



Annual Report

2021-2022

Introduction from our CEO

Geethika Jayatilaka



After the past two years of disruption and challenge for us all – we are pleased that this year we have much to celebrate and share with you.

A real highlight for me has been seeing the Chance UK services grow and develop in line with the ambitions in our new strategy. A key message from children, families, staff and stakeholders was asking us to step forward and be ambitious in how we help children and families with the challenges faced in coming out of the pandemic and beyond. The tried and tested methods Chance UK has used to support children through intensive mentoring over the years are now helping us to do that and reach a greater number of children.

We are delighted to have grown our school workshops to now being delivered in three London boroughs. In addition, we have delivered two new group programmes aimed at developing children's social and emotional skills.

And our work has expanded to new areas across London, enabling us to reach more children with our support. While we continue to provide intensive mentoring for children in Southwark, Islington, Camden, Lambeth and Westminster, we have also launched a significant new programme providing high quality early intervention services for girls. Our work with parents continues to deepen and develop with our renamed 'Family Support Team' engaging and supporting parents and carers.

When I speak to parents, they tell me how they wish they were heard and that people understood the very real and devastating impact of exclusion on their children and the wider family. So, this year we have successfully focused public attention on primary school exclusions and the very real human cost of a system which isn't working. We are grateful to those parents who shared their experiences with policy makers and in the public domain to help raise awareness.

As the full impact of the pandemic, especially on our children's mental health, is still being understood, we have never felt better prepared and energised to face the challenges ahead. We are confident that our new direction and services will enable us to support more children to realise their potential and thrive in a changing world.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Geethika Jayatilaka". The script is fluid and cursive.

Geethika Jayatilaka, CEO

Our Impact



84%

of **children** could **identify strengths** to help them settle into secondary school



100%

of children increased **self-esteem**

208



children

on our mentoring programmes



168

parents had

1:1 support



87%

of **children** on our programmes **showed improved behaviours** after mentoring



85%

of **children** found **friendship** within the group

1289



children

attended our workshops

25



schools

benefitted from our workshops

Case Study: Mary-Ann and Louie*

Louie was just five years old when he was expelled from his first school. This was before we had an ADHD diagnosis and the first I knew that there were any issues was when I would get a call to go and get him from school. Often I would only just have got home and my phone would go and I'd have to go back to school again. It was exhausting. After one incident when Louie climbed a steep staircase and threatened to jump off, they decided to expel him.

Eventually another school place was found for him and things went really well but after a few weeks, Louie started to play up again. Over the next year he was excluded many times for his behaviour. It was so stressful; I'd dread hearing the words 'can we just have a moment'.

Finally, we got a referral to the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and the school put in place an educational plan giving Louie one-to-one support. Things started to get better. I was able to get a job and wasn't worrying all the time.

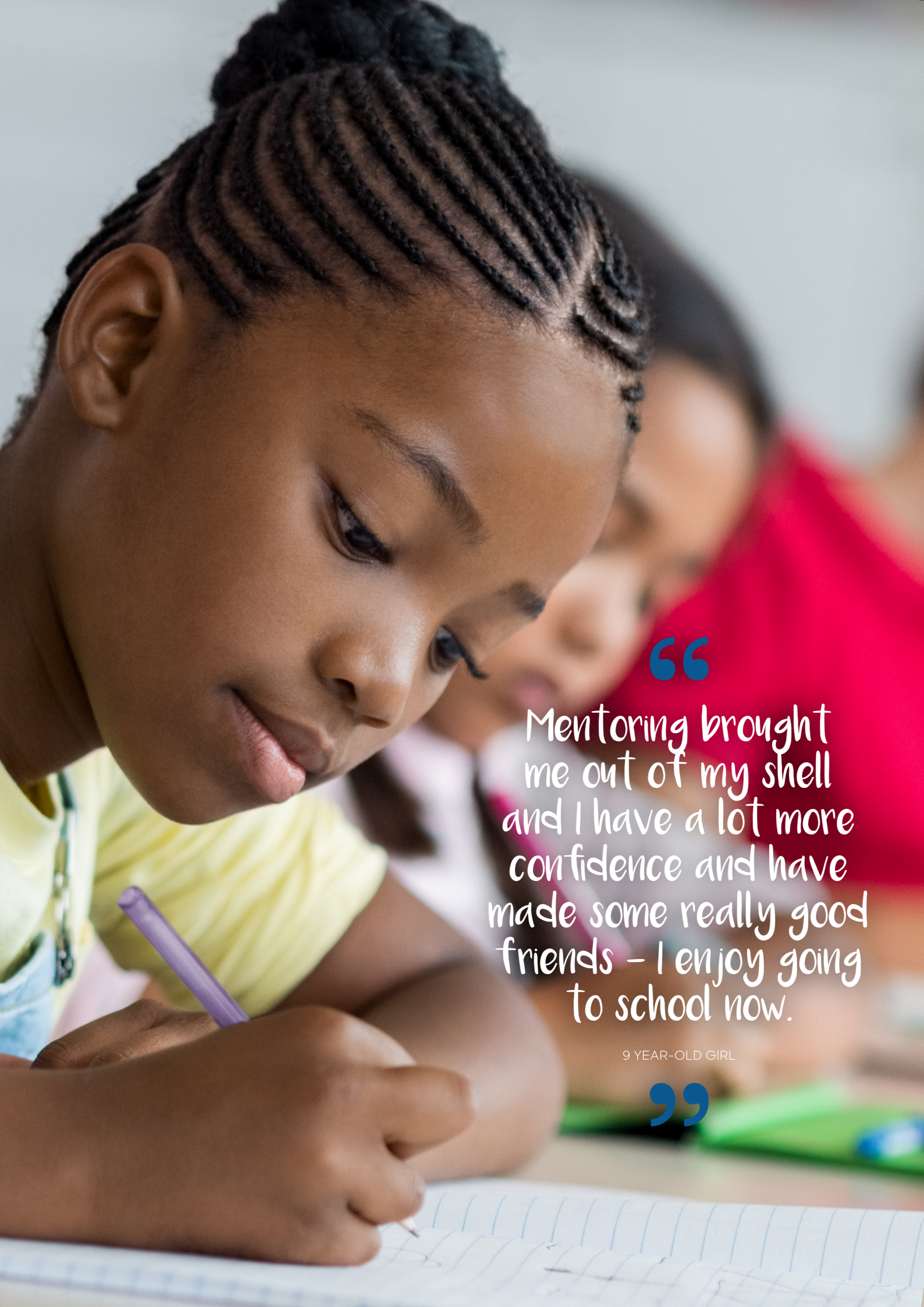
However, when Louie was nine years old there was another episode. When I arrived at school Louie was in the reflection room with the Headteacher and was still smashing it up when I walked in. Finally, I went to my GP in tears and asked for help. That's when Louie was diagnosed with ADHD. I thought everything would be wonderful after this but the issues at school still continued. By this time Louie was on reduced hours. At first it was four hours a day and then it went down to just two hours.

My relationship with the school has really gone downhill. At the start I was very respectful but I've realised that you have to fight and be loud if you want to get the support you need. Sometimes I want to scream and I'm so tired of fighting for things that he should have because of his educational plan. I have put my life on hold just to be able to focus on Louie.



Chance UK have been incredible and have really helped him to calm down. Louie needs someone to just be with him and give him some attention and that's what they do. I would say to other parents who are struggling, to give Chance UK a go – it's really worked for us. Louie gets on really well with his mentor and it's so nice to hear him laughing. It's like I have my old son back. He went on a trip with them and it really brought out his caring side – he was the one helping the other children. He'd always been stopped from going on school trips at school because of his behaviour so it really meant a lot to him to be trusted.

I am worried about what will happen at secondary school. Louie says to me 'what if I can't get into school', I know he's scared and I have to fight back tears when I think about it. I don't want them to look at his past and think about that rather than his future.



“

Mentoring brought me out of my shell and I have a lot more confidence and have made some really good friends – I enjoy going to school now.

9 YEAR-OLD GIRL

”

Mentoring

At Chance UK we support children aged 5-13 and families to develop social and emotional skills, building resilience to flourish in a changing world. We know that if we provide the right support at the right time, children, families and communities can thrive.

During the pandemic, we developed a new part of our mentoring approach which saw experienced youth workers providing mentoring to our children and families. This was partly a response to the ongoing challenges of recruiting volunteers but also a recognition of the complexity of needs of many of the children we were seeing.

As the impact of the pandemic on children's mental health continues to be a concern, we are seeing the value of having experienced youth workers mentoring the children we work with. Already we have seen an improvement in outcomes for our children and a reduction in emotional and behavioural difficulties.

87% of children on our programmes showed improved behaviours after mentoring.

The sessions with my mentor are the best. She's supporting me a lot and this makes me feel good. I always look forward to our sessions together.

9 YEAR-OLD GIRL

LIFT programme

In the UK today, young women have the highest rates of poor mental health, with many also experiencing domestic abuse. Without enough support on offer, too many young women and girls are left traumatised by their experiences of violence and abuse, which leave them vulnerable to being targeted for abuse and exploitation. That's why, with the support of the Mayor of London's Violence Reduction Unit, we have launched our girls programme called LIFT, in partnership with the charity Advance.

This programme will support 37 girls aged 9-13 from across London who have been affected by domestic abuse or may be vulnerable. By listening and working with girls and young women, focusing on their hopes, we aim to build resilience and impact positively on their future.

Our female youth workers will work with a group of girls for 6-9 months - meeting them weekly - providing information and support on topics such as healthy relationships, the signs of domestic abuse and helping them build their self-confidence. Parents will also be supported during this programme.

We know the value of peer-to-peer support and how life-changing it can be. These sessions will empower the girls in our programme to express themselves and discuss their experiences and emotions, including topics like consent and online harm.

Supporting and investing in girls now will change their futures and help to reduce the numbers of young women experiencing domestic violence.

Specialist Group Work

It will be no surprise to hear that we are seeing an increase in emotional difficulties in children since the onset of the pandemic.

Some vulnerable children are waiting almost three years before they get mental health care and the delays in accessing support is something we hear about a lot at Chance UK from both parents and teachers. Yet we know from our work that early intervention and support is vital for children. That's why it's been so important to work with funders like the Westminster Foundation to offer children additional support, especially when they are struggling both emotionally and socially.

Sometimes I'm like a volcano about to explode, but now I know I can control it.

10 YEAR-OLD GIRL

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Our work sees us bring together groups of up to 20 children a week in structured but fun sessions to develop their social and emotional skills.



Case study: Westminster programme

I don't have any friends at school but I do here and everyone is kind.

9 YEAR-OLD GIRL



Over twelve weeks we brought together a group of children who either had previous involvement with Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), were on a waiting list for CAMHS or who were experiencing behavioural and emotional difficulties but not able to access wider support. Many children in the group had experienced trauma at an early age.

So much of this work is about giving children a voice, a way to express their feelings and emotions before they reach a point where they 'explode' or shut themselves off from others. During this programme our youth workers saw the group become more confident in saying what they thought and what they wanted to do.

We ran structured sessions on emotions, social skills and mental and physical health, but we made it fun too. One boy who was very closed and shut down in the first few weeks, loved to cook. He became animated, chatty and was able to talk about things he hadn't been able to express before. When we started to talk about our anger and emotions in terms of being a volcano, he was the most eloquent in the group. Asked what the feelings were that might lead to that volcano exploding, his words came tumbling out: 'isolation', 'rejection', 'sadness'. Suddenly he had a voice and we could talk as a group about how to manage those feelings so that we don't explode.

One girl told us: 'I don't have any friends at school but I do here and everyone is kind'. Another said: 'I wish I could come here every day'. Parents and carers saw a difference at home too and one mum told us her daughter seemed much more aware of her emotions and feelings, and was engaging more with her peers. She was also starting to initiate cuddles, which had not really happened before.



Through these workshops we hope to support 60 children across the year and some of these children will also go on to receive one-to-one mentoring with Chance UK. It's so important we continue to support some of our most vulnerable children so that they feel able to express their emotions and learn how to cope with the trauma they've experienced.

Girls Group – RISE

The Girls RISE workshops support girls to develop their skills and a strong sense of identity, as well as helping them establish strong supportive relationships with adults and peers. We support groups of girls to explore possible and preferred futures and identify existing strengths that are already contributing to those futures.

We were delighted to be able to return to in person workshops this year and ran a series of workshops throughout November and December 2021 in four schools across London reaching 41 girls aged 8 – 11.

Young girls often find it hard to give self-praise so by working as a group, girls feel more encouraged to give themselves positive praise.

One of the most popular activities in the workshops was the creation of a Super Girl. This activity enabled the girls to share positive things about themselves and hear what others liked about themselves.

One girl, who had been reluctant to join in, became very involved and was the first to write something positive about herself, sharing that: 'I am funny and smart'.

YOUTH WORKER



Classroom Workshops

Over the last year, our classroom workshops have supported over 1280 children in 25 schools across 3 London boroughs.

It was good to know that
other people feel anxious too.

YEAR 6 CHILD



Building Strengths for Tougher Times

There has never been a more important time to support groups of children as they face multiple challenges, especially following the pandemic. These workshops were developed in response to the concerns around children and young people's mental health, as schools saw a huge rise in the number of children needing support.

With funding from the City of London Corporation we were able to support over 320 children living on Southwark housing estates; three times the number we'd originally planned to reach.

The feedback from the children showed that they had really benefitted from activities around managing strong feelings and identifying anxiety. At one school, **79% of children felt more able to identify and manage strong feelings and learnt more about how anxiety feels in the body.**

It made me feel more brave
and confident to start
secondary school.
I feel more prepared.

YEAR 6 CHILD



Changes - making a successful transition to secondary school

Transition to secondary school can be one of the most challenging times in a child's school life. We know how important it is that children feel supported to express their worries and fears and learn coping strategies to help them and their families with the change.

Our school workshops have seen just over 1,000 children supported across the year and we were delighted to be able to return to delivering these in person this year. The workshops provide a starting point for children to talk about the next step in their lives and gives everyone a sense of being in the same boat. Each child learns why it's normal to feel worried about change, receive some practical reassurance about specific worries to do with starting in year 7, and have strategies they can use if they feel anxious or have difficulties.



Our Voice and Influence

- ✧ We responded to the Government's consultation on Behaviour in Schools Guidance and Suspension and Permanent Exclusions Guidance to reinforce Chance UK's position on using trauma informed, solution focused approaches and looking at the wider needs of the child and family.
- ✧ The new Guidance was published in July 2022 and while we welcome the recommendation that *"schools and local authorities should work to create environments where school exclusions are not necessary because pupil behaviour does not require it"*, we want to see more emphasis on supporting the child at the heart of this change.
- ✧ We are disappointed that the guidance does not go further in recognising the value of early intervention and support for children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. We continue to raise awareness of the impact of primary school exclusions and the importance of Government action to prevent these, with an ambition of no exclusions being needed.
- ✧ We were delighted to contribute to the report on exclusions by the Commission on Young Lives, which included a special meeting with Anne Longfield and some of our families.

Through our work with the Commission, the report backed our recommendation to prevent primary school exclusions by proposing a ban on exclusions from 2026. They also recognised the need for greater support for children, parents and schools to achieve this. Our CEO Geethika Jayatilaka provided commentary across the media and we ensured that parents voices were heard during the report launch.

Final word from our families:

The support we had from Chance UK was brilliant – it was the first time I really saw my son open up and I could see him building his social skills. He really responded to having a mentor and a positive role model to look up to. ”

My son really liked his mentor; he would talk to him and they would do things together. He became much less shy. ”

I would say to other parents who are struggling to give Chance UK a go – it's really worked for us. Louie gets on really well with his mentor and it's so nice to hear him laughing. It's like I have my old son back. ”



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