FROM CARE TO INDEPENDENCE

Findings from research supported by The Big Lottery, conducted in partnership with The Prince's Trust

Jen Gibb and Amy Edwards

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

→ This report presents key findings from the final stage of a five-year research project, *From Care to Independence* (FC2I). The project was supported by the Big Lottery Fund and focused on the experiences of care leavers attending The Trust's Fairbridge programme.

→ The research was designed to explore the role of Fairbridge in relation to care leavers, alongside other sources of support.

→ The findings are basely largely on data from surveys, monitoring forms and interviews with staff and young people, completed between November 2014 and September 2016.

→ In the context of a renewed Government focus on improving provision for care leavers, the project aims to inform the future development of support offered by The Prince's Trust and partner organisations.

Who were the care leavers who took part?

→ Those involved in From Care to Independence had similar backgrounds to looked after children and care leavers profiled in official data and previous research. On average, the young people had entered care aged 10½. Most had been in the care system for more than three years and almost one third had experienced six or more placements.

→ The majority of young people were enthusiastic about leaving care and becoming independent, though they had mixed experiences afterwards. Alongside loneliness, they faced a range of persistent challenges, including around qualifications and skills, mental health problems, money, housing, relationships, and/ or risky or offending behaviour.

→ The young people had various sources of support, professional and personal. The extent to which they were receiving or satisfied with such support varied, as did their confidence in coping with challenges.

→ Most had long-term goals centred on paid work, but many were also keen to return to education, gain an apprenticeship or join another Prince's Trust programme. They also wanted to boost their confidence and skills, including around managing relationships, teamwork, communication and independent living.

What works? Learning from Fairbridge

→ A broad range of professionals and services referred young people to Fairbridge. Facilitators of recruitment included: time for (outreach) staff time to foster relationships with external organisations; advertising associating Fairbridge with The Prince's Trust brand; taster sessions for young people; and word of mouth – self-referrals resulted from peers having positive experiences on the programme.

→ All aspects of the programme were seen as important, by staff and young people. The Access course boosted confidence, provided challenge, and prepared young people for the rest of the programme. Group Follow On activities enabled working on skills, and one to ones with Programme Executives allowed young people to discuss their plans and choices, and receive practical and emotional support.

→ In terms of techniques used with young people, among those most consistently used and judged effective were: positive reinforcement and encouragement; active listening and reviewing and encouraging reflection on experiences. An individualised approach was key, however, and other techniques such as sharing life experience, while used less commonly, were also judged to work well.

→ Having an assigned Programme Executive from the start of the programme was seen as key to building trusting relationships and commitment. Facilitators of strong relationships included: showing a genuine interest in the young people, being positive, approachable, firm and challenging but non-judgemental, making an effort to understand any challenges they were facing, and offering support.

→ Commonly, Programme Executives worked with external professionals and other sources of support for young people to maximise their engagement with, and gains from, Fairbridge. Facilitators of partnership working included having consistent points of contact in partner agencies; young people having strong relationships with the people in question; and those people having a good understanding of the aims and nature of the programme.

→ Most young people left Fairbridge for positive reasons, namely achievement of employment, education, training or volunteering (EETV) or other goals. Practitioners aimed to ensure that leaving was a planned, positive and empowering step.

→ Risk factors for disengagement included behavioural and relationship problems, substance misuse, difficulties with mental health or wellbeing, a perceived lack of support from social workers/ Personal Advisers, financial or housing problems and low self-esteem/confidence.

→ Young people were less likely to disengage (or be excluded from the programme) if Fairbridge practitioners reported their sessions had involved features such as: agreeing an action plan, providing information/advice on EETV and broader issues, discussing money and practical and independent living skills and signposting/supporting them to engage with other sources of support.

What were the outcomes for care leavers?

→ Based on exit data for 231 young people leaving Fairbridge, 62 per cent had progressed to one or more of the following: education; training, volunteering, paid work, an apprenticeship, self-employment, or a place on another Prince's Trust programme. Other EETV-related gains included improved readiness to work, commitment to achievable goals and more impressive CVs.

→ The vast majority of young people were considered by practitioners to have boosted a range of skills during the course of the programme; most commonly teamwork, communication and confidence. Other positive steps included improved peer relationships and better use of services and support. The few who had not made perceptible gains tended to have disengaged from the programme.

→ Young people and practitioners attributed the progress they made, at least in part, to the support provided by Fairbridge. They were more likely to achieve EETV outcomes if they achieved 'intermediate' goals (regarding skills or personal development), and if their sessions with practitioners involved features such as: review and reflection, action planning, advice and support around EETV, discussion of family relationships, support with other areas (such as housing or money) and liaison with other agencies.

→ Challenges around relationships, social support, mental health, motivation, debt, transport and substance misuse were linked with lower rates of EETV achievement. Such issues were ongoing concerns for many leaving the programme, as were housing and behavioural problems.

→ Practitioners considered that sustaining progress was dependent on young people having good support networks and having their underlying needs met, particularly in relation to mental health.

Conclusions

→ The Fairbridge programme was perceived as effective, by both practitioners and young people, as a means of helping looked after children and care leavers develop skills and achieve their goals. The majority of those tracked through *From Care to Independence* achieved an EETV-related outcome, and almost all made progress in other areas, for example in relation to confidence, skills and addressing personal and practical challenges. Each element of the programme – intensive Access course, group Follow On activities and one to one support from a dedicated practitioner – appeared to play a part.

→ There are limits to what a relatively short intervention like Fairbridge can do for vulnerable young people. A substantial minority of those involved in the research disengaged rather than completing the programme. While some may have left for positive reasons – such as suddenly finding a job – it was more typical for them to drop out due to other pressures and challenges in their lives.

→ Fairbridge could be particularly effective when Programme Executives worked together with other sources of support in care leavers' lives. However, partnership working was particularly challenging to achieve for those most in need of help: those who had weak relationships with, or limited support from, other people, and therefore lacked ongoing support on leaving the programme.

→ The diverse group involved in the research tended to seek similar things from Fairbridge. However, the programme's flexibility appeared important. Young people wanted – and generally reported receiving – support tailored to their individual needs, wants and goals. These could differ, depending upon factors such as: anxieties about features of the programme or about engaging with peers or practitioners; care status or experience of living independently; learning needs; and preoccupation with pressing problems, including around mental health, family relationships or debt.

Recommendations

To a large extent, participants' satisfaction with Fairbridge argues for maintaining the existing provision without drastic changes, and simply redoubling efforts to reach more care leavers who could benefit.

→ *RECOMMENDATION 1:* Continue recruiting care leavers to the programme, drawing on findings from the research in demonstrating its value to partner agencies.

→ *RECOMMENDATION 2:* Involve care leavers, alongside other young people participating in Fairbridge and their practitioners, in shaping recruitment and engagement strategies.

Based on feedback from young people and practitioners, the programme could potentially be enhanced through building on its existing strengths in various ways, including providing more tailored support to maximise engagement, minimise drop out and sustain gains from the programme.

→ *RECOMMENDATION 3:* Review the range of courses and activities on offer, with input from young people. Consider, for example, adding more tailored courses on functional and life skills, adapted to the learning needs and experience of participants; and further opportunities to earn qualifications.

→ *RECOMMENDATION 4:* Continue to develop and roll out training for Programme Executives on supporting looked after children and care leavers.

→ *RECOMMENDATION 5:* Introduce specialist mental health support woven into or running alongside the programme and ensure Programme Executives are trained to signpost to this provision (as well as offer lower level support, within the boundaries of their existing roles).

→ *RECOMMENDATION 6:* Build in greater flexibility to devote time to the most vulnerable or isolated young people. This could include more one to one support, mentoring or life coaching, out of hours work, home visits, visual materials or translators for those with additional learning or language needs.

The remaining recommendations focus on engagement with other agencies, to share learning about 'what works' and to improve the support available to young people.

→ *RECOMMENDATION 7:* Build on best practice across Fairbridge centres to further develop partnership working with external agencies including NHS Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (NHS CYPMPS) and schools/ colleges, and with young people's families and carers.

→ *RECOMMENDATION 8:* For young people not involved with other services, there should be a particular emphasis on supporting their engagement with further sources of help and advice, including statutory support as well as e.g. peer support groups. The Children and Social Work Act will extend the right to request support from Personal Advisers to all care leavers under 25, including those *not* in education. Programme Executives could usefully raise awareness of this and encourage more young people to pursue and make best use of this entitlement.

→ *RECOMMENDATION 9:* Consider if longer-term mentoring is something The Prince's Trust and/ or partners (if not Fairbridge, specifically) could provide. This type of informal and accessible support may be of use to many more care leavers than are currently accessing the Fairbridge programme.

→ *RECOMMENDATION 10:* Stimulate further sharing of experience between Fairbridge centres, local authorities, and other programmes catering for care leavers, to maximise learning about best practice and what makes a difference – from the point of view of the young people accessing the support, and the practitioners providing it.

1. INTRODUCTION

Summary

→ This report presents findings from the final stage of a five-year research project, 'From Care to Independence'. It was supported by the Big Lottery Fund and focused on the experiences of care leavers attending The Trust's Fairbridge Programme.

→ The research was designed to explore the role of Fairbridge in relation to care leavers, alongside other sources of support.

→ This report draws mainly on surveys, monitoring forms and interviews with staff and young people, completed between November 2014 and September 2016.

→ In the context of a renewed focus within Government on improving provision for care leavers, the project aims to shed light on, and inform the development of, support offered by The Prince's Trust and partner organisations.

1.1 Background, aims and context

This section outlines the background to the research, its aims and context.

1.1.1 Background

Around 11,400 young people left care in England, aged 16 and over, in the year ending March 2016[1]. This represents an increase of over 40 per cent in the last decade. Outcomes for care leavers have remained consistently poor, in comparison to their peers; they leave home earlier, and have accelerated transitions to adulthood. In part reflecting the reasons for entering care in the first place (including abuse, neglect and behavioural problems), they fare badly compared to other young people in terms of educational achievement, health and mental health[2,3]. There is robust international evidence that those who do well in later life have had stability in care; achieved success at school; left care gradually and later, and been well supported beyond transition, into adulthood – and the converse are established risk factors (for an overview, see Stein 2015[4]). Research has consistently shown that the quality of support received by care leavers varies considerably, however, and that they often struggle to cope with independent living, placing them at heightened risk of social exclusion, homelessness, unemployment or involvement in crime[5,6,7,8]. Indeed, studies have found that between a quarter and a half of those in young offender institutions have been in care[9,10,11]. In the year ending March 2016, 40 per cent of 19-21 year-old care leavers were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) (compared to just 14 per cent of all 19-21 year-olds)[12]. Of these, over a third were NEET due to a disability, or because they were a young parent[13].

The Care Leaver Strategy[14] sets out the Government's ambitions around delivering better and more effective support. In part, this is to be pursued via new duties upon local authorities, as outlined in the Children and Social Work Act[15], to publish a 'local offer' for care leavers, and extend entitlement to support from Personal Advisers to all those under the age of 25. Other initiatives designed to develop provision for care leavers include exploring the potential of social impact bonds to support their entry into education, employment and training (EET)[16], and using the Children's Social Care Innovation Programme to pilot models of 'Staying Close' for young people in residential care – to emulate existing 'Staying Put' arrangements for those in foster care. The Department for Education have also published an evaluation of the New Belongings Programme, which was funded by the Care Leavers' Foundation and worked with local authorities to encourage greater engagement of care leavers, partner agencies and the wider community in shaping and improving their services[17].

In advance of these recent initiatives, '*From Care to Independence*' (FC2I) began in 2012. Supported by the Big Lottery Fund, the project focused on learning about 'what works' based on the experiences of care leavers on The Trust's Fairbridge programme. Initially, the research focused mainly on one to one support provided through Fairbridge, and employment, education, training and volunteering outcomes. Emerging

findings on these issues were summarised and published by The Prince's Trust in May 2015[18]. Thereafter, the project was broadened to look in more depth at 'soft' and 'intermediate' outcomes, and to consider other forms of support for those attending Fairbridge, both in and beyond the programme.

1.1.2 Aims

The (revised) project was designed to address the following key questions:

→ What role(s) can support delivered by Fairbridge play in helping care leavers to develop the confidence and skills they need to engage with services and wider opportunities and achieve their goals?

→ How does this type of support interact with, and complement, other sources of support available to care leavers, including support from social services, family, social networks, and other support providers?

→ How can (supplementary) support best be delivered to meet the needs of care leavers?

→ What factors are particularly important in supporting different groups of care leavers?

1.1.3 The Fairbridge Programme

Fairbridge was established as a charitable organisation in 1987, providing support for a range of vulnerable young people. In 2011, it merged with The Prince's Trust which now oversees the Fairbridge programme.

The aim of the programme is to empower disengaged and marginalised young people aged 16-25 by helping them to gain the skills needed to stabilise their life circumstances and eventually move into education, employment, training or volunteering (EETV). FC2I focused on support provided to care leavers within this programme, based on its tried and tested support model[19,20].

The Fairbridge model aims to support personal development via one to one sessions and group activities. As well as an induction meeting and/ or taster day, the programme involves a week-long Access course where young people participate in challenging activities and a residential stay. Following this, they participate in a number of one to ones with Programme Executives and Follow on (group) sessions, which focus variously on steps towards EETV outcomes (e.g. CV writing workshops), life skills (e.g. cooking classes) and personal or social skills (e.g. teamwork). Delivery is young-person centred, and tailored to individual needs. As such, the nature of support provided (e.g. the particular activities or number of sessions) varies by participant.

1.1.4 Report outline

Findings from the project are set out in the following four chapters. Chapter 2 profiles the care leavers recruited to the programme, including their backgrounds, aspirations, support needs and networks. Chapter 3 explores 'What works' based on learning about recruitment, programme content, relationships with staff, partnership working, and exits from the programme. Chapter 4 discusses the range of outcomes achieved by the young people, and the various enabling factors and barriers they faced. Finally, Chapter 5 returns to the key research questions, highlighting key messages and recommendations for the future. First, Section 1.2 provides a brief summary of the research methods.

1.2 Research methods

This report is based on quantitative data collected mainly during the final phase of the project, between November 2014 and August 2016, and qualitative interviews with practitioners and young people conducted between April 2015 and September 2016.

1.2.1 Quantitative research

The quantitative research aimed to gather data from all the practitioners and young people involved in FC2I.

Quantitative methods and tools

Fairbridge practitioners were provided with monitoring and feedback forms, designed for them and for care leavers, with guidance explaining the purpose of each form and when and how they should be completed.

The forms included:

→ Baseline and Follow Up surveys for young people, completed at the outset and conclusion of the one to one support, focusing on their needs, goals, achievements and experiences of one to one support.

→ Session Logs, completed by the practitioner after each one to one meeting with care leavers, describing the support provided, as well as perceptions of engagement and barriers to progress.

→ Final Session Forms, completed by practitioners after their last one to one meeting with care leavers, recording overall outcomes, what worked well and any continuing barriers, from their perspectives.

In addition, analyses drew on data collected by The Prince's Trust via profile forms, completed when young people joined Fairbridge, and via text surveys issued three months after they left the programme.

The quantitative sample

The quantitative element of the research aimed to gather data from practitioners on all one to one sessions, including the final meeting, and from all young people at the start and end of their time with the programme. However, completing the surveys was voluntary for care leavers, and – as expected – completion rates at follow up were limited by the fact that some disengaged from support and lost touch with staff.

Table 1.1 below summarises the data received. Aside from the profile data, which covered a longer period, this included at least some paperwork for 350 young people (usually, but not always, including a Baseline survey) who attended Fairbridge at some point between November 2014 and August 2016[a]. In total, NCB received evidence that 231 of these had left the programme, through receipt of Follow Up surveys and/ or Final Session forms. Monitoring data from The Prince's Trust indicates that a further 96 young people may have exited Fairbridge, suggesting that we obtained outcome measures for 71 per cent of relevant leavers (who did not appear to differ in terms of background characteristics from those for whom less data was supplied).

Table 1.1 Data received from The Prince's Trust

Data	Total
Profile forms	736
Baseline surveys	301
Follow Up surveys	107
Session logs	763
Final Session forms	213
Three-month text surveys	93

Quantitative data analyses and interpretation

Quantitative analysis was conducted in IBM SPSS (v23). This report includes descriptive data and tests of change over time (e.g. between Baseline and Follow Up surveys of young people). Where sample sizes allow, we have also explored differences between outcomes for specific groups.

Throughout, we make use of all available data, so the number of valid responses varies. In each case, the relevant count or base (valid *N*) is made clear within the text or tables.

Wherever possible, we draw on material from interviews to explore issues which cannot be fully addressed using the quantitative data.

1.2.2   Qualitative research

In order to explore their experiences in more depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a longitudinal sample of care leavers, as well as relevant managers and practitioners, from across six case study sites.

Qualitative methods and tools

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[a] This report focuses on young people supported by Fairbridge. In the initial phase of the project, FC2I also involved a small number who received mentoring from The Prince's Trust volunteers (20) or partner agencies (13).

Interview topic guides were designed in consultation with The Prince's Trust and Fairbridge practitioners. Young people were approached through Fairbridge practitioners, and were provided with information sheets prepared by NCB researchers. With young people's consent (and ethical clearance from the Association of Directors of Children's Services, and the relevant local authorities), their social workers/ Personal Advisers were also approached to take part.

Initial (Wave 1) interviews with young people generally took place on case study site premises, shortly after they joined the programme. Later interviews (Waves 2 and 3, on exit and approximately three months later), and those with practitioners, were sometimes conducted by telephone. Interviews lasted up to an hour and were recorded with permission. Young people were provided with high-street gift vouchers to show appreciation of their contribution to the research.

The qualitative sample

The interviews conducted are summarised in Table 1.2 below.

Table 1.2 Interviews conducted

Data	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3	Total
Young people	20	7	4	31
Fairbridge Programme Executives	19	18	-	37
Social workers / Personal Advisers	-	3	-	3
Fairbridge Site Managers	5	-	-	5

In terms of their backgrounds and circumstances, the profile of young people who took part in interviews closely reflects that of the broader sample of programme recruits, as described in Chapter 2.

Qualitative data analyses and reporting

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analysed thematically using the Framework approach[21]. (This involves producing a series of worksheets, each of which address a particular theme and enable comparing participants' views and experiences in a systematic way). In general, case study data is used to add depth, detail and understanding, and as such we generally avoid quantifying the views expressed during interviews, or suggesting that those of individuals are typical of the wider population. Pseudonyms have been used throughout, to protect participants' anonymity.

1.3   Interpretation of findings

This report is intended to contribute to understanding and informing the ongoing support offered to care leavers by The Prince's Trust and partner organisations. Findings with respect to young people involved with these organisations, and with this study, are not directly generalisable to the broader population of care leavers. Nevertheless, as set out in Chapter 2, the backgrounds and circumstances of care leavers involved in FC2I are similar in many ways to those highlighted in previous research and government statistics as prevalent in the wider care leaver population. It is therefore hoped that these findings will add to the existing body of knowledge about the needs of care leavers and 'what works' in supporting them to make progress and achieve positive outcomes.

Despite our efforts to gather data on all young people receiving support through From Care to Independence, and to involve a diverse sample in our case studies, those more engaged in Fairbridge were more likely to participate in the research at various points. Accordingly, the views reported may be somewhat more positive than might have been generated from a fully representative sample. However, we highlight differences as well as consensus among respondents, and draw on data from practitioners as well as young people wherever possible to explore issues from different perspectives.

In the remainder of this report, we generally refer to 'young people' rather than the more unwieldy 'children in care and care leavers' – but the focus is on the latter throughout.

2.   WHO WERE THE CARE LEAVERS WHO TOOK PART?

Summary

→ Those involved in *From Care to Independence* had similar backgrounds to the looked after children and care leavers profiled in official data and previous research.

→ On average, the young people had entered care aged 10½. Most had been in the care system for more than three years and almost one third had experienced six or more placements. Most commonly, they had spent time in foster care, with smaller numbers having lived in children's homes or supported accommodation.

→ The majority of young people were enthusiastic about leaving care and becoming independent, at least in advance, but they had mixed experiences afterwards.

→ Alongside loneliness, they faced a range of persistent challenges, including around qualifications and skills, mental health problems, money, housing, relationships, and/ or risky or offending behaviour.

→ The young people were drawing on various sources of support – professional and personal – but the extent to which they were receiving or satisfied with this support varied, as did their confidence in coping with challenges.

→ Most had long-term goals centred on paid work, but many were also keen to return to education, gain an apprenticeship or join another Prince's Trust programme. They also wanted to boost their confidence and skills, including around managing feelings and relationships, teamwork, communication and independent living.

This chapter profiles the young people participating in the research. To set their experiences and outcomes in context, it explores their circumstances, care histories, experiences of moving into independence, support needs and networks, and goals and aspirations, as recorded in surveys at baseline and at interview.

2.1   Number, profile and circumstances

This section describes the profile and circumstances of care leavers on beginning the Fairbridge programme. Data from The Prince's Trust profile forms provides an overview of the backgrounds of all those involved in the research since 2012 (for up to 736 young people). The data is tabulated in Appendix A, but in short:

→ Almost two-thirds were male (63 per cent) and more than eight out of ten (84 per cent) were White.

→ On average, they were aged 18 (53 per cent were under 18 and 47 per cent 18 - 25).

→ Just over half had either left care (33 per cent) or were in the process of leaving (22 per cent), with the rest still in care. Most commonly they were in supported housing (21 per cent), with almost as many living with family members (20 per cent), in foster care (17 per cent) or children's homes (14 per cent). Others were renting (12 per cent), in hostels (11 per cent) or temporarily staying with friends (3 per cent).

→ Over three quarters (78 per cent) were not in work, education or volunteering immediately prior to joining the programme. 11 per cent had been in work (mostly part-time), with fewer in education or volunteering.

→ Around 3 per cent were asylum seekers or refugees.

The circumstances of these young people are similar to those previously reported for looked after children and care leavers. Recent national data showed that 75 per cent of those looked after were from White British backgrounds, 56 per cent were male, and 6 per cent were unaccompanied asylum seekers[22].

2.2 Care histories and moving into independence

This section presents data from Baseline surveys and interviews with young people at various points in their care journeys. In general, those interviewed shared limited information about their care histories with Programme Executives, as these were not the primary focus of their time with Fairbridge. However, those who completed Baseline surveys provided an overview of their experiences.

On average, young people had entered care aged 10½ (broadly in line with recent figures showing that, in the year to March 2016, 47 per cent of those starting to be looked after were aged 10 or over[23]). The length of time they had spent there varied considerably, with the majority in the care system for more than three years, as shown in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1 Time spent in care

	%
Less than a year	19
Between 1-3 years	28
Between 3-5 years	14
More than 5 years	39

Source: Baseline surveys. Base N = 292.

Focusing on types of placement, Table 2.2 shows that three-quarters had been in foster care at some point (74 per cent), with half as many in children's homes (38 per cent). Over a quarter had lived in supported housing (28 per cent). As noted above, this was the most common type of *current* accommodation for those involved in FC2I.

Table 2.2 Types of placement experienced by care leavers

	%
Foster care	74
Children's home	38
Supported housing	28
Independent living	19
Extended family	17
Semi-supported housing	15
Secure home	10

Source: Baseline surveys. Base N = 297.

Almost 40 per cent of care leavers who completed Baseline surveys (*n* = 117) had been homeless at some point (including those reliant on sleeping on a friend's couch).

Many had moved several times, with 30 per cent having experienced at least six placements, and 14 per cent ten or more, whilst in care (Appendix A, Table A.2). Interviews with young people reinforced this picture. As one care leaver reflected:

> *"I've been shipped around my dad, my mum, my sister, aunties, the streets…since I was 12 so I can't actually say I've lived anywhere permanently."*

(Young Person)

Placement instability has been repeatedly identified as a risk factor for adverse outcomes[24,25,,26]. Levels of placement change comparable to those in the Fairbridge sample have been found previously in surveys of those leaving care in England during the 1990s (around 40 per cent reported more than three moves, and 10 per cent ten or more) [27] and also in recent national data: among all looked after children at 31 March 2016, 10 per cent had three of more placements during the single year ending 31st March 2016 [28].

In the context of such experiences, interviewees typically described looked forward to leaving care. They reported striving to be independent – and in control of their own living arrangements – as soon as they could. Young people with positive relationships with social workers or family members sought their support in taking steps towards independence, and finding suitable accommodation. Those assisted by social workers at this time had mixed views of their support, however, and sometimes felt out of the loop in terms of the outcomes of accommodation processes and decisions.

The reality of being independent did not always live up to young people's expectations. Those who did enjoy living by themselves liked the freedom this offered; others reported feeling alone and lonely. Despite having initial positive feelings about leaving care, there were young people who described having regrets later on, including when they had rejected the option of staying put in foster care. As one young person put it:

> *"At first I was quite happy but now it just feels really boring, lonely. Now I wish I was still in care…"*

(Young Person)

Alongside loneliness (which also featured prominently in the accounts of care leavers in the recent *New Belongings* evaluation[29]), a range of other challenges and pressures were experienced by those who took part in the research. These are discussed further in Section 2.3 below.

2.3   Support needs

The majority of young people described facing at least one of a range of challenges, on joining the Fairbridge programme. For example:

→ 87 per cent had fewer than five GCSEs, including English and Maths, at Grades A*-C

→ Almost half reported having a mental health problem (49 per cent), though of these, fewer than half (48 per cent) said they were accessing mental health services

→ Almost half (46 per cent) had a history of offending

→ Over a third had a disability (34 per cent)

→ Nearly one in ten (9 per cent) had children of their own (See Table A.4, Appendix A).

Young people were also asked whether certain challenges were actually affecting their lives. As shown in Table 2.3, more than a third identified problems in relationships with their family (37 per cent), while almost as many noted problems with reading/ writing (33 per cent) and numbers/ maths (29 per cent). Other issues commonly mentioned included being bullied (21 per cent) and involved in anti-social behaviour (20 per cent).

Table 2.3 Challenges affecting care leavers on joining the programme

	%
Problems in my relationships with family	37
Problems with reading/ writing	33
Problems with numbers/ maths	29
Being/have been bullied	21
Committing anti-social behaviour or in trouble with the police	20
Alcohol or drug use preventing participation in day-to-day life	15
Living in a workless household	12
Problems with debt	10
English as a second language	4
Rural isolation	3
Caring for a family member	3

Source: Profile forms. Base N = 730 with the exception of *alcohol/ drug use (N = 727).

The majority of those who completed Baseline surveys felt at least 'mostly' able to manage independent living (69 per cent), but this left almost a third who felt less equipped to cope (See Appendix A, Table A.3.)

Table 2.4 sets out in more detail young people's perceptions of how well they could manage in particular areas. The greatest numbers were less confident regarding money and benefits; family relationships and housing, but in every area, a sizeable minority (typically more than one fifth) were unsure of themselves.

Table 2.4 Perceived ability to manage areas of life at baseline

	No, not at all %	No, not really %	Yes, mostly %	Yes, completely %	Total N
Housing	**8**	**24**	51	16	288
Health and wellbeing	4	17	56	23	287
Relationships with family	**10**	**26**	44	21	285
Friendships and networks	3	16	59	23	284
Making good use of services	3	22	56	19	284
Staying safe and avoiding trouble	3	20	53	25	284
Education, work and training	**3**	**35**	46	16	286
Money and benefits	**10**	**29**	45	17	284

Source: Baseline surveys.

Fairbridge staff who took part in interviews also identified a range of presenting needs among young people, consistent with the quantitative (self-report) data. For the most part, however, they did not consider the support needs of care leavers were vastly different from those of other young people accessing Fairbridge. Indeed, they argued that the majority of those on the programme had complex support needs.

There was, nevertheless, a perception amongst Fairbridge staff that **care leavers needed particular support in a number of areas, including around housing, independent living, and managing their finances**. This reflects the quantitative findings, with almost one in four (39 per cent) stating they did not feel able to manage their money and almost one in three (32 per cent) feeling likewise about housing, on starting with Fairbridge (see Table 2.4). Social workers echoed these concerns and described working with many care leavers who had *"burnt bridges"* with placements or landlords, which made it increasingly difficult for them to find accommodation. Likewise, they were aware of young people struggling to manage their money – including those emerging from foster care with savings which they spent rapidly and sometimes rashly.

Fairbridge staff also felt that **care leavers were especially likely to have mental health needs**, possibly linked to their past experiences and difficulties with relationships, as well as current challenges associated with leaving care. Again, this was backed by the quantitative (profile) data, which showed that nearly half of care leavers (49 per cent) reported mental health problems, and Baseline surveys suggesting that over a fifth (21 per cent) felt unable to manage their health and wellbeing (Table 2.4). It also echoes findings of previous studies which have found that young people's mental health problems may increase at the time of leaving care, and that care leavers report lower overall wellbeing than those still in care[30,31].

Likewise, **previous research has also demonstrated that care-experienced young people have higher levels of involvement in risky behaviour, in comparison with their peers in the general population, including offending and drug and alcohol use,** and that between a quarter and a half of those in young offender institutions have been in care[32,33,34]. In addition, recent research found that more than one fifth of female care leavers in England become teenage parents; approximately three times the national average[35]. Moreover, care leavers, particularly those who leave care at 16 or 17, who have mental health problems and emotional and behavioural difficulties, and/ or who have been in secure accommodation, **are among those most likely to experience housing problems, including homelessness[36].**

The types of challenge identified above were reflected in the smaller interview sample of young people, whose lives were often somewhat chaotic. They described recent experience of a range of issues including: homelessness or unstable housing, money worries, pregnancy, substance misuse, criminal activity, unhealthy relationships, mental health issues and threatened deportation. Nonetheless, they also tended to report spending a lot of time at home; sleeping, watching TV and surfing the internet. **They typically spoke of feeling bored with this lifestyle and wanting more structure in their lives.**

Like the broader sample of young people who took part in the research, the majority of interviewees had not been engaged in EETV activity in the period prior to joining Fairbridge. Those interviewed had different views and experiences of education. Reflecting their typically low levels of qualifications, many described negative experiences of school, and, although college was generally seen in a more positive light, a number had tried this route and dropped out for a variety of reasons; including challenges in other areas of their lives. A minority planned to use Fairbridge as an interim programme before taking up a college place they had already applied for, in order to be better prepared to cope when the time came.

When young people were asked directly about their support needs during interviews, they were generally able to reflect well on the areas in which they needed support, and where Fairbridge could help. These were largely consistent with the areas set out above and can be considered within the following broad categories:

→ **Independent living:** A number of interviewees wanted support to find (better) accommodation. Those with financial problems wanted help to budget and access the benefits they were entitled to.

→ **Education and employment:** The young people often highlighted their lack of work experience and wanted evidence of achievements and qualifications to add to their CVs.

→ **Social skills:** Those interviewed wanted opportunities to meet new people and build social and communication skills. This was especially important for those with high levels of anxiety.

→ **Health and wellbeing:** Interviewees with diagnosed mental health issues wanted support with these. However, young people without such a diagnosis still wanted to feel better about themselves, to increase their self-esteem, self-worth and confidence and to improve their ability to manage their emotions. Those with substance misuse problems wanted support to kick these habits.

→ **Support with difficult, often unexpected, circumstances:** Young people recognised the sometimes chaotic nature of their lives and wanted support with challenges (such as pregnancy or legal problems) as and when they arose.

Despite care leavers' often complex support needs, practitioners voiced the opinion that many had developed an incredible resilience in the face of significant challenges. They suggested that this be recognised as a strength and marker of potential – given the right support.

> *"The process care leavers have often been through creates a massive amount of resilience, and if you can tap into that you cannot just get someone back up to where they ought to be, but you can actually help them tap the potential… in them to be someone who is above average, and has more to offer."*

> <div align="right">(Fairbridge Site Manager)</div>

Section 2.4 below considers the sources of support drawn on by care leavers, prior to joining Fairbridge.

2.4 Support networks

Support networks were very important to young people – both personal networks (of family and friends) and professional networks, including social workers, Personal Advisers and key workers from other services.

Baseline surveys showed that, over the previous year, young people reported receiving support from a broad range of people (see Table 2.5). Of note, less than half had had support from a social worker or Personal Adviser in relation to education, work and training (46 per cent) or accessing services (45 per cent). Around a third (35 per cent) had received support from their social worker or Personal Adviser around housing, money or other practical issues. In some areas, like health and wellbeing, avoiding trouble and managing relationships, the greatest number of young people – albeit still minorities – reported receiving support from their families.

Encouragingly, more than half (56 per cent) said they were getting some support in *every* area, and just five young people (2 per cent) reported receiving no support from anyone in *any* of the eight listed. However, **sizeable minorities of young people described not getting support from anyone in specific areas.** In some cases, they may have been coping well. Nonetheless, further analysis of Baseline data showed that those receiving no support were just as likely – or, with regard to health and wellbeing and relationships – significantly *more* likely to report feeling unable to manage in the relevant areas (Table A.5, Appendix A).

Table 2.5 Sources of support for care leavers over the last year

	Family	Friends	Personal Adviser/ social worker	Foster carers/ children's home	Other services	**No-one**	
	%	%	%	%	%	**%**	Total N
Education, work and training	24	12	**46**	35	32	**12**	288
Health and wellbeing	**37**	16	28	35	19	**17**	287
Staying safe and avoiding trouble	**35**	20	24	31	15	**22**	286
Managing relationships	**35**	23	27	25	12	**24**	287
Housing, money or practical issues	28	9	**35**	34	14	**18**	288
Accessing services	20	9	**45**	32	22	**15**	284
Social skills	28	23	24	**29**	21	**24**	288
Motivation and encouragement	34	29	26	**35**	17	**19**	289

Source: Baseline surveys.

The qualitative data further illustrated young people's variable views of their relationships with social workers or Personal Advisers. **Those who had known their workers for a significant period of time (some two years or more) spoke more positively about their relationships.** They reported using their social worker or Personal Adviser as a source of support regarding money, education, employment, legal and/ or personal issues. This included seeking their help in understanding their previous placements and accessing their files.

> **Kate (19) had known her social worker for four years and counted her as a key support figure. This social worker regularly rang to check in with Kate and helped with practical things like calling different professionals and helping her to budget. Kate also had a key worker who lived in her building that she saw once a week. Kate had kept in touch with her previous foster family and visited them, but not as much as she would have liked to. Her boyfriend and his family were also important to her and supported her emotional wellbeing.**

Not all young people described such positive relationships with their social worker or Personal Adviser – even, in some cases, where those professionals felt they got on well. There were care leavers who maintained that their social workers cared little about them and were purely in their jobs for financial reasons. They claimed to feel unsupported by them and that they could not trust them to provide help. In some cases, they had experienced numerous changes in their allocated social workers; with one young person describing over 40 during his time in care. **Those who had recently changed workers, for example moving from a social worker to a Personal Adviser, recalled finding it hard to build up relationships with those they saw infrequently.** Girls in particular expressed desire to see these professionals on a more regular basis and wanted to take full advantage of the support they could potentially offer.

> **Adam (19) reported having few people in his life offering him support. He said he did not feel that his 40+ social workers had been supportive and did not not have a Personal Adviser, though his solicitor said he was entitled to one. Adam had mental health issues and was supported by a Mental Health Worker who was also a fitness coach and helped him with his mental and physical health. Adam described his religion as increasingly important to him and he came to see this as his main source of support.**

If young people did not have, did not like or did not see their social worker or Personal Adviser, they were still likely to be supported by others. Indeed, all those interviewed reported some professional support from a range of sources including counsellors, key workers, health services, outreach workers, nurses, employment workers from Connexions/ JobCentrePlus, and/ or accommodation staff. Views of these staff, however, were also variable. For example, young people living in care homes generally stated that the staff there were helpful and proactive in supporting them to develop independent living and budgeting skills. Staff in supported accommodation, however, tended not to be described so positively by those who were in the

process of leaving, or who had left, care. Young people in these circumstances tended to be more critical of the staff and typically claimed to feel less supported and cared for. This chimes with findings from other recent research which found that care leavers were more likely than those still in care to be dissatisfied with support from their corporate parents[37].

Young people also spoke about their own personal networks, which in some cases they saw as far more supportive than professionals. Despite being in care, many young people maintained some degree of contact with their birth family. Parents and siblings, as well as wider family such as aunts and uncles, were valued sources of assistance for some. Young people who had positive relationships with their previous foster families also cited them as sources of support, where they had maintained contact. As one young man explained the relationship with his foster family: "*Blood makes you related, but emotion makes family*".

Young people also mentioned friends and romantic partners among their personal sources of support.

> **Megan (20) claimed that all of her social workers and keyworkers had failed to listen to her and she had concluded that they were just there to get paid. In contrast, she saw her boyfriend of two years as trustworthy, and a huge source of support.**

As shown in Table 2.5, almost a quarter of those who completed Baseline surveys had had support from friends with managing relationships (23 per cent) and social skills (23 per cent). A number of interviewees, however, spoke of negativity within their peer group and expressed desire to break free of this.

Despite typically drawing on various sources of personal, statutory and non-statutory support, a recurring theme among young people who took part in interviews was not feeling supported, and an overarching sense of loneliness.

> *"I feel like I've got no one to turn to, and sometimes I feel really alone even though everyone's around."*
>
> (Young Person)

As in other areas, the young people taking part in FC2I described a similar range of experiences of accessing support to those involved in previous studies. Such studies have found that care leavers want, need and value practical and personal support prior to, during and after leaving care[38]. As noted in Section 1.1, the extent to which they *receive* such support varies, as evidenced by official[39,40] and self-report data. For example, in one study involving young people from 12 local authorities, while a majority found their pathway plans 'very' or 'quite useful', more than four in ten found them 'not very' or 'not at all' useful[41].

2.5 Goals and aspirations

Recognising that young people signing up to Fairbridge had a broad array of support needs, Programme Executives used a tool called *My Journey* to help them reflect on a number of key skills (such as communication or managing emotions) and to rate themselves on a scale of one to six to help clarify those skills they most wanted (or needed) to develop. They also encouraged young people to set short, medium and long-term goals early on in the programme, relating to different areas of their lives.

Young people's goals are explored below within three themes; EETV, skills and other personal goals.

EETV-related goals

Long-term goals set by young people were largely focused on employment. As shown in Table 2.6, almost two-thirds (63 per cent) wanted to secure a paid job. Having a stable job and the income that came with it was described as very important by those interviewed. For those unhappy in their current living circumstances, this became even more urgent, as it was seen as a prerequisite for obtaining better accommodation. In the longer term, a secure job and income was seen as a way of enabling a move to a new area; some voiced a strong desire to live somewhere quieter and more peaceful than their current location. Substantial numbers of young people also had goals around (re)entering education, or gaining an apprenticeship (both 38 per cent) while almost as many (32 per cent) hoped to join another Prince's Trust programme.

Table 2.6 EETV-related goals

	%
A paid job	63
An apprenticeship	38
A place in education	38
A place on a Prince's Trust programme	34
A training place	32
Their own business	22
A volunteering place	20

Source: Baseline survey. N = 300.

Skills-related goals

Programme Executives recognised young people's long-term EETV goals, but also encouraged them to focus on short and medium-term goals, typically relating to 'soft skills', to help them make progress in the right direction. As shown in Table 2.7, young people were commonly keen to develop confidence (64 per cent), ability to manage their feelings (61 per cent), teamwork (56 per cent) and communication skills (55 per cent).

Table 2.7 Skills-related goals

	%
Confidence	64
Managing feelings	61
Working with others	56
Communication	55
English or Maths	55
Setting and achieving goals	53
Reliability	40
IT skills	30

Source: Baseline survey. N = 300.

Other personal goals

Young people also aspired to attain a range of other personal goals during their time with Fairbridge. As shown in Table A.6 (Appendix A), nearly two thirds wanted to form realistic plans for their future (63 per cent) and 61 per cent wanted to become ready for work. Despite the most common personal goals focusing on steps towards employment, many also wanted to develop themselves in other ways. These included being more healthy (54 per cent) and improving their independent living skills, around budgeting, cooking or housework (51 per cent).

Data from the qualitative interviews confirmed that young people generally wanted to feel better about themselves, happier in their circumstances, and meet new people. Some started with very simple goals around getting out of bed and turning up at their Fairbridge centre.

Programme Executives suggested that skills and personal goals were particularly important for young people and aimed to help them address these areas, before (more effectively) concentrating on their EETV goals. As one Programme Executive said, of a care leaver on the programme:

> *"I don't think he's ready for work… So it's more like the soft skills and looking after himself, being able to cook for himself and maybe a bit of money management skills and being able to claim the benefits that he's entitled to as well."*

(Programme Executive)

3. 'WHAT WORKS?' – LEARNING FROM FAIRBRIDGE

Summary

→ A broad range of professionals and services referred young people to Fairbridge. Facilitators of recruitment included: time for (outreach) staff time to foster relationships with external organisations; advertising associating Fairbridge with The Prince's Trust brand; taster sessions for young people; and word of mouth – self-referrals resulted from peers having positive experiences on the programme.

→ All aspects of the programme - the week-long Access course; the one to one sessions and Follow On courses – were seen as important, by practitioners and young people. The Access course boosted confidence, provided challenge, and prepared young people for the rest of the programme. Group Follow On activities enabled working on skills; while the one to ones allowed young people to discuss their plans and choices, and receive practical and emotional support.

→ In terms of techniques used with young people, among those most consistently used and judged effective were: positive reinforcement and encouragement; active listening and reviewing and encouraging reflection on experiences. An individualised approach was key, however, and other techniques such as sharing life experience, while used less commonly, were also judged to work well.

→ Having an assigned Programme Executive from the start was seen as key to building trusting relationships and commitment, particularly for some who struggled to engage or open up. Facilitators of strong relationships included showing a genuine interest in the young people, being positive, approachable, firm and challenging but non-judgemental, making an effort to understand any challenges they were facing, and offering support.

→ Commonly, Programme Executives worked with external professionals and other sources of support for young people to maximise their engagement with, and gains from, Fairbridge. Facilitators of partnership working included having consistent points of contact in partner agencies; young people having strong relationships with the people in question; and those people having a good understanding of the aims and nature of the programme.

→ Most young people left Fairbridge for positive reasons, namely achievement of EETV or other goals. Practitioners aimed to ensure that leaving was a planned, positive and empowering step.

→ Risk factors for disengagement included behavioural and relationship problems, substance misuse, difficulties with mental health or wellbeing; a perceived lack of support from social workers/ Personal Advisers; financial or housing problems and low self-esteem/ confidence.

→ Young people were less likely to disengage (or be excluded from the programme) if Fairbridge practitioners reported their sessions had involved features such as agreeing an action plan, providing information/ advice on EETV and broader issues, discussing money and practical and independent living skills and signposting/ supporting them to engage with other sources of support.

This chapter sets out key findings in relation to 'what works', drawing on learning from practitioners and young people in five main areas: recruitment and engagement; programme content and structure; staffing and relationships; partnership working; and care leavers' exits from the programme.

3.1 Recruitment and engagement

Continuous recruitment of young people and, in relation to FC2I, care leavers, was important for Fairbridge managers. This ensured sites always had sufficient numbers to run a good range of Follow On sessions.

In the context of the range of professionals and services providing support to young people (see Section 2.4), referral pathways were correspondingly varied. These involved social workers or Personal Advisers, accommodation staff, keyworkers at other charities, healthcare staff, youth offending or probation services, housing associations and substance misuse support groups. Fairbridge staff highlighted, however, that with diminishing resources in services such as these, their staff had less time to research beneficial opportunities for young people. In some areas, this had led to a perceived decrease in referrals to the programme.

Fairbridge staff felt that **recruiting care leavers (as well as referring them on elsewhere) could be particularly challenging**, in part due to referral routes and options having become increasingly complex.

> *"With referral networks coming in it's really complex... I just feel like there's so many different projects… and so many different timescales with so many different objectives…. It used to be 'Pick a job centre, train in a service'. But now I think it really is just like a supermarket… with the options available. I think that can make it quite hard, both for staff and for young people, to know what they want or what is best."*
>
> (Fairbridge Site Manager)

Nonetheless, **centres taking part in the qualitative research generally had links with leaving care teams, virtual schools and foster carer services**, helping to ensure professionals were aware of the opportunity to refer young people to Fairbridge. **Outreach teams within Fairbridge centres were said to play an important role in helping to foster and sustain these relationships** with external organisations. Social workers and Personal Advisers described Fairbridge staff sitting in on their team meetings to promote the programme, which had helped them to identify those on their caseload who could benefit from attending. However, the local contexts varied and working relationships were influenced by how long The Prince's Trust had been established in the area and/ or the length of time individual practitioners had been in post.

Having the **recognisable brand of The Prince's Trust** associated with Fairbridge helped to develop external relationships. Even if young people or staff did not know about Fairbridge specifically, they tended to have heard about or seen advertisements for The Prince's Trust. As one young person described his experiences:

> *"A lot of people were talking about The Prince's Trust…. a buzz around it – my education and employment worker, a lot of people – and I see a lot of leaflets, I see a lot of big advertising on the road, on the buses, The Prince's Trust. And I was thinking and thinking about it, then I just gave it a try."*
>
> (Young Person)

The **way in which referring professionals spoke about Fairbridge** with young people was said to impact on recruitment. Those who had previously had others on their caseload go through the programme were seen as effective ambassadors. Conversely, Fairbridge staff had become aware of professionals not fully understanding the programme's remit or scope – for example, thinking they were referring young people to a one week (Access) course, without appreciating the subsequent stages. They feared that there were other instances where Fairbridge was explained inaccurately (or undersold) and that this could deter young people from attending. In order to effectively recruit young people, Fairbridge staff maintained that referrers needed a clear understanding of the programme, who it was aimed it, what it involved and the positive outcomes it could help young people achieve, so worked hard to communicate this to a broad range of agencies.

Having clear information on what Fairbridge involved was particularly important to young people. Typically, those interviewed had not heard of the programme before being referred. They had generally been told that it could help boost their confidence, provide opportunities to meet new people, and give their lives some structure. However, young people still had a number of anxieties and questions.

To help ease their worries, **young people were invited into the centre to have a 'taster' session** and

meet other participants and Fairbridge staff. Staff told young people about the activities and sessions on offer. Many heard about an activity that they particularly liked the sound of; either something that they had never done before but wanted to try, or which built on an existing hobby. For those not immediately enthused, Programme Executives were on hand to address any anxieties. One young person recalled that her Programme Executive *"didn't make it* [Fairbridge] *sound as bad as I thought it was going to be"*. **Young people valued the taster sessions and viewed them as a chance to make an informed decision** about whether Fairbridge was right for them. This choice appeared very important for young people.

Those who had previously heard of Fairbridge – typically through friends who had been on the programme – tended to have fewer anxieties about joining. They weighted peer experiences heavily in deciding whether or not to engage. **Personal stories from other young people or seeing change in friends for themselves were key driving forces behind decisions to sign up** (in some cases, through self-referral). One young person had a friend who had made *"outstanding"* progress with Fairbridge and spoke very highly of it. As a result, he was motivated to join the programme himself, concluding that *"there's no smoke without fire"*. Social workers and Personal Advisers had also found such 'success stories' within their own caseloads very useful in encouraging others to get involved.

Young people who took part in interviews voiced ideas about how to encourage others to join the programme in future. Older participants suggested that they could have benefitted from Fairbridge even more if they had known about it earlier and called for **more prominent advertisement of the programme**. It was proposed that this could be done through social media, with pictures of activities and sessions to give potential recruits an idea of what they could be doing on the course; or through **promotional sessions in schools**.

3.2   Programme structure and content

As set out in Section 1.1.3, the Fairbridge programme comprises three key components:

→ **A five-day long Access course** with a three-day residential trip where young people and Programme Executives engage in an array of adventurous activities including rock climbing, gorge walking, canoeing, rock climbing and hiking.

→ **Follow On sessions** which young people choose to sign up to, depending on their goals and interests. They include sessions on topics such as money management, arts and crafts, independent living, adventurous activities, science, technology and maths, employability and aspects of healthy living.

→ **One to one sessions** involving young people and their assigned Programme Executives. These sessions are largely informal conversations and a space for young people and staff to get to know each other, discuss goals and progress (or lack thereof) and address ad hoc concerns.

As discussed further below, young people and practitioners felt that all three aspects of the programme were important – the varied activities allowed them to work on different skills, while the one to ones allowed them to reflect on their behaviours, thoughts and life circumstances and receive practical and emotional support. The combination of elements was thought to be unusual and a valuable feature of Fairbridge. However the time devoted to each aspect varied considerably, based on individual need as well as level of engagement.

Based on data from final session forms, as well as the five day Access course, care leavers attended an average of four one to one sessions (for a total of around four hours). Most (76 per cent) had at least some extra, informal, contact with Programme Executives in between these (planned) sessions. They also spent significantly more time in Follow On courses – on average 37 hours (See Appendix B, Tables B.1 and B.2).

Ratings of aspects of the programme

Before focusing in more depth on each aspect of the programme, it is worth noting how positively young people saw them all. Among 104 respondents to Follow Up surveys who provided an overall rating of Fairbridge support and activities, the majority (61 per cent) rated them 'very useful'; 38 per cent 'quite useful' and just 2 per cent 'not very useful, in relation to pursuing their goals. **Asked to provide separate ratings of each element of the programme, young people assessed all three as helpful,** with slightly more positive ratings of the Access course (See Appendix B, Table B.3). This was echoed during interviews, which revealed that many young people recalled the Access course as their favourite part of Fairbridge.

Admittedly, as highlighted in Chapter 1, it is likely that those who completed Follow Up surveys were among those with the most positive experiences of the programme. Interviews reinforced that there were a minority of young people who did not hold such positive views, who struggled to see the point of the activities and found them less useful. Notably, some of them admitted feeling quite negative about most things at the early stages of the programme but on reflection, looking back on their time at Fairbridge, they generally described changing their minds and feeling that overall, the programme was a good and worthwhile experience.

Table 3.1 helps to illustrate *why* so many care leavers valued the programme. Based on responses to Follow Up surveys, **Fairbridge provision was well aligned with their needs and goals, with young people finding the programme empowering and accessible**. Where less positive views were expressed (typically around the number of courses on offer, or length of the programme), this suggested that some young people had wanted more, rather than that they were dissatisfied with the nature of the provision per se.

Table 3.1 Care leavers' reflections on the Fairbridge programme structure and content

	Not at all true %	A bit true %	Very true %	Total N
Fairbridge helped me focus on things that mattered to me	1	34	65	107
Meetings were held in places I felt comfortable	0	27	73	106
I was supported to make my own decisions	0	24	76	107
There was a good choice of courses and activities	1	26	74	106
I got to do enough courses to learn what I wanted	8	38	55	106
The programme was the right length overall	11	32	56	105
The other young people were supportive and helpful to me	4	27	69	107
The purpose of activities and sessions was always clear	1	21	78	106

Source*: Follow Up surveys.*

3.2.1 The Access course

Aside from the taster sessions, the Access course gave young people their first experience of the Fairbridge programme. Consequently, **it was considered vital as an engagement tool** and way of getting young people into the right frame of mind to achieve throughout the remainder of the programme. One Fairbridge Site Manager described the Access course:

> *"It's 80 per cent adventurous activities and a lot of that time they'll be in their stretch zone whether that stretch is sitting in a minibus for over an hour, staying away from home for a night, getting in a canoe...So that's the essence of Access. It gets them understanding what our programme is about. It's not just social, it's 'you're doing this for a reason' and the reason is 'What's your goal? How are you going to get there?'"*

> (Fairbridge Site Manager)

As illustrated in the above quote, Programme Executives spoke about *"comfort"*, *"stretch"* and *"panic"* zones. They described trying to support and push young people into their *"stretch"* zone, via adventurous activities which served as "*the carrot*" to draw them in. They discussed the different zones with young people – including in one to one sessions – and encouraged them to describe how they were feeling at each stage during activities. The aim was to help young people develop strategies to stop themselves reaching the panic zone, but to push themselves into their stretch zone to give them something to be proud of.

Achieving this was easier with young people who were enthusiastic about the activities. There were those who had reservations, with the Access course being one of the most common sources of worry for care leavers prior to starting Fairbridge. Girls in particular had expressed anxieties about the type of activities, meeting new people and the sleeping arrangements on the residential trip. One young woman said:

> *"At first I didn't look forward to nothing… because it wasn't me. I wasn't that sort of girl that goes rock climbing and caving; I'm that person that's going to sit in there and paint their nails, do make up all day."*

> (Young person)

However, by the end of the Access course young people generally appeared to enjoy the *"stretch zone"* activities. These adventurous activities on the Access course are numerous, varied and often new to participants. They include activities such as canoeing, caving, rock climbing, gorge walking, raft building, hiking and mountain biking. Fairbridge staff found that even if a young person did not like some of the activities, they could usually find something which appealed to them more.

Programme Executives reported that taking young people away on a residential trip so early on in the programme helped to take them out of their comfort zones. It helped to break down any barriers and facilitated interaction with peers and staff. The structure and content of the Access course lent itself well to communication, team building and giving the young people a sense of achievement.

Many of the activities were said to rely on developing trust; between young people and between young people and Programme Executives. Doing activities together served to nurture positive group dynamics and relationships in the early stages of the residential. This helped the staff to encourage young people to push themselves – to go further, higher or faster in the activities to ensure they were in their *"stretch zones"* – knowing that they were supported. For example, if young people responded well when Programme Executives used phrases such as *"Jump off – you'll be fine"* during a rock climbing activity, this reflected a positive and trusting relationship. However, they did note that building positive and trustworthy relationships with care leavers could be harder than with other young people (as discussed further in Section 3.3).

> **Jason was very shy initially and spent most of his time on the Access course sitting on his own. He was adamant he did not want to get involved with activities. However, he said that the number of activities on offer made him feel like he *should* try something. When he started involving himself in the adventurous activities he began interacting more with his peers and the Programme Executives. He tried activities like gorge walking which meant he had to rely on his team and communicate with them at all times. He said this helped to improve his confidence.**

Pushing young people out of their comfort zones was vital for helping them to feel a sense of achievement. Fairbridge staff felt this was integral for young people progressing to Follow On and one to one sessions with increased confidence. In line with this, after completing the Access course, one young person told NCB:

"I want to keep pushing myself now, I want to jump off higher waterfalls and climb higher mountains."

(Young Person)

Young people were able to reflect on these experiences months later and, even where there had been initial apprehensiveness about the Access course, they spoke about it with great enjoyment. For some, it was their favourite part of the whole Fairbridge programme and one which encouraged them to build on the skills they had learned by signing up for more adventurous activities in the Follow On sessions. Others who may not have enjoyed it so much at the time nevertheless reflected positively on the benefits it had brought them.

> **Michelle was apprehensive about the activities on the Access course but described thinking:**
>
> *"Are you really going to stand there and just watch like an idiot? Because I'd rather get involved than let myself down"*
>
> **Eventually Michelle joined in on the acitivites and got in a canoe with one of the Programme Executives on the Access Course. To take her out of her comfort zone, the Programme Executive started rocking the boat. At the time, Michelle was upset, scared and frustrated. However, looking back she said it had helped her become more courageous and to believe in herself:**
>
> *"It's like you don't know what you're capable of until you actually get pushed"*.

As set out in Table 3.2, **all** those who completed Follow Up surveys indicated that – at least to some extent – the Access course had resulted in them trying new activities and feeling more motivated. The vast majority also described experiencing a range of other benefits; meeting new people they could trust; formulating goals; and developing skills and confidence.

Table 3.2 Care leavers' reflections on the Access course

	Not at all %	A bit %	A lot %	Total N
It let me try new activities or learn new things	0	22	78	106
I got to know at least one new person I could trust/ respect	4	27	69	106
It helped me decide on my goals, or how to achieve them	3	38	59	106
It helped me develop personal/ social skills	1	26	74	106
It helped me develop life skills	9	48	44	105
It boosted my confidence or self-esteem	1	26	73	106
It increased my motivation	0	31	69	106

Source: Follow Up surveys.

3.2.2 Follow On courses

Follow On courses are designed to help young people achieve the goals they set with their Programme Executives, and to work on their personal and social development. They can involve: adventurous activities (as on the Access course); independent living skills such as budgeting or cooking; science, engineering and maths sessions; arts and crafts; employment and education fayres; or working with animals or sports.

Session activities provided 'hooks' to try and get young people interested. **Whatever the session, it addressed core social and personal development competencies including working with others, communication, setting and achieving goals and managing feelings.**

Considering the range of activities on offer, it is perhaps unsurprising that – as with the Access course – all those who completed Follow Up surveys maintained that Follow On courses enabled them to try new activities or learn new skills. **The vast majority described the courses as boosting their skills, confidence and motivation** (Table 3.3). Likewise, those interviewed valued the range of activities on offer and appreciated the structure these gave to their days and weeks. They described having their eyes opened to new sports and hobbies that they may not have tried otherwise – as well as building skills and experience for their CVs, which was particularly valued by those seeking employment.

Table 3.3 Care leavers' reflections on the Follow On courses

	Not at all %	A bit %	A lot %	Total N
They let me try new activities or learn new things	0	37	63	102
I got to know new people I could trust/ respect	6	35	59	102
They helped me decide on my goals, or how to achieve them	6	35	59	102
They helped me develop personal/ social skills	1	30	69	102
It helped me develop life skills	7	45	49	101
They boosted my confidence or self-esteem	1	37	62	102
It increased my motivation	1	38	61	102

Source: Follow Up surveys.

Follow On sessions were organised so that young people, with support from Programme Executives, could choose what interested and could benefit them. **This choice was described as very important to young people and helped to differentiate Fairbridge from school**, where many had had negative experiences.

As individuals could choose different combinations of courses, each one could allow meeting new people. For 94 per cent of Follow Up respondents, this meant getting to know new people they could trust/ respect. It also maximised opportunities to hone communication skills and address anxieties around meeting new people.
That sessions involved small groups appeared to ease any anxieties around speaking out and

participating in front of others, and facilitated relationship development with other young people and staff. For young people with negative peer groups outside Fairbridge, the Follow On courses gave them the chance to interact with a more positive group who had similar goals around building their skills and improving their prospects. Their peers on the programme therefore acted as another layer of support for young people, as these interviewees described:

> *"I'm scared of heights. At abseiling I took my time, but everyone was like, 'Yeah, you can do it!', and then I started doing it. I was laughing because it was so easy afterwards."*

> *"When you've got two, three people cheering you on and saying you can do it... it gives you that encouragement to do something that you really think you can't do."*

<div align="right">(Young People)</div>

Individual young people (or groups) favoured different activities. Those who enjoyed the adventurous aspects of the Access course enjoyed building on skills developed there, by undertaking more such activities to push themselves further. Those who enjoyed having something to take home to showcase their work particularly valued sessions such as craft or cooking. One young person described making a pillow in a sewing session and feeling great pride taking this home and giving it to his son.

Some Follow On courses elicited more mixed reactions. One set on which young people expressed differing views focused on budgeting and independent living. Their experiences seemed largely dependent on where they were in their leaving care journeys. Some who were still in care enjoyed them and felt they stood them in good stead for the future. Others who had left care and had more experience living independently sometimes described the sessions as pitched too low for them to learn a great deal.

Similarly, a number of young people expressed frustration around the science, engineering and maths sessions – again, apparently due to their differing abilities. Although Programme Executives worked to make the topics fun and interactive, those aware of the frustrations reflected that in future it could be helpful to invest more time in assessing young people's maths skills beforehand, and run sessions tailored more closely to needs within each group. Alternatively, if this was impractical, another option would be to increase staffing ratios in these sessions, to enable more individualised support.

Regardless of whether young people became frustrated or even walked out of a session, Fairbridge staff described consistently adopting a positive reinforcement approach. Even if a session had not gone as intended, staff would always find something positive to feedback to young people. This review and feedback formed part of a simplified version of Kolb's learning cycle[42], which incorporated three stages; planning, reviewing and applying. In practice, this meant that every time a young person attended a Follow On session, they set an achievable goal for that day. This could be something as small as asking questions if they didn't understand something, to leading a part of a session with other young people. After the activity, young people were encouraged to review how it had gone and the degree to which they had met their self-set goals. One Programme Executive described this process after a session had not gone to plan:

> *"So I'd be, 'How was the session?', 'Do you think you were at your best?', 'Is there anything you could have done differently?' Generally they know themselves when they've acted silly or done something that maybe wasn't the most positive or productive thing to be doing... So once they identify it, then we can talk about it more, 'So why did you do that?' or 'What were you wanting to get out of behaving in that way?'"*

<div align="right">(Programme Executive)</div>

Those who attended Follow On sessions considered them a key driving force in helping them to achieve their goals. Both young people and Programme Executives observed increases in young people's confidence and skills, and were able to reflect on their progress in one to one sessions. Site Managers recognised the benefit of the Follow On sessions in achieving goals and team working and explained that this was the reason for the majority of the hours on the Fairbridge course being 'activity hours'.

Repetition of Follow On sessions was also used as a means of meeting goals. Those allowed to repeat a session were given more responsibility within it – leading a certain aspect, or supporting others who were trying it for the first time. Those who did this spoke highly of the experience and how it had allowed them to develop leadership, public speaking and communication skills, as well as increasing their self-esteem and confidence. These and other outcomes are discussed in Chapter 4.

3.2.3 One to one sessions

Alongside their Follow On courses, young people met with their assigned Programme Executives to have one to one conversations. These Programme Executives acted as young people's key workers on the Fairbridge programme; they set goals with young people, reflected on progress and acted as the person young people could go to with any crisis or problems – related or unrelated to Fairbridge.

Most one to one sessions took place at Fairbridge centres (76 per cent). However, there was some flexibility; a quarter of young people had at least one in a public place (such as a café or park), and smaller numbers had one or more telephone sessions (9 per cent) or home visits (7 per cent) (Appendix B, Table B.2).

Shortly after the Access course, young people and Programme Executives sat down together to set a number of short, medium and long-term goals (see Section 2.5). **Young people said they appreciated these sessions taking place soon after the Access course, as it meant they were not left waiting and were more able to sustain the positivity and motivation they gained from the residential.**

One to one session topics and techniques

Programme Executives supported young people during (and in between) one to sessions in a range of ways – both to engage with the programme itself, and to achieve goals outside of Fairbridge. These included sourcing and providing information, liaising with other agencies (as discussed in Section 3.4) and helping them to access EETV and personal development opportunities (See Appendix B, Table B.6).

Table 3.4 shows the broad range of topics covered with young people at one or more of their one to one sessions. **The vast majority of care leavers had sessions which involved discussing both soft skills and some element of their EETV plans**; with roughly two thirds touching on relationships with peers or partners and around half discussing independent living sills, housing and physical or mental health.

Table 3.4 Topics discussed with young people at one to one sessions

	%
Soft skills (e.g. communication, confidence, working with others, timekeeping)	92
Education (goals, experiences or opportunities)	74
Planning for education, employment, training or volunteering (e.g. job search, CVs)	73
Training (goals, experiences or opportunities)	68
Access/Follow On courses (planning or reviewing)	68
Employment (goals, experiences or opportunities)	67
Relationships with friends, peers or partners	66
Relationships with family members	61
Behaviour (staying safe, or avoiding trouble/offending)	60
Practical and independent living skills (e.g. personal care, shopping, budgeting)	56
Accommodation and housing	54
Physical or mental health	54
Financial matters	37
Volunteering (goals, experiences or opportunities)	34

Source: Session logs, aggregated for young people. Base N = 272 (young people).

On Final Session forms, Programme Executives recorded the range of techniques which they had used with each young person, and whether they had worked well, if used. Both sets of figures are set out in Table 3.5 – with techniques ordered by frequency of use. When interpreting this data, it is important to recognise that if certain techniques were *not* used with a particular young person, this may have reflected a considered judgement that they would not prove helpful in that case. In other words, just because something was generally judged to work well if it *was* used with someone, this does not guarantee it would be equally useful in other situations, with other young people.

Table 3.5 Techniques Programme Executives used with young people and which worked well

	Used	Worked well, when used
	%	%
Providing positive feedback and encouragement	99	94
Active listening	93	87
Reviewing experiences/ activities and encouraging reflection	83	79
Challenging the young person / setting boundaries	79	70
Pushing them to progress	79	74
Agreeing an action plan	72	72
Offering information or advice about EETV	70	64
Offering information/ advice about other challenges (e.g. housing)	64	65
Being available at short notice	60	84
Working with other agencies to support them	59	66
Using other visual materials or tools (e.g. whiteboard, notes on paper)	54	78
Signposting the young person to other agencies/ information sources	49	52
Sharing their (practitioner's) life experience	41	89
Assuring the young person of confidentiality	39	62
Using the computer to find information or prepare an application/ CV	30	68
Meeting in a different venue or doing an activity (e.g. a walk, coffee)	24	82
Attending a support service with the young person	16	59
Being available out of hours	8	56

Source: Final session forms. Base N = 212.

Despite the above caveats, there were some clear messages in the data. **Positive reinforcement and encouragement** was seen to work well in 94 per cent of cases. **Active listening** – whereby practitioners gave young people time to talk and checked they understood – was also deemed effective for 87 per cent.

Likewise**, reviewing experiences and encouraging reflection** was often used, and typically judged effective. Programme Executives spoke highly of *My Journey* as a tool for helping young people to set personalised goals, and to reflect on their developing skills. Using this tool, young people rated themselves, for each of a set of skills, on a scale of one to six. (Scoring one indicated *'I find this skill really difficult and don't care'*; three meant '*I am sometimes OK but I often struggle and need a lot of support to improve'* and six indicated '*This skill is a strength of mine, I excel at it'*.) Generally, if young people rated themselves below a four, Programme Executives encouraged them to set and work on goals in this area through Fairbridge.

Staff also highlighted that a minority of young people disliked the *My Journey* tool and the subsequent goal setting process. They saw this as stemming from defensiveness; as if encouragement to set goals implied that young people were *"not good enough"*, which was interpreted as a form of rejection. Young people not recognising the need for change within themselves could make setting goals very difficult. In fact, Programme Executives observed that most young people rated their skills highly at the outset of the programme. After discussions around skills in Follow On sessions and one to ones, however, their ratings often reduced – despite them, and staff, feeling they were making progress. In line with their belief in positive reinforcement, practitioners valued young people becoming more realistic about their abilities after some time on the programme, and gave credit to them for their honesty and reflective skills.

While not as commonly used by practitioners, techniques including **sharing their life experience**, being **available at short notice** and occasionally **meeting in a different venue** were also felt to work well.

Overall, Programme Executives who took part in interviews maintained that the best approach they could take, one to one, was individualised, flexible and young person-led. As one practitioner explained:

> *"If she needed to talk I was going to be here for her and I was going to allow her that opportunity to talk - whether it was about the weather or about her past. So she would dictate what was going on, bearing in mind I'm not a qualified counsellor so I was just there to listen."*

(Programme Executive)

Programme Executives were aware of their limitations in terms of supporting young people. They

appreciated the extensive training offered by The Prince's Trust, including courses on first aid, mental health, safeguarding, multi-agency working, and dealing with challenging behaviour. **However, they expressed an interest in further training around mental health problems,** in response to their prevalence among those on the programme. Staff recognised they were not qualified in this area and some expressed concerns about doing more harm than good, in attempting to provide support. They mentioned instances in which young people seemed unaware of their mental health difficulties, or where the subject appeared *"taboo"*.

Aside from acting as a listening ear and offering practical advice, staff felt that all they could do was signpost young people to (already stretched) services specialising in mental health; either Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services or Adult Mental Health Services, or, if appropriate, substance misuse and additional groups. The decision to refer was not always an easy one, especially when staff had worked hard to build up and improve a relationship with a vulnerable young person, and were aware of how fragile that could be:

> *"I don't want a flashpoint, I don't want to say something if I'm concerned about his mental health, I don't want to challenge it and then have a situation where it becomes more negative. I'm very aware of that…If I was to say maybe you should go and talk to someone, he might not appreciate that."*

> (Programme Executive)

When staff *did* refer young people, their experience was that, often, they did not follow through and engage with the service. To address this, some centres had established links with charities and hosted support groups at Fairbridge centres, as an environment familiar to young people. Even in these cases, Programme Executives continued to report variability in the extent to which young people took up the service. In light of this, further training for Programme Executives – or deeper, more widespread integration of mental health support into the Fairbridge programme was suggested as potentially helpful, for young people who were engaging with the programme, but not necessarily other services. In the meantime, Programme Executives valued their colleagues' support, especially where one to one sessions had become quite *"intense"*.

In addition, despite receiving some focused training as part of *From Care to Independence,* **Programme Executives were keen to update their knowledge and improve their understanding of issues and processes affecting children in care and care leavers.**

From the perspectives of young people who completed Follow Up surveys, one to one sessions – like other aspects of the Fairbridge programme – had helped them in a variety of ways, as set out in Table 3.6. Not surprisingly, they appeared less likely to credit these conversations with enabling them to try new activities or develop life skills, compared to the more active Access Course or Follow On sessions specifically designed to achieve these ends. Nevertheless, most respondents indicated that the one to one sessions had helped them make or consolidate progress in these and other areas.

One to one sessions were particularly valued in terms of building relationships between Programme Executives and young people. Fully 98 per cent of Follow Up respondents reported getting to know someone they could trust and respect 'at least a bit' during these sessions. Having an assigned Programme Executive was seen as key for helping to build this relationship and encourage the young person to open up.

Table 3.6 Care leavers' reflections on one to one sessions with Programme Executives

	Not at all	A bit	A lot	Total
	%	%	%	N
They let me try new activities or learn new things	11	42	47	105
I got to know someone I could trust/ respect	2	29	69	107
They helped me decide on my goals, or how to achieve them	3	34	64	107
They helped me develop personal/ social skills	2	32	66	104
They helped me develop life skills	10	36	55	104
They boosted my confidence or self-esteem	3	30	67	106
They increased my motivation	1	30	69	106

Source*: Follow Up surveys.*

The most useful thing about the one to one sessions, from the perspectives of those who took part

in interviews, was the mix of structured and unstructured meetings. Structured sessions typically focused on goal setting and reviewing, whilst more informal or ad hoc sessions focused on crisis management. Both were seen as crucial to progress. As one Programme Executive argued, some care leavers needed to discuss and address their life crises before fully engaging with setting other life goals:

"It almost seemed that she needed a platform, she needed that opportunity, she needed to get it out and she was desperate to speak."

<div align="right">(Programme Executive)</div>

Programme Executives believed that young people often failed to recognise these ad hoc, informal, crisis management discussions as one to one sessions. Despite this, young people who took part in interviews said they really valued these conversations and felt as if Programme Executives always had time for them. The typically informal nature of even the structured one to ones was appreciated. Young people described their Programme Executives as very different to teachers – more laid back, down to earth and friendly – which encouraged them to share problems and seek advice from them without fearing judgement.

Section 3.3 continues to explore these issues relating to staffing and relationships.

3.3   Staffing and relationships

The role of Programme Executive at Fairbridge appeared to require a rich combination of attributes and skills; active listening and communication skills; organisational skills to plan engaging sessions, practical and transferable skills, to support young people around independent living as well as EETV; and an informal and friendly approach.

"It's rare that you get to be both the professional making the referrals and organising the signposting, but also that person who practically stands beside them and shows them how to cook a meal, and share a laugh and a joke, and shares a meal with them....so you can be the professional sat at the meeting talking on their behalf as an advocate, or you can be the person that who will sit and listen to them when they need to be listened to, or you can be the person that gives them a practical skill that you know that they're missing. And I think that's the thing that surprises young people – that we don't say no, we don't say, 'oh no that's not our job, you need to talk to someone else for that'."

<div align="right">(Fairbridge Site Manager)</div>

Young people and Programme Executives were in agreement that effective one to one (and other) sessions were built upon strong and trusting relationships, and the holistic 'package' offered by staff. Development of such relationships was prioritised early in young people's journeys through Fairbridge.

"If a relationship isn't built, not a lot of the young people will want to go down the route of explaining more about what they want. So it's about using their personal social skills and the activities to build the relationship first for that young person to feel comfortable to explain what they want going forwards. Then they're more willing to listen to any advice or to be guided into an area that would suit them."

<div align="right">(Programme Executive)</div>

Programme Executives positioned themselves as wanting to become a part of the young person's *"quality world"* (language utilised in reality therapy). In practice, this meant establishing a meaningful relationship with each young person. As noted in Section 3.2.1, this process started on the Access course, which helped to set the foundation for the remainder of the young person's time on the programme:

"My challenge for that week is to create a positive relationship with every young person on the course."

<div align="right">(Programme Executive)</div>

Young people and Programme Executives described bonding during adventurous and trust-based activities. Simply spending a week together on the Access course also served to help young people feel comfortable around, and open up to, Programme Executives. Staff commented that some young people seemed pleasantly surprised to have someone ask how they were feeling and show an interest in them. The process of relationship building continued throughout the programme, with staff and young people describing several factors as facilitating the process. At its heart was being **open and honest**, without a "hidden agenda".

From young people's perspectives, it was essential that Programme Executives showed a **genuine interest**

in making sure they were happy, safe and well. Indeed, those who took part in interviews argued that it took a particular type of person to be a Programme Executive. Young women typically described needing their Programme Executive to be happy, smiley, bubbly, and enthusiastic. Similarly, young men stressed **approachability** and **light-heartedness** – "*the type of guy that you could have a laugh with*". Conveying these characteristics on first impressions seemed particularly important, especially for a group familiar with (and perhaps wary of) a range of professionals. Young people described how, if Programme Executives gave off *"good vibes"*, this made them feel comfortable, safe and less anxious.

An **informal atmosphere** also helped to make young people feel comfortable with their Programme Executives. Those interviewed commented positively on how *"down to earth"* Fairbridge staff were – much more "*laid back*" than those in schools/ colleges or other statutory services. They enjoyed being able to have normal conversations with staff and getting to know them. Where Programme Executives' own personalities shone through, this reinforced the idea that *everyone* could be themselves at Fairbridge.

During their more informal conversations, young people valued Programme Executives **proffering information about themselves**, albeit within professional boundaries. For example, in one case, a Programme Executive had mentioned being a mother; from the young person's perspective this reinforced her 'motherly' qualities and the fact that she had a job to provide for her daughter – this, she said, helped her to feel comfortable with, and respect, the member of staff. If relevant, Programme Executives also shared some of their own life struggles. For young people with similar experiences, this helped to give them something to relate to. Even if young people and Programme Executives had not shared the same issues, simply **having something in common**, such as a football team or where they grew up, could aid bonding.

Programme Executives sharing their own stories was thought to help to establish a **non-judgemental ethos**. They described being clear with young people that they could scream, shout, cry; whatever they needed to do to express themselves. They undertook not to take this personally and to accept it as part of their job. They found many young people were taken aback or disarmed by this approach and by the fact that as Programme Executives, they never shouted or lost control of their tempers. For some care leavers, this stood in stark contrast to their experiences with other adults.

> *"It's the only place that's given me lots of support and the chance to be myself. I've never gone anywhere and been able to do what I wanted to do, say what I wanted to say, be myself and not be looked at and judged."*

<div align="right">(Young person)</div>

> **Jessica's Programme Executive shared that he grew up in the same area as Jessica, which instantly helped to build rapport and trust. Jessica described immediately feeling that they had something in common and developing a respect for him and the struggles he may have faced in his life. Maria had the same Programme Executive and said she felt similarly. She recalled the relationship feeling more equal, with both parties getting to know each other. Maria said:**
>
> > **"He understands because they're the things he's been through… so he can relate."**
>
> **As a result, both Jessica and Maria felt they had a stronger relationship with their Programme Executive and were more comfortable disclosing things in one to one sessions. For Jessica, in particular, this was unusual as she often struggled to trust people. She also didn't want to let her Programme Executive down so was more motivated to turn up and do her best in sessions.**

Reinforcing the non-judgemental ethos was the fact that Fairbridge had **no rules, just four conditions of attendance**:

→ No alcohol

→ No drugs (of any type)

→ No violence (including any form of bullying)

→ No exclusive relationships (including sexual relationships or friendships that exclude others).

Staff were upfront about these conditions, and this appeared to reassure young people that, as long as they

complied with them, they could open up and tell their Programme Executive anything without fear of being judged or excluded from Fairbridge. As one young person explained:

> *"Other than that [the four conditions]….you can put whatever you want across whether it's right or wrong and nobody looks down on you or judges for you being wrong."*

<p style="text-align:right">(Young Person)</p>

Another factor supporting relationship development was Programme Executives' ability to listen. **Active listening** and taking on board young people's points of view was highlighted by staff as especially important for care leavers, as a population who are often misunderstood. For the most part, young people who took part in interviews maintained that the staff did truly listen to and hear them – not something all of them could say about other professionals they knew. They described how Programme Executives **showed interest** in what they had to say, took them seriously, and **asked lots of questions** to get to know them better. In general, Programme Executives recalled young people responding well to this, although some appeared to find even gentle questioning quite intrusive. Accordingly, it was down to them, as Programme Executives, to try and get this balance right; based on the young person's personality and their developing relationship.

Programme Executives' **communication styles** also helped to facilitate the development of relationships. They were very aware that how people speak and how others hear it can be very different. Consequently, they adapted their communication style for each individual young person. For example, one Programme Executive found metaphors to be a really useful tool for encouraging young people to think about things in a different way; however, one young man on his case load took metaphors literally and did not grasp the wider meaning. Accordingly, the practitioner in question adapted his communication style to be more clear and direct. Many young people who were interviewed, in particular boys, valued this direct communication style and did not want Programme Executives to *"beat about the bush"*.

Young people generally depicted Programme Executives as effective communicators. As one young person explained:

> *"She's understandable, mostly. She'll communicate and listen to people –what they say, what their points of view were, where they're coming from and where's she coming from at the same time."*

<p style="text-align:right">(Young Person)</p>

Young people who described themselves as "*from the street*" said they respected someone who could speak their language. Doing so could serve to remove distance from a relationship and establish rapport.

Nevertheless, not all young people wanted to talk much, especially in the early stages of relationship development. In these instances, **patience was important**. Staff described sitting quietly with young people, offering them a cup of tea or a biscuit, and finding that, after some time, many would start to talk. Initiating more informal social interaction helped – whether this started with chatting about football, the weather or another unrelated topic. Again, this helped to distinguish them from other professionals and contributed to the informal atmosphere, whilst slowly ensuring the young people felt comfortable talking more openly about themselves, their needs and goals.

Over and above these qualities and approaches to relationship building, young people were seen to respond well to **consistency in support –** both in terms of having a dedicated worker, and to their being reliable. Interviewed young people generally felt that the staff were very supportive and genuinely focused on helping them solve problems. As one young person explained:

> *"She sees beyond how I'm speaking, and she'll actually try to assist. She'll take you outside, speak, and she'll get to the root of what's really going on, not what you just did on the course but what's going on outside of here that's making you do that, and she's trying to find you support that we're lacking."*

<p style="text-align:right">(Young Person)</p>

Programme Executives considered it important to reiterate that they were there to help, to provide a steady stream of positive reinforcement, and to put plans in place to *"bring young people up the ladder"*. Those young people who engaged in interviews appeared convinced that Programme Executives *"try to make you do your best, 100 per cent"* – and that they had their interests at heart. They were also seen to consistently **stick to their word**; if they said they would do something, they would do it, and not let people down. This was in contrast to many young people's experience of their social workers or other professionals who, from

their perspectives, often failed to follow through on promises. One young person reported that her social worker would say she would call to check in, but would fail to do so and would never answer her phone. Aside from violating one of the four conditions of attendance, young people could do anything and the consistency of support was always maintained. One Programme Executive felt very proud that he had maintained a dogged approach to supporting one young man who at times caused difficulties in group sessions and was rude to his peers and other staff. When other staff were reluctant to invite him back in for sessions, this Programme Executive said he would never turn his back on the young man and continued to invite him in.

However, being determined to maintain support for those testing boundaries did not mean ignoring unacceptable behaviour. One measure of a strengthening relationship was when Programme Executives provided *"challenge"* to young people, about their views or behaviours, and young people took this on board. Staff emphasised that this needed to be done in an appropriate way. Whilst not all young people responded well to this immediately, on reflection they could be more appreciative of having someone who was able to challenge them, finding this a useful tool for looking at something in a different way. However, if Programme Executives challenged young people without the foundation of a good relationship, they felt this could backfire and hinder any relationship. As such, the timing of any *"challenge"* was crucial.

> **At first, Adam said he had disliked his Programme Executive; he thought she was rude and sarcastic. Over time, however, he grew to like her as he realised she was simply challenging him to reflect, grow and achieve. He described her as _"tough"_ and did not think she would stand for being disrespected, but appreciated her intelligence and empathy. Despite not liking her at first, as he felt she challenged him too early, on reflection he felt they had a strong relationship and that she had a good understanding of him as a person, as well as his goals and objectives.**

Despite Programme Executives' best efforts, not all young people said they liked them or described their relationships as particularly strong. **Negative or ambivalent feelings were associated with young people doubting that their Programme Executive understood them, their past experiences or their needs;** meaning that they found it hard and were not very motivated to open up or engage with them. One of the young people interviewed maintained that staff spoke about young people behind their backs and that he therefore felt uncomfortable disclosing anything to them. Other young people described disclosing very selectively, or telling staff what they wanted to hear, rather than telling them the truth. This resulted in practitioners having a partial or distorted view of the young person's needs and finding it harder to provide appropriate support. For some young people who reported initially feeling this way, it was a temporary situation, and their views – and, accordingly, level of engagement, changed over time.

In some circumstances where young people and Programme Executives did not 'click', it was judged better to explore the option of reallocating the young person to a colleague, with whom they might share an interest, or common experience – to try a fresh start and different approach. In these cases, they made it clear to young people that if they wanted to change workers, they would not take it personally as their objective was to ensure they felt comfortable. While such 'swaps' were rare, Programme Executives valued the option – seeing it not as failure on their part, but as a success, if they could together ensure young people were supported in the most effective way during their time with Fairbridge.

More fundamentally, **a key barrier to relationship building could be a lack of time.** The flexible nature of the Fairbridge programme (generally a positive feature) meant that young people could pass through quite quickly. Unfortunately, as Programme Executives realised, establishing trust, effective communication and meaningful relationships could be a long process, particularly with care leavers who had negative past experiences and expectations of practitioners, and were guarded around new people.

> *"It's hard work over a period of weeks to get a good relationship going."*

(Programme Executive)

As long as the young person kept attending, this was not necessarily an insurmountable problem. As one Programme Executive explained, attending training about care leavers had given him a richer understanding of why care leavers sometimes needed more time to develop relationships, and consequently, he placed less pressure on himself to develop – or try to force – relationships too quickly.

Relationships were clearly a fundamental aspect of Fairbridge. **Those young people with good**

relationships with staff saw this as key to their positive experience on the programme. However Programme Executives were acutely aware that the stronger the relationship, the greater the potential for young people to feel bereft on leaving, and wanted to avoid them becoming overly reliant on their (temporary) support. This was a hard balance to strike, however they helped to mitigate this risk by framing making progress and leaving the programme as a positive step. This is discussed further in Section 3.5.

Table 3.7 provides an overview of how respondents to Follow Up surveys perceived Fairbridge staff and the relationships they built with them on the programme. **In line with findings from interviews with young people, the vast majority were very positive about their experiences, stating that it was 'very true' that they got on well with their Programme Executive; that they provided challenge and feedback; were understanding and encouraging; and respected confidentiality.** Relatively speaking, slightly fewer were so emphatic about: staff being equipped to help them with challenges; feeling able to open up or to focus on their own priorities; or to reach staff when they needed to – but even in these areas, fewer than one in five young people expressed anything other than complete agreement that this had been their experience.

Table 3.7 **Care leavers' reflections on Fairbridge staff and relationships**

	Not at all true	A bit true	Very true	Total
	%	%	%	N
I got on well with my Programme Executive	0	9	92	106
Fairbridge staff would challenge unacceptable behaviour	0	9	91	106
The staff gave honest feedback	0	9	91	106
My Programme Executive understood me and my situation	1	10	89	106
Staff encouraged and pushed me to progress	0	12	88	106
I could trust my Programme Executive to keep things confidential	2	12	86	106
Fairbridge staff had clear conditions of attendance I had to stick to	1	15	84	107
Staff paid attention to what I wanted to do, or talk about	0	19	81	107
The staff had the skills to help me with the challenges I faced	2	17	81	107
I could be open with my Programme Executive about my problems	2	17	81	106
I could speak to my Programme Executive whenever I needed to	3	21	77	107
Staff helped me set achievable goals	1	28	71	107
My Programme Executive was flexible about where and when we met	6	26	68	107
Fairbridge staff understood what it's like to be in care, or leave care	6	27	67	104

Source: Follow Up surveys.

3.4   Partnership working and filling in gaps

This section explores the role of Fairbridge alongside other agencies, and specifically in partnership working.

As described in Section 2.4, young people who enrolled on Fairbridge were involved with a number of other professionals including social workers, Personal Advisers, accommodation staff, keyworkers, healthcare staff and employment services. As such, there were a number of other agencies involved with young people who were (at least in theory) able to offer another perspective and reciprocally support Programme Executives in their work with young people by providing encouragement, information and support.

For more than half of young people (55 per cent), Programme Executives reported liaising with other agencies on their behalf (based on Session log data on 271 young people). This was backed up by respondents to Follow Up surveys, with 67 per cent of (106) young people strongly agreeing, and a further 28 per cent partly agreeing, that Fairbridge staff more generally had worked with other professionals to help them.

As noted in Section 3.1, the strength of local links and the degree of partnership working varied. However, Fairbridge Site Managers held that The Prince's Trust brand put staff in a favourable position to initiate and further develop links and work with other professionals in young people's lives. Programme Executives found

that having a consistent point of contact with other organisations was helpful in delivering these benefits of partnership working – not something over which they tended to have a great deal of influence.

Table 3.8 sets out the sources of support which young people reported drawing on, *during* their time with Fairbridge. **For those completing Follow Up surveys at least, Fairbridge was the most common source of support in all areas, except '*housing, money and other practical things*',** with which social workers/ Personal Advisers and foster carers/ children's home staff more often provided advice or assistance.

Fairbridge was clearly filling in gaps for some young people. Comparison of Baseline and Follow Up data (from the matched sample who provided both) showed that fewer were receiving 'no' support at follow up in each area. The most substantive (and statistically significant) changes – reflecting core areas for Fairbridge, and areas where there had been more gaps in the first place – were in the (lower) numbers lacking support in relation to EETV, managing relationships and personal and social skills[b].

Table 3.8 **Sources of support for care leavers during their time with Fairbridge**

	Fairbridge staff/ courses	Family	Friends	Social worker/ Personal Adviser	Foster carer/ Children's home	Other services	No- one	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	N
Education, work, training	**71**	14	6	38	23	31	2	106
Health and wellbeing	**52**	29	13	29	33	24	8	107
Staying safe	**57**	30	16	30	27	22	16	107
Managing relationships	**49**	37	25	28	24	19	9	107
Housing, money and other practical things	27	22	7	**39**	33	24	16	105
Accessing services and support	**57**	13	9	39	27	28	7	107
Personal & social skills	**74**	20	16	23	22	21	8	106
Motivation and encouragement	**76**	29	22	26	28	20	7	106

Source: *Follow Up surveys.*

Programme Executives only worked with, or shared information with, the other professionals in young people's lives with their explicit permission, and to the extent that this was seen as desirable or necessary, based on individual needs and circumstances. In some cases, Programme Executives did not have contact with anyone else in the young person's life. In others, they had regular catch ups with other agencies, and described it as an integral part of their role in supporting young people. For example, one Programme Executive explained that it was fairly standard practice when working with care leavers to introduce themselves (and the Fairbridge programme) to social workers:

> *"With a lot of the cases that I've had with young people it's normally a three, four way email process, whether it's just speaking with the youth offending team workers, social workers, just getting clearance that they can go off site or stay overnight because obviously that's parental guidance or legal guardianship. So from the get go we always introduced ourselves so that meant we were a point of contact for that person so that they knew that they had an open line basically so that obviously helps with relationships and things, and information sharing and things like that as well so, it's really key."*

(Programme Executive)

Partnership working was seen by Programme Executives as an important way of improving and tailoring their support. Through contact with other key figures in young people's lives, they gained knowledge about their past or current living arrangements, and tried and tested behavioral management and other strategies, including awareness of *"triggers"* – topics to avoid or which were particularly sensitive for that young person. With young people who did not feel comfortable sharing information *personally* (but who

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[b] Results of Wilcoxon Signed Rank tests comparing Follow Up with Baseline survey reports of (lacking) support were: $Z = -2.71$, $p < .01$ (EETV); $Z = -2.40$, $p = .02$ (managing relationships); $Z = -3.77$, $p < .001$ (personal and social skills).

did not object to it being shared per se), this was a way to gain valuable insight without causing distress.

Organisations or individuals with longstanding relationships with young people had particularly useful information to share. Programme Executives contended that "*the more information, the better*". In some cases, they had contact with young people's personal as well as professional networks and similar benefits were discussed. For example, one Programme Executive recalled contact with a young person's foster mum as being invaluable:

> *"I always knew kind of what frame of mind he was in, because she might have phoned me just to kind of give me a heads up on if he'd had a bad morning or a bad night, so yeah, that helped."*
>
> (Programme Executive)

As discussed in Section 2.4, young people often had fairly new (and/ or limited) relationships with their social workers or Personal Advisers and tended to change workers quite frequently. In such cases, Programme Executives found information sharing considerably more difficult. Often, these workers were not able to share a great deal and were difficult to get hold of. Where young people had a good relationship with their social workers or other practitioners, however, Programme Executives found them much more receptive to partnership working and to supporting the young person together.

> **Vanessa suffered with mental health problems and often found it hard to find the motivation to attend Fairbridge. Her Programme Executive let her care home staff know when she was meant to be in and they encouraged her to get out of bed and attend sessions. After a few weeks, her motivation decreased and she disengaged from Fairbridge. Her Programme Executive phoned the care home staff to find out what was going on. Vanessa and her care home key worker agreed to come into the centre and had a meeting with her Programme Executive which reinforced that everyone was there to support her and wanted the best for her. They put in place a plan for a fresh start, including choosing new Follow On sessions. Vanessa's Programme Executive said it was invaluable having the care home staff involved as they were with her every day and could really influence her thinking. After that three-way meeting, Vanessa resumed attending her sessions and went on to secure a place at college.**

Social workers and Personal Advisers who took part in interviews also described three-way meetings, like those described in the above case illustration, as helpful in their work with young people. They also appreciated having the option of getting in contact with Fairbridge staff for updates – although those with especially good relationships with care leavers sometimes received such updates directly from them.

> *"I think when a young person enjoys something they will share as much as what they can really. So I was aware what days she was doing, what things she was doing."*
>
> (Personal Adviser)

In a number of cases, local authorities offered a financial incentive for participating in the programme, and this in itself necessitated regular dialogue between statutory services and Fairbridge staff, in order to verify young people's attendance.

Young people also reported benefitting when Programme Executives were in contact with others in their support network. As in the above examples, young people were reminded to attend Fairbridge sessions by other people in their lives, which they acknowledged made them feel supported and encouraged from all angles, as well as ensuring they turned up and continued working towards their goals. Young people also described asking their Programme Executives to liaise with other agencies on their behalf, especially where they did not feel confident doing so. Effective partnership working was most valued when young people faced any form of crisis; whether that was a dip in their motivation, a change in their living situation or a period of time in custody.

These findings align with those from previous studies, which have noted the high level of input required from existing support staff and networks to encourage (some) young people to attend wider support programmes. For example, in one such study[43], a local authority Education, Training and

Employment (ETE) worker had to spend considerable time phoning round his work experience group, to ensure they were up and ready to travel to their placements; collecting them himself; checking they had everything they needed for the day ahead; and being on hand to deal with any anxieties or problems.

Fairbridge staff also described instances where partnership working was not so successful. Indeed, some agencies were held to view Fairbridge simply as a *"diversionary activity"* – focusing on the adventurous activities and *"fun"* sessions on offer. In these cases, Programme Executives made additional efforts to convey the role of the Follow On sessions, the one to one support and the drive to achieve goals, to help other professionals appreciate their work, the objectives of the programme, and the value of supporting young people's commitment and attendance.

Additionally, there were other barriers to partnership working. In some instances, young people said they were uncomfortable with the idea of people talking about them 'behind their backs' and refused permission for Programme Executives to contact other professionals. Conversely, there were cases in which young people granted permission, but other agencies were not willing to share information, citing restrictions around confidentiality.

3.5   Leaving the programme

Leaving Fairbridge could be a mixed experience for young people and took place in different contexts. **Decisions about when and how to leave the programme were dependent on a number of factors including young people's age, progress and external circumstances.** Generally, young people were said to move on at their own pace and when they felt ready; some just needed the Access course, whilst others needed more sustained support and stayed for longer than was typical. Exits could be planned, or unexpected, where a young person simply disengaged.

Final session forms (*N* = 212) completed by Programme Executives suggested that young people left Fairbridge for four main reasons. In order of prevalence, these were:

→ Achievement of EETV or other goals (57 per cent)

→ Disengagement or – far less commonly – disruptive behaviour leading to exclusion (33 per cent)

→ Changed circumstances – for example, moving to another area, or having a baby (12 per cent)

→ Having spent enough time on the programme and gained all they could from attending (4 per cent).

In almost two thirds of cases (65 per cent), the decision for a care leaver to exit the Fairbridge programme was described as mutual. Otherwise, it was more likely to be the young person's decision (21 per cent) than the practitioner's (10 per cent) or someone else's (4 per cent)[c].

Practitioners stressed that **planned exits were preferable, to maximise gains from the programme** and ensure that support was not withdrawn suddenly. They used their one to one sessions to make it clear to young people from the start that Fairbridge was a temporary support mechanism. This was presented in a positive light, as a part of their journey, and young people were empowered to work towards this positive step. This did not stop some young people from becoming upset when it was their time to leave. For the most part, Fairbridge Site Managers considered it important for a young person's Programme Executive to work with them through to the end and support them into the next phase of their journey. However, one manager described taking a phased approach, whereby young people were purposefully transferred to a different Programme Executive who was responsible for managing their exits. It was felt this helped to cut the "*umbilical cord*" between the original Programme Executive and the young person.

In situations where the decision to leave came directly from the young person, Programme Executives said this could be due to a variety of reasons. Some thought they no longer needed support, while others were struggling with their health, housing or other external factors which dominated their time and thinking. One young person described in her own words why she stopped engaging with Fairbridge, and her Programme Executive in particular:

"Where I'm in such a s*** place mentally and emotionally… She phoned me about three weeks ago and I

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[c] Source: Final session forms: *N* = 211.

didn't answer… because I don't really know what to say to her. I know she's going to ask me how I am. I don't feel great at all. I know she's going to ask me what I've been up to. I ain't been up to nothing, so it's just going to be a s*** phone call and when I have a s*** phone call like that, it puts me down."

<div align="right">(Young Person)</div>

Likewise, practitioners recalled instances where, despite their best efforts, young people had disengaged or become inaccessible when overwhelmed by other issues.

"When he disengaged from his supported accommodation his situation went downhill rapidly. He got a lot of support from them but he wanted his independence and chose to leave. This was not a positive move as he started sofa surfing and his level of drug use increased. His mental health got significantly worse... Recently he has been back into the centre to ask about re-engaging with us but we are still struggling to maintain contact with him as he changes his number frequently and has periods without a phone. He definitely needed continued support with his housing issues but he was not open to discussing returning to support accommodation. He also needed specialist mental health support. There are services that we could refer him to but in order to do this we need him to be open to it and to be able to contact him which has been the biggest barrier for us throughout in offering him the support he very much needs."

<div align="right">(Programme Executive, Final session form)</div>

For other young people, Programme Executives cited the theory of relationships cycles (forming, norming, storming, and mourning)[44] as an explanation for them disengaging. In practice, this meant that when young people get closer to leaving the programme, they let it just *"fall away"* rather than formally finishing.

In some situations, however, Programme Executives described having had to intervene and make the decision that it was time for a young person to leave. One Site Manager commented:

"It's easy to come here every week where they know people and it's comfortable, but that isn't them developing and progressing, so sometimes we need to have that conversation with them."

<div align="right">(Fairbridge Site Manager)</div>

Although much rarer than mutual or young person-led decisions to leave, some young people did have experience of others, including their Programme Executive, seemingly making this decision for them. One participant turning 26 (the cut off age for Fairbridge) expressed disappointment that they had to leave the programme at that point. Likewise, as Fairbridge (eventually) put a *"cap"* on the number of contact hours a young person can have, some young people leave the programme when this cap is reached, and not through personal choice. One young person who experienced this cap explained that he would have liked to have known about it from the start as it could have led to him making different choices about activities.

There were also times where young people and Programme Executives disagreed on how the decision to leave was made; with each believing the other was responsible. An example of this can be seen below.

> **Daniel said he stopped engaging with Fairbridge because his Programme Executive stopped calling him as he had been on the course for a long time. In contrast, Daniel's Programme Executive felt that Daniel had been to all the sessions and learnt all he could from Fairbridge. He recalled explaining to Daniel that Fairbridge was for people who wanted to improve, develop and overcome hurdles in their lives – but Daniel did not seem to want to do this. He left it up to Daniel and said that he and Fairbridge would be there for him if he wanted it. He offered to continue Daniel's one to ones every few weeks to provide ongoing support, and *"put the ball in [Daniel's] court"*. As far as his Programme Executive was concerned, he allowed contact to end on Daniel's terms. However, Daniel did not get in touch with his Programme Executive and described feeling abandoned and rejected.**

More typically, young people who made the decision themselves to leave or recognised it as a mutual decision still recognised that they had been supported – and that they could still get in touch if needed. As one young person said, of her Programme Executive:

"I know that I could phone her up and still speak to her if I needed to."

<div align="right">(Young Person)</div>

This open door policy was deemed valuable both by young people who moved onto positive outcomes and those who did not. For those who secured a job or place in education, it gave them a chance to pop back in or phone their Programme Executive and update them on their progress. For others, knowing they had someone should they need any support was comforting, even if they did not take it up.

Many young people who took part in interviews described missing various aspects of Fairbridge, after leaving the programme. More specifically, they missed the social aspects of meeting new people, their relationship with their Programme Executive and the adventurous and fun activities on offer. For young people who had not moved onto a positive outcome, these feelings were amplified and they missed the sense of achievement they previously felt on Fairbridge.

As discussed, the pathways to leaving Fairbridge, and the degree to which they were considered *ready* to leave varied. In 50 per cent of cases, young people were deemed ready to leave by their practitioners at time of exit, with over a quarter deemed not ready (27 per cent) and the remaining 23 per cent of cases unclear, on final session forms (N = 211). Likewise, just over half of all young people were judged to have the skills and confidence they needed for independent living – at least 'mostly' (52 per cent), though just 7 per cent were 'completely' equipped. Practitioners were less optimistic about the rest, marking 13 per cent as 'not at all' ready and 35 per cent 'not really' ready (N = 212). This was reflected in their more detailed assessments of the areas in which young people were equipped to cope, with at least a third of young people considered 'not at all' or 'not really' equipped to manage the challenges they faced in relation to each of the following: housing, health and wellbeing; relationships with family and friends; making good use of services; staying safe and avoiding trouble, education, work or training plans; and money. (See Appendix B, Table B.7.)

It is important to note that the relatively high rates of withdrawal from the programme are not unique to Fairbridge. Previous studies have also identified high dropout rates among care leavers participating in EETV activities[45,46] – and pointed to a similar range of risk factors as those discussed below.

Risk and protective factors in relation to disengagement

In order to explore risk and protective factors for (early) disengagement, differences were explored between two groups: those who left the programme due to achieving EETV or other goals, or for other positive or neutral reasons, and those who disengaged (or, rarely, were asked to leave due to unacceptable behaviour). Additional tests considered whether any factors applied particularly to girls or boys, considered separately.

These analyses demonstrated that **the following were associated with higher rates of disengagement**:

→ A history of offending behaviour
→ Feeling unable to manage their health/ wellbeing at baseline
→ Feeling unable to make good use of services at baseline
→ Reporting a lack of support from a social worker/ Personal Adviser at baseline
→ Financial problems at time of exit
→ Housing problems at time of exit
→ Low self-esteem/ lack of confidence at time of exit
→ Lack of motivation/ commitment to EETV at exit
→ Behavioural problems at exit
→ Problematic relationships with peers at exit
→ Problematic drug or alcohol use at exit
→ Reluctance to communicate at exit
→ Lack of social support at exit.

In addition, the following factors specifically increased the risk of **girls** disengaging:

→ Problems with debt
→ Feeling unable to manage staying safe/ avoiding trouble at baseline
→ Mental health problems at time of exit.

Conversely, the following features of support, reportedly provided by Fairbridge practitioners, were associated with **lower** rates of disengagement:

→ Pushing the young person to make progress

→ Agreeing an action plan during sessions

→ Providing information/ advice on EETV issues

→ Offering information/ advice about other (non-EETV) issues

→ Addressing practical and independent living skills

→ Discussing financial issues during sessions

→ Using the computer with them during sessions

→ Signposting young people to other sources of support

→ Attending another support service with them.

Clearly, the extent to which any of the above support could be delivered in the time available with young people was limited if they dropped out of the programme early, did not engage very well, or were exhibiting problematic behaviour or facing some form of crisis which dominated discussion. However, although those who disengaged or were asked to leave spent less time in one to one sessions than other young people[d], they still spent an average (mean) of 3.4 hours with their Programme Executives – just one hour less than other participants. This suggests that it is worth exploring any scope for focusing sessions on techniques or topics which may maintain or increase engagement.

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[d] t (192) = 3.83, p <.001.

4. WHAT WERE THE OUTCOMES FOR CARE LEAVERS?

Summary

→ Based on exit data for 231 young people leaving Fairbridge, 62% had progressed to one or more of the following: education; training, volunteering, paid work, an apprenticeship, self-employment, or a place on another Prince's Trust programme. Other EETV-related gains included improved readiness to work, commitment to achievable goals and more impressive CVs.

→ The vast majority of young people were considered to have boosted a range of skills during the course of the programme; most commonly teamwork, communication and confidence. Other positive steps included improved peer relationships and better use of services and support. The few who had *not* made perceptible gains tended to have disengaged from the programme.

→ Young people and practitioners attributed the progress they made, at least in part, to the opportunities, structure and support provided by the Fairbridge programme.

→ They were more likely to achieve EETV outcomes if they achieved 'intermediate' goals (in relation to skills or personal development) – and if their sessions with practitioners involved features such as: review and reflection; action planning; advice and support around EETV; discussion of family relationships; support with other areas (such as housing or money) and liaison with other agencies.

→ Challenges around relationships, social support, mental health, motivation, debt, transport and substance misuse were linked with lower rates of EETV achievement. Such issues were ongoing concerns for many leaving the programme, as were housing and behavioural problems.

→ Practitioners considered that sustaining progress beyond the programme was dependent on young people having good support networks, and having their underlying needs met, particularly in relation to mental health.

This chapter explores the range of outcomes achieved by care leavers participating in the research. In turn, it considers achievements relating to: employment, education, training and volunteering; social skills; and other personal outcomes, including wider aspects of skills development and progression towards independence. Secondly, it explores factors associated with achievement, barriers to further progress and the ongoing support needs of care leavers, at the point at which they ended their involvement with Fairbridge.

As a result of the challenges of tracking young people, the interview findings are largely based on reflections made by young people at an early point in their experience of Fairbridge, with some later input from a smaller number of young people a few months after leaving the programme. Programme Executives also discussed outcomes for those who did not participate in the research at later stages.

Fairbridge was perceived to have made an impact on young people in a wide range of ways. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the nature and length of the programme and the challenges facing young people, more achieved 'soft' than 'hard' outcomes. In addition, as demonstrated in Chapter 3, Fairbridge was not the only source of support for those in care, or care leavers. While it is not possible to fully isolate the unique impact of Fairbridge, young people and Programme Executives expressed views about the difference it had made.

4.1 EETV outcomes

Based on combined outcome data from final session forms and/ or Follow Up surveys, **62 per cent of 231 young people had achieved at least one of the EETV outcomes listed in Table 4.1** (53 per cent had done so, excluding entry to other Prince's Trust Programmes (Appendix C, Table C.1)). The most common outcome, achieved by 30 per cent, was a place in education, followed by being accepted onto another Prince's Trust programme, or another training programme. Fewer had found a paid job or voluntary work, and only a handful had started an apprenticeship or their own business.

Table 4.1 EETV outcomes achieved by young people on exiting Fairbridge

	%
A place in education	30
A place on a Prince's Trust programme	21
A training place	21
A volunteering place	10
A paid job	9
An apprenticeship	3
Their own business	1

Source: Final session forms and Follow Up surveys. Base N = 231. Young people could achieve more than one, or none, of the listed EETV outcomes.

If these outcomes are considered in light of young people's initial goals (see Table 2.6), far fewer appeared to have entered paid employment or apprenticeships than had hoped to do so. However, as highlighted previously, Fairbridge practitioners encouraged young people to adopt and pursue more achievable, intermediate objectives – while keeping their ultimate goals in mind.

As well as the more 'concrete' EETV outcomes, young people also appeared to have taken steps in the right direction – in greater numbers. Practitioners reported that 55 per cent (116) had now made realistic plans for their careers or future employment, and 46 per cent (97) had taken strides in demonstrating the attitude and commitment needed in the workplace. More than half (54 per cent, 113) had earned Fairbridge Certificates of achievement and 31 per cent (64) had gained other recognised qualifications (such as first aid certificates) – tangible outcomes which interviewed young people valued. Several of these steps towards EETV were significantly associated with achieving 'hard' EETV outcomes, as discussed further in Section 4.4.

Interviews revealed examples of Fairbridge playing an integral role in helping to secure EETV outcomes. With support from Programme Executives, a number of those interviewed moved onto other Prince's Trust programmes including Get Into, TEAM, and Enterprise. Fairbridge was seen as a stepping stone, helping to prepare participants for these more intensive courses which built upon skills nurtured by Fairbridge and took them further on the journey to being ready for work, further education or training.

Young people aiming to go to college were also supported by Fairbridge staff, who helped them to research their options and put them in touch with education providers. The courses young people chose tended to be more vocationally focused, for example in childcare, business or computing. Whilst several young people had tried and dropped out of college before, Programme Executives and young people credited Fairbridge with encouraging them to attend more consistently and engage more effectively this time around.

Practitioners also highlighted various other examples of positive EETV-related steps on final session forms, including young people having attended job club sessions and created CVs for the first time; using Fairbridge courses to explore and gain insight into potential careers and simply being more focused and dedicated to achieving their goals.

> *"She was very non-committal and would not take a chance on new things. She has now completed Get Started and gone to college."*

(Programme Executive, Final session form)

Likewise, interviews with young people reinforced that participating in Fairbridge had boosted their employability skills, readiness to work, and CVs, even if some were not yet ready to enter work, education or

training. This was attributed to the routine, structure and purpose Fairbridge provided. It help them set clear goals for the future and work towards them. There were interviewees who had achieved 'hard' EETV outcomes, but even if they had not, honing and working towards goals was seen to have helped develop their thinking processes and move them closer to being work ready. As one young person explained:

"My goals back then were just to be myself and try to keep out as many peoples' way as possible. Whereas now it's [to] build my confidence, get a job, move up in the job, and probably move finally onto a job that I really want."

(Young person)

As highlighted in Chapter 3, care leavers' lives could be volatile and other pressures could impinge on their ability to engage with Fairbridge or focus on EETV outcomes. In some such cases, staff had been able to sustain their motivation and help them to identify and pursue new goals – as in Laura's case, set out below.

Laura had low levels of ambition when she joined Fairbridge. She set a goal of getting onto a course in performing arts. Her social worker was thrilled that she had found something she was passionate about, and that her outlook on the future seemed to have changed and become much more positive. After a few weeks, however, Laura fell pregnant. Her goals were amended to reflect her changing circumstances and she successfully secured a place on a local parenting and baby course with the help of her Programme Executive.

4.2 Social skills

Young people and practitioners were in agreement that taking part in the Fairbridge programme enabled developing a range of important social skills.

As shown in Table 4.2, **practitioners indicated that young people had demonstrated achievements in a broad range of skills, by the end of their time with Fairbridge**. The vast majority (86 per cent) were judged to have improved their teamwork, communication skills (82 per cent) and confidence (75 per cent). More than two thirds were considered to be better managing their feelings (69 per cent), and almost as many had demonstrated the ability to set and achieve goals (61 per cent). Just under half had shown improved reliability (46 per cent) with smaller numbers taking steps to improve basic skills in English, maths or IT. Very few young people had apparently made no progress across this set of skills (7 per cent, *n* = 15) – almost all of whom had disengaged from the programme rather than sustaining their engagement until a planned exit.

Table 4.2 Skills outcomes (improved skills) as perceived by practitioners

	%
Working with others	86
Communication	82
Confidence	75
Managing feelings	69
Setting and achieving goals	61
Reliability	46
English or maths	22
IT skills	12

Source: Final session forms. Base N = 210.

The smaller sample of young people who completed Follow Up surveys were equally positive about their skills development, if not more so (See Appendix C, Table C.2). As well as reporting directly on perceived gains, they were also asked to rate themselves in relation to key skills at both baseline and follow up.

As shown in Figure 4.1 below, for every one of these skills, average (mean) ratings increased from start to end of the one to one sessions. These increases were statistically significant except in relation to setting and

achieving goals, and reliability[e]. They were, however, relatively small, in each case amounting to less than one point on the six point scale. The greatest increases related to the areas where young people were least confident at baseline, most wanted to improve (see Chapter 2, Table 2.7) and where there was most room for growth: namely managing feelings and confidence. Nevertheless, managing feelings remained the area with the lowest ratings at the end of the programme, reflecting the high level of mental health and emotional support needs that exists among children in care and care leavers[47,48,49].
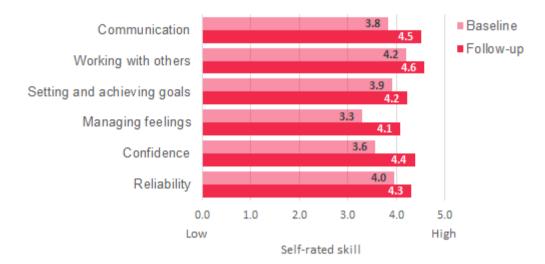
Figure 4.1 Young people's self-rated skills, at baseline and follow up

Source: Matched sample of Baseline and Follow Up surveys. Base N varies between 81 and 82.

The apparently limited (average) increases in self-reported skills on pre and post measures – in tension with positive views of having developed these skills – may partly reflect tendencies for care leavers to overestimate their abilities at baseline, as well as the fact that some made huge gains while others – less engaged with the programme – did not. As suggested by practitioners, *most* care leavers made progress in relation to a range of soft skills, and this was illustrated by some of their comments on final session forms. Asked about areas in which young people had made the greatest progress, their responses included:

*"Being able to **manage herself better** in groups of young people without making disclosures."*

*"Greater **commitment, time keeping** and **attendance** on the course. He has greater **confidence** and has continued to develop his **interpersonal skills**."*

*"She came across as a confident person, but **hid behind a big personality** to avoid having to talk about the real issues bothering her. Through setting daily goals and one to one chats and activities, **she began to let down the barriers**."*

*"He has made most progress in his **confidence, leadership** and **working with others**. He was very shy when he started but by his last session he was **leading** all activities."*

*"He has made the most progress in working with others and his **positive attitude towards engaging and learning**. On his last few sessions he has made a clear decision to **support other young people** during activities, both physical and non-physical."*

(Programme Executives, Final session forms)

Interviews with Programme Executives and young people echoed the survey findings. Consistently, those interviewed highlighted increased **confidence** as one of the most noticeable outcomes for those completing the Fairbridge programme. This was attributed to it having given young people a safe space where they were able to develop; and to the stretching activities involved in Follow On sessions and the Access course. As a result of these, young people reported growing in confidence, boosting their **self-esteem** and feeling **happier** in themselves. Programme Executives reinforced this, noting that for a number of participants, this

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[e] Results of t-tests, detailed in Appendix C, Table C.3 were reinforced by nonparametric equivalents (Wilcoxon Signed Rank tests).

was reflected in them dressing more smartly and taking more care of their appearance.

Young people also felt they built on their social and **communication** skills during Fairbridge. They recalled how the Access course and Follow On sessions had helped them meet new people, and to communicate effectively in challenging situations, such as raft building or rock climbing. A number of them described feeling less apprehensive about new situations and meeting new people, such as in job interview scenarios. By the time they left Fairbridge, there were young people who said they now liked mixing with new people of varying ages and with different interests and felt more comfortable initiating conversations.

"I wasn't really the talkative type, but now I talk to everyone. I'm not scared to talk to anyone."

(Young person)

Alongside improvements in communication, Programme Executives also considered that a number of young people had become more **emotionally literate** and **self-reflective**. This was attributed, in part, to the one to one sessions, which gave young people the opportunity to talk about their feelings and behaviour and enabled them to become more aware of their emotions and how to handle them. As such, they were at times able to think more clearly and deal with difficult situations, such as poor behaviour or disrespect from others without *"losing it"*. During the programme, young people had regularly been prompted to talk about how they were feeling and what was going on in their lives; expressing their emotions verbally appeared to have helped them to feel happier in themselves and calmer. Whilst there may have been few drastic changes to young people's demeanour, staff noticed small but meaningful improvements, for example, with one young person smiling more in groups; and another becoming less rigid in his thinking and more flexible with others.

4.3   Other personal outcomes

Practitioners and young people identified a range of additional outcomes, beyond EETV and social skills. Table 4.3 below sets out practitioners' assessments of the numbers who made meaningful gains in different areas during their time with Fairbridge. Most frequently, these additional gains arose around improved peer relationships (52 per cent) and better use of services and support (49 per cent).

Table 4.3 Other personal outcomes as perceived by practitioners

	%
Improved friendships/ social networks	52
Better use of services or support	49
Improved budgeting, cooking or household tasks	41
Staying safe and avoiding trouble	34
Being (more) healthy	31
Breaking (bad) habits	28
Improved family relationships	25
Reduced use of drugs or alcohol	21
Improved housing situation	16

Source: *Final session forms. Base N = 210.*

As with social skills, the smaller group of young people who completed Follow Up surveys were even more positive about their progress in these areas. (See Appendix C, Table C.4.) Practitioners' comments on final session forms also highlighted some of these additional outcomes, across the areas listed above.

*"He **struggled with making and maintaining friendships.** When he first started he would wind up others on the course a lot and was not very good at dealing with negative reactions to his antagonising behaviour. This has improved and **he is now able to get along with people better** on the programme."*

*"**Improved social networks** – she has **learned to form equal relationships** and not unhealthy relationships."*

*"Staying safe and avoiding trouble –**he got in no fights and had no involvement with the police.**"*

*"**Being healthy** – she is eating more as she initially refused to eat at all in front of people."*

*"Breaking bad habits – he has shown a **vast improvement in drug use** since starting the programme."*

*"Effectively using services and support – **in her time at Fairbridge, she identified the additional support she needs and found the courage and motivation to seek these services with our help,** and will now be engaging with the correct service for her."*

*"Staying safe: he **learned to make decisions for himself** instead of following like a sheep into trouble."*

*"**Housing** – he has been homeless for over 6 months and **we supported him in obtaining a MAP placement.** He has now **got voluntary work and has a place on the Team project**."*

*"He made the biggest progress in **stopping using drugs and in being ready to work** and has **gained an apprenticeship** with outdoor centre."*

<div style="text-align: right">(Programme Executives, Final session forms)</div>

Consistent with the quantitative data, **young people who were interviewed described improvements in their social circles.** Some, particularly those involved with negative peer groups, reported having a much more positive circle of friends and extended support network as a result of attending Fairbridge; their new friends were working towards similar goals to theirs, wanted to better themselves and helped to reinforce their own resolve to make progress. For some, the programme had also helped them to avoid gravitating towards negative peer groups. One young woman described how Fairbridge had helped her address this tendency, and realise there was more to life than getting in trouble:

"This programme's really helped me to actually make better choices of friends because I normally go for the people that I get in trouble with."

<div style="text-align: right">(Young person)</div>

Young people also spoke of how **Fairbridge had increased their knowledge and skills in key areas**. As highlighted in Section 3.2.2, for some interviewees, independent living skills sessions had been well suited to their current needs; providing useful knowledge that helped them budget. This was seen as especially helpful by those who were about to, or had just, transitioned into independence. As a direct result of the Follow On course, interviewees described knowing how to better manage their finances and understood the different types of bank accounts on offer. Sessions focused on cookery had also boosted their confidence in the kitchen. For example, one young person recalled working with others to prepare a three course dinner, and being really proud that the Fairbridge staff had enjoyed the dishes he had made. Young people generally described gaining something from all the courses they attended. As one young person said:

"Most of the, courses I do…I take bits of it and put it in life."

<div style="text-align: right">(Young person)</div>

As a result of the Access course and the adventurous activity Follow On sessions, **a number of young people had also tackled fears or phobias about heights, water or enclosed spaces**. The rock climbing, canoeing/ raft building and caving in particular were activities that were recalled as most effective for tackling these fears. Having done so, young people described feeling much more confident and able to transfer that confidence into other situations. For some, increased confidence also translated into greater optimism about the prospect of living independently, even if they were not quite ready to do it just yet.

A number of **young people with substance misuse issues were also seen to have made progress in overcoming their habits**. Managing to abide by the Fairbridge 'no drugs' policy had helped some to recognise that they were not as reliant on substances as they thought, and that the *"buzz"* they previously sought from drugs could also be had from adventurous activities which were better for their health.

Overall, young people who took part in interviews tended to describe **being more motivated, positive and ambitious** about their lives going forwards; crediting Fairbridge with opening their eyes to different opportunities. Even among those who did not have EETV placements on leaving Fairbridge, several wanted to maintain a lifestyle where they got out of the house and did motivating activities, rather than reverting back to *"watching TV"* or *"playing on the computer"*. One young person described her changed routine:

"I'm out there more, I do a lot more things now than I did before. I go swimming and I go to the park."

<div style="text-align: right">(Young person)</div>

As explored further below, progress in some of these areas was conducive to achieving goals around EETV.

4.4 Enablers and obstacles

Section 3.5 explored a range of factors associated with disengagement from Fairbridge. Analyses of group differences also highlighted certain factors – including background experiences; personal circumstances; features of Fairbridge sessions and gains in skills – associated with achievement of EETV outcomes.

Young people were **more likely** to have achieved at least one of the EETV outcomes listed in Table 4.1 if their sessions with Fairbridge practitioners involved particular techniques, or support, including:

→ Reviewing and reflecting on experiences
→ Agreeing an action plan
→ Providing information or advice on EETV
→ Setting up interviews for them and helping them access EETV placements
→ Liaising with other agencies or practitioners on their behalf
→ Attending a support service with them
→ Discussing relationships with family members
→ Providing them with support around housing, money or other practical things.

These findings validate the individualised approach to support advocated by Fairbridge, within which young people are empowered to make choices and play an active part in shaping their goals and action plans, ensuring that these are relevant to them and that they feel a sense of ownership and responsibility. The results also highlight the importance of having support to tackle challenges and take steps towards goals. In line with this, young people were also **more likely** to achieve EETV outcomes if they attained 'intermediate' goals, in relation to the following skills or personal development areas:

→ Communication, teamwork, setting and achieving goals, managing feelings, confidence and reliability
→ English or maths and IT skills
→ Healthy living and breaking (bad) habits
→ Better use of services/ support
→ Making realistic career plans
→ Showing the attitude and commitment needed for work.

Conversely, young people were significantly **less likely** to achieve any EETV outcomes at time of exit if they:

→ Faced problems with debt
→ Had difficulties with transport
→ Had ongoing drug problems
→ Had relationships problems with friends or other peers
→ Lacked ongoing social support
→ Lacked motivation or commitment to EET.

In addition, they were significantly less likely to achieve one of the six 'core' EETV outcomes (excluding a place on a Prince's Trust programme) if they faced ongoing mental health problems (46 per cent of those facing mental health problems at the point of exit achieved a core EETV outcome, compared with 61 per cent without)[f]. Further details and test results are set out in Appendix C, Tables C.5, C.6 and C.7.

Previous international research has identified some similar enabling factors and obstacles in relation to improving educational and/ or career outcomes. Alongside placement stability and staying put in placements after 18 years of age, facilitators have included: action-orientated personal education plans/ targeted career support, and financial and practical help and encouragement[50,51,52]. Conversely, the same studies have highlighted obstacles to progress including: disrupted schooling, lack of basic skills, low self-esteem, problems in birth families, and not knowing anyone with experience of higher education.

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[f] $\chi^2(1) = 4.6$, $p = .03$, $N = 210$, Source: Final session forms.

It is important to note that **findings from FC2I do not prove *causal* links between the various factors and outcomes.** Activities like action planning, building confidence and addressing potential obstacles in young people's lives may pre-date and be seen to facilitate achievement of EETV outcomes. However, it is also evident that young people who are more willing and able to engage (for a variety of personal reasons) will be better able to take advantage of opportunities and make progress in many different areas – including EETV. On average, those who achieved EETV outcomes attended more 'formal' one to one sessions than did other young people (with an average (mean) of 4.5 compared to 3.5 sessions[9]), which is one indicator of their greater engagement.

Nevertheless, **interviews with Programme Executives and young people reinforced and extended the above findings.** They explained from their perspectives the factors which facilitated and interfered with engagement in Fairbridge, and – as a result – young people's ability to achieve their goals. Programme Executives argued that resilience in the face of difficult life circumstances, both current and past, was a real strength of many care leavers. They sought to recognise and build on this, and expressed belief that young people could achieve great things whilst on the programme. **For the young people, having someone who believed in them and could be relied upon was crucial; as was the support and feedback they received to encourage them to push on and achieve their goals.** Those young people who had positive relationships with their Programme Executives felt this relationship was a key driver of their achievements.

Similarly, **the presence – and engagement – of positive support networks outside of Fairbridge was seen as important** for achieving and sustaining progress. One Programme Executive described the benefits of moral support from a young person's network:

> *"If her support network know that she's working with Fairbridge, then they're going to encourage that. So, I suppose, they were there to encourage her to come here and take part."*

(Programme Executive)

In contrast, having a negative support network – or negative relationships with other young people at Fairbridge – was considered a real barrier to achieving goals. When young people did not get along with others on the programme, this deterred them from signing up for sessions where they risked coming into contact with them. This limited their choice of sessions, and in turn, their progress. In a minority of cases, young people's external networks were unsupportive which stopped them taking up potentially beneficial opportunities within and beyond Fairbridge. For example, one young man's family discouraged him from taking up a *Get Into: Games Design* opportunity as they did not believe he would gain a job in the industry.

> **Megan's father and boyfriend were uncomfortable with her attending the residential part of the Access course. As a result, Megan did not go. Her Programme Executive considered the controlling relationships presented a significant obstacle to Megan's progress as she missed out on *"one of the key building blocks"* for young people's time on Fairbridge.**

Young people indicated that each element of the programme – the Access course, one to one and Follow On sessions – worked together as a package to sustain their engagement and help them to make progress in many different areas, all serving their ultimate goals. The balance of structure, routine and flexibility was also felt to help them become work ready in a phased approach. **However, what was enabling for the vast majority could be off-putting for others – the structure entailed in Fairbridge, despite being very flexible, could still be experienced as too intense.**

In line with this, **a general level of personal disorganisation and *"chaos"* was identified as a common barrier for sustaining engagement and achieving goals.** Young people spoke about the challenge of complying with the structure and timetable required by Fairbridge. They struggled with time keeping and found it hard to get up in the mornings to come in for sessions. One Programme Executive reflected:

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[9] t (192.96) = -4.31, p < .001.

"They lead a very jumbled life and have a hard time fitting into the 'rigidity' of the Fairbridge programme, which in itself should be quite flexible. But just getting up on time, travelling around, having money, that kind of stuff seems much more difficult for them."

<div align="right">(Programme Executive)</div>

Lack of secure housing or financial instability was also seen as an obstacle to engagement and achievement on the programme. Simple practicalities associated with these issues could also get in the way of young people achieving their goals. Despite Fairbridge reimbursing young people for their travel expenses, finding money to pay for travel fares in advance could be hard for them. As discussed in Section 2.3, young people struggled with money management in their transition to becoming independent. For those on benefits, administrative errors further contributed to this; young people sometimes did not receive their payments on time or received reduced amounts, which meant they could not always afford the upfront bus or train payments. Given the finite number of Fairbridge centres across the country, some young people had to travel a significant distance to attend sessions, which increased their upfront costs, as well as the effort and motivation required to attend.

In addition to having too little money which could affect access to the centre, having too much money was also found to hinder the achievement of goals for a minority of young people, in the experience of some Programme Executives. Those with what they saw as sufficient income from benefits appeared to have little incentive to change their lives or get a job and risk losing money. Their lack of motivation meant it was harder to set, let alone achieve, goals they genuinely believed in.

Another factor which contributed to chaotic lifestyles was **problematic drug use or involvement in criminal activity**, which was associated with disengagement from Fairbridge (See Section 3.5). Programme Executives considered that young people referred through Youth Offending Teams or the probation service were not always in the *"right mindset"* to get the most from Fairbridge. Their motivation for attendance could appear to be *"ticking a box"* rather than working towards EETV or other outcomes. This was not conducive to effective engagement, or achievement of meaningful goals. Likewise, offending or substance abuse habits could be hard to break, especially if peer groups were involved, and failing to abstain from alcohol or drugs whilst at Fairbridge had led to the exclusion of a number of young people from the programme.

> **Jessica aimed to work on her independent living skills and changing her anti-social behaviour habits. Her Programme Executive had judged that she was making progress towards these goals but a previous incident landed her in custody. She kept in contact with her Programme Executive during this period and came back to Fairbridge on her release. She began the Access course again but did not adhere to the strict no alcohol condition. She was sent home and cannot re-engage until she is prepared to meet the conditions of attendance.**

Substance misuse and mental health problems were recurring themes across interviews and repeatedly raised as the most significant barriers to care leavers' engagement and achievement. Issues ranged from emotional issues (including a quick temper, negative attitudes, and stress) to diagnosable mental health issues (including anxiety, depression and personality disorders), as well as alcohol and substance addiction. These issues affected young people's motivation, attitude and ability to engage with the opportunities on offer; as well as the ways they interacted with others at Fairbridge. Some were open about their mental health, which allowed Programme Executives to support them as best they could in times of crisis. However, there were limits to what they could do. For example, one young person said his depression stopped him attending, despite staff phoning and visiting him, to try and encourage him back in. He insisted there was nothing more they could have done; he simply had not been in the right place to achieve goals. Other young people did not disclose mental health problems and Programme Executives felt they could be a *"taboo"* subject. While some experiencing problems in these areas *did* make progress and achieve their goals whilst at Fairbridge, practitioners feared that many would struggle to make, or sustain, further gains until the underlying problems were addressed by trained professionals.

As young people left Fairbridge, **Programme Executives were asked to identify any barriers they faced** to *continued* or sustained progress. Their responses, summarised in Table 4.4, show that some of the risk factors identified above were ongoing concerns for substantial minorities of care leavers. **Mental health issues and difficulties with family relationships were concerns for almost half the sample. Despite**

gaining confidence, this, or low self-esteem, was still an issue for four out of ten, as were behavioural problems and lack of motivation or commitment to EETV. More than one third faced financial issues, problems in relationships with peers and with housing. Drug use, communication issues and lack of basic skills were ongoing problems for around a quarter of those exiting the programme.

Table 4.4 **Ongoing barriers to young people's progress as perceived by Programme Executives**

	%		%
Mental health issues	47	Reluctance to communicate	25
Difficulties with family relationships	47	Lack of basic skills (e.g. literacy)	24
Low self-esteem/ lack of confidence	41	Offending/ in trouble with police	17
Lack of motivation/ commitment to EETV	40	Lack of on-going social support	16
Behavioural problems	40	Special Educational Needs (SEN)	13
Financial issues	37	Transport issues	11
Problems in relationships with friends	36	Health related issues	6
Housing barriers	34	Other barriers	4
Drug/ alcohol use	25	Language barriers	3

Source: Final session forms. Base N = 210.

These findings are in accordance with previous research with care leavers which has identified similar risk and protective factors for adverse outcomes[53] , and key stressors and concerns for this group[54].

4.5   Sustaining progress beyond Fairbridge

While the quantitative element of this research, which tracked the progress of the broader sample of care leavers, did not extend beyond their time with Fairbridge, The Prince's Trust seeks to follow up with those who have left Trust programmes, issuing surveys by text approximately three and six months after the end of the young person's involvement. All available three month Follow Up data for those involved in the research was provided to NCB.

At face value, this data indicated that, **three months after leaving Fairbridge, 75 per cent of respondents (*n* = 70) were currently engaged in, or about to start, at least one positive EETV placement, including a place on another Prince's Trust programme**. (The comparable figure *excluding* those on other Prince's Trust programmes was 70 per cent, *n* = 65). However, this subsample amounted to just 16 per cent of those sent surveys, as the response rate was just 21 per cent. Comparison of respondents and non-respondents among the subsample for whom other data was available suggested that young people were more likely to respond if they had had a planned exit from Fairbridge, and had already achieved EETV outcomes at the point of exit.[h]

Fairbridge staff were not surprised by low response rates to Follow Up surveys, highlighting their own difficulties attempting to keep in touch with children in care and care leavers.

> *"They might have changed their mobile number, it might have been a mobile phone they had with their foster carer; the foster carer keeps the phone to pass onto the next child. So if we can't get hold of them, we can't get the outcome from them."*

(Fairbridge Site Manager)

These difficulties in maintaining links with young people had knock on effects for the research, it being impossible to reach all but a small subsample of interviewees for Wave 3 interviews. Accordingly, the researchers – and Fairbridge staff – were only able to explore the extent to which outcomes were sustained – or built upon – beyond the life of the programme in a small number of cases. As outlined in Section 4.4, at earlier stages, practitioners had been aware of young people encountering hurdles which set them back -

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[h] Although the group differences did not reach significance based on such small numbers, among those who responded, just 19% had disengaged from the programme, compared to 30% disengaging among non-respondents. Likewise, among respondents, 75% had achieved EETV outcomes at exit, compared to 61% of non-respondents.

particularly in instances where their current activities lacked the structure, focus and purpose of Fairbridge and where external factors interfered with their motivation.

As staff acknowledged, as time went on they were more likely to hear about success stories. When young people achieved and sustained positive outcomes, some had returned to the Fairbridge centre to update them about their progress. This was a particularly rewarding aspect of the job for Programme Executives, one of whom recalled a recent visitor being "*full of energy, really beaming*" and keen to share their success.

In line with this, **those who took part in interviews three months after exiting Fairbridge also tended to have positive outcomes to report** – variously involving building on their experience with other Prince's Trust programmes; making good progress at college, or applying for university. While these may not be representative of all those who attended the programme, they are very real examples of instances where young people had taken positive steps forward, and where they attributed these, in part, at least, to the progress they had made, and support they had received, through Fairbridge.

> **James was referred to The Prince's Trust Team programme – a 12 week intensive course designed to improve team working skills. James really enjoyed the course, especially the community projects they did and his voluntary work at a charity shop. As his time on TEAM came to an end, the TEAM careers adviser put James in touch with a college and, at the time of his final interview, he was looking forward to starting a Level 2 Diploma in IT.**

> **Vanessa had aimed to get into childcare, as well as improve her self-confidence, self-esteem and communication. When she left Fairbridge she described feeling happier in herself and more confident. Her Programme Executive arranged for her to take up a college course in childcare. Unfortunately, after a few weeks, Vanessa dropped out due to her deteriorating mental health. However, three months after leaving Fairbridge, she was being supported by Talent Match who were helping her to find a new course for when she was ready.**

> **Mark had previously applied to college but had not felt ready and did not take up his place. He came to Fairbridge and his Programme Executive noticed his interest in computers so referred him to a *Get Into: Games Design* course. Mark really enjoyed this, and it motivated him to re-apply for his original college course, in business and computing. At the time of his last interview, it was going well, and he was applying for a degree in games design. He was grateful that Fairbridge had helped him rekindle his passion, and take steps towards his goals.**

> **Zoe had applied to and started college, with support from her foster carer. Along with support from her boyfriend, she credited Fairbridge with helping her to become more confident and focus on improving her attendance and performance on the course. She was now looking towards the next step; if she achieved her Level 3 qualification, she hoped to attain a place on another course taking her closer to her ultimate goal of becoming a dancer.**

While celebrating these positive examples, Programme Executives felt that there were limitations on the long-term influence a short-term course, such as Fairbridge, could have – particularly for young people facing an array of complex needs, and who had been less able to engage with the programme.

> *"I do wonder how much of that he will remember and how much might have just been… something short term that he might have remembered the next day, but I'm not sure whether he will remember forever."*

(Programme Executive)

In line with the findings outlined in Section 4.4, Fairbridge staff maintained that, if young people were to sustain progress, it was important that they had a good support circle around them who could help with positive reinforcement; whether this was a professional or personal support network.

In this context, **Site Managers and Programme Executives regretted that there were gaps in the local support structures for care leavers, and young people in general.** They considered a designated person, with knowledge of their past and circumstances, as crucial for care leavers. Those who had limited or no contact with social workers or Personal Advisers were considered at a real disadvantage, in comparison to those with more positive relationships. Staff suggested that, given the pressures on statutory services, **mentors or life coaches might partially fill the gaps by offering more informal and accessible support. However, these services were also seen to be in short supply**.

Fairbridge and statutory staff agreed that **housing support was also lacking for young people**, which could derail any positive progress. As discussed in Section 2.3, care leavers had specific needs around housing. However, while tenancy support might be available for those in housing association properties, it was suggested that others were equally in need, including those renting privately. In addition to greater access to tenancy support, **young people expressed a desire to know more about their rights generally,** as young people and as care leavers. They wanted access to good quality advocacy services to help them to understand their legal entitlements and hold services accountable.

Lastly, **Programme Executives noted the importance of addressing – or continuing to address – urgent underlying needs, particularly around mental health**, as these could be a significant barrier to engaging and achieving goals during the programme, and could be expected to have similar limiting effects going forward. For those experiencing severe mental health problems, it was emphasised that more specialist mental health support was needed to help sustain any positive outcomes – a gap that Fairbridge could not be expected to fill, particularly after young people left the programme. Young people expressed a preference for mental health support to be independent from other services such as Youth Offending and Leaving Care Teams, to allow them to comfortably explore issues related to their past and/or their experience of services.

5.   CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter draws out key messages from the research together with recommendations for the future – informed by ideas shared by young people, practitioners and other stakeholders.

5.1   Key messages

As set out in Chapter 1, the final stage of this project was designed to address the following key questions:

→ What role(s) can support delivered by Fairbridge play in helping care leavers to develop the confidence and skills they need to engage with services and wider opportunities and achieve their goals?

→ How does this type of support interact with, and complement, other sources of support available to care leavers, including support from social services, family, social networks, and other support providers?

→ What factors are particularly important in supporting different groups of care leavers?

→ How can such supplementary support best be delivered to meet the needs of care leavers?

Key learning on each point is set out in turn in this section and the next.

The role of Fairbridge in helping care leavers develop skills and achieve their goals

Based on the accounts of both practitioners and young people, Fairbridge was an effective programme for care leavers. As outlined in Chapter 3, those who completed Follow Up surveys on exiting the programme complimented the programme's content, structure and staff – and their positive comments were reinforced by those who took part in interviews. Each element of the programme – the Access course, Follow On courses and one to one sessions – was said to contribute to helping them to set and achieve goals, raise their aspirations and boost their motivation, confidence and skills. Crucially, the experience was also enjoyable. As one young person concluded:

> "Fairbridge is a really good experience and I would recommend it to anyone."

As set out in Chapter 4, the majority of those tracked through the research achieved an EETV-related outcome, including a place in education or training, a paid job or voluntary work, an apprenticeship, starting their own business or joining another Prince's Trust programme. Almost all achieved other skills-related or personal outcomes, such as improving their communication skills, confidence, or peer relationships.

Evidently, however, Fairbridge is not a panacea for everyone. A substantial minority of those involved in the research disengaged rather than completing the programme and achieving a planned exit. Some of these young people may have left for positive reasons – such as suddenly finding a job – but the evidence suggests that it was more likely for them to drop out due to other pressures and challenges in their lives.

This is consistent with findings from other studies which have identified high dropout rates among care leavers participating in EETV activities[55,56] and a similar range of risk factors, as discussed further below, in relation to supporting different groups on the programme.

The role of Fairbridge alongside other sources of support for care leavers

It appeared that Fairbridge was helping to 'fill gaps' in the support provided to young people in a range of areas, and 'topping up' input they received from other sources. During their time on the programme, care leavers were particularly likely to report receiving support from Fairbridge (as opposed to other sources) in relation to education, work and training, personal and social skills, and motivation and encouragement. However, many also reported programme staff helping them with issues relating to health and wellbeing, managing relationships and accessing other services.

Evidence from Programme Executives, young people, social workers and Personal Advisers who took part in the study confirmed that Fairbridge staff endeavoured to engage and work alongside other agencies – for the purposes of recruiting care leavers to the programme, and in order to better engage and support them throughout. However, there were limitations on partnership working; firstly, some agencies were reluctant to share information, and secondly, it tended to happen when young people had good relationships with their social workers or other practitioners as well as their Programme Executive – and in that sense was more

challenging to achieve for those most in need. Even if Fairbridge staff were able to compensate for a lack of support in a young person's life, on a temporary basis, they could not wave magic wands and fix delivery and resourcing problems in mental health or social services.

In relation to statutory services, the accounts of young people taking part in FC2I echoed those of care leavers in other recent studies. Despite improvements in entitlements and attempts to improve delivery, satisfaction with support from statutory services varies, with a recent survey of leaving care managers highlighting long waiting lists for mental health services, and eligibility criteria presenting barriers to access for some vulnerable young people[57,58,59]. A recurring theme among interviewees in this study was the difficulty – and perceived futility – of building relationships with allocated social workers or Personal Advisers when these changed frequently, or were inaccessible when needed. This contrasted with their appreciation of the more intense relationships built with Fairbridge staff during the residential Access Course and subsequent sessions. Programme Executives – due in part to their relatively low caseloads and limited responsibilities in comparison with their counterparts in statutory services – were able to engage with young people on a sustained basis, relate to them as human beings, establish trust, earn their respect and be flexible and responsive to their needs – albeit for a relatively short period of time. This reflected the qualities which other care leavers have highlighted as crucial to being a good carer or corporate parent[60].

Given that young people typically attended the programme for just a few months, Fairbridge staff recognised that to let them become dependent would do them a disservice. As a result, a key part of their role involved encouraging care leavers to expand their social networks, make good use of support services and engage in other activities conducive to achieving their goals. For some young people, this meant progressing to other Prince's Trust programmes where comparable support continued to be available. In a number of cases, this appeared vital in keeping vulnerable care leavers 'on track' in the face of persistent or new challenges.

Supporting different groups of care leavers through Fairbridge

Interviews and, to some extent, quantitative analyses, explored whether different groups within the sample required, or benefitted from, different forms of support. For the most part, factors associated with (dis)engagement or achievement of goals did not seem to vary by factors such as gender or age group. The diverse group of those interviewed during the research tended to want similar things from the programme, and to appreciate the same things about it. However, a 'one size fits all' approach was not appropriate and one of the most attractive features of the programme was its flexibility. Whilst young people appreciated the *structure* provided by Fairbridge, the fact that practitioners were on hand to provide support with pressing issues as they arose was key. It was clear that the broad range of issues affecting care leavers (and those still in care) impacted on each young person to differing extents and in different ways. Practitioners were determined to treat each young person as an individual, and tailor support accordingly – and young people themselves wanted support specifically focused on their individual needs, wants and goals.

Practitioners' experience pointed to care leavers having similar needs to other vulnerable young people attending Fairbridge. That said, there were some areas, as highlighted throughout the report, where provision needed to be adapted to recognise and address particular needs, including those of young people:

→ nervous about engaging in the programme or particular activities

→ with more and less experience of living independently, and/ or with differing (academic) abilities, and therefore different needs from certain courses

→ struggling with other life issues – e.g. mental health, family relationships, housing problems or debt

→ presenting with behavioural or attitudinal barriers to engagement

→ with limited external support networks – impacting on their engagement and ability to sustain progress.

In some respects, those requiring the most intense support whilst on the programme resembled the group of care leavers identified by Stein (2012)[61] as '*strugglers'* – often those with the most challenging care (and pre-care) experiences, with the greatest need for, and yet greatest difficulty engaging with, support. For Fairbridge, with its emphasis on group activities, there was a tension between providing for the most disruptive (and in some ways, vulnerable) young people, and protecting the experience of others on the programme. As suggested below, the solution may lie in offering more one to one support for these young people, until they are able to engage more positively with their peers and/ or staff in other situations.

To a great extent, the Fairbridge programme appears to be successfully tackling some of the challenges

around engaging and supporting care leavers and other vulnerable young people. Among the factors key to its success – and potentially transferable to other programmes – are the following:

→ **Recruitment strategies built on networking and relationships:** Staff reach out to social services and other agencies to promote the programme and its benefits; advertising associates Fairbridge with the respected brand of The Prince's Trust; taster sessions allow young people to explore the environment and allay fears by talking to staff; and participants recruit others after sharing their positive experiences.

→ **Three distinct, but complementary elements to the programme:** The Access course with its residential trip boosts confidence, provides challenge, and prepares young people to engage with the rest of the programme. Group activities enable working on skills, and one to ones allow young people to discuss their plans, choices and progress, and receive individualised practical and emotional support.

→ **A focus on building relationships:** Having an assigned Programme Executive from the start helps build trust, communication and commitment. Staff demonstrate genuine interest in young people and their priorities; and come across as positive, approachable, and challenging but non-judgemental. They use positive reinforcement and encouragement; active listening and reflection – sharing their own life experience where relevant to connect with young people. Advice and practical help focuses not only on EETV, but on broader issues, such as independent living skills and engaging with other support.

→ **Effective partnership working:** Fairbridge staff work with other agencies and sources of support in young people's lives to maximise their engagement with the programme and address any barriers to attendance. This depends on earning the trust of young people and gaining their permission to share information, as well as cultivating contacts in partner agencies to ensure they have a good understanding of the aims and nature of the programme.

→ **Building towards planned and positive exits:** Practitioners aim to ensure that leaving the programme is a planned, positive and empowering step for young people. The action planning, goal-setting and review process is key to this, to maintain motivation and momentum.

5.2   Recommendations

As indicated above, Fairbridge appears to be an effective programme for care leavers. On that basis, initial recommendations focus on continuing efforts to recruit these young people to the programme.

→ *RECOMMENDATION 1:* Continue recruiting care leavers to the programme, drawing on findings from the research in demonstrating its value to partner agencies.

→ *RECOMMENDATION 2:* Involve care leavers, alongside other young people and their practitioners across Fairbridge sites, in shaping recruitment and engagement strategies. Initial ideas from those involved in the research included further use of social media, particularly Facebook, and visiting schools and other settings to share young people's experiences on the programme.

In line with the positive feedback provided in Follow Up surveys, a number of care leavers who took part in interviews were critical of *other* agencies, but suggested that Fairbridge was '*pretty much perfect*'. However, additional recommendations, as set out below, draw on ideas from practitioners and young people around further developing the programme, to address challenges highlighted in the research.

Developing care leavers' support from Fairbridge going forward

Practitioners and young people were asked to identify the most important features of the programme to retain or promote, in order to best support care leavers. Among the top priorities for both groups were **flexible support** which adapts to needs and the **amount of support**, along with ensuring staff **understand issues for care leavers** and **push them to succeed.** Substantial minorities highlighted other priorities though, including having one person as a key point of contact; choice of activities, help with other services and ensuring groups of young people worked well together (Appendix D, Table D.1). This last point reflects the challenge alluded to in Section 3.3, whereby practitioners seek to avoid excluding young people, but are aware that sometimes a minority can behave in ways which impinge on others' enjoyment of group sessions.

In line with these findings, a number of recommendations focus on providing more tailored support, where possible, to maximise engagement, minimise drop out and sustain gains from the programme.

→ *RECOMMENDATION 3:* Review the range of courses and activities on offer, with input from young people. Consider adding more tailored courses on functional and life skills (for example, to cover use of washing machines, cookers or other household equipment), adapted to the learning needs and experience of participants. In general, more options – especially in relation to activities which appear off-putting for individuals could be considered – for example, alternatives to long walks, or dancing, drama, or swimming lessons for those wanting to learn. If possible, further opportunities to earn qualifications during Follow On courses would also be welcomed, as young people valued these concrete outcomes.

→ *RECOMMENDATION 4:* Continue to develop and roll out training for Programme Executives on supporting looked after children and care leavers, including to update their understanding of the leaving care process and entitlements.

→ *RECOMMENDATION 5:* Introduce specialist mental health support woven into or running alongside the programme and ensure Programme Executives are trained to signpost to this provision (as well as offer lower level support, within the boundaries of their existing roles).

→ *RECOMMENDATION 6:* Build in greater flexibility and capacity to devote time to the most vulnerable or isolated young people over a longer period. This could include more one to one support, mentoring or life coaching, out of hours work, home visits, visual materials or translators for those with additional learning or language needs.

Based on feedback from practitioners and young people, Fairbridge could be particularly effective when Programme Executives worked together with other sources of support in care leavers' lives.

→ *RECOMMENDATION 7:* Build on best practice across Fairbridge centres to further develop partnership working with external agencies including NHS Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (NHS CYPMPS) and schools/ colleges, and with young people's families and carers.

As noted above, partnership working was most challenging to achieve for those who had weak relationships with other agencies or people in their lives. Devoting more resources to these young people *within* Fairbridge may help to maximise their gains from the programme, but to help them sustain progress, practitioners should make additional efforts to encourage their engagement with other potential sources of support.

→ *RECOMMENDATION 8:* For care leavers not involved with other services, there should be a particular emphasis on supporting their engagement with further sources of help and advice, including statutory support as well as e.g. peer support groups. The Children and Social Work Act will extend the right to request support from Personal Advisers to all care leavers under 25, including those *not* in education. Programme Executives could usefully raise awareness of this and encourage more young people to pursue and make best use of this entitlement.

Encouraging care leavers to engage with statutory support services will be ineffective if there continue to be serious shortcomings in the availability and/ or acceptability of those services. In some cases, practitioners – and young people – reported gaps in support provided by other agencies (education, mental health or social services), and stressed that it would be neither appropriate nor feasible for Fairbridge to address these on an ongoing basis. It is to be hoped that changes anticipated in the Children and Social Work Act[62] will make a measurable difference. Setting aside the prospects of rapid improvement in the amount and consistency of support available from Personal Advisers, and in relation to mental health and housing, it appears that, on leaving Fairbridge, many care leavers could potentially benefit from some form of longer term mentoring or life coaching. Collaborating with other voluntary and statutory sector providers in order to explore this may be helpful. As highlighted in the recent *New Belongings* evaluation[63], engagement with community partners is an underdeveloped area for corporate parents, but as reinforced by findings from FC2I, such engagement can genuinely benefit young people and improve their ability to make good use of the support on offer.

→ *RECOMMENDATION 9:* Consider if longer-term mentoring is something The Prince's Trust and/ or partners (if not Fairbridge, specifically) could provide. This type of informal and accessible support may be of use to many more care leavers than are currently accessing the Fairbridge programme.

→ *RECOMMENDATION 10:* Stimulate further sharing of experience between Fairbridge centres, local authorities, and other programmes catering for care leavers, to maximise learning about best practice and what makes a difference – from the point of view of the young people accessing the support, and the practitioners providing it.

APPENDICES

Appendix A. Supplementary tables for Chapter 2

Table A.1 **Profile of care leavers attending Fairbridge and involved in the research**

		%	Count	Total (valid N)
Gender	Male	63	462	
	Female	37	273	**735**
Age on joining programme	Under 16	12	86	
	Over 16 but under 18	41	301	
	18 and over	47	348	**735**
Ethnicity	White / White British	84	602	
	Black/ Black British	8	60	
	Mixed	5	38	
	Asian/ Asian British	2	15	
	Other	1	6	**721**
Education, employment or voluntary activity immediately prior to joining the programme	None	78	472	
	Working	11	67	
	Less than 16 hrs/ wk	*11*	*64*	
	More than 16 hrs/ wk	*<1*	*3*	
	In education	9	54	
	Volunteering	4	27	**609**
Care status	In care	46	311	
	Leaving care	22	146	
	Left care	33	221	**678**
Accommodation	Supported accommodation	21	153	
	Living with parents/relatives	20	144	
	Foster care	17	121	
	Children's Home	14	103	
	Rented accommodation	12	88	
	Hostel	10	73	
	Temporarily staying with friends/ relatives	3	18	
	Night shelter/temporary hostel	1	6	
	Custody	1	<1	
	Own home (owned)	1	<1	
	Other	2	14	**722**

Source: Profile forms.

Table A.2 Total number of different care placements experienced

	Frequency	%
One or two	103	35
Three to five	101	35
Six to ten	47	16
More than ten	42	14
Total	**293**	**100**

Source: *Baseline surveys.*

Table A.3 Overall confidence in ability to manage independent living (baseline)

	Frequency	%
No. not at all	23	8
No, not really	69	23
Yes, mostly	157	53
Yes, completely	46	16
Total	**295**	**100**

Source: *Baseline surveys.*

Table A.4 Challenges faced by care leavers on joining Fairbridge

	%	Frequency	Total (valid N)
Lacked 5 GCSEs at A*-C	87	634	727
Mental health problems	49	354	721
Offending history	46	328	711
Disability	34	247	723
Have children	9	67	727
Asylum seeker or refugee	3	25	727
Lone parent	2	15	729

Source: *Profile forms.*

Table A.5 Proportion of care leavers with and without support feeling able to manage areas of life

Area of life	With support	Without support	Total N	X^2	*p*
Health and wellbeing	82%	69%	286	3.97	.05
Relationships with family	73%	35%	284	32.2	<.001
Friendships and networks	85%	73%	283	5.11	.02

Source: *Baseline surveys. Note: differences between proportions able to manage with and without support in other areas of life were not statistically significant at p <.05.*

Table A.6 Personal goals

	%
Realistic plans for a career/future work	63
Being ready for work	61
Achieve being healthy	54
Improve budgeting, cooking or housework	51
Break (bad) habits	48
Stay safe and avoid trouble	45
Improve friendships/ social networks	44
Improve housing situation	39
Improve relationship with my family	38
Make better use of services or support	38
Reduce use of drugs or alcohol	29

Source: Baseline survey. N = 300.

Appendix B.   Supplementary tables for Chapter 3

Table B.1 Hours spent in one to one and Follow On sessions

	Mean	Median	Minimum	Maximum	Total N
One to one sessions	4.4	4.0	0.0	20.0	198
Follow On courses	37.1	25.0	0.0	271.0	190

Source: Final session forms.

Table B.2 Prevalence of extra one to one time with Programme Executives in between sessions

	Frequency	%	Total N
All sessions	397	52	763
All young people (at some point)	208	77	272

Source: Session logs.

Table B.3 Care leavers' overall ratings of Fairbridge support and activities

	Frequency	%
Not at all useful	0	0
Not very useful	2	2
Quite useful	39	38
Very useful	63	61

Source: Follow Up surveys. Base N = 104.

Table B.4 Care leavers' ratings of the helpfulness of different aspects of Fairbridge

	Not at all helpful %	Not very helpful %	Quite helpful %	Very helpful %	Total N
The 5-day Access course	1	1	32	66	106
Follow On courses/ activities	0	4	42	54	100
One to one sessions with a Programme Executive	0	1	41	58	104

Source: Follow Up surveys.

Table B.5 One to one session locations

	All sessions		Young people who had sessions in each location	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Centre office / meeting room	495	76	226	83
Public place (e.g. cafe/ park)	97	15	69	25
Telephone session	33	5	24	9
Young person's home	30	5	19	7

Source: Session logs. Base N = 655 logs and 272 young people.

Table B.6 Practical support provided by Programme Executives

	Frequency	%
Provided young people with timetables of activities / written records of sessions	218	80
Helped them access Fairbridge (or other Prince's Trust) courses or activities	169	62
Liaised with another agency/ practitioner on their behalf	150	55
Investigated personal development opportunities for them	119	44
Provided advice or information on independent living	104	38
Investigated additional sources of support for them	71	26
Helped them with travel	51	19
Investigated EETV options on their behalf	43	16
Helped them access an external EETV placement	30	11
Set up an interview for them	19	7
Helped with paperwork related to independent living	17	6

Source: Session logs, aggregated for young people. Base N = 271 (young people).

Table B.7 Programme Executives' ratings of young people's ability to manage on leaving Fairbridge

	No, not at all	No, not really	Yes, mostly	Yes, completely	Total
	%	%	%	%	N
Housing	17	39	39	5	208
Health and wellbeing	7	32	56	6	212
Relationships with family	7	32	52	10	207
Friendships and social networks	6	32	55	7	210
Making good use of services	7	30	52	11	210
Staying safe and avoiding trouble	5	30	51	14	210
Education, training, work or career plans	5	35	53	8	211
Money	10	37	50	3	207

Source: Final session forms.

Table B.8 Risk factors for care leavers' disengagement from/ being asked to leave Fairbridge

Risk factor	Risk factor not present (% disengaged)	Risk factor present (% disengaged)	Total N	X^2	p
History of offending (current or ex offender) [a]	26.3	43.6	211	6.66	.01
Felt unable to manage health/ wellbeing at baseline [b]	30.5	48.6	163	3.99	.05
Felt unable to make good use of services at baseline [b]	30.3	47.5	162	3.93	.05
No Social Worker/ Personal Adviser support at baseline [b]	27.3	44.6	164	5.25	.02
Financial issues presenting obstacles at time of exit [c]	27.1	42.9	210	5.51	.02
Housing barriers presenting obstacles at time of exit [c]	24.6	48.6	210	12.33	<.01
Low self-esteem / lack of confidence at time of exit [c]	27.4	40.7	210	4.06	.04
Lack of motivation / commitment to EETV at exit [c]	22.0	49.4	210	17.02	<.01
Behavioural problems at exit [c]	26.0	43.4	210	6.88	<.01
Problematic relationships with peers at exit [c]	26.9	43.4	210	6.03	.01
Problematic drug or alcohol use at exit [c]	28.7	45.3	210	4.96	.03
Reluctance to communicate at exit [c]	25.9	53.8	210	13.8	<.01
Lack of social support at exit [c]	29.0	52.9	210	7.42	<.01

Source: Reasons for leaving: Final Session Forms. Risk factors: [a] Profile forms, [b] Baseline surveys, [c] Final Session forms.

Table B.8 Additional risk factors for <u>girls'</u> disengagement from Fairbridge

Risk factors particularly for girls	Proportion who disengaged or were required to leave		Total N	X^2	p
	Risk factor not present	Risk factor present			
Problems with debt [a]	25.8%	83.3%	68	8.48	<.01
Felt unable to manage staying safe/ avoiding trouble at baseline [b]	21.4%	50.0%	54	3.80	.05
Mental health issues presenting obstacles at exit [c]	19.4%	42.4%	69	4.29	.04

Source: Reasons for leaving: Final Session Forms. Risk factors: [a] Profile forms, [b] Baseline surveys and [c] Final Session forms.

Table B.9 Protective factors against care leavers' disengagement from Fairbridge

Protective factor (features of Fairbridge support)	Proportion who disengaged or were required to leave		Total N	X^2	p
	Protective factor not present	Protective factor present			
Pushing the young person to make progress [a]	46%	29%	212	4.99	.03
Agreeing an action plan during sessions [a]	50%	26%	212	11.95	<.01
Providing information/ advice on EETV issues [a]	53%	24%	212	17.35	<.01
Offering information/ advice about (non-EETV) issues [a]	43%	27%	212	5.72	.02
Signposting to other sources of support [a]	39%	26%	212	4.20	.04
Using the computer with them during sessions [a]	38%	20%	212	6.90	<.01
Attending another support service with them [a]	36%	15%	212	5.64	.02
Discussing practical and independent living skills [b]	41%	26%	177	4.98	.03
Discussing financial matters with them [b]	39%	23%	177	4.97	.03

Source: Reasons for leaving from Final Session Forms. Protective factors from [a] Final Session forms and [b] Session logs.

Appendix C. Supplementary tables for Chapter 4

Table C.1 **EETV outcomes (proportions achieving 'any' of the following)**

	Frequency	%
A place in education, employment or training, their own business **or** an apprenticeship	112	49
Any of the above **or** a volunteering placement	122	53
Any of the above **or** a place on another Prince's Trust programme	142	62

Source: Final session forms or Follow Up surveys. Base N = 231.

Table C.2 **Skills outcomes (improved skills) as perceived by young people**

	Frequency	%
Working with others	84	86
Communication	82	84
Confidence	78	80
Managing feelings	75	77
Setting and achieving goals	72	74
Reliability	65	66
English or Maths	45	46
IT	42	43

Source: Follow Up surveys. Base N = 98.

Table C.3 **Self-rated skills and baseline and follow-up**

	Baseline		Follow-up		Test of significant differences		
	M	**(SD)**	**M**	**(SD)**	**N**	**t**	**p**
Communication	3.8	*(1.3)*	4.5	*(1.1)*	82	-4.10	<.01
Working with others	4.2	*(1.4)*	4.6	*(1.1)*	82	-2.22	.03
Setting and achieving goals	3.9	*(1.3)*	4.2	*(1.2)*	81	-1.76	.08
Managing feelings	3.3	*(1.6)*	4.1	*(1.4)*	82	-4.42	<.01
Confidence	3.6	*(1.6)*	4.4	*(1.4)*	81	-4.94	<.01
Reliability	4.0	*(1.5)*	4.3	*(1.3)*	82	-1.83	.07

Source: Matched Baseline and Follow Up surveys.