



Department
for Education

The Fair Ways Staying Close Project

Evaluation report

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**Mariela Neagu, University of Oxford
and Jo Dixon, University of York**

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Young person's summary

The Fair Ways Project

Fair Ways received funding from the Department for Education's (DfE) Children's Social Care Innovation Programme to set up a project to help young people aged 16 and over from residential care in Hampshire. The project was created to help these young people to get ready to leave care and live on their own. It recognised that once they leave care, young people lose some of the support they had while they were in care. The project aimed to provide a higher level of support to help young people with their accommodation, relationships and with other areas of their lives. It was evaluated by researchers from the Universities of Oxford and York to find out how well it was working during its first 2 years.

What does the project involve?

To help young people be better prepared for independent living, Fair Ways offered young people accommodation with support between ages 16 to 18, and then accommodation with less support after they turned 18, depending on their needs. Each young person was allocated a project key worker. The project also offered the young people an opportunity to stay in contact with a worker who was important to them while they were in residential care and support to contact family members or friends, should they wish. Fair Ways provided a hub building for young people where they could go to talk to professionals, get support with their mental health, take part in skills development activities or take part in social activities.

Fair Ways staying close project young people

The project aimed to support 10 young people leaving residential care, however, only 7 joined the project in its first 2 years. These young people received support from project workers in addition to the usual support they received from their local authority leaving care service. One young person left the project after 9 months.

The young people in the project had moved into their new accommodation and were accessing the intensive support from their Fair Ways key worker and other staff. Young people's independent living skills were improving according to reports from young people and their workers. The Fair Ways project initially wanted young people to be mentored by older care leavers, however, the project young people were not interested in having mentors. As most young people joined the project in 2019, it is too soon to fully understand what impact the Fair Ways Staying Close project has had on them.

Key messages

This Staying Close project was developed by Fair Ways, a voluntary sector provider of foster and residential care for children and young people in the south of England. Fair Ways has 4 16+ residential homes that can accommodate a total of 18 young people, including 1 for those aged 18+. The project was designed to provide a gradual and supported transition to independent living for 10 young people aged 16 to 20, leaving residential care in Hampshire. It offered a 2-stage accommodation pathway via a supported move to post-16 accommodation followed by a supported and planned move to post-18 independent accommodation. It provided young people with an allocated project key worker and access to a mental health therapist. Young people were offered the choice to maintain close contact with up to 2 workers from their previous residential placement. This proved difficult to arrange, particularly with carers from external providers due to availability, a need for formal agreements and resources. Additionally, some young people did not want to continue contact.

Referral of young people was a challenge to the initial progress of the Fair Ways Staying Close project. For example, Fair Ways had insufficient young people of a suitable age for the project in their own residential homes, and the cohort of residential care leavers in the relevant age range in the local authority was small. There was a need for greater clarity between the project and Hampshire County Council (HCC) from the outset, about which young people and the level of need that the project could support, which also stalled referrals. Interviews with staff indicated a lack of clarity in HCC about their role in referring to the project and little awareness of the project amongst social and leaving care workers. Commissioning regulations also posed a barrier to referring young people, as Fair Ways was not a preferred accommodation provider of HCC for young people over 16. Most of these issues were resolved through increased communication between Fair Ways and HCC. This led to improved understanding of the project and the target group, and improved referral systems and rates into the project. The use of [unregulated post-16 provision](#) was under review at national policy level at the time of reporting. The project's provision of an unregulated post-16 option had not been a barrier with HCC, as they were familiar with Fair Ways, however, this was highlighted as a potential obstacle to extending the project to local authorities that are unfamiliar with Fair Ways provision.

Delays in referrals, which reduced both intervention and evaluation timescales, and young people's low completion of evaluation measures (4) and interviews (2) limited the testing of the project. Some project components (maintaining contact with a previous carer and peer mentoring) were not fully operational during the evaluation and could not be assessed. Nevertheless, monitoring data on outcomes and the reports of young people and staff suggested that young people benefited from a supported post-16 move, stable accommodation and intensive support from Fair Ways Staying Close project staff and key workers.

Executive summary

Introduction

The Fair Ways Staying Close project is 1 of 8 Staying Close projects for residential care leavers, that were piloted across England via Round 2 of the Department for Education's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme (Innovation Programme). The project took place between November 2017 and March 2020. The report describes the facilitators and challenges involved in project implementation and operation, and explores evidence of early impact on outcomes for young people.

The project

The Fair Ways Staying Close project aimed to support 10 young people aged 16 to 20 leaving the care of Fair Ways (a voluntary sector provider) and other residential homes in Hampshire. It offered an extended transition pathway from care using a 2-stepped accommodation approach (a move to a post-16 residential unit followed by a supported move to post-18 independent accommodation) and consistent project key worker support during and after the transition from care to independent living. It also aimed to facilitate on-going relationships with 1 or 2 carers from young people's previous residential home, achieved by splitting their time between the residential unit and the post-16 Staying Close unit, for a limited time period of time. This component aimed to offer young people continuity of relationships to prevent the sudden loss of support that contributes to the so called 'cliff-edge', where support and contact from carers and professionals can fall away sharply after leaving care. The project also provided a hub space, offering young people access to a mental health therapist, learning and skills and social activities. It also hosted staff training.

The evaluation

The independent evaluation, supported via the Innovation Programme, covers the period from April 2018 to March 2020. It is based on data collected between June 2018 and January 2020. The evaluation comprised 3 components:

- a process evaluation to understand project implementation and practice from the perspectives of key stakeholders. Findings were based on: 3 interviews conducted with the project manager at evaluation baseline, midpoint and endpoint; 2 interviews with the Fair Ways director conducted at baseline and endpoint; 4 interviews with key workers at midpoint; 2 interviews with local authority staff at baseline and endpoint; and a theory of change workshop

- an outcomes evaluation to explore experiences and impact for young people participating in the project. Findings were based on: outcome data from the Fair Ways referral and monitoring system on project young people (7); the completion of evaluation measures of wellbeing at project entry (6) and end (4); 1 focus group with 5 care leavers conducted at baseline; and a survey completed at endpoint by 6 Fair Ways staff working directly with the young people. In addition, 3 interviews with 2 young people (1 at midpoint and 2 at endpoint) were carried out. The endpoint interviews with young people were conducted by a care-experienced young person from another project, who had received peer research training and support to interview care leavers
- an economic component using a cost analysis to explore costs and potential saving associated with the project

The evaluation is limited by the small number of young people recruited to the Fair Ways project (7) and to evaluation interviews (2), and the short and variable duration of the project intervention. Steps to address this included regular contact between the project and evaluation teams to monitor referral progress and explore strategies for including young people in the evaluation (telephone or face-to-face interviews). It is too soon to assess project impact on outcomes for young people.

Key findings

Findings emerging from the evaluation include:

- buy-in and a clear understanding of the project amongst stakeholders should be obtained at project set-up to ease referral processes and project operation
- qualitative data from staff interviews suggests that young people were benefitting from the supported move into Fair Ways Staying Close post-16 accommodation and were settling well (2 had remained post-18)
- Interviews with the project staff and young people indicated that direct key worker support was welcomed and positive relationships had been created
- endpoint interviews with 2 young people suggest that project support had helped them improve their independent living skills (such as cooking, cleaning and budgeting) by providing them with opportunities to practice these, which had not been available to them whilst in care
- although the project had originally sought to support the continuation of relationships with previous residential care workers, this was not fully implemented as planned (for example, it was not possible to split staff time between a former residential unit and the young person's post-16 unit). While some young people continued contact, others did not wish to maintain a supported relationship with former carers. In at least 1 case where the young

person had opted to maintain contact, the previous residential provider did not co-operate with Fair Ways to formalise the continuation of the relationship. This raised a need for formal agreements and greater co-operation between different residential care providers around the staff time and resources needed to maintain more formal contact with young people after they leave their care placement

- A cost analysis suggests that the project has the potential to generate a net saving to the state. Based on project spend and potential savings related to outcomes and accommodation, 2 year estimated savings range from £381,285 to £421,791

Lessons and implications

Lessons and implications arising from the findings include:

- findings suggest that securing earlier buy-in to the project from HCC would have assisted with the timely referral of young people to the Fair Ways project. Clearer communication of the project aims and offer, early on would also have aided the identification and recruitment of young people
- staff interviews suggest that initial concerns about the level of need that could be supported by the Fair Ways project, had narrowed referrals early on. This was resolved by clearer communication of the project offer. Staff noted that a thorough understanding of the local cohort of residential care leavers and clarity and awareness-raising of how the project can support them, was important learning and essential for future project planning and referral flows
- where young people move to the project from another residential provider, the co-operation of that provider is important to enable the valuable key worker contact that can facilitate the young person's transition. This is particularly so where a more formal pattern of contact, managed by the project, is envisaged. This carries contractual, administrative and resource implications (such as, paying an employee of another provider for time spent with a young person in the 16+ unit). The competitive nature of the residential care market, however, may hinder co-operation. The project had shifted focus towards supporting informal relationships (family and friends), as per the wishes of young people
- local authority commissioning processes had some impact on how the project was evolving (referral routes, timescales for preparation work, tendering to be a preferred provider). National debates on the use of [unregulated post-16 provision](#) may also influence this. While not an issue for their work with HCC (who are familiar with Fair Ways), project staff considered it a potential obstacle to extending the project to other local authorities that are unfamiliar or have no prior links with Fair Ways as a provider of post-16 accommodation

1. Introduction

Research shows that many care leavers are at risk of poor outcomes during their journeys to independent adulthood, including housing instability, homelessness, not being in education, employment or training (NEET) and having poor mental wellbeing (Mendes and Snow 2016, Dixon and Lee 2015). Research suggests that these risks and difficulties may be greater for early leavers who move from their care placements for independent living aged 16 or 17, in comparison to those leaving aged 18 or staying put with former foster carers beyond 18 (Munro et al 2012, Dixon et al 2006). Care leavers report experiences of isolation and loneliness after care (Dixon and Baker 2016) and studies of marginalised adults show over-representation of care leavers amongst those who are homeless and long-term unemployed (Atkinson and Hyde, 2019). According to a study by Baker (2019) only 40% of the care leavers felt settled in their accommodation and a third felt that their accommodation was not right for them. The same study reports that although 85% of care leavers said they had a really good friend and 92% reported that they had someone to listen to them, 20% of the young people reported that they felt lonely all or most of the time (this compared to 10% in the general population).

Young people leaving residential care can face greater challenges than those leaving foster placements. This might reflect a tendency for residential care to accommodate young people with complex needs or those who come into care late and fail to settle in foster placements, which are scenarios identified in the leaving care literature as risk factors for poorer post-care outcomes (Stein, 2006; Stein, 2012). Unlike their peers in foster care who, since 2014, can formally remain with former foster carers until age 21 through Staying Put provision, there is no statutory provision for young people in residential care to stay where they are beyond 18 or remain in contact with their carers. The Narey Review (2016) identified this inequity and called for measures to test Staying Close approaches to provide ongoing support for residential care leavers.

In acknowledging this, 8 staying close pilots have been implemented across England with the aim of addressing these issues and developing different approaches to provide extended contact and support, accommodation or both, for residential care leavers.

2. Overview of the project

Scheme context and description

Project context

As in other parts of England, the number of referrals to children's services in Hampshire has been on the rise in recent years. At the start of the project in 2018, Hampshire had 147 young people in residential care, of which 29% (43) were 16 or 17 years old and within the age-range for the Fair Ways Staying Close project (DfE 2018). These young people were described as having varying levels of need, some with high level needs such as being at risk of child sexual exploitation (CSE), and involvement in drugs and gang culture. National statistics gathered annually (DfE 2017) reported 505 care leavers aged 19 to 21 in Hampshire, prior to the start of the Fair Ways Staying Close project, of whom:

- 75% (380) were reported to be in suitable accommodation (safe, secure and affordable) and 7% (35) were in unsuitable accommodation
- 44% (225) were in education, employment or training (EET) and 38% (190) were NEET (data was missing for 90 young people)

Hampshire is a large local authority with 5 districts. It relies on contracted residential providers, which means that young people are placed around the country. This was recognised as creating a “geographical disconnect” (local authority staff interview), particularly for young people returning to Hampshire from other areas after leaving care, and finding they have few local links. All young people leaving care in Hampshire have a right to supported accommodation (including shared accommodation and supported lodgings) or independent accommodation. Those leaving care to live independently are entitled to a Setting Up Home Allowance (Independent Living Fund) from the local authority to assist with furnishing their home. Care leavers can also access around 10 to 15 hours of floating support per week. This mainly involves access to a local authority leaving care worker, known as a personal adviser (PA) who works with them on their Pathway Plan¹ and provides support and advice with accommodation, education or employment, health, accessing benefits and building social networks and accessing leisure activities and local activity groups.

¹ All eligible, relevant and former relevant children should have a Pathway Plan, a co-produced document that sets out the support available from leaving care services and other agencies for young people once they have left care. The plan should be based on a needs assessment carried out before the young person leaves care and document the young person's goals across key areas of their life and the support required to achieve them. Pathway plans should be reviewed at least every 6 months.

As part of the Hampshire local offer to care leavers, young people are supported to obtain their national insurance number, passport and other identity documents, as well as support to access their care records.² They are also supported to open a bank account, have access to discretionary financial support in emergencies and to expenses linked with employment, education and training (for example, travel expenses for job interviews) and bursaries for education.

While for young people with a lower level of needs this might be sufficient, many young people in residential care have a high level of needs and may lack the necessary skills and support networks to manage with the reduced amount of professional support. For example, our focus group and interviews with residential care leavers in the area confirmed that young people often do not acquire basic skills such as cooking, maintaining their accommodation or managing money while they are in care. Furthermore, the reduction in direct support after care can be stark in comparison to that which young people receive whilst in care. It is these issues that the Fair Ways project seeks to address, as explained by the Fair Ways director:

“Young people are remaining in residential care with 24 hour support and many other supports around them in a placement. When they leave the residential home they normally move in to a placement that has very little if any support. Our project removes this metaphoric cliff edge with small steps from age 16 through to 20.”

Project aims and intended outcomes

The Fair Ways Staying Close project is 1 of 8 Staying Close projects supported by Round 2 of the Innovation Programme. It began in November 2017.

The project recognised that young people from residential care will have often entered care late in childhood and have struggled to settle, experiencing multiple placement breakdowns. Research also indicates that they have a higher level of mental health needs and a low level of independent living skills, which they may have struggled to gain during their previous episodes of care (Schofield, Larsson and Ward, 2017). This was confirmed by young people who attended the evaluation focus group, “...yeah, been in foster care, care home, I’ve been in all of them, and they don’t teach you independent skills.”

² The Children and Social Work Act 2017, introduced a requirement for all local authorities to publish a [Local Offer](#) for care leavers, outlining how the local authority will support care leavers. The HCC local authority offer was initiated after the Fair Ways project began. While the local offer is for all care leavers in the area, the Fair Ways project aims to provide a higher level of support and an extended transition for residential care leavers.

The Fair Ways project aimed to support 10 young people in Hampshire aged 16 to 20 whose last placement was residential care. The project was staffed by a project manager, project coordinator (during the first year of implementation), 2 key workers, 2 house managers and 1 clinical mental health specialist. The Fair Ways managing director had oversight of the project.

The project works with young people from the age of 16 in order to better prepare them for moving to independent living post-18. Support begins prior to young people leaving their residential unit. This was recognised by project staff and intervening earlier than most post-care accommodation providers, which tend to become involved after the young person leaves their placement. In doing so, the project aimed to reduce the anxiety and uncertainty associated with leaving care, by providing an extended transition pathway from care and a consistent professional support network. To achieve this the project included the following elements:

- a 2-stepped accommodation pathway incorporating a move to Fair Ways Staying Close post-16 residential units where young people are supported to develop independence skills and then, at 18, they are supported to transition into post-18 accommodation (supported lodgings, a house or a flat). During implementation, the project introduced the option for young people to remain in their project accommodation beyond 18 should they wish. Fair Ways uses 4 of its own post-16 residential units (which can accommodate 2 to 5 young people per unit) and works with local authority and private housing providers to secure post-18 accommodation for young people when required
- young people have access to the Fair Ways hub building, a drop in centre for care-experienced young people to access a mental health therapist as well as a range of other advice. It is also a venue for hosting education, learning and skills activities (such as cooking), a youth club and social activities. The hub hosts staff supervision and training (such as child development and trauma)
- young people have the option to maintain contact with 1 or 2 key workers from their previous residential unit to support them during their transition, in addition to the Staying Close key worker and their local authority PA
- to enable previous residential carers to continue working with young people after they move to the Fair Ways post-16 accommodation unit, the project aimed to introduce a new work pattern for previous carers, involving splitting their time between the residential unit and the post-16 unit and receiving training on supporting young people moving towards independent living, however, this was not fully implemented, as discussed above
- the proposed peer mentoring component was not provided as young people did not express an interest in it, though this remains a project objective

The project's stated aims were to achieve the following outcomes:

- increased suitable and sustainable accommodation and decreased risk of homelessness
- improved access to education, training and employment
- increased consistency of workers. The target is that the young people in the project have at least 1 consistent project key worker allocated to them, to work alongside them from the time they leave residential care through to age 21
- improve emotional and mental wellbeing by building lifelong support networks
- reduce harmful and risky behaviours. The target is that the project young people have no convictions and reduced missing episodes, substance misuse, self-harm and criminal activity

Theory of change

A workshop to revisit the project's initial theory of change (Figure 1, appendix 2) took place in October 2018. It was facilitated by the evaluation team and attended by the Fair Ways team, including the director and the project manager, and by 2 representatives of HCC (Placements Category Manager and Interim Placement Commissioning Team Manager). The in-depth discussions indicated a strong commitment by all for the project to succeed. HCC committed to increase social workers' awareness of the project and to recruit a staff member to review all residential care placements to identify possible referrals to the project. The workshop contributed to closer co-operation between Fair Ways and HCC and better mutual understanding of each other's perspectives. Following the workshop and the recruitment of a dedicated staff member to review all care leaver cases, 4 more referrals were made to the project.

The aim of the workshop was to revisit activities and outputs mid-way through the project and reach consensus as to the viability of proposed outcomes. The agreed interim and long term outcomes were incorporated into the revised theory of change (Figure 2, appendix 2), which formed the basis of the discussion in chapter 5. They include:

- being in secure and stable accommodation with post-18 move on accommodation identified in time
- being engaged in EET
- being better supported, with increased self-esteem and emotional resilience
- having better independent living skills and feeling prepared for leaving care

3. Overview of the evaluation

Evaluation aims

The 8 Staying Close projects were evaluated at individual project level by evaluation teams from the Universities of Oxford, York and Manchester Metropolitan (MMU). A common evaluation plan was designed by these evaluation teams to ensure consistency in methods, research questions and data gathered, to allow comparison of implementation processes, and experiences and outcomes for young people participating in the Staying Close projects. The evaluations aimed to describe the Staying Close approach adopted by each individual project, the impact of that approach on young people and the costs associated with the project.

Evaluation questions

The following research questions were agreed for all Staying Close evaluations:

- to what extent were the aims of the project achieved? What was in place previously and what was needed to facilitate successful implementation?
- how have young people, and other stakeholders, been involved in the co-production of the model?
- have support plans been developed and implemented as anticipated? Has there been meaningful contact with an identified worker?
- has staff training been rolled out effectively? Was there improved knowledge and understanding of needs of young people leaving residential care?
- what is the impact of Staying Close on outcomes for care leavers? How many young people:
 - are in accommodation that is suitable (safe, secure and affordable) and stable (with reference to unplanned moves or disruptions in tenancies)
 - are in EET appropriate to their wishes or needs
 - are physically healthy, have good emotional health, well-being and resilience
 - feel well supported
 - are ready for independent living
 - are resilient to unsafe behaviours, such as substance misuse; missing episodes; violence; involvement with the criminal justice system; unplanned early parenthood

- report good social connections, greater social integration?
- what has been the character of the support package (for example, what has been provided by the member of staff from their former children's home) and how has this helped the young person to avoid problems with their tenancy or other untoward outcomes?
- what are the costs of delivering the Staying Close intervention and what are the potential cost savings?

Evaluation methods

The evaluation of the Fair Ways Staying Close project took place between April 2018 and March 2020. It received ethics approval from the University of York and a data sharing agreement was signed with Fair Ways in October 2018. Findings are based on data collected between June 2018 and January 2020. The evaluation design comprised 3 components:

- a process evaluation to understand implementation and operation of the project to inform learning for sustainability and replication
- an exploration of impact to explore the types of outcomes achieved over time for young people using the project provision
- an economic component using a cost analysis approach to explore costs and potential saving associated with the project

These were underpinned by the following approaches:

- theory based evaluation using a contribution analysis to assess and understand if and how the Fair Ways Staying Close project contributed to the expected outcomes³
- descriptive, before and after data analysis of key outcomes (drawn from project monitoring data) and comparison to local and national statistics

³ Contribution analyses is a methodological approach used in the absence of a viable experimental design, and where it is therefore not possible to attribute observed results (outcomes) to the intervention being evaluated. It uses the project theory of change to examine the plausibility of the intervention (for example, the activities undertaken) in achieving the expected outcomes, taking into account other influencing factors that can be gathered via qualitative and quantitative project data and other existing research and available data to consider the likely contribution of the project to any change in outcomes.

- co-production and peer research. This involved consulting with care-experienced young people during a focus group to understand issues that they considered important for the evaluation to include and by delivering interview training to care leavers who contributed to the development of interview schedules and data collection as peer researchers

The following data (outlined in appendix 1) has been collected :

- 9 interviews with Fair Ways staff at baseline, midpoint and endpoint
- 2 interviews with local authority staff at baseline and endpoint
- 3 interviews with 2 young people at (1 at midpoint and 2 at endpoint)
- 1 focus group with 5 care-experienced young people at baseline
- 1 theory of change workshop with 8 participants
- outcome data from project monitoring spreadsheet and completed measures of wellbeing (Good Childhood Index (GCI) and Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS)) at entry, mid and endpoint (4)
- 1 survey with project key workers at endpoint
- monthly project update calls with the project manager
- document review and mapping of the local services for care leavers
- financial data for analysis evaluation

Completion of outcome measures by young people was patchy and the time between completion varied considerably within the cohort (from 3 months to 24 months after baseline measure). This limited scope for analysis.

Changes to evaluation methods

Two changes took place to compensate for the small number of young people and staff in the project, by enabling more in-depth information to be gathered:

- interviews were offered instead of a midpoint survey with young people (though take-up was very low) and interviews with project workers were undertaken instead of a midpoint survey
- 2 case studies were planned but were not undertaken due to the low take-up of interviews by young people at midpoint and endpoint

Limitations of the evaluation

The evaluation was designed for a small project (10 young people) to describe the implementation and the young people's experiences of the Fair Ways Staying Close intervention. As a consequence of the cohort size, it was agreed with the DfE at the evaluation design stage that a comparison group would not be constructed. This means that the evaluation has not been able to incorporate a counterfactual analysis. Instead, a contribution analysis, drawing on before and after data on outcome areas and qualitative data from staff and young people was used to explore the contribution of the project to any change in outcomes (see chapter 5). Analysis based on actual spend and conversations with the Fair Ways team combined with qualitative insights gathered during the evaluation, meanwhile, has been included within the cost analysis (chapter 7). Evaluation limitations include:

- Lower and later than expected referrals

At the time of reporting (March 2020) a total of 7 young people had been recruited to the project, but 1 left the project after 9 months and 1 was referred towards the end of the evaluation in December 2019. Low recruitment to the project was due to a number of factors as outlined above. Low numbers and delays to project entry limited the collection of sufficient data, particularly for follow-up analysis

- Short and variable intervention and evaluation follow-up time frames

A further limitation of the evaluation is the reduced and variable duration of the intervention and thus the evaluation timeframe for measuring change. This has limited the amount of data that could be analysed to establish the contribution of the intervention and its impact on the young people over time. The length of the intervention varied from 24 months for 1 person (who went into post 18 provision after 14 months) and between 4 and 12 months for the other 5 young people, as detailed in appendix 1.

- Low participation in evaluation interviews

A further challenge for the evaluation was the engagement of young people in the evaluation. Only 1 young person agreed to be interviewed at midpoint and the same young person and 1 other agreed at endpoint. This may be partly due to the high level of needs of the young people, their late referral to the project and the evaluation coinciding with a time of transition for the young people. Despite offering a flexible approach in terms of timing and method (telephone interviews, face to face with a peer researcher or an experienced researcher), we were only able to undertake interviews with 2 out of a possible 6 young people at endpoint. This highlights a need for more creative and flexible approaches for engaging with young people during the transition from care.

4. Process evaluation

Methods summary

Findings on the implementation of the Fair Ways Staying Close project are based on the following data: 14 interviews (9 with Fair Ways staff at different time points, 2 with local authority staff at baseline and endpoint, 3 with young people at midpoint and endpoint), 1 survey with key workers who worked directly with the young people and a theory of change workshop with Fair Ways staff and representatives of HCC.

Findings

The project in practice

The Fair Ways Staying Close project is continuing to support 6 of the 7 residential care leavers who entered the project. Despite a slow start, referrals have increased in year 2. The project has met most of its objectives (such as providing a supported 2-stage accommodation transition pathway to independence) and has adapted or removed some components in response to conditions within the local authority or young people's preferences. Project activities that were not fully delivered as intended, included the peer mentoring component and, to an extent, the staying close to a previous carer component. These appeared not to be of interest to some of the young people. Additionally, there were difficulties liaising with other residential providers to arrange formal contact with previous carers, which limited scope for maintaining relationships. Interviews with project staff indicated that a more detailed understanding of the target group and consultation with young people during project design may have helped tailor the project more closely to their needs and wishes.

The hub space offered young people leaving care with access to a mental health therapist and music therapy. Although a small number of the project group had accessed 1-1 support, most did not. The project instead utilised the therapist input by offering support and training to project staff, (for example, in child development and trauma) to assist them to better understand and respond to the young people they were supporting. The project manager and staff considered this to have made a valuable contribution to the level of support available, particularly for young people who preferred not to engage directly with mental health provision. Although the hub was meant to function as a social space for the young people, it was not used as such, as young people did not see it as a space where they could or would want to socialise. This might be due to the location of the hub being outside the city, and therefore some distance to travel, or that young people may not have felt a sense of

belonging to the project cohort. It was also possible that young people associated the space with clinical intervention rather than a space to socialise.

Facilitators for project progress

Data from interviews and surveys highlighted several factors that helped in setting up and delivering the project. These included:

Access to post-16 accommodation

An important enabler in the early set-up of the project was that Fair Ways already had existing houses within its own provision where they could accommodate project young people aged 16 to 18. This allowed control over the accommodation and enabled the project to respond swiftly as soon as referrals to the project were made.

Positive multi-disciplinary working

The positive co-operation between different staff such as that reported by key workers in relation to the mental health therapist and the home managers has been a positive contribution to the quality of work and joined-up approach to supporting young people. The hub therapist can provide input at the monthly review meetings for project young people and provides monthly supervision directly to project staff around reflective practice and issues. This has helped staff to better understand and support their young people's needs.

Flexible, needs-led approach

The project was able to offer a level of flexibility in the transition pathway and a needs-led approach to ongoing support. This was seen as a particular strength:

“The thing I quite like about Staying Close is the flexibility over the transition period and that they can be extended to fit around what the young person needs, and also that you’re building a relationship prior to the actual placement move.”
(Local authority lead)

The project intervention aimed to provide young people with a tapered level of support to match their growing independence and individual need, which began before the move from their care placement and stuck with them beyond their move to independent living post 18. This model provided 30 to 35 hours of direct work a week for each 16 and 17 year old in the project, reduced gradually to 15 to 20 and then to 10 hours a week for those aged 18 and over. In 1 case, the young person's intensive support package was maintained for longer until they were able to manage with a reduced level of support.

The focus group with young people confirmed the need for gradual and individualised support to help them practice and develop independent living skills. They also appreciated that 1 of the Fair Ways residential units had a landline and a dedicated mobile number for former residents to use should they require advice or contact. Young people spoke about the importance of support and advice from experienced staff who understood children, particularly care-experienced children:

“If you haven’t got kids you don’t know that all kids aren’t the same, they do different things at different stages, they speak differently, you know what I mean, whereas they just assume, ‘Well they’re out of social services, oh they’re a naughty kid’, you know what I mean, and it’s like we’re not, we’re just misunderstood.”

Listening and responding to young people

Creating and embedding opportunities to consult with and understand the views of young people was described as important learning and central to the ongoing development of the project. The project managers and workers felt that this could have been stronger whilst setting up the project, and that they had since encouraged young people to share views and had acted upon their wishes at an individual level (regarding their choice of which adult to stay close to) and at project level by adapting the project offer (extended in-house post-18 accommodation and peer mentoring). In response to this learning, a youth participation worker has been recruited into the project to create direct links with the young people to offer information and provide opportunities for them to feed into the project: “meeting with the young people... say, what could’ve been done differently? What was good? What could be improved?” (Project manager).

The importance of extended support

Several project staff felt that an important practice message was the need to engage earlier with young people (prior to leaving residential care), and challenge the assumption that relationships with professionals need to be cut at the time young people move from their placement or leave care at 18. One advised that ending contact denies young people the human need for continuity, recognised as an important principle for growth and development. They noted that discontinuity of relationships and the uncertainty that can be associated with leaving care, contributes to “increased levels of anxiety for young people” which, in turn, reduces their capacity to focus on employment and education and wider areas of their lives. This approach is central to how the project is evolving and working with local authority and other care providers, as a project staff member explained:

“[As] an organisation, that’s something that we’ve probably learnt, that I think we’ve probably sat back a lot and allowed the local authority to maybe make those

decisions about when they're going to move the young people, and been like, 'Look, we're just the provider, we don't make these decisions'. But I think now understanding the importance of how that [uncertainty] creates so much anxiety, we're probably doing much more now to, for even our other young people, fight for decisions to be made much earlier, and feeling empowered, I think, to say 'actually, you can stay in touch with these young people.'

Challenges to project progress

Referrals

An initial lack of referrals was a challenge to early progress of the Fair Ways Staying Close project. This delayed the project and meant that it was operating below expected capacity during the evaluation timeframe. Interviews with staff identified several reasons for this. At the time of project implementation, Fair Ways did not have sufficient young people aged 16 in their own residential homes who could transition into the project, the suitable cohort in the local authority was small and HCC was slow to engage with the project and identify referrals. Data gathered from interviews with the local authority suggest that earlier and clearer communication between the local authority and the project regarding referral numbers, eligibility, awareness of the scope of the project offer and the costs of the intervention could have overcome this challenge sooner. Project staff agreed that further to closer discussions with HCC, collaboration and referrals had improved:

"We've put a lot of work into building relationships, with Hampshire. I think if there's one learning point that we've got from the project it's been that we should've put in more effort earlier on. They're referring to us. They now see the benefits of the plan. They see it's working in partnership." (Fair Ways staff member)

The positive impact of improved buy-in and co-operation between Fair Ways and HCC was paying off in year 2, with the project being more closely integrated with the care planning process (being considered alongside other providers) leading to the identification of potential referrals, as described by the local authority lead:

"So anyone that's in residential and coming up to 16, I will be talking to the social worker about post-16 provision, but I'll also have a separate conversation with [Fair Ways] Staying Close... what is quite apparent is the amount of 2-way communication between our organisations. [The project manager] is a really useful contact, we seem to know what's going on all the time in planning the lead-up. As an example, we've been talking about [young person] as a potential for Staying Close probably for the last 10 months."

Going forward, the project was exploring expansion into nearby local authorities to boost referral rates. The Fair Ways director remarked that being an unregulated post-16 provision (as per existing guidelines) may pose an obstacle to gaining buy-in from commissioners who, in light of continued national debates and negative media coverage, may be reluctant to use an unfamiliar provider. This had not been an issue for HCC, who already worked with Fair Ways as a provider of children's homes. National debates about unregulated post-16 provision are ongoing at the time of this report, and may impact on the project as it continues to develop.

Staying Close to a previous carer

One of the innovative elements of the project involved 1 or 2 residential carers from the previous residential unit continuing to provide support to young people after the move to the project's Staying Close accommodation. This has not worked as expected due to young people's wishes, previous carers being unavailable and difficulties in making arrangements with other providers to enable contact.

Only 2 of the young people in the project maintained contact with previous carers: 1 young person who was referred to the project from a Fair Ways residential home and the other from an external provider. The latter preferred to engage on an informal basis for a short period of time. Two young people interviewed explained that although they had wanted to maintain contact with a previous key worker, it had not been possible because their worker had left the organisation; "the only person I really wanted to talk to doesn't work anymore". Another commented that "everyone who was at [residential unit] has left anyway."

Interviews with project staff suggest that this component had been difficult to implement, particularly in establishing a formal, business led approach to arranging contact with another residential care provider. To enable a formal approach to continued contact, contractual arrangements between Fair Ways and the employer of the previous carer were necessary. Such arrangements might include paying for staff time and formally timetabling work patterns to enable staff to travel and spend time with the young person. For this to work effectively, buy-in from both providers is needed and it was not clear that the will was there from previous providers (who were after all, competitors) and some previous carers. In 1 case, the project attempted to facilitate such contact by offering to pay the previous provider for staff to visit and maintain contact with the young person, however, the provider would only allow phone contact. It is unclear as to why this was, however, it may be partly reflective of the residential carer role, which is often based around shift work and often high levels of contact to support their existing caseload.

The project manager indicated that more work was needed around co-operation and contractual arrangements for Fair Ways to implement this approach when working

with young people from other care placement providers. The project team also acknowledged that an important lesson was that not all young people wished to remain close to or in contact with previous carers. Project staff had responded to these wishes and refocused their efforts to supporting young people to maintain or forge relationships with their preferred support networks, such as family or friends:

“We’ve had a number who really didn’t necessarily want to maintain [relationships] with someone from the children’s home. What we’ve found is that that relationship isn’t always the most important for young people. So, we’ve listened to what young people have said and fed-back, and the relationship [they] want to maintain, we now ask the young person, who is the key relationship in their life.”

Timeframes for moving into the project and accessing support

Another challenge to the project’s planned approach related to managing transition timescales for referrals, which allowed the project to carry out preparation work with young people prior to moving into the project. The project’s preferred approach involved a 2 to 3 month transition period where young people would be supported to prepare for the move from their residential placement into the project’s Staying Close post-16 unit. The aim was to meet with the young person and their current workers early, discuss the project and the young person’s wishes, and create a transition pathway from their placement. For 2 young people in the project, the timescale had been reduced to a month, when referrals were expedited by the local authority after the closure of a local children’s home by Ofsted. In this case, there had been little co-operation from the home, and the Fair Ways project team had experienced difficulties in managing contact and setting up formal arrangements (for example, to co-ordinate support plans and avoid previous carers just turning up in the new accommodation). Although the project was able to adapt accordingly to hastened timescales, project staff emphasised that a gradual transition was preferred to avoid uncertainty for the young person and to provide scope for the project team and young people to get to know each other prior to the move, as was the case for a recent referral “He visited the [Staying Close] accommodation and met his new key worker last week and his key worker has been for dinner with him at his current home”. Where project key workers were able to involve young people in the process before moving into the project, they felt that this had a positive impact on the young person’s engagement with the project as they had time to become familiar with the project and staff, and contribute to plans for moving.

Additional to this, some local authority processes and perceptions posed a potential barrier to implementing the preferred transition timescale. A project manager explained that some social workers and residential key workers were reluctant to begin transition work early, so as not to disrupt young people. That said, going forward, there seemed to be an expectation to work to a shorter timeframe to fit with

local authority processes (such as placement notice periods), rather than the needs of young people primarily. For example, 1 of the project managers explained:

"We've now come to an agreement that [the] transition period is 28 days rather than 3 months....that's based on, the way that the Local Authority works is that they provide a 28 day notice at children's homes, so they know when the young person needs to leave the home. So as soon as they hand in the notice to say the young person's leaving, we start the transition period...to their final day there."

Limitations

Limitations to the process evaluation related to the small number of young participants in the project (and evaluation), and compressed timescale for delivering the project at capacity. This led to a reduced timeframe for testing the intervention.

Conclusions

The main conclusions arising from the implementation of the Fair Ways project are:

- a lack of communication between Fair Ways and HCC at the start of the project affected referrals and timescales for project delivery
- the project was open to young people from Fair Ways' own residential units and other providers. Gaining co-operation from other providers when young people move from those providers into the project was cited as essential to ensure that professional and valuable contact can be maintained should the young person wish. This has contractual and resource implications that need to be worked out between the 2 providers
- some components of the project were not taken up by young people. For example, the hub has not functioned as a social space because of its location. Alternative locations and more accessible activities could be offered to young people, further to consultation with them
- most young people in the project had not accessed the support or advice of the hub therapist. Project staff suggested that some may have been reluctant to be associated with mental health provision. To enable the project to draw on the therapist's expertise, direct work with project workers was undertaken to develop greater understanding of the needs of vulnerable young people
- some components of the model (previous carer contact, transition timescales and engaging project young people in peer mentoring) require consideration and adaptation. Project staff recognised that consultation with residential care leavers and HCC staff was essential to maximising buy-in to the project offer

5. Outcomes evaluation

This was a small scale evaluation of a project for 10 young people over a short intervention period. As such, we would not expect to provide conclusive evidence of impact at this point. The sample size and limited period of the intervention, meant that it was not possible to measure a difference in outcomes that could be attributed to the project within the timeframe of this evaluation. Instead, analysis of qualitative data from the 2 interviews conducted with young people at endpoint, alongside the project monitoring data suggest some early progress, with young people reporting improvements in their independent living skills during the evaluation.

Methods summary

Data on outcomes was gathered via the Fair Ways project referral and monitoring spreadsheet for 6 young people, completion of the GCI, interviews with young people, and surveys and interviews with Fair Ways project managers and key workers. The timeframes for follow-up varied depending on the date of entry to the project and were mostly too short to expect to see change in outcomes over time. For example, young people were asked to complete the GCI and SWEMWBS measures at entry to the project (baseline) and at evaluation endpoint (or at the point of leaving the project), however, as shown in Table 4 (see appendix 1) the time between completion points varied considerably, preventing analysis at group level.

Findings

This section explores whether there are early indications that the Fair Ways project was contributing to progress and experiences for young people in the project. It discusses the plausibility of the model to have an effect on the project's proposed outcomes, within the context of wider evidence of what works, and examines monitoring and interview data to explore any change since entering the project.

Existing evidence base

Existing literature on the risk and protective factors for positive transitions from care to independent adulthood suggest that the Fair Ways model, as set out in the theory of change (see Figures 1 and 2), was a plausible approach towards achieving improved outcomes for young people leaving residential care. In particular, 3 components of the project address some of the key challenges facing care leavers; those being: preparation for independent living; age and needs appropriate, supported post-care accommodation; and continuity of support.

As discussed in chapter 1, research shows that residential care leavers tend to leave their care placements at an earlier age and often have more complex needs than other care leavers. In addition, and like many young people leaving care, they are often poorly prepared and lacking independent living skills and the emotional and practical support to take on the responsibilities of independent adult living at such a young age (Stein 2012). This can lead to post-care accommodation instability and for around one-third of care leavers, episodes of homelessness, which can impact on other outcomes such as wellbeing and EET participation (Gill 2017).

The Fair Ways offer of a gradual and supported transition from care, via a supported 16+ residential unit and support to find and move to independent post-18 accommodation, should contribute gradual, extended and improved transition experiences. Based on emerging findings from project staff and young people and monitoring data, the project appears to be offering a degree of post-care certainty and stability within which young people are given time, support and opportunities to develop the practical and emotional skills and support networks to manage the move towards independence.

Outcomes

Findings are presented for each of the outcomes identified by the project (see Theory of Change in chapter 2), as listed in the bullet points below:

- Young people are in secure and stable post-16 accommodation and future post-18 move-on accommodation is identified in time

Two young people had remained in their post-16 project accommodation when they turned 18. This meant that their accommodation was no longer paid for by the local authority as they had legally left care. To maintain stability, the project supported the young people to take on the tenancy agreement and helped them arrange housing benefit. Another young person was still in their 16+ project accommodation at endpoint.

There was some evidence of accommodation moves during the project, with 2 (33%) of the group moving. One young person requested to move from their project accommodation and was supported by their social worker and the project manager to do so. Another young person appeared to have moved twice, including moving out of the project accommodation because of unacceptable behaviour. This young person had not settled well, and became disruptive to others. The project staff felt that they could not fully meet the young person's needs, and so they were helped to move to another organisation prior to turning 18 years of age. Their Staying Close project worker planned to re-establish contact, once the young person had settled in.

There was no evidence of young people being homeless during the evaluation time frame. Interviews with project staff, suggested that due to the level of needs of some project young people, they might have been considered at risk of homelessness on leaving care at 18. Staff felt that the Fair Ways project had worked with them to help reduce that risk by offering the opportunities to improve their independence skills, which they had not had while in their children's homes, and practise living independently with support to help them better manage and sustain their home.

Qualitative data from young people during the focus group and interviews indicated that the type of support offered by the project (stepped accommodation and intense and bespoke support) was needed for young people leaving care (see comments in chapter 6). One young person, who had valued the help they had received from the project, noted "I never had that support until I moved into Fair Ways."

- Young people are engaged in EET

At endpoint, 4 of the 6 (66%) young people were NEET. This is higher than figures reported for all care leavers aged 18 nationally (30%) and care leavers aged 19 to 21 in Hampshire (38%), as reported by DfE (2019). For those in EET, 1 was attending college full time and 1 had left the project and the type of activity was unknown.

Although most young people were NEET, there was some evidence that they were being supported by the project towards identifying EET options. Three of the young people had identified aspirations in relation to future employment, during their work with staff: 1 to obtain a sports qualification, 1 to work with children and 1 to obtain a full-time job. Two young people had been engaged in external apprenticeships during the follow-up time frame and 1 young person had been offered some paid work experience within the project, on completion of their ASDAN award.

- Young people have better independent living skills and are better prepared for leaving care

The 2 young people who were interviewed at endpoint stated that their independent living skills had improved in most areas (such as self-care, managing budgets, time keeping and cooking). One of the young people mentioned having improved their diet since living in their project accommodation and another young person felt that the ability to manage money had improved with the help of the Fair Ways project. They reported that they had gained these skills through the support they received from their worker as well as their personal effort and having the time and support to practice, which involved "making mistakes like normal people do."

- Young people are better supported, have increased self-esteem and wellbeing and are emotionally resilient

There was some indication that young people felt better supported. At endpoint 4 out of 6 (66%) young people identified having someone close to them. Two were in regular contact with a parent, 1 with a sibling and 1 with a support worker and a friend. One young person interviewed at endpoint indicated a level of self-sufficiency, explaining that 20% of what they had achieved was due to the Fair Ways project and 80% was down to themselves.

Data from the GCI was used to explore young people's subjective wellbeing and life satisfaction. The SWEMWBS was intended to capture psychological wellbeing, however there was insufficient data to utilise this measure (see table 4, appendix 1).⁴ The GCI scores of subjective wellbeing were mixed and showed improvement for 1 young person, no change for another and a deterioration for 2 young people between baseline and follow-up. A further 2 young people joined the project too late to capture any progress within the evaluation timeframe. Overall, the data was insufficient to reach firm conclusions as to progress over time, either due to the short follow-up timescale or attrition rates at various data collection points.

Data recorded on the project's referral and monitoring spreadsheet provided an indication of reduction in difficulties and risk for project young people during the project intervention. For example, 3 young people had reduced involvement in offending by endpoint and 2 were reported as having fewer absconding episodes. Project monitoring data also recorded that a perceived risk of CSE for 1 young person had reduced by endpoint, as had physical health concerns for another.

- Support from Fair Ways project workers

Both young people interviewed were happy with the support they received through the project. One felt they had a good relationship with their project worker, "...yeah they were pretty spot on" and another valued having the project staff around "Yeah, its stops me getting lonely". From the perspective of key workers responding to the survey, the work with the young people included advice alongside emotional and practical support. This included help with planning and cooking a meal (including group and individual cooking lessons) and with budgeting. Young people were also assisted to keep their shared accommodation clean and to share housework responsibilities. Project support also encompassed relationship skills, to help young people connect and maintain relationships with family and friends, should they wish, and to develop new networks. This could involve intensive support to navigate family situations, as the project manager explained; "the post-16 workers really supported a

⁴ The SWEMWBS was introduced to capture wellbeing across combined sample for the 8 staying close pilot projects. The measure is intended to capture psychological wellbeing over time for samples of at least 30, therefore it cannot be utilised in this single evaluation of 7 young people.

young person to understand the relationship, because it's quite complex. We will always maintain that and help them visit or do phone calls, or whatever way that they want that to be."

Other support included offering ASDAN⁵ training (preparing for adulthood) for project young people and support with EET, such as assisting with writing their CV and applying for jobs. Key workers also engaged in advocacy for project young people. This included increasing understanding and awareness of young people's needs amongst professionals from other services with which project young people were involved, such as the Jobcentre. Project staff reported that young people were listened to and invited to give feedback and had access to a dedicated youth participation worker. This was evident in the adaptations to the project offer, made in response to young people's wishes (for example, pausing plans to develop peer mentoring). Young people were also encouraged to contribute to their plans and to stay in touch after leaving the Fair Ways project. Such contact after leaving care was regarded by staff as contributing to self-worth, self-esteem and feeling that they continue to be cared for. The project also provided support to apply for housing benefits at age 18 and help with rental costs for post-18 accommodation, if needed.

Limitations

As discussed in chapter 3, the low number of young people participating in both the project and evaluation and the variable duration of the intervention have limited the evaluation's ability to explore the extent to which the project has had an impact on outcomes. Completion of outcome measures was patchy and follow-up timeframes varied from 3 to 24 months after baseline, (see Table 4, appendix 1).

Conclusions

Two young people had remained settled in their accommodation for around 12 months. There was some reduction in risk behaviour and improvement in life skills. Although most young people were NEET at evaluation endpoint, they were receiving support to identify career pathways. Most young people had been in the project less than 9 months. It was, therefore, too soon to assess impact on outcomes. Fair Ways should continue to record progress for project young people to understand the longer term impact of their work on accommodation stability and other outcome areas.

⁵ ASDAN is a registered charity and awarding body that specialises in the "advancement of education, by providing opportunities for all learners to develop their personal and social attributes and levels of achievement." See the [ASDAN](#) website for further information.

6. The voices of young people

Methods summary

This evaluation used a peer research approach, whereby care-experienced young people were trained to interview other young people across the 8 staying close projects. Peer researchers were accompanied and supported by an evaluation researcher. Two young people from the project were interviewed at endpoint by a peer researcher. A focus group was conducted with care-experienced young people from Hampshire at baseline. It was attended by 5 young people.

Findings

The focus group confirmed the need for individualised support to prepare for leaving care, such as that offered by the Fair Ways Staying Close project:

“Some people can’t be bothered to take the time to show you how to be independent, or they don’t sit down with you and tell you how hard it’s going to be but you can do it, sort of thing, they just think ‘Just do it yourself now, you’re old enough to work it out, here’s the instruction book’.”

“That’s why I get in trouble with the police quite a lot, because I haven’t had that self-support where they can help me not become bad.... Yeah, you can learn together, but you need someone else who has done it... But I never had that support until I moved into Fair Ways.” (Excerpt from the focus group with young people).

Data collected from the young people via interview was limited. That which was available suggested a need for more support to prepare for moving on from highly supported care placements, where everything is done for them. Young people commented on the lack of opportunities to practice independent living skills whilst in care, as a young person described:

“...they don’t teach you independent skills. Well the care home did but they were just pants, but foster care don’t really teach you to be independent, they do it for you, until you get to a point where you’re too lazy and then they’re just ‘You have to do it yourself’.”

Young people who were interviewed felt that their life skills, (such as housework, managing money or living with others) had improved whilst being part of the Fair Ways Staying Close project:

"Post-16, they gradually get you out, like they get you ... using the washing machine or whatever, and I knew how to do a washing machine anyway, but post-16 generally does independence [skills]."

"I think some people don't really put into account washing up and all of that lot and doing your washing and all of this. Sometimes people aren't prepared for that and sometimes also some people aren't prepared for ... you have got to get to places, you have got to use your own travel."

Young people seemed to like their accommodation and 1 was "happy enough" with where they were living and with house rules "they're normal rules that any house would have". One young person particularly appreciated having more freedom while living in their project accommodation:

"We have got the freedom; you don't have a member of staff tagging along with you because you're in a kids' home...with you no matter where you go. Yeah, and you can make your decisions yourself."

Another young person was "just happy to have a roof and 4 walls, truthfully". This young person, had experienced many care placement moves and felt that the move into the Fair Ways Staying Close accommodation was par for the course, rather than their decision: "I didn't get a choice. I just get moved around a lot. I just kind of go wherever I am sent really."

There was some indication from 1 respondent that the project could improve communication, perhaps texting young people rather relying on them being home when staff came to visit.

Limitations

Only 2 project young people agreed to be interviewed. Although representing a third of the evaluation cases, it does reduce the representativeness of the data.

Conclusions

If the intervention continues beyond the completion of the evaluation (March 2020), it would be important to capture regular feedback from young people to ensure that the project was meeting their needs. This includes making sure that young people understand the nature of the Staying Close intervention and what support it can offer them when preparing for and embarking upon the journey to independent living. Regular consultation groups or seeking views via social media or creative methods will assist the project in continuing to meet the needs of their young people.

7. Cost analysis

Methodology

This analysis was conducted on the basis of pre and post-intervention data provided by Fair Ways for 5 young people. For a detailed explanation of the method, please see appendix 3. The analysis combines 2 data sources:

- baseline and endpoint data supplied by 5 young people. This data covers the following categories: education, employment or training (EET) status; placement moves (accommodation stability); drug taking behaviour; criminal activity; absconding; sexualised behaviour and physical health
- estimates from Fair Ways project staff about the savings the project generates for the local authority in the form of residential care and supported accommodation costs that it no longer has to pay

The advantage of this approach is that it uses real baseline and endpoint data supplied by young people who have been supported by the project. The limitation of the approach is that the pre and endpoint data are insufficient to provide evidence on the preventative effects of the approach implemented by Fair Ways. For example, a young person may have no offending behaviour before referral and none during the intervention through Fair Ways. In the context of this cost analysis, that will show as no change or saving. However, it may be that, without Fair Ways, that young person would have fallen into a pattern of offending behaviour. As such, the preventative effect of the project may actually be significant and could have prevented the local authority, the police or other partners from incurring significant additional cost.

Results

Table 1: Indicative savings calculated

Category of cost saving	Number of young people	Total value or saving (with no attribution adjustment)	Low Attribution (33%)	Medium Attribution (50%)	High Attribution (66%)
A positive change in education, employment or training status	0	-	-	-	-

Category of cost saving	Number of young people	Total value or saving (with no attribution adjustment)	Low Attribution (33%)	Medium Attribution (50%)	High Attribution (66%)
Fewer placement moves than indicated at baseline	2	£6,930	£2,287	£3,465	£4,574
Reduction in drug taking compared with baseline data	0	-	-	-	-
Reduction in criminal activity (unrelated to drug taking or sexualised behaviour)	3	£6,216	£2,051	£3,108	£4,103
Fewer absconding episodes compared to baseline data	2	£2,719	£897	£1,360	£1,795
Fewer school or college exclusions	1	£12,007	£3,962	£6,004	£7,925
Reduction in sexualised behaviour	1	£13,082	£4,317	£6,541	£8,634
Improvement in physical health	1	£65	£21	£33	£43
	Sub-total	£41,019	£13,535	£20,511	£27,074

Category of cost saving	Number of young people	Total value or saving (with no attribution adjustment)	Low Attribution (33%)	Medium Attribution (50%)	High Attribution (66%)
Residential care cost savings for the local authority	4	£311,672	£311,672	£311,672	£311,672
Supported accommodation cost savings for the local authority	4	£29,110	£29,110	£29,110	£29,110
	Total	£381,801	£354,317	£361,293	£367,856

Table 1 shows the indicative (estimated) savings calculated through this approach for each of the low, medium and high attribution scenarios (that is 33%, 50% or 66% of observed changes can be attributed to the project). The key points are that:

- indicative annual savings associated with the baseline and endpoint data are relatively small: they range from a total (across the 5 young people combined) of £13,535 in a low attribution scenario to £27,074 in a high attribution scenario. This is mainly because the baseline data does not contain many incidents or activities that are costly to the state. For example, the young people typically had not been absconding, had not had regular placement moves and weren't regularly committing crimes
- placement cost savings account for the vast majority of the total estimated savings to the state (as the cost of placing a young person in Fair Ways accommodation is considerably lower than the cost of local authority residential care): these don't vary according to the different attribution settings because they are already based on the assumption that Fair Ways is responsible for the full saving

The indicative savings above are for a 1 year period. With the exception of residential care costs, it is feasible that all of them could persist for longer (residential care costs cannot because it is assumed that the young people would have left local authority residential care after 4 months). Table 2 below, therefore shows the 2 and

3 year indicative savings. These have been calculated by applying the government's standard discount rate of 3.5% to the 1 year savings.

Table 2: Two-year and three-year indicative savings

	Low Attribution (33%)	Medium Attribution (50%)	High Attribution (66%)
Two-year indicative savings	£381,285	£402,153	£421,791
Three-year indicative savings	£407,308	£441,583	£473,839

The project's anticipated total spend during the Innovation Programme period is £467,200, of which it estimates that 22% (£103,409) are start-up costs that wouldn't be incurred under a business as usual model. Net spend is therefore estimated at £363,791. Based on the results from the cost analysis, the project would be generating a net saving to the state in all scenarios except the 1 year, low attribution scenario. However, the significant assumptions and limitations involved in the calculation of these results should be noted.

8. Summary of key findings on 7 practice features and 7 outcomes

As reported in the Innovation Programme Round 1 Report (Sebba et al 2017), evidence from Round 1 evaluations led the DfE to identify 7 features of practice and 7 outcomes to explore in subsequent rounds. Those features evident in the Fair Ways project are outlined.

Multi-disciplinary skill sets

Young people have access to key workers, residential managers, a mental health therapist and participation worker alongside their local authority PA. The therapist will carry out mental health assessments and will undertake 1 to 1 therapy or signpost to other services. Few young people accessed this and instead, the therapist attends monthly reviews for young people and provides monthly support and supervision to project staff to increase their skills and knowledge of working with vulnerable young people, who have experienced trauma. Project worker support for the young people includes developing practical skills, such as house-sharing roles and responsibilities (keeping communal spaces clean), relationship skills (maintaining positive relationships), ASDAN training (preparing for adulthood skills), and support with EET including writing a CV and applying for jobs.

High intensity and consistency of practitioner

The project has 2 house managers, access to a clinical therapist and 2 key workers who provide intensive and individualised support to project young people in project. The plan is for the key workers to continue to support the young people when they move into their post-18 accommodation and beyond, tapering support as young people increase their skills and move further towards independence. The project also seeks to facilitate continuity of young people's relationships with 1 or 2 key workers from their previous residential placement. It is too early at this stage to comment on the impact of this approach on young people's wellbeing and outcomes.

Outcomes

Young people involved in the project are expected to improve their outcomes through the support they are receiving and having a consistent key worker and support to access other services such as therapists at the Fair Ways hub. Data on outcomes was collected at baseline and endpoint of the evaluation. We do not have sufficient data at this stage to comment on the outcomes for the young people as a result of the intervention.

Reducing risk for children

The extension of the intensive support young people receive in the project through the two-stepped accommodation is expected to reduce the risk of homelessness and other risks that young people might encounter as they leave care. The limited timeframe for the intervention means it is too soon to evidence any change, though some reduction in offending was recorded by the project for 3 young people (see chapter 5).

Creating greater stability for children

The two-stepped accommodation (16-18 and over 18) aims to provide stability to the young people in the project, allowing them to be better prepared to manage as they leave care and to experience a supported and extended transition to independent living. The project has extended its post-16 accommodation offer to enable project young people to remain in the same project accommodation after the age of 18 (instead of supporting a move to another post-18 option). This has enabled continuity and stability for 2 of the project young people, who will also be supported to find move-on accommodation should they wish to move at a later date

Increasing wellbeing for children and families

Young people's subjective and psychological wellbeing was measured using the GCI and the SWEMWBS. Evidence of change was not possible due to limitations in the data.

Generating better value for money

A cost analysis was conducted by York Consulting and is reported in section 7. The cost analysis suggests that the project has the potential to generate a net saving to the state. Based on the results from the project costs and potential savings related to outcomes and accommodation, the 2 year indicative savings range from £381,285 to £421,791

9. Conclusions and recommendations

Fair Ways is contributing to the range of accommodation options for residential care leavers in the local authority and providing access to individual and intensive transition support, additional to that provided by mainstream leaving care services in the area.

Findings at this stage appear to suggest that the project's accommodation and support model is needed for residential care leavers. Some components require further consideration and further monitoring of outcomes will help assess the long-term impact.

The project did not reach the target number of young people due to the lower than anticipated number of young people from residential care within the age range for the project. This was compounded by an initial lack of communication between Fair Ways and HCC regarding making referrals, which had an effect on the speed of project implementation and its ability to reach capacity. This highlights the importance of gaining an early understanding of the target population (for example, the number leaving residential care in the area) and referral procedures amongst key stakeholders. The need for earlier buy-in from referring parties, maintaining effective channels of communication and establishing agreed systems for identifying and planning future referrals between the local authority and the project was an important learning point for project sustainability.

Gaining co-operation from other providers when young people move into the Fair Ways Staying Close project is essential to ensure a smooth transition and so that professional and valuable contact can be maintained should the young person wish. This may be easier said than done in an environment where residential providers are competitors. It carried contractual, resource and administrative implications, for example paying for the key worker from the previous provider to stay in touch with the young person.

Establishing effective communication and joint working early to enable agreements to be worked out between the different providers, could improve the process and enable young people to stay close to carers should they wish. The project has increased its focus on supporting young people to maintain or forge contacts with family and friends, to build a new support system to stay close to going forward.

Some components require further consideration, for example, the use and location of the hub meeting and training space, (both to encourage social activities and provide access to the mental health therapist) and the peer mentoring. Consultation and continued participation work (via the participation worker) with young people to understand what type of social support they require, will help to tailor the offer to meet their particular needs, interests and wishes.

Fair Ways should also continue to monitor and record outcomes, to enable assessment and evaluation of the longer term impact of this intervention.

Appendix 1. Data collection summary

Seven young people were referred to the project between its start in January 2018 and the evaluation endpoint in December 2019. The duration of project intervention ranged from 3 months to 24 months. With the exception of 1 young person who was placed in Fair Ways aged 16 at the start of the project (January 2018), the other young people joined 12 months or more after project start. Two young people were referred to Fair Ways in December 2018 and January 2019, after the children's home where they had been placed was closed down. This determined a shorter transition period than initially envisaged. Another young person from Fair Ways was referred to the project in January 2019, followed by another in March 2019, and another in August 2019. One young person moved from the project to another organisation due to behaviour issues. Six were included in the evaluation data collection.

The following tables show data gathered from evaluation participants:

Table 3: Summary of data collection

	Baseline No of participants	Midpoint No of participants	Endpoint No of participants
Interviews - professionals	3	5	3
Survey - professionals	-	-	6
Theory of change workshop - professionals	5	-	-
Focus Group - young people	5	-	-
Interviews - young people	-	1	2
Outcome monitoring data – young people	6	-	5
GCI & SWEMWBS – young people	5	2	4

Table 4: Completion of evaluation measures (GCI and SWEMWBS)

Young person	Baseline	Midpoint	Endpoint or exit (leaving the project)
A	Yes	Yes	Yes 24 months after baseline
B	Yes	No	Yes 10 months after baseline
C	No	No	No
D	Yes	No	Yes 5 months after baseline
E	Yes	Not applicable (exit)	Yes 3 months after baseline (exit)
F	Yes	Yes	No

Completion of outcome measures was patchy and follow-up timeframes varied considerably from 3 to 24 months after baseline. Only 2 of the young people completed outcome measures over a longer period of time, as indicated in table 4.

Appendix 2. Fair Ways Staying Close Project Theory of Change

Figure 1: Original Theory of Change

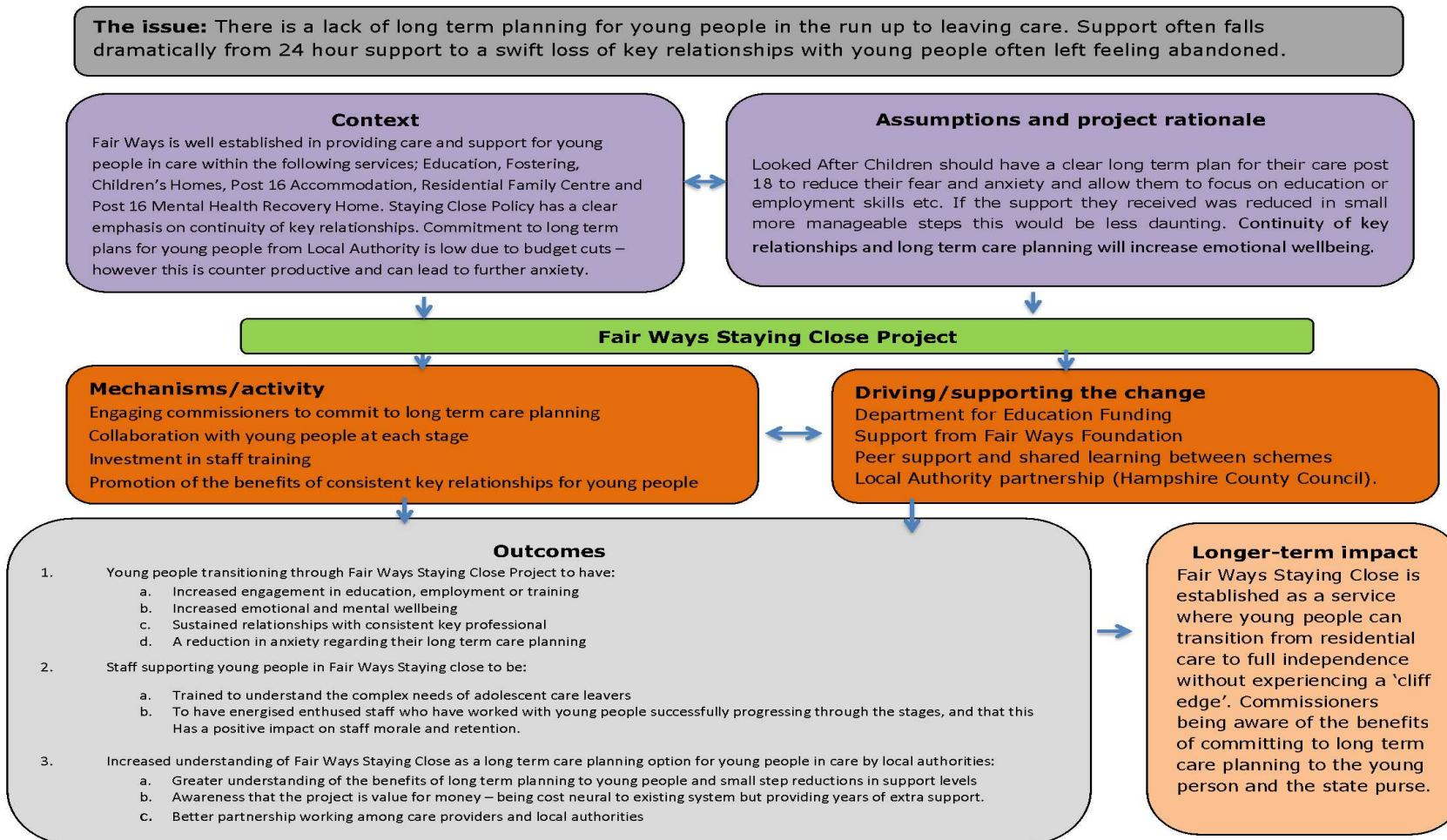
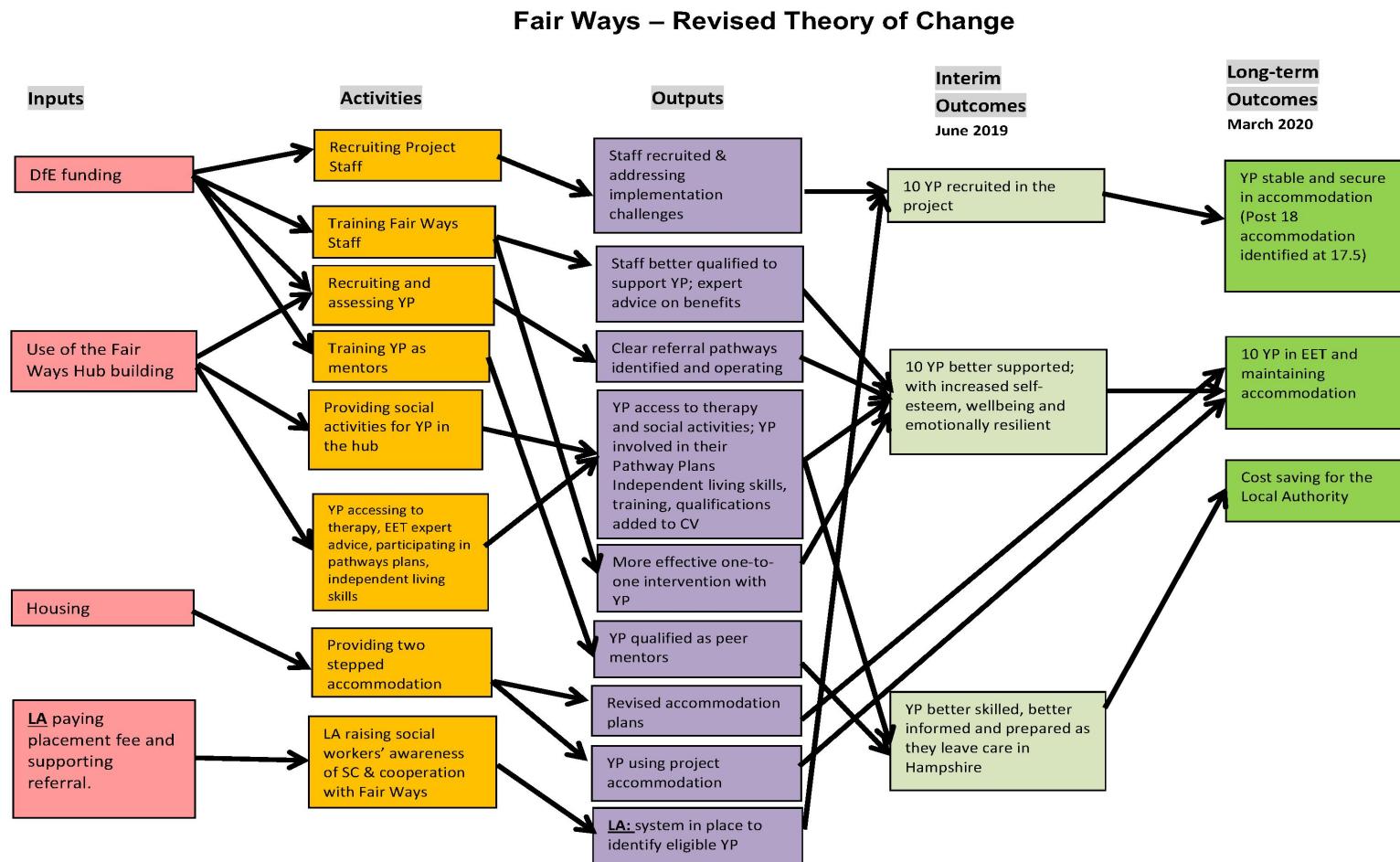


Figure 2: Revised Theory of Change



Appendix 3. Cost Analysis

Introduction

A cost analysis was undertaken to estimate the potential cost savings generated by the Fair Ways project.

The approach combined 2 data sources:

- baseline and endpoint data supplied by 5 young people
- estimates from Fair Ways project staff about the savings the project generates for the local authority in the form of residential care and supported accommodation costs that it no longer has to pay

The advantage of this approach is that it uses real baseline and endpoint data supplied by young people who have been supported by the project. The limitation of the approach is that the baseline and endpoint data is insufficient to provide evidence on the preventative effects of the approach implemented by Fair Ways.

For example, a young person may have no offending behaviour before referral to the project and none during the period of their support through Fair Ways. In the context of this cost analysis, that will show as no change or saving. However, it may be the case that without Fair Ways, that young person would have fallen into a pattern of offending behaviour. As such, the preventative effect of the project may actually be significant and could have prevented the local authority, the police or other partners from incurring significant additional cost. The approach can only provide, at best, an indication of the types and scale of fiscal savings that Fair Ways *might* be generating for the state. The small cohort dictates that a comparison group was not appropriate and therefore any assessment of the counterfactual is going to rely on subjectivity.

Method

The variables below have been included. This is for 2 reasons:

- project staff perceived that Fair Ways has the potential to have a positive impact on these variables
- baseline and endpoint data is available for each of them (for 5 out of 6 young people supported by the project)

Baseline and endpoint variables included:

- education, employment or training status
- placement moves (accommodation stability)
- drug taking behaviour
- criminal activity
- absconding
- school or college exclusions
- sexualised behaviour
- physical health

In addition to the above, the approach also includes feedback on the likely savings to the local authority in the form of placement and supported accommodation costs avoided.

Taking the variables above first, the approach has been to:

- compare the baseline and endpoint status for each of the 5 young people and for each of the variables in table 3
- where there has been a positive change (for example, where a young person had a history of absconding before referral but has not done so since being supported by Fair Ways), assign a proxy saving. These proxy savings, including their sources, are shown in table 3 on the following page. They were discussed and agreed with project staff during the evaluation period

Table 5: Proxy savings for the endpoint data used

Category of cost saving	Proxy change (per young person)	Proxy saving (per young person for 1 year)	Source
A positive change in education, employment or training status	The young person has not become NEET	£10,466	Average annual cost to the exchequer of a NEET young person. Based on Youth Unemployment: the crisis we cannot afford (ACEVO Commission on Youth Unemployment, 2012) and adjusted for inflation.
Fewer placement moves than before referral	One or more placement moves have been avoided	£2,310 per placement move	Median cost of a placement move. Based on Costs and Consequences of Placing Children in Care (Ward, Holmes and Soper, 2008) and adjusted for inflation.
Reduction in drug taking	The young person reduces or stops their substance misuse and does not require a treatment programme	£3,994	Average annual savings resulting from reductions in drug-related offending and health and social care costs as a result of delivery of a structured, effective treatment programme. Based on Estimating the crime reduction benefits of drug treatment and recovery (National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse, 2012) and adjusted for inflation.
Reduction in criminal activity (unrelated to drug taking or sexualised behaviour)	The young person has not offended. An average of 2 prevented offences has been assumed	£4,144	Average cost per incident of crime (across all types of crime). Based on Heeks et al (2018)The Economic and Social Costs of Crime, Second Edition and adjusted for inflation.

Category of cost saving	Proxy change (per young person)	Proxy saving (per young person for 1 year)	Source
Fewer absconding episodes	The young person has absconded 1 fewer times compared to the baseline data	£2,719	Average cost of a missing person's investigation. Based on Establishing the Cost of Missing Persons Investigations (Greene & Pakes, 2012) and adjusted for inflation.
School or college exclusions	A permanent exclusion has been avoided	£12,007	Average cost of a permanent exclusion. Based on Misspent Youth (2007) and adjusted for inflation.
Reduction in sexualised behaviour	One sexualised behaviour-related offence has been avoided	£13,082	Average cost of a court event for sexual offences, National Audit Office (2011) Analysis, based on CIPFA, Home Office, Ministry of Justice and Youth Justice Board Data, 2011 (and adjusted for inflation).
Improvement in physical health	The young person visits their GP less frequently. Three fewer appointments have been assumed	£67	Average cost of a GP appointment. Based on Unit Costs of Health & Social Care 2018 (Curtis, 2018) and adjusted for inflation and 15-minute minimum consultations, continuity of care through 'micro-teams', and an end to isolated working: this is the future of general practice (Royal College of General Practitioners, 2019).

The above enables us to calculate, for each of the 5 young people for whom baseline and endpoint data is available, estimated annual savings that might be attributable to Fair Ways. Accurately assessing the counterfactual, and therefore attribution, is challenging, although it is unlikely that Fair Ways would be the only factor influencing positive changes. Low attribution, medium attribution and high attribution adjustments have therefore been applied, which assume that 33%, 50% and 66% respectively of any positive change observed can be attributed to Fair Ways.

In terms of placement activity, project staff estimated that, had Fair Ways not existed:

- 4 of the young people they supported would have remained in local authority residential care for an average of 4 months each
- those 4 young people would then have moved into local authority supported accommodation for an average of at least 8 months

The annual costs to the state associated with the above are shown in table 6 below. These are based on data supplied by the local authority (for residential care costs) and information published by the Department for Work and Pensions (for supported accommodation costs).

Table 6: Proxy savings for residential care and supported accommodation used

Category of cost saving	Proxy change (per young person)	Proxy saving (annually per young person)	Source
Residential care cost savings for the local authority	Due to Fair Ways, the young person moves out of local authority residential care 4 months sooner than they would otherwise have done	£77,918	Average cost of 4 month placement in local residential care home for children. Based on data provided by Hampshire County Council.
Supported accommodation cost savings for the local authority	Due to Fair Ways, the young person does not enter local authority supported accommodation (it is assumed they would have otherwise been in supported accommodation for at least 8 months)	£7,278	Average cost of an 8 month placement in local authority supported accommodation for care home leavers. Based on the Supported accommodation review: The scale, scope and cost of the supported housing sector (DWP, 2016).

Results

Table 1 (see chapter 7 above) shows the indicative savings calculated for each of the low attribution, medium attribution and high attribution scenarios. The key points are that:

- indicative savings associated with the baseline and endpoint data are relatively small: they range from £13,535 in a low attribution scenario to £27,074 in a high attribution scenario. This is mainly because the baseline data does not contain many incidents or activities that are costly to the state. For example, the young people typically had not been absconding, had not had regular placement moves and weren't regularly committing crimes.
- placement cost savings account for the vast majority of the total: these don't vary according to the different attribution settings because they are already based on the assumption that Fair Ways is responsible for the full saving

The indicative savings shown on the previous page are for a 1 year period. With the exception of residential care costs, it is feasible that all of them could persist for longer (residential care costs cannot because it is assumed that the young people would have left local authority residential care after 4 months). Table 2 (see chapter 7 above) therefore shows the 2 and 3 year indicative savings. These have been calculated by applying the government's standard discount rate of 3.5% to the 1 year savings.

The project's anticipated total spend during the Innovation Programme period is £467,200, of which it estimates that 22% (£103,409) are start-up costs that wouldn't be incurred under a business as usual model. Net spend is therefore estimated at £363,791. Based on the results from the cost analysis, the project would be generating a net saving to the state in all scenarios except the 1 year, low attribution scenario. However, the significant assumptions and limitations involved in the calculation of these results should be noted.

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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to us at:

CSC.Research@education.gov.uk or www.education.gov.uk/contactus