

Break Staying Close, Staying Connected Evaluation report

Dr Jeanette Cossar
Julie Young

University of East Anglia
January 2022

Contents

Acknowledgements.....	6
Executive Summary.....	7
Key findings: Young people’s interviews.....	7
Staying Close Staying Connected	7
Support.....	7
Housing	8
Coproduction	8
Impact of Covid	8
Suggestions for Change.....	9
Key Findings: Staff interviews	9
Support.....	9
Housing	9
Staffing and organisation	10
Communication.....	11
Coproduction	11
Adaptation and Innovation	12
Sustainability.....	12
Suggestions for change	12
Key Findings: Quantitative Data.....	13
Key Findings: Cost benefit Analysis.....	13
Lessons and recommendations	13
Future development and wider application	15
Introduction	16
Background to the project	16
Overview of the Break Staying Close, Staying Connected project.....	16
Evaluation of the Staying Close Projects.....	17
Changes to the project since the last evaluation.....	19
Overview of the qualitative evaluation.....	20
Aims and objectives	20
Evaluation Methods	20
Strengths and limitations of the evaluation	22
Key findings from the young people’s interviews.....	22
Staying Close Staying Connected	23
Leaving Care and Moving In to SCSC.....	24

Housing options	25
Location and Quality	25
Matching	26
Housemates	26
Support	27
Flexibility	28
A wider package of service provision.....	28
Education, Employment and Training.....	28
Emotional Wellbeing Service	29
Finances	30
Social Support	30
Mentors.....	30
Leaving SCSC	31
Coproduction	31
Covid 19	32
Young people’s suggestions for change to SCSC.....	33
Key Findings from SCSC staff and local authority staff interviews	35
A positive option for care leavers	35
Staying Close	36
Key benefits of the SCSC provision for young people.....	36
Relationship-based individualised, flexible support.	36
A Wider package of service provision.....	39
Housing	41
Location.....	41
The referral process	41
House share	42
Matching	44
Boundaries	44
The Impact of Covid	45
The SCSC project organisation and staffing	46
Staff structure and organisation	46
Staff satisfaction and expertise.....	46
Internal communication and support.....	48
Inter-Agency collaboration	48
Collaborative working on the frontline.....	49

Collaboration and support from other external agencies	50
Coproducton	50
Continued innovation and adaption	52
Unmet needs and suggestions for the future	52
Sustainability.....	53
Quantitative Outcomes.....	54
Method summary	54
Cohort	54
Limitations.....	55
Lifelong relationships.....	55
YP is a good tenant.....	56
Improved stability	56
Improved Life Skills	56
Financial Stability	57
Security in Accommodation.....	57
Cost Savings for Services and Society	57
Participation in EET	57
YP is a contributing citizen	59
Decreased criminal activity.....	59
Improved wellbeing	59
Decreased early pregnancy.....	59
Reduction in drug / alcohol use impacting on daily life.....	60
Summary	60
Cost Benefit Analysis.....	61
Introduction	61
Approach.....	61
Accommodation savings	65
Observations and limitations	66
Results.....	67
Total estimated one-year savings	72
Two and three-year projections	74
Comparing estimated savings with delivery costs.....	74
Conclusions	75
Summary of Findings.....	75
Interviews with young people.....	75

Interviews with Staff (SCSC and LAs)	75
Impact on Outcomes: Quantitative Data	76
Lessons and recommendations	76
Future development and wider application	78
References	79
Appendices.....	81
Appendix 1 – Summary of results of outcomes tracker Sept 20- Sep 21	81
Appendix 2 – Break Staying Close Staying Connected Theory of Change.	82

Acknowledgements

The UEA wish to thank the young people and staff who took part in the evaluation. In particular, we are extremely grateful to those who gave precious time to contribute their views and experiences via the interviews.

Thank you also to Break's Staying Close, Staying Connected project team for their support, especially Maren Albrigtsen for helping us to connect with and support all the young people involved in the evaluation, and Janice Lindon for responding to our requests for contact details, general information on the project and setting up meetings.

We are grateful to Temi Akingbade, who was a UEA intern working on the project and made an invaluable contribution. Finally, a huge thank you to our five peer researchers who worked with us from the beginning of the evaluation, helping us with our recruitment materials, contributing to the development of interview schedules, and discussing the emerging themes and implications for practice. Your honesty and energy was inspiring.

The quantitative data analysis contained within this evaluation was analysed and presented by Break staff.

The Cost Benefit Analysis was undertaken by York Consulting LLP.

Abbreviations used:

PA – Personal Advisor

TW – Transition Worker

HW - Housing Worker

LA – Local Authority

CSC – Children's Social Care

SCSC – Staying Close, Staying Connected

EWS – Emotional Wellbeing service

Executive Summary

The Break Staying Close Staying Connected project is one of eight Staying Close pilots funded by the Department for Education Innovation Programme following Sir Martin Narey's review of Residential Care (2016). It began in January 2018 in partnership with two local authorities in the eastern region of England and is now working in three local authorities (with the third joining after the first year). It provides supported accommodation primarily in shared housing, together with personalised support for residential care leavers to help develop stability, support networks and independent living skills. This evaluation report presents findings from qualitative data gathered through semi-structured interviews with young people using SCSC, SCSC staff and local authority staff, this is supplemented by quantitative data collected through project outcomes tracking. The evaluation period was from September 2020-September 2021. Data was analysed thematically using NVivo software (Braun and Clarke, 2021).

Key findings: Young people's interviews

Staying Close Staying Connected

Young people interpret Staying Close Staying Connected in a variety of ways. Whilst many stay close to former residential placements, they also view maintaining or rebuilding relationships with birth family as important. Some also see Staying Close as involving forming new networks of peer support. Seven of the 17 young people interviewed had not moved directly in to SCSC from residential placements so this may impact on the extent to which they prioritised staying close to residential homes.

Support

The quality of relationships with transitions workers was the most often mentioned positive aspect of the service and was rated highly, with young people feeling well supported and saying that they had a good relationship with their workers. The support offered was holistic and flexible and included building independent living skills, practical and emotional support, help with education, employment and training, support to keep in touch with family and signposting to other services. Some young people described their workers as like family or friends. Given the centrality of the relationship with the transitions worker it is notable that nine young people raised a concern about staff turnover and consistency.

Young people appreciated different means of accessing help with their mental health including support from the transitions workers and known staff on the project; use of the on call service; support from the SCSC emotional wellbeing service (EWS) and help with referral to external services. The outcomes tracker, a young person completed questionnaire, shows that health and wellbeing improved across the year despite the challenging context of the pandemic.

Most young people spoke about help that they had received in accessing education or training, or opportunities they had within SCSC that increased their readiness for employment. The coffee van was mentioned by several as helping to increase their confidence and in some cases leading on to paid employment elsewhere. This was supported by quantitative data which showed young people reporting that they felt more work ready as a result of being part of Staying Close Staying Connected.

The social activities on offer via SCSC are an important part of their offer increasing young people's social networks and potentially bolstering their resilience. This was also an area of provision which young people felt was coproduced, with activities planned on the basis of their suggestions. Residentials and activities were viewed as improving housemates' relationships in some cases and enlarging social networks in others. Improvements in positive relationships were reported by young people through the outcomes tracker.

Housing

Most of the young people felt that they had limited options on leaving care, although some felt they had made a positive choice of SCSC. There were mixed views about the location of their placement within SCSC, some felt that they had a choice whilst others felt that they had to take what was available. Whilst some young people wanted to *stay close* to existing networks, others wanted to *move towards* prior connections including birth family, and others wanted to *move away* from existing connections if they were struggling, or felt they were a bad influence. Their satisfaction with their allocated housing was related to these factors.

House sharing is an important part of the SCSC model. Young people had mixed experiences of the matching process and of relationships with housemates. Where arrangements worked, young people spoke positively about the value of sharing with someone with similar experiences or interests. Most young people spoke of some problems with housemates, but these were not intractable. However, four young people spoke of more serious issues, which had a significant impact on their wellbeing. Several young people felt satisfied with attempts made to match them, however three felt that the matching system needed to be improved.

Coproduction

Young people talked about coproduction and the development of SCSC, through activities such as being involved in the young people's forum, interviewing staff and having a strategic influence on the coffee van project. It was apparent that coproduction is a process, and that some issues might be more difficult to address than others, for example it was easier to influence social activities than housing allocation.

Impact of Covid

The impact of covid over the period of this evaluation cannot be overlooked. The interviews with the young people underlined the extent of the impact of the long period of lockdown

on their lives and the SCSC service. This impacted every stage of the process from moving in and matching, relationships with housemates and staff, and moving on from the project. In particular the staying connected aspect of the project was impacted with contact difficult with residential placements and birth family due to lockdown and concerns about transmission of the virus. SCSC had worked creatively to offer online as well as face to face support over this period.

Suggestions for Change

The young people made many suggestions for changes to the service including more one bed housing options; having a trial before moving in with a housemate; allowing young people to sleep over; ensuring flexibility so that the level of support from transitions workers matches the young person's felt needs; closer monitoring of problematic behaviours with realistic consequences; and staff training on mediation/de-escalation and on mental health.

Key Findings: Staff interviews

Support

LA interviewees said that SCSC fills a gap in provision unavailable for care-experienced young people in other leaving care options in the region and also provides support which is hard to access from adult services.

The attention to key transitions, moving into SCSC and continuity of support when moving on from SCSC was generally appreciated, and seen as successful in avoiding the 'cliff edge' scenario that can face young people leaving care. There was some indication that some transition workers may be more proactive than others in working with young people whilst they are in SCSC accommodation to develop independence skills.

All LA and SCSC staff talked positively about the ability of SCSC transition workers to provide individualised, empathic, flexible and tailored support for young people. Some (but not all) LA staff were aware of the wider service offer which is part of SCSC. There were positive references from several LA and SCSC staff to the Emotional Wellbeing Service provided by Break. They highlighted its flexible way of working with young people.

All the PAs felt that the support of the transition and housing workers alleviated worries about their young people, and in some cases reduced the time they needed to spend with them. This was noted to be a particular help during lockdown, when the knowledge that they had company and support was very reassuring.

Housing

From both the LA and SCSC staff perspective, the SCSC team was raising awareness that the SCSC offer was not a remedial or crisis post-care accommodation option. There was evidence of collaborative working with agencies with more detailed information collected on referral and better communication between SCSC and LA managers in the last year. LA and SCSC staff

have developed a system to ensure longer lead in times to enable appropriate referrals and for young people to experience a planned move with clarity about the offer that they are taking up. There was recognition that the referral process was being adapted and SCSC is being stricter on its acceptance criteria.

There were still some references to referral pressures. A few LA staff indicated that there will always be pressure to accommodate in a world of limited choice. Insufficient provision in certain locations is a continuing challenge for LAs who have young people with family connections and a desire to stay in those locations. It was felt that the project was making some attempt to meet need in this area, despite short supply.

The house share model offers the opportunity for young people to develop relationships and peer networks, potentially building resilience, and is viewed as an important part of the SCSC model. Staff felt that sharing was beneficial for some young people. However, conflict and sometimes bullying behaviour between housemates was a worrying aspect of house sharing. SCSC's recent move to take on some one-bed properties was positively viewed by all LA and SCSC staff.

The matching system has been reviewed and SCSC now appears to be delaying filling rooms if the match is not right for the young person living there. Efforts have been made to ensure that matching is a joint decision, helped by relationship-building with the LA PA. It was felt that this had increased the success ratio of matches between young people.

It was suggested that SCSC staff are also making improvements around rules and boundaries for young people living in their houses; with a clear structure and process around tenant behaviour to encourage responsibility and independence, and the understanding of consequences.

Staffing and organisation

Although recruitment and embedding the team has been challenge the right staff were now considered to be in place and there was a clearer focus around roles and responsibilities for the day to day running of the project, rather than the implementation phase of initial set up. A few members of SCSC staff (at different levels of the organisation) felt that the current SCSC staff structure may be 'management heavy'.

The SCSC project had been significantly affected by a turnover of its SCSC transition workers across the early period covered in the previous evaluation. This was noted to be a considerable challenge to the SCSC project's early ability to provide a consistent service to young people, since this key worker relationship is a core part of the model. A high turnover of staff was still referred to in some staff interviews in the current evaluation. However, all transition workers and the two housing workers interviewed were very positive about their jobs. All were receiving mandatory and optional training across a range of skills and were generally very satisfied with the staff induction, support and training opportunities received.

The wide geographical spread of the project's remit affected staff workload. Workers were often required to cover large distances to travel to young people or transport them to activities across the region (staff travel time was said to be included in the allocated hours

for young people). A further challenge related to the geographical spread of the project and its work with three large LAs was ensuring operational consistency of the SCSC service; this was an issue also raised by Break managers in the previous evaluation. The appointment of one operational service manager was felt to have improved consistency across regions, although it was mentioned that there were more opportunities available in one city served by the project.

Communication

Current SCSC staff feel that the organisation generally listens to and responds to staff feedback and suggestions and staff at all levels feel they can have an influence on service development. The introduction of monthly case management meetings was felt to be improving internal collaboration and communication. These enable sharing of expertise from different levels and specialities, as well as involving all regions within the SCSC provision.

At the planning and early implementation stages of the project, Break had brought relevant stakeholders together from partner agencies to consult on the project through a quarterly project board and this continues to be viewed as beneficial. Regular meetings with key managers and commissioners within each LA have also started or developed within the last year, resulting in improved communication about referrals.

Communication between personal advisers and transitions workers was variable. Whilst some PAs had good communication with transitions workers, other PAs commented that they were not always kept in touch about the work that SCSC was doing with their young people – including activities, support hours and regularity of TW visits. Some said that they did not know what targets the project was working towards for the young person, what the consequences were for not meeting the targets, or how long the young people would be able to stay in the project. Not all were aware of the project's wider provision including the emotional wellbeing service and activities to support employment. Some workers were fairly new in their role (or based in the LA that joined the project more recently) and it may be that some lack of understanding may link to missing out on historical information events. However, a general lack of day-to-day communication around young people with individual PAs was evident in some cases.

Coproduction

The project team strives to include and respond to young people's views and feedback, facilitated by a participation worker who joined the team early in the project's development. This role was aided by a young user of the project, who was taken on as an apprentice for a year. As well as suggesting and helping to organise activities, the apprentice was able to offer a more prepared and consistent input at a strategic level, for example, with project meetings and higher-level discussions.

Mentimeter surveys are administered regularly to give an opportunity for all young people to feed back their experiences. Around a third of young people currently using the project have engaged in the participation forum. This forum is held in different areas to maximise opportunities for young people to attend.

Having a separate participation worker, who can encourage engagement through visiting young people and building relationships, was thought to have worked well to promote participation, particularly as the role is positioned as part of the wider Break service.

Adaptation and Innovation

As recognised in the previous evaluation, Break constantly aims to innovate, change and improve. A continued openness to new ideas and adapt to needs was evident in this current evaluation, with many LA and SCSC staff at different levels noting they felt listened to and that all could contribute to the project's development. Through building good relationships with housing providers, SCSC now has access to one-bedroom flats and has put requests in for others. Other changes in response to feedback include improvements to the referral and matching processes as described above.

The emphasis on the future network is a recognition that young people need to develop organic social networks that will support them when they move on from the project. There was evidence of a range of activities that were encouraging the development of individual confidence and social networks, for example via the opportunities team

The option of one-bed properties has been pursued by SCSC and is seen as a beneficial option for young people for whom a house share is not appropriate. Some of these tenancies may provide greater stability for young people as the tenancy can be passed over to the young person when they are ready for greater independence, avoiding a need to move.

Sustainability

Sustainability of the project was understandably a concern for SCSC staff who were living with uncertainty about continuation funding and alternative future funding arrangements.

Suggestions for change

Partner agencies would like the provision to be extended to other care leavers, for example some leaving foster care; those who have been placed out of county and want to remain in locations outside of the three partner agencies; those who came into care at an older age and moved straight into semi-independent living, and pregnant women or parents and babies who need less support than a parent and baby foster placement, but more support that can be gained from their own tenancy.

Although a volunteer mentoring scheme is in place and seems to have been positively taken up by some young people, there did not appear to be a specific system in SCSC for recent or past leavers of the Project to assist and mentor those entering it or at an earlier stage to themselves. This could be considered in the future.

Interviews with PAs suggested that communication between transitions workers and PAs could be somewhat ad hoc, a more systematic system could be considered for TW to update PAs regarding their work.

Key Findings: Quantitative Data

There are two main methods of data collection and outcomes tracking in Staying Close Staying Connected, a staff completed monthly project dashboard and a young person completed outcomes tracker.

The quantitative data collected through the project demonstrates an improvement in all intended outcomes planned for the service whilst making savings to the public purse. There are particularly strong improvements in financial and housing stability and security and potentially risky behaviors such as drug use and alcohol consumption are lower than national comparisons. There have been improvements in health and wellbeing despite the service being delivered in the context of the pandemic and lockdowns.

The quantitative findings compliment the qualitative findings, in particular that opportunities and support provided through Staying Close Staying Connected supports the development of positive social networks and helps build resilience towards work readiness. The positive health outcomes supports the views from young people that staff in the service are able to flexibly support their mental health.

Key Findings: Cost benefit Analysis

An independent cost benefit analysis of the Break Staying Close Staying Connected model was undertaken by York Consulting LLP. The total estimated one-year savings to services and society range from £2,023,574 in a low attribution scenario to £2,131,336 in a high attribution scenario. This takes into account savings for health and social services due to improved outcomes in areas such as emotional wellbeing, reduced alcohol and drug use, fewer evictions, increased employment, education and training and reduced criminal activity. The total expenditure on Staying Close Staying Connected in the period that the cost benefit analysis covers was £1,564,263 which means that for every £1 spent on the project, the net saving to the public purse is £1.36.

Lessons and recommendations

The Department for Education summary of learning from the Innovation programme final report suggests four key learning points from the Staying Close pilots (Fitzsimons and McCracken, 2020:64). These are outlined below, alongside commentary on the extent to which SCSC is addressing these issues as evidenced in the current evaluation.

A range of different supported and semi-independent accommodation options is needed to provide young people leaving care with housing suited to their needs, preferences, and characteristics as they transition to independent living.

Young people and staff interviews both suggested that there are limited choices available to care leavers, but that SCSC was a positive option. In the previous evaluation it was noted that pressure on local authorities to find accommodation could lead to shortened lead in times and pressure to match and introduce new housemates to accommodation. (Dixon et al 2020) In the current evaluation work between SCSC and LAs on the referral and matching process was said to have led to improvements in lead in times, greater awareness of the project remit, more appropriate referrals, and to have increased young people's involvement and engagement in the matching process. It was accepted that there was still an issue with availability of suitable properties in places where young people wanted to live, whether their preference was staying close to a residential home, moving towards family, or moving away from an environment that they felt was not good for them.

The house share model of SCSC can offer several benefits to young people, potentially helping them to develop relationship-building skills, new social networks and combat isolation. However, it is not suitable for all young people and SCSC is therefore developing one bedroom accommodation options, in discussion with local housing providers. These also have the potential to offer greater stability to young people if they are eventually able to take on the tenancy independently. The success and sustainability of this strategy will depend on securing suitable housing, but potentially it may allow SCSC to offer a greater range of options to young people, and perhaps to accept referrals for young people that they would not otherwise be able to accommodate in a house share.

For those young people for whom a house share is appropriate the matching process and transition into the house are of great importance. There is evidence that SCSC and local authority partners have worked hard to improve this process, with closer work between PAs and SCSC. Many young people experienced a positive transition and got on with housemates. However, in a minority of cases there are still protracted difficulties between housemates and where these occurred the impact on young people's wellbeing was pronounced. Training for TWs in mediation and a mechanism for young people to report serious difficulties might help inform intervention in the minority of cases where serious problems emerge.

Tailored, specialist, multi-disciplinary, trauma-informed support is also required to enable young people's individual needs to be met effectively (including needs around mental health; independent living skills such as budgeting, cooking, and maintaining tenancies; education, employment and training; and building support networks).

There was ample evidence in the interviews to suggest that SCSC is successfully delivering a wraparound service that provides holistic individual support through the transitions workers, and additional in-house service offer. Young people spoke positively about their relationships with their transitions workers and the creative flexible approach to supporting them with a range of needs. In particular the emotional wellbeing service was mentioned by young people and staff as filling a gap when external services were hard to access, not sufficiently flexible or had lengthy waiting lists. The development of an independent living

tool provides a structure for flexible levels of support, but also a sense of progression for young people as they move towards independent living. Young people underlined the importance of this tool being used with young people so that young people's own views on their needs form the starting point for discussion and should not be applied in a rigid way by staff.

Services and young people benefited from thoroughgoing coproduction of services, through which young people not only had a choice over their own package of support and accommodation, but also helped to determine aspects of the broader service offer.

There was evidence of coproduction in the service with young people offered some choice over their own support package. Barriers to coproduction include limitations on the housing available, which can result in pressured transitions. Young people commented that it was more possible to co-produce some aspects of the service such as social opportunities and initiatives to promote employment, education and training, than for the core housing offer. Coproduction is a core part of the SCSC value base. This is evidenced by involving young people in staff interviews, ensuring a mechanism for young people to feed into the development of services through the participation forum and ensuring it is run in an inclusive manner, coproduction in the opportunities team, and promoting young people's involvement in service evaluation including making a film about the service, and the employment of a young apprentice working alongside the participation lead.

Preparation for transitioning from care to post-care living should start early and form a core part of support for children in care, including those living in children's homes.

There is evidence of partnership working in the current evaluation to improve awareness of the remit of SCSC amongst agency partners and increase lead in times to allow relationship building with SCSC staff before young people move from children's homes into SCSC accommodation. Understandably covid had an impact on these processes and on the transition out of SCSC into independent living. As the service develops SCSC are also paying attention to young people's transition out of SCSC, developing their project to include focus on future networks to better prepare young people for independent living when they move on. The development of one bedroom housing options that may be transferred to the young person as an independent tenancy, thus avoiding a move, is an innovative development. The lifelong offer of support from Break will also help young people in their transition to independence. Both the housing offer and the lifelong support offer require resource, and should be planned for and monitored.

Future development and wider application

In addition to the developments outlined above Break plan to have a role in scaling up rolling out the model to other LAs. They are creating resources that can be accessed by other LAs and have been commissioned as consultants for the East Midlands as they develop their own Staying Close offer.

Introduction

Background to the project

In 2021 there were 80,850 looked after children in England, of whom 23% were aged 16 or over. The majority of the looked after children were living in foster care (71%), with 14% in secure units, children's homes or semi-independent living accommodation. In addition there were 28,010 children who ceased to be looked after, a proportion of these young people will be care leavers leaving children's homes. In 2021 there were 32,500 care leavers aged 19-21; 29% were in education; 41% were not in education, employment or training (NEET), compared to around 12% of all young people aged 19 to 21 years old (DfE 2021).

A very high proportion of children and young people in out-of-home care have complex needs (Tarren-Sweeney and Hazell 2006; Ward and Holmes 2008). Many children who are looked after move placements frequently throughout their care careers (Ward 2009) and therefore may not have built consistent and committed networks to support them post care. Many care leavers have not received adequate support to address their needs in care, or to help them make a successful transition to adulthood on leaving care (Munro et al. 2012). Care leavers often make 'compressed and accelerated transitions' from care to independence in early adulthood, frequently at a much younger age than their peers in the community (Cashmore and Paxman 1996, 2007; Stein 2004; Stein and Munro 2008). Many struggle with housing instability and homelessness, insufficient qualifications, unemployment, mental health problems, social exclusion and loneliness (DfE 2021; Children's Commissioner, 2019; Berridge 2016; Dixon and Baker 2016; Gill, 2017; Rahilly and Hendry 2014; Stein and Munro 2008).

A government commissioned review of residential care reported that young people in residential care tend to present with more complex needs than other looked after children and require specialist support. Since 2014 young people turning 18 in foster care have been able to remain with their carers until their 21st birthday, under a 'staying put' policy. This option is not available to young people in residential care, something which was a central concern of the Narey report (2016), which recommended the Staying Close model.

Overview of the Break Staying Close, Staying Connected project

The Break Staying Close, Staying Connected is one of eight Department for Education Innovation Fund projects piloted in recognition of the challenges facing residential care leavers. Led by Break in partnership with three local authorities the project delivers a holistic support offer that tries to improve outcomes for young people aged 16-21 who have been in residential care.

Break was founded in 1968 and runs services across East Anglia including children's homes, disability services, fostering service, family assessment centre and leaving care services. A lifelong offer for young people leaving Break's services was developed in 2009. In 2014, it developed a housing component for care leavers (the forerunner of the SCSC project). The SCSC project was launched in January 2018 working in partnership for the first two years with two local authorities. A third local authority joined at a later date and is included in the

present evaluation. The region is a mix of coastal, rural and urban areas, with pockets of high deprivation and low social mobility.

The project has now been running for over three years. An initial evaluation was carried out by York University (Dixon et al, 2020). At the start this of the current evaluation the project was due to complete in March 2021, however funding was extended enabling the project to run for a further 12 months.

The project has brought together staff with a range of professional experience and roles to provide a targeted wraparound service for young people, drawing upon some services provided by the wider Break provision.

Core SCSC staff include

- Allocated individual support workers ('transition workers') to work flexibly to support young people's general wellbeing and transitions to independent living;
- Housing support workers to assist with tenancy responsibilities;
- A participation worker to engage young people in project decisions and development and promote coproduction (assisted by a coproduction apprentice);
- A management team consisting of a head of service, an overall operational manager, two area/deputy managers (for the three local authorities), three senior transition workers;
- A strategic housing lead to focus on the housing specific issues of the project

Staff also providing services to SCSC under the wider Break charity umbrella include a mentoring team, an emotional wellbeing Service (EWS), and an opportunities team.

Evaluation of the Staying Close Projects

SCSC is one of eight Staying Close projects funded by the Department for Education Innovation Fund. A common methodology was used across the eight Staying Close evaluations, which examined how the projects are being implemented, outcomes for young people and cost effectiveness. The first set of evaluations of all projects has been published by the DfE (available at [Children's Social Care Innovation Programme: insights and evaluation - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/childrens-social-care-innovation-programme-insights-and-evaluation)).

The projects all had similar aims and objectives, aiming to improve leaving care services, and ease the transition to independent living by replacing the loss of support/cliff edge experience of young people leaving residential care with a more gradual transition. The projects did this in different ways, but they all wished to better the young people's outcomes with regard to their independent living skills, participation in EET, accommodation stability etc. Most offered a holistic support package aiming to provide flexible support based on level of need.

In most projects, the young people had successful outcomes, in their wellbeing, EET, stability in accommodation and improvements in independent living skills, although the outcomes evaluations were limited by small sample sizes and lack of comparison groups. Most pilots demonstrated the potential to be cost effective, either by breaking even or by generating possible savings to the state. Most of the costs analyses involved estimations of cost based on saving from avoidance of negative outcomes (eg substance misuse, criminal activity). In most projects young people felt their voices were heard due to the use of coproduction and continuous involvement with young people in the project from the design to the evaluation.

The importance of relationship-based practice was seen across projects, with an emphasis on relationships with current project staff but also with maintaining connection with previous placement staff. Most projects aimed to provide a consistent and available support worker based on a relationship-based practice model, which emphasises the importance of consistent dependable relationships for achieving change. Projects worked well when young people had good relationships with support workers who were able to offer skilled direct work. Being able to access flexible support, at a level to suit individual need allowed young people to successfully move towards independence. The initial aim of Staying Close projects was to provide continued contact with carers from prior residential units. However, many projects found that not all young people wanted this connection as they had not built up a relationship with a key worker. Instead some wished to reconnect with birth family or maintain ties with other support networks.

All the projects had a multi-agency approach relying on strong partnerships between local authorities, housing providers and charities to promote the projects and clarify referral criteria and processes. There were some issues with interagency communication, sometimes resulting in a lack of clarity about what was on offer for referring agencies and young people. The importance of coordination and communication between agencies whilst setting up a project was highlighted.

Several issues and challenges were identified across the evaluations; staff turnover was an issue in some projects, impacting on the ability to deliver a relationship-based service and affecting staff morale. Projects were time limited making sustainability an issue, until further funding was agreed. The evaluation period was relatively short, at a point where projects were being established, making it difficult to measure changing outcomes for young people. Different accommodation offers and referral criteria made it difficult to compare outcomes across projects.

An overview of the evaluations of the Staying Close projects by the DfE highlighted key messages of the Staying Close Evaluations:

- The need for a range of different accommodation options;
- tailored holistic and trauma-informed support for young people;
- the benefits of coproduction offering choice about their individual package of support, but also the development of the service;
- early support for young people to prepare them for the transition from care. (Fitzsimons and McCracken, 2020:64)

The first evaluation of SCSC was undertaken by a team from the University of York (Dixon et al, 2020). Findings of the evaluation were that the SCSC project was being successfully implemented and that the SCSC team had formed good relationships with agency partners. There was evidence of improvements in outcomes for young people across various indicators including accommodation stability, education, employment and training, wellbeing and reduced risk behaviours. This was attributed to the holistic integrated support package and the array of in-house support services on offer, which provided a safety net in the context of demands on external services and long waiting lists (Dixon et al, 2020: 62). Key lessons included noting pressure on accommodation which could result in pressure to accept referrals and accommodate young people without sufficient preparation time; tensions in the shared house model and the need to improve the matching process; the continuing need for a relationship-based therapeutically informed approach to maximise engagement with young people with complex needs; and the reality that the Staying Close model in practice differed from that originally envisaged as keeping young people close to their former residential care placement.

Changes to the project since the last evaluation

- LA3 joined the project towards the end of the last evaluation period and was not included in the first evaluation.
- Changes in SCSC staff structure and personnel, which included:
 - changes to the management structure including cessation of the SCSC implementation manager role, and a reduction from two operational managers to one overall operational manager.
 - the addition of a SCSC strategic housing lead role to focus on housing specific issues of the project.
 - the addition of a SCSC 'Staying Close Staying Connected' co-ordinator to help young people build and re-build a network of personal connections
 - cessation of the education worker role;
 - addition of new staff members to the opportunities team, to develop and facilitate specialist work and skill development projects along with general aspiration and confidence building opportunities. This has led to, for example, the co-produced development of Break coffee van and roastery facilitating barista training and ongoing work experience, a construction training and work experience project, and woodland management training workshops.
 - addition of new staff members to the emotional wellbeing service enabling an extended and longer-term provision.
 - Temporary cessation of the coproduction apprentice position.
- Changes to the provision for individualised support from the allocated transition and housing workers for young people (to a tiered system of up to 10 hours per week depending on needs)
- Additional funding from the Department for Education received to resource a system of personal budgets for young people enabling individual and creative financial support to meet young people's specific needs

Overview of the qualitative evaluation

Aims and objectives

Ongoing evaluation is a key requirement of projects funded by the Innovation Fund. The previous evaluations of all Staying Close, Staying Connected projects were arranged centrally through DfE approved evaluators. For the year April 1st 2020-March 31st 2021 the follow up evaluation was instead delegated to the individual projects.

The evaluation criteria set out by Department for Education included a cost benefit analysis along with measures and an analysis of performance indicators laid out by the DfE. The authors of this report, a research team from the University of East Anglia, were commissioned to undertake other aspects of the evaluation:

- **Coproduction of evaluation with young people** using the project
- Exploration of **staff experiences and attitudes** towards working on SCSC
- Understand and analyse **young people's perspectives** on the value of SCSC.

Evaluation Methods

The evaluation plan was approved in September 2020 and ethics approval was granted by the University of East Anglia School of Social Work ethics committee, on 7th October 2020. Local authority research governance approval was also applied for and received. The evaluation took place over one year between September 2020 and September 2021, with data collection ending in September 2021. Data was gathered across most of the year of the evaluation, between December 2020 and September 2021.

Feedback from young people, staff involved in delivering the project and staff from key partner agencies was gained via semi-structured one-to-one interviews. Young people were given information about the interviews from a variety of sources which included postal flyers and personal communication from the participation lead, transition workers and workers from the opportunities team.

Staff were interviewed over the phone or via Teams. Young people were initially offered the opportunity to be interviewed either over the phone or via Zoom, and (when Covid restrictions were eased) were given the additional option of face-to-face interviews. One young person asked to provide her feedback via text, and a shorter, simplified version of the interview schedule was forwarded on to her, with follow up questions asked (again by text) following her reply.

Some staff (transition workers from the project and personal advisors from the local authorities) were also offered an online survey as an alternative to the interviews, but none chose to take up this offer.

A coproduction and participatory approach was used, involving young people as peer consultants at various stages throughout the project. Five meetings took place at 4 stages:

- Stage 1 – to ascertain general information about the young people’s experience and knowledge of the project and explore themes they considered important to focus on in the interviews.
- Stage 2 -to design interview schedules for young people and carry out pilot interviews (included in the final interview number)
- Stage 3 -to design interview schedules for project and local authority staff and carry out pilot interviews (included in the final interview number)
- Stage 4 -to reflect on themes emerging from the interview and consider implications

In addition a participatory film making project was run alongside the evaluation. This involved ten young people in making two films about the development of the project and their experiences within it, including both positives and challenges they have encountered. These young people took part in film making workshops, filming days, editing and reviewing the film. (These films are available at [Break2021 CommissionersFilm OnlineV6 AP.mp4 \(vimeo.com\); https://vimeo.com/626583069/991c84dff5](https://vimeo.com/626583069/991c84dff5)).

This report is based on the interview data and work with the five young people in the evaluation research group.

Participants included:

SCSC young people – 17 interviewees

- SCSC project young people who were in their SCSC accommodation at some point in the evaluation period (14)
- SCSC project young people who had recently left or moved on from their accommodation but still receiving support from SCSC workers (3)

Break and SCSC project staff – 18 interviewees

- SCSC project managers (5)
- SCSC project transition workers, including senior transition workers (7)
- SCSC project housing workers, including the strategic housing lead (3)
- Other Break and SCSC workers, including the participation lead, aspiration lead and EWS lead (3)

Partner agency staff – 17 interviewees

- Semi-structured interviews with senior and team managers and commissioning leads from all three LAs (11)
- Semi-structured interviews with young people’s personal advisers from all three LAs (6)

The research team also attended project board meetings throughout the evaluation period to keep up to date with project and partner agency issues and developments.

Strengths and limitations of the evaluation

- This evaluation approach was appropriate for gaining a wide range of detailed feedback on the project and met with covid restrictions on social contact which were in place during the evaluation period. Interviewees were given an opportunity to voice topics or concerns not considered by the researchers and were enabled to speak openly in a confidential setting.
- Despite the short timescale of the project and in the context of the ongoing pandemic, feedback was gained from all relevant groups and most targets for interviewee numbers were met. Particular effort was made to increase numbers of individual interviews with SCSC young people and SCSC young people's personal advisers, compared to the previous evaluation.
- A variety of options for feedback were offered to young people and some staff to ensure maximum comfort with and ease of participation, and a variety of methods used to invite to interview. It is likely that some young people who do not engage with the project or respond to communication from staff would have been over-represented in the group that did not respond to any of the invitations to interview.
- The use of one-time interviews only may result in the interview content being affected by events and moods at the time.
- The short timescale of the evaluation meant that the long-term impact of the project on all the young participants as they continued their journeys to adulthood was not explored, however attempt was made to include young people at different stages in their engagement with the project, including some who had moved on from the project.
- Young people and staff interviewed reflected on their whole involvement with SCSC, so some of the findings will cover the time period of the previous evaluation. However, efforts were made to include young people and staff who had joined the project more recently, as well as to include their reflections on their most recent experiences of SCSC.

Key findings from the young people's interviews

Data was gathered from 17 young people in semi-structured interviews. They were interviewed between December 2020 and August 2021. The sample included an age range of 17-22 (mean 19) and the length of time they had been involved in SCSC varied from one young person who had moved in five weeks previously, to others who had moved on from SCSC after two years involvement. At the time of interview six of the young people had been part of SCSC for two years or more, two had been with SCSC between one and two years, and nine had been with SCSC for less than a year. Of the 17 three had moved on from the project and were able to reflect on their whole journey through SCSC. The rest were

currently living in SCSC accommodation. 15 of the sample were of white British or white European heritage with two of BAME heritage. Twelve of the young people had additional needs including mental health issues, ADHD and developmental delay. Three young people identified as LGBTQ, nine young people said they were heterosexual and the others did not say.

Staying Close Staying Connected

The young people spoke about what 'Staying Close, Staying Connected' meant to them. Their understanding of what Staying Close meant was influenced by their experience of it in SCSC, rather than reflecting the original vision in the Narey report (2016) of allowing young people to live independently, in a location very close to the children's home they lived in previously, with consistency of relationships and the ability to visit the home regularly.

Eight of the young people interviewed had been supported to keep in touch with members of staff of their previous residential placement or previous carers. They described SCSC in terms reminiscent of the original vision.

Kind of just trying to keep like connections with like Break and stuff if you're a Break Care Leaver to like the Care Homes and stuff like that

However, two of the young people felt that SCSC had not supported their connections with previous residential placements, one said that she had only been taken to visit her previous residential placement once in two years. The other pointed to practical difficulties.

The person that came didn't tell me it was the last visit, but I knew that there wasn't any more visits coming, so to speak. I still keep in touch with them, like on the phone and stuff, and I can still do down and visit them. But that's on my own terms, and obviously I would have to pay for my own trip down there and whatnot.

For several young people SCSC meant staying connected, or in some cases reconnecting with, family members. They appreciated the offer of support with birth family relationships, even if they did not take it up.

Literally what it says, to be fair, they've helped me get close to my family and helped me connect with them.

they help quite a lot when it comes to these sort of things you know regular contact with family and you know I got told I think it was a long time ago me and my dad were you know falling out, we weren't really talking at the time and you know they were offering me to talk to my dad and just sort of if we need a contact from Break to come to me, which you know is an amazing gesture but again you know I didn't, I personally didn't utilise it

One young person equated staying close staying connected more with forging new links and social networks within SCSC.

It's like, if we know people but we haven't got in contact with them, it's like how do we connect with people and then obviously like we're all far away from each other we try and reach out to people like, basically like trying to get to know each other, be friends

This wider concept of Staying Close Staying Connected was consistent with staff views of the remit of the project.

Leaving Care and Moving In to SCSC

Leaving care was described as a daunting time for young people. One young person reflected on their feelings about the prospect of leaving their residential home.

I was really sad that I was moving on because, you know, it wasn't a reality for me. Like, I'd always been saying "Oh, I want to move out, I want to do this, I want to do that." But genuinely for me, I don't think it clicked in until I was like "Oh, they've actually found me a placement."

Seven of the young people interviewed did not enter the SCSC project direct from residential children's homes. They had spent time in hostels, semi-independent accommodation, with birth family, and in one case in prison, before entering SCSC, although all but one had previously lived in residential care. One young person stated that he had 21 care placements over the years before coming into SCSC after his relationship with birth family broke down again. Ten young people came into SCSC direct from residential homes.

Several of the young people referred to some choice about accepting SCSC, but it was often described as a choice from limited options, with some suggesting there was a threat of a decrease of funding as they approached their eighteenth birthday. Several stated that they preferred the sound of SCSC model over the option of a hostel.

I had only heard horror stories about those places so I was like, "No, I'll take this." It kind of felt like the best option out of really crappy options.

However, several young people felt that they had made a more positive choice, particularly those who had previous experience of Break residential care.

Because, I've known a lot, obviously a lot about Break I've been with Break the most, so I was just like 'you know what, why not give them another go because they've given me enough support, that has got me this far'

Two young people felt that they had no choice at all, and they were told that they would be moving to SCSC. Some young people experienced a planned transition, they knew that they would be going to Break, but not the location of the housing within Break. They had the opportunity to begin a relationship with their transition worker, before knowing the location of the housing they would be moving into within SCSC. Transitions workers had been able to visit and establish a relationship in the last few months of their residential placement. For a young person who had spent five years in a Break residential placement, then had a planned move and maintained contact with previous staff, the move to SCSC was still challenging but also exciting;

it was a bit weird like, it didn't really, I mean it kind of affected me in the sense that like I would get home and it would just be 'my place' like there wasn't staff that I could talk to if I'd

had like a really bad day at college or like whatever but at the same time it was a little bit like you know 'this is my place now' like 'I'm an adult now'

Housing options

Location and Quality

Whilst many of the young people felt they had some level of choice about moving into SCSC, they had mixed experiences of the choice of housing within the project, both in terms of location of housing and housemates. Some felt that had been given a choice about location, whilst others felt they had to take what they were offered.

I could always say, like, I didn't want to live there or whatever. You could always say that you don't want to live there with either the people or the actual place itself, just like location or whatever

I had a tour around the house, meet the person they're living with and then they can decide with the Social Workers 'I don't want to move here' or 'I do want to move here it's really nice'....[however] I just looked at this one, this was the only one open.

There were mixed views about the location of the housing they were allocated within the project. Whilst some young people wanted to *stay close* to existing networks, others wanted to *move towards* prior connections including birth family, and others wanted to *move away* from existing connections if they were struggling, or felt they were a bad influence.

Nine of the young people were pleased with the general location of the housing they were offered. These included five young people either staying close to existing connections or moving back to areas they had grown up in close to birth family, *'I was born and bred there'*. Three young people were pleased to move away from people and places where they had struggled, *'all the gang members round there and people not getting on together'*.

Four young people said that they were not happy about the locations they had been placed in. The same themes about moving away or staying close were apparent, however in these cases the housing offered was not in accordance with the young person's wish to stay close or move away. One had actively sought to be moved from the area of his previous placement because *'I wasn't getting on in the area and I was gradually going downhill with behaviour and other things like that, so I wanted to kind of remove myself from the area to start afresh and do better'*. He was offered housing within the same area. Two young people felt that they were being offered housing too far from people they wanted to stay close to.

I have everything here when it comes to support network and my friends, my family, I have got everything in [name of city], so for me at seventeen years' old I am thinking to myself 'why would I really want to move out, out of this city to live somewhere else?'

The young people were generally positive about maintenance and the quality of the housing. One young person who had moved on from SCSC contrasted the wait he was currently experiencing to get something fixed, with the quick response from SCSC maintenance team. Young people appreciated the budget to set up the house on moving in, and the help they received from SCSC around the practicalities of moving.

Matching

Seven young people talked positively about the matching process, saying that they had a chance to meet their housemate and felt that efforts had been made to match them with someone with common interests.

they also try and put people together that have been through the same sort of thing.....So they know that then they can all talk to each other and get to obviously know each other's future, like past and stuff and then they can all like be like 'yeah I've been through that' and the other person says 'I've been through that as well' and then that, that causes like, just like a friendship balance and then they're like 'oh let's just become friends then'

Well they matched my personality, my hobbies and their hobbies as well you know and things like that really, culture as well I mean they match, they go quite in depth I would imagine, you know with the matching process you know whether I am suitable for somebody else or not.

However, a few young people felt strongly that the matching process needed to be looked at. Three young people felt that they had little choice about whom they were matched with. These were cases where serious difficulties between housemates had emerged.

I think whoever they had chosen to come into this house had been pre-chosen and not taken into consideration any of our needs, like me or my flatmate's needs. I think they were just "Here you are, there are two people, let's go"

It was like my last housemate, they basically went..., "Oh yes, this person is moving in." Like it or lump it.

Housemates

The predominant model in SCSC is of house or flat shares and all of the young people interviewed had experienced sharing a house, although SCSC has gone on to develop solo occupancy housing.

Six young people had predominantly positive experiences with housemates, and appreciated having someone else to talk to, having someone there who had similar experiences to themselves, being matched with someone with similar interests, and mentioning the residential trips as a means of encouraging a friendship between housemates.

we both went on the Residential and we became best friends

Eleven young people spoke about problems with housemates. These ranged from disputes about messiness and noise, and not abiding by rules of tenancy which were described as irritating but not intractable. Some described just not getting on very well with their housemate, *'we would argue over the tiniest things'*.

However, a sizable minority (four) of the young people spoke of more serious issues including drug use, intimidation and physical violence. Whilst the more serious issues were rare the impact on the young people was pronounced, with four young people stating that

they had asked to move out as a result of their housemate's behaviour. In a few cases where serious difficulties between housemates had emerged the young people felt action had not been taken soon enough when there were threats of violence.

'that was a match made in hell'. I let it be for a little bit to see if maybe it's just our new place. You know, exciting, so we'll see, and then eventually it got to the point where I would start reporting it. And they did nothing. Well, they didn't do too much. They just kept talking to him and he wouldn't f'ing listen. So I eventually said "I want to move out".

[Staff] sat us down and obviously me and the boy don't get on so it was sort of both jumped up, swung for each other, so.

There were mixed views about staff involvement in mediating disputes between housemates. Whilst some young people felt that not enough had been done by staff to help them, others felt that staff would step in, both to prevent situations escalating and to take action when the house share was breaking down. Just under half the young people described staff trying to mediate housemate relationships and felt this was positive.

they have already started getting on to it and they're sorting it out.... I don't know, I don't know yet, there's a House Meeting I think next, not a House Meeting, there's a meeting with [other young person] next week

Break obviously moved him out which then put them back on the smooth line which is like how I basically put it and since then I've had no trouble from it.

Support

The central support provided by the project was through the young person's relationship with their transitions worker. The quality of these relationships was generally rated highly, with twelve of the young people feeling well supported and saying that they had a good relationship with their workers. This was the most often reported positive theme within the interviews and is a highly valued aspect of the service. The support offered was holistic and included building independent living skills (budgeting, cooking), practical and emotional support, help with education, employment and training, support to keep in touch with family and signposting to other services. Some young people described their workers as like family or friends.

So it's like, that's a family sort of thing like a mum and dad and all that, so they will help, they will just check on you, make sure you're not feeling down and not make sure, basically they make sure your health is alright, they'll make sure like 'what have you been doing today?' sort of thing away from the job sort of thing, yes so it's all done by Break this stuff, yeah.

transition workers are just personal. Kind of like friends in a way

Staff commitment was also praised

How hard they try to make sure that they can do the most they can to support us, and if they can't, they will try to find someone who can

Given the centrality of the relationship with the transitions worker it is notable that nine young people raised their concern about staff turnover and consistency. This was partly due to staff leaving the project, but young people felt consistency was also impacted by Covid and furlough.

Flexibility

The young people had mixed views about the amount and flexibility of support offered. Seven of the young people praised the flexibility of the support they received and said that it varied depending on their needs and was responsive.

I could message them right now on WhatsApp saying 'I want to see you, I need to talk to you' and they would be like 'yeah cool'.

but being in Break it's, basically I'm in charge if that makes sense, I can pick the days, the times, the support I need and it's just, they'll offer it if, do you know what I mean

moving in you will get all the independence you want or as much of the support you want basically so it's very flexible.

However, five young people felt dissatisfied with the level of support, and thought it was based on what staff thought was appropriate, rather than their needs. Some felt they were getting too many visits whilst others felt that there were too few. One young person talked about their perception of unfairness that another young person was being visited several times a week, whilst they only had one visit. Some of the young people discussed the banding system which places young people in varying levels of support. They felt it very important that this was discussed with the young person, so that if there was a difference in the level of support that the staff and the young person felt appropriate this could be a starting point for further discussion rather than their band being presented as a staff decision.

A wider package of service provision

Education, Employment and Training

The young people spoke about types of support offered in relation to different aspects of their lives. Most of young people spoke about help that they had received in accessing education or training, or opportunities they had within SCSC that increased their readiness for employment. They spoke of help with filling in forms for education, developing skills, writing their cv. Two young people spoke of apprenticeship opportunities within Break. The coffee van was mentioned by several as helping to increase their confidence and in some cases leading on to paid employment elsewhere.

[it] helped me get my confidence up that I can work and I can do this... the interview was easier because I had the job... the coffee van was one of the big feature points of the interview'

I mean after GCSE's ... I dropped out because of my mental health andI had a really long think about a lot of things and I decided that despite liking the course I wanted to drop out because it didn't really help me mentally, the workload that I was given didn't work for me mentally and emotionally, I wasn't prepared for it, I think I leant too hard on myself, I expected a bit more than I could cope with so I dropped out and ever since then I have struggled to do anything else. I went for a couple of interviews in that gap, never successful, which put me in a downer I didn't want to do anything up until you know when I sort of moved to Break you know they have been very supportive with that sort of thing, so they have been helpful with finding me courses and finding me not necessarily a job because that's what I do, but you know finding something to do basically has helped me progress as a person whether it's academically or not I can't really say.

Emotional Wellbeing Service

Several of the young people spoke about support with wellbeing and mental health. This took various forms including support from the transitions workers and known staff on the project; use of the on call service; support from the emotional wellbeing service and help with referral to external services.

Young people appreciated the flexibility of the support and different means of accessing help with their mental health. They sought support in different ways that suited their individual needs. Five of the young people talked positively about the help they had received from the EWS.

There was this one time where I was, my suicidal limit hit the top and I had a sharp knife right next to me, I grabbed it, looked at it, went like that and I was like thinking 'no' so I picked up my phone, messaged the EWS Worker saying 'I have a knife and I'm holding it right next to me' and then obviously they, literally they came round and was like 'Don't!' so they supported me through that and now my suicidal stuff has gone.

Young people felt they had been able to access help quickly and that it had been useful. They appreciated the fact that the intervention was not time limited and could be accessed numerous times. For one young person their trust in Break as an organisation led them to trust the EWS service,

I know Break has got my back as well, again that's why I wanted to be referred to the Mental Wellbeing Service, they are the most loving service, I think yeah it's emotional but it's also good so I got referred to that because I thought 'okay well I think it's time to try and help myself.'

Three young people felt that the EWS service had not been helpful, one because their worker left and they did not want to open up to a new one, one said that the waiting list was too long, another that they were not trained to help with their specific need.

Finances

Nine of the young people mentioned help with budgeting as important. They described a learning curve when first getting access to their own money, and appreciated support from transitions workers to manage and to learn from their early mistakes.

When I first moved in with Break I'd get my money and then an hour later all the money would be because of that I got put in a lot of debt with Break and Break have been helping me pay off the debts so say like at the moment I pay £80 a month but altogether it's £160.

I can literally go to them and say 'look can you help me with budgeting, can you see what you can do?' They can help me, they can support me but they can't take control of my money, so I'm learning to be in control of my money, it's all they can do to help.

These young people felt that they were becoming more independent in managing finances and understood more about the expenses and budgeting that would prepare them for independent living. A few young people were not sure what they could spend their personalised budget on or felt that what was approved could be inconsistent.

I said, "Oh is there budget?" and they couldn't give me an answer for that. Or I did say, "Is there things you can't buy?" and they didn't give me an answer to that. So I'm still a bit in the dark.

Social Support

The social activities on offer via SCSC are an important part of their offer increasing young people's social networks and potentially bolstering their resilience. Eleven of the young people spoke positively about the activities on offer including residential stays at the coast and a forest centre. This was also an area of provision which young people felt was coproduced, with activities planned on the basis of their suggestions. Residentials and activities were viewed as improving housemates' relationships in some cases and enlarging social networks in others, for example allowing an LGBTQ young person to meet others within SCSC from that community.

I could say like you can go on like days out, meet new people in your similar situation and make new friends, you can keep in touch with people, you can gain friends with it as well so like they have been in your similar, not the same situation but similar situation to you so yeah

it was a great opportunity to meet other young people within the project and also get away and have a little bit of fun. That was pretty much it, and just like being able to take anything away from the experience. So learning different methods of cooking or, you know, learning about other projects within Break, like for example the coffee van

Mentors

Six of the young people spoke of accessing mentors through SCSC and a couple had these alongside independent visitors. One young person spoke of the importance of matching them to the right person. The mentors were appreciated for going out and doing activities together. Some of the young people had the same mentor for a number of years and saw

them as consistent and valued. A few mentioned a peer mentoring system that had been proposed but was not implemented at the point of evaluation.

Leaving SCSC

Three of the young people interviewed had moved on from SCSC but were still in touch with the project – in keeping with their lifelong offer of support. One young person wished that they had stayed a little longer in the project as they felt they would appreciate the greater support, even though they were still in touch with a transitions worker. Two young people felt that they had needed a little more support at the point of moving on. Although they had felt ready for that level of independence and moving out of SCSC, the point of moving was still a big transition. One young person said that they had felt reliant on family which had placed additional stress on those relationships and that not all young people would have family as a fall back at that point.

A few young people still in SCSC were looking forward to moving out and wanted further information from an early point. Two of the young people said that their move and planning for it had been delayed due to covid.

Coproduction

Young people talked about their influence on the development of SCSC, both in terms of feeling listened to when they raised issues about themselves, but also by getting involved in the general development of the project. Examples include involvement in staff interviews, and in planning a new direction for the coffee can. Several young people who were interviewed had some involvement in the young people's forum.

Some young people talked about suggestions they had made which had been enacted, such as using personal budgets for gym memberships. The banding of an independent living tool had been changed so that the levels bronze through to platinum were reversed so that platinum referred to independence rather than maximum support as originally proposed by staff. One young person talked about the importance of the forum minutes being anonymised so that young people felt free to be open about their opinions. This change had been implemented at the suggestion of the young people.

we got to have our input and we got to put that into actual practice

It was apparent that coproduction is a process, and that some issues might be more difficult to address than others. One young person felt that input from young people made a difference to some things, but not others, for example to the range of social activities on offer, but not to housing. Another felt that changes had been made to the matching process, but that further change was needed. Their language however suggested that they trusted SCSC to keep them involved.

we've got like Matching Matrix changed, but apparently still doesn't work But we got that changed.... I can't remember what it was like before, but it actually had young people's questions and opinions put into it.

Only one young person said that they had disengaged from the forum as they did not feel their voice made a difference.

Covid 19

The impact of covid over the period of this evaluation cannot be overlooked. The young people underlined the extent of the impact of the long period of lockdown on their lives and the SCSC service. This impacted every stage of the process from leaving care, to living within SCSC, relationships with housemates and staff, and moving on from the project.

The impact of lockdown was difficult, as described by one young person,

I'm away from everyone else it felt, it made me feel quite demoralised I would say you know my needs went down, you know my mental health rocked, I was on medication at the time so that's what, that's what helped me get through it all I obviously couldn't get out of the house etc. because everything is closed and trying to survive perfectly because you know, I felt lonely, I felt down, I know that there was someone living with me but they were doing their own thing so I didn't really want to disturb them and I was left to my own devices.

One young person felt that their options had been limited by covid on moving in to SCSC from a residential placement, resulting in less choice.

they offered me this placement. It was either this placement or go into emergency housing. At the time I was also applying for [town] social housing, but obviously due to corona I didn't have – like, it just paused. Everything stopped, so I didn't get a chance to choose where I wanted to go. So it was Break or emergency housing.

Relationships with housemates were affected by lockdown. For some young people lockdown offered an opportunity to get to know each other better and helped combat loneliness.

we literally like used to avoid each other and then we kind of like eventually like, about four or five weeks after he moved in it was Lockdown and if it wasn't for Lockdown I think we still wouldn't have actually have even spoken to each other, so it was kind of during Lockdown because we were both so bored!

I mean during the Lockdown it was kind of quite nice I guess because like they were also there, so it's kind of like I got to be with them lot as well so I wasn't like just by myself.

However, unsurprisingly, being close to housemates during lockdown could bring pressure, due to forced proximity and lack of outside stimulation, or differences in compliance with the national lockdown rules causing tension within the house. Staff were also less able to mediate when tensions arose.

like I don't know it's, it's difficult when you live with someone for so long and then you're shoved into lockdown with them you are going to get wound up with them.

One young person spoke about how she and her flatmate had very different ideas about compliance with lockdown rules. She argued a lot with her flatmate and said she was intimidated and threatened.

it was because of the fact that I was saying “You know, you can’t have people round – it’s the second lockdown. I have to protect myself”,

Lockdown also had an impact on the Staying Close offer. One young person spoke about not being able to go in to their previous placement, although workers would meet outside.

I can meet them on the path, so I want to do that and she was like ‘oh we can arrange something’ so that’s what I really want to do, I was like ‘I want to ring up and say ‘look outside I’m here, come out.

Visiting birth family was also more difficult. Young people were concerned about transmitting the virus to older relatives, and to the consequences of self-isolation if someone were to be infected whilst visiting them.

It’s still about and I don’t want mum travelling to [town], get something and then having to self-isolate with me, do you know what I mean like? She can’t self-isolate with me even though there’s two rooms.

The young people generally appreciated the attempts of staff to keep in touch with them virtually over the period of lockdown. One mentioned that they had not been able to get a haircut but appreciated soap making and craft kits provided. Another said that cooking ingredients had been dropped off and several mentioned the zoom hangouts that were set up for them to meet online. Some mentioned the daily text that was sent.

A few young people felt that their moving on plan had been delayed, but understood that options were limited.

At the moment we can’t do too much because we don’t know what’s happening with the ‘rona

Young people’s suggestions for change to SCSC

At the end of the interview young people were asked for their suggestions for changes to SCSC. Their suggestions have been arranged by theme.

Amount of support/flexibility

- Workers not come round so often and not let themselves into house/give young people more freedom
- More contact with TW
- Ensure enough transitions workers so that if one person is in crisis, there is enough to go round.

Training

- Training for staff on de-escalation/mediation
- Staff training about mental health

Housing and matching

- More one bed options
- Better matching

- Have trial before moving in with another young person
- Allow other young people to sleep over
- Closer monitoring of behaviour when problems emerge in house share
- Be a bit stricter about drugs in house
- Make sure consequences are realistic – for example around paying rent or damage in the house.

Organisation

- Unite all the areas into one service
- Make sure young people are treated equally
- More events/residentials
- Keep on asking young people for feedback

Key Findings from SCSC staff and local authority staff interviews

A positive option for care leavers

The previous evaluation suggested the SCSC project provided a positive option for care leavers and the two partner agencies involved were keen to embed the Staying Close approach in their service offer. This was reiterated in the current evaluation. In fact partner agencies would like for the provision to be extended to other care leavers and feel that they would benefit from this model of support.

Staff were generally very positive about the project overall, sharing examples of committed project staff, a commendable value base and a varied range of services for many of their young people

Break for us has been a lifeline for quite a few of our young people. ... I just don't know where [my young person] would be if it wasn't for Break, to be honest. He'd be one of the young lads who would probably get eaten alive in [another provision in the area] and just hasn't got the capacity at the minute to live independently...he's doing really well there... I think they are doing a lot ... when I sort of dig down or we talk about it I'm going 'wow you've done that'. (PA)

I think Staying Close Staying Connected is one of the best projects I've seen. I really appreciate it, I think it's very beneficial and I would do anything to be able to extend it further (Senior Manager, LA)

All LA staff referred to having few accommodation options available for care-experienced young people approaching or turning 18 years old if they are not ready to go into independent living. Other choices available were described as large hostels with supported living (such as routine health and wellbeing checks) but not flexible and targeted support. The format of large group accommodation was deemed to be unsuitable for some young people, who need the small, intimate and more gradual steps towards independence offered by the project.

The primary thing I would say is any of our young people that have entered Staying Close Staying Connected have benefitted from avoiding alternative accommodations that would definitely not have suited their needs, such as a hostel. (PA)

I think it's unusual to have that level of support and every time a head of service says we have managed to get them into Staying Close Staying Connected they look so pleased and reassured. So, I'm assuming it's unusual and unique. (Senior manager, LA)

SCSC staff too were positive about the project and felt that the team and the wraparound services make a significant, beneficial difference to the lives of most of their young people. The model of the service rests on a systemic and relationship-based approach, aiming to offer a holistic service and consistency of relationships.

[the project is] a massive benefit for them, a massive benefit. We had young people, they came into the Project and they didn't even wash, brush their teeth or take a shower or wash

their clothes. So many things, and they left independent. So, when they moved on, they moved their job or, attending the college, being independent, yeah, I think it's a massive, massive help for them. Even if they just think 'oh we are there for them and we listen'. (TW)

Staying Close

Although a key project aim was to help young people remain in touch with past carers, many leaving care may not want or be able to continue relationships formed within their previous residential home, or with other past carers. As in the previous evaluation there was recognition from LA and SCSC managers that young people with care experience instead often tend to “gravitate back to family”.

Staying Close and Connected is slightly different than what the government wanted from it really, so a lot of our young people are not... near [the] residential home that they have come from. But that's not what young people particularly want... Coming back to their roots is what they want, not being in Coventry or Birmingham or Kent, or wherever the home is. They want to come back, they want to be near family, they want to be near their old foster carers, say, or general connections. (senior manager, LA)

Martin Narey's sort of pure idea of Staying Close was about [a] flat they'd have down the road from the children's home so they could pop in and have tea, that just wasn't what young people wanted, they just, they didn't want to stay close to their children's home particularly, they hadn't, it wasn't like they'd lived there for five years and that was, you know often they'd had quite a lot of, like quite a lot of the young people we had move in lived in many different children's homes and it might be the home before the one they were in when they left or they'd been moved out into supported accommodation before they'd left, before they came to us, so they had quite fractured relationships but the thing, the ties that were strongest for them were their families (SCSC senior manager)

Key benefits of the SCSC provision for young people

Relationship-based individualised, flexible support.

All LA and SCSC staff talked positively about the ability of SCSC transition workers to provide holistic, empathic, flexible and tailored support for young people, underpinned by an explicit value base. Staff in the SCSC team were felt to have shown a commitment to finding ways to engage young people, so that they were able to fully benefit from the direct work of the project and help develop it further. There was also evidence from both LA and SCSC staff interviews that the SCSC team was working flexibly with young people who were not so receptive to the project, offering services and a style of working that maximised engagement.

.... I think it offers young people something that is actually more... 'bespoke' it's much smaller and more tailored rather than actually you're one of a few hundred that are sitting in a hostel... and I think the way in which they actually engage young people quite early on in

terms of engagement about what your room will look like, painting it helps develop the ownership (Senior manager, LA).

I think the flexibility we have, and the autonomy, to plan our own sessions and do what we want to do with the young people makes a real difference... you can do, the smallest activity with them...take them out, go to the cinema, go for a walk, take them to the beach - and that can be one of the most beneficial sessions.It makes it easier to do your job well because you don't constantly have 'oh you have got to achieve this outcome; you have got to achieve this outcome'. You can just do some relationship building sessions, which can make all the difference to the young people we're working with. (Senior TW)

LA and SCSC staff commended the strong commitment from the project to make things work for young people and persist empathetically through their challenges.

For me the value base of Break is really good... they don't want to let young people down. Often in children in care you get phone calls saying 'right I'm giving notice now' and they leave the kid outside... I've had that regularly. So, young people have experienced being let down...And I think Break wants to stop that...I always admired that value base. (Senior manager, LA)

Our young people often have additional challenges that go alongside most young people leaving care... if you look at the providers that are on the supported accommodation framework, their tolerance for some of the behaviours and challenges that they have with young people is, is much less than what we're able to do...we've got quite a bespoke service there because we've got the appetite and willingness to be able to work through a lot of those things for a lot longer and recognise that it's part of their journey...working with them on a strengths based approach ... (SCSC senior manager)

The support provided by SCSC staff was seen to help provide a long-lasting network of support that eases transitions into and out of the SCSC homes. It extends beyond early adulthood via Break's lifelong offer.

What I really like about the Staying Close Staying Connected project is that they engage in people before they reach 18 and it helps with that cliff-edge scenario. (Senior manager LA)

I like the fact that it's not short-term either, they don't kind of do a piece of intervention work and then close it. That they're there for the long haul...That stickability of 'we're going to be there and you don't need to worry we're not going anywhere and we'll continue to work with you'. I'm not aware of any other Service that offers that level of stability. (senior manager, LA)

Whilst the attention to key transitions, moving into SCSC and continuity of support when moving on from SCSC was generally appreciated there was some indication that different transition workers may be more proactive than others, with a suggestion that quieter young people might stay beneath the radar and not be encouraged towards more independent living.

I'm concerned about how [one young man has] progressed within the Break if I'm honest. He's been with them for a long, long time...and I think he's just been left a bit...there's been

lots of different workers all the time going in ...and he's got nobody... he doesn't make friends... It's very comfortable in the Break house...[he] keeps quiet, doesn't make a big fuss, but does nothing... I think in his head he will stay there ...I would say that's not an overall thing, I think it depends on which house they're in and who is overseeing it... (senior manager LA)

As the project moves moves into its third year it might be expected that there would be more attention and learning focused on later stages of the young person's journey through SCSC, including moving on from the project to independent living.

I feel really proud of the work that the team have done...I think the work that the team are doing is brilliant...since June at least we've had in and around or above 70% of young people move on into their own tenancies, which, you know, in the first couple of years of the Service was around 30%. So, you know, I think it feels like things are moving in the right direction and you know we're constantly trying to fine tune things and improve things for our young people. (SCSC senior manager)

However, there was a concern that moving on young people to independence and their own flat did not always work smoothly, impacted by the speed of trying to accommodate those moving in. Pressure on accommodation may impact the experience of significant transitions for young people.

Although we strive to always listen to the young people and make sure they're at the centre of everything we do, I don't think that's always true sometimes. I think if we've got a referral that we're being told 'you need to move in', sometimes it's done at the detriment of another young person because we're...backed into a corner and don't have any options... One example I can think is that we were told we had to move someone in from [x] and move another young person out who was moving on to their own flat. It was her home, and I wanted that to be a really nice experience for them...but it ended up being really rushed and panicked because we had to get this room ready and I don't think that was right for that young person. ...maybe we have got some work to do around the way moving on is going to work in the future. (Senior TW)

The attention to the moving on stage of the project is suggested by the development of the future network, which extends the principles of Staying Close to those leaving the project by having an open-ended lifelong offer, whilst also recognising that young people are best served by developing their own support networks.

The future network part is something that we hadn't really accounted for in the infancy of [the programme]. It was around those historic connections [rather than]...supporting young people to access different things in the community so they can build an organic network... Young people will get the lifelong offer but staff don't stay forever. In ten years' time...it probably isn't going to be the transition Worker or housing Worker that they've got that relationship with so, if they can use [our worker's] support to develop those more organic networks, then that supports them in their journey and then we're still there as well if they need us. (SCSC senior manager)

A Wider package of service provision

Along with the core support provision of a TW and HW for all young people involved in SCSC, young people also have the opportunity to engage in a range of wider services. Some (but not all) LA staff were aware of this wider service offer, which includes the emotional wellbeing service, mentoring and the opportunities team.

There were positive references from several LA and SCSC staff to the EWS provided by Break. They highlighted its flexible way of working with young people on their terms: in their office, for example, or offering visits to the young person's home, 'walk and talk' sessions and brief introductory meetings along with the TW.

This particular young person, who's a bit complex...had basically told the [NHS] mental health team to 'f off'. And the mental health team basically said in the meeting last week... 'they won't stand for it' and they're going to explore whether or not they can continue to offer her a service... [SCSC] offers something a little bit softer, so, while this worker is not a mental health practitioner, she is there to offer that emotional support and that guidance to that young person - even if she has told the mental health team to 'go do one'. (team manager, LA)

[The Emotional Wellbeing provision], that's a very easy service [to access] and what I find with young people is - for anything not too complex in mental health - if you're going to the GP or something, you're waiting a long time. If I do a referral to Break's wellbeing service ... the next week they're arranging visits to go and see them for a 12-week course. And it's very tailored, it's very good. ... It's a creative approach - it's not just one-size-fits-all - which does work really well. (PA)

The EWS has recently been extended and adapted to offer longer-term work. This is in recognition that the young people in the service may have experienced trauma and have deep-rooted difficulties that are not easily addressed by a short term intervention. There are now options for more open-ended interventions.

Some LA staff and all SCSC staff noted the value of some of the work experience opportunities that Break can offer SCSC young people via the opportunities team. For some young people several steps may be needed before they are employment ready and SCSC has developed opportunities for young people to engage with activities that help them gain relevant experience and gain confidence.

We actually have some young people they're almost agoraphobic in their behaviour... they rarely leave their homes, they have such high levels of anxiety, negative emotions, unresolved trauma, real barriers that are very pervasive...young people who would not do anything around EET have been saying 'yes' to the coffee van... if they can do something work related which comes under the Break heading it just feels safer for them, it feels safe enough for them to say 'yes'... (TW)

Many LA staff also were aware of and spoke very positively about the range of social opportunities on offer, such as the woodland bushcraft days, residential stays at a large house on the coast, barbeques and sports activities. These have the benefit of offering routine, social interaction, and scaffolding peer relationships.

They've done BBQs... yoga in the garden...he's been camping...I think they do lots of activities, and they are really... supportive and [he's] gained some of his confidence...When he first moved in, he was a gamer... he was doing gaming at night and sleeping in the day. And by putting certain activities in, they've got him out of that (PA)

SCSC staff interviews also identified other aspects of SCSC that were felt to be beneficial to young people. The financial benefits of the project were recognised and discussed in several interviews, with reference to the inadequacy of the universal credit system in providing a motivation to work.

In a lot of supported living, semi-independent places... it's not worth them working because they lose housing benefit ... [The cost of their accommodation is] too much for Housing Benefit, so they [would] end up paying thousands of pounds... a thousand and a half say a month for it... A lot of our young people will go 'well, why should I?' and actually I agree... But if you're in a Break property that doesn't happen. They can do as many hours as they like and they don't have to pay any more... so the young person... can work and Break absorb the cost... That really encourages them to work. (senior manager, LA)

Other financial benefits include access to a personalised budget (provided as part of the Department for Education funding) and an additional provision to support a flexible plan of personal activities and time with TWs.

Break recently introduced a 'Stay Connected' worker who are able to provide more creative and targeted support to re-build SCSC young people's social networks and connections with family, using a 'shared lives', or family group conferencing model. This is in addition to the Staying Connected Grant. Both the grant and the support of the staying close worker had been taken up by some young people and staff felt that this has been helpful.

We obviously have the Staying Connected Grant, which can fund previous placements to still come and see their young people.....and obviously we've got the Staying Connected Co-ordinator, which can support some young people with their links to their family... one young person...was doing that, and he found that quite beneficial - to connect with, really old connections, like, a teacher from school or something. I know he found that beneficial, so I do think we do quite a good job with it. (senior TW)

Overall the provision of support by SCSC was not felt to duplicate the work of the local authorities, although some LA staff felt they had internal provision to support family networking. In the previous evaluation all the LA managers and the one PA who took part commented that SCSC workers' direct work with young people was enabling PAs to refocus their time with the SCSC young people and free-up capacity to work with other young people (Dixon et al 2020). A greater number of PAs gave feedback in this current evaluation, all of whom felt that the support of the transition and housing workers alleviated worries about their young people, and in some cases reduced the time they needed to spend with them. This was noted to be a particular help during lockdown, when the knowledge that they had company and support was very reassuring.

...knowing that he has a Support Worker and that he's in a supported placement such as Staying Close Staying Connected allows me a little bit to take a bit of a back seat because I know...he's got that layer of support. (PA)

Housing

Location

A challenge raised in the previous evaluation was the pressure exerted from social care teams to secure housing, which can take time to obtain, and may not match the LAs own care planning processes. Insufficient provision in certain locations is a continuing challenge for LAs who have young people with family connections and a desire to stay in those locations. A need for houses in these areas had been raised and discussed in project board and referral meetings and it was felt that the project was making some attempt to meet the need in this area, despite short supply.

The capacity isn't there and that is a number of issues. To be fair to Break and ourselves we do have a challenge in housing...what I mean by that is because we are talking about social landlords here, there has been a lot of reticence and sort of anxiety in [our area] about offering a house up for care leavers, there's a lot of stigma around care leavers and their behaviour...which has been really challenging for Break, I have met with housing, as has Break... we jointly have those meetings to try and move things on with housing...to try and instil that confidence in them and we had to do a lot of conversations about how we would work together (Senior manager LA)

It was recognised by some LA managers and PAs that some young people who have been placed in residential care out of county may not want to come back to their own LA. Some want a fresh start or to be placed closer to particular family members or past carers. LA staff appreciated the fact that the project's housing is spread across three different counties and therefore houses in any location could be considered for young people coming from any of the three LAs.

The referral process

The previous evaluation suggested that communication and planning with the LA social work teams could be improved, with clarity around the ethos and parameters of the project in terms of both the target group of young people and the need for effective forward planning for those coming into the project. From both the LA and SCSC staff perspective in this current evaluation, the SCSC team were said to be raising awareness that the SCSC offer was not a remedial or crisis post-care accommodation option. Both LAs and SCSC are gaining a better understanding of the type of young people who are appropriate for - and can benefit from - the project and its provision. They prioritise young people's current attitude and relationships in referral decision making, rather than past actions, substance abuse, involvement in county lines etc. A recent history of aggression towards staff and other young people would be a significant concern.

We've had quite a few of our referrals accepted into the Project. Some have worked and...the ones that haven't have tended to be those young people that have a high level of need and more behaviours that I suppose is difficult for other young people to live with. (manager, LA)

There were still some references to referral pressures. A couple of LA staff indicated that, in a world of limited choice, there will always be pressure to accommodate. There was some recognition that the referral process was being adapted and SCSC was being stricter on its acceptance criteria.

They have taken some highly complex...individuals, I have to say, and they are probably learning a little bit from that... I am noticing they're turning them away... and it's not in any horrible way but I think they're realising that the outcomes aren't good, that it seems to end not well, so I think that they do adapt...There's quite a few I've got that I would like to place there and probably have put forward and they've said 'no' but then on the other hand it's probably right if they don't think it's right.... (senior manager, LA)

There was evidence of collaborative working with agencies with more detailed information collected on referral and better communication between SCSC and LA managers. LA and SCSC staff had developed a system to ensure longer lead in times to enable appropriate referrals and for young people to experience a planned move with clarity about the offer that they were taking up. A more personalised approach to the referral process had developed to include SCSC manager attendance at LA meetings, discussions with LA and residential home staff on the ground rather than making an assessment solely from paperwork, and meetings with potential young people (online during lockdown restrictions).

I think it's a very good referral system. The Heads of Service know it very well and support the teams and have good relationships with Break...that relationship is ongoing with the Staying Close Staying Connected Head of Service - they work really well. (senior manager, LA)

The interview process was really, really good, it was...quite informal but made her feel very, very at ease, real good explanations of what the Service was about, how much support she'd be getting etc. etc. (PA)

House share

A key issue which was consistently raised was related to the fact that house share with other young people in SCSC was a core feature of the housing offer.

The house share model offers the opportunity for young people to develop relationships and peer networks, potentially building resilience, and is viewed as an important part of the SCSC model, rather than a choice led by limited resources. Staff spoke about the benefits of sharing with one or two other young people. Positive aspects of house-sharing referred to included combatting loneliness, gaining friends, learning to get on with others and consider other's wishes, and providing motivation for tidiness. The transitions workers aim to support the young people in managing relationships with housemates.

I do like the model ... young people who have left Care do feel they fall off a cliff and they feel there's nobody else like them, they're on their own, they're quite isolated so actually having a shared model in terms of a shared house ... there is another kind of strand to that where you can get follow-up support and emotional support around somebody else who has had similar life experiences to yourself (Senior manager LA)

I did some specific conflict resolution training... it's a skill that we want to try to pass on to them, to have the thought process, the empathy of putting yourselves in the other shoes and trying to understand things from the other person's perspective...something might have really really really annoyed them but at least if they can understand the thought process that's lead them to that a little bit then they might come from a more understanding place. But also to try to establish some coping mechanisms with the young people you know 'if this happens what do you do?' 'whether you take yourself away, take yourself outside for a little while, take yourself away to your bedroom' you make that sort of positive choice to withdraw yourself from the situation. (Senior TW)

However, a worrying aspect of house sharing, which was noted to have been experienced by some young people in the previous evaluation, was conflict and sometimes bullying behaviour between housemates. There was indication that some difficult experiences had occurred in the period since the last evaluation, in some cases exacerbated by lockdown.

Just at the point covid started, so [my young man] had been on the waiting list for a place. The place came up and it was because there was nowhere else rather than 'oh this could be a good match'... and that ended up really bad for both young people... lots of troubles in the house etc. etc. The scheme were supporting as much as they could be, but this was covid, so the restrictions... It was a very covid-impact kind of thing and they did move him to another place in [X]...because it was really challenging in that particular house...but the same kind of thing happened again...because [covid meant] there was real limits on what support could go in. (PA)

I do encourage shared living as long as it works... but a lot of Care Leavers do struggle with relationships. It's hard because they really do struggle with attachment and they panic and everything is very extreme. (PA)

In response to the significant challenges of house sharing by some young people (as noted above) SCSC has recent started to take on some one-bed properties, both as an offer for young people currently sharing a house but ready to move on with some support, and for those coming into the service for the first time who would struggle with a house share. The one-bed properties were widely recognised - by both LA and SCSC staff - to be a beneficial option for young people, and could also provide stability if the tenancy could be passed over to the young person when they are ready for greater independence, avoiding a need to move.

I think the [one-bed] flat idea is the way forward. I think moving young people that are ready into a flat of their own, with support, and when they become tenancy-ready...is a real incentive for [them]. (senior manager, LA)

We have got some young people now in the Service... [who] ...fall between the cracks of Adult Services ... We are able now to - with some Housing Associations - take on a one-bed property, keep the tenancy but then eventually that young person take that tenancy on...so, if, for example, a young person needed Break support... for longer than a year, then we could do that because ...it would fit with the lifelong offer and the housing aspect would be paid for through Housing Benefit, so... that wouldn't be a barrier either... We're able to potentially provide these young people in single occupancies with a home for life. If they work with us

and develop the skills to be tenancy-ready, then that tenancy can transfer into their own tenancy and that then is not another move for that young person. (SCSC senior manager)

Through building relationships with housing providers, SCSC now has control of some one-bedroom flats and has put requests in for others. This was noted to have been a challenge, as the locations the project covers have a shortage of housing, and there have been great difficulties accessing single occupancy housing in particular. However, SCSC has recently managed to meet with a local housing provider with significant housing stock in the south of one county who has agreed to work with them. The aim is to take on five further single occupancy properties from this provider over the next two years.

Matching

The importance of good matching was stressed by interviewees. There was indication that inappropriate matching had occurred in the past, leading to some difficult experiences for the young people involved. The matching system has been reviewed and SCSC now appears to be delaying filling rooms if the match is not right. Efforts have been made to ensure that matching is a joint decision, helped by relationship-building with the LA PA and discussion with the young people affected. It was felt that this had increased the success ratio of matches between young people. Many staff interviewees (managers and frontline staff) feel the matching process is currently good and/or improving and has helped to avoid some of the issues between housemates that had been experienced in the past.

You can never really predict how two young people will get on or what or what will or won't work, I guess the only thing that we can do is as we have started doing now, ask them at those initial meetings 'what are your absolute sort of red flags?' 'What would really, what would really, really trigger you into whatever behaviours' and if they're listing things and they're saying 'oh loud music, people being up late at night' and we're thinking of moving them into somebody who likes loud music and staying up all night then we can nip that in the bud (Senior TW)

If possible, taking up opportunities for young people to move into a house at the same time was felt to be ideal, and where this happened recently (led by SCSC) it was referred to as very positive. Where this was not possible managing introductions was felt to be important.

They were very, very careful for her and the other young person, her housemate, to move in at the same time... They were really, really adamant ...that they're moving at the same time if at all possible. So, you've got no one taking 'ownership' of the house... we...did a pre-meeting and they'd met before they actually moved in together as well. So, the preparation was really good and it's made a big difference... (PA)

Boundaries

A concern was raised about getting the balance between allowing young people to make mistakes and supporting them through this, and providing clear boundaries about what was acceptable in terms of behaviour and paying rent. It was acknowledged that Break is responding to feedback and has implemented a new structure for managing housing where

young people are at risk of eviction, which has clear consequences for young people and a clear process for young people to understand and follow. It was felt by both SCSC and LA managers that the new structure is improving practice and making a clear difference to young people.

... they get to know that Break are a soft touch, as they might see it... They're easy going, so rent and things like that they don't pay. They didn't use to pay at all and there was no consequence...[or] 'tough love' that's the word I'm looking for... I think they've recognised that recently. I think there's a new manager... if you're not doing what you say you're going to do you go to panel and you might get evicted... and it's worked, and I'm seeing a much more positive response from young people...It's much better...I think that's something that hopefully Break are learning... I don't think Break should see it as a failure that someone has been evicted. (Senior manager, LA)

SCSC senior managers felt there was now a clearer distinction between staff transition worker and housing worker roles for young people, which together helped provide a balance between meeting the needs of young people for support, advocacy and empathy but also ensuring they experienced firm boundaries and consequences of their actions.

The Impact of Covid

The evaluation took place during the dramatic changes resulting from the covid pandemic. This evaluation must be understood in this context. It was clearly difficult for the project managers to balance staff needs and safety along with the often increased day-to-day concerns for the vulnerable young users of the project. There was some evidence that the quality of the SCSC service provision and staff experiences may have been adversely affected, particularly at the start of the first lockdown period.

I think one thing that was a difficulty was the referrals. I think the referrals dropped off because...we used to have referral meetings in person ...[having virtual meetings] was a challenge, but I think again there absolutely are benefits to some virtual working as well as face-to-face. It means that we can be in more meetings and things like that... In the midst of Covid, especially last year, I think it was, certainly for me it felt like one of the most challenging professional times I've had. (SCSC senior manager)

The impact was huge on young people's mental health and them [being told]: 'you can't socialise, you can't do this, you're not working, you're not doing this, that and the other. You just need to sit in and do nothing.' (TW)

At the same time there was also evidence that SCSC provided valuable support during lockdown, and this was appreciated by LA partners. This included regular texts and phone calls, virtual social gatherings and activity packs delivered to homes. Some young people may have been more receptive to - or benefited from - this type of support than others.

When the first lockdown happened, young people really needed just to...talk about it or just...be a bit, you know, say 'what's going on?' Like, 'what is happening?' So, I think we adapted quite well ... When the lockdown happened...we sent out a daily message through

work days at 10 o'clock with...anything from...an activity they could do, like a cool website with something to keep them entertained...it could be like a playlist with music all put together... Because young people were telling us that they needed more of that kind of...reassurance and that daily check in... We also did kind of a weekly catch-up on Zoom, which was very well attended at the beginning...and then as time went on digital fatigue definitely set in. But we tried to be consistent and so we continued to offer it... We kept it going because we felt it important that that space was held... There were young people that met and became friends on-line during those sessions; there were young people that had been friends before but had fallen out and that were connected again and who built up those relationships again. (SCSC worker)

The SCSC project organisation and staffing

Staff structure and organisation

A challenge related to the geographical spread of the project and its work with three large LAs was ensuring an operational consistency of the SCSC service; this was an issue raised by Break managers in the previous evaluation, which recommended increased consultation and joint working. The project is now overseen by one operational service manager which was felt to have improved consistency across regions, although it was also acknowledged by many LA and SCSC staff in current interviews that there was still a greater provision of SCSC services and events in one SCSC city.

The coffee van is great...my frustration is that not everyone within the Service gets to see enough of that... I know it's been...extra hard with the pandemic...but...that team needs to be more mobile... It's a bit of a frustration that it is...just based in [city] really... It is frustrating when I know there's young people in different areas of the Service, in different locations that would really benefit from the value that that adds... I don't feel like everyone gets that value. (SCSC senior manager)

Recruitment and embedding the team was described as challenging but there was a sense that things were moving in a positive direction with the right staff now in place. There has also been a shift in focus from setting up the overarching project towards a clear focus on roles and responsibilities for the day to day running of the project. A few members of SCSC staff (at different levels of the organisation) felt that the current SCSC staff structure may be 'management heavy' and that there can be lack of clarity around whether to take issues to the senior TW or regional deputy manager.

You've got a transition worker and then you have got a senior and then you have got a deputy and then you have got a manager, it just feels quite excessive... (SCSC senior manager)

Staff satisfaction and expertise

The SCSC project had been significantly affected by a turnover of its SCSC transition workers across the early period covered in the previous evaluation. This was noted to be a

considerable challenge to the SCSC project's early ability to provide a consistent service to young people, given the the importance of relationships between young people and staff at the core of the SCSC model. Staffing difficulties were felt in part to be due to the project drawing in an existing team from the Break charity's 'Moving On' service, who were not able to fully adapt to the new project and to the level of needs of the new cohort, compounded by difficulties in staff recruitment and retention. It was also noted in the previous evaluation that the modest salaries of SCSC Transition Workers were perhaps not commensurate with the emotional impact of their roles and the level of responsibility they held for the young people. A high turnover of staff was still referred to in a couple of interviews in the current evaluation.

There's quite a lot of turnover of staff, if I'm honest, so sometimes that leads to...a little bit of disjointedness happening where plans aren't always pushed through or there's lots of really good ideas and some not always come [to fruition]... (senior manager, LA)

Following the previous evaluation feedback, the salary level of transition workers was re-assessed and increased, and the workforce was said (by several staff) to have become more settled in the recent times, with all vacancies filled at the end of the current evaluation. All transition workers and the two housing workers spoken to as part of this current evaluation were very positive about their jobs and role in the young people's lives, considering the scope of their role to be appropriate for and beneficial to the young people. They also appreciated support for their role from managers.

I feel that we have extremely good team support from the word 'go' and that is always accessible, and I think it's the key to being able to work effectively, to be able to communicate constantly with your managers and that's one of my primary experiences of Break. Meeting the young people in the first weeks was quite alarming in many ways...you can be given background information, but it doesn't prepare you to meet that person and how they are and how they will feel about you... That's where the communication comes in because you can be reassured that it's okay and that's the way they are... The other thing that my manager did promise me from the very start was that everything can turn on a sixpence and that's what I've discovered... They do just skip along and suddenly something will change and you suddenly see yourself and that young person in a completely different place from where you were expecting to be... You have to get used to not feeling that it's your failure - that that is just where life is and that's the way it is for them particularly - and then just to work along with that, help them then from that place. (TW)

The transitions workers and housing workers interviewed for this evaluation came from a variety of backgrounds, including education, business and social care, and interviewees felt that this added to the overall strengths of the workforce, allowing each other to call on help from others, if required. All were receiving mandatory and optional training across a range of skills and those spoken to for this current evaluation were generally very happy with the staff induction, support and training opportunities received. Recent training has focussed on topics such as adult safeguarding, suicide, self-harm, substance abuse, trauma and child criminal exploitation. A couple of specific areas of training gaps were identified, in the areas of mental health and more training on addiction. One suggestion made by an SCSC worker was that there

should be more central resources to call upon, such as budgeting sheets to support TWs in planning sessions.

Break's workforce development procedures enables workers to complete courses appropriate for their role and career development paths. Deputy managers were able to undertake a Level 5 management course, senior TWs a Level 4 in management course, transition workers a youth work qualification, housing workers a specialist housing qualification. This was referred to as positive but also made their schedule extremely full.

The wide geographical spread of the project's remit also affected staff workload; workers were often required to cover large distances to travel to young people or transport them to activities across the region, all eating into the time available to support the young people (staff travel time was said to be included in the allocated hours for young people).

I think travel is a massive issue because we are based in [x] so if you're in [x] and then you need to visit a young person in [y], that's an hour and a half drive. So, we're spending a large amount of our time travelling to see these young people and it eats into what could be some really good work. (Senior TW)

Internal communication and support

SCSC staff feedback suggested that the organisation generally listens to and responds to staff feedback and suggestions, however there are some remaining issues with internal communication, particularly to ensure consistency across the three areas when new strategies and policies are being implemented.

A recent development which was suggested to be improving internal collaboration and communication in this area has been monthly Case Management Meetings with the Deputy Managers, Senior TWs and the Housing Lead, as well as representatives from the Opportunities Team, the lead Emotional Wellbeing Service Practitioner and the Mentoring Lead. This was felt to enable sharing of expertise from different levels and specialities, as well as involve all regions within the SCSC provision.

Inter-Agency collaboration

The previous evaluation highlighted examples of positive collaboration between the project and external LAs, and this seems to have continued and improved throughout this current evaluation period. At the planning and early implementation stages of the project, Break had brought relevant stakeholders together to consult on the project in the form of a project board. This board had continued to meet online quarterly throughout the current evaluation and was well attended by all three LAs. In addition, partly in response to management and practice staffing changes, there had been further external visits from SCSC staff into agencies to explain and publicise the model. These had been welcomed and were said to have improved referrals and understanding of the project.

They're very good at communicating with us and very keen to work alongside us. (senior manager, LA)

Regular meetings with key managers and commissioners within each LA had also started or developed within the last year, resulting in improved communication around and plan for referrals. There was still some indication that not *all* LA staff were fully aware of the project's provision or had a clear understanding of the model's remit.

Collaborative working on the frontline

The previous evaluation picked up some indication that LA leaving care PAs and SCSC workers were working jointly with young people to ensure a consistent and streamlined approach. This current evaluation successfully managed to gather a larger number of PA perspectives from all three LAs, some of whom gave evidence of good communication and relationships between TWs and PAs, and positive working relationships.

For me, personally, I have a very good relationship with the transition workers and the transition worker manager, so at any point...if we're working on something with the young person...we're both...working together [and] there's a lot of communication there and a lot of meetings... I think that goes back to the PAs - whether they have the relationship with the transition worker. I definitely know...what's been done and what we're working on, because I like to work with them together really in support around that young person... (PA)

However, some PAs commented that they were not always kept in touch about the work that SCSC is doing with their young people – including leisure activities, people staying over in the home and housing applications. Some PAs did not know how many hours each young person was receiving from their TW per week or how often the TWs visit. Some did not know about the EWS or whether Break could provide work experience opportunities. It was also mentioned that they did not always know what targets the project was working towards for the young person, what the consequences were for not meeting the targets, or how long the young people would be able to stay in the project. Some interviewees were fairly new in their role (or based in the LA that joined the project more recently) and it may be that some lack of understanding may link to missing out on historical information events. However, a general lack of day-to-day communication around young people with individual PAs was evident in some cases.

I know [his]worker... I do get more regular contact but then I'll get a period with no contact ... I know they do support him; they will take him to the bank, they've got various bits sorted out, they do support him to try and address some of the issues that we've identified. I think they have regular meetings themselves with him, but... outside of what I discuss with the worker, if there are other tasks and things they are trying to achieve, I'm not aware of that... So, there's a bit of a separation there and I'm sure there's an overlap because we're all... supporting him in the same areas really... The more I think about it, I have no idea what their plan is. I know what my plan is and I know how they engage in my plan and how it's in my perspective but I have no insight as to 'have they an alternative plan? Are there aspects of their plan that I'm not aware of that are worth consideration?' I don't know. (PA)

The issue with communication seemed to mainly be around the proactivity of communication. It was reported that the SCSC staff generally respond quickly to communication from LAs and they are happy to work with LA independent living skills systems. Some PAs are proactively organising joint visits to improve this or agreeing a process for updating them.

Collaboration and support from other external agencies

The SCSC project was previously noted to be strengthening links with the police to develop project support for those young people identified to be at risk of exploitation or criminality. The relationship with police has been a recent focus, with a senior manager attending local safeguarding board meetings. There was reference to building links with local education and employment services. Relationships with housing were also said to be improving. However, accessing support from external agencies in relation to mental health was more challenging, due to the national pressure on services and high threshold criteria.

Mental health...that's a real struggle...across the board it's just a general issue of society isn't it? There is just not enough support. I have found with young people that they...fall in-between services. ...I took a young person to the doctors...multiple times to get referred to something. So, he got referred to [the local mental health service] and it didn't meet their criteria so we're back to square one again... And then with another young person, I took her to the doctors three or four times, and she was saying 'I am really not okay, like I feel like I'm going to have a mental health crisis' and then a week later...they had to call the police out because she'd gone missing... (Senior TW)

Coproduction

The project team strives to include and respond to young people's views and feedback, facilitated by a participation worker who joined the team early in the Project's development. This role was aided by a young person in the project, who was taken on as an apprentice for a year. As well as suggesting and helping to organise activities, the apprentice was able to offer more prepared and consistent input at a strategic level, for example, with project meetings and higher-level discussions. The young person employed in the role was viewed to be 'phenomenal' and helped to fully embed user involvement in the core professional team of the project.

The apprenticeship offer was temporarily suspended after the first year, partly impacted by issues connected to covid and due to wanting to ensure greater emotional support for and appropriate training in the role is in place in the future. Plans are underway for a similar position to be offered again in the future. Due to the nature of the higher level and less flexible qualification type required for apprenticeships, this is likely to be an internship offer alongside support to complete a youth worker qualification.

Many SCSC staff showed awareness of and valued the importance the project placed on the involvement of young people in the development of the project.

Everything we do, any change we make, it always goes to the participation forum [see below] for the young people to have their say in it... I think it's really important we get their views and help them - they help co-produce the service ...From a transition worker's point of view, when we're doing these young people's plans and we're trying to make plans for how they are going to achieve what they want, it's always about what the young people want...it's not about what us, as transition workers, think... I think the young people can make a difference to the service, I think they have in the past definitely...there was one young person that made a complaint and it got actioned fully, all the way through, and then it changed the way we done certain things. So, I think always that they definitely have co-produced and have a say in how the Service is run... We're having a celebration event in October, and the young people are co-producing it. So, they're meeting up once a month and it changes locations... It's completely down to the young people to decide about the celebration event and what they want... I do think that's something we do well, we always make sure that it's the young person's centred approach... (SCSC senior TW)

Menti meter surveys are administered regularly to give an opportunity for all young people to feed back their experiences. Around a third of young people currently using the project have engaged in the participation forum. Forum sessions have been structured in an informal way to facilitate engagement, and the group also takes part in fun social activities to help build relationships and confidence – such as football matches or laser-tag games. Having a separate participation worker, who can encourage engagement through visiting young people and building relationships, was thought to have to work well for participation, as has having a role placed slightly outside of the SCSC Team.

I think taking that time to build up those relationships is really important, so that they can feel safe...you know by proxy of being in care you have had a huge life-decision made ...you haven't really had a say in that, very often. So, I think it can feel a bit unfamiliar to young people to have that opportunity to share their opinions and be listened to... I think it is a challenge as well ...if it's not something that you're used to... We're trying to run the [participation forum] sessions in an inclusive way...knowing the young people a little bit in advance so that you know we can shape the sessions is really key... we try to do...games and things and always having food...which is an incentive as well. But I always try and say...'do what you need to do, like if you need to go out for a cigarette - go for it. If you need to take a break, that's absolutely fine...take part as much -or as little - as you feel comfortable with.' I think...the activity-based stuff has really worked... At the last forum, we did a scaling activity with statements and [asked] 'how much you agree and disagree?' Getting them to place themselves on a scale and then...sharing why they placed them there. I think those type of things have really worked, rather than sitting down with a document...I don't know the details of...their day-to-day life...and I think that's a real plus in some ways... I think allowing young people that space to just be themselves without all their whole care history - which support members of staff will know (and the young people know that they know that), I think it's quite positive... I've been able to say to them, 'look, I don't know your story and I don't need to know - you can come and be who you want to be'. I think that's been brilliant... Young people sometimes...assume that I have seen their...care plan...and I will always make the point to say '...I only know what you tell me' and I think that's really valuable. (SCSC worker)

Specific examples of changes to SCSC initiated by young people described in interviews include introducing a clear tiered system of support to provide clarity around the amount of provision they receive from the project and how this will change over time.

The geographical distance covered by the project has been a challenge and different people have engaged in the participation forums at different times. There was acknowledgement that a system to involve young people ideally should have been in place from the very start, prior to the funding offer, so they could have helped in the shaping at that crucial point and be part of co-producing right from the beginning. There was a sense that the Project still had some way to go to be fully coproduced.

I think we missed a trick by not having someone in-post and having that structure set up right from the beginning... For a future Project, I think involving young people has to be...a priority right from the beginning and not something you do afterwards... I think we still have a way to go to get to...coproduction... (SCSC team member)

Continued innovation and adaptation

As recognised in the previous evaluation, Break constantly aims to innovate, change and improve. A continued openness to new ideas and adapt to needs was evident in this current evaluation, with many LA and SCSC staff at different levels noting they felt listened to and that all could contribute to the project's development.

Before board meetings, heads and I tend to talk about anything that we need to address. I also work very closely with the strategic commissioner responsible for Staying Close Staying Connected to make sure that everything is in line, so I have that strategic oversight still... Staying Close Staying Connected are very open to...finding a different way of doing things, if it's helpful, or taking on-board suggestions whenever we come up with them... (senior manager, LA)

You can definitely contribute ideas and make suggestions to how the Service can improve. I mean, we had a team day...a couple of months ago and we did a brainstorm of what we think the service could improve...like communal areas, the outcome tracker... getting young people involved in the community... And then [senior manager]...listed all those points out, sent them out in an email and then you put your name forward for the bit you would like to work on in improving the Service. (SCSC senior TW)

Unmet needs and suggestions for the future

Most workers stated that they were keen for provision similar to SCSC to extend to other groups of care leavers, such as those in foster care or coming from supported living; those who have been placed out of county and wanting to remain in locations outside of the three partner agencies; those who come into care at an older age and move straight into semi-independent living, and pregnant women or parents and babies who need less support than a parent and baby foster placement, but more support that can be gained from their own tenancy.

It was suggested by some LA staff that an offer of SCSC with increased and more intense support as needed by some young people would also be valuable. Some LA and SCSC staff suggested a need for specific additional services which could be incorporated into the SCSC current provision.

...the [young people] that are the most challenging are those really high-end chaotic, substance misusing, into criminal behaviour and it's like, 'where do we go with these extremely hard to reach, high chaotic young people?' We don't have a provision and is that something that Break could consider assisting with in the future? I suppose it would look like something like 16 plus but for the over 18s, with on-site support or definitely...coming in and out often. (PA)

...what I think care leavers need [is] ...having somebody who could deliver, say, like the Freedom Programme for young people, somebody who could offer maybe some family planning...because...a high proportion of care leavers...they've had their children open to social care in one form or another... You would [also] want somebody working with education, maybe... One of the things that...is lacking...is exploitation support for young people - sexual and criminal... just because they're 18 doesn't mean...that this [risk] has gone, because it was still there [just] the day before... In [our LA] we have what's called the 'Safe Team'. So, they work with children at risk of exploitation and they drop off at 18. So, to have somebody able to continue that support would be really, really helpful. Especially if they're going in on a day-to-day basis, you know, that would be great. (manager, LA)

Some informal advice-giving from young people in SCSC had taken place to others yet to move on from children's homes

When young people in SCSC have met with young people still in the Children's Homes - through a football match or something or art and craft workshops...they've been able to like give advice or just...say things like, 'make sure you listen to your Transition Worker because they're only trying to help' [and] 'don't push people away' and I think it's so valuable when young people have been through that to say that to young people who are coming up to that age." (SCSC worker)

Although a volunteer mentoring scheme is in place and seems to have been positively taken up by some young people, there did not appear to be a specific system in SCSC for recent or past users of SCSC to assist and mentor those entering it or at a prior stage to themselves. This could be considered in the future.

Sustainability

Sustainability of the project was understandably a concern for SCSC staff who were living with the uncertainty of employment and concern as to the young people's future stability.

I guess the main thing is the sustainability. I think because no one really knows how the Project is going to sustain going forward when we lose the funding from DFE. I think that worries me a bit...that it may not work in a year or two's time. (SCSC Senior TW)

All LA staff interviewed were strongly committed to consider how the project could continue, seeing it as a valuable offer for their young people. However, funding for provision post 18 was understood to be complex and lying between departments.

I think we would very much want to consider [funding the project]. I think it's really difficult to say 'yes absolutely' at this point, because our funding situation - like most Government bodies ...it's really precarious because of Covid...if we couldn't fund it, we would want to work with Break to see how we could make something like that work... [that] would have support from senior leadership...although it brings great savings to [the] Local Authority - having Staying Close Staying Connected involved - not really for Children's Services, it's for largely Adult Services. So, we'd have to have some conversations within the organisation as well. (senior manager, LA)

Quantitative Outcomes

Method summary

There are two main methods of data collection and outcomes tracking in Staying Close Staying Connected, a staff completed monthly project dashboard and a young person completed outcomes tracker. On a monthly basis staff update young people's progress in a number of objective areas e.g. if the young person has been arrested, how much rent they've paid or how many emotional wellbeing service sessions they have engaged in during that period. The outcomes tracker is a questionnaire undertaken quarterly by young people which tracks their self-reported progress against SCSC outcomes on a scale of 0-5, full results of the outcomes tracker can be found in appendix 1. The following section uses data from these two data sets.

Cohort

In September 2020 there were 33 young people housed through Staying Close Staying Connected by September 2021 the service was housing 30 young people. During this year 16 young people successfully moved on from the service and 13 young people entered. In addition 23 young people continue to receive support having moved out of their SCSC accommodation. This flux within the service along with the quarterly completion of the outcomes tracker mean that some young people had not completed 2 outcomes questionnaires in the 12 month period of this evaluation to allow a tracking of distance travelled, twenty five young people had. The below data therefore, reflect distance travelled for this cohort of twenty five young people for outcomes tracked by the outcomes tracker and the full cohort of 46 young people for outcomes tracked by the project dashboard.

Outcomes tracked are those from Break's theory of change model (appendix 2)

Limitations

The outcomes tracker is a self-reported questionnaire completed by young people in the service, this means that responses can be influenced by transitory factors such as mood at the time of completing or an incident that might be impacting feelings that day, this can mean that responses reflect that day and not necessarily progress over the quarter.

The period covered in this evaluation is September 2020-2021, the results therefore show progress within this timeframe and not the outcomes achieved by the service throughout the life of each young person. For some young people the outcomes presented here will represent less than 6 months of progress.

Lifelong relationships

Break introduced a Staying Connected Coordinator who would work with young people to work with young people to empower them to build and maintain personal support networks using a less formal version of Family Group Conferencing. 18 (39%) of the young people accessed the staying close coordinator offer. Break also offer a mentoring service, matching young people with adult volunteer mentors to support and walk alongside the young person. 15 (33%) young people have accessed a mentor between September 2020 and September 2021.

A calendar of social, educational and developmental opportunities are offered to young people through Break's opportunities team, these include outdoor activities, co-production and planning sessions for the service, work shifts on the Coffee Break van and residential trips. 25 (54%) of young people accessed these opportunities during the evaluation period and on average each young person would attend 1.9 activities or events per month.

	Total out of 46	% of total
Accessed opportunities	25	54%
Average number of opportunities accessed per month	1.9	

As outlined in interviews with young people these social opportunities are important in supporting the, to build their social networks and resilience.

The outcomes tracker shows an improvement in positive relationships with an increase in feeling close to people important to the young people with 19 of the 25 young people reporting improvements or maintaining relationships with an average improvement of 0.2 across the year (3.3 to 3.5 on a scale of 0-5). Young people also reported improvements in levels of trust with SCSC staff with a 0.4 point average increase (3.6 to 4.0), 12 young people reported improved relationships with staff and 10 young people's scores remained across the period.

Indicators relating to feeling close and connected to positive social networks all improved through the year, including that young people feel able to maintain relationships, they know the importance of positive relationships in their life and that Staying Close Staying Connected has supported them to improve connections and positive relationships.

YP is a good tenant

Improved stability

Housing stability has proven strong with only one young person (2%) moving home internally within SCSC during the evaluation period and one young person (2%) having been evicted. The rest of the cohort remain stable within their accommodation or have successfully moved on from the service.

16 (35%) of the young people who accessed the service during this period had moved on by September 2021 with an additional 6 (13%) being considered tenancy ready but still seeking a property to move on to. This means 52% of young people in the service at September 2021 weren't yet tenancy ready however, 11 of these 24 young people had been in the service less than 6 months. The average period of time from a young person being referred into the service to successfully moving on is 472 days. The payment of rent by young people is a key feature of the model and the number of young people paying rent each month has ranged from 54%-86% throughout the year with 70% of young people paying rent in September 2021.

	Total out of 46	% of total
Young people successfully moved on	16	35%
Tenancy ready young people in service	6	13%
Young people in service not yet tenancy ready	24	52%

The outcomes tracker reinforces these findings with young people reporting improvements across their life skills, financial stability and how secure they feel in their accommodation.

Improved Life Skills

Life skills improved across the year with young people reporting improved skills and confidence in undertaking skills key to living independently such as shopping (0.4) and washing clothes (0.4) and also felt more confident in accessing community services and amenities (0.6).

Financial Stability

Financial stability increased by the highest score across all outcomes measured by the outcomes tracker with an average improvement of 0.9 (6.5 to 7.4 out of 10) across young people.

Security in Accommodation

Feelings of security within their accommodation improved amongst young people with by an average of 0.8 across the year (11.0 to 11.8 out of 15).

Cost Savings for Services and Society

An independent cost benefit analysis of the Break Staying Close Staying Connected model was undertaken by York Consulting LLP. The total estimated one-year savings to services and society range from £2,023,574 in a low attribution scenario to £2,131,336 in a high attribution scenario. This takes into account savings for health and social services due to improved outcomes in areas such as emotional wellbeing, reduced alcohol and drug use, fewer evictions, increased employment, education and training and reduced criminal activity. The total expenditure on Staying Close Staying Connected in the period that the cost benefit analysis covers was £1,564,263 which means that for every £1 spent on the project, the net saving to the public purse is £1.36.

This represents a slight reduction from £1.54 of savings per £1 spent in the previous evaluation (November 2019). During the period of the cost benefit analysis Break were encouraged to pilot approaches additional to the core offer which led to increased expenditure and may provide an explanation for the slight reduction in savings. Outcomes achieved by these additional areas of work such as the Staying Close Coordinator and disability transition worker may not have had direct or immediate impact on services considered within the cost benefit analysis.

The full cost benefit analysis can be seen in the following chapter.

Participation in EET

There was an increase in young people accessing education, employment or training from the start of the year or the start of their placement in the service, however, it is clear that there is fluctuation over time in and out of EET. 32 of the 46 (70%) young people who accessed the service during the evaluation period started the period or their placement not in education, employment or training (NEET), of these 32 young people 4 (12% of NEET cohort) had secured education, employment or training by the end of the evaluation period and another 4 (12% of NEET cohort) secured education, employment or training at some point during the year though ended the year NEET, a further 4 (12% of NEET cohort) young

people secured volunteering positions during this time. 36% of total NEET cohort secured EET or a volunteering position at some point through the evaluation period. 14 of the 46 (30%) young people started in education, employment or training (EET), 11 (79% of EET cohort) of these young people sustained that EET while 3 (21% of EET cohort) left EET and became NEET, all 3 of these were young people completing education.

	No. (out of 46)	% of total cohort	% of NEET/EET cohort
Started period/placement NEET – Ended NEET	28	61%	88%
Started period/placement EET – Ended EET	11	24%	79%
Started period/placement NEET – Ended EET	4	9%	12%
Started period/placement EET – Ended NEET	3 (all leaving education and into unemployment)	6%	21%

Of those who started and ended NEET		
Went from NEET to EET at some point during year	4	9%
Went from NEET to volunteering	4	9%

Of those that started and ended EET		
Left education and secured employment during year	3	6%

The measure of whether young people enter education, training or employment doesn't demonstrate the distance a young person might have travelled towards becoming work ready, feeling secure and well enough to consider themselves able to consider EET. The outcomes tracker shows an improvement in self-reported work readiness amongst young people in the service by an average of 0.3 out of 5 (3.0 to 3.3), 10 young people reported feeling more work ready, 10 remained the same score and 5 felt their work readiness had decreased.

The number of young people entering EET through their time in the project or making progress towards work readiness reinforces the views from young people expressed in the interviews that opportunities and support provided through Break have increased their readiness for employment.

These statistics come in the challenging economic context of the pandemic when access to employment, education and training were limited. The significant impact on young people's emotional wellbeing may also have affected the feeling of readiness to enter employment, education or training.

YP is a contributing citizen

Decreased criminal activity

Only 1 young person (2%) was arrested during the evaluation period which at the end of the period had not led to a conviction. National statistics for 2018 show that 8% of 16 to 17 year old looked after young people were convicted or subject to youth cautions or youth conditional cautions (DfE 2019). Data for the residential care population specifically, shows that 15% of 10 to 17 year olds in residential care had been convicted or subject to a final warning or reprimand (DfE, 2016b)

Improved wellbeing

Break offer an Emotional Wellbeing Service (EWS) to young people in their services including SCSC, experienced emotional wellbeing practitioners, provide a relationship-based therapeutic service in a non-judgmental space, in a safe, calm environment close to where the young person lives, work is tailored to meet the individual needs of each young person. 14 (30%) of the young people within Staying Close Staying Connected throughout the year have accessed Break's Emotional Wellbeing Service with each young person attending an average of 16 EWS sessions.

On average young people's self-reported health scores increased over the period of this evaluation, health increased by 0.1 on average (3.2 to 3.3) with 8 of the 25 young people in the outcomes tracker cohort reporting an increase and 12 maintaining their self-reported health. Young people also reported that they felt more confident accessing health services independently.

These finding compliment the qualitative data which demonstrates that yp in SCSC feel all staff can support with MH and have access to flexible internal service or support into external services.

It is worth highlighting that these results were achieved in the context of the pandemic and lockdowns when the deterioration of young people's health and particularly mental health was a significant national concern.

Decreased early pregnancy

During the period 3 of the 46 young people (7%) who accessed Staying Close Staying Connected had a child, 2 of these were male and one female, the young people were 18, 19 and 22.

Research on care leavers shows that 22% of females become young parents (during their teenage years) (NAO 2015) and 8% of care leavers aged 19 to 21 who were NEET, were recorded as inactive due to pregnancy or parenthood (DfE 2018)

Reduction in drug / alcohol use impacting on daily life.

During the evaluation period 1 young person (2% of total young people) was considered to have a relationship with drugs that was risky and significantly impacting their outcomes at the end of their placement or the end of the evaluation period. 13 young people were regularly using drugs, with 3 (21%) of those 13 young people having reduced their drug use from a problem/risky usage to a less impactful social use.

Drug use	No. out of 46	% out of 46
Problem/risky drug use	1	2%
Social/regular drug use	13	28%

	No. out of 14	% out of 14
Moving from problem drug use to social drug use	3	21%

In terms of alcohol use, only 1 young person (2% of total young people) was considered to have a relationship with alcohol that was negatively impacting their outcomes.

Summary

The quantitative data collected through the project demonstrates an improvement in all intended outcomes for young people:

- Improved positive relationships
- The young person is a good tenant
- Increased participation in education, employment and training
- The young person is a contributing citizen

These improved outcomes are achieved whilst making savings to the public purse.

There are particularly strong improvements in financial and housing stability and security and potentially risky behaviors such as drug use and alcohol consumption are lower than national comparisons. There have been improvements in health and wellbeing despite the service being delivered in the context of the pandemic and lockdowns.

The quantitative findings compliment the qualitative findings, in particular that opportunities and support provided through Staying Close Staying Connected supports the development of positive social networks and helps build resilience towards work readiness. The positive health outcomes supports the views from young people that staff in the service are able to flexibly support their mental health.

Cost Benefit Analysis

Introduction

This report presents the results from an independent analysis exercise designed to estimate the savings to the public purse generated by the Break Staying Close, Staying Connected project. The period in scope is April 2020 to July 2021.

The report has been prepared by Tim Allan from York Consulting LLP (www.yorkconsulting.co.uk).

Approach

The approach that has been taken to estimate the cost savings generated by the Break project combines two data sources. Each of these is explained in further detail in the sub-sections that follow:

- a) **Baseline and end-point data for 56 young people supported by the project between April 2020 and July 2021.** Each of these young people had been supported by the project for at least six months¹. For each person, the project supplied two data records: a baseline record dated around April 2020 (or whenever they joined the project if it was after April 2020), and an endpoint record dated around July 2021 (or whenever they left the project if it was before July 2021).
- b) **Estimates from the evaluators and Break staff about the savings that the project generates for the local authority in the form of residential care and semi-independent living costs that it no longer has to pay.** The Break project enables some young people to leave local authority care sooner than they would otherwise have done, thus generating financial savings for the local authority. It is difficult to say with certainty when each of the young people would have left local authority care in the absence of Break, and it is therefore necessary to apply some assumptions. Those assumptions (explained under 'Accommodation savings' later in this chapter) are the same as those used in the previous external evaluation of the Break project.

Baseline and end-point data

Baseline and end-point data was provided by the Break project for each of the variables listed in Table 1.1².

¹ That threshold was chosen because it is unrealistic to expect the project to generate positive outcomes for young people within a few weeks, or a small number of months, of them being accepted. Young people supported for less than six months have been excluded from the analysis.

² The project also provided other variables, but those listed in Table 1.1 most readily lend themselves to monetisation.

Table 1.1: Baseline and end-point variables
Education, employment or training status
Drug taking behaviour
Alcohol consumption
Criminal activity
Going missing
Anti-social behaviour
Sexualised behaviour
Physical health
Mental health (two variables: a) improvement in a young person’s mental health and b) savings to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS))
Self-harm
Evictions ³

For each of the variables in Table 1.1, the approach has been to:

- Compare the baseline and end-point status for each of the 56 young people within the scope of the analysis.
- Where there has been a positive change, assign a proxy financial saving.

It is the second bullet point that sits at the heart of this exercise. For example, if the data indicates that a young person’s mental health has improved, then it is possible (and in some cases will be almost certain) that the state will incur lower costs because that young person will not require the same level of support from the health service. If they have stopped offending, then there will be savings to the criminal justice system, and so on. In this study, we have to assign reasonable financial values to those potential savings.

In reality, the counterfactual position – i.e. what would have happened if a young person’s mental health had not improved – can never truly be known within the confines of an exercise like this. We have to speculate and assign proxy values. Those proxies are shown in Table 1.2. By way of example, if the data shows an improvement in criminal activity, then it is assumed that the young person would otherwise have committed two more offences over a 12-month period. If it shows an improvement in physical health, the assumption is that the young person would otherwise have had three additional GP appointments over a 12-month period.

³ Baseline and end-point data is not available for evictions as a distinct category. As a proxy, it has been assumed that 30% of the cohort would have been evicted in the absence of Break. This is derived from the report, ‘The Money House: Estimating the benefits to social landlords and other public services’ (MyBNK, 2018), which found that 30% of care leavers that hadn’t been supported through The Money House experienced eviction.

Table 1.2: Proxy savings for the baseline and end-point data

Category of cost saving	Proxy change (per young person)	Proxy saving (per young person for one year)	Source
A positive change in education, employment or training status	The young person has not become NEET.	£4,952	Average annual cost to the exchequer of a NEET young person. Based on <i>Youth Unemployment: the crisis we cannot afford (ACEVO Commission on Youth Unemployment, 2012)</i> and adjusted for inflation.
Reduction in drug taking	The young person reduces/stops their substance misuse and does not require a treatment programme.	£3,994	Average annual savings resulting from reductions in drug-related offending and health and social care costs as a result of delivery of a structured, effective treatment programme. Based on <i>Estimating the crime reduction benefits of drug treatment and recovery (National Treatment Agency for Substance Misuse, 2012)</i> and adjusted for inflation.
Reduction in alcohol consumption	The young person reduces/stops their alcohol misuse and does not become a dependent drinker	£2,133	Average annual cost to the NHS of alcohol dependency, per year per dependent drinker. Based on <i>Alcohol Use Disorders: diagnosis, assessment and management of harmful drinking and alcohol dependence (NICE Clinical Practice Guidance 115)</i> and adjusted for inflation.
Reduction in criminal activity (unrelated to drug taking or sexualised behaviour)	The young person has not offended. An average of two prevented offences has been assumed.	£2,072	Average cost per incident of crime (across all types of crime). Based on <i>The Economic and Social Costs of Crime, Second Edition</i> and adjusted for inflation.
Reduction in missing episodes	The young person reduces/stops going missing. An average of two fewer missing episodes has been assumed.	£5,438	Average cost of a missing persons investigation. Based on <i>Establishing the Cost of Missing Persons Investigations (Greene and Pakes, 2012)</i> and adjusted for inflation.
Reduction in anti-social behaviour	The young person has not been involved in anti-social behaviour. One fewer episodes of anti-social behaviour have been assumed.	£701	Cost of dealing with an anti-social behaviour incident Based on <i>The Economic and Social Costs of Anti-Social Behaviour: a review (London School of Economics and Political Science, 2003)</i> and adjusted for inflation
Reduction in sexualised behaviour	One sexualised behaviour-related offence has been avoided.	£13,082	Average cost of a court event for sexual offences, NAO Analysis, based on CIPFA, Home Office, Ministry of Justice and Youth Justice Board Data, 2011 (and adjusted for inflation).

Table 1.2: Proxy savings for the baseline and end-point data

Category of cost saving	Proxy change (per young person)	Proxy saving (per young person for one year)	Source
Improvement in physical health	The young person visits their GP less frequently. Three fewer appointments have been assumed.	£96	Average cost of a GP appointment. Based on <i>Unit Costs of Health & Social Care 2018 (Curtis, 2018)</i> and adjusted for inflation.
Improvement in mental health	The young person does not require a mental health treatment programme.	£2,303	Average annual cost of service provision for people suffering from mental health disorders. Based on <i>Paying the Price: the cost of mental health care in England to 2026 (King's Fund, 2008)</i> and adjusted for inflation.
Savings to CAMHS	Where a young person has mental health issues and has been supported by the project's Emotional Wellbeing Service, it is assumed that they would otherwise have been supported by CAMHS.	£5,255	Average cost per case of a young person supported by a CAMHS multi-disciplinary team. Based on <i>Unit Costs of Health & Social Care 2018 (Curtis, 2017)</i> and adjusted for inflation.
Reduction in self-harm	The young person self-harms less regularly. It is assumed that one unplanned hospital admission is avoided.	£1,664	Average cost of a non-elective hospital admission. Based on <i>Reference Cost Collection: National Schedule of Reference Costs - Year 2017-18 - NHS trusts and NHS foundation trusts</i>
Reduction in evictions	The young person is not evicted.	£7,770	Average fiscal cost of a complex eviction. Based on <i>Research briefing: Immediate costs to government of loss of home (Shelter, 2012)</i> and adjusted for inflation.

Accommodation savings

There are 26 young people in the data who moved into a Break property after 1st April 2020. Before moving into those properties:

- 13 of the young people were in residential care.
- 10 were in a semi-independent setting.
- 2 were in foster care.
- 1 was homeless.

The Break model involves moving young people out of the above settings (where it safe and appropriate to do so) sooner than would ordinarily be the case. We therefore need to estimate how long each of the young people would have remained in their previous setting had they not engaged with Break. This also formed part of the previous cost saving analysis in 2020 and the same assumptions have therefore been applied here, namely that:

- The young people previously in residential care would have remained in that setting for an average of six months each and would then have moved into local authority funded semi-independent living for an average of six months each.
- The young people previously in a semi-independent setting would have remained in that setting for an average of 12 months each.
- The young people previously in foster care would have remained in that setting for an average of 12 months each.
- The young person who was homeless would have moved into a semi-independent setting.

The proxy values for each of the above, together with the sources for those values, are shown in Table 1.3.

Table 1.3: Accommodation-related proxy savings

Category	Assumption	Proxy saving (per young person)	Source
Residential care cost savings for the local authority	Due to Break Staying Close, a young person moves out of local authority residential care six months sooner than they would otherwise have done.	£127,374	Average cost of a six-month placement in local residential care home for children. Based on <i>Unit Costs of Health & Social Care 2018 (Curtis, 2018)</i> .
Semi-independent living cost savings for the local authority*	Due to Break Staying Close, a young person does not enter local authority-funded semi-independent living (in line with the bullet points above, 6 and 12-month savings are shown in the cell opposite).	£5,394 (6 months) £10,788 (12 months)	Average cost of semi-independent/semi-supported living (includes arrangement cost). Based on <i>The costs of not caring: supporting English care leavers into independence (Barnardo's, 2014)</i> and adjusted for inflation.
Foster care savings for the local authority	Due to Break Staying Close, a young person does not remain in foster care (it is assumed they would otherwise have been in foster care for at least 12 months).	£35,620	Average annual cost of local authority foster care. Based on <i>Unit Costs of Health & Social Care 2018 (Curtis, 2018)</i> .

*this also captures the young person who was previously homeless, as it is assumed that, in the absence of Break, they would have moved into a semi-independent setting.

Observations and limitations

A strength of the cost saving methodology used for this exercise is that it draws on 'real' pre and post-intervention data supplied by young people who have been supported by the project. The fact that the data covers multiple time-points allows for an element of pre and post-intervention comparison.

For several reasons, however, the approach is not without its limitations and these need to be kept in mind when considering the results presented in Chapter Two. For example:

- **Missing data:** although not a methodological issue per se, this nonetheless affects the results. The dataset supplied by Break had relatively high proportions of missing data against certain variables, particularly in the end-point records. For example, against the self-harm variable, 34 out of the 63 end-point records were incomplete. For the criminal activity variable, 26 were incomplete, while 22 were incomplete for the sexualised behaviour variable. Incomplete records could not be included in the analysis.
- **Preventative effects of Break:** the cost saving methodology is based on assessing measurable, positive change over time (e.g. reduced drug use, reduced criminal activity

etc.). But that is not the only way in which Break can save money for the state. For example, a young person may have no offending behaviour when they join Break, and none during their time with the project. In the context of this analysis, that will show as no change/saving. However, it may be the case that without Break's support, that young person would have fallen into a pattern of offending behaviour. In that example, the preventative effect of the project could be significant and could prevent the local authority, the police and/or other partners from incurring significant additional cost. In the absence of a larger study that is able to access control group data, it is very difficult to quantify any such preventative effects of the project.

- **Attribution and assumption:** this analysis has sought to make best use of the available data and to apply reasonable assumptions and proxy financial values that are grounded in research evidence. It is nonetheless important to make clear that it can only provide, at best, an indication of the types and scale of fiscal savings that Break might be generating for the state. The absence of control group data, in particular, dictates that any assessment of the counterfactual (and therefore any assessment of impact) is going to rely on a degree of subjectivity.

Results

Introduction

The approach described in Chapter One allows us to calculate, for each of the 56 young people in scope, estimated annual savings that might be attributable to Break.

As previously explained, accurately assessing the counterfactual, and therefore attribution, is challenging. However, it seems unlikely that Break would be the only factor influencing the positive changes observed in the data. As in the previous evaluation, 'low attribution', 'medium attribution' and 'high attribution' scenarios are therefore presented in this report. These assume that 33%, 50% and 66% respectively of any positive change can be attributed to the project. These are subjective figures, the true validity of which cannot be tested within the confines of this study. They are, however, the same figures that were used for the attribution scenarios in the previous evaluation.

Baseline and end-point results

Table 2.1 shows the indicative savings for each of the 'low attribution', 'medium attribution' and 'high attribution' scenarios, focusing on the variables included in the baseline and end-point analysis (the accommodation-related savings are presented in the next sub-section). Key points to note include:

- Total estimated one-year savings for the baseline and end-point variables range from £107,762 in a low attribution scenario to £215,524 in a high attribution scenario.
- Over three-quarters (78%) of the estimated savings come from three of the variables: reductions in evictions (45% of the estimated savings), savings to CAMHS (19%) and positive changes in education, employment or training status (14%).

- The data does not show any savings associated with reductions in alcohol consumption⁴ or criminal activity. However, this benefits from further explanation. For alcohol consumption, only three of the young people were classed as 'problem/risky' at baseline, and for two of those young people the end-point status was 'not known'. In other words, there was only one young person in the dataset with the potential to show a saving for alcohol consumption. For criminal activity, there were seven young people with offending behaviour at baseline, but for six of those the end-point status was 'not known'.

⁴ The inclusion criteria for this variable was that a young person's alcohol consumption was classed as 'problem/risky' at baseline and had reduced to a lesser category (e.g. 'social') at end-point.

Table 2.1: Baseline and end-point results

Category of cost saving	No. young people in the sample to which it applies	Total value/saving (with no attribution adjustment)	Low Attribution (33%)	Medium Attribution (50%)	High Attribution (66%)
A positive change in education, employment or training status	9	£44,568	£14,707	£22,284	£29,415
Reduction in drug taking	4	£15,976	£5,272	£7,988	£10,544
Reduction in alcohol consumption	0	£0	£0	£0	£0
Reduction in criminal activity (unrelated to drug taking or sexualised behaviour)	0	£0	£0	£0	£0
Reduction in missing episodes	5	£27,190	£8,973	£13,595	£17,945
Reduction in anti-social behaviour	2	£1,402	£463	£701	£925
Reduction in sexualised behaviour	1	£13,082	£4,317	£6,541	£8,634
Improvement in physical health	6	£576	£190	£288	£380
Improvement in mental health	4	£9,212	£3,040	£4,606	£6,080
Savings to CAMHS	12	£62,700	£20,691	£31,350	£41,382
Reduction in self-harm	3	£4,992	£1,647	£2,496	£3,295
Reduction in evictions	19	£146,853	£48,461	£73,427	£96,923
	Sub-total	£326,551	£107,762	£163,276	£215,524

Accommodation results

The estimated one-year savings associated with changes in accommodation status are shown in Table 2.2. These exceed £1.9m, the vast majority of which occurs as a consequence of young people leaving local authority residential care sooner than they would have done in the absence of Break.

Note that the accommodation results do not vary according to the different attribution scenarios. This is because they are already based on the assumption that Break is responsible for the full saving, e.g. that a young person was able to leave local authority residential care earlier than normal specifically because Break was available.

Table 2.2: Accommodation results

Category of cost saving	No. young people in the sample to which it applies	Total estimated saving	Low Attribution (33%)	Medium Attribution (50%)	High Attribution (66%)
Residential care cost savings for the local authority (6 months per young person)	13	£1,655,862	-	-	-
Semi-independent living cost savings for the local authority (6 months saving for the 13 young people above)	13	£70,122	-	-	-
Semi-independent living cost savings for the local authority (12 months for 10 young people)*	10	£107,880	-	-	-
Foster care	2	£71,240	-	-	-
Homelessness (the assumption here is that the young person would have moved into a semi-independent setting for 12 months)	1	£10,788	-	-	-
	Sub-total	£1,915,812	-	-	-

*a different 10 people to those listed in the rows above in the table. These 10 young people were in semi-independent living accommodation before moving into a Break property.

Total estimated one-year savings

Adding the baseline and end-point results to the accommodation results gives total estimated one-year savings for Break. As shown in Table 2.3, these range from £2,023,574 in a low attribution scenario to £2,131,336 in a high attribution scenario.

Table 2.3: Total estimated savings

Category of cost saving	Total value/saving (with no attribution adjustment)	Low Attribution (33%)	Medium Attribution (50%)	High Attribution (66%)
Baseline and end-point data	£326,551	£107,762	£163,276	£215,524
Accommodation data	£1,915,812	£1,915,812	£1,915,812	£1,915,812
Total	£2,242,363	£2,023,574	£2,079,088	£2,131,336

Two and three-year projections

The indicative savings shown on the previous page are for a one-year period. With the exception of residential care costs, it is feasible that all of them could persist for longer (residential care costs cannot because it is assumed that the young people would have left residential care after six months).

Table 2.4 therefore shows the two and three-year indicative savings. These have been calculated by applying the government's standard discount rate of 3.5% to the one-year savings.

Table 2.4: Two-year and three-year indicative savings			
	Low Attribution (33%)	Medium Attribution (50%)	High Attribution (66%)
Two-year indicative savings	£2,310,825	£2,419,909	£2,522,577
Three-year indicative savings	£2,594,437	£2,755,217	£2,906,539

Comparing estimated savings with delivery costs

The project's total expenditure between April 2020 and July 2021 was £1,564,263 (data supplied by Break staff). Based on the results of this cost-saving exercise, the project would be generating a net saving to the state in each of the low, medium and high attribution scenarios across any of the one, two or three-year periods.

This is an encouraging finding, but must also be seen in the context of the points raised under 'Observations and limitations' in Chapter One (including the significant assumptions that have had to be employed in the calculations).

It should also be reiterated here that the Break data included a lot of 'not known' entries. If it is assumed that some of those entries – had the data been available – would have shown positive changes, then the results presented here may well understate the total savings being generated by Break.

Conclusions

Summary of Findings

Interviews with young people

SCSC means a variety of things to young people, not only staying close to former residential homes. Some see SCSC as staying close to other support networks, others would rather move towards birth family and yet others see it as about forming new support networks. Most of the young people felt they had limited options on leaving care. There were mixed views of housemates but many spoke positively about the value of sharing. A minority had very difficult experiences which had a negative impact on their wellbeing. Most young people valued their relationships with transitions workers highly and many spoke of the flexible holistic support that was offered. They also talked positively about the wider services available. They felt that they did have a say in service development and some could give examples. The main concerns that were expressed were lack of choice of accommodation, problems with housemates and turnover of staff but overall young people were generally positive about their experiences of SCSC. Young people's suggested changes included more one bed housing options; having a trial before moving in with a housemate; allowing young people to sleep over; ensuring flexibility so that the level of support from transitions workers matches the young person's felt needs; closer monitoring of problematic behaviours with realistic consequences; and staff training on mediation/de-escalation and on mental health.

Interviews with Staff (SCSC and LAs)

LA staff felt that SCSC is a valuable service that fills a gap in provision for care leavers. All LA and SCSC staff talked positively about the ability of SCSC transition workers to provide individualised, empathic, flexible and tailored support for young people. All the PAs felt that the support of the Transition and Housing Workers alleviated worries about their young people, and in some cases reduced the time they needed to spend with them. The house share model was viewed as positive for some young people as it helped them with relationships. However for other young people it was not viewed as appropriate. The development of one bed options was appreciated. It was felt that the system for managing rules and boundaries for young people living within SCSC had improved with more clarity about consequences as well as support to change.

It was suggested that the referral processes and communication between LAs and SCSC, as well as the matching system had both been improved and that there is good communication between agencies to improve the service. Communication between PAs and TWs about young people appeared more ad hoc, with some PAs feeling they did not know enough about the work of SCSC.

It appeared that after the initial set up phase staff were now able to have a clear focus on the day to running of the project. Staff turnover was mentioned as an issue but staff also reported high satisfaction with their roles, and their induction and training opportunities. The geographical spread of the project could be a challenge in maintaining a consistent service. Some TWs also felt their travel time impacted on the contact time they had with young people.

Impact on Outcomes: Quantitative Data

The quantitative data collected through the project demonstrates an improvement in all intended outcomes for young people:

- improved positive relationships
- The young person is a good tenant
- Increased participation in education, employment and training
- The young person is a contributing citizen

These improved outcomes are achieved whilst making savings to the public purse.

There are particularly strong improvements in financial and housing stability and security and potentially risky behaviors such as drug use and alcohol consumption are lower than national comparisons. There have been improvements in health and wellbeing despite the service being delivered in the context of the pandemic and lockdowns.

The quantitative findings compliment the qualitative findings, in particular that opportunities and support provided through Staying Close Staying Connected supports the development of positive social networks and helps build resilience towards work readiness. The positive health outcomes supports the views from young people that staff in the service are able to flexibly support their mental health.

Lessons and recommendations

The Department for Education summary of learning from the Innovation programme final report suggests four key learning points from the Staying Close pilots (Fitzsimons and McCracken, 2020:64). These are outlined below, alongside commentary on the extent to which SCSC is addressing these issues as evidenced in the current evaluation.

A range of different supported and semi-independent accommodation options is needed to provide young people leaving care with housing suited to their needs, preferences, and characteristics as they transition to independent living.

Young people and staff interviews both suggested that there are limited choices available to care leavers, but that SCSC was a positive option. In the previous evaluation it was noted that pressure on local authorities to find accommodation could lead to shortened lead in

times and pressure to match and introduce new housemates to accommodation. (Dixon et al 2020) In the current evaluation work between SCSC and LAs on the referral and matching process was said to have led to improvements in lead in times, greater awareness of the Project remit, more appropriate referrals, and to have increased young people's involvement and engagement in the matching process. It was accepted that there was still an issue with availability of suitable properties in places where young people wanted to live, whether their preference was staying close to a residential home, moving towards family, or moving away from an environment that they felt was not good for them.

The house share model of SCSC has can offer several benefits to young people, potentially helping them to develop relationship-building skills, new social networks and combat isolation. However, it is not suitable for all young people and SCSC is therefore developing one bedroom accommodation options, in discussion with local housing providers. These also have the potential to offer greater stability to young people if they are eventually able to take on the tenancy independently. The success and sustainability of this strategy will depend on securing suitable housing, but potentially it may allow SCSC to offer a greater range of options to young people, and perhaps to accept referrals for young people that they would not otherwise be able to accommodate in a house share.

For those young people for whom a house share is appropriate the matching process and transition into the house are of great importance. There is evidence in the report that SCSC and local authority partners have worked hard to improve this process, with longer lead in times and closer work between PAs and SCSC. Many young people experienced a positive transition and got on with housemates. However, in a minority of cases there are still protracted difficulties between housemates and where these occurred the impact on young people's wellbeing was pronounced. Training for TWs in mediation and a mechanism for young people to report serious difficulties might help inform intervention in the minority of cases where serious problems emerge.

Tailored, specialist, multi-disciplinary, trauma-informed support is also required to enable young people's individual needs to be met effectively (including needs around mental health; independent living skills such as budgeting, cooking, and maintaining tenancies; education, employment and training; and building support networks).

There was ample evidence in the interviews to suggest that SCSC is successfully delivering a wraparound service that provides holistic individual support through the transitions workers, and additional service offer. Young people spoke positively about their relationships with their transitions workers and the creative flexible approach to supporting them with a range of needs. In particular the Emotional wellbeing service was mentioned by young people and staff as filling a gap when external services were hard to access, not sufficiently flexible or had lengthy waiting lists. The development of an independent living tool provides a structure for flexible levels of support, but also a sense of progression for young people as they move towards independent living. Young people underlined the importance of this tool being used with young people so that young people's own views on their needs form the starting point for discussion and should not be applied in a rigid way by staff.

Services and young people benefited from thoroughgoing coproduction of services, through which young people not only had a choice over their own package of support and accommodation, but also helped to determine aspects of the broader service offer.

There was evidence of coproduction in the service with young people offered some choice over their own support package. Barriers to coproduction include limitations on the housing available, which can result in pressured transitions. Young people commented that it was more possible to co-produce some aspects of the service such as social opportunities and initiatives to promote education, employment and training, than for the core housing offer. Coproduction is a core part of the SCSC value base. This is evidenced by involving young people in staff interviews, ensuring a mechanism for young people to feed into the development of services through the participation forum and ensuring it is run in an inclusive manner, promoting young people's involvement in service evaluation including making a film about the service, and the employment of a young apprentice working alongside the participation lead.

Preparation for transitioning from care to post-care living should start early and form a core part of support for children in care, including those living in children's homes.

There is evidence of partnership working in the current evaluation to improve awareness of the remit of SCSC amongst agency partners and increase lead in times to allow relationship building with SCSC staff before young people move from children's homes into SCSC accommodation. Understandably covid had an impact on these processes and on the transition out of SCSC into independent living. As the service develops SCSC are also paying attention to young people's transition out of SCSC, developing their project to include focus on future networks to better prepare young people for independent living when they move on. The development of one bedroom housing options that may be transferred to the young person as an independent tenancy, thus avoiding a move, is an innovative development. The lifelong offer of support from Break will also help young people in their transition to independence. Both the housing offer and the lifelong support offer require resource, and should be planned for and monitored.

Future development and wider application

As outlined above SCSC is looking at the development of one bedroom tenancies that could be transferred to the young person at the appropriate time.

LA partners see SCSC as a valuable option and would like to see it extended to other young people; such as young people with complex needs needing intensive support, and young people moving from placements other than residential settings.

Break plan to have a role in scaling up rolling out the model to other LAs. They are creating resources that can be accessed by other LAs and have been commissioned as consultants for the East Midlands as they develop their own Staying Close offer.

References

Berridge, D. (2016). The education of children in care: Agency and resilience. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 77, 86–93.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2021). *Thematic analysis: A practical guide*. Sage.

Cashmore, J., & Paxman, M. (1996). *Longitudinal study of wards leaving care*. Sydney, Australia: Department of Community Services.

Cashmore, J., & Paxman, M. (2007). *Longitudinal study of wards leaving care: Four to five years on*. Sydney: Social Policy Research Centre.

Children's Commissioner (CC). (2019), *Stability index 2019: Overview report*. Available from: <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/cco-stability-index-2019.pdf>

Department for Education (DfE) (2021) Children looked after in England (including adoption and care leavers) year ending 31 March 2021. London, DfE. [Children looked after in England including adoptions, Reporting Year 2021 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/children-looked-after-in-england-including-adoptions-reporting-year-2021)

Department for Education (DfE) (2021) Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities in England London, DfE. [Outcomes for children in need, including children looked after by local authorities in England, Reporting Year 2020 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/outcomes-for-children-in-need-including-children-looked-after-by-local-authorities-in-england-reporting-year-2020)

Dixon, J., & Baker, C. (2016). *New belongings: An evaluation*. Department for Education.

Fitzsimons, A. and McCracken K. (2020) *Children's Social Care Innovation Fund Round 2 Final Report*, Department for Education, available at [Children's Social Care Innovation Programme, Round 2 Final Report \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/531117/childrens-social-care-innovation-fund-round-2-final-report.pdf) ISBN: 978-1-83870-125-3

Gill, A. (2017) *From care to where? Care leavers access to accommodation*. London, Centrepont.

Munro, E. R., Lushey, C., Maskell-Graham, D., Ward, H., & Holmes, L. (2012). *Evaluation of the Staying Put: 18 Plus Family Placement Programme*.

Narey, M. (2016). *Residential care in England: Report of Sir Martin Narey's independent review of children's residential care*. London, England: Department for Education.

Rahilly T, Hendry E (2014) Promoting the wellbeing of children in care: Messages from the research. <http://clock.uclan.ac.uk/14634/1/promoting-wellbeingchildren-in-care-messages-from-research.pdf> (accessed 3 September 2020)

Stein, M. (2004). *What works for young people leaving care?*. Barnardo's.

Stein, M., & Munro, E. R. (2008). The transition to adulthood for young people leaving public care: international comparisons and perspectives. In *Care matters: transforming lives–*

improving outcomes conference (incorporating the 8th International Looking After Children Conference) (pp. 7-9).

Tarren-Sweeney, M., & Hazell, P. (2006). Mental health of children in foster and kinship care in New South Wales, Australia. *Journal of paediatrics and child health*, 42(3), 89-97.

Ward, H., & Holmes, L. (2008). Calculating the costs of local authority care for children with contrasting needs. *Child & Family Social Work*, 13(1), 80-90.

Ward, H. (2009). Patterns of instability: Moves within the care system, their reasons, contexts and consequences. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 31(10), 1113-1118.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Summary of results of outcomes tracker Sept 20- Sep 21

Outcome/Indicator	Mean Score Sept 2020 (out of 5 unless stated)	Mean Score Sept 2021 (out of 5 unless stated)	Size of increase	No. of yp improving	No. of young people remaining	No. of young people decreasing
Young person feels healthy	3.2	3.3	0.1	8	12	5
Young person feels able to book appointments	3.4	3.6	0.2	7	13	5
Young person trusts SCSC staff	3.6	4.0	0.4	12	10	3
Young person feels close to other people	3.3	3.5	0.2	9	10	6
YP is able to access services in the community	3.9	4.5	0.6	13	11	1
Young person is able to do own shopping	4.0	4.4	0.4	8	15	2
Young person is able to do own washing	4.0	4.4	0.4	10	13	2
Young person feels work ready	3.0	3.3	0.3	10	10	5
Young person feels financially secure	6.5 (out of 10)	7.4 (out of 10)	0.9	10	9	6
Young person feels secure in accommodation	11.0 (out of 15)	11.8 (out of 15)	0.8	12	8	5
Young person does not face barriers in maintaining positive relationships (only 19 responses)	3.1	3.5	0.4	6	11	2
Young person feels they have been supported to make and maintain connections (only 19 responses)	3.3	3.6	0.3	5	8	6
Young person feels they are well connected to important people in their life (only 19 responses)	3.5	3.8	0.3	5	12	2
Young person knows how important people in my life are able to support me (only 19 responses)	3.6	3.8	0.2	5	10	4
Young person knows who to talk to about connecting with the important people in my life (only 19 responses)	3.3	3.8	0.4	5	12	2
Young person has people they want in their life but don't know how to connect with them (only 19 responses)	2.5	3.1	0.6	8	9	2

Appendix 2 – Break Staying Close Staying Connected Theory of Change.



