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Department
for Education

St. Christopher's Staying Close Pilot

Evaluation report

March, 2020

Dr Kim Heyes

Dr Dan Allen, Grace Hothersall Dr Zinnia Mitchell-Smith, Dr Chris O'Leary, Dr Jessica Ozan, and Dr Kirstine Szifris

Contents

Contents	2
List of figures	4
List of tables	4
Acknowledgements	5
Young person-friendly summary	6
Key messages	7
Executive summary	8
Introduction	8
The project	8
The evaluation	8
Key findings	9
Lessons and implications	10
1. Introduction	12
Note on terminology	13
2. Overview of the project	14
3. Overview of the evaluation	17
Evaluation aims	17
Evaluation questions	17
Evaluation methods	20
Changes to evaluation methods	20
Limitations of the evaluation	20
4. Theory of Change	22
5. Implementation evaluation	24
Methods summary	24
Findings	24
The Staying Close offer	24
Relationships between professionals and agencies	25
Implementation successes and challenges	26
Transition as a journey	27

Expectations and experiences	27
Innovation	29
Limitations	30
Conclusions	30
6. Outcomes evaluation	32
Methods summary	32
Contribution analysis	32
Findings	35
Existing evidence base	35
Distance travelled analysis	36
Contribution narratives	38
Limitations	45
Conclusions	46
7. Voice of young people	47
Methods summary	47
Findings	47
Limitations	48
Conclusions	48
8. Cost analysis	49
Methods summary	49
Findings	50
Limitations	55
Conclusions	55
9. Summary of key findings on 7 practice features and 7 outcomes	56
10. Conclusions and recommendations	58
Appendix 1 - Theory of change	60
Appendix 2 - Cost analysis	61
References	66

List of figures

Figure 1 St Christopher's Staying Close pilot theory of change	23
Figure 2 Young person EET survey data	39
Figure 3 Staff views on whether Staying Close achieved EET outcomes	40
Figure 4 St. Christopher's Theory of Change from January 2020	60

List of tables

Table 1: Research questions (common to all Staying Close evaluations).....	18
Table 2: Research questions (pilot specific)	19
Table 3: Contribution analysis steps and their application to this evaluation	33
Table 4: Does the extant evidence suggest that Staying Close could contribute to outcomes	36
Table 5: Distance travelled by young people accessing St Christopher's Staying Close	37
Table 6: Detailed cost estimates	51
Table 7 Benefits Estimate	53
Table 8: St Christopher's Staying Close pilot cost capture	62

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Finally, we would very much like to thank the young people accessing Staying Close who were involved in this evaluation. This evaluation would not have been possible without the input of those who participated in the evaluation design co-production work, who were involved in the peer interviews, and who contributed to the implications, conclusions and recommendations outlined in this report.

Young person-friendly summary

Staying Close is a project that helps to support young people as they leave children's homes to become independent adults. Many young people have the support of their families at this crucial time, but young people leaving care do not have this. The project means that the relationships formed with care workers can continue and develop rather than end suddenly when a young person leaves a children's home. They also have a new housing option for when they leave care. It is a four bedroom moving-on house near to the children's homes. This lets them practise being independent in a safe environment. To understand if the Staying Close project is helpful, we interviewed staff and young people about their feelings towards it. We also asked for their views using surveys.

What we found in interviews:

How does Staying Close support young people?

Young people agree a Staying Close plan with their key worker. This plan is personalised to their needs and wants. Young people can decide to live in the Staying Close house, go back to their children's homes for a few nights when needed, join group activities, and contact their key or Life Skills worker over the phone or through messaging. The support is emotional and practical. For example, Staying Close workers helped a young person with babysitting and accessing a computer so they could go to university. The project enables young people leaving care to learn about independent living and helps them with education, employment and training. It also helps with becoming better at managing relationships and improving their wellbeing.

What are the challenges?

It was not always easy. For example, sometimes the young people in the moving-on house did not get along or the relationships between the care worker and the young person ended. Staff and young people created rules and boundaries to make things easier. The young people interviewed liked very much the support they got, and how staff listened to their opinions for decisions made about the Staying Close project.

Main points and the future

Before Staying Close, young people leaving care did not all receive the same support. The project is changing how things are done in St Christopher's children's homes. Staff are becoming more aware of the problems young people often face when they leave. The young people's journey towards independence starts earlier and support continues after they leave the home as they can keep contact with staff. Ealing and Hounslow local authorities think this is a good idea and are making it happen for all young people leaving care.

Key messages

Evidence presented in this report suggests that the St. Christopher's Staying Close pilot has made substantial progress in setting out expectations and boundaries within relationships. **Policies created by St. Christopher's have already been adopted by both the London boroughs of Ealing and Hounslow.** Key messages from this report focus on how the Staying Close model has been used by St. Christopher's and how they are starting to achieve positive outcomes in several areas:

1. **Outreach:** The idea of **emotional closeness** (rather than physical closeness) is important to St. Christopher's. This unique take on the idea of 'staying close' is a reflection on the amount of out of area placements that St. Christopher's take on within their children's homes, and therefore the young people taking part in Staying Close can be from anywhere in England.
2. **Co-production and evolution:** The pilot has adapted and changed following feedback from young people, and the care workers associated with the Staying Close. The continued development has involved a significant amount of **co-production** with all people involved, including future users of Staying Close. This co-production aspect promoted by St. Christopher's reflects the pilot's genuine desire to allow young people to gain autonomy and its ability to actively engage young people in decision making.
3. **Transition home:** St. Christopher's has a four bedroom home that is used to help young people practice and gain **independent living skills**, increasing their chances of success once they have moved into their own accommodation. St Christopher's also provides 'pop up beds' for young people who would like to temporarily return to their children's home, in times of celebrations or adversity.
4. **Changing cultures:** St. Christopher's is committed to ensuring that there is a **culture change** within their children's homes, **challenging outdated practices** and allowing for organic change. They also recognise that some of the staff will not want to buy into the long-term relationships that Staying Close offers, and it will not be mandatory to take part. St Christopher's identifies authentic relationships as being key to the success of the offer.
5. **Managing relationships:** Recognising how to end relationships in a managed way is an acknowledgement of the transitory nature of adult relationships, and an important issue to learn for young people who may previously have had many relationship breakdowns. However, rather than rely on creating just one relationship, St. Christopher's is creating a community. This is built through the network of young people and care workers, past and present. This helps young people to grow their social networks, and also allows for the creation of a peer support system.

Executive summary

Introduction

Staying Close is a pilot programme that aims to radically improve outcomes for young people transitioning from children's homes. It aims to address the 'cliff edge' faced by young people by improving, extending, and complementing the support provided by local authorities during their transition to independent adulthood. The pilot programme recognises that Staying Close will be designed and delivered in different ways, both reflecting local priorities and also the needs, strengths, and aspirations of individual young adults as they transition from care.

The project

The St. Christopher's Fellowship is a charity that provides a range of services throughout the UK for looked after children and young people leaving care, including children's homes, foster care, outreach, and support into employment. By providing accommodation, independent living skills, and emotional and practical support, the St Christopher's Staying Close pilot complements these services, and seeks to enhance local services for young people leaving, or preparing to leave, children's homes. The pilot aims to make real changes to young people's lives by increasing their wellbeing; improving their independent living skills; enabling them to better manage their relationships; and increasing their education, employment and training opportunities.

The evaluation

This is the second and final report of an independent evaluation of the St Christopher's Staying Close pilot. The evaluation was a mixed-method, theory-based examination of the implementation of Staying Close (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 young people, staff members, and wider stakeholders. It examined the progress made in a range of outcome areas by young people accessing St Christopher's Staying Close, 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.

The evidence for this report has been drawn from interviews with stakeholders (n=5 at mid-point and n=5 in the final phase); responses to the online staff surveys (n=7 for survey one and n=11 for survey two); peer interviews with young people (n=3);

discussions with young people (n=3); responses to the young person's survey (n=6 for survey one and n=4 for survey two); and documentary analysis of meeting notes and descriptive data provided by the project. It also included the collection and analysis of outcome and cost data. The stakeholders were representatives from across the two local authorities, the four children's homes, MACC UK and St. Christopher's. They were not selected as a representative sample, but as people who would give insight. Although during the evaluation there were 36 young people accessing Staying Close, they did so to varying degrees. The young people interviewed were fully engaged with the programme at the time of the evaluation.

Key findings

Through the Staying Close pilot, St Christopher's has established a new accommodation offer for young people leaving children's homes that is used as a supportive step towards independent living. They expanded the Staying Close offer to include an outreach component for young people who may want to stay 'emotionally close', no matter where they are, and personalised support based on young people's needs and wishes. St Christopher's has successfully co-produced elements of the programme, involving young people in key decisions. The work conducted as part of the pilot is contributing to changing culture and policies in the children's homes and local authorities involved.

The four key outcomes expected from the St Christopher's pilot, as set out in the evaluation theory of change, were:

1. **Better relationships management.** The St. Christopher's Staying Close scheme has been successful in developing (and continuing to develop) a team of staff from the London Boroughs of Ealing and Hounslow, and MAC-UK, to support young people transitioning from care. Through the Staying Close framework, staff have been able to formalise, and allow for relationships between themselves and the young people leaving care, to develop as normal adult relationships would outside of the care system. This is through using principles of attachment to develop relationships throughout the care journey, encouraging secure, long-term social networks that work for both the young person and the member of staff. Some of the staff and young people at early stages of the new relationships found that it can be difficult to replicate the relationships they had in the children's home. This has led to St. Christopher's and the young people creating guidance around relationship boundaries that has been adopted by both of the local authorities. However, , staying in touch has been a natural progression for some of the staff at the children's home, and Staying Close provides a formal framework for what they were already doing informally.
2. **Education, employment and training.** Staying Close supports young people to stay in education, employment and training (EET). The support given can range

from allowing the young person to use the wi-fi or computer, to babysitting the young person's children so that they can attend lectures at university. The Life Skills Co-ordinator is also on hand to advise about opportunities and will support the young person to apply for jobs or educational courses. Many of the young people involved in this evaluation report that they have found this support invaluable, with one of the young people stating that they would not be able to go to university without Staying Close.

3. **Improved independent living skills.** Staying Close enhances the independent living skills that young people develop prior to, and during, transition to independent adulthood. The pilot's Life Skills Co-ordinator divides their time between the children's homes and the house in Ealing. During visits to the children's homes, they include all of the children that live there, aiming to create a culture of independence. The young people who had moved into the independent living accommodation felt confident that support was there when they needed it, however, they still found that being responsible for their own home was more difficult than they had thought. In particular, budgeting and cleaning were seen as difficult when they first transition.
4. **Increased wellbeing.** All three of the previous themes link to evidence for increased wellbeing for the young people involved with Staying Close. However, the accommodation offer in Ealing means that young people can transition gradually, which allows them to have their independence, but without feeling abandoned or isolated. Staying Close plans ensure that the young people know who will contact them and when, and can arrange to go for dinner at the children's home on a regular, or ad-hoc basis. This helps to cope with the loneliness of transitioning from a busy environment to their own space. All of the young people felt that this support was useful, particularly for those with existing mental ill-health issues.

Lessons and implications

After reviewing the evidence, the evaluation team believes that Staying Close is an approach that benefits from the ability to evolve with each cohort of young people transitioning into adulthood. St. Christopher's has developed tools and processes to ensure that this happens, and to try and develop a sustainable model.

The Staying Close model has been useful to provide a framework around developing relationships between key worker and young people, but St. Christopher's has taken this a step further. Their model ensures the wellbeing of both the young person and the member of staff, allowing for the safe failure of relationships if necessary, but also building up sustainable communities that enhance social networks.

The challenge for the future is around the turnover of staff at the children's homes. St. Christopher's has identified this challenge and intends to manage it through a positive culture change, ultimately making the support worker role more attractive to the right people. Policy changes have already been adopted into local authority policies in the London boroughs of Ealing and Hounslow, practices and leaving care offers.

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 pilot's objectives, expected outcomes, and outcome data collected would be beneficial. The substantial revision of the pilot's theory of change at the very end of the evaluation and without changes to outcome data collected, suggests some disconnect in thinking around how the pilot should work, what outcomes might be achieved, and how this might be evidenced. The cost and benefit 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 benefits generated and any savings made.

The St Christopher's scheme is one of eight Staying Close pilots in England. There are significant differences between the pilots in terms of aims and design. These differences need to be taken into account if Staying Close is rolled out nationally, as there will be policy and efficacy implications due to local requirements and ability to implement such a scheme.

1. Introduction

Staying Close is a pilot programme that aims to radically improve outcomes for young people transitioning from children's homes. 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. There are two elements that are core to Staying Close. There is an accommodation offer, aimed at providing accommodation that is suitable and close to the young person's previous children's home and, secondly, 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 five outcome areas for young people transitioning from care: independent living; access to education; employment and training (EET): namely, stability; feeling safe and secure; good health and wellbeing; and financial stability (DfE, 2018). The pilot programme recognises that Staying Close has been 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 is a significant body of evidence, both in the UK and internationally, that young people transitioning from care to independent adulthood face a number of significant challenges (Bengtsson et al., 2018). Their transition to adulthood is shorter than, and occurs at a younger age compared to, their peers, in a form of 'instant adulthood' (Rogers, 2011). Young people transitioning from care often lack access to family support during this transition. It has long been recognised that young people leaving children's homes face significant challenges and often achieve poorer outcomes than other young adults (Adley and Jupp Kina, 2017). 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 (HM Government, 2016). They often experience instability in their housing, and are over-represented in homeless populations (O'Leary, Ozan and Bradbury, 2017).

This report focuses on the pilot Staying Close scheme run by St. Christopher's in Ealing and Hounslow, although some of the young people live beyond these local authorities. The report provides insights into the design and implementation of the pilot. It focuses on the Staying Close offer and how it is delivered in conjunction with MAC-UK¹, the successes and challenges experienced in its implementation, and the distance travelled

¹ MAC-UK are an organisation who specialise in co-production. Their expertise has been used in the care homes to train staff and work alongside young people during the implementation of Staying Close.

by young people accessing Staying Close in the area. It also seeks to understand the contribution made by Staying Close 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 at the age of 16. There are two reasons for this. The first is to distinguish between the home or residences relating to the Staying Close project and the second in response to how the young people have referred to their homes throughout their responses to this research. 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

There are eight Staying Close pilots funded under the children's social care innovation programme, of which St Christopher's is one. St Christopher's is a charitable organisation, which is a provider of children's homes. The London boroughs of Ealing and Hounslow are partners in this project. Across the geographical area of the two boroughs, there are a total of four children's homes run by St. Christopher's, which between them offer up to 28 placements.

The mid-year population for the London Borough of Ealing in 2018 was 342,000 people, with approximately 1,436 looked after children in care. Correspondingly, figures from the London Borough of Hounslow are a mid-year population of 278,000 in 2018 with slightly lower numbers of looked after children of approximately 1,084 (DfE, 2020; Greater London Authority, 2020; Ealing Council, n.d.).

There are a small number of young people who meet the eligibility criteria for participation in Staying Close, and of those young people, some are from outside of the boroughs, having been placed in Hounslow or Ealing through spot purchasing from the London Borough of Islington and Leicestershire County Council. The eligibility criteria in the original St. Christopher's proposal was for young people to have access to a separate 4 bed shared accommodation unit to provide secure, annually reviewed tenancies for 17-18 year old former residents of children's homes (young people who have been resident for at least 7 weeks). These criteria can be applied to all young people in children's homes currently or previously supported by St. Christopher's in Ealing and Hounslow, whether they take up the accommodation offer, or choose another option.

At the time of this report, there are 38 young people with a Staying Close plan, 11 of whom are young people who had become independent before Staying Close was introduced, but have come back to participate. Time allocated from Staying Close depends on the needs of the individual; those with higher needs have so far been given around 25 hours per month of support, and those with lower needs will have much less. The ethos at one of the children's homes is that they have enough staff for someone to be able to leave immediately if an ex-resident is in urgent need.

The St Christopher's Staying Close pilot seeks to enhance local services for young people leaving, or preparing to leave children's homes, 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 people as they transition to independence;
- b) the need to find ways of reducing the isolation often reported by young people who have left care; and

- c) improving the likelihood of their maintaining tenancies, staying well and securing employment, education or training in the longer term.

The evaluation theory of change identifies four distinct categories of outcomes:

1. **Stable Education, Employment or 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. Another pathway leading to the same outcome and is more education orientated includes better organisation skills and an increased number of young people in education and training.
2. **Better relationships management:** 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, better ability to maintain healthy relationships and a reduction in loneliness.
3. **Increased well-being:** 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 or recovery after a crisis episode occurs. This would reduce stress and risk behaviours, and generate increased well-being.
4. **Improved independent living skills:** this outcome is achieved through an increased preparedness to try new skills, which leads to increased practical living skills, increased autonomy, and reduced dependency. Another pathway to achieve the outcome comprises increased ability to accept set-backs, increased emotional skills, increased capacity to reflect, and increased ability to problem solve.

Project activities

St. Christopher's ambition is to change the culture of the way in which staff work with young people in transition and to develop a model of best practice for continuation of care post-18. Their project plans refer to:

- **accommodation:** the project provides 'pop home' beds in existing children's homes along with a separate 4 bed shared accommodation unit to provide secure, annually reviewed tenancies for former residents of children's homes (young people who have been resident for at least 7 weeks);
- **life skills and activities:** all young people resident in all 4 children's homes have access to a Life Skills Mentor who will begin work with them whilst they live in the children's home and continue this relationship into independence. The Life Skills

Worker works within the children's homes, but also has a workspace at the top of the house in Ealing. The young people living in this accommodation are encouraged to spend time with the Life Skills Worker, and to utilise the computer for researching education or job opportunities. Meetings with a Key Worker can also happen in this space;

- **staff development:** enhancing skills in reflective practice and working with care leavers through clinical practice supervision. This programme is continually developed and delivered by young people with a team from MAC-UK (with a focus on mental health);
- **outreach:** all young people are able to access support from their Staying Close key worker as and when needed, whether this is to go out for birthdays, or to be accompanied to appointments. Staying Close provides valuable funding to backfill positions in the care homes to allow for outreach without impacting on residents of the children's home. This can be within the children's home, but also at other locations. Some of the young people on the scheme live outside of London, so face-to-face meetings may be infrequent, with telephone support being used more regularly. Where young people outside of London wish to go back to the home and St. Christopher's will help with funding travel if required; and
- **'keeping in touch':** the introduction of an 'ITS Learning' app for staff and young people as a means of communication and possible ongoing contact with young people leaving care. This element of the programme was not implemented as young people decided that they preferred other methods of keeping in touch. A key element of Staying Close is co-production with the young people, and deciding not to pursue this app is a good example of the choices they have within this scheme.

3. Overview of the evaluation

Evaluation aims

There were two key aims of the evaluation reported here. The first was that this evaluation should follow a consistent approach to that used in the other seven Staying Close evaluations, to enable comparison between the pilots. The second key aim was that the evaluation should give voice to young people leaving, or preparing to leave, children's homes.

The evaluation was a mixed-method, theory-based examination of process and experience using a number of different data collection methods and engaging with a range of stakeholders. During the development of the research design and proposed method, the Manchester Metropolitan University, universities of Oxford and York teams held a number of discussions around the Department of Education's requirements, the nature and context of the pilot schemes, and the feasibility, usefulness and likely robustness of different designs. These discussions ensured a level of commonality between the evaluation designs.

Evaluation questions

Each evaluation had a series of core questions, which were common to all of the Staying Close evaluations. There are also research questions specific to St. Christopher's reflecting variation between the schemes, reflecting 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 research questions underpinning this evaluation, and where in this report the questions are addressed, are set out in tables 1 and 2.

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 4 and 5 of this report.
2	How have YP, and other staff members, been involved in the co-production of the model?	Addressed in chapters 4 and 6 of this report.
3	Have support plans been developed and implemented as anticipated? Has there been meaningful contact with an identified worker?	Addressed in chapters 4 and 6 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 chapter 4 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)? 	Addressed in chapters 5 and 6 of this report.

Number	Research question	Comment
	Report good social connections, greater social integration?	
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 chapter 5 of this report.
7	What are the costs of delivering the Staying Close intervention and what are the potential cost savings?	Addressed in chapter 7 of this report.
8	What are the experiences of young people in children's homes who do not access the interventions?	Not addressed in this evaluation ² .

Evaluation questions that are specific to the St. Christopher's Staying Close Pilot include:

Table 2: Research questions (pilot specific)

Number	Research question	Comment
1	To what extent is the pop-home bed used, when, in what contexts and in what ways? What is the experience for young people?	Addressed in chapters 4 and 5.
2	What is the experience of young people and other stake-holders in relation to the 4-bed unit?	Addressed in chapters 5 and 6.
3	How have young people and staff experienced the young person led supervision sessions (MAC-UK led work)?	Addressed in chapters 4, 5 and 6.
4	Do young people remain in contact with their chosen worker?	Addressed in chapters 4, 5 and 6.

² The evaluation did not include a counterfactual.

Evaluation methods

There were three elements of the evaluation design, which examined the implementation of the St. Christopher's Staying Close pilot (implementation or process evaluation), the experiences of young people accessing Staying Close services, and the effectiveness and cost effectiveness (outcome evaluation and cost analysis). The implementation evaluation was scheduled over three points: scoping; mid-point; and evaluation. A range of data collection and analysis methods were used during this evaluation:

- scoping interviews with project leads;
- theory of change workshop, during the scoping phase, with key participants;
- a young person's co-production workshop;
- interviews with project stakeholders (5 at mid-point and 5 in the final phase);
- online stakeholder survey conducted at two points (7 at midpoint and 11 at end point);
- responses to the young people's online survey conducted at two points (6 at midpoint and 4 at end point);
- some monthly meeting notes/internal reports coded for thematic analysis;
- 3 peer led interviews completed and 3 Manchester Met researcher-led interviews with young people;
- qualitative coding of all textual materials (interview transcripts, documents and reports, and open text responses to survey questions), and thematic analysis;
- data collection and analysis of cost data;
- data collection and analysis of outcome and performance data; and
- validation workshop for staff and young people at the end of the evaluation.

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 homes in any local authority in any given year. This sample is therefore not representative of the wider care-leaving population in England. The young people participating in Staying Close have been selected on their maturity and readiness for moving on from care. Those from this cohort that were selected as peer researchers and participants are more likely to give a biased view of the service as they are generally successful and have achieved at least

some of the expected outcomes. The other Staying Close projects can not be used as a comparison because of the differences of location, accommodation offer, support packages, and how pilots have been implemented. What is learnt is how the young people have viewed the project and what changes they feel it has brought about in their lives.

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. And, in any case, 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 (and some people may have participated in more than one way). 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.

As with any evaluation, the design of this research has tried to balance data requirements, evaluation resources, and the impact of research on the daily operation of the evaluand. The evaluation design has also taken into account the need for a common approach across the eight schemes being piloted across England. This evaluation includes a peer-research component, co-production workshops to involve young people in the design of the questionnaire, and qualitative interviews to capture their experience of the programme. Engaging young people in a meaningful way is overall challenging and time-consuming and only a few of them actively took part in the process. This was partly to do with the number of young people available at the time, but non-participation of vulnerable groups is also expected in evaluations such as this, so was factored in to the research design.

Throughout the evaluation, it has been clear that St. Christopher's staff would have preferred that researchers were given more time and used different, more intensive methods to engage a larger number of young people and gather more data. The methods used for this report were the most appropriate given the time and resources and the evaluation team is confident that the approach taken has generated a useful understanding of the changes generated by St Christopher's.

4. Theory of Change

As part of the process of bidding for funding under the Innovation Programme, projects were asked to submit a 'theory of change'; an explanatory model that seeks to illustrate how and through what mechanisms and resource use the intended outcomes of the innovation would be achieved. The Spring Consortium provided support to the development of theories of change during this bidding process. Through the early stages of the evaluation, the research team worked with Staying Close pilots (including St Christopher's) to further develop and reflect on their theories of change. Through workshops, follow up discussions, and interviews, individuals involved in the St Christopher's Staying Close pilot articulated and validated the schematic presented in figure 1. This process provided a space through which the pilots could reflect on the original proposals and make amendments as necessary to account for changes in implementation; to better articulate the causal pathways through which the intended outcomes would be achieved, and help the evaluation team develop a deep understanding of the pilot schemes.

In the closing weeks of the evaluation, the pilot provided a substantially revised theory of change to the evaluation team. It was not possible, given the timing of the revision and the extent of the revision, to incorporate this revised theory of change into the analysis and findings presented here. This report draws solely on the evaluation theory of change that was developed through the bidding process and the scoping phase of the evaluation, which is set out in figure 1. For reference, the revised theory of change (dated March 2020) is given in Appendix 1.

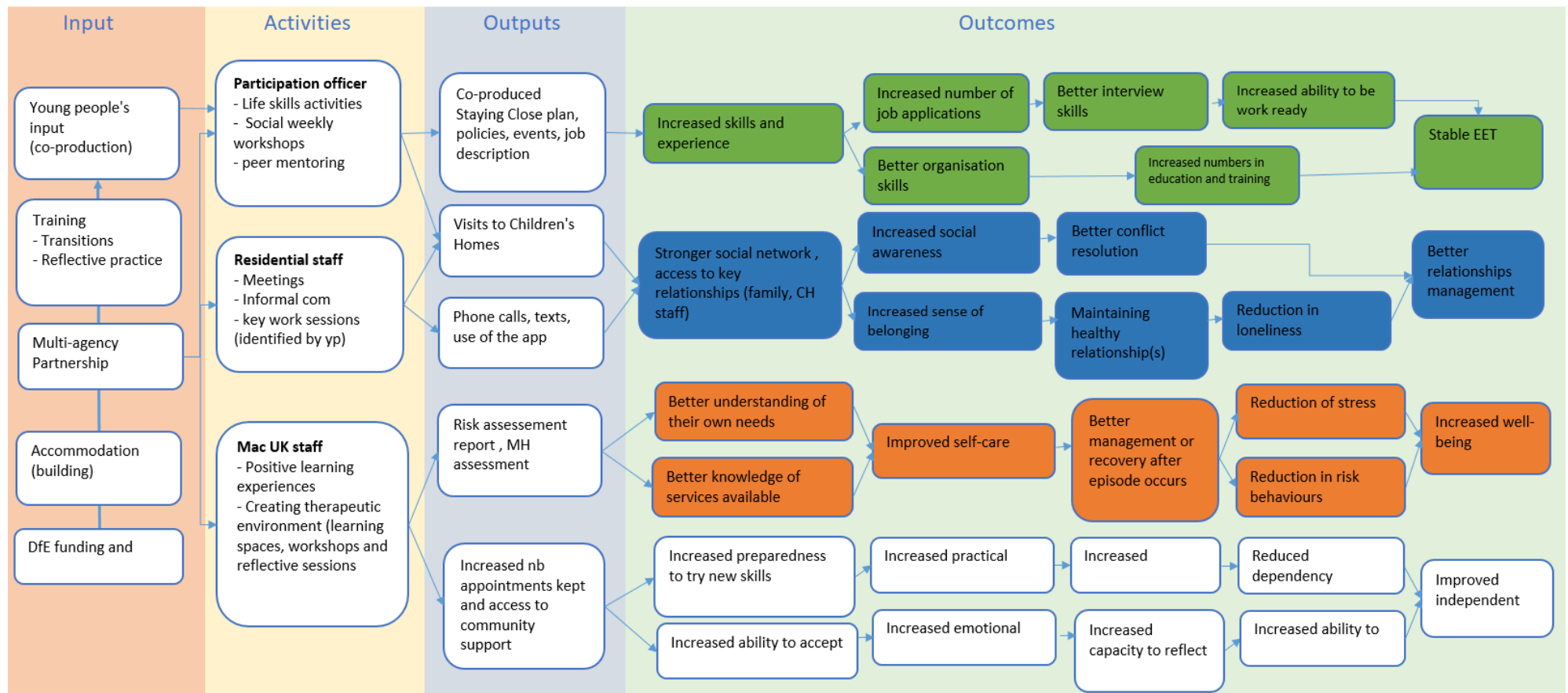


Figure 1 St Christopher's Staying Close pilot theory of change

5. Implementation evaluation

Methods summary

The implementation evaluation was conducted over three time 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 the London Boroughs of Ealing and Hounslow, 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 completed by the evaluation team at Manchester Metropolitan University.

Findings

The Staying Close offer

The Staying Close 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). Each individual pilot has developed their own outcomes, some of which directly relate to these national outcomes, and some of which reflect the context, needs, and aspirations of their local areas.

As reported in the interim report (Ozan et al, 2019), during the early stages of the pilot, the St Christopher's Staying Close offer was focused on providing an accommodation offer. The accommodation consists of a four bedroom house (shared accommodation split into two flats) based in Ealing. The house has a room upstairs that is used for key work sessions with care leavers and young people still in care and also a sleep-in-room for staff and/or family where appropriate/required. The charity also offers pop-up beds to young people who wish to return to the children's home. This focus on accommodation was not reflected in the four outcomes expected by the pilot, as set out in its theory of change.

The programme identifies three types of professionals: Life Skills Worker; residential staff; and MAC-UK Staff. The Life Skills Co-ordinator focuses on preparing young people for independence and developing their life skills. Other staff members also play an important role in the delivery of the support package, including residential staff, who organise meetings and establish informal communication with the young people who have left children's homes. The programme is also supported by MAC-UK staff who are based in the children's homes and work with young people and staff members to support

a shift in culture through creating reflective spaces and positive learning environments. Their work focuses particularly on preparing staff for the shift in culture required to support independence and maintain life long relationships with young people. St. Christopher's staff recognise the importance of providing value for money to the local authorities that use its services. However, they also emphasise the importance of providing support in the right way for young people. The offer is personalised to the young person's needs and wants.

The scheme is one that is being allowed to change and develop over time, which means that staff feel it has become more relaxed and sustainable. The focus is no longer solely on the accommodation, but has become more flexible based on individual requirements:

"I think a big thing that we have learnt is that idea of, 'What actually *is* it, and how do we make sense of what it is?' Because it can be quite conceptual, and I think, really, that is not very clear for young people who... well, it's not very clear for any of us, but clearly, young people are actually living this life, so it can be really confusing that there is a project that is happening that basically just makes a relationship that... a quite normal... that *could* be normal, if that makes sense."
(Staff Interview 6).

The above quote shows that the initial brief for Staying Close was not clear to some of the staff, who then found it difficult to relay to the young people. What has been developed since the initial stages is a shared understanding of what is needed for the young people, paired down to the key theme of sustained relationships.

Relationships between professionals and agencies

The relationships between the professionals and agencies was not alluded to a great deal throughout the interviews, but where it is, it is in a positive light. There are several partners involved in this Staying Close offer: St. Christopher's, MAC-UK, and two local authorities (the London boroughs of Ealing, and Hounslow). One participant said this partnership working was a strength of the pilot:

"I think one of our other strengths has been around how our partnership has got quite a lot of people in it – which you probably already know, but we've got St Christopher's, we've got, as MAC-UK, we've got Ealing *and* Hounslow local authorities, and a private home." (Staff Interview 6)

Some of the participants stated that they believed other local authorities had struggled with the implementation of support services for young people transitioning from care. The framework that has been set up with Ealing and Hounslow has helped them to see what

the transition should look like for young people, and helps to further articulate this to other interested parties:

“Staying Close helps us support and structure how transitions are made where we are able to maintain those relationships within a framework that can be easily understood by the commissioners and local authorities.” (Staff Interview 3)

The staff believe that the framework also helps the professionals involved in Staying Close to understand, clarify and articulate their roles alongside other professionals and agencies.

Implementation successes and challenges

This evaluation has found, based on our analysis of the views of young people, staff and wider stakeholders, given at different points and through different methods, that from the very early stages, young people have been involved in decision making regarding the pilot. St Christopher’s still seeks frequent feedback from young people, through informal conversations, consultations, and outreach activities, and staff ensure that young people’s voices are taken into account and acted upon. MAC-UK has recently conducted an internal survey with young people to ask them about what is working for them and what can be improved. Time and effort have been spent to engage young people and ensure that critical elements of the pilot are co-produced. For instance, the Staying Close plan is co-produced with young people. Whilst this is often a time-consuming process, interviewees indicated that it is a valuable one:

“So rather than just pulling that together ourselves, we are sitting down with young people to say, okay, does this sound like what should be happening. So, co-production and doing things in that sense, I’ll be honest with you, in order to do it authentically, it can be quite time-consuming, you need to meet up with young people repeatedly, you get a counselling session but the quality of the work that’s produced, is constant, it does make you feel like, it is very valuable to do that with the young people.” (Staff Interview 2)

Challenges around the implementation of some planned activities have been avoided and ameliorated through listening to the needs and wants of the young people leaving care. A good example of this is the proposed Staying Close mobile app, which was to facilitate communication between staff and young people. However, upon consultation, the young people felt that the app was not something that they would use, preferring existing media such as texts or WhatsApp. Whilst this creates a challenge for the

organisation in terms of managing privacy and boundaries between staff and young people, they respected and acted upon the feedback received.

Transition as a journey

A number of young people involved in this evaluation did not state that they saw their transition as a journey; it was more that they knew that independence was inevitable. However, the staff felt that there was a developmental element to the transition that signified this was a journey for the young people:

“She feels supported through the relationships or contacts she has built through the home and the fact it has been maintained. And then also a level of actually we have been her longest placement, so I think all of that has helped her achieve quite significant outcomes from where she had started.” (Staff Interview 3)

The documentation provided from St Christopher’s shows that staff from MAC-UK and the Life Skills Co-ordinator are supporting the transitions where the care homes are not able to. This is through taking young people to appointments, or out for their birthdays, and buying gifts for birthdays and for those who have had babies, for example. There is also a great deal of one-to-one support to those who have been summoned to court or are facing adversity.

Expectations and experiences

There were several descriptions of what the participants felt that the project was offering. These included: supporting independence, including building a safety net into the young persons foray into independent living; continuing relationships, especially those built with staff members over the course of the young person’s time in care; and support for budgeting money. Young people benefiting from the project generally stated that they ‘felt safer’ with one stating that it was as it was as though they had a “safety net”, but also still had their independence. Although none of the young people interviewed had used the pop-up beds, the interviews and surveys showed that having options was a key part of the support and allowing for autonomy around how this was utilised. This helps with a feeling of stability and feeling safe and secure in their new environment, whilst also allowing the exploration of independence, as one young person stated:

“It is helpful in terms of being independent and preparing you to move onto your own house.” (Young person 2 Peer interview).

The theme of independence was discussed in many of the interviews with young people and staff. For young people, it is the realisation that they have to be responsible for every

aspect of their lives, when a corporate parent has been providing for all of their needs. However, there are some issues that they may come across requiring advice. One staff member described a call from a young person on the Staying Close project:

“It has been really interesting because young people in children’s homes however hard we work, they do become quite dependent, so one young people rang up and said, “I have got ants and you have to come and sort this out”. Because that would have happened in a children’s home, there would have been someone there sorting out the ants and the life skills worker quite rightly said, ‘I will come over and have a look at the problem.’ And she went over and said, ‘All those dirty dishes aren’t going to help, you are going to have to wash your dishes.’” (Staff interview 5).

The above quote shows that the journey towards independence is one that takes time, and having the support of someone who you can rely on to give advice is important for continuing to learn life skills. The relationships that young people build with staff from the children’s homes is, therefore, an important part of Staying Close, as the young people trust that they are able to contact them when needed. The relationships that are built may also become a stepping stone into EET. Because of the relationship that one young person has with some of the staff at the home they used to live at, they have been able to enrol on a university degree course, receiving support in the form of babysitting, and the use of the computer in the children’s home:

“I’m studying law at the minute, I would never have been able to do that.” (Young person Peer interview 3)

Through supporting the young person in ways such as this, Staying Close means that young people may be able to explore EET options that would not have been open to young care leavers previously, either because of the cost of childcare, or a lack of equipment or money to pay for the internet.

The Staying Close offer is one that has constantly developed and changed over the lifetime of this evaluation, depending on reflection by staff and the young person about how the support is being received, and what the ongoing requirements of the young person may be. The Life Skills Worker adapted methods of teaching young people to personalise the learning around the needs of the young person. As an example of this, the Life Skills Worker was in a children’s home when one of the younger residents asked for help with a wet item of clothing that they had hoped would be dried. Instead of taking the item of clothing and sorting out the issue, the Life Skills Co-ordinator used this as an opportunity to teach the young person how to iron. Each issue that the young people face can be turned into an opportunity to learn, increasing self-efficacy, confidence and

autonomy. However, in reality, once the young person moves into their own accommodation, they state that the realities of being responsible can be difficult to manage:

“That sense of loneliness and that sense of not knowing how to manage their finances... because it’s one thing doing an activity in a children’s home around how to manage finances, when you are getting all kinds of allowances. The fridge is constantly full because it’s the home’s responsibility. That is so different. And then every week, you do a little budget activity, which is nice – but actually, that doesn’t prepare you for living in London on £54 a week.” (Staff interview 2)

Staff and young people agreed that learning to budget and pay bills once independent was important, but instead of telling the young people what they needed, staff also supported them informally, allowing the young person to come to make their own decisions, but stepping in if needed. Through nurture and support, the Staying Close offer in Ealing and Hounslow has adapted to reflect the needs of the young people in the area. The relationships between staff at the residential homes and the young people leaving care enable the young person to explore independence in a way that makes them feel like they have a “safety net”. These relationships improve opportunities for young people to engage in EET, ask for advice when necessary and be supported informally to make decisions that help them to budget effectively.

Innovation

Evidence generated by this evaluation suggests that the Staying Close offer delivers some elements of support that existed before the pilot. Whilst contact between care leavers and staff members may have happened in the past, it was often ad hoc and on a voluntary basis. Not all young people received support, and there was inconsistency in support where it was provided. Through the Staying Close pilot systematic contact has now been formalised (through a co-produced Staying Close plan) and offered to everyone. MAC-UK have been working with staff at the children’s homes to help them with facilitating co-production and building sustainable relationships based on clinically informed practices:

“...so, things like thinking about trauma or understanding narrative therapies around how we change the stories that young people get to say about themselves. That will have potentially been impacted by knowing, but also that maybe she has helped us inform how we might do it differently.” (Staff Interview 6)

St. Christopher's and MAC-UK state that they have been helping staff in children's homes in Ealing and Hounslow to upskill, particularly around co-production and planning with young people. MAC-UK report that, because of their training and Staying Close work, some staff stated that they have strengthened relationships across the partnership, strengthened wellbeing and resilience through their use of psychological approaches. MAC-UK also state that they have strengthened the development and embedding of the Staying close model through their extensive knowledge and ability to understand the needs of the homes and the young people. This, in turn, has increased staff confidence when dealing with psychological issues, and has led to the young people being more involved in meaningful activity (MAC-UK, 2019).

The evidence from this evaluation shows that the co-production element also ensures that other professionals are involved and aware of the plan and often links well with the young person's pathway plan. Key relationships with staff are often important through the transition phase, as social workers and personal assistants do not often know the history of the young person. Rather than go through their story each time, it has been useful to have someone that knows them well, with knowledge of what information the professional services need to know. This is something that would not happen without Staying Close allowing residential staff to accompany previous residents.

The accommodation offer in Ealing is used as a supportive step towards independence. Having the two flats within a building that also has a Staying Close worker during the working week, ensures that the young people do not feel isolated and that they have support and advice on hand should they need it.

Limitations

The research presented here provides three snapshots, at different points in the implementation of Staying Close by St Christopher's. It draws on a limited number of interviews and surveys. It is cognisant of wider changes in the leaving care landscape but is focused specifically on one part of this system.

Conclusions

The implementation of the Staying Close offer by St Christopher's has been a journey of co-production and evolution. The staff are keen to ensure that the offer remains flexible, and that the young people are the ones that direct the offer going forward.

There is a genuine partnership developing between St. Christopher's and the local authorities, resulting in Ealing and Hounslow embedding the Staying Close model into their policies, practices and leaving care offers. This also shows the willingness of these

local authorities to change cultures within children's care and the transition and leaving care services.

Innovation within the St. Christopher's Staying Close pilot comes from the formalisation of the continuation of relationships between staff and young people and the co-produced improvements to the offer.

6. Outcomes evaluation

Methods summary

There are two elements to this part of the evaluation. First, data for the distance travelled analysis provided by the pilot are presented to illustrate the distance travelled by individuals accessing Staying Close in a number of key outcome areas specified by the DfE. Secondly, the evaluation team used contribution analysis (Mayne, 2011) to assess whether Staying Close could contribute to the outcomes expected from the programme.

Contribution analysis

To understand the outcomes achieved by St Christopher's, 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 of 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 3: 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 St Christopher's 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. The evaluation version of the theory of change is set out in chapter 3 of this report.	Theory of Change developed by pilot and further discussed during scoping phase 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
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	Theory of change identifies the outcomes expected from St Christopher's Staying Close Literature review used as evidence to examine the plausibility of Staying

Step	Explanation	Data/evidence
	evidence to suggest it might be plausible (4) there is evidence to suggest that it is not plausible ³	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 St Christopher's Staying Close – 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

³ 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 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 St. Christopher's Staying Close pilot.

The theory of change developed by St Christopher's identifies outcomes in four areas, which broadly relate to four of the eight policy objectives established by the Department for Education. The four St Christopher's outcomes, and the DfE objectives they map to, are (1) improved independent living skills (DfE: are ready for independent living); (2) stable education, employment or training (DfE: are in education, employment or training); (3) better relationships management (DfE: report good social connections); and (4) increased wellbeing (DfE: have good emotional health, wellbeing and resilience).

Table 4 summarises the findings for 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.

Table 4: Does the extant evidence suggest that Staying Close could contribute to outcomes

Pilot outcome	DfE outcome	Plausibility assessment
Improved independent living skills	Are ready for independent living	Strong evidence
Stable education, employment or training	Are in education, employment or training	Weak evidence
Better relationships management	Report good social connections	Strong evidence
Increased wellbeing	Have good emotional health, wellbeing and resilience	Weak evidence

Here, we set out evidence generated by this evaluation of the contribution that St Christopher's Staying Close 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 provide insight to the distance travelled by young people accessing Staying Close support. The second part of this analysis draws on the extant literature, plus interviews, workshops, surveys, and case study work undertaken throughout the evaluation to develop a contribution narrative about St Christopher's Staying Close.

Distance travelled analysis

The St Christopher's Staying Close team provided data in March 2020, which gives count of the numbers of young people accessing Staying Close, and their outcomes. These provide counts at two time points; May 2018 and November 2019. These data are presented in table 5.

Table 5: Distance travelled by young people accessing St Christopher's Staying Close

DfE outcome measured	Relevant St Christopher's outcome	Count at May 2018	Count at November 2019
Number of young people engaging with the project		14	36
Are in EET	Stable education, employment or training	Unable to provide	27
Are in accommodation that is suitable and stable	No relevant outcome	12	36
Are physically healthy	No relevant outcome	14	36
Have good emotional health, wellbeing and resilience	Increased wellbeing	Not measured quantitatively	Not measured quantitatively
Are ready for independent living	Improved independent living skills	Of the 5 young people with 'Journey of Change' trackers at this point, 2 were ready for independent living	Of the 17 young people with 'Journey of Change' trackers, 8 were ready for independent living
Are resilient to unsafe behaviours	No relevant outcome	Not measured quantitatively	Not measured quantitatively
Report good social connections	Better relationships management	Not measured quantitatively	Not measured quantitatively
Feel well supported	No relevant outcome	12	30

The data provided by St Christopher's are not aligned directly to their stated outcomes, but rather to the outcome measures expected by the Department for Education. These data have been used to provide evidence in the contribution analysis, alongside the theory of change outcomes. The contribution analysis takes into account the background literature, evidence from the evaluation and determines the success of the scheme in regards to both the literature and the evidence. This is preceded by a summary table that defines how plausible it is that Staying Close could contribute for each outcome.

Contribution narratives

The extant evidence suggests that, in theory, it should be possible for St Christopher's to make a positive contribution to changes in observed outcomes in all four outcome areas relevant to the pilot. The outcome data provided by St Christopher's suggests that positive changes were observed in one of these areas, namely in terms of improved independent living skills. The qualitative evidence from this evaluation provides further evidence to support this conclusion, and also some insight around the other three outcome areas.

Mechanisms

The mechanisms through which the outcomes might be achieved are not explicitly articulated in the pilot's theory of change. However, it is clear from the interviews, surveys, and workshops that were 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 and providing appropriate accommodation in which to feel safe to develop and test practical skills for independent adulthood.

Stable education, employment or training (EET)

The extant literature suggests that young people leaving care are less likely than their non-care experienced peers to be in EET, and also have poorer education outcomes (Ozan et al., 2019). 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); this provides a safety net and can lessen or at least pause the instability and uncertainty that accompanies transition and that can disrupt achievement in education or training (Munro et al., 2012). EET can facilitate an easier transition into adulthood as this gives young people practical skills and financial independence with which to seek and maintain independence in adulthood (Häggman-Laitila et al., 2019).

St Christopher's does not systematically collect data on employment, education or training. There were a small number of respondents to the young person's survey although this represented a good proportion of the available cohort. The first survey was completed by 7 of the 14 eligible young people, and the second survey was completed by 11 of the 36 eligible young people. The surveys showed that all respondents were in either education or work, and where the given answer was 'other', this was in addition to either work or education (figure 2).

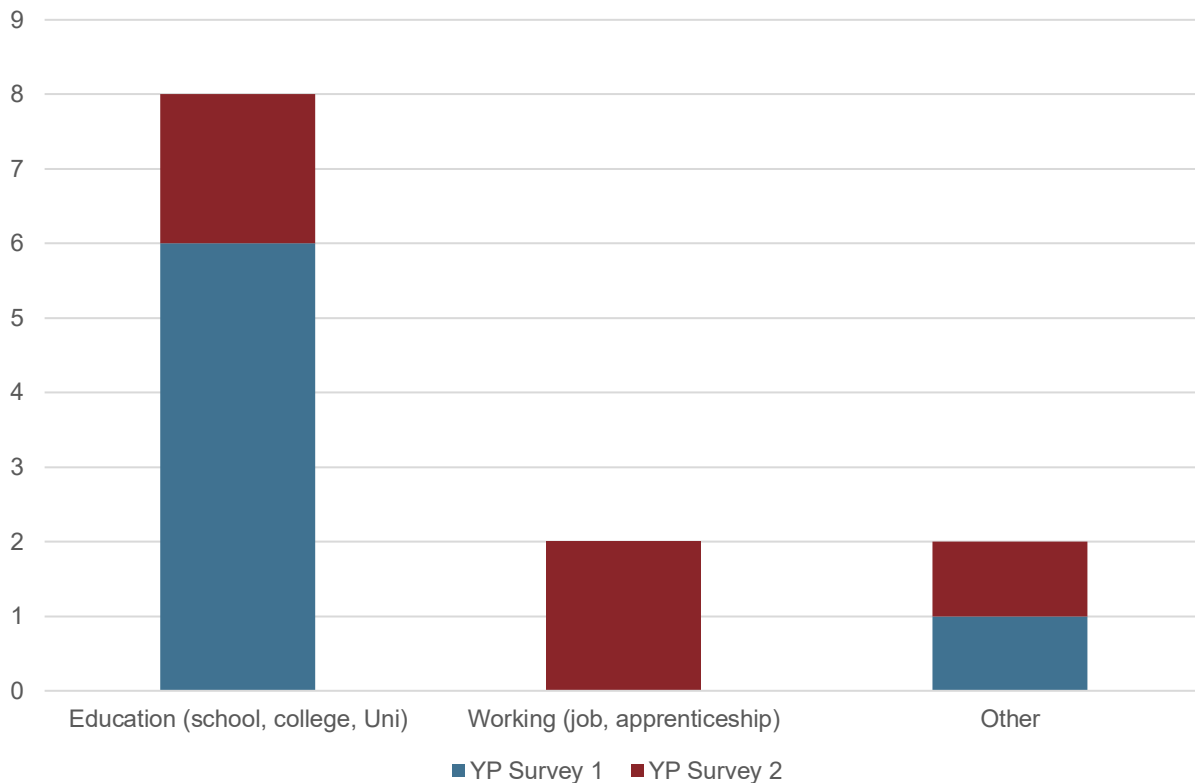


Figure 2 Young person EET survey data

The figure shows that from the young people who completed the surveys, six were in education in survey 1 and 2 were in education in survey 2. Two people were in work in survey 2, and one person in each survey stated that they were 'other'.

We cannot make an assumption that they are in work or education because of Staying Close based on these data alone, however, the evidence gathered from the qualitative data suggest that it is plausible that Staying Close has been important in supporting the young people with EET. There evidence to suggest that Staying Close has enabled young people to enter or continue education even when they have had their own children. The level of support that can be offered ensures that young people can pursue the careers that they want, because they are helped with childcare, a space to work and even internet access.

Other young people have stated that they have realised moving in to their own accommodation means that they need to get a job, because it is expensive to live outside of a children's home. However, one young person stated that they had dropped out of college and was not working since moving into the Staying Close accommodation. They said that their siblings visited frequently and that they spent their time partying.

The staff who responded to the surveys were generally positive about the role of Staying Close in helping young people to achieve the objective of being in EET, although figure 3 shows that some of the staff may have felt that there is more work to be done to facilitate stable EET. However, all respondents agreed that being in EET was less likely to happen without Staying Close.

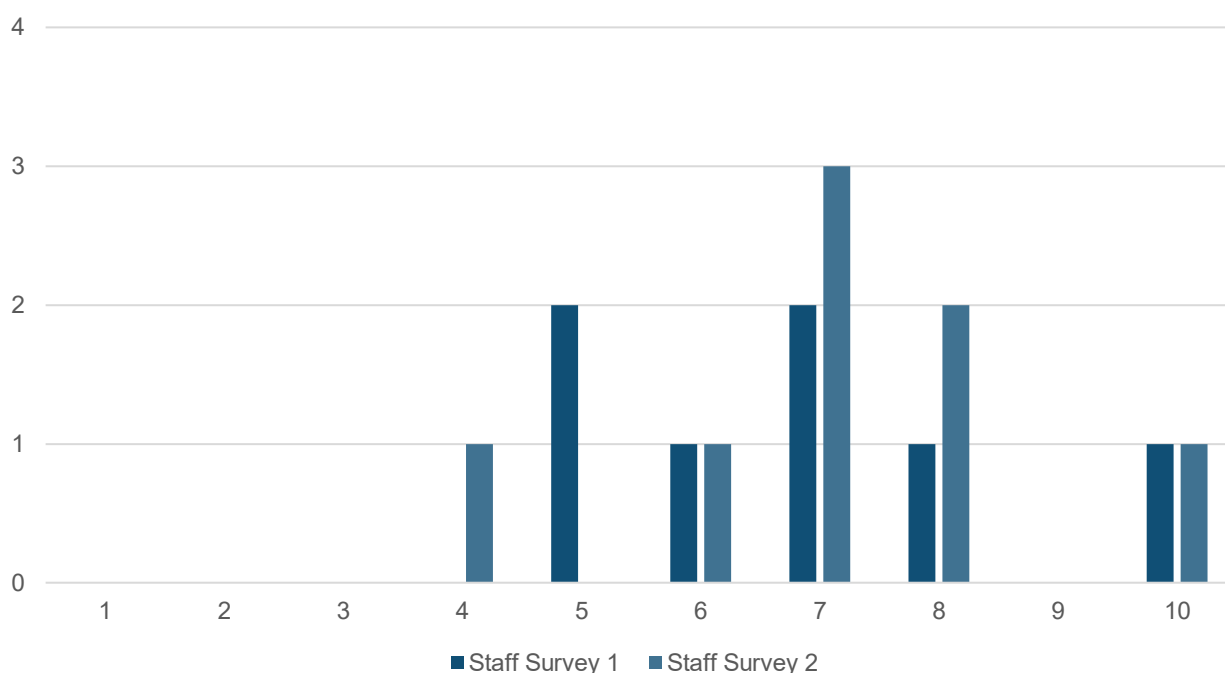


Figure 3 Staff views on whether Staying Close achieved EET outcomes

Figure 3 is a description of the views of staff on whether the outcome of positive EET is successful from both survey one and two. The skew for the graph is positive, with the range being from 4 to 10, but the majority being a 7. (1 is that the outcomes were not achieved, 10 being that they were).

Given the evidence from various sources (the extant evidence, as well as evidence generated by this evaluation), we conclude that the St Christopher's Staying Close pilot should be able to contribute, and may have contributed, to positive outcomes in relation to stable education, employment and training.

Better relationships management

The extant literature provides insight about the plausibility of interventions such as Staying Close making a contribution to this outcome. Using the national evaluation of Social Work Practices (2009-2012), Ridley et al. (2016) found that young people believed their relationship with a social worker or Personal Assistant was generally positive if they responded to text messages and other forms of informal support out of regular working hours. Relationships with professionals were seen more negatively if the worker was rushed when they saw them or they focused their questions to an adult instead of them. Similarly, Brown et al (2019) conducted an evaluation of how young people viewed corporate and foster parenting in the UK. They rated care based on how genuinely cared for they felt. They did not like people that they felt were just doing their job or were in it for the money. Workers who were available outside of working hours were appreciated, although some social workers or personal advisors (PAs) were strict about not offering this, which meant services were inconsistent, leaving young people confused about what they should expect. Consistency was also important to build trust (Brown et al., 2019). Positive relationships with support workers can be useful, but successful transitions are more likely to occur if positive relationships have been built with peers and family members too (Martikke et al., 2019; Stein and Morris, 2009).

This evaluation suggests that Staying Close formalises this, allowing for a legitimate way to keep the relationship going. The feeling of being supported throughout their time at the children's home meant that the young people in this study had a strong sense of belonging, had access to a social network, and were able to conduct meaningful relationships. Some of the young people stated that the relationships were not friendships, but were more like family, although one young person preferred to use the term friend rather than family. The support from the staff helped young people to achieve better relationships management outcome, but was also a key factor in achieving stable EET, improved independent living skills and increased wellbeing.

“They’ve seen you grow and go through situations. It’s probably like just a little bit more informal, but it’s human, it’s normal, because at the end of the day, if that was your family, and you progressed and you went on to have children, or study, or whatever it is, and you’re in your own independence, that’s the sort of relationship you would have. You would meet up, you would go to the gym, you would get invited for dinner. [Care worker] does all of that for everyone, not just one person and it’s always been out of her own time and at her expense, and she doesn’t mind, it’s just who she is.” (Young person 3 Peer research)

However, some young people who may have had several placements do not necessarily want to keep in touch with the staff at any of the children's homes or any foster carers.

St. Christopher's and MAC-UK have a team of people who are external to the children's homes, and they are therefore still able to build a relationship with the young person to help with the transition. There is a reliance on the staff from the children's homes to willingly take on the role of a Staying Close support key worker. There is no extant literature on formal structures in place for the continuation of relationships, but there was some evidence that informal relationships tend to continue only with those young people who were favourites or had built a strong relationship over their time in care (Frimpong-Manso, 2017). A strong message from the existing literature was that formalising the relationship between key workers and young people transitioning from care would ensure that all young people are offered the continuity of support, rather than a select few. Stein (2006) for example states that this formalisation would probably be costly, but being able to form long-term relationships can lead to better outcomes for care-leavers, ultimately saving money, as negative outcomes could mean a lack of employment, homelessness, crime leading to prison or probation, or severe mental ill-health issues including substance addictions (Stein, 2006).

The young people interviewed in this evaluation felt that the staff in the children's homes are still trying to work out their Staying Close roles. They commented that it was a strange leap from being in a set environment, to suddenly being able to socialise outside of that. A staff member from MAC-UK stated that the future of Staying Close is important, because it allows stronger relationships to form earlier in the young person's care experience. Young people, particularly in children's home settings are seeing that they can form positive and long-term relationships with the people working in the home or professionals that are in their life. This means that when they arrive at the placement, they start to think that it is worthwhile forming bonds and attachments. This was also important to staff, as the likelihood of forming a relationship long-term meant that the young people had a more positive attitude toward them. According to a member of staff in one of the children's homes, this positive attitude had improved the working culture, leading to lower staff turnover.

“Saying, ‘Oh, right, so when I get older, if I leave, I can come back.’
And that means that they almost want to *start* making relationships
that matter to them at that point, because they don't maybe as much
fear the constant changing experience they have had with moving
care all the time and not keeping in touch.” (Staff Interview 6)

Given the evidence from various sources (the extant evidence, as well as evidence generated by this evaluation), we conclude that the St Christopher's Staying Close pilot should be able to contribute, and may have contributed, to positive outcomes in relation to better relationships management.

Improved independent living skills

The extant literature identifies that ready for independent living (also referred to as prepared for independent living in the literature) is a broad concept. It is often not defined in the literature or is defined broadly, such as being 'individuals' ability to provide for their needs, to feel comfortable with themselves, and be satisfied with relationships with significant others' (Maluccio, Krieger, and Pine, 1990). Being ready for independent living means developing a number of tangible and practical skills (such as budgeting and cooking), as well as more intangible skills such as problem solving (Melkman, 2016), which enables the individual to get and hold a job, be ready for further education, maintain healthy relationships (Melkman, 2016), and be able to manage their housing (Heerde et al., 2018). As there is a significant cross over between this policy outcome and several of the other outcomes expected from Staying Close (most obviously the outcomes in relation to education, employment or training, wellbeing, and social connections), the plausibility analysis presented here is in relation to maintaining a home and the housing aspects of independent living. This includes practical skills, as well as programmes that provide a structured and supported experience of living in their own home, such as transitional or supported housing.

The extant evidence suggests that it is plausible that Staying Close could contribute to positive outcomes in relation to being ready for independent living. Several studies (largely outside of the UK) suggest that young people leaving care who participated in such interventions experienced better housing outcomes than those who did not, and were less likely to experience episodes of homelessness (Woodgate et al., 2017). Several other studies (Heerde et al., 2018) make it clear that such support needs to be more than just minimal.

Outcome data provided by St Christopher's suggests positive changes in observed outcomes in relation to improved independent living skills. Other evidence generated by this evaluation also supports this conclusion. The young people and staff interviewed stated that workshops for independent living skills were useful. There is also flexibility to adapt to the needs of the young people:

"I think to start off with, it was definitely the cooking and the budgeting and then we moved on to preparing for independence, so she would have regular visits to [Ealing], visualising what things would be needed to live in accommodation like that, going out, looking for things to furnish the place and things like that as well, sticking to a budget. I think those were the things to help her get to the point where she is now." (Staff interview 1)

Given the evidence from various sources (the extant evidence, as well as evidence generated by this evaluation), we conclude that the St Christopher's Staying Close pilot should be able to contribute, and has contributed, to positive outcomes in relation to improved independent living skills.

Increased wellbeing

Existing research about interventions that are similar to Staying Close suggests that there is a high prevalence of mental health issues in care-experienced young people (McAuley et al., 2009; Baidawi et al., 2014; Colbridge et al., 2017; Midgeley et al., 2017). Despite this, emotional stability and wellbeing is often overlooked in favour of other outcomes such as EET (Ferguson, 2018). This is echoed by Sims-Schouten et al (2017) who suggest that the understanding of mental health and wellbeing is ambiguous which is a problem for evaluating projects. Adverse mental health outcomes include low self-esteem, a fragmented self and self-medication due to trauma (Colbridge et al., 2017; Rahamin, 2017). Research suggests that training in mental health is needed for practitioners working with young people who are leaving or have left care (Baidawai et al., 2014; McAuley et al., 2009) along with assessment (Baidawi et al., 2014; McAuley et al., 2009).

The extant literature also suggests that personal defence mechanisms developed in response to trauma, or relationships ending, can lead to mistrust and a lack of one-to-one relationships (Colbridge et al., 2017; Winkler, 2014; Ferguson, 2018). Trusted relationships can limit avoidant and defensive responses and the development of informal support can help avoid loneliness and exclusion which compound mental health issues (Ferguson, 2018; Rahamin, 2017). Trust and continuation of services and relationships is important for the mental health of young people with care experience (Butterworth et al., 2017). Discontinuity has a detrimental effect on identity resulting in self-destructive behaviour (Ward, 2011) through the development of a fragmented self from being in different environments (Colbridge et al., 2017). An insecure base, lack of trust and experiences of unsafe care means young people can become self-reliant which leads to isolation and hiding emotions to keep in control (Colbridge et al., 2017).

This evaluation has found that St Christopher's does not routinely collect outcomes data related to improved wellbeing. Other evidence from this evaluation provides some insight into the plausibility of St Christopher's making a contribution to positive change in this area. One staff member stated that young people leaving care often struggle with the loneliness that they feel once they have moved away from the children's home:

“...something that stood out quite loudly for them was the loneliness factor, and the impact that had on their mental health, and how much they might leave a children's feeling super prepared for

independence, and within weeks they are completely breaking down. They don't know how to manage that loneliness." (Staff interview 2)

Some young people involved in the evaluation stated that they felt supported, particularly as they were able to go back to their old home for dinner, to use the pop-up beds, or for special occasions, but they also felt an increase in autonomy:

"I love the feeling and it is a bit strange saying this because I am so used to staff coming in and leaving when it is time to go home but this time I am the one who gets to go home and I think, 'This is so dope! I don't have to be stuck here!' I say, 'Okay, bye kids, I am going to my own house now! Bye staff members!'" (Young person 1 discussion)

The evidence from the interviews with the young people points to a need for a gradual transition from children's services. Accelerated transition has been found to be detrimental, leading to negative outcomes for health and wellbeing (Ward, 2011). The gradual transition offered through Staying Close allows for the young people to come to terms with being alone and how to manage that without damaging their mental health:

"Once you are in your own flat with your own... just alone, basically, you can struggle, especially if you've had any issues with mental health, which I have. So once I was completely alone, I really struggled with the silence, basically. So with Staying Close, I suppose you still have a friend, you still have someone around." (Young person Peer interview 3)

Given the evidence from various sources (the extant evidence, as well as evidence generated by this evaluation), we conclude that the St Christopher's Staying Close pilot should be able to contribute, and may have contributed, to positive outcomes in relation to increased wellbeing.

Limitations

There are two limitations we would like to highlight here. The first relates to the extant evidence on interventions and programmes design to support young people as they transition from children's homes to independent adulthood. In summary, there is a lack of empirical evidence that identifies factors that affect successful transition, or that identifies the effectiveness of different types of programme or intervention.

The second limitation is around the distance travelled analysis. While distance travelled analysis is the most robust form of outcome evaluation that could be undertaken here,

there are limited data available, partially due to the small cohort of people who have so far participated in Staying Close, but also because the autonomy of the young people is respected, and they may not want to report all of the details that are happening in their lives at any one time. We make recommendations about these limitations in the 'conclusions and recommendations' chapter of this report.

Conclusions

The distance travelled analysis and contribution analysis presented here suggest that the St. Christopher's Staying Close scheme could have made a contribution to positive outcomes in relation to better relationships management, and increased wellbeing, and could be a contributory factor to positive outcomes in relation to education, employment and training.

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 and then accessing St Christopher's Staying Close services. Young people were involved in the design of the evaluation, as researchers, as research participants, and by involving young people in the co-production of the conclusions and recommendations arising from this research.

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. In this section, we focus on two further aspects of the voice of young people; the role that co-production has played in the pilot, and the outcome of a workshop to discuss and validate the findings of this evaluation. This section focuses on the discussion from the validation workshop held in March 2020. During this workshop the evaluation team presented findings, and took notes of the issues and points raised by attendees. The findings below portray the information that the young people wanted to highlight that were over and above the findings in the rest of this report.

Findings

The pilot reported that an operational group, including young people, representatives from all four children's homes, service managers from the local authorities and team members from MAC-UK was set up to make decisions about how Staying Close would be implemented. Decisions made within this group were taken to the young people in the homes to ask for their input and suggestions. Young people are involved as co-producers in the creation of their Staying Close plan. This is seen as being vital to ensure that it will work for them, and even when young people are unsure about how it will develop, the evidence from the peer interviews, surveys and validation workshop showed that they appreciate the autonomy they have in creating what boundaries they feel are appropriate with their Staying Close key worker.

A 16+ group was also set up to decide about the referral process for the moving-on home in Ealing. They decided that rules for the house should be developed as people moved in, and should be a live document, evolving as necessary. St. Christopher's uses different methods to get the young people to discuss what they want most from Staying Close, including taking them out for a meal, or having a discussion whilst cooking together. This means that the young people are able to have different experiences whilst also

developing what Staying Close will look like for them, and other young people in the future. The young people living in the shared house are currently devising a plan to ensure that new people moving into the house are ready, and will fit in with the existing residents. This may involve preparatory weekend stays before taking on a tenancy agreement, including spending time with the other residents and the life-skills worker.

Limitations

The numbers of young people involved in this research are small: Seven people participated in the evaluation design co-production workshop, six and four responses were received to surveys 1 and 2 respectively, and three people were involved in peer research, and conversations with the evaluators. These small numbers reflect the size of the overall population of young people using Staying Close in Ealing and Hounslow, and the well-noted challenges of engaging care leavers in research.

Conclusions

Young people articulated support for the scheme. They recognised the need for support in developing life skills to maintain a tenancy, employment and education. The young people involved in the evaluation stated that they they appreciated the level of autonomy they were given around their Staying Close plans, but also in how to develop the Staying Close offer going forward for themselves, and future participants.

8. Cost analysis

Methods summary

Costs 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 the 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 costs 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 (including IT equipment);
- 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.

Findings

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

We break the costs down into three types:

- pilot setup costs – costs which we would expect to see incurred once, irrespective of the number of young people on the pilot: £102,108;
- pilot fixed costs – costs we regard as fixed irrespective of the number of young people on the pilot: £233,558 per annum; and
- pilot variable costs – costs which vary proportionally with the number of people on the pilot: £729 per annum and per individual.

We estimate that the total cost of the pilot over its lifetime to January 2020 was £620,885. This means that:

- over the period of one year (that is to say, ignoring set up costs) the cost of Staying Close delivery per young person is £6,500;
- over the intervention as a whole (from the start of the pilot to January 2020) and ignoring setup costs, the cost per young person is estimated to be £14,410; and
- over the intervention as a whole, (from the start of the pilot to January 2020), and including setup costs, the cost per young person is estimated to be £17,250.

Table 6: Detailed cost estimates

Category	Cost	Per annum	Total ⁴
Pilot Setup Costs			£102,108
IT and other hardware	£2,870		
Accommodation renovation and adaption	£25,150		
Furniture	£3,245		
Costs of recruiting staff	£2,978		
Development of app	£64,292		
Chief executive oversight (first year) ⁵	£3,573		
Pilot Fixed Accommodation Costs (per annum)		£99,723	£204,796
Telephone/Broadband &c.	£525		
Electricity & Gas	£3,400		
Water	£1,200		
Insurance	£1,225		
Maintenance Charges	£9,700		
Cost of office accommodation ⁶	–		
Subcontracts ⁷	£83,673		
Pilot Staff Costs (per annum)		£133,835	£312,281
Staff costs	£131,435		
Project Co-ordinator 1 FTE			
Participation Officer 1 FTE			
Regional Manager 0·4 FTE			
Director of Operations 0·11 FTE			
Director of Finance 0·02 FTE			
Monthly operational meeting external staff cost	£2,400		
Pilot Flexible Costs (per annum)		£729	£1,700
Travel costs	£729		
Total per annum costs (excl. setup)		£234,286	
Total costs from start of pilot to January 2020			£620,885

⁴ Estimated to January 2020 other than as noted.

⁵ Estimated pro-rata from total staff costs.

⁶ Other than service charges, as noted, the accommodation of 3·4 FTE equivalent staff has been absorbed into the overall cost of accommodation.

⁷ To October 2019.

Benefits Estimate

The benefits of Staying Close are intended to include stable education, employment or training (EET); better relationships management; increased well-being, and improved independent living skills. In the following table (7) we consider each of these in turn and estimate the potential savings to the state and society.

Table 7 Benefits Estimate

Outcome expected	Cost of alternative provision/likely outcome	Comment
Stable education, employment or training	Lifetime costs of being not in education, employment or training (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 ⁸ £72,000. The cost to society as a whole, including to the young person, has been estimated to be £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).
Better relationships management	None identified	There is no clear indicator we might use as a proxy in a situation such as this. In the absence of a counterfactual, it is not possible to work our realistic likelihoods of these costs arising in the absence of the intervention, or the reduction in these probabilities which the intervention promotes.
Increased wellbeing	Cost to the NHS (A&E attendances, GP appointments, giving birth, mental health support), cost of care for a child (if in residential or foster care), costs to support services, for example for substance misuse.	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 our realistic likelihoods of these

⁸ 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]

Outcome expected	Cost of alternative provision/likely outcome	Comment
		costs arising in the absence of the intervention, or the reduction in these probabilities which the intervention promotes.
Improved independent living skills	Costs of Homelessness or local authority children's homes.	The main 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 children's homes, which may cost up to £3,000 per week per child. It is clear that it would take few weeks in children's homes averted to have the intervention break even at that rate.

Limitations

The analysis presented here is based on a number of assumptions, and on cost data provided by the pilot. The pilot costs, and comparison of pilot costs to the likely costs or benefits of alternative provision, are highly sensitive to changes in these assumptions or the accuracy of the cost data provided.

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 informal and ad hoc nature of this previous provision – to estimate likely costs.

Finally, in the absence of evidence around the impact of Staying Close, it is not possible to estimate the likely level of costs avoided or benefits derived from its provision. 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 the St Christopher's 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, in the event that Staying Close could be demonstrated to have an impact on the outcomes expected, that the benefits generated might be at least be equal to the costs incurred (that is, would break even). However, further research is required to determine the actual scale of the savings made.

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), further evidence is required to begin to build an evidence base about what support is needed to help families and protect vulnerable children. The first round of action of the Innovation Programme, identified 7 features of practice and 7 outcomes to consider the challenges and successes of implementation, and the difference the features make to young people.

Staying Close is aimed at young adults leaving children's homes. It is designed to support these young people as they transition from care to independent adulthood. While Staying Close workers engage with registered social workers, and while some of the schemes are located in children's social services departments, Staying Close as an intervention is located within the wider social care system, and Staying Close workers are generally from the wider non-social work, social care professions. As such, many of the practice features and outcomes are not directly relevant to Staying Close, and do not appear as features of the Staying Close pilots. Five of these features are discussed below in relation to the St. Christopher's Staying Close pilot.

Using a strengths-based practice framework. The findings outlined in this evaluation suggest that there is a culture change occurring in leaving care services, where there is an increase in the opportunity to assess and support individual strengths for staff and young people. 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 in those times and places where it was most needed. MAC-UK's involvement in the implementation of the project has helped staff to reimagine their role in relation to the young people. In particular, they have developed their styles of conversation with young people to counter arguments and explore the young people's inner narratives. The results of this new practice were not evident in the cohort of young people that we interviewed, however is an area to evaluate in the future.

Systemic theoretical models. The key role of the Staying Close worker is to capitalise on a relationship-based approaches to enable successful transitions, human development, and change. In practice, this means that the challenges that young people in Ealing and Hounslow face are now (more) formally rooted within the pathway planning process. This approach to support recognises that not all care leavers 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. The young people felt that they had autonomy over the way that relationships between themselves and their identified

Staying Close worker developed over the transition period, which is an important part of how they view and manage relationships going forward.

Enabling staff to do skilled direct work. The Staying Close offer provides an important extension to the role of the children's homes worker. Now that specific workload allocation is given to the Staying Close role, closely bound within a formal assessment and plan for intervention, children's homes are able to facilitate opportunities for young people to engage with more detailed, specific, individualised and task orientated work. Within St. Christopher's, the addition of a Life Skills Worker means that the young people can access one-to-one support when needed, and the children's homes have access to someone who can focus on these skills day-to-day. Younger children are able to feel comfortable with new skills earlier in life, making the transition easier when it happens.

Multi-disciplinary skill sets working together. The Staying Close offer in Ealing and Hounslow enables young people (who often experience a great deal of distress) with a named Staying Close worker, who can help create 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, 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 between professional agencies.

High intensity and consistency of practitioner. The focus on continuity and consistency described in this report enables the Staying Close offer to capitalise on the theory of relationship-based practice. As shown above, Staying Close workers are able to 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 crisis.

10. Conclusions and recommendations

The evaluation concludes that St. Christopher's appears to have successfully piloted and developed a model of transition that meets the needs of young people leaving care. The Staying Close offer has been developed alongside the direct beneficiaries of the project, and continues to evolve with the needs and wants of young people. St. Christopher's has recognised the culture change they want to engender is partly about recognising the value of working with young people much earlier before they leave care to start preparing them for independence, so it is not such a sudden and seismic change. This model is innovative and has already been embedded into the Ealing and Hounslow local authority policies, procedures and leaving care offers.

Outreach is important at St. Christopher's as many of the young people live beyond the local authority boundaries, and one of the children's homes has been able to create a sustainable model for ensuring the residential staff can support past residents quickly, and without a detrimental effect to those still living in the children's home.

Overall, the St. Christopher's Staying Close offer facilitates opportunities for the young people participating in the project to experience a gradual transition to independence. As found by the evaluation, this model may be an effective way to avoid the 'cliff edge' that is so often associated with the experience of leaving care. The cost analysis shows that there is no simple way of calculating possible future benefits to the state.

The evaluation team recommends:

1. This evaluation has highlighted a number of examples of good practice, including co-producing how the Staying Close pilot will work, co-producing care plans, psychological training for children's home staff, and giving the young person control of the relationship boundaries post-care, within leaving care services in Ealing and Hounslow. This is illustrated by the adoption of the St. Christopher's model into policy and practice.
2. To further cement the idea of co-production within this pilot, we would recommend that this research is conducted through co-producing the guidelines with the professionals involved. This would ensure that each would have a stake in making the integration successful.
3. 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 pilot'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. A good place to start is the work of Bethia McNeil, Neil Reeder and Julia Rich (2012), published by the Young Foundation.

4. The break-even analysis undertaken as part of this evaluation suggests that it is possible that the intervention will break-even, however further research is required to determine the actual scale of the savings made.

5. 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. Independent living is also generally understood to encompass being in education, employment or training, yet this is a separate outcome specified by the Department for Education. 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. The policy objectives are also expressed as a dichotomy (having been achieved or not achieved), which is not an appropriate way of assessing the journey experienced by young people as they transition to independent adulthood. It would be simpler to have a single policy objective for Staying Close, such as 'Increased readiness for independent living'.

6. 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 St Christopher's Staying Close scheme, it could include the number of job applications made. It is important to be clear on what is collected, how it is collected, how often, whether a measure of incidence or prevalence (ie currently homeless or has at some time in the past been homeless), and whether it is observed by you or self reported.

Appendix 1 - Theory of change

St. Christopher's revised their theory of change in January 2020, and sent a copy to the evaluators in March 2020. This theory of change shows how Staying Close has developed, and the new focus of the programme going forward. As a theory-driven evaluation, the theory of change has played an important part in the design of this research. However, as the revised theory of change set out here was provided to the evaluation team at the very end of the evaluation, it does not form the basis of the research presented in this report.

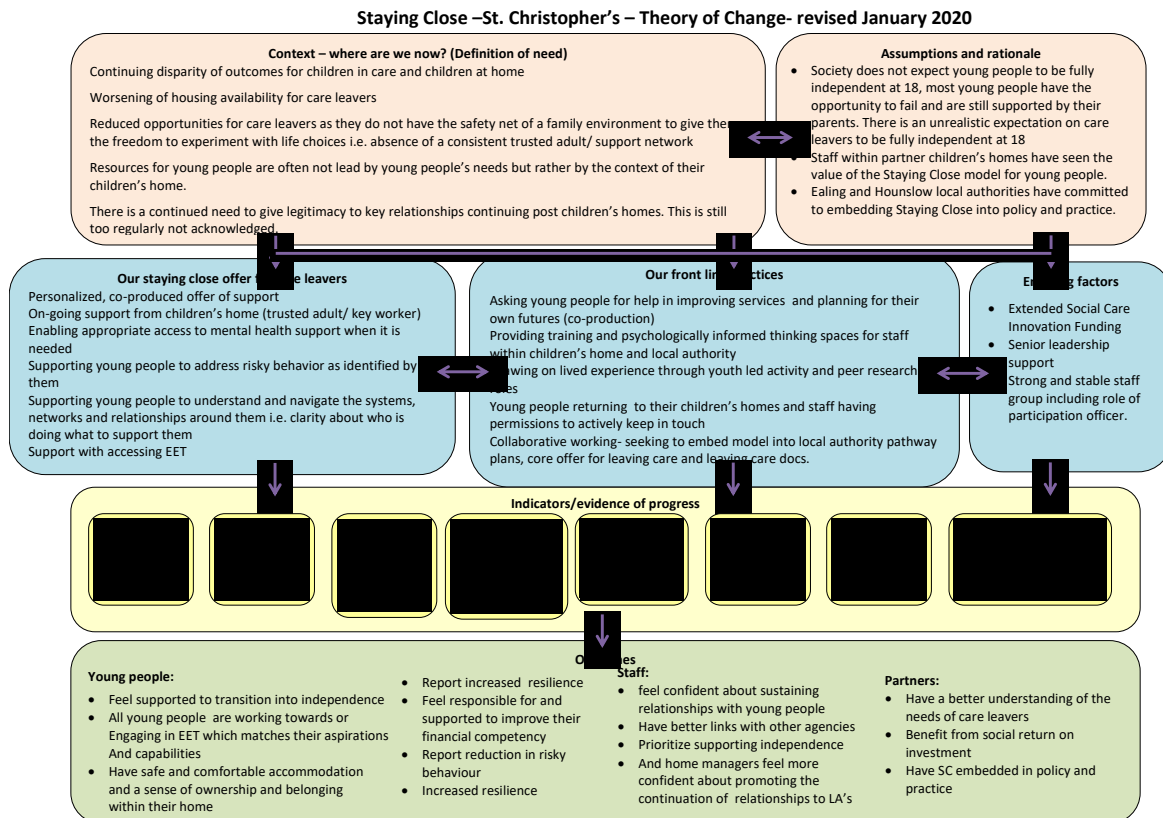


Figure 4 St. Christopher's Theory of Change from January 2020

Appendix 2 - Cost analysis

Objectives

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;
- Comparison of quantitative data sources and qualitative interview material to determine the 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, etc.);
- 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;
- Other costs of Staying Close, for example, briefing groups and transportation.

Detailed Estimated Costs

Table 8: St Christopher's Staying Close pilot cost capture

Category	Cost	Per annum	Total ⁹
Pilot Setup Costs			£102,108
IT and other hardware	£2,870		
Accommodation renovation and adaption	£25,150		
Furniture	£3,245		
Costs of recruiting staff	£2,978		
Development of app ¹⁰	£64,292		
Chief executive oversight (first year)	£3,573		
Pilot Fixed Accommodation Costs (per annum)		£99,723	£204,796
Telephone/Broadband &c.	£525		
Electricity & Gas	£3,400		
Water	£1,200		
Insurance	£1,225		
Maintenance Charges	£9,700		
Cost of office accommodation ¹¹	–		
Subcontracts ¹²	£83,673		
Pilot Staff Costs (per annum)		£133,835	£312,281
Staff costs	£131,435		
Project Co-ordinator 1 FTE			
Participation Officer 1 FTE			
Regional Manager 0·4 FTE			
Director of Operations 0·11 FTE			
Director of Finance 0·02 FTE			
Monthly operational meeting external staff cost	£2,400		
Pilot Flexible Costs (per annum)		£729	£1,700
Travel costs	£729		
Total per annum costs (excl. setup)		£234,286	
Total costs from start of pilot to January 2020			£620,885

⁹ Estimated to January 2020 other than as noted.

¹⁰ Estimated pro-rata from total staff costs.

¹¹ Other than service charges, as noted, the accommodation of 3·4 FTE equivalent staff has been absorbed into the overall cost of accommodation.

¹² To October 2019.

Estimations and assumptions

The breakdown of costs requires a number of reasonable assumptions

- The absorbing of accommodation costs into the overall office cost is based on the observation that the cost of services (pilot fixed costs less contracts) is estimated to be £520 per month per FTE, which seems reasonable for serviced office space in London¹³.
- The IT costs are assumed to be depreciated over a four-year time horizon. For the purposes of this pilot, they are assumed to be fixed, however.
- The salary costs of the app which was in developed are included in total salaries. However, this development is clearly a set-up, rather than a running cost. Hence they have been netted out on a pro-rata basis (that is, the amount of time spent in development compared to the time spent by other intervention staff). The app development and licence are included in set-up costs. The remainder of staff costs are included in fixed costs.
- We assume there is some capacity to increase the number of young people in Staying Close without an significant increase in staff costs. Obviously if there were a significant increase in the number of young people, this assumption will have to be revisited.

Cost per young person on the pilot

Once the scheme matured, there were 36 young people engaging with the Staying Close pilot in November 2019. It is reasonable to assume that engagement with the pilot is over a lengthy period of time.

- Over the period of one year (that is to say, ignoring set up costs) the cost of Staying Close delivery to each of these young people is £6,500.
- Over the intervention as a whole (to January 2020) and ignoring setup costs, the cost per young person is estimated to be £14,410.
- Over the intervention as a whole, (to January 2020), and including setup costs, the cost per young person is estimated to be £17,250.

Stable Education, Employment or 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 be¹⁴ £72,000. The cost to society as a whole, including to the young person, has been estimated to be¹⁴

¹³ c.f. <https://www.flexioffices.co.uk/london>

¹⁴ 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]

£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).

Better relationships management and increased wellbeing

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 be¹⁵ £129, the costs of a visit to a GP are circa¹⁵ £43. The cost to the public of adolescents suffering from mental health disorders is approximately¹⁵ £300 per year.

Teen pregnancy

The estimated cost to the NHS of a teen pregnancy which is carried to term is estimated to be¹⁶ £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 is¹⁶ £800; this does not include the psychological cost to the young lady.

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

¹⁵ 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].

¹⁶ 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]

potential criminal activity with which they are associated. The savings per person, per year diverted from substance abuse are estimated to be¹⁷ £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 be¹⁸ £5,500.

Improved independent living skills

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 is¹⁹ £26,000 each year. However, a more reasonable alternative to Staying Close might be the cost of Local Authority Children's homes, which may cost up to¹⁵ £3,000 per week. It is clear that it would take few weeks in children's homes averted to have the intervention break even at that rate.

¹⁷ 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]

¹⁸ Updated for inflation from Heeks, M., Reed, S., Tafsiri 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].

¹⁹ HomelessLink (online) Impact of homelessness. <https://www.homeless.org.uk/facts/understanding-homelessness/impact-of-homelessness> [accessed 10 March 2020].

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