

**the kids  
network**  
Connecting for Change

# Connecting for Change

The power of a child led  
mentoring programme



This document is a summary of *The Kids Network Mentoring: Evaluation of Long-term Impact*, ImpactEd, 2026. The full text of the evaluation is available on [The Kids Network website](#), under 'Our Impact'.

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Every child who wants a mentor should have one



## About The Kids Network

The Kids Network (TKN) intervenes early, at a proven critical stage in child development.

With half of mental health conditions established by age 14, there is overwhelming evidence for providing support to children as early as possible. This means there is an important opportunity for early interventions that offer support for mental wellbeing and resilience before children transfer to secondary school and reach adolescence.

We work in partnership with primary schools to identify children aged 8-11 who are facing additional challenges. Each child is matched with a trained volunteer mentor from their local community and supported through a structured, year-long programme of weekly one-to-one mentoring where they explore their city and have fun together.

Through trusted relationships and opportunities to discover their communities through child-led activities, children build confidence, emotional resilience, and a stronger sense of agency before difficulties become entrenched and before the transition to secondary school.



Thank you to the children and caregivers for sharing their stories and experiences of the programme so openly.

Thank you to the volunteers, partners and staff that make this long-term impact happen.



“Mentoring changed the way I see things... thinking about myself and focusing on if I like what I’m doing or not. I’m more confident to go to new places and figure out if it’s really the place for me and if I enjoy going there.”



## Foreword from Neil Hunt, the Chair of Trustees:

I am proud to introduce this long-term impact report, which speaks powerfully to the difference The Kids Network makes in children’s lives.

The Kids Network has been supporting children since 2017, with over 1000 children joining our programme since then. For many of the children we work with, growing up in London means navigating significant social and systemic barriers from a very young age. **The Kids Network exists to ensure that these barriers do not define their futures.** Through a trusted, consistent mentoring relationship, children are given something both simple and transformative: time, belief, and space to discover their own voice, make choices, and begin to shape their lives with confidence.

I joined the Kids Network because I could see what a great idea this is. We have countless stories that show how much children enjoy their experiences and the benefits they bring. **Now this report confirms that this doesn’t stop when the programme ends.** Over time, children internalise the encouragement and support they receive and begin to act independently, with greater confidence and agency. As one of the children reflects in this evaluation, “Before, I would only ever make small decisions... now I can make really big decisions without any help.” This growth in emotional wellbeing, self-belief, and agency at a formative age equips children not just to cope, but to move forward with confidence, hope, and a stronger sense of control over their future.

The evidence presented here confirms what we have long believed, **supporting children early through relational mentoring builds durable agency and emotional capabilities.** Sustained, trusting relationships in childhood build protective capacities that endure well beyond the year long programme, helping children navigate inequalities, emotional challenges, and limited access to opportunities. In a city where young people face increasing structural and mental health pressures, this kind of **early intervention is not only effective, but equitable and preventative.**

The impact on children has always been visible throughout our programme. Now, this rich and important evidence demonstrates the depth and longevity of The Kids Network’s approach. It strengthens the case for early intervention and affirms our ambition for the future. We want every child who wants a mentor to have one, and to feel the enormous, lasting benefits that come from having a consistent, trusted adult who listens to them.

We are deeply grateful to the children, families, mentors, staff, funders and supporters who make this transformative work possible. I invite you to read this report as both evidence of our impact and a call to action.

## Our impact since 2017

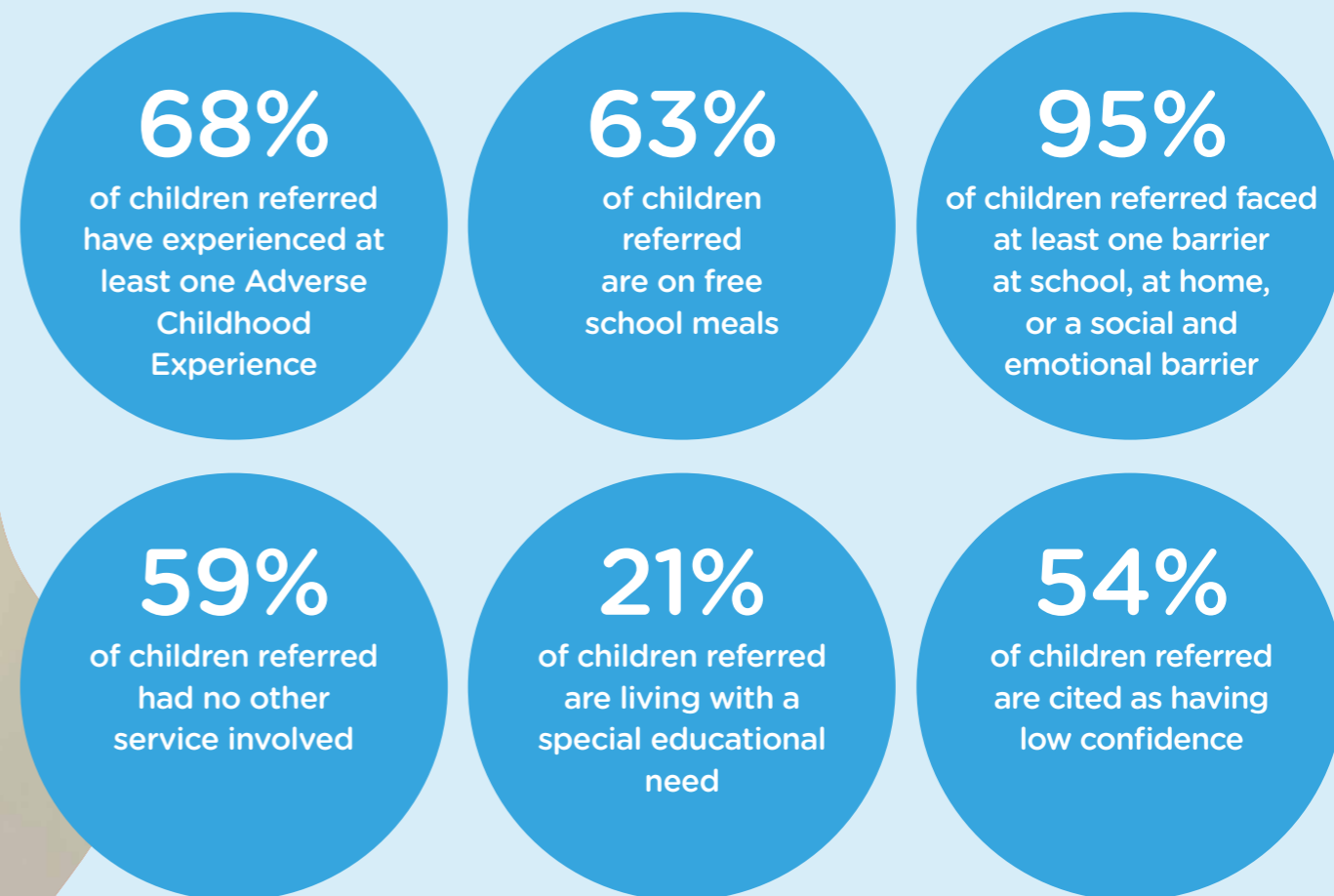


## Why we exist

**One in five children and young people aged 8-16 experience a common mental health problem, such as anxiety or depression (NHS Digital, 2023).**

This is almost double the figure in 2017 when The Kids Network began working in London. Access to support is most limited for children from underserved communities: **more than one in four (26.8%) of those aged 8-16 with a probable mental disorder had a parent who could not afford activities outside school or college.**

Too many children and families are not receiving the help they need, resulting in preventable distress and long-term negative consequences, particularly for those experiencing poverty or from the Global Majority. Without timely intervention, challenges such as low confidence, anxiety and social isolation can escalate, shaping children's educational journeys, wellbeing and life chances well into adulthood.



# What we wanted to learn from the evaluation

**“[It’s] so important to have someone to speak with even if that’s someone outside of the family. she really found comfort in confiding with her mentor. She started to gain confidence almost immediately.”**

**Quote from caregiver**

To deliver our programme effectively, we collect robust data on the children we support and how they change over the course of the year. This data shows that across 12 months of mentoring, children strengthen their social and emotional capabilities, improve their wellbeing and finish the programme feeling better equipped to navigate their futures.

Over the years, caregivers have shared the immediate and longer-term benefits they have observed, and school partners have reported positive impact in the classroom. In 2021, we published our [Case for Early Intervention](#), outlining why early support is critical and identifying the key success factors behind our approach.

As we approach our ten-year anniversary, we wanted to understand the longer-term outcomes of our work more deeply. With support from the Quintessentially Foundation, we commissioned ImpactEd to conduct a Long-Term

Impact Evaluation focused on three key evaluation questions aligned with our Theory of Change. Outcomes on agency, ability to set goals, increased aspirations and building positive relationships were investigated as part of the evaluation, alongside the Key Evaluation Questions (KEQs) below:

**1**

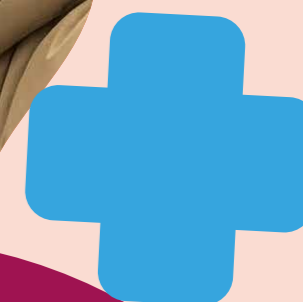
**KEQ1 - To what extent has TKN helped participants develop agency in their lives, set meaningful long-term goals, and take action to overcome personal and societal barriers they face?**

**2**

**KEQ 2 - To what extent do participants use social and emotional skills learned through TKN to support their wellbeing?**

**3**

**KEY 3 - To what extent has TKN helped participants improve their communication skills and emotional literacy?**



**“Several children who’ve been on the programme have really shown a difference in how they present in class during the course of TKN programme, with teachers commenting on amazing changes in their desire and ability to speak in class and increased confidence and sense of their own capabilities. We’ve also seen children develop both in their maturity and their sense of what the wider world can offer them.”**

**Representative from the LEAP Federation**

# Summary of the Main Findings

The findings from the long-term impact evaluation conducted by ImpactEd offer important insight into what sustained, relational early intervention can achieve.

We have summarised the thematic analysis here; the full findings are available in the The Kids Network Mentoring: Evaluation of Long-term Impact, ImpactEd, 2026 which is published in full on our [website](#).

**Rather than delivering short-term boosts, the evaluation shows that TKN's mentoring programme supports durable, transferable capacities that children continue to draw on well beyond the programme year. The overarching messages from the findings speak directly to the systemic challenges facing children in London right now.**

1

## Sustained agency as a protective factor in constrained environments

**"I wasn't confident about achieving my goals. I feel loads different now. [Mentor] always encouraged me. She praised me for my work... I really loved it."**

A central message is that TKN supports children to develop sustained agency: the ability to set goals, take action, try new things and persist despite self-doubt or constraint. This is not unrealistic optimism, but a grounded sense of possibility alongside an awareness of real-world barriers. Such agency helps counter feelings of stagnation and helplessness, **enabling children to see themselves as active participants in their own lives.**

In a city where many children face restricted access to opportunities, limited extracurricular provision and low expectations, exposure to new activities and spaces can be transformative. Mentors act as encouragers and companions, supporting children to enter environments they might otherwise feel excluded from. Importantly, **alumni continue engaging in these activities independently**, suggesting that confidence extends beyond the mentoring relationship.

2

## Emotional literacy and self-understanding underpin long-term wellbeing

**"Mentoring changed the way I see things... thinking about myself and focusing on if I like what I'm doing or not. I'm more confident to go to new places and figure out if it's really the place for me and if I enjoy going there."**

The evaluation highlights lasting improvements in emotional literacy and self-understanding. Alumni demonstrate greater ability to recognise their emotions, values and preferences, and to make intentional choices as a result.

Rather than relying solely on external services, alumni describe independently using techniques such as reframing, breathing and self-talk. The mentor's support becomes internalised, enabling young people to manage anxiety, distress and uncertainty in everyday life.

Given increasing mental health challenges among children and young people in London, alongside long waiting times for specialist support, this is particularly significant. The findings suggest that TKN's structured mentoring functions as an early, preventative intervention, **equipping children with internal tools for emotional regulation before difficulties escalate.**

3

## Emotional safety as the foundation for growth

**"It was nice to be able to hang out with [mentor] and I felt comfortable to talk to him. We'd just talk about whatever. It just definitely helps you clear your mind after a long day."**

Another key message is the importance of emotional safety. Alumni consistently described the mentoring relationship as a rare space of trust, acceptance and non-judgement. This sense of safety was foundational: it enabled improvements in wellbeing, communication and confidence, and allowed children to practise new skills without fear of failure.

For many children in London, particularly those experiencing instability at home or school, consistent access to a trusted adult outside their immediate family is increasingly uncommon. The evaluation shows that **when children feel emotionally safe, they are better able to reflect, communicate and grow.**

This reinforces the value of relational interventions at a time when many systems prioritise throughput and crisis response over sustained connection.



4

### Stronger relationships as an ongoing source of wellbeing

**“I would say I have changed the ways I deal with things, and I do more to try and express my feelings the best I can. [Mentor] taught me, instead of just keeping it to myself and struggling... speak to someone. I am mostly talking to my mum, [but also] some of my friends who are really close to me.”**

The evaluation shows that the TKN mentoring programme not only affects individual children, but also shapes how they engage in relationships more broadly. Having experienced the benefits of opening up to a mentor, alumni report greater openness with friends and family and are less likely to cope with difficulties alone.

Improved communication skills, boundary-setting and social confidence translate into stronger, more supportive peer relationships. In a city where loneliness and social fragmentation are growing concerns for young people, these relational skills are critical.

Importantly, these changes were sustained beyond the mentoring year, indicating **long-term social resilience rather than temporary confidence.**



5

### Equitable impact across gender and ethnicity

Quantitative findings (explored in detail at 3.2.5 in the full report) indicate outcomes across gender and ethnic groups. Whilst this is a small-scale evaluation, it is an important and notable result given the well-documented disparities in wellbeing and agency outcomes for children from minoritised backgrounds.

In the context of London's diverse population, this suggests that TKN's relational, child-centred model is capable of supporting children equitably, without relying on a one-size-fits-all approach. Where impact exists, it appears to cut across demographic lines, pointing to the TKN mentoring programme as a **powerful equalising intervention when delivered with consistency and care.**



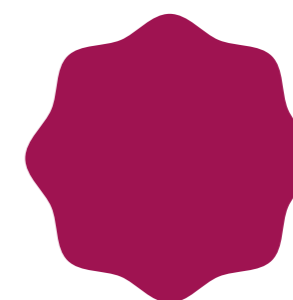
## Methodology: The Most Significant Change

**The primary methodology used by ImpactEd in the long-term evaluation was Most Significant Change (MSC). MSC is a qualitative, participatory monitoring and evaluation approach that identifies and analyses stories of change to understand the most meaningful outcomes of a programme or intervention.**

This evaluation explored the long-term impact of the TKN mentoring programme by hearing directly from former participants who had completed mentoring at least one year earlier. Twenty-three alumni completed a survey examining wellbeing, confidence and emotional understanding, alongside reflective questions about how they felt they had changed over time. To explore these experiences in greater depth, five alumni took part in one-to-one interviews. While both survey and interview data were used, the evaluation placed greater emphasis on qualitative insights, with survey findings primarily used to support and test patterns emerging from the interviews.

The methodology reflects TKN's strong commitment to child voice and child-led practice. By prioritising interviews and open-ended questions, alumni were able to describe changes in their own words rather than selecting from fixed responses, identifying what they felt was the most significant change. The evaluation focused not only on what had changed, but also on how and why those changes occurred, recognising that young people's lives are shaped by multiple influences.

As baseline data was not available for all alumni, the approach and interpretation of findings were designed with this limitation in mind, enabling a clearer understanding of TKN's longer-term impact. The full methodology is available in the complete report found on [our website](#) (2.3 from page 10).



# How our programme works

Children identified by primary schools or other referral partners as facing additional challenges, or experiencing Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) are offered a year-long mentoring relationship, facilitated and supported by our programme managers.

Within a robust safeguarding framework, we recruit volunteer mentors from the London area and manage weekly one-to-one sessions between mentor and mentee. The programme has both trauma-informed practice and key pillars of mentoring embedded throughout and follows all the research evidence about what makes effective mentoring.

These sessions, guided by activities chosen by the child, provide a sense of fun and stability, allowing children to explore their identity, try new things, and express themselves in a safe environment. Ensuring child voice and child-led design are central to the programme underpins the organisation's approach. Research shows that giving children a genuine voice and real choices support their wellbeing, confidence and healthy development into adulthood.

Our year-long programme is structured across three carefully planned stages:

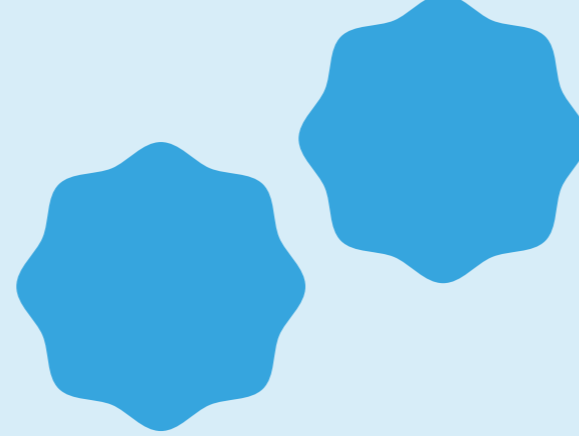
While London offers many enriching activities, not all children can access them. Mentoring sessions address this gap, with mentor support and management of a £35-a-month activity budget, **mentees are encouraged to pursue their curiosity and take part in experiences they might not otherwise have the opportunity to try.**

Although the mentoring year introduces children to new experiences, the core emphasis remains on **foregrounding the child's own choices and interests.** Early experiences of agency help children feel secure in themselves and capable of making informed decisions later in life, while a lack of agency can lead to long-term harm. **Creating opportunities for children to practise decision-making** in safe, low-stakes contexts helps build the confidence and skills they need throughout their lives.



# Jamie's Story

## Case Study Analysis



“Before, I would only ever make small decisions and I would always ask other people, ‘Should I do this? Should I do that?’ But now I can make like really big decisions without any help.”

The following includes a snap shot of ImpactEd’s evaluation of KEQ 1 and narrative analysis of Jamie’s story. This is only a selection of the evaluation and the full details can be found in the full report from [contents 3.1](#).

### Key Evaluation Question 1:

To what extent has TKN helped participants to develop agency in their lives, set meaningful long-term goals, and take action to overcome personal and societal barriers?

### Evaluation Findings

Participants were introduced to new activities and spaces that they went on to pursue independently	Mentors’ encouragement and accompaniment enabled participants to access opportunities they would not otherwise have encountered, with long-term impact evident where these activities became self-directed and sustained post-mentoring.
Mentor encouragement was internalised, supporting sustained agency after the mentoring relationship ended	TKN alumni described recalling mentors’ words, attitudes, and expectations to manage self-doubt and persist with independent pursuit of goals, indicating that relational support has been internalised as an ongoing resource.
Participants developed the ability to set goals, visualise progress, and take action towards increasingly ambitious outcomes	Alumni demonstrated clear awareness of their current position and next steps, using techniques such as visualisation, planning, and incremental challenge to pursue short- and long-term goals.
Increased self-understanding and emotional literacy has enabled more intentional, self-directed choices for TKN alumni	Through mentoring, participants gained greater insight into their own preferences and values, allowing them to make decisions more aligned with who they are and what they want.
Agency was exercised within a realistic understanding of personal and contextual constraints	Rather than expressing idealised, unrestricted autonomy, participants described making choices and taking action within nuanced limits, demonstrating a mature and sustainable form of agency.

### Case study & Narrative analysis:

This case study reflects elements of TKN’s core programme design: fulfilling curiosity, trying new things, having fun and goal-setting – all of which can be seen to reinforce each other.

**“[Mentor] definitely had a really big impact on my life – like with bouldering. The first session me and my mentor went, we were just going to try it out. I never even knew bouldering was a sport before. I found it really fun to try something new and [mentor] always helped me – he was always pushing me to do the next level of climb. I ended up being really good and the centre gave me a scholarship so I could climb for free.**

**So then I could go to sessions all the time. I started watching bouldering World Cups and the Olympic bouldering. I got really interested in competitive bouldering and I went to my first competition. I was going to regular after school sessions and then the centre invited me to join their elite youth squad, which is for children with really good potential.”**

Before exploring the significance of this case study with respect to agency and decision making, it is important to note that the respondent has excelled in a niche sport he would not otherwise have had access to. He is now part of an ‘elite youth squad’, taking part in training multiple times a week as well as regular competitions – and it is fair to assume that this opportunity would not have been available if he had not been introduced to the sport through TKN mentoring. The simple premise of taking mentees to participate in activities around London can have an enormous impact on their lives. London is filled with activities and opportunities, but not all young Londoners are able to access them.

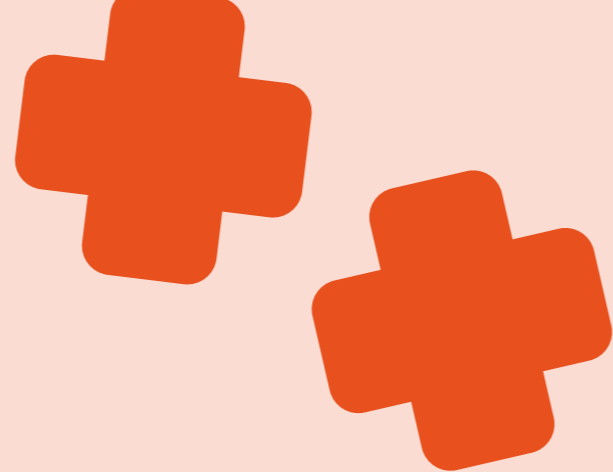
**“My height with bouldering makes it more difficult – I have to find out complex ways to get around it. Right now my max grade is ‘V5’, and most of ‘V6’ is just really ‘reachy’ climbs. I jump quite a bit because of my height, and sometimes I use dynamic moves on a static climb. There’s also a coach at the centre who is quite short and he’ll say ‘Oh, maybe you could use this technique to get a bit more reach’ and that helps a lot.”**

While much of the respondent’s development occurs after his mentoring ended, the mentor’s influence on his goal-setting capacity, through ‘always pushing [him] to do the next level of climb’, is a central element of this story. The mentor’s initial encouragement sets the tone for an approach the respondent then adopts, in that he now chooses to tackle climbs that are ‘above [his] level’ as a matter of course.

**“I pick climbs that are above my level, and then I just ‘project’ [visualise] them for about an hour a day in a session. Last week I was doing a V6 climb, and I really wanted to get it because I was so close. You had to start by running up the wall and jumping onto a mantle, which is where you pull yourself over the hold. I spent the whole week trying to get that move.”**

Since ending the mentoring relationship, we can see that the respondent has developed a pronounced ability to exercise agency, visualise goals and take action towards achieving them – and, it should be noted, in the face of personal barriers. Alongside his stated tendency to visualise these challenging climbs for ‘an hour a day’, this disposition exemplifies short-term goal-setting capacity. Taken together, the respondent has embarked on a course of self-directed, continuous improvement – and, crucially, has become comfortable challenging himself.

# Grace's Story Case Study Analysis



“Getting over being sick is probably the biggest thing that has happened to me. I just think, well, I overcame it. And when I did, I felt a lot better.”

The following includes a snap shot of ImpactEd’s evaluation of KEQ 2 and narrative analysis of Grace’s story. This is only a selection of the evaluation and the full details can be found in the full report from [contents 3.2](#).

### Key Evaluation Question 2:

To what extent do participants use social and emotional skills learned through TKN to support their wellbeing

### Evaluation Findings

Feeling safe within the mentoring relationship was a foundational condition for initial improvements in wellbeing	TKN mentors were consistently described as trustworthy and accepting figures, and mentoring sessions as a ‘safe space’, with this sense of emotional safety enabling participants to begin managing anxiety and distress more effectively.
Social and emotional skills taught during mentoring were internalised and used independently to manage ongoing wellbeing challenges	TKN alumni described continuing to use techniques such as conscious breathing, reframing, distraction and self-talk, demonstrating sustained application of mentoring-derived skills beyond the programme year.
TKN alumni draw on the internalised presence of their mentor to regulate emotions in triggering situations	Many alumni described recalling their mentor’s voice, words, or the feeling of safety experienced during sessions to calm themselves during stress, indicating that relational support had been internalised as a self-regulation or self-soothing resource. This is an area requiring careful stewardship, and reinforces the importance of TKN’s time-bound
Mentoring sessions supported greater openness with others, enabling alumni to increasingly use relationships as sources of wellbeing support	Having experienced the benefits of opening up to a mentor, participants reported applying this learning by expressing feelings more openly with trusted friends and family to support their wellbeing.
Increased emotional understanding helps TKN alumni to reinterpret challenging experiences in ways that reduce distress	Some alumni described using emotional insight and perspective-taking learned through mentoring to make sense of challenging interpersonal situations, supporting more stable wellbeing responses over time.

### Case study & Narrative analysis:

This case study demonstrates the depth of connection mentees can feel towards their mentor.

“One time I was sick in school, and after that I changed. I was fine before, but after that I was crying a lot, having panic attacks and I couldn’t be in class for too long. Just the word [‘sick’] would make me leave the classroom.

[When the incident happened], my teacher and the kids were making fun of me. They made me feel a lot worse because every day they’d be like, ‘Please don’t say you’re going to be sick.’ I was fine for the first week, but they kept bringing it up. [I didn’t talk about this to anyone at the time] because I didn’t really think it was a big deal.

When my mentor came along it helped a lot – she really helped me. She was just always there. When I was panicking, she’d always check in with me. She’d just be like, ‘Are you OK? Do you need a break? Do you need a breather?’ She made sure I was always listened to and I had a safe space around me and it worked. I feel a lot more safe when I’m around people now.”

The entrance of the mentor in this story signals an immediate positive impact on the respondent’s wellbeing at a time of crisis (‘When my mentor came along it helped a lot’). Prior to any discussion of social and emotional skills to support wellbeing, the first step taken by the mentor was to ensure the respondent felt safe. This is crucial given the respondent’s panic attacks, which are understood to be the body’s response to perceived danger – i.e. a ‘fight or flight’ response. It is the predictable, regular and dependable support offered by the mentor that is highlighted by the respondent as being so helpful, shown in her repeated use of the word ‘always’ (‘She was just always there’, ‘she’d always check in with me’, ‘she made sure I was always listened to’).

“She taught me breathing techniques, and how to ignore people – and she made funny names for them. I’m using these skills all the time, definitely in class and crowded situations. I just remember how much she’d make me smile and how much I felt safe around her. I just switch it on in my brain like ‘Get that feeling you had with [mentor] just here in yourself, don’t worry about things. You’re alright.”

Having created a feeling of safety for the respondent during sessions, the mentor offered a range of social and emotional techniques to use in moments of high stress (e.g. breathing techniques, funny names). That these social and emotional skills have successfully embedded over the long-term is without question – indeed, the respondent says she continues to use these skills ‘all the time’.

“Recently I was in class and one kid was saying they don’t feel well. I started panicking and not feeling well and the teacher was refusing to let me out. I’m just in my head panicking a lot. But then I realised I had [mentor] in my head, and she’s just telling me to calm down. So I switched to [mentor] and I’m just like, ‘What would [mentor] do when she helped me?’ And it’s just like, ‘First of all, give the teacher a funny name. And then just think in your head, you don’t need to worry about them. Just take a breath and you’ll be alright.’ And yeah, I managed to do it.”

It is interesting to consider the phrase ‘she was just always there’, because of course there is no way the mentor could have been ‘always there’. Given that TKN mentoring sessions take place once a week, it seems their emotional impact – and sense of protection – was felt beyond the weekly schedule. The idea that a mentor’s guidance and support can transcend the time constraints or finitude of sessions is especially important when considering impact on wellbeing over the long-term.



# Daniel's Story

## Case Study Analysis

**“I went from being the weird kid to just being a kid. I didn't like being the weird kid. I understand my past self but I definitely prefer who I am today.”**

The following includes a snap shot of ImpactEd's evaluation of KEQ 3 and narrative analysis of Daniel's story. This is only a selection of the evaluation and the full details can be found in the full report from [contents 3.3](#).

### Key Evaluation Question 1:

To what extent has TKN helped participants improve their communication skills and emotional literacy?

### Evaluation Findings

<b>Mentoring provided a safe, low-stakes space for participants to practise communication and improve their skills</b>	TKN alumni described mentoring as a judgement-free environment in which regular conversation with a trusted adult supported both conscious and unconscious learning about turn-taking, tone, and socially appropriate interaction.
<b>Participants developed greater emotional literacy, enabling them to better understand how others think and feel and adapt their communication accordingly</b>	TKN alumni demonstrated increased awareness of and improved sensitivity to others' emotional responses, which has reduced misunderstandings and negativity in interactions with peers.
<b>Improved communication skills and emotional understanding translated into stronger and more varied peer relationships</b>	Participants reported moving from social isolation or limited friendships to having multiple peer groups, close friendships, and greater confidence navigating different social contexts.
<b>Increased confidence in social situations enabled more agentic relationship-building and boundary-setting</b>	Mentoring supported participants to initiate conversations, approach new peers, and step away from negative relationships, allowing them to build and maintain connections more intentionally.
<b>Gains in communication and emotional literacy were sustained beyond mentoring, evidenced by participants' current social lives</b>	TKN alumni attributed ongoing improvements in peer relationships and social confidence to the skills and understandings they developed during mentoring, indicating long-term impact rather than short-term change.

### Case study & Narrative analysis:

**“It [being mentored] definitely made it so I'm not like I was in primary school, where I couldn't find like, even two people. I had one friend really - he was the only person that would actually talk to me. I fit in more in secondary school 'cause I talk normally. Well, whatever normal really is. Mentoring for me was just kind of like a hangout session with somebody for a break and to understand how social things work - it just felt like a safe space after school.”**

While this case study, as well as the respondent's full transcript, suggest their mentoring sessions did not explicitly cover social skills, simply having a low-stakes, judgement-free outlet to regularly practise communication - he describes mentoring as 'a safe space after school' - allowed the respondent to join dots and make connections regarding best practice communication.

**“With [mentor], I talked with him a lot. So I learned from him: this is how I'm supposed to sound. That helped me talk more in school. I felt like the main thing he did is he helped me transition to secondary. I didn't normally do many social interactions and then exploring with [mentor] - I socially interacted with him in proper conversations. That helped me to know when to talk, when to not talk 'cause it's just kind of like experience. [Previously] I'd just been like talking at them, not talking with each other.”**

The case study also demonstrates a significant growth in the respondent's agency in navigating social relations and interactions. Having recently experienced isolation and stigmatisation in primary school, his feeling that 'some people want to fit in and that's what I want' is understandable.

**“I suppose I've become a bit more into the norm, which has me fitting in. It's not what loads of people want, but some people want to fit in and that's what I want. It's not like I want to be an exact copy of someone else. But [in primary school] I didn't like being stared at for example, or being called weird.”**

The strength of his desire to be 'whatever normal really is' may relax over time, but it is important to recognise that he now feels able to achieve this if he wants to - compared to his time at primary school, he now has the tools and understanding at his disposal to choose how he presents himself and how he relates to others.

**“Now I've got a best mate that lives down the road, so we can walk to school together. I have a big friendship group that I that I hang out with. I have a small mates group and I have a big group of people for when I don't really feel like one to one conversations. When I first joined the new friend group there was like 4 of us. Now there's like 10 people in our group.”**

The respondent's considerable social development has sustained long after mentoring sessions ended, as evidenced by his present social environment. The respondent's account of primary school life versus his current life at secondary school paint two starkly different scenes. The respondent is adamant in attributing this change in social circumstances to his mentoring sessions.

## Why The Programme Works

TKN's programme is grounded in extensive youth work and child development research. Together, these elements help children internalise confidence, regulate emotions and develop self-belief - tools they continue to use long after the programme ends.

The evaluation has shown us that the key elements that are particularly effective are:



### Early, preventative intervention:

Supporting children before academic pressure and social complexity intensify



### A trusted adult outside home and school:

Providing emotional safety, consistency, and belief in the child.



### One-to-one mentoring with clear structure and endings:

A fixed one-year relationship creates focus, depth, and independence rather than dependency.



### Child-led activities that build realistic agency:

Children practice decision-making, goal-setting, and persistence within real-world constraints - and whilst they are having fun



### Exposure to new spaces and opportunities:

Mentors accompany children into environments they might otherwise feel excluded from, expanding horizons and aspirations.



### Positive endings:

Planned conclusions reinforce learning, help children to internalise strategies and signal trust in the child's ability to carry skills forward independently.

## Every child who wants a mentor should have one

### Louise Johns-Shepherd - Chief Executive

**This evaluation makes clear why more children should have access to a mentor and why The Kids Network's model is uniquely placed to meet that need. Intervening early, before difficulties escalate into crisis, has lasting impact.**

By supporting children at a formative stage with confidence, emotional literacy and agency, mentoring helps prevent later challenges and equips children with the skills to thrive throughout adolescence and into adulthood.

**Schools play a vital role in children's lives, but they cannot do this work alone.** Many children referred to The Kids Network experience low confidence, anxiety or social difficulties that sit below statutory thresholds yet significantly affect their wellbeing and opportunities.

**Our programme provides targeted support outside the school day** for those children who need it most and who might otherwise miss out on enrichment, encouragement and individual attention.

**Volunteers are central to this impact.** By offering a consistent, trusted adult beyond family and school, mentors bring additional care, perspective and capacity into children's lives. This long-term, relational support reflects a simple truth, it takes a city to raise a child. When communities step forward, children feel seen, valued and supported.

The Kids Network's approach is distinctive in **embedding children's voices and agency throughout the programme.** Children are supported to set meaningful goals, make choices and reflect on their progress, enabling them to internalise the skills and confidence they develop. Mentoring is carefully structured: volunteers are trained, supervised and supported, and relationships conclude with intentional, supported endings to ensure safety, purpose and effectiveness.

Taken together, the evaluation shows that **The Kids Network's mentoring programme is a timely and powerful response to the pressures facing children in London.** At a time of shrinking services and widening inequality, early, relational mentoring plays a critical preventative role, helping children build the internal and social resources to navigate an increasingly complex city.

The call to action is clear. **Sustained investment in early, relationship-based interventions that prioritise children's voices, safety and long-term wellbeing is essential.** Partners, funders, policymakers, schools and volunteers must recognise the value of early intervention and help scale approaches proven to work. Above all, every child who wants a mentor must have access to one, so that more children can grow up with the confidence, resilience and agency to shape their own futures.

## **The Kids Network**

The Kids Network, is a London-based early intervention charity, supporting children through mentoring to feel happy and confident about themselves and their futures. It was founded in 2016 by Sarah Woodcock and the first pilot programme launched in 2017. The charity supports children at a crucial time in their lives, in the lead up to the transition from primary to secondary school. We do this by providing them with a volunteer mentor from the local area, who spends one-to-one time with them in the community.

## **ImpactEd**

ImpactEd is a social enterprise that exists to improve pupil outcomes by addressing the evaluation deficit in education. We work in partnership with school leaders and education organisations to support high-quality monitoring and evaluation that informs decisions about what will work most effectively to support pupils.

## **Quintessentially Foundation**

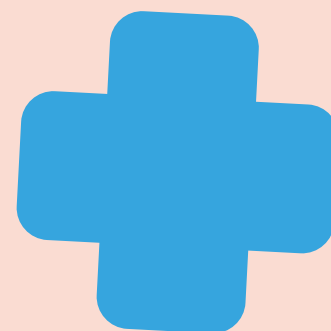
The Quintessentially Foundation transforms the lives of London's most vulnerable young people by backing the small, brilliant charities working on the frontlines of the city's communities. We are grateful to Quintessentially Foundation who funded this research with a generous grant.

## **Thank you**

Thank you to all the funders who have believed in our work and continued to fund and support our work over time - your commitment has enabled us to build futures.

Special thanks to our founder, Sarah Woodcock, who had the foresight, vision and determination to create something that would have an impact for generations to come.

We take the privacy of our children very seriously. The children we talk about in this document are all real children with real stories, but in order to protect their identities we have changed names, pictures and some details.



This document is a summary of *The Kids Network Mentoring: Evaluation of Long-term Impact*, ImpactEd, 2026. The full text of the evaluation is available on [The Kids Network website, under 'Our Impact'](#).