



Always Hope Evaluation Final Report

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Between June 2021 and June 2023, the Innovation Unit (IU) delivered the Always Hope project to 61 care experienced young men in Brinsford and Swinfen Hall Youth Offender Institutions (YOI). The majority of the young men were under the responsibility of Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton local authorities, however, nine were under the responsibility of Sandwell, Shropshire, Torbay and Worcester local authorities. Always Hope aims to reduce reoffending and improve outcomes for young people (aged 18-25) who have been in both the care system and prison, and comprises two key components. Firstly, Integrated Planning and Assessment (IPAA) which aims to improve how professionals in local authority leaving care services and the prison and probation service work together to provide support for care experienced young people in prison and on release. The second component of Always Hope is to offer opportunities for care experienced young people in prison to connect with a positive and sustainable network of friends, family and community members through either Lifelong Links in Coventry and Birmingham or Group Conferencing in Wolverhampton; notably, Group Conferencing does not include the tools and approaches that are a central part of Lifelong Links.

The evaluation

The University of Sussex was commissioned by the IU to carry out an independent evaluation of Always Hope. The evaluation aimed to provide evidence to assess the extent to which Always Hope had achieved its intended aims and impact, explore the factors that facilitated or inhibited its implementation and identify the challenges and opportunities for improvement.

The evaluation was a mixed methods research design carried out between September 2022 and December 2023. It combined qualitative research focusing on the views and experiences of the young men and the key adults engaged in supporting them, with a process evaluation to understand the implementation and mechanisms of service delivery.

Semi-structured interviews, paired interviews and focus groups were conducted with a total of 60 key practitioners and managers in the three local authorities, as well as the prison and probation service. They were mostly conducted online via Microsoft Teams, however a focus group of Prison Offender Managers (POMs) was conducted in person at Brinsford prison. Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face with seven young men at Brinsford prison and online via Teams or on the telephone with three young men who had been released and were living back in the community. In addition, an interview was conducted with one member of a young person's identified personal network.

Key findings

Overall, professionals were positive about Always Hope and indicated that they would like to see it rolled out to other prisons, as well as to other groups, including those on remand, with longer sentences and women with experience of care. The care experienced young people who were interviewed were also mostly positive about Always Hope's objective of joint working, particularly in the run up to their release and generally felt listened to by professionals. Although not all young people were aware of Always Hope, the findings suggest that this does not matter providing the work is being completed with them and around them.

Always Hope is best understood as a process rather than an intervention, providing a simple framework for organising the three agencies around young people. It has increased awareness and understanding of the needs and circumstances of care experienced young people in prison, particularly among prison professionals, and enhanced their commitment to working with them. However, the identification of care experienced young people in prison – how care experience is recorded and young people feeling safe to disclose - continues to be an issue, which has implications for the implementation of Always Hope.

Through IPAA, Always Hope has improved joint working between professionals in leaving care services and the prison and probation service in terms of better planning and increased accountability and understanding of each other's roles; information sharing has been particularly welcomed by probation and local authority professionals. However, participation in Always Hope across the three agencies has not always been equal. There has been

particularly low engagement among professionals in the probation service, due to high turnover of staff and lack of awareness of the project, although stakeholders reported that in recent months the probation service have been leading efforts to embed Always Hope in the West Midlands. This is a significant development because collaboration between professionals in probation and leaving care services has been shown in the evaluation to be important in terms of preventing recall and reoffending. Related to this, stakeholders have highlighted the need for greater senior leadership and policy level support for the project, as well as greater accountability. In this way, Always Hope becomes everyone's responsibility. The differences in institutional cultures and professionals' need for greater understanding about who should be taking responsibility for different aspects of Always Hope, for example, the important task of finding suitable accommodation for young people on release, were also raised as challenges to joint working.

Participants were generally positive about the concept of reconnecting care experienced young people in prison with personal social networks and recognised its potential significance in resettlement planning. Of the two models, Lifelong Links appears to be the most suited to working with this group of vulnerable young people because of the additional tools and approaches with which they work. However, the reality of trying to implement the model with care experienced young people in prison has been challenging. Coordinators highlighted practical reasons, such as the time it takes to build relationships and the difficulties of working with young people in prison rather than in foster or residential homes. However, the most significant barrier to reconnecting is the young person's criminal conviction which it seems can deter their network from wanting to see them again. Professionals described how it is common for families to break contact with young people while they are serving their custodial sentence or contact becomes very limited.

Recommendations for embedding and rolling out Always Hope

Overall, participants were very supportive of Always Hope being rolled-out and would like to see it extended to other prisons and include those on remand and on longer sentences, as well as women with experience of care. However, the success of Always Hope requires support at an institutional level, with senior management within all three agencies showing

commitment to the project; this is particularly important in the probation service where engagement has been lower. Accountability is an important part of this. IU has taken important steps to increase accountability through the governance group and 'care champions', however, working jointly must become part of professionals' job description, so that it is not a choice for them to participate and Always Hope becomes everyone's responsibility.

The literature (for example, Gooch et al, 2022) suggests that there are structural issues preventing the identification of those with care experience in prison - this has implications for Always Hope. Therefore, it is important that prisons continue to work on improving how care experience is recorded and consider how they create the right environment for people to feel safe to disclose their care status.

Always Hope is best understood as a process rather than an intervention, providing a simple framework for organising the three agencies around young people, and should be promoted to professionals as such. Although Always Hope is process driven, it still needs initial set up and training to be completed by the IU, or for the IU to teach, and provide support to, others to deliver training and implement Always Hope. Training would include Learning and Development Days to increase understanding between professionals and Deep Dives to inform joint planning and raise awareness of what it means to have been in care and provide a sense of the life experiences that may have led young people to custody. Training and resources should include positive stories about young people who have been supported by successful joint working and outline who is responsible for each aspect of the support provided for the young people, in particular highlighting the importance of professionals working collaboratively to find and secure suitable accommodation for young people on release. In addition to IU's role in set up and training, there is also a need for continued involvement of someone in a position of responsibility within the prison service who can 'unblock' issues, as well as for a coordinating role in the Offender Management Unit (OMU) - someone who monitors participation in Always Hope of both young people and professionals and provides administrative support.

Finally, while recognising that alternative ways of building personal social networks for young people, should be explored, it is important to remember the unique set of skills and

tools that Lifelong Links has available to support care experienced young people and the benefits that it brings to them in terms of their recovery and rehabilitation.

Context and Background

People with experience of care are over-represented in the criminal justice system (Gooch et al, 2022). While children in care and those leaving care comprise less than 1% of the general population (Office for National Statistics, 2023), people with experience of care account for 24% of all adult prisoners (Berman, 2013). Office for National Statistics figures from 2022 suggest that around 52% of care experienced young people have had a criminal conviction by the age of 24, compared with 13% of the general population. Although the disproportionate number of men and women with experience of care in prison is well documented, it has often been overlooked in both policy and practice (Fitzpatrick & Williams, 2017).

While in custody, care experienced young people in Youth Offender Institutions (YOI) receive fewer regular visits from family and friends, take part in constructive activities less frequently and are more likely to be on basic and standard incentive levels, rather than enhanced (Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons, 2011). Taflan's (2017) research in YOIs and Secure Training Centres (STC) suggests that care-experienced young people are less likely to know where they will live on release and expect to experience greater problems with accommodation, employment and accessing health services. On release from prison, the dual status of having experience of both care and custody makes it more likely that this group of young people will become involved in the adult criminal justice system, as well as be on benefits and have a higher level of involvement with health, mental health and substance abuse services (Day et al, 2020).

Ministry of Justice research (May et al, 2008) suggests that someone who receives visits from their family while in prison is less likely to reoffend, however, work around enhancing family ties and social networks whilst in custody has been inconsistent (Ministry of Justice, 2017). In the 2017 Ministry of Justice report, Lord Farmer concluded that work to strengthen family relationships and create positive social networks is an important step to prisoner rehabilitation and highlighted the need for prisons to do more to support those with experience of care in prison to reconnect with their wider families.

Between June 2021 and June 2023, the Innovation Unit (IU) delivered the Always Hope project to 61 young men, most of whom were under the responsibility of Birmingham,

Coventry and Wolverhampton local authorities, with nine under the responsibility of Sandwell, Shropshire, Torbay and Worcester local authorities. All of the young men were in two YOIs in the West Midlands – Brinsford¹, near Wolverhampton and Swinfen Hall², in Swinfen, Staffordshire. IU is a not-for-profit social enterprise leading the Always Hope project and working with partners in Her Majesty’s Prison and Probation Service, the National Probation Service, Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton local authorities, Family Rights Group, Prison Reform Trust, Catch-22 (NCLBF), Care Leavers Association and Barnardos.

Always Hope aims to reduce reoffending and improve outcomes for young people (aged 18-25) who have been in both the care system and prison. It comprises two key components: Integrated Planning and Assessment (IPAA) and the opportunity for young people to reconnect with their personal support networks through either Lifelong Links³ or Group Conferencing. Through Integrated Planning and Assessment (IPAA), Always Hope aims to improve how local authority leaving care staff and the prison and probation service work together to provide support for care experienced young people in prison and on release. IPAA supports practitioners in working together to form coordinated plans with the young person, that are based on consistent information and working towards the same goals. Always Hope also offers opportunities for care experienced young people in prison to connect with a positive and sustainable network of friends, family and community members through either Lifelong Links in Coventry and Birmingham or Group Conferencing in Wolverhampton. Lifelong Links is an approach developed by Family Rights Group to ensure children in care and those formerly in care have lasting relationships which they can depend on and have people to turn to. Group Conferencing in Wolverhampton is an adaptation of

¹ HMP Brinsford is located in the village of Featherstone, Staffordshire, on the same site as HMP Featherstone and HMP Oakwood. It is a resettlement and reception prison for young male adults on remand and men aged 18-29 from the West Midlands. The prison was opened in 1991 and has a capacity of 577.

² HMP & YOI Swinfen Hall is located in the village of Swinfen, Staffordshire. It currently receives young men between the ages of 18 and 25 alongside category C adult males serving four or more years. It opened in February 1963 and has a capacity of 624.

³ For more information on Lifelong Links, please see: <https://frg.org.uk/lifelong-links/> and https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/60104f74d3bf7f05c3182253/Lifelong_Links_evaluation_report.pdf

Family Group Conferencing which does not include the tools and approaches that are a central part of Lifelong Links.

The core aims of Always Hope are to:

- Reduce reoffending, enable rehabilitation and increase the chances of a positive future for young people with experience of care in prison.
- Create greater connectivity and alignment from young people's personal and professional support networks, including coordinated statutory assessment and planning processes.
- Generate demand for replicating the model and increased understanding of what is needed to adapt, adopt and scale it.

Always Hope governance and project management comprised an Advisory Group which provided advice and support on the development of the project, and an Implementation Group which co-designed the approaches being piloted, shared experiences of testing the new approaches and reported back to the Advisory Group. A Governance Group has been formed more recently to ensure that Always Hope is embedded in the West Midlands. The IU also held Deep Dives which aimed to inform joint planning by building a picture of a young person's care and justice journey, including the trauma they have experienced, to develop a shared understanding of the young adult's actions and feelings and to help plan for a positive future.

Aims and Objectives of the Evaluation

The University of Sussex was commissioned by the IU to carry out an independent evaluation of Always Hope, aiming to provide evidence to address the following questions:

- To what extent has Always Hope achieved its intended aims and impact?
- What factors have facilitated or inhibited the achievement of the intended aims and impact?
- What are the challenges and opportunities for improvement, including regarding model fidelity, acceptability and quality?

Research Methods

The evaluation was a mixed methods research design that combined qualitative research focusing on the views and experiences of the young men and the key adults engaged in supporting them, with a process evaluation to understand the implementation and mechanisms of service delivery. Ethical approval was obtained from the University of Sussex and the necessary Research Governance procedures were completed in the three participating local authorities – Birmingham, Coventry and Wolverhampton. In order to conduct interviews with staff and young people in prisons and the Probation Service regions we obtained research approval from HM Prison and Probation Service (HMPPS) National Research Committee (NRC). The following sets out the evaluation that was carried out between September 2022 and December 2023.

Semi-structured interviews, paired interviews and focus groups were conducted with key practitioners and managers in the three local authorities, as well as the prison and probation service. They were mostly conducted online via Microsoft Teams, however a focus group of Prison Offender Managers (Prison Offender Managers) was conducted in person at Brinsford prison. In addition, two focus groups and two interviews were conducted with stakeholders (i.e. members of the Advisory Group and/or those involved in the development of Always Hope).

The findings outlined in this report are based on:

Table 1: Interviews with professionals

	Professionals	
	First interview	Follow up interview
Local Authorities:		
Birmingham	15	1
Coventry	10	5
Wolverhampton	7	3
Prison Service:		
Brinsford YOI	14	-
Swinfen Hall	-	-
Probation Service	6	-
Stakeholders	8	-
TOTAL	60	9

Semi-structured interviews were conducted face-to-face with seven young men at Brinsford prison and online via Teams or on the telephone with three young men who had been released and were living back in the community. Those who were interviewed once they had been released from prison were given a £15 Amazon voucher as a thank you for taking part. Interviews drew on the research team’s expertise and aimed to put the young men at ease and make the experience as engaging as possible. In addition, an interview was conducted with one member of a young person’s identified personal network.

University of Sussex researchers attended two Implementation Group meetings, one Advisory Group meeting and one Deep Dive. The purpose of our attendance was to increase our understanding of how Always Hope was developed and implemented across the three local authority areas. It was also extremely useful in terms of increasing our understanding of the complexities of the lives of this group of young people and the challenges and vulnerabilities that they experience. We were able to use this understanding to shape the questions we asked them and to structure the interviews that we conducted with them.

The IU aimed to collect quantitative reoffending data about the young men supported by AH. It was intended that this data would include whether any of the young men had reoffended or were recalled in the 12 months after their release from prison, and if they were, the reason for the recall. Although IU worked closely with the participating local

authorities and the HMPPS North Midlands Cohort Lead, data were not available for all of the young men. It also was not possible to collect data about a comparator group, or to compare the data with national administrative data from the Ministry of Justice (Offending data) or the Department for Education (Care leaver data). Furthermore the data that were provided did not capture the complexity of the lives of the young men, that was so evident in the qualitative components of this evaluation. As such the incomplete data are not included in this report, but we recommend that further work is carried out in the future to capture meaningful and comprehensive quantifiable outcome data.

Limitations of the Research

There are some limitations associated with the research. We were unable to conduct any interviews with professionals or young people at Swinfen Hall because none of the young people at Swinfen Hall, for the duration of the fieldwork, were eligible for Always Hope – they were either serving long sentences or were from local authorities that were not part of the project. In addition, interviews were only conducted with those young men who were participating in Always Hope and the views of those who declined to take part have not been captured. Permission to interview the young men in prison was delayed and therefore it was not possible to conduct follow-up interviews once they had been released. However, additional young men who had already been released were recruited and we are confident that the two perspectives offer valuable insight that effectively addresses the aims we set out to achieve.

Interviews with probation practitioners were limited to two areas only because they were unresponsive in the other local authority area, and we were also unable to conduct any second wave interviews with probation practitioners; this is likely to be because of the organisational changes that have been taking place in the probation service. In addition, we conducted just one follow-up interview with a professional at Birmingham City Council because the first wave of interviews only took place during the summer of 2023.

Finally, given the challenges associated with Always Hope establishing positive social networks (see ‘The challenge of reconnecting young people with their support networks’ below), we were only able to complete one interview with a member of a young person’s personal network.

Research Findings

This section of the report sets out the findings of the evaluation described above.

Throughout the report we have included case studies of several of the young people who were interviewed.

Overview of experiences of Always Hope

This section outlines the overall views of participants. Later sections provide greater detail on the benefits of Always Hope, as well as the barrier to implementation that have been reported.

Overall views of young people

The young men interviewed were aware that they were receiving additional support because of their care status, however only a few attributed this to the Always Hope project without being prompted. Not everyone was able to give an answer when asked how they would describe Always Hope, however, among those who did, most referred to Lifelong Links, while one thought it was to do with support for their release and another mentioned help with finding accommodation:

'I think Always Hope is about people that you would like to get back in contact with or support from... Basically, if I don't want to ask, then Always Hope will ask for you'
(Kai)

'I don't know. Just getting in contact with people from the past, and just supporting me with my housing and what not' (Saul)

'Honestly, the Always Hope thing, I'm thinking it's part of a care programme where they're trying to come and just help you towards your release, and for after release, and stuff like that' (Hiran)

Some young men talked about not knowing much about the Always Hope project because only one person had spoken to them about it - their Personal Adviser or someone from the OMU. There seemed to be an expectation that for projects and initiatives taking place in

prison, someone other than their Personal Adviser or someone who they already knew from OMU, would come into the prison to talk to them about it. This may explain why so many spoke about Lifelong Links rather than the other aspects of Always Hope. One young man explained:

'Because no one's really come to see me and spoke to me about it properly. I've been told about it and that, once, but no one's really come to tell me anything else as yet'
(Saul)

There was also an acknowledgment by the young men that they are exposed to a lot of initiatives and often find it difficult to distinguish between them: *'See, there's loads and loads of programmes that people come telling you'* (Hiran). However, when the concept of joint working was explained to them, young people were mostly positive:

'If people stick to it, it will make a difference. It's a step in the right direction' (Kai)

'But with all of them together, it's just easier for everyone to know what needs to be done, and what needs to happen' (Hiran)

Riley, who was aware of Always Hope, initially claimed that the support he received through the project was no different to other times he had been released from prison. However, as his story below illustrates, as he speaks, he starts to acknowledge that there were differences, particularly relating to his accommodation, and how having that sorted out in advance alleviated his stress. Riley's story illustrates the complexity of young people's lives and shows that despite one breach of his license and living with mental health issues, he is doing well, including having been on holiday:

Riley's story

Riley is 22 years old. He went into care when he was 16. He has been in prison four times, but each time has only been for a maximum of four months and only once was for a criminal offence – the others were for breaches of a suspended sentence.

He has a very good relationship with his Personal Adviser who has been proactive in terms of communicating with other professionals. While in prison he had a video call with his Personal Adviser and Probation Practitioner, however, he turned his camera off because he does not like meeting with more than one professional at the same time. He said that he can talk to his Personal Adviser about anything but does not trust probation. He was not interested in Lifelong Links because *'If I'm brutally honest, I just couldn't be bothered. I had better things to be doing and focusing on than dealing with that stuff.'*

He acknowledged that there were differences in the support he had received on the occasion of his most recent release:

'I wouldn't say they made much of a difference apart from I had my housing situation sorted already. Every time I came out before, it was always a constant run around, trying to get in touch with the council, go to probation, sorting everything out, go to the council, try and get temporary accommodation, because I had nowhere to live. But everything was just chaos, like everyone was running around. It was too much stress. This time, it was just chilled. My Personal Adviser came to pick me up, we went and got some food, went home. And then, she came and got me for probation later that day...So much less stress'

When he was interviewed, he had been out of prison over a year. Since his release he had a breach of his license when he was 'kicked out' of his approved premises for visiting his daughter, but he was not recalled. He is now living in private rented accommodation with his girlfriend.

He is signed off work with mental health issues and is on medication, however, he is settled and said that he is doing well, including having been on holiday and making plans for the future.

Another young person who had heard of Always Hope attributed all the support he had received to his Personal Adviser, saying that he had not had any joint meetings. His Personal Adviser, however, recounted a meeting between the Prison Offender Manager, Probation Practitioner and himself and subsequently the Prison Offender Manager, the young person and the Personal Adviser met regularly throughout his time in custody, prior to introducing him to his probation officer. This is an interesting example of Always Hope work being done behind the scenes, with the young person not knowing, or forgetting, that the meetings had taken place. Arguably this illustrates how the background, out of sight joint work by professionals in the three agencies to support the young person in prison and on release is ultimately more important than the young people themselves being able to name the project and understand its purpose, beyond their initial consent to participate.

Overall views of professionals

Professionals were overall very positive and enthusiastic about Always Hope, describing it as a structure uniting the three different services, generating understanding, and providing a more streamlined and joined up additional level of support for the young men:

'Bringing people together to collaborate for the young person' (Local authority)

'I've seen more interest and care and support for this work, for care-experienced people in prisons, than I've seen for anything else' (Stakeholder)

Many professionals described Always Hope as fulfilling a need, or filling a gap, for young people in custody, saying that it has enabled them to better prepare young people for life back in the community:

'Sometimes as a service we try to bridge gaps but sometimes you know that wasn't always possible...some of those gaps were in terms of accommodation, even down to benefits and you know, opportunities... we knew a lot of the barriers for our young people. So, for us to have something like this where we could have a really integrated approach, we were really, really excited about it' (Local authority)

One local authority professional talked about how Always Hope had allowed her to offer her young person something more than just emotional support:

'Before Always Hope, I suppose my main focus was just on emotional support... I'd open up opportunities for this young person to talk about how they're feeling and how they're managing inside... what got them to being in prison and what their hopes were for when they come out. But it felt very limited. Like, that was all I could offer. And actually, the Always Hope project has opened up more of like... connecting them in with their Prison Offender Manager, connecting them in with their Community Offender Manager and making sure that we're aware of what those two parties are doing... we can encourage them to engage with what they're being offered from those situations, from those entities...' (Local authority)

Another local authority professional described Always Hope as 'sort of like an almost constant' or something that supplements the Personal Adviser visits that take place every 6

to 8 weeks, and another suggested that it makes the young men feel *'wanted and that actually people do care about them'*. A professional in the prison service highlighted the importance of giving young men the choice about whether or not to participate in Always Hope:

'The idea that it's something that they don't have to do, that they can opt into is important. And I think there's some power to that, isn't there? (Prison)

Always Hope was described as a simple, straightforward process, rather than an intervention. This is an important distinction because professionals, particularly those in probation, seemed weary, and on occasion cynical, about the number of initiatives in which they are asked to be involved:

'We get quite a lot of organisations and charities and voluntary groups and quite a lot of them can sometimes do the same thing or sometimes they're very good at talking the talk, but then don't walk the walk, so to speak. So sometimes we have to treat things a little bit cynically' (Probation)

Another professional in the probation service, who was initially sceptical about the need for Always Hope and acknowledged that staff can be reluctant to take on new initiatives, was appreciative of its inobtrusive and fluid structure, describing it as fitting in well with her own practice and improving it:

'Especially with probation, when it's a new thing, people can be quite unresponsive to it, because it just feels like another thing you have to do. Whereas Always Hope just feels like very fluid and it's there as a guideline...Sometimes just having that simplification can kind of really support with that' (Probation)

However, there was a sense among some professionals in the prison and probation service, and indeed confusion at the start of the project, that coordination with other services was already part of their job description and that many professionals were already fulfilling that role. Through their participation in Always Hope, most now understand the need for greater coordination between the different agencies and believe that Always Hope provides a structure to start these conversations. A professional in the prison service described Always

Hope as a 'safety net' if the system isn't working and a professional in probation reflected on how it had enhanced her practice:

'I felt like that was already part of my practice and having those sorts of conversations with everybody around the table... Even though I felt that I was already doing that, it kind of gave me a little bit of a structure to how I was utilising that support and showed me the importance of bringing that into my practice more frequently, to be honest. And I've really found that beneficial' (Probation)

Resources and Training

The Innovation Unit's resources and training were generally well received by those professionals who were aware of them. However, there is no doubt that not all participants had read the Handbook or Integrated Planning and Assessment Manual, and some had not attended any Learning and Development Days, Deep Dives or Implementation Group meetings. A minority of professionals argued that there is no need for training at all because the process is so straightforward, while others suggested that there could be less training because they are experienced practitioners:

'I felt like they were doing too much given that we are actually quite experienced practitioners... As I said, it was probably a bit more information than we needed, but I guess you've got to make sure that you get that message across to everybody' (Local authority)

A stakeholder was particularly positive about people with experience of care and custody being included in the training and meetings:

'The use of key people to get the message across... I've listened to Ian Thomas and people like that. So, they've got key people in who've actually been able to share and articulate in a way that not many people can' (Stakeholder)

Perhaps, out of all the IU resources and training, professionals were least positive about the seven Implementation Group meetings that the IU held online with professionals across the two years of the project. They were perceived as useful but too long in terms of the time commitment required:

'... and that's not to say that I haven't really enjoyed the meetings and found them useful, but it can be an issue for me in terms of the level of commitment' (Local authority)

In contrast, the two Deep Dives, which brought professionals together to examine a young person's life experiences in detail, were highly appreciated by every professional because they gave them the opportunity to reflect on the lives and vulnerabilities of this group of young people. Stakeholders described them as *'a lightbulb moment for a lot of practitioners'* because it encouraged them to think about how the young person's life experiences had led them to where they are today and *'reinforced the need for greater coordination between professionals'* (Stakeholder). The quote below summarises the feelings of many professionals:

'We had a room full of professionals that we didn't know, but also like a load of old professionals that used to work with the young person turn up and be part of it. And it was emotional. And it was quite a complex situation as well, because he was at large at the time. And we all really cared about him and we wanted to find him and make sure he was safe... It was amazing and I would love to attend something like that again' (Local authority)

The two Learning and Development Days, which were held in person at Brinsford prison, were also highly rated. Professionals described them as an opportunity to meet each other face-to-face rather than online, making it more likely that they would stay in touch, as well as increasing their understanding of each other's roles and caseload:

'Practically, just meeting people, putting a name to a face, swapping phone numbers, learning about what other people's roles are, and then just learning what Always Hope actually does. So, for me, I feel like that's a fundamental feature of the project, if it gets rolled out' (Stakeholder)

'And it being in person was monumental because the networking was a big part of it... the most interesting bits happen during the breaktimes or during the lunchtimes, when everyone gets to talk to one another' (Stakeholder)

Another local authority professional described the significance of these meetings in terms of having the opportunity to discuss their different approaches and break down cultural barriers between the different agencies. He said that some professionals were initially defensive about their own service, but commented that these meetings gave them a chance to acknowledge and understand their differences:

'I think one of the best things is trying to get people in the same room... get everybody to kind of communicate and understand each other's roles. The kind of angles everybody's coming from. So, for example with the judicial system, they probably work from more of a perspective of risk. Whereas us, we work more in terms of strength-based approaches. So, it's kind of like understanding how we all kind of fit in with each other. So, I think that was really, really positive' (Local authority)

One local authority professional, however, commented that the Learning and Development Days would have been more useful if they had involved people being given responsibility for taking forward the issues discussed:

'At the away days we discussed things but there didn't seem to be any kind of firm action or discussion about whose responsibility it was to kind of look at. So that probably could be tightened up a little bit in my personal opinion' (Local authority)

Although some professionals were not familiar with the Always Hope Handbook and Manual and some had not seen them, those who had read them were generally positive, describing them as helpful and informative:

'The prompts that it provides are things that you should be doing anyway, but it just gives you that little bit more guidance as to... why didn't you talk about this here, and sometimes just having that simplification can kind of really support with that...I think the literature that Always Hope have is very sort of simplified and very easy to follow' (Probation)

A couple of local authority professionals suggested that it is important for these resources to include a simple, clear overall plan of Always Hope that outlines the steps that need to be taken in clear terms:

'Maybe having like a simpler breakdown or structure of how things are going to go during the process. There was one at the first initial meeting but since then there hasn't been like a clear plan of the steps that we're going to be taking' (Local authority)

Some local authority professionals would welcome more information in the Manual about how the prison system works, for example, who picks up a prisoner on release, what are the arrangements for a prisoner being discharged into the community, what is remand, when is a Prison Offender Manager allocated and what is early release. Many of these questions relate to who should be taking responsibility for different aspects of the support for young people, for example whose responsibility it is to put support in place when a young person is released unexpectedly and who is responsible for finding accommodation when there are no licence conditions, etc:

'So, like with my young fellow, he was just released from court and I wasn't expecting that. And I don't think any of us were. So, it was like things weren't put in place. Safeguarding wasn't put in place before he was released. And I don't know whose responsibility that is. Is that prison's responsibility, is it mine? Is it the social workers responsibility?' (Local authority)

There were also broader questions about Always Hope, which professionals would like to see addressed in the Manual, for example, which professional should take responsibility for making initial contact with other professionals and how this may vary according to circumstances.

The Benefits of Always Hope

This section outlines the key benefits of Always Hope as described by participants and focuses on how it has raised awareness of care experienced young people in prison, how it has encouraged person-centred practice, improved multi-agency working and raised awareness of the importance of young people reconnecting with their support networks. To end this section, there is a discussion of the wider impacts.

Raised awareness of care experienced young people in custody

It is now well established that being separated from parents and caregivers, has a deep and lasting impact on a child. We know from John Bowlby's (1969) theory of attachment that infants' and children's early childhood experiences of parenting function as the basis for the development of social and emotional bonds throughout a person's life. On the other hand, children who do not have a caregiver who they perceive as available to them and who will meet their needs, can have low self-esteem and anxiety, as well as feelings of rejection and helplessness (Stein, 2006) and may become either highly dependent on others or very self-reliant (Downes, 1992). Staines contends that:

'Children who enter care having experienced abuse and trauma are then particularly vulnerable to being negatively influenced by relationships and experiences within care. The impact of this interaction is then exacerbated by involvement in the youth justice system itself, which can further criminalise looked after children' (Staines, 2016, p.6)

Although there is no doubt that many people who come into the criminal justice system have experienced trauma and have needs and vulnerabilities, this is particularly the case for those who have experience of care (Gooch et al, 2022). Arguably, it is important that the professionals who support them during their time in prison and on release understand what it means to have been in care and the impact this may have had on the decisions they have made and what led them to be in custody.

A key impact of Always Hope is the extent to which it has raised awareness and understanding of the implications of trauma and emotional impact on young people's behaviour:

'And I would say it's given me a lot of food for thought in terms of how life experiences impact on your choices, social mobility and all of those kind of things... And I've really really enjoyed it. It's really, um, giving me a different way of understanding people and how things happen and why they happen' (Lifelong Links Coordinator)

Local authority professionals discussed how it has increased their commitment and enthusiasm for working with care experienced young people in prison, saying that it has 'lit a fire' and created an increased sense of passion for this group of young people:

'I definitely advocate for those in custody more... It's given me a bit of a passion for it really' (Local authority)

Fitzpatrick et al (2016) discuss how practitioners in the prison and probation service often lack understanding about what it means to have been in care and the issues it raises. The findings of this evaluation suggest that prison and probation professionals may not have previously focused on young people's experiences of being in care and how it may have led them to being in custody, however it would seem that Always Hope has encouraged them to reflect on the reasons why young people offend and has enhanced their understanding of how their background has impacted them:

'I think sometimes our younger offenders, they're as much victims as they are perpetrators. Always Hope not only helps us with their progress in the future but I think also maybe helps remind the probation officer that there's a lot more depth to this kid, and I think with our younger ones, rapport is so important' (Probation)

Another professional from the probation service described how Always Hope has helped to highlight the very particular needs of care experienced young people in custody:

'It generates understanding of their particular needs... And they are very overrepresented in the justice system, and they've suffered, you know, terrible discrimination, in my view, institutional discrimination. I'm not blaming individuals. I mean, just from their life history. And so, I think if it promotes that understanding through that continuity of working relationships. And you know, that's a really sound basis for developing more understanding responses, I suppose, and more consistent responses to meet their needs' (Probation)

Encouraging person-centred practice

The Always Hope model was designed by the IU to be person-centred and respond to young people's specific and individual needs. A stakeholder highlighted the importance of listening to what young people have to say about their experiences:

'They are experts by experience and if they've been in and out of the prison system they'll really recognise where the flaws are within this and it means that you can really develop that ideology ...there are flaws and challenges, so let's fill them'

(Stakeholder)

Professionals suggested that multi-agency joint working not only provides a 'scaffold of support' (Local authority) for young people but also demonstrates that they are at the centre of a network of professionals who care about them. A professional in the probation service described how this model of good working relationships has helped young people to build better relationships with professionals, particularly when they have struggled to trust those in the prison and probation service:

'They had a lot of difficulty sort of building those relationships with professionals. And I think it really benefited them to physically see all three of us there and telling them what the process was and reiterating that that kind of support was there'

(Probation)

Local authority professionals talked about how Always Hope had helped to alleviate young people's anxieties and made them feel less overwhelmed and more settled because they know that the professionals are working around them to find out information and advocate for them:

'And I suppose for me it stops a lot of anxieties. Because you know, especially when you've got a young person who's gone from a child to an adult and then is being released and they haven't got a clue. So yeah, it just helps with all of those anxieties knowing that somebody that they already trust - their Personal Adviser who they've

got a long-standing relationship with - is going to these meetings, finding out the information and giving it back to them. It just helps. And having a plan' (Local authority)

One young person, whose Personal Adviser and Probation Practitioner were still meeting jointly with him six months after he had been released was very positive about these meetings, particularly because it gives him an opportunity to get his point across:

'Very effective. I feel like my point gets put across. They do put things in place, what I've asked them to do. There's no bad communication. Just clear communication'
(Billy)

Another young person summarised his experience of two IPAs while in prison, recognising that all three agencies needed to work together so that they could take account of his views and formulate a better plan:

'I feel like without them all knowing what I need, it's hard for them to all... individually, it's just a lot harder. But with all of them together, it's just easier for everyone to know what needs to be done, and what needs to happen... Three minds are always better than one... So if we're all together and we're talking about certain stuff, they might come up with ideas that's better as well' (Hiran)

Professionals also discussed how joint meetings avoid young people having to repeat themselves and means that they must attend fewer meetings. A professional in probation explained how impatient young people become when asked to repeat their stories and requests:

'He doesn't like repeating himself... in supervision I asked him again... and he said I've already spoken to X (Personal Adviser) about this. He said if you want to know, you'll have to ask her' (Probation)

Professionals considered how working together has enabled them to give young people a greater voice within the process and for their views to be considered. This is particularly important when decisions are being made about what happens when they are released from prison:

'And I think this was a unique opportunity to pull together some key agencies to work with young people to get their voice within this process. And to pull that together in a format that allows each agency to understand roles and responsibilities, to listen to the voice of young people and to work effectively together within, you know, limited resources' (Stakeholder)

Many professionals made a choice to involve the young people in all their joint meetings because their voice needed to be heard: *'it's all about him, isn't it? So quite rightly he should be there'* (Local authority). This was particularly the case when their accommodation on release was being discussed and young people often had strong views about where they wanted to live and were feeling anxious about being placed in approved premises:

'I'm very much advocating for my young people to be involved in those meetings... it's allowing a young person to know that their voice is being heard. And that's so powerful, isn't it?' (Local authority)

The following story shows how Kai was able to express his views about where he wanted live on release:

Kai's story

Kai is 21 years old and the youngest of several siblings. He has been in and out of custody since he was young. On the most recent occasion he was in prison for over a year and during that time he engaged in a lot of courses and was trained to provide emotional support to his peers:

'I listen to their problems and that. It's confidential and that... I've had my own problems for a long time but it's good to listen to someone else's and try and help them'

He describes his family as supportive while he was in prison:

'They've really supported me since I came in here. I'm still in trouble with them when I get out – for coming to prison. I ain't in the clear just yet... Most of them have been in prison but they're changing that now – all got kids, jobs. Because I'm the youngest one, they don't want to see me like this. But it's my own fault...'

However, for some local authority professionals the decision was taken out of their hands, when young people expressed the view that they were only willing for their Personal Adviser to share information about them with prison and probation professionals if they were part of the joint meetings from the beginning. This was often the case when young people had developed a very close relationship with their Personal Adviser over several years:

What the young person did say, if they were a part of that meeting from the onset, then he wouldn't mind sharing information. But if they weren't, then he would be limited with the information he shared with his Personal Adviser' (Local authority)

Improved multi-agency working

A key impact of Always Hope is the way in which it has encouraged and strengthened more productive relationships between professionals from the three different agencies, including developing better-informed expectations of each other's roles, creating accountability and sharing responsibilities in the best interests of the young people. There was much discussion about the importance of professionals working together to create a release plan to avoid what they describe as 'a messy' release, where the young person is not picked up from prison and/or where accommodation is not organised. Participants suggested that supportive relationships led to the young person's needs being met, as well as better outcomes for them:

'Coming together as a team to support this young man as he prepares for his release has given us all a much better chance to support him with what he needs, as we can keep him and each other up to date' (Probation)

'We need that communication because we're all working independently, doing our own thing, so it's helpful for us all to be able to come together, discuss what we're doing, where we've got with that and really just kind of bounce off each other to support that young person holistically... so that the transition from prison then back into the community isn't that big kind of daunting thing' (Local authority)

The following story shows how Cal did not necessarily agree with what was decided at the joint meeting but described it as a positive meeting overall. In particular, he was unhappy with the professionals' choice of accommodation for him, highlighting the challenges associated with finding appropriate housing and the need for further research to explore what housing options work best for a positive resettlement.

Cal's story

Cal is 20 years old. He is care experienced because he was on remand when he turned 18. He has been in prison once before and has only been out of prison for around 10 days since he was 15. He has now been released.

His family visit sometimes and he said that he will not be going back to live with them when he is released. He wants to get into hospitality and open his own food franchise.

He has had a video link meeting with his Personal Adviser, Prison Offender Manager and Probation Practitioner to prepare for his release in which they talked about ID, employment and accommodation.

The professionals wanted to put him in approved premises because they believed it would support him better, even though it was not a condition of his release. He was unhappy with this decision:

'Obviously I don't necessarily think the way they think they can support me is going to help... I'm going to be on a GPS tag for 12 months... So you know where I am for 24 hours of the day, what's the need to put me in a place where I can't have my freedom? ...'I've served my time, you know what I'm saying?'

Despite him disagreeing with this suggestion, he described it overall as a positive meeting:

'It was all right really. It was just, you know, they introduced me to my probation, because I'm due for release soon. And overall it was a good meeting. Some things I didn't want to hear, however I took it as a positive meeting still'

There is a sense that some professionals were not previously aware of the benefits of closer relations, with one probation manager calling it *'eye opening'* and a local authority professional describing it as pulling them all together *'so we're all working from the same page'*. Local authority and probation professionals were particularly positive about the practical difference it can make. In the quotes below a local authority professional described how improved communication has helped them to send Christmas packages to the young people they were supporting, and a probation professional outlined how she maintained

better contact with a young person who was recalled to prison, even when he had become quite detached from the process and had no reason to engage with her:

'Because of those relationships we formed, we were able to speak to X (prison professional), who was able to put us in contact with who we needed to make it simple and get those packages into the prisons...Those relationships and that communication, it's just really helped' (Local authority)

'And I felt the project was almost like an incentive for my relationship to continue with that individual, because we were, as professionals, all tied in together. We were having those conversations with the Prison Offender Manager until his sentence end date. So we were able to kind of give that little bit more structure to his release. Whereas I think if it had just been myself, like sort of trying to engage with him by myself, it would have been really hard' (Probation)

Participants, both professionals and young people, also highlighted accountability as a benefit of joint working. A young person spoke about the importance of the professionals being accountable to each other:

'I've got two other people, let's say my Prison Offender Manager and my Personal Adviser, for my probation worker to have someone like, I actually told you this, so what's going on there?' (Hiran)

Professionals described how, through Always Hope, they better understand the roles and responsibilities of each of the agencies and that this has empowered them to hold others accountable. However, they also cited the IU's role as significant in terms of ensuring that professionals keep in touch with each other:

'I think it's given me a better awareness of the pressures of the different areas... I know more in terms of my boundaries and barriers and also the responsibility of others. So, I think I've been able to kind of push a little bit more. So, for example, if

there are areas that other agencies are supposed to be doing, I'll be able to confidently say, well, that's something that you need to address' (Local authority)

'But it definitely promoted the communication between professionals because I think people had had to be a bit more accountable if they had someone from Always Hope contacting them' (Local authority)

Local authority and probation professionals were also very positive about the impact that information sharing has had on their ability to provide support for young people:

'Everybody had their little bit of information, which is quite crucial to the case and managing the case, managing the risk' (Probation)

There was a particularly interesting example given by a local authority professional about a joint meeting with a young person, in which the Prison Offender Manager was able to talk to the Personal Adviser and Probation Practitioner about how the young person had been involved in a violent incident in prison, which informed how they worked with him in the future. She also recounted how useful it was for the Probation Practitioner to be involved in the joint meeting while the young person was still in prison because it helped the young person to understand how he needed to engage with her on release:

'It was a lesson for him in terms of, oh right, this is how I'm going to have to engage with this person once I'm released. And having the Prison Offender Manager there, meant he couldn't gloss over his behaviour... And for me to hear that helped inform the way that I would work with him as well... If I didn't know what his behaviour had been like in prison because all I was hearing from was him going, yeah, it's great, and I've got a job and this is good, and he wasn't telling me the negative stuff, then we wouldn't have been able to plan properly for him. So he could have just fallen through the net a little bit, I think' (Local authority)

Professionals in the probation service also commented on how useful they found the information that Personal Advisers, Prison Offender Managers and Lifelong Links

Coordinators gave them about young people's backgrounds, saying that it enhanced their understanding of their vulnerabilities and experiences and helped to shape their practice:

'I was able to learn more about who the young person was, not just what he had done. From the experience of the Prison Offender Manager and Personal Adviser, I realised he is actually much more polite, willing to listen and to engage than his file implies. Thanks to the Always Hope meeting I have had a chance to learn this about him and understand him better before meeting him myself' (Probation)

'We've been working with Lifelong Links which is really good for me because it gives me a more in-depth idea of what someone's, not only childhood looks like, but who's around them' (Probation)

A professional in the probation service, who had been working with the Lifelong Links Coordinator rather than the Personal Adviser, was particularly appreciative of what she had learnt about the young person and described how it had changed the way she worked with him, which in turn contributed to him not reoffending:

'For me, having the Lifelong Links Coordinator, who already knew a lot of his history, made my young person feel more comfortable to talk, and it gave me much better insight into him. So maybe I adapted the way I work. I'm still risk-managing but I'm also working on a different form of rehabilitation and helping him develop his own world' (Probation)

A local authority professional reported that herself and the Probation Practitioner had undertaken a version of a Deep Dive on the young person they were supporting. She attributed the Probation Practitioner's dedication to supporting the young person to desist from crime, and the young person's subsequent desistance, to the information that they had shared:

'She did a chronology for him on the criminal side of things and I did one on the care side of things and it was really good. We all got together and we went through it all... I know sometimes it's not doable for every young person because it took a lot of work....It was a very time consuming.... But if something similar could be done then all of us would have a better understanding about the young person that might help

communication and they might realise that we do need to go a little bit over and above for this young person. They've clearly got these needs and they need to be met' (Local authority)

Finally, professionals described joint working as beneficial to them in terms of the sharing of responsibilities and ensuring that professionals were not duplicating effort:

'It kind of pulls us all together, so we're all working from the same page... we can all support the young person without having to keep repeating everything' (Local authority)

A probation professional, who was not working alongside a Personal Adviser, explained what happens when the Personal Adviser is not involved. He was particularly concerned about duplication and something important getting missed:

'But things like the day-to-day needs, like housing and ID... if we both knew what both of us could give, because sometimes I worry we duplicating this. So, actually you're getting two forms of ID but you haven't had other things you could have done with. I think that for me has been the only let down' (Probation)

Recognising the importance of care experienced young people engaging with Lifelong Links and Group Conferencing

The 2013 Care Inquiry describes relationships as the golden thread running through a child's life and talks about 'including everyone who matters' (p.14) in planning and decision making. Burford and Hudson (2000) suggest that involving support networks in planning and decision-making for children in care, leads to more successful plans. The importance of family and positive social networks is also echoed by the literature on those with experience of care in custody, as shown by, for example, the 2017 Ministry of Justice review by Lord Farmer that is discussed earlier in 'Context and Background'.

The professionals interviewed for this evaluation were generally in agreement about the importance of care experienced young people in prison being given the opportunity to reconnect with positive personal support networks and recognised the potential impact this

can have on resettlement. A stakeholder commented that the concept should be broadened to include all prisoners, not just those with experience of care.

'And I think Lifelong Links really emphasised to me something I think we all knew, but we probably didn't realise... you can have the nicest flat in the world, in the nicest area, with the best job, but unless you've got somebody who they can turn to on a Saturday night at 9 o'clock or something, then a lot of that can be undermined very quickly' (Stakeholder)

'And I think one of our key issues we have, especially for our younger people, is that they don't tend to have many positive influences around them. Doing Lifelong Links is quite brilliant, because they can link in with those pro-social adults' (Probation)

Both Lifelong Links in Birmingham and Coventry and Group Conferencing in Wolverhampton encountered a range of issues in reconnecting young people with their social networks (see 'Organisational Issues' below), however, professionals' enthusiasm for the concept has not waned:

'In my view, you start off with a positive footing. You don't start off saying this will never happen because of X, Y or Z... And I think that you might go through ten young men and nothing comes out, but there might be one out of that ten where something happens and therefore it's worth the try' (Local authority)

The box below describes how Lifelong Links reconnected Adam with James, one of his previous Personal Advisers, and outlines how James felt about being asked to be part of his social network:

Adam's Lifelong Links connection story

Adam was released from prison at the end of 2022. The Lifelong Links Coordinator described his family background as 'hair raising', saying that it must have had a big impact on his mental health and contributed to the anxiety he still experiences. He is currently working and bringing up his two children. His Personal Adviser has not been involved in working jointly with other professionals, however, the Probation Practitioner and Lifelong Links Coordinator have worked well together since he was released.

His Lifelong Links Coordinator has reconnected Adam with James, a Personal Adviser from a couple of years ago, prior to his time in prison. James was very touched that Adam had reached out to him:

'So when I was asked, I thought it was really lovely. It sort of made me think, yeah we did get on. It was mutual. That's really nice... it was nice sort of confirmation and he's a really nice kid'

Since recently becoming part of Adam's network, James has not yet had any contact, however he describes what he thinks his role will be:

'It would be a bit like having a family member in a way. So, I will see him occasionally throughout the year - birthdays and things like, and keep in contact. He will call me if he wants to and we can talk things through. And just be like more relaxed, part of his life, as opposed to a more professional role. He can come to me with problems'

He envisages going out for a coffee with him, visiting him at his home or playing pool together and checking in, as he would with a friend, by asking him how he is and what he has been doing, and supporting and encouraging him.

He talked about his role as a 'lifelong link' and recognised the responsibility that goes with this. Although he found it a little daunting to start with because he is a busy person with a family, he then started to realise that Adam, like a friend, is unlikely to be in touch all the time:

'I think he's got potential to have a really bright future actually... I think he's the sort of person who would be in and out of contact. So, you know, I think it would be on me to pursue that and just keep the contact going... It's just like a mate, you know, mates do come in and out... I don't see some of my best mates all the time, but we keep in contact... So that sort of makes it feel less, you know, less daunting then'

James talked about not wanting to set boundaries, as he would in his professional life as a Personal Adviser. However, he recognised that there would have to be boundaries to start with, but hoped that they would evolve over time:

'And I don't want to go in and start setting boundaries sort of thing and create a barrier but there would have to be boundaries, you know. I think that might have to be sort of like organic as we go along, maybe rather than go in and say, we can't do this and this and you can only call at this time or whatever'

Local authority professionals were very positive about the way in which Lifelong Links Coordinators protect young people from feelings of rejection, describing it as a 'buffer' when things do not go as hoped:

'For the young person there might be people they want to be in contact with, but they don't quite know how to make that first step or are worried what the reaction will be. Lifelong Links kind of sits in the middle bit and helps to manage that situation. So, if it is a negative response or that person is not able to support them, Lifelong Links is there to kind of absorb some of that and kind of feedback in a way that the young person doesn't personally feel rejected' (Local authority)

The story of Billy is shown below as an example of how well his Lifelong Links Coordinator managed his disappointment when they were trying to link him up with his two youngest siblings and their foster carer would not allow it. His Personal Adviser described how the Coordinator delivered the information in a way that did not demonise the foster carer and helped Billy to understand:

'They managed the process of talking it through with him, talking with his siblings, carer and coming back in explaining the outcome to him. So, he wasn't kind of upset by that. So I was pleased with that' (Local authority)

Billy's story

Billy is 21 years old and has ADHD, personality disorder and autism. He was in prison for over two years and, when interviewed, had been out of prison for 6 months. On release he did a 'Thinking Skills Programme' and hopes to open a food business/café. His Personal Adviser and Probation Practitioner collaborate well and always meet Billy together. At the time of his interview he was staying on his auntie's sofa because the only alternative accommodation available was a hostel:

'The living situation isn't ideal right now, because I'm living with my auntie and uncle, and they haven't got no room for myself, no bedroom. So, I'm living on a sofa right now but it's better than a hostel because I didn't really like a hostel environment too much'

He was in foster care for around 8 years due to emotional neglect; he was placed with one of his brothers until they were separated because of his behaviour. He then moved to supported living and then to his mum's. He has two other siblings who were placed with a separate foster carer.

He was very critical of his foster carers, saying that there was 'no emotional connection' between them:

'The whole reason why I went into care was because the judge believed that if I lived back with my mum, I would get emotionally neglected. But I got emotionally neglected when I was in care anyway... It was tough. My first carer was literally slagging me off. I think I used to bed wet because of all the stress of being in care, and then she used to try and shame me on the streets saying, bed wetter, bed wetter. And I was only eight years old and all of that, you know what I'm saying? And that flipping dehumanised me and whatever... And then they moved me from her to another carer, and then that carer was even worse. She was always putting me down emotionally, talking about, you can't be a footballer, you can't do this or that, your mum's a lady of the night and all of that. It's led me to where I am today with the probation services and whatever'

Lifelong Links tried to reconnect him with his two youngest siblings, but their foster carer refused to allow it. He talked about this as an injustice:

'But unfortunately, when they tried to communicate, the carer was saying, they don't want no contact with you. My little brother's going through GCSEs right now. My sister's got a lot going on with her. So, it had nothing really to do with the Lifelong Links service at the start, because it wasn't really so much, they're not doing their part. They did their part. It's just, that their carer or my siblings just didn't really play their part in it, so that's why it didn't get to work properly... And it kind of feels like a prison sentence, in a way, because I missed out on their lives and whatever... where's the rights, and justice, and morals and that?'

The Lifelong Links Evaluation (Holmes et al, 2020), which assessed the implementation and impact of Lifelong Links for children in care, indicates that children's objectives for Lifelong Links go further than simply reconnecting with members of their personal network and include wanting information about their family history, accessing and seeing photos of their family and corresponding with family members. In the evaluation of Always Hope, professionals highlighted how, beyond reconnecting with social networks, Lifelong Links and

Group Conferencing have fulfilled other needs, including connecting two brothers in different prisons, facilitating contact between the young person and their family by helping them to set up an email account and supporting relatives with their first visit to the prison by talking to them about their worries and anxieties and even helping them with the cost of travel if they have a long journey. Lifelong Links has also supported young people to talk about their memories, look at old photos and help them to understand their history and identity. Lifelong Links coordinators perceived their job as not just about linking young people up with their social networks but about supporting them to understand their journey and what is true and what is not. One Coordinator described Lifelong Links as part of young people's recovery:

'There's always their perception and what they're told and what the actual truth is... If I can find out something like parents or an aunt or someone did want them, but unfortunately, they had a negative assessment, that builds that bridge back with them because they thought they were abandoned, but actually they weren't' (Local authority)

'I think it's part of their own sort of recovery in some ways because a lot of it is trauma based. And it gives them that opportunity to open up and for you to reflect back to them. You know, how did that make you feel? And what could you do differently next time? You do a bit of therapeutic work because it just comes naturally with what you're doing, but you're not labelled as a counsellor or psychologist or anything, so that they feel ok to share' (Local authority)

A Coordinator talked about the work she had done with a young person from an Irish travelling community. She described how he enjoyed doing the timeline because it helped him to see that he had a large social network and identify who could be a positive influence:

'So, drawing out his family tree with him, he's got about 35 to 40 people so far... And I'm putting them in order and telling them who they are... And then we can also identify from that who is positive. There's quite a lot of criminal offending on the male line... So, we can sort of identify people that aren't and who might support him to keep him on an even keel' (Local authority)

Finally, Lifelong Links Coordinators described how they had built trusting relationships with young people over time and could see the benefits of their visits in terms of providing another source of support, particularly while they were still in prison. The young men themselves agreed and seemed appreciative of this additional support, both in prison and on release:

'She's a great lady. She's funny as well, to be fair...We talk about the support and what do you think we should do and all that... She talks about things generally. We have a little laugh about what I'm going to do and that but...I want to go on holiday and that and she recommended some places...I've got a 'to do' list of where I want to go' (Kai)

Impact on professional practice

As well as the benefits described above, there have also been wider impacts of the Always Hope project. The most mentioned wider impact relates to professionals' increased openness and interest in multi-agency working. Through Always Hope they have seen the benefits of joint working and have taken it into other areas of their work:

'I would say it's changed my practice but in a positive way, so in a way where we can try and make it more multi-agency and use the integrated planning approach with other young people that aren't involved with Always Hope you know - use it where we can' (Local authority)

'In a way it's kind of encouraged me to go into more relationship building kind of work' (Probation)

All the remaining wider benefits described below relate to local authorities, except a significant development in the probation service in one area, whereby they are piloting the setting up of a new team exclusively for care experienced young people. It is unclear whether this initiative was influenced at all by Always Hope but it may signal a recognition within the probation service that care experienced young people require a more nuanced type of support:

'It's quite exciting because, you know, it's a team specifically for them. So, there would be a lot more time being spent on them and again probably more information coming their way' (Probation)

Through their involvement in Always Hope and increased awareness and understanding of care experienced young people in prison, all three local authorities have either amended their Local Offer, or are looking into amending it, to ensure that it reflects the needs of those in custody:

'It's influenced our practice which is published in our Local Offer for care leavers, so wherever young people are they know there is someone they can rely on. You know, I'm really proud of that' (Local authority)

Examples of new offers of support include Christmas boxes in prison, providing a small allowance to those in custody, a release grant and release pack:

'We're looking at delivering Christmas boxes, if we can, to those in custody, as sort of a care package... so that they're not just a forgotten group of young people' (Local authority)

Local authority professionals' increased understanding and enthusiasm for supporting this group of young people has reportedly led to Personal Advisers visiting them more often in prison and one local authority setting up drop-ins at Swinfen Hall for any young person who has experience of care, regardless of their local authority, where they discuss their entitlements. Managers also recalled how they now include a section on care experience and being in custody in Personal Adviser inductions and cascade the learning from Always Hope to all staff, not just those who are involved in the project. Another local authority professional described how colleagues now draw on her knowledge of Always Hope for advice on supporting the families of people in prison and there were reports that Lifelong Links Coordinators in other local authority areas have started extending their work to people in prison.

Finally, this raised consciousness about care experienced young people in prison has led to a local authority professional describing how Always Hope has encouraged them to be reflective and develop their own practice:

'Operationally I am more aware now when I'm in supervision with somebody who's got a young person in custody - around what to push for, how to push for it' (Local authority)

Enablers of the implementation of Always Hope

This section explores what has enabled the implementation of Always Hope and highlights how particular individuals have contributed to its accomplishments.

The IU was commended for establishing good governance for Always Hope and every professional interviewed highlighted the key role of the IU in driving Always Hope forward and giving it momentum and a *'personal touch'*. They were described as *'persistent'*, *'proactive'*, *'tenacious'*, *'good communicators'*, *'flexible'* and *'patient'*. Professionals valued the IU's knowledge of the prison and probation service and how it works, in particular the help they have given them to make contact with professionals in the other agencies, which a local authority professional described as:

'We kind of need someone to be prompting that communication between people...I think it's great and it's needed because I've worked with young people in custody for quite a few years now and before it was a real struggle to get the contact details of people and actually put that support around the young person before they came out of custody, whereas now with my young people at Brinsford, it's been much better' (Local authority)

Another local authority professional gave an example of how the IU helped a Personal Adviser locate her young person through probation and another recounted how IU's role has been fundamental to the success of the project:

'IU were fantastic - chasing up probation for me to try and get a link with probation. The police didn't know either that he'd been released, so obviously they were quite concerned. So they've all been in contact with me and I've been trying to pull it all together' (Local authority)

'I would end up, you know, messaging the general inbox, not getting a response, calling then telling me to e-mail the general inbox, not getting a response... And you're going around in circles and actually what you need is somebody who knows a bit more and is a central point of contact for both sides, for us and probation and the people in prison - to be able to contact and facilitate that. And they've [IU] just done it so well. I think if she wasn't there, I'm not sure this would have got off the ground'
(Local authority)

A professional in the probation service also highlighted the importance of the IU's role in keeping practitioners accountable and talked about the need for someone to fulfil this role in some capacity going forward:

'In a sense it would be like a coordinator role and resettlement coordinator. Potentially something like that and bringing key parties together and making sure that referrals come in and joint meetings are happening. They've just been someone to kind of be accountable for all that' (Probation)

'The Operational Lead for Care Experienced People' role in the prison service was also perceived as pivotal because of their specialist knowledge, oversight and responsiveness: *'people who, you know, wouldn't really normally engage in this stuff listen to X'* (Stakeholder). This role was also described by local authority professionals as significant in terms of 'unblocking' issues:

'So we've got X who we can go to and ask if there's any support to unblock a certain issue' (Local authority)

Professionals in the prison service highlighted the important role played by the Prison Offender Manager at Brinsford who had responsibility for care experienced young people and led on the Always Hope project. One of the young men spoke about how she had talked to him about the advantages of taking part in Always Hope and colleagues in the prison service praised the work she had done to encourage young men to participate and connect Prison Offender Managers and Personal Advisers together:

'I had to tell [the prison that I am a care leaver] but obviously once I told them they were like, ok, fair enough. They were like, Y needs to come and see you. Y is the one who does the care side of things, safety side...' (Tom)

'She was going to all the local and the regional care-leaver meetings, she was reporting on all the statistics, and producing figures. She was helping when we couldn't get hold of Personal Advisers. She was checking when everyone came in if they were a care leaver. She set up a system for identifying the care leavers so that all the lads were identified when they come in' (Prison)

Professionals in local authorities were also grateful for this coordinating role in Brinsford, saying that communication with the prison had become much harder since there has been nobody in this post. From the point of view of the local authorities, without someone fulfilling this role, they have turned up to the prison only to find that their young person has been moved elsewhere and no one knows where they have gone, and there have also been issues with finding out the name of the relevant Prison Offender Manager:

'I knew that I could go to her. And like I said, if we could have that in all of the prisons that our young people are in, it would just make life so much easier for us. And, as we've already said, you're firing off emails to whoever and getting absolutely nothing back. You just feel like you're going around in circles, and you don't know where to start' (Local authority)

Finally, in 'Improved multi-agency working' above we have described how Always Hope has improved relationships between professionals from different agencies and created greater understanding of each other's roles – this was something that professionals believed has significantly enabled the implementation of Always Hope. A professional in a local authority also commented that it has been helpful to have neighbouring local authorities working on the pilot at the same time and another highlighted how the enthusiasm and commitment of practitioners across all three agencies has been a significant factor in the implementation:

'I think there's been a lot of just like 'can do', goodwill attitude to it. I mean, that's been really good' (Local authority)

Barriers and challenges

Previous sections have outlined the benefits of Always Hope and what has enabled its implementation. The following section discusses the challenges and barriers that professionals have experienced in implementing the project.

Several participants highlighted the pandemic as causing difficulties at the start of the Always Hope project which slowed its progress down and has arguably meant that it has not reached its full potential. Managers also described the period of funding as short and restrictive and talked about the difficulties in finalising Information Sharing Agreements. Several professionals commented on the limited criteria on which eligibility was based and how other MOJ interventions have caused eligibility problems. One professional suggested that, with hindsight, it may have been more useful to have selected a pilot prison with less well-established links with local authorities, because it has made it difficult to understand where progress has come from.

Structural issues

Need for effective support for Always Hope at a policy and senior leadership level

There was a very strong perception among stakeholders that Always Hope requires support at a policy and senior leadership level and that developing this is crucial if it is to be rolled out to other prisons. Their argument was that there needs to be greater accountability of professionals involved in the project so that the job gets done and Always Hope becomes part of their job description. Stakeholders noted that there was a correlation between senior leaders not engaging and their staff not engaging:

'It's the maintenance of the programme that's critically important and we need to build in time and resources and leadership in order to make sure that the organisations don't depend on just individuals being part of the pilot scheme, but that it is actually integrated into the culture and the process and procedures within those agencies' (Stakeholder)

On a couple of occasions, professionals also raised the perceived need for strengthening support for Always Hope from senior managers. The first was by a local authority professional in relation to the need for effective and committed senior management support for Lifelong Links and the second was by a professional within the prison service who suggested that prison senior managers may still need convincing of the benefits of Always Hope.

Differences in institutional cultures

In considering the implementation of Always Hope, some professionals discussed how there are difficulties associated with it requiring three separate institutions with different practice frameworks and cultures to work together. As described in 'Resources and Training' above, at the beginning of the project there was a lack of understanding of each other's roles and responsibilities and this was reflected in participants' conversations about other agencies. For example, prison professionals talked about how, in the early days of the project and during COVID, they were overused by Personal Advisers to get updates on the young people they were supporting, with one prison professional describing it as: '*we became a Personal Adviser for the Personal Adviser*'. Although understanding has grown as the project has progressed, there is no doubt that the cultural shift required to work with other services has been a challenge. For example, prison professionals described how the role of a Prison Offender Manager is very much about assessing risk, while local authority professionals talked of using trauma-based approaches and being very person centred. Professionals described the difficulties involved in aligning the objectives of each agency and stakeholders acknowledged that cultural change takes a long time:

'Prison Offender Managers aren't like the old offender supervisors. Their tasks are more risk based and assessment based rather than going to see the person' (Prison)

'The cultural shift for different parts of the project itself... A strength-based approach and a trauma-based approach isn't something that people who work in prisons usually tend to talk about it. It's all about risk or reoffending' (Local authority)

Awareness of care status in prison

The participation of young men in the Always Hope project is predicated on professionals being aware of young people's care status. However, there are structural issues preventing the identification of care experienced young people in prison (Gooch et al, 2022), which has implications for the implementation of Always Hope. Research conducted by Fitzpatrick et al (2016) suggests that the criminal justice system's focus on risk can hinder practitioners asking about care status, which leads to some young people with care experience not receiving the support they are entitled to. Gooch et al (2022) highlight two barriers, firstly the imperfect method of recording care status, described as 'not asking the right questions at the right time' (p.5), and secondly the shame and stigma that people feel about having been in care and associated with this, the lack of trust they have for professionals in the criminal justice system.

It was not possible to estimate the extent of the problems around identification through this evaluation – the young people who were interviewed had all clearly been identified as having had experience of care. It is, however, notable that none of the young men interviewed said that they felt stigmatised in prison because they are care experienced, saying that they do not talk openly about it with everyone but that they are happy to speak to the practitioners they are working with: *'I tell them if they ask but I don't bring it up out of the blue'* (Scott). However, they spoke about how other young people may not want to talk about their experiences of being in care if they have had a difficult time:

'Some people might feel a bit paranoid because they've had rough times in care. I've had rough times in care, ask my Personal Adviser, she'll tell you... I've got learning difficulties myself, but I like to make sure that everybody knows what's what and stuff' (Tom)

It is also interesting to note that some professionals expressed concern about how a young person will get the opportunity to participate in Always Hope if their care status is not identified by the prison and the young person does not have a good relationship with their Personal Adviser. Professionals in the prison service gave examples of young men having very good relationships with their Personal Advisers but were worried about those who do

not and how they would access Always Hope, particularly if the IU is no longer involved or there is no one in OMU responsible for encouraging participation.

Several local authority professionals discussed how difficult it is for them to properly support young people who are on remand in prison because they do not have a Prison Offender Manager and are not eligible to participate in Always Hope. A Personal Adviser talked about how one of the young men she supports was on remand for 6 months but then had a court case and was released on a two-year suspended sentence without her being told, meaning that she could not set up appropriate support mechanisms.

Young people's relationships with prison and probation professionals

The section above refers to young people's relationships with their Personal Advisers and how they are often, but not always, good. Professionals in all three local authorities discussed how some young people expressed concern about taking part in Always Hope because they prefer to be supported just by their Personal Adviser, who they have often known for much longer and have grown to trust. Some young people also talked about reacting negatively to the idea of Personal Advisers sharing information with other professionals:

'Initially I think, because it involves a lot of people, it can become a bit overwhelming... Because we've built up that trust with them. We've been working for years, so they trust us' (Local authority)

'There's stuff that I'd speak to my Personal Adviser about that I wouldn't tell my probation workers' (Riley)

Local authority professionals reported being able to encourage many of these young people to participate by outlining the advantages of joint working, however, for some, the level of distrust of prison and probation officials was too great. One local authority professional said that some young people perceive prison and probation practitioners as 'the enemy':

'So, we have a really great relationship, but he says,' it's just you, it's just you, I trust you' ... I'm his consistent person right now. And I'm the person that knows him, that fits ... So, at the moment I don't think he wants to rock that' (Local authority)

I think they get confused about it, because the Personal Adviser is, I suppose, to all intents and purposes, their "parent"... And we are coming at it from at a different angle. ...we're seen as the, what's the word, bad guy' (Prison)

As mentioned in 'Encouraging person-centred practice' above, when several young people in one local authority were concerned about their Personal Adviser sharing information with other professionals, they resolved it by involving the young person in all meetings from the beginning of the process. However, a few still resisted:

'For one of our young people who was in prison at the time, he was saying, if he's speaking to his Personal Adviser then that information is between him and his Personal Adviser. He didn't want the prison to have it. He didn't want probation to have it' (Local authority)

A few young people, even though they had agreed to participate in Always Hope, found meetings with more than one professional difficult and overwhelming. Personal Advisers either managed to persuade them of the advantages of joint meetings or, like one young person, they took matters into their own hands and switched the video camera off:

'I prefer to deal with people separately, so then it doesn't complicate things... I'm not one for sitting in a room for too long around the table ... I can't do it. You see, with my ADHD, love. When people get in touch with me, I like to meet and deal with them once separately, not all together. I wouldn't like that. I wouldn't like being in prison and then having a meeting... It's intimidating ... I'll feel, like, why are you all ganging up on me?... Why are you all coming at me at once?' (Brady)

'So, I don't really like having those people in the room, to have everyone there looking at me and that? At least, on a video call, I can decide where the camera's looking and

what people can see. You know what I mean? I can just turn off my camera if I don't want people to see me, so they're not seeing me' (Riley)

The impact of recall on young people

HMPPS in England and Wales operates a system whereby individuals are released from prison early to serve the remainder of their sentence on license and under supervision, in the community. Fitzalan Howard (2019) reports that the number of people recalled to prison in England and Wales has increased in recent years. In 2018, recalled prisoners accounted for 10% of the prison population, approximately 6,300 people (Ministry of Justice, 2018).

Many local authority professionals were frustrated that, despite careful planning around their young person's release and detailed liaison and joint working, young people often did not understand the conditions of their license and were caught out by what local authority professionals perceived as quite innocuous conditions of their license, such as not turning up to probation meetings and changing address:

'And one of our young people was recalled because he failed to tell his probation officer of an address he'd moved to. And although he tried to tell his probation officer... It was all done at the last minute and because the probation officer didn't hear from him in the timely fashion about where he moved to, he was actually recalled. So he's back for a month. And that could be really disruptive. I think all of us have probably had those experiences' (Local authority)

A common theme of the interviews with young people was their objection to having to live in approved premises when they are released from prison and for some, leaving this accommodation early may have led to them being recalled. This once again highlights the complexity around finding suitable places for young adults to live after they leave prison:

So, basically, they're trying to put me into an approved premises. Which is like somewhere, it's like a hostel where there's people stay with you 24 hours a day. It's like, I've served my time, you know what I'm saying? I'm going to be on a GPS tag for

12 months. So, you know where I am for 24 hours of the day, what's the need to put me in a place where I can't have my freedom? ... My probation's not really budging, so I'll just have to do what she says' (Cal)

'It was crap in there. It was dreadful. I hate it. I can't be bothered. I was meant to stay for six weeks. I stayed for two' (Riley)

Cal's quote above highlights the significance of accommodation in a young person's resettlement planning and emphasises the need for greater understanding of what housing options work best for young people who have been released from prison.

In a couple of cases, local authority professionals were particularly disappointed that their young people had been recalled, not only because they perceived the reason to be relatively harmless, but also because of the impact it had on them and their rehabilitation. These findings echo the themes emerging from previous studies conducted among people who have been recalled to prison (Digard, 2010; Padfield, 2013 and Fitzalan Howard, 2019) - emotional pain and disengagement, perceived illegitimacy and injustice. The most recent of these studies also suggests that recall may be perceived as 'undoing or damaging prior-to-recall efforts and achievements that may facilitate desistance (adding to its perceived counter-productiveness)' (Fitzalan Howard, 2019, p. 194) and impacts individuals' feelings of hope.

The story below is about Dwayne who was recalled because he broke his curfew and was in the vicinity of a crime, although there is no evidence that he was actually involved. His Personal Adviser is very concerned about the impact it has had on his physical and mental health:

Dwayne's story

Dwayne is 21 years old and has care experience status because he was in custody at 18. He has a very supportive network in terms of his mum and his extended family. He did a lot of qualifications in prison and had high expectations for his future. In the lead up to his release in 2022 he was very overwhelmed, and worried about going into a hostel. He had a joint meeting with his Personal Adviser, Prison Offender Manager and Probation Practitioner 6 weeks before release and on the day of his release the Personal Adviser and Probation Practitioner met with him and gave him a tenancy.

He was recalled to prison because he broke the curfew and was in the vicinity when a crime took place. Although there is no evidence and no further action is being taken by the police, he is still awaiting an oral hearing. His Personal Adviser reported that he feels that this is an injustice, and it has affected his mental and physical health.

His Personal Adviser is concerned for his future because the recall to prison has impacted him greatly:

'I don't understand why he was ever recalled just based on that, it was like, we presume that you're guilty. What message is that giving to a young person who is really trying to rehabilitate themselves and move away from criminality? And I just think it gives a really, really powerful, but negative, message to him. I think he's a young person with the right support who could... he does have the potential to, not reoffend. I'm not saying it's going to be without challenges' (Local authority)

Organisational Issues

The implementation of Always Hope is dependent firstly on young people agreeing to multi-agency working and then the three agencies working successfully together. This section outlines the organisational difficulties that professionals have encountered in working together.

Challenges associated with joint working

It is noticeable that local authority professionals were most negative about their engagement with other professionals, for example, highlighting the difficulties associated with finding out the name of Prison Offender Managers and Probation Practitioners and getting hold of them. This may be because they have regular contact with the young person, placing them in a unique position whereby they can see how and when support is being offered. The following quote is from a local authority professional describing the frustration

she has experienced trying to arrange a joint meeting and how it impacted her young person prior to his release:

'Maybe two or three months before he was due for release... I got to emailing the probation officer at the time and the offender manager as I needed to do his pathway plan and it made sense for us to all go together and kind of discuss what we needed to discuss with him. And unfortunately, it just never came to fruition. I ended up going by myself... And when I did go and see the young person, he expressed a lot that he kind of felt in the dark... he ended up having a different probation officer by the time he was released and... then I think it changed again and he's now got a new probation officer, so it will just be trying to get them in contact again' (Local authority)

HMPPS professionals explained that lack of time and resources, rather than a lack of will, meant that it was very difficult for them to fully engage in Always Hope, with prison professionals saying that *'Prison Offender Manager time is very, very, very resource light'*. Probation professionals also cited a lack of awareness of the project within the probation service, with one probation professional suggested that this was because the IU had approached individual Probation Practitioners rather than going through their managers:

'I don't know whether an effective solution to that is to just get another organisation involved to just try and get these things to work, because if we were staffed properly and we were had the resources, we would be doing all these sorts of things'
(Probation)

'I think there is some awareness of it. I've spotted a few posters around our office building and stuff like that... But I don't know if it's as well-known as other similar agencies that we work with' (Probation)

Stakeholders concurred that HMPPS professionals lack the time to fully engage in Always Hope, saying that many of them want to be more involved and are frustrated that their workload prevents them:

'There are really motivated people on the frontline, who could really take that on and have that real desire, but sometimes the capacity is not given to them to follow it up.'

They have a big passion for this work, but they don't have the time to do it'

(Stakeholder)

Professionals accepted that engagement in the project was to a certain extent dependent on individuals, saying that lack of involvement '*depends on what professionals you're working with*' (Local authority). However, a common theme of the interviews with local authority professionals was the probation service's uneven engagement in Always Hope. There was a particularly high level of criticism about poor attendance at joint meetings and the inconsistency of communication from Probation Practitioners, by both other professionals and the young people themselves:

'I didn't get told the best part of like, two, three months by probation or even by the prison. My Personal Adviser was the one that told me' (Riley)

'They don't seem to want to know. They don't seem to want to use me or ask me anything and when I tried to contact them for support or guidance, they don't respond' (Local authority)

'They don't get back to you and they don't seem to engage with the young people really that much in prison, even towards the end of the sentence. So, their plan is not strong and robust enough from my liking, and once they're out, I mean, I've got one young person who's only seen his probation officer three times and he's been out 9 months' (Local authority)

Local authority professionals were aware of HMPPS reforms and, in particular, the restructuring that has taken place in the probation service. They suggested that lack of engagement by probation was because of organisational change, high staff turnover and practitioner workload. The following quote summarises the feelings of many who value what Always Hope is aiming to achieve and support the implementation but acknowledge that the best of intentions sometimes get disrupted:

'When organisations are potentially understaffed and overworked, so when you have new projects like these, albeit that they are critically important and in the medium and long term would save time right across the board, I think sometimes the pressure of the day, the day-to-day stuff that comes in can derail people' (Stakeholder)

Many local authority professionals were concerned about the impact of high turnover of staff in the probation service and commented on the impact this has on their ability to build relationships and work jointly:

'My experience is that probation need to buy into Always Hope and link in with us and buy into what we're trying to achieve. I'm in, but probation in my experience, aren't. They don't get it' (Local authority)

Local authority and prison professionals were also worried about the impact of high turnover of staff on young people, particularly in terms of planning for their release and resettlement into the community. Young people also commented on frequent staff changes in the probation service:

'Basically, a month ago I had a probation officer, her name is X. And now she's gone. I don't know where she's gone, but I've got a new one now' (Kai)

'He's out at the end of March, and he's now got his third probation officer, the other two didn't reply. I'm sure it's because they've left the service and not told me' (Prison)

One local authority professional went as far as to say that he does not think the probation service value what it means to be care experienced:

'I don't get the feeling that the care leaver tag that we put on our young people makes any difference whatsoever with probation' (Local authority)

Brady's story below illustrates a local authority professional's concern about the probation service's lack of engagement in Always Hope and the potential impact that this has had on his rehabilitation. It also suggests that if the work is being done around young people, it does not matter whether or not they are aware of Always Hope:

Brady's story

Brady is 21 years old. He went to prison for selling drugs and was involved in county lines. He served two years of a four-year sentence and was released in early 2023.

He was in foster and residential homes, saying that he was moved around a lot because he *'wasn't an easy child to foster'* but formed a few good relationships with residential care workers with whom he is hoping to keep in touch:

'They'd start liking me and what not and then basically I'd screw it up myself, then I'd do something wrong, or I'd push them away because I didn't want them to get too close... Obviously, I'd ruin it for myself and then I'd get moved'

He has two siblings - one who he stays in touch with and one whose social worker has expressed concerns about the negative influence that Brady could have on him. Brady was offered the opportunity to engage with Family Group Conferencing and he identified a relative, however there was a lack of interest on the relative's side.

Brady does not remember having any joint meetings whilst in prison, however, his Personal Adviser later confirmed that he met regularly with him and his Prison Offender Manager throughout his time in custody. His Personal Adviser expressed concern that his probation officer failed to attend three meetings prior to Brady's release:

'When we came to meeting up with the COM, the Prison Offender Manager and Brady, the COM kept letting us down and there was never a joint meeting between the four of us in custody. I've never met a probation officer since he's come out... Planning was all over the place' (Local authority)

On release, Brady was in approved premises and is now sofa surfing in another city and, according to his Personal Adviser, is living on the margins of crime. His Personal Adviser is very worried about the choices he is making and continues unsuccessfully to get in contact with his Probation Practitioner:

'Probation don't respond to me, so I really don't know what they're doing... When I challenge him he gets all upset and gets aggressive towards me, so there's only so far I can push him... He doesn't want to hear what I tell him. He doesn't want to hear what anybody wants to tell him. He wants to do his own thing in his own way' (Local authority)

When the interview took place Brady had not seen his Probation Practitioner for nearly a month, although said that they have been in touch by phone:

'I'm supposed to see her every two weeks, but because me and her, our grounds are level, we understand each other, she understands me, and I understand her. She can just phone me every two weeks and be, like, are you all right?' I'm, like, yes, I'm good, I'm good. And she'll put it down as she's seen me and I'm healthy and that. You get me?. But she's a good lady, she's a good woman. I'm singing her praises. She's a lovely woman'

Although our evaluation identified that the probation service's engagement in Always Hope has been less than the other two agencies, stakeholders commented in the latter stages of the evaluation that probation professionals have started to lead efforts to embed Always

Hope in the West Midlands. This highlights the importance of sufficient timeframes to implement and embed new ways of working. In addition, it is important to point out that not all prison and local authority professionals were negative about the probation service's lack of engagement. Participants were generally positive about probation professionals once they became involved in the project. One local authority professional described how she now meets her young person at the probation office so that he can hear what they both have to say:

'I've not had any issues with probation at all. They're sharing information. Any information that I need, any information that I can give them is being shared from my end as well' (Local authority)

'The Probation Practitioner would go over and above for him to make sure that he was OK and that he understood his licence and understood why he had to go to his appointments' (Local authority)

In addition, local authority professionals' more negative comments about probation may also be because of a lack of understanding around when a Probation Practitioner should be reviewing the Offender Assessment System (OASys) assessment. Local authority professionals suggested that probation do not want to get involved with young people until it is closer to the time of their release – the time at which the Prison Offender Manager becomes less involved – making it more difficult for joint meetings to take place. A probation professional also explained how it is difficult to form relationships with young people and professionals when their release dates are brought forward unexpectedly.

Questions around responsibility

As mentioned in the section above on 'Resources and training', a key theme of the discussion with local authority professionals about the Always Hope Manual was the need for more information about who should be taking responsibility for organising different aspects of Always Hope, for example, setting up joint meetings and preparing for a young person's release. One Personal Adviser thought that it was the responsibility of Prison Offender Managers to lead on Always Hope but took control of it herself when this did not happen:

'I was thinking I'm sure it's their (Prison Offender Manager's) responsibility to pull this together...And nobody's contacting me and nothing's happening' (Local authority)

There was also concern that less experienced Personal Advisers may not be able to take on this role or act with the tenacity required to not give up and keep chasing other professionals when required. Some local authority professionals also thought that the Probation Practitioner relied on them too much to take on jobs that were not their responsibility:

'In terms of our capacity, you know we wear so many different hats... A young person's release is not something that we perhaps have that space to be able to really drive forward just on our own. It's got to be you know all of us coming together' (Local authority)

A stakeholder commented that rather than professionals debating who is responsible for each aspect of Always Hope, it is more important that they talk to each other and that there is clarity for the young person:

'Clarity for the young adult about who's doing what. That was what it boiled down to in the end. So, the staff knew who was doing what, and the young adult knew. And that sounds very easy. It's not. It wasn't' (Stakeholder)

Practical challenges of joint working

Personal Advisers from one local authority highlighted the difficulty of holding online meetings with other professionals because they use different systems, while others talked about how communication with Prison Offender Managers had become particularly challenging since there was no longer anyone in OMU who oversaw Always Hope (see 'Awareness of care status in prison' above). They discussed how helpful this person was in terms of keeping the momentum going and connecting them with Prison Offender Managers.

A few Personal Advisers also cited some practical concerns around the Always Hope leaflet and consent form having to be signed in person when they only see them every 6-8 weeks.

They suggested that the form could be made available to young people online if they have access to laptops, although this was not the case at Brinsford:

'So, if I'm getting a consent form just after I've seen them and it has to be signed like in person, it's going to be a long time before I even get to talk to them about it. They don't call because they're using their credit for more important things than to speak to me!' (Local authority).

Finally, one Personal Adviser had a very specific issue regarding getting a passport photo taken for her young person while he was in prison. The Prison Offender Manager was unable to help, and she had to eventually contact a senior manager in the prison service who resolved it for her:

'But the issue with the passport was dragging on for a really long time. And I was just a bit like it can't be that impossible to just get some photos taken. And I was a bit like, you know, this is putting him at a disadvantage for when he's released, he's not going to be able to do anything until he's got photo ID' (Local authority)

The young person involved spoke about it at his interview. He was confused and stressed by it taking so long to organise:

'So, you're going to have me sitting in here for three years, and not even help me towards the first day I get out. The first day I get out, I've got no form of ID. So you're not even trying to help me with nothing. It don't really make sense' (Hiran)

Dependence on the Innovation Unit

Section 4.3 above highlighted how professionals have valued the support the IU has provided to facilitate joint working, in particular the way in which they have chased up professionals who have not been responsive. However, a professional in the prison service also suggested that the IU's success at drawing people into the project and facilitating its implementation may in the long run have led to prisons becoming dependent on them, which could lead to potential challenges in the future. The same professional also, with hindsight, questioned whether Brinsford was the best choice for the pilot because they already have well-developed links with local authorities.

The challenge of reconnecting young people with their support networks

As described in 'Context and Background' above, a key component of the Always Hope project is to provide young people with an opportunity to reconnect with positive support networks, through Lifelong Links in Birmingham and Coventry and Group Conferencing in Wolverhampton. Both models have the same aim – to reconnect young people with positive support networks – however, Group Conferencing does not have the tools and approaches, such as timelines, mapping and social connection tools, that are a central part of Lifelong Links, and which enables Lifelong Links to conduct searches for family members (known or unknown to the young person) and other adults.

The earlier section 'Recognising the importance of care experienced young people engaging with Lifelong Links and Group Conferencing' illustrates how both professionals and young people value the idea behind both models. However, the reality of trying to put the models into practice with young people in prison has been problematic and no Family Group Conferences have been held, despite the best efforts of the teams involved. There were many reasons why it was not possible to organise a Family Group Conference, and these will be described below. However, in some cases, it was simply out of professionals' hands. Scott's story below is an example of this - he wanted a Family Group Conference but reoffended whilst in prison and was resentenced:

Scott's story

Scott is 22 years old and, when he was interviewed, was coming to the end of a four-year sentence. He was also in prison at the age of 16 for two years. He mostly lived with his nan when he was younger but also spent a period in residential care. He has some severe mental health issues and has been in therapy since he was 5 years old. He talked about how he would have liked more support with his mental health while in Brinsford and recognises that he needs this kind of support to continue once he is released, something that did not happen after his first sentence.

He described his relationship with his family as good and plans to live with his mum or girlfriend when he is released. He said that he gets on well with his Personal Adviser who was helping him prepare for his release by organising him a bank account and starting to sort out ID for him. He talked about how OMU had not been able to get hold of his Probation Practitioner.

His engagement with Lifelong Links was focused on the Coordinator setting up a meeting with his family when he is released, in which he hoped they will discuss how they can support him:

'I have some bad problems – it's good to know that people are there'

This meeting never took place because he committed further offences in prison and was given another custodial sentence. He has been moved to an adult prison. His Lifelong Links Coordinator is still in touch with him and expressed concern for him and the changes she has seen in him since being in an adult prison.

This section firstly explores the reasons why Group Conferencing has experienced greater difficulties than Lifelong Links and then examines the challenges that practitioners have experienced in terms of implementation.

Local authority professionals in Wolverhampton identified the Group Conferencing model as having limitations, which has led the local authority to consider the possibility of using Lifelong Links instead:

'The Group Conferencing model has been quite limiting... So that's resulted in me feeding that back to my manager and she's in the process of doing a briefing note for senior managers about us potentially having Lifelong Links' (Local authority)

The Group Conferencing team themselves also acknowledged the constraints of the model, saying that they do not have the skills and tools to undertake the more exploratory work of Lifelong Links – work which is particularly important when trying to reconnect young people in prison with positive personal networks:

'We don't have the tools and we don't have the expertise to be kind of delving into how to find long lost relatives and that kind of thing. You know, our approach comes from the person that we're working with really' (Local authority)

'I think it's one step too far when somebody is in prison because there's more to consider... Like we don't know the reasons necessarily, what's gone on, why they've ended up in prison. There's more to unpick and we wouldn't have the skills to do that.' (Local authority)

Although Group Conferencing overall experienced greater challenges in implementing the model, Birmingham and Coventry Lifelong Links have also faced obstacles. It was apparent from the interviews with local authority professionals in Birmingham and Coventry, and from the information provided by Lifelong Links Coordinators, that not all Personal Advisers fully understand the value of creating support networks for young men in custody. Some local authority professionals expressed concern that it places young men in a vulnerable position and a stakeholder suggested that some Personal Advisers make assumptions that the young people do not need it, or want it, because they can organise their own family time:

'Sometimes the young person just doesn't really want to buy into that (Lifelong Links), which I get because it's a vulnerable place to be isn't it?... and who knows what can come out of Lifelong Links? It's a bit of an unknown, a bit of a worry' (Local authority)

'It felt like there was that feeling amongst Personal Advisers, that the young people don't really want that, they don't really need it' (Stakeholder)

Coordinators were frustrated at how not all Personal Advisers welcomed their intervention and said that it felt as if they had already *'written the young people off'*. They would like consultation with Lifelong Links to become part of a Personal Adviser's job description:

'I think some people [Personal Advisers] can just assume that they'll come out and go back in or, especially if there's a history behind that young person, they've come in and gone out, come in and gone out. That's their expectations' (Local authority)

However, the most significant challenge in trying to reconnect young people in custody with their social network is that their criminal conviction can deter people from wanting to see them again. Professionals described how it is common for families to break contact with

young people while they are serving their custodial sentence or contact becomes very limited. For example, a Coordinator described how the father of a young person in prison found his son's sentence very painful and made the decision for the rest of the family to not have any contact. Billy's story in an earlier section outlined how his siblings' foster carer would not allow them to have any contact with him and Tom's story below describes how his crime deterred practitioners from being able to reconnect with him:

Tom's story

Tom is 22 years old and has specific learning difficulties, including ADHD and dyslexia. He also experiences anxiety and depression. He was in a foster home for one year and a residential home for three years due to physical and emotional abuse and neglect; at 16 he went into supported housing. He has a very large extended family, some of whom visit him in prison. He will be released in 2024. He is a registered child sex offender, and this was his first time in prison.

He is well-informed about his rights as someone who is care experienced through his trusting, stable relationship with his Personal Adviser and through the leaflets he has received whilst in prison:

'The other day I had a piece of paper come through me door saying that I'm a care leaver and that because I'm a looked after child under Section 1989 or something. I can't remember, I think it's Section 21, they have to look after me until I'm 21 if I'm not in education and I think 25 if I'm in education. I know this because my Personal Adviser told me. But my Personal Adviser could stay in touch with me after that if she wants, it's her choice'

He said that he does not think much about his release but has many ideas about starting his own business in the future. He engaged with Lifelong Links and hoped to reconnect with his former residential care workers, who he described as like family to him:

'I miss them because they were a big role model in my life. They looked after me for years...They seem like family'

The Lifelong Links Coordinator tried to reconnect him but, due to the nature of his offence, staff were advised not to have any contact with him. Lifelong Links have now exhausted all options and have closed the case.

Coordinators reported cases, such as Tom's above, where the young person was refused contact outright, however, there were also cases where the Coordinator suggested that if they had more time they may have been able to address the issues and repair some of the relationships. The Lifelong Links Evaluation (Holmes et al, 2020) indicates that the average time for completion of a plan, or a Family Group Conference with children in care and their social network, is 7 months, ranging from 0 to 19 months. Furthermore, the evaluation highlighted the centrality of child led practice and the timeframe for Lifelong Links being

directed by the children and young people (ibid). The implication from this evaluation is that professionals need referrals from Personal Advisers earlier so that they have time to build trusting relationships with the young person and the whole family, set boundaries and address the issues between them.:

'For them to be able to bring that young person back into their family, back into their life, I think maybe I needed more time to work on that, to build up a relationship with the family' (Local authority)

Coordinators also highlighted several practical issues relating to implementing Lifelong Links with young people in custody. Coordinators talked about the difficulties associated with not having anyone in the prison to liaise with about the young person. Firstly, there are issues around not being informed when a young person moves prisons or the prison locks down due to an incident. Secondly, in contrast to when Coordinators work with a young person in care and are able to talk to, for example, foster carers, they do not have anyone in the prison to talk to about how their visits have impacted the young person or if something has happened between visits, for example, bad news about their family, which if discussed in the meeting could trigger them and affect how the visit goes:

'They don't update you. So maybe if they've had a bad day, bad week or they've had bad news, you're not updated, whereas on the outside, foster carers, residential workers will let you know' (Local authority)

Following on this, if a Coordinator has to deliver information that the young person does not want to hear, for example, that a family member refuses to see them, there is no support on offer to them once the Coordinator leaves the prison.

Lifelong Links Coordinators also talked about the difficulties of getting in touch with young people in prison in the first place because many of them struggle with reading and writing and often do not reply to emails. They also described the challenges of getting in touch with young people once they are out of prison as they often *'disappear'* or *'go off the radar'*

Coordinators also discussed the environment where they meet young people in prison, describing it as *'unwelcoming'* and *'unnatural'*, particularly compared with the meetings

they have with younger children at their foster or residential homes and even those that they have had with women in prison.

Communication with potential members of their personal network was also discussed. Young people must add the telephone number to their list, which can take two weeks to be approved, and Coordinators commented that during this time momentum is often lost. They also described issues around network members not wanting to give their telephone number to the young person in the first place. When Coordinators work with children in foster or residential homes the process is much easier because the young person can use the Coordinator's phone, or WhatsApp if abroad, and a date and time can be arranged, something that cannot be done in prison.

Coordinators also described the Lifelong Links social connection tools as too long, too repetitive and using language that is too complicated for this group of young people. They said that the young people looked *'bored'* and *'switched off'*. Finally, in terms of the practicalities of working with young people in prison, Coordinators discussed how it can be helpful for young people to test for their heritage DNA, however, it is not possible to do this while they are in custody.

This section has described how the challenges of reconnecting young people with their social network has led to no Family Group Conferences being held with young people involved in the Always Hope project. However, a few professionals have successfully reconnected young people who are not part of the Always Hope project with their personal network. Having seen the impact that this has had, despite all the challenges described above, they now have even greater resolve to make it work. A professional highlighted how she had arranged a Family Group Conference for a young woman in prison:

'I still think it's a really good idea and it's given me even more of a drive to try and make it work because I can see when it does work, how much kind of emotional well-being it can give... To watch them actually see their family after so long. It's amazing. It's a privilege to witness that' (Local authority)

Conclusion

The care experienced young people who were interviewed, while not always aware of Always Hope (or unable to remember what their Personal Adviser or other professionals had told them about it), were mostly positive about its objective of professionals working together to support them, particularly in the run up to their release, and generally felt listened to by professionals. As Brady's story suggests, arguably it does not matter if young people are aware of Always Hope or not, as long as the work is being completed around them. Among the young men who were interviewed, there are positive stories, for example, Riley who is doing well and commented that his latest release was better organised than previously, and Billy who is relatively settled apart from his accommodation. It is important to consider the young men's story within the context of the complexity of their lives, which have often involved childhood trauma and lack of attachment. Several of the young people interviewed also had mental health difficulties and/or learning difficulties.

The findings of the evaluation indicate that professionals were overall positive about Always Hope, while recognising that there are some challenges and barriers to implementation that need to be resolved. Professionals perceived Always Hope as in essence a simple process that provides a structure for the work that some professionals may already be doing and fits easily into their existing practice. If followed, it should sharpen professionals' practice rather than create something new. They were generally positive about how it has improved the support provided for young people while they are in prison and on release.

There is recognition that Always Hope has increased awareness and understanding of what it means to have been in care, particularly among prison professionals, and enhanced professionals' commitment to supporting them. It has also improved working relations between professionals in the three agencies in terms of better planning and increased accountability and understanding of each other's roles; information sharing has been particularly welcomed by probation and local authority professionals. Professionals reported that the model of good working relationships has helped some young people to build better relationships with Probation Practitioners and Prison Offender Managers and often alleviated their anxieties about their release. Always Hope has also had wider impacts, such as local authorities amending their Local offers for care experienced young people in custody to take better account of their needs.

The findings presented in this report indicate that professionals are hopeful that the structure established by Always Hope, including the newly formed Governance Group, the increased commitment by professionals to care experienced young people in prison and improved joint working, will be sufficiently embedded for the support to continue and be extended to other prisons. However, there are some concerns. Firstly, the findings illustrate that participation in Always Hope across the three agencies has not always been equal. There has been a particular issue with probation in terms of high turnover of staff and lack of awareness of the project, although stakeholders reported that in recent months they have noticed a change in the probation service's engagement in Always Hope, noting that they are leading efforts to embed it in the West Midlands. This is a significant development because collaboration between professionals in probation and leaving care services has been shown in the evaluation to be important in terms of preventing recall and reoffending. Related to this, stakeholders have highlighted the need for greater senior leadership and policy level support for the project, as well as greater accountability. In this way, it is not a choice for professionals to participate but everyone is answerable and Always Hope becomes everyone's responsibility. The Always Hope Governance Group is also an important element of this accountability. Similarly, the introduction of 'care champions' in each prison, probation and leaving care team, who can be responsible for monitoring professionals' participation. If Always Hope is understood as everyone's responsibility, this will help professionals move away from an overreliance on the Innovation Unit.

Other challenges include the identification of care experienced people in prison, which has implications for the implementation of Always Hope, the differences in institutional cultures and professionals' lack of understanding about who should be taking responsibility for different aspects of Always Hope, including the important task of finding suitable accommodation for young people on release. The final challenge relates to reconnecting young people with positive social networks. The theory behind reconnecting care-experienced young people in custody with positive social networks is incontrovertibly strong, and participants were generally positive about the concept and its potential impact on resettlement. Of the two models, Lifelong Links is the most suited to working with this group of vulnerable young people, however, they have experienced challenges, and despite their best efforts, have not conducted any Family Group Conferences. This report outlines

very valid reasons why no Family Group Conferences took place, highlighting the time it takes to build relationships and the impact that the young person's criminal conviction has on people wanting to reconnect. Professionals described how it is common for families to break contact with young people while they are serving their custodial sentence or contact becomes very limited. Lifelong Links were, however, able to contribute in other ways, for example, connecting two brothers in different prisons, facilitating contact between the young person in prison and their family, managing young people's feelings of rejection when reconnecting with their social network did not go as hoped and working with young people to help them understand their history and identity.

Based on these challenges, the following section makes recommendations about how the longevity of Always Hope can be secured.

Recommendations for embedding and rolling out Always Hope

Overall, participants were very supportive of Always Hope being rolled-out and would like to see it extended to other prisons and include those on remand and on longer sentences, as well as women with experience of care. The following is a summary, based on the findings described above, of the research team's recommendations for how to develop and embed the Always Hope project:

1. There was a sense that **individuals alone cannot enable joint working** and push the project through, and that there must be support at an institutional level. The importance of senior management within all three agencies buying into the project should not be understated, however, there is a particular need for greater senior leadership support in the probation service where awareness of, and engagement in, the project was considerably lower.
2. IU has taken important steps to increase accountability through the Governance Group and 'care champions'. However, **working jointly must become part of professionals' job description** and ultimately local authorities should be assessed on the outcomes of care experienced young people by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) and prisons and probation by His Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons and Probation.
3. It is important that **prisons continue to work on improving how care experience is recorded** and creating the right environment for people to feel safe to disclose their care status. Consideration should be given to creating a position within OMU whose role it is to ensure that all care experienced young people in prison get the opportunity to participate, not just those who have a good relationship with their Personal Adviser (this could be part of the remit of the 'care champion' mentioned above, or a separate role). Suggestions for increasing participation in Always Hope include an online consent form where young people have access to laptops and 'Way Out TV'.
4. Consideration should be given to **getting young people involved in Always Hope when they are still on remand**. This would enable professionals to support them better, particularly those who are on remand for a long time or whose case goes to

court while on remand and are then released. Key Workers could potentially fulfil the role of the Prison Offender Manager before sentencing.

5. Always Hope is process driven, however, it still **needs initial set up and training to be completed by the IU, or for the IU to teach, and provide support to, others to deliver training and implement the project.**

6. An important part of embedding Always Hope and rolling it out to other prisons is to **break down the cultural barriers that exist between the three agencies.**

Opportunities must be provided for professionals to learn about each other's roles, not only through the Always Hope Manual, but also through face-to-face events, such as the Learning Development Days. Greater understanding will improve relationships but also make them aware of how they can share responsibilities and support young people more effectively.

7. **Professionals should be given opportunities to attend Deep Dives** - they inform joint planning, raise awareness of what it means to have been in care and provide professionals with a real sense of the life experiences that may have led young people to custody. It is particularly important for prison professionals to increase their awareness and understanding of the issues care raises for young people, including their vulnerabilities and needs.

8. **Always Hope training and resources should include positive stories** about young people who have been supported by successful joint working. There is a sense that take-up will increase once professionals can see real life examples of the impact it has had.

9. Within any Always Hope training or resources it is important to **highlight the simplicity of the concept and present it as a process**, rather than an intervention, that will facilitate better joint working and sharing of responsibility. It should be acknowledged that professionals may already be doing some, or much, of what is required and highlighted that they may require resilience to begin with in terms of forming relationships with practitioners in other agencies. The Handbook/Manual should be an aide memoire to enhance understanding and would benefit from starting with a clear and simple summary and visual plan (with page references for where professionals can find greater detail) of how Always Hope is implemented.

10. **Training and resources should outline who is responsible for each aspect of the support provided** for the young people, as well as provide background information on the roles of each practitioner. In addition, it would be helpful for the Handbook/Manual to provide a checklist of tasks, or a bare minimum of requirements, that need to be completed prior to release.
11. It is also necessary to highlight the importance of professionals collectively putting together a good release plan, in particular **securing suitable accommodation for young people on release**. This should involve Probation Practitioners going into prisons and meeting the young people and other professionals in plenty of time to discuss their accommodation and other release needs.
12. There are **two other roles, both within the prison service, that are important** in terms of implementation, embedding and roll-out: someone in a position of responsibility (currently 'The Operational Lead for Care Experienced People') who can 'unblock' issues; and a coordinating role in OMU, which as mentioned above, could be the 'care champion', who monitors participation in Always Hope of both young people and professionals, and provides administrative support. It is also imperative that the names of professionals working with the young men are added to the National Offender Management Information System (NOMIS) at the earliest possible stage.
13. While recognising that alternative ways of building personal social networks for young people, such as through probation or Family Engagement Workers in prisons, should be explored, it is **important to remember the unique set of skills and tools that Lifelong Links has available** to support care experienced young people in prison and the benefits that it brings to them in terms of their recovery and rehabilitation.

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Appendix 1: Interview schedule for young people in prison

Always Hope Evaluation

Young people’s interview (Time 1)

To be completed prior to interview, where possible

<i>Young person’s age:</i>	
<i>Date YP referred to Always Hope:</i>	
<i>YPs release date (if known):</i>	
<i>Local Authority:</i>	
<i>Any other relevant information about the young person:</i>	
<i>Date of Interview:</i>	<i>Interview conducted by:</i>

Please tick:

- Information leaflet given
- Consent form completed by young person

Introductions

Today is about hearing what you think about the support you've received in prison as a care leaver. (I'm also talking to some PAs, and some people in probation and the prison service to see what they think about how people in prison who are care leavers are being supported.)

At the end of all of that we will write a report about what everybody has told us and this will be used to advise councils, prisons and probation about the best ways to support people like you in the future.

Summary of most important parts of Information Sheet

- *We are really happy that you have agreed to take part in this interview but if you decide that you don't want to take part anymore, you can withdraw without giving a reason at any time during the interview and up to a month after the interview.*
- *I would really like to record our interview and take notes so that I don't forget what you've told me, but I can assure you that only myself and my two colleagues will know what we've been talking about and if we write about this interview in our report, your comments will be anonymised - no one will know that it was you who took part.*
- *So, everything you tell me today is confidential but if you told me about how you, or someone else, might be in danger, then there are rules which say that I have to pass that information on. But we would talk about that before I did anything. Does that sound ok?*
- *If, after we speak, you are feeling distressed, speak to the Wing Staff and they will refer you to the Safety Team.*

Is there anything you'd like to ask me about the interview and the research?

Pens paper...

(I am interested in your experiences and your views on things. There are no right or wrong answers – it's not a test. And if you don't understand anything I say, just let me know.)

Let's start off by talking a little about yourself:

- Age, local authority, experience of care/family
- Sentence – how long etc, first prison sentence / Brinsford
- Release date
- Experience of Brinsford so far

Family/friends connections/visits/ letters

- Contact with people outside – family/friends

- Types of contact (Letters, visits)
- Is there anyone that doesn't contact you that you would like to connect with?
(follow-up with questions about Lifelong Links)

Release

- If been in prison before - what was it like when came out last time?
- What is your plan for when you are released: accommodation / work / support?
- What are you looking forward to/ who are you looking forward to seeing?
- What sort of support would you like to receive once you are released?

Identifying as a care leaver in prison

- How did the prison find out that you are a care leaver?
- Advantages, disadvantages of them knowing
- Staff / professionals understanding of what it's like to be a care leaver?

Support for care leavers in Brinsford

- PA – how often do you see her/him? Relationship?
- Are you aware of any other support that is available in Brinsford for care leavers?
- What sort of support are you getting? *(Support with sentence, release, connecting with family/friends)*
- What sort of support would you like to receive in prison as a care leaver?

Always Hope

- Have you heard of Always Hope?
- How would you describe it? *Explain if required*
- How did you first hear about it? *Prompt: PA, POM, Probation, leaflet, Lifelong Links Coordinator?*
- Can you remember what you thought when you first heard about it?
- Why did you want to take part in? What sounded good about it? Any concerns?

Joint Meetings

- Have you been involved in any joint meetings with your PA, probation and POM? Was it sentence or release meeting?
- How would you describe them?
- What have you liked about them so far? Was there anything you did not like about them? What was that? Is there anything you would like to change about them?
- PA linking with probation and POM – how do you feel about this?

- Is there any change that joint meetings have made to your life? If so, what do you think that it? *Prompt: preparation for release, accommodation, connecting with family/friends – letters, visits, money*

Lifelong Links (LLL)/FGC

- Have you met with a LLL Coordinator / Family Group Conferencing Team?
- Why did you not want to take part in Lifelong Links / FGC? If stopped participating - What made you change your mind about LLL / FGC?
- How would you describe LLL / FGC?
- What have you liked about it so far? Was there anything you did not like about it? What was that? Is there anything you would like to change about it?
- Who are you interested in connecting with? Why? What are you hoping will come out of it?
- How do you think that will make you feel? What difference will it make to you? *(Identity, belonging, family history, circumstances of going into care)*
- Is there any change that LLL / FGC has made to your life? If so, what do you think that it?

Closing questions

- Is there anything else that you would like to add?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Thank You

(If appropriate: we are hoping to interview you again once you have been released, so we will be back in touch with you in about 4 months)

Appendix 2: Interview schedule for young people who have been released from prison

Always Hope Evaluation Young people's interview (Time 2)

To be completed prior to interview, where possible

<i>Young person's age:</i>	
<i>Date YP referred to Always Hope:</i>	
<i>YPs release date (if known):</i>	
<i>Local Authority:</i>	
<i>Any other relevant information about the young person:</i>	
<i>Date of Interview:</i>	<i>Interview conducted by:</i>

Please tick:

- Information leaflet given
- Consent form completed by young person

Introductions

Today is about hearing what you think about the support you've received in prison and since your release as a care leaver. [At the end of all of that we will write a report about what everybody has told us and this will be used to advise councils, prisons and probation about the best ways to support people like you in the future.]

Summary of most important parts of Information Sheet

- *If you decide that you don't want to take part anymore, you can withdraw without giving a reason at any time during the interview and up to a month after the interview.*
- *I would really like to record our interview and take notes so that I don't forget what you've told me, but I can assure you that only myself and my two colleagues will know what we've been talking about and if we write about this interview in our report, your comments will be anonymised - no one will know that it was you who took part.*
- *So, everything you tell me today is confidential but if you told me about how you, or someone else, might be in danger, then there are rules which say that I have to pass that information on. But we would talk about that before I did anything. Does that sound ok?*

Is there anything you'd like to ask me about the interview and the research? [I am interested in your experiences and your views on things. There are no right or wrong answers – it's not a test. And if you don't understand anything I say, just let me know.]

Let's start off by talking a little about yourself:

- Age, (local authority), experience of care/family or has care status
- Sentence – how long etc, first prison sentence / Brinsford
- (Other than seeing PA when in prison) awareness of any other support that was available in Brinsford for care leavers/ Always Hope
- What sort of support was this? (*Support with sentence, release, connecting with family/friends*). Expectations versus support received
- What sort of support would you have liked to have received in prison as a care leaver?
- Release date

Support since release

- How have things been going since you were released/ since I last met with you?
- What's been good? What hasn't lived up to expectations?
- Living arrangements and work/ training
- Who has supported you since you were released? *Prompt: family/friends/other, eg. PA, COM.*
- What kind of support have they given you? Relationship?
- Is there any kind of support that you would have liked to have had on release but didn't?
- If been in prison before – how does it differ to the last time you came out of prison? Why do you think it has been different?

Joint Meetings

- Have you been involved in any joint meetings with your PA, probation and POM? How many and at what point in sentence (sentence or release planning)?
- How would you describe them?
- What have you liked/ disliked about them so far? Is there anything you would like to change about them?
- PA linking with probation and POM/COM – how do you feel about this?
- Is there any change that joint meetings have made to your life? If so, what do you think that it? *Prompt: preparation for release, accommodation, connecting with family/friends – letters, visits, money*

Lifelong Links (LLL) / FGC

- Have you met with a LLL Coordinator / Family Group Conferencing Team?
- Why did you not want to take part in Lifelong Links / FGC? If stopped participating - What made you change your mind about LLL / FGC?
- What have you liked/disliked about it?
- Do you have any ongoing contact with anyone who was identified?
- How is this contact going? Has it made any difference to you/ helped you in any way? *(Identity, belonging, family history, circumstances of going into care)*
- Is there any change that LLL / FGC has made to your life? If so, what do you think that it?

Closing questions

- Do you think Always Hope should be offered to other young people? Why do you think this?
- Is there anything else that you would like to add?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Thank You (give £15 voucher)

Appendix 3: Interview schedule for professionals delivering Always Hope

Always Hope Evaluation

Interviews with Professionals Delivering Always Hope

Thank you very much for agreeing to talk to me about your experiences of Always Hope This is part of the independent evaluation that the University of Sussex is conducting of Always Hope, commissioned by the Innovation Unit. I would like to find out about:

- Your role in the implementation of Always Hope
- The referral process and young people's involvement
- Your views about the impact Always Hope
- Any changes you would like to suggest to the programme

I've got a number of questions I'd like to ask you and would like to video-record our conversation today if that is OK? Our conversation will be transcribed. This is for our own analysis purposes and to ensure we do not miss anything you say. We will not share the recording or transcription with anyone outside of the research team. I want to make it clear that your answers to all our questions will be treated as confidential - they will be anonymised and stored securely. The report that will be written by the research team may use direct quotes but they will not include your name. Your participation is voluntary, and if you agree and then change your mind, you can pull out at any time before the report is published.

Do you have any questions for me before we start?

And can you confirm that you are still happy to take part?

<i>Name:</i>	<i>Position:</i>
<i>Professional experience:</i>	<i>Local authority:</i>
<i>Date of Interview:</i>	<i>Interview conducted by:</i>

Please tick:

- Information leaflet given
- Consent form completed

Introduction - Professional Experience of Always Hope

- Introduction:
 - number of AH cases
 - stage you're at with each of them – in prison still/released
 - any thoughts on how they are going
 - any stories of success or challenges?
- What were your **expectations** of Always Hope and have they been met?
- Have you had any **concerns** since the implementation started?

Training and Resources

- Have you attended any Learning and Development days, Deep Dives, Implementation Groups? How did you find them? How did it contribute to your work on Always Hope and to your everyday practice? If not, were you given adequate information about Always Hope?
- Views on AH resources (old and new), eg. documents about IPAA

Encouraging participation in AH (only applicable if initial contact made)

- Have you been involved in getting consent from the young men to take part in AH?
- How do you find the process of initially engaging with young people about Always Hope and encouraging them to take part?
- Why do you think some did not wish to engage in AH?
- Have you supported any young people who started taking part in Always Hope but then withdrew? If so, could you tell me more? [*Prompts: Why they withdrew? How long after referral they withdrew?*]

Integrated Planning and Assessment

- Have you been involved in any Joint Planning meetings with other professionals and Joint Assessment meetings with other professionals and the young men themselves?
- **If not had any meetings without YP:** Why have you only had joint meetings with YP present?
- What has been your experience of the **Joint Planning Meetings** – meeting with the other professionals? (*distinguish between 'Sentence Planning' and 'Resettlement Planning' meetings*)
 - __Any challenges?
 - __Setting the meetings up
 - __Attendance

- Sharing of information
- Collaborating
- What has been your experience of the **Joint Assessment Meetings** – meetings with other professionals and the young person? (*distinguish between ‘Mapping your Sentence’ and ‘Mapping your Future’ meetings*)
 - Any challenges?
 - Setting the meetings up
 - Attendance
 - How the meeting works in practice?
 - Impact on young men
 - Outcomes

Lifelong Links/Group Conferencing

- **Ask PAs only:** Views on Lifelong Links/GC overall? Is it something you encourage YP to get involved with?
- **Ask LLL practitioners only:** What do you think are PAs/LA managers view of LLL/GC? How has this impacted the work you are doing?
- What has been your experience of LLL/GC in terms of working with other professionals in LA, prison and probation?
- How have you found working with the YP who have opted to take part in the LLL/GC? [Prompts: ease of access, maintaining contact]
- How do you think the lives of the YP taking part will be impacted?
- In the cases you are working on, how have **parents/family members** or other members of the young person’s network responded to you? Could you give examples? Why do you think families/networks haven’t wanted to take part?

Views on Always Hope

- Overall, what do you think the **main impact** of Always Hope will be on young people lives and relationships?
- What do you think has **enabled** the implementation of Always Hope so far?
- How has Innovation Unit/Niamh enabled the implementation? How do you think AH will work when it is rolled out to other prisons and Niamh’s/Innovation Unit are not involved to the same degree?
- What do you think have been the **barriers** to the implementation of Always Hope so far?
- If you were to **change** something about Always Hope, what would that be?

Wider impact

- So far, has this programme changed your standard practice/work with young people in general? If so, how? [impact on system, attitudes etc]
- What is the most significant thing you have learned or changed in your own thinking/practice since being involved in Always Hope? [*Prompts: explore whether this was something always within their control, or whether system barriers have been removed*]?

Closing questions

- Is there anything else that you would like to add?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Thank You

Appendix 4: Interview schedule for professionals involved in Always Hope (not delivering it)

Always Hope Evaluation

Interviews with Professionals Involved in Always Hope

Thank you very much for agreeing to talk to me about your experiences of Always Hope. This is part of the independent evaluation that the University of Sussex is conducting of Always Hope, commissioned by the Innovation Unit. I would like to find out about:

- Your role in the implementation of Always Hope
- Your views about the impact of Always Hope
- Any changes you would like to suggest to the programme

I would like to talk to you for about one hour. I've got a number of questions I'd like to ask you and would like to video-record our conversation today if that is OK?

Our conversation will be transcribed. This is for our own analysis purposes and to ensure we do not miss anything you say. We will not share the recording or transcription with anyone outside of the research team. I want to make it clear that your answers to all our questions will be treated as confidential - they will be anonymised and stored securely. The report that will be written by the research team may use direct quotes but they will not include your name. Your participation is voluntary, and if you agree and then change your mind, you can pull out at any time before the report is published.

Do you have any questions for me before we start?

And can you confirm that you are still happy to take part?

<i>Name:</i>	<i>Position:</i>
<i>Professional experience:</i>	<i>Local authority:</i>
<i>Date of Interview:</i>	<i>Interview conducted by:</i>

Please tick:

- Information leaflet given
- Consent form completed

Introduction - Professional Experience of Always Hope

- How long have you been involved in Always Hope?
- Could you please describe your role in Always Hope?
- How would you describe Always Hope?
- What were your **expectations** of Always Hope? [Expectations maintained/changed?]
- Have you had any **concerns** since the implementation started?

Always Hope

- Overall, what do you think the **main impact** of Always Hope will be on young people lives?
- Overall, what do you think the **impact** of Always Hope will be on **young people's relationships**?
- What do you think has enabled the implementation of Always Hope so far?
- What do you think have been the barriers to the implementation of the Always Hope so far?
- If you were to **change** something about Always Hope, what would that be?
- What is needed to roll Always Hope out to other prisons?

Wider impact

- Do you think that Always Hope has had any wider impacts, for example:
 - in the way practitioners work with young people in general
 - attitudinal change towards care leavers
 - relationship building
 - system changes
- Have you learnt anything personally from being involved in Always Hope/ has it changed your thinking in any way?

Closing questions

- Is there anything else that you would like to add?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Thank You

Appendix 5: Interview schedule for identified network

Always Hope Evaluation

Interviews with identified network

Thank you very much for agreeing to talk to me about your experiences of Always Hope. This is part of the independent evaluation of Always Hope that the University of Sussex, commissioned by the Innovation Unit, is conducting. During our discussion, I would like to find out your views and experiences about Always Hope:

- Your expectations of Always Hope
- What Always Hope means to you
- The impact you think it may have had

I've got a number of questions I'd like to ask you and would like to audio-record our conversation today if that is okay?

Our conversation will be transcribed. This is for our own analysis purposes and to ensure we do not miss anything you say. We will not share the recording or transcription with anyone outside of the research team. I want to make it clear that your answers to all our questions will be treated as confidential - they will be anonymised and stored securely.

The report that will be written by the research team may use direct quotes but they will not include your name. Your participation is voluntary, and if you agree and then change your mind, you can withdraw at any time before the report is published.

Do you have any questions for me before we start?

And can you confirm that you are still happy to take part?

Relationship with young person before prison

- Description of relationship before he went into prison
- Contact: in contact or not
 - If not in contact: how long not in contact? Why not?
 - If in contact: frequency, length (Probe on contact arrangements when growing up and post 16)

Relationship with young person since being released from prison

- Description of relationship since being released from prison (Check when released)
- Contact: in contact or not
 - If not in contact: how long not in contact? Why?
 - If in contact: frequency, length
- If the relationship has changed:
 - How has it changed?
 - What changed it? (Probe: Lifelong Links/Family Group Conferencing)

Views on Always Hope

- Awareness and understanding of Always Hope/Lifelong Links/Family Group Conferencing (*Describe Always Hope/Lifelong Links/Family Group Conferencing if necessary*)
- Expectations of, and concerns about, Always Hope/Lifelong Links/Family Group Conferencing
- Experience of Always Hope/Lifelong Links/Family Group Conferencing (what happened at meeting/conference?)
- Do you think Always Hope has impacted your relationship with the young person? How? [short term; long term]
- What did you think has been good about Always Hope?
- What do you think has been less good about Always Hope? Anything you would like to change?
- Do you think Always Hope could be improved? If so, what would you recommend?

Closing questions

- Is there anything else that you would like to add?
- Do you have any questions for me?

Thank you



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET YOUNG PEOPLE

ALWAYS HOPE EVALUATION

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully'.

What is the purpose of the study?

This research study is part of an evaluation of the Always Hope project, which aims to provide better support for young men who have been in the care system during childhood and are now in prison. It will run for around 18 months and involve interviews with young adults, family members and practitioners to find out their experiences of the Always Hope project.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been asked to take part because you are currently involved in the Always Hope project as a young person in either Birmingham, Coventry or Wolverhampton.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw without giving a reason at any time during the interview and up to a month after the interview.

Choosing to either take part or not take part in the study will have no impact on your prison sentence or date of release.

What will happen to me if I take part?

One of the research team will interview you face-to-face for around an hour in a private room - once in prison and once after you have been released. You will be given a £15 gift voucher if you take part in both interviews. We are interested in your views and experiences

- there are no right or wrong answers. We will bring some simple, practical activities with us or if you prefer, we can just talk, or I can ask you questions. The types of things that we will be talking about will include your experience of the Always Hope project in terms of your relationship with the practitioners involved and the meetings, what it is like to have been in care and now in prison, as well as your hopes for the future.

You will not be asked as part of the interview to share any personal information that might incriminate you and you should not share any such information as this may have to be shared by the research team with relevant professionals.

We would like to record the interview so that we can listen again to what you have said afterwards. This recording will not be made available to anyone beyond the research team and will be destroyed after the research is completed, and your identity will be kept anonymised. If you do not want to be recorded then I can take notes from what you say instead.

(Additional wording for young people from Wolverhampton in prison: 'If the interview makes you feel distressed in any way, please alert your wing staff who will refer you on to the Safety Team')

(Additional wording for young people from Wolverhampton who have been released from prison: 'If, after the interview, you feel that you would like to talk to someone about the issues that were raised, please use your 'Ask Jan' app or contact Wolverhampton Healthy Minds on 0800 923 0222 (9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday (Except Bank Holidays)).')

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no risks, you will just need to commit to meeting with us twice – once in prison and once on your release.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

You will be helping us to understand how the Always Hope project works in practice so that we can improve it for young adults.

Will my information in this study be kept confidential?⁴

Confidentiality, privacy and anonymity will be ensured in the collection, storage and publication of research material.

All data will be anonymised, encrypted and stored on password protected computers/hard drive. Interviews will be named with anonymous unique IDs and stored, password protected, in the University of Sussex secure cloud content management and file-sharing service, Box.com. Once uploaded to Box, original copies of data will be securely deleted from local storage locations.

⁴ As a researcher, **two** principles are important here. Firstly the 'Common law duty of confidentiality' by which all participants, unless specifically informed otherwise can expect that the researcher will treat what they have received with confidentiality. Secondly, the requirements of [data protection legislation](#) that apply to all types of personal data that are processed. Failure to act in accordance with the principles and requirements of either may be considered research misconduct.

What should I do if I want to take part?

If you agree to take part in this study we will ask you to fill in a consent form.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the research will feed into a report which will evaluate the Always Hope project. We will share the completed research report with you if you would like us to. The results of the research may also be presented in other outputs including academic publications and conference presentations. Participants will always be fully anonymised in all research outputs, so you will not be recognisable in any way.

The data we collect will be kept in a secure data repository, in anonymised form such that participants are not identifiable in any way from this data.

Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is being organised by members of staff at the University of Sussex, School of Education and Social Work. It is being funded by the Innovation Unit.

Who has approved this study?

The research has been approved by the Social Sciences & Arts Cross-Schools Research Ethics Committee (C-REC). The ethical review application number of the study is ER/HAPT1/12

Contact for Further Information

If you have any concerns relating to this project please contact Tamsin Hinton-Smith (j.t.hinton-smith@sussex.ac.uk) or the Chair of the Social Sciences and Arts Cross Schools Research Ethics Committee (c-recss@sussex.ac.uk)

INSURANCE

The University of Sussex has insurance in place to cover its legal liabilities in respect of this study.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

September 2022

Appendix 7: Flyer for young people

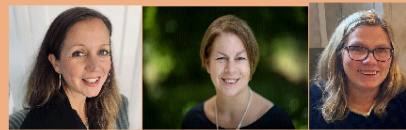
Always Hope

Aims to support young men with experience of care and custody to improve their chances of rehabilitation and create a positive future

Have your say...

Who are we?

We are a team of researchers, based in the School of Education and Social Work at the University of Sussex. The team members are Tamsin, Lisa and Claire



What is this research about?

To learn more about how young men have experienced Always Hope, and whether it has helped to build supportive networks. We want to know what you might have liked about Always Hope and what you think can be improved.

Taking part in this project is voluntary. It is okay to say no!

What would I have to do?

We'll ask you to speak to one of the researchers about your views of Always Hope. They will come and visit you in Prison, and would then like to arrange to come and see you about six months later. Each meeting with a researcher will last around one hour.

What now?

If you're interested in hearing more or getting involved, you can speak with your Always Hope worker (Lifelong Links or Group Conferencing). They will then let us know your behalf. The information sheet gives you much more detail.

Appendix 8: Consent form for young people

CONSENT FORM FOR YOUNG ADULTS

Title of Project: Always Hope Evaluation

Name of Researcher and School: Tamsin Hinton-Smith, School of Education and Social Work

C-REC Ref no: ER/HAPT1/12

This research study is part of an evaluation of the Always Hope project, which aims to provide better support for care-experienced young men in prison. Now that you have read the information sheet, please tick the boxes below which apply to you.

Please tick box

- | | YES | NO |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| • I consent to being interviewed by the researcher | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • I agree to making myself available for a further interview after my release. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that I disclose will lead to the identification of any individual in the reports on the project, either by the researcher or by any other party | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • I have read the information sheet, had the opportunity to ask questions and I understand the principles, procedures and possible risks involved. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • I understand that my personal data will be used for the purposes of this research study and will be handled in accordance with <u>Data Protection legislation</u> . I understand that the University's <u>Privacy Notice</u> provides further information on how the University uses personal data in its research. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • I understand that I can choose to withdraw my data from the project up until a month after the interview. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| • I agree to take part in the above University of Sussex research project. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Name:

Signature

Date:

Appendix 9: Information sheet for professionals and network



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET PROFESSIONALS AND NETWORK

ALWAYS HOPE EVALUATION

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide whether or not to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully'.

What is the purpose of the study?

This research study is part of an evaluation of the Always Hope project, which aims to provide better support for young men who have been in the care system during childhood and are now in prison. It will run for around 18 months and involve interviews with young adults, family members and practitioners to find out their experiences of the Always Hope project.

Why have I been invited to participate?

You have been asked to take part because you are currently involved in the Always Hope project as a family member or professional, in either Birmingham, Coventry or Wolverhampton.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

What will happen to me if I take part?

You will be asked to participate in either a face-to-face or virtual individual or group interview, lasting around an hour. You may be requested to participate in a second follow up interview.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no risks, you will just need to commit to meeting with us once for around an hour for one or two interviews.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

You will be helping us to understand how the Always Hope project works in practice so that we can improve it for young adults.

Will my information in this study be kept confidential?⁵

Confidentiality, privacy and anonymity will be ensured in the collection, storage and publication of research material.

All data will be anonymised, encrypted and stored on password protected computers/hard drive. Interviews will be named with anonymous unique IDs and stored, password protected, in the University of Sussex secure cloud content management and file-sharing service, Box.com. Once uploaded to Box, original copies of data will be securely deleted from local storage locations.

What should I do if I want to take part?

If you agree to take part in this study we will ask you to fill in a consent form.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of the research will feed into a report which will evaluate the Always Hope project. We will share the completed research report with you if you would like us to. The results of the research may also be presented in other outputs including academic publications and conference presentations. Participants will always be fully anonymised in all research outputs, so you will not be recognisable in any way.

The data we collect will be kept in a secure data repository, in anonymised form such that participants are not identifiable in any way from this data.

Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is being organised by members of staff at the University of Sussex, School of Education and Social Work. It is being funded by the Innovation Unit.

Who has approved this study?

The research has been approved by the Social Sciences & Arts Cross-Schools Research Ethics Committee (C-REC). The ethical review application number of the study is ER/HAPT1/12.

Contact for Further Information

If you have any concerns relating to this project please contact Tamsin Hinton-Smith (j.t.hinton-smith@sussex.ac.uk) or the Chair of the Social Sciences and Arts Cross Schools Research Ethics Committee (c-recss@sussex.ac.uk)

INSURANCE

The University of Sussex has insurance in place to cover its legal liabilities in respect of this study.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

September 2022

⁵ As a researcher, **two** principles are important here. Firstly the '*Common law duty of confidentiality*' by which all participants, unless specifically informed otherwise can expect that the researcher will treat what they have received with confidentiality. Secondly, the requirements of [data protection legislation](#) that apply to all types of personal data that are processed. Failure to act in accordance with the principles and requirements of either may be considered research misconduct.

Appendix 10: Consent form for professionals and identified network

CONSENT FORM FOR PROFESSIONALS AND IDENTIFIED NETWORK

Title of Project: Always Hope Evaluation

Name of Researcher and School: Tamsin Hinton-Smith, School of Education and Social Work

C-REC Ref no: ER/HAPT1/12

	<i>Please tick box</i>	
	YES	NO
• I consent to being interviewed by the researcher	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I agree to allowing the interview to be audio-recorded/recorded on UoS MS Teams/UoS Zoom and stored within UoS servers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I agree to making myself available for a further interview should it be required	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I understand that any information I provide is confidential, and that no information that I disclose will lead to the identification of any individual in the reports on the project, either by the researcher or by any other party.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I have read the information sheet, had the opportunity to ask questions and I understand the principles, procedures and possible risks involved.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I understand that my personal data will be used for the purposes of this research study and will be handled in accordance with <u>Data Protection legislation</u> . I understand that the University's <u>Privacy Notice</u> provides further information on how the University uses personal data in its research.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I understand that my participation is voluntary, that I can choose not to participate in part or all of the project without being penalised or disadvantaged in any way.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I understand that I can choose to withdraw my data from the project up until a month after the interview.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
• I agree to take part in the above University of Sussex research project.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

This research study is part of an evaluation of the Always Hope project, which aims to provide better support for care-experienced young men in prison. Now that you have read the information sheet, please tick the boxes below which apply to you.

Name:

Signature

Date: