



Phase One Evaluation Report

The Getting Out for Good Project

Executive Summary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

In 2017, Comic Relief supported nine projects to implement multi-partner, collaborative approaches to affect change in the lives of gang affected girls and young women (G&YW), and their families and communities. This transnational programme called 'I Define Me' was developed by Comic Relief in response to wider research and evidence that shows how gang-involved or affected G&YW have to navigate a range of harmful environments which can expose them to high levels of sexual exploitation and increased criminal activity.

The GoFG project is funded by 'I Define Me' and was established in spring 2017. It seeks to engage with G&YW (14 – 24 years) at risk of gang involvement in the Greater Manchester area. Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) was the lead organisation of the GoFG project. The project was co-designed by MMU with The Averment Group. The project specifically targets G&YW who have been identified as being at risk of serious gang related youth violence, sexual exploitation and abuse, and modern slavery. The G&YW who are referred to the project are given an intensive three-month programme of mentoring, advice and activities by the charity Positive Steps together with local sport, art and cultural providers. With a focus on boxing and football, supported by youth theatre and film-making, the G&YW help their peers to address pathways into and out of gang involvement, devising their own solutions through up-skilling and resilience building.

Evaluation

The Averment Group (TAG) was commissioned by MMU as the local evaluators of the GoFG project. The process evaluation of the first phase of GoFG aimed to explore the functioning of services and systems and identify areas where improvements might be made.

The evaluation examined:

Implementation: GoFG structure, resources and processes of delivery.

Mechanisms of impact: how GoFG activities and their interactions with young people may enable change.

Context: the external factors that may influence the delivery and functioning of GoFG

Method

The evaluation's qualitative methods comprised of narrative life story interviews with eight young people attending the project, observations and field note records, and focus group sessions at specific time points with cohorts. Ketso was used to facilitate focus groups and canvass the G&YW opinions around specific issues relating to the intermediate and end goal outcomes. These focus groups were held at three time points for each cohort.

A small case-based mixed-methods social network study was carried out involving participants from cohort three and four. This involved conducting a personal network interview with eleven participants to assess their support networks at the beginning of their involvement with the programme. There were six successful follow up interviews with participants at the end of their involvement with the project.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Quantitative methods included psychometric assessment completion at the start and conclusion of all young people's involvement with GOFG. Assessments tools that were utilised were the Strengths and Difficulty Questionnaire (SDQ), the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (SWEMWBS) and the MOS Social Support Survey Instrument (MOS SSI). Project throughput data was also collected and analysed.

Participants were aged between 14 and 21 years, all were participating, or had participated and successfully completed GOFG.

Qualitative analysis methods included thematic analysis and social network analysis. Quantitative data were analysed descriptively due to sample sizes.

Results

The results of the evaluation of phase one are summarised as follows:

- On average, the G&YW were aged 15.87 years. The average ages of cohorts 3 and 4 were slightly higher than average.
- On average, G&YW across the cohorts received some 12 contacts from GOFG.
- All SDQ subscales: the emotional problems; conduct problems; hyperactivity; and, peer problems along with the total difficulties and impact scale had mean scores at time one for the GOFG cohort higher than the national average scores. The GOFG cohort average pro-social score is lower than the national average score.
- At time one, the mean SDQ total score of 20.56 sits within the 'very high' category. At time three, the mean SDQ total score reduces to 19.5 which moves the average down a category to 'high'.
- The mean total difficulty score decreases over time.
- The conduct problems and impact scales improve from time one, to time two and onwards to time three. The time three conduct problem scale mean still indicates high need.
- The emotional problem scale mean reduced from time one to time two, but increased at time three to slightly higher than time one. The hyperactivity scale mean follows a similar trend. Both time three means indicate high need.
- The peer problem scale mean increases from time one to time two before reducing again at time three, however the time three average is slightly higher than time one. The average score at time three indicates some need.
- The Pro-social scale mean is scored so that an absence of pro-social behaviour scores low. The GOFG cohort means reduce from time one, to time two and time three.

There were differences between cohorts:

- There were increasing levels of needs comparing cohorts 2, 3 and 4. SDQ total scores were the highest for cohort 4, by some 2 points. The mean emotional problems scale is also much higher for cohort 4 and the mean peer problems scale is higher for cohorts 3 and 4.
- SDQ mean total scores are similar for cohorts 2 and 4 and slightly lower for cohort 3. Cohort 4 has the highest mean scores in the emotional problems scale and conduct problems scale. Cohort 2 has the highest peer problems scale mean and cohort 2 also has the most positive prosocial scale mean. The impact scale means are similar across the cohorts.
- Looking at changes over time amongst the cohorts, the total difficulties score increases from time one to time two for cohort 2 but decreases in cohorts 3 and 4.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Across all cohorts the emotional problems scale decreases.
- The mean peer problem scale scores increase across all cohorts, most of all in cohort 2.
- The prosocial scale improves in cohort 2 but reduces in cohorts 3 and 4.

The other psychometric scales indicate that:

- SWLS scores steadily rise in a positive direction from an almost neutral point, to an increasingly satisfied point.
- The SWEMWBS scale shows a reduction in total scores when time one is compared to time 3. The GOFG cohort indicates higher positive mental well-being at time one compared to time two, but this decreases again by time three.
- The MOSSI subscale also moves in a positive direction over times one, two and three. Whilst not as pronounced as the SWLS, it is a positive improvement.
- Higher positive mental well-being at time two compared to time one, but this decreases slightly by time three

The Ketso analysis revealed key themes of:

- **Relationships** and making positive new ones were the most important factor in ameliorating some of the issues they faced.
- **Aspirations** - were crucial. Poverty, and lack of opportunities and education, was a real concern for the young people.
- **Education** - was a key factor in generating social capital.
- **Loss and bereavement** - became a hallmark of the project, with many G&YW reporting have lost a parent or a significant other in the past few years.
- **Mental health** - presented as a key issue for most G&YW. Each cohort felt that more could be done to support G&YW with issues around mental health.
- **Impact** - G&YW felt that more time was needed on the project to generate significant change, and that meeting new people was the key to success and their engagement.

The narrative analysis of Case Studies also yielded a number of themes. G&YW Life Stories were heavily influenced by familial needs and relationships together with negative peer relationships and influences. As Life Stories progressed to the current day, influences became more commonly school and peer related, moving away from the family. Future life stories were influenced less by others and focused more towards the individual G&YW's agency and necessary actions in realising and achieving their aspirations.

Life story high points -were frequently identified as making and starting more positive friendships and peer networks. Turning points - were both positive and negative but many were associated with the G&YW's engagement with the GOFG project. Emotional health and well-being was frequently influenced by the low points that the G&YW had experienced and for many, the driver of their engagement with GOFG was a wish to improve their emotional health and well-being.

The mentee / mentor relationship was key to many Life Story accounts of where the GOFG project fits with each young person. Outcomes were sought in pathways. More immediate outcomes of the GOFG project were viewed to be those that demanded improved individual agency and improved emotional well-being. These more intermediate outcomes were considered precursors to end-goal outcomes. End goal outcomes sought by G&YW were often more concrete outcome goals. G&YW reflected more on achieved personal agency outcomes rather than more concrete and tangible achieved outcomes such as the AQA awards. G&YW also reflected on empowerment and the things they each needed to do in order to achieve the outcomes they aspired.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The SNA highlighted personal network themes and changes. These included family ties and complex relationships with family members. G&YW had few friends and negative peer relationships were dropped over time (often school friends) and new friendships added (from the project). G&YW had access to some practical support from their personal networks but not as much as emotional support. All young people had at least one and up to 6 members of their personal networks that experienced conflict with authority and included close family members as well as friends. The six -month intervention group experienced a marked positive increase in levels of emotional support.

Conclusions

The GOFG cohort began their involvement with the project with a high level of presenting need. The descriptive and thematic analysis of quantitative and qualitative data indicates that the project design and referral pathways were sufficient enough to target those most in need.

G&YW have realised tangible benefits from GOFG. These have included meeting new friends, developing a relationship with a mentor and trying a new activity. G&YW felt that the project was enjoyable, and exciting. The activities allowed young people to feel good at something and build their confidence and also gain AQA qualifications as result. G&YW reported having previously problematic peer groups and the new and safe space of GOFG also enabled G&YW to make new and more positive friendships. Mentoring provided the G&YW with a trusted adult, and someone to talk to. Project mentors were important sources of support for the G&YW.

Some impacts have emerged:

- Across the cohorts, mean SDQ total difficulty scores decrease over time. The assessment batteries (SWLS/SWEMWBS/MOSSSI) demonstrate positive impact across the three measures. Scores arguably go some way to demonstrating the effectiveness of this type of intervention, and the fact that each cohort presented with such a high level of presenting need (nearly twice the national average in some cases).
- Comparison of content (dosage) Vs. quality (fewer activities, more focused delivery) leads to the conclusion that the quality of the intervention is more important than the amount.
- It is also concluded that the interventions contributed somewhat towards the G&YW improved satisfaction with life scales and mental wellbeing.

Some understanding of the presenting need of G&YW and the GOFG response has also been gathered that will assist in the design of the second phase of intervention:

- A flexible and responsive approach is essential.
- Accordant to previous research, the emotional well-being and mental health of the cohort are prominent needs amongst the GOFG cohort.
- Safeguarding is emerging as the prominent need of the cohort, rather than criminal justice and criminogenic needs.
- The activities were designed by the project partners and may not be the most suitable in terms of engagement and enjoyment for G&YW.
- The activities appear less important than the ability to interact with peers and to access the support of mentors.
- Structured activities may not be suitable for those with the highest need, and a more bespoke approach may be needed to engage those reticent to attend a group- based activity.
- Clear and established referral pathways are paramount to engaging with G&YW most in need.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- Referring agencies need to have a trusted relationship with the intervention provider to enable them to feel confident in referring those most in need.
- AQA awards are appealing for those already engaged in the activities and keen to enhance their opportunities, they are not appealing as a stand-alone intervention.
- Understanding the emotional and practical support networks of G&YW at different stages of the programme can be illuminating. The literature suggests that mentors are an important part of those support structures for young people.
- Involvement with the project has led to a change in support structures, expanded friendship networks, and introduced greater network diversity. This is viewed as a positive indicator for social capital in the SNA literature.

Recommendations from phase one include:

- We need to refine GOFG's Theory of Change and define activities, outputs, outcomes and impact of GOFG.
- We need to establish how GOFG sits within wider safeguarding frameworks.
- A review of activity offer, dosage and content for phase two delivery.
- Relative high levels of support from family is a predictor of engagement with the project – GOFG phase 2 may need to focus attention on referrals where those support structures do not exist or are of poor quality.
- Mentors need to be resourced to enable them to engage over longer periods of time with the highest risk groups.
- It might be useful to explore the influence of the mentoring relationship further from a network perspective to assess the ways in which these relationships can complement rather than compete with the other important relationships in a young person's life. Mentors can link young people with other community- based groups and services.

GOFG has delivered some positively experienced intervention to this vulnerable cohort of G&YW with evidence of early and emerging impact. GOFG has been positively experienced as a relevant intervention for gang engaged and vulnerable G&YW. The qualitative and quantitative findings of this mixed methods process evaluation reveal early indicators of impact.