

# Multi-site trials of practice - mentoring

An opportunity for community youth organisations with a track record in mentoring to join a ground-breaking research project

Briefing document for prospective delivery partner organisations (DPOs)

## About the project

The Centre for Youth Impact is really excited to be working with the [Youth Endowment Fund](#) (YEF) and a consortium led by the [Centre for Evidence and Implementation](#), with [Bryson Purdon Social Research](#), to test an innovative approach to evaluating the impact of youth provision. We will be testing the feasibility of multi-site trials: a rigorous impact evaluation involving multiple delivery organisations that are all using a similar model of practice. We will be testing this approach on the practice of mentoring with 10-14 year olds. We are seeking organisations that would like to work with us on this research project as delivery partners. We will accept expressions of interest from potential delivery partner organisations (DPOs) from England and Wales<sup>1</sup>. The project will begin in November 2021 and run for approximately 18 months.

Through the research project, we want to work with 20 organisations that have a track record of providing mentoring for young people. These organisations will test the feasibility of, and then pilot, a multi-site randomised control trial to evaluate the impact of mentoring practice, where the mentoring is carried out across a range of organisations whose delivery settings/contexts are likely to vary. Multi-site trials are innovative because traditional randomised controlled trials (RCTs) usually take place with one organisation that delivers one programme or project. In this research project, we want to see whether we can run a RCT with multiple organisations that are all offering a similar 'model' of mentoring (rather than the same 'programme') to young people and collecting the same data.

The project will begin in November 2021 and run until May 2023. It will involve a set up phase to agree the mentoring practice model that will be shared across the DPOs, with a smaller group of DPOs commencing the first mentoring relationships in February 2022 as part of the feasibility study. If the feasibility study goes well, then we will progress to the pilot trial with all DPOs involved in mentoring delivery. More details on how the project will run are below!

## What do we want to find out through the project?

There are several things that this research project is exploring. We are excited about the potential that this project has in informing how the impact of a practice (in this case, mentoring) is understood and evaluated in the youth sector.

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<sup>1</sup> All materials relevant to the programme will be available in the Welsh language.

Firstly, we want to find out whether it's possible to support a group of youth organisations to successfully complete a randomised control trial and what support research teams need to provide. This will involve testing the capacity of youth organisations to recruit the numbers of young people needed for the trial, to 'randomise' the young people into two groups and gather the data necessary from both groups.

Secondly, we want to understand how to work with a group of youth organisations to develop and deliver a shared model of mentoring practice rather than a tightly specified or manualised programme. This will involve agreeing the 'core' and 'flexible' components of mentoring at the onset. Core components will include a specific set of criteria, such as the duration of the mentoring relationship, frequency of sessions, and supervision and support for mentors. Flexible components may include the specific strategies, such as supporting young people to set and monitor progress towards goals, which are more likely to vary depending on the context and young people's wants and needs. We want to know how to support these organisations to reflect on the quality and fidelity of their mentoring - that is, how closely they are sticking to the shared model, and where and why they might adapt it.

Finally, we want to understand more about the impact that mentoring has on the young people involved. Specifically, we want to do this by comparing the experiences of young people who participate in mentoring with the experiences of young people who don't. By doing this collectively and working within an agreed model, we will be able to evaluate the impact of mentoring as a practice, not the effectiveness of individual mentoring programmes.

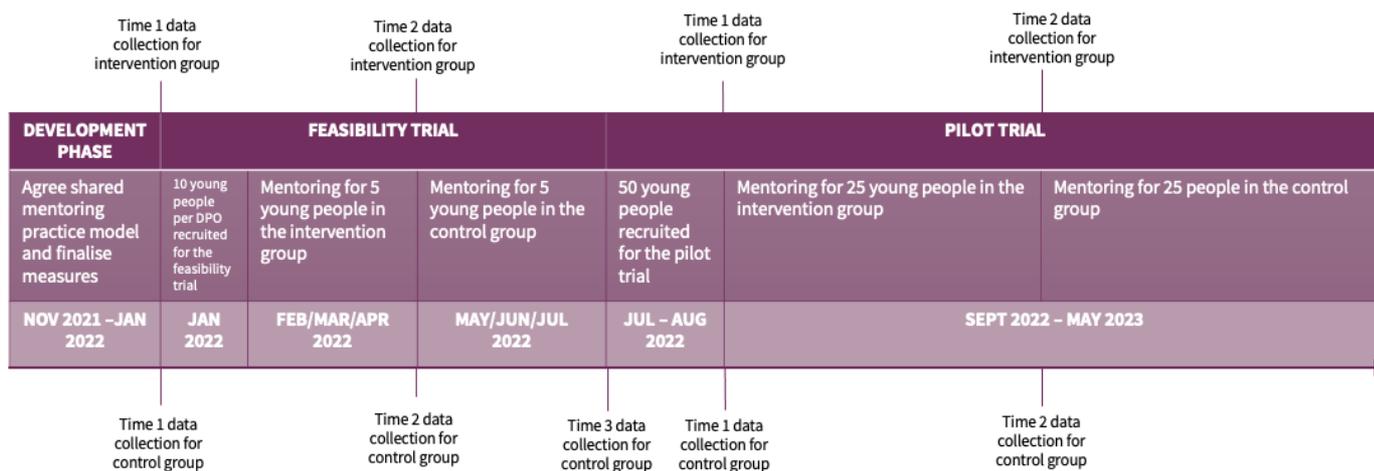
## **What's the opportunity for youth organisations?**

The main learning from this research project will be about conducting multi-site trials and what support is required for youth organisations to successfully take part in such trials. This is an opportunity for organisations that are skilled and experienced in mentoring to be part of a ground-breaking research project, learning a new method of rigorous evaluation that can support your own evaluation approaches. While taking part in the trials will not be an evaluation of each DPO's individual offer, participation in the research project will build organisations' skills and capacity to explain and articulate their approach and measure fidelity and outcomes.

Thinking about the quality and impact of mentoring, this is a chance to work with peers to explore approaches to mentoring in depth, learn from others, and build real insight into your own practice. Multi-site trials recognise that effective approaches to supporting young people are more beneficial when they're shared across the sector rather than sitting within an organisation as a specific project or programme. Multi-site trials also recognise that 'what works' is most likely to be a set of practices or approaches that are used flexibly in response to local context and the needs of young people, with the same practices appearing commonly across the youth sector. Mentoring is one of the strongest examples of this sort of practice.

## What’s involved?

This multi-site trials research project will last approximately 18 months and runs in two stages: a feasibility trial followed by a pilot trial. The research project will adopt a ‘wait-list design’ (please see next section for an explanation of how this will work in practice) to enable comparison of young people’s outcomes with a control group, whilst ensuring that all young people involved have access to mentoring support. We want to recruit youth organisations that intend to take part in both the feasibility and – if this phase goes well, and the research project progresses - the pilot trial. Details on what this will involve are outlined below.



## Who are we looking to work with?

Over the next 18 months, we want to work with around 20 delivery partner organisations that are skilled and experienced in providing one to one mentoring support to young people aged 10-14. Aims for the mentoring should be supporting young people to develop social and emotional skills as part of intervening early and to reduce young people’s risk of involvement in youth violence. This is the focus of the Youth Endowment Fund’s work. The specific criteria for organisations that want to get involved are listed on page five.

Each delivery organisation will need to recruit at least 60 young people in total during the research project (including the feasibility and pilot phase). The majority of these young people (at least two thirds) need to be aged 10-14, but up to one third may be aged up to 17 years old. All young people will need to have not received mentoring from the DPO before. The young people recruited will be randomly allocated into two groups. Half will commence mentoring relationships straight away (the ‘intervention group’), and half will be moved to a waiting list to begin mentoring around 12 weeks later (the ‘control group’). While all young people will receive mentoring at some stage, there will be a delay in receiving mentoring for the young people randomly allocated to the control group. It is essential that all the young people recruited could be put on a waiting list without the delay to mentoring putting them at risk of harm. It would not be appropriate to recruit young people in ‘crisis’ situations for this trial. This is because young people will be randomly allocated by a computerised randomisation tool, not selected based on who would benefit from receiving the mentoring first or who has the greatest need.

## What do we mean by ‘mentoring’?

In this project, we are defining mentoring as an intentional, ongoing one-to-one relationship between a trusted adult and young person, with the aim of supporting young people’s personal goals, aspirations, and socio-emotional development. To take part in this project, mentoring relationships should intend to last for 12 weeks or more. A specific list of other requirements can be found here on the pre-expression of interest checklist [LINK to pre-expression of interest check list]. Some practice components (e.g. length and frequency of sessions, any key discussion themes, strategies for monitoring progress against goals, etc.) will be defined and agreed upon when the practice model is co-developed at the start of the research project.

## The feasibility trial

The project begins with a nine-month feasibility phase, running from November 2021 to July 2022. Project development will take place from November 2021 - January 2022. During project development, the research team will work with DPOs to agree the practice model and finalise the processes for randomisation and data collection. This will involve participating in a number of (likely online) workshops.

In February 2022, at least 10 of the 20 DPOs will begin mentoring and data collection with a small group of young people. This is to test the extent to which the model can be delivered with fidelity (that is, according to plan), and test the evaluation approach for the trial with a small group of organisations and young people. The research team will work with DPOs to decide which are best placed to begin delivering mentoring during the feasibility phase.

With the DPOs taking part in the feasibility trial, we will test the ability to recruit an initial cohort of young people to participate and to gather the data needed for the trial. The young people recruited will be randomly allocated into two groups, so that we can compare the outcomes for the two groups. Organisations will need to gather data from both groups of young people (those receiving mentoring and those on the wait-list) about their social and emotional skills and self-reported offending behaviour. Data on offending behaviour will likely be self-reported by young people via a survey, and we may want to cross-reference that with administrative data. We will also gather data from the youth organisations about their mentoring practice with young people. For more information on the YEF’s data policies, see [here](#).

For those DPOs that deliver mentoring during the feasibility trial, this will involve:

- Recruiting an initial 10 young people aged 10-14 (as above, a small number of young people may be up to 17) who are interested in and eligible for mentoring;
- Explaining to these young people that they will be randomly allocated either to start their mentoring sessions immediately, or after a period of 12 weeks;
- Explaining that the young person will need to agree that, regardless of whether they start sessions immediately or later, they will complete a questionnaire now (before

they know which group they are in) and again at a later point in time. The questionnaire will collect information about their social and emotional skills and self-reported involvement in crime;

- Collecting written consent from the young person plus their parent or carer;
- Asking them to complete an online baseline questionnaire;
- Using a simple online tool that we provide, randomising the young person into starting mentoring immediately (the 'intervention' group) or some time later (the 'control' group).
- Providing mentoring for the intervention group for at least 12 weeks;
- Asking young people in the intervention and control groups to complete a second online questionnaire 12 weeks later;
- Providing mentoring to those in the control group at the end of the feasibility trial.

The research team will fully brief all DPOs on what is required for both the feasibility and pilot trials, with webinars in December and January (which will be recorded for staff who do not attend) and written materials.

## **The pilot trial**

Following the feasibility trial, we will carry out a debrief of the process and make any adjustments to the study design required before commencing the pilot trial (subject to YEF approval).

This phase will run from July 2022 - August 2023, with mentoring and data collection taking place from September 2022 - May 2023. For the pilot trial, all 20 DPOs will recruit at least 50 young people per organisation, who will all receive mentoring support. These 50 young people will all have to be 'new' (that is, they will not have received mentoring support from your organisation before though you may have a pre-existing relationship with them through other provision), and – for those organisations involved in delivery during the feasibility trial - in addition to the 10 young people initially recruited. As with the feasibility trial, DPOs will need to deliver mentoring via a 'wait-list design' with an intervention group and a control group. Each group should receive mentoring support for at least 12 weeks.

Once again, data will be collected through surveys on young people's social and emotional skills and self-reported involvement in crime in both groups, and we may cross-reference data on involvement in crime with administrative data.

Additionally, DPOs will measure the quality and fidelity of their practice in line with the practice model. The specific measures will be agreed upon with DPOs during the development phase when we collectively agree on our approach to data collection. At a minimum, this will involve routine user and engagement data. Other approaches to measuring quality and fidelity can involve the use of quality assessment frameworks, reflective practice surveys for practitioners to complete, and interviews with the research team. All of these options will be considered in the development stage.

## Financial and practical support to participate

Funding is available for all DPOs taking part in the research project. Funding will contribute to staff time to deliver mentoring, and to participate in project development and data gathering (up to £50,000). Grant funding is tied to organisations' participation in the research and will only be granted, in four instalments, to organisations that participate in it actively. If the research project continues but the organisation is no longer taking part in the research, the funding will end. For organisations with an expected income of less than £50k in this and next financial year, we'll need to ensure that the DPO has sufficient financial stability to engage with the trial.

We recognise that recruiting the numbers of young people necessary for the research, alongside collecting the data, will not be straightforward or easy for youth organisations, so we will be there to provide support and training where needed. Specifically:

- There will be a full staff briefing via (recorded) webinars and written notes.
- DPOs will receive funding from the Centre for Youth Impact, supported by the Youth Endowment Fund, to cover costs related to involvement in the trials. Grant funding up to £50,000 will be released in four tranches, paid upfront and tied to organisations' successful engagement in the previous phase.
- We will work closely with youth organisations to enable them to step back from the research project safely and carefully if they are struggling to participate.

## What kinds of organisations are we looking for?

We want to work with organisations that:

- Are fully committed to participating in a research project, rather than a traditional grant programme
- Have a strong track record of providing one-to-one mentoring for children and young people, with at least one current member of staff with relevant expertise
- Can clearly describe their approach to mentoring, and explain why they work the way they do
- Are comfortable adapting their practice to adopt a common approach with other youth organisations
- Are confident that they can recruit approximately 60 young people aged 10-14 to take part in mentoring for this project, who have not received mentoring through your organisation before. This is likely to be through strong and trusting relationships with local communities and partner organisations
- Have the capacity to fully engage with the research project on the timeline set out below, including maintaining mentoring relationships with young people for a minimum of 12 weeks
- Have the capability and willingness to gather demographic and outcome data directly from young people, and quality/fidelity data from mentors
- Are not looking for an individual evaluation of their programme/project

- May otherwise face barriers to involvement in RCTs on their own (such as working with smaller numbers of young people than a traditional standalone RCT would require, for example)

## Project Timeline

Stage	Date
Expression of interest published	13 September 2021
Closing date for clarifying questions	23 September
Information webinars	27 and 29 September
Deadline for submitting expressions of interest to the Centre for Youth Impact	13 October
Interviews for shortlisted organisations	w/c 25 October and 1 November
20 successful organisations notified	w/c 8 November
Consultation process to agree the practice model	November - December 2021
At least 10 of the DPOs selected for the Feasibility Trial	November 2021
Feasibility trial DPOs recruit 10 young people	January 2022
Delivery of mentoring begins for the Feasibility Trial	February 2022
Feasibility Trial debrief, and any revisions to the study required for Pilot Trial agreed	July - August 2022
All DPOs recruit 50 young people for the Pilot Trial	July 2022 – January 2023
Delivery of mentoring and data collection; support for DPOs	September 2022-May 2023

Stage	Date
Delivery of mentoring to the wait-list (ongoing support and oversight through December 2023)	November 2022 - December 2023
Data analysis and reporting	June - August 2023

## How to apply

We will be taking expressions of interest from youth organisations that want to be part of the research project. We will shortlist expressions of interest, and all shortlisted organisations will be invited to interview. We will make final decisions following the interviews. **The expression of interest form is available [here](#). We strongly encourage you to review the checklist [here](#) before you start to complete it.** We will be interviewing all organisations shortlisted from the expression of interest phase, and would like to talk to the CEO (or equivalent) and a manager who will oversee the delivery of mentoring. During the expression of interest phase, we will run two information webinars, and you will be able to ask clarifying questions.

We have compiled a list of questions that we think potential DPOs may have below, but you can also submit your own clarifying questions to [trials@youthimpact.uk](mailto:trials@youthimpact.uk) by 23 September, and we will add them (anonymously) to the list of FAQs.

To attend an informational webinar, sign up using the following Eventbrite links:

- [Tuesday 28 September 13:00 – 14:30](#)
- [Wednesday 29 September 10:30 – 12:00](#)

## Frequently asked questions

**Can I just continue to run (or re-start) my organisation’s existing mentoring programme with the funding?** Possibly, but it might be that the mentoring model will have to be adapted, and you will certainly need to recruit ‘new’ young people (that is, young people who have not received mentoring with your organisation before). The research project is structured around all participating organisations following a shared approach to mentoring, agreed at the outset. It will involve agreeing a common approach to matching mentors and young people, for example, and a common frequency for mentoring sessions. We expect that there will be some variations in approaches (for example, the exact length of sessions, and where they take place), but we want to capture these variations and understand the impact on young people. All participating organisations will need to agree to follow a basic common approach, and share information on how they’re following - or not - this model.

**Can we include the young people we're already working with in the research project?**

Potentially. This depends on how you're working with these young people, and whether they're in the right age group. We wouldn't be able to include young people that have already been part of a mentoring programme with you, as we need to gather data from young people at the start of their mentoring relationship with you. However, if you're already working with young people as part of an open access youth club, or a sport or skill-building project, for example - and they're 10-14 years old - we may be able to include them in the research project.

**Can we apply in partnership with other organisations?** No. We envisage working with single organisations through this research project. There may be exceptional circumstances where two smaller organisations may apply in partnership in order to meet the numbers of young people required, but we would need to understand how those two organisations would work together to ensure they followed the practice model and were aligning their work.

**Do the young people have to be aged 10-14?** Yes, the majority of young people participating in mentoring need to be aged between 10 and 14, but a minority (up to one third) may be aged up to 17. Children under 10 will not be included in the research project, and neither will young people over 17.

**Can the mentors be peers of the young people?** No. This research is focused on models of mentoring where a trusted adult works one-to-one with a young person. The research project will not include peer to peer or near-peer mentoring.

**Can I use my own outcome surveys/questionnaires?** The research project will be using common measures, so participating organisations will need to use our outcome surveys/feedback tools - these will be agreed with the delivery partner organisations along with the development of the delivery model. This does not prevent an organisation from gathering its own additional data.

**How much funding is available?** Participating organisations will receive a grant of up to £50,000 to support their role in the research project. This will contribute toward the payment (salaried or contracted) of mentors and associated staff, plus the time of the staff team in working with the research team to design the mentoring model and collecting data. Funding will also contribute to participating organisations' time for capacity building and support. The funding will be paid in four tranches, which will be contingent on the organisation still being fully able to participate in the research.

**What happens if I'm not able to recruit the number of young people required?** We will work closely with delivery organisations to monitor potential challenges to recruitment so that we can talk about how we might address any difficulties as they arise. The research project is reliant on recruiting certain numbers of young people, so we will only be able to retain organisations as part of the project if they are able to recruit. We will review this regularly, and should an organisation have to exit the project; we will support them to do so well.

**Aren't randomised control trials with young people unethical?** It's true that some people do have ethical concerns about doing RCTs with young people. We are comfortable that this study is ethical, and will also be conducting an external ethical review involving young people. All young people participating in this research project will receive mentoring at some point - the first (intervention) group earlier than the second 'waiting list' (control) group. DPOs will also be encouraged to maintain relationships with and offer some form of ongoing support to young people on the waiting list. All the young people involved will need to give informed consent to participate, alongside their parents/carers.

**What support can we offer to young people whilst they're on the wait list?** DPOs will need to maintain contact with the young people whilst they're on the wait list as part of data collection, but also to ensure that they're able to begin mentoring at the end of the wait list period. We would also encourage DPOs to extend other offers of support to young people on the wait list, *as long as* this does not include mentoring or similar one-to-one support. This research project seeks to understand the impact of mentoring by comparing the outcomes of young people who *participate in mentoring* against the outcomes of young people who don't (because they're on the wait list). The intention is not that young people on the wait list receive no support or provision at all; just that they do not participate in mentoring until after the 'intervention' group. This is what gives the research team the greatest opportunity to focus on the impact of mentoring specifically. Young people on the wait list may participate in other provision at the DPO, like group sessions, sports clubs or drop-in activities – this will be dependent on what DPOs offer to young people on an ongoing basis. The research team will be on hand to talk through the best approach for each DPO.

**Can the mentors be volunteers?** No, all mentors should be paid skilled mentors at the participating organisations. This is because we need to work closely with mentors to understand their practice, and to support them to collect data from the young people. This might be too demanding on the time of volunteers. Given the number of young people involved, we also feel that there may be too many volunteers involved in delivery (on the basis that volunteer mentors often work with just one young person) for us to meaningfully understand variations in mentoring practice. We are anticipating working with one or perhaps two mentors at each delivery partner organisation. If you typically work with volunteer mentors, it would not be appropriate for this research project to start paying them now in order to involve them in delivery.

**Will we be trained to deliver mentoring as part of the project?** No, organisations/practitioners need to be experienced mentors in order to participate.

**We're already receiving funding to deliver a mentoring project. Can we be part of the research project?** Potentially, assuming the age range is aligned, for example. But the existing funding/project would need to be sufficiently flexible that you could adapt the approach if necessary and accommodate the 'outcomes of interest' to the Youth Endowment Fund (specifically preventing children and young people from becoming involved in violence). It would also be important to consider whether it's possible to gather the monitoring and evaluation data that might be needed by both funders.

**I work in a school. Can we participate?** No, the research project is focused on supporting charities and social enterprises to participate in large-scale impact evaluations, and particularly those who would not otherwise have the financial resource or ability to recruit sufficient numbers of young people to do this type of impact evaluation on their own.

**I work for a local authority. Can we participate?** See above. The research project is focused on supporting charities and social enterprises to participate in large-scale impact evaluations, and particularly those who would not otherwise have the financial resource or ability to recruit sufficient numbers of young people to do this type of impact evaluation on their own.

**We already work across multiple sites. Can we apply?** Yes, but we would need to understand how you 'manage' mentoring across multiple sites. If the staff are different, and the sites are in very different locations, we may need to consider your delivery sites separately (that is, as separate expressions of interest). If the same staff work across more than one site, we may be able to consider your sites as one delivery partner for the purposes of the research study. Organisations that work across more than one site with different staff and in different locations (for example, an office in Nottingham and an office in London) would need to submit more than one expression of interest.