

Bright Futures

How London Gypsies and Travellers is creating new pathways to empower young people to shape their own futures

Findings from an evaluation carried out in partnership with the Mantle Consultancy

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Bright Futures

The programme, run by London Gypsies and Travellers (LGT), aims to enable young Travellers to develop the awareness, motivation and skills they need to actively engage in wider society with pride and confidence.

It offers:

- one-to-one mentoring tailored to needs and interests
- career guidance towards pathways to training and employment
- emotional and mental wellbeing support
- informative and fun group activities and workshops
- safe, relaxed, and positive environments
- long-term engagement

The programme is rooted in an understanding of culture and focused on setting goals that have meaning to the participants which can be adapted as needs change.

LGT values:

- Collaboration
- Courage
- Empowerment
- Inclusivity
- Equity
- Community



About the evaluation

The evaluation was carried out by a “Learning Partnership” of LGT and the Mantle Consultancy, which specialises in organisational guidance. It aimed to pinpoint what works and how Bright Futures might evolve.

The evaluation involved research, interviews, guided conversations, workshops and knowledge-sharing, guided throughout by London Gypsies and Travellers’ values. Evaluation was intrinsic to developing the programme itself, with the mentor team, participants, LGT staff and trustees continually reflecting on their work and analysing how the programme was developing. The wider community was consulted continually about need and relevance.

Will's story

“The change is noticeable”

Will (not his real name), a young Traveller from East London, joined Bright Futures in Autumn 2024 at the age of 15.

At first he barely made eye contact and often sat hunched and withdrawn. His early meetings with his mentor gently explored interests and tried to break down what seemed like an overwhelmingly difficult path ahead into small, achievable steps. They talked about construction roles, visiting sites, exploring training centres and courses, understanding college routes.

Soon, Will started asking questions, sharing opinions, even



making jokes in sessions. Six months in, he joined a short construction course for the Design, Engineer, Construct qualification, where he produced one of the best designs in the final assignment. Afterwards, the Bright Futures team noticed he was more confident – almost as if he knew he deserved the support he was receiving.

Will's interests expanded and he worked with his mentor to explore building design further, attending college open days and taster sessions. He even volunteered as a youth panel interviewer for Bright Futures.

Will was accepted onto a design course at a local college for the 2025-26 academic year. Bright Futures supported his bursary application and liaised with tutors to ensure the right academic support was in place. He continues to stay connected with Bright Futures.

“The change in Will is noticeable. Now that he is off to college, we miss having his energy and enthusiasm around.” Bright Futures mentor

What the evaluation found

What worked well as Bright Futures developed? What was its impact? How has the programme adapted?

Success cannot always be judged by “standard” measures

The travelling roots of Gypsies and Travellers can be reflected in their attitude to life, with curiosity and focus following a tapestry of movement and change. So although participation in Bright Futures often brought conventional ideas of “success” – aspirations raised, practical plans leading to training and career opportunities – this wasn’t always the case. For some, an incremental gain could be extremely important given circumstances – a consideration that mentoring might help, for example, or a small growth in confidence.

Success depends on trust-based relationships

Many of the “successes” can be put down to a growing trust between young people, their families and the Bright Futures team – demonstrated by the fact they are recommending the programme to friends and relatives.

“My parents are happy I am getting help because they never had anything like this.”

“I feel good now, as I know I can do something – which is not how it felt before.”

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

Relationships based on trust have led to goal-setting, progression into training/apprenticeships and attendance at skills workshops on subjects such as nail art and textiles. The trust established has led to many participants and families maintaining communication after leaving the programme.

Confidence grew

Young mentees report that the programme has left them better able to communicate their needs, state their ethnicity and feel like they matter. This appears to be having a knock-on effect among friends, siblings and cousins, who come along out of curiosity and show increased confidence in talking to the mentors and asking about activities.

The value of cultural expertise

Cultural expertise and deep understanding about the community underpin the work of LGT and the Bright Futures team. They are seen as advocates and allies.

Their understanding of the importance of family values and the responsibilities often expected of young people removes barriers and deepens trust. Consultation with the whole community has been integral to the programme's success.

The project adapted to need

Despite the team's fears about the risks of deviating from original plans, LGT had the courage to alter delivery based on feedback from young people and the community. For example, the original standard of regularly scheduled one-to-one mentoring sessions was made more flexible to adapt to mentees needs and maximise impact. This led to greater

"I feel like life is easier knowing my mentor is there when I need."

engagement from mentees. Boys in particular benefited from shorter, more tailored, one-to-one sessions.

The meaning of words

Professionals in youth and community work have a common understanding of the word "mentor", but this is not true of the wider community. Certainly, Gypsies and Travellers involved with the programme often did not understand it or misinterpreted it as meaning someone highly qualified. This led to the impression that the object of mentoring was to get young people back into formal education. Careful communication from the team addressed the misunderstandings.

Barriers to participation

There has been understandable nervousness from young people. Some have worried what their peers might think of their participation. Some have found sharing feelings and opinions during consultations difficult and fear being judged. There are also cultural pressures such as reluctance to be seen accepting "outside" help. The Bright Futures team have responded by building trust, with mentors available for informal conversation with participants before, during and after activities or in scheduled meetings.



Main messages for change makers

Two years on from the launch of Bright Futures, the Gypsy and Traveller community is starting to see the programme's impact on young people. It is a slow process, involving steady trust-building between mentors, young people and their families. But it is bringing results.

For those who have authority or influence to bring change, the Bright Futures programme has yielded some important messages about working with young Gypsies and Travellers.

- Systemic discrimination, evictions and limited site provision all impact young people and can negatively affect outcomes.
- Strong foundations of trust need to be built before young people from Gypsy and Traveller communities

"We want them to journey with us to achieve long term impact at depth." Padmini Ravi, Bright Futures Programme Lead and Mentor

"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."

Rachel Veitch-Straw, Mantle

reach what might be seen as a "starting point" in other groups of young people.

- Funded programmes must include time for building trust.
- Meaningful progress often takes time.
- Understanding culture, its values and priorities, is of the foremost importance.
- If funders wish to truly have an impact on the most marginalised and misunderstood communities, they need to understand what makes working with these groups different.



“My mentor gets where I’m coming from”

Wendy (not her real name), a 20-year-old single mother with a toddler, was referred to Bright Futures by her social worker in East London. She received tailored support addressing motherhood, healthy relationships, identity and planning her future. Her home circumstances were challenging, so her mentor offered her a safe, flexible space that allowed her to pause or resume engagement as needed.

Gradually, Wendy’s trust and confidence grew and she attended mentoring sessions more regularly, bringing her child to sessions rather than leaving her with her mother. With support, she explored personal development

“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, Bright Futures Programme Lead and Mentor

“Wendy 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.” Bright Futures mentor

opportunities and, after discussing her capacity and priorities with her mentor, she decided on joining a young mothers’ support group. Wendy also expressed interest in training in hair and beauty therapy and sought help to build her CV so that she could find work in local salons. She is now working with her social worker to explore moving into independent accommodation.



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