

EVALUATION OF APPRENTICESHIP  
PROGRAMME PROVIDED BY THE SALMON  
YOUTH CENTRE IN BERMONDSEY

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# CONTENTS

1. Executive Summary	3
2. Introduction	7
3. Methodology	11
4. Evaluation Findings Phase 1: Interviews with Current and Former Apprentices	12
5. Evaluation Findings Phase 2: Focus Group Outcomes	17
6. Discussion	22
7. Recommendations	28

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is an evaluation of an apprenticeship scheme provided by the Salmon Youth in Bermondsey, South London. The centre serves a community with high levels of deprivation.<sup>1</sup> The centre's work is founded on a framework of promoting the health and wellbeing of children through positive engagement and preparing them for education and employment. This is underpinned by an ethos of long-term support and engagement with children and young adults many of whom encounter significant personal and environmental challenges, including offending, mental ill-health and family disruption.

This evaluation identified clear evidence of a robust and practical value base for the centre's work that can be summarised in the following way:

- **The centre implements a philosophy of 'sticking with people' encountering a destructive cycle of circumstances and behaviour. This philosophy is critical in helping youngsters develop resilience to challenges, which might otherwise see them overwhelmed by adversity.**

Set against this value base this evaluation identified clear evidence of apprentices engaging with the centre and the apprenticeship programme to achieve and sustain resilience to significant and destructive pressures. This was evidenced by them findings new ways of living characterised by accessing higher education or professional employment. Examples of outcomes from the apprentice group who took part in the programme between 2010 – 2015 include:

- **1 former looked after child moved from casual work and homelessness to a university degree and employment in youth offending services**
- **1 young single parent experiencing mental ill-health moved from a chaotic life style to achieving a first class honours degree and employment with a local authority.**
- **2 individuals caught in a cycle of offending are now engaged as professional staff in youth work and youth offending services.**

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<sup>1</sup> Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD) 2010 available at <https://www.southwarkstats.com/public.php?d=D0002&p=P0002&s=S0018>

- 1 former looked after child moved from low paid employment and poor self esteem to studying criminology and a realistic aspiration to work in youth offending services
- 1 person with significant learning difficulties and school engagement and exclusion problems achieved independence away from their community and is now studying for their first degree.
- 1 individual with challenges arising from poor self esteem is now employed as a professional youth worker
- 1 person with a history of mental ill-health and family breakdown is now employed in youth work with aspirations to move to teaching or social work.

Given the alternative life pathways that apprentices might have followed, for example long term and costly engagement with and dependency on the state this evaluation found that:

- **Salmon's interaction with apprentices represents excellent value for money**
- **The model of youth work practice developed by the centre represents important transferable learning for other organisations.**

### **Recommendations.**

1. The staff time, commitment and activity underpinning care to vulnerable youngsters struggling with adversity is difficult to capture in performance management data in situations where there is limited evidence of immediate outcomes. **Consideration could be given to developing a data collection system to capture information about youngsters in this vulnerable group.**
2. **Consideration should be given to expanding and enhancing the apprenticeship programme. This could be achieved through two strategic objectives:**
  - a. **Increasing the number of apprentices**
  - b. **Developing the programme to operate on a three-year basis. Such a programme could follow an NVQ route and parallel a degree in youth work. The aim would be to develop experts in urban youth work.**

- 3. Consideration could be given to reviewing the existing balance of activities based at the centre and outreach work.** Children spend a significant amount of time away from the centre and may be developing greater geographical mobility. Activities within the centre should continue to develop and expand in line with the needs of the local community. The Salmon Centre should give consideration to developing the capacity of outreach work, both as a service in its own right and as a way of drawing youngsters into activities and care available within the centre. Apprentices could prove a crucial resource in implementing such a development.
- 4. The strategic and operational development of centre activities should give consideration to the extent to which staff resources reflect the gender balance of 'street life' and the extent to which children use social media to receive information and communicate with each other.**
- 5. The children's use of social media and impact on their lives and the lives of their communities merits detailed research.**
- 6. Key successful features of the apprenticeship programme to build on include:**
  - a. time spent away from Bermondsey,
  - b. the spirit of teamwork evident in the centre's work
  - c. the support apprentices receive as they learn and implement practical skills such as time management and self-discipline.
- 7. Priorities for improvement should focus on :**
  - a. sustaining improvements in tutorial support
  - b. more focused person-centred planning to ensure a clear transition to the next phase of employment or education.
  - c. greater clarity regarding the remit and range of responsibilities that fall on apprentices.
- 8. The young leader's programme should be expanded both as an experience in its own right and as an opening to apprenticeships.** Consideration could be given to developing this programme on both an internal centre and outreach

basis. Consideration could also be given to developing peer mentoring as an explicit element of a young leader's role

## 2. INTRODUCTION

This is an evaluation of an apprenticeship scheme provided by the Salmon Youth Centre based in Bermondsey, South London. The evaluation method aimed to be participative and involved examination of relevant documents, data collection interviews, focus groups with apprentices and staff and an interview with the Salmon Centre Director. The evaluation was carried out by Dr Richard Slade<sup>2</sup> and Dr Madeleine Mosse on behalf of the Salmon Centre and took place between September and November 2015.

The Salmon Centre was established in 1906 and provides clubs and activities for children over the age of six including children with disabilities. These activities include a broad spectrum of sports and arts clubs, residential stays and trips. Activities are provided by paid staff and volunteers. One-to-one work with young people and providing a safe environment and opportunities for young people to grow and develop are key features of the centre's work. Through their work with young people, Salmon is engaged in a range of contemporary social policy themes including deprivation, school attendance issues, youth crime and health and well-being including sexual health. The centre advocates and impresses as delivering an embedded child-focused approach which is implemented beyond rhetoric into their day-to-day work with children. Their activity is delivered by staff, apprentices, young leaders and volunteers through a model comprising three elements:

1. The health and well-being of children,
2. Their positive engagement with communities,
3. Supporting them in and preparing them for education and employment.

The evaluation revealed that this model is founded on values of 'sticking' with people facing challenging life experiences, for example imprisonment, even when there is limited evidence that investment of staff time and care will bring about immediate positive outcomes. This is accompanied by a keen appreciation of the knowledge and skills that young people possess about their own lives and their environment. Both values were evident in the evaluation interviews with apprentices

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<sup>2</sup> Dr Richard Slade is a lecturer in social work at the University of Leeds. His research interests include conflict resolution, social cohesion and youth offending. He has over 40 years experience of the practice and management of social work and social care

who impressed as having insightful and sophisticated understandings of their lives and the day-to-day reality of the communities where they live.

The Big Lottery (BL) fund is a key stakeholder in the apprentice and young leaders programmes. The Salmon Centre has agreed five objectives with the BL fund as follows:

1. 15 young people will feel more able to pursue training and/or employment through obtaining an apprenticeship at the Salmon Youth Centre by the end of the 5 year project
2. 150 young people will have improved leadership skills, experience and opportunities through gaining accredited awards (including Duke of Edinburgh, AQA awards unit, YAA and CSLA) and being trained in leadership and management (to vocational level) by the end of the 5 year project.
3. 5000 young people at a disadvantage (living in an area which is amongst the 20% most deprived by the index of multiple deprivations), will feel more confident, have more positive role models and be more likely to learn more skills and try new activities through taking part in positive youth activities run by young leaders.
4. 1800 young people with low aspirations, self confidence and limited opportunities will be more able to assess their personal development and set themselves goals through having completed a Salmon Development Cone with Salmon staff and young leaders.
5. 150 young people involved with The Salmon Youth Centre will feel more empowered due to the Salmon Youth Centre moving from Established to Advanced on the Hear by Right scale of participation (or similar) by the end of year 5.

This report is relevant to all these objectives. The majority of apprentice evaluation participants referred to a long term relationship with Salmon that began by taking part in clubs and activities before moving on to the young leaders and apprenticeship programme. This experience gave a holistic perspective on engagement with Salmon and the role of the centre in their community. However, the BL objective most pertinent to this evaluation is the first, which aims to see 15 young people feeling able to pursue employment and training through an apprenticeship. At the time of the evaluation 15 people had completed their apprenticeship programme

between 2010 – 2015 and a further 4 were scheduled to finish by February 2016. Of the group of 15 who had completed the programme:

- 14 obtained NVQ LIII in Youth and Community Work as part of their apprenticeship<sup>3</sup>:
- 9 are now engaged in full-time employment
- 4 are undertaking or have completed first degree level courses at universities
- 1 person was running their own business
- 1 person was engaged in further training.<sup>4</sup>

Given these outcomes the apprenticeship programme appears to be on course to exceed agreed objectives. However, this evaluation aimed to get beyond statistical data by exploring the narratives of people who are, or had been, apprentices alongside the perceptions of staff who worked with them. What factors lay behind this apparent success and how might others learn from the approach taken by the Salmon Centre and its funders? In order to address these themes a series of key question were devised, which were used to structure the evaluation methodology. These questions and their rationale are set out in table 1 below,

**Table 1**

<b>Key Question</b>	<b>Rationale</b>
We asked people about their communities and how they came into contact with Salmon.	Salmon sets out to support and promote the needs of disadvantaged children and young people. Did the evaluation bear this out?
We asked people what the apprenticeship involved and what they enjoyed the most.	Given disadvantage, for example school exclusion, did the apprenticeship programme engage people?
We asked people how the apprenticeship helped.	The BL objective aims to help people feel able to pursue education or employment. Did people take part in activities and learn skills that would prepare them for education and employment?
We asked people how the apprenticeship could be improved.	Asking people about their ideas for improvement could provide learning opportunities for the continued development of the scheme.

Raising clear-cut questions about complicated life events and challenging journeys of the sort discussed in the evaluation lead to complex responses that are

<sup>3</sup> One person opted to join a degree programme before completing the NVQ

<sup>4</sup> Internal Salmon Centre Document. 2015. Data Against Outcomes. Backed up by findings from interviews and focus groups.

difficult to categorise. For example when asked about their experience as an apprentice, people often referred back to being a young leader and earlier contact with Salmon. They also talked about the centre as a presence in their lives and as important to other members of their family. This evaluation should be seen not just as a snapshot in time in relation to the apprenticeship programme but rather an evaluation of experiences involving Salmon, which included, for most, direct experience of the young leaders programme and other activities, and interaction with Salmon staff that together served as a springboard for their apprenticeship.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

A qualitative data collection methodology was utilised in order to gather evidence for the evaluation and was implemented in two phases. The first phase involved interviews with current and former apprentices using a semi-structured schedule designed to draw out experiences relevant to the five BL objectives. Fifteen people were identified who are, or who had been, apprentices during 2010 – 2015. Of this group, eight people were interviewed who were available on the day of interview. Two people were current apprentices and 6 people had been apprentices between 2010 and 2015. Gender was evenly balanced. The second phase comprised two focus groups (A & B) convened to reflect on interview results that had been summarised in a PowerPoint presentation. There was deliberately no formal analysis of data at this stage. Group A comprised four apprentices who agreed to assess the accuracy of findings and explore issues in greater depth. They were also asked to reflect on the experience of the total apprenticeship group as well as their own perspectives. Focus group B comprised five Salmon youth workers who commented on interview findings and added their own perspectives. Their role was invaluable in contributing new insights. The evaluation concluded with an interview with the Salmon Centre Director that provided an opportunity for further clarification and validation of evidence arising from interviews and focus groups.

All participants gave their time willingly and frankly. Apprentices talked in depth about their life experiences and how personal troubles had been overcome. Staff described a skilled youth-work approach to disadvantaged young people. However, the construction and content of this report has ensured this willing and cooperative ethos has not coloured the findings and recommendations of the evaluation.

#### **Anonymity**

Interview participants were given an undertaking that their contributions would be anonymous and this has been strictly adhered to in this report. However, many contributions from apprentice participants were personal and unique and given the small interview sample these contributions might make an individual vulnerable to personal identification. Given this the evaluation report should not be widely circulated without the clear agreement of apprentice participants.

#### 4. PHASE 1: INTERVIEWS WITH CURRENT AND FORMER APPRENTICES.

**We asked about peoples communities and how they came into contact with Salmon:**

Most people said they lived in an ethnically diverse community and the majority of people live in the local area. There were not major concerns with long-term anti-social behaviour in their neighbourhoods or of tensions between communities or groups of different ethnicity, although one person described tensions within 'friendship groups' – groups of youngsters usually of the same gender who use the centre. It was noted that there were not major problems with extreme or radical groups although the presence of the English Defence League was commented on by one participant.

In the majority of interviews this led to discussion about Salmon in the local community and the personal impact of the project on people's lives. For most people there is long relationship with Salmon Centre as:

- A presence in their community providing continuity;
- As a provider of activities, which people took part in at different ages from the ages of six and upwards;
- As a provider of activities for other members of their families;
- As an organisation that cared about them and stuck with them especially when their lives were not working out very well.

For other people, who were not from the local community, the apprenticeship programme provided an opening into a career route where their skills and talents were valued and could develop. However, Salmon, as an organisation that cared about them, was also true for them.

Evaluation participants described a strong sense of personal, practical and emotional support provided by the centre to youngsters who use the service. What was valued and which appears to be effective is that staff know and understand the children and families and what is happening in their lives. There was clear evidence in the accounts of apprentices of a centre ethos of care delivered by staff who were concerned for and supportive of them especially when family life wasn't working out

very well. This ethos was evident when participants revealed key personal insights into their lives and their interaction with Salmon. For some, these insights were relevant during the period of the apprenticeship. For others, they reflected long-term involvement with the centre. However, there was clear evidence that the apprenticeship programme was critical in helping people turn life experiences which could be destructive into positive life outcomes and career skills. For example:

- Being personally involved in offending (committing offences or seeing this behaviour in other people) provided experience that enabled work with young offenders, including an understanding of 'gang culture', offending and strategies to address these issues;
- Experience of personal unhappiness or distress, breakdown in family relationships, or of disability, gave a unique insight into and capacity for understanding the lives and challenges faced by youngsters using the centre;
- Problems at school about 'fitting in' and passing exams gave insights into why youngsters find this aspect of their lives challenging. However, such experiences need not prevent significant later academic achievement when involved with Salmon;
- The struggles involved in starting a family at a young age; moving from being a teenager to a becoming a parent and then moving on in life;
- Dealing with anxieties and difficulties related to self-image.

**We asked how people started being involved with the centre and the apprenticeship scheme:**

Some people became involved with Salmon through personal networking, which led to applying for an apprenticeship, or seeing an advertisement for an apprenticeship post. Others described a longer term relationship, moving from clubs and activities, to mentoring and the young leaders programme and then to becoming an apprentice. This included first coming to Salmon in a pram.

For all evaluation participants their engagement with the apprenticeship programme coincided with a journey through unhappy life events, for example, homelessness, and where people had begun to think about 'turning their life around' and were looking for a chance to make this happen and help in making changes.

Contact with Salmon staff coincided with this and produced a chemistry that comprised motivation to change, care and support and a challenge from Salmon: 'let's see how you get on with this task'. This chemistry appeared significant in helping people moving away from a cycle that could have been increasingly destructive, towards a different life path.

### **We asked people about the Salmon Development Cone:**

Not everyone had used this tool. However those who had found it to be very useful. One person had adapted it for their own needs and two other people had recently revisited it.

### **We asked people what the apprenticeship involved and what they enjoyed the most:**

14 people gained NVQ LIII in Youth & Community Work. The apprenticeship lasted no longer than a year and involved practical tasks such as cleaning, helping with club activities, mentoring and residential events including sporting challenges such as the Three Peaks challenge. Activities with youngsters could be initially challenging in relation to age or gender or working with disability. Together these experiences enabled people to apply their interests and passions in a structured way. Some undertook additional training, which they paid for themselves.

A key element of the apprenticeship 'experience' was the 'social' aspect of working at Salmon. The idea of team work, with everyone pulling in the same direction whilst individual learning was taking place was very important for the majority of participants. For most, there was a clear sense of purposeful and emotional belonging that extended to the work of the centre, their commitment to it, and their interaction with staff.

A major element of the apprenticeship involved periods of time spent away from Bermondsey. For everyone this was a key outcome; meeting other people from different nationalities and ethnicity and seeing the world in a different way.

## **So how did it help?:**

One person commented that learning about the role of an apprentice and applying planning skills was helpful in dealing with the anxiety in relation to life generally and the stress of a new experience. A number of people referred to planning; the idea that a worker might interact in a relaxed and informal way with youngsters but have a clear idea where that interaction was going.

People made regular and strong reference to confidence building. For most this involved public speaking and developing communication skills. Residential events where there were positive learning encounters with other people were important in this process. Confidence building included developing time management and self discipline skills. The diversity of the apprenticeship work experiences, practical tasks, administrative work, direct work and responsibility with and for youngsters extended personal coping skills, which reached from work into people's private lives.

For everyone, trying new activities but especially the role of mentoring and leadership with youngsters were critical in achievement. Together these experiences made people more ambitious, flexible and goal-orientated. Accounts of the development of these career and life skills were allied with the growth of a passionate commitment to developing and delivering key skills, for example music or sport. This had led seeking opportunities in academic and career pathways.

## **Outcomes:**

For all apprentice evaluation participants', engagement with the programme represented a journey of developing resilience leading to outcomes that can be seen as life-changing. Anonymised examples of achievement include:

- A former looked after child moved from casual work and homelessness to a university degree and employment in youth offending services
- A young single parent experiencing mental ill health moved from a chaotic life style to achieving a first class honours degree and employment with a local authority.
- Two individuals caught in a cycle of offending are now engaged in youth work and working in youth offending

- A former looked after child moved from low paid employment and poor self esteem to studying criminology and a realistic aspiration to work in youth offending services
- A person with significant learning difficulties and school engagement problems achieved independence away from their community and is now studying for their first degree.
- An individual with challenges arising from poor self esteem is now employed as a youth worker
- A person with a history of mental ill-health and family breakdown is now employed in youth work with aspirations to move to teaching or social work.

Whether these achievements might have been possible without engagement with Salmon Centre staff can be debated. For each person a capacity for and willingness to achieve change was significant. What was clear from the evidence of apprentice participants was that the centre provided the necessary care and opportunities to realise this change.

#### **And what could be improved?:**

Some people could not identify any areas for improvement. However the majority suggested:

- Recruiting more young leaders so there can be more apprenticeships.
- Providing more work opportunities
- Developing the variety of work experience
- Developing more sport and other types of work opportunities
- More tutorial support and improve the quality of tutorial support.
- More breaks between clubs
- Being clearer about the structure apprentice's work within: what authority do they have when working with youngsters?
- Regular team meetings to look at issues and concerns that might arise within the apprenticeship group

## **5. PHASE 2: FOCUS GROUP OUTCOMES.**

Interview outcomes were validated and developed by two focus groups. Group A comprised four former apprentices and group B was made up of five Salmon staff involved with the spectrum of Salmon work including the young leaders and apprenticeship programme. The perspectives of both groups were both current and retrospective. The work with group A was evidenced based and involved feeding back interview findings and establishing their accuracy; establishing if anything was missing and providing an opportunity to add further views. Work with group B developed the inclusiveness of the evaluation and broadened the evidence base by gathering staff perspectives of the experiences reported by apprentices. Both groups met for approximately 90 minutes and discussion could have continued well beyond this time period.

Each group considered a power point presentation which summarised key findings from the interviews with apprentices, under the following headings:

- Your communities, how people came into contact with Salmon and Salmon in the local community;
- Personal Support from Salmon;
- How the apprenticeship helped and the outcomes of being an apprentice;
- What could be improved?

### **Findings.**

#### **Your communities, how people came into contact with Salmon and Salmon in the local community:**

Group A broadly held to the view that their local communities were not ones with high levels of crime and disorder. They commented that a trend could be observed of children, who used to 'hang around' in their own locality, now travelling to different areas. However, this did not hold true for all areas and behaviour of children stealing bikes and then graduating to stealing cars and selling drugs could be observed. One participant referred to decanting a large social housing estate which had achieved the unintended outcome of dispersing offending behaviour across a wider community. Another observation referred to high levels of drug

dealing in their local community. Further observations included the view that the immediate Salmon Centre locality did not experience problems of offending, which might colour the perceptions of people who lived in close proximity to the centre.

Participants in both groups agreed with interview outcomes that interracial cultural or ethnic hostility was not a problem in the area and that some 'gangs' were racially mixed. Participants in group B were keen to stress the extent to which labelling a group of youngsters as a 'gang' was very contested and allowed older people to unfairly stereotype groups of younger people. This group agreed that tolerance by age groups represented by apprentices of what, in some communities would be considered antisocial behaviour, and was possibly quite high.

Both groups referred to problems within 'friendship' groups. Whilst Salmon was good at purposefully identifying and working with such issues, the roots of these challenges could often be found in interaction between young people at school.

### **Contact with Salmon:**

There was strong validation of interview findings that contact with Salmon represented for many youngsters a long-term interaction. This was clear from the perspective of both groups: staff spoke passionately and with conviction of the importance of identifying troubled youngsters through their personal interaction with them and sticking with them through the ups and downs of often turbulent lives that could span a considerable amount of time. Group A stressed the importance of beginning activities when people are as young as possible and that imaginative and flexible activities with children from the age of six should be a starting point. Both groups endorsed the benefits of a recent activity involving an organisation providing services for 2 years and upwards within the Salmon building.

Both groups took the opportunity to re-emphasise the importance of long-term family involvement and continuity with Salmon. Relationships between staff and children were seen as vital in this aim. Group A participants described clear personal benefits of these interactions, which had led to life-changing opportunities. Group B emphasised how this close personal contact, sometimes directly with the youngster or sometimes with youngsters through their peers, was an essential aspect of their work with children. It was also acknowledged that Salmon provided important free or

minimal cost<sup>5</sup> recreational activities, for example football, which children would have to pay for at other venues.

Group B participants provided crucial additional information about outreach activity that is relevant to the earlier discussion of youngsters stereotyped as gang members. Information about outreach work had not arisen during the first round of interviews where apprentice participants had been encouraged to explore their interactions within Salmon rather than outside the centre. Outreach activity could be seen as having three elements. Firstly, as an engagement tool, building relationships with youngsters that might develop if they decided to take advantage of Salmon centre facilities, or which could continue if this movement did not take place. Secondly, outreach work might involve mediating in the local neighbourhood for example between retail businesses disturbed by youngsters from Salmon congregating when activities had finished. This example was given as part of a wider strategy of 'community engagement'. Thirdly, strategies of working in estates where there were problems of antisocial behaviour or offending by providing outreach activities for youngsters. Underpinning these and probably other strategies was a principle of advocacy: "speaking up for children" whose views might otherwise not be heard. This included attending community council meetings.

Focus Group B participants emphasised the role played by social media in the lives of children. For some youngsters this is a major cause of conflict and unhappiness where issues in the community, including school, continue to be played out. Frustratingly, there was insufficient time within the group to explore the impact of this phenomenon.

### **Personal support from Salmon:**

Both groups validated interview findings relevant to personal support. Participants in group B were keen to stress the importance of remaining constant with troubled youngsters and helping them through difficult times in their personal lives. This could include a spiritual element although one which it is hoped youngsters might be able to find for themselves rather than being delivered through a narrative which might be seen as 'evangelical'. This element of interaction

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<sup>5</sup> A charge of 50p per session

appeared close to work which might take place with a youngster to help them develop and feel confident in a personal identity: "Helping them to find themselves." The relevance of this approach concurred with the views of one member of group A who suggested that whilst faith and spiritual beliefs of Salmon staff were not ones they personally identified with, the overall narrative of this participant was of life-changing engagement with the centre.

Given the number of youngsters who attend the centre, both groups were asked to consider how vulnerable children are identified and how decisions were made about which children to 'stick with'. Both groups referred to a system of briefings or team meetings which are led by a club leader. During these meetings a previous session is reviewed and plans made for a forthcoming session. This includes deciding which youngsters they need to work more closely with alongside a 'who and what' strategy for achieving such aims. Progress is reviewed after each session. Group B participants emphasised the importance of being attuned to relationships between children, especially in the context of friendship groups. They were sensitive to the need to be aware of and make judgements about intervening when banter was moving to bullying.

Group A participants were able to explore in greater depth what helped them in their interaction with Salmon and their journey through a young leader or apprenticeship programme. One person commented that their involvement with Salmon had turned their weaknesses into strengths. Recognising patterns of behaviour in themselves helped them in working with others to recognise potentially negative patterns. There were key ingredients in this interaction that were echoed by both groups. These included empathy and the extent to which young people learn from what they see and hear, and the importance of modelling behaviour including recovery from unhappy life events. Group A participants had developed sophisticated strategies for sharing personal experiences without betraying their personal confidence or well-being. Group B participants referred to an 'engagement tool': it would have been useful to learn more about this.

### **How People Became Involved with Salmon:**

Focus group discussions concurred with interview findings that a long-term relationship with Salmon was a central ingredient. However this should not be

considered the only route. Through discussion of outreach work, Group B participants indicated activity away from the centre was also crucial in engaging youngsters.

### **How the apprenticeship helped and the outcomes of being an apprentice:**

Many of the themes explored so far resurfaced in this group topic. The value of a long-term relationship based on trust and sticking with people was continually emphasised. Group B participants emphasised the importance of personal interaction and conversation with youngsters. Alongside their professional observations these interactions were key in developing openings to assess which children might be in need and what experiences they were going through. Interventions might include working with a young person's family as well as the young person. Group A participants took the opportunity to emphasise the importance of time spent away from the area as part of their apprenticeship. These experiences built relationships which continue and helped to facilitate seeing the world through a different perspective.

### **What could be improved?:**

Group A participants were asked to consider in greater detail what could be improved as a result of their apprenticeship experience. They suggested more leadership opportunities and a clearer remit for their role and responsibilities. One participant spoke with frustration in relation to planning an activity only to be told by a club leader that this would not be possible. Concerns and queries about NVQ tutoring were repeated although participants also commented that the quality of the input had improved. Group B participants impressed as being pleased with the feedback surrounding the personal learning and development which took place during young leaders and apprenticeships programmes. One concern indicating a potential area improvement was that apprentices might experience a loss of focus and momentum when their apprenticeship concluded.

## **6 DISCUSSION**

### **The Salmon Centre and the apprenticeship programme**

The work of the Salmon Centre is founded on a framework of promoting the health and wellbeing of children through positive engagement and preparing them for education and employment. The evaluation findings evidenced this is underpinned by a tangible and empathic ethos of long term support and engagement with children and young adults many of whom encounter significant personal and environmental challenges, including offending, mental ill-health and family disruption. The life experiences of apprentices whose narratives underpinned the evaluation evidence exemplified these and other themes. However, individual interaction with the Salmon Centre does not always produce immediate and measurable outcomes. This points towards the centre's philosophy of 'sticking with people' encountering a destructive cycle of circumstances and behaviour as a key ingredient in children and young adults developing resilience to challenges, which might otherwise see them overwhelmed by adversity.

Achieving this resilience was evidenced in new ways of living, characterised by life-changing achievement including accessing higher education or professional employment. Given the alternative life pathways that can be predicted, for example long term and costly engagement and dependency on the state, Salmon's interaction with apprentices can be seen as representing excellent value for money. This was clearly evidenced in personal outcomes for interview participants where the apprenticeship programme was a central factor in developing and realising aspirations.

On a more individual level, interview and focus group findings revealed the extent to which successfully completing an apprenticeship represented different pathways on a journey of growing resilience. Although 15 people successfully completed the programme, their starting points were diverse. For some, seeing an apprenticeship advertisement was, on the surface, a straightforward business of applying for a post. For others even arriving at the point of beginning their apprenticeship and then going on to realise life-changing opportunities represented a

long and difficult journey through adverse life events. Their achievement of even arriving at day one of their apprenticeship should not be underestimated.

There was clear and sustained evidence that Salmon adopts a caring and nurturing position in relation to the children it works with. The reflection, time, commitment and activity which underpins the delivery of care and support would be difficult to capture in performance management data. However it was valued by interview participants who provided clear evidence of the approach being significant in efforts to achieve change in the lives. Such a strategy is time consuming and may not produce evidence of immediate outcomes. However the value of 'sticking with people as a mainstay of interaction was clearly evidenced in the narratives of participants and their personal outcomes. Such a strategy may produce a mismatch between the need to sustain youngsters struggling with difficult life events and the requirement to produce evidence of clear and more immediate outcomes. Consideration could be given to developing a data collection system that would capture information about youngsters in this vulnerable group. This information may be of use to existing funders and may be relevant to future funding applications.

### **Developing the apprenticeship programme:**

More fundamentally, consideration should be given to expanding and enhancing the apprenticeship programme. Based on the evidence of this evaluation this could be achieved through two strategic objectives: a) Increasing the number of apprentices, and, b) developing the programme to operate on a three-year basis. Both objectives acknowledge the Salmon Centre ethos of valuing the knowledge, skills and expertise of children who live in their locality, about their locality. Children are in many ways unacknowledged experts on the realities of dealing with contemporary urban life but their voices and ideas are seldom sought and articulated. Centre staff already have sound experience of advocating for and representing the views of youngsters. Both objectives would provide a development opportunity not merely in relation to advocacy but in acknowledging and developing the skills and capacities of children and young adults. Both objectives recognise the growing presence of 'new professionals': people, who range from service users and carers to active citizens, and who can be observed as stepping into spaces to organise

services and support for their communities in ways which were previously the province of statutory agencies.

The objectives of developing the apprenticeship programme to cover a three-year rather than one year approach might be:

1. To extend and strengthen opportunities to provide life-changing experience which this evaluation identified;
2. To build on existing achievements so as to develop the skills and knowledge that apprentices hold when they complete their programme. A three-year programme developed through an NVQ route could parallel a degree in youth work;
3. To harness and develop skills and knowledge that people have about community life, the pressures which young people and families experience, and how they can be addressed. The aim might be to develop experts in urban youth work.

### **Outreach Work:**

Irrespective of developing the apprenticeship programme along such lines, it may be useful to consider the balance between activities based at the centre and outreach work. Based on the evidence of interview and focus group participants, the localities the centre serves continues to reflect the Salmon ethos of meeting the needs of children living in deprived areas. Whilst focus group participants referred to a developing process of 'gentrification' that may reflect wider demographic change in London, it is also the case that the locality is dominated by social housing stock. Any trend of 'gentrification' may be superficial and should not be allowed to mask evidence of enduring poverty. The ward where the centre is located sits minutes away by foot from one of the 5% most deprived localities in the UK (South Bermondsey). However it will be important to keep socio-demographic changes under review to ensure that the centre's remit does not drift from its long term focus. Outreach work is likely to be a critical factor in such a process.

Focus group participants referred to young people becoming increasingly mobile and spending more time away from their immediate localities when not at home. Outreach work may be a useful way of developing engagement with increasingly mobile youngsters and involving them in Salmon's lead activities. Given this, there is a clear argument for engaging future apprentices in outreach work.

Evaluation participants had observed that groups of children who might be seen as gang members (noting the need to avoid such stereotypes) were becoming more mobile in terms of the locality where they engage in street life and appeared more homogenous in relation to race. It was also noted that young females were becoming more active in the supply of illicit drugs possibly because their presentation was perceived as less intimidating by males. Consideration should be given to the impact these observations might have on the work of the centre. Outreach work may be a useful way of exploring and assessing any impact, but consideration should be given to the gender balance in providing such a service.

There was clear endorsement for developing and expanding the young leaders programme both as an experience in its own right and as an opening to apprenticeships. The evidence of interviews and focus groups argues the programme represents excellent value for money in relation to staff time investment. It provides youngsters with the opportunity to learn and apply leadership skills (for example planning, communication, time management) whilst providing services for children. Given the Salmon model of working and underpinning ethos, there are significant opportunities to develop the young leaders programme on a peer mentoring basis. If outreach work is developed by including young leaders and apprentices then consideration should be given, if not already present, to including conflict resolution and mediation strategies within the learning programme.

### **Key questions:**

Interviews and focus group participants identified the following evidence to address the key questions that underpinned the evaluation. In summary, the overall responses were as follows.

### **We asked people about their communities and how they came into contact with Salmon:**

Salmon represents a source of continuity in an environment that may be beginning a process of change. Most people feel positive about the community although there were discrepancies amongst evaluation participants in relation to perceptions of antisocial behaviour including drug dealing. In some localities in the UK this illicit economy is closely associated with the exploitation of young people and

'gang' violence. There are not currently major problems with the extreme radicalisation, for example the English Defence League, although the presence of such groups was noted.

Based on the evidence of this evaluation, Salmon impresses as remaining consistent to its mission of meeting the needs of deprived communities. There was some observational evidence that communities may be changing and the centre will need to keep pace with these changes. This was important for how people first came into contact with the centre since for most apprentices this interaction was a crucial platform in later attempts to turn their lives around. It will be important to bear this in mind if the socio-economic demography of the locality starts to change and this connection weakens.

**We asked people what the apprenticeship involved and what they enjoyed the most:**

Participants described a range of practical academic and social interactions with children, which led to a rich and varied experience. They particularly enjoyed time spent away from Bermondsey. Teamwork and a sense of belonging that the apprenticeship programme gave were highly valued.

**We asked people how the apprenticeship helped.**

Apprentices were unanimous in the life-changing opportunities the programme had provided them with. For example, learning and implementing skills in public speaking led to increased self-confidence and self-esteem. For some people these achievements were very significant bearing in mind they had started from a poor sense of self-belief and self-worth. Learning and implementing time management skills and self-discipline skills had been essential outcomes in achieving success in other areas of their lives, for example in higher education or in employment.

**We asked what could be improved:**

Whilst the evaluation evidence was clearly positive, there is scope for improvement.

1. Tutorial support should be reviewed and attuned more closely to the circumstances and needs of apprentices.
2. The period leading up to and after an apprenticeship should be the focus of person-centred planning to ensure a clear transition to the next phase of employment or education.
3. The remit and range of responsibilities that fall on apprentices should be clarified so that there is no doubt in relation to their scope for planning and providing activities.
4. Internal communication should be improved so that apprentices and staff are offered greater clarity when they were addressing the needs of a youngster with challenging behaviour. For example, if a youngster is to be excluded from the centre a clear process needs to be followed in order to determine that this is a right course of action. Sometimes staff, including apprentices, may not be clear about these processes or how they are being followed.

## 7. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The time, commitment and activity that underpins the delivery of care to vulnerable youngsters is difficult to capture in performance management data where there is not evidence of immediate outcomes. However the approach is valued and represents good value for money. Consideration should be given to developing a data collection system to capture information about youngsters in this vulnerable group.
2. Consideration should be given to expanding and enhancing the apprenticeship programme. Based on the evidence of this evaluation this could be achieved through two strategic objectives:
  - a. Increasing the number of apprentices; and
  - b. Developing the programme to operate on a three-year basis.

Such an approach would:

- c. Extend and strengthen opportunities to provide life-changing apprentice experience which this evaluation identified;
  - d. Build on existing achievements so as to develop the skills and knowledge that apprentices hold when they complete their programme. A three-year programme developed through an NVQ route could parallel a degree in youth work; and
  - e. Harness and develop skills and knowledge that people have about community life, the pressures that young people and families experience, and how they can be addressed. The aim might be to develop experts in urban youth work.
3. Consideration should be given to reviewing the existing balance of activities provided by Salmon between centre-based and outreach work. Children spend a significant amount of their time away from the centre and may be developing greater geographical mobility. Activities within the centre should continue to develop and expand in line with the needs of the local community. However, new funding opportunities should give consideration to developing the capacity of outreach work, both as a service in its own right, and as a way of drawing youngsters into activities and care available within the centre.

Apprentices could prove a crucial resource in implementing such a development.

4. Any strategic and operational development in internal or external centre activities should be give consideration to the extent to which staff resources reflect the gender balance of 'street life' and the extent to which children use social media to receive information and communicate with each other.
5. In addition to those aspects of the apprenticeship programme that have already been considered, key successful features of the apprenticeship programme to build on include:
  - a. Time spent away from Bermondsey;
  - b. The spirit of teamwork evident in the centre's work and support apprentices receive; and
  - c. Learning and implementing practical skills such as time management and self-discipline skills.
6. Areas for improvement should focus on:
  - a. Sustaining improvements in tutorial support;
  - b. More focused person-centred planning to ensure a clear transition to the next phase of employment or education; and
  - c. Ensuring clarity regarding the remit and range of responsibilities that fall on apprentices.
7. The young leaders programme should be expanded both as an experience in its own right and as an opening to apprenticeships. Consideration could be given to developing this programme on both an internal centre and outreach basis. Consideration could also be given to developing peer mentoring as an explicit element of a young leader's role.