

Independent Evaluation of the LVRN Youth Champions Programme

Final Report

Mike Parker & Paula Wheeler
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1.0 INTRODUCTION TO THE REPORT

The Champions programme is an intervention aimed at diverting young people aged 10-25 from criminal activity and reducing re-offending among those already involved in the justice system. By offering support and guidance, the programme seeks to empower participants to make positive life changes. Delivered in partnership with the Lancashire Violence Reduction Network, and nine Football Community Trusts across Lancashire¹, the programme initially targeted 18-25-year-olds but since 2021, has expanded to include those aged 10-25 (with some young people aged just above/below that criteria).

In 2023, Lancaster University, through The National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Applied Research Collaboration North West Coast (ARC NWC), in partnership with Progress Health Partnerships Ltd, was commissioned to conduct an independent evaluation of the Champions programme. This evaluation was split into two phases, with the first report, completed in April 2024, focusing on the 'Adult Champions' programme (clients aged 18-25).²

This current report evaluates the 'Youth Champions' programme, which targets clients under the age of 18. Using a mixed-methods approach, this evaluation assesses the programme's process, reach and impact on younger participants. Extensive qualitative engagement with programme commissioners, service providers, and key stakeholders has allowed researchers to identify the programme's strengths and areas for improvement, while offering valuable insights and recommendations to enhance future delivery and inform broader efforts in this field.

2.0 EVALUATION METHODS

This evaluation, conducted between April and September 2024, aimed to provide valuable insights for the Home Office, Lancashire Violence Reduction Network (LVRN), funding bodies, and other key stakeholders working within this domain. The primary objectives of the evaluation were to explore the following:

- The processes involved in delivering and managing the programme
- The programme's reach across Lancashire
- The impact and outcomes achieved by clients
- The effect of the programme on the wider system
- The programme's value to its stakeholders

The methodology was divided into several interrelated work packages, outlined as follows:

- **Understanding the Programme Context:** Desk-based research was conducted to explore and understand the delivery model of the Champions programme.

¹ Accrington Stanley Community Trust; AFC Fylde Community Foundation; Blackburn Rovers Community Trust; Blackpool FC Community Trust; Burnley in the Community; Fleetwood Town Community Trust; Morecambe FC Community Sports; Preston North End Community and Education Trust; and Wigan Athletic Community Trust

² Parker M & Wheeler P. Independent evaluation of the LVRN Champions (Divert) Programme for adults aged 18+ years (2024) Available [here](#)

- **Evaluation Framework Design:** An evaluation framework and tools were developed to assess the programme's impact and outcomes.
- **Collection and Analysis of Quantitative Data:** Secondary analysis of existing service data was provided by programme managers.
- **Collection and Analysis of New Qualitative Data:** Qualitative data was gathered through electronic surveys administered to programme providers (n=16), clients (n=68), and key stakeholders (n=56).
- **Stakeholder Interviews:** In-depth interviews were conducted with critical stakeholders, including programme providers, managers, and clients (n=18)
- **Analysis and Reporting:** All data sources were triangulated to generate a comprehensive evaluation of the programme.

Evaluation Limitations

This evaluation was largely retrospective and, as a result, did not have the opportunity to influence the design of the existing data collection tools within the 'Views' platform (used by the programme for data collection), although some amendments were made to the system following the Champions 18+ year old evaluation.

Once the secondary data analysis began, the evaluators encountered difficulties in accurately assessing the plethora of outcomes recorded by the programme.

Additionally, the evaluation would have benefited from greater access to more 'active' and 'inactive' clients. However, due to ethical considerations (eg age of participants) and resource constraints, this was not feasible within the scope of the evaluation.

3.0 PERSPECTIVES ON PROGRAMME DESIGN

3.1 Background to the programme

In 2018, the UK Government's Home Office introduced the **Serious Violence Strategy**, which emphasised a multi-agency, whole-system public health approach to preventing violence. The strategy aimed to improve individual health and safety by tackling the root causes and risk factors that contribute to individuals becoming either victims or perpetrators of violence.

To advance this initiative, the **Lancashire Violence Reduction Network (LVRN)** was established in 2019. The LVRN is a multi-agency collaboration that brings together specialists from various sectors to implement a public health approach to violence reduction. Its focus is on addressing the underlying causes of violence and embedding trauma-informed practices within its workforce and partner organisations. This trauma-informed approach ensures that stakeholders are equipped to recognise and respond to the wide-ranging impact of trauma and its connection to violent behaviour.

As part of this strategy, the LVRN commissioned several intervention programmes across Lancashire.

One such programme, initially known as **DIVERT** (now **Champions**), was launched in January 2020. This programme was designed as a police custody intervention targeting young adults aged 18-25 who had been detained for violent offences, with the aim of reducing reoffending rates.

In response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Home Office provided temporary funding for "**Teachable Moments**," which allowed LVRN to extend its interventions to younger individuals. This led to the expansion of the Champions programme, which included delivering services to young people under 18. Due to the programme's success, funding was extended for a further three years, ensuring its continuation through to 2025.

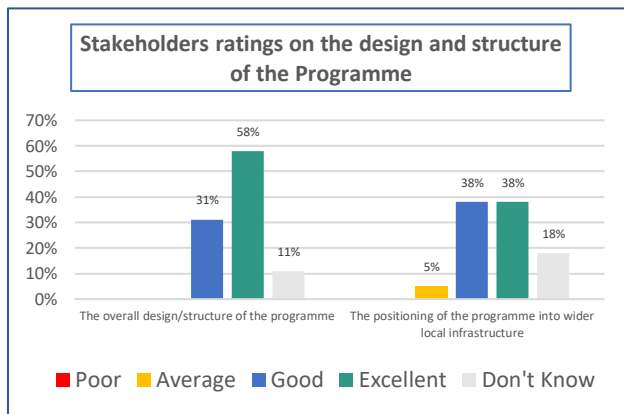
Reflecting on the programme's evolution, a programme lead noted: *"The programme has been developed from the ground up, having started as a custody intervention for adults with a single referral source, and transitioned into a community offer for children and young adults. It now supports referrals from a wide range of services and organisations. The programme has grown significantly and achieved high levels of demand, reflecting positively on the comprehensive offer and dedication of the mentor team."*

This expansion highlights the programme's adaptability and the high demand for its services, further reinforcing its importance in diverting young people away from crime and supporting their long-term positive development.

3.2 Stakeholders' Perspectives on the Programme Structure

The **Champions programme** is delivered by nine football club community organisations (CCOs) across Lancashire, focusing on young people involved in or at risk of serious violence. The programme adopts a trauma-informed approach, which is key to its success. Central to this approach is the development of trusted relationships between young people and their mentors, with one

stakeholder noting that *“the development of trusting relationships between clients and mentors”* enables young people to meaningfully engage in their personal development.



Each participant in the Champions programme is paired with a mentor employed by one of the nine Football Community Trusts. The programme is structured into three clear phases, which are easy to follow and allow clients to progress at their own pace, working towards personally set goals. This flexible, client-centred structure ensures that mentors can provide ongoing support as long as the young person remains engaged and committed to achieving their objectives.

The programme’s holistic, trauma-informed framework aims to create lasting positive change by reducing young people’s involvement in crime and antisocial behaviour while promoting long-term well-being and personal growth. Mentors are all trained and equipped to work with the [Build a Better Life Tool](#) allowing the participant to receive coaching to take control of their behaviours. This flexible and adaptable approach makes it an effective tool in supporting young people’s journeys towards positive life outcomes. For more information about the Champions programme, visit <https://teamchampions.co.uk>.

One of the most impactful aspects of the programme is its tailored support, which resonates deeply with participants. Many stakeholders and participants reflected on the importance of the link to the Football Community Trust’s. As one staff member highlighted: *“The programme is associated with the football club, which in Burnley is a big draw for young people, and the activities and support are tailored to the individual.”*

Mentors play a key role in the programme’s success by offering their time with genuine interest, fostering trust and promoting personal and social development. The interventions they design are innovative and aim to support participants taking a client led approach. Additionally, mentors provide guidance on health and wellbeing, using a behaviour change approach to prevent at-risk youth from engaging in offending behaviours and to divert them away from crime and anti-social activities. *“Some client case studies highlight improvements in wellbeing and mental health, as well as the development of coping strategies, which help them to better regulate their emotions and, in turn, their behaviours.”*

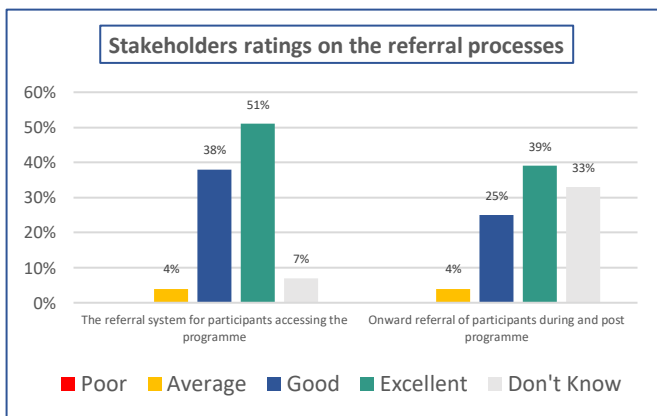
The programme's **confidentiality and non-judgmental environment** is a defining feature. Mentors do not work for the police and are not involved in criminal proceedings, creating a safe space for young people to engage. Through a person-centred approach, mentors ask questions that help clients *“recognise their own thoughts and identify their own needs.”* This method allows the mentors to tailor interventions based on individual needs, providing practical, person-centred support that fills a critical gap in service provision for young people. As one stakeholder noted: *“Champions provides young people with positive role models who aren’t statutory services. Staff are relatable and have similar interests, i.e., sports. Staff are youth workers and mentors combined.”*

The design and structure of the Champions programme have been consistently rated as good or excellent by stakeholders. The involvement of relatable mentors with shared interests helps build trust and rapport, making the programme particularly effective in reaching young people who may be disengaged from more formal support services. Through its collaborative, trauma-informed approach, the Champions programme continues to create meaningful change in the lives of young people across Lancashire.

3.3 Perspectives on the Referral Process

Participation in the **Champions programme** is initiated through formal referrals from a wide range of organisations, including the police, youth justice services, education, social care, healthcare, and probation services. Despite the formal referral system, participation remains voluntary and is subject to an assessment of the programmes suitability for the young person.

The success of the programme is built on a collaborative and positive approach, involving mentors, the young person, and key stakeholders from their support network. This collaboration ensures that the interventions are tailored to the individual's needs, fostering engagement and personal development.



Stakeholder feedback on the referral process is overwhelmingly positive, with nine out of ten stakeholders rating it as good or excellent. They emphasise that the programme uses a comprehensive and collaborative strategy for client recruitment and engagement, effectively leveraging strong stakeholder relationships, targeted outreach, and a structured referral process to reach young people who need support.

One stakeholder expressed confidence in the programme, stating, *"I find the programme very useful and unique to other services. As a professional, I have full confidence in making referrals to the programme and have full confidence the work undertaken makes a difference."* Another noted that *"the referral scheme paperwork is easy and efficient, and the accessibility of staff to discuss participants or youths in need of support provides police with incredibly useful and much-needed diversionary activities."* This feedback highlights the efficiency of the referral process and the programme's ability to offer timely, accessible interventions for young people in need of support, though increasing demand is leading to waiting lists for some providers.

In addition to offering direct support, mentors also assist young people and their families in navigating the often-complex landscape of available services. Again, stakeholders consistently rated this aspect of the service good or excellent and *"The knowledge mentors have built up about services to signpost to"* is highlighted as invaluable, especially as they continuously adapt to changes in the service landscape, including updates in key contacts and third-sector provisions. This guidance helps motivate young people and their families to seek out the support they need.

Stakeholders identified several critical elements of the **Champions programme's referral strategy** as highly effective:

- **Structured Referral Process:** The programme employs a clear referral process, targeting young people who meet specific criteria, such as a history of offending or anti-social behaviour. Referrals come from multiple sources, including social care, police, schools, and organisations like Child and Youth Justice Services (CYJS). Each referral is assessed individually by the appropriate trust.
- **Active Referral and Support:** Stakeholders such as Safer Neighbourhood Teams, local councils, and schools actively refer at-risk young people following a thorough needs assessment, ensuring the programme reaches those most likely to benefit.
- **Collaboration with Multiple Agencies:** The programme fosters strong relationships with local authorities, schools, social services, probation services, and community organisations. This collaborative approach ensures a coordinated response to support young people.
- **Engagement with Schools:** Outreach to local high schools through well-being panels and strong partnerships helps secure referrals early, ensuring timely support for young people.
- **Direct Engagement Strategies:** Various methods, including advertising, direct engagement with stakeholders, and word-of-mouth referrals, are used to build trust with potential clients, emphasising a non-judgmental, open-minded approach.

Challenges within the referral system

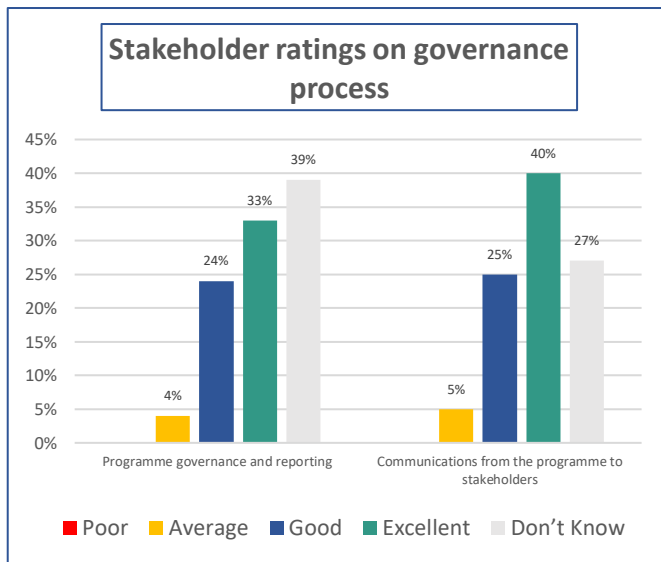
While the **Champions programme's** referral process is generally viewed as effective, several challenges have emerged:

- **Capacity Issues:** Due to increasing demand, the programme has had to stop accepting new referrals in some areas, leading to waiting lists of several months. Stakeholders expressed concerns that long wait times could delay timely intervention for young people in need of support.
- **Referral Quality:** Some mentors raised concerns that the programme is sometimes used as a *"dumping ground"* for difficult cases that referring agencies prefer not to manage. In some instances, agencies may not fully disclose important details about the young people being referred, which can pose risks for mentors.
- **Inadequate Information Sharing:** Mentors reported several cases where critical information about a client's background, such as serious criminal history or risk factors, was not shared, jeopardising safety. One mentor described a situation where key details were withheld, raising significant safety concerns during one-on-one engagement.
- **Lack of Response to Mentor Concerns:** Several mentors feel their concerns about clients' backgrounds are not always taken seriously by referring professionals, and they identified a need for improved communication between agencies.

Overall, while the programme's referral and engagement strategies are widely regarded as effective and comprehensive, there is a need for improvements in transparency, information sharing, and clarity around roles and responsibilities to ensure the safety (of clients and mentors) and effectiveness of the support provided.

3.4 Perspectives on Programme Governance

Stakeholders generally regard the **Champions programme** governance structure as robust, with most who are familiar with the process rating it as good or excellent. The programme benefits from a clear reporting hierarchy, with the **Lancashire Violence Reduction Network (LVRN)** serving as a central coordinating body. This structure allows for effective oversight and accountability, both within the programme and in reporting to the Home Office, the primary funder.



Key elements of the governance framework include mentors inputting client data into the **'Views' system** at the Trust level to track client progress. This data is then aggregated by Champions Programme Managers at LVRN, who compile county-level reports that feed into the LVRN. The LVRN office acts as a central hub, collecting data from the various interventions it oversees, providing a holistic view of the programme's performance. This system ensures that progress and outcomes are monitored effectively and can be shared with the Home Office.

Regular data review processes are in place to maintain programme oversight. Programme managers hold monthly one-on-one meetings with mentors to review active cases, address any challenges, and assess caseloads, waiting lists, and referral sources. These reviews help identify clients who may not be making progress and ensure that any throughput challenges are addressed.

Safeguarding procedures were discussed in depth across interviews. Currently they are managed at the individual Trust level, which some stakeholders and mentors feel may lead to *"inconsistencies."* Mentors are responsible for reporting concerns through their Trust's system and notifying Champions Programme Managers, who ensure that serious safeguarding issues are documented and tracked for audit purposes, though it was acknowledged that this system *"may need reviewing for greater consistency."*

Challenges in the governance structures

While the Champions programme's referral process is generally viewed as effective, several challenges have emerged:

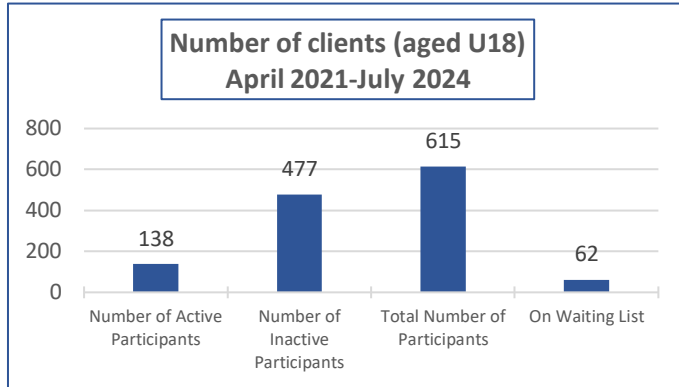
- **Safeguarding:** Managing safeguarding risks remains an ongoing challenge, particularly in supporting mentors who often handle sensitive information from clients. Some stakeholders and mentors have expressed concerns about the emotional strain placed on mentors, who are not provided with the professional supervision typically given to counsellors. As one stakeholder noted, *"They're not qualified to that level, and we don't pay them in relation to that level [of clinical support]."*

- **Full Disclosure from referral agencies:** Another significant issue is the handling of cases requiring specialised statutory services, such as young people who have committed serious offenses, including sexual offences. Mentors, who are not trained for such cases, feel burdened and unsupported, especially when they do not receive full disclosure from referring agencies. One mentor expressed frustration with the lack of transparency, stating, *“I just don’t feel like we’re taken seriously enough by professionals.”*
- **Improving information sharing and risk assessment** between referring agencies and the Champions programme is crucial to safeguarding both mentors and young people. Overall, addressing these safeguarding challenges is essential for ensuring the safety of all parties and supporting the mentors effectively. The programme must continue refining its safeguarding processes and enhance collaboration with stakeholders to manage these risks effectively. Several stakeholders suggested that *“there should be a single safeguarding policy for the programme as a whole”* rather than being a part of individual trusts and another suggested that *“across mentors there should be a single reporting structure”* and *“consistent safeguarding and risk assessment training across programmes”*
- **External Reporting:** While the internal governance systems are strong, stakeholders noted a potential gap in formal reporting back to external referral sources on client progress. Addressing this could further enhance communication and collaboration with key partners.

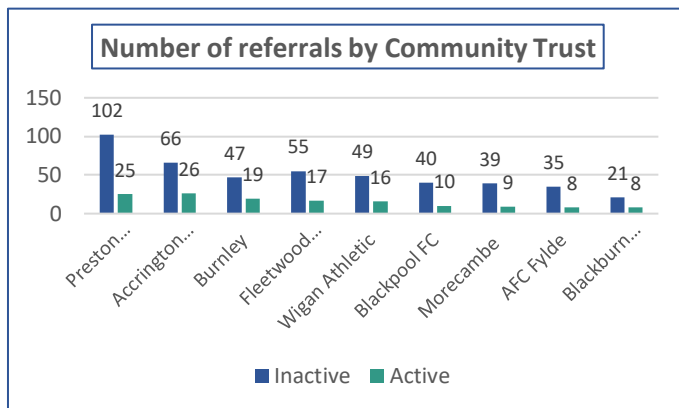
4.0 THE PROGRAMME'S CLIENT REACH

This section of the report provides a summary of participant registration, demographics, and session attendance data. The data was sourced directly from the 'Views' data collection system. Prior to being shared with the evaluation team for secondary analysis, all raw data was anonymised to ensure no identifiable participant information was transferred.

4.1 Number of clients registered



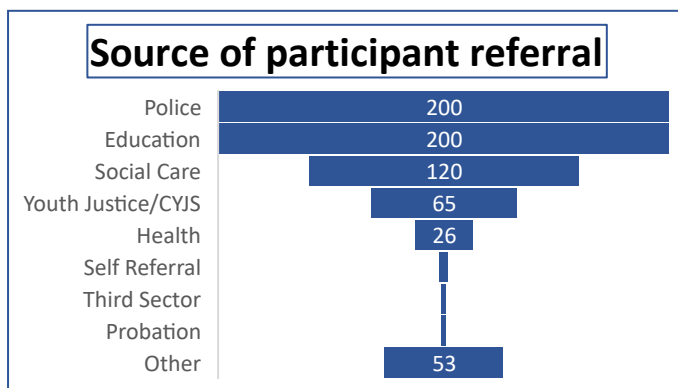
Since the programme's launch on 1st April 2021, over 600 clients under the age of 18 have engaged with the Champions programme across the nine football Community Trusts. As of the end of July 2024, there are 138 active clients enrolled across these trusts.



There is considerable variation in the number of clients across the different Community Trusts. For instance, Preston North End has accounted for 21% of all referrals, whereas Blackburn Rovers has received only 5%. This is in part explained by Preston having 1.5 WTE equivalent Youth Mentors whilst all other Trusts each have 1 WTE mentor in post.

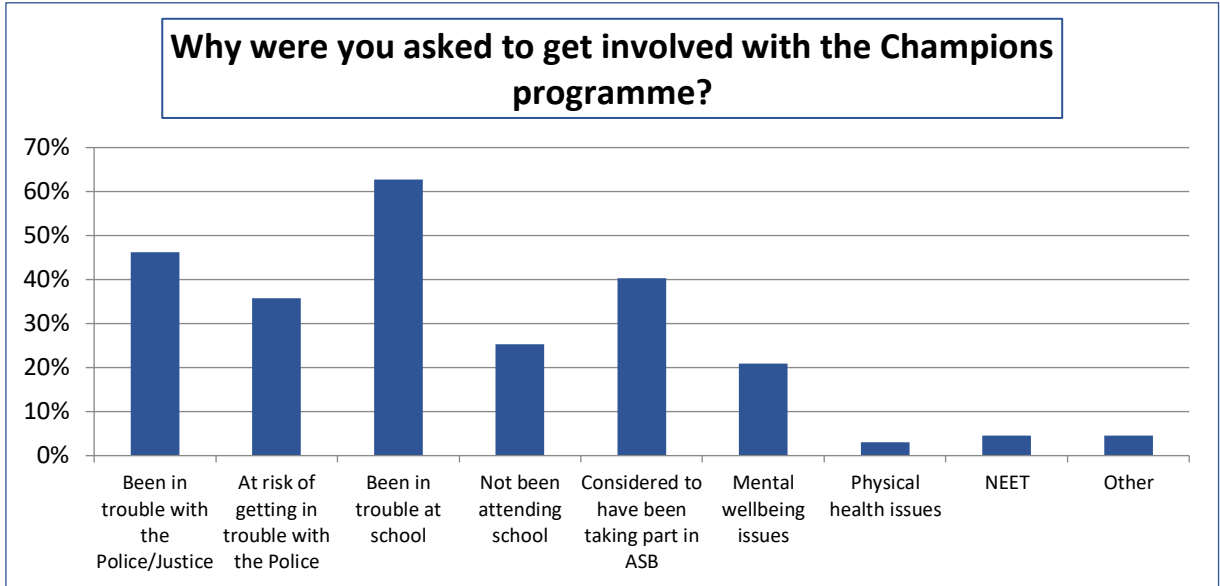
When focusing on 'active clients' (n=138) Preston and Accrington were managing over a third of total programme clients (18% each), whilst Morecambe, Fylde and Blackburn are managing around 6% each.

4.2 Source of Participant Referral

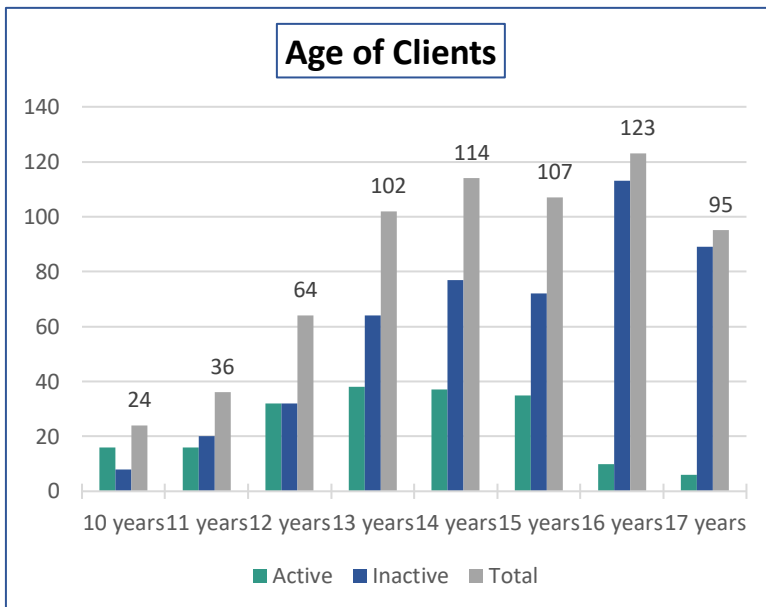


Referrals to the **Champions programme** came primarily from the Police and Education sectors, each accounting for 30% of the total referrals. An additional 18% of referrals were made by Social Care, with 10% coming from the Youth Justice System. This demonstrates a broad range of organisations actively engaging with the programme to support young people.

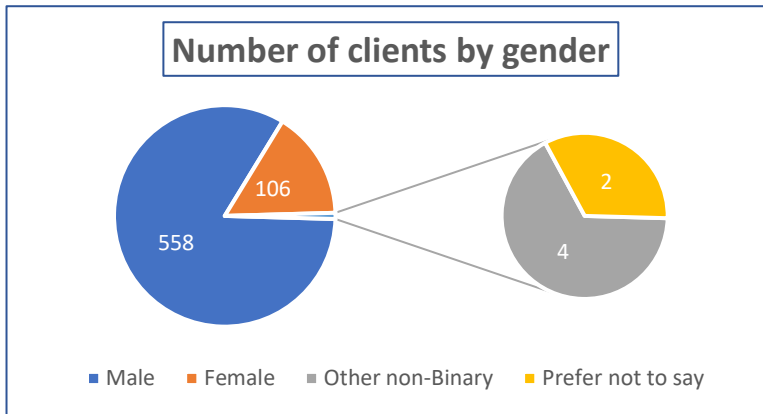
A survey conducted for this evaluation asked participants, "Why were you asked to get involved with the programme?" Of the 68 active participants who responded, nearly half (47%) reported previous involvement with the police or criminal justice system, while an additional 36% were identified as being at risk of police involvement. Furthermore, 63% had experienced disciplinary issues at school, a quarter had not been attending school, and 20% reported concerns about their mental wellbeing. These figures highlight the diverse challenges faced by participants and the wide-ranging support provided by the programme.



4.3 Participant Demographics.



The **Champions programme** serves a diverse age range of clients between 10 and 17 years old. Over half (52%) of total clients are aged between 14 and 16 years, although this distribution is influenced by a high number of inactive clients in the older age groups. Among active clients, 58% are between 13 and 15 years, suggesting a shift towards younger participants within the programme.

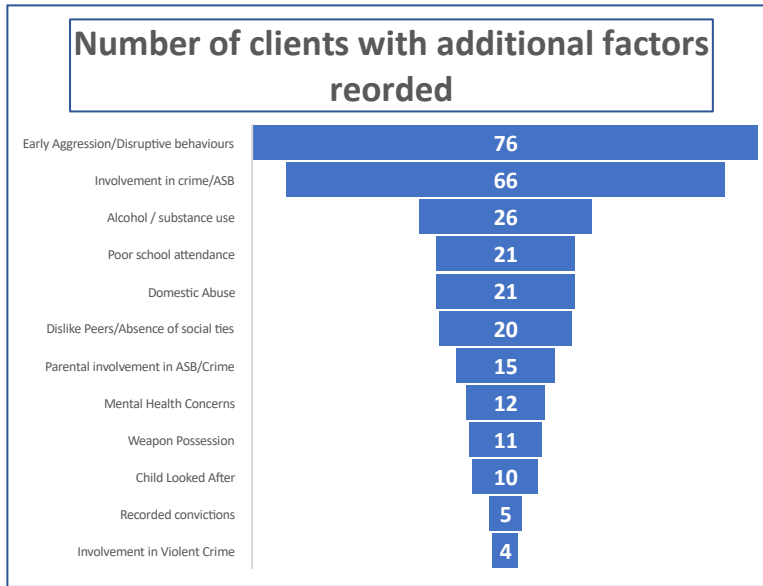


In terms of gender, the programme is predominantly male, with 83% of clients identifying as male and only 16% (n=106) identifying as female. This gender distribution aligns with the broader demographic of children engaged with the Child and Youth Justice Service (CYJS) in Lancashire as of 2023.

Regarding ethnicity, the majority of clients (81%) identified as 'White British,' which is consistent with Lancashire CYJS data. However, only 8.5% of clients identified as being from non-White British backgrounds, indicating a potential underrepresentation of these groups. It should be noted that, 10.6% of clients did not disclose their ethnicity, which may have affected the accuracy of the overall ethnicity data.

Ethnicity	Lancashire CYJS open during 2023 ²	LVRN Champions programme
White British	80.0%	81.0%
Black / African / Caribbean / Black other	2.8%	0.5%
Mixed / Multi ethnicity	7.0%	3.4%
Asian / Asian British	5.2%	2.8%
Other Ethnic Group	1.8%	1.6%
Prefer not to say	n/a	11.0%

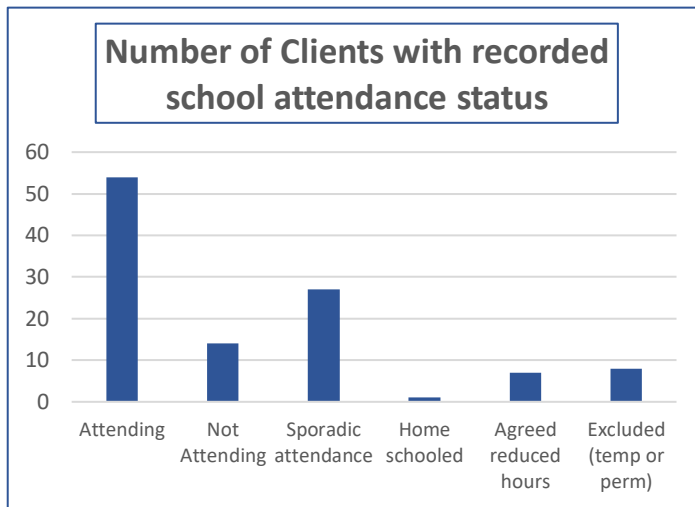
4.4 Additional Participant needs



In the past 12 months, there has been a notable improvement in recording relevant factors for clients. Initially, only 16% of all referrals had additional factors documented in the system. However, 44% (n=88) of currently active clients now have at least one relevant factor recorded.

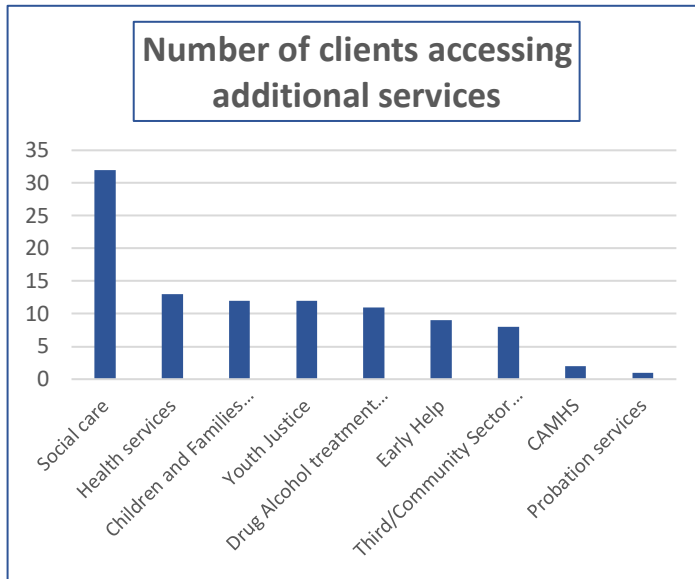
Of those with recorded factors, 69% (n=76) were noted to have 'Early Aggression/Disruptive Behaviours,' while 60% (n=66) were involved in crime or antisocial behaviour (ASB).

Additionally, among clients with a recorded relevant factor, one in five were affected by 'Domestic Abuse,' and a similar proportion had issues with poor school attendance.



Only 16% (n=111) of total clients had a recorded school attendance status. However, recording of this has significantly improved over time, with 61% (n=85) of active clients now having their education status documented on the 'Views' system.

Of those with a recorded status, 49% are attending school regularly, while half are either not attending or experiencing irregular attendance.

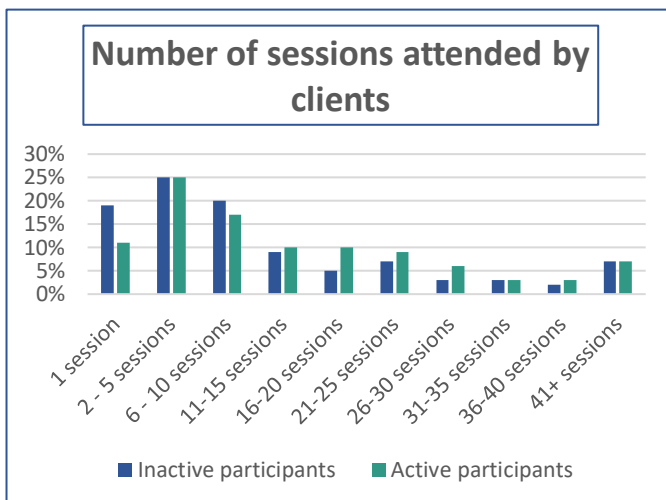


A total of just 66 clients (10% of all clients) were initially recorded as accessing additional care services. However, as with school attendance, recording has improved significantly in recent times. Looking at just the 'Active' clients, 49% are now documented as receiving additional care/support.

Social care is the most accessed service, utilised by 32 clients.

Approximately one in five clients who access additional services are engaged with health services, children and family wellbeing services, youth justice, and drug and alcohol treatment services. Many clients are receiving support from multiple services concurrently.

4.5 Engagement with the service



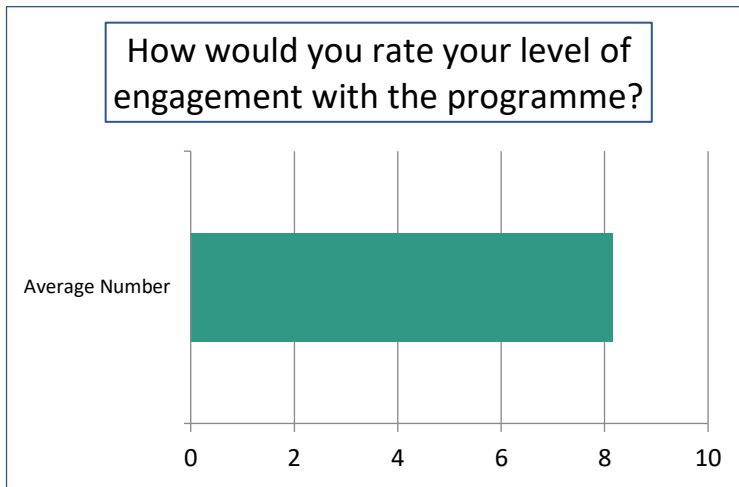
Engagement patterns within the **Champions programme** reveal a significant challenge at the initial stages. Approximately one in five inactive clients disengaged after just one session, while an additional 16% (n=76) did not attend any sessions. This highlights that the largest drop-off point occurs at the outset, emphasizing the critical importance of *"first impressions"* in retaining clients.

The majority of clients (42-45%) participate in between 2 and 10 sessions. However, a

notable portion of clients, approximately 10%, have attended more than 35 sessions, with some clients receiving extended support. Six clients have engaged in over 100 sessions, and one client has attended 159 sessions. However, not all these sessions involve intensive one-on-one interactions. Mentors frequently provide a variety of session types, including brief 5–10-minute phone calls or check-ins, which are still logged as 'sessions' or 'interventions,' even when they do not involve face-to-face meetings. This extended engagement model, while beneficial to the clients, presents challenges in managing programme capacity, as the waiting list continues to grow.

Mentors also note that their roles often extend beyond traditional mentoring, involving significant time in meetings with schools, parents, or social services. As one mentor explained, *"Champions' role naturally becomes more than just a mentor for the child in one session a week. We spend a lot of time in meetings with school, parents, or social services, and although we can add this as a stakeholder*

meeting, it does not reflect on our outcomes for each client.” This additional workload, while critical to supporting clients, underscores the complexity of managing both client engagement and mentor responsibilities effectively.



In the ‘active client survey’, participants were asked to rate their level of engagement with the programme. The average reported engagement was 8.16 on a scale of 0 (no engagement) to 10 (full engagement). This is a highly encouraging result, especially considering that this client group has historically struggled to engage with educational programs, making it a particularly positive outcome.

5.0 PROGRAMME IMPACT

5.1 System recorded outcomes

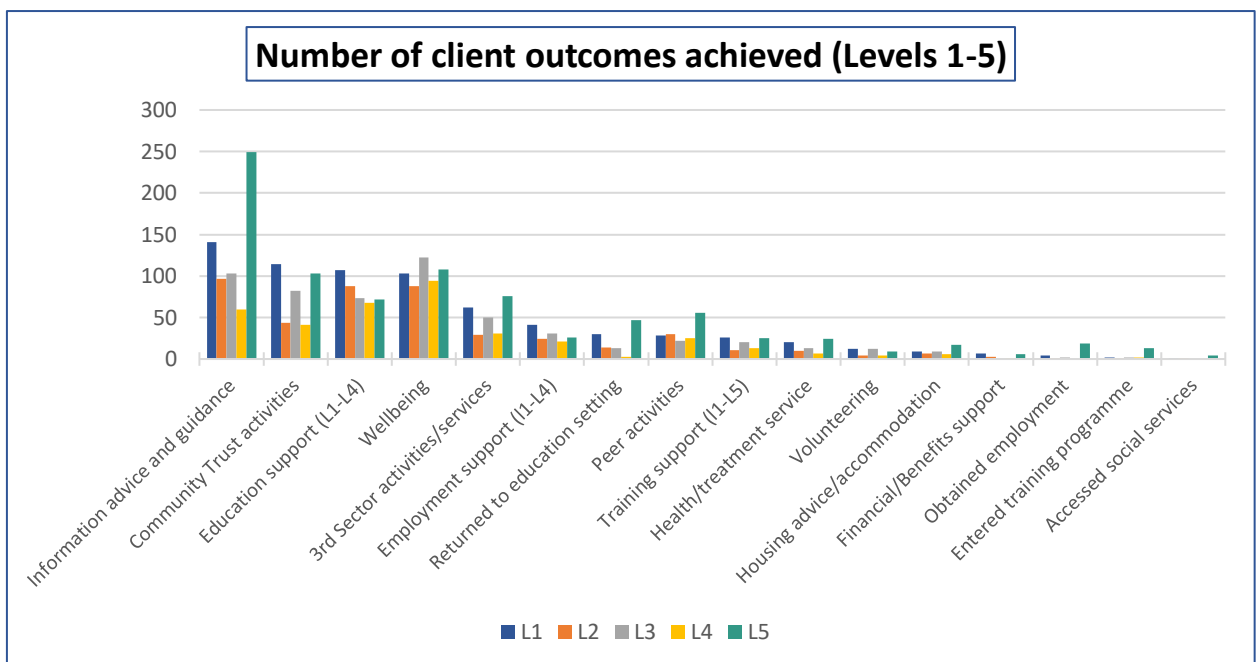
The **Champions programme** tracks client progress through a series of defined outcome themes, including 'Information, Advice and Guidance' (IAG), 'Employment', 'Training', and 'Education'. While the programme captures outcome data within its system, the exported reports often lack specific details behind each outcome. For example, the exported data may simply show 'Information, Advice and Guidance' without indicating the type or depth of the support provided.

Client outcomes are recorded across five levels, representing different stages of progress:

- **L1:** A conversation with the client about a goal they want to pursue.
- **L2:** The mentor makes enquiries on behalf of the client related to that goal.
- **L3:** The client makes their own enquiries regarding the stated goal.
- **L4:** A plan is established with the client to participate in the goal.
- **L5:** The client participates in or completes the goal.

Outcomes from **L1-L4** represent significant support milestones, demonstrating client progression in education, training, or employment. In contrast, **L5** outcomes indicate final achievements, such as re-enrolling in education, securing a place in a training programme, or obtaining employment.

Between January 2023 and August 2024, the programme recorded 3,063 client outcomes. Of these, 650 (21%) were related to 'Information, Advice, and Guidance', which is expected of every client, given that most participants receive some form of this support. It is also debatable if the giving of information or advice is an output rather than an outcome. Alongside this, the 'Wellbeing' outcome accounted for 515 of the reported outcomes (17%). This is incredibly broad and open to individual interpretation and may require further definition.

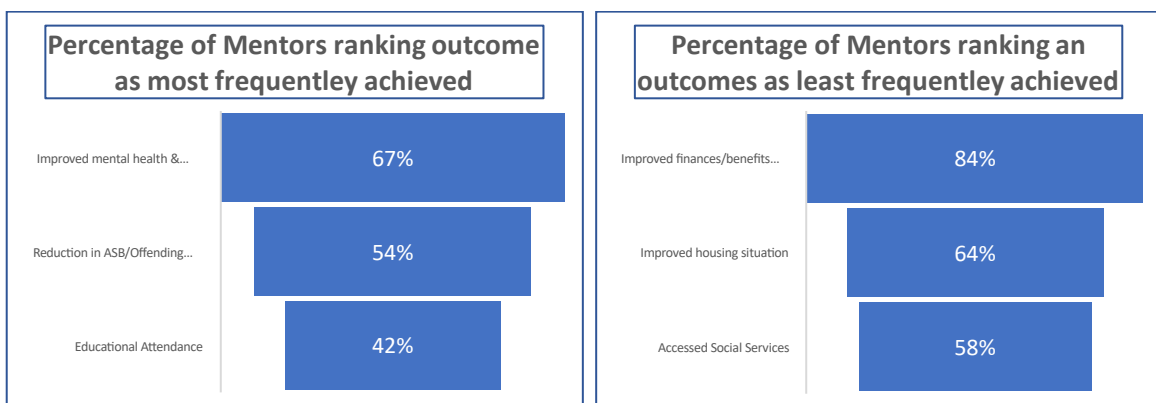


Notwithstanding the above, over the past 20 months, the programme has delivered notable results: 72 participants have re-engaged with education, 47 have fully returned to their studies, 19 have secured employment, 13 have entered training programmes, and 24 clients have accessed healthcare treatment services. These concrete outcomes highlight the programme's impact in helping young people achieve meaningful milestones.

5.2 Mentor reported outcomes

A survey of programme mentors asked them to rank the most frequently achieved participant impacts and outcomes (1 = most frequently achieved, 12 = least frequently achieved). Mentors consistently highlighted the programme's effectiveness in achieving positive outcomes for participants, particularly in improved mental wellbeing, reducing ASB/offending and improved educational attendance.

One mentor reflected on the programme's success: *"I think this is a really promising programme, and the evidence is clear—this programme really does work. Out of all my clients in Burnley, not one has gone back to reoffending, and that is such a powerful statistic."* This statement underscores the significant impact the programme is having on participants and its success in steering young people away from criminal behaviour.

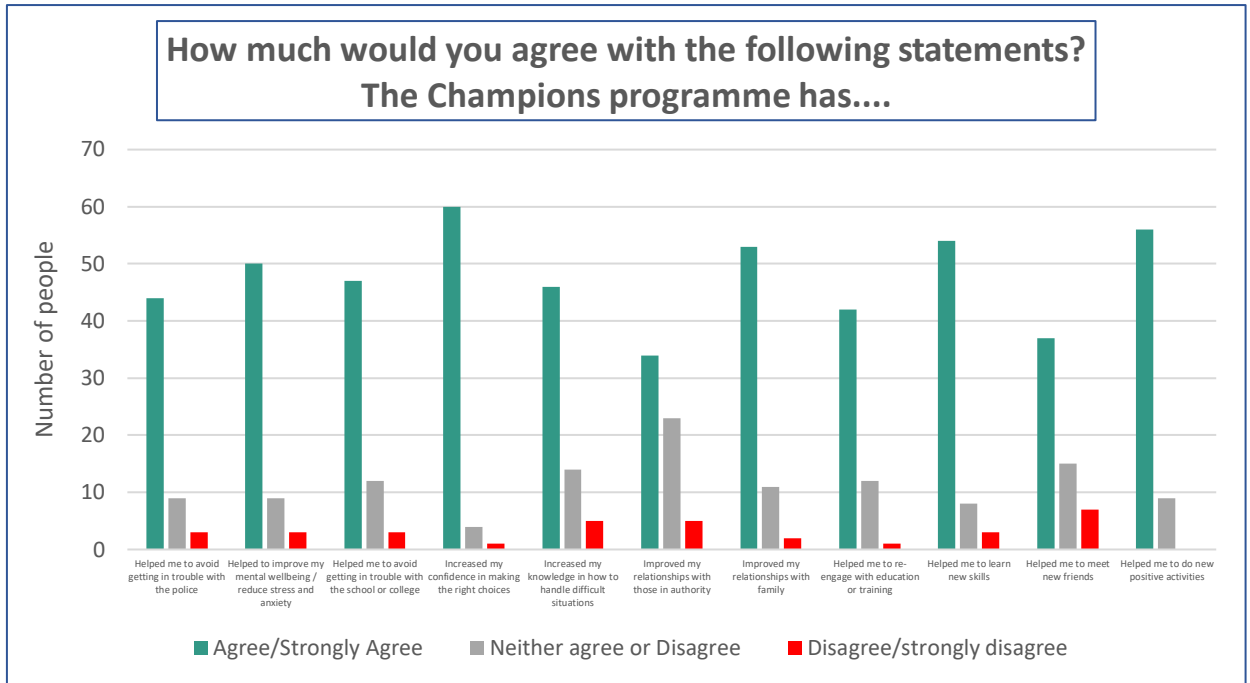


Mentors reported that the least frequently achieved outcomes were related to improved finances/benefits, improved housing situations, and access to social care, with only 27 **L5 outcomes** recorded for these categories across all participants. This is unsurprising, as the programme primarily targets children rather than young adults, for whom these outcomes would be more relevant. While these are important tangible outcomes, it may be worth reconsidering how these are tracked and reported within the **Views** system to better align with the programme's focus and objectives.

5.3 Client reported outcomes

The '**Active Client**' survey, completed by 68 participants across all nine community trust programmes, provided valuable insights into the self-perceived impact of the Champions programme. Key findings from the survey include:

- **65%** of participants agreed that the programme had helped them stay out of trouble with the police.
- **70%** reported that it had prevented them from getting into trouble at school.
- **88%** felt the programme had boosted their confidence in making positive choices.
- **74%** noted an improvement in their mental well-being because of their involvement.



Participants were asked to describe the most significant impacts the **Champions programme** had on them, and their feedback suggests that the programme has made a substantial positive difference in their lives. Key areas of positive change include improvements in mental health, behaviour, school performance, community engagement, and overall personal growth.

- **Improved Mental Health and Well-being:** Many participants highlighted the positive impact of sporting and leisure activities on their mental health and wellbeing. These activities, combined with mentor support, helped them manage stress, addiction, and anger. One participant remarked, *“It takes your mind off things,”* while another shared, *“Talking about my feelings with my mentor helps me because instead of bottling up my feelings and lashing out, I can express how I feel.”*
- **Reduction in Problematic Behaviour:** A large proportion of clients reported that the programme had helped them avoid trouble with the police and at school. As one participant noted, *“It has helped me try to stay in school more and be good at school and for my mum.”* Another shared, *“One-on-one sessions with [Mentor] in the gym and boxing sessions have helped me with addiction, and now I participate in boxing classes outside the programme. I’m soon to have a charity boxing fight.”* Participants also learned to consider their actions, with one stating, *“Understanding the risks of consequences and thinking about my behaviour before responding.”*
- **Enhanced School Engagement and Performance:** Several participants reported improvements in school attendance, behaviour, and focus. The programme helped them stay in school and raised aspirations to be successful learners. One participant reflected, *“My behaviour improved, especially in school. I attend more and want to improve so that I can learn more.”*
- **Social and Community Involvement:** The programme also facilitated positive community engagement, helping participants form new friendships and discover activities that kept them

out of trouble. One client shared, *“It has helped me in the community and find positive things to do.”* Giving a sense of social belonging.

- **Development of Life Skills:** Participants reported gaining valuable life skills such as anger management, conflict resolution, and goal setting. Many expressed increased confidence in handling difficult situations and working toward personal goals and raising their ambition, which are essential for their future success. One went on to state that *“It’s stopped me getting into trouble at school. I want to join the police when I leave school”*
- **Overall Personal Growth:** Clients noted significant personal growth, describing themselves as happier, more active, and more confident. One participant summed up the transformative impact of the programme by saying, *“My life completely changed.”* The programme’s support has helped participants realise their potential and improve their behaviour at home, in school, and within their communities.

6.0 CLIENTS PERSPECTIVES ON THE PROGRAMME

Within the survey, clients provided overwhelmingly positive feedback about the ‘**Champions’ programme**, highlighting several key areas of impact. Overall, the feedback suggests that the programme has made a significant positive impact on its participants, enhancing their emotional, social, and mental well-being, while also providing a supportive and engaging environment for personal growth.

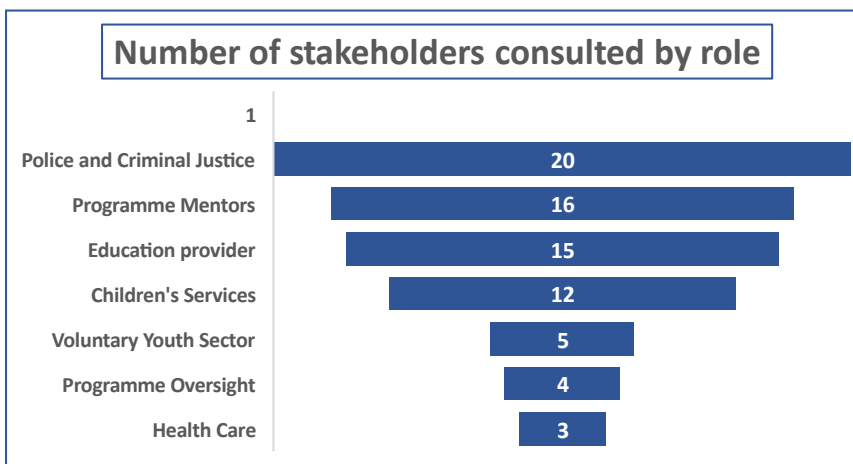
- **Positive Overall Experience:** Many participants described the programme as *“great,” “good,”* and *“life-changing,”* with several expressing their gratitude for the support they received. One participant shared, *“I love it,”* while others remarked that they wished they had joined earlier, indicating the high value placed on the programme.
- **Emotional and Behavioural Support:** The programme has been particularly effective in helping participants manage their emotions, especially anger, and reflect on their behaviour before acting. One client noted, *“I feel like she has helped me to understand my behaviour—thinking about behaviours before acting on them.”* The personalised support from mentors was consistently praised for raising self-awareness and managing anger.
- **Development of Social Skills and Relationships:** Participants reported significant improvements in their ability to build new friendships and strengthen existing relationships. The programme's supportive environment encouraged social interaction and personal growth. One participant explained, *“One of the best things to help you express your feelings and interests, and being supported with them.”*
- **Mental Health and Well-being:** Many participants highlighted the positive impact the programme had on their mental health. They appreciated the relaxed environment and the programme's focus on stress reduction through sport and leisure activities. One client said, *“I think the programme has helped me become more confident. I’ve been doing my functional skills at school and haven’t been stressed out. Nothing bad to say.”*
- **Supportive Mentorship:** Mentors received high praise from participants for their dedication and the positive guidance they provided, particularly in areas such as college preparation and behaviour management. One participant enthusiastically remarked, *“[Mentor] is sick,”* while others simply expressed their appreciation with comments like *“Thank you for helping me.”*
- **Programme Activities and Engagement:** Clients enjoyed the range of activities offered, such as boxing, football, and trips. These activities not only kept participants engaged but also served as a positive outlet for managing emotions and staying focused.
- **Recommendations and Suggestions:** The majority of participants requested more frequent or longer sessions, with some asking for sessions to be offered *“maybe 2 or 3 times a*

week." Additionally, there were suggestions to provide sessions outside of regular hours, extending into the evenings.

7.0 STAKEHOLDER DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the key insights from critical stakeholders involved in the programme. These insights were collected through a combination of one-on-one and group interviews with programme commissioners, managers, and service providers, along with a comprehensive survey of stakeholders, including those who refer clients to the programme.

In total, 72 stakeholders from various organisations contributed data for this evaluation, representing key sectors with a vested interest in the programme's work. These sectors include



Police and Criminal Justice, Education, Children's Services, and Programme delivery teams.

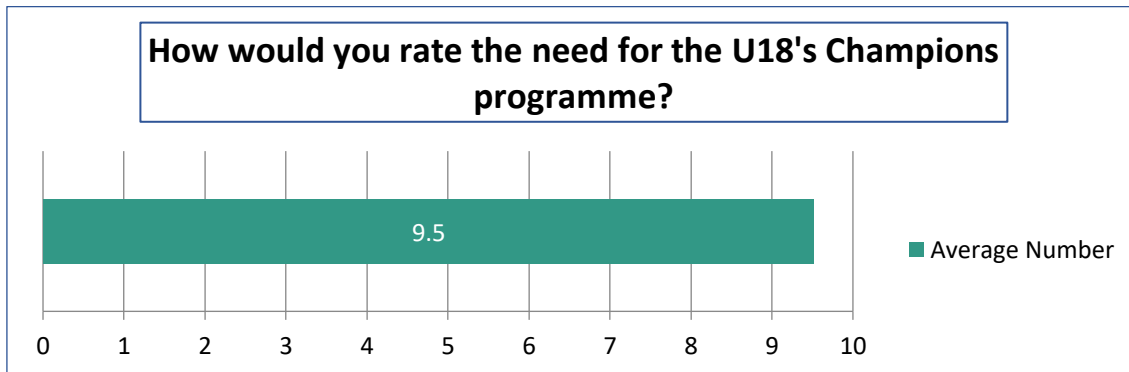
Stakeholders rate their level of engagement with the programme highly, eight out of 10 (where ten is fully engaged). Stakeholder engagement with the programme is

characterised by a collaborative approach, with a strong focus on referral, support, and relationship-building to maximise positive outcomes for at-risk young people. Key points raised by stakeholders about their levels of engagement include:

- **Collaboration and Relationship Building:** Stakeholders emphasise the importance of building strong relationships with the programme team. Regular multi-agency meetings, face-to-face interactions, and ongoing communication help maintain these relationships and ensure effective support for the young people referred to the programme.
- **Ongoing Monitoring and Follow-Up:** Several stakeholders keep track of the progress of the young people they have referred, often maintaining contact with programme mentors to monitor engagement and outcomes. This ongoing monitoring is particularly important for those working in early intervention and safeguarding roles.
- **Strategic and Operational Involvement:** Some stakeholders are involved in the strategic development and oversight of the programme, ensuring alignment with broader community safety and youth engagement goals. Their roles include managing referrals, data oversight, and supporting programme evaluation efforts.
- **Endorsement and Advocacy:** Many stakeholders strongly endorse the programme and are willing to help increase its capacity and reach. They see the programme as a valuable tool for diverting young people from potential criminal pathways and actively advocate for its continued and expanded use.

7.1 Stakeholder views on programme need

Stakeholders consistently emphasised a significant need for the programme, underscoring its critical role in supporting young people facing complex challenges. One stakeholder described the team as "excellent," noting that they are "passionate about the work they do" and are "clearly meeting a need in communities for young people who are struggling with very complex issues." When asked to rate the level of need for the programme on a scale from 0 to 10, stakeholders provided an average score of 9.5, reflecting a strong consensus on the importance of the programme in the communities it serves.



Before the establishment of this programme, stakeholders pointed out that there were limited options and support available for young people at risk of violence or involvement in the criminal justice system. As one stakeholder explained "The programme provides a much needed diversionary service in the Fylde area which has little or next to no alternative programs or provisions for youths who are engaging in ASB, other criminality or may be at risk and in need of support." Whilst another stated "This type of programme is urgently needed in the local area, we need to give young people something positive to focus on." The programme is seen as filling a critical gap in services by offering early intervention and support. "It fills a gap in service provision, whereby some of the young people are not accessing other support services or mentoring."

Stakeholders believe that by addressing issues proactively, the programme can prevent young people from reaching the point where they require more intensive and costly statutory services, such as social care or criminal justice interventions. Although a formal cost-benefit analysis has not been conducted, this preventative approach is perceived as a potential cost-saving measure for other services.

One stakeholder highlighted the programme's shift away from previous punitive approaches that often focused on incarceration, stating that the Champions programme takes "a more comprehensive, public health-oriented approach" to addressing young people's needs. This approach is characterised by empathy and relationship-building rather than punishment, reflecting a broader understanding of how to effectively support young people at risk.

Feedback from stakeholders illustrates that the programme is not only filling an essential gap in existing services but is also aligning with a more modern, holistic approach to youth support. By intervening early and focusing on relationship-based support, the programme is helping to address root causes and provide young people with a better path forward.

7.2 Stakeholder views on programme impact

Stakeholders were asked about their perceptions of the impact of the Champions programme, and the responses were overwhelmingly positive. Across the board, stakeholders reported that the programme has a substantial positive impact on young people's lives by helping them make better choices, engage constructively with their communities, and achieve personal growth and development. Consistent feedback from police services, schools, families, and participants themselves underscores the programme's effectiveness in promoting personal growth, reducing offending, and supporting young people to reach their potential. One stakeholder highlighted the value of the programme by stating, *"It gives young people positive role models and completes fantastic direct work with them to help them choose a better path along with offering support to the young person. A truly brilliant service."* Another noted that *"A lot of young people who engage well with the programme are resistant to statutory services, and working with us helps build bridges and encourage them to engage with other support available."*

The programme is widely regarded as beneficial, providing a constructive outlet for at-risk youth to participate in activities they enjoy while receiving guidance from mentors. Stakeholders have observed significant positive changes in the behaviour and well-being of young people involved. As one stakeholder commented, *"The programme provides a much-needed diversionary service in the Fylde area, which has little or next to no alternative programs or provisions for youths who are engaging in ASB, other criminality or may be at risk and in need of support. The programme has in many instances reverted those away from crime or ASB and improved performance in school."*

- Positive Behavioural Change** The programme is praised for its effectiveness in helping young people understand the consequences of their actions and make better choices. Stakeholders recognise the programme's success in re-educating individuals onto a more positive path. As one noted, *"It allows young people to recognise the risks and dangers posed with their actions. It also makes a huge difference in allowing the young people to understand the severity of situations and the wider impact."*
- Support for At-Risk Youth and Reduced Offending:** The programme is particularly effective in providing a diversionary service for young people at risk of engaging in criminal behaviour or ASB. It offers an alternative to traditional punitive measures, providing constructive outlets and positive role models to guide them toward more productive futures. Stakeholders report consistently that it has been effective in reducing anti-social behaviour (ASB) and offending among participants and have noted reductions in reoffending rates and improvements in behaviour, with many young people moving away from crime. One stakeholder emphasised, *"The programme is highly effective and widely used by the local NHP; it is an incredibly useful tool at our disposal for targeting and engaging our most at-risk or problematic nominal."* Another added, *"The programme has been a really useful tool for young people involved in low-level crime or ASB as a pathway/resolution to an incident."*
- Development of Essential Life Skills:** Participants benefit from improved social skills, anger management, emotional regulation, and a better understanding of healthy relationships. The programme helps young people recognise the risks associated with their behaviour and understand the consequences, leading them to make more positive choices.
- Impact on Educational Attainment and Well-being:** The programme positively impacts school attendance, engagement, and overall academic performance with stakeholder reporting

progress of clients in school. Young people involved have shown improvements in their studies and have developed better relationships with peers, teachers, and family members. One stakeholder pointed out, *“It’s made a huge difference, particularly with their attitude to learning and their impact on their behaviour in the school community.”*

- **Re-educating and Re-engaging Young People:** The programme consistently engages those at risk of offending by providing structured activities that build life skills and offer constructive alternatives to negative influences. This approach helps reduce anti-social behavior and supports young people's integration into their local communities. Stakeholders report that when young people are engaged and willing to change, the programme has a significant impact. The one-to-one support provided by mentors helps to educate and build confidence, motivating participants to set and achieve their goals.
- **Wide Range of Positive Outcomes:** Participants have reported various benefits, including improved mental health and well-being, emotional regulation, trust in professionals, motivation to avoid ASB, recognition of personal needs, and access to wider services such as housing, social care, and substance abuse support.

7.3 Stakeholder views on the Key Strengths of the programme

To stakeholders engaged in this evaluation, the Champions programme is highly valued for its community-based, flexible, and comprehensive approach to supporting at-risk young people, with a strong focus on engagement, mentorship, and positive outcomes. One stakeholder expressed this as an *“Absolutely brilliant programme. It’s a huge asset to the community and makes a real difference to the lives of young people. Keep up the amazing work you all do, I can’t speak highly enough of the service.”*

There is a consensus across stakeholders that the key strengths of the programme are:

- **Effective Engagement and Community Focus:** The programme successfully engages young people, particularly those at risk of anti-social behaviour (ASB) or crime, by providing a positive outlet and accessible support within the community. The programme's presence in schools, community centres, and sports venues makes it approachable and inclusive for all young people, meeting young people where they are. This adaptability helps overcome barriers such as school absences or challenging home environments, ensuring continuous engagement.
- **Mentorship and Relatability:** The mentors are highly regarded for their ability to connect with young people on a personal level. They serve as positive role models who are relatable and approachable, often sharing similar interests with the participants. This connection is essential in breaking down barriers and building trust, especially for those who have previously refused support from statutory agencies or who have had negative experiences with traditional services.
- **Holistic and Person-Centered Approach:** The programme takes a holistic approach, focusing on individual needs through personalised support and mentorship. This trauma-informed, client-led model helps young people build skills, develop coping strategies, and improve mental well-being. The flexibility in engagement methods—whether through school, community settings, or one-on-one support—ensures that young people are effectively reached and supported.

- **Diversion and Positive Alternatives:** The programme provides vital diversionary activities that offer young people constructive alternatives to negative behaviours. Activities range from sports and outdoor events to personal development sessions, giving young people opportunities to build positive relationships and make better life choices.
- **Strong Communication and Collaboration:** Good communication with referring agencies, schools, and other stakeholders is a significant strength. The programme facilitates effective multi-agency collaboration and ensures that stakeholders are kept informed about young people's progress, helping to build a supportive network around each participant.
- **Dedicated and Knowledgeable Staff:** Stakeholders repeatedly highlight the dedication, passion, and expertise of the programme's staff. Mentors are described as caring, knowledgeable, and committed to supporting young people and helping them achieve positive outcomes.
- **Support Beyond the Programme:** The programme offers continued support to young people even after their formal involvement ends. This ongoing commitment, including follow-up sessions and opportunities for further activities, helps maintain positive progress and reinforces the support network for young people.

7.4 Stakeholders views on the challenges faced by the programme

While the Champions programme is recognised for its positive impact, stakeholders identified some of the challenges faced by the programme and several areas were highlighted for improvement, including increasing capacity, enhancing communication, addressing staffing challenges, expanding accessibility, and ensuring the programme's long-term sustainability.

- **Limited Awareness and Engagement:** Several stakeholders noted that there is insufficient awareness of the programme among potential referring organisations and the wider community. Whilst one stakeholder suggested that *“this is deliberate to control capacity”*, increasing visibility and collaboration with more organisations could help in the longer term.
- **Referral and Programme Criteria Limitations:** Some stakeholders mentioned that the programme's criteria for accepting referrals could be restrictive.
- **Challenges with Voluntary Participation:** The programme relies on voluntary engagement, which can be a hurdle. The voluntary nature sometimes leads to difficulties in ensuring consistent participation, particularly when youths are not mandated to engage.
- **Capacity and Staffing Constraints:** A significant issue raised is the limited number of available spaces and staff to meet the high demand for the programme. This is coupled with staffing constraints at a management level. The programme has grown exponentially, and it was reported by some that there is a need to potentially restructure the programme with two area managers to provide more consistency across the large Lancashire region. *“Going forward the provision of locally based team leaders to coordinate and support locality delivery. Review of mentor compensation to align to similar roles within statutory services.”*
- **Safeguarding:** This was highlighted and discussed in an earlier section of the report (section 3.4) but is worth re-emphasising here. Mentors frequently raised the issue of safeguarding, both from a client and mentor perspective. They acknowledge that this is a critical and complex issue given the clients backgrounds and as such requires particular attention across the programme as a whole.

- **Staff Turnover and Retention:** High attrition rates among mentors were highlighted as a concern. Frequent changes in staff can disrupt the continuity of support and make it challenging for young people to build trust with mentors. The temporary nature of contracts and limited compensation are seen as contributing factors to this issue. One stakeholder suggested that *"It would be nice to see progression for mentors. Opportunities for staff growth or reward? I think this could allow the mentors to have more flow in terms of support."*
- **Lack of Transportation and Accessibility Issues:** The geographical reach of the programme was identified as a limitation for some areas. For instance, young people in locations without accessible transportation to programme venues may find it challenging to participate, particularly if specific activities are not within easy reach.
- **Administrative and Strategic Challenges:** There were concerns about the programme's long-term sustainability beyond current funding, with no clear plan for continuation after LVRN funding ends. The short-term nature of funding also impacts staff stability and strategic planning.
- **Balancing Direct Work and Documentation:** While mentors are highly dedicated to working directly with young people, there is a concern that this focus may come at the expense of detailed record-keeping and documenting evidence of outcomes. Striking a balance between hands-on support and administrative responsibilities is necessary for effective evaluation.
- **Training Needs for Mentors:** Mentors have expressed a desire for more targeted training to help them manage specific issues they encounter regularly, such as *"training to help with anger and aggression in young people."* In addition, Mentors have indicated that they would benefit from a range of additional training to better equip them for their roles. Among the training areas mentioned are accredited behaviour change training, mental health and well-being training, managing personal risk, advanced safeguarding, and training in managing challenging behaviours. They suggest that these training programmes should be provided centrally rather than relying on the individual trust training policies. The need for such training highlights the gaps in the current support system and the necessity for a more structured approach to mentor development. This kind of focused training would better prepare them to handle the complex and often challenging situations they face.
- **Clinical supervision for mentors:** The mentors in the programme are working with young people who often have significant trauma and are making serious disclosures. However, the programme currently lacks a clear system to provide mentors with clinical supervision or specialist support, which can leave them carrying a heavy emotional burden. Unlike trained counsellors or psychologists, mentors are not equipped to handle such disclosures, which puts them in a vulnerable position without the proper support structures in place. One key stakeholder noted, *"The mentors keep saying, they didn't feel they have appropriate training. They don't feel they have got much in the way of tools, in that tool bag. And so let's see what's out there."*

8.0 SUMMARY

This evaluation has demonstrated a significant need for this type of intervention, and clearly supports the decision to expand the Champions programme into working at a younger age group and taking a more preventative based approach. This is maybe best summed up with a direct stakeholder quote *"The programme has provided more holistic, trauma-informed approach to proactively steering people away from crime, compared to the previous focus on just "locking them up and chucking them in jail."*

The evaluation highlighted several key strengths of the programme. It effectively engages at-risk youth through a comprehensive referral process, the increasing demand for the programme, coupled with the growing waiting lists, highlights a lack of alternative provision in this area for this cohort. The programme primarily receives clients from police, education, social care, health care and youth justice services. It is clear therefore that the outcomes achieved by the programme are relieving of pressures across a wide system and therefore should be recognised across services. The evaluation has found that participants have reported significant improvements in mental health, behaviour, and school engagement, whilst the measures recording these impacts are not as robust as they could be, triangulating all data sources used in this evaluation gives confidence that the impacts and outcomes are, to a large extent, 'real'.

Central to the success of the programme are the mentors, who play a critical role, offering, person centred, personalised support and guiding participants through a complex process of behaviour change. It is clear from the research that this support is enhanced by the mentors working for non-statutory, non-uniformed services and operating from the local community. Stakeholders praised the programme's ability to provide positive role models, foster community engagement, and fill a crucial gap in services for at-risk young people.

Despite its successes, the evaluation identified challenges in the programme's implementation. Capacity constraints and growing waiting lists have delayed access to services, and safeguarding procedures vary across Trusts, raising concerns about consistency. Mentors also face emotional strain due to a lack of clinical supervision, particularly when handling sensitive client disclosures. Information sharing between referral agencies and the programme was noted as inconsistent, potentially hindering effective support for clients and potentially placing the mentors at risk. Additionally, stakeholders suggested a need for expanded training for mentors, improved mentor retention strategies, and better coordination of safeguarding practices across the programme.

The breadth of this evaluation clearly reports that the **Champions programme** has demonstrated a strong impact on young people's lives, helping them make positive choices, stay in school, and engage more constructively with their communities. By addressing the identified challenges, particularly in safeguarding, capacity management, and mentor support, and given the appropriate resource and will, the programme can continue to expand its reach and improve outcomes for vulnerable youth across Lancashire.

9.0 RECOMENDATIONS

- The programme is clearly highly valued by a range of services and is supporting these services in their core work. Further it is clearly starting to demonstrate significant outcomes for participants, notably relating to crime prevention, education and health and wellbeing. As such the services should come together in a facilitated discussion to consider a **sustainable funding model** for the programme.
- The stakeholders have highlighted a priority to review the current **safeguarding processes** for the programme. The current structure of safeguarding being managed within individual trusts could inadvertently have created inconsistencies in practice. As such the LVRN, alongside critical partners, should consider a review of the current safeguarding procedures across the programme, consider a programme wide safeguarding policy and deliver consistent safeguarding training for all programme mentors and support staff.
- It is clear that mentors are managing very complex case-loads and being exposed to significant sensitive information from vulnerable young people. This highlights the potential for a **programme wide clinical- supervision structure**. An options appraisal in the feasibility of this should be explored by the LVRN.
- There are clear inconsistencies in the level of experience and exposure to appropriate training across mentors and between trusts. Mentors have requested more consistent – cross-programme training opportunities. LVRN should consider conducting a **Training Needs Assessment** across mentors leading to a consistent programme wide training offer. It is anticipated that this will not only ensure consistent delivery between programmes but also help with recruitment, retention and progression of mentors.
- The evaluation notes that significant and ongoing development of the participant output and outcome measures has significantly improved data collection over the past 12-months. However, there are clear limitations to the output and outcome measures used. The programme would benefit from adding more clarity to the data collection systems and **additional support in outcome planning** which could include streamlining the breadth of outcomes recorded to enable the utilisation of more robust evaluation tools and a more focused range of outcome measures. This approach should continue to be co-produced with the mentors to ensure pragmatic solutions are identified.
- To **continue to evaluate the implementation** of the programme, developing the evaluation methodology to incorporate all participants aged 10-25 years rather than separating out the research into two cohorts. An extension to the work could consider a cost-benefit analysis or a social return on investment.
- There is significant learning, locally, regionally and nationally to be gained from sharing the learning from this evaluation. The **report should be widely disseminated and presented** to key internal and external agencies.