



### Information for school staff

This information sheet invites school staff to be involved in the ECHO project commencing in April 2014 to evaluate Chance UK's mentoring programme. Here we explain what the evaluation is and what it will mean for any referrals you make to Chance UK. School staff will be needed to make a valuable contribution to the research, so please read this sheet carefully to find out more before making a referral. Thank you!

### Why is the evaluation taking place?

Chance UK is taking part in an evaluation in order to better understand the effects of its mentoring programme on children's behaviour and emotional wellbeing. This will provide helpful evidence which is important for the future of the service and its users.

The evaluation is part of a project called Realising Ambition, in which the BIG Lottery Fund is supporting UK charities and voluntary organisations to deliver programmes designed to prevent or intervene early in the development of children's behavioural difficulties. Realising Ambition is working with the most promising programmes, including Chance UK, to help them to reach a high standard of evidence about their impact on children's lives.

If proven to be effective, Chance UK's mentoring programme could be rolled out more widely to benefit more children. The evaluation will be of national significance as it will make a considerable contribution to building the evidence base for what works here in the UK to improve children's outcomes.

### How will I be involved?

School staff will make a vital contribution to the evaluation, including:

- Referring children who may be eligible to receive the programme.
- Completing a questionnaire about the child's behaviour and emotional wellbeing as part of the referral process.
- Informing parents/carers about the evaluation and seeking permission for referral.
- Completing a brief questionnaire about the child around nine months and sixteen months after referral, no matter which group the child is assigned to for the evaluation.

### What is the evaluation?

In order to find out about the impact of Chance UK's mentoring programme, researchers need to study how much children's behaviour and emotional wellbeing changes from the beginning to the end of the programme, and compare this to any changes in similar children who do not receive the programme.

Children's behaviour, emotions and self-esteem can change a lot over time and it can be difficult for researchers to state confidently which of these changes is due to an intervention that the child has received. It could be that improvements occur naturally because of other background factors, such as changes at home or in school, or simply as a result of the child growing up.

This evaluation will make it possible to compare the changes we see in children who receive Chance UK's service to the changes in similar children who do not receive it. As a result, researchers will be able to show what improvement is due to taking part in the programme.

### How does the evaluation work?

Chance UK's mentoring programme will be evaluated in what is called a Randomised Controlled Trial (RCT). There are lots of different methods of evaluation, but this is often the best way to find out whether or not a programme works.

In an RCT the children who could benefit from a particular programme are randomly divided into two groups in a process much like flipping a coin. In this case, the two groups will be:

- **Mentoring group:** children in this group receive the mentoring programme;
- **Non-mentoring (comparison) group:** children in this group will not receive the programme but they are free to access any other services available to them.

Information about children's behaviour and emotional wellbeing will be collected from parents and school staff in both groups in the same way. At the end of the evaluation, the researchers will compare the difference in outcomes between those children who received the mentoring programme and those who did not. This will determine the impact of Chance UK's service on these outcomes.





## What do I need to know?

### How is the referral and monitoring process different from before?

- School staff need to ensure the family is aware of the evaluation taking place before the child is referred - a parent/carer information leaflet is provided in the referral pack.
- Staff also need to indicate on the referral form whether they agree to participate in data collection exercises for any child they refer who is accepted onto the evaluation.
- Staff will be asked to complete questionnaires no matter which group the child is in.

### What will happen if I make a referral?

- Chance UK will pass the referral to the research team who will phone the child's parent/carer to explain the evaluation and to conduct eligibility checks, including a questionnaire for parents about the child's behaviour. If the child is accepted onto the evaluation, a researcher will visit the family home for some further short questionnaires.
- The researchers will randomly assign the child to the mentoring or non-mentoring group. Chance UK will let the referrer know if the child is taking part and which group the child is assigned to. Children can be referred to other available services as usual.

### Being involved in research

- The data school staff provide will be used to assess the child's eligibility for the programme and the child's outcomes in terms of behaviour and emotional wellbeing.
- For each child in the evaluation, the research team will collect questionnaire data from a school staff member, the child, and their parent/carer. School staff will be asked to complete a brief, widely-used measure, the *Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire*.
- School staff participation in data collection is voluntary, but highly valuable.
- The data provided will be kept confidential, stored appropriately, and analysed and reported at a group level where no individual could be identified.
- The research will be reviewed by an independent ethics committee.

### The Social Research Unit at Dartington

The evaluation is being run by the SRU - an independent charity that seeks to increase the use of evidence of what works in designing and delivering services for children and their families. The team has extensive experience in conducting randomised controlled trials under real-world conditions.

Working on the ECHO project are:  
Dr. Nick Axford (Principal Investigator),  
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and Laura Whybra (RCT Coordinator).

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## Frequently asked questions

### Will fewer children receive Chance UK's service during the evaluation?

No. Chance UK will be working with exactly the same number of children as usual, and will be seeking to identify double the number of children who are eligible to receive the service in order to form a comparison group of an equal size to the mentoring group. During the period of evaluation, eligible children will have a 50/50 chance of receiving the mentoring programme.

### Isn't it unethical to give some children the mentoring programme, but not others?

No. It is only unethical if it is certain that the children receiving the programme will be better off than those not receiving it. While Chance UK is confident the programme has a positive impact, they don't have conclusive evidence. It is important to be aware that:

- The comparison group children are entitled to receive any other services as usual.
- The research design will be presented to an independent ethics committee for scrutiny and approval before the evaluation begins.

### Why is it random, why can't we choose who goes into each group?

When all of the children meet the same eligibility criteria, random assignment is the fairest way to decide who gets the service. Chance UK cannot serve everybody. Randomisation also increases the chance that the two groups for the evaluation are balanced in terms of factors like gender or age that might influence the results. Both groups are equally important to the success of the study.

### How much time will it take school staff to complete the questionnaires?

Not long! A staff member will be contacted and asked to take part in a short data collection exercise around nine and sixteen months after referral. This will happen for the children receiving mentoring and for those who are part of the comparison group. The *Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire* will be used to assess children's behaviour and emotional wellbeing. This brief, widely-used measure should take no more than 20 minutes to complete.

### Do school staff & parents/carers have to participate in this research?

No. Participation is voluntary. The researchers will seek informed consent from school staff at referral and from parents/carers once their child is determined to be eligible. Families or referrers will not be able to influence which group the child is in as this must be randomly allocated. Those who do sign up to take part have the right to withdraw from the study at any point.

