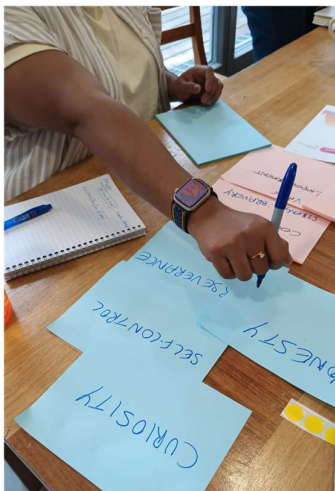


## Bright Futures - Mantle Learning Partnership Report: Cultural Strengths for a Bright Future



### **Introduction:**

This report is a summative analysis of the work of the Learning Partnership between the London Gypsies & Travellers Bright Futures Team and Mantle Consultancy.

The Partnership was designed to be an integral and iterative part of the continuous evaluation cycle of the Bright Futures Mentoring Programme funded by Propel New Deal for Young People.

### **Context:**

Launched in late 2023, Bright Futures offers 1:1 mentoring opportunities for young people aged 15-25 within the Gypsy and Traveller community in London. Sessions are held at Mildmay Community Centre, the home of London Gypsies and Travellers organisation.

The key strengths of this particular youth intervention are as follows:

- Young people are offered the opportunity of individual mentoring sessions
- The approach is rooted in an understanding of cultural nuances and community expectations
- The offer was designed to be fluid and to adapt to the young people's needs
- The focus is on helping participants to set and achieve personal goals meaningful to them
- Engagement is voluntary and direct

The Learning Partnership comprised a reflective analysis of Year 1, and a co-created, real-time analysis during Year 2.

## **Approach, methodology and values:**

Our community-embedded approach has embodied culturally sensitive practice, and collaborative interpretation.

A focused and pragmatic methodological blend was used, including:

- Community consultation and research, building on existing trusting relationships between the Bright Futures and LGT teams and the Gypsy and Traveller community.
- Semi-structured interviews and guided conversations leading to thematic analysis, reviewing year 1 and keeping connected in year 2.
- Facilitated reflective practice and co-creation with the mentor delivery team, generating insight from Year 2 in real time.
- Collaborative interpretation workshops involving the leadership team, trustees, wider staff and Bright Futures mentors.
- Knowledge-sharing sessions and training workshops building staff confidence and their comprehension of the value of their own professional and cultural expertise. Exploring key developments, challenges, and learning points.
- Supporting the team to assimilate, grow, and share knowledge from their culturally sensitive delivery, acknowledging practices like chaperoning, differing traditional (and still very much present) aims for boys and girls, varied learning and communication styles, and familial responsibilities and involvement.

The values throughout the work reflected those of London Gypsies and Travellers as an organisation:

### **Collaboration**

With staff and trustees, with young people and their community, throughout the Learning Partnership.

### **Courage**

Evidenced through the creation of the Bright Futures mentoring programme - courage to try something different, and courage to adapt, flex and grow to ensure best impact for the young people.

### **Empowerment**

Of the Bright Futures team, the young people, of the Learning Partnership - for example, to explore challenging ideas and concepts, to ask incisive questions and to gain answers - or to remain inquisitive and determined if answers are not yet forthcoming.

### **Inclusivity**

Adapting sessions, methods and timelines to support the ebb and flow of community work, training to expand knowledge, learning to understand cultural needs, traditions, and changing values.

### **Equity**

Ensuring wherever possible that everyone can be involved and everyone has a voice. In the words of author Michael Connolly; "Everybody counts or nobody counts".

### **Community**

The bedrock of the Bright Futures approach. Community is a complex value for these young people; contrary to the assumptions of those from other backgrounds, the Bright Futures young people and their peers have a strong sense of community responsibility, and feel keenly real or imagined community judgement. Staff members and trustees from within the Gypsy and Traveller community are essential to the core aims of the organisation; this generates benefits and challenges but most of all, learning and growth opportunities.

## **Learning Partnership Intended Purpose:**

The intent of Bright Futures was to do things differently for the benefit of the young people; the intended purpose of the collaborative learning partnership was to echo this, offering real-time analysis and response to

match the iterative approach of the Bright Futures team, expanding this through skills in learning and evaluation and incorporating our key aims:

- Together, to elicit feedback and use professional judgement about what works, what doesn't, and what changes are required to progress.
- To use the strength of relationship within the community to adapt and respond to the needs of young people, their families and wider Gypsy and Traveller society and amalgamate this with the supportive and positive change that results.
- To enjoy, be mindful of progress, celebrate, review, and plan for new phases of growth in line with the needs of our community and our organisational strategy.

### **Delivery:**

Following initial meetings and a round of introductory and exploratory conversations with LGT and Bright Futures staff and leadership, the Learning Partnership moved forward in two strands; Consultation and Review, and Learning, Analysis and Adaptation.

Consultation and Review incorporated:

- Retrospective insight-gathering through interviews, workshops with staff, and document review
- Monthly reflective practice check-ins (Bright Futures Programme Lead and Learning Partnership Lead)
- Real-time insight-gathering through online and in person meetings, reported conversations and professional observations

Learning, Analysis, and Adaptation incorporated:

- Workshops with the staff team to explore key developments, challenges, and learning points
- Iterative refinement of approaches and practical tools for learning
- Planning and co-design of Learning Frameworks suited to Bright Future's needs

The following originally-planned outputs were changed in a response to our learning:

- Targeted engagement with Mentee and/or Youth Advisory Group - the Youth Advisory group is developing slowly and its progression will span beyond the timescale of the Learning Partnership.
- Contribution to presentation at AGM - it was decided to keep the focus of this event on AGM business and instead present the Learning Partnership Report later.
- The original idea aimed for more wide ranging discussions with the community and young people; due to team size and capacity (further detail follows), this became a more focused approach.

In addition to the in-person events, the following resources were created and delivered by Mantle in response to the Learning Partnership collaboration:

- Documentation of reflective sessions and thematic analysis (Year 2)
- Online training session and online workshop
- Community Consultation slide suite and briefing document
- Change Compass Framework
- Static Star Framework
- LGAT Rapid Analysis Framework
- Summative report
- Final document for a variety of audiences

### **What changed? Thematic Analysis and Key Learnings:**

During the Bright Futures Continuous Evaluation Cycle, repeated themes emerged from every element of consultation and assessment, consistently and in some cases, insistently.

These are:

1. What's Working Well
2. Impact - the Difference Being Made
3. Challenges and Adaptations
4. Community and Culture
5. Messages for Changemakers
6. Solutions Still sought

Key findings and analysis are summarised below, with collated response elements in Appendix 1.

### **1. What's Working Well**

**Adaptation** has been the thread of success throughout the programme. The iterative focus stated within the Learning Partnership Agreement has, at every stage, reflected the flexible approach taken by the Bright Futures team.

This demonstrates the value of courage within the London Gypsies and Travellers Organisation (LGT), within daily activity. The team have altered delivery based on constant instances of micro-feedback and response from young people and the community. The changes were initially the subject of much discussion and deliberation amongst the team and within the Learning Partnership; whether to "stick to the plan" or to adapt. Fears around adapting the delivery style included the possible alienation of current or future funders, being perceived as drifting away from the core mission for moving away from the plan, and that young people could feel let down if the offer was changed. A decision was taken to keep to LGT values, putting communication and consultation with the young people at the fore, and focusing on their needs as a priority.

This meant that the originally perceived standard delivery of 1:1 mentoring, that is, a regularly-scheduled 1:1 session in a closed space, was ameliorated; different approaches were incorporated to ensure the young people benefitted from the strongest impact. This took strong leadership and courage to deliver differently.

The strength in adaptation was evidenced in the following changes:

- Sessions were tailored to mentee needs, changing frequency, duration, and limiting other agency interventions, in response to direct consultation and as a result of observation and cultural knowledge amongst the mentor team. This increased engagement - additional young people participated or promoted Bright Futures to others. More conversations were had with mentors, both mentee-mentor and with the mentee family members.
- Consistently more boys than girls participate, with girls' engagement growing steadily over the year to almost half the mentee cohort currently. Boys' engagement was/is varied - differing levels of focus and engagement led to the team adapting the provision and prompted a need for new strategies. For example, some boys engaged better in shorter one-to-one sessions - so the duration was tailored. The boys who took part in the early stages helped promote the programme to others and their positive comments helped develop the Bright Futures offer.

Overall, Bright Futures has shown that this agile approach builds trust and supports the needs of these young people.

### **Knowing what our success looks like**

During the early stages of the project, and within the earliest meetings and the first workshop, a key piece of knowledge shared by the team was realised to be a significant thread

throughout Bright Futures, and a key element of the positive results. This thread of knowledge is that, “*Our* success may be different to *your* success”.

In this culturally and traditionally distinct community, life is generally peripatetic, and the way of life is similarly experienced - a tapestry of movement; change being a constant possibility, interest and focus following curiosity. It is reported that close to 80% of Gypsy and Traveller families are living settled lives and travel in their caravans during holidays, for family events etc. Traditions and customs remain hugely important, with the way the community feels seen being of significant impact.

In this context, success becomes extremely incremental. This can be demonstrated in the instance of a young person who booked sessions and then didn't attend; he progressed from being a regular “no show” to messaging via WhatsApp to inform of non-attendance in advance. This seemingly insignificant progression embodied a variety of success factors that might not appear elsewhere as “outputs”:

- ❖ Consideration that mentoring might help.
- ❖ A subtle shift in expectations around engagement.
- ❖ A method of communication that has few barriers for these young people leading to trust being gently built.
- ❖ Communication established - light touch, deep significance
- ❖ A first step on the road to commitment.
- ❖ Tentative self-confidence

Whilst success by more standard measures was of course evidenced, with aspirations raised, practical plans leading to training and career opportunities, and the community showing support, it has worked very well for the young people that in measuring impact, (See Appendix 1, section 1) our message is, “*Our* success may be different to *your* success”.

**“BF has most definitely changed how I see my future; never imagined I would be at this place in my life”**

## **2. Impact - the Difference Being Made**

In addition to the expected, and achieved, positive impact that 1:1 mentoring support has had for the young people, many - if not all - of the referenced impacts and outputs can be attributed to a clearly increased **trust** in the Bright Futures team by young people, the wider community, and family members.

Young people are recommending the programme to others, including one mentee who wanted to connect a cousin, who lives in a different region, with any similar opportunity. Families are placing their trust in Bright Futures as guides in the world of education, training, and the workplace, and communication is two-way and often maintained after the mentee completes the programme or moves on.

Impact from trust-based relationships has led to goal-setting, progression into training/apprenticeships, or attendance to activities that are devised for sharing knowledge and skills both for life and the workplace. Examples include the nail art or textile workshops that are particularly popular with girls.

**“The sessions are planned carefully together with community facilitators. The aim is for the girls to see beyond that session and to interact with role models from their community to understand that *you can do what is expected for your culture and also be who you are.*”**

**Padmini Ravi, Programme Lead & Mentor - Bright Futures**

W's story (for full case study see Appendix 2) illustrates the impact these qualities have supported:

**W, a 20-year-old single mother from East London with a 2-year-old toddler, was referred to Bright Futures by her social worker. ...Through dedicated 1:1 mentoring with a mentor, W received tailored support addressing motherhood, healthy relationships, identity, and future planning. The mentor provided a safe, flexible space that accommodated W's challenging home circumstances, enabling her to pause or resume engagement as needed. This culturally sensitive mentoring helped W gradually build trust and confidence.**

**W reflected:**

**"Bright Futures has helped me a lot, and even when I just need someone to talk to, I can speak to all of you. You're really welcoming and nice. My mentor gets where I'm coming from and doesn't judge me. It's made me look at things differently."**

**Over time, W began to take greater responsibility for her child, attending mentoring sessions more regularly and informing the team proactively if she was delayed. She also began bringing her child to sessions, rather than leaving her with her mother.**

**With support, W explored personal development opportunities, including referrals to a functional skills course and a young mothers' support group. After discussing her capacity and priorities with her mentor, she decided:**

**"Doing both things at once feels too much for me right now. I chose the mums group because it's more relevant at the time."**

**W also sought help to build her CV in order to find work in local salons, and recently expressed interest in training in hair and beauty therapy. She is currently working with her social worker to explore moving into independent accommodation, a significant step towards stability and self-reliance.**

**Her mentor shared:**

**"Since we began working together, W has really opened up, is showing more confidence, and clarity about her goals, and is willing to take steps towards them. Our trust has been the foundation for this progress, and it's been rewarding to support her in finding her path and grow."**

The increased trust is leading to improved **communication** - a huge impact, building on strong foundations. LGT, as a long-established and respected organisation, already had strong communication channels, now augmented digitally through frequent use of WhatsApp, which has the benefit of being direct, private communication, not reliant on digital or literacy skills.

Families and community members are responding well to both formal and informal communication. As they effectively lead by example, this opens the door for young people to begin reciprocal conversations.

The third impactful element to highlight is the increased **confidence** of the young people participating, and, indeed, of those not.

Young mentees report feeling that they are more able to communicate their own needs, to be brave enough to state their ethnicity, to feeling like they matter. It has also been observed that young people like friends, siblings, cousins, who sometimes come along, slowly realise this might be useful for

them too, therefore they are also gently showing an increased confidence in talking to the mentors, and even asking about activities. This confidence is a direct result of the increased trust growing from the Bright Futures offer, and, very significantly, the impact of the team's commitment to making the programme work in the way it needs to work for their young people.

**“Feel good now as I know I can do something, which is not how it felt before”**

**“Parents are happy I am getting help because they never had anything like this”**

### **3. Challenges and Adaptations**

This theme has been an inherent part of the Bright Futures success so far. It is evident to the team that changes are necessary to meet the evolving needs of the community.

Each time a challenge was identified, it was met by the team with curiosity, inventiveness and courage.

Two notable instances arising during delivery were:

- ❖ Understanding of Mentoring - what it is, what it means
- ❖ Peer pressure

**Mentoring** is a very specific word. In the UK, the use of "mentoring" as a formal youth work intervention emerged at the end of the 1990's. Mentoring can be a general befriending model, a tool for supporting specific targets, such as: reducing youth offending, or as a method of combatting the complexities around young people regarded as "NEET" (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) - and much more. In the context of the Propel New Deal for Young People (NDYP), a mentor is defined as an experienced person who builds a trusted, positive, and ongoing relationship with a young person (typically aged 8–24).

Professionals in the Youth Work and Community sectors often have an understanding or direct experience of mentoring as a concept for positive impact. This is not necessarily the case for people who do not work in this sector, and understanding has been shown to be further removed within our Gypsy and Traveller community. The word has been met with responses like uncertainty, or misperception arising from other mentoring activity. It's been a common response to think that mentors have to be very qualified, experienced, or high achieving, or that the focus of mentoring programmes is purely to get young people to return to some kind of formal education. It has taken rigorous, committed, and gentle communication from the Bright Futures team to break through barriers caused by a lack of understanding about the word and the process. This continues and is continuously adapted to suit circumstances, families and young peoples' needs.

**Peer pressure** amongst young people is a common barrier to participation. There are the added cultural pressures that can include family pride, or not being seen to be asking for, or accepting, help - especially "outside" help. This has been shown in addition to the young people's unsurprising nervousness around sharing true feelings and opinions during consultation, or around participation for fear of being judged. It has also been seen in interactions with parents - team members have observed that mentees and their parents might not provide honest negative feedback for fear of losing support.

Impactful adaptations by the Bright Futures team in response to feelings of peer pressure have focused around breaking down barriers, and, again, building trust. In delivery terms, this has incorporated active mentoring during events or other activity. This has taken the form of mentors being available for conversation with young people, whether during activities, before or after, and gently within conversation or more formally as a scheduled meeting. Active mentoring is a recognised approach for engaging boys in particular, and has been used increasingly as a tool for engagement. To that end, activities like 3D printing and plumbing workshops are proposed to increase engagement going forward.

“Feel like life is easier knowing mentor is there when I need“

#### 4. Community and Culture

As a theme, this presents as a running thread, being a key element of the founding objectives of London Gypsies and Travellers as an organisation. It highlights the depth of understanding of the Bright Futures team and again, was underpinned by the trust of the Gypsy and Traveller community in LGT as advocates and allies. Consultation with the whole community as well as young people has been integral to Bright Futures’ success.

A strong example of cultural expertise and trust in action is the understanding of family values and the often time-consuming responsibilities expected of our young people. It can be expected that marriage happens younger than many of their non-Gypsy/Traveller peers, and young men and women often take what are perceived to be traditional male and female roles within the family unit. In understanding this, the following impactful comment from a 16 year-old male mentee gains added significance, showing the depth of support for Bright Futures:

“If I had a child, I would most definitely bring them to Bright Futures”

This Bright Futures case study illustrates the impact of culturally appropriate support:

**M’s story (extract - see Appendix 2 for full case study)**

**Throughout, M remained actively involved in the programme, offering input on our approach, maintaining regular contact with staff, and joining the youth panel to interview new team members.**

**However, there was an unexpected change towards the end of the summer. M decided against college and began disengaging from his Functional Skills tutoring. His attendance dropped significantly; coursework wasn’t being completed, and he was eventually removed from the tutoring due to non-engagement. Around the same time, he became less communicative with us, gradually withdrawing until he stopped responding altogether. When we followed up, carefully and gently, taking care not to intrude, he eventually mentioned that he was planning to go to Ireland to work with family members, a surprising shift given that he had not previously shown interest in this option.**

**Throughout this period, we continued to check-in from time-to-time to reassure him that Bright Futures remained open to him, without pressure, and that support would be there whenever he felt ready. After a couple of months, around October, we contacted his mother where we were unable to reach him entirely. She explained that M had been navigating a sensitive personal situation related to cultural expectations placed on young people his age - expectations around stepping into adult roles early, managing peer pressures, and balancing the hopes of wider family and community. These dynamics had left him feeling low, overwhelmed, and unsure of his next steps, and this contributed to his withdrawal and sudden change of plans.**

**When M eventually returned from Ireland later in autumn, it was his mother who played a key role in helping him reconnect with us. Her understanding of our work and her commitment to the programme were especially significant during this period. As we often see, when parents feel aligned with our approach and trust the process, their support becomes a powerful anchor for their children, making it more likely that young people feel safe enough to return, re-engage, and accept help at their own pace. Working with families, understanding their cultural and community expectations, and building relationships with them is a crucial part of ensuring that the young people themselves can fully access the support available to them.**

#### 5. Messages for changemakers

During the reflections on Year 1 and throughout the Learning Partnership, an often-repeated viewpoint has been that direct contact with funders, where the organisation receiving (or hoping to

receive) funding can raise points that they feel are important to convey, are extremely rare. As such, messages for those with the power and authority to make change at higher levels, as well as for those making positive changes every day in the Gypsy and Traveller community, have been collated within this theme. It is important to note that any one of us can be a changemaker, and the LGT and Bright Futures community includes some very empowered changemakers, making a difference every day in their own corner of the world.

For changemakers empowered with the authority to advocate, change policy, offer funding and more, in practical terms, the LGT strategic plan has strands that include sharing messages for these changemakers.

Two messages to highlight are that, “The understanding that good progress often takes time,” and “Strong foundations of trust need to be built before the young people reach what might be seen in other, less- or differently-disadvantaged young people, as a starting point.” Trust is foundational for progress here. The exponential growth of reciprocal trust between LGT and the Bright Futures team, young people, and their families is a definitive prerequisite for progress, confirming that significant time investment is required for building foundations before reaching what may be regarded as a starting point for less-disadvantaged youth.

Messages arising from the Learning Partnership are currently:

- Systemic barriers: Prejudice, evictions, digital exclusion, limited site provision— these are all experiences that negatively influence outcomes for young people. Strong foundations of trust built over time offer a starting point for progression.
- It’s essential that funded programmes include time for building trust - young people tend to “test and then trust”
- Meaningful progress often takes time. “Our success is not your success”
- Our culture is our culture; we have different priorities and values than people often mistakenly expect
- LGT are the experts in Gypsy and Traveller culture, strengths and needs
- Funding delivery process matters - if they wish to truly make an impact within the most marginalised and misunderstood communities, funders should be courageous enough to understand how and why our work differs.

**“We want them to journey with us to achieve long term impact at depth” Padmini Ravi,  
Programme Lead & Mentor - Bright Futures**

## **6. Solutions still sought**

The key issue for which a solution remains for the most part not within the control of London Gypsy and Travellers is that of recruitment and retention. This is not a specific Gypsy and Traveller issue, but it is further complicated due to the specialised nature of expertise needed to offer maximum impact and positive change. Recruitment and retainment is a constant challenge.

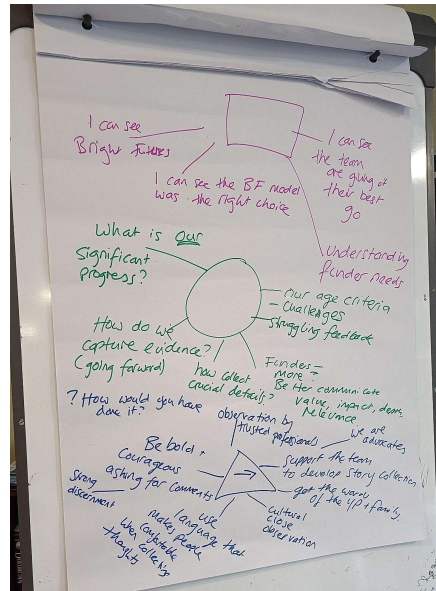
To explore the Bright Futures experience of this further:

Initial recruitment, despite using a variety of approaches to share, advertise and promote the role of Mentor, was hugely difficult. After experiencing the above-mentioned perceptions of what mentoring is, and who can do it, specific and targeted community engagement was undertaken at the start of the programme to encourage mentors from within the Gypsy and Traveller community. Responses were tentative - it was clear that time needed to be taken to evidence benefits, keep promises and build trust. Instead, the approach was adapted and suitable mentors were recruited, still relatively locally, but from within the VCSE sector.

Now almost two years on, there is a growing interest from community members, as they are now starting to see the value and impact of Bright Futures on their young people. It is evident that the “Trust takes time” message reaches here too - mentors are met with slow and tentative engagement from young people and their families, with the trust-building involving slow, steady progress and hard work. This is

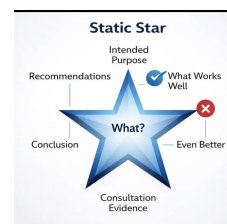
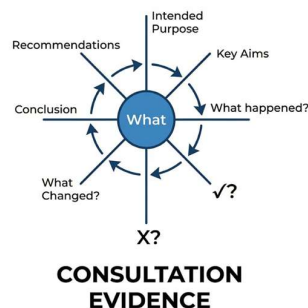
quite a change from standard youth work provision and funders would be well-placed to consider funding training and continuous professional development for community members, new and existing staff if programmes and organisations are to be community led. "Solutions still sought" is a theme that is key to progress. It is a strong indication of the dedication and expertise of the Bright Futures and LGT team that each and every member has had a suggestion or solution to ongoing challenges and situations. Solutions are being sought for issues for which any positive change will have immense and far-reaching impact, such as:

- ❖ Training and CPD for grassroots/community-led activity
- ❖ Funding that supports the necessary project longevity, remuneration methods and values, or **our** success
- ❖ Vehicles for sharing LGT and Bright Futures expertise so that others can benefit from their knowledge



## In Summary for the Learning Partnership - What went well:

The planning before this programme was begun, including the pre-funding development, have provided a sound bedrock for success of both delivery, and the Learning Partnership as a vehicle for evaluation. An approach that was generous in supporting changes and responses to challenges frequently seen in the sector (such as recruitment) as well as regular and efficient communication has resulted in learning that is embedded and is a springboard for continued development and growth. Frameworks were asked for, co-created, and tried; fluid and process-oriented rather than prescriptive, these were to focus on community embedded consultation for change, highlighting key insights, and planning for progression. This report uses the Change Compass outline.



The **LGAT** rapid analysis model, so named and created for ease of recall, was favoured. This can be used before, during and after delivery; for notes, case-studies, reports, consultation and more -

**Learning - what have we learned, what changed?**

**Golden - what was golden, that is, what sparkled, what was positive?**

**Alter - what could we alter next time to improve?**

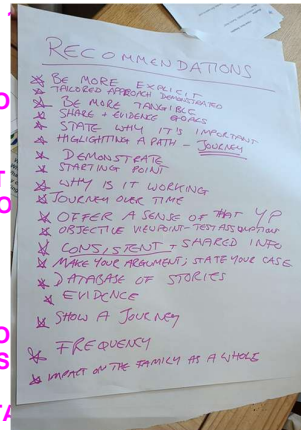
**Travel - what is our future travel, our forward plans?**

**What could be better?**

**Information capture** - It is a constant goal of the Bright Futures team to develop more consistent methods for information capture and records of consultation. This is clearly shown in the recommendations resulting from the whole team during workshop 1:

#### RECOMMENDATIONS FROM WORKSHOP 1

**BE MORE EXPLICIT  
TAILORED APPROACH DEMO  
BE MORE TANGIBLE  
SHARE + EVIDENCE GOALS  
STATE WHY IT'S IMPORTANT  
A HIGHLIGHTING A PATH - JO  
DEMONSTRATE  
STARTING POINT  
WHY IS IT WORKING  
JOURNEY OVER TIME  
OFFER A SENSE OF THAT YO  
OBJECTIVE VIEWPOINT - TES  
CONSISTENT, SHARED INFO  
MAKE YOUR ARGUMENT; STA  
DATABASE OF STORIES**



Exploration of differing methods of this has been a key component of the workshop sessions. The team is in the process of creating a standard process which will underpin both daily interactions and the continuous evaluation cycle.

**Messages for changemakers in positions of authority** - As messages for change become clearer as a result of the continued reflective elements of Bright Futures continuous evaluation, their community consultations, and co-creative approach, the question becomes - what to do with these? How do we share our messages?

### Overall conclusion and recommendations

In conclusion, three essential elements have emerged throughout the Learning Partnership, each underpinning the overall success of the programme.

1. The courageous experimental element of the programme - the iterative and adaptive practical yet reflective approach. With strong processes of question, response, change, consult, the Continuous Evaluation Cycle and responsive delivery have contributed significantly to young people's positive development.
2. Organisations that work through their values experience stability and growth, avoid mission drift, and keep their priorities and beneficiaries in mind. The approach of continually adjusting delivery based on micro-feedback and cultural knowledge, has been validated as the most effective path for supporting the young people of this community, directly aligning the programme's actions with the LGT values to ensure best impact.

Collaboration  
Courage

Empowerment  
Inclusivity  
Equity  
Community

3. Knowing what **our** success looks like is the final essential element of the programme's achievements. This perspective of "relative metrics" spotlights actual success for *these* people in *these* circumstances. The programme's accomplishments confirm that measures of impact must remain distinct and relative. All stakeholders - especially changemakers - are encouraged to take on board the message that incremental progress, rooted in the community's unique context and culture, is valuable and impactful.

W's story illustrates the difference that a gentle approach to progress is making to individuals: (Full case study in Appendix 2)

**W joined Bright Futures (BF) in Autumn 2024 at age 15. A young Traveller resident of a central London borough and navigating additional learning needs, he was quiet, hesitant to speak to strangers, and unsure of steps towards his goal of working in construction. His mum was his strongest advocate, staying closely involved and helping him commit to the programme.**

**In the early weeks, W barely made eye contact and often hunched into himself. His mentor describes initial meetings as 'gentle, steady pacing', focused on building trust, exploring interests and breaking down what felt like overwhelming path ahead. Together, they mapped small, achievable steps..His interests expanded too and he worked with his mentor to explore a different pathway. Being open about a change in plan was a significant moment in his journey with BF.**

**His mentor shared:**

**'The change in W is noticeable....Now that he is off to college, we miss having his energy and enthusiasm around.'**

Through these essential support elements, and more, Bright Futures continues to make a difference to young people, and to the wider Gypsy and Traveller community.

Looking ahead, recommendations refer to work already begun;

**Embedding and Sharing Cultural Expertise:** Focus on elevating the confidence in and awareness of the LGT and Bright Futures teams as trusted experts in Gypsy and Traveller culture. There are plans to increasingly share this message widely, advocating also that Gypsy and Traveller specific interventions and programmes must be funded long-term to generate equality of opportunity and to protect this culture. Continue working with "Strong Discernment" as stated by Bright Futures Mentor Sarah in a workshop session. The Bright Futures team should be confident in themselves as THE experts in their community, knowing that this is based on evaluation and evidence, and that Bright Futures is maintaining meaningful long-term outcomes for participants.

Scalability & infrastructure: Recruitment challenges, limited resources, but successful systems building (e.g., triage, enrolment, partner referrals). Strategic partnerships connected to mentee development include Green Skills Hub, Open Doors, colleges, job fairs, local councils, and national mentoring networks.

Cycle of Continuous Evaluation and Adaptation - for example, gender inclusion: Clear efforts to increase engagement of young women, with some early success.

**Expanding Active Mentoring:** Capitalise on the success of adaptation by expanding the 1:1 mentoring offer to include more informal, 'active mentoring' settings—such as experiences or learning activities (for example, the 3D printing and plumbing workshops)—as a primary tool to engage young men and women and mitigate the barriers associated with formal, closed-space sessions. The workshops led by community members as positive role models will be first step. The longer term ambition here is for a team of youth (peer) mentors developing

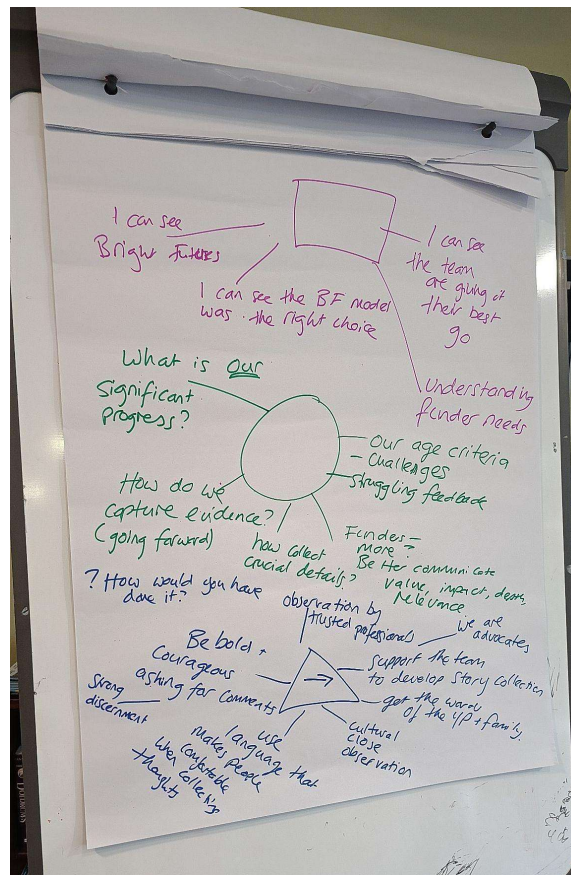
from the pool of mentee alumni or interested and responsible young community members.

## Final thoughts

Adaptation and community-rooted knowledge are the fundamental elements of Bright Futures' continued success. LGT and the Bright Futures team are experts in Gypsy and Traveller culture: traditional, present, and moving into the future with pride. The team are known and respected within the community and the sector, particularly locally. They would benefit from increasing their own confidence in their positions as trusted experts, and sharing more widely the message that Gypsy and Traveller Culture is to be celebrated and protected, and that Gypsy and Traveller-specific interventions and programmes should be funded in order to generate equality of opportunity.

The Learning Partnership showed that slow progress is good progress. Growth is rooted in trust and reciprocal communication, and the steadily-increasing positive impact of Bright Futures will continue to expand and grow. The Learning Partnership has been a true learning experience and is a process which can be repeated to the benefit of many.

Rachel Veitch-Straw, Mantle. March 2026.



## Appendix 1

RI Themes from Team, Leaders, Trustee Interviews, Mentee and parent conversations

Bright Futures - Key Themes emerging from Strand i) Consultation and Review

## 1. What's working well - positive elements

- Tailored sessions including frequency, duration, other agency interventions
- Negative experience of education/external organisations Adaptive, agile approach builds trust and supports YP needs
- Peer influence is leading to increased engagement
- Group event - positive response from whole community
- YP appreciate guidance
- They receive help that gets them opportunities they wouldn't have otherwise, and gives the confidence to try
- "Know better what can be achieved"
- "Know someone is there to help and I don't need to do everything on my own"
- "-See a big difference in his confidence; he is a lot more confident in himself "
- " I wouldn't be on this journey without her "
- "BF has most definitely changed how I see my future; never imagined I would be at this place in my life " Male, 16
- Flexibility

## 2. Impact - the difference being made

- Commitment to the programme - "stickability"
- Two-way communication between mentee and mentor/BF team
- YP being courageous enough to be curious about the programme and opportunities
- Improvement in commitment
- Improvement in perseverance
- The significance of feeling like you matter within the community
- Growing confidence
- Open and increasing communication
- Trust between mentor, mentee, community/families and LGT
- Engagement and interaction
- Being listened to
- Parents are seeing the positive difference in their children
- Confidence growth shown in all case studies, usually in being able to confidently communicate own needs/expectations
- Steady progress
- independent thinking
- interdependence
- exploring the local community i.e. libraries
- Mentees asking for support with particular aims such as college enrolment
- Parents report seeing the positive difference in their children
- "Feel good now as I know I can do something, which is not how it felt before "
- "Helped to open up options for things to do for me, I am enjoying college now"
- "Parents are happy I am getting help because they never had anything like this"
- Strong and tangible life-changing outputs: "Helped me get into skills and work
- - referred me to functional skills study and support programme that I completed, and they facilitated a pre-apprenticeship college course with Network Rail " Male, 16

### 3. Challenges and Adaptations

- Recruiting volunteer mentors
- Misconceptions within the community around mentoring and the value of life experience and personal qualities of those within the GRT community.
- Commitment - mentees often have external pressures but want to attend
- Family responsibilities
- Mentor/staff recruitment challenges
- Literacy issues
- Possible or eventual reliance on mentor “Feel like life is easier knowing mentor is there when I need”
- Collecting feedback from young mentees is difficult due to their age and circumstances.
- They are often overwhelmed with enrollment processes and other life pressures, leading to communication fatigue.
- They may not be used to being asked for their opinion, which is a cultural factor.
- A more formal approach to feedback is sometimes (but not always!) perceived as threatening and makes usable results a challenge
- Mentees and their parents might not provide honest negative feedback for fear of losing support.
- BF team consulting directly and passing on to Mantle to avoid barriers.

### 4. Community and Culture

- Trust is essential for growth and support
- The importance of being comfortable in acknowledging your background
- “I am not education, I trust you to support him on this” mum of male mentee, 16)
- If I had a child, I would most definitely bring them to BF Male mentee, 16

### 5. Messages for Changemakers

- The understanding that good progress often takes time.
- YP require significant support and strong foundations of trust need to be built before the YP reach what may be regarded when supporting other, less disadvantaged YP, as a starting point.
- Our culture is different, we have different priorities and values than people often expect
- LGT are experts in our culture, strengths and needs
- LGTs adaptive - iterative
- Significant issues in recruitment
  - Funding limitations = salary/session fee limitations

### 6. Solutions Still Sought

- Recruitment remains challenging
  - Temporary/sessional recruitment - more attractive to employees, more costly for LGT?
- Engagement of young men - positive change in progress, adapting to their needs

#### Appendix 2: Case Studies in Full

W - case study

W joined Bright Futures (BF) in Autumn 2024 at age 15. A young Traveller

resident of a central London borough and navigating additional learning needs, he was quiet, hesitant to speak to strangers, and unsure of steps towards his goal of working in construction. His mum was his strongest advocate, staying closely involved and helping him commit to the programme.

In the early weeks, W barely made eye contact and often hunched into himself. His mentor describes initial meetings as 'gentle, steady pacing', focused on building trust, exploring interests and breaking down what felt like overwhelming path ahead. Together, they mapped small, achievable steps: learning about construction roles, visiting sites, exploring training centres and courses, and understanding college routes.

W started opening up and there was a noticeable shift in his demeanour. He started asking questions, sharing opinions, and even making jokes in session and with the BF team.

Six months in, W was ready for a first major step: a short construction course for the Design, Engineer, Construct qualification. He produced the best design in the final assignment in the cohort. This achievement, combined with regular mentoring, sparked a visible change. The BF team noticed less hunching, more conversation, more confidence, almost like he knew he deserved the support he was receiving.

His interests expanded too and he worked with his mentor to explore a different pathway. Being open about a change in plan was a significant moment in his journey with BF. W decided to pursue building design; he attended college open days and practical tester sessions, and was supported by tailored sessions on applications and interview skills. He even volunteered as a youth panel interviewer for BF recruitment – something unimaginable when he first joined. His mentor shared:

'The change in W is noticeable. It was so great to see him confidently question interview candidates, and talk openly about his plans, hopes and dreams. Now that he is off to college, we miss having his energy and enthusiasm around.'

W was accepted onto a L1 design course at a local college for the 2025-26 academic year. BF supported his bursary application and liaised with tutors to ensure the right academic support was in place. He is happy, motivated, and engaged, and continues to stay connected with BF, attending workshops and activities whenever his college timetable allows.

## M - Case Study

M joined Bright Futures in early 2024 as one of the first participants in our pilot mentoring programme. A determined 14-year-old at that time, he was navigating a difficult period following a warning from the police for soliciting public donations in an area where he didn't live. The family was referred to the local Children's Services.

M found the intensity of the case worker's intervention difficult to accept. He felt he was being treated like a criminal rather than a young person who had made a mistake and was trying to move forward. His mentor worked with him to process these feelings, recognise different perspectives, and reflect on the impact of engaging, or not engaging, with the support being offered. This approach helped build trust and laid the foundation for a meaningful mentoring relationship.

Over time, M began using his sessions to think about his goals and what the future could look like on his own terms. Through consistent support and space to reflect, he chose to re-engage with the case worker in a constructive way, an important turning point that demonstrated growing self-awareness.

M identified education as a necessary step toward the future he wanted. Though previously disengaged, he expressed a sense of purpose around preparing for college. With support from his mentor, he began Functional Skills tutoring in English and Maths to build confidence and readiness for post-16 study. Alongside this, he started taking better care of his wellbeing: going on regular walks, returning to the gym, and attending church where his local pastor provided support and informal counselling.

His family described a shift, with him being more focused, communicative,

speaking about his future, and taking pride in his decisions. His mother said, “He comes back from meeting you more like himself now, talking about the future and what he wants. He’s chatting more with people, even with family, and just seems happier.”

As part of this journey, he completed a Design Engineer Construct (DEC) Level 1 course through our The Fleet-Green Skills Hub referrals partnership, gaining practical experience and skills. He also explored career options and, after attending college visits and skills workshops, decided to pursue bricklaying. At 16, in summer 2025, he was eager to apply for Level 1 courses starting that academic year.

Throughout, M remained actively involved in the programme, offering input on our approach, maintaining regular contact with staff, and joining the youth panel to interview new team members.

However, there was an unexpected change towards the end of the summer. M decided against college and began disengaging from his Functional Skills tutoring. His attendance dropped significantly; coursework wasn’t being completed, and he was eventually removed from the tutoring due to non-engagement. Around the same time, he became less communicative with us, gradually withdrawing until he stopped responding altogether. When we followed up, carefully and gently, taking care not to intrude, he eventually mentioned that he was planning to go to Ireland to work with family members, a surprising shift given that he had not previously shown interest in this option.

Throughout this period, we continued to check-in from time-to-time to reassure him that Bright Futures remained open to him, without pressure, and that support would be there whenever he felt ready. After a couple of months, around October, we contacted his mother where we were unable to reach him entirely. She explained that M had been navigating a sensitive personal situation related to cultural expectations placed on young people his age - expectations around stepping into adult roles early, managing peer pressures, and balancing the hopes of wider family and community. These dynamics had left him feeling low, overwhelmed, and unsure of his next steps, and this contributed to his withdrawal and sudden change of plans.

When M eventually returned from Ireland later in autumn, it was his mother who played a key role in helping him reconnect with us. Her understanding of our work and her commitment to the programme were especially significant during this period. As we often see, when parents feel aligned with our approach and trust the process, their support becomes a powerful anchor for their children, making it more likely that young people feel safe enough to return, re-engage, and accept help at their own pace. Working with families, understanding their cultural and community expectations, and building relationships with them is a crucial part of ensuring that the young people themselves can fully access the support available to them.

Towards the end of 2025, through our referrals partnership with the EET Group, M completed his L1 Health & Safety qualification, and obtained his CSCS labourer card, a huge milestone for him. Shortly afterwards, he secured trainee work in the trade sector. He has expressed genuine satisfaction with this role, and we have seen his confidence return, along with a renewed sense of pride in himself. He also completed the RSPH Young Health Champion GCSE-equivalent course, adding another meaningful qualification to his growing CV.

M has decided to focus on work for now and is considering college again for the 2026 academic year. He continues to stay in touch, attends our workshops when he can, and has made it clear that he wants to remain involved. We expect that he will return to full support once he feels ready to revisit his educational plans.

M’s journey reflects meaningful and steady growth. With his own insight and commitment, supported by trust-based, consistent mentoring - and strengthened by committed family involvement - he has taken real steps toward shaping a future he can feel proud of. We remain excited to see what comes next for him.

# Organisational values

We try to reflect these values in our day-to-day work; in our relationships with colleagues, the community and other agencies we interact with.

### **Collaborative**

We listen and learn from each other and try to find common ground. We build partnerships and seek to persuade by appealing to evidence, fairness and social justice arguments, rather than through confrontation.

### **Courage**

We have the courage to speak up for what is right, challenge discrimination and handle difficult conversations with honesty and empathy. We navigate challenges with resilience and determination and are committed to continuous learning and self-reflection.

### **Empowerment**

Our work is driven by the goal of empowering community members to claim their rights, have their voices heard and take control of their futures for sustainable long-term impact. Staff are encouraged to take initiative, develop their skills and grow

### **Equity**

We take a nuanced approach to achieving social justice which goes beyond immediate outcomes to understand and address underlying historic and systemic inequalities through our work.

### **Inclusive**

We are committed to developing a truly inclusive workplace, and ensure all our public-facing work respects the diversity of the communities we work with.

### **Rooted in the Community**

The community's interests, priorities and perspectives shape everything we do. Seeking their views is just one way we stay connected, responsive and nurture relationships to align our actions with their aspirations and challenges.

## Appendix 4: examples of workshop outputs:

Values & Strengths

Self-Control

deescalation of conflict between mentees at recent wkshop team handled well & with control

mentees called to apologize honestly

Loyalty

BF → mentees  
mentees → BF

long standing support

perseverance

- mentee did not give up despite course cancellat'n
- hope
- resilience

self worth

humility

- know what they're doing
- self-belief
- acknowledgement of BF wk.

both mentee & mentor support

Sense of meaning

- looking at more than college
- intentional wk.

**Circle, Square, Triangle**

- What's still circling in your mind?
- What's squared away?
- △ What direction will your actions take next?

