

Chance UK Briefing for Southwark on Exclusions May 2020

About Chance UK

Chance UK is an early intervention organisation, providing solution focused mentoring and family support to help children transform their lives. We work with children aged 5-12 and their parents/carers across London – in the last year we have supported over 200 children across 8 London Boroughs, 70 in Southwark. Children are referred to us with severe behavioural and emotional difficulties, excluded or at risk of exclusion from school, or having experienced domestic violence or other adverse childhood experience which has impacted their mental health and self-esteem. The service is also delivered in Liverpool and Wales through our social franchise model. We carefully recruit, train and match volunteers and youth workers with children and support them to deliver one-to-one, solution focused mentoring. These volunteers and youth workers are men and women from very different walks of life, who share a common goal, to support children through a critical time in their young lives.

By intervening at this early stage we aim to equip children with the skills they need to understand, articulate and address underlying issues, to build resilience, confidence and a constructive, healthier approach to life's challenges. Without help, the escalation of problem behaviour or unhealthy coping mechanisms is more likely and the risk of future involvement crime, gangs and drug or alcohol abuse is far greater. To strengthen our work with the child we also work with parents, providing practical and emotional support and developing strategies in the home that will foster positive relationships in the home. Our programmes focus on the development of a young person's resilience – resilience is a combination of protective factors that enable people to adapt in the face of serious hardship, and is essential to ensuring that children who experience adversity can still become healthy, productive citizens

Goldsmiths University has previously followed up children who had been mentored up to 4 years previously after their year with us to find 98% reduced their SDQ scores and 51 ended within the usual range. In terms of value for money and the longer term benefits of our mentoring programme, if just one in every 42 children mentored showed improvement, the benefit would outweigh the cost.

Tackling School Exclusions

The number of fixed period exclusions across all state-funded primary schools increased by 8% from 2016/17 to 2017/18 and the main reason for both permanent exclusions (34%) and fixed period exclusions (30%) in England 2017 to 2018 is 'persistent disruptive behaviour' (DfE July, 2019). Exclusion rates have risen across the country – for children of primary school age this can be a risk factor for later involvement in the criminal justice system. For the child displaying the disruptive behaviour at school the effects can be isolation from their peers, reduction in opportunities for involvement in ordinary community activities and difficulty in finding future educational placements (Garner and Hill, 1995).

Almost a third of primary exclusions were for assault against an adult. Exclusion from school has a severe impact on life chances. 59.1% of pupils gain a pass in Maths and English GCSE.

In pupil referral units and alternative school provision the average is 4.3%. While 1% of the population have been permanently excluded from schools, 42% of adult prisoners make up that 1%. Emotional and behavioural difficulties in childhood place children at risk of experiencing further negative outcomes in adolescence and later life including poor peer relationships, low levels of educational attainment, inability to form secure relationships, criminality or alcohol/drug misuse, and mental ill health.

Children who are excluded will often face many additional disadvantages. For example Ofsted recognised in their 2009 report that many children subject to exclusion have experienced severe disruption and difficulties at home and high levels of involvement of children's services or other support agencies. Whilst the University of Exeter recently identified that "exclusion from school was more common among those living in socio economically deprived circumstances. Poor general health and learning disability among children and poor parental mental health were also associated with exclusion. There were consistently high levels of psychological distress among those who had experienced exclusion".

In 2017/18 Southwark had the highest number of fixed term exclusions of inner London Authorities in state funded primary schools and the third highest number across inner and outer London.

- 60% of the children we work with have been or are at risk of exclusion from primary school. Children referred to us often score overall in the highest SDQ range (highest 5%), presenting with significant levels of emotional and behavioural issues and indicating conduct disorder
- An independent study carried out by Dartington Service Design Lab found that 86% of children mentored by Chance UK showed reduced behavioural difficulties by the end of the placement, 48% having no behavioural difficulties at all

An Early Intervention and Solutions Focused Approach

A range of research cites early intervention as a key factor to help relieve childhood distress and anxiety – the root cause of much problem behaviour. The Home Office Serious Violence Strategy highlighted research indicating that 40% of gang members had signs of behavioural problems before the age of 12. The Mental Health Foundation asserts that 70% of young people with mental health problems had no appropriate early intervention. The Home Office commissioned research which found that a trusted relationship with an adult is a key component of working with vulnerable children. The lack of a trusted relationship is consistently cited in support services. The presence of a trusted adult can help children avoid risky situations and overcome adverse circumstances in their lives. The relationship between the mentor and child is critical to the success of our programmes. Our volunteer recruitment, training and matching process has resulted in 93% of the children we work with reporting a positive relationship with their mentor.

In recent months Chance UK have been engaging with the Department for Education, Schools and Academies and Pupil Referral Units across the boroughs we are operational in (we plan to continue and extend dialogue in time and once Covid-19 adaptations and a new way of operating for all has settled) to discuss how we support primary schools to prevent problems escalating. This includes:

- Continuing to offer solution focused mentoring for children at risk of, or who have been excluded and their parents/carers (commissioned service)
- Exploring a new model to support children through the school gate – transitioning them back into the school environment through intensive support pre, during and after school (commissioned service).
- Continuing to introduce a solution focused professional training offer to primary schools (state funded and academies) – this is a commissioned offer previously due to be launched in autumn 2020.
- Delivering workshops to year 6 students to support their transition into secondary school.

Chance UK – data from our Southwark Cohort:

75% were male; 25% were female

28% identified as White British 14% as Black Caribbean, 16% as Black British, 18% as Black African

Of the children we worked with:

20% were in Year 6, 18% were in Year 5, 20% were in year 4, 16% were in Year 3, 14% were in Year 2 and 12% were in Year 1.

At point of referral, Schools told us that of these 10% had had internal exclusions, 6% were permanently excluded, 12% had already experienced external fixed term exclusions

Of those excluded only 14% of these cases had been excluded once, the other 86% cases had multiple exclusions. One of these children had 6 exclusions, another notably already had 15 different exclusions at referral point to Chance UK.

Also of note is that only 1 of the six year 1 pupils referred to us had not already experienced an exclusion. More than half of the exclusions outlined at referral directly referenced violent or harmful behaviour by the child towards adults or peers.

At point of referral, 70% of these cases have had current or historic Social Care involvement or Early Help support. It has been noted that nearly all of these cases had lengthy and concerning histories, including but not limited to long term experiences of violence, neglect, parental mental health challenges, siblings directly involved in drugs and criminal exploitation, and low levels of primary school attendance.

Southwark Case Study

Sam is currently enrolled on the My Future mentoring programme. He has received multiple fixed term exclusions since the beginning of this academic year and staff members have voiced that Sam is likely to now be given the option of a managed move to another school or may be permanently excluded.

Sam has now completed the first month of mentoring and he and his mentor have established their code of conduct and used the solution-focused tool of 'best hopes' to

create a mentoring mind map. This activity has been a catalyst for conversation about what Sam hopes to achieve from mentoring, the skills he wants to develop and ideas for sessions in the coming months. For Sam, the mind map has been a quick and creative way for him to communicate both verbally and non-verbally. This way of making of plans and gentle introduction to the My Future curriculum has helped to build a foundation for a mentoring relationship that Sam can invest in. As the mentoring programme continues, the weekly 1:1 contact will provide Miles with the consistency that he not currently receiving from his school experience and the opportunity to talk about how he feels about often being isolated from his peers. The practice of self-regulation and boosting of self-esteem through the upcoming group sessions can address the other negative effects that disruptive behaviour and the result can have.

PRU Case Study (out of Southwark)

In Lambeth we have secured ring-fenced funding dedicated to supporting children who have been excluded from school, who are attending the Pupil Referral Unit, of a small sample followed up last year – 2 of 6 later returned to mainstream school and 4 of 6 were placed in alternative provision – a reflection on mainstream provision not always being the right path for some children to successfully engage in education, a year after the end of the mentoring programme, none of these children have been excluded again.

Camaron was in year 5 and already excluded from school when he was referred to Chance UK by Lambeth Pupil Referral Unit. Previously diagnosed with ADHD, Camaron was violent and disruptive at school destroying property and unable/unwilling to focus on structured activities or follow instructions. The youngest of 5 children (other siblings are all adults) Camaron lives with his mother Katrine who welcomed the mentoring, explaining she had little time or money to spend on family activities. Keen on outdoor sports, Camaron was matched with Annalise who shared this passion and together they drew up a plan which included cycling, swimming, biking and trampoline jumping. At three months they created a set of goals to work towards, including writing lyrics and making a video in order to increase Camaron's focus, improve his literacy skills and learn a new skill. Camaron 'premiered' his video to other mentors at Chance UK's office and gave a brief speech about the development of his film. The end of year Graduation Ceremony was attended by family and friends and Annalise spoke warmly about Camaron's dedication, commitment and courage to overcome challenges set during the year. Parent support - Katrine engaged well with Chance UK's Parent Programme Manager (PPM) and spoke of the difficulty of managing Camaron's behaviour. To help her articulate her own anxieties, Katrine was referred to BRIEF for therapy, an organisation with a focus on creating solutions to improve the future rather than dwelling on past problems. To help improve communication between Katrine and Camaron, a joint weekly activity was agreed on with plans to continue now the mentoring year has concluded. Katrine was keen for Camaron to be transferred from the Pupil Referral Unit to a new placement. The PPM, liaising with other relevant agencies was able to advise Katrine on procedures for referral in accordance with Camaron's Educational Health Care Plan (EHCP). Katrine's first choice was initially refused, but the PPM was able to connect Katrine to the Special Educational Needs Disability Information and Advice Service (SENDIAS) for guidance about appealing a school placement decision. Despite the setback with the new placement Katrine ended the year feeling more optimistic about Camaron's future and more confident about her parental role in his life.

Additional suggestions for Panel Consideration:

Although the majority of students excluded are of the secondary age range, we think it is vital that the specific impact and circumstances relating to the exclusions of younger children is considered in policy and commissioned services

Retrospective longitudinal studies have highlighted the particular impact of exclusion at this young age. In a study looking at outcomes in secondary school – Primary school aged children whose initial exclusion in the study was permanent, were nearly twice as likely as those with a fixed period exclusion to have a record of offending by the end of the study. Permanently excluded children were also more likely to have attendance problems following their exclusion at whatever educational placement was provided for them.

Consider how children with Special Educational Needs, Social, Emotional or Behavioural difficulties or Mental Health issues can access the right support, early on.

A large scale study recently concluded that children with learning difficulties and mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, ADHD and autism spectrum conditions were more likely to be excluded from the classroom. (5,000 school-aged children, their parents and their teachers cited in - University of Exeter: The Relationship between School Exclusion and Mental Health)

We know from our work with children that if these needs are not properly identified or supported, children can find the learning or socialising aspects of school challenging which can lead to difficulties in behaviour demonstrated to adults or other children as well as disaffection with school more broadly.

Our experience is that there is a wide variation in how quickly schools link into supportive services and how behaviour is linked to underlying needs. The other side of this is that our work with children and families shows the improvements in behaviour, emotional self regulation and peer relationships which can be achieved through early intervention.

Many of the children we work with have faced multiple challenging events and experiences in their early lives (Adverse Childhood Experiences) – which can impact on children’s development and their responses. Traumatized children may present with a range of symptoms including physical concerns but also poor control of emotions; Unpredictable and/or impulsive behaviour; Intense reactions to reminders of their traumatic event or be over sensitive to actions of others – for example violations of personal space.

We feel there is much to be gained by a more widespread use of the “Trauma informed approach” amongst professionals. This would recognise that children who are have experienced trauma may react in a way which seems disproportionate to the matter in hand and ensure that the right services are in place to help children to recover and process these experiences in a safe and supported environment.

Focus on how to work well with families, particularly at primary school age to prevent exclusion.

Ofsted recognised in their 2009 report that many children subject to exclusion have experienced severe disruption and difficulties at home and high levels of involvement of children's services or other support agencies.

This is often the case in our experience as well. It is important to recognise that schools and parents will often have a shared interest – which is supporting the child. The children who Chance UK supports will often be showing difficulties at home as well as at school and where parents and schools work together, in partnership this is enormously helpful. Again, this was recognised as a key element where schools had not excluded children in the Ofsted report.