interview. The intervention was not being delivered differently across cohorts, so these participants were able to provide additional perspectives on the programme. Seven participants took part in this stage of the tracking interviews. With this group we conducted 'hybrid interviews', combining the key topics of the initial and follow interviews into one interview.

Interviews were carried out over the phone by a member of the King's evaluation team, except in one instance where a young person involved in the initial interview stream requested to submit written responses instead.

Observations

We aimed to conduct approximately ten hours of observations of support sessions, subject to participants' and CSs' agreement. Ideally these observations were to be linked with participants involved in the tracking interviews to develop an in-depth understanding of the journeys of a set of participants.

However, in practice, we were unable to conduct observations. Recruitment for qualitative interviews was difficult, and it was agreed with YFF and DFF that the focus should be on carrying out interviews.

Pulse survey

In addition, throughout their involvement in the programme, we aimed to send participants short 'pulse' surveys of 1 – 2 questions, to capture intervening outcomes and experiences of the programme.

The pulse surveys were delivered via text message and asked participants to reflect on their development during the programme. Pulse surveys were expected to be more engaging for young people, as they would be quicker and delivered directly to their phones.

We intended to carry out six surveys with each participant, on a rolling basis to reflect when they started on the project. However, the first two surveys had a low response rate. The first was responded to by six young people; the second was responded to by seven. Both were sent to over 100 participants.

Our conclusion is that pulse surveys via SMS are not a suitable way to engage this participant group. This is useful to learn and will enable us to adapt our approach to engaging participants across the research lifecycle in any future impact evaluation.

In light of this, it was decided in collaboration with YFF and DFF not to continue with this strand of data collection.

Staff interviews

In addition to gathering feedback from participants, we also interviewed staff involved in SCLiE. The target criteria for staff to participate were as follows:

- Staff member at DFF who is either a Career Specialist, or a senior staff member involved in the programme.
- Staff member must have worked on SCLiE during the evaluation cycle.

We conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with seven CSs and three senior members of DFF staff. Staff interviews took 45 – 60 minutes and sought to provide a more in-depth understanding of factors that facilitated and hindered the programme mobilisation, programme reach and participant engagement. Interviews were carried out over the phone by a member of the King's evaluation team.

Management information

We also reviewed existing programme data held by DFF in their client management database. We worked with DFF to collect the following data:

- Background demographics of participants (e.g., gender, age, postcode, ethnicity, neurodiversity, housing status, country of birth).
- Type of referrals (e.g., self-referral, referral via LA, referral via university, other forms of referral).
- Type of contact between DFF and participants (this takes the needs-assessment made for each CEYP into account e.g., counselling, CV workshops, mock interviews, industry insight events, mentoring matches, etc).

- Level of contact between DFF and participants (e.g., the number of points of contact between DFF and participants).

We aimed to use this data to develop a quantitative picture of how participants engage with the SCLiE offer, which components of the offer appear to be most popular, and how long and how intensely participants tend to be engaged.

4.1 Ethics and data protection

All data was held in accordance with the King's College London Data Protection Policy and Procedures. This ensured the confidentiality of information shared and the secure handling of data in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

All participants were given the opportunity to opt out of the data collection and were provided with an information sheet that explained the reason for collecting and processing their data, detailed how long it would be stored for and whether/how it would be shared with other parties. It also provided them with the mechanism to ask that their data be removed or to raise a complaint.

A Data Protection Impact Assessment was prepared for the project. This was reviewed by King's Information Compliance team to ensure the project met its data protection requirements.

As this study is classed as a service evaluation which did not use randomisation, it was not subject to King's College London's Ethical Review procedures. The project was conducted in line with the university and institute's ethics policy. Ensuring our approach was ethical and appropriate for the cohort we were working with was a key consideration during the design and implementation of the project. For instance, we ensured informed consent was an ongoing process with participants taking part in research activities, and that personal data was stored securely.

4.2 Analysis approach

Quantitative analysis approach

Analysis has been conducted in R following the procedure outlined in the Evaluation Protocol (Appendices

Appendix A: Evaluation Plan).

Table 3 presents the outcome measures in the analysis.

They consist of a set of adapted and shortened versions of survey instruments that have been validated with young people. These were amended and supplemented with additional questions to ensure they mapped closely onto the underlying programme theory outlined in the ToC. The information was collected through repeated surveys at baseline and endline as specified below.

Table 3: Outcomes description

| Outcome | Indicator | Measurement |
|---|---|---|
| Employment, Education and Training (EET) status | Likelihood of being in employment, education and/or training. | Indicator measured by management information captured by DFF. |
| Work readiness | Score from the adapted Life Skills Development Scale (LSDS) ²⁶ for adolescents supplemented by additional questions. The score ranges from one to five, where five refers to highest work readiness. | Indicator measured as the weighted average of ten items measured through baseline/endline surveys. Weights adjust for the number of responded items. |
| Social connectedness | Score from a subset of questions from the Social Connectedness scale ²⁷ . The score ranges from one to five, where five refers to highest social connectedness. | Indicator measured as the weighted average of four items measured through baseline/endline surveys. Weights adjust for the number of responded items. |
| Self-efficacy | Score from a subset of questions from the General Self-efficacy scale ²⁸ . The score ranges from one to five, where five refers to highest self-efficacy. | Indicator measured as the weighted average of four items measured through baseline/endline surveys. Weights adjust for the number of responded items. |

²⁶ Darden, C.A., & Cazda, G. M. (1996). Life skills development scale adolescence form. *Journal of mental health counseling*, 18 (2), 22-142.

²⁷ Lee, R. M., & Robbins, S. B. (1995). Measuring belongingness: The Social Connectedness and the Social Assurance scales. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 42(2), 232–241. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-0167.42.2.232>

²⁸ Schwarzer, R., & Jerusalem, M. (1995). Generalized Self-Efficacy scale. In J. Weinman, S. Wright, & M. Johnston, *Measures in health psychology: A user's portfolio. Causal and control beliefs* (pp. 35-37). Windsor, UK: NFER-NELSON.

| Outcome | Indicator | Measurement |
|------------------|--|--|
| Resilience | Score from an adapted subset of questions from the RS-14 scale ²⁹ . The score ranges from one to five, where five refers to highest resilience. | Indicator measured as the weighted average of four items measured through baseline/endline surveys. Weights adjust for the number of responded items. |
| Mental wellbeing | Score from the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing scale (SWEMWS) ³⁰ . The score ranges from one to five, where five refers to highest mental wellbeing. | Indicator measured as the weighted average of seven items measured through baseline/endline surveys. Weights adjust for the number of responded items. |

It is worth noting that instead of aggregating the items' values to create the score, we opted to estimate the average score of the provided responses. This maximises the number of available observations we can include in the analysis, as we adjust the score for the number of items responded per outcome, meaning participants who have not completed all items do not need to be dropped.

Outcomes Analysis

Specification

The analysis proceeded per the following equation:

$$Y_i = \alpha + \beta_1 D_i + \beta_2 A_i + \beta_{3:n} M_i + \epsilon_i$$

Where:

- Y_i is the post-intervention score on the outcome (see above) for a young person i .
- D_i is the dosage indicator showing the number of services a participant i received from DFF (if relevant).
- A_i is the individual i 's baseline score on the outcome (if relevant).

²⁹ Wagnild G. (2009b). The Resilience Scale User's Guide for the US English version of the Resilience Scale and the 14-Item Resilience Scale (RS-14). Worden, MT: Resilience Center. [Google Scholar]

³⁰ Clarke, A., Putz, R., Friede, T., Ashdown, J., Adi, Y., Martin, S., Flynn, P., Blake, A., Stewart-Brown, S. & Platt, S. (2010). Warwick-Edinburgh mental well-being scale (WEMWBS) acceptability and validation in English and Scottish secondary school students (The WAVES Project). NHS Health Scotland.

- M_i is the vector of individual covariates that could explain participant i post-intervention outcome score. Covariates considered included age, gender and ethnicity.
- ϵ_i is a robust standard error.

The EET outcome is binary, hence we ran the above specification as a linear probability model. All other outcomes are continuous variables and were therefore estimated using Ordinal Least Square OLS modelling.

The main coefficients of interest are the association between baseline and endline outcome scores, as well as the association between the dosage indicator and the post-intervention outcome.

For each of the outcomes described in Table 3, we conducted a set of models, following the specification above. Table 4 describes what each model entails. The results are compared across the different models.

Table 4: Modelling summary

| Model | Description | Sample |
|---------|---|--|
| Model 1 | Estimation of the correlation between baseline and endline outcome measures, controlled by relevant covariates. | Estimation based on the participants matched across baseline and endline (complete cases). |
| Model 2 | Estimation of the correlation between outcome at endline, and dosage of the programme, controlled by relevant covariates and outcome at baseline. | Estimation based on the participants matched across baseline and endline (complete cases). |
| Model 3 | Estimation of the correlation between baseline and endline outcome measures, controlled by relevant covariates. | Estimation based on the sample that combines complete cases, and participants for whom we imputed their outcome at baseline, since they only completed the endline survey. |
| Model 4 | Estimation of the correlation between outcome at endline, and dosage of the programme, controlled by | Estimation based on a sample that combines complete cases, and participants for whom we imputed their outcome at baseline, since they only completed the endline survey. |

| Model | Description | Sample |
|---------|---|--|
| | relevant covariates and outcome at baseline. | |
| Model 5 | Estimation of the correlation between outcome at endline, and dosage of the programme, controlled by relevant covariates. No control included for baseline. | Estimation based on the participants matched across baseline and endline (complete cases). This model was used only on the estimations for the outcome EET status, to check the sensitivity of the dosage indicator. |

We believe this modelling approach will provide important feasibility information. Models 1 and 3 will provide valuable insights on the predicting power of baseline measures for each of the six outcomes, in the context of the specific cohort targeted by the programme. This information can contribute to future power calculations and decisions on sample sizes, not only for the evaluation of SCLiE, but for the sector more widely. Models 2, 4 and 5 aim at assessing whether there is evidence of promise related to the programme effect.

It is also worth emphasising that the reported analysis doesn't make any causal claims. This analysis provides suggestive associations, but it is not an RCT or quasi-experimental design, and therefore, the results should be treated cautiously.

Imputation of missing baselines

To include participants who only completed the endline survey, we imputed their baseline outcomes based on the demographic information available. As per specified in the protocol (see Appendices

Appendix A: Evaluation Plan) we used multiple imputation with chained equations (MICE).³¹ This is an iterative process that uses several subsequent rounds of regressions to predict a likely baseline value. This prediction considers the observable characteristics of the participants as well as the distribution of the existing values in the outcome variable. We used the mice package in R, with predictive mean matching across five iterations.³²

Data missingness could come from three sources. It could be missing completely at random (MCAR), which assumes that the probability of having a missing data point is independent of observable and unobservable variables. It could be missing not at random (MNAR) when the

³¹ Wulff, J. N., & Jeppesen, L. E. (2017). Multiple imputation by chained equations in praxis: Guidelines and review. *Electronic Journal of Business Research Methods*, 15(1), 41-56. <http://www.ejbrm.com/volume15/issue1>

³² Wilson, Sam. (2021). The MICE Algorithm. <https://cran.r-project.org/web/packages/miceRanger/vignettes/miceAlgorithm.html>

missing data points are systematically related to unobserved characteristics. The third source is missingness at random (MAR), where missingness could be considered random, conditioning on observable variables. MICE imputation is the default imputation method used for Randomised Controlled trials, and hence we are using the method in this study. In that sense, we are assuming missingness at random. This assumption is based on the idea that after controlling for the available participants characteristics, such as poor mental health, gender, and housing stability, the missingness left is likely at random. Nevertheless, we acknowledge this is a strong assumption and that it is still possible to have MNAR as this study does not do any experimental or quasi-experimental analysis. For the full-scale evaluation, we will include some modelling to assess whether there is some MNAR in the data, before implementing MICE.

Numbers included in the evaluation

This pilot evaluation is based on the records of 236 CEYP. A young person has been included in the analysis if they have a record of having worked with DFF during the evaluation period. There were data limitations when identifying the participants effectively engaged in the programme. We detected inconsistencies in the numbers reported across several check-up points in the evaluation. As per conversations with DFF, given the transition to a different data management system, which happened internally at DFF during the evaluation period, there are reasonable concerns about the accuracy of the registers. This affected particularly the registration dates due to data migration between databases making it more difficult to identify which participants were in scope for the evaluation. Given this ambiguity, it was agreed with DFF to use their “evaluation record” indicator as a guide to decide who to include in the analysis, combined with the reported dates of the evaluation period. Despite the limitations, the agreed evaluation cohort included all the participants for whom we have baseline and endline surveys.

Of the 236 participants, 181 completed the baseline survey, either partially or in full. CSs carried out baseline data collection as part of their onboarding process. At endline, King’s collected surveys from 137 participants, with contact details provided by DFF. However, during data analysis and in conversations with DFF, we excluded several records for which it was not possible to find a match with the management information or the baseline survey. The matching was challenging due to the data transition problems mentioned above; it is likely that we received records of a group of participants that either received some services from DFF, but did not have management information, or participants supported outside the evaluation period. Given these factors, 75 records have been included in the final analysis.

Regarding complete cases (cases for whom we have baseline and endline records, as well as demographic information), the numbers vary depending on the endline variable. When the endline outcome was obtained from the management information (specifically EET status at exit), completed cases covered 236 participants. However, when the outcome was measured through the endline survey (all the other outcomes), the analysis is based on 58 cases. A further 17 participants agreed to undertake the endline survey, even when they did not complete the baseline. Further exclusions were made where DFF has explicitly asked to remove participants from the data or to not contact them, and in cases where the

participants did not provide enough information when responding to the endline survey to enable matching back to their Contact IDs in DFF's database.

For this analysis, we are therefore considering a response rate of 76.7% for baseline, and an attrition rate of 68% from baseline to endline.

Additionally, the sample also includes a sub-group of re-engagers. These are participants who have re-joined SCLiE after a period of inactivity. They represent 36.86% of the recruited participants with demographic information, which shows that participants' trajectories in the programme are not always continuous. Hence, computing a dosage indicator is necessary to control for these differences.

Qualitative analysis approach

Interviews were transcribed in full by a professional transcription service. A thematic framework matrix was developed in Nvivo, and data was summarised into it in line with 'Framework Analysis'.³³ This approach allowed data to be organised under descriptive themes, whilst retaining the ability to view any individual's journey. During data management, the framework was reviewed by the research team to ensure its categories were discrete and exhaustive.

Once the qualitative data had been managed, it was analysed descriptively using a process of detection, categorisation and classification.³⁴ This stage in the process involved team discussion to build a shared understanding of the data, and to encourage internal challenge. Researchers conducted explanatory analysis to look for linkages, associations and possible explanatory concepts to provide a rich understanding of how SCLiE is delivered, and how different participants experience it.

When all qualitative data had been analysed, researchers came together to compare themes and explanations across the participant types.

Data triangulation

To triangulate findings, we first analysed each strand of the evaluation separately to ensure that the data was viewed without expectation, then discussed findings as a team to identify convergence and divergence between the methodologies. Where divergence was identified, we worked to understand why different data was telling different stories, and present additional nuance in findings.

4.3 Timeline

Table 5 provides a timeline of when the respective evaluation activities were carried out.

³³ Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., (2003) *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers* Sage Publications

³⁴ Ritchie, J., Lewis, J., (2003) *Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers* Sage Publications

Table 5: Evaluation timeline

| Data Item | When | Data Collector |
|---------------------------------|---|----------------|
| Pre/post survey | Baseline: January 2022 – November 2022 | DFF |
| | Endline: December 2022 – October 2023 | King's |
| Management information | Jan 2022 – November 2023 | DFF |
| Staff interviews | Career Specialists: January 2023 – March 2023 | King's |
| | Senior Staff: December 2023 | |
| Participant tracking interviews | July 2022 – Sept 2023 | King's |
| Pulse survey | June 2022 – July 2022 | King's |

4.4 Evaluation limitations

The pilot evaluation of SCLiE has some limitations, related to the data coverage of the qualitative interviews, and the quality of the management information. As this is a pilot evaluation, these will inform the design of any future impact evaluations, which should allow us to address these limitations.

Qualitative data

- As discussed above in Section 2.3: Participant tracking interviews, recruiting CEYP to take part in the qualitative aspects of the evaluation proved challenging. This is not surprising given the challenges this cohort are facing, as described in the
- Background section. These challenges reduced the amount of information we have on young people's experiences of the programme and of the different stages of their journey with DFF, as in the majority of cases we only spoke to them at one time point. Given the number of participants who were successfully recruited (10% of those initially approached) it is likely that those who agreed to take part in a qualitative interview were more engaged with the intervention than those who were not. Given this, the results from these CEYP should not be taken to represent the views of all service users.

- However, the sample is a reasonable size for a pilot evaluation, and the findings triangulated well with the findings from staff interviews.
- These insights can be built on at the full impact evaluation stage. The lessons from the pilot phase around appropriate methods to engage CEYP in qualitative research will inform how we approach this. For instance, we will consider using methods, such as working with peer researchers, which work due to the connections between CEYP, rather than relying on rapport between CEYP and the research team.

Quantitative data

The quality of the management information has several limitations, as specified below.

- **Data accuracy and consistency.** During the pilot evaluation DFF transitioned to using a new data management system. As part of this process, information was migrated from their old system. This led to some issues with data consistency. This is particularly evident when it comes to recording consistently the start and end dates of participants' engagement with DFF, which has caused challenges for assessing which participants to include in the final analysis. This limitation also meant that, for the endline survey, we received information and contacted participants outside of the scope of the evaluation. While the transition has posed some challenges, DFF's new system is much more structured, which will help to minimise these problems moving forward (if an engagement measure is used in a full RCT approach).
- **Lack of demographic and baseline data for a subset of endline surveys.** This was a key challenge during the matching phase. A group of the participants who had been provided by DFF to contact for endline surveys did not hold demographic or baseline information in DFF's systems during the evaluation period. This means that we contacted some CEYP who worked with DFF but were not registered in their management information (possibly due to loss during the transition to the new data management system).³⁵ We consequently could not include them in the evaluation analysis, which reduced the sample available, impacting on the robustness of the estimations and how informative the findings are overall.
- **Issues with Contact IDs and EET status variables.** There were some inconsistencies in the reported Contact IDs: for instance, there were duplicated IDs and changes in IDs when pulled out across different rounds, again most likely related to the transition to the new data management system. Additionally, while DFF's management information includes information on participants' employment situation, and EET or NEET status, these variables represent the CEYP's status at last update, and are regularly updated by CSs as young people's situations change. Therefore, there was

³⁵ All participants who took part in the endline survey were briefed about being involved, informed that participation was voluntary, and provided consent for their survey responses to be analysed. It was also made clear in DFF's privacy notice that those taking part in SCLiE may be contacted by King's about the evaluation.

uncertainty to some extent about the baseline status of the participant. This limited the analysis of the primary outcome of this evaluation. To overcome this challenge, however, DFF's also provided some revised baseline assessments that have been included in the analysis as well.

However, it is important to note the improvement that DFF's case management systems have undergone during the evaluation period. During the feasibility reporting, we detected multiple issues regarding heterogeneity across how the CSs recorded information, such as low standardisation of categorical variables, lack of clarity on consent registration and unorganised registration of services provided. These issues have been notably reduced for the final reporting phase, demonstrating the positive trajectory of DFF's case management systems. Additionally, the new case management system will allow DFF to produce more consistent data going forward.

We would also like to emphasise DFF's willingness to continually improve their data management, as well as how responsive they have been to collaborate and address our queries during this process.

Quantitative analysis

As a pilot study this evaluation was not meant to address causality. As such the quantitative analysis provided below does not capture the causal effect of the programme. Therefore, all outcome analysis results should be interpreted cautiously.

- **EET baseline outcome:** one of the main limitations of this report is that it was not possible to confidently identify the EET status of the participants before joining the programme. While we have established a proxy for the baseline informed by conversations with DFF, we acknowledge reliability concerns. This means that the estimations identified could be either an over- or underestimation of true baseline-endline correlation for the EET outcome, as well as the correlation with the programme's dosage. Also, it is not clear towards which direction the results are biased.
- **Low number of covariates included:** as the sample of matched individuals across baseline and endline is small, we were not able to include all the covariates for which we had data. Adding a covariate into the specification would have reduced the degrees of freedom restricting the estimations. Nevertheless, omitting relevant covariates diminishes the explanatory power of the model and might introduce bias to the estimations.
- **Matching concerns:** we conducted several rounds of matching, using exact and fuzzy approaches considering identification variables including contact IDs (when available), names and email addresses (when available), and initials. We also conducted robustness checks manually across unmatched records in order to maximise the matched pool of participants. Despite these efforts, we acknowledge the matched sample is small and limits our capacity to explore further findings. For any future impact evaluation a number of strategies will be considered to reduce issues with matching. These include working with DFF to ensure IDs are unique or creating IDs to use at the beginning of the evaluation, and including in each data collection instrument several pieces of

information that can be used for matching. It would also be useful to conduct a matching exercise during the mobilisation phase of an impact evaluation to spot and resolve inconsistencies in matching.

4. Findings

This chapter provides the findings from the pilot evaluation, bringing together all strands of the evaluation. This section is broken down into the following sections:

-
- **Participants:** a description of those involved in the study, including discussion of baseline characteristics.
- **Programme theory:** this section discusses the ToC and participant journey, and whether the programme was delivered as intended.
- **Operation of the model in practice:** a summary of the findings related to the programme's implementation in practice. This addresses research questions 4, 5 and 6.
- **Evidence of promise:** this considers the evidence for the programme having the effects set out in the ToC, addressing research questions 1, 2 and 3.

5.1 Participants

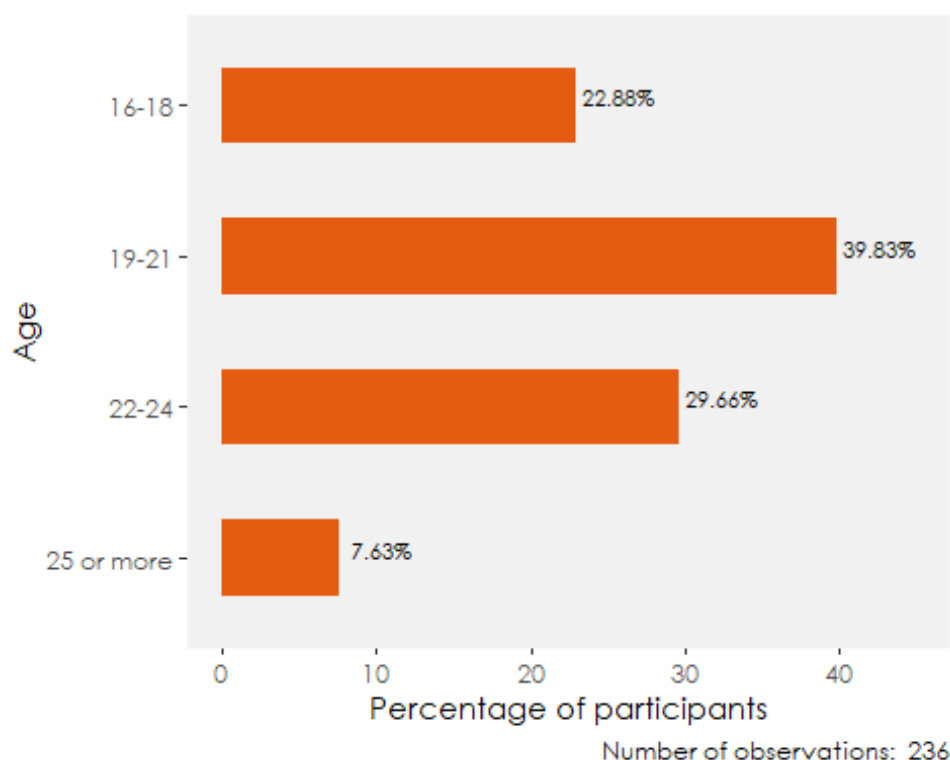
The following section presents a demographic profile of the young people in SCLiE, for whom we have demographic information (236).

The age of the participants at the start of the evaluation ranged from 16 to 27 years old,³⁶ where the average is 21 years old. 92.37% of the sample are 24 or younger.

Figure 1 presents further details on the distribution.

³⁶ It should be noted that this is different to the inclusion criteria of the evaluation. This may reflect that some CEYP start working with DFF when they are within the set age band, and then continue to work with the programme, or that CEYP outside of the inclusion criteria work with DFF.

Figure 1: Participants' age distribution

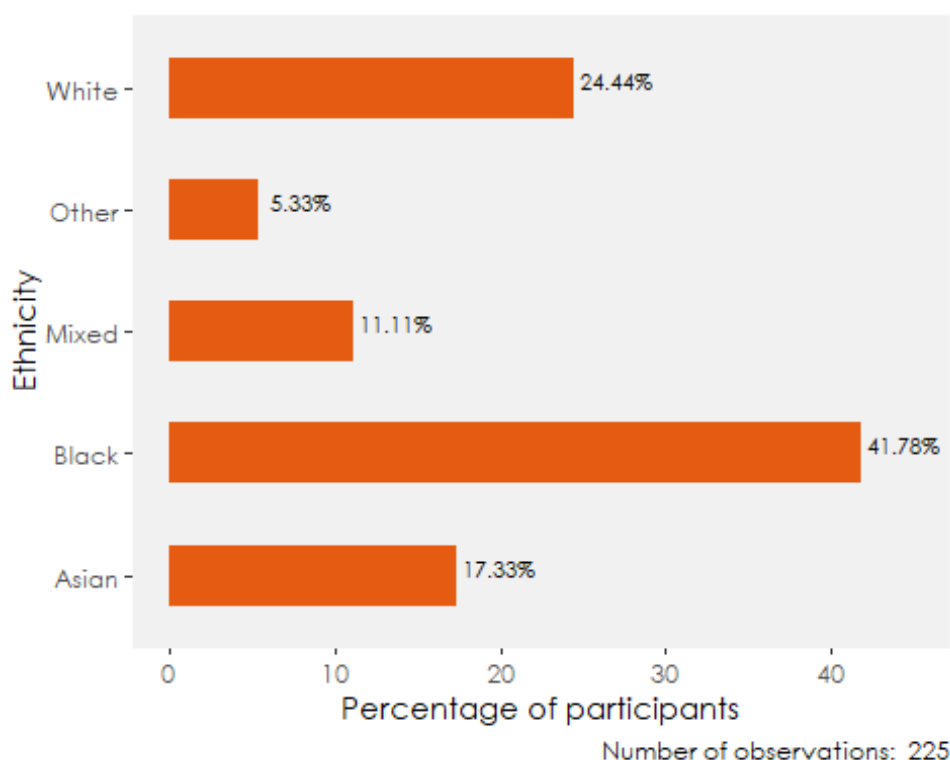


Although the target population for this evaluation was 16 to 24 year olds, we decided to keep in the sample older participants to maximise the use of available data given the matching constraints. The small share of over 24s included in the sample is likely reflective of DFF adjusting to the evaluation process at first, especially given that DFF's business as usual is wider than the eligibility criteria for the evaluation. As we are recommending SCLiE for a full impact evaluation, it is worth including eligibility check points on a rolling basis during the recruitment, to ensure all participants are in scope.

In terms of gender, the sample is evenly balanced between young people who identify as female, and male. The sample also includes a small share of non-binary young people. In terms of ethnicity, the sample of young people receiving support is quite diverse. The largest proportion of the sample (41.78%) self-identify as black, the largest category which includes black British, black Caribbean, among others. The second largest category in the sample self-define as white, representing 24.44% of the sample. Other categories are presented in

Figure 2. While DFF data presents a much more granular description of ethnicity, we aggregated categories to avoid disclosing small numbers that could risk participants' anonymity.

Figure 2: Participants’ ethnicity



DFF’s work focuses on London, and the participants of the evaluation came from 32 local authorities. Table 6 presents the main areas currently referring participants. Lambeth and Barnet provide a considerable share of participants (30.19% jointly). The rest of the sample is quite widespread across local authorities. Such a disaggregated distribution emphasises the importance of exploring the key factors driving referrals prior to any future full-scale impact evaluation. Factors to consider include the density of the CEYP across local authorities, DFF’s current outreach strategies and catchment, and the strength of DFF’s relationship with local authorities. Additionally, the disaggregated distribution also shows that it is important to involve a large number of local authorities to recruit the necessary sample size for any future impact design.

Table 6: Local Authority distribution

| Area/location | Share of participants (%) |
|---------------|---------------------------|
| Barnet | 14.62 |
| Camden | 4.72 |
| Hackney | 5.66 |
| Haringey | 6.13 |
| Lambeth | 15.57 |

| Area/location | Share of participants (%) |
|----------------|---------------------------|
| Newham | 4.72 |
| Waltham Forest | 5.66 |
| Other | 42.92 |

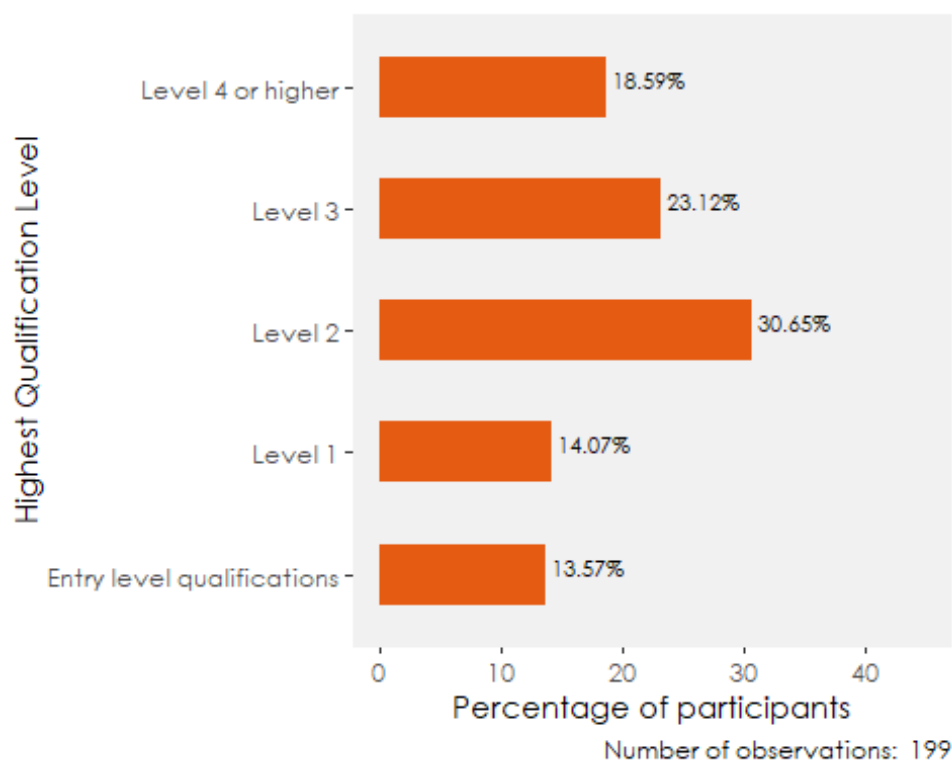
Participants’ location extracted from postcodes. *Other* includes 25 local authorities including Lewisham, Islington, and Croydon.

Number of observations: 212.

Source: DFF management information.

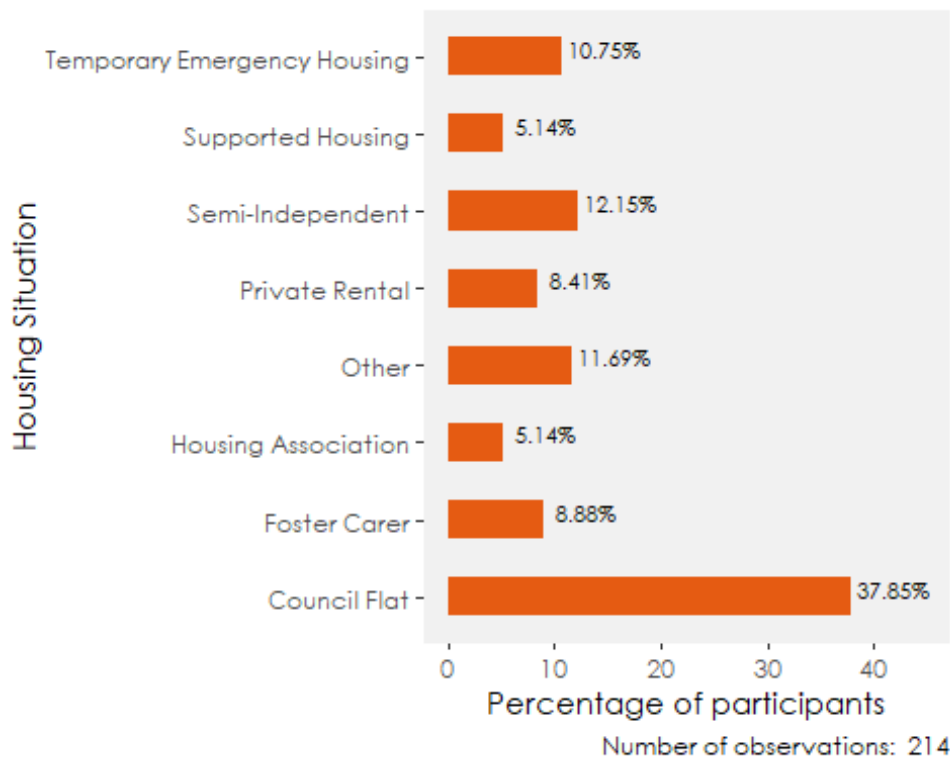
Regarding qualification levels, most of the young people in the sample hold a Level 2 qualification or higher (72.36%), with Level 2 qualifications the most common. Figure 3 shows the specifics of the breakdown.

Figure 3: Highest Qualification Level



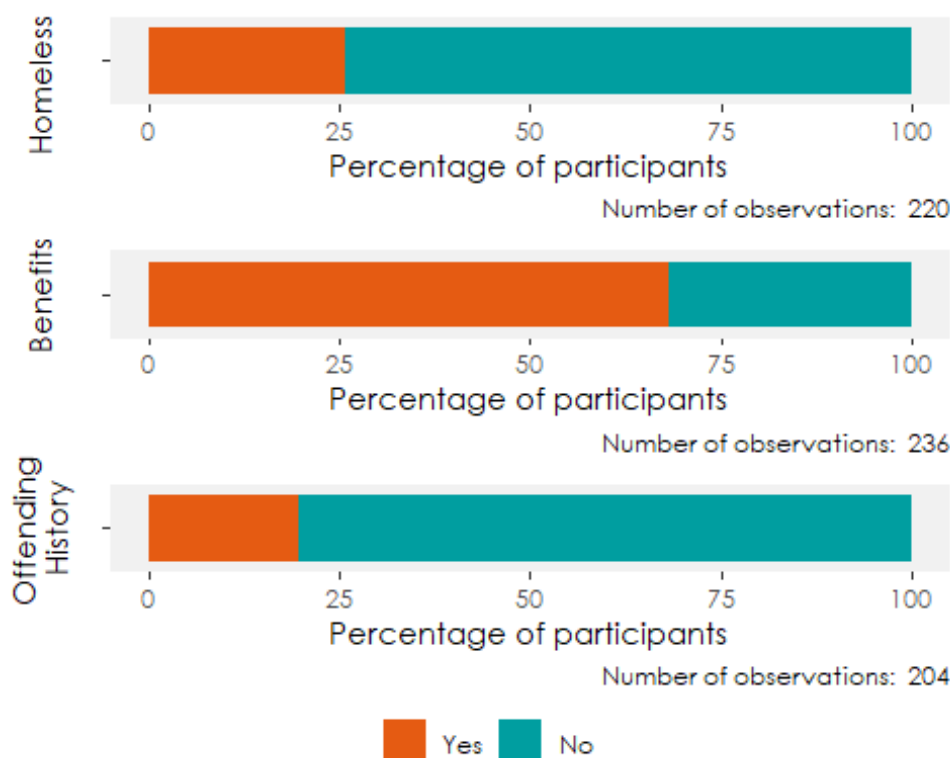
When it comes to participants’ housing situation, 37.85% of the sample live in council flats, which shows that a proportion of the population have some degree of stability. However, a considerable proportion of the sample were not in a stable setting. For instance, those (10.75%) staying in temporary emergency accommodation are likely facing risk of homelessness. Indeed, as part of the management information collected by DFF, 25.91% of participants responded that they have experienced homelessness, and 21.33% of the participants currently in council flats had previously experienced homelessness.

Figure 4: Housing Situation



The financial vulnerability of the participants is demonstrated by the fact that 68.22% are currently receiving benefits as presented in Figure 5. Regarding offending history, 19.61% of participants reported having past offenses, either spent or unspent.

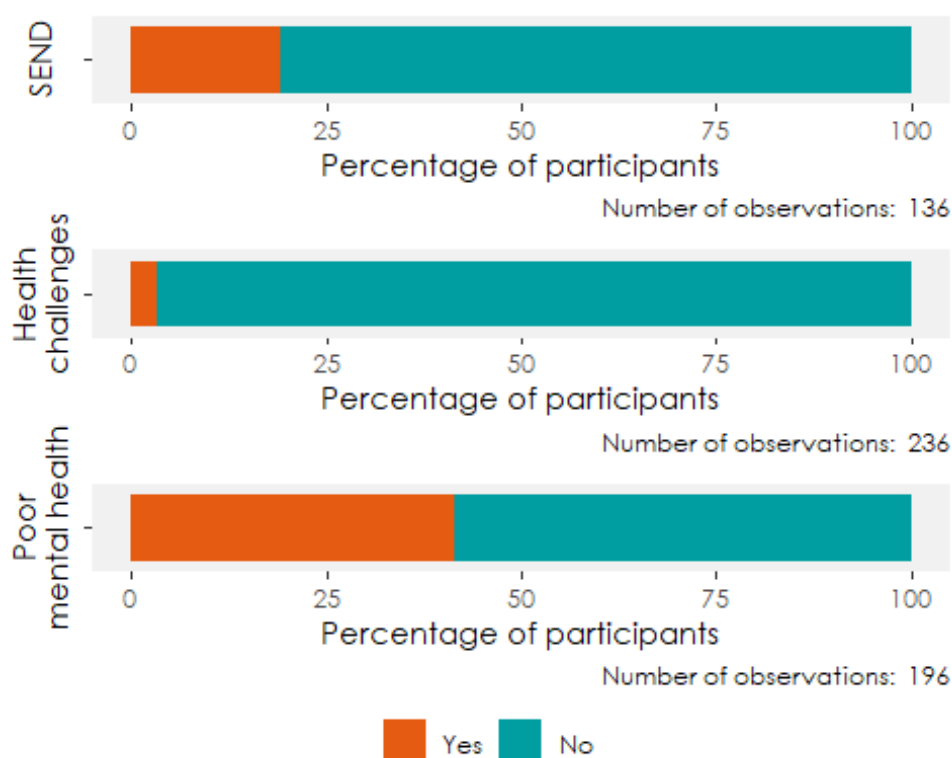
Figure 5: Offending history, benefits & homelessness



Both Figure 4 and Figure 5 show that for a considerable share of the participants, instability goes beyond work opportunities. It is expected to see a high number of benefits recipients among this cohort, given the financial constraints derived from being NEET. However, housing instability, previous experiences of homelessness, and having offending history add extra layers of vulnerability. The complex needs of the cohort, and how CSs work to support them through these are discussed in Section 3.3: Operation of the model in practice.

The demographic findings also demonstrate the importance of considering mental health as a relevant variable in the next stages of the evaluation. Almost half of the young people in the sample reported experiencing poor mental health (41.33%). This is a concerning statistic but not unexpected given the insecurity that the participants face. During the mobilisation phase for a future full-impact evaluation, it would be worth exploring the possibility of carrying out subgroup analysis on mental health, or using it as a stratification variable for the randomisation. This is because this variable might influence the effectiveness of the programme. The sample also has some participants with Special Education Needs (19.12%) and experiencing health issues (3.39%), although their shares are considerably lower. Figure 6 provides further details on these characteristics.

Figure 6: Mental health challenges, and SEND



In Summary

The sociodemographic findings show that DFF is reaching a set of CEYP experiencing high instability. In general terms, around 40% of their beneficiaries are aged 19 to 21 and the sample is evenly distributed across men and women. CEYP who self-identify as black are the largest group in the sample and most beneficiaries have Level 2 qualifications. Participants

are dispersed across several local authorities across London. When it comes to their stability, almost 70% of participants are currently receiving benefits, 25% have experiences of homelessness, and more than 40% are facing mental health issues. The work that DFF is doing through their SCLiE programme is therefore reaching a group of CEYP that can potentially benefit from support. If effective, then, the programme can support participants experiencing multiple layers of instability.

From this analysis it appears that DFF was broadly reaching the target population of the evaluation. The majority of participants appear to be NEET at the beginning of the evaluation (we were not able to collect data on participant's being at risk of becoming NEET). Less than 8% of participants were outside of the age cohort for the evaluation, and participants were living in London.³⁷

5.2 Programme theory

This section provides a detailed description of SCLiE's Theory of Change and causal pathways, as well as a participant journey map. In line with findings from qualitative research, both the ToC and participant journey originally developed during the mobilisation stage have been reviewed to ensure they accurately reflect the SCLiE programme.

SCLiE Theory of Change

As explained in the Methods section above, during the mobilisation stage of the evaluation, a ToC was developed by King's in collaboration with key staff at DFF, and it was further reviewed by YFF. The overarching theory of the programme is that CEYP are provided with support tailored to their needs and goals through working with CSs and accessing appropriate additional activities. These help them to improve their wellbeing; build their social networks and connections; and increase their work-related skills, leading to higher chances of employment for the young person.

Figure 7 below shows the final ToC for the programme in full. This sets out the intervention and context it works within; the outcomes that the intervention aims to achieve; and the mechanisms staff believe lead to these outcomes.

Context

The contextual factors that allow the successful delivery of the programme, as identified during the mobilisation stage and confirmed during the main stage of the evaluation include:

- A positive reputation amongst service users, partners, and in the sector, that enable referrals to take place and CEYP to engage in the programme.
- Empathetic staff who have subject expertise and are trained in trauma-informed working/healing-centred engagement.

³⁷ We did not collect data on two of the criteria: participant's right to work; and their status as CEYP as defined by DFF.

- An organisational culture that invokes trust from CEYP.
- Services and a strategy informed by lived experience.
- Having sufficient venue, budget and time available to deliver the programme.
- The rapport with corporate partners and the cultivation of corporate champions.
- The engagement with CEYP and effective relationships with LA and Virtual Schools teams.

Interventions and mechanisms

As shown by the ToC, Care Experienced Young People (CEYP) are either referred into the programme or self-referred. A key aspect of this process is building effective relationships with Local Authorities and Virtual Schools teams to ensure appropriate referrals. Once a CEYP is referred and agrees to take part in the programme, a CS conducts an **initial assessment** with them. This assessment is key to exploring young people's current situation, the challenges they are currently facing in their lives, as well as goals and ambitions they want to work towards. It also starts the process of building engagement with CEYP.

The **one-to-one support** offered by CSs is seen as central to the programme, with the needs-based action plans that are developed by them, and the signposting to external opportunities and other services DFF provide, leading to skills development and employment. Some of the opportunities that are signposted include offering CEYP work placements, apprenticeships, and training courses to obtain qualifications, that are expected to provide young people with work experience and skills to progress their careers. CSs can also **support young people to develop their CVs, job applications** and build their interview skills to succeed in job application processes and develop soft skills.

Staff training and work placements at DFF's extensive network of corporate partners are also seen as key interventions that contribute to employment, education, and training (EET) outcomes; these interventions enable support that is targeted, efficient and meaningful. **Networking events** introducing CEYP to different industries, organisations, and professionals, aim to increase their awareness of industry-specific employment skills and behaviours. These are expected to lead to an increase in their soft and employment skills. **DFF's networking** with corporate partners is key to offering CEYP employment opportunities within these organisations. Corporate partners attend events organised by DFF, as well as training sessions, to gain a better understanding, increased awareness of CEYP, and motivation to employ CEYP. As a result, corporate partners employing CEYP are expected to be more confident and able to support CEYP. In the medium term, this is expected to lead to a change in employment practices to establish employment pathways for CEYP.

Professional mentoring opportunities are another intervention that staff see as particularly important – participants are given the opportunity to build professional networks and sector-specific skills which, in turn, can increase their social capital and improve their EET outlook. **Bespoke counselling sessions** are also offered to those most in need. These sessions aim to provide participants with the tools to thrive without

direct support from DFF, increasing their ability to sustain EET outcomes. Finally, participants are also offered the opportunity to join **group sessions**, such as book clubs, theatre days, a Policy Forum, to build skills and peer networks.

Outcomes

DFF provides a flexible and participant-driven programme; therefore, CEYP taking part in the SCLiE programme will not receive the same types of support (e.g., not all participants will attend counselling sessions), and consequently, not all of them will achieve the same outcomes. The next section will provide further details on participants' journeys.

Overall, the different interventions provided by DFF aim to lead to the following outcomes:

- In the shorter-term, SCLiE aims to achieve the following:
 - Increased resilience and confidence among CEYP.
 - Increased soft skills and hard skills among CEYP.
 - CEYP have more informed employment aspirations and employment skills.
 - CEYP are active and contributing members in their community/the wider society and CEYP have meaning, support networks and stability in their lives, leading to less isolation and marginalisation of CEYP.
 - Employment practices change and more employment pathways for young people are established.
- In the long-term, SCLiE aims to reduce the CEYP employment gap, leading to a more diverse workforce that includes CEYP. It also aims to increase social capital for CEYP and increase CEYP's mental wellbeing.

Theory of Change Updates

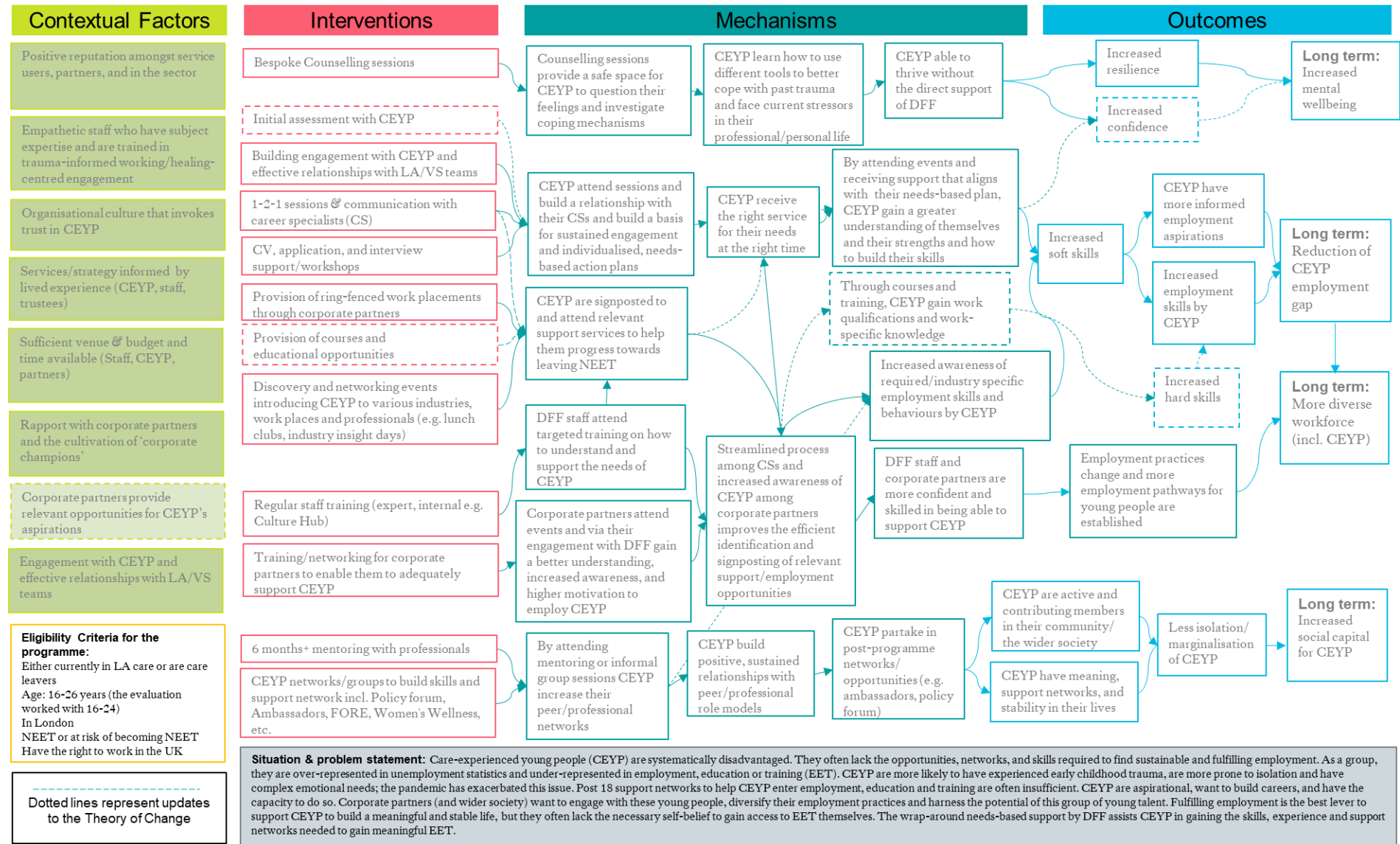
The delivery of the SCLiE programme was largely reflected in the ToC initially developed. However, in line with findings from qualitative interviews with staff and participants that will be explained later in this report, further details have been included to ensure greater accuracy. The additional elements included in this final ToC have been added in with dotted lines. They are also listed below:

- Contextual factors:
 - Corporate partners provide relevant opportunities for CEYP's aspirations.
- Interventions:
 - Initial assessment with CEYP.
 - Provision of courses and educational opportunities.
- Outcomes:
 - Increased confidence.

- Increased hard skills.
- Linkages:
 - Between 'Initial assessment with CEYP' and 'CEYP attend sessions and build a relationship with their CSs and build a basis for sustained engagement and individualised, needs-based action plans'.
 - Between 'Provision of courses and educational opportunities' and 'CEYP are signposted to and attend relevant support services to help them progress towards leaving NEET'.
 - Between '1-2-1 sessions with career specialists (CS)' and 'CEYP are signposted to and attend relevant support services to help them progress towards leaving NEET' and 'CEYP receive the right service for their needs at the right time'.
 - Between 'CEYP are signposted to and attend relevant support services to help them progress towards leaving NEET' and 'CEYP receive the right service for their needs at the right time'.
 - Between 'By attending mentoring or informal group sessions CEYP increase their peer/professional networks' and 'Increased awareness of required/industry specific employment skills and behaviours by CEYP'.
 - Between 'Streamlined process among CSs and increased awareness of CEYP among corporate partners improves the efficient identification and signposting of relevant support/employment opportunities' and 'Through courses and training, CEYP gain work qualifications and work-specific knowledge'.
 - Between 'Through courses and training, CEYP gain work qualifications and work-specific knowledge' and 'Increased hard skills'.
 - Between 'Increased hard skills' and 'Increased employment skills by CEYP'.
 - Between 'By attending events and receiving support that aligns with their needs-based plan, CEYP gain a greater understanding of themselves and their strengths and how to build their skills' and 'increased confidence'.
 - Between 'Increased confidence' and 'Long term: increased mental wellbeing'.

While the ToC was largely validated by the findings from the main evaluation, one outcome in particular would be worth considering in more detail to understand if the mechanisms in the ToC are working in practice: increased social capital and reduced marginalisation. The limited reported uptake of social events, as well as targeted nature of mentorships may reduce the likelihood that this outcome is achieved across the cohort engaging with DFF. However, whether it is possible to address this in an impact evaluation will depend on the design, as administrative data is unlikely to capture social connectedness and social capital. As this is not a key outcome of interest for YFF, the downsides of using data collection approaches that would capture social capital and marginalisation is unlikely to justify a change in impact evaluation approach.

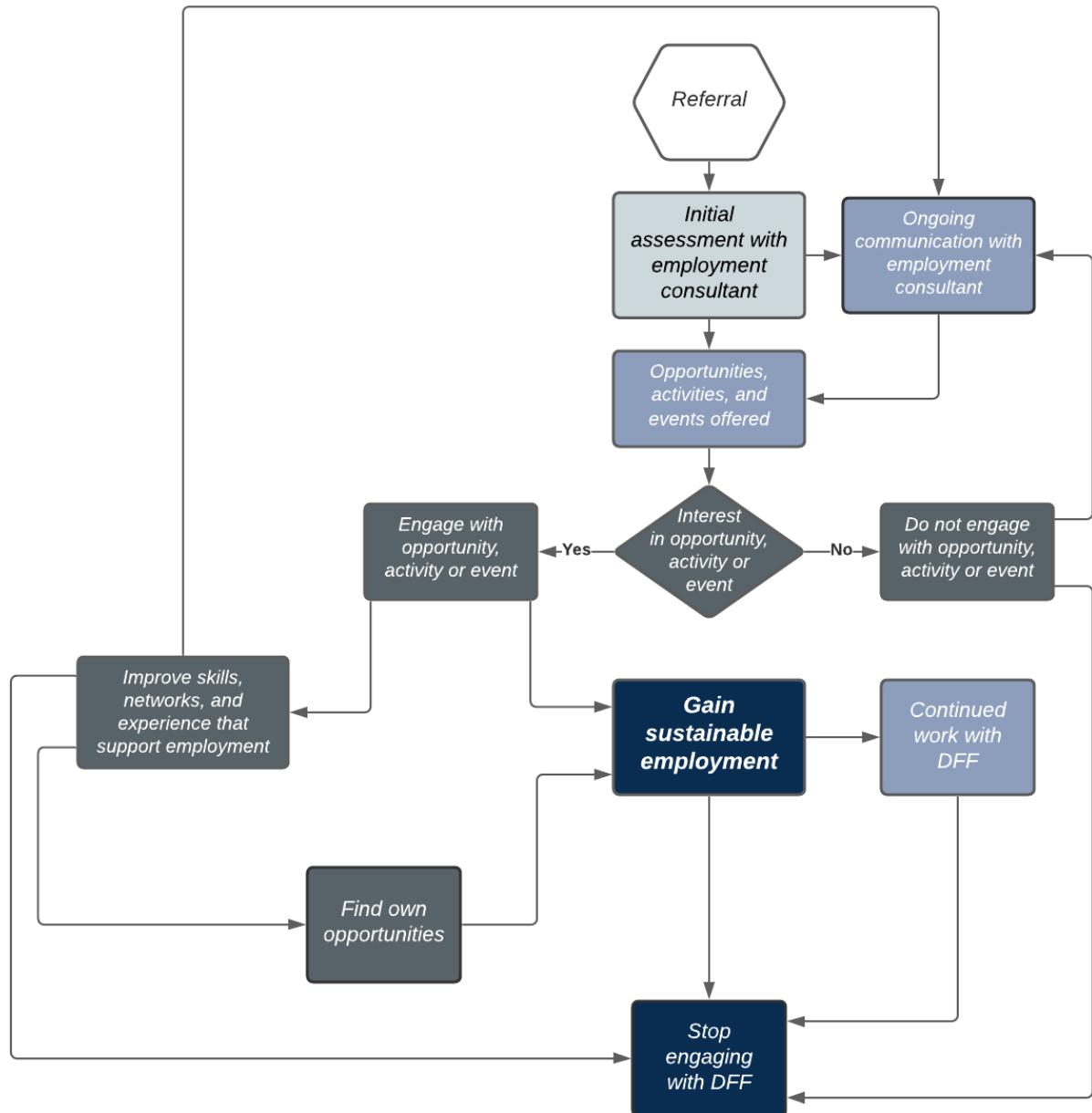
Figure 7: Theory of Change



SCLiE Journey Map

During the mobilisation stage, based on the ToC, detailed conversations with DFF and participant journey interviews, an overview of the participant journey was developed. Figure 8 below outlines the participant journey.

Figure 8: Journey Map



As identified during the mobilisation stage and confirmed during the data collection period, a key feature of the programme was its adaptation to the needs and interests of the service users. This means that participants' engagement with the service varied substantially, but five broad phases appeared common across participants:

- **Referral (white):** CEYP may have been referred to DFF by their social worker, carer, virtual school, or other agencies such as Job Centre Plus or may have self-referred.

- **Initial assessment (light grey):** once referred, participants met with a CS for an initial assessment. In this assessment, basic information was recorded, including contact details, national insurance information, benefit status, Maths and English GCSE attainment, and any offending history. Previous areas of work and interests were also discussed and recorded. Alongside gathering this data and onboarding participants, the primary purpose of the initial assessment was to begin building the relationship between the CS and the young person that formed the basis of the programme, as well as understand the CEYP's current situation and goals.
- **Continued communication with CSs (powder blue):** following the initial assessment, CSs contacted the service users to signpost them towards opportunities, activities, and events provided by DFF. These ranged from job opportunities to referrals for mentoring and lunch clubs. This communication could be via telephone, email or in person. The young people themselves could contact their CS to request support and the frequency of this contact fluctuated according to the needs and engagement of each individual.
- **Engagement with different activities, events, and opportunities (dark grey):** participants engaged with various activities and events according to their needs and interests. Skills-building workshops, mentoring, application support, and more were offered by DFF. The dosage of each element of the programme varied considerably by individual – the process was driven by the young people.
- **Finishing the programme (dark blue):** as with engagement throughout the programme, this step varied considerably by individual. Some participants ceased contact with the DFF once they let them know they found employment, whereas others maintained contact with DFF via 'In Work' progress support and continued working with DFF. Other service users chose to stop engaging without securing employment, and some may decide to re-engage later in their lives.

Evidence review

The development of the preliminary ToC and participant journey map was followed by a rapid evidence review to gauge the extent to which the ToC and journey map components were supported by available evidence in the academic and grey literature. Full details of the evaluation review can be found in the Evaluation Plan (see Appendices

Appendix A: Evaluation Plan) and a summary is provided below.

The review concluded that there is evidence (of varying quality) that suggests the individual elements of SCLiE can address barriers that CEYP experience in their journey to employment, education, or training. Overall, the main insights from the evidence review are that:

- There are positive associations with outcomes for needs-led interventions that provide role-specific training and opportunities, well-matched mentors, and that respond to fluctuating contexts.

- Robust support networks founded on strong relationships are associated with positive outcomes and can increase resilience in young people.
- Holistic support – that considers broader issues such as mental health and multiple disadvantage – is likely necessary to assist CEYP into employment.
- Interventions to assist CEYP’s transition into adulthood are more likely to succeed if staff and volunteers are trained and supported in working with CEYP specifically.

This suggests that the approach taken by SCLiE is broadly consistent with the evidence. However, the evidence review showed that there is a lack of strong, causal evidence on the effectiveness of any support available to CEYP. Despite this, the available narrative and empirical evidence suggests that effective support programmes are likely to be holistic and consider care leavers needs, enabling them to be decision makers. Flexible, ongoing support that is consistently available to care leavers has the most promising evidence in being likely to promote successful transition to adulthood. This suggests that the package of core interventions DFF provides may also be effective in supporting care leavers into employment.

5.3 Operation of the model in practice

This section provides a summary of the findings related to the programme’s implementation in practice. To do this it considers whether the programme was delivered as intended, how relationships are built and supported by the programme, and how those involved in the programme are trained and supported. This chapter addresses research questions 4, 5 and 6, as set out in the introduction.

Was the programme delivered as intended?

This section answers ‘RQ4: To what extent was the programme delivered as intended and where do variations of the planned implementation occur?’ using qualitative data from interviews with DFF staff and participants.

Referrals

CEYP were recruited on a rolling basis, and through different pathways. Overall, DFF staff reported that the referral process worked well and was functional, although the number of referrals fluctuated, with some periods being very busy and others very quiet.

As explained by DFF staff interviewed, referrals come from Councils’ and Local Authorities’ in-care and care leaving teams, Virtual Schools,³⁸ and social services, including social workers and Personal Advisors. They also came from Jobcentres, and from CEYP themselves (self-referrals). Referrals were also accepted from organisations that did not currently have a

³⁸ Virtual Schools are responsible for making sure Looked After Children (LAC), previously looked after children, and Care Leavers achieve the best possible educational outcomes in the local authority they work for. Virtual schools are not physical schools but provide support to children and young people, and those who work with them, including managing pupil premium funding.

contract with DFF such as hostels, art organisations and accommodation centres as long as the young person referred met the eligibility criteria. More details on DFF's relationship with referral agencies are covered under: 'Research Question 5: How are relationships built and supported by the programme?'

The variety of referral pathways is confirmed by the findings from interviews with participants. Some mentioned having been referred by their college, personal advisor, social worker, or work coach from a Jobcentre. Others mentioned having referred themselves to the service. Those who submitted self-referrals found out about DFF through different means; some knew someone who had worked with DFF in the past, others found out about it online, through posters sent to their carers, family members or LA young adults services.

This picture is confirmed by the findings from the management information. Table 7 outlines the type of referral agencies.

Table 7: Referral Agencies

| Referral channel | Share of participants (%) |
|--|---------------------------|
| Charity/NGO | 4.37 |
| Job Centre Plus | 15.53 |
| Leaving Care Team | 36.89 |
| Local Authority (agency not specified) | 8.74 |
| University | 2.43 |
| Virtual School | 32.04 |

Referral agencies of recruited participants.

Number of observations: 206.

Source: DFF management information.

Local authorities, through their different agencies, are the main referral channel in the cohort evaluated. In total, 87.3% of the participants provided information on their referral routes. Additionally, DFF's management information includes a variable to capture whether a participant has self-referred into the programme. In the current sample, 21% self-referred to the programme. Self-referrals include two types of participants: participants who did not provide any information about their referral agency and who likely found out about DFF by their own means, or because they have worked with DFF in the past; and participants that have a referral agency listed in the management information but also considered themselves self-referred.

Among those with a referral agency listed in the management information leaving care teams (36.89%) and Virtual Schools (32.04%) were the main two channels through which

participants were referred. Both of those teams belong to local authorities. LAs represent 77.67% of referrals in the sample. For any future impact evaluation, local authorities are the most suitable referral path to recruit participants, and outreach would likely be most effective if focused on the two teams mentioned above. It is also worth exploring if there are the links between relevant local authorities and Job Centre Plus, as another potential route to enhance recruitment.

Some DFF staff have flagged that CEYP tend to know little about DFF when they are first referred, and some might have felt forced to be referred not only to DFF but to other employability organisations, as recent cuts in benefits mean they feel they must find a job. When this occurs, CSs have identified that the level of initial engagement among these participants is low. By contrast, self-referrals are more likely to come from proactive CEYP who are more willing to engage with the service.

I feel that many of them [participants], they've been forced to be referred to me. Not only to me; to any employability organisation. Some of them, I can feel that they have been forced to, because now, with the benefits cut, they force them to find any job. (Career Specialist)

Findings from CEYP interviews reveal that most participants were not aware of DFF's services before their referral. Several CEYP reported being provided with some information about DFF by their referrer at the time of the referral, such as the type of support offered and the possibility to opt into opportunities in the Civil Service. At the same time, those who were self-referred, mentioned finding out information about DFF online or through friends.

My friend did an internship with them [DFF] last year, because she's a leaving care person, so then I was like, 'Okay, I'm from leaving care too, and I would like to get involved' (...) I never got that [information on DFF] from my key workers, or my social worker. I never really got that. (Participant).

When submitting a referral, referral agencies send details on the CEYP, including personal and contact details, the reason for them being referred, education history, accommodation status, safeguarding issues, and criminal record. This simplifies the initial engagement process for CEYP, who have defined it as simple and straightforward.

The best thing, I think, was that they got to the point very quickly. (...) They did, obviously, ask me to do a form, and it was very simple: just putting down my own details. So, it wasn't like a process of making somebody do all of these forms, which can be daunting. (Participant)

Initial engagement with participants

Once a referral is made, the CEYP is assigned a CS depending on which borough they are from. That is, CSs are allocated certain boroughs to work in and will work with CEYP from those boroughs during their journey at DFF.

After this, the designated CS gets in touch with the CEYP to introduce themselves and schedule an informal call. According to staff interviews, CSs usually get in touch with young people over text, although others try phone calls and emails. As explained in the section above, the level of initial engagement is very varied; some CEYP might be willing to engage straight away, while others might take longer to reply to the initial text message. CSs interviewed mentioned that, in some instances, they text several times before they get a reply, and if no reply is obtained, they would communicate that to the referrer. The number of times CSs should contact a CEYP if they do not hear back from them is not defined; some CSs have mentioned that the guidance suggests trying to contact the CEYP for six weeks, yet some have tried to contact CEYP over months.

Over the initial phone call, CSs introduce themselves, the services offered by DFF, and explore the CEYP's current situation, difficulties and how they could benefit from DFF's services. They also seek consent from the CEYP to work with them, and arrange a time to conduct an initial assessment, which can be conducted face to face or over the phone.

The initial assessment is a first key step to decide the type of support the CEYP could benefit from. During this assessment – which is typically done over the phone – CSs ask a range of general and personal questions to better understand CEYP's background, the barriers they might be facing, and goals. They collect information on employment history, education, religion, sexuality, care history, housing situation, and mental health.

During the initial assessment, CSs also take the opportunity to further explain DFF's services, including their corporate partnerships, one-to-one career support and mentoring, and together with the CEYP, they arrange a bespoke action plan.

Following on from that [initial assessment] I'll look at all the things we've got going on Drive Forward [DFF] that might be of interest to them and float that by them and I'll try and make a list of all the things coming up. And that's when it becomes very bespoke because no two journeys are the same from that point onwards. (Career Specialist)

Most CEYP interviewed reported having a positive experience with their initial assessment, due to factors such as being paired with a mentor after the assessment, reuniting with a familiar CS when re-engaging with the service which made communication easier, and being able to express their support preferences to CSs. One also flagged that since the beginning, DFF felt different from other organisations, as they have a range of options and CSs do not give participants too much to work towards.

I was very satisfied with how it went [initial assessment], because I think it just helped me a lot more. Because obviously I'm independent, I live on my own, so I don't really have that support system, so it was just nice to have that clear understanding in what steps that I need to take (Participant).

One CEYP also mentioned that the initial assessment allowed them to disclose a mental health issue they needed support with. After that, the CS was able to refer them to another programme.

She [CS] was just asking me what I needed help with. This was when I actually disclosed the mental health thing to her and not too long after that was when she WhatsApped me and said to me that they had this programme.

(Participant)

A couple of CEYP mentioned that these types of assessments were new to them, and one flagged that it was not particularly useful for them but acknowledged its relevance for the CS.

She made an assessment with me. And that was, to be honest, a new type of assessment to me (...) because there was a lot to do with how to deal with me basically, to understand my mentality, I guess. (...) I think it was helpful for her, not for me, I answered her questions. (Participant)

Working with participants

The following section summarises the findings from DFF's management information about how participants engaged with the SCLiE programme.

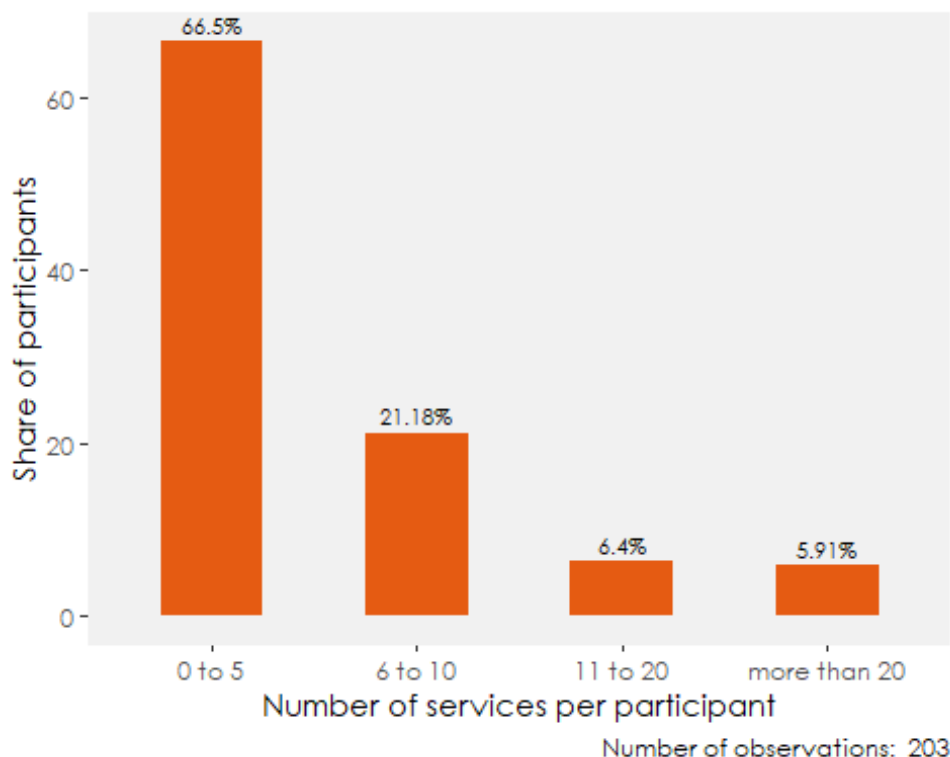
Services are recorded in DFF's case management system as reported by participants' CSs. During the analysis conducted throughout the evaluation, one of the main concerns raised was the heterogeneity of what each CS was recording. While DFF has done considerable efforts to improve the consistency of the records moving forward, we are aware that the data we have worked with might still reflect previous variation in approaches. Additionally, DFF has reported that some information on services is yet to migrate to the new system, which implies that some services provided to young people might not be included in the analysis below. Therefore, we expect the numbers presented to be an underestimation of the load of provided services. Overall trends are nevertheless informative and are presented below.

For the services analysis, we focus on all the participants we have demographic information for as this is based on them holding an evaluation record. We have services information for 203 participants, out of a sample of 236. Services in this analysis were provided between 01/02/2022 and 31/10/2023, with a total of 1223 services provided.

On average, participants have received 6 services. Nevertheless, there is notable variation in the distribution of services, ranging from 1 to 58.

Table 8 summarises the dosage distribution of the programme. As stated above, this may be due to the variation in how CSs were recording service use, rather than a genuine reflection of variation in the service provided per participant.

Table 8: Services per participant



Most of the participants in the sample (66.50%) received up to five services from DFF. The three top services provided were 1-2-1 Pre-work and In-work support, as well as Advocacy, representing 56.66% of the total load of services. Table 9 presents details for the different types of services provided.

Table 9: Types of services provided by DFF

| Type of service | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1-2-1 In Work Advice and Guidance | 24.94 |
| 1-2-1 Pre-Work Advice and Guidance | 16.35 |
| Advocacy | 15.37 |
| Check In/Follow Up | 11.53 |
| Closing the Gap | 10.14 |
| CV/Cover Letter/Application Support | 4.17 |
| Hardship Fund | 4.01 |
| Holistic Support | 2.37 |

| Type of service | Percentage (%) |
|-------------------------------|----------------|
| IA (Initial Assessment) | 1.88 |
| In Education Support 13 Weeks | 1.64 |
| In Work Support 13 Weeks | 1.47 |
| In Work Support 26 Weeks | 1.39 |
| Interview | 1.31 |
| Job Search | 1.23 |
| Partnership Opportunities | 1.06 |
| Self-Employment | 0.65 |
| Training | 0.33 |
| Work Placement | 0.08 |
| Work Trial | 0.08 |

Type of services provided by DFF.

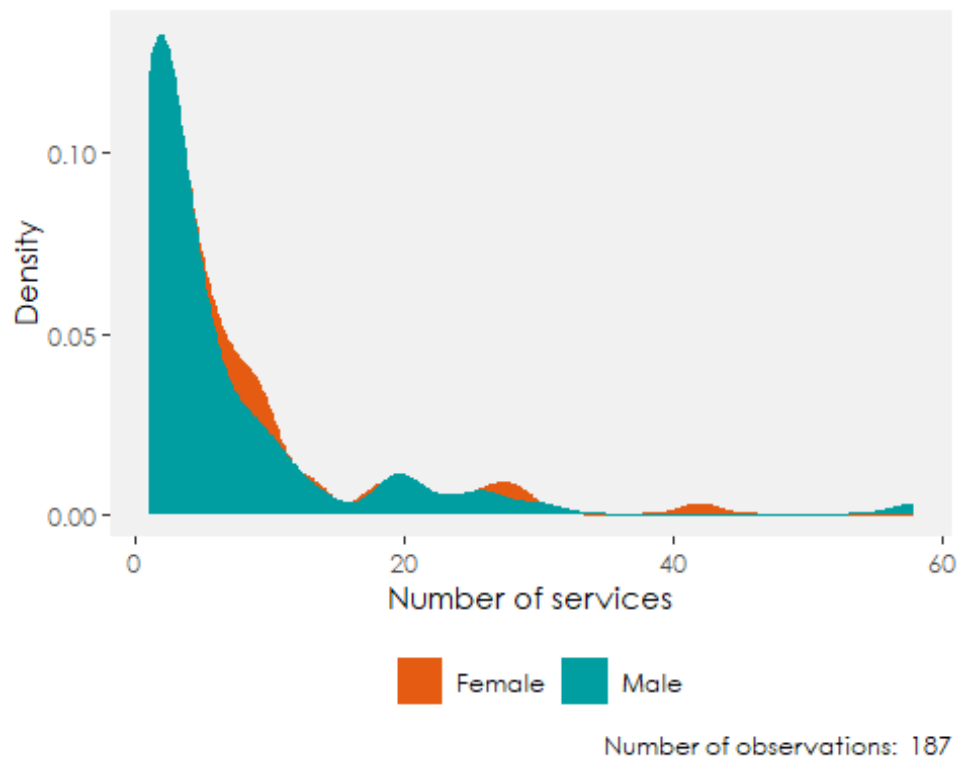
Number of services analysed: 1223

Source: DFF management information

Dosage by gender and ethnicity

We also explored whether DFF services are reaching specific groups of young people differently.

Figure 9: Services accessed by gender

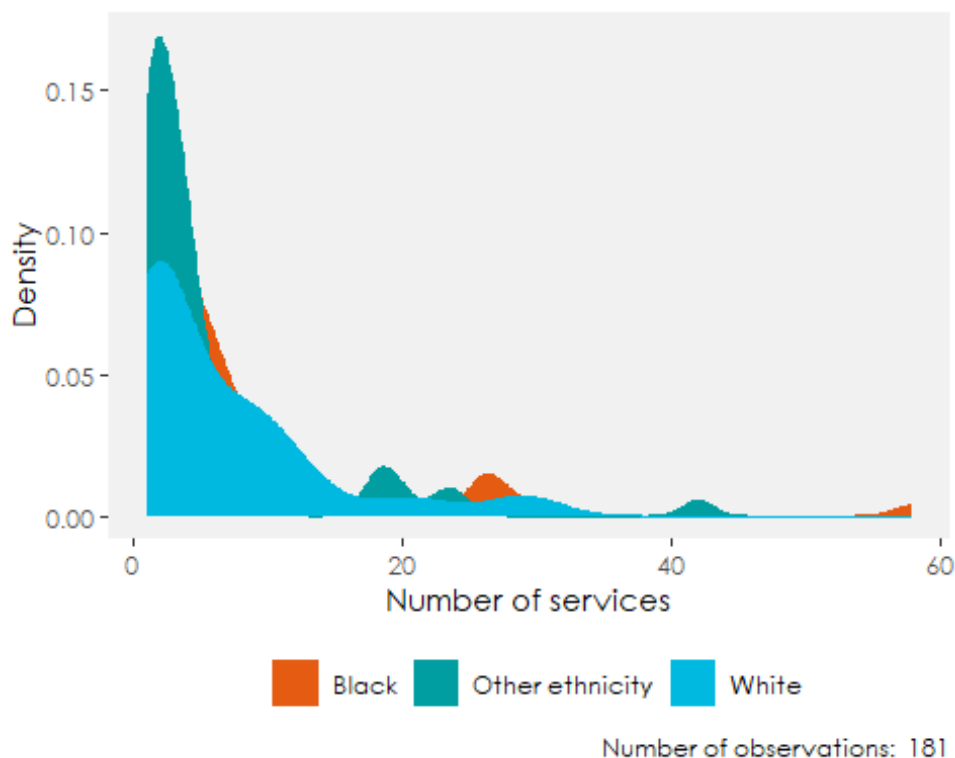


In terms of gender, male and female participants have similar distributions as presented in

Figure 9. Female participants receive a slightly higher number of services, however the difference with male participants is not statistically significantly different from 0, both in terms of their means, and their distribution (tested through the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test). We have excluded from this comparison participants who define themselves as non-binary due to small numbers.

Regarding ethnicity, there are no statistically significant differences on the distributions of services across ethnic groups. As presented in Figure 10, participants who self-identify as black receive a slightly higher number of services, while participants who self-identify as other than white or black received slightly fewer services. Nevertheless, the difference is not considerable and may be related to the inconsistency in how CSs record service provision.

Figure 10: Services access by ethnicity



Support and assistance being sought by participants

Findings from the qualitative interviews with participants and staff also provide insight into how CEYP interacted with the SCLiE programme. As mentioned previously, DFF's programme was participant-driven, therefore CEYP's journeys could be very different, depending on the type of support and opportunities provided and accepted. Findings from interviews with DFF staff and participants suggest that the type of support being sought by CEYP was very diverse, with some CEYP having very clear goals in mind (e.g., building a career in the film production industry, hospitality, or in IT), and others being unsure about what they like and what they wanted to achieve.

Interview findings reveal that the goal of getting a well-paid job that provides CEYP with employment stability was a recurring theme among those who engage with DFF. Finding stable employment could help CEYP pay their bills and come off Universal Credit.

While some CEYP interviewed were interested in specific full-time and/or part-time jobs, such as government and local council jobs, others were open to different employment opportunities. CSs also reported that apprenticeships were popular among participants, as some might need to obtain specific qualifications if they want to do certain jobs such as plumbing or electrical.

Another aim described by participants was the desire to develop different skills in the short-term, such as job application skills (e.g., interviewing skills and CV preparation), and administrative skills.

My short-term goals would be to slowly just achieve improvement, improve little things like my CV, improve little things like my interview skills, and just improve with all the little things. Then I feel like that will all add up, long-term, to have a good career. (Participant)

Other types of support sought by participants – according to CSs – included counselling services, advocacy, advice, help leaving their current job, or finding someone to talk to and that will listen to them. Overall, participants’ goals and ambitions were very diverse, and the achievement of their goals could be influenced by different barriers and enablers, such as their foster care stability or their mental health. Further details on the barriers and enablers that affected CEYP’s capacity to achieve their goals are covered under Reasons for improvement or otherwise of outcomes by SCLiE

This section considers Research Question 3 “Why are the outcomes of interest improved, or not improved, by engagement with the programme

Support and assistance provided by DFF

According to senior staff interviews, DFF had a total of eight CSs and two career managers during the evaluation period. CSs work directly with CEYP, and Career Managers line manage CS, focusing on staff management, wellbeing and performance. Each CS had around 40 people on a caseload at each time, and over the course of the year they worked with around 80 to 100 people. Based on participants’ goals, needs, and personal circumstances (e.g., education and employment history), CSs provided the level of support needed to each participant and identified different opportunities that could be of interest to the young person.

They [CSs] give the young person as much or as little attention as they need for their journey. So that’s also why you may have some Career Specialists with suddenly a caseload of 50, because they have loads of light touch ones, and then you have others who only have 30 because there is a lot of heavy, intense work ones. (Senior staff member)

For CEYP looking to find a job, CSs could send them job opportunities (including opportunities in corporate partners’ organisations), provide them with mentors in specific

industries, and support them with job applications (e.g., preparing for interviews, tailoring CVs, and writing cover letters). CSs also tried to guide CEYP by helping them understand the different requirements needed to enter specific sectors and jobs and identify what barriers they might face to access them. CEYP were also encouraged to attend Insight Days or Partnership Events to gain further knowledge into different industries, organisations, and roles.

The type of employment opportunities and employment support offered varied depending on the CEYP. For instance, a CS mentioned that they might send employment opportunities with corporate partners only to CEYP that are ready to commit to that opportunity in order to avoid damaging DFF's relationship with that partner. They would then support those who were not ready (e.g., due to issues with their attitude or punctuality) by helping them refine their CV and find other job opportunities.

The majority of my young people I get work for, aren't with corporate partners. (...) The majority of the young people I put forward for corporate partners, are ones that I think will thrive. I don't want to put a young person with a corporate partner, if that young person struggles, they get into work late all the time. (Career Specialist)

For CEYP looking to upskill or that might benefit from additional qualifications, CSs could help them access courses, apprenticeships and qualifications. They also helped participants navigate university applications, write university statements and get further information on scholarships.

At the same time, CSs could also signpost participants to counselling services, therapy, and group activities such as the Policy Forum.³⁹ They could also support CEYP transitioning from their current employment by facilitating a comfortable exit, help them set up email addresses, or learn more about their benefits, as some might need transition from Universal Credit to reduced benefits.

I think the level of support that Drive Forward [DFF] offers compared to so many other organisations is amazing and I think, to come across them and get the help that you need, I see it as such a massive, incredible thing to get from an organisation. (Participant)

Overall, it appears that the CEYP were broadly receiving the types of support that they want from DFF, though for those with specific careers or sectors in mind there were some instances where they felt DFF did not have the relevant contacts they needed. This and details on participants' and staff's views on the impact of these activities are covered under Reasons for improvement or otherwise of outcomes by SCLiE

³⁹ The Policy Forum (run by DFF) is a group of CEYP who campaign for change to ensure that those in care and care leavers get a better deal, meeting with a range of local and national politicians and other care-experiences groups.

This section considers Research Question 3 “Why are the outcomes of interest improved, or not improved, by engagement with the programme

Communication with, and engagement of, participants

Findings from qualitative interviews show that communication with participants was bespoke and dependent on the young person. CSs used different channels to keep in touch with participants, including text, email, video calls, phone calls, or even face-to-face meetings, and the type of channel used varied depending on the CEYP, as not all of them had access to laptops and/or smartphones. Generally, CSs and participants agreed that remote communication – especially WhatsApp, calls, and video calls – worked well, although some young people could benefit from face-to-face interactions. For instance, one CS mentioned that they used to communicate with participants only online yet meeting young person face to face helped boost their engagement.

Last December, I met a few [participants], at a Christmas lunch, and it was the first time they'd seen me. And one, she made a comment, she said, 'I wish I'd seen you before. I would be answering your calls.' And since then, we became more in contact. (Career Specialist)

In order to meet face-to-face, interview findings suggest that CSs tended to find it easier to travel to the participants' location than to meet at DFF's offices, as participants were reluctant to pay for travel expenses and had limited time.

We speak over the phone regularly but not meet; we don't meet regularly. We always plan to meet but because she's not free, I'm not free, all the time so it's difficult. (Participant)

The type of communication channels used can vary depending on the purpose of the communication. For instance, findings suggest that CSs reached out to participants via email to send them job opportunities that might be of interest, and used phone calls to check on how young people were doing. CEYP interviewed were generally satisfied with the number of opportunities being sent to them. While some flagged that they received emails with relevant job opportunities, a few thought some of the vacancies sent were not relevant to them as they were interested in other type of jobs (e.g., opportunities to apply their undergraduate skills, or opportunities in their industry)

Even when she [CS] called me up and asked me about different job opportunities, the majority of it wasn't in an area or field I was remotely interested in but they didn't give up. They were actively trying to give me something because I had no job at the time and they were trying to find anything that could have been relevant, which I did appreciate. (Participant)

Participants' engagement with CSs varied over time, therefore CSs worked with CEYP at their own pace, taking into account their personal circumstances. CSs acknowledged that young people had different issues going on in their lives, such as housing or childcare issues, that could negatively impact their engagement with DFF.

A lot of things happen in their [participant's] life. They're moving. There's issues with their housing. There's so many things happen that we are, as I said to you, a very small influence in their life and because it's an option to engage with us (...) We're not high up. We're not a big part of their life. (Career Specialist)

As communication with CEYP can be challenging, CSs emphasised the importance of building effective relationships, asking open questions and being active listeners. The section How are relationships built and supported in SCLiE explains how CSs build effective relationships with participants.

CSs have flagged that disengagement is common among participants for a range of reasons including having mental health problems, being involved in gangs, or struggling with English as it is not their first language. Others might stop replying because they have found a job but do not wish to inform their CS. A CS mentioned that normally DFF sends a disengagement email when participants stop replying after communication attempts over the course of six weeks. In the disengagement email, they are told that DFF will stop actively making contact if they do not hear back within a week, but they leave the door open in case they want to reach out again (as discussed below, CSs described not always sticking to this disengagement approach). While some CEYP might reach out after receiving the email, others do not.

I don't want to assume but we do have a lot of young people where drugs and gang life are quite a distraction. So, if they're going to earn more money elsewhere, why on earth are they going to do a CSCS course and then get paid a load of nothing on a construction site doing manual labour that's going to be tough? (Career Specialist)

Re-engagement of participants is also seen as common by DFF staff. While there is an age limit to be part of the programme (27 years old), CSs leave the door open for those who disengage so they can come back for support once they need it. For instance, young people might find a job and stop engaging with their CSs and come back months or years later when they need another job or further support. One CS flagged that sometimes they try to re-engage CEYP by sending them opportunities that could be of interest. Another mentioned that if someone who has worked with DFF in the past but is now above the age limit asks for support, they would offer them guidance even if they might not be able to provide them with the same services.

When I start working with young people, I tell them that, 'I'm here, I'll be able to work with you until you are 26.' (...) I'm here, even if you are working, you can come back to me (...) I feel, like, many of them, they find that, 'That's really good. At least we know there is someone to go back to.' (Career Specialist)

Disengagement and re-engagement of CEYP with SCLiE has implications for any future impact evaluation. Our power calculations account for the fact that disengagement will require a large sample size, due to an attenuation effect for the Intention-to-treat

estimations, and a reduced number of compliers for the Compier Average Casual Affect (CACE) estimations. We put forward power calculations that were conservative enough to detect an attenuated effect size of the programme.

Regarding re-engagement, we have proposed excluding re-engagers from the study to ensure all participants have a shared starting point of treatment delivery. Although there is high flexibility on how CEYP engage in the programme, DFF confirmed an average length of engagement of six months, which has been accounted for in the design on the next phase. Similarly, in the next phase of the evaluation, we will investigate the most appropriate ways to measure dosage of the programme so that we can capture the flexibility of the engagement mentioned above.

Working with external partners

In order to support CEYP in their employment journey and try to secure opportunities for them in different industries and sectors, DFF has built a network with various organisations and companies. DFF has corporate partners (more details on DFF's relationship with them are available in the section on External relationships), and in addition CSs try to expand their networks to find opportunities beyond those offered by partners. These networks act as an enabler for securing roles for some CEYP, as corporate partners and contacts are willing to give opportunities to CEYP. This is particularly beneficial as CEYP tend to face barriers to accessing competitive job opportunities, such as lack of professional experience or qualifications. Some partners also offer ring-fenced opportunities for CEYP and can sponsor training for CEYP.

Mentors are also external to DFF and are matched to CEYP according to CEYP's interests and goals. DFF has a pool of people from different organisations (including from corporate partner organisations) who have volunteered to become mentors, and once a CEYP flags they would like to be paired with a mentor, CSs look for one that could be a good match. Further details on DFF's and young people's relationships with mentors will be covered in the section on Relationships between CS and CEYP, and the section on Training and support explains the type of training that mentors receive before engaging with CEYP.

In summary

Findings from qualitative interviews with staff and participants suggest that the programme was delivered as intended. That is, support offered and provided to CEYP was tailored to CEYP's needs and goals, and CSs demonstrated an ability to deliver a person-centred programme. CSs did offer various forms of support to participants based on their individual needs, ranging from employability support to the facilitating access to counselling sessions. They also adapted their working styles to align with the specific requirements of the CEYP they were working with.

While flexibility is a central feature of the programme, there are a number of core elements to the model of support provided. Career support including CEYP building skills and having access to relevant career networks and job opportunities is key. Alongside this, stability of contact and the holistic support provided in 1-2-1 sessions and additional services such as counselling appear central to the model.

The perceived impacts of delivering a flexible and adaptable programme are discussed in the section on Reasons for improvement or otherwise of outcomes by SCLiE

This section considers Research Question 3 “Why are the outcomes of interest improved, or not improved, by engagement with the programme.

How are relationships built and supported in SCLiE?

Strong relationships between staff and clients, and staff and other stakeholders, are central to DFF’s operational effectiveness. As noted in the rapid evidence review (Appendices Appendix A: Evaluation Plan – p.10) robust support networks founded on strong relationships are associated with positive outcomes and can increase resilience in young people. Given this, there is a specific focus on relationships as part of SCLiE. Building on the previous section, this chapter explores research question 5 – ‘How are relationships built by the programme?’ – by combining evidence from interviews with participants and staff. It considers how staff and participants look to build relationships throughout the programme and their attitudes towards these processes. The impact that the proactive relationship building has on outcomes and causal mechanisms is discussed in Section 5.4.

Relationships between staff and referrers

As an established service with a positive reputation amongst local authorities, DFF has strong organisational relationships with referral partners that pre-date many of the current staff’s involvement with the organisation. However, CSs do work proactively to cultivate healthy relationships with referral partners to maintain a flow of referrals to DFF. Different CSs have their own approach to developing these relationships, but methods include in person visits, such as weekly visits to care leaver teams at job centres, maintaining open channels of communication, and responding promptly to any queries that referral partners have. “Rapport” and “credibility” were viewed as important factors by CSs in relation to building strong relationships with referral partners. Emphasising the quality of the DFF offer to potential clients was another strategy used by staff to ensure buy-in from referral partners – for example, CSs spend time explaining the ring-fenced opportunities that they can provide CEYP to potential referral partners.

CSs also have relationships with local authority personal advisors (PAs) who work directly with CEYP in the boroughs they operate in. These relationships are built in a similar fashion to those with other referral partners, but, importantly, CSs maintain these relationships throughout the time their clients spend with DFF, keeping the PAs informed of their young person’s journey. CSs believe this is important in keeping their clients on track with programme activities. It also means the PAs and their teams become familiar with the services offered by DFF and, consequently, a degree of trust and common purpose develops between the organisations. This strengthens the relationship between DFF and these crucial referral partners.

Relationships between CS and CEYP

Following referral, building relationships with their clients is at the centre of CSs’ work; in fact, developing this central relationship is built into the processes that staff must follow when onboarding clients. As outlined in the section on the Operation of the model in

practice, the initial assessment completed when CEYP joined the programme was the first step in this process – the assessment covers a range of topics and allows the CSs to understand their clients' goals, circumstances, and background. CSs described how getting to know their clients and understanding their barriers and contexts underpinned the relationship that was subsequently developed.

CSs getting to know their young people was also described as a two-stage process by senior staff. Understanding the barriers to entering work that a young person was experiencing was a crucial first step, after which it would be possible to help that person into work.

With a lot of these other issues going on you can't concentrate on a career. It's a luxury a lot of young people don't have. (Senior staff member)

This immediate focus on their clients' needs was seen as meaningful to the creation of robust relationships as CSs argued it gave CEYP confidence in the programme and in the CSs as service providers. Several CSs also argued that reliable and consistent communication around initial meetings and opportunities was critical to build trusted relationships with their clients.

Establishing a relationship quickly was seen as vitally important to the effective working of CSs by a senior staff member.

They need to be able to establish a relationship quickly. Obviously we don't achieve anything without a level of trust between a young person and a Career Specialist. (Senior staff member)

CSs also commented on how strong relationships with referral partners had a downstream effect on relationship building with CEYP, as better relationships with referral partners resulted in higher quality information about their clients being shared which allowed them to tailor their support from the outset. This individualised approach, combined with open, non-judgemental communication was seen by CSs as central to developing strong relationships with their clients at the start of their journey.

Interviews with participants echoed these findings. CEYP appreciated the straightforward and quick referral process, which did not involve onerous paperwork, that allowed them to access the service efficiently. The subsequent enthusiastic communication they received from CSs was seen as positive and gave participants a sense that they were being supported – *"she was constantly approaching me with what she could do to help"*. The quality and breadth of the support on offer was also made apparent to the young people from the outset; for young people who expressed a sense of hopelessness around finding employment this was clearly meaningful – *"this impossible thing became possible"*. This immediate sense of support and opportunity helped young people to develop trust in their CS and the programme; and was therefore central to successful relationship building.

CSs continued building their relationships with their clients throughout the programme by focusing on *"trust, honesty, and professionalism"*. This was mirrored by senior staff. Following

the initial meeting, CSs' reliability and good communication skills were crucial to sustaining this trusting relationship.

They need to let young people know that we're always on their side. No matter what happens, no matter what goes wrong, that we're always there to pick up the pieces. (Senior Staff Member)

Building trust in particular is crucial to the effective running of DFF, in light of the particular experiences of CEYP.

I think it's honesty and trust and reliability. What these young people feel is that people let them down, so we can't do that. If we say we're going to do something then we have to do it. (Senior Staff Member)

Several CSs emphasised how they wanted to develop a supportive and open relationship whilst maintaining healthy boundaries. As with the initial stages, providing person-centred support and, importantly, being available and responsive to participants, were seen as the crucial building blocks in maintaining an effective relationship. Practically speaking, offering and using a variety of communication channels was seen as a necessary aspect of this, as it enabled young people to engage on their own terms. Feedback from participants demonstrated how creating an atmosphere of trust and openness allowed working relationships to flourish:

"She was really nice to me...she's always been gentle and understanding and she's given me really nice advice and I felt like I was talking to a friend [...] I'd never worked with anyone that made me believe that she was there simply because she cared." (Participant)

Both CS and participant interviews touched on how a sense of agency was important for CEYP on the programme. CEYP referred to the service as "advice" and "support" and suggested that their working relationship with CSs were collaborative – they were able to voice their opinions and direct the focus of meetings and opportunities to their needs and interests. CSs argued that this approach was crucial in maintaining a good relationship as it built trust between themselves and their clients, whilst also demonstrating their commitment to working towards their clients' version of a positive outcome.

Continuing to offer a range of meaningful and appropriate opportunities throughout the journey had a similar function in relationship building. Having the capacity to offer their clients targeted opportunities maintained CEYP's trust in the service, generated increased buy-in and, subsequently, facilitated strong relationships.

Building and maintaining positive working relationships with CEYP was not always straightforward for CSs. As one interviewee put it, "it takes two to tango"; in short, when clients chose not to engage and were unresponsive to the approaches used by CSs, it could be extremely difficult to build meaningful relationships. When this happened, CSs made an effort to "leave the door open" so dis-engagers had the opportunity to rejoin the programme. One CS highlighted how the COVID-19 pandemic had made this engagement problem increasingly common as the lack of in-person meetings had prevented meaningful initial

conversations which were seen as key to establishing strong working relationships. Ultimately then, the relationships between CSs and clients were reliant on engagement from the young people themselves, but it appears that working towards and creating opportunities to build strong, supportive relationships was a central and ongoing part of the CS role.

Relationships between CEYP

DFF also tried to encourage relationship and network building between participants. A range of activities were geared towards bringing CEYP together around common interests and goals. Book clubs, policy forums, theatre days, job taster sessions, and skills workshops often occurred as group sessions, and senior staff indicated that they wanted to develop this arm of the DFF offer. There were also formal and informal social media groups on WhatsApp and other platforms that participants used to connect and stay in touch with each other.

Whilst this work to build these relationships did occur, interview findings suggest that engagement in these activities was not highly valued by CSs. When asked to describe the most impactful activities that DFF offers, CSs did not mention group activities or events aimed at building their clients' social networks. CSs also explained that some opportunities were only taken up by a small but enthusiastic minority. Moreover, participants rarely referenced activities of this sort at all during their interviews which focused on their journeys, and the aspects of the programme that were meaningful to them. However, as discussed in the section 5.4, those who engaged did describe an impact on their confidence and reducing isolation. As such, it may be that opportunities for peer-to-peer relationship building are taken up by a minority of motivated participants, but it does not appear to be an aspect of the programme that CSs and participants expend significant amounts of time engaging with. However, it is possible these could be engaged with by more CEYP if some of the barriers to engagement were addressed.

External relationships

Staff and participant interviews also highlighted the role that external relationships played in defining the DFF offer. Clearly, important parts of DFF's service relied on external relationships that the CSs and the organisation had built and maintained

The connections that DFF had within different sectors and the opportunities they could offer their clients as a result were viewed as valuable by the CEYP they worked with:

"[I had] been looking for this type of thing for so long, and all of a sudden, it was so easy they have their connections and they know people, and people trust them, so it was very, very efficient." (Participant)

As the interviewee quoted above recognises, these connections only continue to be beneficial because DFF are a known and trusted partner for other organisations. How CSs and strategic staff approach building and maintaining these relationships is therefore important.

Generally, it appears, relationships were initiated by passionate partners; more often than not interested organisations got in touch with DFF, rather than DFF making first contact. Partnerships were then developed by a dedicated partnerships team and the head of partnerships at DFF. Young people's needs were considered when building partnerships, according to senior staff. CSs logged the industries in which young people were interested so that the partnerships team was able to focus its search.

When a Career Specialist is working with a young person they put on our database the areas of industry that interest them and the level that interest them. So we can...report every month...‘This is the industries we’re looking at.’
(Senior staff member)

The partnerships team had a clear idea of the organisations that would work well for the CEYP that DFF supported. Part of that was the team finding organisations that recognised the needs of CEYP in work.

Our partnership team look to work with employers that recognise that they may not have had [the same levels of support available], which is why it’s so valuable for us. (Senior staff member)

Crucial to the development of relationships with external partners was finding someone who was passionate about CEYP employment in the organisation.

The best relationships are about finding a person within an organisation who has got the same passion as we have. And then they just make it work. (Senior staff member)

The head of partnerships (who had recently left DFF at the time of senior staff interviews) was crucial to the sustainability of corporate partnerships

Because I gave that relationship over to the head of partnerships, she kept it on, built one with somebody else so when he moved onto another team we still had [someone at the partner] to work with. (Senior staff member)

DFF senior staff were considering how the partnerships team would continue to operate following the departure of the head of partnerships. They envisaged the partnerships team being led by two managers, one of which would act as a kind of account managers “*building up the relationship slowly, slowly.*”

CSs ways of working were also significant in maintaining effective relationships with corporate partners. For example, as mentioned in the section on Support and assistance provided by DFF,

Support and assistance provided by one interviewee explained how they would not refer their clients to opportunities unless they were ready and likely to fully engage with it; they argued that this approach maintained trust with their corporate partners who felt they were given young people to work with who could benefit from the opportunity and benefit the company in return. DFF also organised Partner Appreciation Days, which brought

together a range of corporate partners and participants, in order to strengthen relationships and secure buy-in.

There were barriers to maintaining effective relationships with corporate partners. CSs described how some partners were unable or unwilling to commit appropriate amounts of time to develop tailored opportunities for the CEYP they worked with. A senior staff member commented that the partner needs time and energy to invest in the young person they've taken on.

At times, partnership building was hindered by internal 'red tape', that limits organisations' ability to hire the young people supported by DFF. HR processes and existing recruitment practices, including the use of reasoning tests, could pose a problem.

There was also a feeling amongst some interviewees that several organisations did not have a genuine interest in supporting CEYP but rather saw collaborating with DFF as an opportunity to strengthen their corporate social responsibility strategy. At times, this disconnect between the needs and interests of DFF's clients and the corporate partners led to difficulties in the relationships. It was precisely because these problems could emerge, though, that CSs and leadership staff are proactive in building effective corporate relationships, as described above.

In Summary

These interviews suggest that building and maintaining relationships was at the very core of the DFF service – it underpinned frontline staff's approach to working with CEYP and was fundamental to securing opportunities for DFF's clients. It is clear that CSs, participants, and leadership staff valued relationship building and invested time and resources into developing connections where necessary. Having strong relationships between CSs and CEYP and having strong relationships with external organisations who could provide employment opportunities was core to the successful delivery of the programme.

The perceived impact of these relationships is discussed in section 5.4

Training and support

This section considers the training and support available to those involved in the programme and whether this helps them to work more effectively with participants (Research Question 6). Training and support provided to DFF staff was highlighted in the ToC workshop and during the rapid evidence review as a key contextual factor for delivering the SCLiE programme. Given the highly tailored nature of the programme, ensuring staff have the skills necessary to work effectively with CEYP is likely to be crucial for the programme to be scalable or replicable.

Career Specialists (CSs) described a wide range of training available to them. Some training was provided internally, while other courses were provided by external organisations and sourced by CSs individually, based on their own perceived needs. Training is provided to staff so that they are better able to support themselves, and so they are better able to support the young people accessing the service. Outside of training, staff wellbeing is supported in a range of ways. This section will begin by describing training and support available to staff and how training has changed over time. It will then go on to describe how

CSs perceive the training to help them work more effectively with care experienced young people (CEYP).

Staff Training

CSs acknowledged the wide range of training made available by DFF, to support themselves and young people accessing the service. What's more, they generally received the training that they wanted to access.

I must say that they invest a lot in us, and we receive lots of training (Career Specialist)

A number of courses related to supporting young people's well-being were mentioned by CSs. The vast majority seemed to be provided internally by DFF. Trauma-informed training was considered highly important and is updated every two years. The content of the course was considered technical and in-depth, in line with the kind of training expected at university-level.

Mental health training is also now mandatory for CSs working for DFF. This training focused on helping CSs to support young people with mental health challenges and included mental health first aid and suicide prevention. CSs were also provided with courses focusing on working with young people who are neurodiverse or have special educational needs, and safeguarding training. The safeguarding course had a focus on safety for the CS and for the young person as well. As a result, it included training on boundary setting, which is considered important given the nature of the relationships between CSs and young people being supported.

Setting boundaries for you and for the young person because the relationship can get very intense and sometimes it can be misunderstood to [be] something else (Career Specialist)

CSs were also trained in the immigration and care systems, and on the legal rights of the young people they support.

Senior staff and some CSs described receiving coaching and leadership training. While managers learn how to manage staff, coaching and leadership training is important to keep up due to the stress of the job, and to enable managers to support their team.

You have to revisit that coaching and leadership [training] because we all get so stressed with the job we forget that kindness part of leading people and coaching. (Senior staff member)

This leadership training generally seemed to be welcome and was considered an important part of effectively managing a team by line managers themselves. Additional leadership training was also planned for in the future which staff felt would help them to better support their team.

As the team at DFF has grown, training available to them has become more structured and the types of courses available have been widened. Senior staff reported that CSs have scope to shape training available to them. Staff were involved in the formulation of the training

plan, and it appears there is scope for CSs to decide on additional training they received. CSs had access to a ‘personal allowance’ for upskilling and their training plans are decided each year.

Frontline staff described the importance of training being provided at the beginning of programme implementation in order for it to be effective. As such, if the intervention were to be replicated elsewhere, this would need to be part of project mobilisation to ensure all staff felt as prepared as they could to work with their clients who are likely to present with a range of complex needs.

Staff Support

Outside of training, various forms of support were available to CSs. Support mechanisms included access to a mental health counselling service and supervision with a specialist external provider every six weeks. Supervisions were used by CSs to share challenging details of their work. Supervisions appeared, also, to serve a safeguarding purpose, creating an accountability mechanism to ensure CSs remain impartial.

Supervision is basically just so we can offload if we have stresses and there’s stuff that we might hear that might affect us, or to get an external set of eyes to keep us impartial. (Career Specialist)

An ‘employee voice’ group was recently established to help CSs communicate with DFF leadership. The group brings together all staff apart from the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), with one staff member responsible for reporting any staff concerns to the SLT. When we spoke to staff the group was in its nascent stages and staff continue to work out how to best use it.

Each CS also has a line manager available from whom they could receive regular support, depending on the CS’s need. Line manager meetings appeared to offer an additional place for CSs to discuss and reflect on any work-related stresses. The lines of communication appeared to work both ways, with line managers checking in regularly and CSs feeling able to contact their line managers as and when they need to. The efficacy of this support does, however, seem to have depended on the relationship established between the CS and their line manager.

I guess it’s dependent on whether they feel comfortable enough and the relationship is established to [seek out support]. (Career Specialist)

While support was generally considered to be positive, CSs did describe some areas for improvement, which have implications for the programme going forward. First, a clear career progression plan was requested. Aforementioned challenges in engaging young people led a CS to struggle with self-motivation at work. They suggested a clear progression plan would help them to motivate them again.

Second, the counselling service available to CSs could be improved. The external employee assistance line available to DFF CSs was considered by one CS to be providing “very bad counselling”. Support provided was not relevant enough to the ‘big stuff’ they needed help

with. It was, however, acknowledged that the availability of the counselling phoneline was a sign that DFF was trying to ensure staff felt supported.

Evidence gathered from the staff indicates that successfully sustaining and replicating the intervention would rely on reproducing the supportive management structures that are currently achieved, which CSs credit for allowing them to fulfil their roles.

Does this training and support help them to work more effectively with participants?

CSs reported their training as helping them to support young people to navigate where they are.

Mentors are trained actually to help the young person to navigate the space they're in as well, whether it's school, whether it's education, or whether it's work (Career Specialist)

This reflects the trauma-informed and, specifically, Healing-Centred Engagement ([HCE](#)) approaches outlined in the ToC. This approach requires CSs to understand the experiences and situations of the young people they support. HCE takes a holistic view of the individual, re-centring culture and identity as features of support. In line with this approach CSs reported not providing blanket advice to young people, regardless of background and experiences. Instead, they sought to understand the young person's situation, and aimed to support the young person to navigate their situation for themselves.

Views on how well-prepared training left them varied across CSs. Training on trauma-informed approaches and on religion and culture were felt to be particularly helpful in leading CSs to understand the situations of the young people they supported. In turn, CSs were better placed to effectively work with young people accessing support. Training on Islam via the internal 'Culture Hub' was described as particularly helpful in ensuring CSs had an understanding of cultural and religious differences they may face while supporting a young person.

Through trauma training, CSs were able to understand the many different ways in which experiences of trauma can manifest and shape a young person's ability to engage with a programme like SCLiE. CSs described feeling frustrated after difficult phone calls with or a lack of engagement by young people. Trauma-informed working was key to helping CSs empathise with and understand the experiences of the young people they supported. In turn, that understanding allowed CSs to react appropriately and continue to support their young people.

[Trauma-informed training] helps you take a breath and not fire back. (Career Specialist)

Trauma training also provided CSs the opportunity to consider the balance between understanding underlying trauma and thinking about how best to support that young person day-to-day. Again, this seems to reflect HCE, in that a holistic view of the young people was taken and informed decisions on support provided.

Having said this, there was a view that additional training on some areas would help CSs to work more effectively with DFF participants. For instance, understanding the realities of living in a hostel for a number of years, or being gang-affiliated, crucially from the young person's perspective.

There was also a view that employment support training could be improved. DFF aimed to support CEYP into employment and key interventions include CV, application and interview support (see Section 3.2 SCLiE Theory of Change). Some CSs felt they lacked some formal training in this area. CV training was considered one such priority area, where they felt they weren't always able to provide the 'best of the best'.

*Sometimes I'll see young people with CVs and I'm like [laughs] I need to kind of, copy that a little bit, so it would be better if I had the best of the best.
(Career Specialist)*

Follow-up employment advisor training could go some way in supporting CSs to work more effectively with the young people they support. While a CS might have achieved a qualification in employment advising earlier in their career, questions were raised about the lack of further training provided in this area while working for DFF. While these CSs felt they had *enough* experience or training to successfully support the young people working with DFF, there was a sense that further training could improve how effectively they could offer support.

It is important to note that training and skill levels varied across CSs. CSs described having different levels of skills than other staff due to their level of experience or career stage; or staff receiving different levels and types of training outside of those mandated by DFF. For instance, staff sought out additional training when they had faced an issue, or where they had relationships with external providers that allowed them to access training. This may mean staff have varying levels of skill to support CEYP.

In Summary

Training for staff is becoming more formalised at DFF. Some CSs felt this training allowed them to understand the circumstances of the young people with whom they worked, in line with the trauma-informed and HCE approaches on which their work is based. This is crucial to building relationships with CEYP and taking a flexible, CEYP approach; and therefore, is crucial to the successful delivery of the programme. However, the training accessed by CSs was varied, and some felt in need of more specific training on different challenges a young person might be facing, for instance the realities of living in a hostel, or being gang affiliated.

Ensuring all CSs have access to the training needed to prepare them to effectively work with those accessing DFF's support is crucial to SCLiE's programme theory.

5.4 Evidence of promise

Association between SCLiE and EET status

This section considers Research Question 1: "what is the association between engaging in DFF's support programme and the rate of being in EET?" The main outcome of interest for

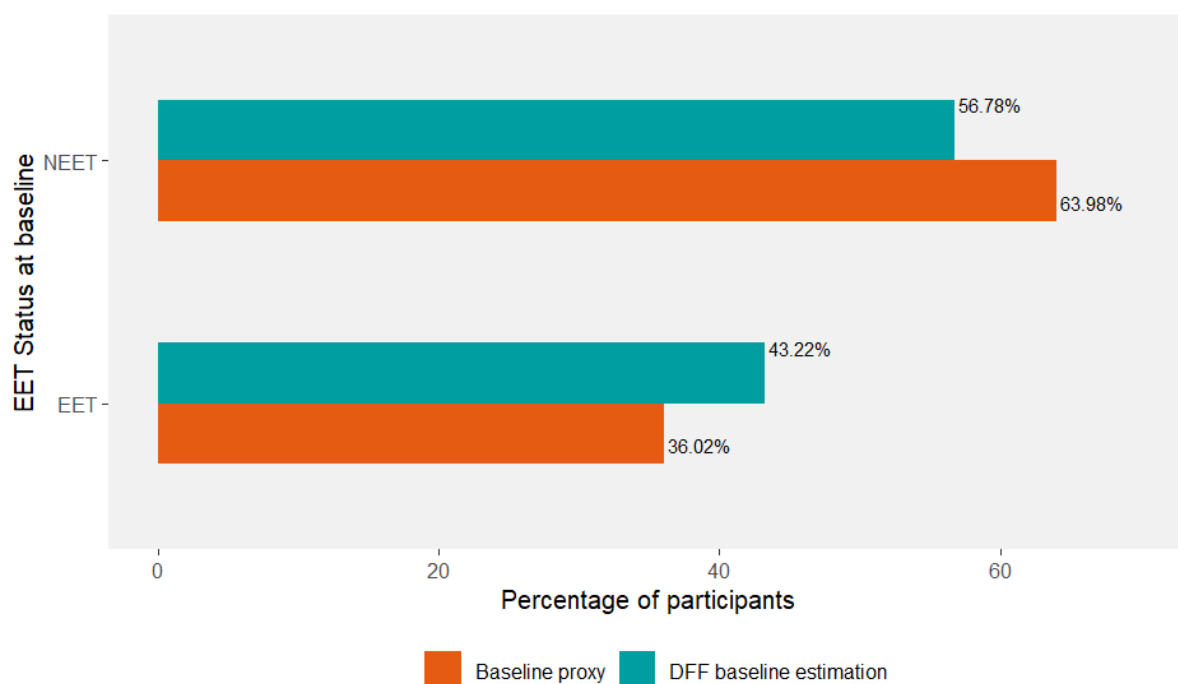
the evaluation is young people’s EET status: whether they have entered Education, Employment or Training.

EET status at baseline

CEYP’s baseline EET status was obtained from DFF’s management information. For the evaluation, we received first a dataset that contained several variables related to EET status. After conversations with DFF, we realised it was possible that the status, while first recorded at baseline, was later updated by CSs throughout the participants’ engagement in the programme. Therefore, we chose one variable as proxy, the variable for which the share of NEET CEYP was closest to 80% (we chose this one because this was DFF’s estimation of the level of NEET CEYP when entering the programme). Our reasoning is explained in more detail in Appendix E: EET status baseline proxy description. We conducted a first set of analysis for this variable. We will refer to this variable as ‘baseline proxy’. During the revision rounds of this report, DFF revised their records and pulled out an estimation of the baseline EET status of the participant based on information not held on their new data management system. We will refer to this variable as ‘DFF baseline estimation’. We therefore repeated the analysis to include this variable and commented on variations below.

Figure 11 summarises the EET status of the recruited cohort, using the two variables mentioned above, as per reported DFF’s management information.

Figure 11: EET status of participants at baseline



Number of observations: 236 (Baseline proxy and DFF Baseline estimation)

The share of CEYP NEET at baseline ranges from 56.78% to 63.98%. The baseline proxy variable we used reported a largest share of NEET participants, compared to the DFF baseline estimation. In any case, these values are lower than DFF’s judgement of their client group. During the feasibility process, DFF estimated that 80% of the population they work

with are NEET. The difference could be because data on some participants was updated while they were working with DFF, as mentioned above. In addition, as noted in section 3.2, we have included some participants who are aged over 24, who may have different NEET rates, which could also be driving the differences.

We also explored how long the average participant recruited for the evaluation has been NEET. Table 10 provide summarises the findings. The findings suggest a variation in the distance CEYPs are from the job market, and therefore a variation in the support needs of the cohort that DFF work with. This is reflected in the findings from the IPE as well. This factor introduces bias to the dosage indicator of the analysis, given that we are not using a control group.

Table 10 Participant’s duration as NEET

| Neet duration | Percentage (%) |
|---------------|----------------|
| 0-3 months | 33.73 |
| 4-6 months | 21.69 |
| 7-12 months | 21.69 |
| 13-18 months | 6.02 |
| 18+ months | 16.87 |

Duration of the participants not in education, employment or training.

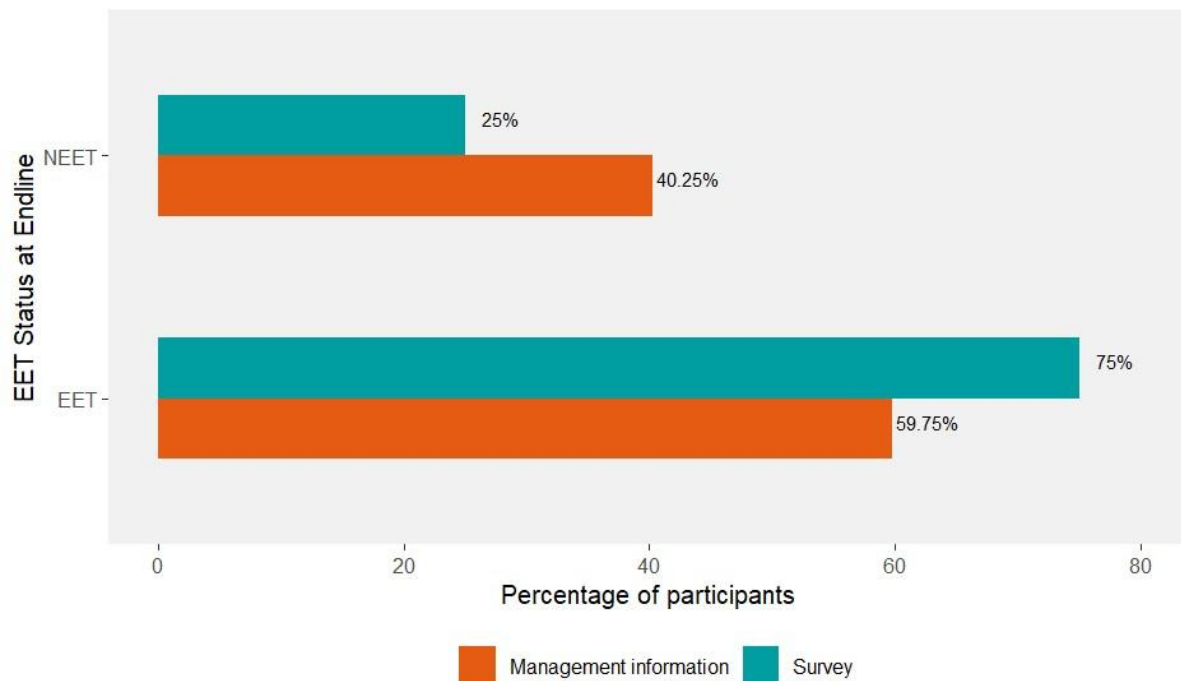
Number of observations: 83.

Source: DFF management information.

Endline

To measure the EET status of the participants at the end of the evaluation, we considered two variables: the EET status of CEYP at the programme’s exit point, as reported by DFF, and a relevant question from the endline survey.

Figure 12: Participants’ EET status at endline



Number of observations from survey data: 236 (Management Information) 120 (Survey)

There are important differences on the shares of NEET participants captured through the two endline measures presented above. As per the information captured in the monitoring data, the share of EET participants when exiting the programme is smaller. One possible explanation is that participants were captured in the endline survey at a later stage in their journey towards employment, and hence several had more time to secure an opportunity. Another explanation is that the particular group who responded to the survey did it because they were more motivated by the programme and its results, and the measure is reflecting this positive self-selection. Having said that, we are also aware of the inconsistencies in the management information which could be reflected on the measurement of this variable too.

Results

Estimations to analyse the EET status outcome were as specified in Table 4: Modelling summary. For this outcome, in a nutshell, Model 1 estimates the predictive power of the outcome at baseline, through baseline-endline correlations, over a sample of complete cases. Model 2 estimates the association between SCLiE's dosage, and the likelihood of being EET at endline, for the sample of complete cases. We did not use Models 3 and 4 for this outcome, as imputation was not necessary since we were able to obtain baseline EET records from DFF's management information. Model 5 was conducted with no baseline variable to observe the sensitivity of the dosage indicator. We conducted these estimations for each of the two endline variables for EET status: one obtained from DFF's management information, and one from the endline survey.

The results are presented in Table 11 EET status-management information: associations with engagement with SCLIE Table 11 and

Table 12. The baseline-endline correlation represents the estimate associated with the baseline EET status. Dosage correlation represent the estimate associated with the number of services. All models included the following covariates: age, gender and ethnicity.

Table 11 EET status-management information: associations with engagement with SCLIE

| Estimate | P value | Conf. Interval | Signif. | Included dosage | Variable | Model | Baseline |
|----------|---------|----------------|---------|-----------------|------------------------------|-------|-------------------------|
| 0.61 | 0.00 | 0.51 - 0.71 | *** | No | baseline-endline correlation | 1 | DFF baseline estimation |
| 0.60 | 0.00 | 0.5 - 0.71 | *** | Yes | baseline-endline correlation | 2 | DFF baseline estimation |
| 0.00 | 0.95 | -0.01 - 0.01 | | Yes | dosage correlation | 2 | DFF baseline estimation |

| Estimate | P value | Conf. Interval | Signif. | Included dosage | Variable | Model | Baseline |
|----------|---------|----------------|---------|-----------------|------------------------------|-------|----------------|
| 0.41 | 0.00 | 0.3 - 0.52 | *** | No | baseline-endline correlation | 1 | Baseline proxy |
| 0.44 | 0.00 | 0.33 - 0.55 | *** | Yes | baseline-endline correlation | 2 | Baseline proxy |
| 0.00 | 0.86 | -0.01 - 0.01 | | Yes | dosage correlation | 2 | Baseline proxy |
| 0.01 | 0.17 | 0 - 0.01 | | Yes | dosage correlation | 5 | No baseline |

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05, +p < 0.1.

All models included controls for age, gender, and ethnicity and robust standard errors. Further controls were excluded to conserve degrees of freedom in the estimations.

Table 12 EET status-endline survey: associations with engagement with SCLiE

| Estimate | P value | Conf. Interval | Signif. | Included dosage | Variable | Model | Baseline |
|----------|---------|----------------|---------|-----------------|------------------------------|-------|-------------------------|
| 0.31 | 0.01 | 0.08 - 0.54 | ** | No | baseline-endline correlation | 1 | DFF baseline estimation |
| 0.28 | 0.02 | 0.04 - 0.52 | * | Yes | baseline-endline correlation | 2 | DFF baseline estimation |
| 0.01 | 0.43 | -0.01 - 0.02 | | Yes | dosage correlation | 2 | DFF baseline estimation |
| 0.14 | 0.27 | -0.12 - 0.4 | | No | baseline-endline correlation | 1 | Baseline proxy |
| 0.11 | 0.42 | -0.16 - 0.39 | | Yes | baseline-endline correlation | 2 | Baseline proxy |

| Estimate | P value | Conf. Interval | Signif. | Included dosage | Variable | Model | Baseline |
|----------|---------|----------------|---------|-----------------|--------------------|-------|----------------|
| 0.01 | 0.09 | -0.01 - 0.03 | + | Yes | dosage correlation | 2 | Baseline proxy |
| 0.01 | 0.21 | 0 - 0.02 | | Yes | dosage correlation | 5 | No baseline |

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$.

All models included controls for age, gender, and ethnicity and robust standard errors. Further controls were excluded to conserve degrees of freedom in the estimations.

From this set of models, there is variability on the strength of the detected baseline-endline correlation for the outcome EET status. While most of the models detected a statistically significant correlation of 0.28 or higher, models 1 and 2 using our baseline proxy as per Table 12 did not find a significant correlation. On average, the correlation is likely to be approximately 0.36. Regarding dosage, only one out of six models that included the dosage variable found a small but positive association, statistically significant ($p < 0.1$). For the other models, we find no association between increasing engagement with SCLiE and increasing likelihood of being in EET. The implications of these results are discussed below.

Discussion

The baseline-endline correlations measure how good of a predictor the EET status of participants at baseline, is for the EET status they hold at endline. This correlation is a key component of the 'power of covariates', a parameter that influences how big a sample is required to detect a treatment effect of a given size. As we are recommending the SCLiE programme to move forward to a full-scale RCT, this baseline-endline estimation in this pilot provides valuable information for the upcoming design. The pilot evaluation found a moderate baseline-endline correlation for the EET status outcome, but with wide confidence intervals and sensitive to the variable used to assess baseline, suggesting the true correlation could range from very small to quite substantial.

Due to the binary nature of this outcome, we anticipated that the explanatory power of including it as a baseline was likely to be small, and we conducted some preliminary power calculations that were conservative and hence well-aligned to this finding. In our power calculations, we assumed a power of covariates of 0.25 and found that, after attrition, we will require a sample of 310 to detect an effect size of 0.3 (Cohen's h), or a sample of 690 to detect an effect size 0.2 (Cohen's h).

It is worth bearing in mind that although baseline outcome level is usually the most powerful explanatory covariate, there are a range of other covariates (such as demography) that also contribute explanatory power and hence make the regression model more efficient at estimating treatment effects. We have limited inclusion of demographics in the

above analysis due to missing data and restricted degrees of freedom; however, we should be able to include a wider range of covariates in future analyses.

Regarding dosage, while with the exception of one model, most of our analysis finds no association between increasing uptake of SCLiE opportunities and likelihood of being in EET. These findings should be treated with caution for a number of reasons. It is possible that we mostly find no association between increasing dosage and increased likelihood of being in EET because there is no causal link, i.e. SCLiE does not improve outcomes for care leavers engaged with the service. However, there is a high risk of uncaptured confounders biasing this finding. Omitted variable bias may drive a positive association (if participants who are closer to work are more likely to take up opportunities), a negative association (if participants who are further from work are likely to require or receive more support), or no association (if level of intervention is 'masking' or ameliorating an underlying trend in the outcome). This is an intrinsic limitation of most dosage-response models as increasing dosage is usually endogenous to the other variables in the model, including the outcome. The experimental design for the next phase will help to deal with this endogeneity. We will also explore different options for dosage measurement as well as mechanisms to keep consistency across the register of services received by CEYP.

Association between SCLiE and 'soft' outcomes

This section considers Research Question 2: "What is the association between engaging in DFF's support and participants' work readiness, social connectedness, self-efficacy, resilience, and mental wellbeing?"

This question addresses the associations between engagement with DFF and a set of five 'soft' outcomes. The estimations to analyse this set of outcomes were as specified in Table 4: Modelling summary. Briefly, for each of five outcomes explained below, four models are shown. Models 1 and 3 estimate the predictive power of each outcome at baseline, through baseline-endline correlations, over a sample of complete cases, and a sample including imputed baselines, respectively. Models 2 and 4 estimate the association between dosage of SCLiE's, and the relevant outcome at endline, for the sample of complete cases, and the sample with imputed baselines, respectively.

To keep consistency with the EET outcome discussed in Research Question 1 above, these models also include controls for age, gender and ethnicity. The results are presented below.

With all these analyses it is necessary to be cautious about over-interpretation, especially of the dosage indicator. As with the analysis of Research Question 1, there is a high risk of omitted variable bias.

Work Readiness

Work readiness is the second outcome of interest. It is meant to capture improvements in the participants' trajectory towards employment, even if they have not yet entered work. This is scored based on ten items of the Life Skills Development Scale (LSDS) for adolescents, supplemented by additional questions. The score ranges from one to five, where five refers to highest work readiness. Further details on the measurement are in Table 3. Table 13 presents the results of the four models.

Table 13: Work readiness: associations with engagement with SCLiE

| Estimate | P value | Confi. Interval | Signif. | Included dosage | Imputed | Variable | Model |
|----------|---------|-----------------|---------|-----------------|---------|------------------------------|-------|
| 0.42 | 0.00 | 0.17 - 0.67 | ** | No | No | baseline-endline correlation | 1 |
| 0.40 | 0.00 | 0.16 - 0.64 | ** | Yes | No | baseline-endline correlation | 2 |
| -0.01 | 0.37 | -0.03 - 0.01 | | Yes | No | dosage correlation | 2 |
| 0.36 | 0.00 | 0.13 - 0.59 | ** | No | Yes | baseline-endline correlation | 3 |
| 0.35 | 0.00 | 0.12 - 0.58 | ** | Yes | Yes | baseline-endline correlation | 4 |
| 0.00 | 0.59 | -0.02 - 0.01 | | Yes | Yes | dosage correlation | 4 |

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05, +p < 0.1.

All models included controls for age, gender, and ethnicity and robust standard errors. Further controls were excluded to conserve degrees of freedom in the estimations. MICE Imputation used predictive mean matching. Outcome was measured as the average score adjusted by the number of responded items in the LSDS.

All four models detected a positive and statistically significant baseline-endline correlation for the work readiness outcome. Correlation sizes range between 0.35 and 0.42, which shows the strong predictive power of the scale. This means that the work readiness score that a CEYP has at baseline is a strong predictor of the outcome score at endline. This strong correlation ultimately boosts the overall power of covariates and suggests that this is a reliable measure of work readiness over time. Regarding dosage, none of the models found statistically significant associations between receiving more services from DFF, and an increase in work-readiness levels.

Social Connectedness

Social connectedness is another outcome explored in this evaluation. Social networks have an important role in supporting young people, especially if they come from vulnerable backgrounds. A strong social network can also facilitate education, employment and training opportunities, as well as enhancing young people's mental health. To assess social connectedness, we used four questions taken from the Social Connectedness Scale. The

score ranges from one to five, where five refers to highest social connectedness. Further details on the measurement are in Table 3. Table 14 presents the results.

Table 14: Social connectedness: associations with engagement with SCLiE.

| Estimate | P value | Confi. Interval | Signif. | Included dosage | Imputed Variable | Model |
|----------|---------|-----------------|---------|-----------------|------------------------------|-------|
| 0.15 | 0.19 | -0.08 - 0.37 | No | No | baseline-endline correlation | 1 |
| 0.13 | 0.34 | -0.14 - 0.4 | Yes | No | baseline-endline correlation | 2 |
| -0.01 | 0.56 | -0.03 - 0.02 | Yes | No | dosage correlation | 2 |
| 0.17 | 0.12 | -0.05 - 0.39 | No | Yes | baseline-endline correlation | 3 |
| 0.14 | 0.22 | -0.09 - 0.38 | Yes | Yes | baseline-endline correlation | 4 |
| -0.01 | 0.20 | -0.03 - 0.01 | Yes | Yes | dosage correlation | 4 |

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$.

All models included controls for age, gender, and ethnicity and robust standard errors. Further controls were excluded to conserve degrees of freedom in the estimations. MICE Imputation used predictive mean matching. Outcome was measured as the average score adjusted by the number of responded items in the Social Connectedness Scale

Across the four models, the baseline-endline correlation for this outcome is small, ranging from 0.13 to 0.17, none of which are statistically significant. This means that a participant's prior level of social connection as measured in this research is not very predictive of their subsequent level, suggesting the measure is not very reliable. In future it may be necessary to investigate other ways of measuring social connectedness to ensure the measurement is valid and reliable. The correlation between dosage of the programme and the social connectedness score is not statistically significant in either of the two models (2 and 4).

Self-efficacy

This outcome measures young people's perception of their own self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is an optimistic self-belief that one can perform novel or different tasks, or cope with adversity.⁴⁰ To measure this outcome, we used a subset of four questions from the General Self-efficacy Scale. The score ranges from one to five, where five refers to highest self-efficacy. Further details on the measurement are in Table 3. Results of the estimations are presented in Table 15.

⁴⁰ Schwarzler, R., & Jerusalem, M., (1995) *General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE)* APA PsycTest

Table 15: Self-efficacy: associations with engagement with SCLiE

| Estimate | P value | Confi. Interval | Signif. | Included dosage | Imputed | Variable | Model |
|----------|---------|-----------------|---------|-----------------|---------|------------------------------|-------|
| 0.22 | 0.06 | -0.01 - 0.44+ | | No | No | baseline-endline correlation | 1 |
| 0.12 | 0.34 | -0.13 - 0.38 | | Yes | No | baseline-endline correlation | 2 |
| -0.02 | 0.08 | -0.03 - 0 + | | Yes | No | dosage correlation | 2 |
| 0.11 | 0.32 | -0.11 - 0.34 | | No | Yes | baseline-endline correlation | 3 |
| 0.05 | 0.69 | -0.2 - 0.29 | | Yes | Yes | baseline-endline correlation | 4 |
| -0.01 | 0.10 | -0.03 - 0 + | | Yes | Yes | dosage correlation | 4 |

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$.

All models included controls for age, gender, and ethnicity and robust standard errors. Further controls were excluded to conserve degrees of freedom in the estimations. MICE Imputation used predictive mean matching. Outcome was measured as the average score adjusted by the number of items responded, based on a subset of questions from the General Self Efficacy Scale

In general, the baseline-endline correlation estimates for the self-efficacy outcome are small and range from 0.05 to 0.22, with Model 1 finding this correlation to be significant, again suggesting that this is not a reliable measure of self-efficacy. Regarding dosage, there appears to be a small negative association ($p < 0.1$) between increasing dosage and this outcome in two models (2 and 4). As with other findings it is necessary to be cautious about over-interpretation, due to the small sample size and risk of omitted variable bias, particularly as this is not significant at conventional levels (i.e. $p < 0.05$).

Resilience

The 14 item Resilience Scale, of which we used four items, is a widely validated instrument commonly used to assess resilience in a diversity of contexts. Further details on the measurement are in Table 3. The results of the analysis for this outcome are presented below in Table 16.

Table 16: Resilience: associations with engagement with SCLiE

| Estimate | P value | Confi. Interval | Signif. | Included dosage | Imputed | Variable | Model |
|----------|---------|-----------------|---------|-----------------|---------|------------------------------|-------|
| 0.53 | 0.00 | 0.23 - 0.82 | *** | No | No | baseline-endline correlation | 1 |
| 0.57 | 0.00 | 0.23 - 0.91 | ** | Yes | No | baseline-endline correlation | 2 |
| 0.01 | 0.24 | -0.01 - 0.03 | | Yes | No | dosage correlation | 2 |
| 0.50 | 0.00 | 0.24 - 0.76 | *** | No | Yes | baseline-endline correlation | 3 |
| 0.57 | 0.00 | 0.24 - 0.89 | *** | Yes | Yes | baseline-endline correlation | 4 |
| 0.01 | 0.10 | 0 - 0.03 | | Yes | Yes | dosage correlation | 4 |

***p < 0.001, **p < 0.01, *p < 0.05, +p < 0.1.

All models included controls for age, gender, and ethnicity and robust standard errors. Further controls were excluded to conserve degrees of freedom in the estimations. MICE Imputation used predictive mean matching. Outcome was measured as the average score adjusted by the number of items responded, based on a subset of questions from the RS-14 resilience scale.

The models detect a strong baseline-endline correlations estimate, which is statistically significant across the four models. The magnitude of the correlation ranges from 0.50 to 0.57. This means that baseline measures of resilience have strong predictive power. The estimated correlations between the intensity of programme engagement and resilience are small and not statistically significant in any of the two models (2 and 4).

Wellbeing

Finally, we also looked at associations between DFF's support and CEYP's mental wellbeing. To measure it, we used the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing scale (SWEMWS), a well-known and widely validated instrument. The score ranges from one to five, where five is the highest level of mental wellbeing. Further details on the measurement are in Table 3. We conducted four models presented in Table 17.

Table 17: Mental wellbeing: associations with engagement with SCLiE

| Estimate | P value | Confi. Interval | Signif. | Included dosage | Imputed | Variable | Model |
|----------|---------|-----------------|---------|-----------------|---------|------------------------------|-------|
| 0.50 | 0.00 | 0.25 - 0.75 | *** | No | No | baseline-endline correlation | 1 |
| 0.52 | 0.00 | 0.27 - 0.77 | *** | Yes | No | baseline-endline correlation | 2 |
| -0.01 | 0.15 | -0.04 - 0.01 | | Yes | No | dosage correlation | 2 |
| 0.46 | 0.00 | 0.28 - 0.64 | *** | No | Yes | baseline-endline correlation | 3 |
| 0.51 | 0.00 | 0.3 - 0.72 | *** | Yes | Yes | baseline-endline correlation | 4 |
| -0.01 | 0.27 | -0.03 - 0.01 | | Yes | Yes | dosage correlation | 4 |

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$, + $p < 0.1$.

All models included controls for age, gender, and ethnicity and robust standard errors. Further controls were excluded to conserve degrees of freedom in the estimations. MICE Imputation used predictive mean matching. Outcome was measured as the average score adjusted by the number of items responded, based on The Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing scale.

Across all models, the baseline-endline correlation of the mental wellbeing score is strong and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$), and it ranges from 0.46 to 0.52. This means that the measurement of mental wellbeing at baseline is a strong predictor of this outcome for CEYP at endline. This is also a reflection that the questions in the scale are appropriate for this age group at their level of vulnerability, which is not always the case for validated scales. The models did not find any statistically significant association between the intensity of DFF's services and mental wellbeing.

Discussion

Three of five outcomes assessed in this section show strong and statistically significant baseline-endline correlations (work readiness, resilience and mental wellbeing). Strong baseline-endline correlations are important as they indicate the reliability of a measure and can increase the statistical power of an analysis by helping to explain variation in the outcome at endline. This improves the statistical power of an experimental design by allowing the model to more efficiently attribute variation to the treatment indicator. In the

context of the future evaluations of SCLiE, including baseline levels of these scales in the analysis may reduce the sample size required for adequate statistical power at a given treatment effect size.

Regarding measurement, the strong correlations we found for work-readiness and resilience support the case for using a subset of items. During the survey development, we decided to include four questions for each of the scales (Life Skills Development Scale and the R-14 resilience scale, respectively). This was done to reduce survey length. However, this comes with the risk of significantly reducing the validity and reliability of the scales. It is therefore encouraging to see that fewer items on the scales are still jointly valid (as they were aggregated in a score and still a good measurement), and reliable (as they show strong correlation in levels over time).

These strong correlations, including the one for mental wellbeing (measured by SWEMWS), are also pointers that these scales are appropriate for measurement in this cohort. While this is arguably not surprising given that these scales have been widely validated, they haven't been validated as extensively in this specific group, and the results are therefore encouraging when it comes to using them in further evaluations.

The other two outcomes (social connectedness and self-efficacy) do not present meaningful baseline-endline correlations. This suggests that as implemented in this research, these outcomes are not being reliably measured, and their predictive power is more limited. This could be a result of several factors:

- We have selected a subset of the items and in this exercise, it is likely that we are not fully capturing the outcome and hence predictive power shrinks.
- Given that the sample size is small, it could be that we simply don't have enough power to find a significant effect.
- As there is omitted variable bias, other relevant covariates not included could be mitigating a stronger correlation (either positive or negative).

Regarding associations between higher 'dosages' of the SCLiE programme and outcomes, the consistent result across all soft outcomes and the several models is that the correlation is very small and generally not statistically significant. We cannot make any causal claims on the impact of SCLiE on this basis.

The dosage indicator is sensitive to omitted variable bias and self-selection of the sample. Omitted variable bias means that the dosage correlation is likely capturing the impact of variables such as poor mental health or housing insecurity (that can affect how many times people use the services), as well as the soft outcomes, in addition to the dosage of SCLiE. Regarding self-selection, the fact that participants who are struggling more need more support, and those who are overall coping better need less support also influences the strength of the correlation. This is an intrinsic limitation of most observational (i.e. not randomised or externally assigned) dosage indicators.

Going forward, using a randomised assignment to SCLiE mitigates concerns about omitted variables, but as we will also wish to explore links between levels and types of engagement

and the outcomes, we will work with DFF to try and develop a measure of dosage that is consistently and clearly recorded.

It is worth noting here that the findings related to research question 2 do not suggest that the SCLiE programme does not have an impact on the secondary outcomes. By design, a pilot evaluation does not intend to assess the effect of a programme but rather whether the programme has the features to be involved in a rigorous impact evaluation. Due to this, the pilot did not include any comparison group that can act as counterfactual to measure the effect. The aim of the pilot was rather to assess whether there is a positive association between the intensity of the programme and CEYP outcomes. While we did not find evidence of this, it is possible that this is more a reflection of the data weaknesses, and the lack of a counterfactual that controls for other variables, such as the composition of the sample, for instance.

Reasons for improvement or otherwise of outcomes by SCLiE

This section considers Research Question 3 “Why are the outcomes of interest improved, or not improved, by engagement with the programme?” We consider the key aspects of the programme that facilitate or hinder improvement in the outcomes of interest, based on the views of participants attending the programme and the CSs supporting them. This section covers 1-2-1 sessions with CSs; ringfenced opportunities; industry mentoring; counselling; and social groups and events.

1-2-1 Sessions with Career Specialists (CSs)

Working with a CS was a significant part of young people’s experience of working with DFF. In fact, one senior staff member commented that 1-2-1 support from CSs was *the* intervention that made a difference.

100% it’s the core one to one support with the Career Specialist. Absolutely that’s key to everything that we do. Nothing happens without that relationship.
(Senior staff member)

Through discussions with young people and CSs, it is believed that a number of outcomes were shaped by this aspect of the intervention, including employment skills, informed employment aspirations and, long-term, sustainable employment. Increasing confidence and improving well-being appear to not only be a common outcome of these sessions but also feed into long-term employment outcomes; these outcomes appear to interlink. What is significant about these sessions, according to the young people we interviewed, is the support throughout the application process, and after entering work; young people felt less alone.

More specifically, CSs explained how they aimed to help young people towards stability and to a place where they felt in control. Empathy and feeling listened to were central to this.

I think the whole idea is to get a stable life where they can process things in their own time. (Career Specialist)

He's able to control the situation where he's in, where he's able to turn away from stuff like that [drinking] and he's got like, coping mechanisms now, very different than before. (Career Specialist)

However, CSs made clear that for a young person to reach employment outcomes, they needed to be engaged in the support offered; CSs were not a silver bullet. In fact, one CS found it frustrating to hear young people describe them as such.

It really annoys me when people say, 'You want to talk to [Name]. He is going to change your life. He's really, really good.' You know? It's like, 'Oh no. No, no, no, no. It takes two to tango.' (Career Specialist)

As discussed above in the section on Communication with, and engagement of, participants, young people did not always engage with the support available. Not surprisingly, a young person not engaging with their support was considered a key barrier to the young person meeting an employment outcome. Ultimately, a CS's ability to support a young person hinged on the strength of their relationship, the intention of the young person to engage in 1-2-1 support and on their personal circumstances.

When people actually play ball, things can really be really powerful. I mean, it's like the basic work that I do is as good as the relationship, really. (Career Specialist)

However, it was not always the intention alone of the young person that shaped outcomes and some needed extended periods of support. A CS commented that they tended to have a few young people with mental health challenges or who are neurodiverse in their caseload who needed support weekly for a number of years. Mental health, low confidence and trauma could all hold young people back from reaching outcomes, according to a senior staff member.

The barriers, their mental health, their confidence levels. When you've been through the trauma that they have it'll always present in some way that might hold them back. (Senior staff member)

A young person mirrored this sentiment, describing how their mental health shaped their ability to engage; they might be enjoying part of a service or a relationship for a few days but that can change quickly if their mental health deteriorates.

It really depends on my moods around people, because I can be enjoying something for a few days and the next thing I'll have a breakdown, and...it goes on like that. (Participant)

Interview skills and application support

Improving CV and interviewing skills, and job application support, were a significant part of getting young people into work, according to young people interviewed. There was a sense among young people that it was not just tangible interview and application skill sessions that support young people, but 1-2-1 support from CSs during the application process left them feeling less isolated and more confident

You don't feel like you're left alone, like with a normal job, when you're applying for a job. You don't feel as much pressure on you. (Participant)

For example, having an interview 'trial run' with practice questions meant one young person, who suffered with anxiety, felt their confidence was boosted; they no longer had to do everything on their own. Crucially, it was this care that set DFF apart from other services accessed; even after a CEYP secured a job.

You've helped me secure my job... Usually, once that's done, we get left on our own and that's what I've always had with previous support. Having [my CS] still checking in just makes you feel like they do actually care. (Participant)

Employment Goal Setting

Another way in which CSs supported young people during 1-2-1 sessions was through employment goal setting, according to both young people and CSs. Developing informed employment aspirations was a key outcome of interest for DFF. CSs supported young people towards this end by guiding them towards jobs that fit with their existing skillsets.

Sometimes they need guidance, ... let's look at your skillset, let's look at what you enjoy doing and how can we employ that in a job (Career Specialist)

This experience was also discussed by a young person receiving support, who described how their CS was helping them to think about jobs they were interested in, specifically, rather than being open to any opportunity. This kind of goal setting may lead to sustained employment long-term for CEYP, as CSs suggest work needs to be relevant to young people's interests for it to be sustainable. Commenting on their progress towards employment, another young person who was in the process of focusing their job search described the challenges they perceived their CS to have faced in supporting them. This young person saw their own uncertain employment aspirations as a barrier.

I just want, like, a normal job. But it's quite difficult. If I don't know what I want, then it's quite difficult for [my CS]. (Participant)

Again, support from CSs to develop informed employment aspirations was closely tied to improved wellbeing. Young people described positive implication on their mindset and sense of self confidence from working on their career goals.

It's maybe pushed me that I can get any opportunity that I put my mind to, I guess. (Participant)

It impacted me in a positive way to see that I do have opportunities whichever the background I come from. (Participant)

This kind of mindset change appears fundamental to much of DFF's work and was seen as the job of DFF by a senior staff member.

If I grow up in care, my local authority makes sure when I'm 18 that I'm on benefits and I've got somewhere to live, but that's it. That's where the

aspiration ends...It's our job to circumvent that and to provide options (Senior staff member)

Ringfenced opportunities

Tied into work CSs did to guide young people towards clearer employment aspirations was the work placements and opportunities that DFF established with corporate partners (how these relationships are established is covered in section 5.4 under external relationships). These opportunities are a significant part of the process to reach employment outcomes, according to CSs and young people. The number and range of opportunities available and their ring-fenced nature appear crucial to their utility. As will be discussed below, however, successful employment outcomes hinge on the relevance of these opportunities to young people's aspirations.

DFF worked to 'ring-fence' job opportunities available to the young people they support. Existing partnerships were described with the Civil Service, the NHS, Superdrug and Thames Water. A partnership with the Civil Service created opportunities for numerous young people, highlighting the importance of ring-fenced opportunities as an intervention in increasing employment of CEYP. One CS had seen 19 of the young people they supported enter employment with the Civil Service in a single year as a result of the scheme.

The big deal, partnership-wise, has been the Civil Service. So they've been running this internship scheme for the last four years now. And, I mean, one year I got, like, 19 young people into the Civil Service. (Participant)

Ring-fenced opportunities helped young people into employment by easing the process for them to enter employment. A CS explained how such opportunities reduced the burden of CEYP applying to work: they just have to show up. Mirroring this idea, young people described how much more quickly they were able to enter work with DFF's support, as opposed to that of other services.

I had been looking for this type of thing for so long, and all of a sudden, it was so easy...they have their connections and they know people, and people trust them, so it was very, very efficient. (Participant)

Additionally, ensuring that CEYP are appropriately supported by employers who are trained and able to support them appears to be a central part of the success of these opportunities (as discussed further on page 61).

It's not just about preparing young people for the world of work. It's kind of...preparing managers for care experienced young people...with adverse childhood experiences. (Career Specialist)

However, there were mixed views about the range of opportunities available. Some considered opportunities available at DFF to be better than those provided by other organisations. This is reflected by one participant commenting that her current position in research insight, supported by DFF, is "one of the best opportunities I've ever had" (Participant). Others suggested, however, that a barrier to their own employment

outcomes improving was the limited relevance of the opportunities to their interests or skillset. For example, young people described seeking work in their degree fields (such as the creative industries or fashion) but found that DFF's opportunities were not so relevant to them, being sent jobs in the service industry or corporate fields instead. As one CS described it:

I think sometimes there's a disconnect between the needs of the young people, the needs of the corporate partners and then the people who work in those two camps for Drive Forward [DFF]. (Career Specialist)

One view was that this disconnect limited the sustainability of the work that young people found via DFF. For them, opportunities provided to young people need to be relevant to their interests to work out long-term. A solution to this would be having a wider variety of ring-fenced opportunities available.

Mentoring

Outside of the relationship a young person built with a CS while working with DFF, some were also provided with an industry mentor. Young people described the largely job-related support they offered, some of which was similar to that provided by CSs. What set relationships with mentors apart, however, was their proximity to the industry in which the young person wanted to work. According to senior staff, DFF has a set of suitability criteria that mentors must meet, and they are paired with young people based on the young person's needs.

Some people would want emotional support. Some people might want specific industry knowledge or expertise...We would look at what they wanted and then we would pair it based on the needs of the young person. (Senior staff member)

The relationship was very personal, however, and might not always work. To ensure that mentoring relationships were compatible, a mentoring coordinator joined the first meeting.

For some, working with a mentor built on support they had already received from their CSs. For example, young people reporting attending interview prep and practice sessions with their mentors as well as their CSs. In terms of career planning, too, mentors guided young people towards more informed career aspirations. In a very tangible example of this, one young person described receiving a job offer which they were able to discuss with their mentor, drawing on industry experience to understand if or how that role could help them move towards long-term goals.

Access to industry-specific advice from mentors appears to be a significantly impactful aspect of this relationship. Industry-specific feedback on job offers and opportunities were valued by young people, in some instances filling a gap they perceived to exist in the support they received from their CS.

[Support from my CS] was a lot more basic... I really wanted something a bit more specialised... I liked the fact that they did introduce the idea of having a mentor from an industry, that's what really helped me the most. (Participant)

I felt super happy to just be in a position where I could get someone from the industry to give me feedback (Participant)

Mentors also provided a direct connection to employment in a desired industry. In one instance a young person described being hired by their mentors, highlighting the impact of industry mentoring on positive employment outcomes.

Interestingly, while a senior staff member described the ‘massive disparity’ between the outcomes of those young people with a mentor and without a mentor, success was attributed to the self-awareness of the young person to see the value of having a mentor, rather than the support of a mentor alone.

I don't attribute that success to the fact that they've got a mentor. I attribute it to the fact that they're self-aware enough to understand that a mentor would be beneficial and why. (Senior staff member)

Counselling

Young people working with DFF were able to access 13 sessions with a counsellor. Generally, key outcomes for counselling surrounded improvements to young people’s mental health and wellbeing, by allowing them to cope with past trauma, and face current stressors. However, CSs also felt that young people with improved mental wellbeing would be better placed to find and take on work.

One young person described the toll that a difficult job search had had on their wellbeing. It was this experience that led them to seek counselling via DFF which, in turn, improved their mental health.

I was very, I think gutted with opportunities not going through and everything falling apart, so it has been good that I have had a bit of therapy and just calmed down my anxiety and just focus on the present rather than the future. (Participant)

Others sought counselling to help with existing mental health challenges, which were not directly related to their job search. Counselling for one individual had made a significant difference to their life in general.

[Counselling is] probably the difference between me having [good] mental health and having a really terrible one or feeling isolated...It made a huge difference to my life. (Participant)

Engaging with counselling, then, appears to have positively shaped wellbeing outcomes for some young people we interviewed.

However, engagement with the services and, therefore, positive long-term wellbeing outcomes, could be hindered by a young person’s existing mental health challenges. And not all young people felt that counselling had improved their mental health. One young person we interviewed described the mental health challenges they had experienced as a result of the fixed number of counselling sessions provided by DFF. They described how providing care leavers with a fixed number of sessions could be re-traumatising, as they build a

relationship with a counsellor and, before they feel entirely comfortable, that support is taken away. They suggested that DFF lengthen support available or make it possible for young people to access counselling on a more ad hoc basis, after the initial 13 sessions.

An individual's existing mental health challenges may also inhibit their ability to engage with the service to reach outcomes like improved mental wellbeing. Young people described not being able to cope with their situation and missing appointments as a result, which led to their counselling sessions being cancelled. Another individual described needing to stop work with a counsellor who didn't have the right kind of experience to support them through a particularly difficult time. This individual described the barriers they faced in starting counselling again; it was mentally draining and upsetting to explain their situation to somebody new, even if they did have appropriate experience.

Social Groups and Events

DFF organised numerous social groups and various events. These included women-only social groups, West End theatre trips and barbecues. It was generally young people who described the impacts of DFF's social groups and events. Key outcomes they appear to have facilitated include network-building and increased confidence. Again, it seems as though the network building that this intervention facilitated leaves young people feeling less isolated and alone for those that attend.

Social groups, including a women-only group, provided the opportunity for participants to meet other care experienced young people. Reduced isolation and marginalisation of CEYP was an outcome of interest for DFF. Young people describe how social groups facilitate this and, particularly, how the fun and informal nature of the groups support network building.

I find it fun because we get to meet new people. I made very good friends with one of the young people. (Participant)

Social groups and events also helped young people to increase their confidence as they provided an opportunity to learn how to interact with others in a social setting.

Going to social groups, it's helped me learn how to interact with other people and just become confident. (Participant)

Network-building was particularly significant and impactful for an individual who had migrated to the UK as an unaccompanied minor and did not have family support. They described the network that they perceived a British person would have and felt that they were missing such connections socially and in terms of their desired career in engineering.

I was struggling to form...that network around me. I think then Drive Forward [DFF] came to rescue me and...that was the most important thing somebody could have done for me, in my situation. (Participant)

As noted in the section 5.3 under Relationships between CEYP, CSs did not discuss these activities when considering the most impactful aspects of the intervention, and there were mixed views among participants. They described barriers to engagement with social events. Generally, these were related to the timing and location of events, and awareness of events.

A number of young people explained that they would attend more frequently if events took place outside of standard working hours (a number of them suggested that events clashed with their work). Others commented that they lived too far away from DFF's office, making it difficult to attend.

The limited uptake of these activities may limit DFF's ability to increase CEYP's social capital, as set out in the ToC.

In Summary

1-2-1 support sessions with CSs were generally seen as a very positive intervention by the pool of CSs and young people interviewed. Key intervention activities such as interview skills training and goal setting appear to drive outcomes most significantly. Ring-fenced opportunities with corporate partners were considered crucial by CSs and some young people, too. However, both groups raised concerns about the relevance of some of the opportunities available to young people's career aspirations, limiting access to sustainable employment.

From considering the various interventions described by CSs and young people as driving the primary and secondary outcomes for this evaluation (EET status, work readiness, social connectedness, resilience, mental wellbeing and self-efficacy) there are two key themes that appear. First, young people reported feeling less alone as a result of numerous DFF interventions, including 1-2-1 support sessions with CSs, counselling sessions and social events. This sense of support from CSs and other CEYP alike, it appears, increased young people's confidence and sense of wellbeing. Increased confidence and openness to opportunities also seems to feed into positive and sustained employment outcomes.

Second, what's clear from our discussions with a handful of DFF CSs is that meaningful engagement by young people is necessary for interventions, like 1-2-1 CS support and the availability of ringfenced opportunities, to be effective. CSs are not a 'silver bullet' and the CS-CEYP relationship is a two-way street. Similarly, if CSs are not able to offer relevant opportunities, or the right type of support at the right time, outcomes are less likely to improve.

These findings validate the updated Theory of Change: the interventions and mechanisms outlined in the ToC largely plausibly lead to the outcomes of interest. However, it should be noted that while the mechanisms *can* lead to the outcomes of interest, in reality this may not always happen due to the barriers described above. For instance, negative experiences may make a CEYP unable to engage with counselling sessions.

5. Readiness for further evaluation

Readiness for further evaluation was discussed in detail in the final feasibility report for this project, which was provided to YFF.

In summary, the feasibility report suggested that DFF has the capacity and appetite to be involved in a further phase of impact evaluation for SCLiE. In particular, the onboarding of 236 CEYP included in the evaluation demonstrates their capacity to engage CEYP in their work, and CEYP's willingness to be involved in evaluations. Additionally, the improvements to DFF's case management system made during the evaluation period will allow them to produce more consistent data going forward, which will facilitate future evaluations creating a robust engagement indicator. It is also worth noting that DFF's has been cooperative and always willing to introduce improvements in their systems for the evaluation.

Additionally, the findings from this report further support the suitability of doing an impact evaluation. The IPE findings suggest that the programme was largely delivered as intended, and that the programme theory and mechanisms of change are largely plausible. Staff and CEYP also viewed DFF as having a positive outcome on CEYP. In particular the 1-2-1 sessions between CEYP and SCs; DFF's sector connections and ringfenced opportunities; and the focus on well-being and offer or counselling were felt to lead to improved outcomes. The quantitative findings confirm that the power calculations estimated for next phase are appropriate for the intended design. Additionally, there is some non-causal evidence of promise that shows that across the several measures used to assess EET status, the share of participants EET at endline is higher than the share at baseline. This pilot has also helpfully highlighted possible referral routes, sample composition, attrition and response rates, and measurement challenges that will shape the development of a robust RCT moving forward.

Of the methods we reviewed, a non-waitlist RCT is likely to be feasible. If we were to take an RCT approach we recommend using administratively collected outcomes,⁴¹ rather than survey-based outcomes due to higher response rates, and as we would not be able to use DFF's management information for the control group. A non-waitlist RCT should be combined with a strong IPE to understand additional outcomes of interest for DFF and CEYP, and to further understand programme implementation and the programme theory.

We would propose conducting an impact evaluation mobilisation phase ahead of a full RCT, to onboard referral partners and agree the details of the approach.

⁴¹Such as those relating to employment education and training, and income/benefits in the Annual looked after children return, or Longitudinal Education Outcomes dataset (LEO)

6. Conclusion

7.1 Summary of Findings

Table 18 provides a high-level summary of our findings under each research question. Following the table we consider each research question in detail.

Table 18: Table summarising findings

| Research questions | Findings |
|--|--|
| <p>Research question 1: What is the association between engaging in SCLiE and the primary measures?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> While challenges matching pre/post surveys and problems with the quality of the management information limited our ability to assess research question 1 fully, a higher proportion of participants surveyed at the endline are in EET than when they joined SCLiE, as estimated across several baseline variables. However, due to the quality of the data it is difficult to say whether this is meaningful. |
| <p>Research question 2: What is the association between engaging in SCLiE and the secondary measures?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The subset of questions we used from the work readiness and resilience validated scales seem to appropriately capture the overall outcome in this cohort. These two scales, and the mental wellbeing scale also appear to be reliable measures for the specific cohort of CEYP. The associations between engagement with SCLiE and the secondary outcomes are largely not statistically significant. |
| <p>Research question 3: Why are the outcomes of interest improved or not improved by engagement with the programme?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> While we were not able to conclusively assess if the outcomes of interest were improved, we were able to speak to CEYP and CSs to understand the perceived impact of SCLiE. Key aspects of SCLiE that DFF and participants felt led to improved outcomes included the 1-2-1 sessions between CEYP and CSs; DFF's sector connections and ringfenced opportunities; the focus on well-being and the offer of counselling. |

| | |
|--|--|
| <p>Research question 4: To what extent was the programme delivered as intended?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The programme was delivered as intended. The organisation's belief in participant-led services which give CEYP agency translated into practice, leading to a flexibly delivered service. • The five broad phases described in the participant journey were present in the delivery in practice. These were: referral to DFF; initial assessment and relationship building with a CS; continued communication with CS; engagement with different activities, events and opportunities according to the participant's needs; and finishing the programme. |
| <p>Research question 5: how are relationships built and supported by the programme?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is clear that leadership staff, CSs and participants value relationship building and invest time and resources into developing connections. • The relationship between CEYP and CSs in particular is prioritised. • DFF has a positive reputation and strong relationships with referrers, external partners, and other delivery services, contributing to the effectiveness of SCLiE. |
| <p>Research question 6: How are staff involved in the programme trained and does this help them work effectively with applicants?</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A wide range of training is available for CSs, intended to ensure they can support the needs of the CEYP they work with. While there were some areas for improvement, on the whole, staff felt they received the training they needed to effectively support CEYP. |

Below, we consider each research question in more detail.

Research Question 1: What is the association between engaging in DFF's support programme and the rate of being in employment, education and/or training among participants?

- There were several challenges during the pilot evaluation which limited our ability to fully assess RQ1. There were difficulties with matching baseline and endline surveys to DFF's records, and DFF's work to migrate to an improved case management system had impacts on the quality and consistency of the management information (both of these challenges have been addressed in our suggested design for a full impact evaluation).
- However, there were signs of promise. Across all the several measures used for EET status, the share of EET CEYP has been consistently higher at endline than when they joined SCLiE. This should be treated with caution, as there are several possible sources of bias, which means it is difficult to assess how meaningful this finding is. Evidence from

the IPE suggests that the finding that the programme theory is feasible, there is potential for SCLiE to achieve improved outcomes for CEYP, and SCLiE is ready for a robust impact evaluation.

Research Question 2: What is the association between engaging in DFF's support and participants' work readiness, social connectedness, self-efficacy, resilience, and mental wellbeing?

- The associations between engagement with SCLiE and the secondary outcomes are largely not statistically significant. Findings from the IPE suggest the mechanisms that would lead to change on these secondary outcomes of interest were plausible, however we are not able in this evaluation to assess quantitatively whether SCLiE impacts on the secondary outcomes.
- The work readiness, resilience and mental wellbeing outcomes appear to be functioning well with this cohort. They are validated scales but have not yet been validated as extensively with this cohort. This suggests they may be appropriate to use in further evaluations with this cohort.

Research Question 3: Why are the outcomes of interest improved, or not improved, by engagement with the programme?

- 1-2-1 sessions with CSs were viewed as important, providing interview skills and application support, helping young people set employment and personal goals setting and build confidence. CEYP reported feeling supported and less alone through sessions with CSs.
- DFF's sector connections and ringfenced employment opportunities were seen as a crucial mechanism, although in some instances these did not feel relevant to the goals of the CEYP. Related to this, 'industry' mentors were felt to be effective primarily due to their proximity to the industry in which the young person wants to work.
- The counselling support DFF could refer CEYP to was seen as an important mechanism for improving well-being and therefore making them better placed to find and take on work. However, there were barriers to CEYPs' well-being improving because of counselling, including the nature of their challenges, or their readiness for support.
- While some CEYP described relationship and network building events organised by DFF positively, there did not appear to be a high take up of these activities among participants. This could limit the programme's ability to help CEYP build strong networks and support systems. Addressing some issues with CEYPs' access to the events may address this issue.
- Across the different aspects of the intervention that were described as driving changes in the outcomes of interest, two key themes emerge.
- Firstly, CEYP reported feeling less alone as a result of numerous DFF interventions. This was described as increasing their confidence and sense of wellbeing.

- Secondly, all of these mechanisms required meaningful engagement from the participants to be effective in changing outcomes. Sometimes CEYP either did not want to or were not able to engage. For instance, mental health challenges, low confidence and trauma can make it difficult for CEYP to engage.

Research Question 4: To what extent was the programme delivered as intended and where do variations of the planned implementation occur?

- The programme was delivered as intended. This is in part due to the nature of the programme, which was very flexible and participant-led. In this context, there was not a standard participant journey that everyone on the SCLiE intervention received. However, the five broad phases described in the participant journey were present in the delivery in practice, as were the range of services outlined in the ToC. Crucially, the organisation's belief in participant-led services which give CEYP agency translated into practice.
- While small updates were made to the version of the ToC created at the beginning of the research (such as the addition of mechanisms, and some links), the programme was largely delivered as set out in the ToC.

Research Question 5: How are relationships built and supported by the programme?

- Strong relationships between staff and clients, and staff and other stakeholders, were central to DFF's operational effectiveness. It is clear that CSs, participants and leadership staff valued relationship building and invested time and resources into developing connections that allowed them to support CEYP
- The relationship between CSs and participants was prioritised. CEYPs' needs and wishes were a focus throughout the time an individual worked with the programme. The sense of agency this created, as well as regular communication, consistent support, and the provision of a range of opportunities helped to build a relationship of trust between CEYP and CSs. The training provided to CSs, discussed below, also supported them in building these relationships.
- Relationship and network building between CEYP was addressed by providing a range of activities and events. While there may be a small enthusiastic minority who took advantage of these, CSs and participants did not describe it as a highly important aspect of the intervention.
- DFF has a positive reputation and strong relationships with local authorities. CSs worked proactively to cultivate these relationships to maintain the flow of referrals. They also maintained relationships with personal advisers throughout the time they work with DFF.
- Parts of DFF's service relied on external partnerships. DFF is a known and trusted partner for organisations. Effort was put into finding organisations that will work well for the CEYP, finding individuals and organisations that are passionate about CEYP's employment, and ensuring young people who are referred to external partners can benefit from the opportunity and benefit the company in return. However, sometimes

these partnerships were hindered by the partner being unable or unwilling to commit time and energy to supporting CEYP, internal red tape, or not having a genuine interest in supporting CEYP.

Research question 6: How are CSs, mentors, counsellors and other adults involved in the programme trained and supported, and does this training and support help them to work more effectively with applicants?

- A wide range of training was available for CSs, including mandatory mental health training; training on supporting young people with neuro-diverse or special educational needs; trauma-informed practice training; safeguarding training and training on the governmental systems CEYP experience (e.g. the care system, immigration etc). There was also scope for CSs to shape the training they receive. Training was seen as relevant and important for the work they do.
- Support was also available to CSs, including mental health counselling and supervision with a specialist external provider every 5 weeks. Line management relationships were also described positively, as a place CSs could find support when facing difficulties.

7.2 Limitations

During the evaluation period, in discussion with King's and YFF, DFF worked to introduce a new case management database. One of the reasons for implementing the new system was that it will produce more reliable and consistent data going forward. This will contribute positively to any future evaluation work on SCLiE.

However, for the pilot evaluation, the transition to a new system caused some data consistency issues and data gaps. In particular, it produced challenges in matching cases and identifying which participants had worked with DFF during the evaluation phase. This reduced the sample size we could use for parts of the analysis, as well as the robustness of the results. This means that the findings on outcomes need to be interpreted cautiously.

The results presented are suggestive associations and cannot be interpreted as causal evidence of the programme's impact.

In relation to the qualitative data, recruiting CEYP to take part in the qualitative aspects of the evaluation proved challenging. This is not surprising given the challenges this cohort is facing, as described in the Section 2. However, it is likely that those who agreed to take part in a qualitative interview were more engaged with the intervention than those who did not. Given this, the results from these CEYP should not necessarily be taken to represent the views of all service users.

7.3 Future research and publications

- Prior to this report, an evaluation plan, and feasibility study report were provided to YFF. These have not been publicly published. The evaluation plan can be found in Appendices
- Appendix A: Evaluation Plan.

- Given the positive findings of this pilot evaluation, we would recommend the intervention moves to a full impact evaluation, with a mobilisation phase in the first instance to test the approach for an RCT.
- From the pilot phase there are also some reflections on carrying out future research that can apply more broadly:
- Carrying out research with CEYP during the pilot highlighted the limits to attempting to engage this cohort via contact directly from a research team, even using more light touch methods such as the pulse surveys. As discussed in the methodology section, this may be due to the cohort's negative experiences of interacting with professionals. Alternative approaches such as working with peer researchers may be more effective as they are supported by interactions between CEYP, rather than solely with the research team.
- Updating and embedding data collection approaches at a delivery organisation to support an evaluation needs a realistic timeline to be successful, and the buy-in of delivery organisation staff (as there was in this case) to support the culture change necessary.

8. Appendices

8.1 Appendix A: Evaluation Plan

8.2 Appendix B: Repeated survey with Participants

Drive Forward Foundation Repeated Survey

Start of Block: Introduction

Introduction to the survey for Employment Consultants

Welcome to the start-of-programme survey for young people participating in the Drive Forward Foundation's Supporting Care Leavers programme.

The Youth Futures Foundation (YFF) is working with the Drive Forward Foundation (DFF) to understand the way the programme works to support care leavers, and how it may influence their outlook and ability to achieve their goals and aspirations.

YFF has asked King's College London to conduct this evaluation. As part of our work to understand the way that young people experience the programme and how it may influence their outcomes, we are asking Employment Consultants to work with the young people to complete a start-of-programme survey. This will help us get a picture of where young people are starting from in their journey with DFF.

This survey should be completed by you as the young person's Employment Consultant, working through each question and recording the young person's response. Please try to stick to the question wording as given but do use your judgement in how and when to present the questions. There are three sections to the survey. You can choose to break up the survey by delivering the sections at different times. However, you should ask all the questions in one section at one time.

We have provided guidance text for you in italics throughout the survey. For each question, we will give you the wording of the question, then, if necessary some guidance on how to respond if the young person asks for clarification on the question. This prompt text will be in italics under the question text; e.g. the below:

“On a scale from one to five, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree, how much to you agree with the following statement? I get in touch with experts and get as much information as I can before making decisions about my education/employment.

Prompt: An expert might be someone like a careers advisor, a careers website, or anyone you trust and who you think can help you to learn about employment or study options.”

Young people can skip any question they don't want to answer, without having to give a reason. If a young person declines to answer a particular question, please select the 'No Response' option. The 'Don't know' option is for when a young person is unsure which of the answer options to choose.

We also want to understand what the experience of answering the questions is like for young people and whether there are any questions they particularly struggled with or disliked answering, so we will ask you to provide some information at the end to help us improve the questions before we do the end-of-programme survey.

End of Block: Introduction

Introduction to the survey for young people

Please read out the following to the young person before commencing the survey. You can rephrase the below as appropriate for the young person, but please make sure that you cover the key points.

The Drive Forward Foundation is working with the Youth Futures Foundation* and King's College London** to understand how this programme works and whether it helps you achieve your goals and aspirations. Your feedback will help us to tailor our support to you and will also help to improve the programme for other people we work with.

In order to understand how the programme has helped you, we need to understand how you are feeling right now about your skills and strengths. I am going to go through a survey with you, which should take about **ten** minutes to complete.

Some of the questions may seem a bit strange or repetitive, so just let me know if you don't understand anything. You don't have to answer any question that you don't want to, and if you don't want to finish the survey, just say so and we'll stop immediately. You don't have to give me a reason.

As we talk, I'll record your answers on our online system, and they will be shared with KCL later. All your responses will be kept anonymous, and the data that KCL and DFF collect will be kept private and secure. You can choose to stop taking part at any point. You've also been emailed an information sheet which has lots more details about the project. So if you would like to know more about how your information is being used by KCL and DFF, please have a look at that email.

* Youth Futures Foundation are an organisation that want to understand what works to support disadvantaged young people into good jobs.

** King's College London is a UK university. The team working on this project aim to solve society's challenges with evidence.

Please select the below if the young person is happy to proceed

I have read out the above information and the young person is happy to proceed with the survey

End of Block: Introduction

SECTION 1: Life and work skills

Start of Block: Life and work skills intro

The first set of questions relates to young people's life skills development; for example their ability to make plans and act on them, figure out how to solve problems, and seek appropriate advice and support. This section has 10 items.

I would like to ask you a bit about how you go about making big decisions in your life. For each of the following statements, can you please tell me on a scale of one to five, where 1 is strongly disagree and 5 is strongly agree, how much you agree with each statement?

End of Block: Life and work skills intro

Start of Block: Life and work skills questions

1. "I get in touch with experts and get as much information as I can before making decisions about my education/employment."

Prompt: An expert might be someone like a careers advisor, a careers website, or anyone you trust and who you think can help you to learn about employment or study options.

- Strongly disagree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Strongly agree
 - Don't know
 - No Response
2. "I know people who work in areas I am interested in."
 - Strongly disagree
 - Somewhat disagree
 - Neither agree nor disagree
 - Somewhat agree
 - Strongly agree
 - Don't know
 - No Response
 3. "When it is time to make an important job or education decision, I am able to think clearly and make a decision I am happy with."

Prompt: Important decisions could include whether or not to accept a job offer, apply for work in a new area, or whether to go to college or university.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know

No Response

4. "When it comes to solving a problem, I think about the different parts of the problem before deciding what to do."

Prompt: Parts of a problem could include what caused a problem, who is affected by it, what the different outcomes of different solutions are and so on.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- No Response

5. "I know which talents to work on that will help me in the future."

Prompt: Talents can be anything you think you're good at and enjoy doing, including skills like understanding numbers, working with software, getting on well with other people, or being confident when speaking in front of others.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- No Response

6. "I use information I get to help me think about several different ways to solve a problem."

Prompt: Information you might use to solve a problem could come from trustworthy

people you know, online research, your own assessment of a situation, or from other sources.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- No Response

7. "I know where to look for job vacancies that I am interested in."

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- No Response

8. "I have the skills I need to advance my career."

Prompt: Skills for your career could include technology based skills, presentation skills, analysis skills, writing skills, and so on.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- No Response

9. "I am optimistic about being hired in the future."

Prompt: If you already have a job, think about how optimistic you would feel finding a new job.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree

- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- No Response

10. "I know how to use the digital tools and software that are necessary for me to do well in my job."

Prompt: This could include using writing software to create professional documents, creative software to create pictures, videos or animations, or presentation software to plan talks or share information.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- No Response

11. Please use the following text box to record any thoughts or feedback the young person or you have on answering those questions. Please make it clear if the comments are yours or the young person's [Text box]

SECTION 2: Wellbeing & Social Connectedness

This section is made up of two parts: four questions on social connectedness, and seven questions on wellbeing (11 in total).

Start of Block: Social Connectedness intro

We'd now like to ask a little bit about the young person's sense of social connectedness and how they relate to the world. There are 4 questions on this

I'd now like to ask you a bit about how you feel about the people around you.

End of Block: Social Connectedness intro

Start of Block: Social block

In this section, a young person might ask about the timeframe the question is referring too.

Prompt: "Think about how you've been feeling recently."

If they still want a more concrete timeframe, tell the young person that it is up to their interpretation.

12. I feel disconnected from the world around me.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- No Response

13. Even around people I know, I don't feel that I really belong.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- No Response

14. I feel valued by people I am close to.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- No Response

15. I feel comfortable when I am with my friends.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree

- Don't know
- No Response

End of Block: Social block

Start of Block: SWEMWS intro

In this section, a young person might ask about the timeframe the question is referring too.

Prompt: "Think about how you've been feeling recently."

If they still want a more concrete timeframe, tell the young person that it is up to their interpretation.

We would now like to ask some questions to understand the young person's sense of wellbeing. This section has 7 questions.

I'm now going to ask you some questions about how you've been feeling recently.

End of Block: SWEMWS intro

Start of Block: Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale

16. I've been feeling optimistic about the future.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- No Response

17. I've been feeling useful.

Prompt: think about if you feel like you make a difference at home or work/college.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- No Response

18. I've been feeling relaxed.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- No Response

19. I've been dealing with problems well.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- No Response

20. I've been thinking clearly.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- No Response

21. I've been feeling close to other people.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- No Response

22. I've been able to make up my own mind about things.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- No Response

23. Please use the following text box to record any thoughts or feedback the young person or you have on answering those questions. Please make it clear if the comments are yours or the young person's [Text box]

End of Block: Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale

SECTION 2: Self-efficacy

Start of Block: GSES intro

We would now like you to ask the young person some questions about self-efficacy. There are 7 questions in this block

I'm now going to ask you about how you deal with everyday situations.

End of Block: GSES intro

Start of Block: General Self Efficacy Scale

24. 14. It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish goals.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- No Response

25. I can solve most problems if I put in the required effort.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree

- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- No Response

26. I can usually handle whatever comes my way.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- No Response

27. I feel proud that I have accomplished things in life.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- No Response

28. I am determined.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- No Response

29. I have self-discipline.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree

- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- No Response

30. My belief in myself gets me through hard times.

- Strongly disagree
- Somewhat disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Somewhat agree
- Strongly agree
- Don't know
- No Response

31. Please use the following text box to record any thoughts or feedback the young person or you have on answering those questions. Please make it clear if the comments are yours or the young person's [Text box]

End of Block: General Self Efficacy Scale

Start of Block: Feedback

Thank you for answering those questions, that's the end of the survey

Thank you, this brings us to the end of the survey. If you have any further feedback you would like to share with us about administering the survey, you can do so below. Alternatively, if you have more detailed feedback to share, please email us at edit@kcl.ac.uk.

End of Block: Feedback

8.3 Appendix C: Participant interview topic guide

Below is the topic guide for the participant hybrid interviews. This combined the topics for the first and second interviews, so provides a broad overview of the questions asked during the participant interviews.

Participant Interviews: Hybrid Topic Guide

Evaluation of the Drive Forward Foundation's Supporting Care Leavers into Employment Programme

Aims of the interview

The aims of the participant tracking interviews are to understand:

- the mechanisms of change in the intervention that will lead to improvement in the outcomes of interest,
- the relationship between the young people and DFF staff, which is a crucial aspect of the theory of change for the programme,
- the fidelity of programme delivery,
- and barriers and facilitators that support or inhibit how participants interact with the service.

In this **interview**, we are aiming:

- to establish the participants' perceptions of their referral and initial contact with DFF's service;
- to understand their goals for engaging with the service;
- to understand how the participant engaged with the service;
- to explore how the relationship between the young person and their employment consultant has developed, and the role this has played in their engagement with the service;
- to explore perceived barriers and facilitators to engagement with DFF;
- to understand what opportunities the participant took part in, and their motivations behind this;
- to understand what participants have gained from engaging with the service, and whether this was what they hoped for or expected;

Across all these points we want to understand the barriers and facilitators to these processes as perceived by the young people.

The interview should last roughly 30-45 minutes.

| Topic | Content |
|-------------------|--|
| Intro | <p>My name is [NAME] and I work at King's College London as a researcher. We are working with Drive Forward Foundation to understand how the support programme you are on is working and how it can be better. We would like to understand whether the Drive Forward Foundation helps young people, like yourself, to better engage with educational or employment opportunities and to develop personal skills. We're going to ask questions about your experiences working with the DFF and elements of their support that you find to be particularly useful or not. Some of the questions may seem a bit strange but it would be great if you can try to answer them.</p> <p>The information you give us will be used to help us understand the programme, and to write a report about it which will help the Drive Forward Foundation improve their service for young people like you. However, your response will be kept anonymous. This means your name will not be used in the report and no one will be able to work out what you said from the report, or that you participated.</p> <p>It is completely up to you whether you want to be interviewed. You can stop or pause the interview at any time and you do not have to answer any questions you don't want to. There are no right or wrong answers – we just want to hear your thoughts. At the end of each interview, we will ask you if you're happy for us to use the information you've shared.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Confirm with participant that recordings are okay so we have an accurate record of what they said. These will be transcribed afterwards. The recording and transcript will be deleted when the project is completed. Check they are okay with audio recording of interview. ● Turn on recorded & check they consent to go forward ● Thank for taking the time to talk. ● Reaffirm anonymity and that there is no right or wrong answer and we'd like them to be as open and honest as possible. |
| Referral (5 mins) | Rationale: to understand how the YP was referred, and their experience of the referral process. |

| | |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How they came to be working with DFF <p>Prompt sensitively for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specific organisation/individual referred by <p>Knowledge of reason for referral</p> <p>Interviewer note: they may not know this</p> <p><i>Prompt sensitively for:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficulties/barriers with employment/skills gaps • Issues around focus/motivation • Positive/negative feelings around (reasons for) referral <p>Their decision to work with DFF/take part in the programme</p> <p>-> Reflections on reasons for engagement with DFF</p> <p>-> Positive/negative feelings around engagement</p> |
| <p>Goals of engagement (5 mins)</p> | <p>Rationale: to understand what YP hopes to gain from working with DFF</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Goals for end of engagement with DFF <p>Prompt for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • goals around employment • Short/medium term goals <p>Prompt for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • skills/experience • soft skills e.g. resilience, work skills, confidence etc. • Perceptions of DFF’s ability to facilitate these goals <p>-> Perception of DFF’s responsibility to facilitate these goals</p> <p>- who else is responsible?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential barriers/facilitators to these goals being met |
| <p>Initial interactions (5 mins)</p> | <p>Rationale: to understand what happened in the YP’s initial meetings with the EC, and the YP’s view about them</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial assessment/meetings with Employment Consultant (EC) <p>Prompt for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did the EC Communicate before/after the meeting |

| | |
|---|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● What happened in initial assessment/meetings Was this as expected? ● Agency of YP in process Role of EC in process Were these elements as expected? Positive/negative feelings about process ● Satisfaction with initial focus of meetings |
| <p>Relationship with EC (5-10 mins)</p> | <p>Rationale: to understand how YP & EC work together, the relationship between them, and how this is developing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ways of working with EC in support sessions <p>Prompt for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Frequency of meetings ● Mode/ ease of communication ● Focus of meeting ● Agency (who leads) ● Trust ● Significance of relationship ● EC's impact on decision making ● What do you think about the way you work with them? <p>Prompt for:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Satisfaction with current relationship ● How supported they feel ● The ability/capacity of ECs to provide suitable opportunities for them ● The most important/most valued aspect of the relationship ● Changes that could improve relationship ● Worked with any other staff at DFF? ● How have they been involved with them ● How came about ● Reasons for working with them |

| | |
|---|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What liked/didn't like |
| <p>Experience of activities (5-10 mins)</p> | <p>Rationale: to understand how the YP has engaged with the service, activities involved in and their motivations attached to engaging</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How worked with DFF? (other than working with EC) <p>Prompt to understand specific activities completed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshops • Events • Interview/CV writing prep • Activities with other CEYP working on the programme <p>For each activity mentioned probe on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What activity involved • Frequency of engagement • How this changed throughout the duration of their work with DFF • How came to be involved • Agency of YP • Role of EC • Reason for engaging/what hoped to achieve • Feelings about the activity engaged with • What worked/didn't • Barriers/facilitators to engaging <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overall how satisfied with the aspects of the service you've engaged with? • Have these activities met needs? • Anything missing? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why have you not engaged with other elements of the service [if not done any activities]/any elements you decided not to engage with? <p>Prompt to explore cause:</p> |

| | |
|---|---|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lack of knowledge ● Lack of interest ● Lack of EC support |
| <p>Reflections on engagement (5 mins)</p> | <p>Rationale: to understand perceived impact of the programme from YP point of view</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Can you describe how working with DFF has impacted you? <p>Or ask: ‘where do you think you would be in your life now if you hadn’t worked with DFF’</p> <p>Prompt to explore:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Developing workplace skills ● EET outcomes ● Social/emotional/ attitude changes [confidence, happier in their own skin etc – has it changed how you think about yourself] ● Attitude/outlook Which aspects of working with Drive Forward has led to these changes? <p>Prompt on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Work with EC ● Specific activities |
| <p>Hopes and aspirations (5 mins)</p> | <p>Rationale: to get a sense of YP’s long term goals, and also to leave them in a positive, forward thinking place if any of the conversation was difficult</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● In a year’s time, what skill(s) would you like to have improved? <i>Prompt for:</i> ● Employment related skills ● Hobby related skills ● Education related skills ● In five years, what would you like to be doing? <p>Probe sensitively around jobs</p> |
| <p>End</p> | <p>Thanks, and any last comments</p> |

| | |
|--|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is there anything else you'd like to add or anything you feel we haven't covered in this session? (turn off audio recording)• Check happy with everything shared during interview <p>****</p> <p>Thank you for taking the time to speak to us, we really appreciate your contribution. A Love2Shop voucher code will be emailed to you (double check best email address).</p> <p>Discuss being involved in observations</p> |
|--|--|

8.4 Appendix D: Data protection information

Participant information sheet for taking part in the evaluation

Participant information sheet about the SCLiE Evaluation

The Drive Forward Foundation (DFF) is running the 'Supporting Care Leavers into employment' (SCLiE) programme, and you have been invited to take part. If you do take part in the programme, you will also be involved in a service evaluation of the programme. The evaluation is being carried out by the Policy Institute at King's College London and has been funded by the Youth Futures Foundation.

What is the purpose of this evaluation?

We want to understand if SCLiE helps young people, like you, to better engage with educational or employment opportunities and to develop personal skills, such as self-efficacy, social skills, mental wellbeing and community engagement.

What will happen if I take part?

If you take part in the SCLiE programme you will also be part of the evaluation of the programme. To test if the program helps young people, we will be keeping track of several pieces of data (information) about you during the programme. This data will be:

- Unique Participant Number, which is a unique number DFF uses to identify you.
- Your gender
- Your current postcode
- Your ethnicity
- Your housing status
- Your country of birth
- The type of referral into the programme (e.g. self-referral, referral via your local authority, referral via your school or university, etc.)
- The programmes you've participated in with Drive Forward (e.g., counselling CV workshops, mock interviews, industry insight events, mentoring matches, etc.)
- The intensity of your participation on the programme (e.g. the number of contact points between DFF and you)

You won't have to do anything for us to get this data, as it is collected and stored by the Drive Forward Foundation.

We will also ask you to:

- complete **two short surveys** about things such as your professional aspirations, your mental wellbeing, and your social networks. The surveys will be completed at the start and end of the programme with your employment consultant or a researcher. Your responses will also be stored by DFF.

- answer **2-3 short questions** about your experience of the programme. We will text questions to you six times over your time working the DFF.

DFF will provide us with your phone number and email address so we can invite you to take part in these surveys (you do not have to take part if you don't want to). We may also invite you to take part in some interviews, or observations.

You don't have to answer any questions you don't want to, and you can decide not to take part in a survey or interview at any time. Not taking part in a survey or interview will not affect your involvement in the SCLiE programme.

What if I don't want to take part in the evaluation?

If you decide to take part in the SCLiE programme your data will be used as part of the service evaluation of the programme. If you do not want to be part of the programme and evaluation, please get in touch with your employment consultant at the Drive Forward Foundation. They will be able to tell you what happens next, and will let us know that you are no longer taking part.

What will happen to the results of the evaluation?

Once we've collected all the data we've mentioned, we will study it and write a report on whether SCLiE has a positive impact on young people. We will not present any results in a way that could identify you. The report will be published on the Youth Future Foundation's website and may be used in other publications.

Data handling and confidentiality

In doing this project we must follow the UK GDPR/Data Protection Act 2018, which is the law that says how personal data can be used in England. Your data will be processed in accordance with Article 6(1) (e) and Article 9(2)(j) of UK GDPR. UK GDPR states we must have a good reason (legal basis) for handling data – in this case, the legal basis for processing your personally identifiable data for research purposes, under UK GDPR, is a 'task in the public interest', and the condition for processing special category data is 'archiving, research and statistics'.

Your responses will be confidential. However, if something you say tells us that you or someone else may be in danger or at risk of harm, we may need to call emergency services or report back to DFF to ensure your safety. The information you and DFF give us will be held securely on a King's College London server. Only staff working directly on the project will be able to access it. Your name and contact details will be kept separately from your survey and interview responses.

We may share the information you give us with a transcription service, or with DFF if it is necessary to ensure your safety. A Data Sharing Agreement (an agreement about how your data will be used and shared) will be in place before we share any information about you, and data will be transferred securely via secure file transfer.

Your data will be securely shared with the project funders, Youth Futures Foundation (YFF), to be held in a data depository for the purposes of evaluation and research to help young people. To fulfil these purposes the data may also be shared with other organisations who manage the depository, evaluate outcomes or conduct further research that is associated with YFF's vision and values. YFF will process your data in accordance with data protection law which includes keeping it secure and only using it where there is a fair and lawful basis to do so. For more information, please see YFF's privacy policy.

If you withdraw from the evaluation you can withdraw your data up until 31 July 2023, when we will remove your name and contact details from our records. After this point the remaining data we hold on you won't be able to be withdrawn, as it will have been combined with other data and analysed. The evaluation will end on 31 December 2023. After this all data we hold on you will be pseudonymised (meaning we will delete all direct identifiers such as your name, contact details, date of birth and postcode) and archived at the Youths Future Foundation's data repository, held in YFF's SharePoint.

Data Protection Statement

If you would like more information about how your data will be processed in accordance with UK GDPR/Data Protection Act 2018 please visit the links below for King's, and DFF's approach to data usage:

King's College London:

<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/support/research-ethics/kings-college-london-statement-on-use-of-personal-data-in-research>

Drive Forward Foundation:

<https://driveforwardfoundation.org/privacy/>

Who should I contact for further information?

If you have any questions or require more information about this evaluation, please contact Susannah Hume using the following contact details:

Email: edit@kcl.ac.uk

Address: The Policy Institute, King's College London, Virginia Woolf Building, 22 Kingsway, London, WC2B 6LE

Privacy notice for the study

DFF's privacy notice can be found here:

<https://driveforwardfoundation.org/privacy/>

King's privacy notice can be found here:

<https://www.kcl.ac.uk/research/research-environment/rgei/research-ethics/use-of-personal-data-in-research>

8.5 Appendix E: EET status baseline proxy description

In this appendix, we summarise the reasoning behind choosing the variable 'EET baseline proxy' used in the quantitative analysis.

From DFF's management information, we extracted four variables that contained references to participants EET status. The variables were: 'Employment Status', 'EET details', 'NEET details', and 'EET status' a simplified binary variable constructed from 'EET details'.

However, it was not clear which variable represented the status at baseline. As per conversations with the DFF team, we became aware that it was possible that CSs have updated such variables when working with the participants. This also became evident when cross-referencing the variables, since they pointed towards different shares of NEET CEYP in the sample.

We therefore followed these considerations when choosing which variable to use as proxy for the baseline. During the feasibility conversations, DFF estimated that 80% of the population they work with were NEET. In that sense and considering that SCLiE is a programme aimed at moving CEYP into employment, and hence we would expect NEET rates to diminish across time, we decided to choose the variable with the highest share of NEET people as baseline. This variable was 'EET Status'. We also excluded NEET details as this variable captured NEET duration and was likely updated along the participants' journey. We nevertheless included it as a descriptive in the analysis. We excluded EET details, as we wanted a binary variable. We therefore used EET status as the best proxy of participants starting point in the programme.