

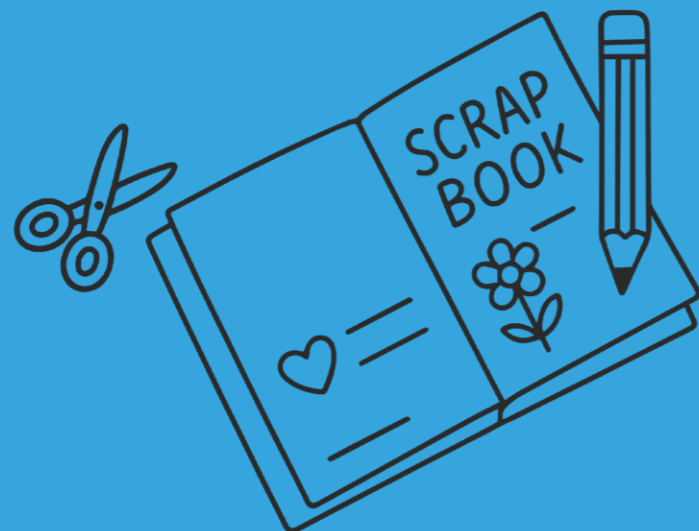
**the kids
network**
Connecting for Change



The Kids Network 2025 Impact Report

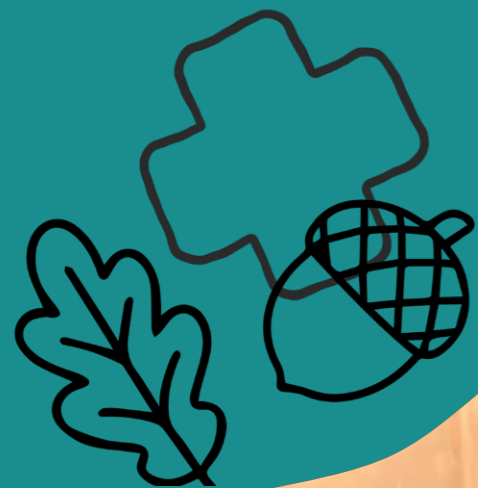
A Mentor for Every Child

We know mentoring works and that our programme is impactful. At The Kids Network, we have great ambition that no child should have to navigate their future alone and that every child who wants a mentor should have one.



LONDON





Too many children in London are facing the devastating effects of poverty, limited access to opportunities and mental health struggles. Without intervention, these challenges can set the course of their life before they've even reach secondary school. **At The Kids Network, we believe every child deserves to feel seen, heard and supported as they navigate the challenges of growing up.**



Foreword from from our Chief Executive - Louise Johns-Shepherd

“He said he likes his teachers a lot because ‘they brought me you’ that made me smile.”

Quote from mentor in session report

Our mentoring programme provides children with a consistent, trusted relationship at a critical stage in their lives, connecting them with trained volunteer mentors who build confidence and a sense of possibility. At a time when children should be learning, playing and dreaming about the future, many instead face social isolation, mental health challenges and are living in poverty.

This Impact Report reflects on 2025, a pivotal year for The Kids Network. It was a year of focus and consolidation, as we strengthened our internal foundations while securing important external validation of our work. Through improved data collection at baseline, six months, twelve months and beyond, we deepened our understanding of the difference mentoring makes in children’s lives.

Most significantly, our independent external evaluation provided robust evidence of the programme’s long-term impact. It confirmed that consistent, relational early intervention before the transition from primary to secondary school improves wellbeing, confidence, social and emotional development, and children’s sense of connection to their communities.

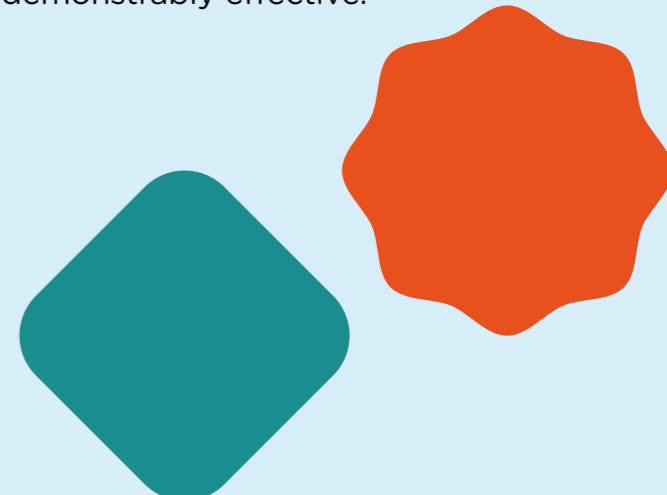
This impact is made possible by our volunteers, who give their time, energy and care to build meaningful relationships with children.

As we look to 2026 and beyond, our ambition is to reach more children while maintaining the quality and relational depth that underpin our outcomes. Guided by strong evidence and powered by volunteers embedded in their communities, we are building a model that is both deeply human and demonstrably effective.



2 in 5
Children in London are living in poverty
 Trust for London data

4x
Children from low-income households are four times more likely to have serious mental health problems.
 Centre for mental health



Building Futures – what we do

“In Costa, Harry very confidently ordered his drink which made me feel very proud!”

Mentor in session report

1

Early intervention:

We support children aged 8-11 before they transition to secondary school, when guidance can make the biggest impact.

2

Trauma-informed & child-led:

Every child’s journey is unique, and our programme is tailored to meet their needs.

3

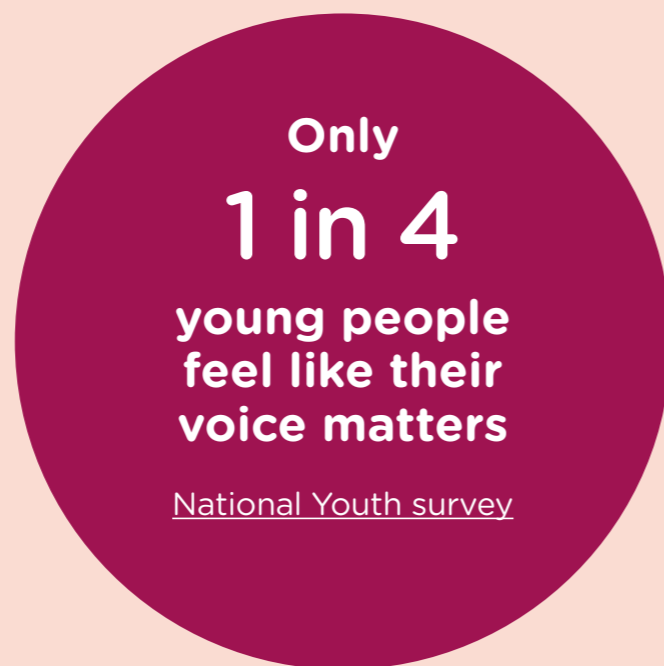
Community-based mentorship:

Mentors are trained volunteers from local communities, providing a trusted relatable role model.

4

Beyond mentoring:

We provide £35 per month in activity funding so children and mentors can explore new opportunities and experiences together.

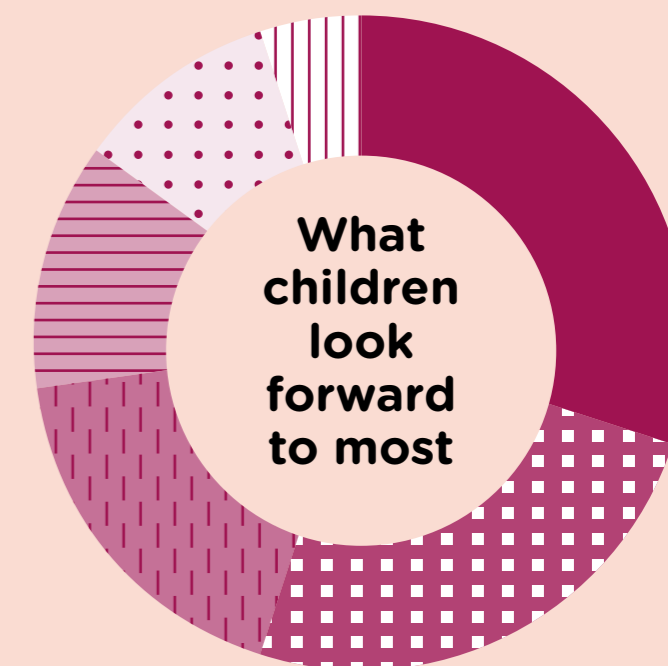


Child Led

Even before the programme starts, children instinctively identify what helps them thrive. Before the programme begins, children are asked what they most look forward to. Their responses consistently highlight getting out, exploring new places and trying new experiences. **Our external long-term impact evaluation revealed these same themes became the mechanisms that drive lasting change.** Children benefit most when they have choice, access opportunities they might not otherwise experience, can express their identity, and build a trusting relationship with their mentor. This reflects the strength of our child-led approach and reinforces a core belief at The Kids Network:

when children are given voice and agency, they help shape the conditions for their own growth and futures.

84% of mentoring sessions in 2025 were child led



- 30%** Physical activity
- 25%** Exploring new places
- 18%** Having fun
- 12%** Spending time with a mentor and building a connection
- 10%** Creative activities
- 5%** Food and treats

Things to be proud of in 2025

95% —  Of children increased in at least one self value metric


192 —  Children had one to one sessions

53 —  School partners

111 —  Children supported in child voice work

3k+ —  Supporters receive our monthly newsletters

09 —  London boroughs

4k+ —  Session hours

2.7k+ —  One to one sessions

Key achievements

Mentor-informed training:

Mentors asked for more support working with neurodiverse children. In response, we partnered with **University of East London** to deliver additional training with great success.

Expanded partnerships:

We had several opportunities for children and mentors through partnership organisations including **London Zoo, Kew Gardens, Big Bus Company, Hackney School of Food, Chelsea FC Foundation, University of East London, Two Temple Place, and Young Hammersmith & Fulham.**

Child-friendly policies:

We developed accessible versions of key policies (GDPR, Safeguarding, Health & Safety, and Anti-Oppression) and ran school workshops so children could help shape them.

Dedicated team:

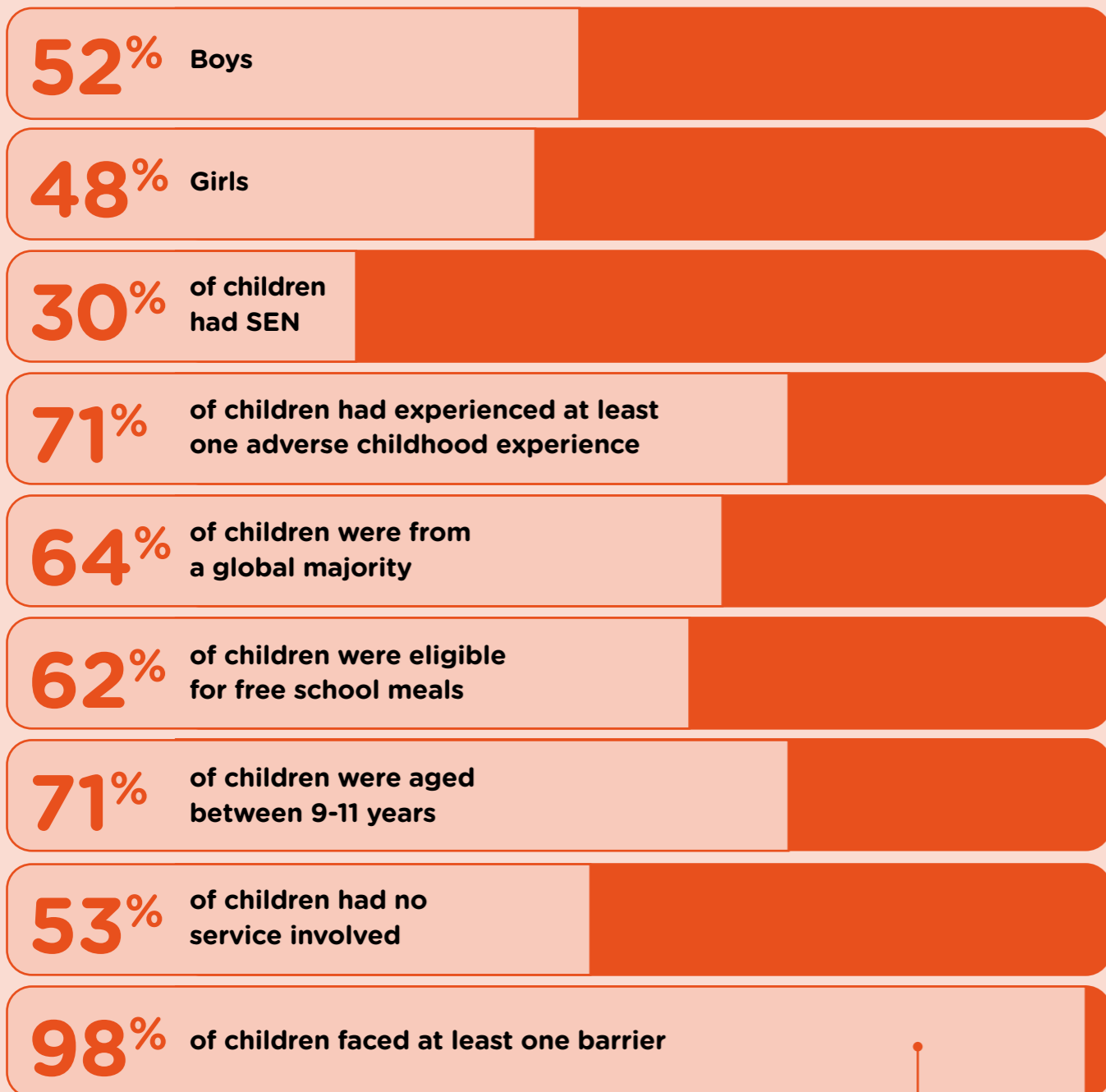
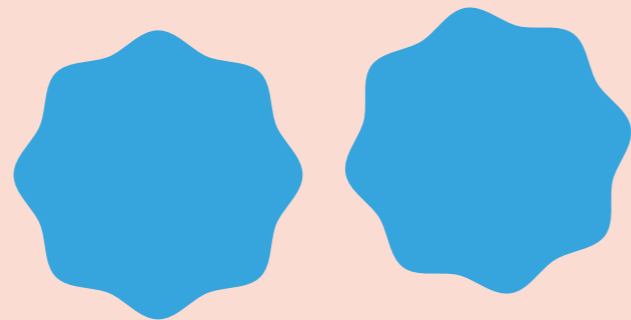
We are proud of our team who worked tirelessly to support mentors and children, reviewing thousands of session reports, developing programme resources, raising funds, and strengthening our operations.

Findings of the long term impact:

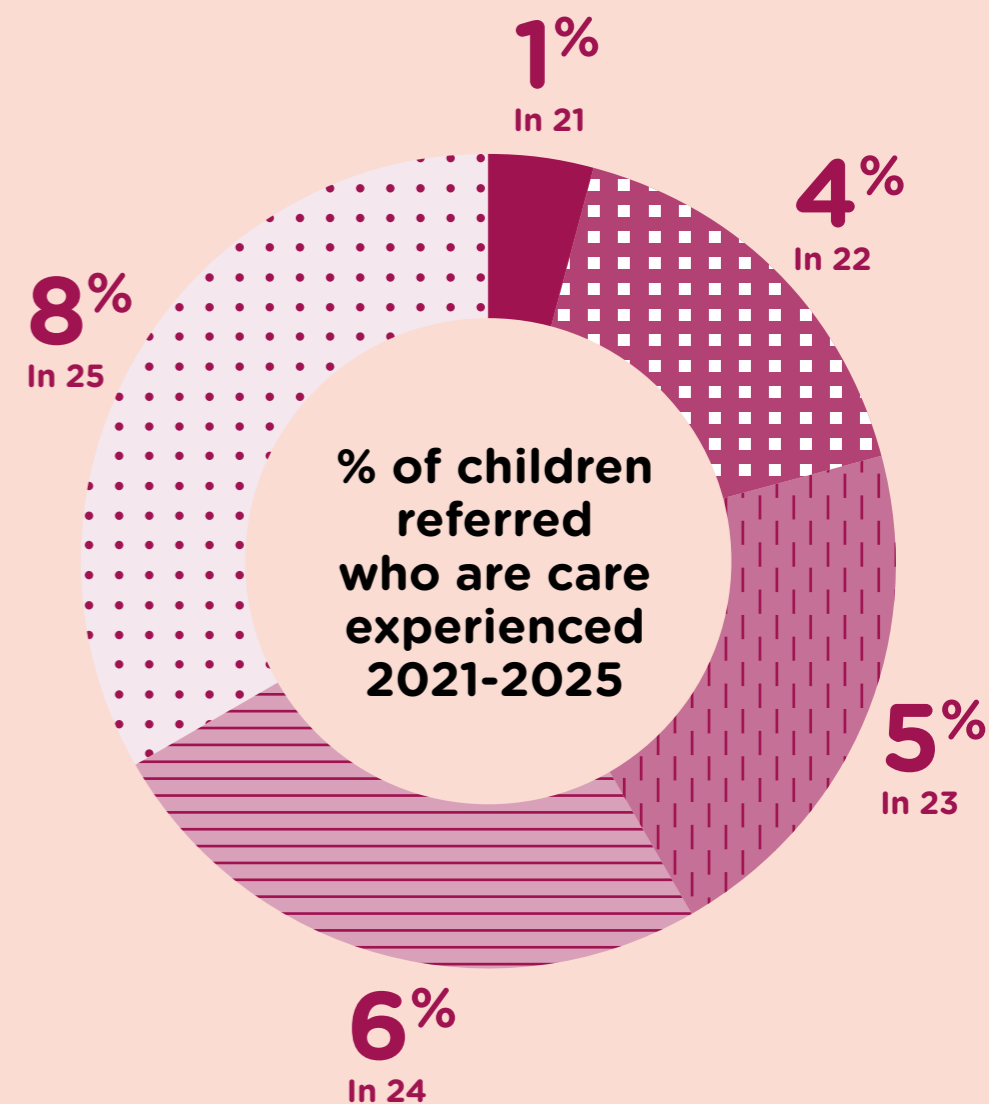
An external evaluation by ImpactEd demonstrated the programme's long-term impact and gave alumni children a platform to share their experiences and the change they felt.



Who we supported



We have seen a year on year rise of referrals of children living in care. While experiences vary, many face separation from family and friends and educational instability which impacts on their wellbeing. **A consistent weekly mentor** can provide invaluable stability and support during this time.



This includes barriers at **school, at home, in the community and social and emotional barriers.**

Recent years have seen an increase in girls being referred to The Kids Network and in the number of barriers they face. This reflects recent findings from The Good Childhood Report, which showed girls were significantly less happy than boys on average, with lower wellbeing trends across all six measures over time.

[The Good Child Report 2025](#)

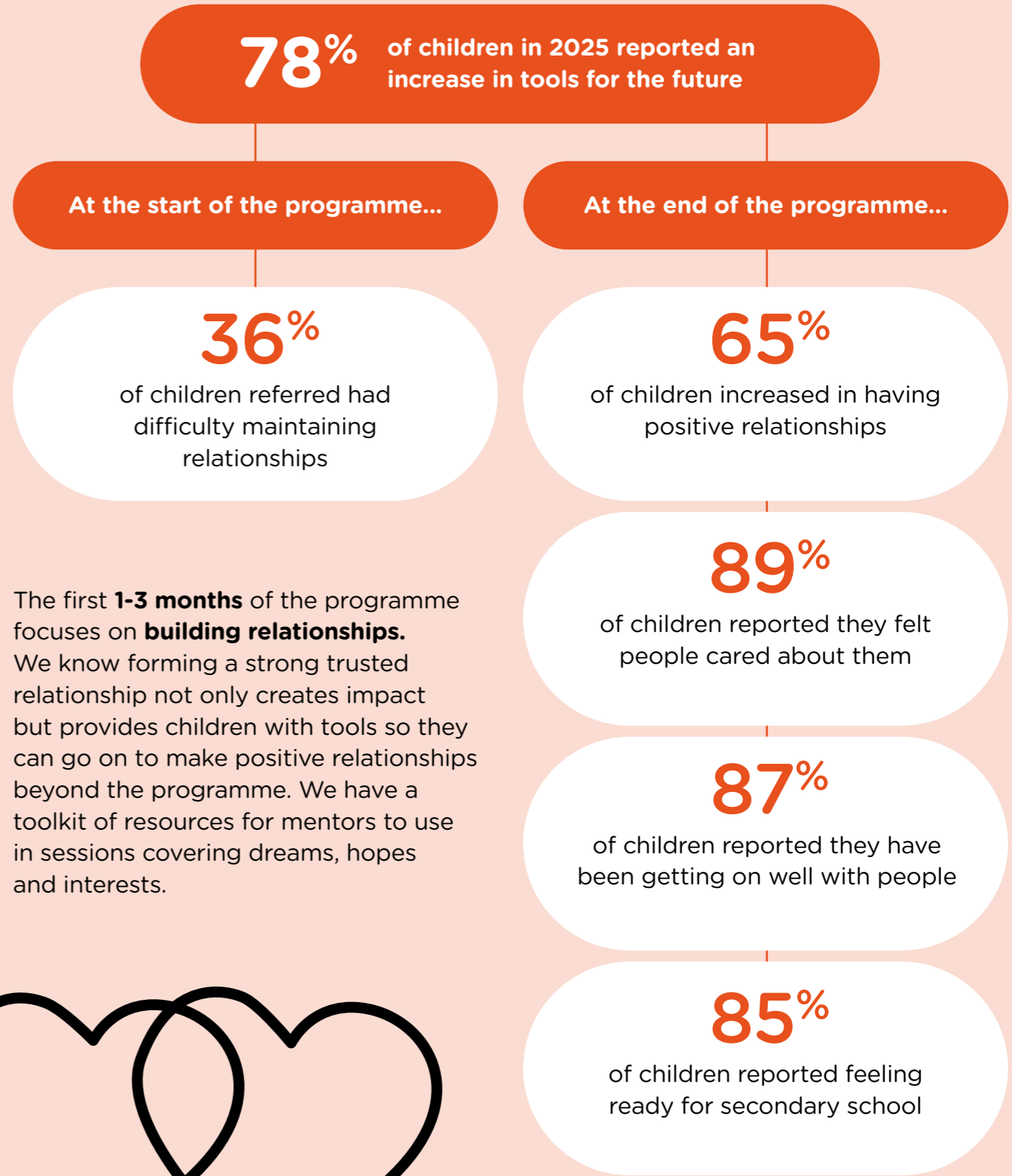
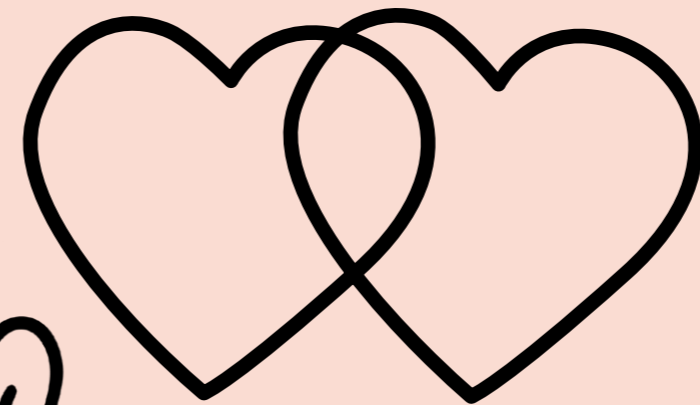


Building Relationships



“I prompted her to share any goals she would like to create for the next few months. She then told me how she was getting bothered by school fights between her friends and how she would get stressed, when asked to choose sides. She would like to be better at handling these kinds of situations...she also shared how she gets anxious in general about making new friends, and this is also a worry she would like to remove as she prepares for secondary school...It would be interesting to have activities to support these goals she said...”

Ana's mentor



The first **1-3 months** of the programme focuses on **building relationships**. We know forming a strong trusted relationship not only creates impact but provides children with tools so they can go on to make positive relationships beyond the programme. We have a toolkit of resources for mentors to use in sessions covering dreams, hopes and interests.

Ana's story of building relationships

Ana, a shy and anxious Year 6 girl, struggled with school attendance, low confidence, and peer conflict. She was referred to The Kids Network in the hope a mentor could offer support during her transition to secondary school. She was matched with Tasha, a calm and empathetic mentor. Early sessions focused on building their relationship, exploring Ana's neighbourhood, library visits, and cafés. With gentle encouragement, Ana gradually led sessions, sharing her interests and trying new experiences with her mentor.

Goals and activities for building relationships

Ana set herself three goals to work on:

- 1 Being able to feel less stressed during fights between friends
- 2 Being healthier (limiting treats to once a month)
- 3 Increasing confidence to make friends

By the end of mentoring Ana could proudly see how she had worked towards and achieved her goals

A change in approach to school and friends:

As trust grew, Ana began speaking more openly about her anxieties. Instead of fearing class changes, she reframed them as opportunities to make new friends.

Creative activities were used in sessions which focused on building relationships like a 'river of life' and a 'recipe for a great friendship'. Through these, Ana reflected on her experiences, values and hopes. Notably, she included her mentor in her river drawing, symbolising the bond they had formed.

At the end of the programme, Ana is a noticeably different child. She has had a positive transition to Year 7. She has high attendance and enjoys school. She talked non-stop in mentoring sessions her confidence and aspirations had grown immensely. She would proudly tell her mentor she wants to be a lawyer and is keen to work hard in school.

This story shows how one secure, encouraging relationship can model trust and communication, empowering a young person to build healthier, more confident relationships with others.



How building relationships can support long term change

The [external long term impact evaluation](#) conducted by ImpactEd in 2025 found that the TKN mentoring programme not only affects individual children, but also shapes how they engage in relationships. By internalising the experience of opening up to a mentor, alumni demonstrate sustained openness with family and peers, moving away from isolated coping mechanisms.

In a city facing rising social fragmentation, these lasting improvements in communication and boundary-setting empower young people to build supportive, independent networks. Importantly, these changes were sustained beyond the mentoring year, indicating **long-term social resilience rather than temporary confidence.**

Building Confidence

“I’ve enjoyed the routine and seeing Theo. He keeps me on my toes; Theo get’s more joy from exploring London than anything else. He gets amazed by the little things and that gives me joy...He wants to explore as much of London as possible. My biggest hope for the next 10 months is to nurture that and take him to wherever he wants to go and see”

Theo’s mentor



93% of children in 2025 reported an increase in wellbeing

At the start of the programme...

At the end of the programme...

61%
of children were referred with low confidence

83%
of children reported feeling confident at the end of the programme

93%
of children felt that they were good at things

83%
of children reported knowing how to set goals

Between **4-8 months** pairs set **goals** that they would like to work on together. As the children set their goals they begin to increase in confidence. They start to gain a stronger sense of their identity and have things they can feel proud of.



Theo's story of building confidence

Theo is a 10-year-old boy in Year 5. He describes himself as funny, special, talented and weird and has a talent of being able to recite a whole 3-minute song listing every single station in London! Theo has an autism diagnosis. He is a fun boy who likes to ask lots of questions and his favourite thing to do in his spare time is research interesting facts about London.

He was referred by his school as he does not like to take risks or make mistakes. They felt he would benefit from a mentor to improve his confidence and resilience, giving him time outside of the home to explore his interest.

Setting Goals for confidence

Together with his mentor, Theo set an ambitious goal: visit up to 100 stations and try as many modes of transport as possible. London became their classroom. Theo increasingly led sessions, arriving with detailed plans not only for the day but weeks ahead, demonstrating growing ownership and self-belief.

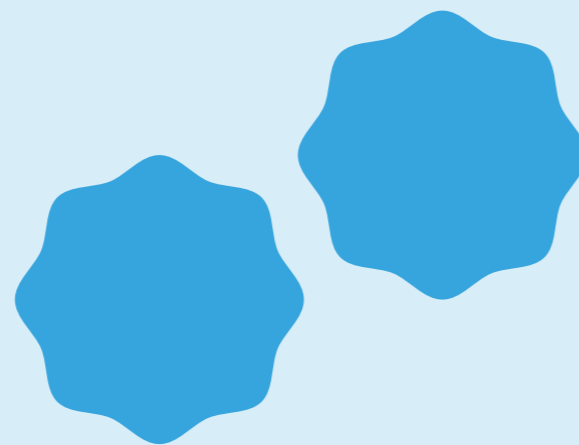
Mentoring transformed curiosity into courage. By nurturing his passions and encouraging leadership, Theo developed resilience, pride in his identity and the confidence to explore the world on his own terms.

Exploring Identity

Representation also played a powerful role in the pair's relationship. Sharing the same faith background, Theo expressed interest in visiting a mosque, something he had never done. With careful planning, they visited a multi-prayer space. This experience strengthened both identity and confidence.

Another pivotal moment came when Theo questioned why autism is classed as a disability, stating he did not see himself as disabled. Through open discussion, he reflected on difference, support and celebrating uniqueness. Rather than limiting him, the diagnosis was something he could define for himself.

This story shows how supporting children to follow their interests, explore new things can build confidence and agency.



How building confidence and setting goals supports long term change

Our [external long term impact evaluation](#) found that the programme and mentoring builds sustained agency, enabling children to set goals and persist through self-doubt. By acting as companions in new environments, mentors help children overcome restricted access to opportunities.

Crucially, the evaluation evidenced that alumni continue these activities independently, proving their newfound confidence and active participation in life extend far beyond the mentoring relationship.

Building social and emotional skills

“When we said goodbye, Kayce told me she was going to miss me. She doesn't always find it easy to be vulnerable, but this time she was honest about feeling sad that mentoring was ending. That honesty showed just how far she had come”

Kayce's mentor



85% of children in 2025 reported an increase in social and emotional skills

At the start of the programme...

At the end of the programme...

45%

of children were referred due to difficulty in managing their emotions.

90%

of children reported an increase in ability to manage emotions

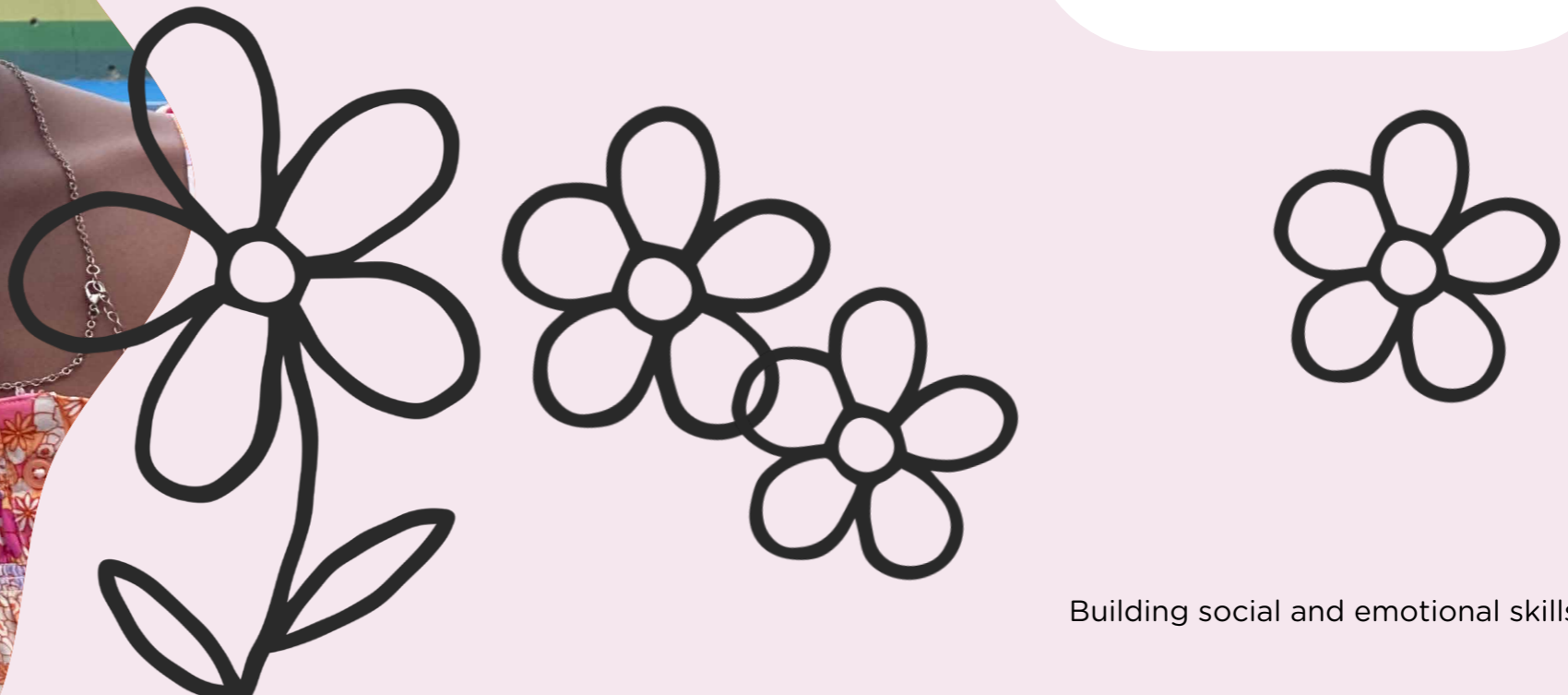
91%

of children reported feeling calm

89%

of children reported feeling relaxed

In the final **9-12 months** mentors focus on **reflection and gratitude** to further develop children's social and emotional skills. As noted by the Centre for Youth Impact (2023), these skills are critical mediators for lifelong success, including higher educational attainment, steady employment, healthy relationships, and overall physical and mental wellbeing. [Centre for Youth Impact, 2023](#)



Kayce's story of building social and emotional skills

Kayce is a sporty, energetic 10-year-old in Year 5 who loves football, swimming and being outdoors. With a sibling who has additional needs and her own physical disability affecting mobility. Kayce was referred by her school as she often struggled to manage her emotions, this sometimes impacted her peer relationships and her ability to express herself openly. They felt she would benefit from building a positive relationship with someone outside of school/home, to be able to express her feelings and manage her emotions.

Widening the Impact:

The impact extended home. Her caregiver noticed a shift in how she manages and expresses her emotions: 'Emily was literally so brilliant, they really had that special bond. Kayce felt so comfortable with her, knew she could talk to her...and make Kayce feel confident in herself and make her try things she thought she couldn't do with her disability. She now comes to me (Caregiver) and speaks to me openly about things that are happening in her life. Now she thinks about what she is going to say before saying it.'

Kayce was matched with Emily. Over 64.5 hours of mentoring, Emily built a trusted relationship where K felt safe to explore her feelings.

Strategies and tools

Kayce came up with a 'three emotions' activity where they both wrote three emotions they felt that week and what caused those emotions. This became a powerful tool. Kayce began identifying feelings such as anxiety and sadness, linking them to real experiences like conflict with her sister, or nerves before a Spanish exam. As her emotional literacy developed, so did her confidence. She began trying new activities and communicating more openly at home. A key tool was to demonstrate that emotions are neither 'good' or 'bad', just signals to understand.

Kayce's journey demonstrates how building emotional awareness within a trusted relationship can strengthen resilience, communication and self-belief.



How developing social and emotional skills supports long term change

Our [external long term impact evaluation](#) found that structured mentoring leads to lasting improvements in emotional literacy and self-understanding. Alumni internalised their mentors' support, independently using tools like reframing and breathing to manage anxiety and everyday uncertainty.

Given London's mental health challenges and specialist wait times, these findings suggest the programme acts as a vital preventative intervention, equipping young people with emotional regulation tools before difficulties escalate.



He asked about my day and we had a special golden moment when he said even when I am sad or tired or stressed I make him so happy. I said we are like a happy ping pong ball - we bounce happiness off each other and always feel better when we see each other.

On the way back he expressed that he was enjoying our sessions because they are fun. I expressed that I was enjoying the sessions as he helped me be more creative and think 'a bit more like a ten year old'.



I always learn something from TR but today was particularly golden as we were just so in tune with each other. He was like my little design buddy and our ideas were working together.

I can see that every time she makes a decision big or small it is boosting her confidence and developing her expression of autonomy.



The moments we see every day



My mentee led the entire session and was very confident. He was very confident in deciding what we wanted to do and i didn't have to suggest or steer. When we got a drink at the shop he was very confident talking to the cashier.

CD also shared that things are going well at his new school and that his teacher said he might even be nominated for class captain, which he seemed proud of, although he wasn't sure whether he should go for it or not. I tried to encourage him to go for it as it sounded like a good opportunity.

T planned the whole session - she bought all the ingredients she needed and took charge showing me what needed to be done when we made the slime.

All quotes extracted from session reports submitted by mentors.



These quotes are from caregivers describing the long-term changes seen in a group of alumni who completed the programme between 2021 and 2024.



Mentoring helped her build confidence to perform in front of her peers on several occasions without self-sabotage.

She definitely sees the future with a brighter outlook and wants to follow through with things more to produce an outcome. She is now setting herself goals for the future now and thinking about it.



[His] transition into secondary school was made so much easier by having a mentor. Someone outside of his family that he could be open and honest with, someone to talk through situations with, that I believe boosted his confidence just at the time he needed it.

The moments seen long after the programme

Mentoring has given her the confidence to speak to others and has helped her to maintain friendships as she has been able to confidently speak about her interests and is less scared of expressing herself.



She has taken strategies she learnt from her mentor into challenging situations within her school environment...the techniques she learnt have helped her cope when she has found herself overwhelmed...I witnessed this after she was able to take a breath and walk away from a situation with her peers and was able to talk through it with me.

[He] has dealt with change and challenges in a much more measured way. Instead of always just reacting before thinking he will now give himself time and space to process things.



Our volunteer mentors

“Thank you for setting B up with such an amazing person”

Quote from caregiver

Skill building

17%

of volunteer mentors in 2025 were students or unemployed viewing the opportunity as a great well to build their skills and experience.

31%

of mentors were aged between 18-24

43%

of mentors were aged between 25-34

47%

of mentors said mentoring influenced their career goals/ developed their skills

Our volunteers

69%

of mentors were female

39%

of mentors were from the global majority

73%

of pairs identified as the same gender

94%

of volunteer mentors felt supported by the charity

88%

of volunteer mentors felt mentoring had a positive effect on their wellbeing

Value of volunteering

In 2025, our volunteer mentors delivered **over 4,000 hours** of mentoring sessions, alongside many additional hours spent travelling, planning, training and reporting. This represents a significant investment of time and commitment. UK government research estimates that formal volunteering contributes £24.7 billion to England’s economy each year, with an **average impact of £2,012 per volunteer**. Our mentors are part of this powerful civic contribution, creating lasting change for children while generating significant social value.

Department for Culture, Media and Sport

Our mentor community

In addition to giving their time our volunteer **mentors raised over £10,000** for the charity in 2025 taking on various challenge events and fundraisers.

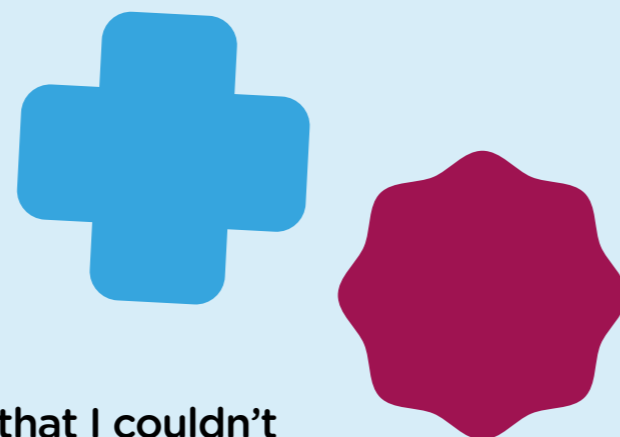
“Due to my own personal things going on in my life I have been quite down recently but seeing R be so energetic and bubbly is definitely something that gives me hope for myself and encourages me to stay positive”

Quote from mentor

100%
of children reported they enjoyed the time with the mentor



Building a community



“C had managed to experience things that I couldn’t do and C has become more happier and learned a lot from the places she’s visited”

Quote from caregiver

Community building

80%
of children reported they did new things with their mentor.

100%
of mentors said that they had a better understanding of the issues affecting children

74%
of children reported doing things in their local community at the end of the programme

Going to new places and trying new things was a big feature. Here is just a *few* of the places explored in London by pairs in 2025:

- ✓ China town
- ✓ Camden
- ✓ Regents park
- ✓ Green Park & Buckingham Palace
- ✓ Battersea Power Station
- ✓ The Natural History Museum
- ✓ National Maritime Museum
- ✓ Greenwich
- ✓ London Eye
- ✓ O2 arena Greenwich
- ✓ Kennington Park
- ✓ 50+ Bubble tea shops

Thriving Communities

A thriving community acts as an ecosystem where individual wellbeing and community resilience are deeply interconnected through strong social connections, supportive spaces, and empowered, people-led approaches. According to the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, this structure fosters personal flourishing and reduces isolation by enabling residents to feel safe, included, and connected to their environment.

What works wellbeing.

100%
of mentors said that The Kids Network has increased believe they can create change in their community

While London offers many enriching activities, not all children can access them. Mentoring sessions address this gap. Both children are able to connect with both their local and wider London community through exploration and trying new things. **During sessions in 2025:**

18% spent enjoying outdoor spaces around London

24% spent eating food and drinks

11.5% spent on physical activity

10% spend on creative activities or connecting with their local community.

“When we walked through Leicester Square and Chinatown, DA was so amazed by the Lampion decoration in Chinatown, it was her first time to be there and she said she felt like she was in the movie!! We stopped by the Taiyaki shop and she was shocked to see a fish-shaped pancake and so excited to try it”

Quote from mentor in session report



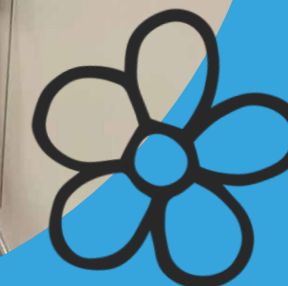
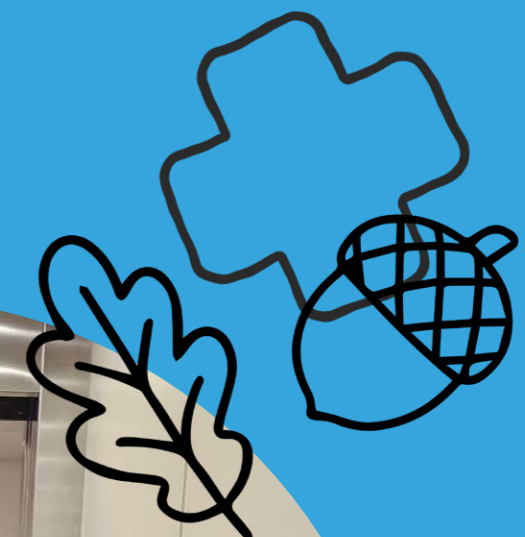
Thank you for supporting us

It takes a city

The Trustees of The Kids' Network would like to thank our partners, supporters, volunteers, staff, and everyone who is part of our network for your ongoing commitment to our mission.

With special thanks to our funders in 2025

Addison Youth, BBC Children in Need, CriSeren Foundation, Dragon School, Eranda Rothschild Foundation, Foux Foundation, Garfield Weston Foundation, Greenwood Place, John Lyon's Charity, LSEG, MGAC, Posettes Foundation, Postcode Society Trust, Quintessentially Foundation, Sage Publishing, South Western Railway, Stanley Grundy Foundation, Tesco Community Grants, The Childhood Trust, The Christopher and Henry Oldfield Trust, The Gosling Foundation, The Guinness Partnership, The Henry Smith Foundation, The J Van Mars Foundation, The Jane Hodge Foundation, The Julia Rausing Trust, The Leathersellers' Foundation, The National Lottery, The Rank Foundation, The Roden Family Foundation, The Sidney and Phyllis Krystal Foundation UK, The Sobell Foundation, The Stone Family Foundation, The Story of Christmas, The Yorkshire Building Society, Walcot Foundation, Westminster Almshouses Foundation, Westminster Foundation, and William Wates Memorial Trust



**Want to find
out more about
becoming a supporter
or volunteer?**

Click to visit our site.

Or follow us on: [LinkedIn](#) [Facebook](#) [Instagram](#)

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

