



An Evaluation of Time Matters: a support service for children experiencing parental imprisonment

Final evaluation Report, April 2024

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About this report

Merseyside is one of the 18 areas allocated funding since 2019 by the UK government to establish a Violence Reduction Unit. To inform the continued development of the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP), the Merseyside Academics' Violence Prevention Partnership (MAVPP) led by LJMU have, since the VRP's inception, been commissioned to evaluate the Merseyside VRP as a whole, and evaluate selected work programmes to fill gaps in local knowledge. This report forms one of a suite of outputs from the 2023/24 evaluation and research work programme, and specifically presents a final evaluation of the Time Matters Programme after a two-year evaluation project. All Merseyside VRP research and evaluation outputs are available on the LJMU¹ and Merseyside VRP² websites, or via the work programme led by Prof Zara Quigg (z.a.quigg@ljmu.ac.uk).

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The cover images and illustrations used through-out this report were created by the children and young people at Time Matters.

¹ <https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/research/centres-and-institutes/public-health-institute>

² <https://www.merseysidevrp.com/>

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Child friendly summary

Children whose mum or dad are in prison can find it hard at school and feel unhappy, angry, and scared. We think about 312,000 children in England and Wales have a mum or dad in prison, but we do not know how many for certain because these children do not always have somewhere to go for help. When children have somewhere they can talk about how it feels to have their mum or dad in prison, they can become more confident, happier, and less stressed and scared.

Time Matters is a group in Merseyside for children whose mum or dad are in prison. Children at Time Matters have a mentor who comes into school to visit them and talk about how they are feeling. Children and their families can also attend groups with other children whose mum or dad are in prison and go on days out together. The parents and grandparents who look after these children can also get help from Time Matters.

We (Jane, Chloe and Zara who are researchers at Liverpool John Moores University) were asked by an organisation called the Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (we will call it Merseyside VRP for short) to “evaluate” Time Matters. Evaluate means understanding 1) what Time Matters does, 2) what children and families think about Time Matters and 3) how Time Matters has made things better for these children and their families.

What did we do?

We spoke to 18 children, nine parents and grandparents, and nine people who work at or with Time Matters. Time Matters also sent us information about the number of children it had supported. This was “anonymised” – this means the researchers didn’t see any names and didn’t know who it was about.

What did we find out?

Time Matters wants children to feel happier and have good experiences. It also helps them have a better relationship with their parents or grandparents who look after them. Time Matters also tries to make people aware of what it is like to have a mum or dad in prison and what help children need.

Last year, 61 children came to Time Matters for the first time. Every child can have a mentor and come to the group, but Time Matters makes sure they know it is their choice. Children and their families liked Time Matters because they could trust them, and they made friends with people who had the same experiences as them. They liked the mentors who understood and listened to them. Staff were worried though, that they needed more money and staff so they could keep helping children in the future.

After going to Time Matters, children felt more confident, that they weren’t alone, and that they could cope better with their mum or dad being in prison. Parents felt like they had help and could spend time having fun with their children. Children at Time Matters also want to make things better for other children with a mum or dad in prison. For example, they have shared their stories on television, radio, parliament, and through a play. Young people and parents who have had help from Time Matters also sometimes become mentors themselves, so they can help other children.



Executive summary

Introduction

Parental imprisonment is an adverse childhood experience associated with poorer outcomes in education and health, as well as potential feelings of stigma, shame, and rejection. Parental imprisonment currently affects around 312,000 children in England and Wales. Despite this, there is no routine national assessment to identify children affected by parental incarceration, and dedicated support services are scarce and often rely on self-referral. There is currently little evidence on interventions to support the complex and interrelated needs of children experiencing parental imprisonment and their families. However, it is anticipated that such interventions could lead to a range of positive outcomes, including increased young people's resilience to deal with the stress and stigma of parental imprisonment, reduced parental reoffending, an increased voice for young people locally and nationally, and increased awareness of these young people and family's needs among wider support services such as schools. Considering this, Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP) have asked the Public Health Institute at Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) to undertake a two-year evaluation of the Time Matters Programme in order to better understand implementation (including barriers and facilitators, fidelity, and reach), the experiences and perceptions of young people, carers, and key stakeholders, and the intended and actual impacts of Time Matters on young people and their carers.

Time Matters

Time Matters is a Merseyside VRP funded project which provides support for children impacted by parental or familial imprisonment and their parents/carers. By providing a safe, non-judgemental space for young people and parents/carers with these common experiences, the project aims to mitigate the risk of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and support family cohesion. The project predominantly supports young people aged 5-18 years through support groups and one-to-one mentoring both online and in person. Children are given the opportunity to take part in cultural and sporting activities together. Parents/carers are also offered separate structured and social support, including access to workshops on topics including childhood anxiety, child criminal exploitation, and trauma. Children with a parent or family member in prison (regardless of if they are in touch with statutory services) are eligible for the programme. Parents and carers can self-refer themselves and their child/children to the service, but most referrals come through support workers or schools. Retention into the Time Matters programme varies depending on young people's support needs once their family member is released from prison and the programme runs a peer mentor training scheme for existing clients.

Evaluation aims

The evaluation aims were to implement a process and outcome evaluation of Time Matters. The key research objectives were:

1. To monitor, document, and describe the implementation of Time Matters.

- To describe the implementation of the programme across Merseyside.
- To understand the extent to which the intervention was implemented as planned (fidelity).
- To identify how much of the intervention was implemented (dose).
- To explore the uptake of the programme amongst the target population (reach).

- To elicit the facilitators and/or barriers to programme development and implementation, and adaptations to programme delivery.
- To identify areas for development and sustainability.

2. To assess the perceptions and impacts of Time Matters.

- To explore key stakeholder perceptions and experiences of the programme, including young people, families, programme implementers, and wider services.
- To identify the intended and actual impacts of the programme on young people, families, programme implementers, and wider services.

Evaluation methods



Review of programme evidence, policies, and operational documentation



Collation, analysis, and review of programme monitoring (referrals, year 1=57, year 2=61, attendance, year 1=86, year 2=71) and progression data (n=17, both years)



Interviews with programme implementers (n=11)



Focus groups and interviews with children and young people (n=18)



Focus groups with parents/guardians (n=9)

Key findings

- Time Matters takes a family-based approach to providing support to children experiencing parental imprisonment, with clear aims across the four domains of the socioecological model (underpinning the public health approach): providing emotional support and positive experiences to individual children and young people, improving parent-child relationships, providing a safe community for people experiencing parental imprisonment, and raising societal awareness of children's experiences of parental imprisonment.
- In the first three quarters of 2023/24, Time Matters received 61 referrals. Time Matters currently has 80 as open cases and in quarter three provided face-to-face support to 63 children, young people and parents/carers.
- Time Matters has evolved significantly over the past six years to provide a six-week one-to-one mentoring programme for every new referral; support groups for children, young people, and parents/carers; and a range of social activities. Stakeholders also described taking an individualised approach to support, which was flexible (for example, providing additional

mentoring sessions if needed) and empowered children, young people, and parents/carers to choose how they engaged. This model aligns well with the limited literature on effective interventions and trauma-informed approaches to care.

- **Facilitators:** participants identified several factors they felt facilitated the delivery of Time Matters:
 - A clear sense of community and communal identity built on trust, confidentiality, friendship, and shared experience. This led some parents and young people to remain with Time Matters beyond their need for immediate support in mentor and peer-mentor roles.
 - Committed and passionate staff and mentors with varied experiences who provided children and young people with a reliable source of external support.
 - Strong links with external organisations, which had been further enhanced through their partnership with Merseyside VRP.
- **Barriers:** the main barrier to sustaining implementation of Time Matters was funding. Time Matters had grown from a local support group to a larger organisation to meet increasing numbers of referrals and was implementing several strategic changes including Community Interest Company status, stronger links with partners and implementing process and outcome monitoring. Time Matters currently relies on part-time staff and volunteers to deliver support. Stakeholders felt they might lack capacity to sustain good quality provision without longer-term funding.
- Participants described several positive impacts for children and young people, including increased confidence to express themselves and engage in social activities, reduced isolation, increased ability to express their emotions and seek help, increased self-esteem, and improved coping skills. Promoting positive health and wellbeing was linked to positive longer-term outcomes including better engagement and performance at school and meeting further education and employment aspirations. Many young people had participated in Time Matters for a number of years, highlighting the potential to capture longer-term positive outcomes and this should be explored further.
- During this evaluation, Time Matters had begun implementing an Outcomes Star tool (the Shooting Star™) to measure the impact of their service on children and young people. Initial baseline and follow up data from this tool suggests it is promising in demonstrating positive impacts which align with the objectives of Time Matters and can supplement existing child-led evaluation methods to further evidence the positive impact of Time Matters.
- Parents/carers also felt that Time Matters had reduced their feelings of isolation by connecting them to parents with similar experiences, providing them with support and advice when they encountered difficulties and facilitating fun, stress-free time spent with their child. Stakeholders and parents provided multiple examples of Time Matters mediating to improve parent-child relationships at home and liaising with prison services to facilitate contact with a parent in prison (for example during prison moves or home leave).
- Time Matters has also engaged in a range of advocacy work (including visits to parliament, podcasts, workshops for police and journalists, media engagement, and plays and art exhibitions) to challenge stereotypes of parental imprisonment and raise awareness of young people's need for support. Young people valued these opportunities to have their voice heard and to advocate for positive change for children in the same situation.

Recommendations

- Time Matters provides children, young people, and their parents/carers with a combination of one-to-one mentoring, group support, and positive social activities. The model is led by and responsive to children and families' needs. This model of provision was universally well received by participants and qualitative data suggests positive outcomes for children, young people, and their families. This model of provision should continue.
- Time Matters delivers a package of care which includes “*three-pronged*” or “*sandwich*” structured mentoring sessions over six weeks. The Time Matters programme has been developed directly from young people's experiences and aims to achieve outcomes across the socio-ecological model. Given the lack of published evidence on effective interventions for children experiencing parental imprisonment, ongoing monitoring work should continue, and efforts should be made to share the Time Matters model as an example of best practice.
- Young people enjoyed the opportunities to take part in advocacy work, which allowed them to have their voice heard and raise awareness of their experiences at regional, national, and international level. Time Matters should be supported by Merseyside VRP and partners to explore the role that young people can play in delivering ongoing training and raise awareness of how to support young people experiencing parental imprisonment across local and national systems.
- Volunteer mentors were an important part of the Time Matters model, who brought varied experiences and were positively received by children, young people, and their parents. Time Matters should be supported by Merseyside VRP and partners to expand their mentor training programme to ensure peer support for children across Merseyside.
- Time Matters has benefitted from partnership with the Merseyside VRP through connections to new partner organisations and increased referrals. Further support should be provided to enable them to continue building these partnerships and increase their visibility across the whole system, particularly with the NHS as Time Matters is well placed to identify young people in need of mental health support.
- Young people expressed a desire for more regular group meetings and Time Matters should explore options to facilitate this, particularly when developing plans for further funding.
- Time Matters has shown extremely positive progress in strategically developing their organisation to meet a growing number of referrals. However, stakeholders were concerned that they could not sustain their current provision, quality of support, and ethos without more paid staff. Time Matters requires longer-term funding to allow them to embed current changes and expand to meet demand.
- Time Matters should continue the collection of Outcome Star data and qualitative feedback to allow them to demonstrate and monitor the impact of their work on children, young people, and parents/carers. Initial data suggests the Outcome Star is a promising method of evidencing impact which aligns well with Time Matters' objectives and complements existing child-led monitoring and evaluation methods. Systems should also be put in place to allow them to capture longer-term impacts for children/young people as retention of families for prolonged periods is a unique and positive aspect of their provision which should be evidenced.
- Time Matters should consider developing and validating a parental imprisonment Outcomes Star in partnership with children and young people and their parents/carers. This tool has the potential to inform evaluation efforts nationally and could provide an additional source of revenue. By implementing an independent pilot feasibility study of this tool, Time Matters could inform national approaches to supporting children experiencing parental imprisonment.

1. Introduction

Time Matters is a Merseyside Violence Reduction Partnership (VRP) funded project which provides support for children impacted by parental or familial imprisonment and their parents/carers. By providing a safe, non-judgemental space for young people and parents/carers with these common experiences, the project aims to mitigate the risk of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and support family cohesion. The project predominantly supports young people aged 6-18 years through support groups and one-to-one mentoring both online and in person. Children are given the opportunity to take part in cultural and sporting activities together. Parents/carers are also offered separate structured and social support including support groups and access to workshops on topics including childhood anxiety, child criminal exploitation, and trauma. Children with a parent or family member in prison (regardless of if they are in touch with statutory services) are eligible for the programme. Parents and carers can self-refer themselves and their child/children to the service, but the majority of referrals come through support workers or schools. Retention into the Time Matters programme varies depending on young people's support needs once their family member is released from prison and the programme runs a peer mentor training scheme for existing clients. The Merseyside VRP commissioned the research team at the Public Health Institute (PHI) Liverpool John Moores University (LJMU) to evaluate Time Matters over a two-year period³. The aim of this evaluation was to describe how Time Matters is implemented and assess the perceptions and impacts of the project on children and young people, parents/carers, and stakeholders.

Recent estimates suggest that parental imprisonment currently affects 312,000 children in England and Wales, which equates to at least one child in every school in England and Wales (1). This is likely to be an underestimate due to a lack of systematic recording and a reluctance to disclose parental imprisonment by both parents and children. Parents are often reluctant to disclose (in court or prison) that they have children for fear of statutory service involvement (2) or negative judgement and repercussions for their children (3). Fear of judgement, rejection or scapegoating may also prevent children from disclosing that they have a parent in prison (1, 4-6). As a result, children affected by parental imprisonment are consistently referred to as an "invisible group" (4, 7-9) (who all too frequently remain unidentified by agencies which could assist them (3)).

Health and social impacts of parental imprisonment on children and young people

Children who experience parental imprisonment are more likely to face significant disadvantages, have complex familial needs, and are less likely to meet child wellbeing indicators (10, 11). Parental imprisonment is recognised as one of ten ACEs which have a significant impact on children's long-term health and wellbeing across the life course (12). This includes increased risk of adopting health harming behaviours (such as smoking, harmful alcohol consumption, drug use, risky sexual activity, and violence), poorer mental and physical health, chronic disease, and early mortality. Importantly, the more ACEs children suffer, the greater their risk of poor outcomes later in life. Given the social inequalities in exposure to the criminal justice system (13, 14), many children of incarcerated parents

³ The interim findings from the first year of this evaluation are available at: <https://www.ljmu.ac.uk/research/centres-and-institutes/public-health-institute/phi-reports>

are a socioeconomically and demographically disadvantaged group, even before experiencing parental imprisonment (15).

Parental separation increases the risk of poor health outcomes for children and young people. A number of factors are associated with poor health, including psychological distress, inconsistent explanations of parental imprisonment, changes in care provision (particularly when a mother is in prison) (16), loss of family income, stigma, home and school moves, and difficulties in maintaining contact with imprisoned parents (17). Research from the US suggests separation from a parent through imprisonment has a more detrimental impact on a child's wellbeing than divorce or the death of a parent (9). However, imprisonment does not always elicit the same sympathetic or supportive response from family members and the community, so children often do not have the opportunity to deal with or understand these emotions.

Large scale and longitudinal studies have found that children with a parent/carer in prison are at significantly greater risk of mental health problems and self-reported anxiety when compared with their peers (18, 19). Parental imprisonment is also a recognised risk factor for antisocial behaviour (7, 11, 17, 20), with one study suggesting that children with a parent in prison have about three times the risk for antisocial behaviour compared to their peers (21). Long term, parental imprisonment has been linked to an increased risk of offending in adulthood (8, 22, 23), and parental imprisonment might also have a stigmatising effect, making prisoners' children more likely to be prosecuted for their crimes (21). Parental imprisonment is also associated with decreased academic performance (24-27) linked to a number of factors, including absenteeism due to isolation, peer rejection or bullying, reduced household income, parental health, and changes in caregiving arrangements (9, 10, 26, 28, 29).

Families may also experience significant financial strain due to the loss of the incarcerated parent's income. Economic strain is associated with more erratic and authoritarian parenting styles, and increasing working hours to compensate for loss of family income can reduce a parent's ability to provide emotional support to their child (29, 30). The interconnected nature of these outcomes (for example, social stigma leading to isolation, which then impacts mental health and school attainment) demonstrates the wide and significant needs of children experiencing parental imprisonment and the importance of having access to high quality support.

Interventions to support children with parental imprisonment

Despite growing recognition of the needs of children who experience parental imprisonment, the literature on effective interventions to support these children and their families remains sparse (31). Existing interventions tend to focus on providing parenting support to parents in prison and broadly fall into three categories 1) perinatal interventions to support mothers through pregnancy and birth in prison, 2) postnatal interventions to allow mothers to maintain contact with their new-born child whilst in prison, for example, through special housing facilities or nurseries, and 3) parenting programmes. A meta-analysis of 13 parenting programmes for prisoners found that they were moderately effective in the short term in improving parenting skills and knowledge, parental wellbeing, and parent-child relationships (32), including feeling less stressed, less depressed, and having more positive parent-child interactions when compared with a control group (33). However, considerable heterogeneity across these studies (in programme content, institutional context, and parental characteristics) makes it difficult to come to clear conclusions about how much parents retain the knowledge and skills they have learnt post release (31, 32). Perhaps the greatest oversight in

existing parenting interventions is a lack of involvement for children in both the parenting programmes and the outcomes measured. Armstrong et al (32) found that only four of 22 reviewed interventions had direct child involvement, and these tended to be limited to the prison setting, for example, through supervised play visits (Woodall et al, 2014) or educational videos (34). Similarly, Nilsen et al (35) found only four of 21 reviewed interventions examined the impact of these interventions on children and these outcomes tended to be related to parenting success, such as intensity of disruptive behaviour or consistency of discipline (36).

Children experiencing parental imprisonment have specific support needs, including feelings of isolation, lack of someone to talk to, feeling judged or misunderstood, keeping parental imprisonment secret to avoid stigma, and the loss and change of a parent being in prison (37). A qualitative systematic review identified a range of coping strategies used by children with a parent in prison, including choosing to maintain distance from the parent in prison, normalising the situation, seeking out supportive mentors, participating in therapy, and engaging in prosocial recreation activities (such as sports, movies, and friends) (38).

Despite this need for support, there is little published evidence on interventions to assist children experiencing parental imprisonment. Evidence from two RCTs of mentoring programmes in the US (the Amachi Texas Programme specifically for children with incarcerated parents (39) and Big Brother, Big Sister, which included a large sample of children with incarcerated parents (40)) found that children who actively engaged with their mentors reported improvements in their behaviour, relationships, and emotional wellbeing up to 12 months following the intervention. However, school awareness and support for children with a parent in prison is variable, and the majority of school-based initiatives remain unevaluated (41, 42). A systematic review identified three levels of support needed in school settings: at the systemic level (through appropriate, consistent support, training for staff and using the curriculum to reduce stigma), family level (practical/emotional support for carers and facilitating communication with the imprisoned parent) and individual level (emotional/practical support for children, supporting visits/contact in school time, considering the child's perspective when planning support) (42).

The lack of evaluated programmes for children and young people means that there is limited evidence to demonstrate what works to improve the health and wellbeing of children with a parent in prison. The evidence that is available suggests whole system and family-based approaches which incorporate mentoring, school-based support, time spent with peers who understand their situation, and prosocial recreation activities are all promising support methods. This report aims to further this evidence base through an evaluation of the Time Matters project. Time Matters was established in Merseyside in 2017 to support children aged 5-18 years who are impacted by parental imprisonment. In line with the existing evidence, Time Matters takes a whole system family approach to support combining one-to-one school-based mentoring, group discussion, and social and recreational activities for young people and their families to allow them to explore their emotions and feelings and generate positive change. Through this mixed methods evaluation, we aim to provide further insight into both the process of implementing this support for children and young people and the measurable outcomes produced.

1.1 Study aims and objectives

The evaluation aims were to implement a process and outcome evaluation of Time Matters. The key research objectives were:

1. To monitor, document, and describe the implementation of Time Matters.

- To describe the implementation of the programme across Merseyside.
- To understand the extent to which the intervention was implemented as planned (fidelity).
- To identify how much of the intervention was implemented (dose).
- To explore the uptake of the programme amongst the target population (reach).
- To elicit the facilitators and/or barriers to programme development and implementation, and adaptations to programme delivery.
- To identify areas for development and sustainability.

2. To assess the perceptions and impacts of Time Matters.

- To explore key stakeholder perceptions and experiences of the programme, including young people, families, programme implementers, and wider services.
- To identify the intended and actual impacts of the programme on young people, families, programme implementers, and wider services.



“Broken Heart” artwork by Time Matters child, female, aged 10

2. Methodology

2.1 Methods

To meet study objectives, a range of methods were implemented over the two-year study period with findings triangulated to inform the evaluation.



Review of programme evidence, policies, and operational documentation

Existing and on-going programme evidence, policies, and operational documentation were accessed and reviewed.



Collation, analysis, and review of programme monitoring and progression data

Anonymised Outcome Star (Shooting Star, n=17, both years), referral (year 1=57, year 2=61), and attendance data (year 1=86, year 2=71) for children and young people accessing the service was collected by Time Matters mentors for young people referred to the programme.



Interviews with programme implementers (n=11, P1-5 year 1 & P35-38 year 2)

Semi-structured interviews (telephone or MS Teams, n=11) were undertaken with nine stakeholders (including Time Matters staff n=2, volunteer mentors n=2, primary school teachers n=2, Merseyside VRP staff n=1 and a national charity n=1). Time Matters staff took part in repeated interviews in year one and year two. The interviews explored their experiences of implementing Time Matters, supporting and impeding factors to implementation, outcomes and impacts, and programme sustainability. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.



Focus groups with parents/guardians (n=9, P6-10 year 1, P29-32 year 2)

Face-to-face focus groups were undertaken with nine parents/carers who accessed support from Time Matters with their children. Focus groups asked participants about their experiences of the Time Matters programme. Focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed.



Focus groups and interviews with children and young people (n=18, P11-24 year 1, and 25-28 year 2)

Face-to-face focus groups were undertaken with 14 children and young people. Groups were stratified by age (6-11 years, 12-16 years) with age-appropriate questions that explored their experiences of the Time Matters programme. Children aged 6-11 years also completed a Draw, Write, and Tell exercise. Semi-structured interviews were undertaken with four young people (age 10-16 years). Focus groups and interviews were audio recorded and transcribed.

2.2 Data analysis

Quantitative analyses were undertaken using descriptive statistics. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data from the interviews and focus groups (43). The analysis is presented with illustrative quotes where appropriate to highlight key findings.

2.3 Ethical approval

Ethical approval was obtained from LJMU (REC no. 22/PHI/022). Two young people from Time Matters provided feedback on the research design, data collections tools, and information sheets before the research took place.

3. Findings

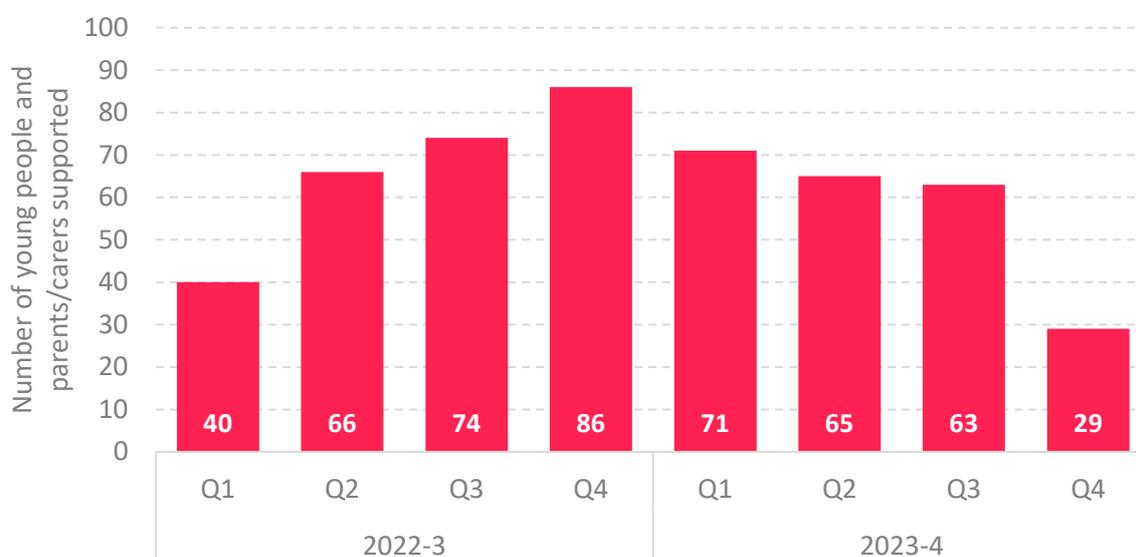
3.1 Who is Time Matters for? (reach)

Time Matters offers support for children who are impacted by parental imprisonment, but also aims to provide support to whole families, including parents and carers in the community and the parent who is or has been in prison. Figures 1 and 2 below show the number of people referred to and directly supported by Time Matters from the first quarter of 2023/24 to the third quarter of 2023/24. At the end of 2023/24, 80 children and young people were open cases receiving support from Time Matters. During the first year of the evaluation, Time Matters saw a small increase in the number of young people and parents/carers supported per quarter and during year two, this has consistently remained above 60 people each quarter. Between April 2022 and March 2023, 61 young people have been referred to Time Matters (figure 1), a slight increase from the previous year (n=57, figure 1). During quarter 3 of 2023/4, 63 young people and parents/carers (figure 2) were receiving support from Time Matters.

Figure 1: Number of referrals to Time Matters April 2023 to March 2024



Figure 2: Number of people receiving support from Time Matters from Q1 2022/23 to Q3, 2023/4



As the first year of the evaluation demonstrated, all stakeholders interviewed had a clear and mutual understanding of the objectives of Time Matters and described a holistic approach across all four domains of the socio-ecological model (individual, relationship, community, and societal). Having “*agreed boundaries*” was viewed as an important element of support for children experiencing parental imprisonment because “*everybody knows what the offer is...it gives children a bit of safety and security knowing...where they’re going...and what the process is going to look like*” (P38, stakeholder). Children and young people also expressed feelings of security, which came from having clear expectations of the ongoing support they would receive.

“The aim of Time Matters, it’s for children...their mum and dad that are in jail for the time that they’re there...or even if when you get older...you’re still here, and you’re supported, and if you’ve been there for a year or if you’ve been there for ages, then you get more support and you’re welcome.” (P28, Interview, Male, Age 10)

At an individual level, stakeholders recognised “*every young person’s unique and individual... [and has] got different experiences and situations*” (P3, stakeholder) and described Time Matters as providing “*positive experiences to...overcome the challenges and barriers that they face daily*” (P3, stakeholder). They aimed to improve young people’s mental wellbeing by reducing self-judgement (*it’s not your fault...it doesn’t have to define you in a negative way*) P2, stakeholder) and encouraging them to express and regulate their emotions and seek support (“*it’s OK to cry. It’s OK to feel angry. And, if you need help, ask for it*” P1 stakeholder). Equally importantly, stakeholders wanted children to have fun at Time Matters, providing them with positive experiences to strengthen their resilience when coping with adversity.

“For them to have fun and to do nice things because the research is that...the more joy and the more...positive childhood experiences a child can have when they’ve suffered a lot of trauma, the more likely they are to be resilient and be able to cope with adversity.” (P1, stakeholder)

At a relationship level, stakeholders described a family approach (“I believe like happy families, a happy child” P3, stakeholder), which encouraged positive relationships between children and their parents/carers. Stakeholders felt this family approach was vital because “with every young person who's got a parent in prison, there's a ripple. And the ripple could affect siblings. It could affect family. It could affect education. It could affect mental health. It could affect relationships” (P3, stakeholder). At a community level, Time Matters was described as “a safe place...for our local children if they've got a mum or dad in prison” (P1, stakeholder) which reduced young people’s feelings of isolation and judgement. Time Matters was often described as “like a family” by stakeholders, young people, and their parents/carers. The group had a code of conduct which is based on kindness: “Children will come with a lot of trauma and difficult feelings, and they might initially present as very angry, but I think once they realised that the only way to be in this group is to be kind” (P1, stakeholder).

“The kids that come to the group, they know...that every single child in that room has either got or has had a parent who's been to prison so...there's no judgments...They don't have to talk about how they feel about it, but they can if they want to. And that's I think really therapeutic.” (P1, stakeholder)

Finally, at the societal level, stakeholders described “challenging attitudes in wider society” towards parental imprisonment and “advocacy for change”. Time Matters aimed to challenge stereotypes in society and the media and to improve the support that was available to children affected by parental imprisonment. Children were encouraged to be “change makers” and “the experts...it's about empowering them to have their voice heard if that's something they want to do” (P1, stakeholder).

“And what I love is that it defies all the stereotypes...children with parents in prison...they must be really horrible, and they must be really badly behaved...these are the kind of stereotypes we get, some kind of badge of honour that my dad's in prison and it's...the opposite of all those stereotypes. These are intelligent, polite, nice young people that have just had this difficult experience.” (P1, stakeholder)

3.2 What does Time Matters deliver? (dose)



“Help!” Drawing by Time Matters child (Female, age 10)

Time Matters is an open referral service that offers both group and one-to-one support to children and young people and their parents/carers. Stakeholders described the majority of referrals coming as self-referrals by parents or grandparents and through schools and children’s services. A smaller proportion came from Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) or prison services. Each child referred into Time Matters is allocated a mentor who initially provides them with six individual sessions (although this can be extended if the child needs more sessions) usually at school or online via Zoom. Alongside this core mentoring programme, Time Matters also runs group activities, providing children and young people with both therapeutic support and social, leisure activities. Social

activities for young people and parents/carers include day trips and a summer residential. Support groups are also provided for parents and carers.

During the first year of the evaluation, stakeholders described how the Time Matters model of delivery had *“evolved over time”* (P2, stakeholder) from *“a tiny kind of one-off support group, and it just kept mushrooming from there until we became an established organisation”* (P1, stakeholder). This evolution had largely been due to a *“huge demand for support for children”* (P1, stakeholder). During the second-year evaluation, Time Matters had sustained the core elements of delivery (school-based mentoring, group support, and social activities) but emphasised the importance of a flexible delivery model that was responsive to the needs of families attending. Time Matters introduced several new initiatives over the 2-year period, including parent/carer coffee mornings, partnering with a local tutoring service to provide additional educational support and access to a free law clinic via LJMU. Stakeholders tried to ensure they were young person led in both mentoring (*“I always reiterate it’s your choice if you want to share that”* P2, stakeholder) and group activities (*“when the young people raise an issue, we’re like right, you need to podcast on that”* P3, stakeholder).

During the first year of the evaluation, stakeholders discussed their reliance on volunteers for much of their mentoring provision. Whilst volunteers still played an important role in year two, Time Matters had proactively worked to expand the organisation with two additional part time members of staff, IT and finance support, and by becoming a Community Interest Company (CIC) with a new board of directors. These delivery changes are further discussed under the sustainability section below.

Mentoring

Each child referred to Time Matters is assigned a mentor for six sessions (usually delivered weekly either in school or online) before they are integrated into the group sessions. Time Matters staff generally matched mentors to new referrals based on the young person’s needs and the mentor’s experience. The mentoring sessions aimed to *“get to know the child, see what their key issues are, let them get anything off their chest”* (P1, stakeholder) and *“give them coping mechanisms and raise their self-esteem and confidence”* (P3, stakeholder). The introductory session allows the mentor and young person to get to know each other, and then the *“middle sessions are very reflective of what the child brings to the table and the age of the child”* (P1, stakeholder). Each session lasts 45 minutes and follows a *“three pronged” “sandwich”* structure, which is described in the quote below. Mentors received training and spoke positively about the practical and emotional support they received from the Time Matters team. Young people receive a certificate at the end of their mentoring period and young people were usually encouraged to *“have a goal, a challenge...a strategy”* (P1, stakeholder) to work on during the six sessions.

“A three-pronged structure...an icebreaker at the beginning...like a feelings check-in or a bit of a game. And then the meaty bit in the middle...the thing we’re gonna explore. And then every session I ask the mentors to finish with a game...even if it’s a teenager because... you might have to go into maths next or...do some homework or it might be time for bed... it kind of puts these safety boundaries around that. So, you don’t want to end on talking about something so deep and then just leaving the child...so, we do train mentors to have that structure.” (P1, stakeholder)

Both young people and mentors spoke positively about the mentoring sessions. Mentors described mentoring *“as such a privilege...”* (P2, stakeholder) and how *“watching the young one’s getting support and seeing them excelling, I think that’s the best part”* (P4, stakeholder). Mentoring was viewed by stakeholders as vital because *“a lot of young people blame themselves and...keep things to themselves because they don’t want to upset mum...it’s really important that we give them an*

opportunity just to have their space and their say on things really" (P3, stakeholder). All young people participating spoke positively about the time they spend with their mentor ("I felt like I was wanted" P27, young person interview, female, age 13) and valued the opportunity to have their feelings listened to ("we just talk about how we're feeling...because at school I would be worrying about what would be happening" P19, 6-11 years focus group). Young people described a good mentor as someone "who makes it easy to talk to them" (P14, 12-15 years focus group), "just felt like they wanted to listen to me" (P27, young person interview, female, age 13) and who "can like care for you, so if something bad happens in like school or just at home, you can always come and talk to them" (P13, 12-15 years focus group). Several young people had requested their mentoring continued beyond six weeks which had been accommodated.

"when [mentor] came to my school,...he checked up on how I was...we made like friends...He gets me a pack of Haribos and we play blackjack with his cards and yeah it's dead good...I mean, I've already done six weeks, but he...comes over every like 2 weeks or 3 weeks to see how I am getting on...It just helps me with like my health because I feel that some days I can feel happy and some days I can feel depressed because where my dad is, I don't get to see him a lot." (P28, young person interview, male, age 10)

"So, I did like someone coming once a week....and I could tell anything to them and...it weren't like CAMHS or anything like that, it was more of like a relaxed conversation than a therapy session type of thing...Because in school I struggled, especially in primary school. I was the only kid in the school who had a parent in prison, so no one understood me. The school weren't very good helping, they didn't really know how to help either. So when [mentor] would come in once week I would feel more relaxed, and just got everything off my chest then to someone that was more understanding." (P25, young person interview, female, age 16)

Group support

Time Matters also offers group support, which children and young people were generally invited to attend on completion of their six-week mentoring (although there is sometimes some overlap). Group wellbeing sessions offer young people the opportunity to talk "about mental health stuff, but they're related to parents in prison...help people get through the hard stuff" (P25, young person interview, female, age 14). Young people described being able to express and process their emotions ("if you're feeling like sad or like angry, we can help you and support you throughout the time that your dad or mum's gone to jail... it's quite sad for the people who are like me...because you've only got one parent [with you] and your mental health with it" P28, young person interview, male, age 10) among people who understood their experiences ("instead of bottling up you can just like express your feelings and you're in a room with people who can like understand you" P27, young person interview, female, age 14). Young people listed various social activities they had attended, including day trips, residential trips, sports, art therapy, and music therapy. Young people felt that social activities were important because they allowed the group to get to know each other in a relaxed setting ("it brings us all close" P25, young person interview, female, age 16), which made it easier to open up emotionally ("if it is your first time and you come on a day out, it helps you talk about everything" P14, 12-15 years focus group). Young people also valued being able to create positive memories with their families through these social activities: "it's a trip out with your family and your friends and like people you love...And then you get to experience good memories" (P26, young person interview, female, age 14).

Appendix one provides a summary of the 65 group activities undertaken by Time Matters over the past 24 months.

As previously discussed, Time Matters also aimed to empower young people as “change makers” and “the experts” in their own experiences (P1, stakeholder) and so the group also took on an advocacy role. Stakeholders and young people described multiple activities undertaken by Time Matters to raise awareness and “have their voice heard” (P1, stakeholder). This included speaking with government and at international conferences, contributing to international research, speaking on the radio and in documentaries, developing podcasts, participating in workshops for police staff and journalists, and developing a play based on young people’s experiences (further details are included in the community impacts section). Young people also spoke extremely positively about these “change maker” activities and saw them as an opportunity for “publicising and showing the experiences of the group” (P11, 12-15 years focus group). As the quote below describes, these opportunities to advocate for better services and reduce the stigma of parental imprisonment increased young people’s self-esteem and gave them the opportunity to take positive action as a result of their experience.

“I think it's flipping them from being a victim of a crime they didn't commit to going...this is awful, this is not your fault. This is a horrible situation that you're in... but not just how can we make this better for you, but how could we potentially make this better for children that you would never even meet and that I think changes somebody's level of self-esteem.” (P1, stakeholder)

Support for parents

Time Matters is a family-based service with over 70 families currently registered for support. Each referral of a child to Time Matters involves assessing both the child and their families’ needs and introducing both the child and parent/carer to the organisation. Time Matters runs support groups for parents/carers (“we done a coffee morning the last half term. I think there was about 15 parents in the room... it was so powerful, people sharing their own stories and supporting each other” P3, stakeholder) and will also sometimes divide family events into child and parent spaces to allow both groups to seek support separately. Time Matters also run a range of family activities, including days out and a summer residential trip. Stakeholders also recognised that “every family is different” and parents would sometimes require more individual support “to keep the parents able to manage everything and feel confident...and overcome challenges and problems” (P3, stakeholder). For example, Time Matters staff and mentors would often receive telephone calls from parents who were seeking advice on a particular family situation or problem. As illustrated in the two quotes below, examples of this included providing one-to-one support to a parent whose mental health was preventing them from attending group support and mediating to improve the relationship between a mother and her teenage son.

“When I was speaking to mum she went, here’s his dad...and the dad was speaking to me while he was in prison...can you please sort my kid, I will do anything...I could sense his frustration because he couldn't do anything...we set up the mediation meeting with mum and himself [son]...in a pizza place, and we all had pizza together and...just facilitated a discussion about what was going on and the feedback from that was immense in terms of getting home, fixing his relationship with his dad and him getting into college again.” (P3, stakeholder)

“...one [parent] at the moment whose mental health has been really poor, and she hasn't wanted to come to groups for a while. But one of our mentors is working really closely with her. So she's doing a lot of home visits... supporting her and she's got to go and see, like a solicitor over something and we've got her a meeting coming up with the John Moores Law clinic...for some people when their mental health is on the floor...they're getting the one-to-one support...someone to talk to, but also maybe a little bit of advice and guidance as well.” (P1, stakeholder)

Participating staff also acted as an “adult advocate” (P1, stakeholder) for parents to help them get the support they needed. Examples included facilitating access to the free law clinic at LJMU, liaising with schools and hospitals (“that’s been really helpful for mum having somebody physically there. In the school, in the meetings, to help kind of navigate the complexity of working with the hospital...working with maybe mental health services and just helping kind of tie that stuff together” P1, stakeholder) and contacting prison services about family issues, such as child resettlement licence leave. The quote from a parent below describes how Time Matters liaised with prison services to move a dad who was a three-hour drive away to a closer prison to allow family visits.

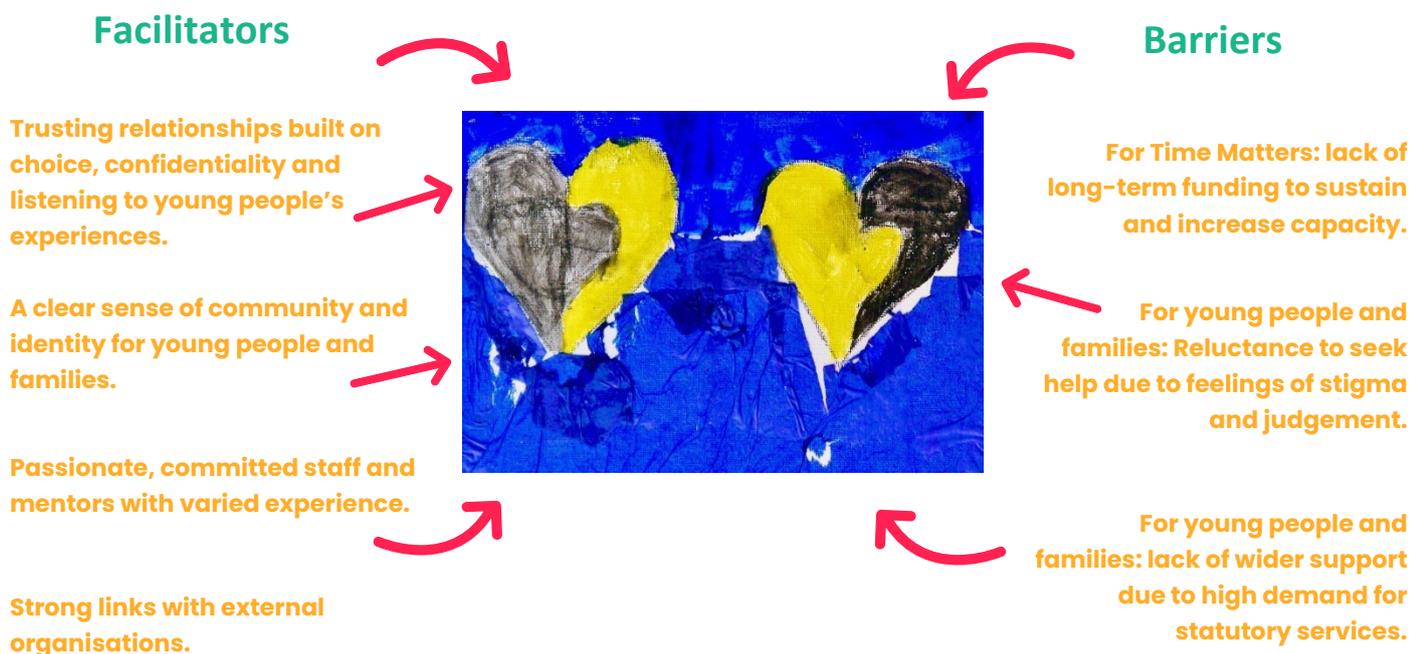
“So mine was miles away. And I had to get up, drive for three hours, sit there for two hours, go in and see him for two hours, drive back home and it was like the whole day and the kids...used to dread going to see their dad. [Another parent] was like tell [Time Matters staff] and two weeks later he was in [prison name], 40 minutes away. She emailed them and was like no, that is not right...We used to leave in the morning and then when we got it would be time for bed... so he chose to not see the kids because he was worried about me driving and...I was like why don’t you want us to come and see you and he was like I can’t, I’ve put you through enough. And now he’s [moved] there we can see him every single week.” (P8, parent/carer)

Discharge and referral

Time Matters currently does not have a discharge policy, but rather operates on the policy that “we never close the door” (P3, stakeholder) on a young person or family. Instead, one stakeholder described this as a “revolving door, people come and go whenever they want. There’s no pressure and we always try and touch base if people haven’t engaged for a while” (P3, stakeholder). This open-door approach was a deliberate one because, as illustrated in the first quote below, each family’s experience of parental imprisonment would be different, and they could require support at various time points, including whilst a parent was in prison and post-release. For example, one young person (P25, young person interview, female, age 16) discussed how she had “just stopped going for a little bit”, but on returning to Time Matters received mutual support (“I realised there was still some girls that went when I was younger...and a few new faces. But they’re all like you anyway, they’ve all been through it”) and was motivated to support others (“with the younger kids, it’s more recent for them...so then you can then share your story...that it does change. It’s not all like rough like now, it does get better”). However, during the second year of the evaluation, referrals to Time Matters had continue to increase and stakeholders acknowledged the challenges of maintaining this open-door policy without sustained funding and resources.

“Some people, when somebody goes to prison, they go once and once only it’s a one off and it’s an unusual part of their life and they’re never gonna go back... but unfortunately, you’ve got some people that do go in and out...and actually release can be as hard if not harder for children and families as the imprisonment phase...we’ve had families where...there’s been periods of calm and there’s been periods of chaos...sometimes families we might not see them for a long time and then all of a sudden, they’ll reengage. And then some people...attend every session without fail...we don’t really wanna close a door to anybody if we can help it, I guess because...life is up and down.” (P1, stakeholder)

3.3 Why does Time Matters work? (barriers and facilitators)



“The Good and The Bad”, artwork by Time Matters child (female, aged 11)

Facilitators

A key facilitator in the delivery of Time Matters from participants' perspectives was that it built trusting relationships with young people and their families. It was clear from stakeholders' perspectives that they had worked hard to cultivate this trust (“they’re turning up because they want to and...because we’ve kind of built that relationship with them” (P3, stakeholder). As quoted below, building this trust began when a parent was first referred into the service, when stakeholders emphasised that attending Time Matters was the parent/carer’s own choice for them and their child and the door would always be open to them, which was seen as empowering. Similarly, stakeholders felt trust between themselves and young people was built through listening to their experiences (“they want other people to understand what they’ve been through and I think it really kind of raises their self-worth and self-esteem from it”, P3, stakeholder) and giving them choice over how and when they engaged (“I always say to the kids in a support group...They don't really have to do anything they don't want to do...you wanna just listen to the other kids. That's fine.” P1, stakeholders).

“We'll just start off with a conversation with the parent. Tell them a little bit about the service, reassure them that it's completely voluntary... think that builds trust initially...we're not gonna judge you if you don't wanna come. It doesn't mean you're a bad mum because you're not ready for this. We're just here if you need us. So I think that that is immediately empowering...it's making sure that families know that it's in their own time...group support, is not for everyone. Mentoring is not for everyone...you feel like it's your choice...I think it's absolutely crucial and that's how we build trust and how we build relationships.” (P1, stakeholder)

Young people and parents also felt this sense of trust, describing both mentors and Time Matters staff as “supportive in any way she can...always there when you need her...I trust her” (P26, young person interview, female, age 14). For example, young people discussed how they and their parents/carers

had separate spaces for discussion and trusted that *“if you don’t want your mum or dad to know what you’re talking about, no-one will tell them unless it’s serious”* (P14, 12-15 years focus group) and that *“the confidentiality on both parties...it lets them open up fully”* (P11, 12-15 years focus group). Young people and parents not only felt trust for staff and mentors but for each other due to a lack of judgement (*“everyone’s in the same boat, they don’t judge”* P30, parent/carer focus group) and feelings of safety and confidentiality (*“whatever is said in the group stays in the group”* P26, young person interview, female, age 14).

As a result, Time Matters had a strong sense of identity, with all participants frequently likening it to a family (*“they feel like they’re a family...they’re kind of growing up together...if you could bottle that, it’s a very special thing to offer”* P37, stakeholder). As one mentor who had been with Time Matters since they were a child said *“I think that is what keeps everyone coming is that they feel like a family...it’s unusual. Like it’s something that like no one else’s got”* (P4, stakeholder). As a result, there was a strong desire to support each other from young people (*“they’re by my side and I’m by their side whenever they need me...so I feel appreciated”* P28, young person interview, male, age 10) and parents (*“once you’re in, you’re in”*, P29, parent/carer focus group).

“Time Matters as a group, we’re all strong...we won’t let anything get past us. We’re a group, we’re like a family, basically.” (P28, young person interview, male, age 10)

“P32: usually kids in place – bickering. Nothing, absolutely none of it. Never seen any of it. Which just shows how positive it is.

P30:...once he came here , he’s like a different child. Honestly. Even his teachers in school said to me, he’s like a different boy. He’s more confident. If someone’s a bit down and that he’ll go over and speak to them....he had so much going on in his head...he’d sit there quiet. Now he’ll go over and comfort other kids.

P32: He’s learnt that from here, do you know what I mean. So, once they learn it from here, it’s amazing do you know what I mean.”

(Parent/carer focus group)

These trusting relationships also brought benefits to the Time Matters service. In year one, stakeholders had implemented peer mentor training because *“we noticed that we had this group of children...they were happy, they were healthy, the parent had perhaps now been released from prison. They didn’t need us anymore, but they didn’t wanna leave us”* (P1, stakeholder). Following training, these young people act as leaders within the group, *“an additional source of support, as well as the adults”* (P1, stakeholder) for younger children and new members. Parents and young people described their intention to continue attending the group once they no longer had immediate need for it: *“I will come back and support the group...I know what it feels like...it’s not a nice life, but it’s our life and we’ve just got to make the most of it haven’t we and try and help as best we can”* (P6, parent/carer focus group). Young people training to be peer mentors also clearly felt a sense of responsibility to younger members (*“I am like a mentor...the younger ones we have out there, help them do stuff...because then it’s, it’s me giving back on something that I received”* P26, young person interview, female, age 14).

A second key facilitator was the Time Matters team who brought passion, commitment, and varied experience to the role (*“You’ll never hear people say oh that intervention really helped me. They’ll say it was [name] from Time Matters. It’s always about a person and relationships”* P37, stakeholder). Mentors described being guided by strong leadership (*“she’s so committed and she’s so driven and*

she guides us” P2, stakeholder), regular check-ins, and practical and emotional support from Time Matters staff. Mentors brought a wide range of different experiences of parental imprisonment and supporting young people, which they felt helped them build trusting relationships: “every mentor’s got something different to offer. We’ve got like 18 year old mentors...50 year old mentors...really varied in their experience and knowledge and it’s key to allow them to be themselves” (P3, stakeholder). A mentor who had been supported by Time Matters herself as a child felt this experience helped her “because the situation I was in, I’ve had to help myself and I know how to help other kids who are in the same situation” (P4, stakeholder). P5, a teacher who had referred two children to Time Matters, also felt that the relationship the mentors built with the children encouraged them to engage (“both of the adults from Time Matters...you can see why the children will engage because they were very passionate about their role and...you could see they clearly enjoyed the time that they spent with the children”).

The final facilitator identified was strong links with external organisations. The founder of Time Matters was also employed by LJMU and nurtured these connections to assist with their delivery needs. This included a 70-day social work placement student each year, student volunteers, and access to resources, such as the previously described drop-in law clinic. Time Matters had also built connections with external agencies. They had worked to raise awareness of their services in local schools and as a teacher, described “*knowing there is this charity there...that we can signpost...[that] will support the children and the family and beyond the school environment...it enables us to be more confident with the support...you know they’re not alone”* (P5, stakeholder). Stakeholders also felt that being part of the Merseyside VRP meant they were “*getting really quite known now by a lot of services”* (P1, stakeholder) including courts, Style Prison, and the National Probation Service. The Merseyside VRP provided Time Matters with opportunities to “*share our work through a much bigger network, gain more referrals, gain lots of expertise”* (P1, stakeholder). In the year two evaluation, Time Matters had continued to strengthen these partnerships in response to young people’s needs. The quote below provides an example of a new partnership with Assess Education tutoring service to help support young people to achieve educational outcomes.

“We’ve created a partnership in the last six months with Assess Education...They offer a day service for children that don’t...manage mainstream school and...they also offer after school tutoring, so any child in any school...can get maths, English and science extra help...because when you’ve got a parent in prison, you do miss your education, even if you’re bright, even if you’re well behaved and well mannered...Your education is quite significantly affected because your mind’s obviously all over the place and then lots of children are regularly missing school because of visits or...more sad situations like bullying or they’re getting in trouble for whatever reason. So, we decided that if children wanted to go to Assess Education and have, like an hour a week extra maths, we’ll pay for it.” (P1, stakeholder)

Barriers

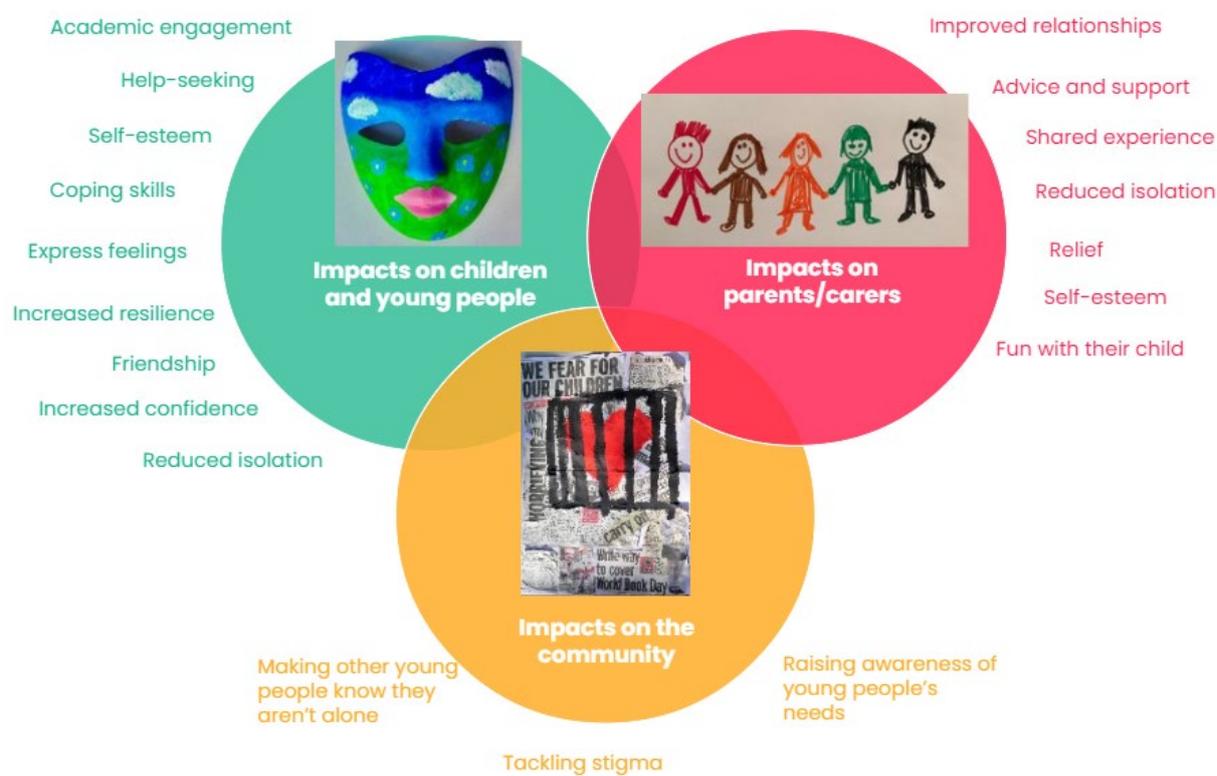
The main barrier identified in relation to delivery was having sufficient funding, time, and staff to deliver all the activities Time Matters would like to achieve (“*my biggest challenges are always gonna be time, are always gonna be funding”* P1, stakeholder). As previously described, the organisation had grown from a small local support group to a larger organisation to meet increasing demand and growing numbers of referrals. Between the year one and year two evaluation, stakeholders described a number of strategic steps they were taking to grow their organisation, including establishing themselves as a CIC with a board of directors, finding a new office space at the Merseyside Play Action

Council, increasing staffing levels (with two additional part time staff members), strengthening links with schools and partner organisations, and introducing processes for monitoring the work they were doing and the outcomes this produced for young people. However, stakeholders expressed concerns that they lacked capacity to continue with this sustained growth and meet increasing demand without longer-term funding. Despite recruiting new staff, the Time Matters workforce remains small, and this created time pressures for part-time staff and volunteer mentors. Stakeholders were conscious that if *“you rely on volunteers, you don’t wanna snow them under”* (P3, stakeholder). Volunteer mentors also worried about *“letting them down”* (P2, stakeholder) if they were unable to make a mentoring session due to work, family commitments, or illness. Furthermore, stakeholders were conscious that they wanted to increase Time Matters capacity in a sustainable way, which did not compromise the current model of delivery or the supportive, family-based ethos.

“We’re growing I’d say maybe 20% every year in terms of young people and families...maybe 20 new people every year...next year we’ll probably have hundreds of people on our books. It’s about the capacity of what we can do. Then we don’t want to dilute what we do, we want to grow what we do because we think it works, it’s a great model.” (P3, stakeholder)

Stakeholders also discussed the barriers which impacted families accessing support, namely reluctance to seek help due to fear of stigma and judgement and a lack of access to wider support services due to high demand. Stakeholders recognised young people and families experiencing parental imprisonment faced stigma from a range of sources including school peers, service providers, and the media, which meant *“it is difficult for families and young people to talk about their situation”* (P3, stakeholder). This stigma meant that families did not *“really know where to turn”* (P3, stakeholder) and *“there’s a lot of closed doors and there’s a lot of isolation and that can breed a lot of worry and anxiety”* (P3, stakeholder). As one grandparent described *“it’s hard...and we didn’t know how to go about getting help”* (P7, parent/carers group). In addition, stakeholders described families having varied and sometimes complex needs, which would require additional external support but accessing this support for families was sometimes very challenging. This was particularly the case in accessing CAMHS services, where there were high caseloads and long waiting times, meaning many children and young people could not access support (*“families are stuck...it takes so long get any type of service from CAHMS”* P3, stakeholder). This led to *“parents who are really, really frustrated...they feel like they’ve been pushed away, and they’ve had no support whatsoever even though they tried to get it”* (P3, stakeholder). Stakeholders were clear that whilst Time Matters provided *“early intervention and emotional and wellbeing support around feelings”* (P3, stakeholder) they should not be seen as a replacement for CAMHS support. However, across the two-year evaluation period, they recognised the growing need for support for children *“not quite meeting that [CAMHS] threshold but then equally...need more than early intervention”* and that this support needed to be *“a more trauma-informed approach”* (P1, stakeholder). Time Matters had therefore allocated budget to employ a psychologist to provide support to young people.

3.4 How does Time Matters impact young people and their families? (outcomes)



“Bright Future Ahead”, “Peer Support”, and “Stop Press” produced by Time Matters children

During the evaluation period, Time Matters had begun to implement an Outcome Star tool to measure the impact of mentoring sessions on children and young people. Prior to this, the service used a combination of individual mentor reports and qualitative feedback from young people and their parents/carers. Time Matters staff and mentors had received training on the Outcomes Star. However, there were some concerns among stakeholders that the Outcomes Star was not completely appropriate for children experiencing parental imprisonment (*“it just doesn’t always feel like our kids”* P1, stakeholder) and in some parts was *“a little bit intrusive”* (P2, stakeholder), so staff and mentors had worked together to produce an adapted version. As demonstrated in the quote below, stakeholders were concerned that the Outcome Star was designed to demonstrate linear positive progress for children and young people but because Time Matters offered an open-door service with many young people engaging for long periods of time, this did not always necessarily reflect young people’s experiences and *“that up and down of everybody’s lives”* (P1, stakeholder). P1 also noted that while many specialist Outcome Stars existed, there was not one for children experiencing parent imprisonment. They would be keen to develop and validate one as a service because they *“know immediately the kind of areas our kids need to talk about...I know exactly what our star would look like”*.

“My other issue with the Outcome Star is...it’s designed to show positive progress. You know, you come in and you might be a one, and then you might end up being a three and then...ideally a five. But life isn’t like that...our kids can be, like, really content, even if the parents in prison...for six weeks to six months and then have a moment where they’ve heard that...their dad’s been

attacked in prison, this is a genuine case that we had...and obviously their mental health just went off the rails. They didn't go in school because there were so worried about their parent...If you did a star with them at that point, they would go right back to like one or zero. So, my issue is like. It sometimes looks like the kids are getting worse, not better, but it's just because you're capturing a moment in time...it's that up and down of everybody's lives." (P1, stakeholder)

Time Matters measure outcomes using the Shooting Star™ outcomes star for children and young people. The star measures holistic outcomes and (as outlined in the box below). Time Matters staff choose the Shooting Star™ because it fit well with the work of Time Matters and focused at “*skills and personality attributes that a child might not previously considered as important*” (P1, stakeholder). Initial data collected from the Outcome Star is presented below, followed by qualitative insights from children and young people, stakeholders, and parents/carers on the impact of Time Matters.

Box 1: Outcomes measured by Time Matters using the Shooting Star™

1. **Aspiration:** Time Matters wants to challenge the negative rhetoric that children with a parent in prison will have worse educational outcomes than their peers and are at higher risk of offending by encouraging children and young people to focus on hope, goals, and aspirations for a positive future.
2. **Contribution:** recognising the contribution children make through supporting each other and advocacy work.
3. **Confidence:** building confidence and encouraging children to express themselves and believe in themselves through mentoring and group activities.
4. **Learning:** helping children learn new skills and access new cultural, sporting, and learning experiences.
5. **People and support:** core value of Time Matters UK through mentoring, family-based approach. Support, being welcome, and kindness are also embedded in the Time Matters code of conduct.
6. **Communicating:** helping children learn how to communicate difficult emotions, worries and anxieties and to reach out and ask for help when they need it.

During year two, outcome star data was available for 17 young people who had received one-to-one mentoring. Baseline (session one) and follow up data (final mentoring session, approximately six weeks later) was available for 11 young people (figure 3). Young people are asked how they view changes they are making in relation to the six outcomes, on a scale which ranges from ‘not interested’ to ‘actively enjoying it’. The data demonstrates that at the end of their mentoring programmes, all 11 young people had remained stable or seen a positive change in five of the six outcome domains and all young people were at a minimum considering changes in all six domains. Notable changes on figure 3 below include young people’s sense of contribution (with 100% having a go, working on, or actively enjoying this outcome compared with 54% at their first session), confidence (with 90% having a go, working on, or actively enjoying this outcome compared with 36% at their first session) and learning (with 64% working on this compared with 18% at first session). Figures four and five provide case study examples of two young people’s Shooting Stars with comments recorded by their mentor to provide greater context to the positive changes experienced by young people during their mentoring sessions.

Figure 3: Shooting Star Outcome data for mentees at first and final mentoring session, 2022/23 – 2023/24 (n=11)

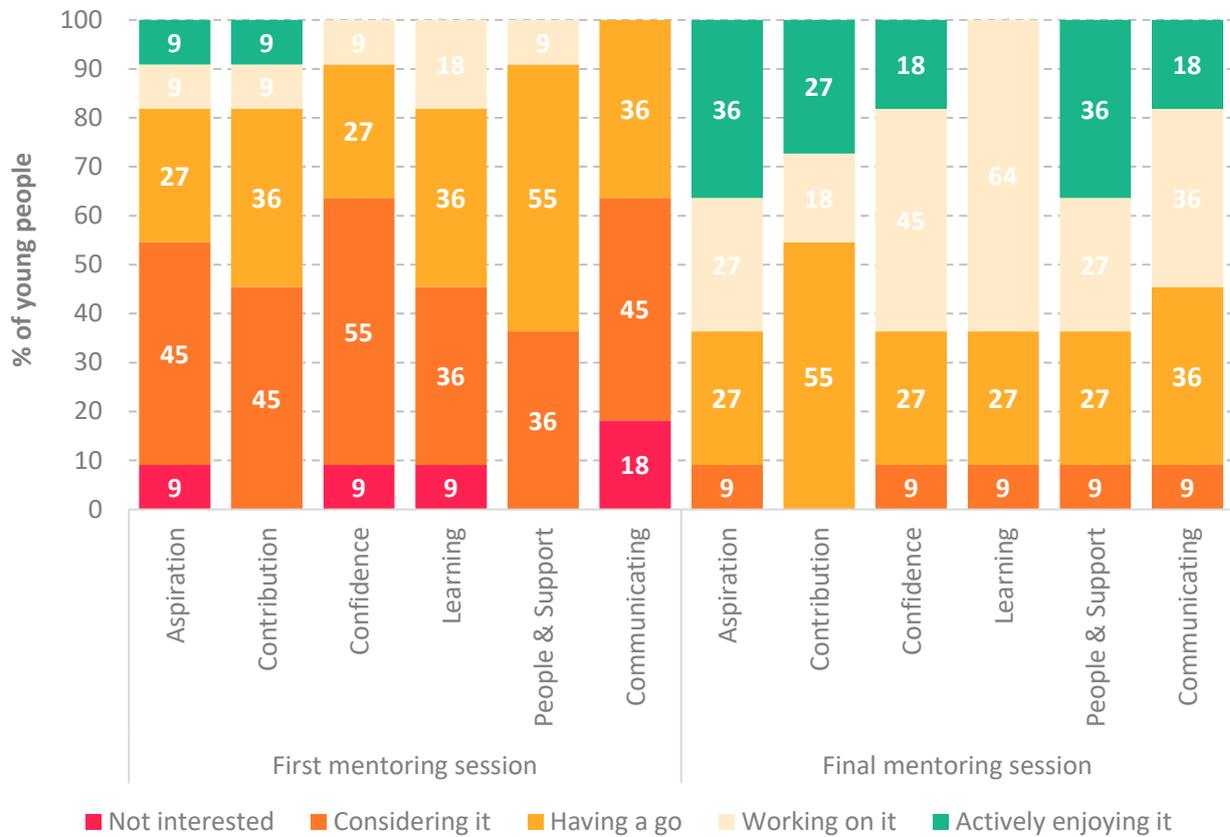


Figure 5: Case Study Shooting Star for a young person receiving mentoring (male, age 9)

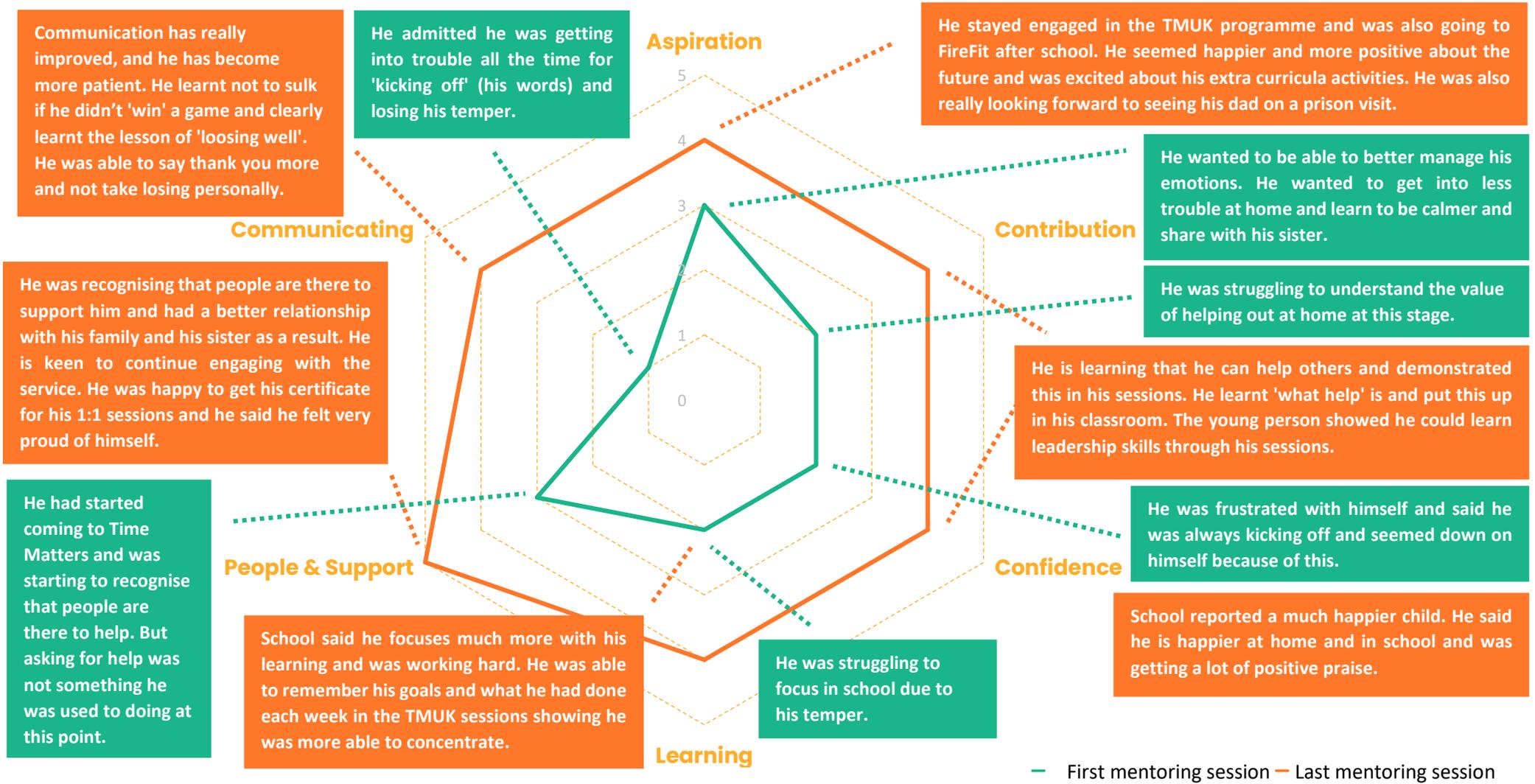
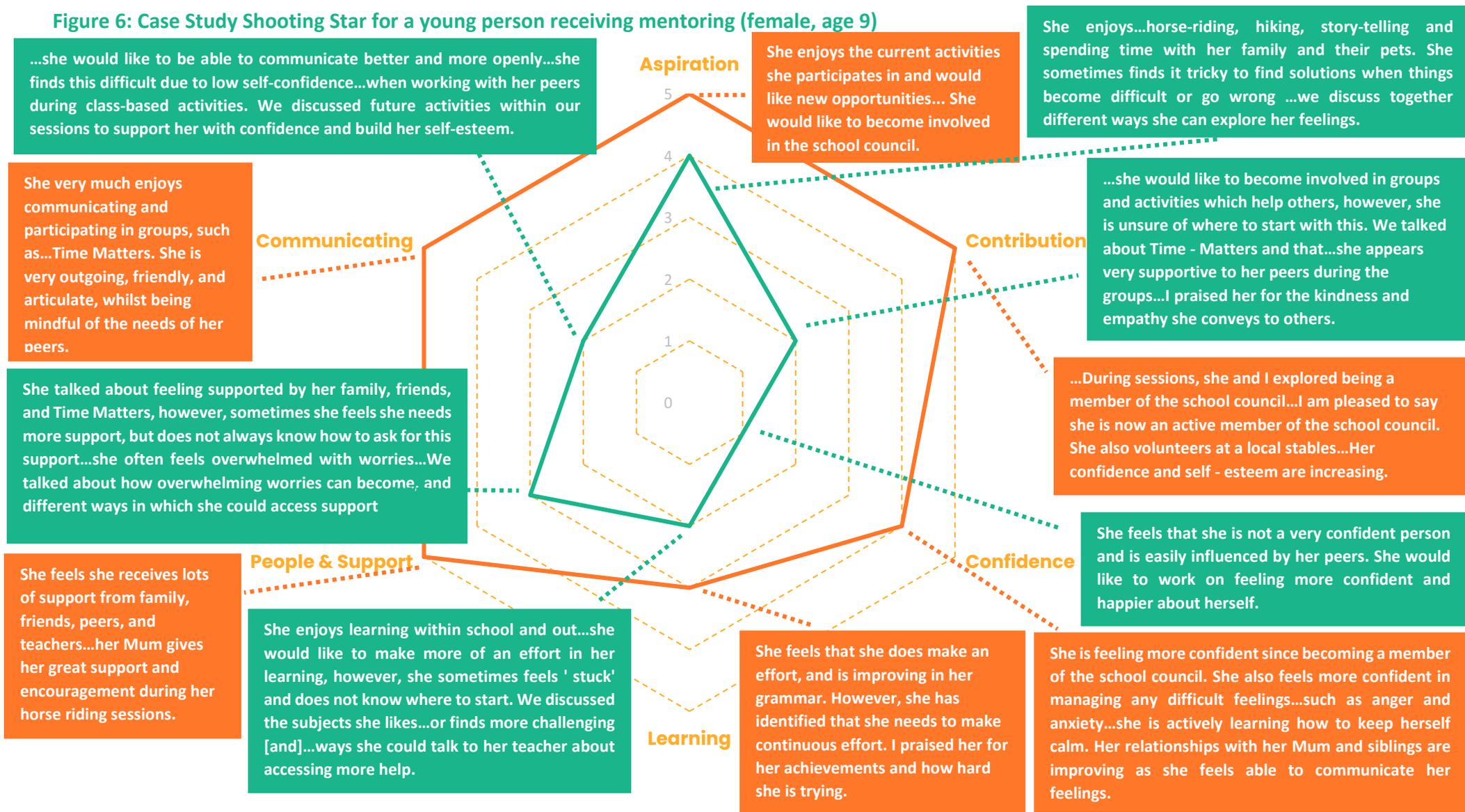


Figure 6: Case Study Shooting Star for a young person receiving mentoring (female, age 9)



Impacts on children and young people

The biggest initial change described by stakeholders, young people, and parents was increased confidence. Young people described becoming more able to express themselves and engage in social activities at Time Matters: *“massive difference, I went from someone that didn’t speak out or...have much confidence in myself to someone that’s pretty confident”* (P11, 12-15 years focus group). Parents could visibly see their children growing in confidence: *“it’s knocked my son’s confidence where he wouldn’t speak to no-one...he’s come right out of his shell...it like the self-worth isn’t it”* (P6, parent/carers focus group). As quoted below, this growth in young people’s confidence was also seen to have a positive impact over time by teaching people to communicate their views and feelings effectively, to *“have their voice heard”* and be able to advocate and *“speak up for themselves in other aspects of their life”* (P1, stakeholder).

“We have support groups too...and when they come, they are quiet and very sad and things and then as time goes on, they get more confident, and they are the first ones in the line...and their faces light up and they want to play games.” (P4, stakeholder)

“I think when I was younger if someone was to mention me mum, I would get dead upset and I couldn’t talk about it. Whereas now, I could have an open conversation about me mum being in prison. And I think that’s through Time Matters because they’ve shown me...it’s not an uncomfortable thing to speak about...if people have got things to say they show you how to react. Like don’t flip, don’t start crying in front of them. They’ll just say just have a conversation with them about it and like knowledge [sic] them more, because they don’t know. They’re not in that situation.” (P25, young person interview, female, age 16)

Positive impacts included reducing young people’s isolation through having a shared experience with others in the group (*“I understand that other people have went through a similar situation...it’s OK to talk about it. It’s not like you’re going to get judged”* P26 young person interview, female, age 14) and allowing them to express and work through their feelings (*“then like you can open up without everyone else knowing. And it’s just like good to get it off your chest”* P27, young person interview, female, age 13). By listening to young people, stakeholders saw reduced anger (*“Me brother especially...he’s like a very angry person, he used to be and then when he come here...he went back to like his normal self”* P27, young person interview, female, age 13), sadness and stress (*“I was very stressed...I just didn’t know what was going on in my mind. I was just thinking what, what can help me...and when I joined, I got better.”* P28, young person interview, male, age 10), increases in young people’s self-esteem (*“that doesn’t mean I’m a bad person or can’t, like, achieve in life”* P1, stakeholder), their resilience and skills to cope with their experiences of parental imprisonment and in difficult situations (*“I think a lot of people can overcome stuff once they’ve been able to talk to someone and been listened to”* P3, stakeholder). This also had a positive social impact for young people through friendship; young people described how socialising with the group *“got rid of the negative emotions that we feel...so that we can feel happier in the groups...and more comfortable”* (P13, 12-15 years focus group). These impacts are demonstrated in the examples below from young people.

“It’s made me open and honest about stuff. Helped me talk about it, and like whenever anyone makes silly jokes about it, I’ll just go. “And what” - it doesn’t faze me anymore...before I came here. I was like dead shy and wouldn’t say anything about it to anyone...After a few sessions because I realised not everyone is, like, judgmental. Not everyone’s just gonna sit there and like

bully you for it, because I got bullied over it...that's what made me like pure cautious about it...they helped me through, like, bad situations. She's just, it just made me like more confident and speaking about it and everything.” (P26, young person interview, female, age 14)

*“P14: I think when I was younger, I used to get dead upset whenever anyone would mention me mum but now...it has helped me to just not worry as much or not get as upset about everything... P11: Mine's more like confidence. Not really worrying so to speak and it will all be good and so it's like learning to deal with things when people say things and not losing it. So, taking a step back.”
(12-15 years focus group)*

Promoting positive behaviours, help seeking, and improving young people's wellbeing were linked to a range of longer-term positive outcomes for young people including better engagement and performance at school, progressing to higher education and employment and reduced risk, violence, and antisocial behaviours. As quoted below, parents discussed how there was often unhelpful rhetoric in society and the media which assumed their children would be involved in criminal activity in the future, but that Time Matters changed that rhetoric for their children by normalising aspiration and achievement. Stakeholders were very clear that they were challenging “*the awful negative rhetoric*” (P1, stakeholder) by giving “*support and encouragement to re-engage in education, higher education or workforce...coming to a group, seeing other people doing well and everybody encouraging you*” (P1, stakeholder). As one stakeholder summarised, “*it's OK to ask for help. It's not your fault. You're not alone. If they can understand that...that's the start. And then all the other positive things that can happen in life, like healthy relationships and a good education. Those will come from that*” (P1, stakeholder). For example, in the second quote below a teacher (P5) describes how she saw improved engagement in the classroom of children who had received weekly mentoring.

“P29: because the cat's in the kitten...So I'm here and I am trying to teach him that it is not normal. So, him coming here is making it not normal and putting them on the right path. Because otherwise it's an easy path to go and follow your dad or your mum. You know, without the right guidance and I think here massively helps that because there is so many kids together in the same position.

P32: I think without this my kids may well have gone down that path. Because there was a moment... back years ago where she was getting mither from the police and that. And then coming here has changed her, absolutely has changed her, and took her off that road. And they've totally turned away from it now and they understand”.
Parent/carer focus group

“We just have conversations with their class teachers, you know how much more chilled, focused, settled that they were. And I think happy because of having that outlet with somebody who wasn't to do with school, wasn't to do with their family...I know that they really looked forward to that session, got a lot out of it and it did transfer you know to their wider life beyond that precious time that they had...we had really positive outcomes and I think the children are still upbeat, they're still doing well, so even though they haven't got that weekly hour [anymore] they're still riding that wave.” (P5, stakeholder)

Draw, write and tell responses from children (aged 6–11 years)

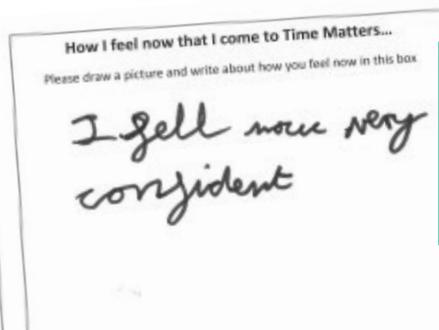
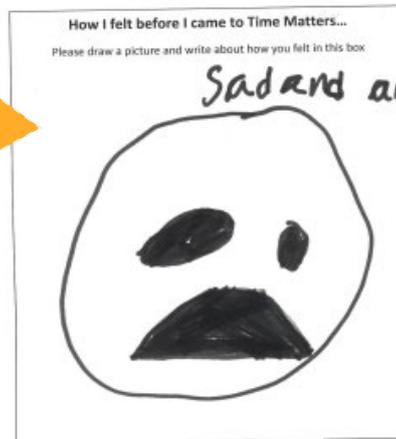
P20: Sad and angry

R2: Sad and angry and now that you've come to Time Matters you are...

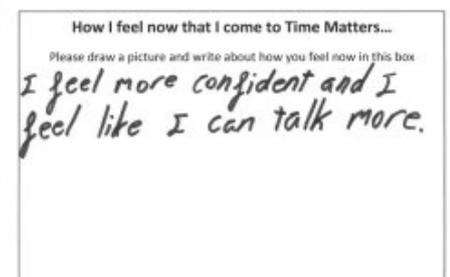
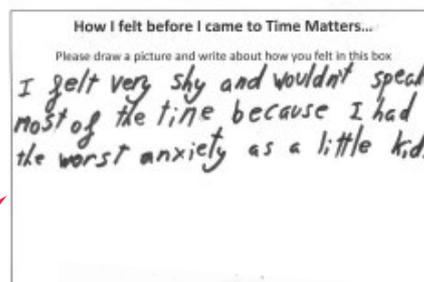
P20: Happy and excited

R2: That is brilliant. And what would you say that Time Matters does to make you happy and excited.

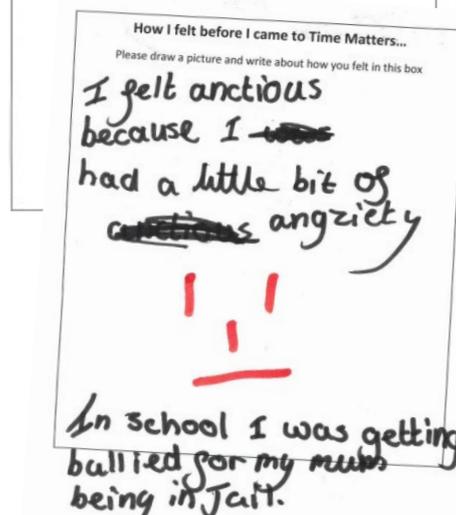
P20: They've been helping me.



P18: Anxious because I'd never met anyone and there are lots of new people...More confident...Cos I could talk about how I feel.



P19: That I was shy, and I didn't speak a lot of the time...Yeah because initially I had the worst anxiety when I was a kid, and I just wouldn't speak. They've made me more confident because I feel like I can speak a lot more now.



Impacts on parents

Many parents/carers described the initial impact of engaging with Time Matters as a sense of relief. Parents often described feeling “on your own” (P30, parent/carer focus group) in supporting their children (“I’ve never had a phone call off anybody for my kids about their dad being in prison, not one person. Not social services, nobody” P29, parent/carer focus group) and being “stigmatised and isolated in their communities” (P3, stakeholder). They felt “relief to actually meet parents who have gone through similar experiences” (P2, stakeholder) and to see their children engaged and happy at Time Matters. Many parents/carers described this sense of relief when Time Matters made them “feel normal” (P8, parent/carers focus group) and reassured that when “you are coming here, you know you’ve got support if anything goes wrong” (P6, parent/carers focus group). The young people could also see this positive difference in their parents after they had accessed support (“when, like, there’s a group on and she’s been over thinking it, that day when we go home, she’s like, oh, finally happy again because she’s being able to speak about her feelings” P26, young person interview, female, age 14).

“It’s a big relief. But until we went to Time Matters, I was just I was giving up I was just thinking oh I can’t do this...But since Time Matters, we know we’ve got someone here. I’d be lost without them...Because until then we had no-one. And knowing that someone is here...and we can get support and help from them has helped my mental health like a lot. There’s not many services like this out there for families like us.” (P7, parent/carers focus group)

“So for two years, [mentor] focused on [son’s name] and he’s done amazing. He’s passed all his GCSEs and everything. Whereas if I didn’t have this group, I wouldn’t have been able to do the things I’ve done for him...Seeing normality, is what this is for them. Honestly with [dad] going away...normality is what they needed and that’s where they get it, here” (P30, parent/carer focus group)

Participants also felt Time Matters improved relationships between parents/carers (at home and in prison) and with their children. Multiple examples were given of Time Matters “mending relationships at home or making relationships stronger at home” (P3, stakeholder). In the example quoted below, a stakeholder describes Time Matters staff facilitating a prison move for a dad who had been placed far away from his family to allow his children to visit him. An equally important impact from participants’ perspectives was that Time Matters allowed parents and children to come together away from the emotional and financial stress of their experiences of parental imprisonment, to spend time together and have fun during social activities.

“One of the issues that was having an impact was their dad was in prison far away. So the children have...spoke on the phone, but there was no physical contact...during the meeting with Time Matters they said they could maybe see if they could facilitate a possible move to somewhere...a bit more accessible...for the children to visit, which did happen halfway through the process.” (P5, stakeholder)

“It’s well better because we used to argue all the time in our house and then once we come here, obviously we still like argue over little bits but that’s just normal. It’s like normal now whereas before it weren’t normal. But it feels like happy.” (P26, young person interview, female, age 13)

Impacts on the community

As described in the year one evaluation, Time Matters has continued to undertake a large range of awareness raising and advocacy work. Examples given included speaking at Parliament, with national and international organisations and at conferences, and a range of engagement activities including podcasts, radio, art exhibitions, documentaries, short films, and plays. Case study one gives the example of Aaron, a young man supported by Time Matters who was a finalist for the International Child Peace Prize in 2023. Time Matters also developed educational resources, tools, and workshops for professionals such as journalists, police officers, the Prison Reform Trust, and probation staff (Case Study 2) to increase awareness and improve their practice in issues relating to parental imprisonment. As the first quote highlights, these activities were felt to impact the community both locally in Merseyside and nationally by tackling stigma, challenging people's preconceptions of parental imprisonment, and raising awareness of young people's need for support. In the second quote below, a teacher describes how the support given by Time Matters increased her confidence in supporting children effected by parental imprisonment.



Drawing by Time Matters young person, female, age not reported.

“The play we did last year... every single scene or testimony was...an experience that one of the Time Matters kids has been through. It was absolutely amazing...We shared them with all social workers. And we invited the police, we invited schools...we had professionals just go oh my god, we need to change our attitude, or we need to do this, and we need to do that. And that's all because of a young person's voice...so empowering, you know...and it can really bring about some change.” (P2, stakeholder)

“Knowing that there is this charity there, that we can signpost our families to that...will support the children and the family and beyond the school environment...we've got that road to go down...it enables us to be more confident with the support that we can kind of put forward to some of our families because...we're 100% confident that there is an organisation there that, you know, do what they say they're gonna do.” (P5, stakeholder)

This advocacy activity was undertaken in partnership with young people and their families and led by their priorities (“it empowers, and it's always been voluntary” P1, stakeholder). Young people valued these opportunities “to make a change” (P14, 12-15 years focus group) by raising awareness (“there's lots of others that will have a parent in prison...if we can publicise our experiences... it will show them that there is support out there” P11, 12-15 years focus group) and tackle stigma (“people sometimes have the wrong idea about kids who've got parents in prison. So, we're trying to not let people have that idea” P12, 12-15 years focus group)

Case study 1: The International Child Peace Prize

“I want every child with a parent in prison around the world to know, no matter what your circumstances that...You are not alone and it’s not your fault!”



In 2023, 17-year-old Aaron Scarth who had been supported by Time Matters since he was a child, was one of three finalists for the KidsRights International Children’s Peace Prize which is an annual global showcase of young people who are fighting for children’s rights. As a finalist, Aaron attended the Winners Ceremony at the Banqueting Hall in London and his speech was streamed online. The award gave Aaron an international platform to raise awareness and challenge the stigma experienced by children with a parent in prison.

“I was lucky, when my father went to prison, I found a support group called Time Matters. Here I met other children just like me. Children who had hopes and dreams. Well mannered, hardworking, kind, decent young people. We came together because it was hard to talk to anyone else. Here there was no judgement. It didn’t matter if we visited our parents in prison or if it was better for us not to. We learnt that you could love someone so much and be disappointed and hurt by them all at the same time. We learnt that our worries and our mixed emotions are normal, and there is no such thing as a criminal gene. And yes, it’s difficult. We worry all the time about what other people think about us and our family. We wish we could fix it. At Time Matters, as well as getting support we give support to each other. We are the leaders, the changemakers.”

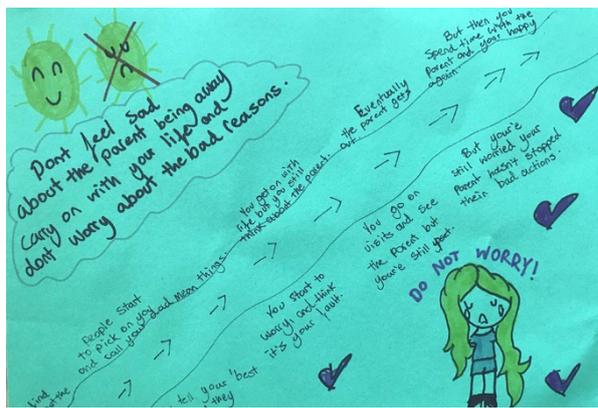


Case Study 2: Probation Think Child Campaign

During the two-year evaluation period, Time Matters continually worked with UK Probation services on their Think Child Campaign. Young people from Time Matters have participated in podcasts and live Q&As, discussing their experiences of school and probation practitioners for three consecutive years. Young people have also spoken at a regional away day and conference for Merseyside Probation offices (each with between 200-250 delegates). In the quote below, a stakeholder who has worked in partnership with Time Matters on this campaign describes the impact of young people's voices on national probation policy.

"...last week I was speaking at a probation conference alongside a young person from Time Matters...This will be the third year we've done it...making sure the voices of children and young people are reflected in the national work that's going on. And they've got very powerful voice in that...we're saying to them we hear what you're going through. We know it's tough, but you can actually make a difference...feeding them into national initiatives, making sure they've got a place around the table...So the probation conference last week, 250 people, overwhelmingly people said that was the most powerful presentation because it's a young person saying this is what it was like for me when my dad went to prison... there's a huge narrative around policymakers at the moment that we need to support young people with a parent in prison so they don't become offenders themselves. It's a terrible narrative...And then in his speech last week, one of the young people, challenged that. So, I think that it changes the national conversation. It helps people steer away from narratives that are unhelpful." (P37, Stakeholder)

3.5 Where does Time Matters go from here? (Improvements and sustainability)



Drawings by Time Matters Children, ages unknown

In the year one evaluation report, stakeholders identified a number of key issues impacting upon the sustainability of Time Matters, including the need for funding and additional staff to enable them to meet increased demand whilst also maintaining the quality of their current delivery. The year two evaluation highlighted several areas where Time Matters had made significant progress towards increasing their sustainability. Firstly, Time Matters had found new offices within the Merseyside Play

Action Council (MPAC) and hired two additional part-time members of staff. Young people in the year one evaluation expressed their desire for Time Matters to have a permanent location, and the new office space gives Time Matters access to communal rooms for group sessions and activities. From a staff perspective, this also brought additional benefits including access to physical resources, advice, and support on fundraising from staff within the building and feeling part of a community of like-minded organisations. Time Matters has also developed a new bespoke database to help improve recording and access to data on their interactions with each young person.

“Just in terms of us having an identity...an office with Time Matters on the door just makes a massive difference...We’re part of a community now, instead of feeling isolated. We hire rooms and we do a lot of our activities in the summer and Easter in the MPAC building...all the IT support, communal coffee, photocopier, little things.” (P3, stakeholder)

“...it’s a place for people to go and work and for us to have meetings. But the biggest benefit of that office space is that we are positioned in MPAC, where there are multiple other organisations. So it’s the professional relationships that we have...It just makes our professional life easier.” (P1, stakeholder)

Secondly, Time Matters had become a Community Interest Company (CIC) in the past 12 months and appointed a board of directors. Stakeholders hoped that CIC status, along with support from the fundraising officer at MPAC, would assist them in seeking longer-term funding support. Stakeholders described how the funding they received from Merseyside VRP had made a significant difference to Time Matters by giving them the financial security to “do what you feel is right with this funding...to try new things and achieve big things and work on a national level and an international level. Even though we’re this little, tiny group in Liverpool. So, it’s given us creativity, space, reassurance, networks, relationships with key people in the city” (P1, stakeholder). Similarly, Merseyside VRP felt they had a successful relationship with Time Matters because they had acted as “a sounding board...we’ve tried to be more than just a funder, but we haven’t tried to be interfering...because we can see that she has the knowledge and it has to be run in the way those children and young people need it” (P36, Stakeholder). However, stakeholders, parents, and young people all expressed concerns about the security of funding for Time Matters in the future. Time Matters staff were working to seek more long-term sources of funding from national organisations. Both staff and stakeholders for Merseyside VRP identified that “the exit strategy for them is help around...how will you find alternative funding streams” and “be a little bit more loud and proud around what they’ve done... going to places like Merseyside Strategic Policing and Partnership Boards (MSPPBs)...take it as a case study...the audience there is wide of all those funders and stakeholders” (P36, stakeholder).

Parents and young people were unanimously happy with the current provision and wanted to see it continue. Young people’s suggested changes focused on sustaining and expanding Time Matters current provision through more regular group meetings, as they valued this opportunity “to tell people what you’ve done or how you feel” (P13, 12-15 years focus group) and “if we have something to get off our chest, we could just get it off our chest” (P12, 12-15 years focus group).

4. Summary and Recommendations

As part of a range of activities to develop, promote, and sustain a whole system public health approach to violence prevention, in 2022/23 and 2023/24 Merseyside VRP funded Time Matters. Time Matters is a Merseyside based organisation which provides support to children experiencing parental imprisonment and their families. Time Matters has an open referral policy and receives referrals from families, schools, and statutory services. Children and young people referred into the programme receive six weekly one-to-one mentoring sessions (either in school or online). Since April 2023, Time Matters has received 61 new referrals. During the two-year evaluation period, Time Matters consistently provided direct support to over 60 young people and parents/carers per quarter. In addition to individual mentoring, Time Matters also provides group support sessions, social activities, and a summer residential for children and their families and 43 different activities were offered over the 2023/24 period. Parents/carers can also access support through a parent and grandparent group and individual advice. Time Matters is also engaged in advocacy work, providing young people with the opportunity to have their voice heard and raise awareness of the experience of parental imprisonment at a local and national level. This report presented the findings from a process and outcome evaluation of Time Matters, describing the programme implementation and impacts on children, young people, and their families.

4.1 Delivery of Time Matters

Time Matters takes a family-based approach to providing support to children experiencing parental imprisonment. Stakeholders described clear aims across the four domains of the socioecological model: providing emotional support and positive experiences to individual children and young people, improving parent-child relationships, providing a safe community for people experiencing parental imprisonment, and raising societal awareness of children's experiences of parental imprisonment. The public health approach similarly highlights the importance of acting across multiple levels of the social-ecological model with interventions taking this approach more likely to sustain their efforts over time and achieve population level impact (44). Time Matters operates an open referral policy, with the majority of children and young people coming from parent/carer self-referrals or schools and social services (with a smaller number coming from other statutory services). Parents/carers and children and young people described Time Matters as helping them feel they were not alone in their experiences of parental imprisonment, and many had not had access to any support prior to their referral. Their experiences concur with the wider literature, where children experiencing parental imprisonment are described as an invisible group, unidentified by agencies who could help them (4, 8). Time Matters appears to be providing vital support to these families as well as facilitating access to other services through signposting and onward referral. Figure 7 presents a logic model of Time Matters implementation which outlines the key inputs, activities, and long and short-term outcomes for children, young people, parents/carers, and the wider community.

Time Matters was described as having evolved significantly over the past six years, developing from a support group for children to a more comprehensive programme, including a six-week one-to-one mentoring programme, parent/carer support groups, and a range of social activities. There is limited published evidence on effective interventions for children experiencing parental imprisonment but the literature available suggests whole system, family-based approaches using mentoring, school-based support, time spent with peers, and prosocial recreation are the most promising (38, 42), which

fits well with the Time Matters model. However, stakeholders also described taking an individualised approach to support which was flexible (for example, providing additional mentoring sessions if needed) and empowered children, young people, and parents/carers to choose how they engaged. Time Matters has an open-door policy, meaning young people are not formally discharged and can re-engage with the service if they need to. This approach fits well with the core principles of trauma-informed care (safety, trustworthiness, peer support, collaboration, empowerment, and responsiveness) (45), which is being increasingly endorsed in UK policy (although evidence on the effectiveness of these approaches nationally is lacking) (46).

Stakeholders, children and young people, and parents/carers identified several factors that they felt facilitated the delivery of Time Matters. Firstly, Time Matters had a clear sense of community and collective identity which was built on trust, confidentiality, friendship, and shared experience. Consequently, many participants described having engaged with the service for many years. Time Matters had recently begun peer mentoring training to allow teenagers to share their experiences with younger and newer members. A second facilitating factor was the mentors themselves (both employed staff and volunteers), who brought commitment, passion, and a range of experiences of parental imprisonment. Children and young people valued their mentors because they were easy to talk to, were a reliable source of external support, and were fun. Existing evidence suggests children are better able to cope with parental imprisonment when they have social support from their environment (including talking to supportive people) (38), with a large scale UK longitudinal study reporting that having continuous access to a trusted adult in childhood can dramatically reduce the impacts of childhood adversity on mental wellbeing and adopting health harming behaviours (47). Finally, stakeholders described strong links with external organisations as a key facilitator. Time Matters had strong links with LJMU and funding from the Merseyside VRP had allowed them to foster new connections (for example, the National Probation Service, the Prison Reform Trust and Merseyside Police), raise awareness of their work, and gain more referrals.

The main barrier to sustaining implementation of Time Matters was funding. Time Matters had grown from a small local support group to a larger organisation to meet increasing demand and a growing number of referrals. Time Matters relies on part-time staff and volunteers to deliver their programme of work. Over the two-year evaluation period, stakeholders described several proactive steps taken to grow their organisation including establishing themselves as a Community Interest Company (CIC), employing additional members of part-time staff, implementing new IT systems for process and outcome monitoring, and hiring a new office space at Merseyside Play Action Council (MPAC), which facilitated access to fundraising support and other likeminded organisations. Stakeholders felt the funding received from Merseyside VRP had helped them innovate, take steps towards greater sustainability, and increase Time Matters' capacity in a way which did not compromise their current model of delivery or supportive family-based ethos. However, stakeholders acknowledged that they could not indefinitely sustain and meet increasing demand without longer-term funding. Stakeholders from both Merseyside VRP and Time Matters agreed that supporting Time Matters to seek larger scale funding and increasing their visibility among local commissioning organisations is a key priority for both organisations in the coming year.

4.2 Impacts of Time Matters

Multiple positive impacts of Time Matters were described for children and young people, parents/carers. Increased confidence was the most frequently described change for children and young people, regardless of age and the amount of time they had been engaged with Time Matters.

Young people described being more able to express themselves and engage in social activities. Time Matters was also described as reducing young people's isolation, increasing young people's ability to seek help, and improving self-esteem and coping skills. These are positive outcomes as previous studies show that children experiencing parental imprisonment often fear stigma, shame, or ostracization and avoid or lack someone to talk to about parental imprisonment, which decreases their coping abilities (38, 48). Promoting positive wellbeing and help seeking was linked to a range of longer-term positive outcomes for children and young people at Time Matters, including better engagement and performance at school and reduced health risk, violence, and antisocial behaviours. These outcomes align well with existing research on ACEs; for example, a Welsh cross-sectional retrospective study found that greater childhood resilience (being treated fairly, having supportive childhood friends, opportunities to use abilities, access to a trusted adult, and having someone to look up to) is associated with improved health and wellbeing outcomes for children experiencing ACEs (49). Time Matters also presents a unique perspective in comparison to existing interventions for children experiencing parental imprisonment because it also has the potential to measure longer-term outcomes (35, 42). Its "no closed door" discharge policy means many young people have been engaged with the programme for a considerable amount of time; the majority of the teenaged focus group had engaged with Time Matters since their early years of primary school. Staff, parents/carers, and young people gave multiple examples of young adults' support by Time Matters achieving their school, further education, and employment aspirations. Future monitoring and evaluation should attempt to capture these longer-term outcomes.

Whilst this evaluation was being undertaken, Time Matters had begun to implement an Outcome Star Tool (the Shooting Star™) to quantitatively measure the impact on children and young people. Time Matters staff and mentors had worked to choose and adapt the star to best suit their young people, and stakeholders continued to express caution about the star. In particular, that young people's experience of parental imprisonment did not always progress on an uninterrupted upward trajectory, emphasising the need for continued qualitative monitoring to provide context to young people's scores. However, the small number of baseline and follow-up Stars reported in this evaluation show overall positive outcomes which align well with Time Matters goals – indicating promising initial changes in feelings of contribution, ownership of learning, confidence, communication skills and aspiration. These initial findings suggest that the Shooting Star™ is a useful way for Time Matters to demonstrate impacts for young people by complementing their existing child-led methods of monitoring and evaluation.

Time Matters was equally described as reducing isolation among parents/carers, providing them with opportunities to speak with parents/carers going through similar experiences, and providing support when they encountered difficulties. Stakeholders and parents/carers provided multiple examples of Time Matters mediating to improve parent-child relationships and liaising with prisons to facilitate parental contact (for example prison moves or home leave). Social activities also allowed parents/carers and their children to spend time together away from the stress of their experiences and have fun. Previous research highlights that parents/carers providing care to children with an imprisoned parent are likely to face emotional, psychological, and financial difficulties, which can put stress on their parental relationships due to reduced parenting confidence and low self-esteem (50).

Time Matters also engaged in a range of advocacy work to try and challenge stereotypes around parental imprisonment and raise awareness of young people's need for support. This includes direct engagement with professionals from policing, journalism and probation and contribution to policy and campaigns at a regional and national level (for example, through the Prison Reform Trust and National

Probation Service). As a finalist at the International Child Peace Prize, Aaron ensured that the voice of children impacted by parental imprisonment was heard on a global scale. It was clear during the evaluation that children and young people valued these opportunities to make positive changes, share their experiences, and tackle stigma. The United Nations recognises that children and young people have the right to be heard on matters that affect them and that collective action by children and young people increases their capacity to make a difference in their communities and drive change (51).

4.3 Conclusion

This evaluation has demonstrated the impact of Time Matters, working in partnership with Merseyside VRP, for children and young people experiencing parental imprisonment and their parents/carers. Children and young people experiencing parental imprisonment often lack formal support and Time Matters fills a clear gap in service provision across Merseyside. Time Matters provides a good example of a public health approach to supporting children experiencing parental imprisonment with service provision that is trauma-informed and works at multiple socio-ecological levels to improve the health and wellbeing of children and their families. Funding through Merseyside VRP has allowed Time Matters to continue to provide this support, with evidence of increased referrals and expansion in their provision over the past 24 months. The evaluation found positive impacts for children and young people, including increased confidence and self-esteem, reduced isolation, better emotional regulation, and improved help-seeking and coping skills. The findings also demonstrate reduced isolation among parents/carers, improved family relationships, and greater awareness of the needs of children experiencing parental imprisonment through advocacy work. Time Matters are working to implement more outcome measures (including Outcome Star) and, along with Merseyside VRP, should continue to monitor these outcomes. Further work with Time Matters focusing on national funding opportunities and increasing visibility among local commissioning organisations is required to enable them to sustain their high-quality provision and allow them to continue to provide a safe, friendly, and trusted place of support for children experiencing parental imprisonment.

4.4 Recommendations

- Time Matters provides children, young people, and their parents/carers with a combination of one-to-one mentoring, group support, and positive social activities. The model is led by and responsive to children and families' needs. This model of provision was universally well received by participants and qualitative data suggests positive outcomes for children, young people, and their families. This model of provision should continue.
- Time Matters delivers a package of care which includes “*three-pronged*” or “*sandwich*” structured mentoring sessions over six weeks. The Time Matters programme has been developed directly from young people's experiences and aims to achieve outcomes across the socio-ecological model. Given the lack of published evidence on effective interventions for children experiencing parental imprisonment, ongoing monitoring work should continue, and efforts should be made to share the Time Matters model as an example of best practice.
- Young people enjoyed the opportunities to take part in advocacy work which allowed them to have their voice heard and raise awareness of their experiences at regional, national, and international level. Time Matters should be supported by Merseyside VRP and partners to explore the role that young people can play in delivering ongoing training and raise awareness of how to support young people experiencing parental imprisonment across local and national systems.

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- Volunteer mentors were an important part of the Time Matters model, who brought varied experience and were positively received by children, young people, and their parents. Time Matters should be supported by MVRP and partners to expand their mentor training programme to ensure peer support for children across Merseyside.
 - Time Matters has benefitted from partnership with the Merseyside VRP through connections to new partner organisations and increased referrals. Further support should be provided to enable them to continue building these partnerships and increase their visibility across the whole system, particularly with the NHS as Time Matters is well placed to identify young people in need of mental health support.
 - Young people expressed a desire for more regular group meetings and Time Matters should explore options to facilitate this, particularly when developing plans for further funding.
 - Time Matters has shown extremely positive progress in strategically developing their organisation to meet a growing number of referrals. However, stakeholders were concerned that they could not sustain their current provision, quality of support, and ethos without more paid staff. Time Matters requires longer-term funding to allow them to embed current changes and expand to meet demand.
 - Time Matters should continue the collection of Outcome Star data and qualitative feedback to allow them to demonstrate and monitor the impact of their work on children, young people, and parents/carers. Initial data suggests this is a promising method of evidencing impact which aligns well with Time Matters' objectives and complements existing child-led monitoring and evaluation methods. Systems should also be put in place to allow them to capture longer-term impacts for children/young people as retention of families for prolonged periods is a unique and positive aspect of their provision which should be evidenced.
 - Time Matters should consider developing and validating a parental imprisonment Outcomes Star in partnership with children and young people and their parents/carers. This tool has the potential to inform evaluation efforts nationally and could provide an additional source of revenue. By implementing an independent pilot feasibility study of this tool, Time Matters could inform national approaches to supporting children experiencing parental imprisonment.



"In life you should always look up high and not low" by Time Matters child, female, aged 10

Figure 7: Logic Model of Time Matters implementation



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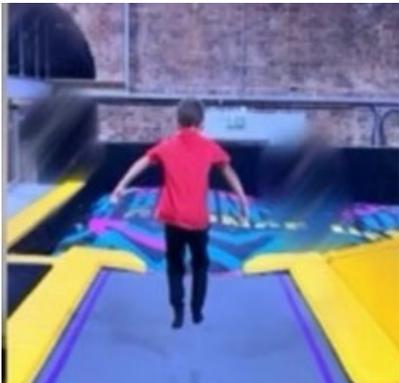
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Appendix 1: Group events held by Time Matters April 2022-March 2024

			No of young people	No of parents/carers/ adult members
April 2022				
	11 th April	Mental health support with food bags for all families	14	7
	12 th April	Easter themed support group and podcast recording on children’s views on probation for the National Probation Conference	15	8
	13 th April	Swimming and lunch	7	3
	14 th April	Roller skating at the Invisible Wind Factory	9	3
	19 th April	Mental health support followed by sports at Wavertree Aquatics Centre	5	3
	20 th April	Trip to Knowsley Safari Park	10	4
	21 st April	Trip to New Brighton with fish and chips	7	3
	22 nd April	Parents support group with pampering	-	6
May 2022				
	18 th May	Child Friendly City Children of Prisoners Roundtable Event on addresses in the media at LJMU	6	3
	25 th , 26 th 27 th May	“Picture This; Picture Me” Photovoice workshop 3 days at Assess Education. Theme – what makes you thrive? This is being written up as a journal article for publication	12	-

			No of young people	No of parents/carers/ adult members
August 2022				
	2 nd Aug	Podcast recording on the Child Impact Assessment Tool Kit used for Prison Reform Trust CIA Toolkit	8	-
	3 rd Aug	Anthony Walker Foundation workshop on the role of the police	3	-
	4 th Aug	Pottery painting support group specifically for children who live with grandparent carers.	6	1
	12 th , 13 th , 14 th Aug	PGL Adventure Centre 3-day Family residential	31	10
	23 rd Aug	Awesome Walls Rock Climbing	14	4
	25 th Aug	Trip to Alton Towers	30	12
Oct 2022				
	26 th Oct	Mental health support group with Halloween art and craft, followed by a trip to the Bowling Alley / Edge Lane	29	10

No of young people
No of parents/carers/
adult members

Dec 2022			No of young people	No of parents/carers/ adult members
	1 st Dec	Family trip to the Everyman Pantomime	30	18
	7 th Dec	Parents/carers meeting at the LJMU Law Centre for legal support	-	3
	15 th Dec	Junior Children Build a Bear	20	-
	22 nd Dec	Family Christmas buffet with food bags for every family and presents for the children from Cash for Kids	30	16
	23 rd Dec	Senior children outing to the cinema and Pizza Express	12	-
	28 th Dec	Sefton park walk followed by family meal on Lark Lane.	12	7
Feb 2023			No of young people	No of parents/carers/ adult members
	9 th Feb	Parents and grandparents breakfast meeting at Papas Bistro with LJMU researchers	-	7
	14 th Feb	Mental health support Valentines themed followed by outing to the Quirky Quarter	17	9
	15 th Feb	Mental health support groups with LJMU researchers, followed by Cash for Kids grant / city centre shopping.	23	8
	16 th Feb	Trip to the Bounce House with party food	20	8
	23 rd Feb	Supportive meal for families who live in Wirral. Includes cash for kids grant for each child	5	3

			No of young people	No of parents/carers/ adult members
April 2023 	4-6 th April	Animation workshop. This culminated in a short, animated film made by the young people about their experiences of parental imprisonment	12	-
	11 th April	Football skills and Zorbing	10	-
	12 th April	Cinema Reward Trip for Peer Mentors	5	-
	14 th April	Chester Zoo family outing	25	11
May 2023	18 th May	First meeting re: short film on maternal imprisonment at LJMU	-	3
	30 th May	Research: experiences of crime reporting when a parent is sent to prison	8	-
	31 st May	Family Trip to Rhyl Waterpark	22	15
June 2023	2 nd June	Football sports day	7	1
	29 th June	Second meeting re: short film on maternal imprisonment at LJMU	-	4

			No of young people	No of parents/carers/ adult members
July 2023				
 <p>And what was it like, or is it like, at school when that happens to you? What's it like at school? I think when people find out, it's the hardest, because people can be nasty about it because no one really understands what you're going through. Lots of teachers will tell each other what's going on, your business, and it would get rid of like it was your personal business and everyone would know.</p>	6 th July	Teenage girl support group online	3	-
	13 th July	Third meeting re: short film on maternal imprisonment at LJMU	-	4
	18 th July	Parent and caregivers support group	-	7
	29 th July	Titanic at the Empire Theatre	18	12
	31 st July	Podcast for Probation	8	-
August 2023				
	2 nd August	MAPC park funday	5	2
	3 rd August	Teenage girl support group reward meal		
	8-10 th August	Spoken word and art (three day course)	10	-
	14-15 th August	Let's Get Cooking workshop (two day course)	11	-
	17 th August	Peer Mentor catch-up	4	-
21-23 rd August	Family Residential Activity Holiday to Colomendy (3 days, 2 nights)	29	12	
	31 st August	Family Trip to Splashworld	10	12

			No of young people	No of parents/carers/ adult members
September 2023	19 th Sept	Pottery Support Group filming campaign video for International Child Peace Prize	13	6
				
October 2023	31 st Oct	October Half Term Halloween Party	19	12
November 2023	3 rd Nov	Family Mental Health Support followed by bowling	23	13
				
	17 th Nov	International Child Peace Prize Event in London	14	3
	23 rd Nov	Town Hall Awards Ceremony for "Incredible Children"	29	21
	30 th Nov	Christmas Pantomime at the Everyman Theatre	22	21
December 2023	5 th Dec	Research: Witnessing Parents Arrest Video for COPE for police training	5	2
	22 nd Dec	Schools Out TMUK Christmas Party	25	9
	29 th Dec	Wolly Hat Sefton Park walk and family meal	7	5
January 2024	5 th Jan	Wellbeing lunch at the Egg Care	7	6
February 2024	12 th Feb	Mental health and creative activities	11	3



March 2024

		No of young people	No of parents/carers/ adult members
13 th Feb	8 Hours There and Back support group and research for the play	15	1
13 th Feb	Cinema Trip ODEON	15	1
15 th Feb	Roller Skating	21	8
26 th March	Short film consultation group - online	-	3

Notes: Some young people aged 18-25 years may have joined Time Matters as children but access support. These young people are counted in the adult column as attendees.

