

Pro Bono Economics analysis shows Chance UK would have to reduce negative outcomes by only 2.5 per cent more, on average, than would occur naturally in children who do not receive its service, for the benefits of the programme to equal the costs.

Chance UK is a London-based charity which delivers one-to-one mentoring to primary school children who have been referred to them due to conduct difficulties. The charity's aim is to help the children improve their behaviour over the course of the mentoring, with a view to reducing anti-social behaviour and youth crime in the longer term.

Pro Bono Economics (PBE) is a charity which matches volunteer economists with charities to address questions around measurement, results, impact and value.

Previous evaluations commissioned by Chance UK found that children who completed their mentoring programme had a statistically significant improvement in their behaviour. Chance UK asked PBE to take that analysis a step further and consider the potential impacts that an improvement in behaviour could have on life outcomes and the value of those improvements.

The analysis shows that the benefits would equal the costs if Chance UK were successful in ensuring that one in 42 children avoided the negative outcomes and costs associated with conduct problems, as a direct result of the mentoring programme. An alternative way of putting this is that Chance UK's work would have to reduce negative outcomes resulting from conduct problems by an average of 2.5 per cent in children who would not have improved without the service.

Because there was no control group or follow-up data, these estimates are based on evidence and data from other studies. This literature looks at the life outcomes of children with conduct problems, as opposed to behavioural difficulties more broadly, and the costs of those outcomes. The analysis compares Chance UK's costs with the potential benefits to both public services and also to the individuals themselves, and estimates how many children would need to avoid negative outcomes for the benefits to equal the cost of delivering the intervention – a breakeven analysis.

Chance UK is committed to improving their understanding of the outcomes they achieve and to robust evaluation of their work. The report's recommendation that 'data is collected to allow an assessment of the lasting impacts of their mentoring programme, which can be compared with a control group of children who do not receive that support' has already been addressed. The Big Lottery Fund is funding a randomised control trial (RCT) of their intervention through the Realising Ambition programme. This will be undertaken by the Social Research Unit at Dartington and will provide data on their actual impact which could then inform a full cost-benefit analysis.

"Ever since its inception 18 years ago, Chance UK has been keen to ensure our work makes a real difference in the lives of the children we work with and so has always welcomed evaluation by independent organisations. We were therefore keen to engage with Pro Bono Economics on this cost-benefit analysis to help evidence the savings our early intervention programme can make to a local authority or government funder. Building on this vital work, we welcome the next stage of our evidence-based approach: the RCT funded by the Big Lottery Fund via Realising Ambition, which will begin in 2014 and be carried out by Dartington Social Research Unit (SRU). The more evidence we gather, the more we will learn how to make our service even better and so benefit even more children."

Gracia McGrath, OBE, Chief Executive of Chance UK



CASE STUDY

J, an eight-year-old boy, was an only child growing up with his mother, who found it hard to set boundaries. His father lived elsewhere with his new partner and other children, and J craved contact with him. J was also isolated from his friends, as he lived more than an hour from his school and so never saw them outside school hours.

When he was at school, J was both very anxious and very angry. He regularly fought with other pupils and was at risk of exclusion for this persistent violence. He was also desperate for recognition and praise, often calling out inappropriately in class, and unable to concentrate properly on his work. As a result, he was not reaching his considerable academic potential. As part of their referral to Chance UK, J's school completed a Goodman Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). This gave him a behavioural difficulties score of 29 – anything above 16 is counted as abnormal and makes a child eligible for the Chance UK programme.

Chance UK matched J with a 33-year-old male mentor who was a writer and also training to be a teacher. J also loved to write stories so they had a clear shared interest. During the mentoring, the two of them did lots of writing together, but also played chess, went swimming and used the solution-focused approach, which underpins all Chance UK's work, to help J imagine and plan a better future. Chance UK also supported both J's parents so they could learn to better support him.

Over the year, J developed many strengths. One of his goals, set at the three-month review stage, was to write a book about himself in the future, imagining how he would use the solution-focused approach to manage his frustration and raise his aspirations. He used patience and persistence to complete this work, which was revised many times. Through reflecting and engaging in activities with his mentor, J also learned respect, so that he was able to accept other people's strengths.

By the end of the mentoring, J's school SDQ score had gone down from 29 points to just 8. But his mother's words perhaps sum up the success of the mentoring even better: 'My son's behaviour has vastly improved. He can deal much better with confrontations. He is trying very hard. He's really taken this year on board. It definitely does work.'