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Department
for Education

Bristol City Council

Staying Close Pilot

Evaluation report

June 2020

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Young person-friendly summary

What is Staying Close and does it work?

Staying Close is a new project, which seeks to improve the lives of young people when they're moving out of children's homes and don't have the support they need. This can include providing support in areas like independent living, education, jobs and training, stability, safety, health and wellbeing, and having enough money and using it well. To understand if Staying Close is helpful, we interviewed staff and young people about their feelings towards Staying Close, speaking to them three times each over a two-year period.

What we found in interviews

How does Staying Close support young people?

Staying Close wants to make the support regular and long-lasting, and reduce feelings of loneliness. This way of giving support is new, and young people have helped to decide the type (face-to-face or over the phone) of support, and how often they get it. Staying Close can help young people with education, jobs, and training.

What do young people want from Staying Close?

Although support with education and jobs/training is important, it's also important that young people have someone to talk to when they're unhappy. One young person, explained that when she became pregnant, she had to move away from her carers and struggled to cope. But a Staying Close worker could support her as often as needed, whilst slowly reducing this contact over time.

Relationships with Staying Close workers

As young people see Staying Close workers more often, other staff who they don't see often like social workers and housing officers can be a stranger to the young person. Young people may find it hard to talk to them, and so Staying Close workers can be the main person young people have to contact.

Success and challenges of Staying Close

Evidence from this evaluation suggests that Staying Close in Bristol has been successful because it provides an accommodation offer and housing pathway that helps young people to experience a gradual journey to independence. Although the young person's former key worker can utilise their knowledge of the young person to assess, plan, implement and review services, better training programmes could extend to consider the approaches that are needed to support care leavers too.

Main points and the future

Staying Close seems to help young people start, improve and keep relationships, find safe housing, and get into education, jobs and training. Young people are able to say what they are comfortable with, what they want more support with, and changes they want made.

Key messages

Staying Close is intended to address the 'cliff edge' of support that is faced by young people leaving children's homes. Although the 2017 Children and Social Work Act requires local authorities to provide advice and support to all care leavers until the age of 25, aspects of financial, housing and practical support remain discretionary. For young people leaving the care of a children's home, this means that there can be substantial variability in provision of support.

For many young people, the experience of leaving a children's home can be marked by loss. Confronted with a complex process of legally becoming an adult, young people also have to accept the loss of their key worker. This worker, depending on individual circumstance, could be one of the closest people to the young person.

In line with the duty to provide some consistency in a time that is defined by loss, this report shows that Staying Close in Bristol is able to facilitate the opportunity for care leavers to access ongoing and flexible support, dependent on assessed need, from their former key worker. Young people in Bristol have explained that Staying Close can help to fence off the 'cliff edge' associated with the experience of leaving care and provide a 'safety net' that can catch those who find themselves at risk of falling into crisis by maintaining relationships that reflect genuine concern, availability, and consistency.

Evidence from this evaluation suggests that Staying Close in Bristol has been successful because it provides an accommodation offer and housing pathway that facilitates opportunities for young people to experience a gradual journey to independence. However, the key workers explained that they are not formally trained to support the specific emotional, psychological, social, or practical needs of care leavers. Although the young person's former key worker can utilise their knowledge of the young person to assess, plan, implement and review services, amendments to mandatory training programmes could extend to consider the specific, effective, and integrated approaches that are needed to support care leavers too.

Evidence presented in this report suggests that the addition of the Staying Close worker within existing formal leaving care services means that the purpose and function of the role are not always understood by the young person or the range of professionals supporting the leaving care transition. The development of Staying Close provides an opportunity for future research and co-produced policies that could better guide the integration of Staying Close within the social care, health, education, and housing workforce.

Executive summary

Introduction

Staying Close is intended to address the 'cliff edge' of support that is faced by young people leaving children's homes. Although the 2017 Children and Social Work Act requires local authorities to provide advice and support to all care leavers until the age of 25, aspects of financial, housing and practical support remain discretionary. As a result, Heerde et al (2018) conclude that for young people leaving the care of a children's home, there can be substantial variability in the provision of support. For many young people, the experience of leaving care can be marked by loss (Quinn et al, 2017). Confronted with a complex process of legally becoming an adult, young people also have to accept the loss of their key worker. As shown by Narey (2016), this worker, depending on individual circumstance, could be one of the closest people to the young person.

Staying Close is a pilot programme being funded under the Department for Education's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme (Innovation Programme hereafter) that aims to radically improve outcomes for young people transitioning to independent living. It is intended to address challenges faced by young people leaving children's homes by improving and extending the support provided by local authorities during the transition to independent adulthood.

In this report, we consider the progress and findings from an evaluation of the Staying Close pilot in Bristol. We evaluate the Bristol scheme, its implementation, the experiences and expectations of staff, stakeholders, and the young people who access or accessed the service. The outcomes achieved by young people accessing Staying Close and the contribution that Staying Close makes to those outcomes, as well as the costs and benefits of Staying Close, are also reported.

The project

Staying Close in Bristol is part of the council's young people housing and independence pathway (Bristol City Council, 2017). The pathway is focused on preventing housing crises and homelessness; it makes linkages between a number of the council's strategies and their application to young people leaving care and young people more generally, and includes proposals for establishing a youth housing hub, improvements to supported accommodation and floating support, new assessment processes, and improvements to longer-term accommodation options.

Co-production is a core part of the housing and independence pathway. The Bristol Staying Close offer is targeted at young people leaving children's homes, and individuals who have already left a children's home who would benefit from additional support. The

Bristol offer includes accommodation, accommodation support, and social and emotional support elements.

The evaluation

This is the second and final report of an independent evaluation of the Bristol Staying Close pilot. The evaluation was a mixed-method, theory-based examination of the implementation of Staying Close in the city (implementation or process evaluation), the experiences of young people accessing Staying Close services, and the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness (outcome evaluation). The evaluation used a number of different data collection methods and engaged with a range of staff members. It examined the distance travelled in a range of outcome areas by young people accessing Staying Close in Bristol, and assessed whether Staying Close could and did make a contribution to the outcomes observed. It also considered the cost and benefits of the scheme. The implementation evaluation took place over three points: scoping, mid-point, and final phase, over the period from April 2018 to March 2020.

Key findings

The evidence presented in this report has been drawn from interviews with stakeholders, responses to the online staff surveys, peer interviews with young people, discussions with young people, responses to the young person's survey and documentary analysis of meeting notes and descriptive data provided by the project.

There is evidence to support the conclusion that Staying Close in Bristol has been successful in developing a team of staff to support young people transitioning from care. Through the Staying Close framework, staff have been able to formalise an approach to leaving care support using the underlying principles of interdependence and relationship-based practices that encourage secure, long-term social networks. Staying Close is well regarded by staff, stakeholders, and young people accessing Staying Close support.

There is evidence that Staying Close in Bristol can facilitate opportunities for young people to experience a gradual, not instantaneous, journey to independence. In contrast to the traditional models of support, the Staying Close pilot in Bristol facilitates the opportunity for care leavers to access ongoing and flexible support, dependent on assessed need, through relationships with former carers that reflect genuine concern, availability, and consistency. It is this focus that enables Staying Close in Bristol to work with the young person and other professionals to fence off the 'cliff edge' that is so often associated with the experience of leaving care, but also provide a 'safety net' to catch those young people who find themselves at risk of falling into crisis.

It appears that the pilot is making a contribution to positive education, employment and training outcomes, and could make a contribution to positive accommodation outcomes. In other areas, it has not been possible to measure the distance travelled by young people as they access Staying Close in the borough, or to assess whether Staying Close may have contributed to this positive change.

For cost analysis, there is no obvious counterfactual we may employ in the case of the Bristol Staying Close Pilot and no data on which to measure impact. The analysis undertaken suggests that the intervention could break even (that is to say, that the economic benefits estimated might at least be equal to the exchequer costs incurred). However further research is required to determine the actual scale of the impact achieved and the benefits generated. As with all such interventions, it is not always possible to capture and monetize all benefits, particularly second order, longer term, and benefits that accrue to the individual but not the public purse. It should also be stressed that there is a difference between economic benefits and cash savings.

Lessons and implications

Recognising the duty to provide some consistency in a time defined by loss, the Staying Close pilot in Bristol facilitates the opportunity to provide care leavers with access to ongoing and flexible support, dependent on assessed need, from their former key worker. This support has been shown to improve the lives and opportunities of the young people who contributed to this evaluation.

Some further work is needed to identify and reduce gaps and tensions in the leaving care system in Bristol, particularly for young people who have wider health and social care support needs, as they move from children's to adult services. It may also be beneficial for the borough to examine the scopes of practice of different professionals in the system to ensure they are complementary and understood.

One future challenge is around the sustainability of Staying Close in the long term. More work is needed to demonstrate the outcomes achieved and the benefits generated by this form of support. In particular, some work to better align the scheme's objectives, expected outcomes, and outcome data collected would be beneficial. The break-even analysis undertaken as part of this evaluation suggests that the intervention could break even, however further research is required to determine the actual scale of the savings made.

Bristol is one of eight Staying Close pilots in England. There are significant differences between the pilots. These differences need to be taken into account if Staying Close is rolled out nationally.

1. Introduction

There is a significant body of evidence, in both the UK and internationally, that young people transitioning from care to independent adulthood face several significant challenges (Narey, 2016 and Bengtsson et al., 2018). Their transition to adulthood is shorter and occurs at a younger age compared to their peers and is often described as ‘instant adulthood’ (Rogers, 2011). Despite the introduction of the 2017 Children and Social Work Act, young people transitioning from care lack consistent access to formal structured support during their transition (Adley and Jupp Kina, 2017). As a result, evidence demonstrates that young people with a history of local authority care have poorer social outcomes in adulthood when compared with peers who have not been under local authority care (Her Majesty’s Government, 2016). They often experience instability in their housing, and are over-represented in homeless populations (Dixon, 2008, Quinn et al, 2017 and O’Leary, Ozan and Bradbury, 2017).

Staying Close is a pilot programme that aims to radically improve outcomes for young people transitioning from residential care. Originally outlined in Sir Martin Narey’s Independent Review of Children’s Homes (Narey, 2016), Staying Close is intended to address the ‘cliff edge’ faced by young people leaving children’s homes by improving and extending the support provided by local authorities during the transition to independent adulthood. The pilot programme is intended to contribute to five outcome areas for young people transitioning from care: independent living; access to education; employment and training (EET); stability, feeling safe and secure; good health and wellbeing; and financial stability (DfE, 2018). The pilot programme recognises that Staying Close will be designed and delivered in different ways by local authorities, both reflecting local priorities and also the needs, strengths, and aspirations of individual young adults as they transition from care.

There are eight Staying Close pilots funded under the Innovation Programme. The pilot programme was intended to test the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of Staying Close, and identified what should be core to the Staying Close offer. Each of the 8 Staying Close pilots is therefore being evaluated. Five of the pilots are being evaluated by a team at Manchester Metropolitan University; three are being evaluated by a team at the universities of York and Oxford. Most of the pilots are being delivered directly by local authorities, with three being delivered by charities.

This report is the second and final report, and focuses on the pilot Staying Close scheme run by Bristol Council. The report provides insights on the design and implementation of the Bristol pilot. It focuses on the Staying Close offer and how it is delivered in Bristol, the successes and challenges experienced in its implementation, and the distance travelled by young people accessing Staying Close in the area. It also seeks to understand the contribution made to the change in outcomes experienced by those young people. An

important part of the evaluation reported here is the involvement of young people; in the evaluation design, as peer researchers, as research participants, and as stakeholders.

Note on terminology

This report is one of five reports written by evaluators at Manchester Metropolitan University. For uniformity and clarity the research team has taken some decisions regarding the use of terminology throughout the reports. The reports will refer to **'children's homes'** as opposed to residential home or care home when referring to the homes that the young people have left from the age of 16. There are two reasons for this. The first is to distinguish between the homes or residences relating to the Staying Close project and the second is in response to how the young people have referred to their 'homes' throughout their responses to this research. The reports will refer to **young person with experience of care**. For brevity, 'young person' will be used to refer to research participants, as it is understood those interviewed are care experienced.

2. Overview of the project

The State of Bristol (2019) report indicates that Bristol is the 10th largest city in the United Kingdom with an estimated population of 463,400. Considered to be a 'global city' that is home to a unique mix of cultures and languages, the report shows that Bristol, remains a city where some of the most affluent areas border some of the most deprived. Whilst economic growth has created opportunity, new problems associated with health and wellbeing inequalities have emerged, often with worse health outcomes for people living in the most deprived areas.

The State of Bristol (2019) report summarises deprivation data to show that Bristol has 41 areas in the most deprived 10% in England, including 3 in the most deprived 1%. The greatest levels of deprivation are in Hartcliffe & Withywood, Filwood and Lawrence Hill. The report shows that 15% of Bristol residents (70,400 people) live in the 10% most deprived areas in England, including 18,900 children. Of this number 16,440 children under 16 live in low income families, which is 19.7%, higher than national 17.2%. The report also shows that 27% of Bristol pupils (16,900 children) are 'disadvantaged' and 7.7% of 16-17 year olds (2017/18) were "not in education, employment or training" (NEET), worse than national average of 5.5%. The State of Bristol (2019) report also shows that on 31st March 2019, there were 618 children living in state care, 348 children had a child protection plan and over 1,500 were classified as "Children in Need".

The Bristol Joint Service Needs Analysis (2018) shows that Bristol has a significantly higher number of Looked After children and care leavers than the national average and higher levels of risk factors for poor mental health. These risk factors include a higher proportion of older children placed in children's homes and secure units and frequent changes of placement within the care system. The Joint Service Needs Analysis (2018) also suggest that care leavers in Bristol show much higher levels of risky behaviour than other children and young people, including smoking, drug use and criminal activity. It concluded that whilst the proportion of care leavers living in Bristol in 'suitable' accommodation is increasing, younger care leavers (17 year olds) are at significantly higher risk of poor health outcomes than those who are older.

Originally outlined in Sir Martin Narey's Independent Review of Children's Homes (Narey, 2016), Staying Close is intended to address some of the challenges that young people living in and leaving children's homes can face by improving and extending the support provided by local authorities during their transition to independent adulthood. Staying Close has been designed and is being delivered in different ways by the five local authorities and three voluntary sector providers, reflecting both local priorities and also the needs, strengths, and aspirations of individual young adults as they transition from care.

In Bristol, there are five children's homes that are managed directly by the local authority. There are also homes run by the private or voluntary sector and which take placements from Bristol and outside of the borough.

Two elements are core to Staying Close in Bristol. First, there is an accommodation offer, aimed at providing accommodation that is suitable and close to the young person's previous children's home. Second, there is a support offer that focuses on maintaining relationships with staff at the young person's previous children's home and providing emotional and practical support during the transition to independent adulthood. The pilot programme is intended to contribute to the Department for Education's (2018: 4) five outcome areas for young people transitioning from care. These are independent living; access to education; employment and training (EET); stability, feeling safe and secure; good health and wellbeing; and financial stability. The pilot programme recognises that Staying Close will be designed and delivered in different ways by local authorities, reflecting both local priorities and the needs, strengths, and aspirations of individual young adults as they transition from care.

Staying Close in Bristol is part of the council's young people's housing and independence pathway (Bristol City Council, 2017). It is offered following a detailed assessment of an eligible young person's needs. When conducting the assessment, the Staying Close coordinator determines whether it would be appropriate to provide advice, assistance and support to facilitate a Staying Close arrangement. Where it is determined that it would be appropriate, the local authority details the advice, assistance and support needed to facilitate a Staying Close arrangement in the Pathway Plan. The Staying Close option, subject to frequent review, typically includes the two core elements described above recognising:

- a) the importance of encouraging and supporting a continuation of trusted relationships between a young person and their chosen staff member, who will offer support to that young person as they transition to independence;
- b) the need to find ways to prevent housing crises and homelessness; and,
- c) improving appropriate accommodation and securing employment, education or training in the longer term.

The Theory of Change (ToC) listed chapter 4, provides an illustration of the four distinct outcomes, agreed by four key project staff at a planning and consultation workshop, designed to meet the three aims listed above.

- **Establishing and maintaining positive relationships** – this outcome is achieved through young people gaining a stronger social network and access to key relationships (in their family or with children's home staff). The expectation is that this leads to increased social awareness and better conflict resolution. Another

potential pathway to this outcome includes an increased sense of belonging, a better ability to maintain healthy relationships and a reduction in loneliness.

- **Improved mental health** – this outcome is achieved through young people gaining a better understanding of their own needs and a better knowledge of the services available to them. The expectation is that this leads to improved self-care and better management to prevent crises. This would reduce stress and risk behaviours and generate improved mental health.
- **Appropriate accommodation** – this outcome would be achieved through a choice of accommodation options that are suitable to the needs of the young person. Another route to achieve the outcome is a 'housing pathway' that facilitates the opportunity for young people to receive weekly meetings, and additional drop-in opportunities, from a specific children's home worker who is already known to them, who can address any accommodation difficulties early on.
- **Improved Education, Employment, and Training (EET)**: this outcome is theorised to be achieved through increasing the skills and experience of young people, which leads to an increased number of job applications, better interview skills, and an increased ability to be work-ready.

In March 2020, Staying Close supported 32 young people who had left the care of a children's home, and provided distance travelled data (see chapter 8) for 17 young people.

Project activities

The ambition of Staying Close in Bristol is to change the culture of how staff work with young people in transition, and to develop a model of best practice for the continuation of care post-18. Their project plans refer to:

- **Facilitating Staying Close network activities**: Co-production is seen as an essential part of the offer and is a core element of each service and intervention that Staying Close offers.
- **Tailored activities (cooking, washing and administration)**: In addition to standard forms of support, an innovative project in Bristol is a 'pod'; located in the garden of one of the children's homes. It was designed to provide a safe space in which young people leaving care can experience independent living and develop independent living skills.
- **Living Independently**: Independent living skills are also supported by facilitating opportunities for young people to access an independent living skills course provided by ASDAN, an education charity and awarding body. The offer also includes 'enhanced CEIAG' (careers, education, information, advice, and guidance), as well as tailored practical skills development.

- Staying Close Apprentice: Young people are offered 'enhanced' careers information and advice and supported to enrol on an apprenticeship as part of the EET offer.

The scheme is part of round two of the Innovation Programme, and has been operating since October 2017. Innovation Programme funding was originally provided for the pilot to run until March 2020. In November 2019, the Department for Education extended funding for the pilot for a further year.

3. Overview of the evaluation

Evaluation aims

There were two key aims of the evaluation reported here. The first was that the evaluation should follow a consistent approach to that used in the evaluations of the other seven Staying Close pilots, to enable comparison between them. The second key aim was that the evaluation should enable and empower young people to talk about and reflect on their experience of leaving, or preparing to leave, children's homes. The evaluation was a mixed-methods, theory-based examination of process and experience using a number of different data collection methods and engaging with a range of staff members. It examined the distance travelled in a range of outcome areas by young people accessing Staying Close in Bristol, and assessed whether Staying Close could and did make a contribution to the outcomes observed.

Evaluation questions

There are a series of core questions that are common to all of the Staying Close evaluations. There are also research questions that are specific to Staying Close in Bristol, reflecting variation between the schemes, their local context, objectives, existing service provision, and scheme design. The evaluation questions cover the implementation of the pilot; the voice, experience and expectations of young people accessing Staying Close services; and, the outcomes observed for these young people. The core research questions for the evaluation of Staying Close in Bristol can be found are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Research questions (common to all Staying Close evaluations)

Number	Research question	Comment
1	To what extent are the planned developments achieved? What was in place previously and what needs to be in place to facilitate successful implementation?	Addressed in chapters 5 and 7 of this report
2	How have young people, and other staff members, been involved in the co-production of the model?	Addressed in chapter 5.

Table 2: Research questions (common to all Staying Close evaluations) continued

Number	Research question	Comment
3	Have support plans been developed and implemented as anticipated? Has there been meaningful contact with an identified worker?	Addressed in chapters 5 and 7 of this report
4	Has the staff training been rolled out effectively and what has been its impact from staff perspectives? For example, improved knowledge and understanding of the needs of young people leaving children's homes	Addressed in chapters 5 and 7 of this report
5	<p>What difference has been observed in outcomes for young people receiving Staying Close? What proportion:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Are in accommodation that is suitable (safe, secure and affordable) and stable (with reference to unplanned moves or disruptions in tenancies) b) Are in education, employment or training appropriate to their abilities/wishes/needs? c) Are physically healthy? d) Have good emotional health, well-being and resilience e) Feel well supported? f) Are ready for independent living? g) Are resilient to unsafe behaviours (e.g. substance misuse; missing episodes; violence; CJS involvement; and unplanned early parenthood)? h) Report good social connections, greater social integration? 	Addressed in chapter 6 of this report
6	What has been the character of the support package (e.g. provided by the member of staff from their former children's home) and how has this helped the young person to avoid a problems with their tenancy or other untoward outcomes?	Addressed in chapters 5 and 7 of this report
7	What are the costs of delivering the Staying Close intervention and what are the potential cost savings?	Addressed in chapter 8 of this report

Table 3: Research questions (common to all Staying Close evaluations) continued

8	What are the experiences of young people in children's homes who do not access the interventions?	Not addressed in this evaluation ¹
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Evaluation questions that are specific to the North East Lincolnshire Staying Close pilot include:

Table 4: Research questions (pilot specific)

Number	Research question	Comment
1	To what extent is option of accommodation choice (on-site, self-contained, shared) utilised by young people, in what contexts and in what ways? What is the experience for young people?	Addressed in chapter 5 and 7 of this report
2	Do young people experience a continued relationship with residential staff and how is this and the transition from residential support team to wider support network experienced by the young person?	Addressed in chapter 5 of this report
3	Do young people experience improved preparation for independence through ASDAN courses, enhanced EET opportunities, individual health care budgets and participation in a staying close support network?	Addressed in chapter 5, 6 and 7 of this report
4	What is the experience and impact of training on restorative approaches for staff? What are their perceptions of how it has changed their practice with young person?	Addressed in chapter 5 of this report

Evaluation methods

To answer the research questions outlined in tables 1 and 2, the evaluation uses a mixed-method, theory based examination of process and experience through workshops, interviews, focus groups and online surveys with young people (including some young people who have already left the council's care), key practitioners and managers. A key interest to both policy makers and those involved in the pilot is the

¹ Those young people eligible to answer this question did not provide consent to participate in this evaluation.

outcomes achieved by young people accessing Staying Close services. Given the limitations presented by the small number of people accessing the pilot's services (see limitations section below), the evaluation used a non-statistical approach to understanding the difference made by interventions such as Staying Close, known as contribution analysis (Mayne, 2011).

There are three elements of the evaluation design, which examine the implementation of the Bristol Staying Close pilot (implementation or process evaluation), the experiences of young people accessing Staying Close services, and the effectiveness of the pilot (outcome evaluation). It also considered the cost and benefits of the scheme. The implementation evaluation took place over three points: scoping, mid-point, and final phase. A range of data collection and analysis methods were used during this evaluation:

- two scoping interviews with project leads;
- Theory of Change workshop, during the scoping phase, with four key project staff;
- young person's co-production workshop with four participants;
- nine interviews with project staff (five mid-point and four in the final phase);
- online survey of six staff conducted at two points (five mid-point and one in the final phase);
- five responses to the young people's online survey (five mid-point, none in the final phase);
- quarterly reports, case studies and a number of meeting/internal reports coded for thematic analysis;
- three peer led interviews completed;
- qualitative coding of all textual materials (interview transcripts, documents and reports, and open text responses to survey questions), and thematic analysis;
- collection of cost data, and completion of break even analysis (a form of cost benefit analysis);
- acquisition, cleaning, and analysis of two performance and outcome datasets and completion of distance travelled analysis;
- structured literature review to support the contribution analysis; and
- contribution analysis (Mayne, 2011) to assess whether it is plausible that the Bristol Staying Close pilot made a contribution to the outcomes achieved.

Changes to evaluation methods

There have been no significant changes to the evaluation method since the proposed approach was agreed with the Department for Education in March 2018. There have been a small number of additional tasks undertaken, over and above those included in the evaluation funding, including validation workshops with staff and young people at the end of the evaluation, and additional rounds of staff and young people's surveys.

Limitations of the evaluation

There are very small numbers of young people who leave children's residential homes in any local authority in any given year. This is the case in relation to Bristol, where there have been 32 people eligible for Staying Close support over the duration of the pilot (of whom around 17 engaged and were receiving support), and three members of staff directly involved in providing Staying Close services. This small number of means that some evaluation methods were not feasible. So, while the aim of the national evaluation of the Innovation Programme (of which Staying Close is a part) was to measure the impact of funded projects, it was not possible to use such evaluation methods in relation to the Staying Close pilots. As such, the evaluation cannot comment on whether or not Staying Close works.

Participation in the evaluation was voluntary, and it has not been possible to ensure that everyone receiving or working on Staying Close was involved in the research. The evaluation was funded to involve a small sample of those individuals working on or receiving Staying Close. This means that interview, workshop, and survey evidence presented here represents the views of a handful of people. The evaluation was designed in part to address this, so that a number of different data sources were used at various points in the evaluation. However, the small numbers involved and the voluntary nature of their involvement means that the findings here might amplify positive or negative aspects of the pilot.

The evaluation was funded through to March 2020, to coincide with the pilot funding. At the end of 2019, the evaluation team was advised that the Department for Education (DfE) had extended funding for the Staying Close pilots through to March 2021. This means that the pilot will be running for a year longer than the evaluation. This limits the extent to which the evaluation can consider issues around sustainability, and also consider the longer term effects of Staying Close.

4. Theory of change

Core to the theory-driven evaluation design – and to linking findings from different parts of the evaluation – is the theory of change. This sets out how Staying Close in Bristol was intended to work; the outcomes that we expected, and how these outcomes were expected to be delivered. Theory of Change is a fundamental part of the contribution analysis undertaken as part of the outcome evaluation.

The Bristol pilot has developed its theory of change considerably over its lifetime. Its original Theory of Change, developed as part of the Council's original bid for funding under the Innovation Programme, focused solely on outcomes expected for young people accessing Staying Close, and identified four key outcomes. During the early stages of this research, the theory of change further developed, although there was a great deal of consistency between the bid theory of change, and that articulated through the evaluation scoping phase (O'Leary et al., 2019). Between the mid point and final phases of the evaluation (February to October 2019), the Bristol pilot further developed and made substantive changes to its theory of change. The pilot's theory of change as of November 2019 is given in Figure 1 (on the following page) of this report.

There are two key issues that arise from this theory of change. First, the theory of change does not explicitly articulate the mechanisms (the causal chains or causal pathways) through which positive outcomes will be achieved. Mechanisms are a vague concept in evaluation science, with much debate about their meaning and nature, and how and whether evaluations might uncover them. Broadly speaking, a mechanism explains how doing x activity is expected to lead to y outcome or outcomes.

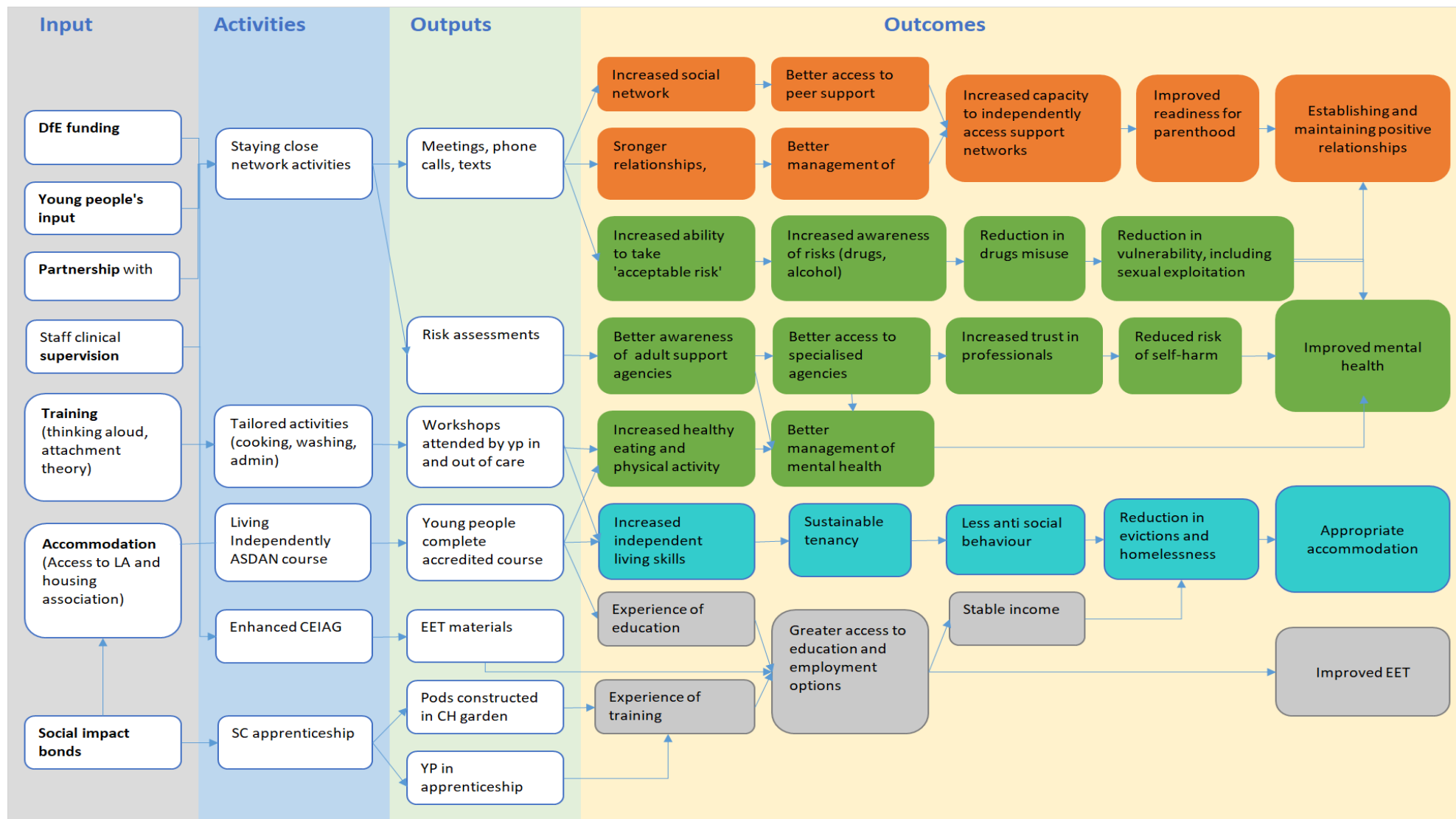


Figure 1 Theory of Change

Programmes aimed at supporting young people leaving care as they transition to independent adulthood are generally under-theorised and the lack of explicitly articulated causal pathways in the theory of change discussed here might reflect this. It should also be noted that mechanisms are a missing component of the theories of change developed by the pilot as part of the bidding process.

A second key issue with this theory of change is the connectivity between the outcomes expected for young people, the indicators of progress, and the outcome data collected by the pilot. There are some minor discrepancies so that not all outcomes have an indicator and/or a measure. Some of the measures appear to have been collected at only one point by the pilot, so that it is not possible to examine change over time. There are also differences between the pilot's outcomes, and the outcomes expected by the Department for Education.

5. Implementation evaluation

Methods summary

The implementation evaluation was conducted over three points during the lifetime of the pilot, in May/June 2018, in February 2019 and October/November 2019. Data were collected in a number of different formats (interviews, workshops, surveys, collation of secondary materials), involving young people accessing Staying Close services in Bristol, and professionals involved in delivering Staying Close and wider leaving care services in the borough. All data were coded in NVivo, and thematically analysed. Both the coding framework and the thematic analysis were common to the five evaluations of Staying Close pilots completed by the evaluation team at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Findings

The Staying Close Offer

This evaluation has found, based on our analysis of the views of young people, staff and wider stakeholders, given through different data collection methods at various points in the evaluation, that the support provided by the Staying Close offer in Bristol emerges from direct partnership and consultation with the young person. Formalising elements of an 'outreach' service that existed before the pilot, Staying Close has begun to create a foundation from which to improve an approach to pathway planning processes frequently described as being fragmented (Stein, 2012).

One staff interviewee explained that the Staying Close offer is innovative because it acts upon the need to provide the consistency and continuity that many others who have not grown up in children's homes might take for granted:

"Primarily, Staying Close gives our young people the thing we hear cited most often as important to them – consistency. It is beneficial to young people to stay in touch with and be supported by people they already know and have close relationships with." (Staff survey respondent 1, mid point)

The focus on continuity and consistency described here enables the Staying Close offer to capitalise on the theory of relationship-based practice (Amaral, 2011). By supporting young people in this way, Staying Close workers are able to provide tailored support that can help fence off the 'cliff edge' that is so often associated with the experience of leaving care (Action for Children, 2017) but also provide a 'safety net' to catch those

young people who find themselves at risk of crisis. Staff involved in this evaluation identified this as a key ingredient of the pilot, as illustrated in the following quotes

“A key part of how we’re doing it in Bristol is [...] having that tailored support with transition as they move out, because it is really quite young to be leaving home without a safety net. So, it’s about helping the young people kind of establish themselves really in their new communities and supporting with them with that transition.” (Staff interviewee 8, mid point)

“The (young people) know that when they leave that they will have support that’s planned. So, that’s a really good safety feature for them.” (Staff interviewee 8, mid point)

“[The young person I support] likes that safety net. It (Staying Close) gives her that feeling of security...and the knowledge that she’s got somebody there that she can go to.” (Staff interviewee 1, final phase)

By providing a “safety net” that supports young people to make sense of the potential impact of isolation, separation, loss and a feeling of abandonment described by Bengtsson et al., (2018), the Staying Close offer also facilitates an opportunity for young people in Bristol to experience the support, care and sensitive consideration that any other reasonable parent might provide. As two staff survey respondents commented:

“[Staying Close] provides the bridge between leaving care and entering the real world - providing continued care which “normal” young people would get from family and gearing Young people up for adult life.” (Staff survey respondent 3, mid point)

“...[Staying Close] fits the promises – the ‘Bristol’s Pledge’, so we’ve got the Bristol’s Pledge to children in care and care leavers, and it does really, really emphasise the whole point about Bristol care leavers promise about respecting and honouring them, to listen to them, to support them, to help them find a way to move on to better accommodation.” (Staff interviewee 5, mid point)

The central focus on the corporate parent’s duty to respect, honour, listen, and support young people has provided a further opportunity to focus on suitable and sustainable accommodation. For this reason, one staff interviewee commented that the suitability of accommodation for young people leaving care in Bristol is also seen as a fundamental part of the Staying Close offer:

“...Young people being in suitable and sustainable accommodation supports them in every other aspect of their life and they can only really start to look for work and look for education and start to achieve when they’re in the right accommodation...” (Staff interviewee 1, final phase)

Each person who took part in this evaluation explained the importance of stability and permanence in “the right accommodation” as a key enabler of a successful transition. Also understanding the fact that successful transitions often occur on a graded and gradual basis, the Staying Close offer aims to ensure that “the right accommodation” should also be located within a formal housing pathway. One staff interviewee explained:

“...we’ve been developing what I call a “housing pathway.” The first part of that is delivering a Living Independently short course to young people before they leave the children’s homes. So, better preparation for independence...The next step is about young people going into independent accommodation. So, we’ve created agreements with council houses, for some of the young people to be offered a property by “direct offer” that is either close to the children’s home that they’re moving on from or close to a family member.” (Staff interviewee 3, mid point)

Taken together, the formalised approach to provide continuity, consistency, the right type of accommodation, and the development of a housing pathway, mean that the wider aims and objectives of the Staying Close offer are realistic. As shown in the following section, the Staying Close offer supports the pathway planning process by emphasising the importance of, and the council’s commitment to, the concept of interdependence.

Despite the fact that the role of social relationships, emotional and behavioural support are set out as a requirement in the 2000 Children (Leaving Care) Act and the 2017 Children and Social Work Act, the focus of traditional approaches to leaving care remains on offering financial and practical support, with elements such as accommodation, education and training (Stein, 2012). While these elements are clearly important, there remains a gap in offering the emotional support that aims to ensure young people are being helped to develop an emotional support network with carers who are well known to them (Adley and Jupp Kina, 2017). It is this emotional network, facilitated by Staying Close and informed by relationship-based theories, that speaks to the central premise of what Propp et al. (2003) term ‘interdependence’.

Although the word interdependence was not mentioned in the interviews, all of the people who contributed to this evaluation explained that Staying Close enhanced the opportunity for young people to access ongoing and flexible support, dependent on need, through

relationships that reflect genuine concern, availability, and consistency. The case study below provides an example of interdependence in action:

Nadine's story

Nadine (pseudonym), had to leave the children's home because she fell pregnant. Instead of being provided with accommodation in a mother and baby home, as per her wish, Nadine was moved into a flat away from the support of her carers.

After leaving the children's home, Nadine explained that she did not feel ready to live independently. She would regularly call her former keyworker asking for support and advice. Unemployed, not in education and claiming benefits, Nadine often described the experience of isolation, anxiety, stress and a feeling of frustration because the key worker at the children's home was unable to provide the support that Nadine was asking for.

One year later, when Staying Close offer was formalised, Nadine's former key worker took on the dual role of a Staying Close worker. This meant that she had dedicated hours to provide the support that Nadine was requesting. Following a detailed assessment, Nadine was provided with 24 hours of dedicated support each week. After six months, this support reduced to six hours a week and has gradually decreased ever since. Currently, the Staying Close worker visits Nadine once a week for two or three hours but is in regular telephone contact with her too.

Nadine described how the effects of isolation, anxiety, and stress have been decreasing since she engaged with the Staying Close offer. Nadine is now undertaking an apprenticeship; she leaves her house more often and feels more able to live independently. Nadine is proud of the fact that she is a mother who can demonstrate a range of skills such as cooking, cleaning, managing budgets, contacting energy suppliers, planning meals, and attending to her child's day-to-day care needs. Compared to her initial feelings of abandonment, Nadine now feels happier, more confident and less anxious.

Implementation successes and challenges

The interdependent engagement and involvement of young people in the Staying Close offer is seen by the young people and the staff as a central principle that has been able to guide the success of the scheme. This involvement of young people is also core to the wider pathway for care leavers in the city (Bristol City Council, 2017), and was mentioned by several staff interviewees as a key strength of the Bristol Staying Close offer. One interviewee commented:

“...our bid was actually developed based on a series of interviews conducted with care leavers where they talked about what support they would like to have in place. So, even before we’d got any money, we’d already involved young people at that point.” (Staff interviewee 3, mid point)

This interviewee went on to mention that a young people’s group has been set up with the aim of getting feedback and suggestions for future development of Staying Close services. One suggestion led to the investment in the ‘pod’:

“...our pod house idea came from a young person who said, “We want to live in the gardens of children’s homes. We want to stay living in the children’s homes for longer but not have to live in the home. We want to be able to live in our own little section of the house and have a bit more independence.” (Staff interviewee 3, mid point)

The speaker went on to explain that the pod was never intended to provide long-term accommodation. Rather, its purpose was to provide a safe space, very close to the children’s home, for young people to start to develop independent living skills during their housing pathway. However, by the end of the evaluation, the pod had yet to be used for the purpose that it was originally designed. Based on the experience of trying to manage the development of the pod, one staff interviewee explained that rental agreements have been the primary challenge to the implementation of this facility:

“I think we were really keen to trial this pod...but there are some things that we would do really differently next round. If someone said to me, ‘Oh, we want a pod,’ I would talk to them about the terms of rental agreements. Be careful what you pay for up front. We’ve had a lot of difficulty to get that pod finished and ready to use, which has been quite disappointing. I’d be advising them to be really careful about what provider they would use for that and make sure it’s somebody that will provide an aftercare provision if it’s a rented facility. We’ve got stuck in a position where the providers of the pod didn’t finish it, but because we’re renting it and we’ve paid the rent up front, our property services are also saying, ‘Well, we can’t finish it off because it’s not ours, it’s rented.’” (Staff interviewee 8, final phase)

A further challenge for Staying Close in Bristol, which can affect the delivery of the Staying Close offer that young people have asked for, is related to training and staffing. Staying Close in Bristol does not have a specific pool of designated Staying Close workers. Instead, young people choose their Staying Close worker from the team of staff who have supported them in the children’s home. When a young person selects their

Staying Close worker, the children's home manager must release that member of staff from their substantive post and backfill the vacancy. As one staff interviewee explained, the operation of two separate staff rotas becomes particularly complicated where there are staffing shortages or competing priorities between the safe running of the children's home and the effective delivery of the Staying Close offer:

"It has been difficult to get [Staying Close] to work as part of our daily practice within the homes as well, because the staff are already overstretched and already have a lot of responsibilities in the homes. And adding in extra work can be tricky with things like staff sickness, so that Staying Close worker trying to make sure that they don't get absorbed into the rota." (Staff interviewee 3, final phase)

The challenge of providing staff for the children's homes and for the Staying Close offer was particularly difficult in the early stages of the pilot. Bristol Council has now established a senior manager steering group so that any training and performance management concerns can be quickly resolved without adversely affecting the continuous service delivery model for young people living in and leaving care.

In relation to training, all children's home workers are required, under National Minimum Care Standards, to have completed, or be working towards, a National Vocational Qualification in caring for children and young people. This qualification supports and informs an approach to care for children living in children's homes. Two staff interviewees explained that it does not consider or prepare carers to support the pragmatic needs of young people leaving care in an equal way:

"We were hoping that training would have a lot more practical skills that Personal Advisors have – it didn't, so something that we are looking at is training for staff that includes understanding housing, benefits and skill-based care. Skills that we as residential staff don't necessarily have because we are used to working with under eighteens." (Staff interviewee 3, final phase)

"Some of the support I give is around housing, but that is not my game. My game is not housing. I don't have knowledge about housing, but I have had to help the young people that I work with in regards to their housing. Support workers need to be thought of a little bit more to be honest. When [Staying Close] first started, I grappled in the dark a lot." (Staff interviewee 2, final phase)

The absence of formal accredited training means that some Staying Close workers may not have the formal knowledge of housing, welfare systems or skills-based care. One

interviewee explained that their developing knowledge of the Staying Close offer meant that the Staying Close Worker had to learn about these systems by working in closer collaboration with a Personal Advisor:

“Personal Advisors may be more experienced in dealing with some of the adult benefits side of applications then support and help the Staying Close worker to learn those systems a bit better for future, kind of, with more confidence.” (Staff Interviewee 8, final phase)

Consistent with the concept of interdependence, a clear success of Staying Close is that young people are being supported to understand the technicalities of benefit and housing applications in partnership with their Staying Close Worker, who, as shown in the following section, can collaborate with other professionals to help demystify the complexity of independent living. Relationships between professionals/agencies

Whilst Personal Advisors, Social Workers, and Housing Officers provide advice, assess, implement, and review the pathway plan, they can also be a stranger to the young person. As a result, Bengtsson et al (2018) explain that some young people may feel reluctant to engage with them and with leaving care services. As shown in the following case study however, the Staying Close worker can build on an established relationship with the young person to help create a sense of stability that encourages them to access the support of other professional agencies:

Francis’ story

Francis (pseudonym) was vulnerable to criminal exploitation before he moved into a children’s home.

Whilst living in the children’s home, Francis’ key worker helped to increase his self-awareness and self-worth, allowing him to have the confidence to make positive changes in his life and steer him away from gangs and into positive activities and work.

When Francis was moved out of the children’s home 2 years later, his situation quickly deteriorated. Without the support of his key worker, Francis quickly became vulnerable to exploitation and was constantly threatened with physical violence. He soon lost his job and the landlord threatened to evict him due to rent arrears.

In crisis, Francis asked for support from the Staying Close coordinator. After an initial assessment conducted by the Staying Close coordinator, he was provided with 2 hours of Staying Close support a week.

With the help of his former key worker, Francis was able to avoid homelessness and find alternative and more suitable accommodation. The Staying Close scheme paid for Francis’ rental deposit and his Staying Close worker supported Francis to apply for

college, and access his leaving care grant and other well-being support services. When Francis' application for Universal Credit was turned down because he had a history of rent arrears, the Staying Close worker was able to help him to liaise with Universal Credit office so that a suitable alternative arrangement could be agreed.

Francis is now living independently and is no longer vulnerable to exploitation. He is working and attending college. Although Francis does not receive weekly support from Staying Close anymore, he knows that his Staying Close worker is available if he needs any advice or support.

Transition as a journey

The Staying Close workers interviewed for this evaluation described the gap between the period for independence and the psychological adjustment period involved in leaving care. Consistent with the findings of Atkinson and Hyde (2019), each worker suggested that the previous practice of providing informal 'outreach' support had failed to recognise that the practical and psychological aspects of transitions do not always occur spontaneously or naturally.

Explaining why the Staying Close pilot was crucial to the enablement of independence, professionals stressed the practical and psychological role of support in empowering young people to cope both "physically and emotionally" during transition. They acknowledged the multiple dimensions of transition in recognition of the need for greater flexibility and enough time for young people to adjust to their new situation:

"So, [a young person] was preparing to leave the children's home... So, to begin with, the pathway planning process involved with the Staying Close plan, so before they had even left the children's home [the young person] knew he was going to have a Staying Close worker, he was going to have ten hours a week of support, he knew what the support would be, he knew where he was moving to and he knew what he wanted to achieve." (Staff interviewee 3, final phase)

Culture change

The evidence collected for this evaluation shows that the implementation of the Staying Close offer has refocused some children's home workers, and other connected professionals, on the need to review the way that they support the leaving care process:

"I've been [working in residential care] for 13 years now. Next October it will be 14 years. I've seen a lot of young people slip through the net and really struggle in life. I bump into them and they'll

say things like, 'I left the care home and I didn't get support'...We can become really old school at this job and think we know what's best for them, when we don't." (Staff Interview 1, final phase)

Reflecting on the previous assumption that the service provider knows best, Bristol Council has been able to redesign leaving care services.

Limitations

The research presented here provides three snapshots of young people's, staff and wider stakeholders' perceptions, at different points in the implementation of Staying Close in North East Lincolnshire. It draws on a limited number of interviews and surveys. It is cognisant of wider changes in the leaving care landscape in the borough, but is focused specifically on one part of this system.

Conclusions

This evaluation has found, based on both our analysis and on the data provided by individuals (young people, staff, and wider stakeholders) that Staying Close has been successfully implemented in Bristol. It is making a significant contribution to the leaving care system in the city, and is valued by young people accessing this type of support. It is clear that the Staying Close offer has developed to reflect local needs and learning. In particular, the development of an accommodation offer is significant. The Staying Close team has worked hard to ensure that young people can access suitable accommodation, and this includes some innovative and effective features. Facilitating opportunities for young people leaving care to receive regular weekly meetings and additional drop-in opportunities from a selected Staying Close worker clearly provides a much-needed extension of support that facilitates the journey to independence. In alignment with the interdependence approach described by Propp et al. (2003), the Staying Close offer in Bristol enables young people to choose a programme of ongoing and flexible support, dependent on need, which enables a gradual and supported move towards autonomy.

6. Outcomes evaluation

Methods summary

There are two elements to this part of the evaluation. First, quantitative data provided by Bristol Council were analysed to understand the distance travelled by individuals accessing Staying Close in several key outcome areas. Secondly, the evaluation team used contribution analysis (Mayne, 2011) to assess whether Staying Close could contribute to the outcomes expected from the programme.

The evaluation team undertook a structured literature review, examining empirical literature around the outcomes expected and achieved from programmes or interventions targeted at supporting young people as they transition from care to independent adulthood. This literature provides a view on whether it is plausible that an intervention such as Staying Close could contribute to positive change in the outcomes expected by the Department for Education and covered by the Bristol Staying Close pilot.

Contribution analysis

To understand the outcomes achieved in Bristol, we used an alternative form of impact evaluation called contribution analysis (Mayne, 2001). Contribution analysis is a structured approach to understanding and evidencing whether, and to what extent, observed changes in outcomes are a consequence of the intervention being evaluated. It is designed specifically for interventions such as those being evaluated here, as it is designed to assess impact in areas of causal complexity. The aim of contribution analysis is to provide a credible, evidence-based narrative of the contribution that an intervention makes to any changes in outcomes, and how and why it works in this way. It is a theory-driven approach; a key part of contribution analysis is to set out the outcomes that are expected to arise from the intervention, and how (the pathways or causal mechanisms by which the intervention is intended to work). As such, developing a theory of change of the evaluand is an important first step in undertaking contribution analysis (Delahais and Toulemonde, 2012).

Contribution analysis is undertaken in six steps (Mayne, 2001). Table 3 sets out these six steps, how each step has been undertaken in this evaluation, and what types of data (whether or not these data were generated by this evaluation) were used to address each step.

Table 5: Contribution analysis steps and their application to this evaluation

Step	Explanation	Data/evidence
Set out questions to be asked	The research questions that underpin the evaluation. These were set out in the original proposal to DfE and are given in chapter 3 of this report.	
Develop theory of change	An initial theory of change was developed by Bristol as part of its bid for funding for the pilot. This was reviewed and further developed through a Theory of Change workshop during the scoping phase of the evaluation. Further work has been done by the pilot.	Theory of Change dated November 2019 Theory of Change workshop
Gather existing evidence	The evaluation team completed a structured literature review to identify empirical evidence around programmes/interventions aimed at supporting young people leaving care as they transition to independent adulthood. This literature review focused on evidence around the policy objectives set by DfE.	Literature review

Table 3: Contribution analysis steps and their application to this evaluation (continued)

Assemble and assess the contribution narrative	Drawing on the literature review, the evaluation team assessed whether interventions such as Staying Close might contribute to the outcome objectives set out in the pilot's theory of change. There were four outcomes from this assessment: (1) strong evidence, that is it is plausible that an intervention such as Staying Close could contribute to the expected outcomes (2) weak evidence, that is there is some evidence to suggest it might be plausible (3) there is no evidence to suggest it might be plausible (4) there is evidence to suggest that it is not plausible ²	Theory of change identifies the outcomes expected from Staying Close in Bristol Literature review used as evidence to examine the plausibility of Staying Close making a contribution to outcomes in these areas
Gather extra evidence	This stage examines whether changes in outcomes were observed, and whether evidence generated through the evaluation suggests that Staying Close might have made a contribution to these observed changes	Distance travelled analysis. Interviews, surveys, and documentary analysis conducted through the evaluation
Conclude the contribution narrative	Taking all of the evidence together – the extant evidence about interventions similar to Staying Close and the evidence generated about Staying Close in Bristol – is it plausible to conclude that Staying Close made a contribution to the changes in outcomes observed?	Synthesis of steps 3, 4 and 5 of this analysis

² It is important to stress the difference between no evidence of plausibility and evidence that it is not plausible. The former is an assessment of the evidence base; a lack of evidence means that it is not possible to examine the likely efficacy of the intervention. The latter is about the intervention itself; that the existing evidence suggests that the intervention will not achieve or contribute to the outcomes expected of it.

Findings

Existing evidence base

The theory of change developed by Bristol identifies outcomes in four areas which are mapped to the seven policy objectives established by the Department for Education. These seven outcomes are: (1) are more independent; (2) have a stable home; (3) continue to engage in EET; (4) have strong supportive relationships; (5) continue to engage with health services; (6) increased resilience; and (7) feel less lonely/improved wellbeing. The two pilot outcomes that do not correspond to national policy outcomes are (a) to become a peer mentor; and (b) make a positive contribution to society. The analysis outlined here only focuses pilot outcomes that relate to national policy outcomes, as only national outcomes were within the scope of the evaluation commissioned by the Department for Education.

The evaluation team undertook a structured literature review, examining empirical literature around the outcomes expected and achieved from programmes or interventions targeted at supporting young people as they transition from care to independent adulthood. This literature provides a view on whether it is plausible that an intervention such as Staying Close could contribute to positive change in the outcomes expected by the Department for Education and covered by the Bristol Staying Close pilot.

Table 4 summarises the findings from the structured literature review. These findings focus on whether the extant evidence (from published, empirical studies) indicates that an intervention such as Staying Close could contribute to positive change in the outcomes expected for young people transitioning from care to independent adulthood. It is an assessment of whether, in theory, there is evidence that it could be effective. This analysis is the third step, 'gathering existing evidence', set out in Table 4.

Having used the existing evidence base to assess whether an intervention such as Staying Close might, in theory, contribute to the outcomes expected by the Department of Education and the Bristol Staying Close pilot, the next stage of the analysis was to examine whether changes in outcomes were observed, and whether evidence generated through the evaluation, suggests that Staying Close might have made a contribution to these observed changes. This stage of the analysis draws on two types of evidence.

Table 6: Does the extant evidence suggest that Staying Close could contribute to outcomes

Pilot outcome	DfE outcome	Plausibility assessment
Improved education, employment or training	Are in education, employment or training	Weak evidence
Appropriate accommodation	Are in accommodation that is suitable and stable	Strong evidence
	Are ready for independent living	Strong evidence
Establishing and maintaining positive relationships	Report good social connections	No evidence ³
Improved Mental Health	Are physically healthy, are resilient to unsafe behaviours; and are well supported	No evidence ³

The first examines whether there has been positive change in the relevant outcomes. Data provided by the pilot have been analysed to identify the distance travelled by young people accessing Staying Close support. The second part of this analysis draws on the extant evidence, the interviews, workshops, surveys, and case study work undertaken throughout the evaluation to develop a contribution narrative about Staying Close in Bristol.

³ It is important to stress that this is an assessment of the available evidence. It does not mean that Staying Close cannot contribute in this area; simply that there is no evidence that is directly relevant and from which an assessment could be made.

Distance travelled analysis

Two types of data were provided by the Bristol team. Individual level data were provided about seventeen (n=17) individuals. A detailed explanation of these data, and the outcome of the distance travelled analysis, is provided in Appendix 1 of this report. These findings are summarised in Table 5.

Table 7: Summary of distance travelled analysis

Pilot outcome	DfE outcome	Distance travelled analysis
Improved education, employment or training	Are in education, employment or training	The proportion of young people recorded as being in education, employment or training (EET) fluctuated over the lifetime of the pilot, but increased overall. At the beginning of the pilot, 7 out of 17 young people were in EET. At the end of the pilot, 9 out of 17 young people were in EET (see Appendix 1).
Appropriate accommodation	Are in accommodation that is suitable and stable Are ready for independent living	The proportion of young people recorded as being in supported or independent accommodation fluctuated over the lifetime of pilot, but increased overall (see Appendix 1). The proportion of young people recorded as living in independent tenancies increased for the first five quarters. At the beginning of the pilot, 5 young people were in a stable home and at the end of the pilot, this number had risen to 14 (see Appendix 1).
Establishing and maintaining positive relationships	Report good social connections	Not measured in the data collected by the pilot.
Improved mental health	Are physically healthy, are resilient to unsafe behaviours; and are well supported	Not measured in the data collected by the pilot.

The data presented in Table 5 gives an insight into the age and sex of young people eligible for, and accessing Staying Close services, their care history, the type of support they are accessing, and data in relation to several outcomes. These data provide a single snapshot and do not allow for a measure of change over time. The second set of data were 'score cards' giving an aggregate level view of progress towards outcomes. They are three-monthly summaries of Staying Close activities and outcomes. Together, these two datasets provide a rich insight into the progress of the scheme and the outcomes being achieved by young people accessing Staying Close in Bristol, and both datasets have been used to assess the distance travelled presented in this report. In addition, the young people's surveys undertaken at the midpoint and final phases of the evaluation includes questions that relate to DfE expected outcomes, including two questions that measure wellbeing.

As the analysis set out in Table 5 illustrates, there are two outcome areas in which distance travelled can be evidenced. In relation to education, employment and training, this analysis suggests positive change was experienced by some young people during their time with Staying Close in Bristol. In relation to appropriate accommodation there appears that positive change was experienced by some young people during their time with Staying Close in Bristol.

Contribution narratives

The assessment set out in the previous section focuses on whether the extant evidence (from published, empirical studies) indicates that an intervention such as Staying Close could contribute to positive change in the outcomes expected for young people transitioning from care to independent adulthood. It is an assessment of whether, in theory, there is evidence that it could be effective.

In the following section, we set out evidence generated by this evaluation of the contribution that Staying Close in Bristol appears to have made to outcomes for the young people accessing its services. This stage of the analysis draws on two types of evidence. The first examines whether there has been positive change in the relevant outcomes. Data provided by the pilot have been analysed to identify the distance travelled by young people accessing Staying Close support. The second part of this analysis draws on the extant evidence, the interviews, workshops, surveys, and case study work undertaken throughout the evaluation to develop a contribution narrative about Staying Close in Bristol.

Contribution narratives

The outcomes for which distance travelled (change in outcomes) can be evidenced also have some evidence, in the extant literature, that suggests that an intervention

such as Staying Close could make a contribution to the observed change. This analysis suggests:

- for **appropriate accommodation**, the extant evidence suggests it is plausible that Staying Close contributes to positive change (there is strong evidence), and the distance travelled analysis suggests fluctuation over the lifetime of the pilot but overall positive outcomes experienced by young people accessing Staying Close Bristol; and
- for **education, employment and training**, the extant evidence suggests some evidence that Staying Close might make a contribution to positive outcomes (there is weak evidence), and the distance travelled analysis suggests that positive outcomes are experienced by young people accessing Staying Close in the area.

Mechanisms

The mechanisms through which the outcomes might be achieved are not explicitly articulated in the pilot theory of change. However, it is clear from the interviews, surveys, and workshops undertaken as part of this evaluation that strong, positive and supportive relationships between Staying Close staff and young people are seen as an important mechanism through which young people are able to achieve positive outcomes in their housing, education, employment and training, and other areas. This mechanism includes giving agency to young people (as set out in chapter 5) and providing appropriate accommodation in which to feel safe to develop and test practical skills for independent adulthood.

By working in close partnership with young people leaving children's homes, and individuals who have already left care but who might benefit from additional support, Staying Close provides an extension of support throughout transition that is broadly similar to Propp et al. (2003) concept of interdependence.

In contrast to a traditional model of independence, one that has been criticised for creating pressure on leaving care services to enable young people to become self-reliant, to emancipate themselves from helping systems and to be economically self-sufficient (Stein, 2012), the Staying Close pilot shows that the relationship between a young person and their Staying Close worker can achieve a more successful transition to adulthood (Atkinson and Hyde, 2019).

The relationships described in this evaluation suggests that young people may be better supported in their transition to autonomy because opportunities are facilitated for them to access the physical, practical, and emotional support of others. The positive value of this mechanism for Staying Close in Bristol is that it focuses on the

mutuality and relationships between the young person and their named Staying Close worker. In alignment with the concept of interdependence, the Staying Close offer in Bristol facilitates the opportunity for care leavers to access ongoing and flexible support, dependent on need, through relationships that reflect genuine concern, availability, and consistency, thus enabling a (more) gradual move towards autonomy. It is through the approach to establishing and maintaining positive relationships, appropriate accommodation and improved education, employment, and training (EET), that all other outcomes, including improved mental health, can emerge as plausible.

Establishing and maintaining positive relationships and improved mental health

Research shows that the need to establish and maintain positive relationships with young people leaving care is essential to support their mental health and transition to adulthood. However, changing priorities and inconsistent professional approaches to care and leaving care services can lead some young people to develop distrustful feelings toward the social care system and the intentions of the residential carers more generally (Gill et al., 2020). Feelings of insecurity, a lack of trust and experiences of unsafe care mean that some young people leaving children's homes can also focus on an opportunity to become self-reliant which leads to isolation (Colbridge et al., 2017). Having experienced adversity in childhood and discontinuity throughout their care experience, a pattern of transiency can develop and continue into adulthood affecting relationships and potential engagement with formal programmes of support (Ward, 2011).

The outcome data collected by Bristol Staying Close does not measure progress against this outcome. Data collected by the evaluation team through interviews, workshops and surveys, and through the peer interviews, provides some evidence from which an assessment can be made.

Staying Close in Bristol has been able to establish and maintain positive relationships. By advocating for the young person's rights and by providing a named worker who is available to help promote stability and health, the pilot has enabled some of the young people to access the services, hobbies, interests, and activities that they wanted to access. By working in a planned and coordinated way, Staying Close has recognised the need for a gradual transition from children's services by providing the support in those areas that young people want:

“[Staying Close] is about getting the help when we need something...that's what I tell people what it is... We might go shopping; we might go to meetings like hospital etc.,

appointments; paperwork we need to fill out at the job-centre.”
(Peer interview 3, final phase)

“They support me...If I need something then I call [my Staying Close Worker] and I can talk with her as well, like at the children’s home...Any problem, like they phone the doctor, and with the college they support me as well. (Peer interview 4, final phase)

As shown in the literature, good support for young people leaving care is a protective factor of mental health (Akister et al., 2010). Social isolation in the transition to independence can exacerbate mental health and behavioural difficulties and impacts on the ability of young people to deal with everyday tasks (Badawi et al., 2014). As the compressed transition can compound feelings of distrust, abandonment, isolation, instability, and powerlessness, affecting engagement with services (Butterworth et al., 2017), the focus on interdependence, establishing and maintaining positive relationships, clearly facilitates a gradual transition that could plausibly improve mental health and wellbeing outcomes for young people leaving care as well. For these reasons, we conclude that the Bristol Staying Close pilot can contribute to positive outcomes in relation to establishing and maintaining positive relationships and improved mental health.

Appropriate accommodation

There is a significant body of research around young people leaving care and access to appropriate accommodation, including several structured evidence reviews. These include a systematic review of preparedness for independent living of young people transitioning from foster care (Haggman Laitila et al., 2019); a meta-analysis of participation in intervention programmes aimed at the successful transition to independent living for young people leaving care (Heerde et al., 2018); and a scoping review (Woodgate et al., 2017). There is also a body of research that examines specific programmes/services in a number of different countries around the world (Chase et al., 2006; Knight et al., 2006; Goddard and Barrett, 2008; Matthews and Sykes, 2012)., though the evidence base is less well developed in relation to UK programmes/services.

The outcome data collected by Bristol Staying Close does not directly measure progress against this outcome. Rather, it provides details on whether scheme participants are in supported accommodation or independent accommodation, or are homeless. There are a small number of individuals who do not appear in either of these categories, and there are significant issues with the data around

homelessness. The Bristol outcome data also provide insight into the number of young people who have completed an ASDAN independent living skills course⁴, which Bristol uses as a proxy to measure progress towards this aspect of the appropriate accommodation outcome (see Appendix 2). Data collected by the evaluation team through interviews, workshops and surveys, and through the peer interviews, provides some evidence from which an assessment can be made.

As the pilot has progressed in Bristol, one staff interviewee explained that the definition of appropriate accommodation has been developed through the principle of advocacy:

“A young person was placed into this property an hour and a half away across town away from the children's home was, where his girlfriend was, where his family lives and where his girlfriend's family is, so his whole support network was right across the other side of town. So, he wasn't staying in the property, so he ended up losing the property [and becoming homeless]. His [Staying Close worker] went straight to the council and got him a property in the area that he wanted to be in, so that is really positive.”

(Staff interviewee 3, final phase)

As suggested above, Staying Close workers in Bristol can support young people to find appropriate accommodation at a time of crisis by understanding individual need. The individualised support that is provided to enable young people in Bristol to live in appropriate accommodation is key to the wider goal of maintaining independent living skills and reducing vulnerability as shown in the two case studies above. For these reasons, we conclude that the Bristol Staying Close pilot can contribute to positive outcomes in relation to appropriate accommodation.

Improved Education, Employment, and Training (EET)

Young people leaving care are less likely than their non-care experienced peers to be in EET, and more likely to have poorer education outcomes (Cameron et al., 2018). Evidence suggests that interventions aimed at supporting young people as they transition from care to independent adulthood may improve EET outcomes, if they are provided with the opportunity to stay longer in care until they have completed courses (del Valle et al., 2008; Quinn et al., 2017). For Munro et al., (2012) the focus on interdependence can provide a 'safety net' for many young

⁴ ASDAN is an organisation whose curriculum programmes and qualifications help young people develop knowledge and skills for learning, work and life.

people and reduce any sense of instability, uncertainty and other factors that are known to disrupt achievement in education or training.

Consistent with the advice of Munro et al. (2012), the pilot involves several activities that focus on EET. These include practical support to access education and training courses, and support around apprenticeships and further education opportunities. Staying Close workers also provide practical support with job interviews.

The outcome data provided by Bristol does suggest some positive progress towards achieving this outcome. Seven of the 17 young people accessing Staying Close services in Bristol between January 2018 and September 2019 were in education, employment or training (EET) when they started receiving support. This includes one of the two individuals who started in September 2019 and for whom we only have one month's data. As shown in Appendix 2, this data compares to nine of seventeen individuals who were in EET in the final month of their participation in the programme (or September 2019, which is the last month for which we have data). However, it is worth noting that almost all of the young people involved appear to have experienced periods in EET and not in education, employment or training (NEET). Two individuals are recorded as having experienced three separate periods of being in EET during their participation in the scheme, and all but one⁵ have experienced at least one period of EET.

Although none of the young people who were interviewed for this evaluation were in employment, education and training, the case studies above do indicate that Staying Close in Bristol can maintain and improve EET because young people are provided with the opportunity to receive formalised support to access and stay enrolled on a college course. In addition to this, the distance travelled analysis suggests positive outcomes in EET with both an increase in the proportion of the Staying Close population in EET and a reduction of those not in education, employment or training (NEET) through the duration of the pilot. There were also a series of questions in the staff surveys (midpoint and final phase) about outcomes. Ten people responded to these surveys. Respondents to the mid-point survey and end-point survey both stated that Staying Close could make a difference to EET, and that without Staying Close it was less likely that the outcomes could be achieved. Taken together, the evidence provided for distance travelled analysis and the extant literature enables us to conclude that the Bristol Staying Close pilot could be able to contribute to positive outcomes in relation to EET.

⁵ One of the two individuals who joined the scheme in September 2019 was recorded as being NEET.

Limitations

There are two limitations we would like to highlight here. The first relates to extant evidence on interventions and programmes design to support young people as they transition from children's homes to independent adulthood. There is a lack of empirical evidence that identifies the factors that affect successful transition, or that identifies the effectiveness of different types of programme or intervention. The evidence of impact and effectiveness that does exist is largely drawn from US studies, and not from studies from here in the UK. This means that the first analytical stage of the contribution analysis – where it is plausible that an intervention like Staying Close might contribute to positive change in outcomes – is based largely on US evidence as there is a lack of UK evidence around the impact of interventions such as Staying Close. This means that the evidence that does not take account of the UK context, legal framework, or care landscape, which raises questions about the extent to which these findings are applicable in the UK (Atkinson and Hyde, 2019).

The second limitation is around the distance travelled analysis. The data provided were limited as they did not cover all of the outcomes expected within the Theory of Change. Therefore, conclusions drawn around this data are limited. We make a recommendation about this in the 'conclusions and recommendations' chapter of this report.

Conclusions

The distance travelled analysis and contribution analysis presented here suggest that the Bristol Staying Close pilot could and did make a contribution to positive outcomes in relation to stable housing, and could and did make a contribution to positive outcomes in relation to education, employment and training.

We are unable to draw any conclusions in relation to the other outcomes expected from this pilot. The extant evidence seems to suggest that an intervention or programme such as Staying Close could make positive contributions in the other outcome areas targeted by Bristol, but the lack of outcome data means that we are unable to complete the analysis in these areas. We make a recommendation about this in the 'conclusions and recommendations' chapter of this report.

7. Voice of young people

Methods summary

A key aim of this evaluation was to give a voice to young people leaving, or preparing to leave children's homes in Bristol. Young people were given voice through being involved in the design of the evaluation, as researchers and as research participants. Whilst we sought to involve young people more fully in the production of this report, we have not received detailed information from them.

We have previously reported on the role that young people played in the evaluation design (Wright et al., 2019). The views of young people have been integrated with those of other research participants in the findings of this evaluation, and have been particularly important to the findings around the sections on the Staying Close offer and expectations and experience in both this and the interim report.

Findings

Young people have a voice in the Bristol Staying Close pilot, both as individuals and as a group. Young people are involved in making key decisions about the support they receive from Staying Close. Care leavers choose the type of support they feel is appropriate. As one young person explained, they also have choices in terms of who will act as their support worker:

[My Staying Close worker] supports me. I have lots of support. I chose him because he used to be my care worker...If I need something then I call him and I can talk with him as well...So, yes, it's like [the support that I received] the children's house.
(Peer interview 1, final phase)

The three young people who took part in the final phase interviews highlighted how and why their agency was important to them, both in their choice of Staying Close support worker, and in their opportunity to co-produce services and participate in their housing pathway. The extract taken from a peer interview with one young person shows why Staying Close is important:

I only have a Staying Close worker because it's the person that used to work with me. I have known her for, like, seven years. I wouldn't normally use Staying Close, because I don't like talking to people and stuff, and I have had so many people come in and out of my life with social services and stuff if you know what I

mean? The lady that works with me contacted me and asked if I wanted to be on it and stuff. I said yes, but only if it was someone that I knew. I wasn't willing to work with new people. I thought it was a brilliant idea because it helps people. Obviously, I am very independent. I have been independent from the age of 11 but I think it helps a lot like if you're not independent like for an example, if you need help with your shopping and you've got a baby like me. She can come and help me with stuff even if I'm feeling sad, or want somebody to talk to. She is really flexible. She can obviously talk to me and make me feel better, take me out for a coffee just to get me out of the house really. (Peer interview 3, final phase)

The revised focus on flexible support that was described here is provided through relationships that emphasise a gradual and planned move towards autonomy. As one young person explained, the ability of Staying Close to support her transition as a journey has been an important part of the pathway to her own autonomy and success as an independent adult:

"[As a person] I am less angry and when I was [living in the children's home] I was always an angry child and I used to be so rude. I wouldn't even probably sit here now and speak to you now. You wouldn't even believe the person I was...Everyone is so proud. I am proud of myself...Now I'm better at sorting my benefits out, getting a job and just focusing on being around the right people, not going along the wrong path." (Peer interviewee 3, final phase).

Based upon a programme of sustained collaboration with young people living in and leaving care, there emerges a clear message within the data that some care leavers want to be able to count on people who have proven that they are reliable to support and witness their gradual, rather than instantaneous journey to independence. It was also made clear by one young person that this level of support may not have been possible under the traditional 'outreach' service:

"I only have the Staying Close because it's the person that used to work with me. I have known her for, like, seven years... I think [Staying Close] it was a brilliant idea because it helps people a lot, like if you're not independent...When I was in hospital ill, with the baby, [my Staying Close worker] helped me a lot. She

bought pyjamas and everything because all of my clothes were dirty.” (Peer Interview 3, final phase)

The young person went on to explain how she would have been alone in the hospital without pyjamas or clean clothes if the Staying Close programme did not exist.

Commenting on the report

Representatives of Bristol Council were invited to share the details of this report with the young people being supported by Staying Close. The authors also extended the opportunity to facilitate a workshop to share, discuss, and review the conclusions of this evaluation. Although the coordinator of the Staying Close project has reviewed this evaluation and verified its accuracy, the opportunity to share this report with young people, or include their views on the content, has not been enabled.

Limitations

The numbers of young people involved in this research are small: three people participated in the evaluation design co-production workshop, five responses were received to the surveys, three people took part in the final interview and nobody responded to the invitation to be involved in the findings workshop. These small numbers reflect the size of the overall population of young people using Staying Close in Bristol (n=32), and the well-noted challenges of engaging young people leaving care in research (Stein, 2012).

Conclusions

The three young people who took part in the peer interviews each agreed that Staying Close provided an extension of care that enabled them to feel more supported in the transition to independent living. It is important to note that each young person had experience of leaving care without a designated Staying Close worker. Each young person explained that without the allocation of a Staying Close worker, they might not have been able to manage the transition successfully. In light of this finding, we have developed the conclusion that the Staying Close worker can help fence off the ‘cliff edge’ that is so often associated with the experience of leaving care and provide a safety net to catch those young people who find themselves at risk of falling into crisis.

8. Cost analysis

Methods summary

The overall aim of this element of the evaluation was to gather information on the cost of the Staying Close Cost pilot that are *additional* to those costs which would have been accrued had the pilot not been running. Additionality is the guiding principle of cost capture, requiring a comparison of the costs of the pilot to those of the situation had the pilot not been running.

Findings

We provide a summary of the findings in relation to the costs of the pilot, and the costs/benefits that would likely be faced if the pilot had not been running. A more detailed breakdown of these estimates is provided in Appendix 3, which includes details of the basis of individual benefit estimates.

Pilot costs

32 young people were supported during this pilot. We therefore estimate that the total cost over four years was £1,050,347.

This means that:

- over the period of one year (assuming 2019/20 is a typical year once the intervention is established) the average cost of Staying Close delivery per young person is £12,494; and,
- over the intervention as a whole, (over four years), the cost per young person is estimated to be £55,281.

Benefits estimates

The outcomes expected from the Bristol Staying Close pilot include:

- establishing and maintaining positive relationships;
- improved mental health;
- appropriate accommodation; and,
- improved Education, Employment, and Training.

Table 6, below, summarises the potential savings to the state and society (that is, the likely cost to the public purse had the pilot not been running).

Limitations

The analysis presented here is based on a number of assumptions, and on cost data provided by the pilot. The pilot costs and benefits, compared to alternative provision, are highly sensitive to changes in these assumptions and the accuracy of the cost data provided. The cost data provided by the pilot did not allow for the separation of set up and running costs, and so we assume set up costs are included in the total costs of the project in the first two years. In the following, we take the Year 3 costs as indicative of annual costs excluding setup costs.

The analysis of the potential costs and benefits that would be incurred in the absence of Staying Close does not take into account the provision of some support – on an informal and ad hoc basis – prior to the implementation of the pilot. It is simply not possible, because of the nature of this previous provision, to estimate its likely costs.

Finally, in the absence of evidence around the impact of Staying Close, and the lack of complete knowledge of the support which was previously in place, it is not possible to estimate the likely additional level of costs avoided or benefits derived from its provision. Due to the lack of accurate data, it is also not possible accurately to estimate the level of change that would need to take place for the costs of the pilot to be covered by the benefits generated.

Conclusions

Although there is no obvious counterfactual we may employ in the case of Bristol Staying Close pilot, the level of the costs which might be saved if young people are diverted from a range of negative outcomes are significant. It seems reasonable to suppose that there is a likelihood the intervention will break even, however further research is required to determine the actual scale of the savings made.

Table 8: Benefits estimates

Outcome expected	Cost of alternative provision/likely outcome	Comment
Appropriate accommodation	Homelessness £26,000 per year Local authority residential care £156,000 per year	The major cost to society which might be avoided by those young people in the Staying Close pilot is homelessness. In the absence of Staying Close might be the cost of Local Authority Residential Care, which may cost up to ¹⁸ £3,000 per week.
Improved Education, Employment, and Training	£72,000 lifetime costs of being NEET	The public finance costs of a young person who is not in education, employment or training (NEET) over the course of their life have been estimated to be ⁶ £72,000. The cost to society as a whole, including to the young person, has been estimated to be ²⁴ £133,500. The cost is increased by nearly 100% if we compare the average life outcomes of a NEET young person with the average outcomes of a graduate (on average).

⁶ Updated for inflation from Coles, B., Godfrey, C., Keung, A., Parrott, S. and Bradshaw, J. (2010) Estimating the life-time cost of NEET: 16-18 year olds not in Education, Employment or Training, Research Undertaken for the Audit Commission at the University of York.
<https://www.york.ac.uk/inst/spru/research/pdf/NEET.pdf> [accessed 12 March 2020]

Table 9: Benefits estimates (continued)

<p>Establishing and maintaining positive relationships Better relationships management and improved mental health</p>	<p>Cost of A&E - £129</p> <p>Costs of a visit to a GP - £43</p> <p>Cost of mental health disorders is approximately £300 per year</p> <p>Cost to NHS of pregnancy/birth - £4,000.</p> <p>Cost of care for child - residential care £150,000 and £36,000 for foster care for a child.</p> <p>Savings per person, per year diverted from substance abuse - £6,250.</p> <p>Cost per offence of crime - £5,500.</p>	<p>There is no clear indicator we might use as a proxy in a situation such as this. We might take, as proxies, the reduction in the likelihood of a teen pregnancy, the potential of reduction in the probability of substance abuse, and a potential reduction in criminal activity in the areas of substance misuse and crimes against the individual. In the absence of a counterfactual, it is not possible to work out realistic likelihoods of these costs arising in the absence of the intervention, or the reduction in these probabilities which the intervention promotes. Notwithstanding, it is clear that the costs of poor relationships are significant.</p>
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9. Summary of key findings on 7 practice features and 7 outcomes

As reported in the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme Round 1 Final Evaluation Report (Sebba et al, 2017), evidence from the first round of the Innovation Programme led the DfE to identify 7 features of practice and 7 outcomes to consider the challenges and successes of implementation, and the difference the features make to young people. Five of these features are discussed below in relation to Staying Close in Bristol.

Using a strengths-based practice framework. The young people who took part in this evaluation spoke specifically about how their strengths were being recognised and supported by Staying Close workers who could offer sensitive and responsive support at those times and in those places where it was most needed.

Systemic theoretical models. The key role of the Staying Close worker is to capitalise on relationship-based approaches to enable successful transitions, human development, and change. In practice, this means that the challenges that young people in Bristol face are now (more) formally rooted within the pathway planning process. This approach to support recognises that not all young people leaving care can experience a successful transition to autonomy entirely on their own. Now that young people are being better supported through the Staying Close offer, a central part of their relational pattern, or social system, has been shown to enable adjustments in the immediate context that can provide a further source of strength and support.

Enabling staff to do skilled direct work. The Staying Close offer provides an important extension to the role of residential care worker. Although a scheme of 'outreach' has been used historically in Bristol, this approach was often fragmented. Now that specific workload allocation is given to the Staying Close role, closely bound within a formal assessment and plan for intervention, children's home workers are able to facilitate opportunities for young people to engage with more detailed, specific, individualised and task orientated work that could be better supported with formal training on topics that include housing and benefit entitlement.

Multi-disciplinary skill sets working together. The Staying Close offer in Bristol enables young people with a named Staying Close experience a sense of stability. Whilst personal advisors, social workers, and housing officers have a particular function to provide advice, assess, implement, and review the pathway plan, they can also be a stranger to the young person. As shown above, Staying Close workers can support young people by managing and promoting communication between professional agencies, thus creating a sense of stability for the young person. As shown above, the opportunity to build on an established relationship can help the Staying Close worker to create a sense of stability by managing and promoting communication (directly and by

encouraging young people to speak to other workers involved in their transition) between professional agencies.

High intensity and consistency of practitioner. Based upon an assessment of individual need, which is agreed directly with the young person, a focus on continuity and consistency described in this report enables the Staying Close offer to capitalise on the theory of relationship-based practice. In alignment with the concept of interdependence, the Staying Close offer in Bristol also facilitates the opportunity for young people leaving care to access ongoing and flexible support, dependent on need, through relationships that reflect genuine concern, availability, and consistency, thus enabling a gradual move towards autonomy. As shown above, the consistency enabled by the Staying Close worker can help fence off the 'cliff edge' that is so often associated with the experience of leaving care, but also provide a safety net to catch those young people who find themselves at risk of falling into crisis.

10. Conclusions and recommendations

The evidence presented in this evaluation suggests that Staying Close in Bristol has been successful at supporting young people transitioning from care. Through the Staying Close framework, key workers have been able to formalise an approach to leaving care support based on relationship-based practices that encourage secure, long-term social networks in support of the concept of interdependence.

The evidence presented in this report also suggests that Staying Close in Bristol can facilitate opportunities for the young people to experience a gradual, not instantaneous, journey to independence. The Staying Close pilot in Bristol achieves this by facilitating the opportunity for care leavers to access ongoing and flexible support, dependent on assessed need, through relationships with former carers that reflect genuine concern, availability, and consistency.

The content of this evaluation highlights a specific example of good practice that could be extended to other areas. Although the role of family and social relationships and emotional and behavioural support are both in the pathway plan set out as a requirement in relevant legislation, the young people who took part in this study suggested that there remains a gap in offering emotional support. For these young people, Staying Close was effective because it delivered on the promise to provide unconditional emotional and practical support.

Recommendations

We recommend that:

- further work is needed to identify and reduce gaps and tensions in the leaving care system in the borough, particularly for young people who have wider health and social care support needs as they move from children's to adult services. The findings set out in the section on implementation success and challenges suggest some potential for tension between different parts of the leaving care system about where responsibilities and actions lie. It may also be beneficial for the borough to examine the scopes of practice of different professionals in the system to ensure they are complementary and understood;
- the implementation of a formal strategy for collecting outcome data could enable future Staying Close projects to verify the progress experienced by young people, and on the aims that it is trying to achieve. The data collected should relate directly to the outputs and outcomes specified in the Theory of Change. Important monitoring data that projects should try to capture include the number of young people eligible for the Staying Close offer and accessing the different components of the offer (e.g., number of young people living in Staying Close accommodation,

number of young people attending social events etc.). Regular monitoring might include the frequency and nature of contacts with their key worker, the young person's status regarding accommodation, employment, and education. Ideally, young people would complete a survey once a year using validated well-being scales such as the ONS4, which measures life satisfaction, sense of worth of activities, happiness and anxiety, and the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale. It is important that the outcome data captures short and medium term outcomes, at least two points over time, to measure progress made by the young people. Outcome data could also include a list of independent living skills (possibly co-produced by young people) and a measure of their level of confidence against each skill. Each project will then need to add measures carefully tailored to their own theory of change. For instance, in the case of Staying Close Bristol, additional data could be collected, at agreed intervals, on the number of evictions and cases of homelessness to measure incidence and prevalence;

- more work is needed to demonstrate the outcomes achieved and the benefits generated by this form of support. In particular, some work to better align the scheme's objectives, expected outcomes, and outcome data collected would be beneficial. There are a number of different resources that are publicly available to support this work. The break-even analysis undertaken as part of this evaluation suggests that it is likely the intervention will break-even, however further research is required to determine the actual scale of the savings made;
- the Department for Education should simplify the policy outcomes expected from Staying Close. The current objectives are not mutually exclusive, and include a number of terms that are fuzzy, contested, poorly defined, and open to interpretation. The term 'resilience', for example, appears in two of the current objectives; there is a high level of interaction between the objective around being ready for independent living and being in stable and suitable accommodation; and, the term stable accommodation is difficult to conceptualise and measure. In two specific areas – physical health and resilience to unsafe behaviours – there is a lack of evidence to suggest that Staying Close could make a contribution to positive outcomes. It would be simpler to have a single policy objective for Staying Close, such as 'Support young people leaving care to be ready for independent living';
- Bristol is one of eight Staying Close pilots in England. There are significant differences between the pilots in terms of their objectives, their expected outcomes, the Staying Close offer, how and what form of support is provided, and whether and how they work to provide safe and suitable accommodation for young people as they transition to independent adulthood. These differences are such that it is challenging to draw conclusions overall about Staying Close, which needs to be taken into account if the initiative is rolled out nationally.

Appendix 1: Distance travelled analysis

Introduction

Distance travelled is a form of analysis of the change in the behaviour of individuals who participate in a programme or receive an intervention. It is a simple way of understanding the contribution that a programme or intervention may make to the observed outcomes of participants. Distance travelled analysis is often used to understand changes in ‘soft’ outcomes – outcomes which are broad, big picture, and often intangible and difficult to measure or quantify. Soft outcomes are often contrasted with hard outcomes, which typically have a high level of specificity, are tangible and easily measurable. Soft and hard outcomes are not mutually exclusive, and the difference between them is often the result of subjective decision making.

Distance travelled analysis is focused on changes in observed or self-reported behaviours/experiences/outcomes at the level of the individual programme participant or individual receiving an intervention. It does not allow for any changes in observed or self-reported behaviour or outcomes to be attributed to individual programmes or interventions. Such analysis does not involve comparing the progress of programme participants or intervention recipients with similar individuals who are not engaged in the programme or receiving the intervention; it does not involve controlling for factors beyond the intervention or programme that might affect the observed changes; nor does it involve examining average changes overall for programme participants. Despite these limitations, when combined with other elements of this evaluation – the implementation evaluation and the contribution analysis used to understand the impact of Staying Close – it provides a basis from which to judge whether and how the programme makes a difference to the lives of young people who participate in it.

Data

The Bristol Staying Close team provided anonymised, individual level monitoring and outcome data to the evaluation team. The data were provided as for each month between January 2018 and September 2019. The data gives an insight into the number of young people accessing Staying Close in Bristol each month (and from which we can estimate the duration of each individual’s participation), as well as counts of whether each individual was in not in education, employment or training (NEET), was living in supported or independent accommodation, was homeless, had completed the ASDAN course, was on benefits, or was charged/convicted of an offence. The Staying Close team made some changes to the data collected over the reporting period. Details of the outcomes collected and the periods over which they were collected are provided in the Appendix to this report.

Policy objectives, scheme outcomes, and data

The Department for Education has identified a number of outcomes to which Staying Close might be expected to contribute. These include outcomes related to: employment, education and training; independent living and accommodation, physical and mental health and wellbeing; behaviours; and, social networks. Individual Staying Close pilots are not expected to work towards achieving positive changes in all of these outcome areas, and there are differences in which of these outcomes are and are not objectives for individual schemes. It is also the case that schemes do not necessarily collect data to measure progress against each of their outcome objectives.

The Bristol Staying Close pilot has set out the outcomes it expects to achieve in its theory of change. This was initially developed by Bristol City Council with support from the Spring Consortium as part of Bristol's bid for Department for Education funding, and has been further developed through the evaluation. The Bristol pilot aims to improve outcomes for young people accessing Staying Close in 4 overall areas:

- Establishing and maintaining positive relationships
- Improved mental health
- Appropriate accommodation (defined by the individual pathway plan)
- Improved Education, Employment, and Training (EET)

There are also 23 interim outcomes that the Bristol scheme expects to contribute to these 4 overall outcomes. The Bristol pilot collects a range of data around outcomes, some of which directly relate to the outcomes specified for the scheme, and some outcomes are not covered by data collected. Table 3 maps the national policy objectives to the Bristol specific objectives, and the outcome data collected by the Bristol Staying Close team.

Table 10: Mapping of national outcomes, Bristol outcomes, and Bristol outcomes data

National outcome objectives	Bristol outcome objectives⁷	Bristol outcome data
Are in education, employment or training	Improved education, employment or training	Nine separate forms of education, employment or training Not in education, employment or training ⁸ and ⁹
Are in accommodation that is suitable and stable	Appropriate accommodation	Supported accommodation Independent accommodation Homeless ¹⁰
Are physically healthy	Improved mental health	None ¹¹ .
Are ready for independent living	Appropriate accommodation	Rent arrears Tenancy breakdown ¹²
Are resilient to unsafe behaviours	Improved mental health	None ¹³
Report good social connections	Establishing and maintaining positive relationships	None ¹⁴
Feel well-supported	Improved mental health	None

Number of young people accessing Staying Close in Bristol

Figure 2 provides insight into the total number of people accessing the programme in each month between January 2018 and September 2019. Between January and June

⁷ Explained in detail in Section 2

⁸ The data provided by Bristol record several scheme participants as being both NEET and in some form of education, employment or training in the same month. This might be a recording area, or denote that the individual concerned moved between NEET and EET during the relevant month. This issue only arises in early months of the scheme and only affects the EET/NEET outcomes.

⁹ We have used in NEET data to measure change in this outcome

¹⁰ Recorded from June 2018

¹¹ This data was collected instead in the implementation and process evaluation (Section 6 and 7).

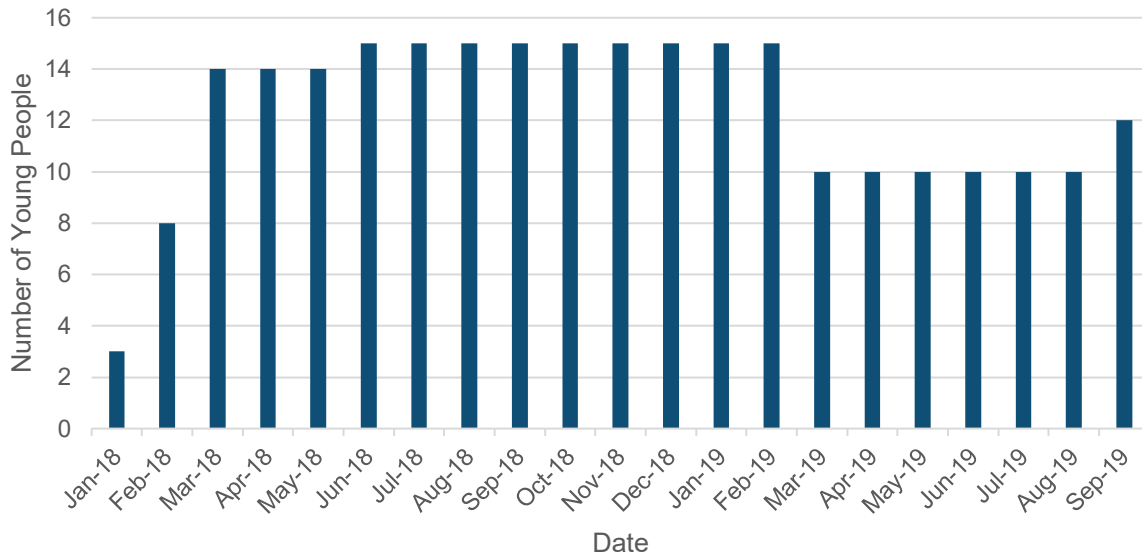
¹² There are significant issues with these data which we have been unable to resolve. We are therefore unable to provide distance travelled analysis on this outcome

¹³ This data was collected instead in the implementation and process evaluation (Section 6 and 7).

¹⁴ This data was collected instead in the implementation and process evaluation (Section 6 and 7).

2018, the programme was increasing in size as a number of new people joined each month; five new participants joined in February 2018 and seven in March 2018, with one joining in June 2018. During this period, no one left Staying Close.

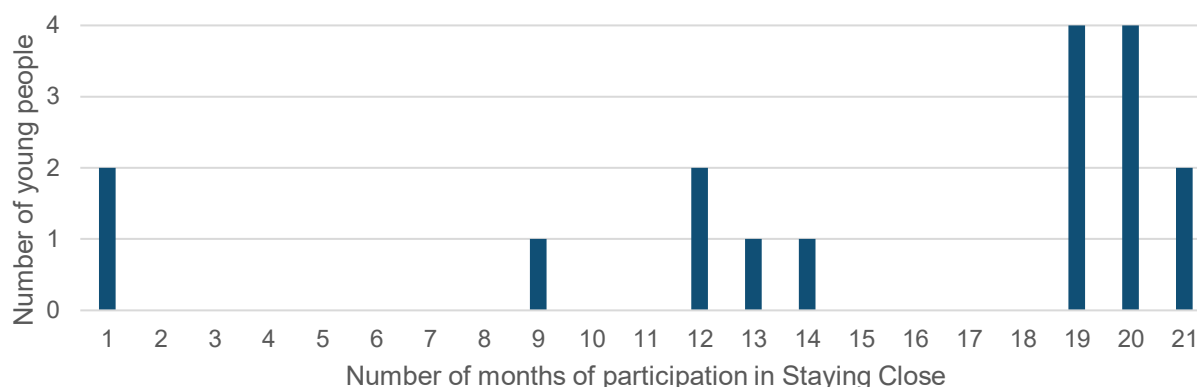
Figure 2: Number of Staying Close participants each month (from data provided by the Bristol Staying Close team)



The cohort remained stable between June 2018 and March 2019, with no joiners or leavers during this period. In March 2019, 5 individuals left Staying Close because they no longer required the support of the team, and the overall number participating in the programme dropped to 10. These 10 individuals continued through to September 2019, when 2 new individuals joined.

Most programme participants remain with Staying Close for a significant period. The average duration of participation in the programme was just over 15 months (SD 6.35 months) (median 19 months). Figure 3 sets out the duration, in months, of each of the 17 individuals for whom we have data. This shows that ten of the participants accessed the programme for more than 19 months (of the 21 months for which we have data), and that two participants were in the programme for one month (both of these individuals joined in September 2019).

Figure 3: Count of participant's duration in Staying Close in Bristol



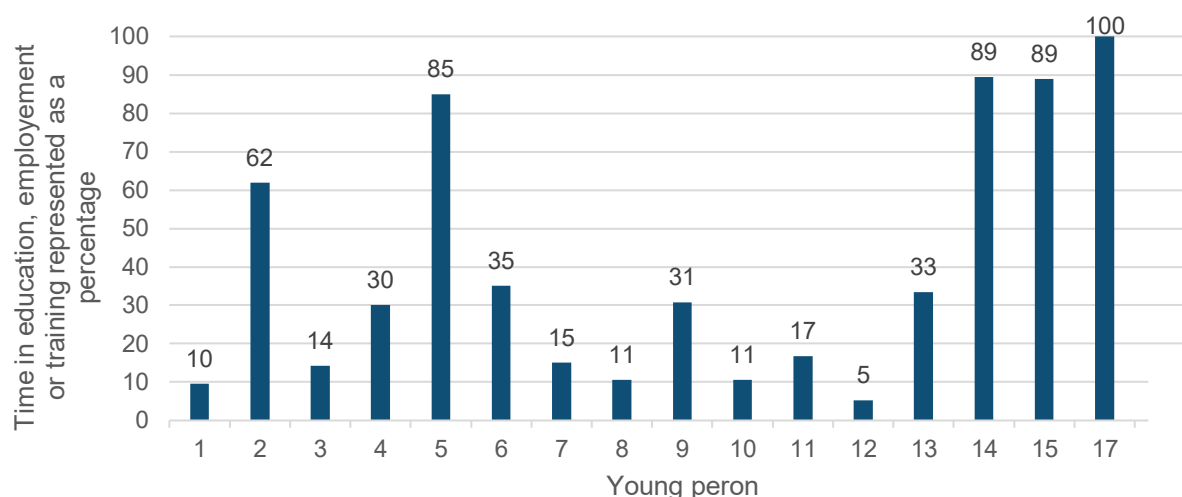
Distance travelled: education, employment or training outcome

7 of the 17 young people accessing Staying Close services in Bristol between January 2018 and September 2019 were in education, employment or training (EET) when they started receiving support. This includes 1 of the 2 individuals who started in September 2019 and for whom we only have 1 month's data. This compares to 9 individuals who were in EET in the final month of their participation in the programme (or September 2019, which is the last month for which we have data).

This data suggests some progress was made in this outcome. However, it is worth noting that all but 1 of the young people involved appear to have experienced periods in EET and not in education, employment or training (NEET). 2 individuals are recorded as having experienced three separate periods of being in EET during their participation in the scheme, and all but 1¹⁵ have experienced at least 1 period of EET. Figure 4 provides further details on scheme participants' EET experiences. For each of the 17 young people who received support at some point between January 2018 and September 2019, this figure shows the percentage of the time in the scheme that there were in EET.

¹⁵ One of the two individuals who joined the scheme in September 2019 was recorded as being NEET.

Figure 4: Time in EET while receiving Staying Close services in Bristol (n=17 participants¹⁶)



It is worth exploring the figures used to illustrate the EET experiences of young people accessing Staying Close in Bristol. On average, scheme participants were in EET for around a third of their time in Staying Close (average 5 months in EET on an average length of stay in the scheme of 15 months). This average hides a wide range of individual experiences. So, for example, one of the first young people to receive support – identified in the Bristol data by the number 1 – has been in Staying Close throughout the period for which we have data (January 2018 to September 2019). During this period, this young person is recorded as doing work experience in January 2018, work experience and apprenticeship in February 2018, and then NEET from March 2018 to September 2019. Number 2 was also in Staying Close throughout the whole period for which we have data. This young person experienced three periods of being in education, employment or training during this time; the first period lasted two months, the second lasted three months from June 2018, and the third started in February 2019 and continued through to September 2019 (the last month for which we have data). Number 17 has the most sustained EET experience. This young person joined Staying Close in March 2018 and has experienced three periods of being in EET, with one month between each of these experiences. For the nineteen months for which we have data on this young person, they spent seventeen months in some form of education, employment or training.

Distance travelled: appropriate accommodation

The Bristol outcome data do not provide a direct measure of whether young people accessing the scheme are in appropriate accommodation. Rather, it provides details on whether scheme participants are in supported accommodation or independent

¹⁶ The Bristol data includes 22 individuals from March 2019, for whom data are provided for 17 individuals.

accommodation, or are homeless. There are a small number of individuals who do not appear in either of these categories.

Five young people were in supported accommodation or independent accommodation when they were first recorded as receiving Staying Close services in Bristol. This includes the two individuals who joined in September 2019, and for whom we only have one month's data. This compares to fourteen young people who were recorded as being in these two accommodation types in the final month for which we have data.

There were five individuals who are recorded as having experienced homelessness at some point during period. However, it is not clear from the data provided whether these are a measure of prevalence (number of people who experienced homelessness) or incidence (number of episodes of homelessness experienced by each individual). The data appear to be a mixture of these two types of measures. The evaluation team was unable to resolve these data issues with the Bristol Staying Close team, and cannot therefore report on homelessness. Suggested guidance for data collection is included in chapter 9.

Appendix 2: Cost analysis

Introduction

The overall aim of the evaluation was to gather information on the cost of the Staying Close Cost pilot that are *additional* to those costs which would have been accrued had the pilot not been running. Additionality is the guiding principle of cost capture, requiring a comparison of the costs of the pilot to situation had the pilot not been running. The objective of the cost evaluation was to provide an assessment of the full cost of the pilot, taking into account direct, indirect and absorbed costs, and by augmenting existing sources of cost data with information based on the experience of those implementing the pilot. This was necessary because a proportion of the costs were absorbed into existing budgets, for example, Local Authority budgets and existing office accommodation provision. Therefore accurate costs could not be obtained from a simple analysis of relevant accounts.

A secondary objective was to comment on the value for money of the Staying Close Cost more generally. However, as outlined below, this was far from straightforward due to variations in throughput and the absence of an appropriate counterfactual. As we note below, there is evidence the project may break even, however this is a matter for further research.

Cost capture methods

The cost capture process involved three methods:

- cost-capture questionnaires completed by key stakeholders, followed by further liaison as required;
- triangulation of interview data with existing data sources such as accounts data where available; and,
- comparison of quantitative data sources and qualitative interview material to determine adequacy of coverage of cost points and estimation of the likely missing cost points as required.

Costs captured

The range of costs captured included:

- capital costs (IT equipment, &c.);
- running costs (rent, utilities, maintenance, insurance, subcontracts and so on);
- staff related costs (relocation, recruitment, training, salary and time spent);

- absorbed costs, where the costs of the pilot have been absorbed by cross-subsidy from existing budgets, from existing surplus capacity or from staff goodwill; and
- other costs of Staying Close, for example, briefing groups and transportation.

Staying Close Pilot Cost Estimates

In table 6, we provide estimates of the setup and running costs of the pilot. We also provide an estimate of cost per young person on the pilot.

There are no data on the setup costs specifically; the data which are available relate to a year by year break down of the costs of the programme.

Caveats

As we have noted, there is no information available on setup costs. We assume these are included in the total costs of the project in the first two years. In the following, we take the Year 3 costs as indicative of annual costs excluding setup costs.

The staff and volunteer time for events is estimated based on the length of the events.

Cost per young person on the pilot

During the time of this evaluation, Staying Close had supported 19 young people with experience of care.

- over the period of one year (assuming Year 3 is a typical year once the intervention is established) the average cost of Staying Close delivery to each of these young people is £12,494; and,
- over the intervention as a whole, (including all setup costs) the cost per young person is estimated to be £55,281.

Table 11: Bristol Staying Close pilot cost capture

<u>Category</u>	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4	Total
Pilot Setup Costs					N/A
Running Costs					
Staying Close Coordinator BG12	43,185	47,111	47,111	47,111	£184,518
Project management - 2 days per week BG12	15,700	9,420			£25,120
Residential worker - 1 additional per home BG8	123,842	123,842	123,842	123,842	£495,367
Shift allowances	3,000	3,000	3,000	3,000	£12,000
2 × care leaver apprentices	19,324	27,192	27,192	27,192	£100,900
IT - phone &c.	4,000	500	500	500	£5,500
Travel	1,200	1,200	1,200	1,200	£4,800
Refurbishment	30,000	15,000	15,000	15,000	£75,000
Indep sector staying close costs	3,204	9,612	9,612	9,612	£32,040
Ofsted variation	2,644				£2,644
Engagement & Learning dissemination events	4,000	4,000			£8,000
ICT and policy revision costs	5,000	5,000	2,000	2,000	£14,000
HR recruitment and Finance	8,597	3,924	3,924	3,924	£20,369
Other Costs					
Training and development	12,000	4,000	4,000	4,000	£24,000
7% Evaluation cost	19,578	17,951			£37,529
Absorbed Costs					
Time cost of events (staff and volunteers) ¹⁷					£8,560
Total Cost of Staying Close Pilot			£237,381		£1,050,347

¹⁷ Calculated from time spent on training/briefing/preparatory events.

Benefits Estimates

The benefits of the Bristol Staying Close pilot are intended to include:

- establishing and maintaining positive relationships;
- improved mental health;
- appropriate accommodation; and,
- improved Education, Employment, and Training.

In the following we consider each of these in turn and estimate the potential savings to the state and society.

Better relationships management and improved mental health

There is no clear indicator we might use as a proxy in a situation such as this. We might take, as proxies, the reduction in the likelihood of a teen pregnancy, the potential of reduction in the probability of substance abuse, and a potential reduction in criminal activity in the areas of substance misuse and crimes against the individual. In the absence of a counterfactual, it is not possible to work out realistic likelihoods of these costs arising in the absence of the intervention, or the reduction in these probabilities which the intervention promotes. Notwithstanding, it is clear that the costs of poor relationships are significant.

General Health

We may note, in the first instance, the cost to the NHS of an A&E visit is estimated to be¹⁸ £129, the costs of a visit to a GP are circa¹⁸ £43. The cost to the public of adolescents suffering from mental health disorders is approximately¹⁸ £300 per year.

Teen pregnancy

The estimated cost to the NHS of a teen pregnancy which is carried to term is estimated to be¹⁹ £4,000. This includes the cost of antenatal, intrapartum and postnatal care. It does not include the impact of the baby on the employment outturns of the mother or the cost of bringing up the baby. The average cost to the NHS of a termination is¹⁹ £800; this does not include the psychological cost to the young person.

¹⁸ Updated for inflation from New Economy (Greater Manchester) (online) Business Case Support Tool. Department for Communities and Local Government's (DCLG) Troubled Families Unit, and Greater Manchester and Birmingham City Council. <https://www.local.gov.uk/sites/default/files/documents/download-community-action-7a0.xlsx> [accessed 19 March 2020].

¹⁹ Updated for inflation based on NICE (2014) Contraceptive Services With a Focus on Young People up to the Age of 25. Manchester: National Institute for Health and Care Excellence. <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph51/resources/costing-report-pdf-69198589> [accessed 10 March 2020]

There is some evidence that, where young people become young mums, Staying Close is providing them with the support they need to be more likely to continue looking after their child(ren). In the absence of this, it is relatively more likely such children would be taken into care. The cost of this varies but a reasonable estimate of the cost of residential care for a child is²⁰ £150,000 and £36,000 for foster care for a child.

Substance misuse

The estimated average cost of substance misuse is proxied by the savings which might be made from an effective treatment programme. These in turn are proxied by the potential criminal activity with which they are associated. The savings per person, per year diverted from substance abuse are estimated to be²¹ £6,250.

Involvement in crime

The average cost per offence of commercial crime and crimes against the individual (excluding fraud and cybercrime) or against is estimated to be²² £5,500.

Appropriate accommodation

The major cost to society which might be avoided by those young people in the Staying Close pilot, homelessness. It is estimated that the average cost of a homeless person to the public purse is²³ £26,000 each year. However, a more reasonable alternative to Staying Close might be the cost of Local Authority Residential Care, which may cost up to¹⁸ £3,000 per week. It is clear that it would take few weeks in residential care averted to have the intervention break even at that rate.

²⁰ Updated for inflation from NAO (2014) Children in Care. <https://www.nao.org.uk/report/children-in-care/> [accessed 20 March 2020].

²¹ Updated for inflation from National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse (2012) Estimating the Crime Reduction Benefits of Drug Treatment and Recovery, London: NHS. https://www.drugsandalcohol.ie/17540/1/NTA_Estimating_crime_reduction_benefits.pdf [accessed 15 March 2020]

²² Updated for inflation from Heeks, M., Reed, S., Tafiri M. and Prince, S. (2018) The Economic and Social Costs of Crime: Second Edition, Research Report 99, London: Home Office, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/732110/the-economic-and-social-costs-of-crime-horr99.pdf [accessed 19 March 2020].

²³ HomelessLink (online) Impact of homelessness. <https://www.homeless.org.uk/facts/understanding-homelessness/impact-of-homelessness> [accessed 10 March 2020].

Improved Education, Employment, and Training

The public finance costs of a young person who is NEET, that is to say, not in education, employment or training, over the course of their life have been estimated to be²⁴ £72,000. The cost to society as a whole, including to the young person, has been estimated to be²⁴ £133,500. The cost is increased by nearly 100% if we compare the average life outcomes of a NEET young person with the average outcomes of a graduate (on average).

Conclusions

Although there is no obvious counterfactual we may employ in the case of the Bristol Staying Close Pilot, the level of the costs which might be saved if young people are diverted from a range of negative outcomes are significant. It seems reasonable to suppose that there is a likelihood the intervention will break even, however further research is required to determine the actual scale of the savings made.

²⁴ Updated for inflation from Coles, B., Godfrey, C., Keung, A., Parrott, S. and Bradshaw, J. (2010) Estimating the life-time cost of NEET: 16-18 year olds not in Education, Employment or Training, Research Undertaken for the Audit Commission at the University of York.
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