MCR Pathways:
The Relationship-Based Journey to Breaking the Cycle of Child Poverty



MCR Pathways

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Sharon McIntyre, CEO Foreword

It is truly a privilege to represent the voices of the young people, mentors, and partners who have volunteered their time, invaluable expertise and lived experience with us to create this report. This publication is a testament to the transformational power of the human connection and relational practice benefits for young people, mentors and partners. Together they form a collective eco-system of change makers , each bringing incredible insights, knowledge and belief in a shared commitment to a future where child poverty no longer exists.

The stark reality of child poverty affects 23% of Scotland's children and young people, severely limiting their life chances.[1]

In the UK, 1 in 3 children live in poverty, totalling 4.5 million children. This isn't a new problem; it's a persistent one that drives sky high, long-term costs in education, health, and justice systems. At MCR Pathways, we firmly believe in the transformational power of a Trusted Adult in a young person's life. We believe that a Trusted Adult mentor can change the course of a young person's life through empowering encouragement and kindness that focuses on self belief. That deeper self belief and sense of self nurtured through a trusted relationship then creates opportunities to positively affect educational outcomes, career opportunities, and life chances.

The evidence is unquestionable. Relationship-based mentoring plays a crucial role in the fight to eradicate poverty.

We provide an overview of how together, our work with partners provides people-first, practical, community-powered, and cost-effective access to mentoring support that empowers young people toward brighter futures. The data speaks for itself. In Scotland, 75% of the young people supported in 2023/2024 were from the 40% most deprived areas. Despite this, 94% of mentored young people from areas with high deprivation went on to a positive destination after school. The power of relationship based mentoring helps young people in poverty and challenging circumstances to break cycles of inequality and exclusion as they move into adulthood.

Our recommendation is to leverage the power of mentoring to not only tackle the issue of poverty but to prevent it from worsening. These young-person-led proposals demonstrate the immediate need for continued national collaboration and investment to take urgent action now to eradicate child poverty.





[1] Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2023

Executive Summary: MCR Pathways' Child Poverty Report

Child poverty is a complex issue that goes beyond a simple lack of money; it's a significant barrier to opportunity that affects a young person's life, wellbeing, education, health, and future prospects.

The effects of poverty are not felt equally across all groups, with lone-parent families, ethnic minorities, and households with a disabled member being disproportionately affected. Those who are from the care-experienced community are also disproportionately at risk of poverty due to a number of interrelated factors, such as; leaving the care system into unemployment, housing instability, and financial hardship often stemming from inadequate support, limited access to resources, and large-scale systemic disadvantages.

MCR Pathways: A Proven Intervention

Since 2007, MCR Pathways has supported nearly 20,000 young people. The programme operates in 21 local authorities in Scotland and 6 in England. The 2024/25 academic year saw the programme support 5,930 young people across 125 secondary schools in Scotland. The report uses the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) to analyse the socio-economic backgrounds of the young people supported, showing that 75% of them came from the 40% most deprived areas in Scotland.

The data from the 2023/24 academic year shows the significant impact of mentoring:

- **S4 to S5 Staying-On Rates:** Mentored young people from the most deprived areas who attended 10 or more mentoring sessions were 24.2% more likely to stay in school compared to their non-mentored peers.
- **S5 Attainment:** Mentoring had a greater impact on young people from the most deprived areas, showing a 26.1% difference in attainment between mentored and non-mentored students, compared to a 4.4% difference in less deprived areas.
- **Post-School Destinations:** Mentoring helped more young people from most deprived areas move on to positive destinations (college, university, or employment), with a 28.3% increase compared to non-mentored young people in the same areas. 58.2% of non-mentored young people from the most deprived areas left school for University, College or employment / apprenticeship compared to 72.9% of non-mentored young people from the least deprived areas. So the difference for non-mentored young people between most and least deprived areas is 14.7%, compared to 3% for mentored young people.

Key Recommendations and Call to Action

The findings within this report emphasise mentoring as a powerful catalyst for change and prevention. MCR Pathways calls for:

- **Trusted Adult Guarantee:** Making mentoring a fundamental right for every young person who needs it. This report asks policymakers, government bodies, and communities to collaborate to make this vision a reality, ensuring every young person in Scotland and the UK has the chance to thrive and be the best they can be thanks to the support of a Trusted Adult.

Mentoring also needs to be part of a collaborative approach with partners, complementing existing school and community services as part of an integrated, young-person-centred support system.


YAMAHA
Clavinova

Child Poverty: The Stark Reality

The impact of child poverty is severe, affecting children's health, wellbeing, and future economic opportunities.

It's the daily struggle of a young person who doesn't have the same access to support, guidance and resources as their peers. It's the feeling of being left behind, not because of a lack of talent or ambition, but because of circumstances they can't control. This reality can cast a long shadow over a child's life, affecting their education, health, and future prospects.

The Scottish Government defines child poverty as 'a child living in a household with an income below 60% of the national average income.' However, child poverty can mean different things to different people. Some may associate it with not having enough money to meet essential needs for an acceptable standard of living, such as food and heating - a measure often defined as material deprivation.

Different Types of Poverty

- **Very deep poverty:** This is defined as living in a household with an income less than 40% of the national average income.
- **Less deep poverty:** This is defined as living in a household with an income between 40% and 60% less than the national average income[2]
- **In-work poverty:** This is defined as being in employment that does not pay enough to afford a decent standard of living[3]

For others, child poverty is about not having the same opportunities to grow and develop, which impacts their education, health, and future.

The effects of poverty are not felt equally; some groups are disproportionately affected.

The Intersection of Identity and Poverty

Poverty disproportionately affects certain groups, including lone-parent families, ethnic minorities, and households with a disabled member. For many young people, especially those in care or from vulnerable family backgrounds, the barriers are even higher. Their experience of poverty is often compounded by **intersectionality** - the way different parts of their identity, like their race, gender, or disability, can overlap and intensify the challenges they face. Those who experience intersectionalities in their experience of poverty will have a unique and altered experience of poverty, depending on what intersectionalities they experience. They often lack the stable, consistent support systems that are crucial for navigating the challenges of adolescence and preparing for adulthood.

Children in Scotland are still at greater risk of poverty than anyone else in the country.

The Vicious Cycle: The problem of child poverty is complex and cyclical. It creates a vicious cycle wherein a lack of resources in childhood directly limits opportunities in adulthood, which in turn can lead to their own children and the next generation experiencing the same struggles. The effects aren't just personal; they have a significant impact on society. When a large portion of the population is unable to reach their full potential, the entire community suffers from a loss of talent, innovation, and productivity.

[2] Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2023
[3] Living Wage Scotland, 2019

MCR Pathways: The Relationship-Based Journey to Breaking the Cycle of Child Poverty

Our journey began with a clear focus on care-experienced young people, but we quickly recognised that the challenges they faced - instability, lack of consistent adult support, and an uncertain future - were shared by many others.

Life instability can take many forms, from family breakdown, to poverty or mental health challenges. Our data shows the need for the MCR Pathways programme to be extended particularly for young carers, those living in informal kinship settings and young people navigating through bereavement.

These obstacles can be just as significant as navigating the care system, and they often lead to disengagement and a sense of hopelessness. By expanding our reach, we can intervene earlier and provide a lifeline to many more young people who are on the brink of disengaging from their education and risk realising their potential.

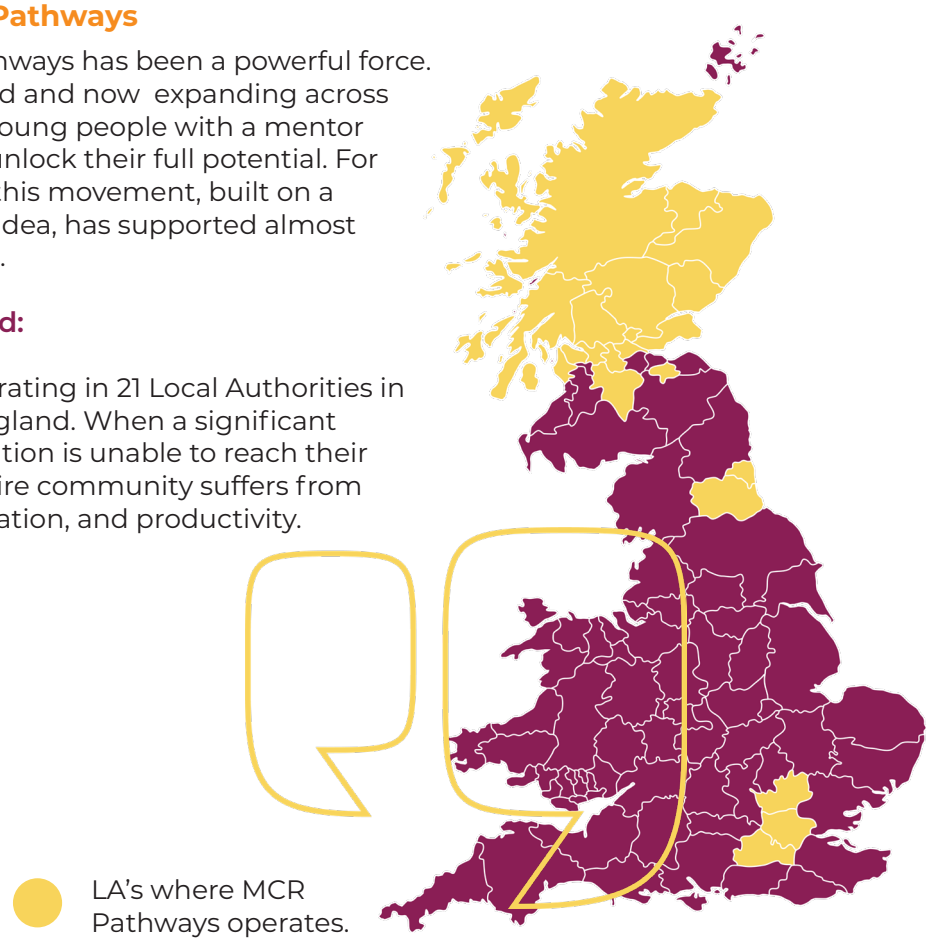
This evolution is driven by the belief that our relational, person-centered model is universally effective. We've seen firsthand how a consistent, trusting relationship with a mentor can transform a young person's life. It's the difference between feeling invisible and feeling seen; between giving up and finding the courage and resilience to try again. Our ability to adapt and grow is a testament to the power of our model. We don't just provide a service; we create a community of trust and stability that young people can rely on now and in the future.

The scale of MCR Pathways

Since 2007, MCR Pathways has been a powerful force. Beginning in Scotland and now expanding across the UK, connecting young people with a mentor who can help them unlock their full potential. For over eighteen years, this movement, built on a simple yet profound idea, has supported almost 20,000 young people.

Geographical spread:

We are currently operating in 21 Local Authorities in Scotland and 6 in England. When a significant portion of the population is unable to reach their full potential, the entire community suffers from a loss of talent, innovation, and productivity.



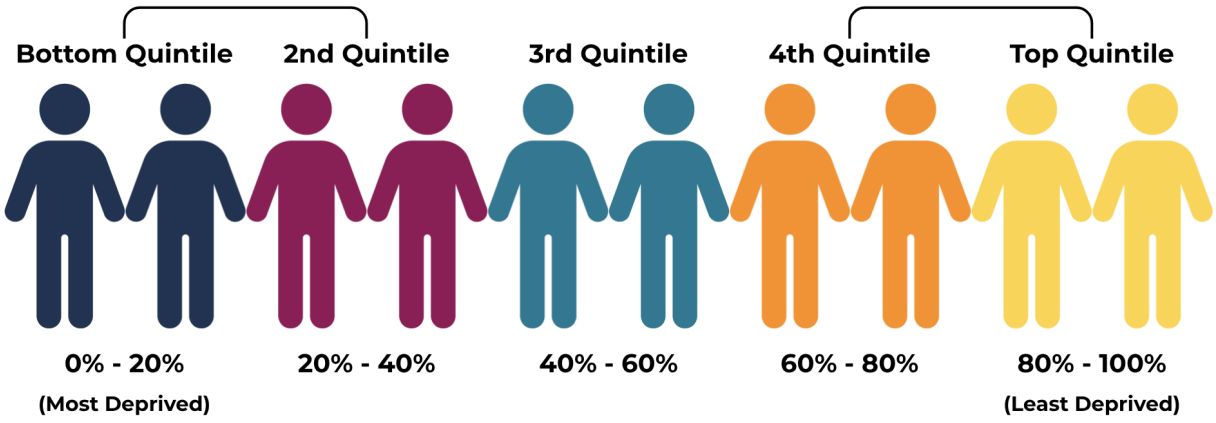
LA's where MCR Pathways operates.



MCR Pathways as a Child Poverty Intervention: The Evidence

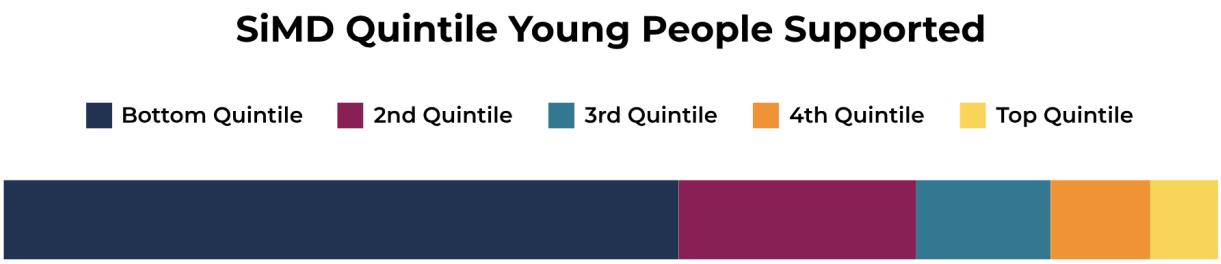
During the 2024/25 academic year MCR Pathways supported 5,930 young people, across 17 different Local Authorities, in 125 secondary schools across Scotland.

We have used the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation to measure the likelihood of young people living in poverty. We have performed the analysis by grouping together those in the Bottom and the 2nd Quintile, and those in the Top and the 4th Quintile, then comparing those two groups against each other:



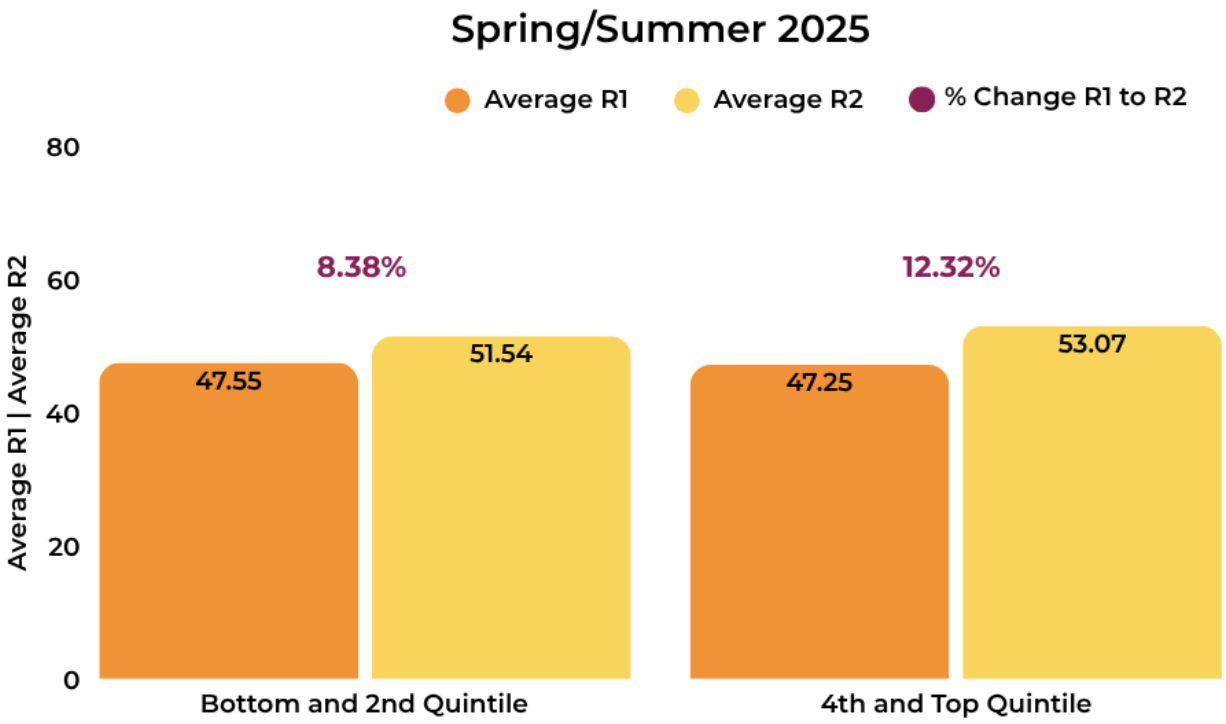
75% of young people supported by MCR Pathways in the academic year 2024/25 came from the 40% most deprived areas in Scotland (2nd and bottom Quintile group) and 13% from the least deprived areas (4th and Top Quintile group), with the distribution differing depending on Local Authority. For example, we have supported more young people from less deprived areas in Aberdeenshire, whereas in North Ayrshire or Glasgow more than 75% of MCR Pathways supported young people came from the 40% most deprived communities. So local findings are likely to differ from our national findings discussed in this report.

Below is the distribution of MCR supported young people by SiMD Quintile:



There is no notable difference regarding ethnicity distribution for supported young people from more deprived areas, compared to less deprived areas. There is a slightly higher percentage of MCR mentor supported young people from minority backgrounds living in more deprived areas compared to the least deprived areas (7% vs. 4%). This again highlights the intersectionalities faced by many young people, who have wide ranging experiences of poverty due to other factors in their lives. Due to mentoring being designed around the needs of young people and personalised to their likes and dislikes, dreams and ambitions, the MCR Pathways model allows for each individual's intersectionalities to be recognised and supported through the holistic nature of the Trusted Adult model. Across all areas there is a higher percentage of care-experienced young people who come from the most deprived areas, compared to the least deprived (35% vs. 27%). There are also higher percentages of informal social work supervision, or being on the cusp of social intervention, in these areas (16% vs. 9%).

To measure the wellbeing of young people we applied the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale twice throughout the 2024/25 academic year. In the first round, conducted in autumn/winter 2024 (R1 and R2), there was almost no difference in average scores between young people from the most and least deprived areas. In fact, young people from the bottom two quintiles actually had slightly higher average wellbeing. However, a significant shift occurred in the second round in spring/summer 2025. Young people from the fourth and top quintiles showed better average wellbeing and higher rates of improvement. This suggests that the impact of mentoring support grew stronger and deeper over the academic year.



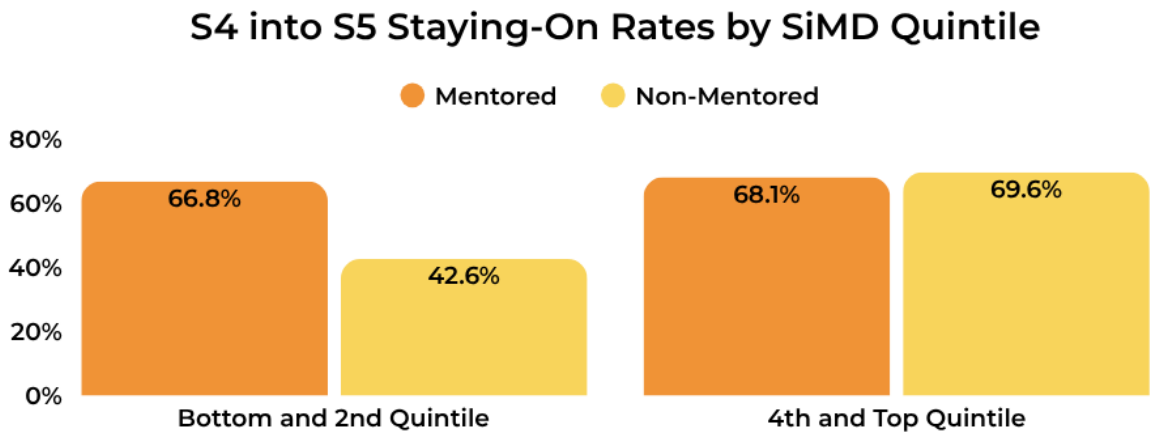
Key Performance Indicators 2023/24

In addition to our 2024/25 statistics, we also analysed our Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) from the 2023/24 academic year: S4 to S5 staying-on rates, S5 attainment, and post-school destinations.

The data revealed significant differences in outcomes for our young people, directly linked to their socio-economic background, as measured by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD).

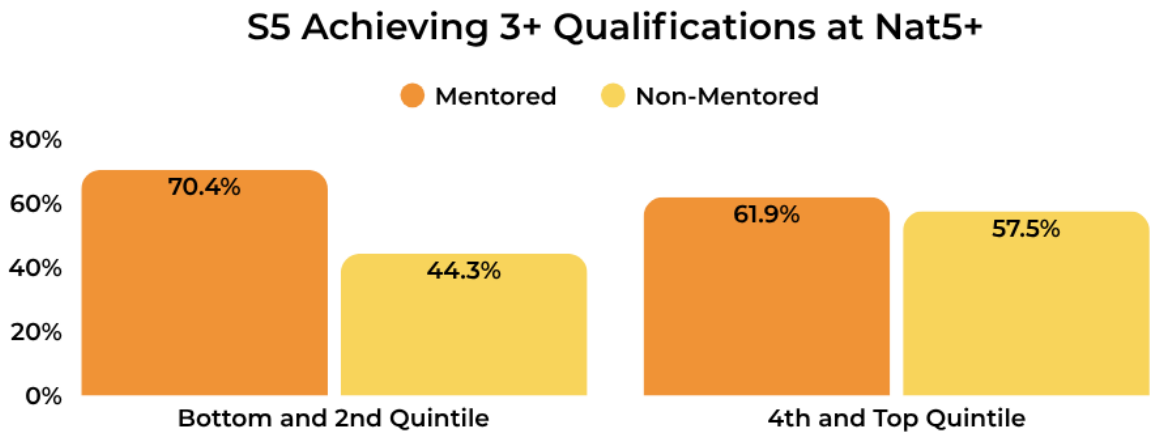
Staying on Rates

We observed higher staying-on rates from S4 to S5 for young people from the least deprived areas (68.8% vs. 58.5%). However, mentoring is having the greatest impact on young people from the most deprived areas. Those who attended 10 or more mentoring sessions were 24.2% more likely to stay on to S5, highlighting the programme's powerful role in preventing early school leavers.



Educational Attainment

When we look at S5 attainment by SiMD Quintile, mentoring plays a significant role in collaboration with schools and other school based services in improving the attainment outcomes of young people living in the the most deprived areas (26.1% difference between mentored and non-mentored young people) when comparing figures to the least deprived areas (4.4% difference between mentored and non-mentored young people). Mentored young people in the most deprived areas outperformed mentored young people in the least deprived areas.



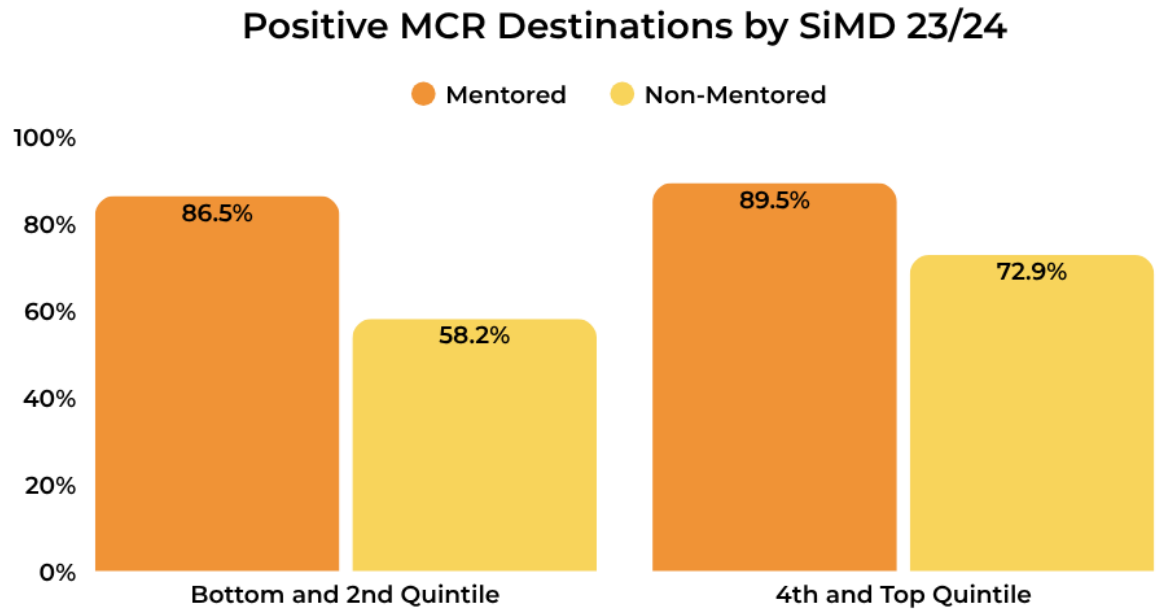
Post-School Destinations

Young people from less deprived areas were more likely to leave school for a positive destination (Higher or Further Education, Employment, or Apprenticeship) than their peers from the most deprived areas (83.9% vs. 76.7%). However, the data shows that more young people from deprived areas chose post-school pathways defined as positive by the Scottish Government, specifically Voluntary Work, Training, or Personal and Social Development. There is a distinct difference, of 7.8% more young people from the most deprived areas choosing these destinations compared to those from the least deprived areas.

12.7% of young people from the most deprived areas left school for Training, Voluntary Work or PSD compared to 4.9% of young people from the least deprived neighbourhoods. However, there is a stark difference in cohort size with 93 young people choosing this destination from the most deprived areas and 7 young people from the least deprived ones.

We observed that a higher percentage of young people from the least deprived areas left school for Higher Education (+10%). Fewer of them went into employment or apprenticeships than young people from areas with higher deprivation levels (-4.4%).

In relation to positive destinations, there was the biggest impact of mentoring in young people from the most deprived areas. 28.3% more mentored young people from a background with high deprivation levels left school for College, University or Employment/Apprenticeship than young people from the same areas, who were not mentored. This gap is smaller for young people from the least deprived neighbourhoods (16.6%).



While mentoring is beneficial for young people from all backgrounds, we see the most distance travelled and the biggest impact on young people from areas with high deprivation levels.

The data suggests that mentoring appears to make a vital difference there, encouraging young people to stay in school longer, achieve better attainment and leave school for College, University or Employment/Apprenticeship.



What mentors say about the power of mentoring

The MCR Pathways programme is built on the belief that a stable, trusted adult relationship can change a young person's life. But as these powerful testimonials show, the impact of mentoring is a two-way street. Mentors not only provide crucial support, but also gain valuable insights that extend far beyond the mentoring sessions themselves. Our mentors consistently attest to the impact they see first-hand.

> ***"My young person shared that in the previous school year his attendance rate was something like 20%, but that this year it was in the range of 90% or more...He's shared with me dozens of recordings of his music accomplishments...I think hearing them himself and seeing my very positive reactions to them gave him added confidence."***

Mentors witness firsthand the remarkable transformations in their young people - from increased school attendance and improved confidence to taking on leadership roles.

> ***"She went from being very lacking in confidence when we first met, saying she had no friends and felt socially awkward, to taking on leadership roles both in and out of school."***

In turn, mentors gain a deeper understanding of the challenges young people face, including those related to social challenges and neurodiversity. This empathy and knowledge are not just academic; they are transferable skills that mentors can apply in their own professional and personal lives.

> ***"I was expecting that I would give more than gain from the experience. I found that I learned so much from working with my young person...one of my team recently commented on how well I'd handled an issue related to her neurodiversity and I know I genuinely wouldn't have had the first idea had I not heard first hand from my young person..."***

This mutual growth and development is the true power of mentoring. It's an experience that not only empowers young people to overcome barriers but also enriches mentors and communities, creating a ripple effect of social impact.

Pioneering Our New Chapter in Alternative Provision

In 2025, we are taking a significant step forward by pioneering community-led and community-based mentoring within alternative provision settings.

These are spaces where traditional education and student support is not in place for a young person due to many environmental factors. In a recent report, Impetus have found that non-attendance has become a regular part of several young people's lives, and many weigh school up with other priorities in life; where school often does not come out as a top priority[4]. New emerging partnerships with community anchor organisations like Centrestage in Kilmarnock and Forth Valley College are not just about extending our reach; they are about reimagining how our mentoring can change to meet the needs of young people, and to meet them where they are.

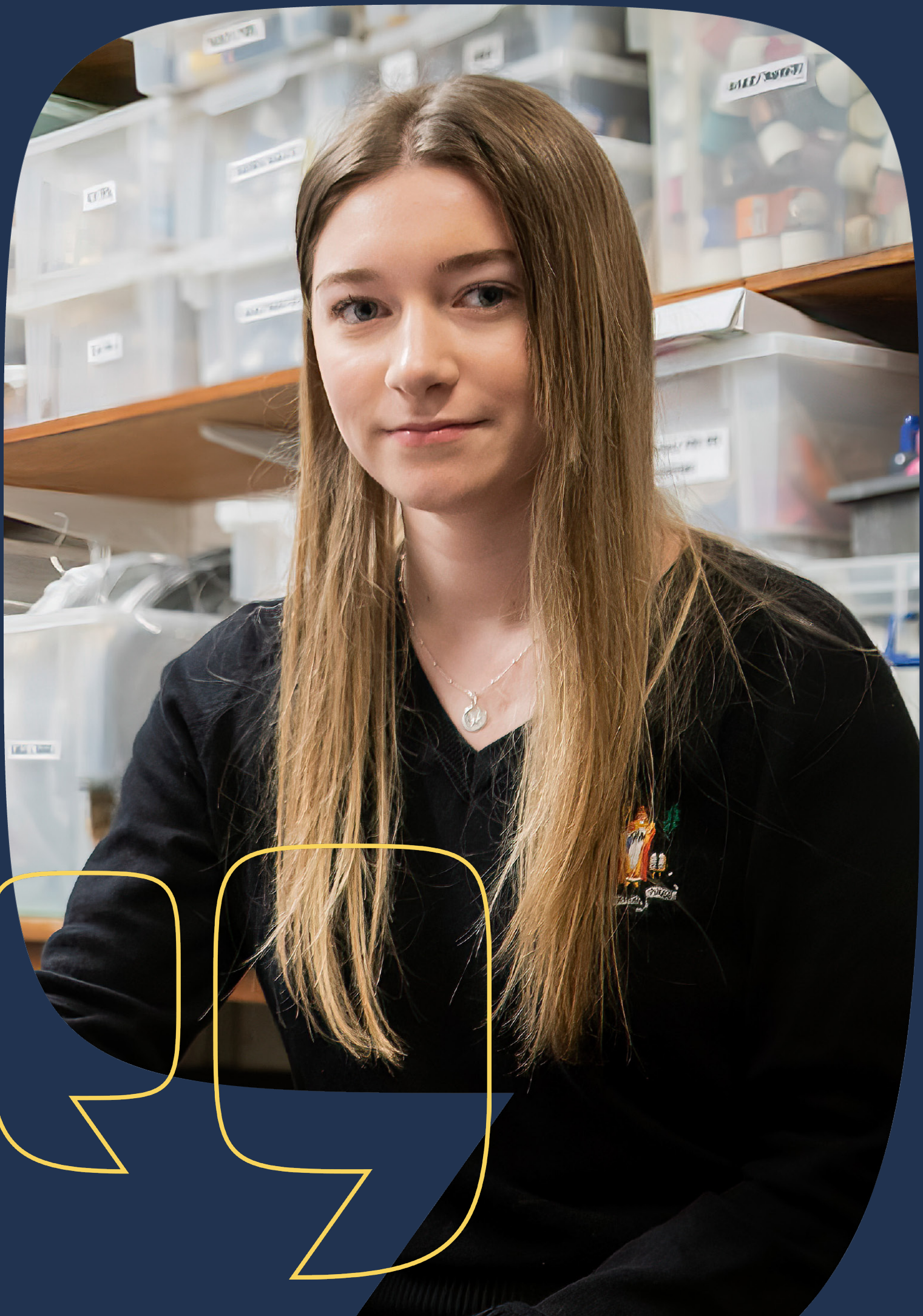
We're moving beyond the school gates and into the heart of the community, across the UK. This approach allows us to meet young people in environments that feel safe, supportive, and more familiar to them. Centrestage, with its focus on creative arts and community engagement, and Forth Valley College, with its vocational and further education pathways, offer unique opportunities to embed mentoring within their existing services, enhancing their purpose. In the north of Scotland, we are meeting the needs of Aberdeen Young Carers, and in the south of England we are partnering with Ealing Council: both of these new initiatives will help us to meet young people where they are, in community settings and on more flexible timeframes. These new approaches are designed with partners to provide alternative Trusted Adult support for young people to build confidence, discover their passions, re-engage in learning and create a path forward. By working with these partners, we are demonstrating that the relational practice mentoring offers is just as vital beyond the school setting. This diversification is crucial because it ensures that no matter a young person's journey, a Trusted Adult can be there to support them. Our commitment is to ensure a mentoring relationship is a constant source of stability and hope, especially at times of key transitions in a young person's life.

[4] Impetus

What Young People Tell Us They Need

Young people have told us that while MCR Pathways mentoring is a powerful catalyst for change, the benefits of mentoring can only be sustained with broader support.

For young people to truly thrive and break the cycle of poverty, the trust and confidence built with a Trusted Adult mentor must be reinforced by a robust system of support.



Conclusions and Call to Action

This report represents an opportunity to share how the power of relational support, like the mentoring provided by a Trusted Adult, can be a powerful tool in mitigating the impact of poverty. By building a consistent and trusting relationship, mentors enable young people to navigate challenges, develop confidence, and find their unique path.

Using the lens of relational practice, the report also shares what more can be done to support young people, families and communities mitigate the impacts of poverty. These are significant investments in what already works within the system, that are a priority consideration for the new Child Poverty Plan 2026-2031. For all young people, mentors and partners, they were all united in the need for a more solution focused approach. The need for deepening impact we already know makes a difference has never been more critical. It is the difference between a Scotland that thrives or a Scotland that continues to be blighted by poverty, stunting the growth and potential for years to come.

Mentoring is one such solution. It grows potential from the inside out. It provides hope, stability and opportunity, just by recognising the power of one trusted adult. The life long benefits of relational practice in a digital age are far reaching. The TA dynamic is vibrant and supersedes all other service thresholds to drive a journey of exclusion to inclusion, isolation to engagement and separation to belonging. We call upon policymakers, government bodies, and communities to recognise that access to a dedicated Trusted Adult mentor is life changing for every young person who needs one. Let's work together to ensure that every young person in Scotland has the consistent, caring support they need to thrive, not just survive. This is about justice and creating a more equitable future for young people, for the good of all.

For any enquiries in relation to our Policy and Influencing work, please contact:



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Acknowledgements

We would like to extend our thanks to all those who gave their time and expertise to our ongoing work in the area of child poverty.

Representatives from the below organisations provided invaluable insight, as well as MCR Pathways mentors, for whom we are incredibly grateful, and our young people, for whom we will continue to do this work until every young person has a trusted adult.

Aspire North
Ayrshire Public Health
British Transport Police
Career Ready
City of Edinburgh Council
Developing the Young Workforce (DYW)
Generations Working Together
Glasgow Caledonian University
Growing2Gether
MCR Pathways
Money Advice Scotland
National Leadership Network (NLN)
NHS Fife
Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Scottish Prison Service (SPS)
Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA)
Scottish Water
Skills Development Scotland (SDS)
Super Power Agency
The Place Youth Club
The Salvation Army
University of Glasgow
University of the West of Scotland (UWS)
Wheatley Group
Youth Highland

MCR Pathways

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