

The Reconnect Programme – Evaluation

As of September 2022



Figure 1: A photograph taken by Barn Lodge Childcare of a speech and language therapy session they delivered.

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Executive Summary

C&YP across in the UK, including Kent, continue to face unprecedented levels of challenge and change in the wake of nation-wide covid-19-related lockdowns and restrictions. Evidence suggests that the covid-19 pandemic has had a drastically negative effect on all, especially C&YP in the UK, in terms of their mental health and wellbeing, learning, emotional resilience, and economic status.

- There is limited evidence for a relationship between the Covid-19 pandemic and mental health, learning, emotional resilience, and economic status of C&YP due, perhaps in part, to the abrupt and unexpected nature of the pandemic.
- But some, including the UK and Scottish government, Barnardos and The Children’s Society, have reported an increase in referrals for counselling and mental health services amongst C&YP. C&YP themselves report a greater sense of uncertainty about the future, high stress, and anxiety levels post-covid, all of which suggests that covid-19 (specifically, the limitations it placed on social interaction) has had a significantly negative impact on the mental health and wellbeing and emotional resilience of C&YP.
- The pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities. Covid-19-related nation-wide school closures contributed to widening an already existing gap in access to education between high-income households and their lower-income, historically disadvantaged counterparts less equipped to support their children’s remote and home learning (otherwise known as the ‘learning gap’). As a result, many C&YP are behind in their learning and academic progress, and less engaged in their learning.
- YP also face a greater likelihood of unemployment post-lockdown. Again, YP from already disadvantaged and vulnerable backgrounds have seemingly been disproportionately affected. Covid-19 has seemingly exacerbated existing inequalities in education and employment meaning that for some disadvantaged, vulnerable, and marginalised groups the impact of the covid-19 pandemic is greater than it is for others.¹

At the heart of Reconnect is a desire to support C&YP to reconnect and engage with their learning, with family, friends, and beneficial activities.

- The goal of the Reconnect programme is to address the impact that the covid-19 pandemic, and ensuing lockdown, has had on C&YP in Kent – and ultimately, give a year back to children and young people along the way.
- The Reconnect programme seeks to achieve this through use an enhanced and networked approach to 1) create opportunities for children and young people in their communities, and 2) create an environment for organisations and communities to work together to generate meaningful impact and sustainable change for *all* children and young people.
- We know positive impactful change across the County isn’t something anyone or any single organisation can do alone.

This paper aims to highlight the impact that the Reconnect programme has had on Kent-based CYP and families: in relation to the programme’s theme-specific indicators.

- The ensuing pages contain a breakdown of the extent to which the programme has met its intended aims, objectives, medium-term outcomes, and theme-specific objectives.

¹However, for the purpose of this paper, I am not focusing on gender, age-related other differences in, for example, emotional resilience.

- A selection of theme-specific indicators was created to determine the programme's impact, and the extent to which it has its aims, objectives, and outcomes.
- There are certain Reconnect activities that correspond with certain theme-specific indicators, and so any evaluation data gathered from said Reconnect activities have been used to demonstrate that said theme-specific indicators (and by extension related programmatic aims and objectives) have been met. For example, Reconnect activities which targeted or supported Kent's NEET population have been used to demonstrate that the NEET specific indicators have been met.
- Evaluation data was obtained through 1) online Monitoring information which were distributed to all activity providers (with varying degrees of responsiveness); 2) semi-structured debrief interviews which lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to 1 hour, and 3) data returns via email. Evidence of impact through the recorded numbers reached and evidence from case studies and feedback directly from beneficiaries.
- Based on this evaluation data we have received the Reconnect programme has achieved its intended objectives and desired outcomes (please see the three tables below): that is, made a positive difference for the organisations delivering these activities and the children, young people and families participating in these activities. Evidence for provider feedback suggests that the Reconnect activities are having a positive impact on C&YP, and their outcomes, specifically outcomes related to mental health and wellbeing, learning, sports and activities and reconnecting with friends, family, peers, and communities.

To achieve this, it is important that we need to understand the context behind Reconnect.

- In the end we want to understand 1) the reach and engagement of Reconnect with C&YP, their families and stakeholders across Kent and 2) the difference (if at all) Reconnect has made in the lives of C&YP and the families concerned. But to do this it is important that we have a strong and shared understanding of the context.
- The aim of this literature review is to provide evidence for the need for the Reconnect Programme and should, primarily, be used as a reference to help better understand the context in which the programme was established as well as key concepts referenced throughout the programme. This review draws on evidence for the impact of Covid-19 on C&YP globally, and more importantly, in the UK, with a focus on the impact of covid-19 on 1) mental health and wellbeing, 2) learning and educational achievement, 3) engagement, and 4) emotional resilience of C&YP.

Literature Review

1. Conceptual Framework

In creating this literature review, we wanted to answer one key research question: to what extent, and in what ways, has covid-19 impacted on C&YP in the UK, Kent in particular? In this section, we consider the research and literature about the impact that covid-19 on the mental health and wellbeing, learning, emotional resilience, and economic status of C&YP.²

1.1. Socialisation (included under Friends, Families and Community)

Human beings are inherently social beings (see and paraphrase Vygotsky). Covid-19-related restrictions (including lockdowns and social distancing) prevented families, friends, CYP and their peers from socialising with others in the way their usual routines allowed (e.g., work, school, play or support groups, etc). A significant number of individuals, especially CYP and more vulnerable groups, experienced loneliness: For example, reports that the odds of 16-24-year-olds reporting loneliness in the last 7 days (from 14 October 2020 to 22 February 2021) was high.³ Jones, Jopling & Kharicha (2021) report that covid had an unequal impact regarding loneliness: individuals who were already at 'greater risk' of experiencing loneliness (e.g., due to their ethnicity, income, health, or other markers) were more affected.⁴ By contrast, individuals who had strong social connections (e.g., links to family, friends, etc) were less affected. Consequently, many marginalised and vulnerable CYP and families, missed out on opportunities to interact and engage with others; opportunities crucial for their overall wellbeing, healthy socio-emotional development (including mental health),⁵ their ability to socialise and be socialised.

What is socialisation?

According to social learning theory, (child) socialisation is lifelong process that prepares individuals to be functional and successful members of society through a transmission of the skills, culture, values, and behaviours (and other various elements of the to-be-entered social world) that are a necessary for meeting this end. There are differing perspectives on how a person is socialised, or rather the process of socialisation. For example, a more traditionalist or unidirectional understanding of socialisation would reduce socialisation to the transmission of skills, culture, values, and behaviours into the minds of CYP.⁶ By contrast, a more interactionist or interpretivist conceptualisation of socialisation posits that the social world is fluid, not static, and CYPs in the social world interact with

²This literature review consists of searched using several phrasings including mental wellbeing covid young people. Sources were included so long as they were either academic and peer-reviewed or reputable.

³ [Mapping loneliness during the coronavirus pandemic - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](https://ons.gov.uk/methods/data-analysis/mapping-loneliness-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic)

⁴ [Loneliness-beyond-Covid-19-July-2021.pdf \(campaigntoendloneliness.org\)](https://campaigntoendloneliness.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Loneliness-beyond-Covid-19-July-2021.pdf)

⁵ [Full article: Children and Covid 19 in the UK \(tandfonline.com\)](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17513758.2021.1988888)

⁶ <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199791231/obo-9780199791231-0035.xml>

⁷ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6176765/>

and negotiate these elements on an everyday basis. So far socialisation has had largely positive connotations. However, socialisation can also include inadvertent or less positive outcomes which ‘send children on negative trajectories of poor achievement and antisocial behaviour.’ (This bears strongly on our later discussions in this paper around the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on healthy habit formation and implications of disparities in the home learning environment on the learning gap. Parental characteristics, economic, social and cultural capital can have a significant impact on their child rearing practices, and in turn, the child’s developmental outcomes).

Evidence of impact on family, friends, and community

The pandemic *has* had ‘positive’ outcomes. (Positive is used very lightly here to refer to for example, to the fact that the lockdowns provided many families with an opportunity to spend a substantial amount of quality time together that they would not have otherwise had. We also witnessed communities in the UK coming together to help each other abundantly.) Relate found that some individuals and families have observed positive outcomes for relationships following the covid-19 pandemic.⁸ Nevertheless, the fact remains that the pandemic was a significant unprecedented event, which had a series of less positive outcomes for CYP and families in the UK, and some CYP and families felt the negative impacts of covid-19 more profoundly than others (see --- for more on the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on disabled individuals). Learning was significantly affected. Home became the new classroom. [Benefits of digital learning]. And yet, this shift exacerbated disparities in access to education as well as existing inequalities in opportunity to maximise on the potential benefits of digital learning: “Families differ in what they can offer” – on a material, physical, and psychological level.⁹ As a result, how the educational experience and home learning looked varied from child to child. There are studies which point to the negative effects that long holidays have on disadvantaged groups the impact.¹⁰ Now, imagine extended periods spent away from the classroom, at home, for several times that duration.

Another possible positive outcome of the pandemic was that it gave families the opportunity to spend a greater amount of quality time together. However, this was at the expense of other important relationships and connections, including non-immediate family members, friends, peers, and the community. (Many individuals were isolated on their own, away from family even). Many parents experienced a greater strain on their work-life-balance, specifically mothers, who had to juggle work with additional house and child-care responsibilities.¹¹ We have also seen an increase in domestic violence and domestic abuse cases in the UK. Figures suggest that there was an increase in domestic violence cases during and following the lockdowns compared to before.¹²

⁸ <https://www.relate.org.uk/about-us/media-centre/press-releases/2020/7/20/nation-divided-new-statistics-show-uks-lockdown-relationship-realisation>

⁹ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13668803.2020.1756568>

¹⁰ Campbell, M., Watson, N., & Watters, N. (2015). The cost of school holidays. What Works Scotland (WWS). <https://eprints.gla.ac.uk/122643/1/122643.pdf>. [Google Scholar].

¹¹ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15487733.2020.1776561?src=recsys>

¹² For evidence please see: <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2020/apr/03/coronavirus-quarantine-abuse-domestic-violence>.

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/bulletins/domesticabuseinenglandandwalesoverview/november2020>

1.2. Learning Loss

Background

The covid-19 pandemic has had a significant impact on the education of millions of C&YP across the globe (UNICEF, 2021, [Source](#); Azevedo, 2020, [source](#); Blaskó, 2021, [source](#)). Different words and phrases have been used – gap, catch-up, remedial, etc. The National Literacy Trust defines learning loss as ‘differences between levels of learning in pupils affected by educational disruption related to COVID-19 and what would be expected in a typical academic year,’ ([source](#)). A few more consequences of school closures is social isolation, increase in dropout rates, increased threat of violence and exploitation, drops in reading, writing and mathematics outcomes or skills ([UNESCO](#); Soland, 2020, [source](#); Christodoulou, 2020, [source](#)). Need to caveat the size of the effect of covid-19 and school closures on learning loss as length and nature of school closures varied from school to school (Youth forum, 2021, [here](#)).

Learning loss will be used here as an overarching term to refer to the general impact that covid-19 restrictions had on learning and education.

Evidence for impact

Shift from face-to-face instruction to remote learning. Many statistics that have predicted or calculated the learning loss for C&YP in the UK and elsewhere, in terms of hours, days, months, and even years (Sibieta, 2021, [source](#)). There is research to suggest that covid-19 related school closures have caused disruptions in school learning, academic achievement, especially for disadvantaged and marginalised groups. It has magnified existing learning and achievement inequalities in access and has, in addition to this, has an additional digital dimension (i.e., a child’s access to the digital device used for instruction, like computers and laptops) (Engzell et al., 2021, [source](#); OECD, 2020, [source](#); OECD, 2020b, [source](#); Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020, [source](#); Scottish gov, 2020, [source](#)). How home learning looks varies from family to family, as do access to home learning resources, therefore, the impact of covid-19 on learning will ultimately vary from family to family. For example, in a survey conducted by the IFS and the Institute of Education with 4,000 parents with children aged 4-15 years of age, high income parents were more likely to report that their secondary school-aged children received online lessons and videoconferencing with their teachers than their lower income counterparts. 64% higher income quartile in a state school compared to only 47% from the poorest fifth of families. Similarly, children from higher income households spent greater time in home learning (30% more than their lower income or lesser well-off counterparts (Andrew et al., 2020, [source](#)). Students from better off households were likely have greater access to learning resources, better home-set up for home learning. Despite this, many of the parents of primary AND secondary school students struggled to support their children’s home learning. Further inequalities in study space in the home, equipment, access to high quality remote learning, participation in the digital classroom and digital learning.

<https://www.womensaid.org.uk/information-support/what-is-domestic-abuse/how-common-is-domestic-abuse/>

<https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/domesticabuseduringthecoronaviruscovid19pandemicenglandandwales/november2020>

https://www.womensaid.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/Shadow_Pandemic_Report_FINAL.pdf

School closures, specifically in the first National lockdown (March to June 2020) have also impacted on MFL and EFL language learning: reduced international engagement,¹³ reduction in contact hours for language learning in school, especially in deprived areas (with 71% of state schools in these deprived areas reporting a ‘big negative impact on language learning compared to 52% in the most affluent areas, and 16% of independent schools) and reduction in time spent learning another language during the lockdown – 2 in 5 didn’t in state secondary schools compared to 1 in 20 in independent schools (Collen, 2021, [source](#)). Some improvements observed in the third January 2021 national lockdown. Drastic reduction in exam entries for other subjects besides French, Spanish, and German, likely due to restrictions on Saturday schools/lessons. In a different study, teachers surveyed reported language loss and loss of speaking confidence for children EAL – key factor seeming to be a family’s proficiency in English (Scott, 2021, [source](#)). ‘Those who had been eligible for free school meals were 1.9 months behind in reading in autumn 2020 – and by June 2021 that had widened to 2.4 months’ (Gov, 2021, [source](#)).¹⁴

1.2a. School Attendance (post-covid restrictions)

National UK statistics reveal that the overall absence rate in Autumn 2020/21 was 4.7% (or approximately 3 school days were per pupil), compared to 4.9% last year.¹⁵ ‘Unauthorised absence has increased in mainstream settings but decreased in Pupil Referral Units (PRUs).’¹⁶ This could be due to any number of reasons. At face value, it seems that negative student behaviours (which would have ordinarily led to admittance to PRUs) has improved; however, this shift as with the percentage of school absences, could be attributed to several additional factors (including covid-19, a reduced number of pupils who would have ordinarily been referred to PRUs not attending school in the first place, etc). There is much to be said about the potential learning lost in and due to these school absences.¹⁷ Studies have pointed to a relationship between school attendance and academic achievement. School absence is also more likely in certain groups, namely, pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), EFL, SEND, and Traveller of Irish Heritage and Gypsy/Roma pupils.¹⁸¹⁹

Defining school attendance and absence

Several terms are associated with, used alongside or even in place of ‘social attendance’ in literature and practice. It is important that we define and distinguish these terms to avoid confusion. These terms are, though are not limited to, the following: *school attendance*, *school absence*, *chronic*

13 64 per cent of primary schools and 38 per cent of state secondary schools reported no international activities within their school (compared to 46 per cent and 11 per cent respectively in 2018 – colleen).

14 Differences in home learning environment contributed to a variation in the learning experiences of CYP (see the Socialisation section). Anxiety levels was higher living in crowded places, which implies that CYP living in more crowded housing (most likely to live in deprived or more vulnerable communities) were more likely to have higher levels of anxiety.

15 ‘This does not include sessions where pupils were not attending in circumstances related to coronavirus (COVID-19) for which a further 7.0% of sessions were recorded. 60% of pupils had some period where they did not attend in circumstances relating to coronavirus (COVID-19).’

16 Pupil absence in schools in England: autumn term, Autumn Term 2020/21 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK (explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

17 Research explores association between school absence, exclusion and pupils’ mental health - News - Cardiff University

18 Pupil absence in schools in England: 2017 to 2018 (publishing.service.gov.uk)

19 See Preece & Howley (2017) for research on a relationship between autism and school avoidance. Full article: An approach to supporting young people with autism spectrum disorder and high anxiety to re-engage with formal education – the impact on young people and their families ([tandfonline.com](https://www.tandfonline.com))

absence, truancy, and persistent absence. Each term has a slightly different connotation and context of usage. However, persistent, and chronic absence will be used interchangeably (as chronic by its very definition means long lasting). Chronic absenteeism is often referred to as a problem hidden in plain sight (Chang & Romero, 2008). School attendance can be further divided into two 'subtypes': (a) school refusal, referring to pupils who miss school due to anxiety or emotional distress, with the knowledge of their parents; and (b) truancy, referring to pupils who miss school due to a lack of interest in school or defiance of authority, and who attempt to conceal the absence from their parents.' These contributing actors which interplay and intersect (see for factors²⁰). Findings from one study highlight the importance of school, YP and family collaboration: The overall perception was that school factors were less important than individual, family and peer factors. Implications include a need for increased awareness of the role of school factors in attendance problems, focus on promoting positive peer and pupil-teacher relationships, and collaborative working between young people, families, and schools.²¹

- a. School anxiety has been understood as an experience of unpleasant symptoms arising from or triggered by school-related stressors. These stressors can be real or perceived to be dangerous or threatening by a pupil (Kearney et al., 2007; García-Fernández et al., 2014).
- b. School phobia is like school anxiety, in that it, 'consists of a serious difficulty to attend or remain in the educational center due to an irrational and excessive fear of school situations such as being evaluated, fear of the teacher or the peers' (García-Fernández et al., 2008). (however, recently, links have been made between school avoidance and SAD, the fear of certain circumstances related to the school, social phobia, other anxiety related disorders.)²²
- c. School *truancy* is, s Kearney & Bensaheb (2006) describe, 'repeated unjustified absence, not based on anxiety and performed without paternal consent (Kearney & Bensaheb, 2006). This is a multifactor problem, as there are different risk factors that can lead to this action. Among them are personal variables, such as personality or lack of interest in the educational institution, as well as the influence of the family environment, the measures carried out by the school or institute, and the relations established with the peer group (Sáez, 2005).²³

Heyne 2019; Kearney 2008a; Gren-Landell et al. 2015 argue that:

'...it is likely that attendance problems result from complex interactions between risk factors, and the best approaches are likely to involve interdisciplinary collaboration between professionals in the fields of education and healthcare, as well as between these professionals and families.'

Terminology aside, early intervention is important for mitigating some of the short- and long-term effects that school absence can have.²⁴ For example, see Balfanz & Byrnes, 2012; London et al., 2016; Gottfried, 2014; Baker, Sigmon, & Nugent, 2001 for evidence of links between attendance and attainment and behavioural outcomes).

Different interventions

There are different kinds of interventions which can and have been used to address school absence.

²⁰ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13632752.2019.1647684>

²¹ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13632752.2019.1647684>

²² <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1888899215000124>

²³ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1888899215000124>

²⁴ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13632752.2022.2067704?src=recsys>

Freeman et al. (2019) summarised empirical research related to improving attendance or reducing tardiness in high schools and found the three most common elements of interventions with positive impact were skills training, family support and incentive-based strategies. The following are a few of these different interventions²⁵:

- Mentoring
- Parental engagement e.g., parental communication interventions through, e.g., email.
- Responsive and targeted approaches to attendance (One of the key characteristics across all of these approaches is monitoring and identification of pupils that need attendance support and the reasons for low attendance. Some of the approaches combine the targeting of barriers with the positive re-enforcement of good behaviour.)
- Teaching of social and emotional approaches which aim to build social and emotional skills and outcomes that have been shown to be correlated with school attendance.
- Behaviour interventions
- Incentive-based strategies (incentives and disincentives), e.g., meal provision, extracurricular activities e.g., **OrchKids, Playworks, etc.**

School-based interventions for attendance difficulties at primary school typically involve targeting the functions of school avoidance (Kearney and Silverman 1999), through a partnership between the school and families/communities (Epstein and Sheldon 2002). This involvement of parents/carers may be particularly important within this age range where parents are likely to have great influence over their child's day-to-day attendance. Accordingly, recent CBT interventions for treating anxiety (rather than school attendance difficulties) in primary school-aged children have been demonstrated to be effective when delivered *solely* through parents (Thirlwall et al. 2013), rather than the more typical approach involving the therapist working directly with the child or young person.²⁶²⁷

²⁵ <https://d2tic4wvo1iusb.cloudfront.net/documents/pages/Attendance-REA-report.pdf?v=1647348064>

²⁶ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1750946717300739>

²⁷ <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13632752.2022.2067704?src=recsys>

1.2b. Speech and Language Development

Background

There is evidence for widening gap in speech and language development²⁸ and the literature seems to emphasise the need to provide support to SLT.²⁹ According to ----, 'Children with poor vocabulary skills at age five may be up to twice as likely to be unemployed in their 30s.'³⁰ This can have serious implications for outcomes in later life, as the early years period (and the development which is supposed to take place during this period) is incredibly important for later life, and there are many studies which highlight this.³¹ For example, peer talk key to pragmatic development. This includes conversational skills such as turn taking and understanding the implied meaning behind a speaker's words.³²

Evidence of impact

A positive home learning environment is key to healthy speech and language development in children, and effective interventions (which support parents to engage with their children's learning and utilise research supported strategies) can address entrenched disparities in learning between disadvantaged and advantaged families. During the covid-19 lockdowns, families spent extended time together in the home. Bonding aside, this close proximity among other things (including financial insecurity) may have exacerbated existing inequalities. There is research to suggest a relationship between a positive early year's home learning environment and spelling and literacy in young children (Smees and Sammons), and their learning outcomes. Children from disadvantaged families are more likely to develop language problems than their more advantaged peers. Likely to impact other areas of their development (social and emotional) I CAN 2006. The likelihood of lower working-class families receiving support for their child's speech and language development is lower. For example, loneliness, loss of sense of control (control is key to wellbeing). Families were limited in how many opportunities they had to attend baby groups and spend time with extended family (Papworth et al 2021).³³

The authors recommend that government should continue to support locally delivered place-based programmes that bring together local organisations and services to improve outcomes for disadvantaged families. The authors also recommend parental wellbeing through group support sessions, peer support model, knowledge exchange, help develop skills and confidence, build on existing skills (Moore and McDonald 2017). There are not currently any projects in the Reconnect

²⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/commissioning-of-public-health-services-for-children/early-years-high-impact-area-6-ready-to-learn-and-narrowing-the-word-gap>

²⁹ <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/CECIL-Report-Summary.pdf>

³⁰ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/919947/Hungry_Little_Minds_Campaign_Toolkit_Web_Final.pdf

³¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/455670/RB455_Effective_pre-school_primary_and_secondary_education_project.pdf.pdf

³² Blum-Kulka, S . The role of peer interaction in later pragmatic development. In: Berman, RA , ed. Language Development Across Childhood and Adolescence. John Benjamins Publishing Co; 2004:191-210.

doi:10.1075/tilar.3.13blu

³³ 'Commission research on what works in supporting parents with home learning environment activities in early years settings. The Education Select Committee found that there was a lack of evidence on what type of interventions can support parents and families in creating a positive home learning environment' (Education Select Committee 2019).

programme that seek to train and support SLT practitioners.³⁴ However, at the heart of all of Reconnect activities is a desire to improve parental access to support to engage in their child's learning (think capital and Bourdieu). A survey of front-line practitioners found that three-quarters were concerned that children were not being reached by external agencies (Action for Children 2021). These Reconnect projects create a space that allows and promotes parents to engage in these activities that are said to have a positive effect on development (playing with their children, reading to them, teaching songs, painting, and drawing, visiting the library, teaching the alphabet and taking children on visits (Sylva et al 2004). Ex. Evidence for summer reading challenge (see study which found that children who were taken to the library more frequently experienced benefits - Roulstone et al 2010). Finally, the article authors recommend ensuring that all families have digital access to support children's learning by expanding the laptop scheme.

³⁴ Evidence for SLT: <https://gethackneytalking.co.uk/our-team/slt-works/>

1.3. Mental Wellbeing

Background

From March 2020 to the present, in the UK and across the globe, lockdowns, quarantines and restrictions have been introduced in response to the covid-19 pandemic; the primary aim of these measures being to reduce the spread of the virus (i.e., transmission rates). With these measures in place (including physical distancing and local restrictions), individuals were isolated, and social interaction and participation in outdoor activities were restricted, cautioned against and/or heavily monitored (UK Youth, 2021; Singh, 2020, [source](#)). Research would suggest that these restrictions and measures have had an unprecedented and disproportionate social and economic impact on (vulnerable) C&YPs long-term mental health and wellbeing (Panchal et al, 2021; BSA, WEBSITE [SOURCE](#)), unemployment ([Eurofound](#), 2021) new and in the long term (Youth forum, 2021, [here](#)). For more on unemployment please refer to section 2.3.

Evidence for impact

Mental health essentially is a term used to refer to the state of the human mind; its condition, much like physical health, except that issues cannot always be visibly seen as one might a broken leg or cold. Mental wellbeing, according to the WEMWBS, covers ‘feeling good *and* functioning well,’ (see [here](#)), a holistic definition that covers on the one hand the philosophical notion of happiness and on the other the psychology of the mind. In the Reconnect programme, *mental health* and *mental wellbeing* are used interchangeably to refer to ---.³⁵ Research suggests that covid-19 has had a detrimental impact on the mental health and wellbeing of C&YP across the world. There is evidence that C&YP are the worst affected (Health Foundation, 2020, [source](#)).³⁶ For example, there are a number of studies with findings which suggest evidence for impact on psychosocial wellbeing (Singh, 2020, [source](#); HealthWatch, 2021, [source](#); RSPH, 2020, [source](#); the Early Intervention Foundation, Miriam Sorgenfrei, 2020, [source](#); The [Mental Health Foundation, 2020, source](#); the British academy, 2021, [source](#); Kooth, 2020, [source](#); OECD, 2021, [source](#); Wilkins & Anderson, 2021, [source](#); London Assembly Health Committee, 2021, [source](#); Alma economics, [source](#); Jeffery et al., 2021, [source](#); Mind, 2020, [source](#); [You-COPE, 2020, source](#); Strang et al., 2021, [source](#); Samaritans, 2021, [source](#); Banks & Xu, IFS, [source](#); Hagell, 2021, [source](#); Williams, Z. 2020, [source](#)).

A British Science Association (BSA) poll found that 67% YP 14-18 years old concerned about impact that covid-19 pandemic was having on the mental health, 24% wanted to know how they can take care of their mental health i.e., advice. There have been calls for the greater provision of and widening of access to support of YP for their mental health and for YPs concerns regarding the impact of covid-19 on their lives and wellbeing being taken seriously (BSA, WEBSITE [SOURCE](#); [Nuttfield, 2020,](#)

³⁵Here, we are focused on impact, so less focus will be placed on mental wellbeing or health during the lockdown/pandemic.

³⁶Spiritual wellbeing might also be included under this heading of mental wellbeing. For more on spiritual wellbeing, see <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1364436X.2021.1971164?journalCode=cijc20>.

[source](#)). Access largely impacted by stretched services during the lockdown (YMCA, 2021, [source](#)). This seemingly confirms UK Youth Network's predictions on the needs that will arise among YP due to COVID-19 restrictions based on surveys (see UK Youth, 2021).

The restrictions were likely to have had a differential effect on C&YP depending on pre-existing conditions/factors (Co-space - Waite et al., 2021, [source](#); Jones et al., 2021, [source](#)). including whether SEN, age, gender, household income, single parent, or even a parent's ability to support their child with schoolwork (McMahon, et al., 2021). For Reconnect's marginalised and vulnerable groups: BME, NEET and LGBTQ+ (Jones et al., 2021, [source](#); Panchal et al., 2021, [source](#); O'Connor et al., 2020, [source](#); Prince's Trust, 2020, [source](#)); disadvantaged children (McNair & Banham, 2021, [source](#)), women (Samaritans, 2021, [source](#)). Adolescents are in a time in their life where autonomy etc are crucial to their development / autonomy etc are crucial to development in adolescence, both of which were curtailed during the lockdown with the extended school closures, mixing restricted and usual sites for entertainment closed. The researchers found a small increase in mental health conditions in primary school-aged children, more so than their adolescent counterparts (Co-space - Waite et al., 2021, [source](#); Co-space – Waite et al., 2021b, [source](#)). NHS report an increase in referrals and cases (Robinson, 2021 – find a better [source](#)).

In a survey carried out by Children in Need with 300 respondents early in the pandemic, the target group being C&YP aged 0-18 years, several impact themes were identified: 1) isolation as parents and C&YP missed out on engaging with existing and new relationships with their peers and family and support networks. 2) the pandemic increased pre-existing emotional wellbeing and mental health challenges, particular anxiety, fear, and stress. 3) increased pressure on family relationships (i.e., strained family relationships due to all the above). 4) increased exposure to harm and risk to physical wellbeing and risks to physical wellbeing (i.e., in the digital space). ONS figures suggest an increase in abuse (ONS, [source](#)). These changing circumstances meant that basic needs are harder to meet (incl. the digital divide – see Cambridge Assessment, 2021, [source](#); Bayrakdar & Guveli, 2020, [source](#)) and increased financial hardship), and C&YP had reduced access to education and activities that would have ordinarily provided them stimulation (Children in Need, 2020, [source](#)).

In a YouGov survey which Barnardo's asked 4,000 8–24-year-olds how they were feeling post-covid compared to during the lockdown, 'more than half of 16 to 24-year-olds surveyed said they were feeling stressed (58%), worried (54%), sad (52%) and lonely (56%) more now than before the coronavirus pandemic,' (Barnardos, 2021, [source](#); Barnardos, 2020, [source](#)). YP respondents reported a 43% to 58% increase in stress, 48% to 56% increase in loneliness, 48% to 54% increase in worry, and 46% to 52% increase in sadness at 52% from last year, before the pandemic.³⁷ This supports UCL findings on loneliness during the lockdown (also BERA findings, 2021, [source](#); Harme & Moss, 2021, [source](#)). However, the younger respondents seemed to fare better than their older peers. Barnardos Chief Executive Javid Khan highlights the need for schools to provide support for mental health and wellbeing, opportunities to reconnect with peers and build their resilience. A third (35%) of 16–24-year-old respondents said that they felt that schools need to spend more time 'helping them cope with anxiety,' (Barnardos, 2021, [source](#)). There also needs to be greater access to mental health services (Children's commissioner, 2021, [source](#)).

³⁷ those in the 16-29 age group were more likely than the 60-and-over group to report chronic loneliness – defined as feeling lonely "always or often" – with the proportion steadily increasing as lockdown went on (YMCA 2021, [Youth-Affairs-Report-2021.pdf \(ymca.org.uk\)](#)).

1.3a. Emotional Resilience

The covid-19 pandemic marked as a source of significant stress and hardship for many people across the globe. However, there seems to be less evidence which points to the direct impact that covid-19 had (if at all) on the emotional resilience of C&YP. It is mostly implied. In this paper, emotional resilience is understood as an integral part of mental wellbeing and health. Emotional resilience (sometimes known as psychological or stress resilience) refers to an individual's 'ability to respond to stressful or unexpected situations and crises' (Children's Society).³⁸ Put simply, it is not only an individual's resilience and ability to adapt in the face of significant adversity; but also, their ability (developed overtime through experiences) to overcome such circumstances.

Research suggests that mental health (and resilience) can have significant implications for other areas of development:

*'Even when mental health difficulties are taken into account, mental health competence is still directly associated with better physical health and cognitive development. Mental health competence in late childhood is associated with health risk behaviours in mid-adolescence. Compared to those with high mental health competence, children with lower mental health competence at age 11 are more likely to have taken part in health risk behaviours (e.g., smoking and substance use).'*³⁹

One sign of emotional resilience is evidence of positive outcomes irrespective of the adversity. Counterbalancing factors that 'predispose children to positive outcomes in the face of significant adversity' are: 1) facilitating supportive adult-child relationships, 2) building a sense of self-efficacy and perceived control; 3) providing opportunities to strengthen adaptive skills and self-regulatory capacities; and 4) mobilizing sources of faith, hope, and cultural traditions.⁴⁰ Models; praise; teaching them explicitly through their experience; SMART goals.

The authors suggest several strategies for 'tipping the scale.' 1) Reducing sources of stress. All key basic needs (see Maslow). 2) Support responsive relationships. 3) Strengthening core skills.⁴¹ – observe that 'Social learning experiences are responsible for children's development of self-regulatory competence to adapt to changing settings.'⁴² Examples of adaptive skills include health and safety - ex. road safety in reconnect programme; work - economic wellbeing theme; using community services, academics, home, leisure, social skills, self-direction -problem solving, choice, etc, communication, and self-care.

Conclusion

Childhood and adolescence are a crucial time for C&YP to 'build the foundations for a healthy adulthood.' As such, the Covid-19 pandemic may have had real consequences on biological development, crucial time for developing and maintaining relationships (The Health Foundation, 2020,

³⁸ [What Is Emotional Resilience? | The Children's Society \(childrenssociety.org.uk\)](https://www.childrenssociety.org.uk/what-is-emotional-resilience/)

³⁹ [EBPU Key Findings 2020 \(ucl.ac.uk\)](https://www.ebpu.ac.uk/ebpu-key-findings-2020/)

[Associations between mental health competence and indicators of physical health and cognitive development in eleven-year-olds: findings from the UK Millennium Cohort Study | BMC Public Health | Full Text \(biomedcentral.com\)](https://www.bmcpublichealth.com/articles/10.1186/s12916-020-01618-1)

[Is Mental Health Competence in Childhood Associated With Health Risk Behaviors in Adolescence? Findings From the UK Millennium Cohort Study - PubMed \(nih.gov\)](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34811111/)

⁴⁰ <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/resilience/>

⁴¹ <https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/resilience/>

⁴² <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/computer-science/child-socialization>

[source](#)). 'Understanding Society data from 2017/18 and April 2020 and shows that young people are three times more likely to report that they were not enjoying day-to-day activities in April 2020 than they were in 2017/18.' C&YP expressed greater concern over their future employability and wages (see also Youth forum, 2021, [here](#); youth forum, 2020, [source](#)). It is also important to remember that this impact of covid pandemic on unemployment and perceptions of employment are important as employment and job status can affect wellbeing and self-esteem etc (Youth forum, 2021, [here](#); youth forum, 2020, [source](#)). There are key implications for mental health and wellbeing and unemployment for educational attainment, as we shall see in the next section (see What Works Wellbeing).

1.4. Economic Wellbeing⁴³

Background

Under ordinary circumstances, we would have determined the economic wellbeing of all supported under the Reconnect programme by recording the household incomes of each and every CYP and family we support on the programme. However, this was not possible due to time constraints and the programme's design. As such we relied on data returns provided by providers (i.e., number of CYP they have support - attended/participated - on the project or in their activity; and, if possible, school postcodes to determine IDACI). We have also relied on qualitative data (i.e., survey and interview responses, case studies, and direct quotations for beneficiaries) to gauge the economic wellbeing of the CYP and families supported on a project or through an activity.

It is important to preface by saying that there is a great deal of overlap between each of these areas discussed: learning and educational achievement, physical health, mental health and wellbeing, speech and language development, socialisation, and socio-emotional development. The level at which one has of one can significantly impact their level of another. (Perhaps in other words, an individual's subjective well-being. The alternative view could be a deterministic view. (See Sen, 1999, Dunn, Gilbert and Wilson, 2011, Jenkins and Sacker, 2011). OECD (2011) present three pillars for understanding a person's wellbeing, one being economic wellbeing. These pillars are as follows: '1) *Material living conditions* (or economic well-being), which determine people's consumption possibilities and their command over resources. 2) *Quality of life*, which is defined as the set of non-monetary attributes of individuals that shapes their opportunities and life chances and has intrinsic value under different cultures and contexts. 3) The *sustainability* of the socio-economic and natural systems where people live and work, which is important for well-being to last over time. Sustainability depends on how current human activities impact on the stocks of different types of capital (natural, economic, human, and social) that underpin well-being.'⁴⁴

However, economic wellbeing cannot be limited or reduced to how much a person or an entire household earns. It is not only one's real income and wealth, their jobs and earnings and housing - all of which might be and have been considered to be indicators of or proxies for economic wellbeing.⁴⁵ Economic wellbeing covers an individual's attitudes to and/or relationships to work and employment, their job prospects, the NEET population, and the future aspirations of individuals in society.

Evidence for impact

Lockdowns and restrictions may have had an impact on YP transition from education to paid employment, and contributed to reduced work hours, career aspirations, life chances, work uncertainty and instability. Youth unemployment and job loss related to covid-19, call by some the

⁴³ Buzzwords: limited employment flexibility; overcrowded housing; low-income communities; underserved communities.

⁴⁴ <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/9789264194830-5-en.pdf?expires=1652460967&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=7437AE704A97968803D0D03166CB587E>

⁴⁵ <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/9789264194830-5-en.pdf?expires=1652460967&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=7437AE704A97968803D0D03166CB587E>

‘scarring effect,’ (Youth forum, 2021, [here](#)). Experiences of loneliness or ‘lockdown loneliness’ were also more likely in areas of unemployment.⁴⁶⁴⁷

‘...young people with the lowest household income were the most likely to have lost employment or have had their hours cut at 8%. In contrast, the opposite pattern is displayed for proportion of young people furloughed indicating that young people from households receiving the smallest incomes are more likely to have taken a decrease in income during this time. Figure 3b shows that young people from a minority ethnic background are twice as likely to be no longer working or had hours cut since lockdown than their peers at 13.9%. Previous research from the Institute for Employment Studies highlights how black and minority ethnic young people already suffer significant labour market disadvantage and are less likely to be in employment compared to others in their age group,’ (The Health Foundation, 2020, [source](#)).

⁴⁶ [Mapping loneliness during the coronavirus pandemic - Office for National Statistics \(ons.gov.uk\)](#)

⁴⁷ CAVEAT that it was already a ‘challenging job employment situation following the 2008 financial crisis – covid-19 exacerbated these conditions (YMCA, 2021, [here](#); see the Edge Foundation, 2020, [source](#)).

2. Additional Terminology: Definitions

2.1. “Sustainable” Engagement

Literature on engagement in the generic sense is rather limited. As a result, discussions around engagement in this paper will draw from literature on student engagement, and ‘engagement’ will be understood 1) in relation to education and learning amongst C&YP, and 2) as participation of C&YP in beneficial activities, such as sports and exercise and intergenerational interaction.

Student engagement is a multi-layered and complex concept and ‘meta-construct’⁴⁸ which has been defined in several different ways: The measures I have used coincide with this framework used by GOV: exploration, realisation, anticipation, persistence, initiation.⁴⁹ Engagement could be understood in ‘degrees’ - ranging from participating in an intervention or activity (whether by coercion or interest) through to exhibiting signs of investment in these activities (e.g., leadership, which is about creation) and expressed anticipation for future activities, a view proposed by Ashwin & McVitty (2015) who argue that, ‘in leadership, the emphasis is on the ways in which students can create new objects through their engagement. In this degree of engagement students set their own terms for what engagement entails and for the outcomes of engagement.’⁵⁰ Put simply, it could be defined as a shift from passive to active participation in an activity. By contrast, engagement could also be understood in dimensions: affective, cognitive, and behavioural (though the number and label for these dimensions is well-debated). The behavioural dimension might include attendance, participation, and time-spent; the affective dimension (otherwise known as the emotional or psychological dimension) might include interest, enjoyment, support, belonging, and attitudes; and the cognitive dimension might include goal setting, intrinsic motivation, self-regulation, commitment to mastery learning, and use of learning strategies.⁵¹⁵²

2.2. Healthy Lifestyle

A healthy lifestyle is vital to positive physical and mental short- and long-term outcomes. A ‘healthy lifestyle’ is generally understood to consist of habits and activities that contribute to overall good health. These include, but are not limited to, physical exercise (e.g., sports),⁵³ a balanced diet, dental hygiene, limited consumption of alcohol and smoking.⁵⁴ Financial constraints, arising from or exacerbated further by covid-19, may have put some families in a position whereby they were could not were unable to afford a more balanced diet. For example, families eligible for FSM. Figures suggest

⁴⁸ [Secondary teachers’ conceptions of student engagement: Engagement in learning or in schooling? - ScienceDirect](#)

⁴⁹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/903458/Engagement_Model_Guidance_2020.pdf

⁵⁰ https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-319-20877-0_23

⁵¹ <https://educationaltechnologyjournal.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s41239-019-0176-8>

⁵² [Mapping research in student engagement and educational technology in higher education: a systematic evidence map | International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education | Full Text \(springeropen.com\)](#)

⁵³ <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/2020/05/covid-19-sport/>

⁵⁴ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/psychology/healthy-lifestyle>

an increase in excessive drinking,⁵⁵ child obesity rates;⁵⁶⁵⁷ and food poverty. **358,000 admissions to hospital in 2018/19 where the main reason was due to drinking alcohol. 6% higher than 2017/18 and 19% higher than 2008/09. National UK statistics reveal that '20.8% are known to be eligible for free school meals, representing 1.74 million pupils. This has increased from 17.3% in January 2020.'⁵⁸**

Extended lockdowns meant that some CYP regressed in positive habit formation (e.g., engaging in regular physical exercise) or were unable to access public health services provided. Disadvantaged groups, lacking an access adequate play or open space, were unable to participate in physical exercise, or were deprived of the exposure to these habits and activities their regular interactions and access to public health services provided. Stress, and other factors, can contribute to these trends in behaviours proven to be detrimental to mental and physical health - stress, in many cases, created by the reduced control, greater burden of responsibility and reduced outlets, that the covid-19 pandemic created.

⁵⁵ <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/statistics-on-alcohol/2020>

⁵⁶ <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/sn03336/>

⁵⁷ <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/statistics-on-obesity-physical-activity-and-diet/england-2020>

⁵⁸ [Schools, pupils and their characteristics, Academic Year 2020/21 – Explore education statistics – GOV.UK \(explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk\)](https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk)

3. Conclusion

Most of the literature presented and discussed in this literature review points to the impact that the covid-19 pandemic has had on C&YP in the UK, specifically, on their mental health and emotional resilience in the face of change and uncertainties they face, engagement and progress in their learning in and out of the classroom, and their financial situation. Considering these findings, some have proffered recommendations on what can be done to address the trends identified in this literature review. Regarding mental health, there is the long-term consequences/impact and gap in how government has addressed it (Youth forum, 2021, [here](#)). The authors also proffer recommendations around mental health in line with Reconnect's projects and their intended outcomes. Regarding learning loss, some have offered evidence-based recommendations for remedial education or 'catch-up.' One such example of this is from the national tutoring programme.

In the ensuing section, we will look at where the Reconnect Programme fits in with all of this: 1) what it was? Its methodology, goals, and the research questions for this evaluation paper.

Evaluation Findings

4.1. Summary

The programme has successfully reached a significant number of CYP through its activities including individuals with SEND and individuals and has worked with hundreds of organisations to support CYP and families in Kent.

- While the Reconnect Monitoring and Evaluation team did not have an initial reach target number (i.e., a target number of CYP and families that they wanted the programme to reach), it was our intention to reach as many Kent-based children and young people (CYP) and families as possible through each activity delivered under the Reconnect Programme.
- The programme has reached at least 749,070 C&YP with an £8,130,356 total spending (through grant giving towards Reconnect activities). This means that on average every Kent child aged 0-19 years has engaged in two Reconnect activities. It is evidently not that simple. Clearly some C&YP will have engaged in more activity than others. Some activities will have been more than one session. For example, the reach for bus passes is determined as the number of bus passes issued, but we know in summer 2022 the two big bus operators recorded over 1 million Reconnect journeys between them. In addition, we know more C&YP have been supported indirectly through the programme's activities. For example, Reconnect funded early years and forest school training for leaders to help Kent Scouts accelerate the opening of "Squirrel Dreys", a new group for younger children. While the children joining the new Squirrel Dreys are included in the reach figure, many leaders have commented how the training has altered their practice in other fields, such as with an older age group, or in their profession as a teacher. The children in the older groups, or school classrooms are the "indirect reach" we are not able to count.

The two tables below illustrate the reach of the programme, by age group and geography. It is evident that the objective of providing a universal programme with something for all ages in all localities has been achieved, thanks to the tremendous efforts of the organisations and individuals who joined the Reconnect cause.

Activity	Under 5	6 to 11	12 to 16	Over 16	SEND	NEET	Total CYP and adults
Reconnect Summer 2021	2,416	6,063	2,445	1,182	n/a	n/a	12,106
County grants and Commissioned Activities	3,780	15,063	2,955	19,186	937	319	252,358
Locality Grants Round 2	2,297	6,757	4,529	2,040	1,211	148	17,531
Locality Grants Round 3	3,044	10,364	4,920	4,298	1,627	438	34,209
Leisure Centres	462	1,162	861	839	n/a	n/a	6,271
Open Access	810	223	20	0	n/a	n/a	10,315

Big Adventures	178	2571	1349	177	780	n/a	4,275
Bus Passes	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	399,992
Curious Maths	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	581
Total	12,987	42,203	17,079	27,722	4,555	757	725,532

*The figure we have for the bus passes is the total number of bus passes (physical and digital) issued to CYP and families in Kent. The figure we have for Curious Maths is the number of subscriptions. It is highly likely that the programme has reached significantly more CYP, especially SEND and NEET CYP or CYP within these age ranges. These numbers are reflection of the data and feedback we have received from providers.

*The Reconnect Programme 2021 includes our leisure centre discount scheme (2,500 altogether, 54% FSMs), our open access activities including the Christmas programme (approximately 4-5000 altogether) and the Invicta summer programme (approximately 4,900 registered; 33,000 sessions attended by children residing in Kent).

District	Just CYP	Under 5	5 to 11	12 to 16	Over 16	SEND	NEET	All
Ashford	4,877	1,237	2,446	879	151	286	47	7,442
Canterbury	16,773	1,379	10,949	1,269	3,147	359	58	24,776
Dartford	2,712	203	1,714	614	468	226	51	3,412
Dover	1,971	906	804	192	980	135	5	2,057
Folkestone and Hythe	6,193	809	3,871	1,354	132	506	15	6,727
Gravesham	1,539	8	602	798	63	16	13	1,557
Maidstone	6,840	1,520	3,440	1,428	590	672	288	7,933
Sevenoaks	2,441	142	1,631	929	267	503	23	3,665
Swale	1,731	339	796	293	327	158	10	2,955
Thanet	4,333	469	1,249	2,382	251	482	130	4,930
Tonbridge and Malling	1,649	423	792	279	183	213	28	2,034
Tunbridge Wells	1,158	180	581	619	220	162	10	1,757
Grand Total	58,478	9,121	32,184	12,404	8,543	3,775	905	77,498

Health and Happiness: 90% of C&YP and families reported that they were 'happy,' had 'had fun' and were 'engaged.' 65% of survey respondents reported that they saw improvements in the mental health and wellbeing of C&YP involved in their activities (thanks to the Reconnect funding they received). Reasons commonly given for this include being able to socialise with others and make new friends, learn new things, and have new experiences they would not have otherwise had. 95% of children and family services and support groups were able to reach sustainable engagement with the C&YP and families in their communities. 186 activities altogether delivered by 158 providers.

Economic wellbeing: Over 21 businesses and partner agencies were able to work together to support young people to engage with future employment opportunities. The programme was able to co-ordinate and promote a range of approximately 32 activities and opportunities for

children and young people relating to economic wellbeing. As a result, through these activities YP aged over 16 on the programme were given a better chance of securing work in the future through their involvement in key reconnect economic wellbeing activities.

Learning Missed: We were able to support C&YP to re-engage in education following the pandemic by sourcing and promoting number of educational activities and opportunities for children and young people. For example, 4184 C&YP were able to re-engage with learning and gain cultural capital instrumental to the education experience through Big Adventures. 85% of providers reported that the CYP had learned or 'caught up' with their learning. 76% of C&YP and families were able to engage in activities that they were able to 'go out' and be 'active' following the pandemic. 146 activities delivered by 125 number of providers. As a result, C&YP on the programme, were able to catch up with learning missed and are engaged in education.

Sports, Activities, and the Outdoors: C&YP were able to live healthier lifestyles and engage in sport and physical activity. For example, 6271 CYP through the leisure centres alone. We were able to coordinate and promote a range of around 230 activities and opportunities for CYP relating to sports, activities, and the outdoors through around 204 providers. As a result, more C&YP are engaged in healthier activity.

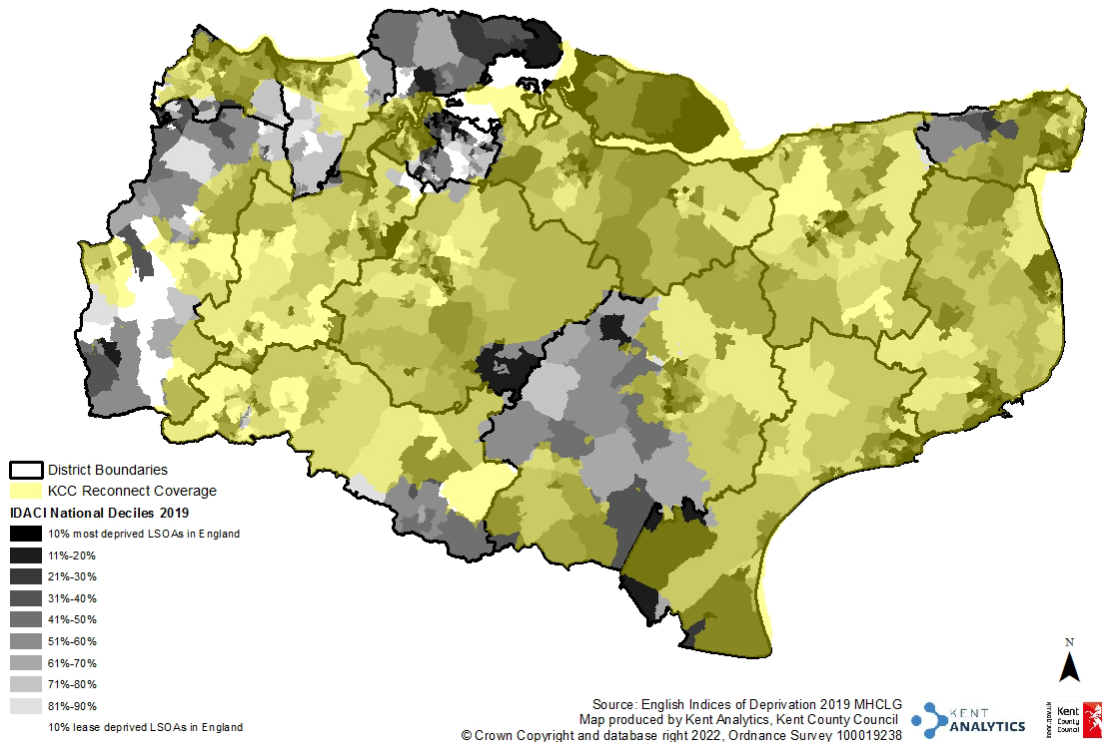
Family, Friends, and Communities: Over 192 multiagency partners, business, community organisations and groups worked together, and this led to an increase in the number of local activities and opportunities available to C&YP in Kent. 218 activities. 56% of providers reported that they were able to enhance local networks for community assets. The programme was able to reduce the accessibility gap for some disadvantaged C&YP: 50% of respondents reported that the reconnect funding enabled them to provide activities or run events that were free (therefore, more accessible for lower income groups from deprived areas) and that had not previously been available in their area. The programme was also able to support connections between C&YP and responsible adults from older generations, as some interview respondents revealed.

As a result of investing in Kent communities we have created opportunities for communities to support C&YP and their families and fill gaps.

The latest IDACI analysis suggests that the Reconnect Programme activities and events have reached the most deprived and vulnerable populations (the top %) as the visual representation demonstrates.

- 96% of the most deprived LSOAs (decile 1 and 2) in Kent were reached by the Reconnect programme earlier this year (2021).

KCC Reconnect Coverage compared with the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index



More recently, looking at KCC schools from a select sample on Reconnect only, out of 587 schools, 99% (581) signed up to the service with the majority of these taking up the school bus pass offer.

- The school pupils were profiled using the Income Deprivation affecting children Index (IDACI), each pupils is grouped into a decile from the most deprived to least deprived in England, based on the LSOA they lived in.
- Overall in January 2021, 19% of pupils in Kent lived in the 20% most deprived LSOAs in England. Of the 581 schools involved in the Reconnect programme, 32% has a higher proportion of pupils from the most deprived areas when compared to Kent and 59% of the schools had a lower proportion than the Kent rate. There were 50 school (9%) with the same as the Kent rate.
- Looking at the Big Writing Challenge Programme, 57 of the 581 schools signed up (9.8%). Of these 57 schools, 13 (23%) were from the schools with a high proportion of pupils from the most deprived areas, whereas 40 (70%) were from schools with a lower than Kent rate of pupils from the most deprived areas. The remaining 4 schools had the same rate of deprivation as Kent.
- However, when looking at the Big Adventure Programme, whilst only 62 schools signed up (9.0%), we have data returns from 33 of these schools (approximately half). 70.97% of these schools were schools with a high proportion of pupils from the most deprived areas.

4.2. What impact is Reconnect having on C&YP, families and their outcomes in relation to themes and their priorities?

In this section, we will look to answer one key overarching question: 'What impact has Reconnect had on C&YP and their outcomes in relation to themes and their priorities?' To answer this question, we will be using the results from online surveys distributed to providers at the end of 2021, and interview data taken from interviews conducted with providers from August to October 2022.

As a part of the programme evaluation, the Monitoring and Evaluation team conducted 100 debrief calls with locality grant, county grant and commissioned service providers. The purpose of these telephone interviews was to understand their experiences and thoughts on the Reconnect activity they participated in and their participation in it. In analysing and reporting your interview responses, all identity and personal details remained confidential. Interviewee participation was completely voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw from the study and/or withdraw any data you provide at any point in the study a given date. In this section, we will consider the key themes that emerged in the calls, as identified through a process of thematic analysis.

Themes

From thematic analysis of the monitoring and evaluation form data, I have identified 10 themes, and several sub-themes which could point to the impact that Reconnect activities in the Summer Programme and this year had on C&YP and their families. These are as follows:

1. Gratitude

a. A positive experience

In general, positive experiences and feedback from organisers, parents, children, YP and other attendees. This theme can be broken down further into 3 sub-themes: Gratitude, enjoyment, fun and excitement, and lots and a variety of activities.

Gratitude: This was 4-fold. Providers expressed gratitude for the funding to deliver activities they would not otherwise have been able to deliver without Reconnects funding. C&YP and their families expressed gratitude for the opportunity to attend certain events and activities that they would not have otherwise been able to attend, whether due to funds or other limitations. Finally, respondents, parents, C&YP and their families expressed gratitude for and praised the staff, teams and key individuals who delivered these events and activities. There was overwhelmingly positive parental feedback on and gratitude for certain resources provided (notably, ---) gratitude for the experience and opportunity for their children, the support provided, especially during Summer break. Therefore, we must caveat this theme with the following observation: There are any number of reasons for why the parents or providers could have been grateful. Gratitude does not necessarily indicate need; however, it does suggest that some benefit has been gained or that the activity has been of some benefit for the individuals concerned.

b. Enjoyment, fun and excitement with lots and a variety of activities.

Whether it was keeping children busy, giving a grandparent a break, or ensuring that there was 'a lot' or 'so much' for children to see and do – for most respondents, Reconnect activities and events were

successful insofar as they were opportunities for children, young people and their families to enjoy themselves and have fun. Words were identified as indicators or signposts for enjoyment, fun and/or excitement. These include, but are not limited to: 'love,' and 'happy.'⁵⁹

Many attendees wanted to see or were looking forward to more future events, which suggests a general interest in and anticipation for future events in the communities reached. For many parents and organisers, the activity/event either met or superseded expectations, hopes, and needs. For example, some parents expressed a desire to 'do it again.'

Participation exceeded the expectations of some organisers who successfully/were able to achieve their objectives and facilitate a quality event that attendees (including feedback from several parents, providers, and agencies, who found the Reconnect activities useful and/or beneficial. For example, one parent noted that the event was beneficial to their child's transition into the new school year, another that the event 'made it a special week for all the children involved.' Quite a few parents praised the volunteers, staff, coaches, and team, for the support they gave them, one describing them as inspiring; another described the bonding that took place between staff/coaches and the C&YP involved.⁶⁰

Finally, several parents commented on the care and safety; feeling at ease and being able to access activities which were an opportunity for some children to express themselves.

c. *The programme supported parents and carers.*

"I'll explain how they linked to the pilot in a moment and then we had virtual events now last year we did this because it was obviously we didn't have events in the library. It was our first foray into live virtual events and we found that the feedback that we got. That it was quite important for families, not because of COVID, although that was important, but we found that actually there were families regardless of COVID valued the virtual fashions because if somebody's having to work, work at home and they've got two kids, they can do it while they sit next to them doing their work. If they've got a baby who needs to be asleep at 2:00 o'clock, they can still have the older one taking the session with the baby upstairs. We had home educators who said it helped add to the teaching for their children. We have people who were thrilled because it allowed them to have it but saved on the environment. We have people whose children had some special educational needs or were neurodivergent. They said that because they were in the light at home, it was a safe space for the for their child and their child actually managed to stay focused and there was no distress going to anywhere new."

"Well actually this was the thing. We were hopeful when the first grant came out and we were really amazingly grateful to receive it, especially in the small child minding setting as well. To be awarded this kind of funding was magic for us because it wasn't something we were expecting to get because we're tiny compared to other schools and things like that. And we did put a second funding bid in, because the first group got friends before just doing four sessions. And I did have an indication right at the beginning that it might take me a little while to get some of my more vulnerable families kind of warmed up to the idea, if that makes sense. So one of the barriers would have been that we couldn't continue but there are reasons

⁵⁹ Caveat: There are any number of reasons for why the children, YP or parents could have loved an activity.

⁶⁰In this report, volunteers, staff, coaches, and team, are be used and understood as terms used to describe individuals responsible for supporting event attendees/participants, facilitated the event's activities on the day in whatever capacity.

for that and you guys have a strict panel, so we know that the reasons we weren't selected the second time round. So I do feel that if we delivered more sessions over a longer period of time, potentially these families who didn't engage over the four sessions, we might have got them a little bit more engaged maybe by session six or seven. Yeah, after they kind of seen the output from the other sessions and the other families, if that makes sense."

2. Many C&YP and their families were engaged with and self-motivated to attend/participate in activities.

There is evidence of C&YP being motivated to attend events and participate in activities. Here, indications of C&YP and their families being engaged and/or self-motivated were explicit references made to 'engagement,' expressed desires to attend future events/activities; an impatience and eagerness (i.e., a desire to 'do it again,' or not being able to wait for the event or activity). Some respondents were glad that they went, and others expressed that they would recommend the event, activity, or resource to others. There were two instances of 1) an increase in uptake and 2) an increase in traffic to site which indicates interest and suggests that the resource or activity was popular.

"A number of our participants returned to more than one session as they enjoyed themselves so much!"

"Some of them came back and told us they had tried the activities at home and asked if they could take some materials home to do some more."

"The groups enjoyed the sessions and returned each week to complete the programme. We had 161 additional expressions of interest and we have put them on a waiting list to run the next round of delivery where we will repeat the process once more with 3 x groups of 12."

"All parents of the children/young people who have attended have passed on how pleased they were with their child's engagement and enjoyment in the sessions."

3. Activities facilitated learning and enabled C&YP to have new experiences & acquire new skills.

Activities contributed to an increase in confidence (and other associated skills). Many parents reported that the activities helped their child/children develop confidence and other key skills. For example:

One might argue that as the C&YP participating in these activities learn new skills and have new experiences, they inevitably gain confidence in these domains (e.g., certain fine motor skills, sports, interpersonal skills in their repeated interactions with friends, peers, and staff). Other key skills mentioned include resilience, self-confidence, coordination (perhaps more so with the physical activities), 'independence' – all of which are a key part of the transition into adolescence and adulthood, teamwork, perseverance and self-discovery, and knowledge; and finally, 'confidence in learning how to control emotions,' which is instrumental to developing emotional intelligence and self-awareness. This is in line with another of Reconnects aims, objectives and medium-term outcomes. C&YP can learn, catch-up with learning missed during the pandemic, in way that is perhaps like how taken-for-granted cultural capital is acquired.

“Parents said that the activities were a godsend through the summer as they were free and lots on. Young people said that all the activities were fun and that they were glad there was so much on. They also said they had learned a lot of new skills over the summer.”

“Well, just the amount of interest it's installed and children take responsibility for going out and watering the plants and they're so excited when they can see how big sunflowers have grown and the marrows and it's just amazing, you know? You think. You wouldn't think it would instil such enthusiasm amongst the younger ones, but it does. And the staff seemed to enjoy it too.”

“They are learning math because they're measuring out the distances between the planting. They are learning how to use tools. They've been using quite a lot of maths actually. They've been weighing the watering cans to see how much each size of them weigh when they're full. None of them can lift the big one when it's full, but obviously the teacher does that. So yeah, there's a lot of maths. They've been writing about what they're doing in the garden. So that would be attached to their literacy skills. They've been learning how to take care of the plants. You know, they've got to be gentle with them. So there's quite a lot of skills that vary across the board, yeah, yeah.”

4. The programme helped to mitigate the effects of the lockdown and the pandemic.

Children were able to access creative and physical activities that had been missed due to COVID. Overall families and YP enjoyed the ability to have face-to-face group contact once again. Explicit references were made to the impact of covid-19 and benefit of the scheme, and the support provided which allowed children to get out.

“The parents felt that their children were able to access creative and physical activities that had been missed due to COVID.”

“Children young people and parents expressed how pleased they were that such a wide range of activities were offered for free. especially post Covid.”

“Nice to have a baby group in the village, lots of children haven't met children their age due to covid!”

“...obviously I think, I think it was a great initiative myself for of putting this money back out there to get people back into the community, to getting young people and to get back out there. And for myself personally, I think it has been a worthwhile project and I think it's. For us, it's done what it said it would do and, you know, there's a pot of money. What do you want to do with it? I want to do this. OK. There you are. We've done it. So basically for us it worked well. It's gone really well. And I know for our young people and the feedback we've heard from them and from the staff about how they've done all these things and from parents is like, this is fantastic, why can't we do this more than that other thing? It worked really well and we was lucky that we managed to get the money that we did get because we did, not just activities, but we got some new art and craft stuff. We got some new basketballs, there were bits and pieces.” (Salus Group).

“It was it was something that they wouldn't be able to do usually because obviously financially I think a lot of the parents were unable to afford to send them to the club and I think they got a lot out of it.”

“You know you just the need for more funding schemes like this and whether you all can KCC can work with the lottery and actually look at sort of lottery funding coming through for

education workshops or cultural workshops. But you know it's easier if there is a big body like KCC doing it then individual organizations having to sort of find little tranches of money."

*"...schools generally are quite strapped. They really are strapped for cash. So, and I think now it's going to get even worse because they're going to have to look at electricity costs and all of that. So it is, you know, a lot of them are saying it's going to go up 3 * 4 times. And you know I'm not sure if any of the caps yet have come in for schools or businesses. So that's going to be, but even with the caps, it's going to still be quite an increase really. So, I you know and there's always resources and things to buy like more computers, software, all of that so as to keep their kids digitally sort of on par with other schools. So I think enrichment activities will go further down the list in terms of priorities really. I'm not sure if KCC are thinking about having further funds like reconnect, but it's certainly been really useful."*

"You know during our school years, none of that [enrichment] was happening and I think that's really made an impact on kids. And funnily enough our artists noticed it when they were doing the school workshops very early on, in March and April. They said it's funny the kids don't ask questions anymore. And I said what do you mean the kids don't? They said before when we used to go into schools, within 5 minutes of entering the class they would be saying hi, where are you from? What are you doing? Why are you wearing this? There was all that sort of thing straight away. But now our dancer was saying it took him in the first month in the schools."

5. *The programme encouraged CYP and families to engage in healthy and/or active activities.*

Respondents reported that the activities were an opportunity for interaction and healthy exercise with others, engage with sport and fun. It offered children, young people, and their families with healthier and active alternatives to being couped up at home.

"Providing the core target group of young people with free access to bottled water and fresh fruit, and fresh hot healthy meals and the promotion of a healthy lifestyle was one the key positive impacts we have seen. In addition, giving the young people free access to the sport venue during twilight times when normal provision is closed was another extremely positive element."

"Team theme Canterbury was an incredible experience. My son enjoyed the opportunity to partake in a range of different sports that he hadn't tried before..."

"My grandchildren thoroughly enjoyed the week and it helped both confidence, and co - ordination! - It gave me a rest and stopped both boys from excess screen time - fresh air and activity, meeting new friends and learning new skills - excellent!! Thankyou."

6. *Activities encouraged family members (of different generations), CYP, and communities (including vulnerable communities) to reconnect and socialise.*

It was an opportunity for communities, families, children, and young people of different ages, to interact, reconnect and spent time with each other, in what was aptly described by one respondent 'community spirit' and by another as a 'coming together.' Families could take a break and spend some quality time with each other. It encouraged generational interaction. On the other hand, activities helped with socialisation, which is a key part of the transition into adulthood. C&YP were able to

socialise with others, including other children in their age group (i.e., their peers); friends; peers and community; and meet new people. This finding is consistent with a key objective of the Family, Friends, and Community theme; to support intergenerational connections.

"It has given me some quality time with my younger daughter, which she rarely gets."

"Comes home telling me all about the new friends he has made."

"For one family the idea of going into the forest and getting covered in mud was something that they found really quite scary as adults. They're happy for me to take the children to do those things, but they don't want to do things like that with their children. So that was one of my biggest barriers, because I want these parents to understand that the fact that they avoid such situations with their children puts their children at a disadvantage, both educationally and socially. What this did, was allowed me to work with whole family units and the outcome of that has been rapid, accelerated progress for two children who were really behind." (This is also an example of the impact Reconnect activities have had on learning.)

"Arturo has loved the mix of people and has learnt to make new friends as he knew no one in his group."

"Table tennis was particularly popular. Local volunteers involved in table tennis helped with the sessions which was great."

"...having a young baby can be massively isolating. And on top of that, these parents had been isolated from the family that they would normally have relied on during the lockdown. So being able to get ourselves open again and get the group open again gave them a chance to feel like they, you know, being a family was really good news and they could go and socialize and have a cup of tea and share the highs and lows. It was, yeah, absolutely brilliant. Wouldn't have it any other way."

"I know a lot of the students hadn't really experienced that before. I think it was quite nice for them to do it out of school time and come along. They definitely made friends and made artwork and they were asking me whether they could use it for their school work as well."

Support Worker - "I've got children who lost their mummy. Dad was really reluctant to come. He finds being around other people at the moment really difficult because people are asking how he's doing, if he's managing, how the family are and he's grieving and doesn't want people to ask him those questions, because he doesn't want to talk about it. And it took me through Session 4 to get them to come. It was like the forest is great. Look, look all the pictures, look how much space there is. If you don't wanna talk to anybody, you can go and do this or you can go off and do that. And actually it's OK. Nobody's gonna be intrusive. And they came to session four and they came as a family unit. So Dad came with his 10 year old and the three-year old, but they also have adult children. And those adult children lost their mum too. So the 22 year old daughter came and brought her child who is also three. So we were able to incorporate them even though they are not directly linked to my setting, they're part of that whole wide family unit and that family unit has been the most impacted by COVID-19 because they lost their mother. Being able to work with them again as a multi generation. We have 3 generations of the same family there and we were able to work with them and Dad came back and he's just like, this is amazing."

“...it's had intergenerational impact actually, and it's given the child consistency.”

“...I have a number of families with links to my setting that has varying vulnerabilities from we have children who've experienced domestic violence, we have children who have come into the country and with refugee status, I have two children whose mum died as a result of COVID-19 six months ago. So we would put those in the vulnerable family category and have a number of children both with diagnosed SEND and awaiting diagnosis of SEND or speech and language issues. Speech language issues as a direct impact, actually of COVID because the little children that we have currently. Really, their speech and language has been affected by two years of not normal living and so vulnerable. When I say vulnerable, it comes in quite a spectrum really. And so we have single parents, families, which in one sense are not vulnerable because actually the remaining parent has the most amazing job ever. But the fact that there's only one income and only one adult and there's only one lot of headspace to see to everything, makes those families more vulnerable than others. Does that make sense?”

7. Activities supported the mental health & wellbeing of C&YP:

Some respondents reported that the activities had had a positive impact on their mental health and/or wellbeing, an outcome which is in line with one of Reconnect's aims, objectives, and medium-term outcomes. This is supported by evidence in literature to suggest the benefits of engaging in social activities in improving the mental health and wellbeing conditions of individuals. For example: it was an opportunity to the target wellbeing and learning needs of individual attendees, like anxieties before starting secondary school, and negative thoughts.

“...parents were happy that their children/young people had space to reflect safely on their mental health.”

“As we continue to build the Stepping out project it continues to reduce social anxiety and gives confidence to communities to interact more.”

“So the history of Fantastic Fred is that we were asked to do a campaign for 11- to 16-year-olds in senior schools, really by the NHS, back in 2016, which we did. And what we recognized there was that there was no resources for primary school children and there's a critical number which is the age of 14 if you don't try and deal with the mental health issue by the age of 14. Then there's a 75 to 85% chance of that mental health issue will go into adulthood, which is obviously not good in itself, but also it's also very expensive for the NHS to treat and we brought back from that. And the theory is that the sooner that you can get young people or children really understanding mental health, understanding the importance of it, the understanding of the well-being, it's really important to do. And that can really help with later life. But what you also have to do is communicate it in a really simple, straightforward way. And that is what Fred does. So it's really focusing on food, rest, exercise and the time you spend online. If you focus on those four things, they are really helpful to good well-being and good mental health. And all of those things come from the NHS. They are based on NHS research and understanding. And I think to underline that as well a lot of what you hear now to do with mental health is that the steps that we've been implementing for two or three years, food, rest and exercise, they are really important issues for people.” (Fantastic Fred explaining the reasoning behind the initiative's focus on mental health. Please see the evidence-base for data on the Fantastic Fred project.)

“...we did board games, but interestingly, we have had a massive influx of young people with ASD symptoms. So board games do not fly with them. So we've been playing badminton football and that kind of thing. We have also attempted to do program called what if? It is a program which designed by youth SCAPE to start talking about anxiety and how to manage anxiety when it does appear. That has been successful because they can sit down and listen, talk, laugh. It's just funny game with some serious things in between.”

8. The programme helped to increase organisational capacity to increase reach and maximise impact.

For example, increase an organisation or body's capacity so that they can provide a service that they wouldn't have ordinarily been able to provide. Providers were able to meet a need(s) so impact was very grassroots and tailored to communities. Providers' feedback has revealed that there is a real need in communities for funding, especially for cultural charities, ethnic minority charities, and family charities.

“...we're very grateful that we got some help financially from somewhere because we couldn't afford to do it in the capacity that we have done it without that help. So it was key that we managed to get some funding from you to push it ahead in a better way than we would have. We would have still done it, but we would have been a lot smaller.”

“The other thing that really evidences some of the need was the number of people that would jump from one side to another. So they go to Vigo, then they might go to Meopham, and then they turn up at Dartford Central, which is 20 minutes down the road. They actually come because a lot of our residents, and they're not, I'm not suggesting they're all deprived communities because actually some of our residents, particularly in Tonbridge are what I would call, you know, professional parents. But there's a craving there right now for stuff that's affordable, that they can do with their children and their young people. We have definitely got very good case studies of people that were jumping maybe two or three in a week, and were really using it as their holiday. (New faces new places)

“All these big organizations, they will come to us, they will collaborate with us. They get the big funding. But you at least see what they're doing apart from going to small organizations and then they use them to tick boxes. (...) We, we want to work ourselves. (...) You get the big money and then the next thing is, are you giving us some pennies to pay volunteer expenses? (...) So please, if you have the voice to speak out for black, any minority small organizations we are used and we are struggling. We are not getting enough compared to what we are doing when they're [big organisations] counting impact the way they count their impact...” (One locality grant provider)

9. The programme helped connect people, create partnerships, and facilitated knowledge exchange.

This is consistent with key Family, Friends, and Community objectives: It has enhanced local networks for community assets. (These have the resources and support needed to deliver a localised

programme of opportunities.); and has helped families engage with local services and support groups. The Reconnect programme has highlighted or brought issues to the forefront (For example, the domestic abuse service).

This theme can be split into two:

- 1) Benefits of inter-agency working/partnerships to see positive changes in children and raising awareness of community or local activities.
- 2) Expert support to all, especially the families and CYP that really need it: Experts they wouldn't have otherwise had access to, especially in relation to speech and language and mental health and wellbeing. It also alerted families to other key services/opportunities.

"I think it has. During COVID, I think everyone sort of tried to help preschool aged children through home learning and doing things virtually. But I think especially the cohort in the disadvantaged area. Parents didn't really engage in any of that. I think going back to face to face and having someone that they know is there to support their children speech and language and actually they were really eager to learn how to support their children. So the impact we've seen children's language since then, the children that attended, their language is just flourished. So it's definitely worth the parents doing more and they've given that feedback that their children's language has just flourished. I think it's made a big impact and it was a short amount of time, but I think that hopefully will be long lasting for those parents for those children. And so it's been a quite a positive impact I believe."

It facilitated interactions between individuals that would not have usually worked together.

"...there was some benefits that were unexpected such as for example those learning educational teams within the businesses, they don't normally work together. So say like the marketing teams, they might do a bit all together and collaborate and but we don't normally have a lot to do with the educational teams and they don't have a lot to do with each other. So what was really nice was they actually got together and they connected and they actually learned from each other and they learned from the consultants we have as well. So there was a really nice opportunity there for those educational teams to actually share their best practice and learn from each other as well which was nice which again will benefit the kids overall because then the provision they provide will be better, so yeah."

"...but actually having a couple of people who, whose focus is childcare, who have very good background knowledge of all aspects of childcare, you, you know, they have been reporting that they have been able to talk to families about tax free childcare, which is another government scheme to support childcare costs. And we know that. You know, some families, a lot of families didn't even know about it, didn't know that they could use it in conjunction with free for two and therefore we're going to look into applying for it and therefore might well benefit from other government support. So I think that's been one of the positives around it and I think that that dovetails with what I've said about having somebody who's very knowledgeable. I'm not saying children centre staff and not knowledgeable about childcare, but you know Alison and Emma work in early years, that is the focus of their job, whereas children centres have a much wider reach. I do think that has been one of the benefits."

“...we did it in partnership with aroma of charity and Folkstone. So we got a bit of additional income from the Roma charity, which meant we could put on free foods. We had a BBQ for everybody.”

10. *Activities were inclusive and accessible, and gave providers, CYP, families, and communities opportunities they would not have otherwise had (or afford).*

The activities gave C&YP and their families, and vulnerable and/or marginalised groups (including individuals with disabilities, low-income families) an opportunity they wouldn't experience elsewhere. For example, the fact that activities were also free made activities more accessible (economically speaking) and inclusive of lower social classes. It also provided an opportunity for community engagement. Vulnerable families/YP engaged well with sport activities via leisure centre pass.

SEND and Disability:

“All parents of the children/young people who have attended have passed on how pleased they were with their child's engagement and enjoyment in the sessions. Due to their disabilities, many of the children/young people do not have many opportunities to access extracurricular activities and they were very grateful to have the chance to do so with appropriate support from experienced and trained staff.” (Provider)

“Yes, one or two children, one little boy who went to the group he only actually attended once, but he's actually now in our setting and we know he's got SEND. There were other families as well who if it wasn't that child, it may have been a younger or older sibling, depending who they brought to the setting, brought to the toddler group, and by being there and being able to have conversations, family feel very well supported. So yeah and just by the different activities I was able to put on there was a little boy who's 4 he's just started school potentially is on the ASD spectrum and you know, I really consider what play invitations I would put out for him. And that meant he absolutely loved coming, whereas the other groups prior to us, he'd been a bit anxious about going. So yeah, it was good.”

“We, we have a child who's got a complete phobia of food. So I don't know if that's come under your SEND or not. But again, doesn't leave. Mum doesn't attend parties with friends because he's so phobic. He came and paid for 24 hours. He bought his own food, but he stayed for 24 hours. And that's huge because of his mom said he doesn't even stay at his Nan and granddad. If it's going to be too long because you can't eat, yeah, he just struggles. So we know we're breaking down barriers. We know that we're making a massive impact on their lives. So yeah, we've gotta do it again. There's no way we're gonna leave it at that. We can't.”

“Well, like I say this, this has provided autistic children not just at play time because all the children have access to it at play time, but it's also used as a breakout. So when children want to go and deregulate then they've now got a place rather than just going and laying on a cushion or us having to go out and take a peanut ball and roll it up and down them. They can now go out and do it themselves. Yeah. And completely self-regulate when they're feeling really stressed and they just lie in it and they just gently rock in it. And so they're allowed to go out for a 5 minute time out and they can use it. As I say, we've only got it installed at half term. So we've only had it for 1 1/2 weeks, but the children absolutely love it and we've actually got

a little boy who's in year five and he's very, very sick and he absolutely loves it. We've also got a little autistic boy in year three who joined us. He's what I call one of my Independent School casualties. So the Independent School just couldn't cope with them and just inform them and chucked him out. And every morning his teaching assistant meets him at the top of the school steps. They go straight out to the Eagles nest swing, and he just lays in it for a couple of minutes and then he gets his bag and he comes into class, hangs his things up and then starts the lessons. So I'm going to say that was the intention of it was to give self-regulation opportunities to the mostly to the autistic children."

"Perhaps highlights a need to be intentional in how we are accessible. Additional negative feedback, unrelated to SEND, though important to consider nonetheless, includes a lack of communication around the programme – what's happening, and not enough time between delivery and award of grant for good marketing and mobilisation. This feedback appears to be project/activity specific."

"We have had a range of dancers attend with both physical and learning needs and they fitted into the workshops beautifully. A real camaraderie was created amongst participants and there is a real urge for us to do this again from both venues."

BAME and diversity:

"Many communities from BAME backgrounds enjoyed the mix of ages and parents' interaction too. Young boys really enjoyed having older boys teaching them and interacting with them as it gave them great positive role models. Food brought the communities together and allowed the opportunity to mix with different people from areas." (Feedback from the Stepping Out Project provider).

"I think almost every ethnicity was there. It seemed. Anyway, there's so many black kids, Asian kids, there's white kids. And so, especially in this area of Margate, to see that much diversity at our park was amazing."

Pupil premium

"I think it's always a problem to target the people we want to target [speaking about children who are on pupil premium] and obviously we can ask the questions, but we can't always verify that we are hitting the target group. (...) and quite often I found that when we've devised projects or the general public that some of the people who are attending could probably afford to pay actually, rather than the people who can't afford to pay. (...) so, working with the school, I thought it was a really good thing because they do know kids are on pupil premium. Which kids are going to be the kids who aren't gonna benefit from that kind of activity outside the school. So I think that that was one of the checks that the target group was a big. Big thing for us. (...) In the context of our organization, it's quite difficult to verify that information."

Working class:

"I just wanted to say thank you for the current scheme which is providing Kent school children with a free bus pass, as well as other opportunities such as subsidised leisure centre attendance, during these school holidays."

As working parents who have, fortunately, continued working all through the past year, we do not generally qualify for anything free. Our 15-year-old has been adversely affected in terms of socialisation throughout Lockdown.”

Low-income parents’ gratitude for the opportunity – free.

“We had a lot of parents from low incomes thank us for this opportunity for their children to receive coaching for free. “ (Parent).

Young Carers:

“...much of the attendance has been from families with both disabled children as well as Young Carers which has been amazing. Feedback from families has been positive as they have felt able to fully relax and participate in activities- without feeling judged.”

Children in care

“We have spoke to quite a few people on about different things within the projects I've done myself and we work with some of them around issues they are struggling with. Going to a new school or going to a new class or even moving home and going to a new school and new class as well. So there was lots of conversations when they're on young people, those around us that we also have had over the last year, a slightly more higher ratio of young people coming in from foster care and we have previously.” (Salus group)

11. Sustainability or the continued engagement of children & young people and their families.

A big part of the Reconnect programme’s aims and objectives is to leave a legacy and work towards promoting the sustainability of the programme so that its benefits might continue to be felt in the communities it reaches. There is evidence of providers beginning to think about sustainability. Thinking about how they can engage them going forward. Inspiring providers to facilitate future events. Is, and in what ways, is Reconnect facilitating system change in community approaches to children and young people’s outcomes? There are signs of this being the case. For example:

“We're going to open it up to nurseries in the area to come and sort of spend half the day and they can look at the animals and then look at the plants and maybe children who are being home schooled.”

“We are looking as to how we engage these children going forward and have a few ideas. It was interesting to note that some of the parents are as anxious about the start of a new term as the children which is something that I am mindful of.”

“Many families have now signed up to attend weekly sessions together in the new school term.”

“We have 16 young people who took part in the Reconnect activities now taking part in our own regular activities.”

“They'll be able to access on. The only thing is now all I get is ‘Are we going out now, are we going to the park, are we going to the beach?’ We get that all the time now. It was also getting

a bit busier and stuff now. So I'm hoping that we'll be able to afford to pay extra staff to come in and help, getting parents to come and help do some volunteering maybe and help with children taking them out. Yeah. Something definitely 100% that we wanna continue doing exactly. You know being outside is most important thing for our young children. Well that's great."

"It's a little frustrating that more didn't grow and but that that'll happen like in the next 12 months because we will carry on with it now.

"We've had another grant from the early help grant and we have been doing transitions in to schools. We've used the speech and language therapists, but we've been working with schools and adult education and actually educating the parents in how to get their children ready for schools. That's what our focus is at the moment. We would probably do this again. We're doing another one in the new term in October, in time for transition from home into preschool. We want to use speech and language as the core of that, so social and emotional development, speech and language development is going to be the core and emotional, emotional well-being and mental health is going to be the core of that. So children are ready to come into preschool, because we know that the children that are coming are going to be Covid babies. They would have had a lot of time at home. So we're going to focus on getting that right and getting those strategies for those parents right as soon as they start, not leaving it until quite late in the year."

"Agencies have come back and said thank you for taking Tommy over the four days of the session. And he's come back. He's full of energy. He's much more motivated now. He's changed. He feels better attitude. And I and the member of the agency would say, I've had a conversation with mom and she said Tommy wants to go paddleboarding again and he's never done it before. So that is a good positive feedback, not just for us but for the family and from that agency as well, because we've all had a part to play in that and that young child might eventually move on from the whatever he was struggling with to better things from it. So there was things like that are some of the feedback. We've had feedback about the woodland crafts. They had five parents come back. They said their children really loved the woodland craft state and can we plan it again. So we've now got one planned for October and then the other one we did was the animation project which is where they make the stock."

"In terms of the post Reconnect, I've now invested as a setting in a session in Wednesday morning sessions. So we're going back to the same forest school, so they're toddler group on Wednesday for this term. We did our first group on Wednesday, just gone and this particular child got up and said 'let's play'."

"We are asking schools if they can contribute, only because it means we can sustain it after December.... In a way it's a shame you start all this and then you know, the funding comes to an end. So it's really important for us to have that legacy and to have that continuity, especially once we've made those relationships with schools."

4.2. Evidence for Theme-Specific Indicators⁶¹

In this section we will consider the extent to which Reconnect has met its intended aims and objectives based on the qualitative and quantitative data received and evidenced in this paper.

4.2.a. Learning Missed (LM)

The following are a few key projects and activities on the programme which sought to support the Learning Missed objectives:

1. To support children and young people to re-engage in education following the pandemic.
2. To source and promote additional educational activities and opportunities for children and young people.

And medium-term outcome:

1. C&YP catch up with learning missed and are engaged in education. As one provider reports:

We cannot establish a causal link between the programme these objectives and the medium-term outcome. However, the following data and feedback from key projects and activities on the programme suggests we have, to some extent, met them.

Home study Learning Support (Invicta National Academy)

- Attendance levels were good.
 - KS2 attendance data totals across 16 weeks overall: 673. 16.62% on FSMs and 4.99% SEN. KS4 attendance data across 17 weeks overall: 217. 4.99% SEN and 16.62% FSMs. (Please see the final evaluation report for difference in registration and actual attendance numbers.)
 - Attendance was evenly spread at all IDACI levels, with the highest attendance living in the 40% deprived areas in England. IDACI is measured by the ONS against the whole of England as opposed to Kent only.⁶²
- Mostly positive feedback from students and parents:
 - KS2: Maths – 73.65% of reported that the sessions were ‘enjoyable and informative,’ 75.32% for maths.
 - 90% of parents said they would attend more sessions in the summer term and 80% said they would recommend the programme.
 - 80% of parents chose to answer the optional question ‘What did your child think about virtual home study support?’ with parents identifying that their children felt the benefits of the sessions and they found it very convenient.

⁶¹ First person perspective is frequently used in this section in reference to the activities delivered and the outcomes seen, as it is assumed that the activities delivered by specific providers and outcomes seen all come under the Reconnect Programme.

⁶² Students' postcodes were matched against the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) to monitor Invicta's reach across the county to those in deprived areas. The IDACI measures multiple aspects of deprivation and groups them together to rank them from 1 (most deprived) to 10 (least deprived) based on the impact on young people.

- A few positive quotations from parents: “The format is very good and the 'facilitator' keeps things moving along swiftly” “My son learned a lot on it” “My child liked the Kahoot sessions in the Maths sessions and he liked the way they explained the questions for easier understanding.” “it's useful and helpful” “He liked the extra learning, and he actually asked me to log in. Happy to participate”
- KS4: Has this session been helpful to you? English yes (88.76%, maths 86.29%, science 95.16%. 83% of parents would recommend the programme with 17% saying they weren't sure and the programme had an approval score of 7 out of 10.

Babble, Chatter, Talking Matters (Home-Start)

- They worked with parents and children together, offering support around the following areas: building relationships, speaking, listening, attention and understanding and self-regulation.
- Over the course of the project from February 2022 to August 2022 this project in total has supported over 80 children. We have delivered 480 hours of support to the children. To date Home-Start Dover District has had 53 children referred into this project. The project has been so successful that we have had to source additional funding in Dover to keep the project running to March 2022. We have assessed children in some or all areas and 98% of the children supported have seen improvements in listening and Attention, speaking and communication, self-Regulation, and building Relationships.
- See below for feedback from some parents.
- *“Improved so much since the visit started, enjoyed the visits, P got used to them and recognised Lorraine, combination of all the advice has been really useful.” (Waiting for a diagnosis and he has improved in all of the areas)*
- *Learning about Makaton has been useful for me I never knew how to go about that. When you spoke about the symbols, I did didn't understand it but when I was out I saw a mum doing it so I have bought the symbols and am now doing this with R. The now and next board has helped R have an understanding of what the daily structure is. The bubble machine – he really responded well and listened to simple instruction like stop, go etc. R has started signing with singing such as Twinkle Little Star. I think he has learned to understand a lot more that he can say. He is now signing where and go and starting to understand facial expressions like sad and no. (Dad's words (He has a 3 year old who has been diagnosed with server ASC)*

A for Attendance (Salus)

The purpose of this project was to increase school attendance. It offers a bespoke programme of support which includes:

- a group-based pupil centred approach to overcome barriers to attending school regularly
- support to develop effective networks and support mechanisms in home, school and community
- support to parents to understand their role in ensuring attendance is maintained
- referral to other agencies to offer family support as required
- 64 groups were referred to the programme (268 individuals). Altogether 85 CYP attended at least one session.
- Following A for Attendance sessions, children and young people showed improvements in emotional symptoms, conduct problems and hyperactivity, resulting in an overall reduction in total difficulties from an average score of 13.06 to 10.58. An improvement in prosocial behaviour was also noted.

- Young people indicated an improvement in their well-being score following sessions, with the average score increasing from 41.76 to 46.76.
- An improvement in the average school attendance of children and young people increased following the sessions, from an average of 81.80% to 83.53%.
- Young people indicated an improvement in their sense of school connectedness following sessions, with their average score increasing from 18.82 to 20.22.
- See below for some feedback from the CYP:
 - “I feel more motivated to come to school”
 - “I feel happier. I come into school everyday now, even though I am late I do come in. I form relationships better and I feel a lot confident. The sessions have been helpful.”
 - “I have improved a lot. behaviour, less angry, forming relationships, I talk about my feelings more and I feel more motivated.”
 - “I want to get up for school in the mornings and I find it fun now. The gratitude journal will really help me stay positive as I struggle sometimes with my illness absence.”
 - “I feel happier I can achieve things and I have the book that will help me going forward.”
 - “My attendance has improved and I can talk to people more.”
- See below for some feedback from the schools:
 - *“Attendance has improved, he is coming in late rather than not at all. He used to stay at home all day and now he will attend but late. That’s improvement!”*
 - *“Attendance is still inconsistent but we have seen improvement in her time keeping. She was also in school earlier for sats week which is a massive improvement.”*
 - *“(She) has engaged well and her absences are from a genuine medical need. She has been a lot more settled when she is at school.”*
 - *“(She) has made an effort with her attendance and I’ve noticed she is putting in routines. She also talks about her feelings more.”*
 - *“(She) has made an increased effort to come to school but it is often restricted due to family circumstances. She genuinely wants to be in school and is proud with her attendance. She made it in early for sats week. A really positive step.”*
 - *“An increase in attendance % has been noticed.”*

Reconnect Kent Education - Lessons in a box (Visit Kent)

- This project aimed to harness this increased interest in exploring locally to engage children with the rich heritage and culture of Kent and bring learning to life. The engagement with local attractions within the classroom should also lead to enthusiasm to visit local heritage with friends and family.
- By supporting teachers with ready-made lesson plans linked to the National Curriculum, we set out to address learning gaps by providing useful and relevant resources, with a focus on creative writing and collaborative learning. It also aimed to highlight the value of educational visits to local attraction partners.
- Visit Kent received 107 entries. 8115 children took part in the reconnect activities. 125 boxes were quickly snapped up by Kent teachers in just 15 days from opening registrations.
- Please see below for some positive feedback:
 - *“Our Year 5’s loved taking part in the Reconnect Lesson in a Box challenge in Term 6. The children loved having a real-world focus for their writing and were especially motivated to create advertisements for local attractions. They were able to practice some amazing work completed for the project. As a teacher, the PowerPoints and resources were engaging, easy to use and pitched to the right level for my class. The children are amazed that they*

won and cannot wait for their class trip to Historic Dockyard Chatham at the beginning of next term." (KS2 Teacher)

The Youth Summit (The University of Kent)

- More than 650 YP on campus enjoying around 25 different types of activity across a wide range of subjects and over three days. Positive feedback from attendees.
- Please see below for some positive feedback from participants and key facilitators.
 - "I think it was really good as we were all given a chance to participate in the interactive movie which was fun and an incredible experience overall."
 - "I think the "Exploring Scientific Spaces" workshop that we did was probably most inspiring as we talked about women in STEM and how anyone can do anything, lifting our spirits higher."
 - "Amazing and very nicely interactive."
 - When asked if anything inspired them, one respondent replied: "Meeting new people."
 - When asked if they would come to the Youth Summit again, 68 out of 73 said yes.
 - Words used to describe their experience - a few examples: fun, gave me ideas, and valuable.
 - When asked 'how confident do you feel about sharing your opinions and ideas with others after taking in today's activities?' 14 said definitely more confident, 37 said slightly more confident.
 - "The place felt exciting, the place felt vibrant. We got some of our researchers and academics who are world leading researchers to think about their teaching, but for a very different audience and that's really a positive learning for them. I think what the young people in schools got out of it was a different environment in which to learn. It gave them a taste of university, it gave them aspiration and inspiration. I think it gave them a flavour of a different kind of learning, different subjects, subjects they may not have even thought of. It was also partly outdoors, so it was healthy and positive and there was exercise involved with some of the sessions, which the students really enjoyed."

Digital Inclusion

- We were able to distribute 400 laptops to disadvantaged communities.
- 14% of HAS referrals – pathway 3 were approved via pathway 3. 86% of HAS referrals – pathway 3 were approved via other pathways. 22% made by Dartford, lowest number 1% in Dover and Thanet at 2%. 16% in Sevenoaks. (See the annex for full district breakdown). Software pathway 3 – 59% no software required, an 41% Microsoft office. See the annex for HAS referrals and software by district – pathway 3 and HAS referrals and software by district – pathway 3.
- Feedback from beneficiaries was mostly positive, as the following examples and case studies demonstrate.
 - "I just wanted to thank you for all your help. The children's laptops turned up today and they got one each. This is going to help them so much with their homework. They are going to be so happy and excited when they come home from school. I haven't set them up yet as my brother is going to help me do it at the weekend. This honestly means so much to both the children and I so thank you so much for your help 😊 hope you have a lovely day."
 - "I can't tell you what a difference your service makes to our learners, thank you so much for the work you do!"
 - "Thank you! I am sure that the notebook will enable my son to take computer courses. He has great ability to master this subject. Looking forward to!"

- *“Thank so so much for helping me and support me and the children”*
- *“I just want to say a huge and enormous thank you for this. It really will make a huge difference and we are incredibly grateful. Many thanks.”*
- Case studies:

Case study: One of six siblings. He is the eldest. (...) He relies on the resources in the school to do his homework as there is no computers in the home. If he is assigned home via the internet he needs to do this on his dad smartphone (the only device in the household with access to the internet). The family are in poverty due to a number of different factors and therefore things like computers are not even considered. Now he can do more self-learning and develop more in his own time with the resource. Additionally, it will create more access to things in and outside the community to open the avenues of support for the family.

Case study: A 15-year-old who has autism and an EHCP. Her and her mum fled Domestic Abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite strenuous efforts and support, she has been unable to access education placement locally, but should have a placement ready for next academic year. Now she has a laptop of her own to support in accessing her learning and she never expected that he could be the recipient of a laptop and she is showing considerable resilience in the face of considerable stress.

Case study: A 16-years old in Year 11 who is digitally excluded. She has had a very unsettled education since her parents separated during lockdown in 2020 and whilst suffering with anxiety and depression. She had received a number of fixed term exclusions and following the most recent one she has not been in school since November 2021. She is at-risk of becoming NEET. She can now access appropriate training with NUYU Academy and is engaging as she is keen to gain sufficient qualifications to secure a college place.

Case study: A 16 years old and a young carer. His mother has mental health illness and his younger sister has special educational needs. The family is being evicted from the home through no fault of their own and are being supported and the mother is currently out of work. Due to his carer role, he is unable to able to attend revision sessions at school but could access these online. The family do not have a suitable device (only a mobile) and limited data. Now he can access learning and revision whilst at home, preparing for his GCSE exams.

Case study: A Year 4 student who has been awaiting referral for ASD since the start of the pandemic. He is high-risk dyslexic but this has not been assessed due to the pandemic. His access at home is limited and he requires digital applications (such as Office 365) to support his learning. He is significantly behind on his peer group in this learning and the gap is widening. Now he can dictate his thoughts onto his laptop and listen to any instructions, rather than try to read. It also reinforces his learning with ICT.

Case study: A young person who does not have access to any form of digital device at home to be able to complete his GCSE studies to the best of his abilities. During the lockdowns he came into school, as his mum is a critical worker. He is very engaged with his learning but is at times held back by his digital exclusion – his

old laptop is now not repairable, and mum is not in a financial position to purchase another one. Now he has access to a laptop that will enable him to study for his GCSEs.

Lyfta

- Reconnect partnered with Lyfta to offer Kent schools and students the opportunity to use Lyfta during the summer holidays 2021.
- One sixth of children who signed up engaged in at least two Lyfta lessons; and 20 schools who have signed up have had access to Lyfta over the summer but can also be directed to sign up for our free training to gain an additional month's free access to the platform.
- 20 schools signed up to use Lyfta, four attended webinars.
- A real success of the project was the engagement of students who accessed Lyfta independently of their schools. Lyfta provided bespoke lesson plans, created for students aged 4 to 6, 7 to 11 and 12 plus.
- In total, there were 165 sign ups from parents, carers or students which equated to 198 children given access to the platform. Of these 198 children, 32 children engaged with the platform. Of these 32 children, 8 completed the Lyfta summer challenge, meaning that a quarter of those engaged completed all six lessons. Engagement amongst the other twenty-four young people was good with most completing two lessons as a minimum.
- See below for some feedback:
 - *"Yes, (child) spent the weekend completing these excellent tasks. I must say, we were both really impressed with them. The information, videos, facts etc about each person and their location and lifestyle was amazing. She found each lesson extremely engaging and each one opened up a different conversation between us and discussions around the countries, cultures, feelings etc. Each lesson was completely different too, it was wonderful to be able to visit these places virtually. Her favourite was Anna in Norway. But Erkan in Turkey was a close second. She is going into year six when she returns in September. Many thanks once again. This summer holiday we have made full use of KCC's offering. Thank you again."*
 - *"My child and I absolutely enjoy the Lyfta platform! Thanks for signing us up and sincere thanks to the summer programme development & admin teams of KCC!"*

Sir Linkalot

- We received positive feedback from beneficiaries, which suggests that Sir Linkalot helped to support student learning, specifically English and literacy, in an enjoyable and engaging manner.
 - *(Year 3) – It's good because you get to remember rhymes to help you learn words.*
 - *(Year 3) – It's really cool because it helps you know how to spell correctly. It helps me to learn.*
 - *(Year 4) – When we saw Sir Linkalot he made up a little sentence about Zach's name, and he thought of it instantly, he was so quick and it made us laugh. He thinks of really good links. Some of them you have to watch them a few times to see what they are helping you to learn. Most of them you get them really quickly and they're really funny.*
 - *(Year 4) – I think it's really good because you learn from it but it's also funny and it makes us laugh.*
 - *(Year 5) – I really liked it when he visited because he taught us and then he used different techniques that weren't on the app to help us. He is very enthusiastic and encouraging.*
 - *(Year 5) – I thought he was really funny and really good in the videos.*

- *(Year 6) - I really liked him because he was very funny and a little bit silly. I do think the app is useful because the links do help you to spell the words. I have got much better at spelling because I've remembered the links.*
- *(Year 6) – When he came it was very helpful. He was funny but he also taught us to spell lots of different words. The links are quite catchy sometimes and they're sometimes very funny.*
- *(Year 5 TA) – I loved everything about him, especially his eyebrows.*
- *Just to say we've been using this app for the past year and it is fantastic. Really, very good and an excellent resource. A much better way to learn spellings than lists or competitions.*

Curious Maths: 581 yearly subscriptions taken up by parents and 23 free yearly subscriptions taken up by participating schools.

Families Supporting Families (FSF)

- The Families Supporting Families (FSF) Pathway was designed to support families who had found it more difficult to access information and support during the Coronavirus pandemic, particularly those with very young children, who were unable to access the usual services during the lockdown phase. This project ran in Dartford, Sevenoaks, and Tunbridge Wells. However, for the purposes of time, this paper has chosen to focus on the work in Sevenoaks.
- In Dartford, 10 families were initially referred, representing 14 children, 13 of foundation stage age. Seven families started the Pathway on 19 May 2022, which represents 10 children, five under ones, three two-year-olds, one four-year-old and one older than foundation stage.
- In Tunbridge Wells, 11 families were initially referred, representing 11 parents and 13 children, all of Early Years Foundation Stage age. Eight families started the Pathway on 22 June 2022, which represents nine children, four under ones, two one-year-olds, two two-year-olds and one three-year-old. One family dropped out of the programme after week one.
- In Sevenoaks, seven families were initially referred, representing seven parents and eight children, seven of Early Years Foundation Stage age.
- The 80% increase in families playing outside more and accessing community events and facilities is notable. A couple of mums said that the improving weather may have helped them get into the habit of spending time outdoors initially, since the outdoor week, and they now hope to maintain their levels of outdoor engagement, whatever the weather.
- Of the 60% of parents saying bedtime routines had not changed, one said they already had an effective, established routine, the other two said their babies were still too young to have developed a bedtime routine, although both recognise the importance of it, and one had started reading at bedtime.
- *Really, really interesting and helpful, with simple and effective ideas, learning through play, spending time talking with children. It was really powerful."*
- *"I wanted to know more about it and things to help me."*
- Most parents reported that their family and friends had benefitted from the information they had shared and were extremely interested in it, particularly the schema information. One parent said her friend had *"noticed her baby displaying covering characteristics and is now more able to be aware of how she develops."* Another spoke about how her mum (who they live with) understands more about why her daughter is so messy (probable dominant scattering schema).
 - *"It gives an insight to how children develop whilst in the early stages of being a new parent. Learning sessions with lots of opportunities to ask questions and relate to current situations."*
 - *"Definitely, a great way to learn about how to support young children. It has benefitted me, but even more helpful for mums with younger children."*
 - *"Yes, really interesting and lots of helpful ideas."*

- “Yes, I didn’t know anything, really opened my eyes about how children and babies develop and grow.”

The following is a range of activities which potentially increase learning and wellbeing, which families identified as undertaking more often with their children as a result of taking part in FSF Pathway.	Families doing more or a lot more
• Reading and looking at books together	100%
• Singing songs and rhymes	60%
• Creating made-up stories with their children	80%
• Make-believe play	40%^
• Cooking	60%^
• Household chores	60%*^
• Messy play	80%*^
• Play outdoors together	80%~
• Access community events and facilities e.g. the library, swimming pool, the park, local woods.	80%

Playground

In the Playground project, artists were selected to develop and deliver creative sessions to babies aged 0–24 months and their families in 12 libraries and 6 children’s centres.

311 playground sessions were delivered across 26 weeks. In total there were 1665 visits by adults. 12 libraries and 6 children’s centres in Kent were involved in the project. The majority of babies were aged between 3 and 15 months. Summer Outreach 2021 was delivered in 6 venues by 19 artists. It was attended by 362 adults and 546 children. In total there were 1537 visits by children aged 0-2 years. Feedback from Parents/Carers was hugely positive –

- 95.4% would recommend Playground to other families.
- Reasons for liking Playground sessions varied but some of the most popular answers included being free (84.6% of families), sessions were calming/relaxing (78.5%), sessions were baby-led (76.9%), and sessions encouraged baby development (66.2%).
- Following participation in Playground:
 - Parents/Carers reported engaging in creative play more often with their baby at home. Before attending Playground almost, a quarter of the parents/carers (23.1%) reported that they either never engaged in creative play, or only engaged once a week. Post Playground however, this had reduced to 7.7%. In contrast, the numbers of parents and carers engaging in creative play at home at least once a day, or even several times a day, had increased from 33.8% to 58.4%
- Parents/carers reported an increase in the use of techniques (such as mirroring) inspired by Playground – 78.5% of parents/carers who responded to the questionnaire reported that they had used some Playground inspired techniques at home.

- Over half of parents and carers (53.8%) who responded to the questionnaire indicated that they had recreated some of the objects used at a Playground session at home. 56.9% indicated that they had been inspired to make new objects at home (i.e., things that weren't used in a Playground session).
- Parents/Carers reported an increase in the intention to engage in arts events for babies in the future.
- *"This has been a fascinating project to be part of, it has brought more footfall to the library and some attendees have joined the library as a result of attending Playground. The babies all appear to have responded positively. I would welcome the opportunity to attend more session in the future."* (Library Staff Member).
- *"It is absolutely brilliant; I really look forward to the sessions and make a special effort to make myself and baby available. I've never seen my little boy so happy. The artists are fantastic, so welcoming and kind and excellent at what they do. When the sessions finish, we will really miss them. They have been invaluable. I was even planning my return to work around the days they playground is run as I know how beneficial it is for my little one."* (Parent/Carer)

Culture Camps

Culture Camps is an inaugural Youth Cultural programme, supported by Kent County Council and Reconnect across Kent during Summer 2022. Four organisations delivered twelve 2-day camps, a series of Cultural Visits, and two final sharing days at the Woodville in Gravesend and at the Picture House Cinema in Ashford, where all participants received a Culture Camps certificate of achievement.

345 young people aged between 5 and 18 attended the Culture Camps, delivered by 19 professional artists. 140 young people and families attended the 2 showcase sharing days. Every young person who attended was offered the chance to take part in Arts Awards and 288 achieved Discover Arts awards certificates. Please See below for positive feedback:

- *"It was so much fun on the boat and when we made our flags and learned to use them to spell out words and signalling by moving our bodies."*
- *"This has been the best camp ever! You are all the best and you have taught us new skills and even secret codes and languages!"*
- *"Enjoyed making new friends and meeting people from different schools."*
- *"Really enjoyed meeting new people and making new dances."*

4.2.b. Health & Happiness (HH)

The following are a few key projects and activities on the programme which sought to support the following HH objectives for not only CYP and families in Kent but also key groups: SEND, CYP in care, BAME, LGBTQ+, CYP affected by domestic abuse and bereavement:

- 1) To support C&YP to engage or re-engage with activities that promote resilience and positive well-being.
- 2) To source and promote additional activities and opportunities for children and young people, relating to health and happiness.
- 3) To promote suitable engagement with children's and family services and support groups.

Medium term outcomes:

- 1) to help more families access FSM related benefits and know how to access mental health services and develop good management strategies.

While we cannot establish a causal link between the programme the medium-term outcomes, this feedback suggests that the programme has met its HH objectives and medium-term outcomes.

Early years and speech and language development - Feedback

"The Wye Parent, Toddler and Baby group received money from Reconnect, which enabled us to pay for the rent on the hall and pay towards an extra member of staff to staff the group. We've opened for 18 weeks over the last academic year, with 2 sessions in Dec 2021 and the remainder Jan – July 2022. Today was our last session of the academic year. We currently have 61 children registered as attendees of the group. Families have been charged £2 for the first child/adult and then an additional £1 per additional child attending from the family. The reconnect grant has been an enormous help and has allowed us to keep our charge to a minimum. From September we will need to increase our price to £3 for the first child/adult and then £1 per additional child. Without the reconnect grant, we would not have been able to run the toddler group this year, so it's very much appreciated." (One case study)

"So, so for one child, he came to me at Christmas. He's four. He will go to school in September. And he came to the setting. He was in nappies still at four, and very limited speech and language. And his answer to every question is I don't know and has no confidence whatsoever and. But it's a lovely little boy and just wanted to engage and he has spent two years of COVID in a flat with no outside space, and has had a disproportionate amount of screen time. So all of his all of his play revolves around video games. So when he comes to the setting, he plays Sonic the Hedgehog with the other children or he wants to play Minecraft and make Minecraft things. And we don't have screens in my setting at all. I'm a screen free setting. So it's really impacted everything that that that child does. (...) The result of that is within two or three days of being back in the setting, we printed all the pictures off from the weekend sessions and actually sat down and got the children to talk about what they've done. And all of a sudden this child just came alive and we built a bridge and we did this and we did that. And all of a sudden he wanted to play the things that he'd done at Forest School. He wasn't playing Sonic the Hedgehog anymore because he has a new experience and the outcome of that is we were able to take his learning to another level. His speech and language has improved. He is a child who speaks well but has very, very limited language and very limited vocabulary." (One case study)

○ **Individuals with SEND**

Youth group (including SEND and inclusivity):

“Since January we have had 5 new boys and 3 new girls join the youth group. Of the 9, 5 are diagnosed to be on the ASD spectrum (...) and all are totally happy and feel included. 2 boys are looked after. Age groups of the new young people are from 11 to 15. There is a variety of different races and religions represented too. I have had conversations with some parents who have been over the moon about the fact that their children have ‘found a friendly place to be themselves.’ The young people themselves also feel included and “OK”. Parents have started chatting to each other at the beginning and end of the evenings and this seems to have created a small support group too.”

Case study: Thanet Wanderers

“We decided to set up a SEND hub as for me this is a huge passion of mine as I work with autistic children, and I also attended a special needs school and know first-hand how amazing a sport rugby is. I know rugby can help grow confidence, help with mental health, improve fitness and strength and work as part of a team. So, for me this was always something I always wanted to be a big part of the schools and community programme and I knew there was a demand and need. I’m also aware that there are still not enough groups out there for special needs children and this was a fantastic opportunity to give young people in the local area an experience to try rugby, have fun and meet/interact with other children. Having set up the hub I saw how a after school club being based up the rugby club could work and having so many special need schools in the local area there was a demand and need for more clubs and activities for children.

We’ve been inundated with parents/carers registering their children to attend the hub and a day before the first hub session where currently have 32 students registered which is remarkable and beyond are wildest dreams. From what I’m aware I don’t know of any other rugby club in Kent who have a service set up like this and we hope these 7 hub sessions are just the starting point and we grow this amazing product throughout the years.”

BSL supporting families with deaf members who have been especially isolated in covid (Deaf Connect)

30 CYP altogether were able to go on trips and outings with others CYP their age. See below for feedback.

- *“I was very enjoying to go BSL community’s events because I was meeting lots of new and old faces for the first time and long time since we met. These activities were very good and encouraging for Deaf/hard of Hearing youths to go because this helps and develops our social, mental and communication skills! These skills are very massive important of their entire life! They have gained lots of experiences to do different activities which is good challenging for them to take part of this. Staff always look after us and they always make sure we are in good morale as happy.” (CYP Feedback).*
- *“Because it good to talk and see deaf people for fun and learn to go out not stay home all the time.”*

- *“Because it was fun, enjoyable. It was different and these events were useful to meet deaf people, social with them, during the events there were some team work which was good. Also during the events, I was meeting new people which was good to see and it helps me to develop my soft skills. Because it was different events and I’ll totally enjoyed it is experience for myself and other deaf people. Hopefully with more events coming up in the summer will be more enjoyable the events because I get to meet new deaf people or old deaf friends that I haven’t seen for a long time and doing something different.”*

Nova Children's Project CIC - Youth Club for YP with SEN and disabilities.

18 activities have been completed in total, with the most recent activities being bowling, movie night, dinner out, a games evening and swimming. 93% of YP reported that the activity they took part in was very fun. 100% of YP reported that had enjoyed spending time with other young people. Please see below for some positive feedback.

- *“I really enjoyed the games we played. I haven’t done that before.” (YP)*
- *“Having time away from my parents and getting to know others is good. I do love my parents but it's nice to do things with other people.” (YP)*
- *“Thank you so much for all you and your amazing team do. We are so thankful for the service you provide.” (Parent)*

Individuals eligible for Free School Meals (FSM):

One locality grant provider’s activity: *“We invited 50 children in receipt of Free School Meals to join us at Silvers on Margate High Street. We served breakfast and Hot Lunch every day using the team from Our Kitchen. The Children were offered an Art Activity and a walk out every day. We went to the library, which they hadn't been to before, Turner Contemporary, which some of the staff hadn't been to before and Margate Museum. The team at Margate Museum were fantastically engaging and the children loved seeing the old pictures of their town. We did a Hula Hoop Session, African Drumming, beach obstacle course and martial arts at the beach.”*

One locality grant provider: *“[The Reconnect funding] paid for 10 weeks of each of the following provision from outside providers: Forest school club (years 1-6), Breakfast boxing club (KS2), and KS1 football club. Year 1 – 6 61 children out of 95 took part 81% of the SEN children took part in at least one of these clubs, and 60% of the FSM children took part in at least one of these club.”*

Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller (GRT) – feedback from one parent:

“Would just like to say a big thank you to the school on all the support of last week with the help to learn the other children in the school understand my children’s culture the children thoroughly enjoyed it and said the other children enjoyed it as well this is Really made them feel a lot more welcome and that the children understand them a bit more xx.” (One of the GRT traveller mums)

LGBTQ+ (case study – work by Porchlight activities)

Reconnect reached out to BeYou as a LGBTQ+ specialist provider to tender for funding to increase the activities and opportunities for young people who access the existing BeYou service and other LGBTQ+ young people through 1) Three **swim together Trans-Inclusive Swimming Sessions – 10 CYP** and their families and **30 contacts**. 2) **Intergroup meet ups with 12 Kent-based groups support 52 CYP**. 3) 3 **Family activity days** with parents and their children

who would benefit from additional peer support. (approx. 15 children and their families with **45 contacts**). 4) **Pride Event** summer 2022 (approx. **75 young people**). Feedback:

- *“it’s the first time they have been swimming for years” and “I felt safe”*
- *“Felt comfortable and supported and enjoyed the flume”*
- *“Enjoyed the company of other adults and staff” (the climbing experience)*
- *“Really really fun – not sure what to expect and would love to go back” (The Ninja Warrior activity)*
- *“Got a lot out of the event during the summer as it gave them a lot to look forward to especially the social elements of meeting up” (YP in care)*
- *“Despite the rain, YP enjoyed this and said they would like to do it again” (YP in care)*

The Reconnect funding enabled the BeYou Project to reach out this summer and offer our young LGBTQ+ audience more activities, events and social interactions which ultimately saw them increase in confidence, start to rebuild their social skills, and once again enjoy all of life’s pleasures in open spaces, that are fun, safe and non-judgemental. This funding allowed us to host a Be proud event that was bigger and better than 2021, offering more diversity, and reaching a geographically wider audience. BeYou is incredibly proud to work alongside the KCC Reconnect programme and we look forward to celebrating its successes over the coming months.

Our Wellbeing worker has made great progress over the summer working on school resources and has 7 schools booked in to work with, initial visits have been conducted and safe spaces are now being set up. We will be producing a full report next year.

Children affected by domestic abuse (case study – Oasis Domestic Abuse Service. Mentoring for C&YP affected by domestic abuse.

When asked how they would rate the delivery, they responded “And I can honestly say a 10 for us. There’s disappointment that the service isn’t continuing and we yeah, we the schools received it really well, as did the parents as well. They’re non abusive parents. And the children, obviously it’s, it’s had a massive impact on the children.”

“I think we’ve worked in a slightly different way with our one to ones especially over the summer. We really wanted to push that summer engagement. It traditionally falls off quite a lot during the summer holidays, especially teenage boys, they don’t like to be pinned down in the summer holidays. So we did focus on being more creative and finding exciting way to keep the professional contact in these young people, because that’s when the risk increases, doesn’t it? They don’t have anybody monitoring them or monitoring their well-being when they’re not at school. So having that professional contact in the home in the holidays, it’s really important I think.”

Children affected by bereavement (case study – Demelza Bereaved Siblings Project - Reconnecting families of life limited and life threatened children)

The aim of this project is to support CYP whose sibling has died and was open to children and young people living in all parts of Kent. Delivered several activities. A total of 25 individual children participated in the events and activities. Eleven different events and activities took

place on different dates. One CYP attended 6 of these; 5 attended 3 of them; 5 attended 2 of them and 14 people attended one event or activity. Together there were 95 spaces used across these events, 45 for CYP and 50 for other family members. See below for feedback:

“My daughter spoke so animatedly about the day and how she had enjoyed mixing with others. She told me that she finds it hard at school, that she is shy and often doesn't join in. My daughter is keen to take part in more events and the impact of reconnecting over the summer is clear, extending in to how she feels about school, how we spend our time as a family and her feeling more relaxed and positive.”(Parent/Carer, Sibling day at Bewl Water)

“Just wanted to say a massive thank you for yesterday. We absolutely loved it. Singing has always felt so cathartic. Music was a big part of [my Son's] short life and I was lucky enough to have music therapy at Demelza after we lost [my son] 9 years ago. At the time, the music therapist helped me to create a CD of songs that had been important to us during [my Son's] life along with recoding some of the poems I had written. It helped so much in the early part of the grieving process. So, being back, now with [my other son] taking part in the choir was so special and I felt a strong connection with [both my son's] together. The [Music Director] made it so fun and was so inclusive too. We feel privileged to have been able to take part in such a special event. Thank you so much. “ (Parent/Carer, Choir Day).

They had a WildWood Family Day in May 2022. Families gave fantastic verbal feedback about how much they had enjoyed being together, being outside and using the time to interact socially. A father was able to open up about his feelings and need for support which has been provided. The adults said they really enjoyed being together. The children said they loved the animals and meeting new people.

Other cases for HH:

Play Place

Play Place established a new outreach programme that focussed on working with children, young people (0-18 years old) and their families / communities. We achieved total contact numbers of 4,820 during the delivery of 120 sessions. Reconnect funds were used for revenue costs including staff, travel materials and equipment. Our evaluation film evidenced good outcomes and feedback from parents and C&YP: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SeZVDDbnwI>

It was noted that the parks included areas that have high levels of rural, social, or financial deprivation. Some parents talked about the importance of activities being delivered for free against the backdrop of the pending financial crisis. Parents, partners and C&YP have told us that they were pleased to be getting back outdoors and having something positive to do locally; they did not like lockdown. Feedback from parents:

- “I commend the organisers; my kids are playing with the neighbours here and the event offers a sense of belonging (in the community)”

- “It is really good that the event is promoting outside play – getting kids away from screens and laptops”
- “We love these sessions; both my sons have really enjoyed attending each week”.
- “We would love more of these events please”
- “It is good that these activities are across age groups and different schools all coming together”
- “Great to have so much variety of activities for the children to get involved in”
- “It is good they (The children) are trying new things”

Youth Club for Young People with SEND (Nova Children and Young People’s Project)

They delivered a number of activities specifically for young people with SEND, including theatre trips, Meals Out and Trips to Pubs and Restaurants, climbing, bowling, cricket and a residential activity weekend. Please see below for some feedback from beneficiaries.

- *“My son X is autistic and has problems interacting with others, so this club offers him the chance to be with others and enjoy activities that would otherwise not be suitable for him. Nova has given him the chance to just be himself with people that understand his needs and ways, and he thoroughly enjoys and looks forward to all the club events whilst we, his parents, are safe in the knowledge that he is being well looked after. I am so grateful to Nova for offering this opportunity for X to enjoy himself, he is just so eager and looks forward to all the club events.”*
- *“Nova has been a lifesaver. It has been the only provision of socialisation I have felt confident enough to use since the pandemic. They have been rigorous and vigilant in their Covid procedures and I have every confidence in them having provided a safe environment for our young people to socialise. They took the initiative quickly and realised the importance of providing these occasions for our youngsters at a time when so little had been accessible to them. I can’t overstate how grateful we have been for these opportunities for our daughter to socialise in a safe and thoughtful way. The activities are well planned - Nova are thoughtful in providing activities they are know are going to be popular and occasionally offer something a little different to keep things interesting. The staff are warm and compassionate and my daughter looks forward to seeing them as much as her peers. A number of groups my daughter attended have fallen by the wayside as a result of the pandemic and this had made Nova all the more valuable to us. They are absolutely wonderful! Heartfelt words, I really can't tell you how much it has meant to us to have Nova in our lives!”*

Siblings Club ((Nova Children and Young People’s Project)

- 10% of siblings reported that the best part of attending a siblings club has been the activities.
- 40% of siblings reported that the best part of attending a siblings club was having a club for them.
- 50% of siblings reported that the best of attending a siblings club was trying new things and new activities.
- Siblings voted the most enjoyable activities as ‘games afternoons,’ swimming, trampolining and bowling.

ShivaNova multicultural dance, music, and crafts workshops

We have delivered culturally diverse music and dance workshops in Folkestone, Dover and Ashford. Delivered 180 sessions. All (2700), CYP (2600), 240 SEND. (See below for feedback from schools.)

“The children absolutely loved the sessions. It created a real buzz around the school and they were all very excited afterwards. The members of staff were amazing and great with the children. The main man who led the session, e.g., modelling the drums, was calm and spoke clearly for the children. The children listened well and all children were engaged. I can't think of anything that they could have done differently.”

“Students involved in today's workshop were between 11 and 12 years of ages. Over the course of today 127 students accessed the workshops. The percentage of students who are deemed to be pupil premium (parents on universal credit or earn under a particular amount) is 39% within the groups that were seen on the day.”

“We really enjoyed the drumming workshops on the Monday. This workshop was accessed by Year 2 and Year 3 children aged between 6-8 years old. Of the 4 classes of children that attended, there are nearly 30% of children with EAL and then also a selection of Pupil Premium children (15-20% of each class including: services, free school meals, LAC). (...) The children really enjoyed the dancing. In terms of feedback from the children the loveliest thing I witnessed was when my class realised that the workshop leaders were Nepalese, they were incredibly excited, especially my Nepali boys. One of them even said 'I know it hasn't started yet, but this is going to be the best day ever!’”

Mental health and wellbeing – interventions (counselling and mentorship)

South Kent Mind

South Kent Mind were funded under the Reconnect programme to deliver wellbeing courses and activities aimed at improving the mental wellbeing of children and young people (CYP) across the Ashford, Dover, and Folkestone & Hythe districts.

- Through these courses and activities, they have supported 250 CYP overall, 224 aged 12-15 through their county grant activity.
- The top 3 most common answers to the best aspects of sessions/activities from participants were as follows: 1) Learning about anxiety, stress, coping with life, confidence, and self-esteem. 2) Improved confidence, improved self-expression, improved communication. Learnt more about peers and friends, understand more about recognising mental health in others.
- See below for one case study:
“In collaboration with school staff and social workers, we delivered a session with pupils focused on understanding feelings, the body's response to anxiety and how to identify these triggers. Using an energetic and friendly approach to hold concentration and build rapport, we helped the children create art pieces and complete quizzes to help them consider life challenges and how to deal with them. The engagement and feedback from the pupils was great. In particular the session allowed one young person who was quite quiet and anxious to begin with, to come out of their shell and by the end of the session become one of the main contributors. Being able to work alongside someone who has low self-esteem and help them gain confidence and contribute is huge success and very rewarding.”

Salus Intensive Mentoring:

Salus were funded, through the Reconnect Programme, to provide intensive support to children and young people who have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. The aim is to improve

their mental health, emotional well-being, resilience, and engagement through an evidence-based, flexible and responsive programme of 1-1 support. To date the service has supported 421 children and young people and will support a further 204 by March 2023. Robust evaluation has consistently demonstrated improvements in emotional health and well-being and school attendance.

- *'Having a mentor is having someone to talk to and it makes you feel like someone is listening and understands you. It's a chance to have a break from everything going on.'*
- *'I thought mentoring would just be talking about my family and be boring. It's been SO much more than that. It's helpful, motivating, and empowering - I can be me. I don't know where I'd be now if I hadn't had mentoring for the last year.'*
- *'Having a mentor is comforting, not to feel judged and having someone that I can talk to and trust has been so helpful. I feel listened to.'*
- *'I thought it was going to be really formal - like CAMHS! It's so much more relaxing and sessions have no pressure.'*
- *'I feel like I have come SO far with my anxiety. I feel happier, I was just so unhappy. I was so negative about myself and thats changed now. I've come so far.'*
- *"Just spoke to F & he is in such good spirits. So different from the boy we had a year ago! We have noticed such a change in them both & have you to thank largely for that! So glad we have found you & have you working with us." - Head of a Year Group*

KCHFT School based counselling services: Reconnect funding to get more counsellors to reduce the referral to treatment time for the Children's and YP counselling service from 12 - 6 weeks.

- In the 2nd quarter 489 CYP were reported to have received a Tier 2 (Targeted) Emotional Wellbeing Intervention (CYP Counselling).
- 92.80% of children had closed referrals (and two or more contacts) with paired scores.
- The average waiting time in weeks (Referral to 1st Assessment) – Primary – was 10.3 (an increase from 9.1 in the 4th quarter last year).
- The average waiting time in weeks (Referral to 1st Assessment) - secondary – was 9.8 (an increase from 9.2 in the 4th quarter last year)
- 72.70% of children's paired scores show measurable improvement - Emotional scale confirmed as the indicator for paired score. We see some improvement from the 4th quarter from 69.80% to 72.70%
- The longest wait time for primary is 16 and 14 for secondary (a decrease from 21 and 18 respectively in May 2022).
- See below for some positive feedback received:
- *"Thank you so much for your time with T. He said today he finally felt comfortable to tell you his insecurity's about his friendships at school. That he nearly cried as he felt you were a lovely person and had to say goodbye to you. Then I picked him up after work he said he had made the effort to befriend a younger child who was shy and looked like she had nobody to play with, he said he introduced himself and said he understood how it felt to feel shy and alone at times but that it was ok as he would he would introduce her to the friends he had made at after school club. I am so proud of T. You keep doing a good job for the children you support and I am even more determined than ever to keep T safe happy and healthy with his best wishes centre of all decisions." (CYP feedback).*
- *I just wanted to email your team to say thankyou for all your support and guidance in regards to the referrals I have completed and sent to you. I have completed what could be said are a fair few referrals and your team are always quick to respond and are a reassuring presence for us. Knowing that you are there to support our students, in a timely fashion offering advice and acknowledgement to our students mental health is just so helpful, and working collaboratively so we are able to give our students the best service – thankyou again. (Professional feedback).*

Talents and Interests Grants (Jan- Sept 2022):

- 55 out of the 62 evaluation forms for T&I grants this year stated that they either agree or strongly agree that the activity has improved their resilience. 42 strongly agreed that they enjoyed the activity, and 16 agreed. The following are quotes from young people about why they liked the activity. Please see below for feedback:
- *"I have never been a sporting person. Archery allows me to take part in a sport without getting hot and bothered. I like the way it is just me not a team I rely on myself to do well and even win."*
- *"Archery is just me It lets me control what I am doing and I do not have to think about anything else. I did not mix well before I started shooting but I think I have got a lot better. I really like archery because it helps me to concentrate and I have learnt to focus my thoughts."*
- *"I find the [gym membership] helps me release stress. It makes me feel better about my self physically and mentally."*
- *"I really like the [guitar] teacher. He listens to me and I can choose the songs I want to learn. I spend spend time practising at home and I find it relaxing."*
- *"It was a fun activity to put my mind away from all the other stresses and worries at the time and it boosted my self-confidence in what I can do, it made me feel pretty cool."*
- *"Being new to the area i didn't really know what was available and where I could go but now i have my rod licence and the information I need about where I can fish with it I have really enjoyed being able to spend time in the local area do something I enjoy."*
- *And why it helped their resilience;*
- *"I was having a tough time and this helped me feel better about things as it's something I enjoy doing. It was like my safe space being an actor."*
- *"I wasn't that confident when I first joined. Now I join in with the group activities/when having to lead as a group etc. I really enjoy talking to everyone now too."*
- *"Learning a new instrument can take a lot of patience and time, meaning I had to persevere with a lot of tricky bits. By concentrating on this and this only, I wasn't thinking about anything else and I felt like I could take out my stresses on the instrument, since it is relaxing."*
- *"Playing football helps me feel more confident in my sporting ability and it helps improve my mental health and well-being. Playing football gives me a much needed physical outlet which I feel I need in order to improve my mood, without a physical outlet I can experience low mood and feelings of sadness."*

4.2.c. Sports Activities and the Outdoors

Leisure Centres, Open Access activities and Big Adventures are three initiatives under the Reconnect programme which contributed to meeting the following Sports, Activities, and the Outdoors' objectives:

- 1) To support children and young people in Kent to live healthier lifestyles and engage in sport and physical activity.
- 2) To co-ordinate and promote a range of activities and opportunities for children and young people relating to sports, activities, and the outdoors.

Leisure centres

6271 CYP and families were supported through leisure centre activities.

- 'I think it was a really positive offering, which really made a difference to local people.' (Feedback from one beneficiary).
- "The free bus travel and really low-cost swimming has given my kids so much to do this summer, I made them go (swimming) at least once a week to meet up with their mates as I had to work throughout." (Feedback from one beneficiary).
- "It has been a brilliant opportunity to deliver Reconnect at Hermitage Park Community Centre. These were very positive and everyone who attended really enjoyed what was on offer. Most activities were open to all children; regardless of whether they had a Reconnect voucher, which we feel really brought the community together. The housing development on which the Community Centre is situated, comprises of a range of families (with varying ages of children) including some who are housed in affordable accommodation through Golding Homes. It is felt that our offer had something for everyone."
- "One young person immediately spotted a boy that he had travelled over in the boat with and they were both excited and happy to see each other again. They will now retain their friendship and support each other. Another young person hadn't had anyone to speak to his own language for 7 months and is now in frequent contact with new friends. He says he feels less lonely and isolated than before."
- "The boys came together to play football and are now meeting up regularly for casual kickabouts. The foster carers that stayed have connected with other foster carers and now attend coffee mornings together where they can share experiences and advice."
- "A number of parents have told us that they would never had considered the gym for their children without the incentive of the discount or free membership being offered (the targeted groups) especially as some of these young people suffer with anxiety , ADHD , autism . The parents have told us how much using the gym has benefitted their children and in some cases given them some much needed rest bite. We are currently getting together some testimonials from some of these users but it has been fantastic to get this feedback . We will look to see when the Reconnect programme finishes what we can do to keep these young people."
- "The HAF offer at Sheppey filled really quickly and there was an extremely big waiting list – the Reconnect offer allowed these to take part in something even though they had missed out on the HAF scheme. There was a bit of confusion between the HAF/Reconnect vouchers but as a whole, the team managed to support the families with this."
- "The offer in Swale also attracted a number of Ukrainian families who have been able to benefit from this and access leisure centres near to where they are residing. This is a hugely positive outcome which allows the children to be 'doing what children do' after what they have been through the last couple of months. It also would have helped these families to feel safe within their local communities."

Big Summer Challenge

1087 sign-ups altogether. 136 participants completed at least one activity; 78 completed more than 15 activities, and 17 completed 40 activities. 64 voucher prizes given out in total. Please see below for the following positive feedback:

- “Wow Thank you so much! L loved taking part in this with her brothers! Was full of great ideas to fill the summer holidays! And not things that would cost a fortune being from a big family!”
- “Wow, I didn't expect us to win anything, that is great news! Thank you so much. Could we please have the voucher as an Amazon voucher? My son is autistic, so he found it a bit hard to complete the tasks at times, he will be really happy to know that he also gets this as a reward for his hard work.”
- “That is wonderful news. Thank you. My granddaughter will be absolutely delighted. We had such fun doing these activities during the summer.”
- “The girls had lots of fun doing the different activities and were so pleased to have completed them all.”
- “The news still hasn't really sunk in yet. If at all possible, could we please have our voucher from Amazon. We are going to use it to buy some new resources. The children are so excited.”

Duke of Edinburgh (DofE): 512 DofE Sectional activities were supported (362 Expedition, 63 Volunteering, 27 Physical, 16 Skill and 44 Residential). Each participant will have different programmes for each section. However, there is a minimum number of sessions required for each session. Therefore, the funding supported in excess of 3,000 sessions. Supported 512 CYP altogether. 304 were SEND. 438 were aged 12 to 16 and 76 over 16 years.

Big Adventures

This was a project that sought to give CYP exposure to new experiences, cultural or extra-cultural opportunities (see capital and capital acquisition). Please note that 62 schools participated in this scheme altogether. However, only received data returns from 33 of these schools which means that the figures included below are only a reflection of these 33 schools. Undoubtedly, the programme was able to support more CYP through the other 29 schools that did not return data.

- Altogether, 4184 CYP were supported, 780 being SEND (18.64%). Most of the CYP were aged between 6–11, however, there were CYP aged under 5s and over 11-year-olds.
- For example, 122 were under 5. The numbers for over 11 are less clear cut as each school used a different age-range/bracket.
- Out of all the CYP that participated in this project, 14 were ECHP, 50 on pupil premium, and 30 on FSM. However, these numbers are likely to be higher).
- We received largely positive feedback from the schools that participated.

Positive feedback from the schools and CYP that participated. 4 key themes emerged from a review of the feedback received from participating schools. These themes are as follows:

- 1) CYP were able access expert support. For example, “Our children were able to go on a train, see a museum and learn about the past from experts.” (One school staff member).
- 2) The trips superseded the children's expectations and 'raised their aspirations,' perhaps because they were able to see a world outside their own bubble.

- 3) CYP learned, saw, and experienced new things; acquired new skills such as teamwork. The trips supported student learning as CYP were able to build upon and contextualise what they had learned in class - 'real life.'
- 4) CYP enjoyed the trips and there is a general sense of excitement as for many of the CYP, it was an opportunity to do and see things for the first time that they wouldn't have otherwise had, for example, due to the cost of travel and paying to visit places.

When asked if they thought their activity or trip had provided disadvantaged CYP with opportunities to engage in learning, schools and trip facilitators gave the following responses:

- *Definitely. Many of the children had never been to London so even the journey there was amazing for them when they saw the landmarks of London. They were amazed by the golden rooms of the Houses of Parliament and that they were walking in the Queen's footsteps.*
- *Yes, children had an opportunity to visit and experience places which otherwise would not allow them to build on their learning or educational experiences had it not been for this event – the fact the whole school took part made it even more significant to everyone who took part.*
- *Yes. Many of our children are disadvantaged, and some of the experiences will prove to be once in a lifetime.*
- *Most definitely. Many children will never have had the opportunity to experience an orchestra performance including opera singer, contratenor and trumpeter before. As well as visit the cathedral.*
- *Yes, it helps build schema and cultural capital, it allows them to be equal to peers who may have had the experience from a parent or carer.*
- *Yes. The Observatory Science Centre at Herstmonceux is a place that disadvantaged children in our area would not ordinarily have the opportunity to visit. The distance from the school and the admission prices would be a barrier for many of the disadvantaged families from our school. The hands on nature of the exhibits meant that all children were able to engage with the learning. The bridge building workshops were inclusive and an opportunity for all pupils to work as a team.*
- *100% yes. Many of our children had not heard of Kew Gardens or Dover Castle and no one had visited there before. They were excited for a coach trip to London (many had not even been that far before). There was so much to see and do that got the children talking about their learning as well as just being something to explore.*
- *Absolutely! 95% of our children have never been to a farm before. This was a perfect trip for them and they were able to see a real life farm and animals. Many parents are disadvantaged too in the area and would not be able to afford the travel costs to see a farm.*
- *Yes. Very successful in giving disadvantaged children the experience of the science museum and the access to the wonder that it brings. The children were able to see and interact with exhibits which brought to life topics being studied – environment, physics, maths – the real life applications of these outside of their community.*
- *Yes – entry is quite expensive and families cannot normally afford this. This gave them the chance to have a trip which was paid for and gave the children the opportunity to learn about valuable local history.*
- *As above, many of our children have never been on a train let alone visited London. They were able to visit Buckingham Palace which they always see on TV but have never seen in real life.*
- *Our children have heard of this place but never been able to experience it due to transport issues. This was a fantastic opportunity to give our children the chance to see a wildlife centre, the animals and habitats.*
- *Yes I do. We would never have been able to offer this trip to our children had we not had this grant. We try to keep our trips local due to the cost of coaches, especially recently – 1 coach cost £1,200 approx, so this grant meant that we could go further and see what else we could offer.*

- *Yes the children were given the opportunity to experience new things e.g. visiting an art gallery and the seaside. This enriched their learning in art, dt, science and geography.*
- *Yes. Active participation helped with engagement.*
- *Yes, it captured their interest, deepened their understanding and widened their overall experiences, many of our children have never been to London and were in awe of the landmarks they've only seen on TV.*
- *Absolutely, most of the children on the trip had never been to London before so allowing them to see the sights – even just on the Southbank – was very special and they all loved it.*
- *Yes - several children had never been to the seaside before and it was lovely to watch them witness this for the first time. Lots of natural learning experiences from just being at the coast.*
- *Yes, definitely. The comments from the children during and after the event proved how successful it was. Witnessing them overcoming fears, learning new skills, helping others gave them the opportunity to experience and learn outside the classroom. Most of our children would never get this opportunity otherwise.*
- *Definitely! The children were buzzing after the day. They couldn't wait to tell their friends and family. The sense of achievement they had was immeasurable.*
- *Yes. Children could experience things first hand things that they may not do otherwise – for example, the children could take their own fingerprints and analyse them, they got to handle historical objects from the police museum, and they particularly enjoyed the talk from the Border Force agency, where they could examine everyday objects that have been used to smuggle in illegal goods.*
- *Yes, absolutely! Many of the disadvantaged children in the classes had not been to a museum previously, and some had never been on a school trip. It gave them an opportunity to learn outside of the classroom, from different teachers and created unique learning experiences. It supported their ongoing knowledge for our history topic, which they have since used within the classroom when writing a diary and a newspaper report about the time.*
- *Yes, definitely. We are a small primary school in a deprived area of Thanet with a large number of disadvantaged and vulnerable pupils with over one third of these children in receipt of Free School Meals. We also have a large number of children with special educational needs who greatly benefited from this experience. Some of our pupils had never been outside of their home town or Thanet. Some of our children had never travelled on a coach before either or seen any exotic animals in real life. There were a lot of 'awe and wonder' and 'wow moments' seen throughout the day!*
- *The event was extremely successful in providing the disadvantaged with social opportunities and to develop and engage in learning. When students see real people delivering workshops and experience art and design 1:1 then they can see themselves in these roles. The trips to the V and A generated excitement from the beginning, and students were keen to participate. The invitation was very welcome and more would have liked to have come. Students felt they were chosen to do something positive and has raised their aspirations in art and design. We would be very keen to be involved in any of these opportunities again.*
- *Yes – no difference was observed between disadvantaged children. All children could access the activities and those who struggle with reading and writing could work in pairs.*
- *Very much so. I have no doubt that these children will remember this trip for a long time! They experience a day that they normal would not be given the opportunity to. Travelling to a different area outside of Dover. Exploring orchards, learning about the weather, fruit picking, new experiences, meadows, a day of outside hands-on learning.*
- *Yes, and raises aspirations too. Why? Raises children aspirations.*
- *Yes. Children on the trips has not been exposed to the historical places we explored and it had not been something they thought they would enjoy, but they did. Many children had not been to a castle or heard of the Ramsgate tunnels so exposing them to these experiences was vital to widen their 'bubbles'.*

- This was well structured and was able to cater for all children of ages and disabilities.



Figure 1 Word Cloud: Children were asked to think of three words to use to describe their experience.



Figure 2 Word Cloud: The trips and visits the schools went on.

- “We travelled to Dover by coach to visit the castle. Once in Dover we explored the castle and took part in an hour-long expert led interactive tour including lessons on courtly language and behaviour and role play. We travelled back to Margate the same day.”

- *“We had a tour of the Palace of Westminster in the morning followed by Shrek Adventure in the afternoon.”*
- *“The older children also took part in a Dickensian town trail learning about the landmarks in Rochester during Victorian times.”*
- *“We took the children to Stratford, London, to the Discovery Story Centre. Here they took part in a workshop where they started writing about their own characters for the 100 Story Hotel. They also took part in an activity where the 100 Story Hotel had had a story stolen and they had to investigate to find out who had stolen it.”*

Scouts – Squirrels

- The numbers of Squirrels dreys increased, there are an additional 13 well established groups and a further seven starting out. Four of these dreys were in areas of deprivation. However, several of the Squirrels drey leaders reported they had families come from lower deprivation areas as the families are travelling to attend.
- There was a wide range of volunteers from the Scouting community who attended the training, District Commissioners (managers for the district), appointments chair (interview the Squirrel leaders to see if they are suitable and understand the needs of the children), young leaders (young people aged 16 – 24), headquarters staff, to parents who want to assist. At the last few training sessions we had early years providers participate in the training too.
- The wider impact not accounted for when writing the bid was what the volunteers do for their ‘day job’ and several fed back how the training influenced their early years practice in a nursery, their teaching of a reception class, along with their environments.
- There was a total of 189 attendees across all training sessions, the most popular being introduction to forest school, den building and stories training.
- The number of young people who have attended Squirrels since March 2022 to September 2022 is an approximate owing to young people moving onto beavers and then others who only stayed maybe for a term or two. It is estimated that during the life of the project it has reached 650-700 young people this allows for these variables and groups which have two dreys as it has proven to be so popular, like in Folkestone.
- Parents and carers were enthusiastic about their child attending Squirrels and fed back at the Squirrel fun day how much they enjoyed seeing their children attend and be part of the organisation.
- Several leaders fed back they could adapt what they learned at the training they attended for the older sections (Beavers, Cubs, Scouts and Explorers).
- Feedback from one Teaching Assistant/Squirrel Leader in Maidstone was *‘Just wanted to say thank you for inspiring me. My school book corner will also benefit from the squirrel training. Also. I am now the proud owner of a storm kettle’*.
- This reached a wide range of leaders within Kent Scouts from those just starting on their scouting journey to those who are involved at district or county management levels. We also saw people attend who are part of the appointments committee to those who oversee the running of groups ensuring they are creating programmes that meet the needs of the age group.

See appendix for more case studies from locality grants rounds 2 and 3

4.2.d. Friends, Family and Communities

While we cannot establish a causal link between the programme's objectives and medium-term outcomes, feedback does suggest that the programme has, to some extent, met its medium-term outcome: it has worked with multi-agency partners, businesses, community organisations and groups to increase the number of local activities and opportunities available to CYP in their communities. See below for examples of self-reports providers and beneficiaries of Reconnect-funded local Kent-based activities / interventions.

One key finding from the programme evaluation was that the programme gave CYP opportunities to get out and about. Families were able to just have fun and post-covid. Impact of covid-19 on parent's confidence to take children out to do new things. (See a case study below).

"Lots of the families were like we really want to do something with the children, but we don't know what. So actually, if you can run something, we might have the confidence to go and do things. And I was quite surprised at that point because obviously COVID had a massive impact on everybody, but it hadn't occurred to me how much of an impact it has had on parents, and on parents' confidence to actually take their children out and do things with them. And so the fact that it was for families, I did have a few families that said, Oh well, happy for you to take the children, but we don't want to come to which my response was that's not the deal and we're doing this together."

The work of districts in community events through Open Access

- Many Reconnect-funded Open Access activities were delivered in this summer, oftentimes in partnership with other local agencies, businesses, or community organisations.
- Thanet ran **Family Skateboard sessions in Westgate On-Sea** during the Summer Holidays in partnership with Westgate Town Council. They have agreed to deliver this partnership again next year and County Councillor Crow-Brown was so impressed he has asked them to replicate the event next year in Minster. See below for some positive comments:
 - *"I wish to thank you and your team for organising the Westgate Summer Youth Sessions, which have been an enormous success to the local community. Having two teenagers myself, I have witnessed first-hand how the Covid lockdown affected their development/wellbeing and sincerely hope we never return to that era. Your events this summer have clearly helped the children of Westgate in boosting confidence, enjoyment, and coordination, plus provide a sense of escapism."*
- Over the summer, Ashford Open Access provided 37 events over the 6-week period. 685 families and 1070 children, 3 SEND individuals participated.
- Dartford Children Centres Reconnect ran a summer Family Outreach Event which had 96 individuals and 45 families in attendance.
- There were several Swale summer events (including Beaches Children Centre, Milton Court Children Centre, St Mary Children Centre Orchard Place, Oare Gunpowder Workers Country Park Faversham, and Queenborough Well Bank), which had, altogether, 564 individuals in attendance. See below for some positive feedback from services and staff:
 - *"Thank you so much for having us! We have had a lovely morning and afternoon connecting with wonderful members of our community and its always great to lean about what other organisations are doing." (feedback from services and staff)*
 - *"The purpose of reconnection was a success with services as well as families, children and young people. The high attendance to each event enables service users to reconnect with their community fully!" (feedback from services and staff).*

- Gravesham Youth Hub ran several summer activities, and altogether 995 individuals participated. Parents thought the free sports coaching was an amazing opportunity for their children. Parents shared that they were worried about how to occupy their children over the summer due to cost-of-living burden, and this opportunity eased some of these pressures and it allowed peace of mind to know that their children were occupied in positive activities. Young People feedback was immensely positive too, all involved enjoyed the activities in their local area. See below for some positive feedback from staff.
 - “activities offered were engaging and YP benefited from the additionality to the Youth Hub offer in their local communities.” “ Activities were rolled as planned, the linkages to local community sport coaches helped immensely with building rapport with YP.”

The Open Access Ice-skating event: 416 individuals. Please see below for positive feedback received from attendees:

- *“We all had fun on the ice rink, we laughed so much. Thanks for putting it on.” Mum of 2.*
- *“We all had a fantastic day, we all laughed and had fun skating. This is a day to remember, a special memory.”*
- *“A day of the holiday that will be remembered for the right reasons.”*
- *“It was great to get outside as a family and socialise with others.”*
- *“It is not an activity my daughter can do, due to no local skating rink and the costs involved, so she was able to participate in a new experience.”*
- *“My little one has never been ice skating before, and she really loved it.”*
- *“A chance to try it as none in the area.”*
- *“It was fun and taught me how to ice skate.”*
- *“Spend time together - quality time.”*
- *“Nice to have something to do together for all the family and different aged children so positive.”*

Youth Reconnect: Together the following providers were able to support **11573** individuals (including **4960** YP) altogether: The Canterbury Academy, PlayPlace, Pie Factory Music, Salus, The Gr@nd, West Kent Extra, and Optivo/Brogdale.

The Kent International Jamboree: This event had 3,500 CYP and 1,000 adults in attendance. There were a variety of activities for everyone, including dodgems to zip lines, tea ceremonies, outdoor cinema, and activities focused on the sustainable development goals, encouraging physical activity, getting out and socialising with others.

Bus passes (Stagecoach and Arriva)

Reconnect issued 150,000 paper-based young person’s bus passes in summer 2021 plus 40,000 family tickets; over 50,000 e-tickets to low-income families at Christmas 2021; 150,000 paper-based young person’s tickets in summer 2022 with 34,000 electronic family bus passes being downloaded in summer 2022. The big two bus companies, Stagecoach and Arriva between then recorded over 1 million Reconnect journeys in summer 2022 alone. We do not have details of journey numbers for other periods or other companies.

- *“...lots of families have mentioned the reconnect bus passes making lots of days out more accessible.” (a leisure centre provider)*

- *“We’ve always loved it here but this summer has really cemented that we live in such an amazing place. Free bus passes, free summer events and the new Market Square with Artisan Market reinforced how lucky we are to live here. I really hope Dover Big Local and Reconnect are encouraged to keep offering these wonderful opportunities to Dover’s families.” (parent)*

Festability (SNAAP): This was a music festival aimed at disabled children, young people and adults. It was one event, but there were multiple activities within the day including Silent Disco, VR/Gaming suite, Soft Play area, ball pool and messy play area plus entertainment including bubble show, pirate show, bounce bot, arts and crafts and Karaoke. Altogether 900 of individual children and young people took part. Please see below for some positive feedback received:

- *“Fanbloodytastic”*
- *“It catered for everyone”*
- *“Great chilled atmosphere, very relaxed and friendly”*
- *“Absolutely outstanding experience, great activities for all ages”*
- *“Amazing, Amazing, Amazing. Massively needed in Kent”*
- *“Its nice to come to an event where children aren’t seen as different”*
- *It's such a happy place and we love being part of something so accepting and inclusive. Everyone having such a great time and being themselves. Our third Festability and smiles on our faces so wide and hearts full. Thank you again xxx*
- *“First time ever attending Festability 2022, but it certainly won’t be the last. The detail that goes into the planning of this event is so clear to see. All the activities the children loved, for us parents a chance to let our hair down and have fun with the kids and friends-what more could you ask for. Thank You all.”*

The Canterbury Festival: We: Connect (some events moved to autumn)

- This festival was able to engage young people and their community. 18 Young people were a part of the panel, and altogether there were 104 individuals in the audience (made up of friends, family, students and college staff). In addition to this, there were volunteers, 3 professional bands, 6 student bands, 34 students who performed, 8 students who led workshops, and 42 participants in workshops. Please see below for some positive feedback:
 - *“Hey, sorry I couldn’t say a proper goodbye to everyone I had to rush for my bus, just wanted to say I’ve really enjoyed volunteering and being a part of this, it was really fun being able to have a part in event managing and being able to perform, thank you for the cool opportunity and well done to everyone involved in organising :))” (A Panel Member)*

Pillar Reconnect Festival in Folkestone: They delivered workshops which took place as part of the enterprise challenge on NCS over the summer. They reached 1500 young people through these workshops. 350 young people attended the festival altogether. The workshops supported youth engagement and key skill acquisition (e.g., responsibility, creative thinking, etc). Please see below for positive feedback.⁶³

- *“It was great being asked what we wanted the festival to look like, it was great” (A workshop Participant).*
- *“I feel like the skills I learned over the last few months will help me in the future” (A Youth Board Member)*

⁶³ See here for the festival video:

<https://wetransfer.com/downloads/96fd6fc6de8bf0196cbcc67606d1cb9520220831085802/2639b7>

- *“The Highlight of my summer” (A, festival attendee)*
- *“I was worried about my son attending the festival due to his mobility needs, but the staff were great! They kept in touch in the weeks leading up to the gig and let him in early to show him round and beat the crowds. He had a great time!” - Parent of attendee*

*The following is an example of the impact of funding for smaller organisations that may not have necessarily been considered for such funding.

“.....I think it was. That there were potentially hidden barriers there that I hadn't considered because I just didn't know that they existed. (...) And one family I've got as well, they've got a 12-year-old, a single mum with a 12-year-old boy who goes to a special school. Now we accommodate that little boy in everything that we do. He's very much a valued part of our setting. But on the day mum couldn't face bringing him even though we had a once one in place for him. Because she was embarrassed. “

4.2.e. Economic Wellbeing

The following are a few key projects and activities on the programme which sought to support the following Economic Wellbeing objectives: 1) To work with businesses and partner agencies to support young people to engage with future employment opportunities. 2) To co-ordinate and promote a range of activities and opportunities for children and young people relating to economic wellbeing.

The Reconnect programme has met the first objective, especially individuals with SEND, to engage with future employment opportunities. (See for example The Mason Foundation's Propel project.) It has also met the second objective: there were also several providers on the programme that co-ordinated and promoted a range of activities and opportunities for CYP relating to economic wellbeing. As a result, we are seeing YP on the programme accessing opportunities that would enable them to develop skills that would increase their employability, or opportunities to access voluntary or paid work. These are opportunities they might not have had if not for the Reconnect programme. See below for an example of this:

"...people really enjoyed it and there were quite a few new friendships made in the courses from the people attending, which is also really nice to see. People realizing that there are other people like them out there doing the same journey. Maybe not the same business but wanting to do the same thing and people. One course, actually. (...) It was a lady who was a photographer and she's good with IT. So she's going to support a guy who is wanting to sell his paintings and she's going to help him set up a website because he's not good with writing. And she's going to help another lady who is also starting her own thing. It's an online selling business. Can't quite remember what you're selling. And maybe delivery business, but it's gonna help her look into how to set up the website for that as well, yeah."

In turn, this suggests that the Reconnect programme has, to some extent, met its medium-term outcome: that YP that were aged between 15 and 19 at the start of the pandemic are given a better chance of securing work in the future.

There are cases of YP transitioning into post-16 education on the programme.

"We also had an exhibition on the final day and that was really nice because the student, the young people were able to invite their friends and family to come along and it was really nice to kind of show what they've made and it's always during summer school. I'm always surprised at how much they can make. We normally do them and they're about 3 days on campus. But this was kind of five days, including the trip. And it was really nice to see how much they actually make. It was really nice to see and we've got some really good feedback from parents. And there was actually one young person that I was a bit concerned about when we had to proceed her application. She was quite anxious. And she had lots of things going on. And I kind of gave her mum a call and her mum told me about all of her kind of the things that she's got going on. And I was quite worried. And I thought, oh, it's gonna be really hard for her to come along. But then she came along on the first day and she was a bit anxious. She could see that she was a bit anxious, but I kind of said, you know, I'm here to help. You can leave at anytime. She only lived 5 minutes along the road and her parents kind of came in every day to drop her off and they said the change that they'd seen in her was amazing. On the final day, her mum came and was really thankful and really grateful for the opportunity. She is talking about going to college now, which she's home schooled. And yeah, it was just that chance to get out that she needed and to push past her."

“And when we did, I employed a young lady who is at university at the moment doing occupational therapy.”

Carlton Athletic Community Trust (CACT)

- This CACT project supported student learning and participation in physical activity through a combination of supported SchoolOnline tuition and sports activities.
- The total number of children that participated in the programme was 59. Of these, 2 children left the programme. Another 6 children did not complete both assessment papers, as they were absent for either the pre or post programme assessments or were working well below expected levels. The progress data which follows therefore relates to 51 children in total across the 3 schools.
- When asked ‘How do the education sessions and SchoolOnline tool benefit you?’ pupils responded that:
 - ‘They benefit me because it has helped me in understanding my work better’
 - ‘I feel it helped me with some maths questions that are to do with using lots of different solutions to answer the questions’
 - ‘By making me a better learner and practising more’
 - ‘It helped me in my maths and made me better at it’

The progress data which follows therefore relates to 51 children in total across the 3 schools.

- Queenborough School and Nursery Progress Data: All children (15) completed both pre and post programme assessment papers, with 11 children (73%) demonstrating improvement of between 7%-100% (average of 37%). Four children (27%) didn’t demonstrate improvement in the post programme assessment.
- St Edward’s RC Primary School Progress Data: Twenty-five children completed both pre and post assessment papers, with 21 children (84%) of this group demonstrating improvement of between 5%-175% (average of 50%). Four children (16%) didn’t demonstrate improvement in the post programme assessment. Four children (14% of the original group of 29 children) didn’t complete the post programme assessment due to the following reasons: • 2 children (7%) were working well below expected levels, therefore didn’t participate in the SchoolOnline tuition but joined the sports sessions • 2 children (7%) were absent and didn’t complete the pre-programme assessments, therefore their data is not included.
- Thistle Hill Academy Progress Data: Ten Children (67%) completed both pre and post programme assessment papers, with 7 (70%) children in this group demonstrating improvement of between 13% to 33% (average of 21%). Three children (30%) in this group didn’t demonstrate improvement in the post-programme assessment. Four children (27% of the original group of 15 children) didn’t complete the post programme assessment due to the following reasons: • two children had left the group including one who had moved abroad • one child was working well below expected levels and unable to access most of the platform so worked on separate teacher set activities (had a little trial of SchoolOnline platform) and joined the group for sports • one child with additional needs was distressed and unable to engage with the assessment on the day.

Case study - one of pupil that benefited from the programme.

“Pupil X has additional needs relating to behaviour and attends the ‘Special Resource Provision’ unit at his school. Prior to the CACT Connects programme, he attended the unit every day, leaving at

1.30pm after lunch as he found it difficult to manage a full day at school. He also did not integrate into the main year group class for any sessions as this was considered too challenging and not in his or the class's best interests.

In the first one or two sessions, it was not difficult to identify Pupil X within the group, as he had a 1:1 support worker by his side all the time and there were some verbal outbursts. However, as the programme progressed, he was increasingly working independently and there were no further classroom outbursts. By the end of the programme, if an adult observed the tuition session, it would probably have been impossible to identify him as a pupil with additional needs. He stayed till the end of every tuition and sports session and therefore the end of the school day once a week, engaged productively and with motivation often wanting to stay on and complete his work after the end of the tuition sessions.

Pupil X also engaged well with his year group peers in the sports sessions, with a clear improvement in behaviour evident very early on in the programme. On one occasion when he had an outburst and found it difficult to manage his behaviour, he took himself off to a bench to calm down and when another child approached him and encouraged him to rejoin the group, he did just that.

The head teacher, and several teaching staff that know Pupil X well, commented on his level of engagement with the programme, how he was demonstrating a maths ability that was somewhat hidden previously in school and his ability to cope with a full day at school on programme days. They also commented on the positive impact that moved beyond the programme sessions, quoting improvements in behaviour and engagement in other lessons and progress in his work generally."

The Construction Skills Certification Scheme (CSCS) card training for 16–19-year-olds.

- 41 people attended 4 courses (aged between 16-24).
- The courses were held in Ramsgate x2, Hawkinge, and Herne Bay.
- 91 qualifications were gained. 19 people have since found work and we are in touch with the others, offering support where they need/want it.
- 18 went into construction and 1 into retail. Many of the 18 going into construction did so within a few weeks of finishing the course and only a few days after receiving their CSCS Card (it can take a few weeks to process and be delivered)
- Everyone completing the course felt they were in a better place to find work and could do so more quickly than having attended longer courses. They all reported having improved their employability and their confidence.
- A few said they would like to do more to give them the confidence to apply for jobs and have a strong enough CV to compete with older, more experienced people. We offered everybody on the project the opportunity to take part in any of our other projects, with 17 people taking the offer.
- Everyone was offered the opportunity to attend further support activities with us. Some attended other courses and gained additional qualifications on their journeys to finding work. 91 qualifications were gained in total, 41 were Site Safety Plus and 50 additional qualifications in total were earned between 17 young people attending extra courses/activities to improve their employability. An average of 2.9 qualifications were earned between the 17 young people receiving further support. Of these 17, 9 have found work. Of the other 10 people finding work through the CSCS Cards project, 6 found jobs within 2 weeks of getting their CSCS Cards and the other 4 did so within a month.

Kickstart Programme: Latest Kickstart numbers reveal 80 starts. 46 have moved onto employment, training, or education, 33 of which have employment in a school.

Propel (The Mason Foundation)

- This was a county wide programme, delivered across Kent to support 60 young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) into meaningful employment.
- Of the 43 learners they have enrolled on the programme, 34 attend The Oaks Specialist College and 9 attend Grow 19.
- Of the 9 young people that have secured employment, these roles range from paid to voluntary positions. They include General Assistant at American Golf, cleaning for various local and national companies, housekeeping at Premier Inn, several Teaching Assistant roles, within local educational settings, care work and volunteering at a local charity shop.
- Please see below for feedback gained from The Managing Director, The Warehouse Manager, and an Employee.
 - “** is enjoying his time here, however, his level of Maths and English lets him down. Because of this he is finding some of the jobs difficult including, reading orders, stock control and collating orders, additionally he on’t be able to apply for his forklift licence which is what he shows the most interest in. We will emphasise the importance of Maths & English and maybe he ill recognise this whilst he is here. e don’t want to give up on **, so following this meeting, I will talk to my team to see what we can come up with.”
 - “** is incredibly polite and thoroughly enjoys his time here, he never wants to leave at the end of the day and often asks if he can stay longer. He is always on time e can’t fault his time keeping. e have seen an improvement in his confidence, and he is always enthusiastic and keen to do a job. He is happy to take part in a conversation and talks openly about his home life and hobbies including Tom & Jerry. He will now join us for tea or coffee and has accepted the offer of toast in the morning. We have noticed that he never brings lunch”

Kent Choices

- Under the Reconnect Programme, they used radio advertising to promote the Kentchoices website to support learners with their GCSE results; and if stage 1 was successful, progress to further radio, bus, social media and print advertising.
- Over the past three years usage of KentChoices for results day support has improved. This year more than 5000 users accessed KentChoices during results week. The Year 11 cohort this year was 16981. This reinforces our belief that increasingly young people are looking online for support and justifies our determination to develop a high-quality online platform. The length of time users spend on KentChoices suggests that those who do visit it, find it a useful resource.
- Following results day, our team supported over 70 people with their next steps decision making via the telephone, email and the KentChoices webchat.
- There were seven events held at hotels across Kent, they were an opportunity to raise the profile of KentChoices, gain feedback from users and network. In total over 80 people from 60 schools attended. The outcomes have been positive:

YMCA: Locality Grant activities

- The Reconnect Programme funded several activities with YMCA. Please see below for some feedback provided by a key activity facilitator:
 - “We had 12 young people gain Sitech qualifications. We had 80% of the young people attending the job club end up with some form of employment. So there were some really

tangible outcomes. 100% of the young people attending Sundays absolutely loved that.” (In relation to one YMCA activity).

- Cycling project: “The instructors gained instructor qualifications where they can now test the young people who come through the scheme. We've had 12 young people get their level 1 tech qualification, so they're sort of qualified bike mechanics now. So that's been fantastic as well, because a lot of these are young people who don't gain qualifications in school. To go away with a qualification has been fabulous for them.”
- The Job Club: “ We had 23 young people that engaged regularly, and all of them at least attended interviews. I think it was 82% ended up with some form of work whether that was a 0-hour contract that actually they know they were getting shifts, or bank shifts, up to full time employment.”

Work Experience and Volunteering Programme (Nova Children and Young People’s Project)

- Following funding from Reconnect, we have run a successful Work Experience and Volunteer Programme for Young People aged 13-24. The following provides a brief snapshot of some of the project’s achievements and highlights, and feedback from participants. , ● We have actively recruited volunteers from within the local community. We now have 47 trained volunteers supporting our project. Since the start of the reconnect programme 1160 hours of support have been provided by volunteers. Please see below for some feedback from a participant.
 - “Volunteering at Nova Children’s Project has helped improved my confidence in a team and as a leader. Everyday is different and it is an amazing opportunity to work with such wonderful young people. Most of all it helped me develop values like empathy and responsibility. Also it is great for your CV or university applications! “ - “I first heard about Nova Children’s Project through an Aspiring Medic webinar from a medical student who volunteered with Nova. After then researching the charity, I realised volunteering with Nova Children’s Project would be a fantastic opportunity to push myself into new situations. Through my volunteering at Nova Children’s Project, I have learnt many new skills such as communication, independence, time management and learning about responsibility. Nova has increased my awareness and taught me a lot about people with disabilities. Through my time at Nova Children’s Project, I have met some of the most enthusiastic and lovely people and I have made friends with lots of other volunteers. Nova Children’s Project has taught me to step out of my comfort zone and become more confident in my communication skills.”

NEETs Bootcamp (West Faversham Community Association)

- This project was focused on providing fun and intensive skills development for NEETS to help them gain both hard and soft skills for employment.
- 73 over 16s NEETS were supported. 1 under 16 NEET supported. 28% of these individuals were SEND. 81% felt more confident going into an interview after the third workshop on interview skills. 91% of attendees felt they were best positioned to gain employment after completing the boot camp (i.e., readiness).
- “We got a 96% satisfaction rate from the parents. And we're talking probably 200 parents, across that. It's just huge if you end up being way bigger than what was funded just because of everyone. Absolutely loved it and I think a lot of these kind of things that weren't commercially at like 7-8 pound a session. And obviously we're providing it for free, so everyone wants to use it.” (Feedback from a key facilitator)
- Please see below for a case study of one of the attendees:

“One of our attendees had just come out of education last year and was unsure of what he wanted to do for a job going forward. As such he had not gone into any employment living a rather sedentary lifestyle with no work. He was not overly interested in anything but wanted to gain employment where possible as he wanted to have a bit more money and move out from his parents. At first the attendee was very shy and did not engage much with others within the programme, keeping to himself at breaks and often taking a lot of encouragement to talk.

One thing we noticed was that while attending our sessions he showed an interest in the course, especially around those regarding safeguarding and the protection of children. While within the bootcamp sessions we found that the attendee had an interest in childcare, both primary and secondary school age children. Within the first trial interview, he offered very minimal in terms of answers and there were a substantial amount of pointers we had to give. Throughout the bootcamps we worked on his confidence as well as key skills required for the role. By the end of the week, he was very good in his interviews, giving robust answers and showing other key skills within the interview process, such as researching the company and engaging with what they do and what they want to achieve. The attendee is now looking to go to college to see if a childcare course is an option and will may look to do some work with us after.”

MyPocketSkill

- This is a digital platform that connects young people to skills-building, money-earning opportunities with households and businesses, and supports savings goals using behavioural science-based “nudges” to build financial capability.
- Demand (Household and Businesses) = 108 signed up, 142 onboarded, and 46 transacted. Supply (Young People) = 178 signed up, 282 onboarded, and 56 transacted. Please see below for a case study from one of the beneficiaries:
- “On MyPocketskill I have had the amazing opportunity to work with a variety of individuals and small businesses, helping with their Social media.” “Along with my growing financial knowledge, I have massively grown in confidence through using the platform and have developed a real sense of professionalism by conversing with both clients and the MyPocketSkill team.”

Education Business Partnership (EBP)

- 2230 Students 442 New employers engaged
- MAINSTREAM PLACEMENTS 1068 Students 8 Schools
- ALTERNATIVE / BLENDED 1090 Students 12 Schools
- SEN SCHOOLS 72 Students 6 Schools
- IDENTIFIED VULNERABLE 308 Students Across 12 Schools
- Key Stage 3: 200 Key Stage 3 secondary school students, a mixture of mainstream and those threatening to be termed NEET. Each student to receive 3 days of intervention – Make it Your Business (a way to utilise the principle of Enterprise to improve Literacy, numeracy and Digital Skills for the workplace), For Me or Not For Me (each student to participate in a series of sector specific workshops, interactive that highlight the work, but also the linkage to the curriculum) and Pathway to Employment (a workshop intended to utilise our Virtual Platform in a new way that links hobbies and likes to appropriate careers). Each student to complete a Career Action Plan sheet, with EBP Careers team, in order to focus on a specific career or a series of options.
- Key Stage 4/5: 200 SEN/Vulnerable Students. Horizons (A series of workshops looking at the different courses available at FE, HE, the content, student life and support. Also, apprenticeships,

promoted by specific companies currently offering them). Workplace Expectations (how to successfully perform in the workplace, the transferable skills required and talks from different employers breaking down any stereotypes or fears that the students might have). Pathway Selection (A blended approach, utilising the Virtual Platform in one session, linking likes and hobbies to careers, but also live employer workshops, employer mini-fair and an Improving Personal Confidence session)

- Key Stage 4/5: 200 Mainstream Students: The Application (How to apply for FE/HE/Apprenticeships/Employment, each student to create their own personal profile in the form of a CV, plus be shown how to shape their own digital presence using applications such as LinkedIn and the intricacies of the Group Interview). Employability Day (students will have the opportunity to hear from employers, be interviewed by them, take part in an Interview Techniques session and think about their own skillset in a 'Marketing You' workshop). Career Health Check Day (Sessions on Personal Confidence, How to Study, Digital Skills in the Workplace and understanding differing workplace ethos).
- Both sets of Key Stage 4/5 students to complete a Career Action Booklet as a record of achievement, contact with employers and successful completion of job application/employability skills workshops.

Feedback:

- *'Thanks so much for Monday and Wednesday, it was a huge success! Everytime I visited the rooms, all students were engaged and enthusiastic. As you know, I have been involved with Enterprise related activities for many years and I can't remember seeing such a high number of student engagement and positivity, despite the heat!! I was pleased to hear from both Alec and Janice that they were impressed with our student's attitude and behaviour. It was great to see all of them being actively involved and enjoying their experience.'*
- *"It was fantastic that despite not having a work experience placement, students were still able to develop their employability skills and get an insight into the world of work. The local employers Alec and Janice delivered the workshops with had lots of enthusiasm and the planned team-based activities engaged all our students. It was great to see all of them being actively involved and enjoying their experience!'* Teacher following 'Alternative Placement' delivery
- *ECHP student place at East Kent Railway Trust during March: 'He's had a great placement, he's got to know most of the staff and he's really come out of his shell. They have said if he wants to carry on working there he can. He's like a different young person after the challenges of lock down. He goes train spotting at the weekends and he knows all the volunteers here. The driver has taken him up and down the track in the cab/cockpit/drivers room'*
- *'Year 12 student on a placement with a care provider did such an exceptional job during the week, she was efficient learnt everything really quickly, was personable and quickly became a member of the office based team. At the end of the placement she was offered a job around her studies; this has helped her own situation and will enable her to gain significant skills during her level 3 qualifications. The student used 'day in the life of' Instagram posts which delighted the employer.'*

Be Your Own Boss (BYOB) courses

- 56 people attended across 4 courses (some of these attended as pairs, either attending sessions together or in some cases, attending the specific sessions they were interested in and their friends attending the others). 47 were aged between 16-24. 9 were over
- The courses were held in Ramsgate (Thanet District), Herne Bay (Canterbury District), Hawkinge (Folkestone & Hythe District), and Dover (Dover District).

- Of the 56 starters, we had 49 complete
- We contacted the 7 who left early and could only get through to 1 person, who said the course wasn't for him
- Through a ripple effect and through learners telling us how they were passing on what they had learned on the course to friends and family, we estimate that from the 56 starters, an additional 50 people would have had access to the course material and would have been able to access our support
- Attendance per session was good overall. All the businesses were either in the initial idea stages or had recently started and were small, sole trader businesses
- At the end of the grant, there have been 15 new businesses started, 24 people have said they intend to start their business idea this year, and 11 existing small businesses said they felt they have improved their ability to run and manage their own business.

5. Sustainability and Reconnect Programme Legacy

- A key question asked in each of the debrief calls was ‘What are your plans post-reconnect?’ The thinking behind this was to get a sense of the provider’s plans for the activity after the programme has ended (if any). 100% of interview respondents revealed that they would either continue delivering these activities, go on to deliver additional activities, or look for additional funding to continue delivery which suggests sustainability of the impact they have had. Several highlighted the key issue being funding and expressed hopes that there will be similar programmes available in the future.
- Some providers did not have plans for sustainability, instead suggesting a reliance on funding for delivery of future activities. For example, childminding and some playgroups. This is understandable as the primary goal of the programme was engagement (or reengagement). In a future programme, mechanisms should be put in place to either confirm that these providers have plans for sustainability, or the programme can have a mechanism in place to support such providers to become sustainable and maximise knowledge and practice exchange. Other providers were perhaps more established, and as such, already had mechanisms in place for embedding practices, projects, interventions, and activities.

6. Key Recommendations and factors to consider (for future programmes)

The following are key recommendations and factors to consider for future programmes based on the conversations with providers, organisations, and the team's work on the programme:

- Parent willingness is a key factor to engagement levels and impact.
- There is the need for continued and sustained 'joined up thinking': "All in all, running events through youth clubs is a fantastic model however there needs to be more joined up thinking to ensure that events are well advertised and that there is maximum benefit from spend." (One provider).
- Greater attention needs to be paid to marketing: One provider commented on the need for greater Reconnect awareness, and another that if the beneficiaries knew about the reconnect programme and its ties or relatedness to their activity might have improved engagement levels.
- There are several key monitoring and evaluation lessons that can be learned from the Reconnect Programme.
 - Monitoring and evaluation should be prioritised from the start.
 - Working with schools: schools were hardest to get in touch with.
 - Greater strictness is needed for the names given for activities delivered. Similarly, contacts given to the team need to be up-to-date and accurate. The expectation is that providers will be contacted via the contact details provided.
 - Greater clarity on deadlines is need - that is, what each data submission deadline means and what is expected for each.
 - It is difficult to send a tailored email that indicates the grant name to each provider as there are hundreds of grant recipients. For this reason, and for the purpose of this programme, providers were sent M&E emails in bulk. Tailored emails and/or initial conversations over expectations and timelines with providers before grant giving and grant agreement may improve provider engagement.
 - Invest in an internal team (a monitoring arm, and research and evaluation arm). This would allow for greater efficiency and effectiveness.
- Cost-benefit consideration: This is difficult to answer. There are a few activities that did not deliver as expected or for whom reach was not as high as expected, even though they did receive Reconnect funding to deliver these activities. A few reasons have emerged for this:
 - Covid-19 which affected the availability of and access to staff.
 - The infamous 'free' admission (where potential attendees sign up, but because of low risk or loss, do not turn up), Logistical concerns/challenges (e.g., problems with the venue or a lack of a venue) parental engagement (for different reasons).
 - The grant giving, commissioning, and monitoring process. Reconnect activities were selected if they had⁶⁴ the potential to support or increase CYP and family engagement with learning, their physical and mental wellbeing, their friends, family and community, physical activity, employment, and training opportunities. In other words, the wider, overarching benefit of the Reconnect programme is engagement with each of the programme's key themes (i.e., areas that have, to a greater or lesser extent, been affected by covid-19 –please see *the literature review*). However, the expected benefits from funding the Reconnect activities arguably falls into one of two categories: 1) to increase capacity to achieve specific outcomes and reach and/or support the number or kind of CYP and families that they wanted to reach but didn't have the funding to do so, (e.g., more staff, equipment, expert support) 2) do things

⁶⁴ met individual, community and targeted needs

they would not have ordinarily been able to do (e.g., visits and trips). A strict process of grant giving was established to do this. However, as one provider noticed, attention should be paid to their capacity to deliver, capacity and plans for sustainability, and the extent to which their audience or beneficiaries are there. This should be coupled with regular locality grant audits.

- One of the Reconnect programme's objectives was to see long-lasting and sustained impacts in the CYP and families concerned. This has been mostly achieved, however, opportunities for greater sustainability or longer-term impact were missed with the locality grant organisations whose activities were, for the most part, isolated.

7. Conclusion

The primary aim of the programme was to support and/or improve engagement with the key themes. The programme's impact will, ultimately, be determined by the extent to which Reconnect activity providers report that the grant they received supported and/or improved engagement.

Learning, physical health and mental wellbeing, employability, and employability prospects for CYP and families in Kent and elsewhere, as has been identified in existing literature on the subject. (For more on this please refer to the Literature Review section). However, the Reconnect programme has to some extent helped to address this impact. See below for a brief overview of examples of this.

- Through the Reconnect Programme many CYP were able to gain the social capital they would not have otherwise gotten from home. Similarly, we talked earlier about digital inclusion being exacerbated during covid-19. (See the Reconnect Programme's Big Adventures and the Digital Inclusion).
- One issue highlighted in the literature review was the fact that covid-19 had an impact on parents. There were activities in the programme which allow parents to take a break from their child caring responsibilities; that address child anxieties about starting school (transitions); about work and employment; connecting CYP with training and employment opportunities; providing academic support; support individuals eligible for FSM; support children and families that have experienced bereavement, digital inclusion etc. (Please see the evidence for theme-specific indicators section).
- Support responsive relationships: e.g., visits, connections with family and friends. (See interview analysis section and evidence for theme-specific indicators).
- Reconnect is in line with recommendations to start targeting early (before preschool and before 2 years).
- Interventions and projects like the locality grants & Babble chatter, talking matters are helping to bridge this gap in speech and language development.
- In response to government's priorities concerning youth employment, the Reconnect programme has allowed for several volunteering opportunities in Kent through its funded activities (Please see the Economic Wellbeing section in evidence for theme-specific indicators section).
- Finally, there are activities on the Reconnect Programme which provided CYP with opportunities to fail, again and again; and workshops and mentoring which seeks to target mental health (including self-esteem and self-efficacy - all of which are instrumental to building emotional resilience (See literature review).

Thus, the Reconnect Programme has employed strategies and funded work that is in line with the literature, and we have seen and are beginning to see the positive impact that the work is having on CYP and families in Kent, especially in terms of reconnecting people to their family, friends and their communities, learning, their mental health, and wellbeing, etc. The programme has led to several benefits for communities and beneficiaries including:

- Improved speech and language development
- Employment and engagement in voluntary work
- Skills development
- Connecting, networking, knowledge sharing and exchange

One thing that has become clearer is that providers are able to deliver and meet need in ways that are unique and suitable to their community. They know their communities best. They know where the

need and gaps are and with the funding are able to meet these needs and drive grassroots change and impact. Perhaps this framework or approach is key to wider system change - connecting people and helping groups gain exposure.

We have received mostly positive feedback from providers in the form of data suggesting that they have been able to make an impact or reflect on the work they have been able to do because of the Reconnect programme. We have seen families working together and engaging with one another. We have seen increased accessibility to things for CYP and families. For example:

Interviewer: "So, you've seen this is their need for these activities in the communities?"

Interviewee: "Ohh yeah. [There's a] Really really big need. Not every member and not every family in Wye has got a car and they can't always get on the bus to go to a toddler group. And when you've got very young children you know fitting in with bus times isn't always convenient for them. So yeah having something that they can walk to in the village is really necessary."

What has become abundantly clear is the need for maximising the opportunity Reconnect has created for inter organisation partnerships. There are a lot of organisations doing similar things or having similar goals. Ultimately, a greater coordination between these organisations and projects would be beneficial for sustained impact and positive social change.

8. Appendix

For more literature on learning loss, please refer to the following:

- <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/department-for-education-publishes-new-epi-research-on-pupil-learning-loss/>
- <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/epi-research-for-the-department-for-education-on-pupil-learning-loss/>
- <https://epi.org.uk/publications-and-research/education-recovery-and-resilience-in-england-phase-two-report-october-2021/>
- https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/EPI-Policy-paper-Impact-of-Covid-19_docx.pdf
- <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/guidance-for-teachers/covid-19-resources/best-evidence-on-impact-of-covid-19-on-pupil-attainment>
- <https://riseprogramme.org/tools/simulating-learning> - projected loss
- <https://www.educ.cam.ac.uk/centres/real/publications/Using%20educational%20transitions%20to%20estimate%20learning%20loss%20due%20to%20Covid-19%20school%20closures.pdf>
- <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/news/2021/sep/ioe-academics-compile-rapid-evidence-reviews-uk-government>
- https://cramsurvey.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/11.-Shepherd-D-_-Mohohlwane-N.-2021.-Changes-in-education-A-reflection-on-COVID-19-effects-over-a-year.pdf
- https://www.exeter.ac.uk/news/homepage/title_866422_en.html
- <https://www.suttontrust.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Lost-Learning-Lost-Earnings-1.pdf> - evidence for impact of learning loss on labour market outcomes, among other things
- <https://post.parliament.uk/impact-of-covid-19-on-early-childhood-education-care/> - ECE specific trends
- <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/about-us/reports-and-impact/policy-reports/what-impact-is-the-covid-19-pandemic-having-on-education/>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/learning-during-the-pandemic/learning-during-the-pandemic-quantifying-lost-time--2>
- educational attainment and attitude to education and learning (HealthWatch, 2021, [source](#))

For more literature on mental health and wellbeing, please refer to the following:

- <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/resources/covid-19-research-studies-children-young-peoples-views> - lots of studies
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-mental-health-and-wellbeing-surveillance-report/7-children-and-young-people>
- [Good-Childhood-Report-2020.pdf \(childrenssociety.org.uk\)](#)
- <https://theconversation.com/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-the-mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-the-uk-what-the-research-says-172653> - DEPRESSED project; The English Mental Health of Child and Young People Survey (MHCYP) and its follow-up surveys, & other useful ones
- <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2021-follow-up-to-the-2017-survey>
- <https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/mental-health-of-children-and-young-people-in-england/2021-follow-up-to-the-2017-survey>
- Alma economics, [source](#)
- <https://research.senedd.wales/research-articles/mental-health-young-people-and-the-pandemic/>

- <https://www.acamh.org/blog/covid19-resources-on-child-adolescent-mental-health/> - list of useful resources
- <https://www.ox.ac.uk/news/2021-10-08-researchers-set-out-steps-address-mental-health-effects-pandemic-young-people> - really good resource
- [youngminds-coronavirus-report-march2020.pdf](#)
- <https://www.youngminds.org.uk/about-us/reports-and-impact/coronavirus-impact-on-young-people-with-mental-health-needs/>

Mental health and wellbeing:

- Panchal et al, 2021 - [Source](#) - meta-analysis of existing literature on the subject from a variety of databases.
- [Source](#) - The UK Youth Network's predictions on the needs that will arise among YP due to covid-19 restrictions based on surveys – so no evidence of the real-life impact of covid-19. Significant overlap between the YPs predictions, what eventually did happen, and Reconnect's view of the impact.
- BSA - <https://www.britishecienceassociation.org/news/the-forgotten-generation-the-impacts-of-covid-19-on-young-people> - not the most reference worthy, need to find an alternative if possible
- [Nuttfield, 2020, source](#)) <https://www.nuffieldfoundation.org/news/young-peoples-perspectives-on-covid-19>
- Eurofound- <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2021/impact-of-covid-19-on-young-people-in-the-eu>
- <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publications/covid-decade-understanding-the-long-term-societal-impacts-of-covid-19/> - the British academy, 2021, [source](#)
- <https://acamh.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/jcv2.12009> - Waite et al.,, 2021, - parent and carers (over 18) and YP; online survey; the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire; used R
- [https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642\(21\)00177-2/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanchi/article/PIIS2352-4642(21)00177-2/fulltext) - waite et al, 2021, - the Co-SPACE study, the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), longitudinal study
- <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/publications/impacts-lockdown-mental-health-children-and-young-people> - mental health foundation, 2020, [source](#)
- Jones et al 2021 - <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/26895269.2021.1890301>
- <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/03323315.2021.1932555> (McMahon, et al., 2021) - used the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) and regression analysis
- Children in Need, 2020, [source](#)). <https://www.bbcchildreninneed.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/CN1081-Impact-Report.pdf>
- <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/mental-health-covid19-in-our-own-words-report> - barnardos 2020
- <https://www.mentalhealthtoday.co.uk/news/children/how-can-we-safeguard-children-and-young-people-s-mental-health-post-pandemic> - barnardos 2021
- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7444649/> - Singh, 2020, [source](#)
- <https://gov.wales/review-impact-mass-disruption-wellbeing-and-mental-health-children-and-young-people> - Williams, Z. 2020, [source](#)
- Cambridge Assessment, 2021, [source](#);
- <https://www.cambridgeassessment.org.uk/Images/628843-digital-divide-in-uk-education-during-covid-19-pandemic-literature-review.pdf>
- Bayrakdar & Guveli, 2020, [source](#) <https://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/research/publications/working-papers/iser/2020-09.pdf>;
- <https://www.healthwatchharingey.org.uk/report/2021-11-30/young-people-and-mental-health-impact-covid-19-and-lockdowns> - healthwatch, 2021, [source](#)

- <https://www.health.org.uk/publications/long-reads/generation-covid-19> - (The Health Foundation, 2020, [source](#))
- <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0262562> - depression and anxiety among higher education students (Chen & Lucock, 2022, [source](#))
- <https://www.rsph.org.uk/about-us/news/rsph-calls-for-more-mental-health-support-for-young-people-in-lockdown.html> - RSPH, 2020, [source](#);
- <https://www.eif.org.uk/blog/life-during-lockdown-in-england-charting-the-impact-on-young-peoples-mental-health> - the Early Intervention Foundation, Miriam Sorgenfrei, 2020, [source](#))
- <https://www.ymca.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/Youth-Affairs-Report-2021.pdf> – YMCA, 2021,
- <https://www.youthforum.org/news/youth-covid-19-impacts-on-jobs-education-rights-and-mental-wellbeing> - youth forum, 2020, [source](#)
- <https://www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk/2021/01/28/damage-to-childrens-mental-health-caused-by-covid-crisis-could-last-for-years-without-a-large-scale-increase-for-childrens-mental-health-services/> - Children’s commissioner, 2021, [source](#))
- <https://www.youthforum.org/news/introducing-our-new-report-beyond-lockdown-the-pandemic-scar-on-young-people> - Youth forum, 2021, [here](#)
- https://xenzone.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/150520_CYP_infographic_D4.pdf - Kooth, 2020, [source](#)
- McNair & Banham, 2021, [source](#)
- <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/supporting-young-people-s-mental-health-through-the-covid-19-crisis-84e143e5/> - OECD, 2021, [source](#)
- <https://www.bera.ac.uk/blog/learning-loss-or-learning-disruption>, bera, 2021
- <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/mental-health-covid19-in-our-own-words-report> - barnardos 2020
- <https://www.london.gov.uk/assembly-publications/covid-19-impact-mental-health-children-and-young-people> - London Assembly Health Committee, 2021, [source](#)
- <https://www.nominet.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/The-impact-of-COVID-19-of-young-peoples-mental-health-report.pdf> - Wilkins & Anderson, 2021, [source](#)
- <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/11033088211032783>
- <https://phwhhocc.co.uk/whiasu/the-impact-of-the-covid-19-pandemic-on-the-mental-wellbeing-of-children-and-young-people-in-wales-literature-review/> - Alma economics, [source](#)

Learning Missed:

- Andrew et al., 2020, [source](#) - [Edited Final-BN288 Learning during the lockdown.pdf \(ifs.org.uk\)](#)
- (Sibieta, 2021, [source](#)). - <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/15291>
- (Collen, 2021, [source](#)) - <https://www.britishcouncil.org/about/press/british-council-report-reveals-impact-covid-19-language-learning-schools-england>
- <https://www.egfl.org.uk/news/2021/06/language-and-learning-loss-evidence-children-who-use-eal> - scott, 2021
- Engzell et al., 2021, [source](#) - <https://www.pnas.org/content/118/17/e2022376118>
- <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2021/oct/29/disadvantaged-pupils-in-england-lag-behind-in-covid-learning-catch-up> - gov 2021
- <https://www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/education-and-covid-19-focusing-on-the-long-term-impact-of-school-closures-2cea926e/> - OECD, 2020, [source](#)
- (UNICEF, 2021, [Source](#)) - <https://www.unicef-irc.org/publications/1119-covid-19-how-are-countries-preparing-to-mitigate-the-learning-loss-as-they-reopen.html>

- <https://www.oecd.org/education/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-education-insights-education-at-a-glance-2020.pdf> - OECD, 2020b, [source](#)
- [Full article: Learning disruption or learning loss: using evidence from unplanned closures to inform returning to school after COVID-19 \(tandfonline.com\)](#) – harmey & moss, 2021
- Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020, [source](#) - <https://www.oecd.org/education/The-economic-impacts-of-coronavirus-covid-19-learning-losses.pdf>
- Scottish gov, 2020, [source](#) - <https://www.gov.scot/publications/report-covid-19-children-young-people-families-october-2020-evidence-summary/pages/8/>
- Azevedo, 2020, [source](#); <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2020/07/30/learning-losses-due-to-covid-19-could-add-up-to-10-trillion/>
- UNESCO; Soland, 2020, [source](#)) - <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2020/05/27/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-student-achievement-and-what-it-may-mean-for-educators/>
- <https://ftp.iza.org/dp14298.pdf> - Blaskó, 2021, [source](#)
- Christodoulou, 2020, [source](#) - [Baseline Secondary Writing: have Year 7 pupils gone backwards? | by Daisy Christodoulou | The No More Marking Blog](#)

More case studies from the locality grants

Appendix

Case Study 2: Reconnect funding: Dance buddies project report (August 2022)

Our charity 'Activate Us' applied for a grant of £1500 from the reconnect programme for running a dance buddies project for children 12 and under in the Dover area. The project started by organising a skilled dance teacher (trained in dance and musical theatre at LIPA in Liverpool) to plan and teach the classes. We then spent a few weeks making advertising for local children's groups, schools and social media to let local families know about the dance project. The idea behind it was to encourage children to come along with a friend or relative of a similar age to take part in a class that would be taught over a number of months. The aims of the course were to:

1. Encourage children to return to face to face activities after the covid pandemic.
2. Encourage children to enjoy a new activity with a friend or relative.
3. Try a fun and popular dance form that could become a hobby.
4. Introduce children to a different part of culture - musical theatre.
5. Get children physically active again after the pandemic.

The dance classes started in April this year and ran all the way through to mid July. Up to 15 different children attended the sessions during that period. Some children were already attending dance classes but wanted to try a different style and also try with a friend. Other children had never attended a dance class before and so for them it was a completely new experience.

The parent of one of the children who attended for the whole block of lessons said that her daughter had wanted to attend dance classes for a long time, but financially it was not possible for the family to pay for regular classes, so the funded block of classes was very good as it gave her daughter the possibility of attending classes. This child will also attend the second block of classes starting in September. After speaking to the girl's mother we have also been able to refer her to another scheme supporting families with low incomes whose children want to take part in activities that are beyond their means. So this has been a real success story for this girl.

Another child who has been attending dance classes for a few years was delighted by the opportunity to bring a friend with her for this class. Her friend's family again were unable to financially support her attendance and so funded classes again made a huge difference.

Children enjoyed various aspects of the class and when asked what they enjoyed most their answers varied from:

1. Learning how to dance
2. Having fun
3. Being able to bring my friend
4. Learning a routine from a musical and then performing it to their parents at the end of the lesson block.

In mid-July, when the first lesson block had finished, we organised a small event where the children were able to perform the dance routine they had been learning to their parents and families. This was appreciated by the families as they got to see the fruit of the hard work their children had put in during the weekly lessons. Children's confidence was boosted by being able to remember and perform a dance routine in front of a group of people.

The dance teacher was very pleased with the children's progress and felt that all the children had progressed from the start of the classes.

The rest of the grant will fund another block of musical theatre dance classes beginning in early September and ending in mid-December.

The children who attended the first block were keen to continue and the second block will also be advertised again to see if any new children would like to join in.

Case Study 1: YO! Street Zone CIC

With the help of the Reconnect funding, YO! STREET ZONE CIC has been able to run a weekly indoor street football club in Margate from January until July 2022 as well as two street football competition events in our local park in June and July 2022.

Street football club:

Reconnect funding enabled us to have children from low income families attend our weekly football club sessions free of charge. The funding also allowed us to cover the rent for the sports hall as well as staff costs. Young people really appreciated that the club was located in a sports hall which was in walking distance from their homes. Many vulnerable BAME young people attended very regularly and enjoyed making new friends, learning fun football skills and being in a positive environment.

Feedback from young people about our Reconnect street football club:

- "The club helped me to get better at football and I also made some new friends"
- "I was able to get more confident"
- "It was great that I could attend for free because my family couldn't afford it. Thanks Yofi!"
- "I wish the club didn't stop in July. If it comes back I would like to attend again"

Street football events:

With the help of Reconnect funding, we were also able to run two street football competitions in Dane Park in Margate. These were family events and open to anyone to attend. The first competition in June was for 11-15 year olds and the second competition in July was for 16+ year olds. Teams of 5 players were competing against each other in heated 7 minute matches to find out which team has got what it takes to rule the court. We also had our Panna Arena set up where anyone could get involved and play fun 1v1 panna matches, as well as halftime crossbar challenges, music and food and drinks for the players. Both events were a huge success and the feedback we have received has been amazing!

Over 80% of players attending this event were black or from other minority ethnic groups.

Feedback about our Reconnect street football events:

- "It is moving to see so many young black people together. The work you are doing for the local community is truly amazing."
- "These events have been amazing for the community! It helps to put Margate on the map"
- "Thanks a lot for having our team attend this event! We didn't expect to see such a professional street football competition set up here in Margate."
- "I really enjoyed the food, the vibes and the people. Great day!"