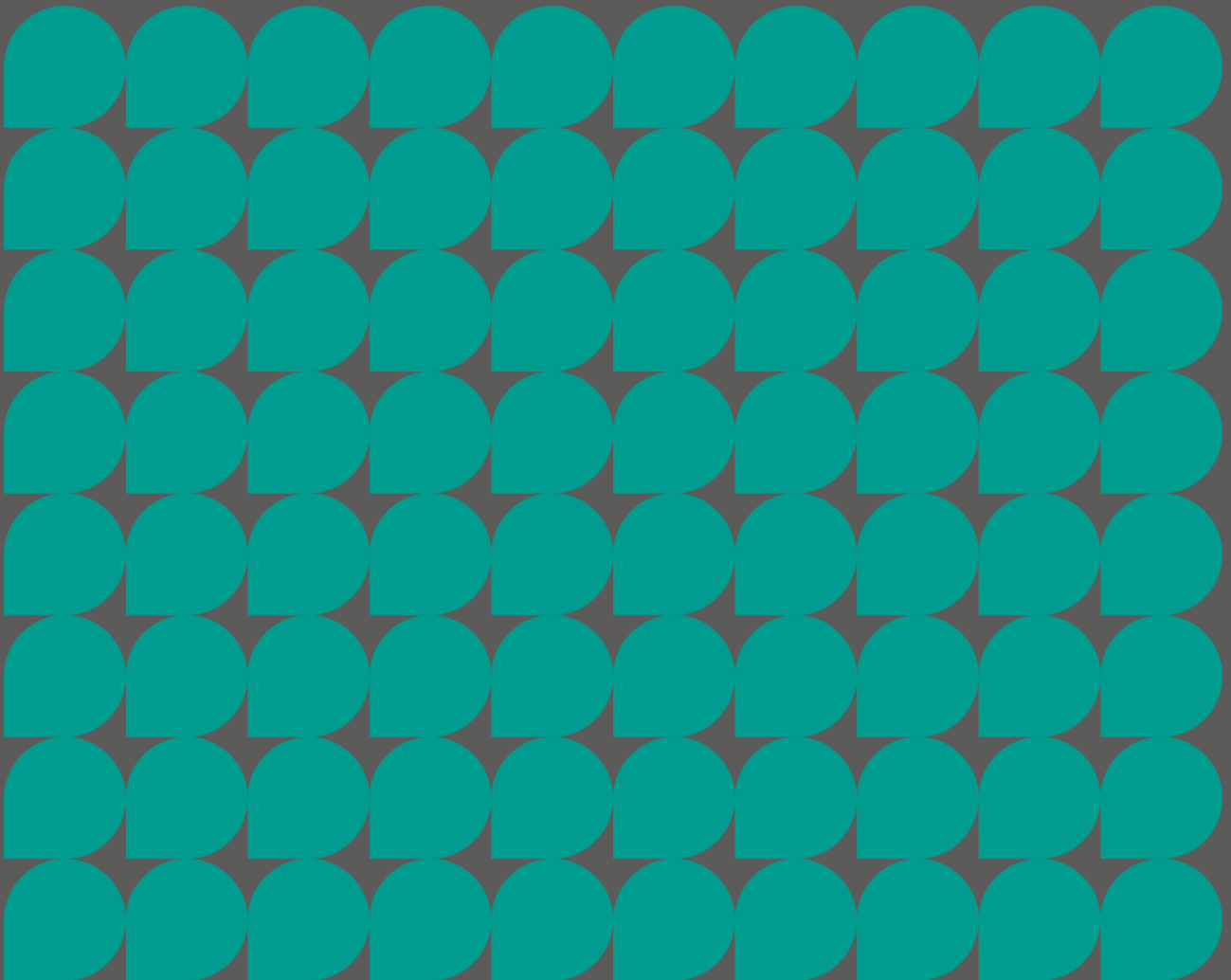


# Young Persons' Homelessness Prevention Pathfinder Evaluation

Research Team, GMCA

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### **GMCA Research Team**

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) produces high quality research and intelligence to form the evidence base underpinning policy and strategy for the city region. We undertake both overarching research and analysis to inform all Greater Manchester priorities, as well as research projects relating to the GMCA portfolio areas.

**Research - Greater Manchester Combined Authority ([greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk](https://greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk))**

# 1. Key findings and recommendations

## Key findings relating to the aims of this evaluation

*Evaluation aim 1: Assess the effectiveness of interventions undertaken by Pathfinder coaches in preventing homelessness in the long-term.*

- The Pathfinder service does support young people to prevent homelessness and evidence collected during this evaluation shows that homelessness prevention often lasts beyond the initial point of disengagement from the service. Similarly other positive outcomes are also sustained following disengagement from the service and in the months that follow. This provides an initial indication of long-term homelessness reduction.
- The design of this evaluation allowed for follow-up engagement with interviewees which shed some light into the lives of this cohort after disengagement with the service. It was not possible to determine future homelessness risk for this cohort, due to the inability to track longer-term outcomes across the life course of participants. Whilst a history of homelessness is one risk factor for future homelessness, this evaluation found that the Pathfinder service promoted protective factors which are likely to mitigate long-term homelessness risk.
- In some cases, Pathfinder support was found to be long-lasting as young people took action to prevent future homelessness after disengagement from the service. In other scenarios, young people were less able to take such action due to a lack of awareness of options, or confidence to pursue them. In some of these latter cases, absence of wider services made this even more difficult for young people.

*Evaluation aim 2: Establish an understanding of the timing of the intervention in young people's journeys of homelessness risk.*

- In some cases earlier intervention from the Pathfinder would have led to the avoidance of negative outcomes and experiences for some young people. Some of these individuals, were engaged with other services which reflects a missed opportunity for earlier and more effective prevention.
- The procedure of managers assessing cases referred into the service in order to determine whether effective prevention work was achievable, was generally

effective. Some coaches highlighted that sometimes individuals' cases were 'too far gone' in relation to homelessness prevention once the coach was able to contact them. This was often due to crisis developing between initial assessment and the support offer being put in place. This reflects the quick pace at which things can change in such circumstances, rather than any failure within the service.

*Evaluation aim 3: Uncover any challenges or barriers experienced by those who received support from or worked on the service.*

- The support is least effective for young people when it loses the key component of being person-centred. Without a focus on the needs and aspirations of the participant, the support offered can feel irrelevant and unsuitable to some participants. This ultimately leads to less effective interventions and outcomes which are less likely to be sustained in the long-term.
- A lack of consistency in the support offer can be disruptive in the lives of young people who are receiving support from the service. Such inconsistency relates to coaches being hard to contact or offers of support falling through. This disruption then prevents positive outcomes from being met.

## **Other key findings**

- The open ended support and coaches access to funding were the main elements that allowed the service to effectively prevent homelessness for young people. Both elements allow coaches to establish and develop relationships with the young people they work with.
- Improving support networks is a crucial key tenet of the service. Those engaged in the Pathfinder service are more likely, than young people in general and the general homeless population, to experience breakdown of their support networks. Coach support is crucial in improving these relationships.
- Those engaged on the Pathfinder service were able to build greater faith in public services, which was evidenced in multiple ways. Firstly, young people were offered preventative support, rather than having to reach crisis before

they could access help. Secondly, young people are able to spend dedicated time with coaches which is often unexpected due to their own experiences of other services or what they understand of how services conventionally run. Finally, this faith is further compounded by coaches working in a holistic manner, which instils the feeling that the support they require is not burdensome or 'asking too much.'

- As services prioritise 'upstream' intervention and preventative approaches, it increases the likelihood of working with individuals at the lower end of risk profiles. Engagement with those who have very low level risk of homelessness is reflective of the universal service offer, as prioritised within the Greater Manchester Homelessness Prevention Strategy. Engagement with this group who have less severe needs in relation to homelessness prevention, should be focused across all key tenets of the service in order to ensure engagement which is as effective as possible.
- The Pathfinder service was filling a gap of other services which were not appropriately supporting this cohort of young people, potentially due to being under-resourced. In some cases, the Pathfinder became the main (or only) service involved in supporting young people. For example, young people finding employment or being supported in new tenancies they may struggle to manage. Whilst it is of benefit to young people that they receive support from the Pathfinder which makes up for strain elsewhere in the support offer, this creates wider risks. Firstly, the core support offer of Pathfinder – to prevent homelessness risk by intervening upstream – can become diluted. Secondly this can alleviate pressure from other services which reduces perceived demand, whilst not making the best use of resources.
- Whilst the Pathfinder does relieve some pressure on the stretched Housing Options teams across Greater Manchester, through the prevention work done with young people, there is still some use of local authority teams once young people are engaged with this service. Young people, for whom this is the case, often received positive outcomes from this arrangement, such as access to social housing properties, which reflects the importance of this advocacy to ensure this cohort access the support they are entitled to. However, it should be acknowledged that the service working in this way does

not fully relieve pressure on local authority teams as ongoing engagement with this cohort is required from Housing Options teams.

## Recommendations

- The Young Persons' Homelessness Prevention Pathfinder is effective in preventing homelessness for young people and this service or another which has the same focus on prevention, should continue to be commissioned to do so. The key focuses of the service on improving support networks, increasing financial stability and encouraging engagement in meaningful activities should be preserved.
- The service and its commissioners should review the current approach to disengagement. A more flexible approach should be taken which ensures young people know what to do and who to contact should they require further support after the point of disengagement. This may involve the incorporation of a more formal disengagement point. All those who receive support from the service should be provided with guidance on steps to take should they face difficulty in the future, when their coach is not present.
- The service works most effectively when young people have a consistent coach throughout their time on the programme. Consistent support means they are able to build a stronger relationship with their coach; set higher quality self-determined outcomes; and have a more effective experience of disengagement from the service when support has ended. Whilst staff turnover is inevitable, services should seek to better understand and promote circumstances in which delivery providers may be effective in reducing staff turnover and maintaining consistent coach support. This should include further input from young people on the Pathfinder programme.
- The Pathfinder's service offer should be better communicated to young people who are facing early risk of homelessness. An improved approach would allow young people at risk of homelessness to recognise the value in engaging with a service like the Pathfinder. Young people who referred themselves into the service often had a greater understanding of what the service could offer them; a developed willingness to engage; and therefore more positive outcomes in relation all elements of the service.

- The service and its commissioners may wish to consider a self-service offer of support for young people who are at risk of homelessness but do not wish to engage with all elements of the programme – or who have fewer needs in relation to the key tenets of the Pathfinder service. This offer should bring together relevant material that is suitable for a younger audience and be portrayed in an accessible and concise way. For example, the offer should be cognisant a lack of wider support networks for some within this cohort and reduced financial literacy for some young people. This self-service offer would allow for young people who require support to access it in their own way and in their own time, as well as meaning that service capacity is prioritised for those who are more likely to fully engage in the Pathfinder offer.
- Accessing the private rented sector is an essential component of any future commissioned prevention services. Within the Pathfinder service, the existing partnership with Credit Unions across Greater Manchester should be maintained and the pilot of young people accessing loans should be continued. This pilot allows young people to access loans, underwritten by the Pathfinder provider, which can be used for property deposits and initial rent payments. This allows for easier access of the private rented sector market. This is particularly crucial considering that coaches highlighted the difficulty of accessing the private rented sector market, particularly in cases where the delivery provider is the named guarantor, something landlords and letting agents are reluctant to accepting.
- The GMCA should consider to best approach to incorporating learning from this evaluation in relation to barriers which prevent organisations from acting as a guarantor. The fuller and more frequent perpetuation of this practice will enable many vulnerable young people, such as those supported by the Pathfinder, to access the private rented sector market.
- Findings from this evaluation should be incorporated into the Live Well agenda. In particular:
  - The promotion of wider awareness of welfare entitlements and ability to gain access to such entitlements should be prioritised. This evaluation found coach support in accessing Personal Independence Payments (PIP) was crucial for young people who were entitled.
  - Housing advice should be an element incorporated into the offer made to communities through the Live Well programme. This advice should be tailored

directly for those accessing the support. For example, for young people this advice should focus on developing an awareness of the housing market and managing expectations about what is realistically accessible. The integration of services offering advice and support in relation to welfare and housing, such as Step Change, Shelter and DWP, should ensure those who access the Live Well offer are supported in a holistic way.

- The prioritisation of the key tenets of the service which include improving support networks, increasing financial stability and encouraging engagement in meaningful activities, is highly effective and the prioritisation of these elements of support should be considered throughout the Live Well agenda.



## 2. Service overview

The data below reflects young people supported on the Young Persons' Homelessness Prevention Pathfinder service between January 2022 and September 2024. Partly due to the outcomes based nature of the project, Greater Manchester Better Outcomes Partnership record and monitor large amounts of data related to those engaged with the programme.

As shown below, 1,711 young people have completed the Initial Support Plan as part of their engagement with the Pathfinder programme. This number is reflective of young people who have engaged with the service and therefore does not include young people who started on the programme but did not participate.

Almost 3 in 4 (72%) of all those who completed their Initial Support Plan went on to achieve at least one housing outcome, demonstrating instances of homelessness prevention. As will be discussed further in this report, young people engaged with the Pathfinder set their own self-determined outcomes, which are essentially goals they wish to achieve whilst receiving Pathfinder support. Over half (59%) of all those who had completed an initial support plan had achieved at least 1 self-determined outcome and almost 1 in 3 (28%) had achieved 3 self-determined outcomes.

Engagement outcomes	
Completion of Initial Support Plan	1,711 young people
Housing outcomes	
Homelessness prevented (one or more housing outcome)	1,240 young people
Initial housing outcome	699 young people
3 month prevention	758 young people
6 month sustainment in stable accommodation	538 young people
12 month sustainment in stable accommodation	347 young people
Self-determined outcomes	
1 outcome achieved	262 young people
2 outcomes achieved	267 young people
3 outcomes achieved	487 young people

## 3. Context and background

### Background to youth homelessness

The causes of homelessness for young people are distinct from those experienced by the wider homeless population<sup>1</sup>. Centrepoint data reflects that of the young people they support, 58% left their last home due to family or relationship breakdown; 38% have previously been in care and have often experienced poor transition out of the system; and around 20% are seeking asylum, including young people who have come to the UK as unaccompanied minors.

The very nature of being young also has a direct effect on an individual's experience of homelessness<sup>2</sup>. For example, young people are at further risk of poverty due to reduced welfare entitlements, a lower minimum wage, and discrimination in the labour market. These factors all lead to a greater risk of entrenched homelessness for young people. Other elements of being young interact with homelessness risk, including the reality that these individuals have often left homes and relationships they were economically and socially dependent on; they are experiencing a transition into adulthood which can be a period of significant change and development; and due to less life experience<sup>3</sup> they may be unaware of support or services which could help prevent or relieve their homelessness.

Statutory homelessness data released prior to the establishment of the Pathfinder service highlights the scale of youth homelessness in Greater Manchester (GM), reflecting the importance of a service like the Pathfinder. 23% of households found to be homeless or at risk of homelessness in the quarter ending December 2020<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [The causes of youth homelessness | Centrepoint](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Young People | Homeless Link](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Young and Homeless 2020 Executive Summary.pdf \(kxcdn.com\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Homelessness statistics - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

included or were led by a young person<sup>5</sup>. Statutory data from this time also reflects there were over 4,000 children housed in temporary accommodation on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2020, a figure which has grown significantly since this time. As well as the immediate impact of so many children living in temporary accommodation, this is also an indication of future pressure on homelessness services for these children who are more likely to require housing support once they reach adulthood.

This understanding of the scale of youth homelessness in GM and the background of the uniqueness of youth homelessness, demonstrates the need for a different approach to preventing homelessness for young people. This approach should provide extra support and give insight and knowledge that will help prevent homelessness in the long-term.

## **Introduction to the Young Persons' Homelessness Prevention Pathfinder service**

The Young Persons' Homelessness Prevention Pathfinder service (in this report, referred to as 'the Pathfinder') operates across Greater Manchester, with the aim of intervening in the lives of young people (aged 18-35) before they become homeless.

Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) commissioned the Greater Manchester Better Outcomes Partnership (GMBOP) to deliver this service. The service initially operated as a pilot between January and December 2021 in some boroughs and then was contracted across the whole city-region from January 2022, with funding until March 2025. Whilst GMBOP hold the contract and operate strategically across the service, individual providers are tasked with service delivery in each borough across Greater Manchester. The different providers include:

- Calico – covering Bury, Stockport, Tameside and Trafford;
- Early Break – covering Rochdale and Oldham;

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<sup>5</sup> Households including or led by a young person, as defined in the homelessness case level information collection (HCLIC) releases includes households with either a young person aged 16-17, a young person aged 18-25 requiring support to manage independently, a young parent requiring support to manage independently, a care leaver aged 18-20, or a care leaver aged 21 or older.

- De Paul – covering Bolton, Manchester and Salford; and
- The Brick – covering Wigan.

GMBOP maintained relationships with AKT and 42<sup>nd</sup> Street as specialist organisations. AKT were brought in by the GMBOP team as a specialist delivery partner to work with young people in scenarios where gender or sexuality is linked directly to the individual's risk of homelessness. The mission of AKT is to support young people who are LGBTQ+ and at risk of, or experiencing homelessness or in a hostile living environment, to ensure they are able to thrive. AKT are therefore able to provide dedicated support to those in the Pathfinder cohort who are LGBTQ+.

The service operates using an outcomes-based approach. This means that measurable outcomes are agreed in advance which, when achieved by delivery providers, are then paid for by the GMCA. Each young person, with their coach's support, will decide upon self-determined outcomes which are essentially goals that they would like to achieve. If achieved, these outcomes would then be paid for by the GMCA. The outcomes will centre around the key tenets of the service. These key tenets will be referred to throughout this report and include:

1. Removing homelessness risk
2. Improving support networks
3. Increasing financial stability
4. Driving engagement with meaningful activities

Each young person is assigned a coach with the primary aim of preventing their homelessness, but also focuses on other key areas such as those described above. The coaches aim to work in a person-centred way, with a strengths-based approach to deliver effective and long-lasting outcomes for those they work with.

## **Introduction to this evaluation**

This evaluation has been undertaken by the GMCA Research Team. The primary aims for undertaking this evaluation were set out during the scoping phase of this project and were agreed following consultation with a range of stakeholders, including GMBOP and a group of coaches working for the Pathfinder service. These aims included:

- Assessing how effective the interventions undertaken by Pathfinder coaches are in preventing homelessness in the long-term;
- Establishing the most appropriate and effective point in time at which services should intervene to prevent homelessness; and
- Uncovering any challenges or barriers experienced by those working on the project, or shortcomings felt by the young people, in relation to preventing homelessness.

The approach taken for this research was a qualitative evaluation involving semi-structured interviews. The methodological rationale is described in detail in the Methodology section of this report (from page 14). The team began conducting interviews and collecting data in May 2023 and finalised interviews in July 2024. In this time, the team spoke to 16 young people who had been supported by the programme. Each interview was scheduled for an hour and a half and included a set of questions focusing on their experiences and circumstances<sup>6</sup>. The only requirement for eligibility was that each young person should have sustained in accommodation for 6 months. Some young people remained open to Pathfinder support at the point of this initial interview, while the support for others had concluded. The eligibility criteria was intentionally loose, in order to ensure a wide range of young people supported could participate in this evaluation. Each young person was then offered a second interview, 6 months after the first, for which 14 young people returned. The purpose of this second interview was to understand the effectiveness of the programme in the long-term; any relevant change in circumstances; and experiences of disengaging from the programme, as had occurred for many by the point of follow-up. Each young person received a gift

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<sup>6</sup> Shortly after the commencement of initial interviews with young people, the Research Team reviewed the interview experience and amended the structure of the interview questions. Whilst the content of these questions remained consistent, the wording and order of the questions were amended in order to facilitate a smoother and more relaxed conversation. Whilst conversations prior to these changes were successful and much insight was drawn from these initial interviews, it was found that making changes was effective in facilitating fuller conversations with participants.

voucher for each interview, as remuneration for their time. These vouchers also may have incentivised some young people to take part.

The team also spoke to 7 coaches who worked on the Pathfinder programme. These coaches had a range of prior work experience, with regards to homelessness and support-work more broadly. They also had varied lengths of time working within their Pathfinder role. Some coaches had started in the role less than 12 months prior, whilst others had been on the programme since its inception in the pilot stage. This variation allowed for wide ranging perspectives.

In terms of coverage across GM, all delivery providers were represented in terms of young people and coaches interviewed.

Thematic analysis was undertaken by the GMCA research team, on all interviews, to establish findings. These findings and key messages have been collated and presented in this report.

## 4. Methodology

As outlined in the previous section, the main aims of this evaluation were to:

- Assess the effectiveness of interventions undertaken by Pathfinder coaches in preventing homelessness in the long-term;
- Establish an understanding of the timing of the intervention in young people's journeys of homelessness risk; and
- Uncover any challenges or barriers experienced by those who received support from or worked on the service.

A qualitative, longitudinal approach to evaluation was best suited to meeting these aims for a number of reasons. These reasons can be summarised as follows:

- The ability to develop an understanding of young peoples' positions before the Pathfinder intervention;
- The ability to gain an understanding from young people into action taken, the result of this action and what it meant to them as individuals; and
- The ability to speak to young people following their disengagement from the service to develop an understanding into the longer-term impacts of the Pathfinder.

A portion of the first interview with each participant was spent discussing their circumstances – and specifically their housing situation – prior to intervention by the Pathfinder. This allowed the interviewee to discuss what they believed to be the causes of their homelessness risk and to tell the interviewer, in their own words, how they became connected with the Pathfinder service. This was crucial in providing insight into the types of young people who were engaged with the support and what their needs were on entry into the programme. Developing this understanding was instrumental in taking a view on the GMCA's goal to intervene at the earliest and most appropriate point.

Speaking to a combination of young people and the coaches supporting them allows for a greater understanding of the work done to achieve outcomes in this service. Young people have been able to provide their point of view on the action taken by their coach; how this differed to other services they have worked with (or that they

would expect from statutory support); how it felt for them to receive this type of support; and ultimately what the outcomes meant to them. Coaches gave their perspective on the practical nature of working to achieve outcomes for young people; the stumbling blocks they sometimes encountered; and the approaches used to support young people to meet their potential. The objective to understand *how* something was done, not just *what* was done, was key to the successful evaluation of this service. Such an understanding was only made possible using a qualitative approach.

The interviewer spoke to 14 out of the initial 16 young people a second time, 6 months after their initial interview. These conversations were directly linked to the insight shared in the first interview. The intention of conducting the interviews in this way was to ensure young people felt they had been listened to and what they had shared had been remembered. By speaking to a smaller number of participants, this could be facilitated. Ultimately, this allowed for the development of a rapport between the interviewer and participants, and therefore testimony was shared which was highly insightful to this evaluation.



## 5. What needs do these young people have?

### Section summary

- There was variety in the level of homelessness risk experienced by those supported by the Pathfinder. Some participants were closer to the point of potential crisis in relation to homelessness, whilst others were unlikely to require local authority homelessness support, even without the Pathfinder intervention. The effects of this variation are further explored in section 6.
- Some participants felt their only requirement for support related to their accommodation needs, however coaches were often able to provide beneficial support in relation to the other key tenets of the service (support networks, financial stability and meaningful activities). This reflects that these areas should be prioritised even when this is not identified by the young person receiving support.
- The preventative nature of the service often meant that the offer of support was relatively unexpected for participants. This was due to young people feeling that they were not in such great need that a service would be able to support them. Whilst this was surprising to participants, they often reflected the importance of receiving support at the point they did. Receiving support at a time that was somewhat surprising but also appreciated, allowed greater faith in public services to be built by this cohort.
- Breakdown of support networks was the cause of homelessness risk for most participants and therefore help from a coach to improve support networks was integral to the offer.
- Coaches reflected the extreme difficulty for young people to maintain financial stability, something they viewed to have become worse in recent times. This related to cost of living pressures, as well as modern factors such as easily accessible credit providers.

The beginning of the first interview with each young person centred around a discussion of their situation and requirements when they first engaged with the Pathfinder service. This section will delve into this cohort's circumstances in relation to each of the four key tenets of the service, as referred to in section 3 (removing risk of homelessness, improved support networks, increased financial stability and engagement with meaningful activities). In part, these key tenets are supported by young people setting and achieving self-determined outcomes, which can be understood as goals. These self-determined outcomes will also be explored in this sections.

## **Homelessness risk**

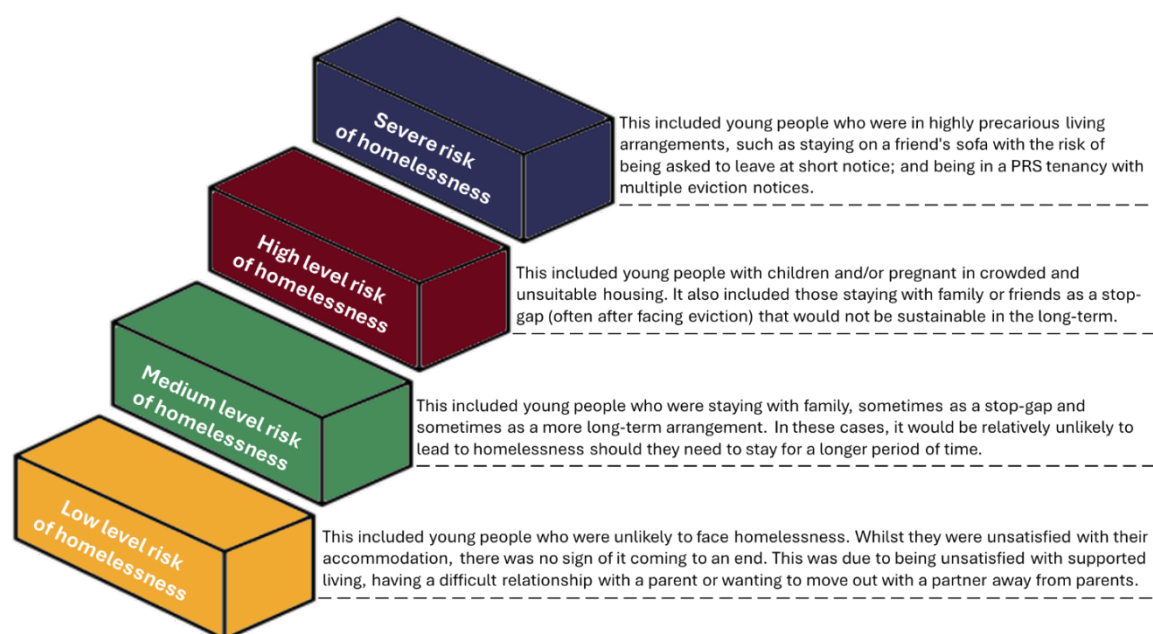
Homelessness risk, in this report, refers to the experience of homelessness which local authorities would have a statutory duty to support, i.e. households who are being threatened with homelessness in the following 56 days or households who do not have accommodation at the point they present to their local authority<sup>7</sup>.

When considering the risk of homelessness amongst the cohort who participated in this evaluation, there is variation between those who were almost at crisis point and those who realistically were at very low risk of becoming homeless, even without intervention by the Pathfinder. The diagram below details the different levels of risk experienced by evaluation participants.

It should be clear, there were no young people involved in this evaluation who had a stable life at home and had no requirements that the Pathfinder could support with.

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<sup>7</sup> Homelessness HRA17 Implementation Briefing FINAL.pdf



The suitability of participants, based on their level of homelessness risk, will be discussed in the following section of this report (from page 27).

### **Participants who felt support with housing was their only requirement**

This evaluation found that some young people felt they only needed support in relation to their housing needs. In relation to financial circumstances, these individuals were more likely to be in employment on entry into the service and when this wasn't the case, they were already claiming the benefits they were entitled to. They also had good support networks already in place which they felt was stable and reliable – this was mainly parents and friends. Some of these young people were already engaged in meaningful activities, whilst some others did not have an interest in getting involved in this type of activity and did not see this as a priority in their lives. These individuals were often keen to clarify that they were offered wider support by their coach separate to housing, but that they didn't feel it to be required.

***“There wasn't really anything like that [meaningful activities] but I think that's just because I didn't need it or want it at that time. I don't think it's something I couldn't have asked for or wasn't offered, I was just more focused on sorting out my living situation.”***

Although these individuals only recognised that they required support with housing, they still occasionally accessed other parts of the service. For example, these young people often had good relationships with their coaches, who they could confide in and seek advice from. In one case, an individual's coach helped them buy a new washing machine whilst in their original property. Another of these young people took part in employment preparation through the Pathfinder, including relevant volunteering and CV writing.

In all of these cases, the young people accessed new housing, whether this be social housing or a room in a shared private rented property. Accessing housing and having a limited inclination to involve themselves in other areas of the programme, often meant that disengagement followed soon after finding more stable accommodation. Disengagement was also more likely for these individuals if they had a change in coach, something which was found across the full cohort and will be discussed further in section 7 (from page 59). This was often due to the young person feeling they did not have an established relationship with a new coach and that their housing need, which they felt was their only need, had been met.

***“The other two [coaches] probably would have been just as helpful but I was already offered a home by that point and you know, getting back on my feet so I didn’t really require the help that the first coach gave me.”***

On one hand, in the context of limited resources, this presents a question about whether support should be targeted at those with a greater level of vulnerability in relation to all elements of the service. On the other hand, the main focus of this programme is homelessness prevention and therefore these cases can be seen as effective examples of support. Overall, these findings show that whilst some young people see their only support need to be homelessness, other elements of the service should still be offered and encouraged. There are often unexpected benefits that can be actualised by young people using the service holistically.

### **Homelessness prevention services engaged with prior to Pathfinder**

Many young people had already been engaged with their local authority in relation to their homelessness risk, prior to Pathfinder intervention. In some cases, it was

through this route that they were referred onto the service. A number of young people expressed their dissatisfaction with local authority homelessness teams. Whilst there was often little explanation for this dissatisfaction, some young people reflected that they felt the council were less personable and approachable, in comparison to their Pathfinder coach.

***“Like trying to talk to the council about stuff, they were always quite, I don’t want to say unfeeling but everything seemed quite cut and dry and a bit of a numbers game. Whereas to have an actual person, who isn’t reading something off the screen, is just a lot better.”***

## **Support networks**

The majority of those interviewed as part of this evaluation were facing homelessness risk due to fractured support networks which had left them in a precarious housing situation. This was mainly due to the breakdown of relationships or familial fall outs. This highlights the importance of prioritising improved support networks as an element of this programme.

### **Support services engaged with prior to Pathfinder**

Some young people discussed health and wellbeing services they were engaged with at the point of entry onto the Pathfinder. Some of these had a drug and alcohol focus, such as We Are With You, whilst others were more focused on mental health and wellbeing support, like the Living Life Well Neighbourhood team, Change Grow Live and The Prevention Alliance. Some participants spoke about the involvement of social workers in their lives. For some this came from having children, whilst others were involved with children’s social care since they themselves were children. One participant who had experienced service involvement since a young age spoke of the ways in which the Pathfinder approach was different, particularly with its focus on building confidence and independence.

***“I didn’t have independence at all. I had no privacy either. I was on a child protection plan and then a looked after child. So all my life, everything was shared around the table...so I had a lot of people speaking for me and I never felt empowered to use my own voice and be able to speak my own words and***

*actually say how I felt. So yeah, it's good that I've been able to have [my Pathfinder coach] to help me build all that confidence, to be able to speak for myself."*

Other young people spoke about Pathfinder being the first support service they had accessed. Some of these individuals felt that they were not in a position to receive this kind of support but that doing so has left a positive impact in their lives. Engagement from the service at a point that was somewhat unexpected but appreciated, allowed stronger faith to be built in public services for some of these young people.

*"Like even though I needed the help, I was like 'oh god I'm not worse off, and there's other people worse off than me.'"*

*"I pray every day for this project, because I know maybe my situation is not too terrible than others, other young people. This project is an angel for me and for other young people who need something."*

*"I feel like, a lot of the time in some situations, unless you are completely rock bottom, no one will help you. And when you're in that sort of tier above rock bottom, you still need that support and there's nothing there...like at the time I was homeless but because I was sleeping on my mum's couch, it was like, 'well you're not sleeping on the street, so it's not really priority.' And it's like, 'yeah, but I'm still homeless.' And it was good to have someone who could help me, without me being like near death basically."*

## **Financial stability**

When discussing their finances prior to Pathfinder engagement, some participants shared that they had been in stable employment at this point. Others had been looking for work with varying levels of success. Some were claiming their full welfare entitlements. Others were unknowingly underclaiming benefits they could have accessed. Multiple young people spoke about the struggles they faced in relation to budgeting and keeping afloat with their money, as well as some discussing difficulties in relation to debt and the effects this had. Despite many coaches having extensive experience working with young people and working within homelessness,

many indicated they were somewhat surprised by the financial strains young people were under and the causes of these.

*“I was really shocked when I started on this project and [people shared] ‘my money goes into my sister’s account’, simple things like that.”*

*“I’ve spent a lot of sessions with people actually explaining what Klarna and Clearpay and I’ve found a new one this week, Zilch...explaining what these payments are and what fees are if you don’t make that payment.”*

*“When you do the financial budgeting and stuff with them, a lot of them are paying £50-£60 a month for a phone. Why are you paying that much for a phone when you can’t even afford to get the bus to come and see me? It’s about educating them.”*

The causes of these financial difficulties are clearly varied. For some young people, stress played a role in creating debts that they couldn’t afford. One young person spoke about a period of substance misuse and a toxic relationship which led to a lot of their financial issues.

*“I budget well anyway. I’ve always been one of those, but obviously when all that happened [family relationship breakdown], I just spiralled and stopped paying things, like little catalogue bills and stuff and then it built up.”*

*“I was in a lot of debt, I forgot to mention that. My ex took out a load of credit cards and stuff in my name. He was using the ones that I already had...I had no reason to be checking my bank every day when I had my inheritance. I didn’t realise that £500 here is missing, £500 there is missing, which had been sent to him.”*

One coach also indicated that sometimes young people, particularly those who are vulnerable in some way, get left behind with regards to knowing what financial support they are entitled to.

*“Young girls who have toddlers who didn’t know they could get child benefit...that extra £25 a week, it really helps people...who tells you? I know as a mum myself, I don’t think anyone told me I was entitled to it, I think it was my*

*mum who said, 'have you claimed your child benefit?'...I think services just expect you to know...young parents who are on Universal Credit and have their first baby, they're not told they're entitled to a £500 Sure Start grant."*

### **Financial support services engaged with prior to Pathfinder**

Many young people were already engaged with organisations such as Job Centre Plus and Restart, in efforts to get into employment. There were mixed reviews from evaluation participants about their engagement with these services. Some spoke positively about these services, for example finding Restart's interview and CV advice useful (this was particularly the case when individuals had little experience of working in the UK). Some found receiving job openings helpful and others discussed their 'job groups' as useful spaces to use a computer and apply for roles. One participant also appreciated advice they had received from their Restart advisor, to pursue a career in the area which they were qualified and interested in, rather than short term jobs which provide less stability.

*"[Restart] do regularly send job openings. But obviously it's up to me, whether to find a suitable job for me. They send things through Indeed. Only other good thing is they've got job groups, I can use the computer as I don't have my own."*

Others found Job Centre Plus and Restart to be less effective. For example, some found that the job openings received from their Restart advisor to lack relevance to them as individuals and others shared that they were not direct enough with sharing employment opportunities.

*"In the time that I work with them, they never show me something, some page or something like that to, where can I find a job. I try on my own, I apply with Primark, with Select."*

Section 6 of this report will include discussion on the interaction between the Pathfinder service and existing services such as Job Centre Plus and Restart.



## Meaningful activities

### Engagement in meaningful activities prior to Pathfinder

Some young people were already engaged in hobbies and meaningful activities prior to receiving support from the Pathfinder service. These were mainly exercise and sports related, such as going to the gym and being a part of basketball and football teams. Other meaningful activities were education-focused, including attendance at university and college. In these scenarios, when young people clearly had an established interest or hobby that did not require Pathfinder support, they did not necessarily recognise their involvement as integral to homelessness prevention. They were more likely to understand it as a part of normal life and something they simply enjoy.

Coaches discussed that some young people were reluctant to engage in meaningful activities when they first started receiving support from Pathfinder.

***“We found a lot of young people like ‘no, I want a house before I do anything’ and it was breaking that barrier down, of ‘oh come on, whilst we’re still looking for that PRS property or local housing authority property, what are you going to do with yourself? There’s no point just sitting in a room. Let’s do something, make yourself feel better.’”***

In other scenarios, it was less about young people being uninclined to get involved and more the case that surrounding factors inhibited the likelihood of engaging in meaningful activities. One coach spoke about the reality that cost of living pressures meant young people were unable to afford day-to-day basics, travel costs, and sometimes access to healthcare and the effect this had on the seemingly less important things, such as engagement in meaningful activities.

***“That becomes a massive barrier to the meaningful, holistic [approach] of getting really into activities and doing something they really enjoy, because it makes it more difficult for them. Like someone will talk about wanting to join a gym and that’s great. But then when they can’t buy basic foods to nourish themselves, how can we expect them to then be going to the gym?”***

One coach highlighted that an initial lack of interest or inclination to be involved in meaningful activities did not always mean that this element of the service is unattainable for that individual.

*“A lot of people that come into the service won't have really thought about meaningful experiences very much, for example, or they won't have actively pursued finding a creative outlet or something for them to learn new things, because that's just not what society's set up for them to do. Which makes it easier in the sense, it's easy to bring these things up and maybe get somebody excited about it because they never had an experience with that before.”*

## **Self-determined outcomes**

One priority of the Pathfinder service is that young people should be able to set their own goals, known as self-determined outcomes. If these self-determined outcomes relate to one of the key tenets of the service and are achieved, they are the basis of the claims made by the delivery provider to the commissioning organisation, in the same way that housing related outcomes are claimed.

Some young people struggled to remember any self-determined outcomes that they set at the beginning of the programme. This is not necessarily concerning, due to the significant time that had passed between these individuals starting on the programme and their interviews as part of the evaluation. Furthermore, the relaxed approach adopted by coaches (as described in section 7) will have likely impacted young people's awareness of their self-determined outcomes. Whilst the interviewer did reference 'goals' rather than using the programme specific language, the informal approach of goals naturally developing through conversation and assessment, was likely to inhibit participants being able to recognise their own goals when asked. It should be clear that where this more informal approach was applied, it was effective in ensuring young people had a relaxed experience of the service, without feeling like their personal goals were part of a tick-box exercise with their coach. For those who could remember the goals they set on entry into the services, the most prominent themes focused on housing, health and wellbeing, employment and finances, and children. Some key examples of these priorities are outlined below.

## HOUSING

*“To move out and have my own place. That’s the biggest and the ultimate goal because after that, if I do have my own place, I am getting the rest that I need, everything else falls through nicely.”*

## HEALTH AND WELLBEING

*“Just better myself, like self-improvement. Like improve my mental health and physical health.”*

*“I think my main goal was getting myself up and getting myself out a bit more.”*

## EMPLOYMENT AND FINANCES

*“Find the career-job that I can sustain in and that I enjoy doing.”*

*“I want to get into [work] again, I want to find a purpose.”*

## CHILDREN

*“I basically wanted to make sure that [my daughter] was fine at the end of everything, after everything got sorted that she was covered and looked after and was getting everything that she needs. That’s about everything really.”*

*“For now, I just want to focus on [my daughter]. But there is stuff I want to do with my future, like I want to [look into being] either a nursery teacher or a nurse...I will want to do something with that in the future, when she’s a bit older.”*

## 6. What outcomes are achieved through Pathfinder?

### Section summary

- Variety in the level of homelessness risk experienced by those supported on the Pathfinder should be understood as an expected factor of an 'upstream' service. However, in order to ensure effective service delivery, participants should be expected and encouraged to fully engage with all elements of the service where appropriate.
- Participants' assessment as to whether the service intervened at the appropriate time for them, is often an indication of their own resilience. In some cases, missed opportunities by other services were identified which led to delays in homelessness prevention and further negative life experiences.
- All participants were appropriate candidates for support in relation to homelessness prevention. However in some cases, local authority support would have been more appropriate due to broader risk in the individuals' lives. Whilst it is of benefit to young people that they receive support from the Pathfinder which makes up for strain elsewhere in the support offer, this creates wider risks. Firstly, the core support offer of Pathfinder – to prevent homelessness risk by intervening upstream – can become diluted. Secondly this can alleviate pressure from other services which reduces perceived demand, whilst not making the best use of resources.

## Section summary – continued

- Whilst the Pathfinder does relieve some pressure on the stretched Housing Options teams across Greater Manchester, through the prevention work done with young people, there is still some use of local authority teams once young people are engaged with this service. Young people, for whom this is the case, often received positive outcomes from this arrangement, such as access to social housing properties, which reflects the importance of this advocacy to ensure this cohort access the support they are entitled to. However, it should be acknowledged that the service working in this way does not fully relieve pressure on local authority teams as ongoing engagement with this cohort is required from Housing Options teams.
- Expectation setting was of utmost importance in preventing immediate and future homelessness. This was made possible due to effective relationships.
- In some cases the effect of Pathfinder support was found to be long-lasting as young people took action to prevent future homelessness after disengagement from the service. In other scenarios, young people were less able to take such action due to a lack of awareness of options, or confidence to pursue them. In some of these latter cases, absence of wider services made this even more difficult for young people.
- Engagement with the Pathfinder service was instrumental in improving support networks and increasing financial stability. In relation to support networks, this included the impact of new accommodation on existing relations; coach provided mediation; and coach support to access other service. In relation to finances, this related to accessing PIP; debt management; and some elements of employment preparation.

As an outcomes-based programme, the Pathfinder aims to deliver outcomes for young people across the previously mentioned key tenets of homelessness prevention, support networks, financial stability and meaningful activities. This section examines examples of outcomes being met, action taken to meet these

outcomes and how these outcomes ultimately help prevent homelessness in the long-term.

## Homelessness prevention

### Preventative nature of the service

This service is designed to be preventative in nature. This means it should intervene in the lives of people who are at risk of homelessness, but not yet experiencing homelessness. The previous section of this report focused on young people's needs, exploring the different levels of risk experienced by evaluation participants. Some participants were clearly at severe risk of homelessness when they initially engaged with the service, whilst others were experiencing lower levels of risk.

This evaluation finds that there is a proportion of the cohort who were less likely to have experienced homelessness to the extent that a local authority would identify a duty owed, irrespective of any prevention work by a service like the Pathfinder. Whilst this is the case, it is not necessarily a failure of the service. By aiming to be 'upstream' in homelessness prevention, there will always be cases which would be unlikely to develop into homelessness. Of all those assessed as experiencing low level homelessness risk, some engaged in other parts of the service effectively, whilst others received very little support from the service overall.

#### Young people experiencing low level risk of homelessness, who **received other effective support** from Pathfinder.

This young person was able to confide in and check in with their coach which brought them a lot of comfort. The coach also recognised the value of them engaging in varied meaningful activities. These experiences were transformative for this person's independence, confidence and mental health. These changes were long-lasting as seen in the young person's second interview.

This young person received support and advice from their coach. In relation to housing this was mainly expectation setting, which meant they understood the importance of maintaining their accommodation in the family home. The young person got involved in a number of courses, which were beneficial in relation to

spending more time outside the home, as well as giving them more insight and ambition for a future career.

Young people experiencing low level risk of homelessness, who **received little effective support** from Pathfinder.

This young person did not appear to have a developed relationship with their coach. When discussing looking for new housing, they mentioned friends and family who were helping with this, rather than their coach. Their coach was facilitating engagement in volunteering, but this was through the delivery provider organisation and did not seem to relate to the individual's interests or qualifications.

Overall, it is clear that due to the 'upstream' nature of the Pathfinder, there will be support offered to some young people who might never experience homelessness. When this occurred, the service could still be effective when the individual received other transformative benefits around independence and positive functioning, made possible through the holistic nature of the service. On the other hand, when young people with little homelessness risk also received little support in wider areas, this reflected more poorly on the quality of the service intervention.

Coaches discussed the reality that some young people are not in a situation where homelessness can be prevented. This can be the result of a referral being received too late by a separate organisation, or in some cases young people ***"burying their head in the sand a little bit and getting all these letters and messages off landlords and they just don't know what to do. They're waiting until the last two weeks and there's not much work that can be done two weeks before that crisis point comes."*** Managers in services defer referrals if a young person is at crisis point, in acknowledgement of the fact that the Pathfinder is not best-placed to support at that point. Even so, as one coach pointed out, a lot can change within short periods of time in relation to homelessness, meaning sometimes by the time a referral has made it through to a coach, it is no longer possible to do preventative work. Some coaches discussed strategic action in this space, such as working with local authorities and organisations like DWP to ensure that the Pathfinder was well understood, ultimately meaning better referrals could be made.

***“It’s [about] getting that referral in at the right time. Sometimes you can turn it around. Sometimes you might be too late. It just depends on the person and the situation, but it’s crucial that we get in there at the right time, which is why it’s important to have the good links with the local authorities.”***

This insight from coaches is of great value, as they have worked with more young people, in varying circumstances, than this evaluation has engaged with. None of the participants of this research were found to be too close to crisis for Pathfinder to have made a preventative intervention.

### **Point of service intervention**

Each young person was asked about whether they felt the service intervened at the right point in time for them. The answers they gave could broadly be grouped into three categories:

- Young people who felt that the Pathfinder did come at the right time, whilst other evidence shared reflects that an earlier intervention could have been more effective;
- Young people who felt that the Pathfinder did come at the right time, with the evidence they shared supporting this claim; and
- Young people who recognised that a Pathfinder intervention would have been more effective had it come earlier in their journey.

These different groupings are further explored throughout this sub-section.

In relation to those who felt that the Pathfinder did come at the right time, whilst other evidence shared reflects that an earlier intervention could have been more effective, some referenced support arriving as things were reaching the most stressful and complex point in their journey.

***“I feel like it was just one thing after another was going wrong. So I feel like [my coach] did just come in at the right time. And within such a short amount of time it’s just switched.”***

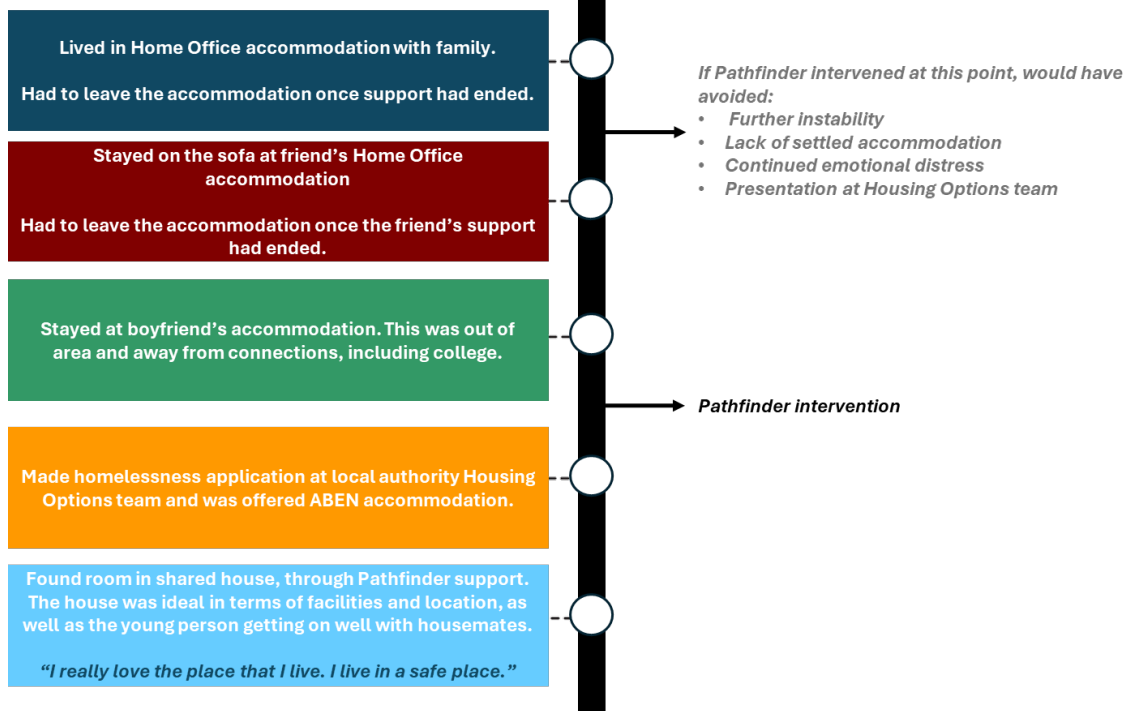
***“That was literally the perfect time. I needed support at that time. I just felt so, I don’t know how to explain it, like mentally I wasn’t there and I got a lot of help. And now I’m much better.”***



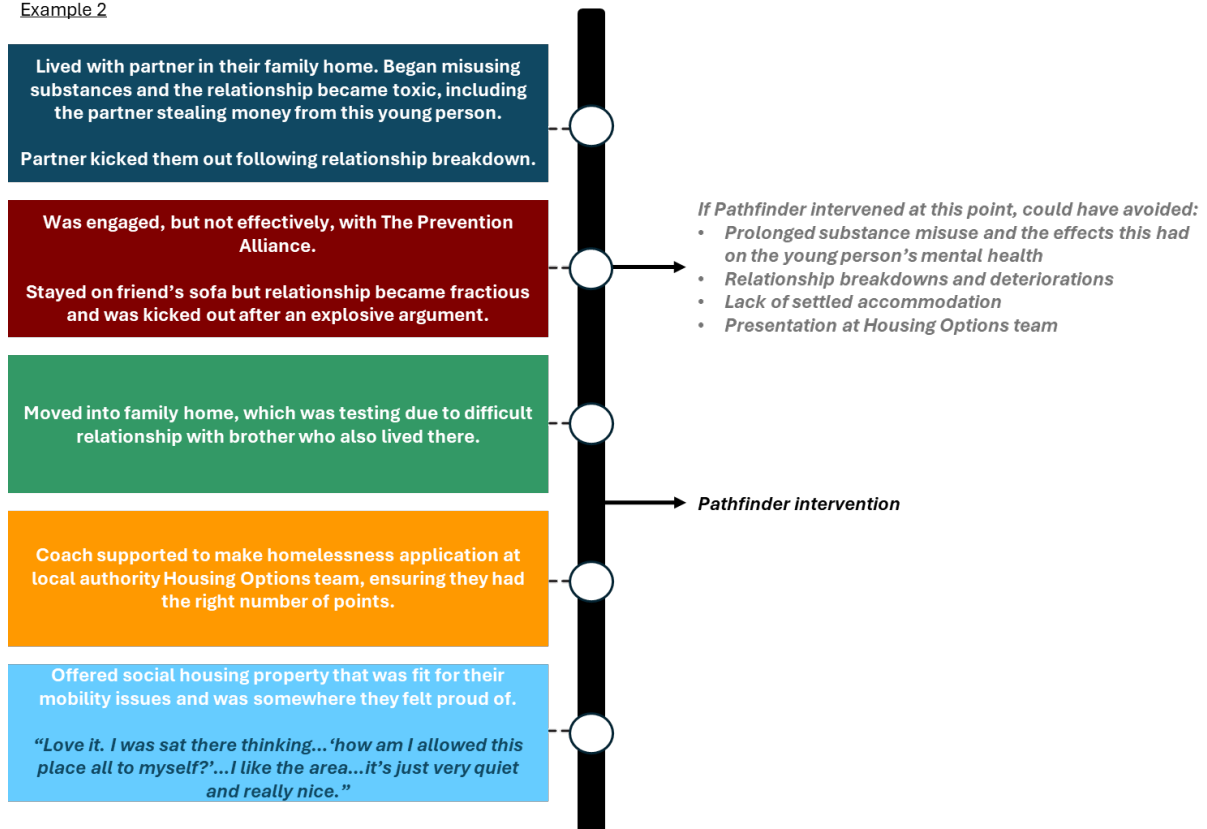
Whilst it is very important to understand the interviewees' perspectives on whether they were supported at the right time, it should also be added that such an assessment is subjective. Personal resilience will influence the answers people give as to whether the intervention happened at an appropriate point in time. In some cases, those who responded that the service had intervened at the right point, also shared struggles and hardship prior to Pathfinder intervention that could have been somewhat alleviated through service support.

The examples below represent two participants' experiences, who both shared they felt Pathfinder intervened at the right point. However, when analysing their journeys, it is clear that there were prior points when service intervention would have been more effective and could have avoided additional poor outcomes. In both of these cases, the individuals were engaged with, or known to other services (the Home Office and the Prevention Alliance) which could have facilitated an effective referral into the Pathfinder. It should be noted that although these examples reference earlier Pathfinder intervention, it could be that other services would be able to intervene and offer the necessary support.

#### Example 1



#### Example 2



It can be problematic for young people to stay temporarily with family or in other accommodation as a stopgap, as this frequently leads to the deterioration of relationships with those with whom they stay; upset and stress throughout this prolonged period of instability; and a more severe period of crisis when it does develop.

Other participants felt that the Pathfinder did come at the right time and the evidence they shared supports this. For example, those that were living with family as a more permanent arrangement and whilst staying there for much longer would have led to a severe risk of homelessness, staying there whilst other arrangements were made was appropriate.

Finally, some participants recognised Pathfinder intervention would have been more effective had it come earlier in their journey.

***“I feel like if I had the Pathfinder earlier rather than later, I would have gotten somewhere sooner and I wouldn't have had the two years where I lived [in unsuitable housing with their young child], decaying my mental health so much. It would have been a lot smoother and a lot healthier”***

***“I didn't know anything when I was asked to leave [my family home], if I knew Pathfinder I would not have got those [driving] points, that would have changed the whole story.”***

Many individuals were connected with the Job Centre Plus service and therefore had an active service involvement in their lives which could have made an effective referral. In other cases, young people who did not have ongoing engagement with other services, it is not clear how earlier intervention could have been facilitated.

Some of those who felt earlier intervention from the Pathfinder would have been more effective, did acknowledge that they would have been unlikely to take on the Pathfinder offer at an earlier point. One young person had recently suffered the loss of their child, which meant they would not have been ready to engage with the service any earlier. Another young person was dealing with a toxic partner and substance misuse issues that would have inhibited their capacity to engage with support any earlier.

None of these evaluation participants were seen to be at the point of crisis when they entered the service, as preventative work could be done to avoid them experiencing homelessness. Nevertheless, there were some individuals who should have been supported by a local authority Housing Options team rather than this service, for example, one young person at risk of domestic violence whilst caring for their children. Young people, who had cases which were beyond the scope of Pathfinder support, were effectively assisted in preventing their homelessness risk. However, in cases where domestic violence could be involved, local authority teams are better placed to provide support, due to safeguarding procedures which would be completed by local authority teams to ensure the safety of these individuals. The Pathfinder engaging with cases beyond its intended purpose could also lead to the service becoming bloated by demand and the quality of the service becoming eroded, as seen in other homelessness services. There is also a risk that this service taking on such cases beyond its intended remit, could ultimately relieve pressure on other services which could reduce perceived demand, whilst not making the best use of resources.

The Pathfinder was able to achieve positive outcomes for participants, irrespective of the point that it began to support them. It is clear in some cases that, had other services been able to refer into the Pathfinder at an earlier point, a more effective prevention offer could have been put in place to reduce poor outcomes experienced by this cohort.

### **Action taken to prevent homelessness**

In cases where homelessness was prevented by the Pathfinder, some participants were given assistance to find new accommodation, and others were supported to sustain their existing accommodation.

Most participants obtained new housing as part of engaging with the Pathfinder programme. The main ways Pathfinder supported with this included:

- Providing deposits, a first month of rent and the offer to act as guarantor for those in shared private properties.
- Assistance finding shared private properties, ensuring they were in the right areas and were suitable for the individual.

- Support navigating the social housing market, such as ensuring young people had the right number of points to bid on properties.

Many young people found deposits, rent and the offer of a guarantor incredibly useful.

***“They helped me with the deposit, which was really a big help. Yeah, that took weight off.”***

***“The deposit and the first month yes. But Pathfinder helped me to pay this...when this one happens, I was crying. I was crying every time, but this time I didn’t cry for the neighbours because I was scared, now I was crying because I was very, very happy. I will be, where I live, where I sleep, I will get my own bed. Yeah, because I was sleeping on the sofa, but now I sleep in my bed.”***

Young people clearly recognised the value in this element of the service. However, coaches spoke of the persistent difficulty to support young people in this regard – largely because of challenge obtaining the trust of landlords.

***“One of the biggest barriers is landlords and letting agents being willing and being open to Pathfinder paying the deposit or Pathfinder being the guarantor. That is [not] happening with like 90% of the landlords and letting agents.”***

***“We went to the [landlord] event. And we said ‘we’ve got deeper pockets, you’re gonna get the money off us more than you’re gonna get it off someone else that is paying their own mortgage and everything else.’ But they want someone that’s got personal connection, because it becomes an emotive situation, they feel that they’re more inclined to get any money from somebody else to support that person.”***

Some young people gained access to social housing whilst on the Pathfinder programme. The process by which this is accessed means that each young person was supported by their local authority whilst receiving Pathfinder support. Young people often mentioned the benefit of having a Pathfinder coach to advocate for them whilst they navigated this process; whether this was chasing up applications

and getting more information; or working with the housing provider to increase the young person's points and banding when they bid for houses.

*“[My coach] kept trying to contact them and see where it's at because they weren't getting back to me and when they did get back to me, they offered me a house and they just kind of didn't give me any information about that. She went round trying to chase it up and found out who was in charge and got in contact with her and she managed to get a date set of when I could view the house, so that was very helpful of her.”*

*“Someone from Pathfinder had a contact from social housing, council housing and they told them my situation...because I was trying to get put higher up on a band for council housing and they contacted me straight away, put me on the highest band for council housing and I got offered a property near enough straight away.”*

*“[The council] just like helped me do the like the form for Manchester Move. Put me on there, told me like 'you can bid for this many properties, this many beds' and stuff like that. And then I was just sort of just left to do it.”*

Continued engagement from local authority Housing Options teams is an unintended outcome of the Pathfinder service and should be considered when assessing the impact the Pathfinder has on statutory services. This continued reliance on statutory services signifies added pressure on teams which are already stretched, with limited pools of resources in the form of social housing. Whilst this must be considered, it should also be highlighted that without such advocacy and support from Pathfinder coaches, some of these young people may have not been able to access the social housing they were entitled to. This is important considering the long-term homelessness prevention that can be achieved through accessing social housing.

For those who did not find new accommodation but were deemed to no longer be at risk when they were initially interviewed, there were two main forms of action taken to prevent homelessness. This included expectation-setting by coaches about the realities of the housing market, and facilitating individuals to get involved in meaningful activities which took them outside of the home.

Expectation-setting about the housing market was a prominent method used by coaches within the Pathfinder service. Young people reflected the effectiveness of this method as they often relayed that their coach helped them understand what would be possible in relation to housing, ultimately providing the lesson that maintaining their current home, even when they did not feel totally satisfied with it, was essential.

Multiple young people, who remained in their original accommodation, shared that they had developed an understanding that shared private rented tenancies were their only realistic, affordable option to move onto. Some evaluation participants shared that this was not an option they wanted to pursue, for a variety of reasons, as shown below.

*“[My coach] was encouraging spare rooms, which I looked into and I had a switch between living with someone and living on my own. Before it was like, I could try to compromise and live with someone. I went to one viewing and it was not good so I ditched that and after that it was kicking in, I’m already living with a large family and I have needs and wants and I can’t have that whilst I’m living with someone so this isn’t an option, I need my own place.”*

*“I never felt the need to like look for accommodation because my friend’s house was actually better than any other shared accommodation. First of all, I know him. And secondly, basically it’s in [my local area] and thirdly because when you share with strangers there’s always like an element of safety.”*

*“[My coach] looked at different areas for me that I was happy to move to, but my only option was shared accommodation and I wouldn’t cope well with strangers in my space.”*

By developing the understanding that shared accommodation would be the only viable alternative and also reflecting that this was not something they wanted to pursue, young people knew that they had to continue to maintain where they were in order to avoid homelessness.

One coach discussed the types of housing-related goals that young people often enter the service with, and how it is part of their role to help manage expectations in this regard.

*“It’s just the way that the market is at the moment and there are a lot of people that come into the service who have, on the face of it, pretty unrealistic goals – and they’re not unreasonable goals by any means. A lot of the time it’s just ‘I want to have my own place’ and I think we’ll probably both agree that’s a pretty reasonable goal. But it would be somebody that cannot get back into work over a period of the next six months, but they don’t have a sort of conditions or characteristics that means they have accessibility to PIP or something like that, and then they want their own place because they’ve got maybe social anxiety to the point where the thought of them living in shared accommodation is just completely unfeasible.”*

Some coaches discussed providing young people with more information on the realities of living in shared accommodation and using their own life experiences to show individuals that it could be a positive next step for them.

*“Just genuine conversations with my team where we’ve all laughed with the young people and said ‘this is what we’ve done in a house share, it’s not that bad. Should we go and have a look at one, do you want to come and see one and we’ll go with you?’ I think having our own experience has really helped.”*

The unrealistic expectations of some young people supported by the Pathfinder, combined with a housing market which is challenging for most young people, means that coaches can provide insight which is more realistic in relation to young peoples’ circumstances. Some coaches discussed speaking to young people about the realities of statutory homelessness provision like temporary accommodation and hotels. They found that this provided young people with a more well-rounded view on their options should they not sustain in their current accommodation and often gave the young people motivation to stay where they were, ultimately preventing their homelessness.

*“And I’ve still got contacts [within local authorities] and so I can say ‘would you like to see what TA is actually like?’ and then when you say [what it is like]*



*they're like 'I don't think I do want to go there'...[and so you can say], 'let's work it out with Mum, or let's find Great Auntie Sally or whoever.' I think it's definitely helped."*

For some of those who sustained in their existing accommodation and had their risk of homelessness removed, the main action taken by coaches was supporting young people to engage in meaningful activities which took them out of the home. The benefit, in relation to homelessness prevention, of engaging in meaningful activities will be further explored later in this section (from page 59).

### **Preventing homelessness in the long-term**

When speaking to participants for a second time, 6 months after their initial interview, it was clear that some young people were still experiencing some risk of homelessness. Factors which suggested risk included:

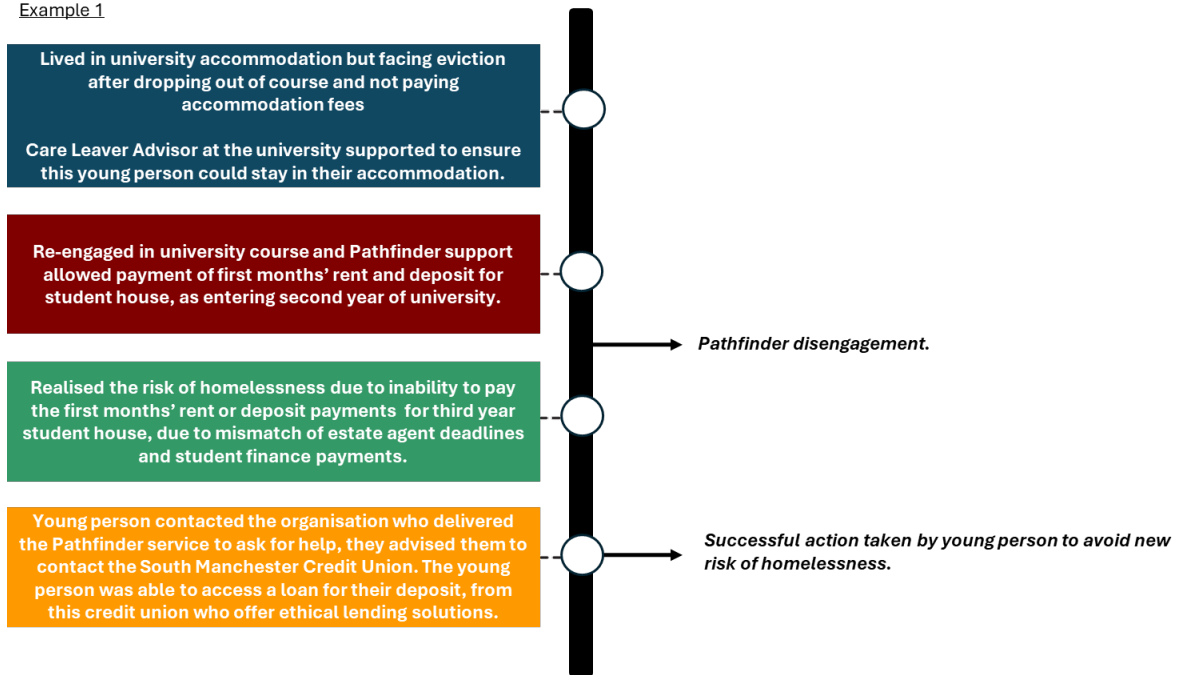
- Mental health struggles leading a participant to contemplate ending their social rented tenancy;
- Poor quality social housing shared by a participant and their family, which they felt was unsuitable;
- Concern from one young person that whilst they were stable at this time, the mismatch of timings between student lettings becoming available and student finance being received may lead to future risk; and
- Continuation of one young person staying on their friend's sofa, who had once been asked to leave at short notice, (the friend had allowed them to continue to stay on a temporary basis).

Clearly, it is not possible for any intervention to guarantee lifelong protection from risk, particularly for individuals who have been at risk previously. When the service works to its full potential, it should equip young people with the skills, knowledge and contacts to be able to avoid homelessness, even when a risk presents in the future following disengagement from the service. Participants reflected that sometimes this was the case, whilst others showed that they were no further equipped to deal with these sorts of challenges.

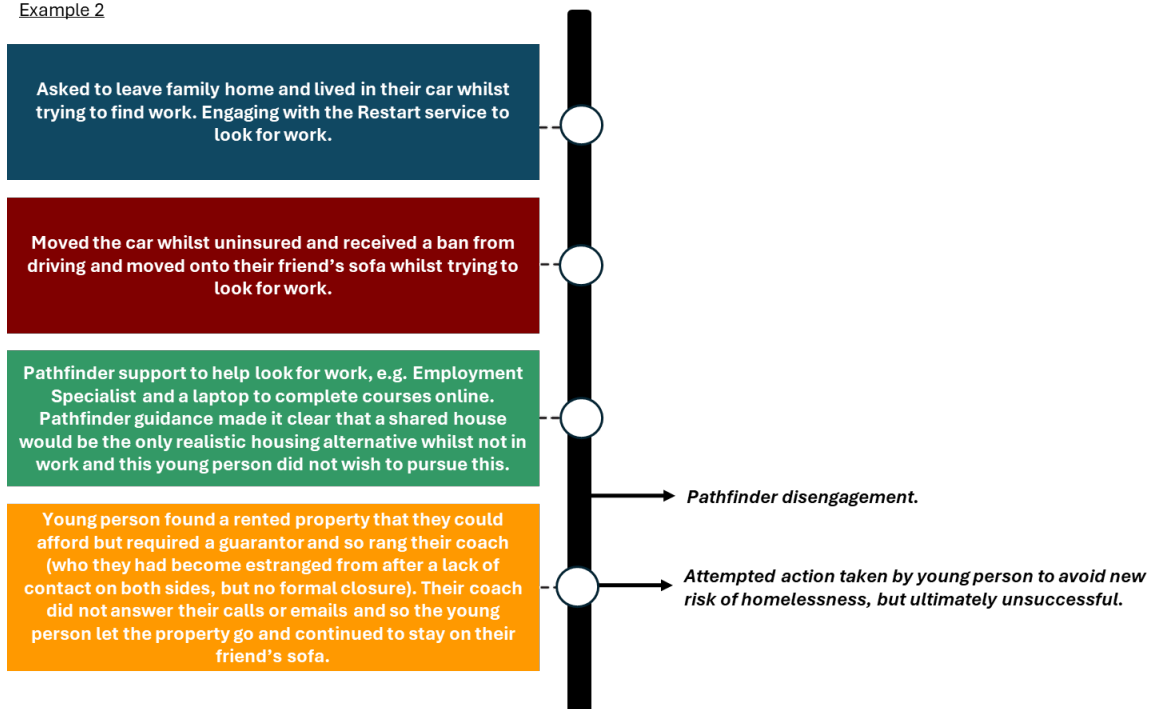
The examples below show the timeline of three individuals' journeys through the programme and following disengagement from the programme. These individuals

were found to be at some level of homelessness risk when interviewed for the second time. In the first case, the young person was able to avoid a new risk of homelessness by using contacts they had from their time being supported by the Pathfinder. In the second case, the young person was unsuccessful when they tried to make use of similar contacts and then was unable to remove their risk of homelessness. Finally, the third case reflects a young person's journey represented earlier in this section, this case shows the importance of other services in the wider system when homelessness risk develops for individuals who have been relatively settled.

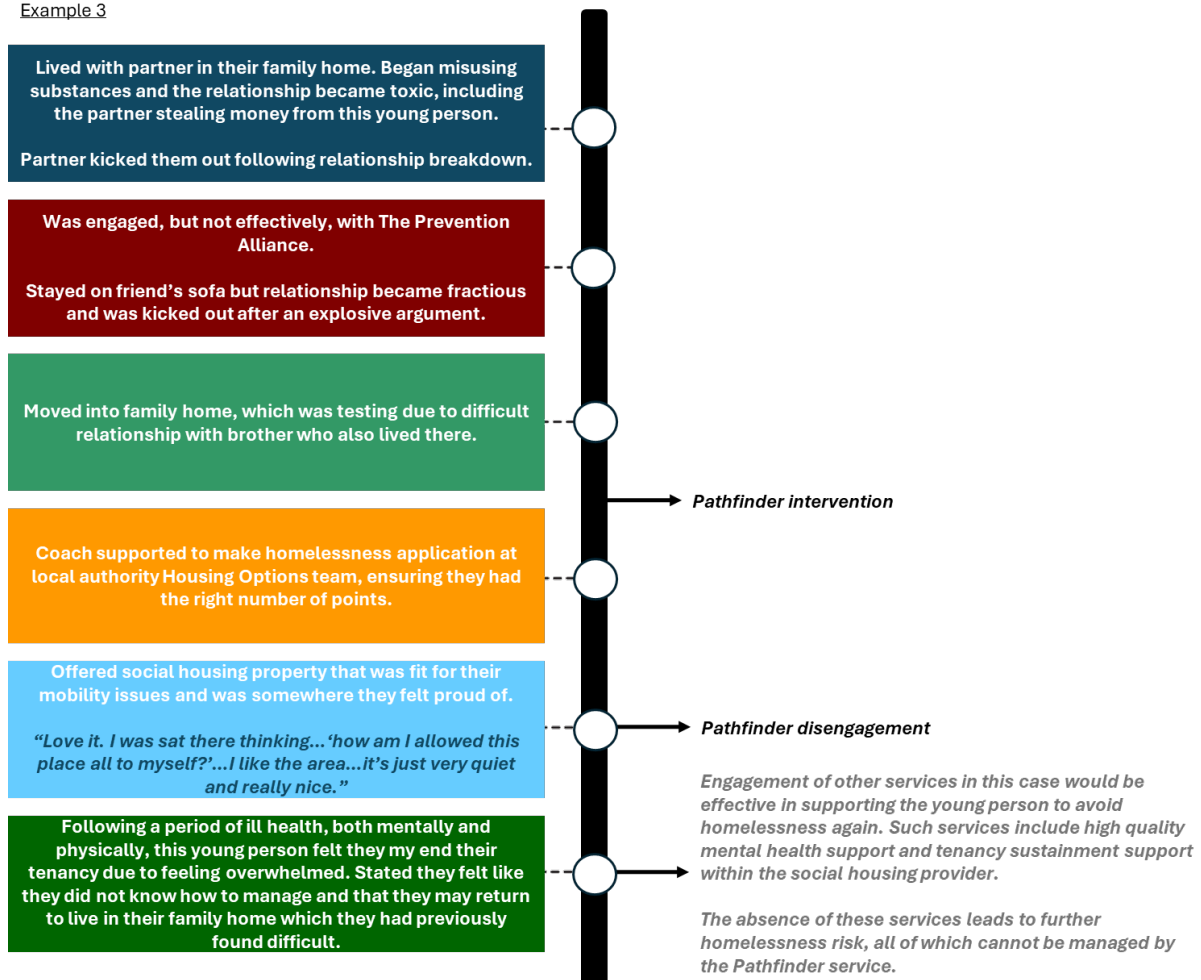
#### Example 1



#### Example 2



### Example 3



It is recognised that homelessness is not always a linear experience and there may be further complexities that lead to increased risk of homelessness, after a period of relative stability. These examples show that in some cases, relatively short-term interventions like the Pathfinder service, are effective in preventing homelessness in the longer-term, for example, service intervention enabled some individuals to gain the knowledge they require to independently avoid new homelessness risk. Overall, these findings uncover that sometimes further work needs to be done to ensure homelessness can be prevented in the long-term. Sometimes this further work is relation to the Pathfinder service itself, to ensure clear disengagement points and stepped down support (as detailed in section 7). In other cases, it is the presence of services in the wider system that could have an effective role to play in long-term homelessness prevention for this cohort.

## Support networks

Improving support networks for the young people at risk of homelessness is a key mission of the Pathfinder programme. This includes re-engaging with those who they no longer have a relationship with, developing new relationships or strengthening existing relationships. Friends, family, partners, other services and Pathfinder coaches were all key individuals referenced whilst discussing support networks in these interviews.

### **Improving support networks with family members and friends**

With regards to family, many young people discussed the fractious nature of these relationships. This was often due to the intensity of living together when personalities or circumstances were not conducive to this setup. Many young people spoke about how finding new accommodation was crucial to improving these relationships – that addressing accommodation-related need would itself promote the sustainment of good support networks. For example, one young person spoke about how they then saw their mum and brother weekly, rather than living under the same roof, *“there are no big arguments, no long stubborn moods...it’s all good...it’s just easy.”*

For those who were still living with their family, some found outlets outside of the house and within themselves that helped improve their familial relationships. For example, one young person returned to their faith which, as they described, gave them *“more mental resilience”* ultimately improving the relationships within their home. Another young person began engaging frequently and consistently with Back on Track, which meant they spent more time out of the house and there was less pressure on the relationship they had with their mum.

Whilst none of the interviewees discussed their coaches providing family mediation, this was something most coaches mentioned as a way to facilitate improved support networks for those they worked with. Coaches referenced that parents often felt reassured following mediation sessions as they understood the work of the Pathfinder and the type of commitment their children had made. Often this ultimately meant they were happy for these young adults to stay in their homes.

***“I mediated with his dad and said ‘look he's working really well with me, he's going to interviews, he's getting his CSCS card. He's turning up. He's trying really hard. And this is what we're doing. We've put this, this and this into place.’ And by having that conversation with his dad, a professional to his dad, his dad then turned around and said, ‘right, you can come back home’ because he knew he was engaging and he knew there was a plan and he knew there was a professional involved.”***

There was less evidence of Pathfinder intervention relating to young people's friends. In part this is because less interviewees were staying with friends, when first engaged on the Pathfinder, in comparison to family members. Coaches discussed creating forums and groups where young people engaged by the programme could come together, coaches shared that they had seen friendships blossom in these spaces. This included a group for parents at a local baby bank, a space for peer support, utilising resources (such as nappies) and having fun, the coach had used the personalisation fund to have a nail technician come and do treatments for the group for example. Another example included a young men's group that met weekly with structured focuses like CV writing and anxiety management. The coach was aware of these young people meeting outside of group time, indicating developed support networks.

### **Pathfinder coach as part of participants' support networks**

It was clear that some participants regarded their Pathfinder coach to be a part of their support network. The approach taken by coaches which leads to this outcome is examined in detail in section 7. Often participants referenced coaches feeling like family or friends, rather than services, and that this was something they greatly appreciated.

***“The way my Aunty used to be, my coach has replaced that, because every time I need help, she's there and sometimes she gives me advice.”***

***“I wouldn't say she was worked as a coach. I said she worked more as a friend and that's what I needed.”***

Another young person pointed out that knowing their coach's job was to support them made them feel more comfortable in accepting their help. Whilst this individual

did consider their coach as part of their support network, they reflected some reluctance in reaching out to other parts of their support network e.g. family or friends, when they had a problem. They shared this was not the same for their coach as they knew it was their job to help and so asking for support did not feel like they were burdening them.

The reality that young people often consider their coach to be part of their support network is also effective in ensuring support and guidance can be well received from coaches. As discussed earlier in this section, managing and setting young peoples' is key in homelessness prevention. Advice from a professional to a young person which is centred around the housing market and what is realistic, is far better received when a relationship is established between the two. For example, young people are more likely to trust that what they are being told is the case and not the result of a professional saving money or not taking them seriously. Ultimately this shows that coaches being part of young peoples' support networks allows for more effective service delivery.

Coaches also recognised that many young people would consider them to be part of their support network. This was something coaches were comfortable with but they were clear about the professional boundaries around this, for example, some coaches referenced ensuring young people don't become dependent on them, or the service more broadly.

***“Obviously we want the young people to trust us, but we don't want them to rely on us and it's getting that balance and obviously that's something to talk about in the coming months.”***

***“We do become part of their support network and I make it really clear that I'm available Monday to Friday 9:00 to 5:00. If you need me, reach out to me, e-mail me, phone me, text me. I'm here and I'll do whatever I can and need to do. But I'll make it really clear, I'm their coach, I'm there to guide them. This is their journey, I'm just there to guide them and do the best for them really.”***

Young people were likely to build greater faith in public services due to their Pathfinder coach becoming a part of their support network. Participants referenced feeling like they 'couldn't believe' what their coach was able to offer. This related to

advice, financial support and advocating on their behalf. Importantly young people referenced how different this was to other services they had experienced in the past or what they had expected from the service.

### **Services providing support for young people**

Both coaches and young people spoke of other services, external to the Pathfinder, which were ingrained into the lives of the young people on the programme. Young people were less likely than coaches, to identify these services as part of support networks, but the value they saw in these was regularly still palpable.

Engagement with the specialist partner organisation 42<sup>nd</sup> Street was vital in the improvement of young peoples' lives whilst they were on the Pathfinder programme. Many young people spoke of the distinction they recognised between counselling they had received through the NHS and that received via 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. For many, NHS counselling had been defined by frequent changes in therapist, short session cycles, and a service which was not person-centred. By contrast, the support provided by 42<sup>nd</sup> Street meant young people often had interventions which were quick following a referral and these interventions frequently led to transformative experiences. In one example, intervention by a Pathfinder coach meant a young person could receive therapy from a professional who spoke the same native language, allowing them to build a stronger bond and work through troubling issues.

***“Because if I'm being honest, I want to kill myself in the beginning because it was a very, very hard situation, because it was a bad situation. So I wanted to kill myself and that's it. But now, I want to live good, I want to live, I feel free, I feel better. I think you don't understand how I feel with, with everything that Pathfinder do, that [my Pathfinder coach] do and [my 42<sup>nd</sup> Street counsellor] as well.”***

Another young person engaged with 42<sup>nd</sup> Street as part of a care leaver group which acted as a positive space to ***“connect with other people, like young people who are care leavers.”*** Within this forum, this individual was contributing towards a training session which would be used with professionals engaging with young people who had been in care. This was clearly a source of pride for this young person.



Whilst the quality of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Street support was clearly paramount to the improvement in mental health and emotional wellbeing for many participants, some also indicated they wanted the support to continue for longer. This was particularly the case for those with the most severe mental health struggles. One young person acknowledged that for some young people the six months of support they received would be long-term but that ***“for someone who’s dealing with mental health for 3 years and...I have some days where I can be OK for like a month and then I go back again to the same situation.”***

As mentioned in the previous section, many young people were already engaged with Restart and Job Centre Plus when they initially engaged on the Pathfinder programme. Some young people specifically discussed the importance of Pathfinder support alongside involvement in these services in order to achieve the utmost success. For example, one young person who did not feel that their Restart advisor was direct with employment opportunities, shared that their Pathfinder coach was the person who supported them most effectively in relation to employment. This individual shared that due to the relationship they had built with their Pathfinder coach, their coach knew them better and offered advice and guidance which was meaningful to them.

Similarly, some participants spoke about the difference in approach from these services and their Pathfinder coach. For example, they mentioned that these organisations worked inflexibly, highlighting the risk of welfare sanctions if they did not attend meetings or meet certain conditions, and that they only provided signposting towards support. All of these elements were distinctly different to the way in which these young people experienced Pathfinder support.

***“Like the work coach for Universal Credit that was just like, ‘yeah, just drop something on the journal and we’ll get back to you.’ And it was never helpful, just like a load of numbers ‘ring all these,’ I’m not doing that...Like pressure to come into the meetings. Like [they’d say] ‘if you don’t, we’re going to stop this.’ Most of the time I’d be dragging the kids with me because they’d set it at a weird time.”***

Whilst engagement with the Pathfinder programme does not reduce contact with Job Centre Plus coaches, or impact how their support is delivered, findings from this

evaluation suggest that Pathfinder coaches offer support and guidance that helps young people better navigate these kind of support services. For example, coaches often reminded young people of their appointments, gave individual advice on their next steps in relation to employment and ensured young people understood the implications of missed appointments or unmet conditions.

Very few young people spoke of organisations or services they had been referred to or signposted towards at the end of their Pathfinder support. When this was the case, it was mainly employment-focused, such as the JETS Scheme and the organisation One Manchester. Some young people spoke about services they had engaged with, independently from Pathfinder, as reflected below.

<b>Counselling following the loss of a child, with a dedicated charity</b>
<b>Employment Advisor from Great Places, whilst resident in property</b>
<b>Retail Trust, through employment</b>
<b>Community Mental Health Team</b>
<b>Social Hub, following advice from mental health nurse at GP surgery</b>
<b>The Growth Company</b>

It is fair to say that some of these instances of engaging with service support would have occurred without the Pathfinder, particularly where healthcare services are already ingrained in the lives of these young people. However, in other instances Pathfinder support and resolving the risk of homelessness meant that young people had greater capacity to engage in this type of support, leading to life improvement in the longer-term.

### **Benefits of improved support networks in preventing homelessness**

Support networks are crucial for anybody living a balanced and consistent life. Their importance is even more pronounced for vulnerable people such as those engaged with the Pathfinder. The benefits of improved support networks in relation to preventing homelessness are sometimes apparent, for example, where improved

familial relationships mean participants can stay in their existing accommodation. In other cases, receiving consistent and high-quality mental health support meant young people felt relieved of worries and burdens, and more capable of managing issues that may come their way – importantly, before they reach a point of crisis.

In some cases, the link between improved support networks and homelessness prevention is less clear. For some young people who did move out of their family home, their improved relationships with these family members provided practical support. For example, borrowing money from siblings to help with deposits for new accommodation was raised as one practical benefit of improved support networks. Other benefits of these improved relationships, for interviewees who were parents, included an appreciation of the childcare support which their family offered. This allowed the young people to spend time doing other things. In some cases this included taking time to relax and destress, and in others it meant young people could spend time pursuing future career opportunities. In both cases, this provided stability for young people.

***“First month’s rent, I had to ask my brother and sister to lend me some, along with my overdraft as well.”***

***“It’s like really nice to have [family] there because I get help with [my daughter], get a lot of help with her and she gets to be around them as well. I get to go out more as well.”***

***“I do take time for myself, because like my mum will pick them up Saturday and take them over night. And I do have my own time and I’ll probably just like play on the game or eat mostly.”***

## **Financial stability**

As one of the core tenets of the service, improving financial stability is a priority for all young people. The different elements of financial stability focused on throughout this evaluation include employment, welfare support and budgeting/debt advice.

Whilst none of the participants interviewed for this evaluation gained employment through Pathfinder intervention, many discussed coach support in employment preparation. This included referrals to an internal employment specialist who

supported with CV writing, finding suitable work and interview skills. Pathfinder coaches also supported with finding roles and offering advice, which interviewees referenced as surpassing the level of that offered by other organisations. Some young people received equipment that supported future employment, such as a camera and laptop. Whilst others gained experience, such as volunteering and completing a cosmetics course, which will be of use in future roles.

***“[The Pathfinder Employment Advisor] helped me with my CV, like sent it out and everything and when I apply for jobs, they get back to me and they're like ‘oh your CV’s good and it’s set out right’ and stuff like that. And it’s just making me think, he’s done a good job really.”***

Coach support was not required for participants in relation to claiming Universal Credit, as eligible participants were already claiming this on entry into the service. On the other hand, support from coaches in relation to Personal Independence Payments (PIP) is of the utmost importance. One coach referenced making links with a specialist organisation to support young people with PIP. Participants often referenced the difficulty and complexity of making PIP applications which their coaches supported with. Furthermore, coaches helped young people in engaging in PIP interviews, or supported an appeal for a denied application.

***“It’s the doctors were the ones who, like, ‘do the PIP, do the PIP.’ I was just like, ‘no.’ When I told [my coach] that, she was like ‘do it, you’re entitled to it. It’s extra money. It’ll be beneficial. Whether you get £100 extra or £50 extra or even more, think you could spend that on [your children] you could improve the flat or whatever’ and I was like, ‘OK. OK, I’m out of work. I might as well give it a whirl.’”***

Participants spoke of coach support in developing a budgeting plan and the majority reported keeping on top of this the second time they were interviewed. Some mentioned specific budgeting help from their coach e.g. helping them find low costs for their water and electric bills. Participants also spoke about struggles with debt and many received support to set up repayment plans.

***“I was in £8k debt and [my coach] was talking me through what options are available to me. She got me in contact with Step Change, which was really***

***helpful...I'm now on a debt management plan and I pay back £92.00 a month, which isn't the end of the world. And it's gonna be repaid in four years"*** and 6 months later they shared that they had ***"maintained debt [repayments], yes. I still pay Step Change once a month, all my debts are rolled into that."***

Whilst there is clearly a dedication to employment support and preparation into jobs, none of the young people interviewed as part of this evaluation were able to access employment throughout their engagement with the Pathfinder programme or in the immediate months that followed. It is recognised that young people who were eligible to take part in this evaluation were potentially less likely to do so if they were in employment, due for example to time constraints and the financial incentive being less appealing. This may act as an in-built bias in which affects these particular evaluation findings.

### **Financial struggles and successes**

Interviewees often touched on pressures external to the Pathfinder programme that inhibited financial stability. For example, some interviewees raised issues with welfare support when interviewed for the second time. In one scenario, they had received a large deduction from their monthly Universal Credit payment due to unknowingly missing a meeting. Another participant raised an issue of their PIP payments being stopped with no explanation. A third participant discussed experiencing issues receiving the housing element of their Universal Credit payment when their partner started at university. Whilst these can be identified as wider systemic issues relating to welfare support, the presence (or not) of a Pathfinder coach was integral to how these issues were experienced by participants. In the latter of the 3 examples, the young person's coach was still engaged and therefore they received advice and guidance on how to resolve the situation. In comparison, in the prior scenarios the young people did not have coach support to navigate these hardships.

***"And [PIP] was taken off me with no real explanation. So I'm currently trying to appeal that and get that sorted because I can't afford to move out until I have that back because my disabilities, I can't really work full time at the moment...I was going to start a degree as well but again because my PIP was taken away, I wasn't eligible for disabled students allowance anymore. So I had to put that***

***on hold. So yeah, job and degree, everything just had to be pushed off until I can get it back basically”***

***“I did have a big issue with Universal Credit though, I missed a meeting in April. I get £550 a month from UC, they took £490 off me. So I was struggling for a little bit.”***

One young person reflected a nervousness about engaging in employment due to the risk that this could affect their benefit payments. Another young person spoke about health difficulties inhibiting their ability to get into work and be more financially secure.

***“Until my health kind of improves, it does kind of leave my financial situation not in the best position.”***

The cost of living was also raised as an external factor affecting financial stability. One interviewee was in part-time work, receiving welfare support, and living in social housing with their parents who also worked. They reflected their concerns for their family’s financial difficulties during their engagement in the Pathfinder. A coach spoke about the difficulties which the increased cost of living caused for young people and their engagement with the service.

***“In the times that we’re delivering this with everything that people face and I think everything with the cost of like electricity and gas and day-to-day basics like young people that we’ve worked with... they’re not able to afford day-to-day basics like food and pay their electric bill...I think that becomes under massive barrier to then that kind of that meaningful, holistic [approach].”***

As well as financial successes that would be expected in terms of being prepared for employment and claiming all income they are entitled to, some young people identified their own financial successes. For example, one person spoke of looking forward to a holiday once their debt was paid off in the near future and another discussed being able to use money earned from their side-job that started as a hobby as ‘pocket money’ i.e. to treat themselves.

## **Benefits of improved financial stability in preventing homelessness**

Financial stability is clearly directly correlated with homelessness avoidance and prevention. The main ways this has been identified throughout this evaluation is the impact Pathfinder has on budgeting, young people's aspirations to one day access their own accommodation and the expectation management of the realities of the housing market.

In relation to budgeting, multiple young people mentioned setting aside the money for their rent and bills each month as good practice they had gotten into. This reflects an improved understanding of how to manage money; an outcome which might go on to reduce the risk of rent arrears, or even ultimately eviction for some people.

Multiple young people referenced their aspirations to one day access their own, self-contained accommodation. One young person, who moved into shared private rented housing (with Pathfinder assistance) mentioned that they ***"would love to get my own place at some point when I'm financially better. Obviously, house sharing is alright but it's not the best"***, indicating that with greater financial stability further accommodation options would follow. Another young person in social housing discussed the future goal of buying a bigger property with their partner. This reflects the long-term effect of the Pathfinder in relation to saving money and setting goals that are relevant to each individual.

As discussed earlier in this section, young people also reflected a developed understanding of the current market conditions, and particularly how this interacts with stable work. For example, young people shared that they were unlikely to be able to afford their own housing whilst they were out of work or working part-time hours. This is the result of clear expectation setting by coaches providing guidance and understanding of the rental market. One young person, who was still living with their mum when engaging in a second interview and was not in work, spoke of how once they were in a more financially viable position, they would consider going back to their coach for help with finding a property. This demonstrated an understanding of the requirements for accessing rental properties, reflecting that young people recognise the importance of maintaining their current living situations due to lack of other options.



## Meaningful activities

Many young people spoke of ‘meaningful activities’ they were engaged with when interviewed at both points in the evaluation process. For some young people, Pathfinder support was integral to their initial engagement and ongoing commitment in these activities, whereas for others this was not the case, often because the young people already had the interest or commitment prior to the Pathfinder.

The main ways that Pathfinder played a part in young people engaging in meaningful activities were covering the cost of the activity, coaches suggesting activities and encouraging young people to take part. Examples where involvement in meaningful activities was clearly important to the individual include: engagement with the organisation Back on Track, volunteering with charities and organisations which the individual found to be relevant and interesting; and driving lessons. In these scenarios, the coaches were clearly working with a person-centred approach to support the young person in activities that suited them.

Not all participants were engaged in meaningful activities. The reasons for this varied on a case by case basis. In some cases, young people reported that activities had not been offered by their coach, or that an offer had been made but had fallen through. Other individuals felt that other priorities were more pressing, i.e. childcare responsibilities, financial concerns, and their risk of homelessness.

There were some meaningful activities which young people were engaged in that did not relate to the Pathfinder programme. For example, one young person returned to their faith after disengaging from the service which provided considerable solace in their life. Another young person often spent time creative writing, and another participant discussed spending their free time litter-picking in their local area. Whilst these activities were not directly encouraged or facilitated by the Pathfinder programme, it is fair to consider that without all other elements of support provided by these individuals’ coaches, it would be more difficult for them to engage in these self-identified meaningful activities.



## **Positives of engaging in meaningful activities**

Young people often discussed the improved confidence and chance to meet people as a benefit of engaging in meaningful activities. For those who had struggled with their mental health or felt isolated throughout the period of instability they had faced at home, the meaningful activities acted as a way to build confidence and independence, which was transformative in some cases. For those who started going to the gym through Pathfinder support, many spoke about the health benefits they experienced, both in relation to their mental and physical health.

***“I love getting outdoors. I love dog walking. I love making wax melts and everything. I’m just more happy than I was when I last spoke to you, I’ve become more independent and basically, I’ve grown up a bit.”***

Sometimes, there were future employment opportunities that came as a result of the engagement with these activities. For example, the young person who engaged with Back on Track was taking part in a photography course and when they had their second interview, they were volunteering at a football club as a ‘Team Photographer and Videographer’, hoping to one day have a career in the field. Another young person attended a cosmetics course through Pathfinder support and when they engaged in a second interview they discussed hoping to get into this sort of work and had been making related enquiries.

When interviewing young people for a second time it became clear that many individuals had not continued with the meaningful activities they were once engaged with, this was due to a range of factors. Some of these factors were practical, like the financial support from Pathfinder ending, or the activity being further away from home than they wanted to travel. In other circumstances, discontinuation was due to personal factors, such as the loss of motivation, falling out of a routine, or otherwise no longer wishing to engage. Whilst many individuals had stopped engaging in activities once Pathfinder support ended, young people agreed that activities had been a worthwhile and fruitful use of their time. It is understandable that individuals may have periods of disengagement. But having these opportunities, encouraged by a service like Pathfinder, gave young people the experience to see the benefits for themselves and will have potentially instilled an understanding of the importance of engaging in meaningful activities in the future.

## **Benefits of engaging in meaningful activities in preventing homelessness**

In relation to preventing homelessness, meaningful activities have three main benefits. One centres around getting young people out of the house and therefore diffusing pressure within the home. Another benefit is maintaining young peoples' participation with the programme, particularly at points when we may expect to see disengagement. Finally, meaningful activities centred around volunteering provide multiple homelessness prevention related benefits.

### **Opportunities to get out of the house.**

In some cases, young people were getting out of the house to engage in an activity which was good experience for their long-term career goals.

***“They gave me some sessions at Pirate Studios and sorted my transport so I could move around. Either way, it’s getting me out of that environment so I’m not cooped in.”***

In other cases, young people were getting out of the house and experiencing cooking classes, yoga and the gym (with the support and encouragement from their coach).

***“[One person I worked with] was living with their mum, but they didn’t want to be there. What I’ve worked on with them has kind of been about easing the relationship with mum. So even though I haven’t actually spoken to mum, it’s been getting the young person a gym membership, so they’re out of the house more, so than there’s less chances for them and their mum to clash. And then that kind of makes living there a bit easier.”***

***“[Meaningful activities act as a] change of scenery. You’re with those people you’re living with less, so it’s less arguments, they can see you being productive.”***

### Securing young peoples' continued participation on the programme.

A coach shared how there can sometimes be a lull in support, particularly as the process of trying to resolve issues at home or finding new housing becomes stagnant. Keeping young people engaged on the programme by offering activity engagement is a good way to further prevent homelessness.

*“You can sort of lose the engagement of the young person. You can sort of like sort of say like you know like ‘any updates?’ ‘no.’ And that's not productive for anybody. So [you can say] “well no, there's no update on this but let's explore this and that.”*

### Multiple benefits that can come from volunteering.

One coach discussed how young people sometimes view volunteering as ‘working for free’ but that with coach guidance of the benefits, became more open to engaging.

“Stepping stone back into employment.”

*“A lot of the local housing authorities give extra housing points if you regularly volunteer...those 10 points can make a big difference.”*

## 7. How does Pathfinder achieve these outcomes?

### Section summary

- The organisational and administrative leadership of the GMBOP team was well regarded by those who worked on the Pathfinder service. This related to the organised Peer Support Sessions, the appropriateness of documentation and the flexible approach by the leadership team which was found to be supportive and responsive.
- Overall the outcomes-based nature of the programme was viewed positively, as it provided focus and structure for work being undertaken. This was also reflected by the young people who appreciated the productive approach taken by coaches.
- The service was less effective when it strayed from having a person centred approach. This was because work done with young people was less relevant to them and therefore outcomes achieved were unlikely to be sustained. For example, progress was most likely made when the self-determined goals, prioritised by the coach and young person, were truly of importance to the young person.
- Inconsistency in the offer by coaches, for example a lack of engagement from coaches, multiple changes in assigned coaches and offers made by coaches falling through, led to a less effective experience of the service for the young person affected.

## Section summary – continued

- When coaches provided an effective experience, there was a clear difference between this offer and coach roles in other services. The main differences relate to the amount of time coaches could spend with young people and the ability this gave to establish and grow a relationship, as well as the holistic nature of the service where young people felt they were receiving support in all areas of their lives. One impact of this is the developed faith young people have in public services from having this experience. Having positive relationships between young people and their coaches allows for the service to be delivered effectively, for example, young people are more likely to take

advice and guidance from a professional who they know and who they believe wants the best for them.

- There was an inconsistent approach to the ending of support. Some young people were clearly informed when support would be ended and were advised on what action to take if they struggled in the future. In other cases, support dwindled away and young people were left unsure as to whether they were still engaged or what to do if they require support. In these latter cases, this risked undoing positive progress made in relation to building faith in public services.

Whilst sections 5 and 6 have focused on the needs and requirements of participants and the outcomes achieved for these individuals, this section examines the ways in which these outcomes are met. This relates to how the programme is designed and the way in which the service is delivered. The coaches, as the face of the service, are integral to the way in which the service is delivered and therefore focus on the approach taken by coaches is examined in this section.

## Programme design

### GMBOP approach

The coaches often referenced the immense value in the role of GMBOP have in leading this programme. Below are some examples of the high praise coaches provided to the GMBOP team.

*“The support we get from the guys [at GMBOP] is superb”*

*“Early on we raised some issues...and they responded to say ‘okay, we’ve heard what you’ve said, we’ll take it on board’ and they changed it. I feel like they listen to coaches and I think the majority of us feel valued.”*

*“I cannot fault the support that the [GMBOP team] give. Super responsive to emails, any question you’ve got. They’re really great support.”*

*“I think the project has worked so well because of the collaboration with GMBOP as well. They’re so invested in the project, they’ve definitely steered us in the right direction.”*

Key elements of their support included the facilitation of running Peer Support Sessions (a chance for coaches and managers to come together and share learning about working within the service) and the flexible approach they take in helping support all young people, however complex their lives may be.

Some coaches referenced that further training would be of great value, in order to ensure continuous innovation and learning. Previous training from organisations such as Shelter and 42<sup>nd</sup> Street were well-regarded. One coach was conscious it *“could be easy”* to get into the mindset that some wider systemic challenges, such as the lack of social housing or the unaffordability of the private rented market, were too hard to combat. They suggested that this mindset could lead to missed opportunities to ensure everything is being done for young people. A coach also spoke about using the lessons from the Pathfinder to lobby for social change.

*“Our role is [to] help people navigate these systems and people are still really, really struggling. Like they have professional support alongside them and they*

*are still struggling. If there's a way of going on record or making certain organisations aware of what is going on and how difficult it is for people. There's definitely room for making some sort of statement, lobbying for social change and using our platform for that."*

## **Service administration**

Interviews with Pathfinder coaches often included some discussion of the administrative elements of their roles, particularly the forms they complete with and for young people, namely the Youth Homelessness Outcomes Tracker (known as the YHOT), the Danger Zone and the Changes Plan:

- Youth Homelessness Outcomes Tracker: 30 questions covering the life and circumstances of each young person. The purpose is to help coaches understand how the individual is feeling, in relation to themselves and their situation. Completed initially when starting on the programme and guidance suggests this should be recompleted every 3 months, or earlier if there are significant changes. This can then be used to assess change and progress<sup>8</sup>.
- Danger Zone: Aims to identify risk in the lives of young people that coaches should be aware of. Questions focus on health, disabilities, substance misuse, offending, working and learning, care history and domestic abuse<sup>9</sup>.
- Changes Plan: Used to facilitate conversation about an individual's situation and goals. Priority outcomes are recorded in this document. This can be used to keep track of a young person's journey. There is space for information to be recorded about the young person themselves, their learning and development, their financial situation, their accommodation, their relationships and anything else that is relevant to the individual.

A coach who had worked on the programme since its initial pilot year spoke of the way forms have developed over time and improved throughout their experience. For example, they discussed how some forms had been condensed which made the

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<sup>8</sup> Since the data collection period for this evaluation, the 'YHOT' has been condensed.

<sup>9</sup> Since the data collection period for this evaluation, the 'Danger Zone' documentation has been replaced with an alternative approach, which focuses on information and safety.

process of filling them out smoother, the language used within them had been changed which had been useful in driving engagement and the key tenets of the programme (support networks, financial stability and meaningful experiences) were ingrained within the documents which allowed for more focused working on these areas.

Whilst the forms are clearly focused on the programme priorities, one coach discussed how when using the YHOT, ***“not everything has to be claimable...and that is something that I think does work really well and it means that we don’t have to work on things that are specifically mentioned in an outcomes booklet and therefore projecting support needs onto young people, which is obviously not what we want to do.”***

Coaches discussed the difficulty of filling out these forms with young people. Some coaches discussed how completing a YHOT or Danger Zone with an individual could act as a barrier to establishing a relationship. Some coaches discussed working around this, by filling these forms out in a relaxed and gradual fashion. For example, some coaches used a ***“conversation-based approach”*** where they had questions in mind but did not explicitly ask them. As they gathered information through more natural conversation, they would fill out the forms based on the matters discussed. Using this conversation-based approach means that the rapport is not negatively affected by what could be off-putting questions. This coach also shared that the GMBOP team were happy with this approach to completing the forms, which they found reassuring and positive. Another coach discussed using different methods for filling out these forms, depending on which individual they were working with.

***“Some of my young people will print out a copy and they’ll fill it in themselves and bring it back next time and they’ll scribble notes on and that’s great. I’ve got some people who like to do it with a fluid conversation, like we’re having now. I’ve got some people who will do it question by question. I think it just depends on the individual.”***

One young person reflected the benefit of the coaches taking this relaxed approach with forms and administration.



*“Obviously she was making notes but it didn’t feel like a form, it felt like notes. And if there ever was a time when she was helping me fill out a form, like when I was going to send stuff off like sort my house out and that, I felt like we were filling out a form together, it wasn’t like she was interviewing me and ticking the right boxes.”*

## **Personalisation fund**

The personalisation fund is used to support coaches in meeting the needs of young people when there is a financial cost of doing so. Whilst young people were understandably not directly aware of the personalisation fund, its use made a clear impact on many. The diagram below examines the purpose, process and impact of the fund. This shows how this mechanism can support relationships between young people and coaches to be established and grow.

### **What is the personalisation fund?**

This can be used for practical requirements (e.g. buying beds, white goods or bus passes), or to fund meaningful activities (e.g. driving lessons, days out). Coaches can respond directly to the needs of the individual, removing barriers of coaches having to turn down requests of things that are important to the individual.

*“When I first started working here, [and I heard about] this personalisation fund I was like ‘what? If people need a washing machine you can get them or washing machine?’ and that’s crazy and that is to me the biggest thing because it’s fantastic for basic things such as a washing machine or a cooker.”*

### What is the process for the personalisation fund?

Coaches often referenced the ease with which the fund could be accessed and the importance of this. Purchases over a certain threshold require a form to be completed by coaches which details the reason for purchase and ensures the fund is being used in a focused way to support young people's needs.

*"We just have a form that we can fill out and send to Bridges and it gives a bit of an opportunity to just write a little bit of narrative and talk about how it transposes into outcomes and stuff like that, just to kind of keep it structured and meaning that it is the right things that are utilised...but that process is really, really quick. We normally get an e-mail back on the same day and you don't have to write a massive amount."*

### What are the impacts of the personalisation fund?

As well as the appreciation for support in engagement with meaningful activities, as discussed elsewhere in this report, some young people discussed their coaches helping financially when they were struggling. This type of support is crucial to building relationships and trust, as coaches can use the personalisation fund to provide immediate support to young people with issues they are going through.

*"When I told her that I need help with my phone, my credit and everything, she's gone out of her way to help me with that."*

### Outcomes-based programme

Some coaches discussed the importance of the Pathfinder being an outcomes-based programme. It is apparent that one of the main benefits to coaches, is keeping them focused and centred around the key tenets of the service.

*"Just constantly having to work with those things and obviously them being like claimable outcomes, just kind of keeps that focus on those topics."*

*"It gives the work you're doing direction and evidence that you're actually doing something. It gives the young person something to work towards, you*

***know if you set a goal of ‘okay we’re going to try and get you a job’ it gives direction to your work and obviously that sense of achievement when you do it.”***

Whilst coaches mentioned the outcomes being a reminder of the key areas of focus, they also referenced not feeling limited or constrained in their work by this.

***“I think that the outcomes, especially from where they were to now, have been made so broad that it doesn’t feel very constricting like at all anymore.”***

As well as coaches feeling the benefit of specific focuses in the project, young people also referenced this being useful. Some interviewees spoke of how sessions with their Pathfinder coaches felt productive, and that they were able to get more out of them than just sharing their feelings, which they appreciated.

***“It’s like a therapy session but you’re gaining from it, you’re not just talking about it, then going away, feeling a bit sad because you’ve spoke about it and you left with that sad emotion...it’s a meeting you look forward to, not like ‘oh I’ve got the doctors’ it’s like ‘oh yeah, I’ve got my Pathfinder meeting,’ because you just know you’re gonna get some information, you’re gonna get told you can do this. I like it, like ‘go on here and ring them’ and it’s exciting.”***

***“They were easy to talk to as well. It was very much like if I emailed them, they’d email me back me like, ‘this is what we’re doing.’ They were very clear and distinct...I’m very much the person that needs a checklist, I need very specific instructions and [I can] be like ‘right, this is what we’re going to do’ and they’re very, very helpful with that, which I really liked.”***

One issue coaches identified about working on an outcomes-based project was the occasional unsuitability of outcomes in relation to the work done with young people. In some cases, this was due to the outcomes checklist not being reflective of the time taken to achieve some outcomes. In another case, a coach referenced that sometimes work done with a young person cannot be claimed as an outcome and the reality that this is the focus of the coaches’ roles.

***“We can claim essentially the same outcome for doing a budgeting plan together in a 90 minute session and [gaining access to PIP]...[both] can be***

*really useful but it's just the fact that we claim the same thing for [a budgeting plan] as we do for 6 months' worth of PIP work."*

*"Sometimes you can have a really good session with someone, they'll really open up and they're really grateful for the support, but there isn't an outcome for that."*

A risk of outcomes-based projects is potential perverse incentives they could create for those working on the programme. Whilst it would be too strong to suggest that such perverse incentives were identified in this evaluation, there were cases where outcomes were achieved that did not seem relevant to the individual young person. In one case, a coach had arranged for a young person to volunteer within the delivery provider organisation. This individual did not seem interested in this opportunity and would have rather engaged in a meaningful activity which was more reflective of their qualifications. In another scenario, a young person reflected that their coach shared documents which reflected recorded improvements in their wellbeing scores and the outcomes they had achieved, but which didn't reflect the participant's own experience: *"she used to send me these plans she wrote and I would sign them off and think 'we've not talked about that?'"*

Whilst the service operates as an outcomes based project; this was never an element of the programme discussed during interviews with young people. It appears that young people had little awareness of this part of the programme.

## **Coach support**

### **A 'coaching' approach**

Coaches are integral to the Pathfinder service and act as each young person's way into the service. The graphic below highlights some of the key elements of being a coach on the Pathfinder, as defined by young people who receive their support.

## Relaxed approach to 'checking in'

*"[My coach] checked up on me, the mental health team don't really, they've not rung me for months and months, it was mainly [my coach] who checked up on me...I'm just grateful that I was able to get in contact with him and to be able to speak to him and get the support from him, because I've never had someone like him support me before, because I never felt like I needed it."*

*"[My coach says] 'just text me whenever you need me, if you want to meet I'll fit you in.' So I was like 'oh, thank you.' Because it's like a bit of a pain with [childcare]. So she says 'well I'll just give you a call or a text and we'll talk things through then.'"*

## Dedicated

*"I love [my coach]...the fact he stuck with me, you know we were trying to work towards something."*

*"[My coach and I] were at the [Housing Options office] for 3 hours maybe...she spoke with the manager, she spoke for me, because at the time I was not speaking very well, or very fast, or I didn't understand everything."*

## Motivating

*"[My second coach] she's been the same, dead easy to get on with, motivating and she's just got a can-do attitude and it rubs off on you, so when she was like 'just get the ball rolling, just ring them' I was like 'okay, I'll do it' and then I did and it worked out."*

*"I saw going to those meetings as checkpoints, like 'how am I doing? How am I doing now?' And that acts as a remedy."*

The difference such an approach makes on the lives of young people is clear throughout this report. Some of the main advantages of this type of approach includes young people feeling that their coach is part of their support network, young people building stronger faith in public services and young people having someone to rely upon to make progress within their lives.

## **Ineffective coaching experiences**

Some young people had less effective experiences of having a Pathfinder coach. These ineffective experiences often centred around a lack of engagement from their coach, lack of clarity on who their coach was and a lack of certainty when support was being stepped down.

Some participants shared that they had periods of struggling to get in contact with their coach or where they would attend meetings and their coach would not show up. For young people, this led to feeling let down, losing faith in the service and frustration. In one case, a young person shared that they felt some responsibilities were being dealt with by their Pathfinder coach and when this did not materialise, feeling stressed by having to take this on.

Having a lack of engagement also meant that participants had a lack of certainty about what the service could provide or what their coach could help them with. This made some participants feel that they were asking for too much in their requests.

***“I don’t like having to ask other people to find out, ‘okay, I’m expecting too much’...it wasn’t the best feeling. So I kind of just [thought] ‘whatever happens next, I’m probably going to just sort it out myself’ because I’d rather that than just having that stress of ‘can I ask this?’”***

Participants who experienced a change in coach, whilst receiving Pathfinder support, were the most likely to report not knowing who their coach was. Participants also reflected that there was greater difficulty in building relationships with coaches who were not their first. This was more pronounced when young people felt they had achieved what was required and therefore there was less incentive to build a relationship, as referenced in section 5 of this report. The issue with this is that some participants had further issues, following disengagement, that they required coach support with, but did not have a relationship with their subsequent coach in order to access this support. These issues were rarely severe enough to warrant full service re-engagement but if a relationship had been sustained with the original coach, or a relationship had been developed with the new coach, support would have been effective for these individuals.

***“I feel like if I did have a coach now, I would have been able to speak to them about my aunty’s [homelessness risk] situation and how that’s making me feel and if there’s anything that could be done to help her... you know, advice that I could take to help them with the council and stuff.”***

Some participants had an ineffective end to their engagement with the programme. This was mainly the result of a lack of clarity of when support was ending and, in some cases, participants were unsure as to whether they were still engaged with the programme or not. This often led to confusion for young people, as well as disappointment and feeling let down.

***“I’ve literally not heard anything from any of [my Pathfinder coaches].”***

***“I was living somewhere and then I think I got a new worker. But then it was kind of a similar thing and it just got to a point where I was like ‘well I have a house now and I guess that’s probably why I don’t have that much communication with [the Pathfinder].’ For me I wasn’t expecting [them] to be communicating too much, but it got to a point where I was like, ‘okay, it does feel like I’m just doing this like completely by myself.’”***

### **Practical considerations of coach support**

Some of the practical considerations of having a coach were discussed with young people and coaches throughout the interviews, this mainly focused on the places and ways for coaches and young people met.

With regards to how and where coaches and young people met, many interviews involved conversations around the prospect of meeting in person, rather than over the phone. One coach discussed the benefit of this approach, ***“I’ve started to meet maybe 3 or 4 [young people] face-to-face for the first time over the past couple of weeks and they’ve always been keen to do it again and I think it gets over a lot of barriers...I think [it helps] just making that connection as well and seeing who is actually sat opposite you, rather than just some voice on the phone.”***

Some coaches spoke about being based in offices with working hours that they would share with young people, offering a drop-in approach, whereby young people did not need to book appointments but would know their coach, or a colleague,

would be available when they arrived. One coach spoke about how this developed awareness for a young person of other people in the team, to whom they could then turn if their coach was not available. Another coach discussed that being based in offices could sometimes inhibit young people engaging, as they struggled to afford transport to them. Other coaches discussed the value of meeting in the community, for example, meeting in a coffee shop. One coach found that this reduced the power imbalance of a professional going into an individual's home where they require help. This coach acknowledged that this does mean some sensitive conversations cannot be conducted, due to the setting, but that the flexible nature of the service means this is not an issue.

Overall, each coach shared an individual practical approach they take to their role. It should be highlighted that in order to ensure young people are receiving support that works for them, practical considerations should be flexible and discussed with each individual. In one case a participant shared that they would have liked to meet in person but due to feeling shy they did not share this with their coach and ultimately this did not occur. In another scenario, a participant shared that the drop-in approach did not work for them and they were less inclined to go and see their coach if they did not have a set appointment time and meeting place.

***“I know she said she was in here every Tuesday or something, but it's not like an invite [when you just say] ‘pop down and see me’...if she said, ‘could you come along and see me 3pm Tuesday,’ ‘yeah I’ll see you then.’”***

### **Comparison with coach support in other services**

Something that was clear from all evaluation interviews was the distinct difference between Pathfinder coaches and similar roles in other services. As one coach described, ***“a young person could be 18-19 and they’ve been with 4 or 5 different services and that’s a big barrier, that’s one that takes a while to break down and to gain trust.”*** Providing a service and creating a relationship that is distinctly different from these previous services is crucial to the success of the Pathfinder. The main ways this is done, include the lack of time limit on the support offer and the holistic approach rather than focus on one issue.



The flexibility of time is a key component of the support offered through the Pathfinder service. This includes no time limit on individual instances of support, no allotted number of contacts between a coach and a young person, and no time limit on the length of engagement with the programme. The comparison between this and the approach in statutory services was outlined by one coach as per below.

***“We can go out and meet them in the community and we can spend 2 hours with them and not be on a schedule, whereas [other services have] got 12 minutes or 15 minutes with somebody and then it's the next person.”***

Coaches shared that the autonomy they had within their roles meant they could use this freedom of time flexibly, in order to make progress with the young people they worked with.

Another coach spoke about recognising that sometimes the people they support want to chat or vent about an issue rather than make significant progress in an area and that the coach had the ability to facilitate this, ultimately making them more comfortable.

***“[Sometimes] you're approaching somebody with more of a ‘right, let's problem solve, let's do this and that’ [and sometimes] you're approaching somebody with ‘I know you've had a bit of a tough week, do you just want to go and get a coffee on us, and then we'll just have a chat for a bit.’”***

Coaches distinctly referenced having manageable caseloads and some spoke about this being a difference with other services they have worked on in the past. This is crucial in order to be able to facilitate the amount of time and dedication each coach provides to the young people they work with. The flexibility of the service was also highlighted in this regard by coaches, for example referencing that each individual in their caseload would not need intensive support each week and that there are no box-ticking exercises from management to speak to every individual every week.

Whilst the primary focus of the Pathfinder should always be homelessness prevention, the holistic approach it takes is highly significant to both coaches and participants. Coaches described the time, autonomy and funding they have to dedicate part of their work to improving elements of young peoples' lives that are not

directly homelessness related. The ability to show a young person that their interests and hobbies are valued was of great importance to some coaches.

*“I think a lot of these people that we work with do have a lot to say on their meaningful experiences, for example. It's just not something that they've been asked about for a very long time or something they've thought about...[for one young person], all of that stuff got pushed in the back alongside housing concerns. But she was able to think, ‘Hang on yeah I had this list of things on my phone that I was chatting to my mum about that I wanted to do over the next five years and stuff. And I don't really know why I haven't thought about that for ages.’ And we started to sort of slowly pick away at that and see what could be feasible. So, yeah, I think just the emphasis on the three major things outside of specifically housing [is important] and obviously they're all kind of related anyway.”*

The time spent on these other elements was also clearly important to the young people interviewed. Young people referenced feeling like their Pathfinder coach helped them with ‘everything’, often referring to personal support, financial assistance, as well as sharing information and knowledge. Some young people referenced that their support coaches in other services, such as the Job Centre and Restart, were focused on one area whereas their Pathfinder coach covers a range of elements they needed support with.

One way in which the Pathfinder provides a holistic offer is by collaborating with other services. Some coaches discussed the importance engaging with these other services, in relation to referrals and signposting.

*“I place an emphasis on how generalist we can be and if they have any concern, the worst case scenario is us saying ‘this isn't something that we have special knowledge on but I'm gonna help you find somebody that can help you with that and we can get you signposted.’ It just means that nothing is really missed in that sense.”*

In a more innovative example, one provider worked within the same office as DWP and therefore used this opportunity to partially integrate their services. For example, being available after DWP Youth Hub sessions meaning young people had a wider

awareness of the Pathfinder if the service was relevant to them. Offers could then be made to have joint meetings between the two services, which was convenient for the young people and also effective for the services, to ensure all support needs are being met. Colleges were also cited as key organisations that some coaches worked with. These developed relationships with colleges meant that appropriate referrals are more likely to be received, but also that there is a link between the Pathfinder coach and college staff should co-working be required for any students engaged on the service.

As mentioned elsewhere in this report, an effective experience of the Pathfinder service allowed young people to build greater faith in public services. This greater faith can initially be established when young people are offered support which would help them prevent homelessness, rather than having to wait until they are at crisis point to receive support. This is further built upon by the dedicated time coaches are able to spend with them, which is often unexpected due to their own experiences of other services or what they understand of how services conventionally run. Finally, this faith in public services is further compounded by coaches working in a holistic manner, which instils the feeling that the support they require is not burdensome or 'asking too much.'

### **Ending of coach support**

All participants discussed the disengagement from their coach, sharing the feelings they had when this occurred; the way in which it happened; and whether they felt they could get back in contact with their coach should they need to.

The information below relates to the difference in opinions between those who wanted support to continue and those who were happy with it coming to an end.

### **Satisfied with support coming to an end**

Some young people saw that their disengagement from the Pathfinder service happened at the right time.

For many of those who found housing through Pathfinder support, they felt their coach had given them everything they needed.

One young person shared that they felt the support had naturally come to an end and the final conversation they had with their coach officiated this.

### **Mixed feelings about support coming to an end**

Some young people shared that they understood why they were disengaging from Pathfinder at the time they were and that most support they required had been provided, but they still would have appreciated ongoing support.

Some of these individuals shared that whilst they recognised it may have been the right time, they were sad to see their coach go.

One young person shared that they wished they had told their coach they wanted support to continue but they felt too shy to be able to do so.

### **Dissatisfied about support coming to an end**

Some young people felt support ended at the wrong time for them and they needed ongoing engagement with their Pathfinder coach.

In one scenario, an interviewee shared that they thought they would be able to access other support of a similar nature, but they had not been able to do so.

Others shared specific issues they would have appreciated ongoing support with. For example, one young person had family move into their social housing property after they were made homeless and referenced that if they were still engaging with

their coach, they could have received advice on this. Another young person was struggling with their mental health, which led to considerations of ending their social housing tenancy, something they felt their coach could have provided advice on.

It is valuable to understand participants' perspectives as to whether they were satisfied or not with the Pathfinder support coming to an end, as this provides insight into the human experience of the service. Whilst some young people felt dissatisfaction, it would not have been appropriate for support to continue for all of these individuals. In some cases, everything the Pathfinder could support with had been done and to continue to engage with these individuals would have encouraged unnecessary dependency on the service. In one of these cases a participant shared that they would have liked engagement with their coach to continue as they were one of the only people that rang them to check in and they appreciated talking with them. Whilst this shows a positive experience of the service, to continue support on this basis would not be realistic or effective in the long-term. One coach discussed how there has to come a point when ending of support is raised with young people and acted upon.

***“So I had to close somebody yesterday who I've been working with for nearly 12 months now and we've achieved all of his outcomes [driving lessons, employment preparation qualification]. He's done really well...The only thing he needs is his own accommodation, private rented is going to be his only option and his gateway into that is income. He needs a job...So we've built up a good relationship and we've done a lot of work together and I had to ring him yesterday and I said 'I'm really sorry, but there's nothing else I can do for you. You've kind of met all of your own objectives...You just now need to find a job', which I've pretty much set him up with. And then find his own accommodation...He knows what he needs to do. But I always say to my young people, keep my number and I'll keep your number in my phone.”***

In other cases, some of those who were dissatisfied with support coming to an end could have been further helped by support continuing. These cases are examined in section 6 and sometimes relate to further Pathfinder support being suitable and in other cases relate to the absence of other service provision in the round which could indirectly support with homelessness prevention.

When discussing the actual point of disengagement, young people tended to have one of two polarised experiences. Some young people had effective conversations where it was clear to the young person why support was no longer continuing and what they should do if they required further help. Other young people did not feel they were properly notified of this change and felt that support dwindled away without clear explanation.

Those who had an effective experience of disengagement often shared that their coach had told them to get back in touch should they need support.

*“He said that contact was going to stop, but if you really need us then keep this number, not [my coach’s] in particular, they gave me Pathfinder’s number, I’ve got that.”*

*“They did ask my opinion and they asked if I needed support before and it was because I didn’t need that support at the time. But they made it clear that I could reach out to them if I needed to. So yeah, that was really helpful to know that they are there if I ever do need them again.”*

Many young people supported on the Pathfinder had received support from other services in the past. Having this valuable experience at the end of support was another example of how the Pathfinder works distinctly to that of other support.

In scenarios where individuals reported feeling that support had faded away without a real explanation about why, the young people did not have the same experience shown above, where they were encouraged to get in touch for further support should they need it.

*“I think [my coach] was going for annual leave as well, right after our first interview...last week I tried to get in touch with them and it was not successful, so I thought she may no longer work with them or that they don’t provide the same support, so I just left it.”*

*“I’ve literally not heard anything from any of [my coaches] and with the [Pathfinder run] playgroup I used to go to, they closed that down.”*

Young people were more likely to have an unclear end to engagement when there was a change in coach or their coach was off for a period of time. Young people clearly defined this type of end to the programme as disappointing and confusing.

***“For me it's not something new, I'm kind of used to disappointment. [My coach stepping away] wasn't something special, to be fair.”***

As seen above, many young people were advised to get back in contact by their coach, if they felt they required further support. During the interviews, some young people shared that they did feel able to do this, whilst others shared that this was not the case for them.

Some young people were reassured by their coach's offer and therefore shared that they would be more than happy to make contact should they need it. One young person did so when they found themselves facing financial difficulties relating to debt, and spoke of how easy the process was, ***“I think I just emailed and then they said, ‘oh, yeah, we'll put you through.’ And then it was just done then.”*** This individual then went on to receive further support from their coach, including social housing advice as they were looking to move area. Another young person was still engaged with their coach when they had their second interview and their coach spoke of offering ad hoc support where it was required, for example by working to resolve an issue related to welfare entitlement and engaging with the young person's landlord when needed. Other young people spoke about re-engaging with Pathfinder where necessary but without such intensive involvement.

Other young people, however, felt that they were unable to reach out for support from the Pathfinder service. In some cases, this was due to young people referencing not knowing where to turn to for this support. In one scenario, an interviewee shared that they felt so much had changed since they were engaged with their coach that they wouldn't be able to continue the relationship they had before. One interviewee shared that they had tried to get in contact with their coach when they needed help with a deposit but had been unsuccessful.

***“I tried to call Pathfinder, my coach. I couldn't get through, I left a few messages, but she never got back to me, so I wonder if she still works with***

***Pathfinder or not. Yeah, so that's pretty much it. And right now I'm still with my friend."***

Some young people also shared that whilst they recognised they needed support with some issues, including mental health and quality of a social housing property, they had not reached out for support. In one case this was due to using another support service which they had access to through their employer. In another case, a young person recognised that they required further mental health support, similar to that which they received through 42<sup>nd</sup> Street, but had their own personal concerns in reaching back out.

***"I don't know how to express how I feel because I got all the help I needed with Pathfinder and [I wouldn't want to] go back and say I really need help with therapist...the one I had with Pathfinder it is every week and if I needed help with anything, she was always there. And I don't want to let her down because I promise her like, 'I'm going to get better' and I was getting better until that happened. And yeah, I feel a bit bad, but I need to try and get better again."***

As well as further risk of homelessness and deterioration in other areas of individuals' lives, ending of support in the ineffective ways described above, leads to young people feeling let down or that offers made of long-term support were not genuine. Ultimately, this risks undoing the progress made in developing faith in public services, which should be viewed as a long-term risk of ending support in this way.

It should be made clear that this evaluation did not make clear, one way or the other, whether there is a correlation between a poorer experience of the Pathfinder service and a reluctance to re-engage when an individual requires support. Some interviewees who had an excellent experience of the Pathfinder sometimes shared that they would not feel able to contact the Pathfinder for support after disengagement. Some participants who had a worse experience showed that they were comfortable reaching out when they required it. Overall, these findings show that more needs to be offered by Pathfinder coaches at the point of disengagement so that all young people are able and empowered to make contact should they need to.



## Self-determined outcomes

As outlined in section 5, some of the main goals identified by these participants were related to housing, health and wellbeing, employment and finances and children. It is clear how these fit within the key tenets of the Pathfinder project, financial stability, support networks and meaningful activities. It was rare for young people to specifically mention achieving goals. More commonly, young people spoke about how areas of their lives had improved, stayed the same or worsened, as referenced throughout this evaluation.

Coaches discussed the importance of person-centred working in relation to achieving goals for young people. This related to factors important to each individual, as well as understanding the best timing and methods to help them achieve their goals.

***“I think for me the most important thing is to get to know the young person first of all before kind of having them conversations and deciding what's appropriate and what's not appropriate.”***

### Goals going forward

When asked at the end of the final interview what goals participants had going forward, for some young people these involved resolving issues that they were facing during or since Pathfinder support. For example, finding their own accommodation (independently of parents or friends), rectifying issues with welfare entitlements and improving their mental and physical health. In other cases, these goals related to more positive future aspirations such as going to university, starting businesses, going on holiday, buying a car, moving to a new area, moving in with partners, gaining British citizenship and seeing their children start school. It is fair to assess that many of these future goals could not be actualised without the support some of these participants received from their Pathfinder coaches throughout their engagement with the service.

## 8. Conclusion

The beginning of this report includes sections relating to key findings and recommendations (pages 2-7) and therefore such content is not included in this section. Rather, this section aims to detail next steps to be taken following the finalisation of this report.

The report will be shared with GMBOP and likely further circulated to the individual Pathfinder providers across Greater Manchester. These organisations will be able to use specific findings and recommendations in order to develop the Pathfinder service when its funding and service delivery is continued.

The report will also be shared with the Greater Manchester Housing Needs Group. Members of this group will be able to use the report to assess the value of the Pathfinder within the prevention agenda, taking into account local authority homelessness pressures across the city-region.

Following this initial circulation, the report will be shared with the Public Service Reform Board and the Greater Manchester Homelessness Action Network. Key findings and recommendations are likely to be considered which relate to the wider Public Service Reform agenda, particularly Live Well. The Greater Manchester Homelessness Action Network may use the structure of Task Groups to progress recommendations and findings across the broader homelessness landscape.