

SWITCH MINDS **EVALUATION**

Autumn 2019–
Summer 2022

Rachel Dunford & Mary Battley
Rachel Dunford Consulting Ltd

Preface

This evaluation has been conducted by *Rachel Dunford Consulting Ltd.* Rachel was assisted by Mary Battley, of Mary Battley Research.

For more info, see www.racheldunfordconsulting.co.uk.

Rachel Dunford is an independent education consultant who delivers research and evaluation projects for her clients. A lot of her work is within the STEM and science education landscape, but latterly she has prioritised projects that maximise impact on outcomes for children and young people. Rachel has a passion for work that seeks to improve inclusivity and overcome disadvantage, and she helps her clients to focus their efforts on making a positive difference to the lives of young people.

Rachel runs a wide range of research projects including evaluations of all scales, impact measurement, literature and landscape reviews, and exploratory research. Her work results in reports and products that her clients use to promote and showcase their work, to raise additional funds or to inform strategy and policy. Rachel's writing is often published.

Mary Battley is a specialist qualitative researcher who has over 20 years' industry experience and a wealth of expertise in educational, social and commercial research and insight.

Having worked for commercial agencies such as TRBI and Synovate as well as the Social Innovation Hub, The Young Foundation and EdComs (an educational research organisation), Mary is skilled in multiple qualitative methodologies.

Mary is passionate about conducting research with vulnerable and hard to reach audiences, including young people. She is highly effective at discussing research topics of a more sensitive nature, and her background in Social Anthropology informs her approach to ethnographic techniques.

Contents

1. Executive summary	7
2. Introduction and context setting.....	11
3. Evaluation methodology	13
3.1. Qualitative interviews	14
3.2. Online surveys.....	15
3.3. WEMWBS data	15
3.4. Interim reporting.....	16
4. Overall effectiveness	17
5. Theory of Change outcomes.....	20
5.1. Introduction.....	20
5.2. Increased happiness and wellbeing	20
5.3. Improved self-esteem and self-confidence	23
5.4. Better ability to understand their own and other’s emotions and behaviours	27
5.5. Become advocates for SWITCH Minds	30
5.6. More engaged in their own education and future employment	32
5.7. Raised aspirations and a purpose in life	35
5.8. The ability to develop trusting relationships with others	37
5.9. Feeling safe, secure and supported.....	41
5.10. Feeling part of their family and local community	47
6. Areas for improvement	51
6.1. Align expectations of the programme	51
6.2. Refine communications with schools.....	51
6.3. Improve data collection.....	51
6.4. Support teachers in selecting young people	52
6.5. Balance staff workloads	53
6.6. Work closer with Local Authorities.....	54
6.7. Investigate wider funding	54
7. SWITCH Minds’ unique selling points	55
7.1. The strength and make-up of the team	55
7.2. The positive impact that the programme has had	56
7.3. The comprehensive response to the pandemic	56
7.4. The continuity of support combined with the importance of relationships.....	57
7.5. The dedication to go above and beyond to ensure that young people are supported to the fullest extent	57
8. Acknowledgements	58

1. Executive summary

Rachel Dunford Consulting Ltd was appointed in 2019 to conduct a three-year independent evaluation of Lifeline Projects' **SW!TCH Minds** programme.

SW!TCH Minds combines a proven approach to mentoring young people with positive activities in the community to support and improve mental health outcomes.

The programme has been running over three academic years in the three London Boroughs of Havering, Barking and Dagenham and Redbridge.

The evaluators used a range of qualitative research tools to gather the perspectives of young people, their teachers, the team of Youth Development Workers (mentors) and where possible, representatives from each of the three commissioning Boroughs.

Combining this evidence with quantitative data collected by *LifeLine Projects* using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS), the evaluators have produced this final report which seeks to determine the degree to which **SW!TCH Minds** successfully delivered its stated outcomes.

The evaluation team judges SW!TCH Minds to have delivered significant positive impact to the students in all of the schools it operated in over the last three years.

The benefits that young people have experienced have been very visible to us as independent observers, but also to their teachers and mentors.

We have been given numerous powerful endorsements for the programme by teachers in the course of our engagement with them.

Given that schools can often be overwhelmed by, and wary of, interventions from outside for a variety of reasons, the fact that **almost every single school has said that they would recommend the programme to others suggests that SW!TCH Minds has made a lasting positive impact.**

It is our hope that the programme can continue to deliver its vital support to many more young people in the future.

The follow is a summary of the evaluation's findings:

Increased happiness and wellbeing

Conclusion: strong impact

A convincing majority of young people reports that their happiness and wellbeing has been improved by taking part in the programme. They told us that the positive activities helped them form friendships, which also contributed to their happiness.

Youth Development Workers and teachers identify that the tools learnt through the mentoring programme have helped the young people cope with the very difficult circumstances they face and to become happier as a result, even if their circumstances have not changed.

Better able to understand their own and others' emotions and behaviours

Conclusion: strong impact

Young people and their teachers could clearly articulate the ways in which **SWITCH Minds** positively impacted the students' self-esteem and confidence.

Improved self esteem and confidence manifested itself in a multitude of ways for the young people, ranging from helping them to express themselves better, to making new and more appropriate friendships, feeling more confident inside and outside of school, improving their lives at home and developing new coping mechanisms.

Better able to understand their own and others' emotions and behaviours

Conclusion: strong impact

A clear majority of young people reported that the **SWITCH Minds** project had a positive impact on their ability to better understand both their own and other people's feelings.

Teachers told us that the programme improved the young people's empathy with other younger students with similar issues. Youth Development Workers saw a difference in the students' ability to control their own emotions.

Become advocates for SWITCH Minds

Conclusion: strong impact

Young people describe their experiences of **SWITCH Minds** very positively. The overwhelming majority would recommend it to their friends and peers and they are able to articulate both why they would benefit from it, and who would be best suited to participating.

The experiences of the small number of young people who go on to train to become SWITCH Ambassadors provide additional positive testimony about how highly young people value the programme.

Both of these groups of young people are vital, enthusiastic advocates for **SWITCH Minds**.

More engaged in their education and future employment

Conclusion: moderate impact

The programme was less effective in achieving this outcome than others. Less than half of young people agreed that the programme had made them enjoy school more. Youth Development Workers acknowledged the impact that the pandemic had on disengaging some young people from their education.

Despite this, teachers reported that some young people were more likely to attend school on the days when the mentoring sessions were taking place and some young people told us that the programme helped them to understand the importance of their education.

Raised aspirations and a purpose in life

Conclusion: strong impact

The support provided by **SWITCH Minds** has helped young people to aim higher, aspire to new things, start to enjoy their learning at school and beyond, and to access valuable opportunities through positive activities and the SWITCH Ambassador programme.

Testimony from young people, teachers and Youth Development Workers is rich with examples of where this is visible in practice. The reassurance of having reliable, consistent support from a mentor has often been the key to enabling young people to discover what it is they want to do with their future.

Ability to develop trusting relationships with others

Conclusion: strong impact

The young people who have participated in **SWITCH Minds** have been able to develop trusting relationships with their Youth Development Workers, which have translated into improved relationships with school staff and other young people.

Both teachers and Youth Development Workers agree that giving young people the chance to spend time with their peers and YDW team outside of school via various positive activities facilitated this.

It is also testament to the strong bonds the YDWs have developed with their mentees that significant safeguarding disclosures were made, leading to important support being provided to young people who otherwise may not have been helped.

Feeling safe, secure and supported

Conclusion: strong impact

This outcome has been a particular success. A significant majority of both young people and their teachers said that **SWITCH Minds** helped young people to feel safe, secure and supported. Youth Development Workers also provided numerous examples of where they saw this in practice.

Helping vulnerable young people who may also be experiencing difficulties at home and school, who are also dealing with significant mental health challenges to feel safe, secure and supported, is a stepping stone to unlocking all of the other outcomes for **SWITCH Minds**.

The evaluation team considers this to be a significant success for the programme, therefore.

Feeling part of their family and local community

Conclusion: moderate impact

The evaluation concludes that this outcome has been partially delivered. We found that there was some evidence to suggest that **SWITCH Minds** helped young people to improve the way that they feel about life at home with their families.

This was also accompanied by evidence that suggested that the positive activities enabled some young people to engage more with their local communities.

The evidence was not as compelling for this outcome as for some of the others, however.

The evaluation team has made a number of recommendations to improve the future effectiveness and impact of **SWITCH Minds**:

- Ensure all schools understand what the programme can and cannot do at the outset
- Ensure that the **SWITCH Minds** team regularly links with the most appropriate staff member in each school who has close contact to participating students.
- Ensure that complete and consistent data is collected using WEMWBS for all participating young people once a term for all of their participating terms.
- Record all interactions between the YDWs and the young people and share this data with evaluators at regular intervals. This will allow a more comprehensive evaluation of impact enabling the programme to have a closer eye on the way it is working and the degree to which it is making a difference, and to respond to issues if they arise.
- Support teachers and schools to select young people that are likely to benefit from the programme the most.
- Consider options to reduce or reorganise or reprioritise the workload of the Youth Development Workers to increase staff retention and foster their wellbeing.
- Foster closer collaboration with Local Authorities in the relevant boroughs, to keep them better informed about the programme's progress and impact and to ensure that **SWITCH Minds**' work and impacts are showcased appropriately.
- Investigate all funding opportunities available to be able to offer the programme to as many schools as possible, given the increasing demand for the programme

Finally, the evaluation team wanted to acknowledge the following five points as being important unique selling points for the **SWITCH Minds** programme:

- The strength and make-up of the team is something very special.
- The programme has a very visible positive impact on the lives of young people.
- **SWITCH Minds**' comprehensive response to the pandemic demonstrated the programme's values in action.
- The continuity of their support, combined with the importance that the YDWs attributed to their relationships with their mentees demonstrates the programme's genuine commitment to the young people it supports.
- **SWITCH Minds** will always go above and beyond to ensure that they support their young people in every way that they can.

2. Introduction and context setting

In the autumn of 2019, *Rachel Dunford Consulting Ltd* was appointed as the independent evaluator for *LifeLine Community Projects'* **SWITCH Minds** programme. The main purpose of the evaluation has been to determine the degree to which **SWITCH Minds** successfully achieved its outcomes, as set out within its Theory of Change.

SWITCH Minds is an initiative that provides mentoring services and support to young people to improve their mental health. It focuses on helping them to cope with transition and life-changing events that affect their long-term health and life choices. The programme has been running for three academic years, operating out of secondary schools across the three London boroughs of Barking and Dagenham, Redbridge and Havering. Delivered by a team of Youth Development Workers (YDWs), young people identified as meeting the programme's entry criteria are provided with weekly in-school one-on-one mentoring support over three terms, complemented by a programme of extra-curricular positive activities in the community.

In December 2019, the **SWITCH Minds** team participated in a workshop facilitated by the evaluators to develop the programme's Theory of Change (see overleaf).

The Theory of Change sets out the most important elements of the programme—its inputs, outputs and outcomes—and shows how they come together to deliver SWITCH Mind's ultimate goal of **'building a community of resilient, confident and empowered young people, capable of making the best choices for themselves and of giving back to their local communities'**.

Over the course of the last three years, the evaluation team has conducted a range of data collection activities, working directly with participating young people, their teachers, the team of Youth Development Workers and—where possible—relevant stakeholders within the three commissioning Boroughs, to determine the degree to which each of the outcomes within the Theory of Change has successfully been achieved.

This report sets out the evaluation methodology and its findings.

Strong and diverse team of mentors

One-on-one mentoring relationship

Continuity and consistency of support

Individual learning plans with short, medium and long-term goals set and regularly reviewed

Supported access to community-based positive activities

INPUTS

21 schools across 3 boroughs participating for 3 years

240 young people participating each year

Weekly mentoring sessions during term-time

Regular extra-curricular positive activities

OUTPUTS

The ability to develop trusting relationships with others

Raised aspirations and a purpose in life

Improved self-esteem and self-confidence

Feeling safe, secure and supported

Better ability to understand their own and others' emotions and behaviours

More engaged in their own education and future employment

Advocates for SWITCH Minds

Increased happiness and wellbeing

Active part of their family and local community

OUTCOMES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

To build a community of resilient, confident and empowered young people, capable of making the best choices for themselves and of giving back to their local communities

END GOAL

3. Evaluation methodology

The evaluation of **SWITCH Minds** has made use of both qualitative and quantitative data, the majority of which has been collected independently by the evaluation team via telephone and Zoom interviews and online surveys. This data has been triangulated with additional quantitative data gathered by *LifeLine Projects* themselves using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale.

The table below sets out the detail of the data collection activity that has taken place since the start of the evaluation in 2019:

Young people

Year 1

Face-to-face recorded interviews with 16 students (spring term 2020)

Online survey with 37 responses (summer term 2020)

Online survey with 53 responses (autumn term 2020)

Year 2

Online survey with 74 responses (Easter 2021)

Case studies of three **SWITCH Minds** Ambassadors, 'graduates' of **SWITCH Minds** (July 2021)

Online survey with 64 responses (July 2021)

Year 3

Online survey with 44 responses (September 2021)

Online survey with 109 responses (March 2022)

Teachers

Year 1

Telephone interviews with teachers in 3 schools (spring term 2020)

Telephone interviews with 5 teachers (summer term 2020)

Telephone interviews with teachers in 5 schools (autumn term 2020)

Year 2

Telephone interviews with 6 teachers (May/June 2021)

Online survey with 14 responses (July 2021)

Year 3

Telephone interviews with 8 teachers (April 2022)

Youth Development Workers

Year 1

Theory of Change development workshop (autumn 2019)

Telephone interviews with the initial team of 4 YDWs (spring 2020)

Telephone interviews with the team of 5 YDWs (May 2020)

Telephone interviews with 4 YDWs (June/July 2020)

Year 2

Online survey with all 5 of the YDW team (September 2020)

Telephone interviews with 5 YDWs (November 2020)

Telephone interviews with 5 YDWs (April/May 2021)

Year 3

Desk-based data capture exercise completed by 2 of the YDW team (September 2021)

Reflective online survey; completed by 3 of the 5 YDWs (spring 2022)

Online survey with 109 responses (March 2022)

Local Authority representatives

Year 1

Interview with one Local Authority contact; the other two were uncontactable (December 2020)

Year 2

Interviewed remaining two Local Authority contacts by telephone (February/June 2021)

Year 3

n/a; no contacts available to interview

Analysis of data collected and supplied by LifeLine

Year 1

n/a

Year 2

Analysis of WEMWBS data collected at the end of terms 1, 2 and 3 for cohort 2 students (autumn 2021)

Year 3

Analysis of WEMWBS data for students in all three years' cohorts who completed a WEMWBS survey in each of their three participating term; 85 records (summer 2022)

3.1. Qualitative interviews

Interviews with **teachers, Youth Development Workers, and Local Authority representatives** were largely conducted by telephone, using scripts that were pre-approved by the **SWITCH Minds** programme manager to ensure consistency of the conversation and to enable all participants equal opportunity to contribute their views. The initial plans for the evaluation included much more face-to-face interaction with these stakeholder groups but the COVID-19 pandemic required us to adapt our approach and to minimise travel and in-person contact. Nonetheless, these changes have had minimal impact on the volume and quality of the data we have been able to collect.

It is important to note that all teacher feedback included in this report is based on their personal interactions with the young people participating in the programme and the teachers' own perceptions of student behaviour in school. The YDWs were keen to maintain student confidentiality and therefore, unless they encountered a safeguarding concern, did not offer direct feedback on student progress to schools. Teachers themselves did not undertake any formal tracking or monitoring of the mental health outcomes of the young people in the programme.

It should also be noted that we had hoped to engage with considerably more stakeholders from the three London Boroughs. Despite our best efforts to contact them and invite them to participate in annual interviews, it has not been possible to engage them anywhere near as frequently as we had hoped. During our conversations with them, it became evident that their roles were more strategic than operational, and therefore they were unable to comment in much detail about the impact of the programme. Even so, all feedback they have shared with us is reflected in this report.

3.2. Online surveys

Young people were initially consulted in person too—with the first set of interviews being conducted face-to-face in their schools. Again, however, the pandemic required us to change our approach and so, from that point onwards, participating students were asked to complete simple and accessible online surveys using Google forms at regular intervals. No student was ever asked for any personal or identifiable data, ensuring that their confidentiality was maintained and encouraging them to be as open and honest in their feedback as possible. The online surveys elicited good responses and have enabled us to analyse some 345 sets of responses from young people over the course of the evaluation.

Teachers and YDWs have also completed online surveys at various points during the evaluation. Each survey was written specifically for the stakeholder group it would be used by, and questions were designed to be repeated each year to enable a fair comparison of the impact of each year of the programme. At two points during the evaluation, the YDWs were asked to provide the evaluation team with examples of young people who were demonstrating the **SWITCH Minds** Theory of Change outcomes in practice. These examples have been used to produce short vignettes, which are shared at the end of each outcome chapter, where they were available.

3.3. WEMWBS data

The **Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scales** is a tool that was developed to enable the measuring of mental wellbeing in the general population and the evaluation of projects which aim to improve mental wellbeing. It consists of 14 statements (known as 'items') which individuals score, choosing a score between 1 and 5 to demonstrate how they are feeling about each sentiment at that particular moment in time. Their responses are then summed to provide a single score. The items are all worded positively and cover both feeling and functioning aspects of mental wellbeing to make them more accessible.

LifeLine Projects administered a 14-item WEMWBS questionnaire to participating young people within the **SWITCH Minds** programme every term. Some 85 young people completed WEMWBS during all three of their terms in the programme. Their data have therefore been matched (without using any identifiable data) and tracked over the three terms to enable analysis of their overall and question-specific scores within the context of examining the effectiveness of **SWITCH Minds**.

To complement our own data collection and analysis, each of the individual WEMWBS items has been mapped against the **SWITCH Minds** Theory of Change outcomes to enable a 'best fit' comparison between the two datasets, as shown in the table below:

SWITCH Minds outcomes	WEMWBS items
Increased happiness and wellbeing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ I have had energy to spare ■ I have been feeling cheerful ■ I have been feeling relaxed ■ I have been interested in new things
Improved self esteem and confidence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ I have been feeling confident ■ I have been feeling good about myself ■ I have been feeling useful
Better ability to understand their own and others' emotions and behaviours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ I have been dealing with problems well ■ I have been thinking clearly ■ I have been able to make up my own mind
Become advocates for SWITCH Minds	<i>n/a</i>
More engaged in their education and future employment	<i>No direct link to WEMWBS items</i>
Raised aspirations and a purpose in life	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ I am optimistic about my future
The ability to develop trusted relationships with others	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ I feel close to other people ■ I am feeling interested in others
Feeling safe, secure and supported	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ I have been feeling loved
Feeling part of their family and local community	<i>No direct link to WEMWBS items</i>

3.4. Interim reporting

The evaluation team has produced two interim reports prior to this final analysis:

- An end of year one report reflecting on the high level impact of **SWITCH Minds** on the first cohort of young people to participate in the programme in December 2020.
- An end of year two report reflecting on the high level impact of **SWITCH Minds** on the second cohort of young people in December 2020.

Given the exceptional circumstances presented by COVID-19, the evaluation team was also asked to produce an additional report into **SWITCH Minds'** response to the pandemic, which was written in September 2020.

This final report is the culmination of the three-year evaluation and presents an independent view about the degree to which **SWITCH Minds** has been effective in achieving its stated outcomes.

4. Overall effectiveness

The evaluation team judges **SWITCH Minds** to have delivered significant positive impact to the students in all of the schools it operated in over the last three years.

The benefits that young people have experienced have been very visible to us as independent observers, but also to their teachers and mentors.

We have been given numerous powerful endorsements for the programme by teachers in the course of our engagement with them. Given that schools can often be overwhelmed by, and wary of, interventions from outside for a variety of reasons, the fact that almost every single school has said that they would recommend the programme to others suggests that **SWITCH Minds** has made a lasting positive impact.

It is our hope that the programme can continue to deliver its vital support to many more young people in the future.

Throughout the course of this three-year evaluation, the team has encountered very few, if any, negative comments or perspectives about **SWITCH Minds** whoever they speak to. The young people who have participated in this evaluation consistently offer enthusiastic descriptions of their experiences, sharing self-aware observations about the impact that the programme has had upon their lives.

Their views have been corroborated by those of their teachers who may not have been formally monitoring the same outcomes, but who have been able to see the difference that the programme has made to the way that their students engage, behave and participate in school life. What's more, the team of YDWs has been able to provide countless more anecdotes about the successes their mentees have enjoyed than it has been possible to include in this report and their remarks have further reinforced the points made by young people and teachers.

We have acknowledged that it was difficult to engage with Local Authority (LA) contacts, but when we did, we received the following feedback about *LifeLine Projects* and the confidence that the LA had about **SWITCH Minds** and the impact it would have on young people in the borough:

We've worked with Lifeline over many years. They've got a great team, they work very relentlessly with the children...it was quite good that our experience of them had been a really positive one...we had confidence that what they would do with our young people would be really, really good.

—Local Authority contact

When these perspectives are laid alongside the overall WEMWBS scores taken from the data collected and provided by *LifeLine Projects*, the picture becomes even stronger¹.

For the 85 students who completed WEMWBS questionnaires in each of their three terms in **SWITCH Minds**, the scores they provided for every one of the 14 items was summed every term to produce their overall scores. The average overall score in term one was 41.64. By term three, the average overall score had increased to 47.68, representing an increase of 6 points, or **14.5%**.

¹ As has been noted elsewhere, however, individual WEMWBS item scores did not give quite as positive a picture of the programme's impact as the evaluation team uncovered through its own data collection.

Warwick University guidance on how to interpret WEMWBS scores states that a score of between 41 and 44 is indicative of *possible or mild depression* and a score of less than 41 is indicative of *probable clinical depression*. The average young person in **SWITCH Minds** at the start of the programme was presenting with a score indicative of possible or mild depression, therefore. By term three, the average young person in **SWITCH Minds** had a score that did not indicate a likelihood of depression.

Looking more closely at the scores presented by young people, at the start of the programme, clinical depression was probable for 37 individuals (**43%**), mild depression was possible for 12 young people (**13%**) and the remaining 36 had scores that did not indicate any depression (**42%**).

These statistics improved by the end of the programme. By term three, clinical depression was *probable* for just 26 young people (a reduction of 9 young people), mild depression was *possible* for 7 young people (a reduction of 5 people) and the remaining 52 young people had scores that did not indicate any depression.

Almost seven in ten young people saw their overall WEMWBS scores increase over the three terms (**68%**, n=58), suggesting that they would describe their own mental health as having improved. There was no change in the overall score for two young people, and 24 young people's overall scores decreased (**28%**).

These data would therefore suggest that **SWITCH Minds** has been successful for a convincing majority of the young people who took part.

Another important way to consider the overall effectiveness of the programme is to refer back to teachers' views because, after all, the ability of **SWITCH Minds** to access young people is dependent on teachers being prepared for it to take place in their schools. We asked teachers in years two and three whether they would recommend the programme to other schools:

- In year two, all but one (13 schools) said that they would recommend it, and the fourteenth school said that it was too early to see enough of an impact at the time of us asking the question.
- In year three, **100%** teachers interviewed again said that they would recommend **SWITCH Minds**.

Some teachers shared the reasons to explain why they were so happy to recommend the programme to other schools. They told us that it has been able to reach students that they may not have managed to support themselves. They also commented on the reliability of the programme's leadership team.

It's a programme that engages students that you may not have been able to engage as a pastoral team and you feel that somehow you have exhausted your resources within school, and somebody new and somebody fresh coming in offering really fantastic mentoring, [it's been] very engaging, very personal. I wouldn't hesitate to recommend it.

—Teacher, autumn 2020

*Yes, 100%. I'd give them the telephone number and say speak to him. [The **SWITCH Minds** programme manager] is so approachable anyway and he's so good with his communication. When you're in a meeting, he just replies straight away. The communication is so good. Sometimes you do something with the council, and you email them and three weeks later you don't get a reply...when you work in a school, you need answers straight away, you can't wait weeks."*

—Teacher, autumn 2020

We also asked teachers whether they felt that **SWITCH Minds** had successfully delivered the things they had hoped for their students or not. Thirteen out of the fourteen schools who completed the survey (**93%**) said that yes, **SWITCH Minds** had achieved what they were looking for. Of these people, six schools (**43%**) said that **SWITCH Minds** had achieved their goals for their students to a great extent.

Teachers praised the programme for its **impact on their students' mental health**:

It's very beneficial for the kids for behaviour and mental health. Having that external person to talk to, to feel confident enough to talk to. To get advice from someone who's not a teacher. As teachers they're not very interested in what we're saying.

—Teacher, summer 2022

They commented on **the positive changes that they could see in their students** because of their participation in the programme:

I think the children that need help and the changes that we've seen is incredible. If they could do that just for a handful of students in every school that they're in, I couldn't ask for more because it's really hard, not only to open up, but also to make that connection and see the positive change coming back, not from the adults, but the students themselves. I think we can often underestimate how hard that can be.

—Teacher, summer 2022

They recognised that **SWITCH Minds offers something to students that is not available in school**:

I think it's really nice for getting certain students support that they otherwise wouldn't get in school... I have said to them I would love to have the mentor for two or three days if it were possible.

—Teacher, summer 2022

Teachers also acknowledged that **the YDW team was able to connect with their students in circumstances where they had not been able to do so themselves**:

...a qualified trusted person who can reach students in a way that possible staff can't.

—Teacher, summer 2022

Teachers said that **SWITCH Minds provided safety for their students** and enabled them to improve the way they felt about their lives:

I would talk about the way it offers students a safe space to speak...the positive impacts it has on students' outlook and their ability to take responsibility.

—Teacher, summer 2022

And finally, **teachers were simply grateful for the support SWITCH Minds had delivered to their students**:

It's been really invaluable, and I've been very appreciative of the support the mentor has been able to offer to our students.

—Teacher, summer 2022.

5. Theory of Change outcomes

5.1. Introduction

This chapter brings together all of the data collected by the evaluation team from young people, teachers, Youth Development Workers, and—where relevant and possible—Local Authority contacts, alongside the WEMWBS data as supplied by *LifeLine Projects*. It then considers the degree to which **SWITCH Minds** has successfully delivered against each the outcomes within the programme's Theory of Change in turn.

It should be noted that data collected by the evaluation team, particularly from young people directly, often presents a more positive picture than the WEMWBS data supplied and collected by *LifeLine Projects*, which is especially visible when WEMWBS items are analysed individually. Given that young people completed the evaluation team's surveys independently and that they were asked to provide a qualitative justification to support their answers, the evaluation team is confident that these data can be relied upon to be accurate.

Where possible, we have ended each outcome analysis with one or more 'success stories'—brief descriptions of scenarios where a young person has been able to demonstrate an outcome in practice, as observed by their Youth Development Worker.

5.2. Increased happiness and wellbeing

Conclusion: strong impact

A convincing majority of young people reports that their happiness and wellbeing has been improved by taking part in the programme. They told us that the positive activities helped them form friendships, which also contributed to their happiness.

Youth Development Workers and teachers identify that the tools learnt through the mentoring programme have helped young people cope with the very difficult circumstances they face and to become happier as a result, even if their circumstances have not changed.

74% young people (n=159) agree that **SWITCH Minds** had a positive impact on their happiness and wellbeing. **45%** young people (n=97) also said that they enjoyed making new friends within the programme, which contributed to improving their happiness.

At the end of year one, young people were asked whether they would recommend **SWITCH Minds** to anyone else. In their answers, they highlighted the positive impact that the support they received from *LifeLine* had on their motivation, life and happiness:

*It is an amazing experience, with incredible people. I wouldn't be where I am right now without the help and support from *LifeLine*. They have motivated me and inspired me to do much more in my life and gave [sic] me more happiness.*

—Young person, September 2020

Another young person commented on how **SWITCH Minds** had helped them make new friends and build trust through the relationship with their mentor as well as the positive activities they took part in:

It is a great way to get out there and meet new people, as well as being able to confide in people you trust. It is not just about being mentored, it is also about building friendships!

—Young person, September 2020

A similar impact was also reported by other young people in years two and year three of the programme:

My mentor was very kind and gave me a lot of happiness after I left [our 1:2:1 sessions], so that could make your day.

—Young person, March 2022

I enjoyed taking part in the group activities because...I learnt how to interact with new people and to be happy.

—Young person, July 2021

Positive activities made the young people happy as they increased their bonds with other young people and made new friends:

I made some friends, and it was very fun to be in Colchester Zoo. The mentors are very nice and fun to be around.

—Young person, July 2021

Data collected by *LifeLine Projects* using the WEMWBS tool also suggests that **SWITCH Minds** can have a beneficial effect on young people's happiness and wellbeing, though their data does not show quite the same degree of impact as those collected by the evaluation team. Data from the four WEMWBS items with the most relevance to this outcome have been analysed, and they show that between a third to a half of those young people who completed WEMWBS in each of their three terms on the programme saw their scores increase for:

- I have been feeling cheerful (**54%**, n=46), with the mean average score increasing from 2.89 (out of 5) to 3.49
- I have been feeling relaxed (**47%**, n=40), where the average score increased from 2.87 (out of 5) to 3.20
- I have been interested in new things (**38%**, n=32), with the average score increasing from 3.27 (out of 5) to 3.35
- I have had energy to spare (**38%**, n=32), with the average score increasing from 2.77 (out of 5) to 3.04.

79% teachers surveyed also agree that **SWITCH Minds** has successfully made a difference to their students' happiness (n=11).

They are happier about themselves, more connected and more in touch with their emotions.

—Teacher, summer 2021

Teachers reported that they can find student happiness and wellbeing hard to measure as they perceive them to be longer term outcomes, particularly given the very difficult circumstances that the young people were facing. Teachers do acknowledge, however, that the support of the programme allows young people to open up about elements of their life that will ultimately lead to improving their wellbeing.

It's difficult to say she's a happier person...I think it's enabled her to open up about things that are going on and then for her to get the necessary support. So, I think it's quite a long journey for lots of our students on the programme. But in terms of their happiness around being on the programme, absolutely.

—Teacher, 2020

Youth Development Workers also noticed improvements to students' wellbeing due to the skills they have gained in their one-on-one sessions, despite their circumstances remaining the same.

I think overall that they feel happier. That their situation may not change, but they've changed, or their attitude has changed, or their resilience skills have helped them to cope.

—Youth Development Worker, spring 2021

Success stories

These vignettes were provided by the team of Youth Development Workers about students who have participated in **SWITCH Minds** over the 3 years of the programme.

One of my girls has been through a lot in the last 3-5 years. She had no relationship with her dad and step-mum, did not want to see them or talk to them, her mental health was getting worse to the stage where she tried to commit suicide. She then also lost her grandad a couple of months later. By working with the whole family and enabling them to understand mental health and what she had been through and was still going through, a new support system was put in place for her and the whole family was involved. It took a couple of months for her to get back on track—so much so that she now spends weeks at her dad's and has met some new young people that are also on the programme after coming on a residential over the summer.

A boy in Year 8 sadly lost his father shortly before seeing me. He had had previous CAMHS support due to self harm. He was very quiet at the beginning and hardly spoke to me, but thoroughly enjoyed playing games. We spent most of lockdown virtually playing games together, building a relationship and getting to know one another. Two terms in and he is really starting to engage in mentoring, he brings conversation and is visibly happier. He will make jokes with me, tell me all about what is going on for him and it all with a big smile on his face. Both school and I can see a huge change in his wellbeing.

5.3. Improved self-esteem and self-confidence

Conclusion: **strong impact**

Young people and their teachers could clearly articulate the ways in which **SWITCH Minds** positively impacted the students' self-esteem and confidence.

Improved self esteem and confidence manifested itself in a multitude of ways for the young people, ranging from helping them to express themselves better, to making new and more appropriate friendships, feeling more confident inside and outside of school, improving their lives at home and developing new coping mechanisms.

Over two-thirds of young people (**69%**, n=152) report that **SWITCH Minds** has a positive impact on their self-confidence.

Young people were asked what the best thing about taking part in the programme had been for them and confidence was a common theme—regardless of which cohort they had been in:

[SWITCH Minds] helped me clear my mind and helped me with my confidence.

—Young person, March 2022

Increasing their confidence often led to other benefits too, such as increasing their self-belief:

If [SWITCH Minds] made me feel more confident and believe that I can do things that I haven't done before, it can do the same for others.

—Young person, July 2021

[My mentor] has helped me be more confident and believe in myself.

—Young person, July 2021

Improving their confidence also enabled young people to increase their resilience:

[The best thing about SWITCH Minds was] being able to build myself back up again and not think about past situations.

—Young person, March 2022

It made me more and more confident that I can stand-up for myself even more than before.

—Young person, July 2021

For other young people, an increase in confidence enabled them to feel better about expressing themselves:

I was able to get things off my chest that I don't feel confident talking to others with.

—Young person, March 2022

Young people could see the benefit the increase in their confidence at school and beyond:

...cause [stet] you get your feelings out and you have someone to talk to and it makes you feel more confident in school and outside of school.

—Young person, March 2022

We regularly asked young people whether they would recommend the programme to their peers, and if so, why they would. The potential of **SWITCH Minds** to improve other young people's self-esteem and confidence was again a common response:

*[I would recommend **SWITCH Minds** because] it helps me socialise and meet new people, boosts self esteem and confidence.*

—Young person, March 2022

SWITCH [stet] has helped me so much with confidence and everything else and others should be able to experience it.

—Young person, July 2021

Data collected by *LifeLine Projects* using the WEMWBS tool also suggests that **SWITCH Minds** can have a beneficial effect on around half of the participating young people's self-esteem and confidence, though they do not show this to quite the same extent as data collected by the evaluation team. The three WEMWBS items with the most relevance to this outcome have been analysed and they show that around half of those young people who completed WEMWBS in each of their three terms on the programme saw their scores increase for:

- I have been feeling confident (**48%**, n=41), with the mean average score increasing from 2.88 (out of 5) to 3.43
- I have been feeling good about myself (**53%**, n=45), where the average score increased from 2.90 to 3.51
- I have been feeling useful (**47%**, n=40), with the average score increasing from 2.96 to 3.37

Teachers also agree that **SWITCH Minds** has successfully made a difference to their students' self-esteem and confidence: **79%** of teachers surveyed (n=11) said that the positive activities within **SWITCH Minds** had contributed to this.

Teachers reported that they could perceive this impact by observing how their students were now able to increase the size of their social group and to make new friends or to increase their resilience within their social group—moving to a different social circle if their old one wasn't working.

One teacher described this in detail:

...I think them being confident enough to reach out to other people as a result of being on the programme... Confidence maybe around social groups, it's one of those things [that is] quite hard to measure because it might be that—okay, we've dealt with this one student loads socially, and then gradually when I actually reflect on it [we] barely had to do it recently. I think maybe that child is being more resilient in their social group to kind of build confidence around [being] a liked member of the group and [...] you know, confidence to make friends and to make other friends if their current groups aren't going too well, which has happened to a couple of those girls that have been on the programme.

—Teacher, 2022

Other teachers spoke about how their students were provided with a safe space through **SWITCH Minds** in which they could freely and safely express themselves, which enabled the young people to take their new confidence back into the rest of their school life:

I think that was one of the main things that [was] prominent and worked for us. I think a lot of the students [felt that] they have a safe space to freely express themselves, [and are] able to take a little bit of that back into the school life, which I definitely noticed.

—Teacher, 2022

Another teacher commented about the fact that their students seem to have developed the tools they need to deal with the things they are faced with, which in turn has had a positive impact on their self-esteem:

There was much more positivity and they learned some really good coping mechanisms...it did have an impact on their mental health and their self-esteem.

—Teacher, 2022

Teachers also attributed their students improved ability to make and maintain relationships with their peers and family to the fact that their self-esteem had improved:

The ones that did engage during COVID, I've got one [student] in mind that's really come on. His confidence has come on, his self-esteem is different, he talks different [stet], his relationship with his Mum is better, so he's a really good example of how the mentor programme has really worked for him and he did engage throughout COVID, so it was really, really positive...he's a different child to the one I met last year...I went and spoke to the boy. His mannerisms had changed, his confidence...to what he was last year...it just shows how well the programme has worked for him.

—Teacher, 2020

Finally, the Youth Development Workers have also seen evidence of how their young people have developed their confidence and improved their self-esteem during their time in **SWITCH Minds**. They describe how young people have appreciated having someone to talk to, having someone they trust to listen to them and the importance of working with their students to create a support network between the school, the family, and the Youth Development Workers themselves to encourage the young people to feel more self-assured.

When I first started seeing one young person, I saw her for a week then she was admitted to hospital for an overdose... [but since then, her] confidence and self-esteem have improved so much. It feels like she's got way more support there—she can call or message me whenever she wants me to come round. She knows I can do that. And with other [LifeLine] staff members she feels the same too—[she trusts] us as a team. [Another YDW] worked closely with [her] dad—[they] run our parent programme—[her] dad has attended all of them—he's been happy to be able to talk about what's been happening, and grateful for all of our help. [He] can talk to us whenever [he needs to] as well.

—Youth Development Worker 2020

Success stories

One of my young girls is deaf and wears hearing aids. She was very uncomfortable in her own body and had very low confidence and self-esteem. During the summer she came to an all-girls residential, and made some new friends, and really opened up to other staff members about what she has been through. She is now back in school, mum and the school have said that she is a completely different person, she is smiling and talking more about herself and is more confident in herself.

I had a very emotional and negative girl in Year 11, who was displaying really poor behaviour in school. I saw someone who was very broken. By the end of it, she was at school every day during lockdown. She had lots of issues at home with her Dad. I was able to mentor her in school and at home and she became so much more positive. One of her aims was to love herself more and to work on her self-esteem...what has worked is having someone to talk to, to listen to her and support her...we were able to create a triangle of support between the child, the school and the family...mentees won't tell us how much they struggle at home or how and it is. Parents will tell you how much they are struggling.

I had a year 11 boy with very low confidence, who got bullied by some in his year-group. He really struggled with friendships. He managed to make friends with another boy in his year through mentoring. He built up his confidence during his final term and he expanded his friendship circle, hanging out with people who were better for him. He made it to his prom after not wanting to go!

5.4. Better ability to understand their own and other's emotions and behaviours

Conclusion: **strong impact**

A clear majority of young people reported that the **SWITCH Minds** project had a positive impact on their ability to better understand both their own and other people's feelings.

Teachers told us that the programme improved the young people's empathy with other younger students with similar issues. Youth Development Workers saw a difference in the students' ability to control their own emotions.

SWITCH Minds aimed to help young people understand not just their own emotions and behaviours but also those of other people.

When asked whether the programme had helped them better understand their own feelings, nearly three quarters of young people **74%** (n=170) agreed that it had. The same proportion of those who responded to the relevant question (**74%**, n=170) agreed that it had helped them understand other people's feelings.

Young people reported how much having a mentor to talk to and to listen to them had helped them express their feelings and to work through mental health problems.

It was fun talking to [my mentor] and finally expressing my feelings.

—Young person, September 2020

Some young people identified this as the best part of the programme:

Being listened to has been the best [thing] because I have been able to find words to my feelings and explore them.

—Young person, March 2022

...that I get to talk about my feelings and there is always someone to listen and help me.

—Young person, March 2022

Young people also reported that they would recommend the programme to others due to their increased ability to understand their feelings, as a result of having a mentor listen to them and ask the right questions.

Because with this, I was able to understand my feelings. It also felt nice letting my bottle of tears out.

—Young person, September 2020

[The best thing was] my mentor asking me certain questions that allowed me to think differently about things.

—Young person, March 2022

Another young person reported that they had no other outlet for their feelings apart from their mentor.

Speaking to [my mentor] has allowed me to speak about my feelings which I do not speak about to my friends or anyone else.

—Young person, March 2022

Data collected by *LifeLine Projects* using the WEMWBS tool also suggests that **SWITCH Minds** can have a beneficial effect on young people's ability to better understand their own feelings and better understand the feelings of others. Data from the three WEMWBS items with the most relevance to this outcome have been analysed, and they show that around two fifths of those young people who completed WEMWBS in each of their three terms on the programme saw their scores increase for the following:

- **I have been dealing with problems well (46%, n=39)**, with the mean average score increasing from 2.98 (out of 5) to 3.42
- **I have been thinking clearly (44%, n=37)**, where the average score increased from 2.93 to 3.27
- **I have been able to make up my own mind (38%, n=32)**, with the average score increasing from 3.60 to 3.82

It should be noted that the data gathered from our own research indicates a greater impact than that demonstrated by WEMWBS data.

Encouragingly, in our survey of teachers in 2021, nearly three quarters of teachers or 71% (n=10) stated that they believed participating in SWITCH Minds had helped their students to better understand their own feelings. The same proportion agreed that participating in SWITCH Minds had helped their students understand other people's feelings.

Some students have felt they have been able to express themselves in a way that is not judged. This has then impacted friendships in a more positive way around school [and the] knock-on effect is better engagement in lessons and behaviour in general.

—Teacher, 2021

Teachers noted increased empathy in participating students towards younger students:

We see with the students [an increase in their] empathy for younger students, students that they think are vulnerable...they've been wanting to create a space where it's inclusive and asking if they could have a space at lunchtime. It's been amazing.

—Teacher, summer 2022

When I think about the amount of social issues that have gone down to some of them, it probably suggests that they're more able to look at a situation and go, Okay, I'm upsetting this person, I'm going to stop now and kind of be a bit more aware about their impact on others.

—Teacher, summer 2022

Teachers also noticed an increase in young people's desire to take responsibility for their own actions as well as in the strong bonds that the young people formed with others. This meant that the students were able to support each other in school and out of school, something that was reinforced by the positive activities. Some mentoring sessions were also done together out of choice, with peers buddying up.

Youth Development Workers reported that the length of the SWITCH minds programme allows the young people time and space to understand their own emotions.

It gives them space to unpack stuff, especially people who struggle with social anxiety, they have the opportunity to come to the activities. You're pushing them out of their comfort zone. The longevity of it, especially for kids that have anxiety or have a hard home life because they have attachment issues or they feel very anxious with people, knowing they are not going to see me for just four sessions, that they've got me for six months to a year. You build better and deeper relationships and then you get better results because it goes on so long...it's not like it's six weeks of counselling, now off you go, it's like 'I share my life, you share your life'.

—Youth Development Worker, summer 2021

Youth Development Workers were keen to highlight that from the very start of the programme, in the initial workshops, young people were learning about their own emotions and understanding what mental health meant.

Even from the workshops that we did with them from the very start of lockdown before they did mentoring. They did workshop evaluations. A lot of them on their forms said that they never knew that this was classed as mental health. As a whole it opened their eyes up quite a lot.

—Youth Development Worker, autumn 2020

YDWs told us how rewarding they found helping the young people to be able to view their issues from a different perspective:

It's fulfilling and rewarding watching the young people grow and helping them see things from a different mindset.

—Youth Development Worker, summer 2021

Success stories

"I have been working with a Year 9 boy who has ADHD. He would always say he just got angry and would feel angry a lot of the time. We spent some sessions unpacking his anger and did some worksheets around other emotions that can feel the same. He worked out he had been feeling other emotions but not understanding them or knowing how to deal with them. He found the exercises we did really helpful and it enabled him to better communicate how he was feeling at school and at home."

5.5. Become advocates for **SW!TCH Minds**

Conclusion: **strong impact**

Young people describe their experiences of **SW!TCH Minds** very positively. The overwhelming majority would recommend it to their friends and peers, and they are able to articulate both why they would benefit from it, and who would be best suited to participating.

The experiences of the small number of young people who go on to train to become **SW!TCH Ambassadors** provide additional positive testimony about how highly young people value the programme.

Both of these groups of young people are vital, enthusiastic advocates for **SW!TCH Minds**.

The **SW!TCH Minds** programme set out to equip their young people with the drive and desire to share the benefits of taking part with others.

It is a testament to **SW!TCH Minds** that—when asked at the end of their third term—**94%** (n=200) of all of the young people surveyed throughout the lifetime of this evaluation said that they would recommend the programme to their peers.

Becoming an advocate for the programme has manifested itself in two main ways. The first is that young people who have taken part are able to voluntarily explain the difference that the programme has made to their lives and to articulate how it works to their peers. The testimony of students who have completed the programme is a powerful asset. One young person explained why they wanted other people to be able to benefit from the combined elements of the programme:

I would recommend it to people because I would want people to have that support and that personal diary for them to confide to, but also to enjoy different activities and get active and social with other members of the youth community.

—Young person, September 2020

Young people who have completed **SW!TCH Minds** advocate the benefits of the programme very naturally:

If you are having a hard time or need someone to talk to, there will always be someone you can do it with and you know you can say what you want, and they won't tell anyone.

—Young person, March 2022

Another student was able to explain the circumstances in which **SW!TCH Minds** could make a particular difference to something a young person might be struggling with:

*It helps when you are going through something. Whether it's a problem at home [or] anywhere you can always get input and advice. Not only this but it can be seen as an escape/retreat that helps you think. I would recommend **SW!TCH Minds** to other people as it can change your view on certain things you find difficult.*

—Young person, March 2022

The second way that young people are able to become a more formal advocate for **SWITCH Minds** is by choosing to train to become an Ambassador. Lifeline Projects seeks to encourage young people to get involved in helping other people too, so they developed **SWITCH Ambassadors** which provides students who have completed the programme with training so that they can work alongside the SWITCH team to provide guidance and support to their peers, to support and lead the delivery of positive activities and even to produce and design new activities.

Teachers have commented on the additional impact that the programme has brought to those of their students who have gone on to train to become Ambassadors:

One student who had been mentored and now she's an Ambassador, and now she's much older and the journey that she's had—it's been very positive...I think giving her that leadership role has been huge for her...

—Teacher, 2022

In year one, *LifeLine Projects* trained up some 18 young people to become Ambassadors. The evaluation team surveyed a sample of Ambassadors to find out about their experiences at the end of year two. The first young person we spoke to wanted to gain more confidence and was motivated to join **SWITCH Minds** in October 2019. They took part in many group activities before being offered the opportunity to also become a SWITCH Ambassador. They felt that **SWITCH Minds** was particularly helpful in increasing their self-awareness:

It [helped] me understand my mentality better and understand what are healthier ways of dealing with bad mental health.

—SWITCH Minds Ambassador, 2021

The young person said that they appreciated the chance to meet new people and the staff, who they felt created a safe and positive atmosphere for everyone. They were ultimately motivated to become a **SWITCH Minds** Ambassador because they:

...wanted to be able to help others just the way SWITCH helped me.

—SWITCH Minds Ambassador, 2021

After undertaking the Ambassador training, they were able to get more involved in the programme. They were keen for other young people to have the same chance to be involved as they did, particularly as they knew many other people who needed help but couldn't access it. They said that they would definitely recommend that other students should do the same and train to become an Ambassador:

DO IT [stet] it's a great experience and you should take this fantastic opportunity with both hands.

—SWITCH Minds Ambassador, 2021

A second Ambassador explained that they joined **SWITCH Minds** in August 2020 and were hoping to gain more confidence and leadership skills from participating in the programme. Alongside their mentoring sessions, they took part in football, boxing and skating sessions and they went on various trips. Being in the programme resulted in just that: they said that it helped them to improve their confidence in

leading groups as well as working with their peers. They went on to undertake three days of training with *LifeLine Projects* and have since gone on to lead sessions themselves, take part in weekly activities, meet other young people and help others. All of these experiences provided the young person with:

...opportunities to lead and be a better version of myself.

—SWITCH Minds Ambassador

Again, this Ambassador was very keen to encourage other people to follow the same route that they took:

Do it. It'll help you emotionally, physically and socially, you'll make friends and gain advice to help you through everything... every opportunity will help you become a better you and will get you out there more.

—SWITCH Minds Ambassador

5.6. More engaged in their own education and future employment

Conclusion: **moderate impact**

The programme was less effective in achieving this outcome than others. Less than half of young people agreed that the programme had made them enjoy school more. Youth Development Workers acknowledged the impact that the pandemic had on disengaging some young people from their education.

Despite this, teachers reported that some young people were more likely to attend school on the days when the mentoring sessions were taking place and some young people told us that the programme helped them to understand the importance of their education.

SWITCH Minds outcome aimed to help young people to be more engaged in their own education and future employment.

Just over three fifths of young people (**64%**, n=70) agreed with the statement '**SWITCH Minds** helped me with aiming high at school and in life'. Around four in ten young people (**44%**, n=92) agreed that the programme had helped them enjoy school more².

Young people attributed their increase in engagement in school to the support their mentor provided, which in turn led to better behaviour.

...because I have had better behaviour during lessons, and I can speak openly with my mentor.

—Young person, 2021

...because if I've had a bad or even good week I know there will always be that safe space for me to talk about it, and also it's has helped me behave more in school.

—Young person, March 2022

2 There were no relevant WEMWBS scores for this outcome.

The process of reflecting on their feelings and goals helped some young people identify the importance of their education.

It made me talk about my feelings and helped me to realise how serious my education is.

—Young person, March 2022

[I've been] working on my goals (e.g. revision). I don't like revising but I got through it in the end.

—Young person, July 2021

One young person identified the opportunity to focus on their future as one of the best elements of the programme.

[The best thing has been] speaking about what I want to do and where I want to be in the future.

—Young person, March 2022

86% of teachers (n=12) said that they could see that their students were enjoying school more as a result of participating in SWITCH Minds.

Teachers identified an improvement in some young people's behaviour—noting that they were more likely to respond positively to their teachers, they were staying in classes longer and not being asked to leave as often. Teachers also observed that young people were more willing to listen when talked to which teachers put down to another outcome—the increased ability to develop trusted relationships with others, which is outlined in more detail elsewhere in this report.

During the pandemic, YDWs tried to keep in touch with young people, to maintain the link between the young person and their education, which was otherwise in danger of being lost. This was not always possible to achieve, however.

I feel that if we hadn't had lockdown and they didn't come back into schools with all these new rules and expectations, I think it would have been a different story. I feel they would have gained so much more out of it. A couple of my boys did, and they were working towards it and were doing really well and then obviously lockdown happened and now they are back to their old ways, which is a shame.

—Youth Development Worker, autumn 2020

Nevertheless, without the programme YDWs believe that there would have been more exclusions, reducing young people's engagement with education even further.

[Without the programme] I think a lot of them would have been excluded from school. I have a couple that probably wouldn't have been here today. It has definitely had an impact.

—Youth Development Worker, autumn 2020

In some cases, Youth Development Workers identified that their mentoring was valued so much by the young people that it improved their school attendance, as they were so keen to participate:

I think it's been really handy for the schools, especially for those who have come back from school, it's been really good having that half an hour that they look forward to. I had feedback from one of the DSLs [designated safeguarding leads] on Friday that they had a kid who had been off for a few days of the week and the mum was being very vague about it, but mum had said that he would be in on Friday because he has mentoring. The DSL said 'I cannot believe that this kid actually wants to come to school because of the mentoring...whatever you're doing is working.

—Youth Development Worker, autumn 2020

Youth Development Workers noted that both behaviour and attendance had improved for some young people.

You can see their growth. One example for me is that you can see that their behaviour is improving, they're not in isolation. They are coming into school more regularly. Sometimes they can be very down, very cagey and by the end of it they are quite happy coming to see you, happy to see you. Or the teacher is telling you that this young person has really improved in this way, engaging in your activities and things like that.

—Youth Development Worker, spring 2021

Success stories

During lockdown and COVID, one of my young girls was playing catch up with her schoolwork and was doing well, as she had fallen behind due to her ADHD. She used to find herself not in classes or being kicked out because teachers struggled to manage her behaviour. More recently she is now in year 11 and is trying to keep her head down still as best as she can, as she knows that she will need to pass all of her exams to be able to work with children.

One Year 11 who had not applied for college was not sure what to do in life. We sat down for a few weeks, worked out what he enjoyed, what he could practically do. He is now applying for a railway engineering course at college and then will apply for a TFL engineering apprenticeship in the future.

5.7. Raised aspirations and a purpose in life

Conclusion: **strong impact**

The support provided by **SWITCH Minds** has helped young people to aim higher, aspire to new things, start to enjoy their learning at school and beyond, and to access valuable opportunities through positive activities and the **SWITCH Ambassador** programme.

Testimony from young people, teachers and Youth Development Workers is rich with examples of where this is visible in practice. The reassurance of having reliable, consistent support from a mentor has often been the key to enabling young people to discover what it is they want to do with their future.

Just under two-thirds of young people surveyed (**65%**, n=148) told us that **SWITCH Minds** had helped them to feel better about their futures.

When asked what they felt was best about the programme, some young people chose to focus on the fact that their mentor had given them the chance to talk about their future together:

For me, the best thing was speaking about what I want to do and where I want to be in the future.

—Young person, March 2022

*[**SWITCH Minds**] has allowed me to think and get help for the future.*

—Young person, March 2022

Another young person took similar benefits from their time in **SWITCH Minds**, explaining how it helped them to make achievable plans for their future:

I had someone to talk to and share my experiences and past with, and I had someone to help me know what I need to do to improve my behaviour and work on what I want from the future.

—Young person, July 2021

Another young person referred to the clarity that they had taken away from working with their mentor:

I found the one-to-one sessions very useful with my mentor as it's helped me have a clearer mindset for my future.

—Young person, March 2022

For young people who may not have had such a long interaction with the programme, it was still possible to see the impact on their future aspirations:

I feel like it has helped me even though we only had 7 sessions, I have been able to see a different perspective to things that I have been doing and how I can improve them for the future.

—Young person, March 2022

The item within the WEMWBS tool most closely related to this outcome was “I am optimistic about my future”. By the end of the programme, **45%** (n=38) young people saw their scores for this statement increase. The average score for this item in term one was 3.13, increasing to 3.67 by term three, a change of just over 0.5 points—again suggesting a much lower impact than in the data collected by the evaluation team.

Almost two-thirds of the teachers who completed the evaluation survey in 2021 (64%, n=9) also reported that they agreed that SWITCH Minds had improved the way that their students felt about their futures.

One teacher talked about the experiences of one of her students and how, after the lockdown period and thanks to the support she received from **SWITCH Minds**, she noticed improvements with her engagement in school:

She was a student that we had some behavioural concerns with, yet over lockdown she engaged really well with her work and has had a good start to this term. I think her engagement with [her YDW] most likely contributed to that, and her lockdown journey was a positive one as well.

—Teacher, autumn 2020

Another teacher commented on the positive changes in their pupils’ aspirations for the future, which they attributed to working within **SWITCH Minds**:

Two pupils in Year 11 have thought seriously about college or sixth form. One pupil has really grown in self confidence this year and his identity as a LAC [Looked after child].

—Teacher, spring 2021

One teacher observed the way that the programme gave young people practical ways to achieve their aims and offered them a welcome external perspective which resonated with their students:

It cemented their aspirations by giving them real life insight into how to go about it and that it's possible. It's made it feel like it's achievable because we say that to everyone, but it can sound quite jaded, but to hear it from someone who's outside school and you can show it to them is really good.

—Teacher, summer 2022

Another teacher commented on the fact that the programme had helped some of their students to think further ahead:

It's improved because they have a sense of longevity at school. Rather than thinking that the school is going to kick me out, they are now thinking that they want to remain.

—Teacher, summer 2022

A further teacher noted the difference that they could see in the way one student was more prepared to talking about their future plans after having been in the programme:

A bit more confident about the future, I'd say. A bit more open to discuss the future.

—Teacher, summer 2022

Youth Development Workers also observed improvements in their young people's aspirations as a result of the work they had done together. They were able to describe the journey that the young person had gone on, despite the challenging circumstances they were facing at home, to first become a SWITCH Ambassador and then successfully apply for a place at university:

One of mentees has had her last session this week. She is going to uni. She's just been amazing. She's had a lot of issues at home, real struggles growing up and she has really excelled. She comes to all the positive activities and engages in absolutely everything and she is one of our ambassadors. She has just been amazing. She still wants to carry on volunteering with us. She said to me, "You've been amazing, the best mentor I've ever had."

She said that it has helped her, it has really helped her having that support and encouragement as she says she doesn't feel that she gets any of that at home...she suffers with depression and she said that having that support really helped her a lot.

—Youth Development Worker, spring 2021

Success stories

One of my Year 11 pupils started off in our mentoring with very low self esteem. They did not want to participate in the programme, and they were getting into trouble at school. He was generally very low in mood and motivation for anything. He really engaged during our sessions, however, and we formed a great relationship. At the end of year 11 he managed to stay in school and attend sixth form and now wants to do a similar mentoring role or family support role in the future."

One of my mentees didn't come straight away to the positive activity, but when she finally did, she then kept coming every week. She is now in college doing art, which is what she wanted to do –her school didn't think she would achieve it.

5.8. The ability to develop trusting relationships with others

Conclusion: **strong impact**

The young people who have participated in **SWITCH Minds** have been able to develop trusting relationships with their Youth Development Workers, which have translated into improved relationships with school staff and other young people.

Both teachers and Youth Development Workers agree that giving young people the chance to spend time with their peers and YDW team outside of school via various positive activities facilitated this.

It is also testament to the strong bonds the YDWs have developed with their mentees that significant safeguarding disclosures were made, leading to important support being provided to young people who otherwise may not have been helped.

SWITCH Minds seeks to help young people to gain the ability to develop trusting relationships with others. Young people agreed that the programme did this.

Encouragingly, over eight in ten (**84%**, n=191) young people agreed that they enjoyed the fact that **SWITCH Minds** provided them with someone to talk to that they trust.

Over three quarters (**76%**, n=175) of young people reported that the programme enabled them to have someone listen to them who they trust.

And, just under three quarters (**71%**, n=163) of young people agreed that the project helped them to be able to ask someone they trust for advice.

We asked young people to describe their relationship with their YDW. It was heartening to hear that six in ten (n=71) described their mentor as being 'like a friend' and a further three in ten (**30%**, n=34) as being 'like an older brother or sister'—associating trusted and familiar relationships with the way that they felt about their mentor.

Some young people identified the trusting and consistent relationship they developed with their mentor as the best thing about the **SWITCH Minds** programme:

...being able to connect to someone I trust and can understand me and what I am going through.

—Young person, March 2022

The best thing is knowing I was able to talk to someone every week with no fail.

—Young person, March 2022

Young people really appreciated that their mentors were of a similar age to them, as they felt they could more easily develop a relationship with someone who was not like a teacher and who they could talk to on their own level.

It's safe and reliable. And disconnected from any school teachers. Also, the mentors are younger so actually understand.

—Young person, March 2022

SWITCH is like a second family. You're able to bond with people and feel comfortable just being yourself. I think it's just easier to talk to people who are of similar ages.

Young person, September 2020

Young people told us that the non-judgemental nature of their relationship that they can develop with their mentors allows them to express how they really feel in a way that they can't always do with others.

Because it gives you a chance to express how you really feel and talk about stuff that can be difficult to like telling your parents or friends.

Young person, March 2022

They are very helpful and so easy to talk to. They are understanding and won't judge me at all!

Young Person, March 2022

The statements that most closely aligned with this outcome from the WEMWBS data collected by *LifeLine Projects* were analysed and for both, scores increased for around four in ten of those young people who responded:

- I feel close to other people (**40%**, n=34), with the mean average score increasing from 3.35 (out of 5) to 3.60
- I am feeling interested in others (**46%**, n=39), where the average score increased from 3.16 to 3.32

64% (n=9) of teachers who participated the 2021 survey agreed that participating in the programme helped their students to build trusted relationships with other people.

Teachers reported that many young people had built strong, trusting relationships with the Youth Development Workers in school even though they can struggle to do this with teachers.

A student who was very reluctant to trust adults has built a very strong relationship with their mentor. This means that they have been able to talk about their lived experience and engaged with an adult which has not been achieved successfully by school staff.

—Teacher, summer 2021

Teachers put this down to the ability of the Youth Development Workers to relate to the young people on their level, thanks both to their age and independence from school staff.

I think the Youth Development Worker, the way that she is with the students, is relatable. They like working with her. She's cool, she's young and I think that's really, really important. They engage with her better than they would a member of staff...she is actually there for them, helping them. I think that's vital.

—Teacher, autumn 2020

Local Authorities also valued the way that Youth Development Workers relate to the young people so successfully:

There's something about the learning mentors being young and understanding the children. You need to have a bit of street about you. You can't be easily shocked—that's appealing for the children.

—Local Authority contact, winter 2021

Teachers told us that the YDWs, through the trusting relationships they built with the young people, were able to be honest and help the young people reflect on their own behaviour and their relationships with others.

One of the good things is they're speaking to someone who is not employed in the school. There's someone who has come in and they are a younger person who is not one of their teachers. They don't have the same boundaries...it's about them developing a relationship where there is a building of trust. They can go and be honest with them. She's guiding them and helping them think about their behaviour, how they respond to people...helping them to look at themselves and thinking about "why am I doing that?"

—Teacher, spring 2021

Teachers identified that once the YDWs have developed strong relationships with the young people they were able to facilitate safeguarding disclosures, something that wouldn't otherwise have been possible:

One thing that we did have an increase in was safeguarding concerns, but it's a positive for me that they felt comfortable enough as part of the programme to tell people it's passed on...we had a couple of really huge cases come out of it, that Lifeline were really central to.

—Teacher, summer 2022

Teachers also noticed that the young people's new skills of being able to develop a trusting relationship were transferred beyond just their relationship with their YDW to staff in the school, impacting positively on their openness with their teachers and their behaviour there too.

I know from the end of term reports that Heads of Year have done for this round, lots of them have commented on the fact that the students are more open with other staff in the school.

—Teacher, autumn 2020

They're more likely to stop and listen, when they're called up by their teachers with their behaviour. Rather than being kicked out straight away, they're staying in classes a bit longer, which is progress for them. I would say that when I have to stop, sort of talk to them about how they're behaving. There's a willingness to do so.

—Teacher, summer 2022

The young people's ability to develop trusting relationships with others was something that was also reported by the Youth Development Workers themselves.

One child is a completely different person, he's not getting in trouble as much, he's not being sent to isolation. He didn't trust adults at all. Since I've built a relationship with him, I've been able to make him trust some of the teachers in school more. He has moved from one parent's home to another parent's home and it's turned his world upside down. He seems so much happier...he's got 38 good behaviour awards in class. His teacher says they can't believe this is the same child as nine months ago. It was definitely having someone who showed him attention. He had a very poor relationship with his Mum. Just having someone that he could talk to that would show him attention, that proved that adults do care about him...it was like a whole new concept for him. Just having a space you can talk to someone...just someone who understands where you come from.

—Youth Development Worker, autumn 2020

YDWs were able to build trusting relationships with young people through the positive activities they ran with them and spending time with them outside of school.

I can connect with them in a way that a teacher can't... I had one girl whose Mum recently died and she had a counsellor for a long time. I spoke to her teacher on Friday who said that she really enjoyed the [positive activity] session because she can connect with me a bit more. I'm a bit younger, we've got things in common. I think my relationship with my young person works quite well because I'm able to gauge the type of young person they are.

—Youth Development Worker, spring 2021

YDWs reported that the fact that they worked so hard to stay in touch with young people during the pandemic solidified their relationships with their mentees and demonstrated their commitment to them.

I think us checking up on them knowing that they are not going to school and still trying to call them and have their mentoring sessions—I think that has made a difference in certain relationships as well...some of my students haven't been in touch with their teachers and they haven't heard anything, so I think that makes a difference, that we're not just the school. We're here to support you no matter what.

—Youth Development Worker, May 2020

Success stories

One of my young people is the oldest of four and has been a witness to domestic violence at home and has huge difficulties in trusting other people. Recently over the summer she came on a residential and met another young person who is autistic. Since the residential, the two girls have become good friends and meet up with each other every weekend, they have matching phone cases, and have just started going to roller skating as well. The young person I work with now has someone that she can talk to and reach out to if she is struggling or has a bad day, this also works for the girl she met.

I work with a Year 10 girl who puts up a huge front in her behaviour of how things really are. She pretended for a long time that home life was fine. She would come to sessions and tell me nothing was wrong and she was good. After a while she eventually came to a session and was actually herself. She completely let her guard down, shed some tears, and was honest about what was going on and how she was feeling. Since then we have built a really good relationship, she has also been able to open up to other family about how she was feeling and even her friends”

5.9. Feeling safe, secure and supported

Conclusion: **strong impact**

This outcome has been a particular success. A significant majority of both young people and their teachers said that **SWITCH Minds** helped young people to feel safe, secure and supported. Youth Development Workers also provided numerous examples of where they saw this in practice.

Helping vulnerable young people who may also be experiencing difficulties at home and school, who are also dealing with significant mental health challenges to feel safe, secure and supported, is a stepping stone to unlocking all of the other outcomes for **SWITCH Minds**.

The evaluation team considers this to be a significant success for the programme, therefore.

Students who took part in the programme were selected on the basis that they presented with some or all of a list of potential emotional difficulties or challenges at home (among others), suggesting that the need for them to be able to feel safe, secure and supported was already an important priority. However, the COVID-19 pandemic which struck in the early part of 2020, in the first year of **SWITCH Minds** operating, served to exacerbate these difficulties to an unprecedented level. In March that year, the UK government imposed a mandatory national lockdown, which imposed significant limitations on what people were permitted to do in England. The rules prevented anyone from leaving their house unless it was for specific and essential purposes: purchasing food; accessing medical support; providing care for the vulnerable; or going out for one period of exercise a day. Businesses were closed: people were told to work from home. Schools were closed indefinitely and, for most year groups, did not reopen again until September for the new school year.

The pandemic continued to disrupt normal life beyond this first year, with further periods of lockdown and varying levels of rules regulating the things that people could or could not do. Consequently, the mental health challenges faced by the students working with **SWITCH Minds** increased significantly, making the need to help them to feel safe and supported even greater.

86% of those young people surveyed³ (n=145), reported that **SWITCH Minds** had helped them to feel safe and supported.

Students found it easy to articulate how and why they felt like this, explaining the sanctuary that their mentor provided where they felt supported, safe, loved, and cared for:

The best thing about SWITCH Minds for me was that I felt supported at a time where I needed it and it gave me a much better perspective on personal issues I have struggled with for nearly 5 years.

—Young person, March 2022

YDWs were able to connect with their young people and to make them feel at ease in a way that didn't appear possible elsewhere in school at times:

I feel like I had a safe space outside of the classroom and whenever I felt anxious and upset, the one-to-one sessions really helped all that anxiety ease. In addition, as someone who doesn't really enjoy the classroom environment and school as a whole, the one-to-one sessions allowed me to take a small, peaceful break throughout such a hectic day.

—Young person, March 2022

Another young person explained how they found themselves able to open up about things that they otherwise would not have been able to talk about, because they felt safe with their mentor:

I was made to deal with stuff I didn't want to deal with. I spoke in an environment that I felt safe in. Lastly, I felt like I wanted to talk and didn't feel like I was getting interrogated.

—Young person, July 2021

3 Year 1 students appeared not to have been able to record an answer to this question due to an unforeseen technical glitch

The safety and security provided by SWITCH MInds was one of the elements that one young person wanted to highlight in their recommendation of the programme:

I recommend it because children all need to be shown love and support and to have someone to speak with and to laugh with and to have someone that genuinely listens to you and gives you advice on how to deal with things.

—Young person, July 2021

SWITCH Minds provided some young people with genuine physical security and safety by helping them to avoid being caught up in crime:

[SWITCH Minds] helps me relax and socialise with friends [and it is] also a safe space away from street crime.

—Young person, March 2022

The most relevant item within the WEMWBS tool that relates to this outcome is “**I have been feeling loved**”, though the scores did not indicate as significant an impact as was seen in data collected by the evaluation team. **40%** students who completed WEMWBS for all three terms reported that their score for this item increased over the lifetime of their engagement with **SWITCH Minds**, ending with an average score of 3.76, suggesting moderate impact.

86% of teachers (n=12) agreed that participating in the programme helped students in feeling safe, secure and supported.

Teachers frequently acknowledged the fact that **SWITCH Minds** offered their students the time and space to feel safe, within an environment that is traditionally very busy and fast-paced. This was important as it provided students with the opportunity to have a break and to talk about the things that mattered to them, with an adult who was able to give them their undivided attention:

As secondary school and all schools get busier and busier, the opportunity to have a thorough conversation, reflecting and planning ways forward, with students is so rare now...that it's so vital that they have an adult where [sic] they've got that designated time to talk.

—Teacher, autumn 2021

Teachers attested to the fact that the team of YDWs were able to play a crucial role within the wider safeguarding agenda in the schools they worked in, precisely because they gained the trust of their students, and made them feel safe and supported and able to discuss anything that was troubling them:

What they have done is been a great tool in extracting more information out of students. Which can then be actioned by SWITCH or by the school. They have also helped unearth some serious safeguarding concerns which have supported the school when making referrals.

—Teacher, autumn 2021

Teachers also described the added value of having a YDW supporting their students, particularly for those who might be especially vulnerable:

They offer an extra layer of intervention for targeted students. They make students feel comfortable and confident to discuss various personal topics.

—Teacher, autumn 2021

Teachers commented on how important it was that the team of mentors was similar in age, background and experience to the students they supported, as those connections allowed them to easily empathise with and support the young people:

*It's a safe space for people who are struggling a bit and want someone to talk to for half an hour. That genuinely is how I see it. A lot of [external] provision complicates matters and actually children just want someone a bit closer to their own age to talk to. It's not a counsellor they require... it's someone who gets them and [helps them to] let off some steam and that's what I see the **SWITCH Minds** project offering.*

—Teacher, spring 2021

They also acknowledged the value of the mentor being someone who was not part of the school team:

It's nice for them to know there's someone for them to listen to who's not a staff member. It's nice for them to be able to talk to someone who's not a teacher and that they see every day. I think that's important. I mean that somebody else external coming in.

—Teacher, summer 2022

Teachers were also grateful for the timing and availability of support from **SWITCH Minds**, given the levels of demand for mental health support they were observing in their schools. Not only this, but they were also confident that **SWITCH Minds** was the right provision for their students:

*As a school we want to support the students in any way that we can, so they don't fall out of the system, or become just another number who leaves without prospects. If **SWITCH Minds** can come in and support us with that, we will wholeheartedly go along with that. Particularly at this time with the, honestly overwhelming, SEMH [social, emotional and mental health] demand that we're experiencing in schools; students struggling for so many reasons, particularly anxiety seems to be one. **SWITCH Minds** is what we need and is able to provide that space for them, I think.*

—Teacher, spring 2021

One teacher highlighted the safety provided by **SWITCH Minds** for their students as the reason why they would recommend that other schools use the programme in future:

I would talk about the way it offers students a safe space to speak...the positive impacts it has on students' outlook and their ability to take responsibility.

—Teacher, summer 2022

Youth Development Workers were particularly keen to stress the importance of the safety and security that they were able to provide to young people during the pandemic. They attributed this to the continuity of the support that they gave them, particularly during the periods when schools closed, as this was not something that teachers were able to do:

Those who have engaged with us during lockdown, we probably have a better relationship with them now. We got a real sense from the young people who engaged with us [during this time] that they felt that we really cared: we phoned them, we checked up on them, we were there for them, they could unload on us, they could tell us how they were feeling. We've been able to prove to them that it wasn't just lip service: we're interested in how they're doing. Even if it means ringing them more than they might want! This is all so brand new—some of the relationships were so new just before lockdown, so no-one knew how it would pan out, but there have been some real successes.

—Youth Development Worker, 2020

Another YDW talked about how they were able to make their young people feel safe enough to be able to talk about the things that were troubling them and to be able to trust the adults that supported them:

...[it's given the young people] more of an understanding not to be afraid to talk to someone—keeping things in won't do you the greatest, and they're not on their own. [There are] so many others going through it (but who don't talk about it!), but they know they can have someone to talk to, to trust, and they can talk to anyone about stuff they have going on.

—Youth Development Worker, 2020

Another YDW explained how the relationship they build with their young people enables them to provide completely non-judgemental support to them, accompanied by the reassurance that when things go wrong (and they will), things will be okay:

It's all about being heard and having a voice, offering praise and encouragement. We also give them space to make mistakes. A lot of young people feel like they are under so much pressure and they get really anxious with that. Sometimes we need to give a young person the option that if this happens, you will have other choices. You may not get into that university, but there are two or three other options. They are being supported, being heard.

—Youth Development Worker, June 2020

Success stories

One of my young boys had a major safeguarding issue just before the summer holidays where he was going to be removed from home and live with other family members. We supported him as best as we could over the summer even though he was not in the area. Now we are back at school, and he is back living at home, he knows what to look out for if something does not feel right, he informs someone and allows him and sister to be safe.

I supported a Year 7 boy who had quite a traumatic home life. He struggled to open up and feel comfortable with people. We built a good relationship over our three mentoring terms. On his evaluation form he said he would really miss mentoring—he felt it really helped him with his feelings. He felt supported just by having someone to go to that was just for him. He has now moved onto specific art therapy which is building on from the work I have done with him.

5.10. Feeling part of their family and local community

Conclusion: **moderate impact**

The evaluation concludes that this outcome has been partially delivered. We found that there was some evidence to suggest that **SWITCH Minds** helped young people to improve the way that they feel about life at home with their families.

This was also accompanied by evidence that suggested that the positive activities enabled some young people to engage more with their local communities.

The evidence was not as compelling for this outcome as for some of the others, however.

Seven in ten young people (**70%**, n=159) reported that **SWITCH Minds** had helped them to feel part of their life at home.

Young people who took part in positive activities run by **SWITCH Minds** that also involved their wider family members commented on the way that they had helped them to improve how they feel about their life at home, as the activities provided them with the opportunity to do new things together and to get closer as a family:

Art class helped me look at different ways to draw pictures and landscapes, and 'Positivity breeds Possibility' was a fun concept that brought the family together.

—Young person, July 2021

Me and my family attended the 'Positivity breeds Possibility' event and we enjoyed it thoroughly. It also helped us connect as a family.

—Young person, March 2022

Another young person acknowledged the way that the mentoring support they received helped them to reconsider how they perceived their life and their family and to change the way they behaved at home:

I would recommend it to people because I would want people to have that support and that personal diary for them to confide in, but also to enjoy different activities and get active and social with other members of the youth community.

—Young person, September 2020

While **57%** teachers said in our survey that **SWITCH Minds** had improved the way that their students feel about their life at home; they did not make explicit reference to this as a noticeable impact of the programme during their evaluation interviews, perhaps because it was not something they were monitoring closely.

However, Youth Development Workers were able to offer a view on the difference the programme made to the young people's lives at home, particularly in instances where they had also provided support to the wider family, something that happened more during the various COVID-19 lockdown periods.

For the team of YDWs to maintain contact with their students while schools were closed, they needed to seek explicit permission from parents. This enabled them to build new and successful relationships with parents and carers—something that, prior to the pandemic, had not been possible. They ran frequent

online coffee mornings for parents to come together and discuss parenting strategies, tailoring the topics they discussed to the needs of those who attended and, when rules permitted, invited families to join in positive activities.

The increased and improved contact with parents and carers also enabled the YDWs to demonstrate the importance of the programme in action, and their commitment to supporting their children, which was greatly welcomed:

Lots of our young people have been very happy and appreciative of our support. One young boy was very surprised that I wanted to visit him at home and to check in on him, but he was very thankful, as were his parents. He's seen a different side to what we can do.

—Youth Development Worker, 2020

Not only did this additional engagement improve the relationship between the YDW team and parents and carers, but it also helped to provide them with important contextual information about the young people's home lives too:

The biggest thing that's had an impact is being able to speak with parents. When we were just school based, we had no contact with them. But now I know them by name: it's a good thing. When you're at the school, you just go in, do the session, leave. But now we have a real understanding of who the parents are, and the family setting.

—Youth Development Worker, 2020

It has been great for me to see the family outside of school—the sister, brother and mum as well as the young person. It's been fun, really useful for me to get more context and a much more relaxed setting. So, when we start mentoring in school after lockdown, we will already have an established relationship. We've established trust really well—it's been a blessing for this family. The mum has embraced what Lifeline stands for—she said to me, "this is the support I need, and you're giving it to me!"

—Youth Development Worker, 2020

The improvement in links with the young people's families was welcomed by parents and carers. One parent described how she felt about her daughter's mentor to her school:

She has literally been a lifeline.

—Parent, 2020

Almost six in ten young people (**59%**, n=95) said that **SWITCH Minds** had helped them to feel part of their local community.

Young people noted the way that the positive activities offered by **SWITCH Minds** were successful in bringing the community closer together:

*The best thing about taking part in **SWITCH Minds** this year was the events. The events are flexible and free to anyone who would like to join and also help people come together.*

—Young person, March 2022

Another young person commented on the way that they enjoyed being able to take part in running events in their community:

The best thing was working alongside and helping the adults with the foundation and gaining more interest in art.

—Young person, March 2022

Teachers observed this impact most in the way that the programme helped their students to form new friendships and join new, bigger social groups outside of school, thereby improving the degree to which the young people felt part of their local community. Teachers attributed this to the holistic model adopted by **SWITCH Minds**, combining mentoring with positive activities:

What's really helpful and positive about this project is that it seems to be taking a holistic approach. They do the mentoring, then the kids get involved in football and so on outside school... There's some really good stuff going on.

—Teacher, spring 2021

Another teacher commented on the importance of improving young people's experiences outside of school:

I think [...] having a positive experience in the local community is really important. For young people, there's loads of stuff that they can do, especially like during COVID. So I think being able to go there and have a really positive experience is great.

—Teacher, spring 2022

Teachers also reported that the additional opportunities offered through positive activities outside of school were particularly significant for students who otherwise would have been quite socially isolated. They observed them meeting new people with whom they shared common interests and could experience new things together. In turn, teachers said, these new interactions, relationships and experiences made a difference to their students' mental health:

Some of the students in our schools that were having issues were isolated and some of the issues were with friendship groups, so they have been able to form friendship groups with people outside of school. I think that was beneficial for them because it gave them another avenue, another set of friends that they could mix with and also share their experiences with other people that may have had similar experiences as what they had...I think the main thing was to get them out of the environment that they was in and get them to a new environment and also get them involved in new activities.

—Teacher, autumn 2020

One YDW observed that the delivery of positive activities did not just benefit **SWITCH Minds** participants and their families, but helped the wider community to come together too, particularly during COVID:

The way that we are engaging with the community is a benefit. We are still going out and doing different things, for example [one of our mentors] is running the roller-skating still and is still involving other people from the community. Other girls come over and say that they want to be involved as well. I think it's bringing more cohesion to the community.

—Youth Development Worker, June 2020

Success stories

Two year 8 pupils from the same school were not necessarily friends, but they both attended our skating positive activity. They have been coming ever since, and they themselves have formed a great friendship as well as with the other young people that attend.

I had one kid who was so incredibly angry and was always being sent to exclusion... we'd go for a few walks and we'd really talk about school and I think him being at home for quite a long time really benefited him, which is quite surprising and him coming back to school, he's like a completely different kid. He's never on report, he never gets sent to internal exclusion...I wouldn't have expected him being at home would have such a big impact, but it has. I think just being at home and having time to mature, not in a school environment, not having bad influences around. I would still call him every week, take him for a walk and stuff like that, so he would have time to process what we would talk about as well.

6. Areas for improvement

Listening to the feedback we received from schools and combining this with our observations as evaluators, we have identified seven potential areas where the programme could make small changes to improve its impact, efficiency, and effectiveness.

6.1. Align expectations of the programme

It is important that both the participating schools and **SWITCH Minds** have aligned expectations and goals from the outset. Some schools had expectations of the programme as being able to have an impact on behaviour, despite this not being a stated aim of the project. Improvements to behaviour may have been an unintended consequence of the programme but were not a priority. **SWITCH Minds** needs to make this clear at the outset and let teachers know what the programme is seeking to achieve.

- **Ensure all schools understand what the programme can and cannot do at the outset.**

6.2. Refine communications with schools

SWITCH Minds should consider refining their communications with schools throughout the programme both in terms of who they communicate with and what they report.

Schools want to know how their students are progressing, without compromising their confidentiality and would like to be kept informed about the impact of the intervention throughout the process.

I would like to receive impact data that Lifeline obtains for those participating in the programme. I need to be able to measure and articulate the impact to the school's management team.

—Teacher, 2021

SWITCH Minds needs to identify and communicate with the most appropriate teachers in each school to maximise the effectiveness of the programme. Ideally this would be a member of the school staff who has close and frequent interaction with the participating students to ensure that communication is clear, monitoring is better and interactions can be more meaningful.

- **Ensure that the SWITCH Minds team regularly links with the most appropriate staff member in each school who has close contact to participating students.**

6.3. Improve data collection

The consistency of data collection by *LifeLine* could be improved.

While WEMWBS data is potentially a strong tool to evaluate **SWITCH Minds'** impact, the WEMWBS data collected over the three years of the programme was inconsistent for each cohort and resulted in incomplete data sets. Only 85 complete records were available for all three terms, which does not represent all the young people who completed the programme each year, or overall.

Additionally, it would have been useful if **SWITCH Minds** were able to record or log the interaction that each YDW had with the young people they worked with, both for internal monitoring and external evaluation purposes. For example, it would have been useful to know how well each young person attended their weekly in-school mentoring sessions, how many (and which) positive activities they participated in and how much additional contact or interaction they had with their YDW or any other member of the **SWITCH Minds** team. Such data would have allowed the evaluation team to assess the extent to which increased contact and support leads to higher impact.

- **Ensure that complete and consistent data is collected using WEMWBS for all participating young people once a term for all their participating terms.**
- **Record all interactions between the YDWs and the young people and share this data with evaluators at regular intervals. This will allow a more comprehensive evaluation of impact enabling the programme to have a closer eye on the way it is working and the degree to which it is making a difference, and to respond to issues if they arise.**

6.4. Support teachers in selecting young people

Selecting the most appropriate young people to participate in **SWITCH Minds** is crucial in order to maximise the impact of the programme and to ensure that the right people are receiving the support they need. **SWITCH Minds** should work closely with the schools to ensure that the young people selected are those who will benefit from the programme the most. This may entail supporting teachers with the selection process and steering them away from choosing young people with behavioural issues only. Teachers may also need support with understanding and adhering to the referral forms.

There are some that I think it is really beneficial for. In the case of home issues; definitely. There are some in school where it's behaviour issues, where I'm 50:50. For those...who are being bullied, or who have low self-esteem, it's really beneficial, but I have a few students who are very young—year 7 or year 8 who are in trouble because they are a bit cheeky and just doing stupid things and they want the attention and ...they're the ones where I've said I'm not going to give them more than two terms because it's the same thing every week.

Although it's really helpful for them to have someone to speak to, there are only so many behavioural conversations you can have.

—Youth Development Worker, autumn 2020

- **Support teachers and schools to select young people that are likely to benefit from the programme the most.**

6.5. Balance staff workloads

SWITCH Minds employs Youth Development Workers who willingly go above and beyond to provide the best care and support to the young people that they work with. This can lead to unsustainable workloads, particularly given the combination of casework and the associated administration. YDWs often reported that the workload they had to complete at times was overwhelming.

A lot of us are stressed because of the admin. The stress doesn't come from young people, it comes from the admin and that makes it harder for us to do our best job. My stress is reports. I put a lot on myself to get them done. Reports, but mainly logs—there is a minimum of how much to write, which is causing issues for a lot of colleagues. As long as a report or a log is clear and concise, it shouldn't need to be long.

—Youth Development Worker, spring 2021

Teachers also noted the impact of running back-to-back one-to-one mentoring sessions had on the Youth Development Workers.

Thinking about the mentors themselves, they literally go back-to-back to back-to-back. We all know we would struggle to do that. That in essence is my job. They are young...we need to think about their health and wellbeing.

—Teacher, spring 2021

- **Consider options to reduce or reorganise or reprioritise the workload of the Youth Development Workers to increase staff retention and foster their wellbeing.**

6.6. Work closer with Local Authorities

SWITCH Minds should work to establish closer ties with the relevant Local Authorities.

Local Authority contacts reported a good awareness of **SWITCH Minds** as a project in the initial stages of setup, but were more distanced from its aims and inputs as the delivery progressed. Closer links with the commissioners to showcase the impact of the programme would allow the positive work that **SWITCH Minds** undertakes to be properly showcased.

There doesn't seem to be much shouting about these projects, which is a shame because there is a lot of good work that is happening out there. The wrong people are being told maybe?

—Local Authority contact, summer 2021

Local Authority links also highlighted the benefits that could come from even closer working:

Rather than call all the schools and find out who picks up, we could share with Lifeline some intelligence about our schools...we know which are the most deprived from a vulnerability perspective and they could use that as a robust steer as to which schools to go into. We can provide them with an introductory email, so the schools know we are behind them and if they have an appetite, they can contact them.

—Local authority contact, autumn 2020

- **Foster closer collaboration with Local Authorities in the relevant boroughs, to keep them better informed about the programme's progress and impact and to ensure that SWITCH Minds' work and impacts are showcased appropriately.**

6.7. Investigate wider funding

Schools expressed a desire for continued and increased provision of **SWITCH Minds'** support in the future, given the increasing demand for mental health services from young people in their care. Teachers acknowledge how beneficial the programme is for students, but do not have the funding to support it.

I'd like to have them with us more often. I would love more sessions with them. The challenge is deciding which students see [the mentor] over the others...I reckon if I asked the Head of Year if they could refer one student a day, I would have enough, so that would be 25 students a week.

—Teacher, summer 2022

Rather than having one mentor one day in one school, why not have mentors in school but keep them in schools for the week and approach mentors that way. I think schools would bite your hand off if you still had the funding.

—Teacher, spring 2021

- **Investigate all funding opportunities available to be able to offer the programme to as many schools as possible, given the increasing demand for the programme.**

7. SW!TCH Minds' unique selling points

It has been a privilege to observe the delivery and impact of SW!TCH Minds as an independent third party for the last three years. We feel that five important unique selling points (USPs) of SW!TCH Minds emerged very clearly throughout this time.

7.1. The strength and make-up of the team

From the very beginning of the evaluation, facilitating the discussions between the members of the **SW!TCH Minds** team and supporting them to articulate the programme's Theory of Change, it was clear to see the passion and drive among the Youth Development Workers and their manager to make a real difference to the lives of the young people they would go on to support. Together, the team discussed what they felt should be the core values of the programme and they used them to develop a series of ambitious outcomes that they wanted the programme to deliver.

For us as evaluators, being able to get to know the team in this way at the start of the project was very valuable, as it provided us with one of what turned out to be very few occasions (due to the significant disruption caused by the pandemic to most face-to-face contact over the remainder of the evaluation) to observe the team working together. We were able to find out about their backgrounds and their stories and to listen to their reasons for wanting to be part of the programme.

The way that the YDWs so quickly and easily built and maintained positive relationships with their mentees, and the fact that the young people themselves also recognised this, demonstrates how special the team is:

It is beneficial and helpful. You're given someone to talk to that understands what things you are going through and can support you through it. It is nice having someone who is like a friend but has more life experience than you and can educate you without belittling you.

—Young person, March 2022

7.2. The positive impact that the programme has had

The evidence we have collected throughout the evaluation has demonstrated the real and significant impact that the programme has had upon the young people who participated. *LifeLine Projects* already had a successful track record of delivering their VIP Mentoring approach within other projects before the start of **SWITCH Minds**, but our independent view is that it is an approach that works and that makes a genuine difference to the outcomes for young people.

In the words of two young people:

My mentor is very helpful and understands what I mean to say even when I don't know how to say it. She's there for me and helps me with things from school and home. She's the only adult that always tells me that they believe in me which means a lot and she tries to do everything she can to help me.

—Young person, July 2021

The difference for me is that mentoring is of a more laid-back tone. It makes me feel comfortable whereas counselling feels more forced and compelled. Counselling gets to know your problem, whereas mentors get to know you personally, which allows you to feel better as a person and better able to understand your problems and how you feel.

—Young person, June 2020

7.3. The comprehensive response to the pandemic

This is a particularly strong USP—demonstrating the programme's values in action.

The way that the **SWITCH Minds** team responded so quickly and nimbly when the pandemic hit should be celebrated as another important success, and a further USP (for full detail of this, please refer to our additional report "The **SWITCH Minds** response to the COVID-19 Pandemic" published in September 2020).

It might have been easy to pause delivery of an in-school mentoring programme when the schools shut down—access to the young people was reliant on the YDWs' ability to go into school on a weekly basis—but the team worked hard to find ways to overcome these challenges and to offer continuing support to their mentees in innovative ways, working online and socially distanced, all within the government guidelines. This meant that the young people, who found themselves even more in need of consistency and support, were able to continue to take part in their mentoring and positive activities, if they chose to do so.

Not only this, but the YDWs spotted a need to provide additional support to the families of participating young people during the pandemic and went above and beyond their original remit to make this happen.

7.4. The continuity of support combined with the importance of relationships

A key principle of **SWITCH Minds**, according to the team, was that they would be a consistent and dependable presence in the lives of the young people they were supporting. They would attend their one-to-one mentoring sessions every week (both in person when this was possible or online when it was not) unless they encountered circumstances beyond their control. They wanted the young people to be able to see that they were someone they could rely on, and someone that would be true to their word.

If one of the YDWs was unwell or unable to make it into school one week, the programme made it clear that the session would not take place. It was important for them not to disrupt the relationship between the young person and their mentor by substituting them with a colleague. Instead, they worked hard to show their students that they could be relied upon to come back after an illness or other absence.

This did not go unnoticed. Teachers commented that students—even those with attendance issues—were more likely to attend school on their mentoring days because they enjoyed spending time with their YDWs so much:

It's something that they look forward to, for want of a better description, even though it's once a week, they're always there—they don't need to be chased.

—Teacher, autumn 2020

7.5. The dedication to go above and beyond to ensure that young people are supported to the fullest extent

The support provided by the team of YDWs is so much more than the weekly one-to-one mentoring sessions and the regular positive activities. YDWs have been known to spend their evenings being visible and available to their young people in the parks and common spaces where the students live, so they could continue to be a positive influence and a consistent presence in their lives outside of the school day.

And, on the rare occasions when tragedy strikes within the young people's lives, they have made sure that they were there, to do anything they could to support and comfort them. This was best illustrated by the example below, which was shared by a teacher this summer:

In March, one of our students was stabbed and killed just round the corner from school. It just happened to be that [the mentor] was in the school next day and honestly, they just saw groups of them, just spoke to them, just sat with them. The mentor was amazing. The children were distraught...The mentor just said "whoever needs to see me"...we allocated them a room...we just needed all hands on deck. It was above and beyond.

—Teacher, summer 2022

8. Acknowledgements

The evaluation team would like to express their gratitude for the support and patience demonstrated by the team of Youth Development Workers and SWITCH Minds programme manager/ YDW team leader over the course of the three-year evaluation. They have all championed our repeated requests for data from their young people, facilitated access to key teachers in the schools they have been working with, and have also taken the time to fully engage in numerous telephone interviews and online surveys.

We are also grateful for the time taken by teachers from each of the participating schools to complete online surveys and telephone interviews and for their openness and honesty in sharing their views.

Local Authority staff that responded to our requests for interview also endeavoured to participate in the research to the best of their ability, given the more limited contact they had with the programme over the three years, and we are grateful for their time and input.

Rachel Dunford and Mary Battley
July 2022



SW!TCH Minds is a programme by *LifeLine Projects*
www.lifelineprojects.co.uk

SW!TCH Minds was evaluated by *Rachel Dunford Consulting Ltd*
www.racheldunfordconsulting.co.uk