

# Programme Guide **for** **Partners**



# We Are MCR Pathways

We see a spark in every young person. It's their dream, their ambition, waiting to grow.

But for too many, life has been unfair. Circumstances, not talent, have shaped their path. These barriers can chip away at confidence and hope. Without support, young people can feel lost and alone, unsure of their future.

MCR Pathways is here to change that. We are a mentoring charity supporting over 7,800 young people each year. Our mentors, donors, staff, and partners share one belief: every young person deserves someone to help them find their way.

Mentoring is powerful. One trusted adult can change a life. Our mentors listen, encourage, and help young people believe in themselves.

Alongside one-to-one mentoring, group sessions on skills for life, and talent tasters related to careers, all help to spark young people's ambitions. These open doors to education, apprenticeships, and careers that once felt out of reach.

With the right support, young people can see beyond today and dream bigger. A single mentoring connection can be the spark that changes everything.

**“She knew I had the ability but had struggled with things at home during some of my education so missed parts. She encouraged me to aim higher and work harder. If it wasn't for her I wouldn't have got the Uni offers I have now received. She was someone I could talk to when worried and by listening and talking she calmed me down and motivated me in the right direction. When I had doubts about my ability to pass subjects she believed in me.”**  
**Joan, Young Person.**

**For privacy, throughout this publication, some names and personal details have been changed. Photos are for visual context only and may not show the people whose stories are shared.**



# In A Nutshell

When a school or community joins the MCR Pathways programme, a locally based Pathways Coordinator is key. From day one, they know the area, the services and support available, and most importantly get to know the young people who need us most.

## Building Foundations

At the start of secondary age schooling, young people take part in regular group sessions. These focus on resilience, relationships, confidence, problem solving and other essential life skills. Every session is tailored to the needs of the group—helping young people grow in confidence and lay the groundwork for mentoring.

## The Magic of Mentoring

By the time they reach the third year of secondary education, each young person is carefully matched with a volunteer mentor. This isn't a quick process—it's where we make the magic happen. We match based on shared experiences, interests, and values, using both human insight and smart technology. Each relationship is unique, built on trust and connection.

Mentors and mentees meet in schools and communities, face-to-face, every week. These regular meetings become the turning point—helping young people reconnect, whether that's with school, their family, or their community. They build belief in themselves and begin to shape a future they can see and achieve.

## Supporting Our Mentors

Our mentors come from all walks of life. We give them everything they need to succeed—comprehensive training, safeguarding and PVG / DBS checks, ongoing support, and 24/7 access to resources. Regular check-ins, handbooks, a helpline, and a lively mentor community ensure they feel confident and connected.

## Driving Mentor Diversity

We recruit mentors through partnerships with employers, the third sector, and local communities. From inspiring recruitment events to CSR partnerships with businesses, we're building a diverse network of mentors to reflect the young people we serve.



## Transitions from Primary School

Our Pathways Coordinators start working with young people even before they leave primary school. From December, they visit feeder primaries to help pupils prepare for the big move. In the summer, many Coordinators also run events for parents, carers and young people — building confidence, answering questions, and introducing families to the support of the MCR programme.

## Future Me Talent Tasters

We work with partners to give young people a wide range of opportunities in work, college and university. Our team builds strong links with local employers and widening access teams to create chances that fit each region. Young people choose the industries they want to explore through our Talent Taster sessions, making sure the experiences are led by their interests. We also run virtual tasters which can connect young people to employers all across the country.

## Leaving School with Confidence

Mentors and Pathways Coordinators help young people get ready for their next step into college, university or work. We provide resources and access to our Leavers Hub, and work with local colleges, universities, apprenticeship providers, careers organisations and employers to make the move smoother. Transitions can be a tough time for any young person, so MCR staff, alumni, peer support and mentors all play a part in giving them the continuity and confidence they need.

“The programme has helped me more than I could ever imagine. I’ve had so much support from not only my mentor but my Pathways Coordinator as well. Even if it’s just having a little chat once a week to see how I’m feeling. It’s made such a difference to my last year at school and also made me learn a lot about myself. I feel very lucky to have been part of this programme and if anyone gets the opportunity to take part, make sure you do, because it helps you so much knowing that if anything goes wrong or you’re struggling, you always have somebody to speak to.  
Katie, Young Person.





## Liam's Story

Liam had been through a lot. He often moved through the care system. Faced family crises. He even experienced homelessness. School was hard for him. He couldn't focus, and going to class felt more like a way to escape problems at home and make sure he got fed. *"Things were awful, at home and at school. I felt lost and didn't care about school at all. I had no idea what my future would be,"* Liam said.

Then Liam met his mentor. Someone who listened, supported him, and helped him find his way back to learning. With that guidance, he started to catch up on the lessons he had missed.

Today, Liam has come a long way. He has completed a university degree and now works as a building surveyor. He even gives back as an MCR mentor himself.

**"If I didn't have someone to speak to, everything would be trapped up inside and I would be fighting with myself. Having a mentor has 100% changed my life."**

## Nicole's Story

At 15, Nicole went into foster care and became very depressed. She felt alone and disconnected. She didn't want to see friends, family, or even go to school.

Then Nicole met her mentor. Someone who would really listen and support her. With that help, she started going back to school and re-engaged in learning.

Today, Nicole has graduated from college. She took a year to travel and even lived in Canada.

Back in Scotland, she is building her career. She is mentoring the next generation. She's showing young people that, even after tough times, it is possible to move forward and succeed.

**"She told me she believed in me and no matter what, I could go out there and do it. At one point, I had no confidence. Now I feel I can do anything. I have now left university and am employed in my ideal profession, something I never thought I could achieve. I want more."**



# Young Lives at the Heart

We support young people who have faced more barriers than most their age. Some are in care, or have experienced foster or kinship placements. Others live with the daily pressures of poverty, unstable housing, or the absence of consistent family support. Many take on caring roles at home, cope with the impact of poor health or disability, or face isolation because of stigma or identity. For too many, these challenges chip away at confidence and make it harder to stay engaged in school, even though their ability and potential are every bit as strong as their peers. What unites them isn't the barriers they face, but their potential. These are bright, capable young people with ambitions just waiting to be unlocked. What they often lack is consistent support—someone to listen, believe in them, and help them see a future they can step into with confidence.



**7,800**  
young people supported

### These include those with...

## SOCIAL WORK INVOLVEMENT

- **Looked After At Home**
- **Looked After Away from Home**
- **Informal Social Work supervision**
- **Previously Looked After**

## CONTINUOUS INSTABILITY AT HOME

- **Young Carer**
- **Those experiencing severe hardship**
- **Addiction issues**
- **Asylum seekers and refugees**
- **At risk of homelessness**
- **At risk of social work**
- **Informal kinship care**
- **Parent in prison**
- **Parental or sibling bereavement**
- **Prolonged financial hardship**
- **Safeguarding concern**
- **Serious illness**
- **Teenage pregnancy**
- **Lack of one good adult**



Over  
**63,000**  
mentoring hours have been  
completed, building relationships,  
confidence & aspiration.

**71%**  
of young people  
supported

**are from the  
most deprived  
areas**

**60%**  
of young people  
supported

**are registered for free school meals indicating the higher levels of deprivation they face**

**65%**  
of young people supported

**have one or more additional support needs (ASN) further highlighting the vulnerabilities they face.**



## Measuring the Difference

At MCR Pathways, we're committed to showing the difference mentoring makes. Our measurement framework is rooted in our Theory of Change – starting with the spark of a trusted relationship and following its ripple effects through school, life and beyond.

We measure what matters most to young people and their futures: wellbeing, confidence, attendance, attainment, and the destinations they move on to after school.

Alongside this, we capture rich insights from surveys, stories, and feedback from young people, mentors, schools, and partners.

By combining hard data with lived experience, we build a full picture of change – from the first signs of improved engagement in the classroom to long-term impacts like employment, and healthier, happier lives.



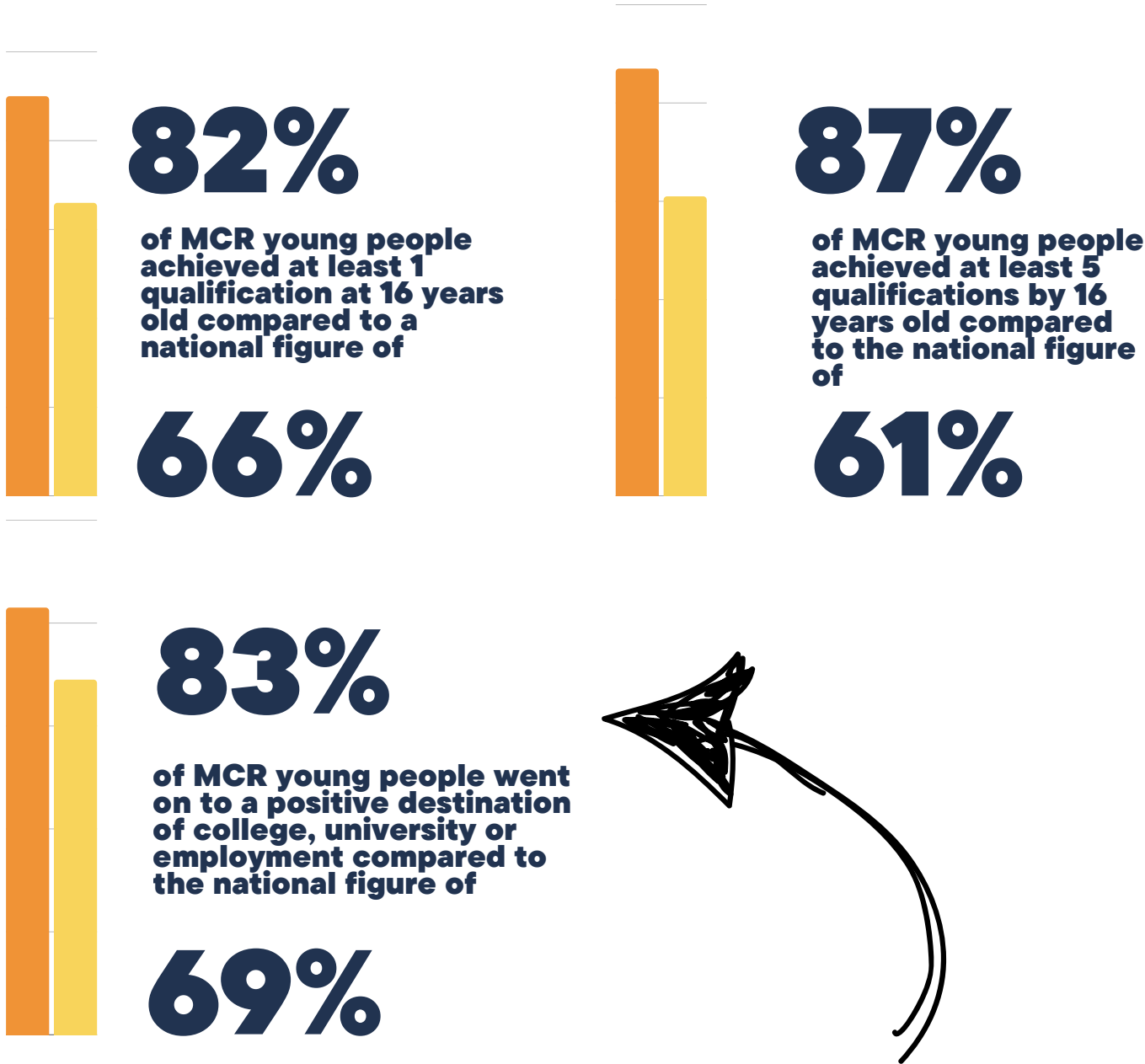
**“Since meeting my mentor I’ve had such a better mindset than ever before. I had no confidence in myself at all. But my mentor has helped me realise that I need to start believing in myself and do what’s best for me instead of putting other people first. If it wasn’t for my mentor, I think this year at school would have been a lot more difficult for me.”**

**Aydee, Young Person**



# Transforming Outcomes

At the heart of MCR's Theory of Change is a simple but powerful truth: when a young person has the consistent support of a trusted adult, everything begins to shift. With mentoring, young people start to believe in themselves, feel more motivated, and grow in resilience. That vital spark ignites — and suddenly, attending school feels worthwhile, learning becomes possible, and behaviour improves. Attendance, wellbeing, and engagement rise, while temporary and permanent exclusions fall. As progress builds, young people achieve more in school, move into positive destinations, and carry their confidence into adulthood.



**This is the key goal we're striving for, for all our young people - awakening their ambition and setting them up for a successful adulthood**

“When I was still at school **there were many times where I felt like just leaving** due to conflicts in my personal life. Having **the support of a dedicated person convinced me to stay on** and sit my exams after almost leaving 2-3 months before. **All it took was a bit of a shove in the right direction** and someone like my MCR Mentor to **take an interest in me** to go from **potentially nothing to now attending college**. A lot of **opportunities opened up for me** through this kind of help and **I struggle to think where I would be without it.**”  
Alex, Young Person





# What Having A Mentor Means

In our year end surveys

✓ **83%** said that having a mentor improved their confidence.

✓ **83%** said it helped them understand their talents and strengths.

✓ **86%** said it supported them in identifying goals.

✓ **85%** said it helped them believe in themselves more.

✓ **93%** said it has helped them built trust.

✓ **95%** said that their mentor was a good role model.

“I had no qualifications, no experience and most of all no confidence. I felt useless. I felt like no one would want to help someone who had been in care. I dropped out of school with no way of demonstrating the potential I knew I had. Finally with my mentor I felt like someone had belief in me and was willing to keep trying to engage me. They were persistent and encouraged me to try. Seeing how much belief they had in me finally made me realise this is what I needed to do. Being encouraged has really helped focus me and give me the confidence to move onto my next stage.”

Rashi, Young Person.





# A High Impact Programme

## School Staff

The MCR programme gives school staff the gift of time and capacity. With Pathways Coordinators leading mentoring, teachers and support staff see young people who were once disengaged start to re-connect with school life. Attendance improves, behaviour calms, and learners begin to believe in themselves again. This creates a more positive classroom environment and helps staff focus on teaching and learning, confident that young people have the one-to-one support they need.

## Mentors

Mentoring doesn't just change young people's lives — it changes mentors too. Volunteers tell us how rewarding it is to see their young person grow in confidence and ambition, and how much they value the weekly time to connect, listen and encourage. Many mentors describe it as one of the most meaningful things they've ever done. They develop new skills in listening, empathy, and problem-solving — skills that enrich their personal lives and professional roles.

## Local Community

When young people thrive, communities thrive. The MCR programme helps reduce social isolation, supports better mental health, and encourages young people to see positive futures for themselves right where they live. Our mentors are drawn from the local area — from all walks of life — creating stronger connections between schools and their wider communities. The result is a culture of care and shared responsibility, with communities proud to see their young people succeed.

## Businesses

Business involvement with MCR brings real benefits. Companies see staff grow in confidence, empathy, and leadership through mentoring, while strengthening Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG), Corporate and Social Responsibility (CSR), and Diversity & Inclusion commitments. Young people gain exposure to career pathways, networks, and opportunities they might never otherwise access. By investing time and people in MCR, businesses unlock local talent, diversify future workforces, and demonstrate commitment to lasting social impact.



## Emily's Story

When she first met mentor Elaine, Emily had very low self-esteem and her mental health was a real concern. She lacked confidence. Struggled with anxiety around her family relationships. She had been referred to children's mental health services to help deal with signs of depression. Emily and her younger siblings had moved to live with their grandparents when she was in Primary school and her early years had been very turbulent.

Matching with Elaine meant Emily could have someone who could help her deal with life inside and outside of school. Together Emily and Elaine built a strong, trusting relationship over three years of meeting together. Every week Elaine helped her mentee develop coping strategies for situations. To deal with things more calmly. To learn to travel and do things on her own. She overcame lots of everyday hurdles that meant getting to school and college, and being able to explore and participate in subjects she loved became easier.

Elaine and Emily took part in a short film where they shared their story and discussed Emily's dream of opening her own restaurant or cafe one day. The film was shown as part of the Centre for Social Justice Awards, introduced by Bake Off Judge Prue Leith. Emily is now an inspiring confident young woman, pursuing her dreams and a bright future ahead. Watch the short film in which we meet Emily & Elaine on YouTube @MCRPathways.

## Josh's Story

Josh had always been extrovert – outgoing, funny, the one to make others smile. But underneath, he carried a heavy doubt. Schoolwork felt impossible. His confidence was low, and he didn't believe in himself enough. His School Coordinator could see it clearly: Josh was bright, but fear of failure held him back.

Then came Lee-Anne. From the very first meeting, the two clicked. She matched Josh's energy and brought a constant stream of positivity. Week after week, Lee-Anne encouraged him to focus, to push a little harder, to believe that he could do it. Slowly, Josh began to open up about the struggles at home. And slowly, his results began to change too. For the first time, Josh saw himself differently. Exams didn't seem out of reach. The future started to look like something he could shape. With Lee-Anne by his side, he applied for college courses, created his very first CV, and dared to dream of a career.

That dream is now real. Josh has started a joinery apprenticeship – a path he never thought possible. He says it was Lee-Anne's encouragement, her gentle pushing, that made all the difference. What he once thought was out of reach, he now holds in his hands.



# Partnerships are essential for success

We develop multiple partnerships and support networks across each region.

## Local Authorities & Other Essential Public Services

In the frontline of supporting people and places facing the most challenging circumstances are our local authority and other key public service partners like Police, Fire and Health. Our relationships and joint working with them, help us choose the priority places for launching the programme, spot early intervention opportunities for working with young people, and place Pathways Coordinators exactly where they are needed in their workforce to effect the best change. They help us engage with their workforce where we encourage everyone from the CEO to the caretaker to become mentors. Impacts on both young people and mentors have led to senior leaders making commitments for proportions of their workforce in all departments and services to become MCR mentors as part of their working week.

## Colleges, Universities & Careers Guidance

We develop partnerships with Widening Access and Participation colleagues in colleges and universities, and our specialist services across the UK that provide careers guidance, careers education and links to employers. As well as ensuring a comprehensive and smooth transition for our young people to their next steps, these partners offer Talent Tasters and opportunities for the young people to experience industries, work experience and workplace visits, courses and of course a taste of student life. Through staff becoming mentors, relationships are built with young people who are capable but need the support to realise their ambitions.

## Business & Industry

Our business and industry partners play a crucial role in opening doors to the world of work for young people. By offering work experience, insight days, placements, and mentoring from staff across all levels, they give young people real-world exposure to different careers, industries, and workplace cultures. These relationships not only inspire ambition but also provide tangible opportunities to build skills, networks, and confidence. Staff who become mentors bring knowledge, experience, and encouragement that help young people navigate their career paths, while businesses benefit from developing future talent and fostering a culture of social responsibility within their workforce. Together, these partnerships bridge aspiration and opportunity, ensuring young people have both the guidance and the practical experience needed to take their next steps successfully.

# What Partners Think

“It’s a **fantastic boost for our school**, it’s made a **wonderful difference to the young people** and our Coordinator has really positive relationships with the young people and with the mentors as well, so **I couldn’t recommend this highly enough** really. The **challenges vary**, some of these young people are quite isolated, some young people have mental health difficulties, some of them are young carers, **for every individual it’s quite different**. But our Pathways Coordinator did get them matched and it’s been **one of THE most successful pieces of work that I’ve ever seen in my career here.**”  
Karen, Depute Headteacher

“It is clear that the **provision of MCR work can play a part in diverting young people from crime and anti-social behaviour**, and instead **engage them in activities which are more likely to lead to positive destinations**. Through the early partnership work we are engaged in with MCR Pathways, we see clear potential in the approach to **change outcomes for young people** and **change lives and prospects for them to move away from risky behaviours**. It provides a trauma-informed, relationship-based mentoring model that **fills a critical gap in early and effective intervention**. For many of these young people, **the consistent presence of a trusted adult** - someone outside the statutory system and key negative influencers around them - who chooses to be there - has the power to **disrupt harmful cycles and build hope, connection, and agency.**”  
Chris, Police Scotland.

“We know that **some young people need more help to achieve their dreams**. Time to **talk things through, explore their ideas, explore the challenges they face... in a safe space** with someone they can make a **genuine connection** with. With someone they know **really cares. Their Champion...** I recommend this programme. I can’t recommend it highly enough.”  
Deborah, Headteacher







## What Mentors Think



“It is the **interaction with a very talented and enthusiastic young person** who always brightens up my day. I have quite a stressful job and I look forward to chatting with my young person as **they have so much to offer** and put a perspective on life. **I love their enthusiasm for life** and what is going on in the world. I have learned so much.”

**Gillian, Mentor**



“My mentee is like a **ray of sunshine**, with the **biggest of smiles**, which is **contagious**. I **always feel good after our meetings** and meeting up virtually helped me no end during lock down when I couldn't meet up with friends and family. When we had our first face-to-face meeting, which was wonderful, it was like **meeting up with an old friend** after a long period apart.”

**Linda, Mentor**



“I wasn't sure what to expect from mentoring a young person but **I look forward to every meeting we have**. I get the chance to **catch up on their life**, the opportunity to **give my thoughts** and **together we discuss what is yet to come**. Sometimes we, as adults, **forget just how inspiring young people can be!**”

**Tom, Mentor**



“I heard about MCR through a colleague. I was **totally bowled over by their passionate work** and just knew I had to get involved. In the few months I have mentored my young person, I have seen her **grow in confidence**. She believes in herself and her talents. This **experience has been truly rewarding**, I have **learned from my young person who never fails to amaze me!** It's a **two way deal for us**. It will be the **best hour of your week!**”

**Liz, Mentor**



“**Not until now have I come across a programme that does what it says on the tin – transforms lives!** My mentee is someone who **keeps on taking me by surprise**; she has **kept me on my toes**, inspires me, makes me laugh, **takes me through her life in vivid colour** and **teaches me compassion**, tolerance and how to survive her generation. **I am learning as much as my mentee. We are a team**, there is nothing we don't talk about and explore. **I am there for her no matter what – full stop**. For me, I have the **greatest privilege of being able to be let into her life**, to share some of mine. It takes **time to build trust** between you, but when you have it, you know it.”

**Senga, Mentor.**



# Get in touch with your partnership lead



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