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# Quarriers Coaching for Life

An Independent Evaluation

Dr Charlene Plunkett

Nadine Fowler

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## Executive summary

Quarriers Coaching for Life service requested that CELCIS carry out an independent evaluation of the Coaching for Life project. We used a mixed-methods, realistic approach drawing on a wide range of perspectives and information. We captured the views from young people who had received the service, Lifecoaches and other workers who had knowledge of, or were involved with, the service. We gathered this information through an online survey and focus group activities. We also asked young people to complete a questionnaire at two time points: when they first met with their Lifecoach, and when they felt they were ready to finish working with the service. The data were collected and analysed deductively, using thematic analysis to answer four broad research questions:

1. What is the Coaching for life model?
2. What is the Coaching for Life experience?
3. What are the Coaching for Life service outcomes?
4. What is the key learning from the Coaching for Life Initiative?

Although the data from all sources was analysed and organised into four broad themes based on the research questions, a fifth central theme emerged relating to Young People's Needs. This theme seemed to interlink the Coaching for Life service's model, experience and outcomes.

### What are the key features of the Coaching for Life model?

Two key themes emerged from the evaluation describing Coaching for Life as a flexible but consistent service. Flexible in that they take a person-centred approach that is built around the needs of the young people they serve. As such, there is no strict remit that dictates what Lifecoaches must focus on when working with young people. This flexibility extends to the skills and professional backgrounds of the Lifecoaches themselves. Coaching for Life have produced a team of Lifecoaches with a repertoire of expertise from which to draw upon when supporting young people. This allows the Lifecoaches to utilise a range of adaptable approaches to meet the young people's needs. One of the unique features of the Coaching for Life service model was the long-term, consistent support provided to young people. The range of approaches used by Lifecoaches allows them to provide a service which is reflexive and responsive to the dynamic needs of the young person during the length of their engagement. For many young people, this aspect of the service is meeting a previously unmet need for a predictable and consistent relationship that promotes trust. These two elements of the service have emerged as key factors in promoting young people's engagement with Coaching for Life.

### What is the Coaching for Life experience?

Themes such as Choice, Acceptance and Wider Service Engagement emerged to describe the Coaching for Life experience. Choice and Acceptance particularly related to young people's experience of the service. Promoting choice from the outset is a salient feature of

young people's experience of the service. Lifecoaches encourage young people to choose their terms of engagement early as a means of relationship building. Young people are encouraged to make choices and decisions about the frequency and place of contact with Lifecoaches. This is a small but simple intervention that is developmentally appropriate, fostering decision-making skills and independence, which is crucial for the trajectory towards young adulthood. Choice and decision-making also emerged as the early steps towards helping the young person tap into their own values, strengths and future aspirations. The experience of a relationship with an adult that was built on the premise of unconditional acceptance was viewed to be a first for many of these young people. For this reason, timely access to the service was considered to be an asset to the young people's experience, helping them to feel comfortable and accepted. The Wider Service Engagement aspect of Coaching for Life is multi-dimensional and relates to the experience of young people working directly with Lifecoaches, working indirectly with other agencies, and accessing services through Lifecoaches. These processes become an internalised learning experience for the young people, enabling them to identify future needs and goals. The young people then know how to build relationships with services and work in partnership to meet their personal objectives. Working in partnership with other agencies helps the Lifecoaches extend their networks and build their knowledge of services to continue to provide young people with further opportunities. This dimension of Wider Service Engagement also highlights the Coaching for Life service to other agencies, further refining referral pathways.

## **Young people's needs**

Improving opportunities for young people by engaging with their current Need and level of functioning was interwoven throughout the Coaching for Life service. Young people who took part in the evaluation indicated that the service helped them to address a broad range of tangible needs (e.g. housing, education, employment, etc.). By adopting a need led, young people-centred approach, the service has been described as having an immense impact on any area of importance to a young person's life. The young people received a bespoke package of care, tailored towards their specific needs and equipping them with functional skills across many areas of life. Young People's Needs are at the heart of process interlinking the Coaching for Life, Model and Outcomes.

## **What are the Coaching for Life outcomes?**

The evaluation revealed that there were two tiers of outcomes achieved by the Coaching for Life service. This consisted of non-tangible 'soft' outcomes, such as developing trusting relationships and nurturing emotional wellbeing, providing a platform for 'harder' outcomes, such as education or employment. Young people involved with the service also enjoyed wider benefits, such as enhanced engagement with education, employment and housing services, and developing life skills such as budgeting. These in turn led to longer-term benefits and goals, helping young people to recognise opportunities that are available to them and how to access help in the future.

## What is the key learning from delivering the Coaching for Life service?

Themes such as Successful Elements and Barriers/Challenges emerged as the key learning derived from delivering the Coaching for Life service. Flexibility emerged as a key ingredient for success if the service were to be recreated or extended. This refers to the model of service delivery and the funding remit. This has allowed Lifecoaches to really engage with young people in a manner that is meaningful to their personal life circumstances. Similarly, consistency was considered to be key element for replication, ensuring that young people always felt able to maintain contact with their Lifecoaches, even once they had achieved their original goals. Any future developments should seek to continue working in a way that provides continuous, flexible and young person-centred support. The main barriers and challenges identified suggest that it can be difficult to manage the specificities of the service alongside young people's expectations. This results in situations where some referrers and partner organisations struggle to understand the role of Lifecoaches in the lives of young people. Coaching for Life, then, is simultaneously responsible for maintaining flexibility while projecting a clear understanding of the service.

## Conclusions

The evaluation highlighted that the Coaching for Life service provides a flexible and consistent model of service delivery not previously experienced by this group of young people. Furthermore, these two elements are considered to be successful ingredients for engaging care experienced young people across the four localities, affording them better opportunities and improved outcomes. The experiences of choice, acceptance, and wider service engagement (across several tiers with coaches and other agencies) leads to improvements across a hierarchy of 'soft' and 'hard' outcomes. Data from the focus groups and the online questionnaire indicates that the service is responsive to young people's need, as well as that of local communities. The service has been considered by many involved to be essential and would be a loss if the service was discontinued.

In summary, this evaluation has found the Coaching for Life service to have a positive impact for care experienced young people who have previously disengaged from other services. The evaluation has offered insight and discussion around the current model of service delivery in relation to existing literature, with implications for practice and future models of service delivery highlighted throughout.

# Introduction

## Background and context

Quarriers is a Scottish charity that aims to challenge inequalities by providing practical care and support to vulnerable children, adults and families. The Coaching for Life service aims to provide more opportunities to care experienced young people aged 16-25 years old. The service is for young people with particular needs related to their experiences of being in care. Funded primarily by the Big Lottery and from the Quarriers charity, the service started in 2016 and is delivered across four areas; Glasgow, Edinburgh, Falkirk area and Renfrewshire.

The Coaching for Life service works with the young person to help them reflect on their situation and aspirations, make decisions, and access opportunities, services, or expert support, as required. The service is not time-limited, and is achieved based on a platform of strong and trusting one-to-one relationships with a Lifecoach. The service consist of direct one-to-one work with young people to help them understand their needs and long term goals. Meetings with Lifecoaches can take place anywhere, in accordance with the preference of the young person. Lifecoaches help young people access education, housing and other life skills. The service also provides opportunities for group activities, which help the young people access new experiences and develop their relationship networks.

Lifecoaches work with young people drawing on a range of evidence based approaches, including the PATH model (Pearpoint et al., 1991), which is a person-centred planning approach, and the GROW model of coaching (Alexander 2006). These approaches are further enhanced by more specific training such as the Pacific Institute PX2, a young person specific goal setting approach with a strong emphasis on choice (Pacific Institute, 2019). Other approaches that Lifecoaches use to engage young people include the Steps Facilitator Courses and Creative Facilitation training (which enables them to facilitate activities undertaken in groups). The organisation has also invested in the Rickter Scale, a tool used to measure young people's progress. Lastly, an accredited Life Coaching qualification is also undertaken by Lifecoaches. The Coaching for Life service consists of a team of highly skilled workers who are able to draw on their specialist expertise to meaningfully engage with young people.

Whilst each young person receives a unique package of support, there are two main intended outcome areas:

- The first relates to non-tangible, 'soft' outcomes for the young person, such as increased confidence and resilience.
- The second relates to tangible, 'hard' measures, such as engagement with training, education, employment, etc.

Young people can access the service through several referral pathways. Anyone can refer a young person aged 16 to 25 years with a history of being looked after by the care system.

Young adults can refer themselves; parents can refer their child, and; brothers or sisters can refer siblings. Professionals in other agencies who think a young person meeting the above criteria could benefit from the programme can also refer.

## **Purpose of the evaluation study**

Quarriers requested that CELCIS explore options for an independent, mixed-methods evaluation of the Coaching for Life service, drawing on a range of perspectives. The aim of this evaluation was to explore and understand the experiences and outcomes across the Coaching for Life service. The evaluation sought to answer four broad research questions:

- 1) What is the Coaching for Life Model?
- 2) What is the Coaching for Life Experience?
- 3) What are the Coaching for Life outcomes?
- 4) What is the Coaching for Life key learning from delivering the initiative?

## **Methodology**

The School of Social work and Social Policy Ethics Committee at the University of Strathclyde granted ethical approval for the study. A mixed-methods, realistic evaluation approach was used drawing on a wide range of perspectives and information (Brannen, 2005; Pawson & Tilley, 1997; Sayer, 2000).

Ten young people participated in two focus groups to explore their views of the Quarriers' residential group activity and Coaching for Life service. This was structured around WWW/EBI exercise (what worked well / even better if). To recognise and value their contribution and time, each young person was offered a £10 high street shopping voucher. A third focus group was conducted with the four locality Lifecoaches, and a fourth focus group with three workers at managerial level who have been involved with the service. The aims of the staff member focus groups were to: reflect on staffs' experiences of being involved in delivering the project, explore perceptions of the benefits for young people and others, and capture suggestions for development. Each session lasted around 90 minutes; they were recorded, transcribed and transferred electronically to a secure data folder for analysis.

A pre- and post-questionnaire was used to collect information on education, accommodation and emotional wellbeing. The pre-questionnaire was completed by 58 young people who were actively engaged with the service. We were able to collect post-questionnaires from 14 young people who were coming to the end of their involvement with the service.

An online survey using Qualtrics software was used to capture views of the service from referrers and other individuals who had knowledge of the service. We extended the survey to young people who did not feel they could attend a focus group, but were willing to express their views about their experience with the Coaching for Life service. The survey



was completed by 31 participants: 18 of the respondents were young people who were involved with the service. Thirteen of the participants were described as practitioners; this consisted of practitioners who had referred into the service (9) and practitioners who had knowledge of the service (4). The survey was open between July 2018 and January 2019. Data was entered into SPSS – Statistical Package for Social Sciences – for analysis. A deductive thematic analysis was applied to qualitative data collected from the focus groups and free-text questions in the online questionnaire. The four research questions were used to organise the findings of the evaluation into four broad themes.

To ensure that the evaluation was grounded in existing evidence, we provided the Quarriers team with an annotated bibliography (see Appendix A for more details).

## Findings

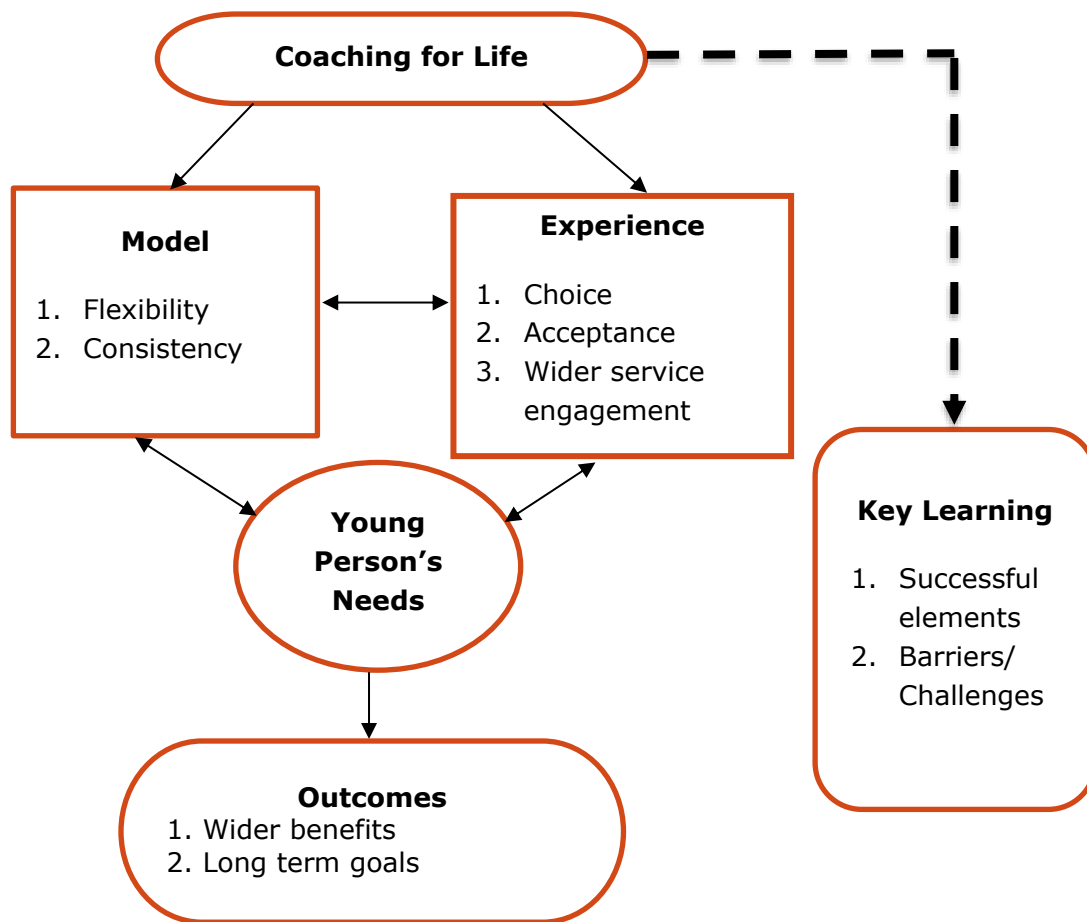
### Participants

In order to preserve anonymity, we agreed to limit the amount of detail regarding demographic information collected on both the pre-/post- and online questionnaires. However, of the 58 young people who completed the pre-questionnaire, the following information was reported regarding accommodation at the start of their involvement with coaching for life: 41% were living in single accommodation; 17% were living with one other person; 19% were in households comprised of 3 people; 12% of young people lived in occupancies of 4-5 people, and; 10% of young people lived with 6 or more people. Of the 10 young people who took part in the focus groups, 3 were female and 7 were male.

### Analysis

The findings of the evaluation are organised into four broad themes (i.e. The Coaching for Life Model, The Coaching for Life Experience, The Coaching for Life Outcomes and The Coaching for Life Key Messages/Learning), each consisting of smaller sub-themes. Young Person's Needs emerged as a central theme linking together The Coaching for Life Model, The Coaching for Life Experience and The Coaching for Life Outcomes. Figure 1 below provides a visual illustration of these data themes.

**Figure 1: Broad themes and subthemes**



## The Coaching for Life model

### Flexibility

The Coaching for Life service is delivered in a bespoke manner according to the young persons' needs. This mainly involves one to one work with a Lifecoach. Meetings with the Lifecoach can take place either in the young person's home or any other venue of their choice. When appropriate, there are also opportunities for small group activities such as cooking skills or visits to employment centres with other young people in the locality and their Lifecoach. There have also been larger events coordinated across the four areas. What has emerged from the data of this evaluation is that at the heart of the Coaching for Life service is a flexible, bespoke model tailored to the needs of the young people they serve.

It depends what you need. It's very specific to you. Everyone is an individual and gets individual support so [it] can be finding work or managing independence or mental health.

(Young person, focus group)

The flexible, bespoke model appears to be of central importance. This is understood and recognised by a range of stakeholders including those individuals outside of the organisation: *"I'm a bit detached but from a distance the support seems to be comprehensive and built around the needs of the young person"* (Practitioner, survey). Flexibility is apparent through every aspect of the service, from how it has evolved across the four localities to individual roles fulfilled by the practicing Lifecoaches: *"So, what a Lifecoach, or a model of a Lifecoach, isn't actually one thing and flexibility is incredibly important in early settings"* (Managerial staff, focus group). The flexible approach was adopted at pre-conception, with a clear understanding that young people's needs vary and require adapted responses to provide a service that attends to these needs. Another key element of the Coaching for Life model is that it provides a service that consistently attends to the needs of the young people as they evolve over time. This is acutely summarised in one young person's reflection that the service provides help:

*In many aspects of life, whatever that may be.*

*(Young person, focus group)*

Flexibility also appeared to encourage the participation of young people in the service. Staff members and young people alike acknowledged that the service needed to be person-centred if it wanted to succeed. It was suggested that without focusing on the goals of individual young people, the service would not be as successful:

*You're not going to achieve anything if you are pushing an agenda that is not driven by the young person. So if I was trying to push you to do something that you have no interest in, you're just going to lose the engagement.*

*(Lifecoach, focus group)*

This flexible, person-centred approach was compared to the previous experiences of some young people and considered by those involved with the service to be different to experiences with other agencies:

*A criticism of young people in care is that a lot of things get done for them. This is a complete change of mind-set for young people... 'What do you mean I can choose when I'm meeting you? What do you mean I can choose what we are looking at? I can choose what we're doing this week?' That is different as opposed to the normal pattern of supports that are available.*

*(Managerial staff, focus group)*

First service person-centred, not all about staff and team. Young people are the priority.

(Young person, focus group)

Flexibility permeates throughout the model, from the bespoke service delivered to the young people to the individual Lifecoaching role. This is apparent in the high regard at managerial level for the existing skillset that each Lifecoach brings to the service and the wider team:

We have four coaches in from different geographical areas, who all come from different backgrounds, who all come with a different skill set by having a Coaching for Life team that is managed centrally by the organisation we are able to bring that and allow for the sharing of skills, so that they learn from each other and they become more rounded Lifecoaches.

(Managerial staff, focus group)

The flexible approach of the organisation nurtures the individual skill sets of the Lifecoaches and promotes team working. This has created reflexive and responsive relationships within the Coaching for Life team, benefits the young people that they serve. Which drives the flexible, person-centred, bespoke service that the young people receive from the Lifecoaches.

And when a particular skill set is being challenged they have got a real safety net and their colleagues' particular expertise, can pull coaching from another area to do particular pieces of work. So while it is flexible, and as [an] approach it's flexible enough that there are coaches in each geographical area, you're not stuck in that area, they are lone workers they are not lonely workers. It is a real sense of togetherness there is a real sense of we work together to get the best for these young people.

(Managerial staff, focus group)

Flexibility has emerged from the data as a key feature of the model of service delivery which has evolved within Coaching for Life. This allows both the staff members and young people to negotiate what is expected of each other and work collaboratively without any time constraints.

### **Consistency**

Long-term, consistent support was considered unique to this particular model. The Coaching for Life service recognised that many of the young people they supported had an

unmet need for consistency within their personal life and through their experience of professional engagement. *"Consistent, long-term support, that's what they need. Some people, it's 2 to 3 months and for others it's 2 to 3 years"* (Lifecoach, focus group). The service was designed to be free of time-limited restrictions, Lifecoaches stay involved in the young person's life for as long as required. The Coaching for Life model is recognised by young people and various other stakeholders to be one of the first services to address this issue:

Really good. Connection to someone, not just a period of time. Good that it is unlimited, no cut off point. Even if you disengaged, they would still check on you. Keep supporting you even if you disengaged. Lots of services don't do that. They build a relationship and keep in touch.

(Young person, focus group)

The ability to provide a level of service where the *"interventions are really many and varied"* (Lifecoach, focus group) is recognised to be an asset of the model. Lifecoaches have described various approaches that they use with young people, from practical skills such as writing job applications, budgeting, physical health and exercise, to emotional resilience and developing healthy relationships. This can take the format of one to one work with the Lifecoach or in small groups of young people. The intention is for a consistent model of service delivery where practitioners are able to be responsive to the young people's needs and priorities throughout their engagement: *"The milestones and the goals constantly change, we just kind of roll with it"* (Lifecoach, focus group). This is achieved through developing a predictable and consistent relationship with coaches. Young people ultimately learn to trust that coaches will respond to their needs:

The fact that they are always there for you. You could message them at 3am and even if they don't respond straight away you will always get a response.

(Young person, focus group)

For some of the young people the consistency provided by the service is something that they have not previously experienced: *"I wouldn't have as much stability and success!"* (Young person, focus group). Furthermore, it seems that the Coaching for Life service was developed as one that would be flexible and consistent in order to meet young people's needs as they evolve. This has led to a model of service delivery that is free of prescriptive or restrictive restraints.

... They have a focus – it's life – our coaches take young people and focus on life in its entirety... What we did not create was something that says you have to work on all these areas. We have less of a

restriction, less boundaries, in what we are able to do because it's completely flexible to the life of each and every young person and down to their specific needs.

(Managerial staff, focus group)

The data gathered from the evaluation indicated that flexibility and consistency are key elements of the model, which enables young people to have a successful Coaching for Life experience.

## The Coaching for Life experience

### Choice

The ethos of empowering young people through choice is embodied throughout the Coaching for Life service. It is understood by many involved with the initiative to be a critical part of engaging and building relationships with young people early in the process.

Offering choice is viewed to be the key to successfully engaging young people in the longer term. *"For the young people I think they choose to stay with it because there isn't that duty on them to perform in a certain way"* (Lifecoach, focus group). Choice seems to provide the foundation for creating trust and helping the young person to consciously access their own goals and aspirations. *"But when you get to the stage when the coach is able to get to the heart of what is really important to that young person it is then that you start to see the real impact of the service"* (Managerial staff, focus group). This simple but powerful tool of offering choice seems to have many benefits. Lifecoaches also recognised that experiencing choice early on can be an intervention for developmentally appropriate transition towards adult decision making.

Even really simple things when you first start meeting with them and you say where would you like to meet today? Do you want to go for lunch? It's always 'I don't know – you choose', 'Well I'm not choosing, it's your choice, you are the one that supposed to tell me what you want to do because you're being given that independence now'. So a lot of them just have no idea how to make their own decisions because they have never been given the opportunity. So I think it's really important, especially because some of the ones that I've had are coming to an end of their time with Through Care [services], so I think it's really important for the transition group. So for people like that and who are making the transition I think it's really important that they get used to making decisions, and I find they get used to that quite quickly.

(Lifecoach, focus group)

This simple intervention of promoting choices facilitates decision-making and helps the young person access their own values and desires through the relationship with the Lifecoach. The importance of choice was stressed as a mechanism for helping the young person accept and recognise their strength and abilities. Promoting choice within the context of the secure relationship with the Lifecoach also helps the young person take steps towards resilience and independence:

That's a really important thing because this is not about coaches doing things for people it's about recognising the skills and strengths of that person and encouraging them to undertake the things that will allow them to achieve because they need to achieve more than what a coach... because the coach does something for them the young person is still in the same situation. They need to have these experiences so that they can continue to believe in themselves.

(Managerial staff, focus group)

It seems that coaches are able to provide young people with an experience that allows them to connect and experiment with interests and activities. Again, this is an important developmental process for young adults which allows for exploration and individuation. This can be attributed to the flexibility of the model outlined above and possibly to the interpersonal style of the coaches:

I enjoy the fact that the workers are really easy-going and flexible and will help young people get into any sort of course or activity that you feel you want to do!

(Young person, focus group)

Young people who participated in the online survey described a range of areas that they chose to focus on with their Lifecoach, ranging from practical support with managing finances to health and exploring employment opportunities:

Budgeting, debt management, confidence building, healthy relationships, looking at college options, support with returning from work after a prolonged period of sickness, mental health support.

(Young person, survey)

Another young person reflected that the Coaching for Life service helped them to pursue enjoyable interests and potential hobbies, alongside addressing health needs and pragmatic resources such as housing and education, etc.:

Activities and fun days out, mental health support, healthy relationships, CV and Princes Trust course referral, involvement in music programme, support w/ sorting out council tax arrears and housing benefit issues, [...] has attended job centre meetings with me as an advocate, recently been looking at self-esteem.

(Young person, survey)

It is clear from the data above that the Coaching for Life service provides the young people with a breadth of supports. In this way, the service enables and empowers the young people to make pertinent life choices.

### **Acceptance**

The experience of being understood and accepted is recognised by many who are involved with the service as an essential element that leads to the young person's achievements. The strong ethos of acceptance is promoted as being at the heart of the Coaching for Life experience and attributed to successes and progression of the young people:

Ultimately it's about acceptance, we accept young people for who they are. And work with them to become a better version of themselves, if that is what they choose. It can be difficult to describe or say what is different but that is a big fundamental area of it. We do not have any predisposed ideas on what young people need to achieve. They will achieve what they want to achieve and we will do our best to empower them to do so.

(Managerial staff, focus group)

The philosophy of unconditional acceptance is also considered to be an essential element of the Coaching for Life experience. The data in this evaluation has described this as being different to the young people's previous experiences of service provision:

...And when they are receiving positive reinforcement it's very much the deserving and undeserving. Whenever they start to use alcohol or drugs again they suddenly become undeserving. That is absolutely not the case in our service and I think the constant concentration on the young person and the constant concentration on the positives, that they have been achieving no matter what or how small those things are cannot be underestimated.

(Managerial staff, focus group)



Likewise, the young people have recounted that the Coaching for Life Service has been able to meet their needs in ways that were perhaps unavailable in other services:

Social work might not be able to help, but Quarriers can fill a void ... they'll hold your hand and help you through.

(Young Person, focus group)

For these reasons, relationship building with the Lifecoach is recognised as the first crucial step in the process: *"They are apprehensive at the beginning of the coaching. The first 8 [sessions] maybe it is about building that relationship"* (Lifecoach, focus group). Timely access to an appropriate relationship with the Lifecoach is also echoed by the young person as an important factor in their experience of the service:

No time delay – so I met her straight away. Nerve wracking but then immediately comfortable.

(Young person, focus group).

We understand from the evaluation that the Lifecoaches use a range of approaches to enhance the young person's overall experience (one-to-one sessions, group work, linking with other agencies, etc.). More specifically, young people have commented on how a recent residential trip (a three-night stay which brought together young people from all four areas), involving a range of activities, impacted positively across a range of areas, including mental wellbeing:

I noticed a big difference in my mental health. Having time away from my phone and doing this (residential). With Instagram, I'm always looking at this and it's a chance to get away from all this. Felt better in body and in confidence. I recognised I'm good at things. That makes a huge difference to me. Built confidence and I feel better. It was really helpful.

(Young person, focus group)

This type of experiential activity also enhances the young people's network of relationships fostering new friendships: *"Help me come out of my shell and have confidence. Met new people and made new friends"* (Young person, focus group). Lifecoaches themselves have also reflected that group activities can add to young people's experience of the service, helping to facilitate engagement and relationship building.

It can be a really good tool working with the group, as well with new referrals because with new referrals some young people are quite apprehensive until the relationship starts to build. So when you do

like a group work thing and they can see how other young people interact with you, I've found that in the weeks that follow they are so much more comfortable in the one-to-one.

(Lifecoach, focus group)

### **Wider service engagement**

A key part of Coaching for Life experience is working in partnership with young people to help them address current needs and access further opportunities. This process extends to supporting young people to re-engage with other services. Lifecoaches can have a role in modelling repairs to ruptures in relationships with other professionals. This may simply involve: *"something as small as going into school to help a young person resolve a difficulty with a teacher something as small as that can actually make that change"* (Lifecoach, focus group). In helping young people to re-engage with services, the Lifecoach can help the young person express their views: *"The coach is there to see 'what was it that you didn't like? Do you want to share that with them and to see if they can adapt?'"* (Lifecoach, focus group). The young person is also empowered to be involved in every step of the process of working with partner agencies (for example, social work services, housing, health, GPs, etc.). *"It's about encouraging real, partnership working I suppose and its true sense and it is completely driven by the young person"* (Managerial staff, focus group). In addition, the process of rebuilding relationships or establishing new relationships with wider services is very much driven by their personal choices and interests of the young person: *"We are also about opening doors for young people ... we raise their awareness to what exists and then empower them to make the choice, if they wish to, to access that"* (Managerial staff, focus group).

Coaching for Life helps young people to engage in wider services in a manner that is dynamic and responsive to the young person's needs as they evolve. This can range from providing stability through physical safety, such as working with Lifecoaches to access housing and secure accommodation, then moving on to the next set of needs such as health and mental health, etc.:

Quarriers has had such an impact on me and my life when I first started working with Lifecoach ... I was homeless, my family had broken down and I was living with my best friend at the time who also worked with [Lifecoach]... Now a year and a half later my life has completely turned around I went into temporary accommodation which [...] worked so hard to get me into my own flat which I love [...] had also helped cope with past traumas throughout my life and also helped me with my anxiety and depression using various techniques. Honestly, I don't know what I'd do without Quarriers they

have helped me so much and I couldn't be more thankful especially to [...] she is one in a million.

(Young person, survey)

It is evident from the data extract above that young people who engage with the Coaching for Life service have a range of needs that cannot be addressed by a single agency or intervention. Often these needs must be addressed in a step-wise manner. It would seem that the Lifecoach has a role in identifying, prioritising needs and providing the bridge to accessing vital supports from other agencies such as housing and health, etc. There were many examples of wider service engagement provided by young people who took part in the online survey and the focus groups. Many young people emphasised that it would not have been possible to access other agencies, for example accommodation, health or employment without the help of the Coaching for Life service: "*[They] helped me get a job that I struggled to do on my own, supported me*" (Young person, survey).

Young people have also reflected that this multi-tiered approach to wider service engagement (directly with Coaching for Life and indirectly with other agencies through Lifecoaches) has had a beneficial impact. It would seem that one of the main gains from working with other agencies is that young people develop knowledge of what other supports are available to them. This indirect engagement with other services through working with Lifecoaches helps the young person to realise what other opportunities could be available by accessing other services: "*I know more about opportunities*" (Young person, survey); "*It has helped me a lot with fixing my CV, what options are out there*" (Young person, survey).

Practitioners in other services have also reflected that input from Coaching for Life can help the young person scope out potential life goals and further avenues of support: "*Having that 1:1 person that they talk through life issues and map where they hope to go within different timescales*" (Practitioner, survey). The Coaching for Life service was noted by other stakeholders to provide highly practical support in accessing other agencies. This transpires in various ways: "*applications for courses and training providers, accompany to other support services*" (Practitioner, survey). One young person commented on the interpersonal aspect of partnership working with the Lifecoach and other agencies: "*I've been more confident with speaking to the doctors and the job centre when she's there to help me*" (Young person, survey).

The collaborative approach of the Coaching for Life team has helped the young people to recognise their own needs. This has enhanced the young people's life in a broader sense too, in that they can look to the future, learn how to seek out help and identify opportunities.

I have received excellent support from the service, it has helped me set goals to achieve and make an effort to achieving them.

(Young person, survey)

My life has changed a lot I am thinking about things more clearly, I feel more ready to move on in different areas of my life like work and where I live.

(Young person, survey)

The data presented above illustrated that wider service engagement is more than just an experiential aspect of the Coaching for Life service. It could be argued that this then becomes a key life skill in itself for the young people. From the very practical aspects of communicating with agencies in written format through application forms to the interpersonal skills necessary for managing appointments with other agencies and accessing what is available. Arguably helping young people to engage with wider services has become an internalised learning experience, where the young people have learnt how to identify future needs/goals. The young people are then empowered to establish relationships with services and build partnerships with professional agencies in order to achieve and realise positive outcomes.

It is clear from the data that working with other agencies has a reciprocal function, to enhance the existing supports of the young people, but also brings Coaching for Life into the awareness of other agencies and develops referral pathways.

But without that partnership without that connection we wouldn't have been aware of ... what exists if you are interested in the college is something that you want to explore then you can have access to this this and this. Is that something that you want me to do? Yes it is - okay then let's take it to the next step. So yeah there is a lot of partnership working with through care teams and across the four areas they are really very involved and a lot of our referrals will come from them. As a service we are very much responsive to young person's needs but in a wider sense we are also responding to local priorities in terms of where our referrals are coming from.

(Managerial staff, focus group)

Within the Coaching for Life team there is a sense of cohesion which helps to keep staff motivated and feel supported during difficult times. *"And the team is really good. Although they're not working side by side 24 hours, you can always send an email and the team meetings that we have are really positive"* (Lifecoach, focus group). In this manner there are parallels between the young people's experiences of the Lifecoaches and the Lifecoaches' experience of the organisation. This was summarised by one of the staff members: *"By and large my positives far outweigh the negatives"* (Lifecoach, focus group).

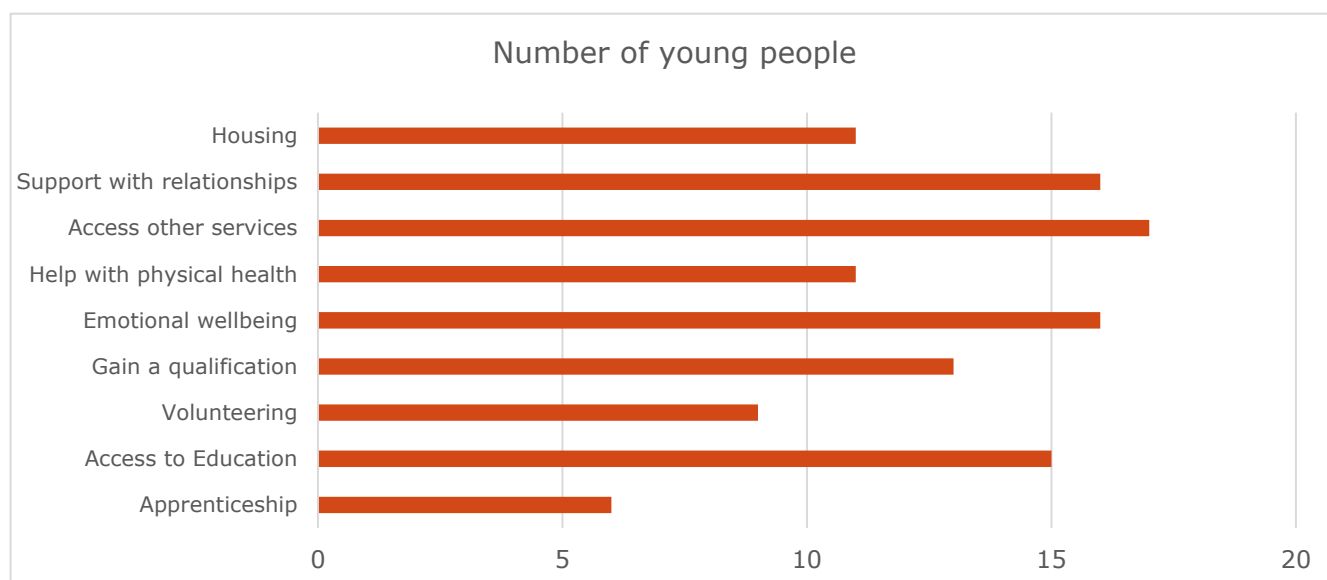
There is a sense of partnership working across the Coaching for Life team, as well as with agencies outside of the organisation. The data suggest that the partnership approach of the Coaching for Life service is experienced by staff, young people and other stakeholders in a positive manner. Indeed, to an extent that there is a need for the Coaching for Life team to have: *“more workers as the demand can be high ... other workers simply do not have the working hours to commit fully as young people require”* (Practitioner, survey). It would seem that the Coaching for Life experience provides a level of positive partnership working between the young people and other agencies in a manner that participants perceived may not be possible within the remit of other services.

## Young people’s needs

All of the data sets in this evaluation indicated that Coaching for Life engaged with the young people to help them meet a broad range of needs. Improving opportunities for young people by engaging with their current needs appears to be interwoven throughout the Coaching for Life service.

Young people who completed the online questionnaire identified the service as having addressed their needs in tangible areas such as employment, education and housing, etc. The data indicated that Coaching for Life provided help and support across a number of areas of need, as highlighted in Chart 1 below.

**Chart 1: Needs reported by young people (online survey), n = 18.**



Data from the focus groups suggest that needs in mental wellbeing were addressed through improved confidence and the emotional support that the Lifecoaches provided. One young person reflected that:

Coaching for life has felt like sort of counselling/therapy in a way and I feel like from the first session I took part in there was a weight lifted from my shoulders and new things to look forward to after each session.

(Young person, survey)

The above quote demonstrates that the service engages with young people in a relational manner that goes beyond focusing on specific targets. By keeping the young person's needs at the centre of engagement, the Coaching for Life service has been described as having an immense impact on any area of importance in a young person's life:

[...] Coaching for Life have had quite a substantial impact in my life as over the past few months engaging with the Coaching for Life team my confidence [has] become stronger and I have gained additional communication and sociability skills such as talking in front of a crowd of people, getting to know new people.

(Young person, survey)

It seems that the service provides young people with a package of care that is not only salient to personal circumstances, but also helps them to build and develop a broader spectrum of functional skills. Similarly, participants who identified themselves as people who have signposted or referred into the service noted impact on the following areas of need: employment, education, emotional well-being (social anxiety, self-esteem, self-confidence) and general health. As one participant stated: "*The young people received support with employability, food and nutrition, exercise, routine and general life skills*" (Practitioner, survey).

By taking a needs led relational approach, Coaching for Life has been described by some young people to have been the most beneficial service they have engaged in. They report that they are able to witness, and reflect on, the positive changes taking place in areas of need that are important to them at present:

[Coaching for Life is] probably the best thing I've had. I struggle with confidence, self-esteem, depression and anxiety. I'm more confident and coming out of my shell. It has helped with my depression. Like a Lifecoach is friendship. If you're in desperate need, you've got them.

(Young person, focus group)

The impact of Coaching for Life on young people's needs is widely acknowledge in the data. The accounts of improvement in self-esteem, confidence and mental health highlight the

perceived ability of Lifecoaches to engage young people and address their needs in a manner that is meaningful to them. This ultimately makes a marked improvement in young people's overall well-being:

The very personal things like increase to their self-esteem, in their self-confidence, a sense of achievement and recognising that they have achieved and they can continue to achieve which has been fundamental.

(Managerial staff, focus group)

It would seem that by keeping young people's needs centred throughout the Coaching for Life service, the Lifecoaches are able to help young people achieve and make pertinent choices and changes to their lives that will then lead to other benefits.

### **The Coaching for Life outcomes**

Through their own data gathering, Coaching for Life have identified that in the first year of delivering the service they have actively engaged 57 young people. Fifty of this number remained engaged in the second year of operation (Quarriers Coaching for Life: Big Lottery Funding Report, 2011).

The focus group data suggest that there are two tiers to the outcomes achieved by the service. Firstly, non-tangible, 'soft' outcomes, including facilitating trusting relationships and nurturing emotional wellbeing, leading to the attainment of 'harder' outcomes, such as education or employment:

*Helped with anxiety and confidence. Helped get qualifications and a place in college.*

(Young person, survey)

Gave me confidence and motivation.

(Young person, survey)

It has helped me a lot with my confidence, when I first was referred I was very isolated and spending a lot of time by myself and now I am the opposite of this.

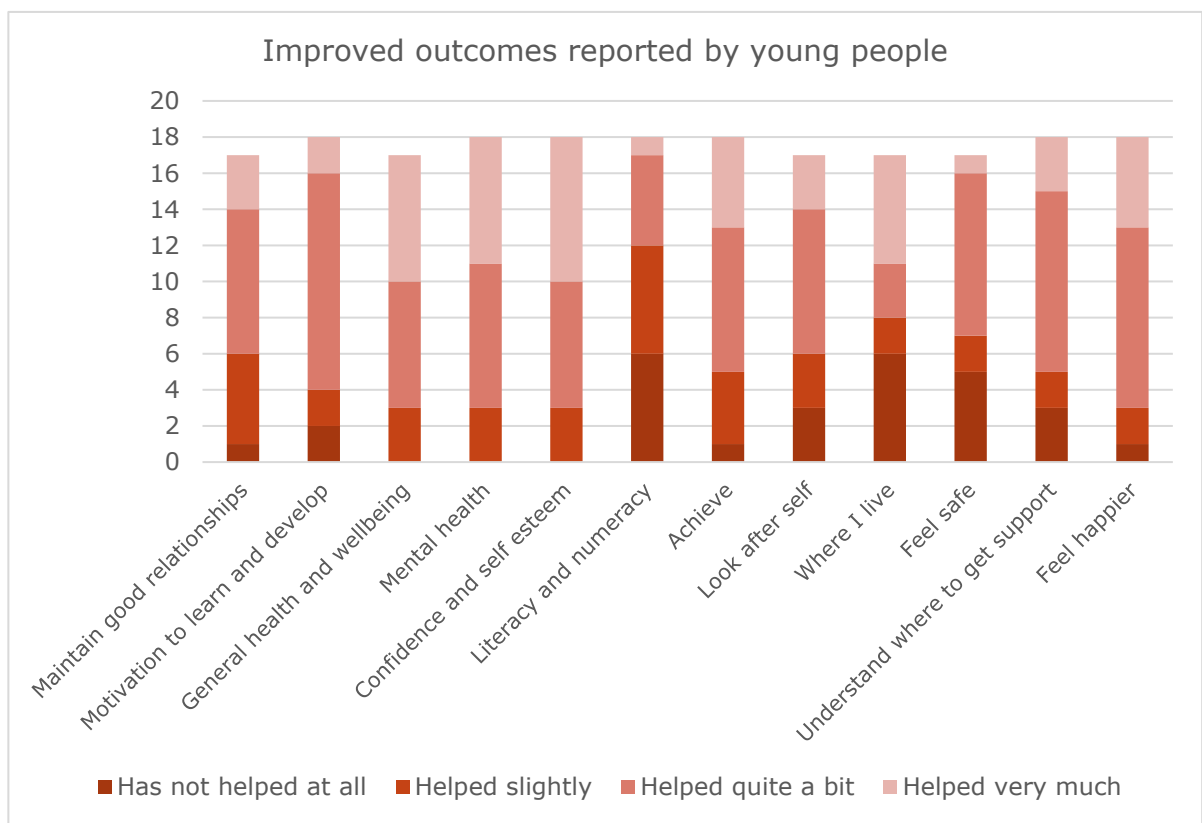
(Young person, survey)

The snapshot of data from the 14 participants who were able to complete pre- and post-questionnaires at two time-points highlights specific trends in mental wellbeing ratings between the period of young people entering the service and continued involvement. Young

people reported a reduction in negative affect states such as *upset*, *hostile*, *ashamed* and *afraid* between time-one and time-two of completing the questionnaire. Similarly, there was a move away from low ratings e.g. 'very slightly/not at all' for positive affect states, such as *alert* and *active*, towards more positive reporting, such as 'moderately', 'quite a bit' and 'extremely' in these positive affect states. Consistent ratings in positive and negative affect remain stable between time-one and time-two. The stability in ratings may be indicative of the stabilising impact of the service. The indicative improvements in *alert* and *active* may also be mechanisms of change for further outcomes, as highlighted by data in the focus groups and the online questionnaire.

The young people's reflections illustrate the importance of addressing more intrinsic needs and non-tangible outcomes as a bridge to achieving longer-term 'hard' outcomes. Young people who completed the online survey reported improvements across many life outcomes, as demonstrated in Chart 2 below.

**Chart 2: Outcomes reported by young people (from the online survey), n=18.**



**Wider benefits**

Wider benefits of the Coaching for Life service include engagement with health, education, employment and training, as well as maintaining tenancies, for example through improving budgeting skills. These were discussed by staff members in the following ways:





The amount of young people who are now more settled in their own home accommodation. The amount of young people who are now budgeting and the reduced number of offending and lower substance misuse. I think across all 58 of our young people they have all made improvements in at least one area of their life.

(Managerial staff, focus group)

These wider benefits are indicative of the flexibility of the Coaching for Life service. Where the service is able to be flexible in its approach, the outcomes of the service can vary significantly from personal improvement in young people's needs to maintaining budgets, housing and refraining from offending behaviour. Overall, the wider benefits of the Coaching for Life service can be summarised in the following quote:

By engaging with Coaching for Life the young people get access to a wider range of services and values that we've touched on. These young people's horizons are all of a sudden enriched by opportunity as opposed to being restricted by negative representations.

(Managerial staff, focus group)

It is evident from all data sources that the outcomes achieved by the service directly benefit young people. However, the benefits also extend to other organisations attempting to engage young people:

The benefits to The Partner [other services] are that they are getting exposure to young people that are making the choices for themselves and have the safety net of a Lifecoach so that if there are any particular challenges they will have a Lifecoach there who will support them.

(Managerial staff, focus group)

The facilitative role of Coaching for Life enables the young people to accept other beneficial services. This parallel process allows partner agencies (e.g. housing, social, Health, Department for Work and Pensions, criminal justice and education) to engage with young people and fulfil their service roles.

In most cases helped to turn the young person around and managed to get them to engage in support services they require

(Practitioner, survey)

## Long-term goals

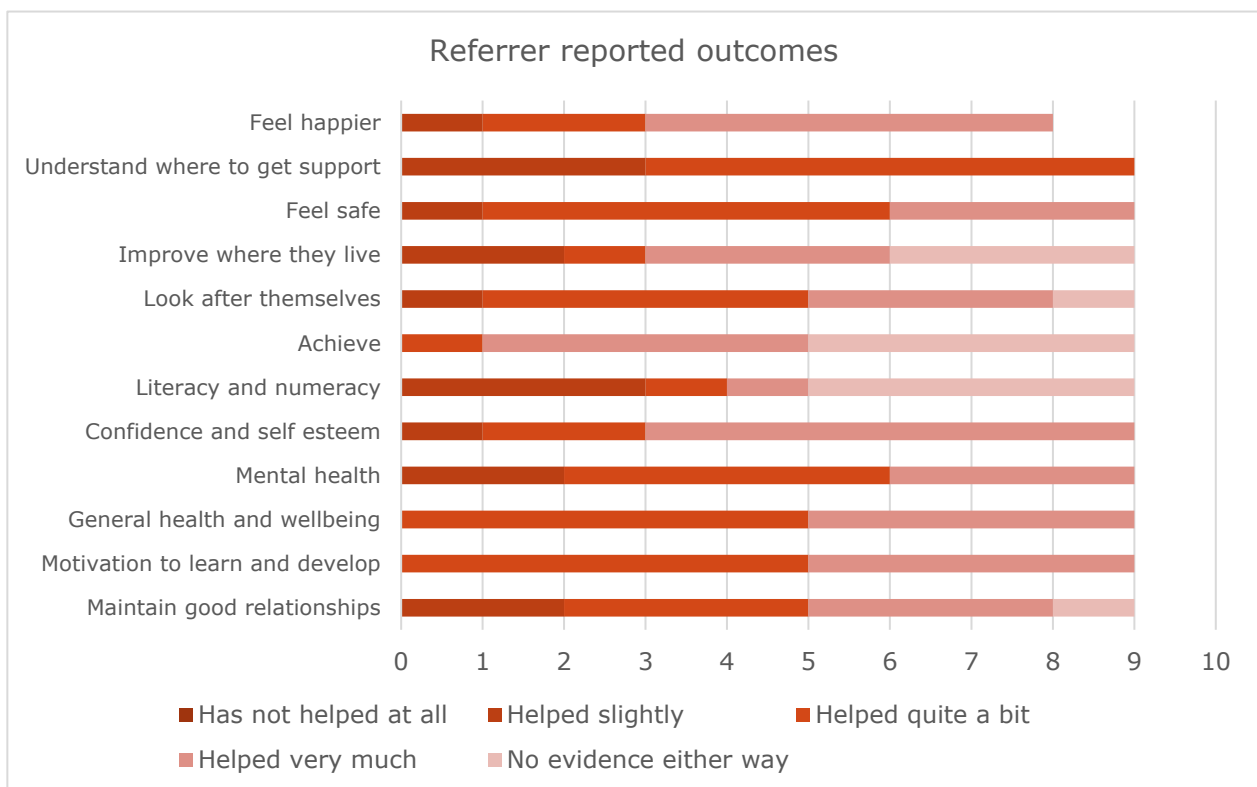
A key aim of Coaching for Life is to improve young people's lives on a long-term basis. While the outcomes discussed above are examples of the impact that Coaching for Life has on young people, there are some specific long-term goals that were highlighted as part of the services outcomes. These revolve around increasing young people's independence, coping strategies and enabling them to be active contributors to society. This is highlighted in the following extract:

Their confidence to access the support that is there for them and to use it for their best interest has afforded the opportunity for all the things I mentioned; college, employment, education, training, reduction in offending, substance misuse, being able to access the support that they are entitled to, along with feeling that they can and will make an active contribution to their communities. But always just being recipients of services, so that there is much more balance within their life.

(Managerial staff, focus group)

Referrers also reported improvements across a breath of outcomes in areas that will have a long term impact on a young person as they develop through life. This data, captured by the online survey, is illustrated in the figure below.

**Chart 3: Referrer reported outcomes for young people (from online survey), n=9.**



The data illustrates that 'soft' outcomes, such as a trusted relationship and improved mental health, lead to improvements in longer-term 'hard' outcomes.

Improvement in confidence, having a trusted adult to rely on and talk to, enrolment, engagement and support in college, new opportunity's to experience work environments, full-time/part-time employment, support into new accommodation, help with filling in forms and CV writing, awareness of new job opportunities.

(Practitioner, survey)

The ability of Coaching for Life to help young people manage their service involvement and independence was mentioned by young people themselves. One young person reflected: *"I've realised it's okay to ask for help"* (Young person, focus group). The long-term impact of Coaching for Life in this young person's life highlights the ability of the service to change one's outlook on support. This was echoed by another young person who stated: *"I'm not always pushing him [the Lifecoach] away"* (Young person, focus group). Overall, Lifecoaching enables young people to see the value in support services and to feel more comfortable in accessing those support services when they need to.

## The Coaching for Life key learning

### Successful elements

Everyone who took part in this evaluation was immensely positive about the impact of Coaching for Life for care experienced young people. Their key messages highlighted the role of the service alongside statutory social work, arguing that the success of Coaching for Life is that it is flexibility in both daily practice, and funding received, to provide the service:

We also meet a local unmet need by responding to their priority areas, with the provision that they can't either afford or have the skills and knowledge that Quarriers can equip their staff with to provide, without restrictions, upon that service delivery. It's completely flexible and responsive to local need.

(Managerial staff, focus group)

The dynamic interplay between Lifecoaches maintaining a professional role, while creatively meeting a young person's needs that is meaningful to them at that specific point in their life, is something that has resonated with all involved with the service. This is highlighted in the following reflections from young people of the many and varied interventions provided by the Lifecoaches:

Without [...] funding for my washing machine, carpet and utensils, I would have had to save money for a considerable amount of time in order to get these things so thanks to [the Lifecoach] I now have all the things I need to get my new flat in right order and up and running properly. [The Lifecoach] helped me get into sports coach volunteering, and has access to sports coaching course and we have agreed that if I make the appropriate effort towards the sports coach volunteering then that will make a good impression to start the sports coaching course and will give me further education, training, new skills and experience in order to do well in the course.

(Young person, survey)

Like a buddy, extra support. Someone there to talk to. Help to apply for jobs. Available to you. [...] does different activities with you. I'm still on the sick so she'll go with me to an appointment [inferred medical appointment].

(Young person, focus group)

'Professional boundaries' – not pushed away, will give you a hug if you are crying. Relationships. In proper need of help – came to flat when I had no electricity/gas and played board games and got me money. Longer than 5pm ... – [meant that this service doesn't do this – they stayed later and played games]

(Young person, focus group)

When considering key learning from delivering the service across the four areas, 'flexibility' of the design from preconception was considered an important element, especially if the service was to be replicated elsewhere. Overall, staff members and young people indicated that the key advantage of Coaching for Life over other programmes that they had been involved in was its ability to work flexibly and in-line with the needs of young people:

I kind of felt that the success of the project is built on the fact that we are allowed the freedom that we get. So you can just go with whatever works when it works, how it works, so just whatever. I kind of do a mix. I do a lot of one-to-one stuff, and a lot of group work stuff. I've kind of adopted a process...

(Lifecoach, focus group)

Flexibility was also considered to be important, not only at the level of engagement and service delivery, but also from a funding perspective. Lifecoaches indicated that they felt supported to work on the basis of need, with the Lifecoach quoted above summarising how their approach to the service changes depending on the young person's wishes. This flexibility has been facilitated by the management team from the outset. As a programme that was designed with flexibility in mind, this forms a key part of the Coaching for Life model.

One thing that is particularly helpful is that we have a very broad and flexible remit. There is no saying 'you are not supposed to do that, the funding doesn't allow that'.

(Managerial staff, focus group)

Consistency was also considered to be an essential element of the service approach and a key element for replication. It was indicated that contact with a young person's Lifecoach did not end once their goal had been achieved. Instead, young people were encouraged to continue to contact their Lifecoach when needed:

I think it's important to say that it has opened so many doors, and even if someone has got to that positive place, it doesn't need to stop. We can keep in touch with them... When someone's going to college we won't stop working with them. We continue to work with them to help them sustain that.

(Lifecoach, focus group)

There was an acknowledgement that the service can only provide this continuous contact so long as young people and staff members can feel the benefit of the service:

It's so powerful that if you treat young people with respect, it's flexible around what their needs are. And if you stick with that, they are able to see 'I can make changes to my life', because it's not always that obvious that the coaches are positive people... The young people themselves see that linking in with these 'lifecoaches can make a change' to their life and that in itself is powerful.

(Managerial staff, focus group)

Overall, the assertion that the service would always be there, no matter the circumstances of any individual young person involved, came across strongly in the data. This continuous support was accompanied by a feeling of limitless contact and availability in some of the responses given to us.

The ability of a young person to contact their Lifecoach at any time of the day, during any point in their Coaching for Life journey, was communicated as a key feature of the programme and one of the 'key messages' that we asked participants to reflect on.

Quarriers Coaching for Life service has been a great part of my life. I am happy to still be accessing such a good service and my Lifecoach, [...] is the best.

(Young person, focus group)

### Barriers and challenges

Alongside the positive aspects of Coaching for Life highlighted above, the participants in this study did suggest some challenges that the service has faced. These largely reflect the way that the programme is managed and the capacity of the Lifecoaches. One young person commented that:

No one covers when they [Lifecoaches] are on holiday, so they should have more funding to help with cover.

(Young person, focus group)

While the young person acknowledged that the staff member providing 'cover' should be someone known to the young person as part of the Coaching for Life service, rather than someone 'random', this does highlight a challenge faced by Quarriers in their delivery of Coaching for Life.

The lack of cover for staff holidays links to the wider challenge of staff capacity, with Lifecoaches limited in their ability to take on new cases:

Within each of the four areas all coaches could probably double their amount of their capacity and we could reach out to more people. When you only have one full-time coach in each area there is a real consciousness around how much do you raise the awareness publicly of this service with the fear that we are not able to meet the demand.

(Managerial staff, focus group)

This was corroborated by free-text data captured by the online survey. Participants who took part in the survey and who identified themselves as individuals who had knowledge of the service observed the need for "*more staff*" (practitioner, online survey) to increase capacity and reach out to more young people. The limitation of the service to four locality areas was also acknowledged as a barrier to increasing opportunities for the young people living outwith these areas:

More Lifecoaches working in the current areas to reach more young people who would benefit from the service, extend into new geographical areas.

(Practitioner, survey)

The focus groups and the online questionnaire implied that the service can help meet young people's needs in ways that other agencies are unable to do so. However, it is recognised by many who took part in the evaluation that increased staffing is needed for the service to continue in this manner.

Wider service engagement and partnership working is understood by many of those involved with the service to be a key part of the Coaching for Life experience. However, experience of the process itself varies across the four geographical areas. This may be reflective of the different organisation and operation of local authorities in different areas. Data from the focus groups indicated that smaller localities appear to benefit from smaller networks that facilitate smoother partnership working: *"[...] is a small area so there is close contact for the agencies so it's really good"* (Lifecoach, focus group). In contrast, the larger urban regions experience more complications with partnership working: *"I think it's the difference between the cities and the smaller areas the bigger cities are struggling"* (Lifecoach, focus group). It is not possible within the scope of this evaluation to tease out the likely multiple and variable factors contributing to this experience. However, it would seem that in the larger areas multiple organisations can have an impact on communication channels, making it difficult to promote joined up working between agencies:

*In [...] there are so many services but the flipside of that is that it can very difficult to have joined up work than any other areas. The through care team in the smaller areas know all the young people. It's not the case in [...] and names come up and people are like 'I think they were linked in with this service or that service 6 months ago' in that way you can be a wee bit disjointed.*

(Lifecoach, focus group)

If the service was to be extended or replicated elsewhere, the differing context between geographical areas is worth future consideration for ongoing service delivery.

Providing a flexible model of service delivery that promotes choice for young people has been recognised as an essential element for successful engagement. However, there was also a recognition that this approach may have some limitations. Young people's choice and engagement, along with the role of staff members, were seen as key areas for reflection:

There are also challenges and limitations in giving young people the choice... If they wish to engage or not and let's not lose sight of that... Young people may not be feeling it one week, or one week you may go through a lot of cancellations and just not turning up... And that's real life and they don't get reprimanded or whatever... But they are able to know that next week when I meet my Lifecoach they are not going to say 'you should have been there'.

(Managerial staff, focus group)

Helping referrers and potential partner organisations understand the parameters of the service and the role was highlighted as an early challenge encountered by the Coaching for Life service. There was a reflection around the importance of not duplicating work that could be undertaken by existing services. This has been illustrated below as a learning point from delivering the service and is likely to be fruitful for any future plans regarding expansion or replication elsewhere.

For me there are some challenges around the role of a Lifecoach in young people's life and other people's awareness of that... In particular in terms of what they would expect a Lifecoach to be doing. When there are other organisations that can provide that level of support and are there to provide that. So it was a challenge to get some partners to truly understand what the Lifecoach provided in terms of the coach's support. Again, it was a healthy challenge because they needed to know for the referrals to be more relevant to the service.

(Managerial staff, focus group)

The acknowledgement of barriers and challenges outlined provide key learning for the development of the Coaching for Life service, especially when one considers the future direction of this service, or similar services. Whilst the service as a whole is perceived and received positively across staff members, young people and wider practitioners, these challenges and barriers need addressing if Coaching for Life is to continue to receive such positive feedback. This is especially true if Coaching for Life is to "*give Scotland's young people a much better chance*" (Managerial staff, focus group).

## Discussion

In this evaluation we used a mixed methods approach, gathering a broad dataset from a range of perspectives which was analysed deductively across five themes: the Coaching for Life Model, the Coaching for Life Experience, the Coaching for Life Outcomes and the



Coaching for Life Key Learning. Young People's Needs were identified as an additional theme linking the first four areas. These broad themes were analysed to answer the following research questions:

5. What is the Coaching for life model?
6. What is the Coaching for Life experience?
7. What are the Coaching for Life service outcomes?
8. What is the key learning from the Coaching for Life Initiative?

## **What is the Coaching for Life model?**

Data from the focus groups and online questionnaire highlighted flexibility and consistency as key features of the model. This results in a model of service delivery that was described by one coach as 'many and varied'. What emerges is a service that is reflexive and responsive to the dynamic needs of the young person during the length of their engagement in Coaching for Life, which is not time-limited. The young person's 'need' will be defined and evolve with their personal circumstances. With this in mind, the Coaching for Life model cannot be defined as a single intervention, but rather multi-modal and integrative, drawing on a range of skills, expertise and resources. In this manner, the Coaching for Life Model can be considered a 'complex intervention'; in complex interventions it can be difficult to identify and define all of the 'active ingredients' (MRC, 2000). The complex nature of the model means it is likely that there will be a degree of 'flexibility and tailoring' (Craig et al., 2008). It is also likely that young people involved with the service will receive various packages of bespoke intervention. The bespoke approach can present as a challenge for services in terms of describing and evaluating their intervention. Current social and economic culture seeks to operationalise and simplify services into discrete elements that map easily onto hard outcomes. However, the reality of delivering a service to a population with complex needs often involves a form of service delivery with layers of vital intrinsic variables and outcomes that are not easy to define. This can be challenging for services when funders often speak in a language of tangible costings and outcomes. However, from our evaluation, we believe that flexibility and consistent relationships are the 'active ingredients' of the Coaching for Life Model. Furthermore, it fits with the 'integrated' approach that draws on the three empirical pillars of Behaviourism, Cognitive Behaviourism and Contextualism when working towards social emotional goals. This approach incorporates behavioural reinforcement and skill acquisition through the motivating power of a relationship. The Integrative principles allow for intervention that is individualised and meaningful during both crisis and growth (Centre for Integrated Intervention, 2019). Which accurately sums up the work of the flexible and consistent Coaching for Life model.

Currently, evidence highlights the importance of consistent relationships in order to deliver better outcomes for families and young people (Gadda & Fitzpatrick, 2012; Holt et al., 2008; Lerpiniere et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 2007; Welch et al., 2015; Young et al., 2015). Through providing consistent, long-term support that is unconditional, the Coaching

for Life Model illustrates the importance of relationship building. Based on the evidence emerging from this evaluation it would be that the Coaching for Life model through its flexibility and consistency (across crisis or growth) provides 'relational permanence' which is the foundation for meeting 'needs' and skill acquisition (Vygotsky, 1978). While this is achieved through the interpersonal skills of the individual Lifecoaches, practice informed by coaching and mentoring models such as PATH, GROW and the PX2 approach also influence flexibility and consistency (Pearpoint et al., 1991; Alexander, 2006; Pacific Institute, 2019).

## **What is the Coaching for Life experience?**

The Coaching for Life Experience is characterised by acceptance, choice and wider service engagement. There are two tiers to the overall Coaching for Life Experience: that of the young people and of the staff. A key element was young people's experience of complete acceptance through their relationship with their Lifecoach. Elsewhere, acceptance is seen as an essential element towards realising value-based living and commitment actions (Hayes, 2004). It is historically recognised in health and social care that acceptance in the form of 'unconditional regard' is the hallmark of collaborative working. In the Coaching for Life context, it is clear that the service understands that providing young people with this experience requires considerable time, but is necessary and will vary according to the life experience of the individual young person. It is widely understood in research literature that children who have experienced early adversity may develop strategies that are initially resistant to any form of support or compassion (Lewing et al., 2018; Neff & McGehee, 2010). The data gathered from the focus groups and the online questionnaire suggest that some young people who have come into the Coaching for Life service may have had difficult experiences of prior agencies or service support. As such, it can take time for young people to feel accepted and realise their intrinsic values and aspirations. Providing young people with choice emerged as one of the service's most powerful interventions from the outset. This is consistent with contemporary policy, which recognises that everyone using health and social care has the right to choice and control (Department for Health, 2007). This aspect of the Coaching for Life experience is also developmentally appropriate for the young adults being supported from the service. Furthermore, this experiential approach removes barriers to decision-making (Burchardt et al., 2013). Furthermore, there is a strong ethos of working in partnership with the young people to help meet their needs, but also internally with other team members and externally with other agencies. It is recognised that creating high quality relationships helps to provide emotional support and is instrumental to accessing other resources (Winter, 2015). Data from both the focus groups and the online survey indicated that this way of working gives young people an experience of receiving help that has not been possible with other agencies.

## **Young people's needs**

The evaluation revealed a fifth theme of Young People's Needs which seemed to link the Coaching for Life Model, Experience and Outcomes. The Coaching for Life service keeps

young people's needs at the centre of engagement. This needs-led relational approach seems to account for the flexible and consistent model, and is the platform for successfully achieving meaningful outcomes for the young person. This approach is consistent with the hallmarks of good practice when engaging children and young people. This means to consider a young person's needs (including strengths and difficulties) in terms of their developmental stage and their social milieu (Fulcher & Garfat, 2015; Bellefeuille & Ricks, 2010).

## **What are the Coaching for Life outcomes?**

The Coaching for Life Outcomes are discussed in relation to wider benefits and long-term goals. All data sources demonstrated a positive impact of the Coaching for Life service on young people's mental health and well-being, self-confidence, self-esteem, social engagement and life skills. The outcomes identified here strongly echo the results of research into Lifecoaching, mentoring and support for young people moving on from care placements (Gaskell, 2010; Greeson et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 2016). Additionally, the ability of Coaching for Life to help give the young people the tools necessary to support their education, employment and housing status is reflected in wider discussions with care-leavers (Collins et al., 2010; Johnson et al., 2011; Höjer & Sjöblom, 2014; Marion et al., 2017). This is an important outcome for Coaching for Life, as the overall service aim is to improve 'hard' and 'soft' outcomes, such as education and employment, and well-being. Young people's needs and wider benefits, as discussed in this evaluation, both fulfil these 'hard' and 'soft' outcomes. These 'hard' and 'soft' outcomes also influence the long-term goals of Coaching for Life, which are discussed by evaluation participants as increasing young people's independence and encouraging their individual engagement with services in times of need. We noted from the evaluation that, while this element of the overall experience is understood to be essential, it can be difficult to define and operationalise. Nonetheless, it has long been documented in the evidence-base that human beings have a hierarchy of needs to be achieved in order to meet their full potential (Maslow, 1943). It could be argued that, based on the data captured from this evaluation, outcomes fall on a hierarchy ranging from 'soft' to 'hard'. For example, 'soft' outcomes would include nurturing relationships, mental wellbeing, while longer-term, 'hard' outcomes incorporate housing needs, education engagement and employment prospects. It is plausible that the attainment of 'soft' outcomes are a platform for longer-term, 'hard' outcomes. Both the qualitative and quantitative data in the evaluation indicate that many of young people have had support from Coaching for Life with emotional wellbeing. The data illustrates that a Coaching for Life model has elements of consistency that provide many of the young people with an unmet need for stability. It is well documented in the trauma literature that emotional health issues related to adverse experiences cannot be achieved without stabilisation (NHS Education for Scotland and The Scottish Government, 2018). The data from this evaluation suggests that Coaching for Life service delivers a hierarchy of outcomes in order to challenge social inequalities and enhance opportunities for care experienced young people.

## **What is the key learning for the Coaching for Life experience?**

The elements for successful engagement of young people and inevitably achieving better outcomes included the flexibility of the service, the young person-centred approach and continuity of support. The barriers and challenges to providing Coaching for Life were also highlighted and require some reflection. The importance of providing a flexible service is highlighted elsewhere in this discussion. It is, however, suggested to be a key element of mentoring, coaching and care services more generally (The Care Inquiry, 2013; Lerpiniere et al., 2015). This is also the case for person-centred approaches, where providing services for young people in a non-judgemental way, appropriate to the young person's background, is deemed a necessary quality of good mentoring services (Sulmani-Aidan, 2017). Ensuring that young people always felt able to maintain contact with their Lifecoaches, even once they had achieved their original goals, was also described as a strength of the service. This continued support is a key element of the current policy landscape (Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People, 2008; The Care Inquiry, 2013; HM Government, 2016). Any future developments should seek to continue working in a way that provides continuous, flexible and person-centred support.

Additionally, the main barriers and challenges identified suggest that it can be difficult to manage the specificities of the service alongside young people's expectations. This results in situations where some referrers and partner organisations struggle to understand the role of Lifecoaches in the lives of young people. Defining one's role was also highlighted as an issue in other mentoring relationships (Colvin & Ashman, 2010). Being unsure of a Lifecoach's purpose could result in infrequent use of mentors and unfamiliarity with the relationship. Participants here indicated that being unclear of a Lifecoach's role can also make it difficult for the service to work alongside other organisations. Coaching for Life, then, is simultaneously responsible for maintaining flexibility while projecting a clear understanding of the programme. Another challenge identified was the disparity between local areas and wider service engagement, particularly in the larger areas where there are complex networks which can impede communication channels. It is not unusual for services to evolve in a bottom-up, needs-led approach. However, this is an area for future consideration or plans for expansion. Subsequent service evaluation may include mapping exercises of wider service engagement, identifying areas of success and challenge.

## **Strengths & limitations of this evaluation study**

This evaluation employed a mixed-methods approach, which allowed for data triangulation through multiple sources (Tariq & Woodman, 2013). We are satisfied with the number of participants engaged in qualitative data, ensuring data sufficiency (Dey, 1999), in that we are confident that we have captured all relevant data themes. However, we only have data from a small number of participants who completed the pre-/post-questionnaires at two-time points. Therefore, this provides us with a snapshot of data from a brief period of time. In order to protect anonymity, it was not possible to secure agreement to collect detailed demographic data from young people who completed the pre-/post-questionnaire.

Therefore, we were unable to describe in detail the young people who participated in this evaluation. Future evaluations may wish to consider capturing data over a longer time-frame and across multiple data points. This will allow for evaluating the longevity of outcomes. Lastly, we only have data from participants who have actively engaged with the service. We do not have data from participants who have disengaged with the service. This latter point is beyond the scope of this current evaluation but may be an area for future consideration. Overall, we are satisfied with the validity and rigour of the methodology employed in this service evaluation.

## Conclusions

This study aimed to undertake an evaluation of the Coaching for Life service with a focus on four broad research questions. The data gathered from the evaluation has been analysed and discussed in relation to each of the research questions. The evaluation highlighted that the Coaching for Life service provides a flexible and consistent model of service delivery not previously experienced by this group of young people. Furthermore, these two elements are considered to be successful ingredients for engaging care experienced young people across the four localities, affording them better opportunities and improved outcomes. The experiences of choice, acceptance, and wider service engagement (across several tiers with coaches and other agencies) leads to improvements across a hierarchy of 'soft' and 'hard' outcomes. This results in direct benefits to young people, both in the wider sense and in the longer-term; knowing what opportunities are available to them, helping them to engage in other services, and knowing how to get help in the future. Enabling young people to be active members of the community benefits partner agencies and local communities. Data from the focus groups and the online questionnaire indicates that the service is responsive to young people's needs and those of local communities. The impact of the service has been considered by many involved to be essential and would be a loss if the service was discontinued. Issues of capacity and joined-up working with partner agencies (to increase young people's wider service engagement) in the larger areas have been highlighted for future consideration regarding sustainability and possible expansion. Future service evaluations may wish to include mapping exercises to address disparity of partnership working across the local areas. Longitudinal data pertaining to evaluation outcomes across the lifespan of young people may also be advantageous, especially when considering future funding opportunities. Ongoing service delivery may also seek to capture data and feedback from those young people who fail to engage with the service.

In summary, this evaluation has found the Coaching for Life Service to have a positive impact for care experienced young people aged 16 to 25 years old who have previously disengaged from other services. The evaluation has offered insight and discussion around the current model of service delivery in relation to existing literature, with implications for practice and future models of service delivery.

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## Appendix A: Annotated Bibliography

To ensure that the evaluation was grounded in existing evidence; we provided the Quarriers team with annotated bibliography. We scoped a range of online and offline databases to identify relevant literature. We compiled a suggested reading list with summaries of the existing literature. The bibliography consisted of three sections:

- Part 1: The Need for Adult Mentoring Relationships with Young Care Leavers
- Part 2: Characteristics of Effective Mentors and Mentoring Relationships.
- Part 3: The Policy Context

Each section contained a short paragraph introducing the content and purpose of the papers discussed, with the final section of the bibliography summarising the main arguments from the literature. This format was intended to help readers at Quarriers to identify and select sources most relevant to their work for further reading. To view the full document please follow this [link](#) to it on the CELCIS website. Alternatively, you can search the Knowledge Bank for *Moving on from Care: The Need for, and Purpose of, Mentoring and Coaching Relationships with Supportive Adults*.

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