



Starfish



Impact Report Summary

September 2022 to May 2025

With additional highlights for
June 2025 to May 2026



Children
& Youth



Starfish

**Reaching potential,
one young person at a time.**

This is a summary of the Starfish Impact Report, highlighting the impact of mentoring on children and young people and reflecting on the outcomes achieved through the programme for this period. This visual overview draws out the main story behind the evidence: how early intervention and relational mentoring helps children and young people feel supported, build confidence and stay connected to school and community life.

**‘There comes a point where we need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they are falling in.’
(Desmond Tutu)**

Across the UK, children and young people are experiencing growing levels of vulnerability, including poverty, poor mental health, exploitation, loneliness and educational disengagement. For the first time, more than one million children and young people in England have been referred for mental health support.*

The Salvation Army has always stood in the river, responding with compassion to those who have been swept downstream. Starfish builds on that commitment by going upstream: offering early intervention mentoring for children and young people aged 9 to 16 in schools, recognising early warning signs and acting before crisis becomes entrenched.

*Children’s Commissioner for England Report 2024/25

Working within a school’s student wellbeing support, Starfish provides committed and trusted adults from local corps to work with children and young people who need some additional support without which they would be at risk of not meeting their full potential. The evidence in the report affirms that Starfish is making a difference – one young person at a time – while also building stronger communities around them.

To sustain and expand this impact, ongoing investment will be needed in mentor recruitment, local co-ordination and support structures that enable Starfish to grow while remaining faithful to its core purpose: trusted adults walking alongside children and young people with hope, care and consistency.

Ultimately, Starfish is more than a mentoring intervention: it is a way of showing up – consistently, compassionately and without conditions. While Starfish does not replace specialist services, such as CAMHS, it offers something profoundly human and deeply Christian: a relationship that makes space for healing, resilience and growth and the integration of wider Salvation Army support and services at a local level.

In walking alongside young people one by one, Starfish embodies The Salvation Army’s calling to love God and love others, offering a faithful expression of with-ness so that children and young people might not only cope, but also flourish. It is through these sustained, trusted relationships that transformation is often most clearly seen – not only in measured outcomes, but also in lives quietly and meaningfully changed.



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**Scan here for the
full Starfish Impact
Report Document**

Starfish Offers...



Support for schools

- Free mentoring provision
- Strong school-corps partnerships
- Locally embedded delivery
- Wrap-around support through corps.



Trusted relationships

- Consistent one-to-one mentoring with committed adults
- Safe space to talk and be heard
- Trauma-informed, relational approach that protects, stabilises and strengthens
- Enjoyable, creative sessions that make mentoring fun and engaging.



Early help

- Timely intervention before difficulties escalate
- Emotional wellbeing support
- Confidence and self-esteem building
- Improved engagement with school.



Growing potential

- Tailored support for individual needs
- Life skills and personal development
- Resilience building
- Goals set and progress tracked with Outcomes Star (by Triangle*).

*Triangle Consulting Social Enterprise Ltd. www.outcomestar.org.uk



Mission in action

- Ministry that reaches beyond the walls of corps buildings
- Whole corps ownership, united around serving children, young people and families
- Mentors growing in discipleship, compassion and awareness of God at work
- Relational presence that brings dignity, belonging and hope.

‘Every child mentored is a life improved.’

Sarah Robinson, Starfish Coordinator



Reach and Delivery

Starfish reached 331 children and young people through trusted mentoring relationships across schools, corps and divisions.



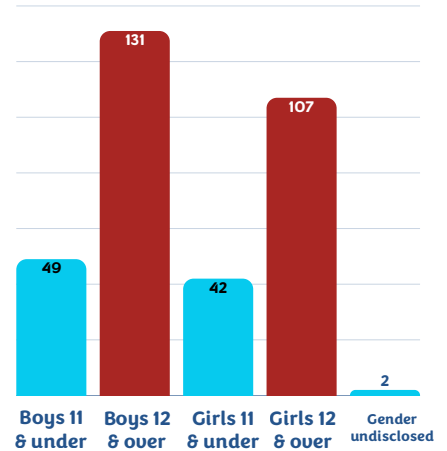
331

children and young people were mentored through Starfish



Age range 7 to 19 years

56% of mentees are 11 to 13-years-old



Starfish was delivered across

67 schools
(49 primary, 18 secondary)

40 local corps (churches)

12 divisions



77 mentors
of which

38 were Starfish coordinators

31% volunteers

44% Salvation Army employees

23% officers



14 weeks

is the average length of a mentoring relationship

3,310–3,972 estimated total sessions delivered

(based on an assumed 10 to 12 sessions per mentee x 331 mentees)



45–60 minutes

is the usual length of a mentoring session



‘The Starfish programme puts children’s emotional wellbeing at the heart of everything.’

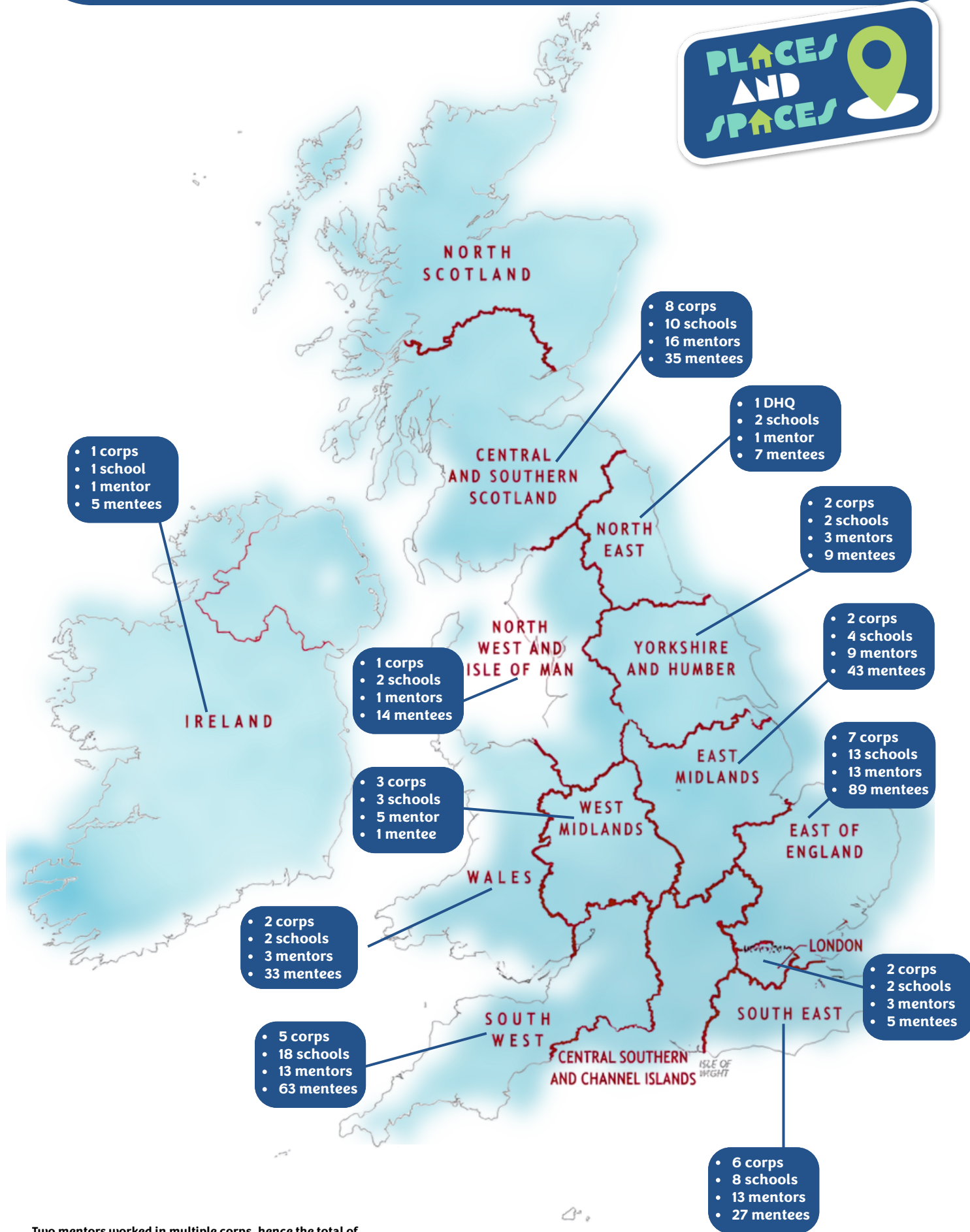
(School)

‘Starfish provides a place for children to be able to express how they feel or what they are finding difficult, and find support within a safe space.’

(School)

Starfish Programmes

Across the United Kingdom & Ireland Territory by Division, 2022-2025



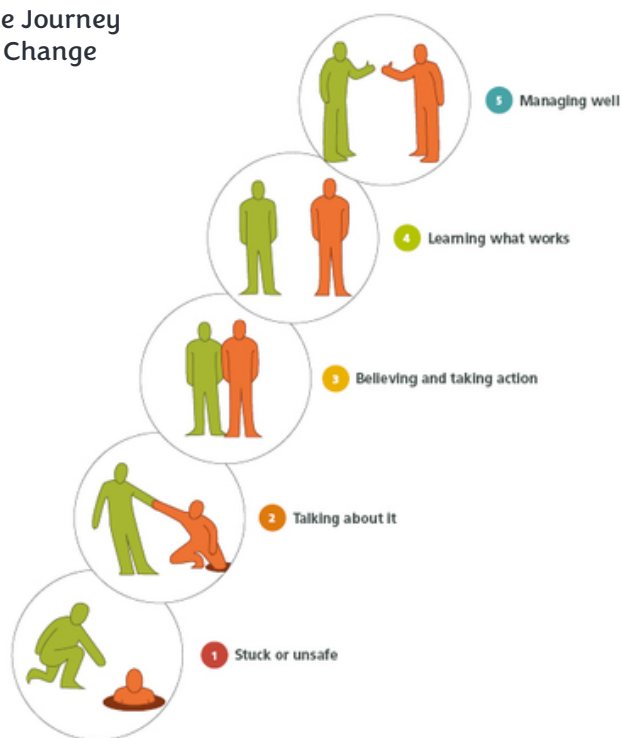
Two mentors worked in multiple corps, hence the total of mentors on the map is 81, rather than 77.

Impact Measurement Using Outcomes Star

Starfish uses the Outcomes Star – My Mind Star™ – to promote the positive emotional wellbeing of the mentees and to support the Journey of Change.

The Outcomes Star helps mentees reflect on their own wellbeing and identify where they are starting from. It tracks progress over time and provides a consistent way to understand each young person's journey of change. Mentees complete a Star at the start of the mentoring relationships and again at the end of the intervention (and possibly additional stars if mentoring continues for an extended period of time). Mentees rate themselves at one of five stages across the seven key mental health and wellbeing areas, shown in the following diagram.

The Journey of Change



My Mind Star™ and Journey of Change © Triangle Consulting Social Enterprise Ltd. Authors: Sara Burns and Joy MacKeith. www.outcomesstar.org.uk. Reproduced under licence.



521

Outcomes Stars
were completed

68%

of mentees (225)
completed more than
one Outcomes Star *

98%

of all Stars were completed
collaboratively, with mentees
actively involved in identifying
their own starting point
and progress

*The other 106 mentees only completed one Star, most likely as they were still mid-mentoring.

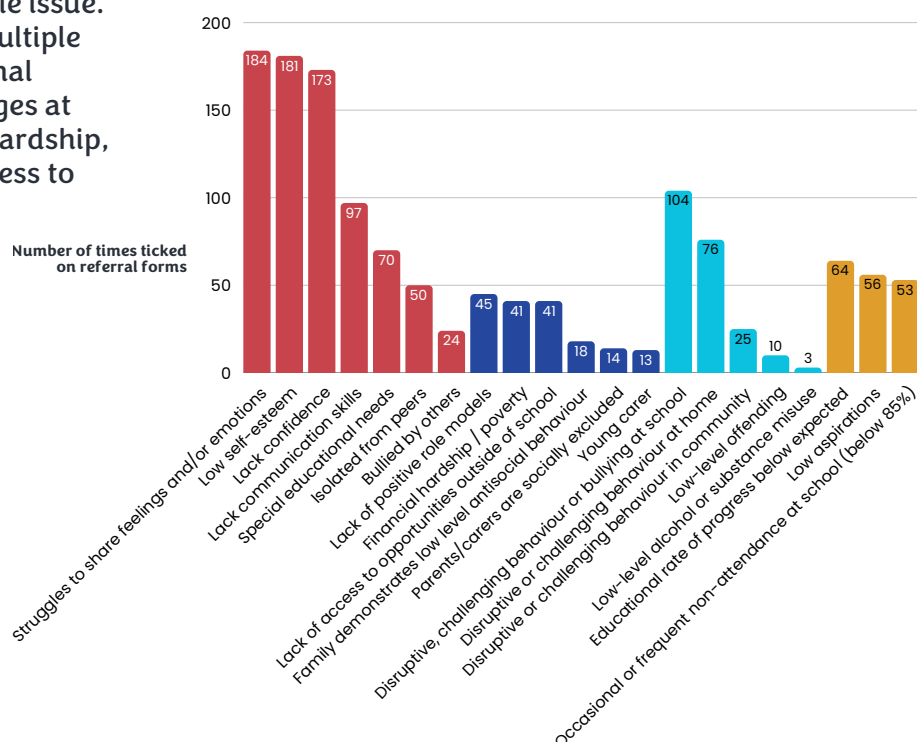
Why Young People Needed Starfish

Many children and young people came to Starfish facing overlapping emotional, social and school-related pressures. They were referred to Starfish because schools identified that they would benefit from additional targeted support.

Most referrals were not about a single issue. Many mentees were experiencing multiple pressures at once, including emotional difficulties, low confidence, challenges at school, family pressures, financial hardship, caring responsibilities or limited access to positive activities.

The most common referral needs were:

- struggle to share feelings/emotions (on 56% of referral forms)
- low self-esteem (55% of referral forms)
- lack of confidence (52% of referral forms)
- disruptive, challenging behaviour or bullying at school (31% of referral forms)

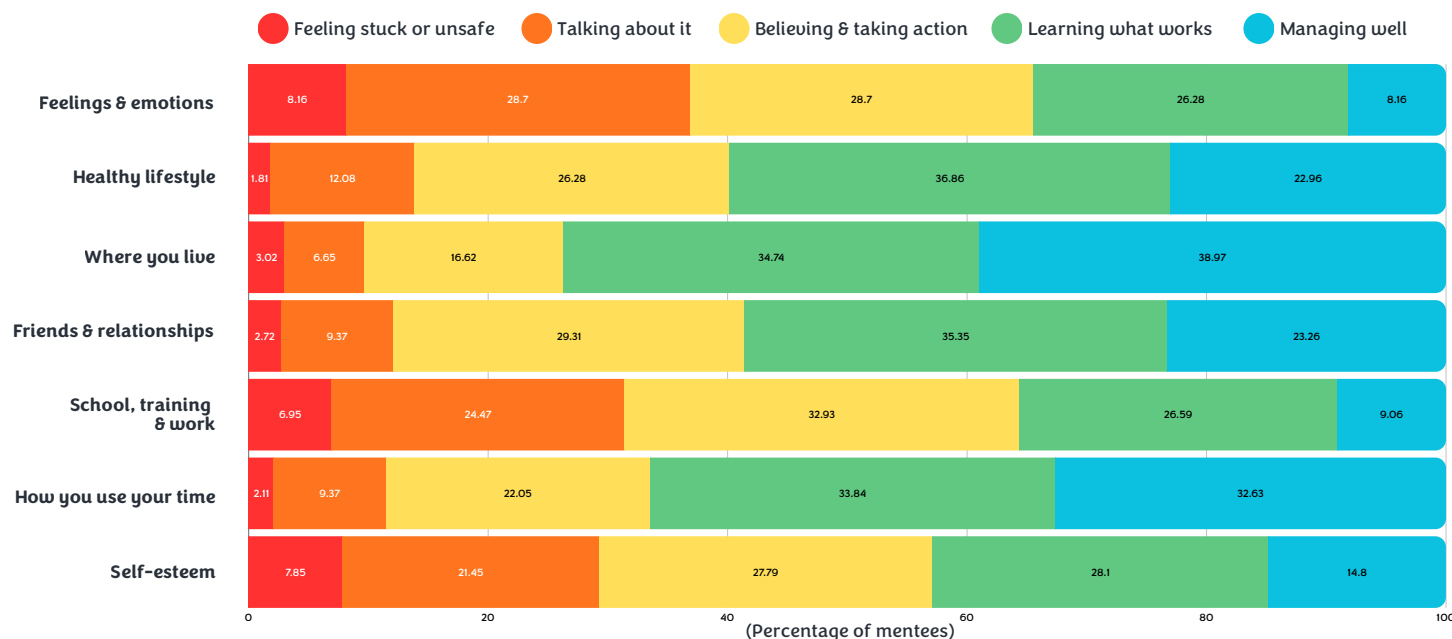


At the start of mentoring:

- 92% of mentees recorded a low reading in at least one outcome area on the Outcomes Star
- 81% in at least two areas
- 66% in at least three areas

The greatest challenges were in: **self-esteem, feelings & emotions** and **school, training & work**, where around one third of mentees placed themselves in the lower stages (1-3) of the Outcomes Star.

Where Mentees Began: First Star Assessment



The Impact of Starfish: Mentee Progress

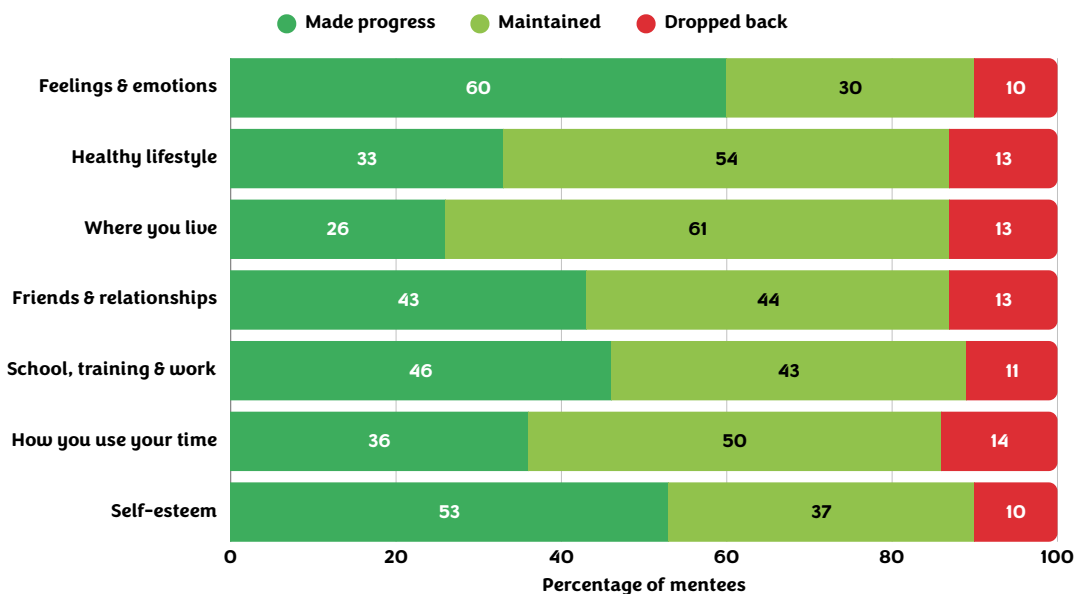
Starfish helps young people make meaningful progress across multiple emotional health and wellbeing areas of their lives, helping mentees better understand themselves, express their feelings, manage worries, strengthen relationships and engage more positively at school and at home.

Mentoring does not appear to affect only one isolated outcome; rather, it contributes to broader growth across emotional, personal and school-related areas of life.

Alongside supporting positive change, Starfish also appears to provide important stability and protection against deterioration, particularly in areas where mentees were already functioning relatively well. Longer engagement is associated with slightly deeper outcomes, reinforcing the value of sustained relational support.

Starfish is **developmental, stabilising and protective**: helping mentees move forward in the areas where support is most needed, while also helping them gain stability in other parts of life.

How much progress are mentees making in each outcome area?



‘Made progress’ shows movement to a higher wellbeing stage.



‘Maintained’ means young people held their position, reflecting stability and resilience. For many young people, maintaining stability in the context of ongoing pressures, uncertainty or disadvantage is itself an important outcome. Between 37% and 61% of mentees maintained their starting position across outcomes.



‘Dropped back’ is when a mentee moves to a lower stage. It may reflect increased honesty, self-awareness and trust as the mentoring relationship develops, or temporary external pressures such as exams, family changes or school transitions, or even the development process of puberty. Drop-back was consistently low across all outcome areas (10-14%) and progress outweighs decline in every area.



Progress data is drawn from the 225 mentees with two Stars.



92%

of mentees made progress in at least one mental health and wellbeing outcome area

(95% for those with longer engagement)



Change is typically multi-dimensional

Mentees improved across an average of

3

outcome areas

(3.1 areas for those with longer engagement)

79% improved in two or more areas

63% improved in three or more areas

Mentees showed the strongest progress in feelings and emotions, self-esteem, and school engagement; the areas where mentees – and school referral forms – reported the greatest need at the start of mentoring.



Feelings & emotions

60%
made progress
30% maintained

↓ 4% decrease in those feeling 'stuck/unsafe'
9% increase in those 'managing well' ↑

This suggests that mentoring is helping mentees to better understand and express feelings and move from recognising and struggling with difficult emotions toward developing more effective coping strategies, greater resilience and improved emotional wellbeing over time.



Self-esteem

53%
made progress
37% maintained

↓ 3% decrease in those feeling 'stuck/unsafe'
12% increase in those 'managing well' ↑

This suggests that mentoring is helping mentees grow in confidence, self-worth and belief in themselves. These gains are especially important given that low confidence and low self-esteem were among the most common concerns identified at referral.



School (training & work)

46%
made progress
43% maintained

↓ 3% decrease in those feeling 'stuck/unsafe'
11% increase in those 'managing well' ↑

This suggests that mentoring is helping mentees engage more positively with school life, feel better supported and grow in confidence in relation to learning. In practice, this points to benefits not only for emotional wellbeing but also for daily participation, motivation and future aspirations.

Mentee Voice

**What children
and young
people
told us...**



100%

**said the mentor
understood
them**



98%

**said
mentoring
was fun!**



100%

**said mentoring
increased their
confidence**



100%

**said mentoring
helped them get
on better at school**



96%

**said mentoring
helped them feel
less anxious
and worried**



98%

**said mentoring
helped them
identify/express
feelings &
emotions**



96%

**said mentoring
helped them
understand
themselves
better**



96%

**said mentoring
helped them get
on better at
home**

Percentages reflect only the mentees who answered each question on the Mentee Review (50–54 respondents).

What did you discuss during mentoring?

[illegible]

School Impact

Schools saw clear improvements in confidence, resilience, relationships and learning.

Schools identified children and young people who would benefit from Starfish mentoring, and their feedback shows that Starfish provides effective, targeted interventions that deliver meaningful improvements in mentees' emotional wellbeing, confidence and engagement in school life.

Starfish's personalised, one-to-one approach fills a critical gap in school support systems and has a positive ripple effect on families, staff and the wider school community. The findings show consistently strong, positive impacts across participating schools, with widespread recognition of the value Starfish provides. Schools described real changes in mentees' confidence, emotional regulation, academic performance and overall wellbeing.

Examples highlight mentees making progress with significant challenges such as anxiety, trauma, bereavement and disengagement from education.

Mentees are reported to be more confident in class, more willing to communicate with staff, better able to manage their emotions and more engaged socially and academically.

There is strong alignment between initial referral reasons (such as low self-esteem and managing feeling/emotions) and the improvements reported.

The following data is gathered from the 57 responses to the Starfish school survey.



96% of schools identified multiple positive changes in mentees demonstrating that the impact of Starfish mentoring extends beyond a single area of need.

Those changes included:

Increased confidence and self-esteem

81%

Improved resilience & emotional management

76%

More positive attitudes to learning

72%

Improved friendships and relationships

70%

Reduced feelings of anxiety

59%

Increased attendance/engagement

44%

57% of schools suggested no improvements to Starfish indicating Starfish is already highly effective, with any suggestions given focused mainly on expanding capacity and reach, rather than changing the model.

61% reported no delivery challenges Where issues were noted, they were generally minor and logistical (eg, finding space), rather than concerns about the quality of mentoring.



100% of schools said they would recommend Starfish to other schools



Corps Impact

Through trusted relationships with schools and families,
Starfish helps local mission flourish.

Starfish deepens relationships among corps, schools and local communities, offering practical support to children and families and helping Salvation Army communities live out their calling to Love God and Love Others in visible, meaningful ways.

Where Starfish is embedded locally in corps, its impact reaches far beyond mentoring. It supports vulnerable children and young people, strengthens school partnerships and creates natural pathways for wrap-around family support. The relationships formed through mentoring often open doors to deeper engagement with whole families, not just individual mentees.

Mentors reported deeper prayer lives, greater compassion, renewed purpose and a heightened awareness of God at work in everyday situations. Walking alongside children and young people helped them understand discipleship as active, relational and missional.

Starfish also fosters a whole-corps sense of ownership in mission, uniting congregations around a shared purpose of serving children and young people in their communities.

The following data is gathered from 37 responses to the Starfish school survey.



Corps said that:

Starfish positively impacted corps mission and outreach

86%

Starfish positively impacted the discipleship of the mentors

76%

Corps members supported Starfish through prayer

84%

They provided wrap-around support (such as food banks, toy appeals, attendance at corps activities)

76%

They needed more mentors to meet the demand

78%

Starfish is important to the schools in their community **95%**



‘Starfish can be life-changing and completely alter a mentee’s trajectory in life.’

(Corps)

‘Starfish has meant that we take God’s love out of the building and into the local community. It is an opportunity to show that the church cares for the community and is there to provide a listening ear when others can’t or do not have the time.’

(Corps)

Funding, Value and Investment

Starfish uses a Cost and Value Model to provide an overview of the financial investment and the value generated through programme delivery.* This model draws on past expenditure and estimated average costs across the whole programme.

It is designed to give a clear picture of overall value rather than a detailed budget or cost breakdown for individual corps, divisions or Territorial Headquarters.

*The Cost and Value Model was developed by the Research and Development Department during the 2021 Starfish pilot. The figures presented here relate to 2022-2025.



Starfish delivers strong value:

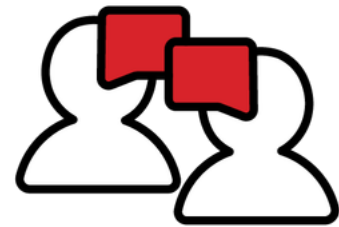
Approximately **£500,000** worth of mentoring is delivered each year



£200,000
of volunteer time is contributed annually



£181,000
has been raised to support coordinator posts and delivery



Each mentoring session has an estimated value of **£59**



‘Philanthropy is passionate about supporting Starfish because it is a programme that brings lasting change through trusted relationships with children and young people. It is a hugely valuable upstream intervention that could reduce the number of adults who seek The Salvation Army's support in later life. By raising funds, Philanthropy enables more vulnerable children and young people to meet with a Starfish mentor on a weekly basis – helping them grow in confidence, resilience and wellbeing.’

(Karen Reid, Assistant Head of Philanthropy)

June 2025 to May 2026

Impact Highlights

The following data offers an additional snapshot of Starfish delivery and impact from June 2025 to May 2026. This dataset includes all mentees who were active during the period, including those who began mentoring before June 2025.

The outcomes closely mirror those seen in 2022-2025, showing a consistent pattern of positive change. Mentees continued to make progress across multiple wellbeing areas, with strong improvements in feelings and emotions, self-esteem and school engagement. Rates of stability remained high, and drop-back stayed low - reflecting the same developmental, stabilising and protective impact seen previously.

It is encouraging to see Starfish expand in reach and delivery while maintaining the same strong impact on mentees' confidence, emotional wellbeing and resilience.

'Starfish is a valuable programme that benefits pupils, parents, staff and the whole community.'

(School)



Reach and Delivery 2025-2026

Starfish reached 333 children and young people through trusted mentoring relationships across schools, corps and divisions.



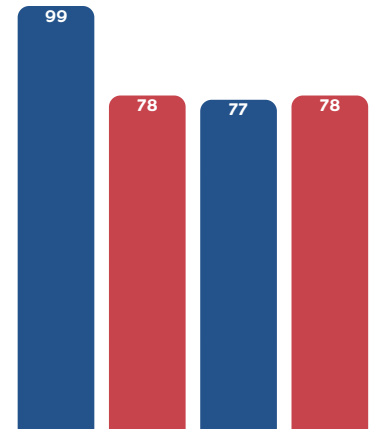
333

children and young people were supported through Starfish



Age range 6 to 16 years

58% of mentees are 10 to 12-years-old



Boys 11 & under
Boys 12 & over
Girls 11 & under
Girls 12 & over

Data includes all mentees who were active in this time period, even if they started mentoring before June 2025.

Starfish was delivered across

49
corps
includes 2 DHQs

13
divisions

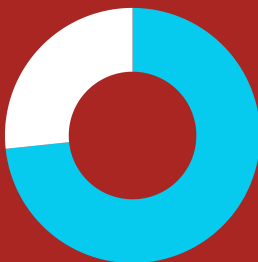


90



mentors supported Starfish

24 male mentors



65 female mentors

85
schools

58 primary
27 secondary

3,330-3,996

estimated total sessions delivered

(based on an assumed 10 to 12 sessions per mentee)



492 Outcomes Stars were completed

44%

of mentees completed more than one Star

96%

of Stars were completed collaboratively with the mentee

Starfish Programmes

Across the United Kingdom & Ireland Territory by Division, 2025 - 2026



One mentor worked in two corps, hence the total of mentors on the map is 91, rather than 90.

The Impact of Starfish 2025-2026



91%

of mentees made progress in at least one mental health and wellbeing outcome area

76% improved in two or more areas

60% improved in three or more areas



Change is typically multi-dimensional: mentees improved across an average of

3

outcome areas



Feelings & emotions

52%

made progress

39% maintained



Self-esteem

51%

made progress

42% maintained



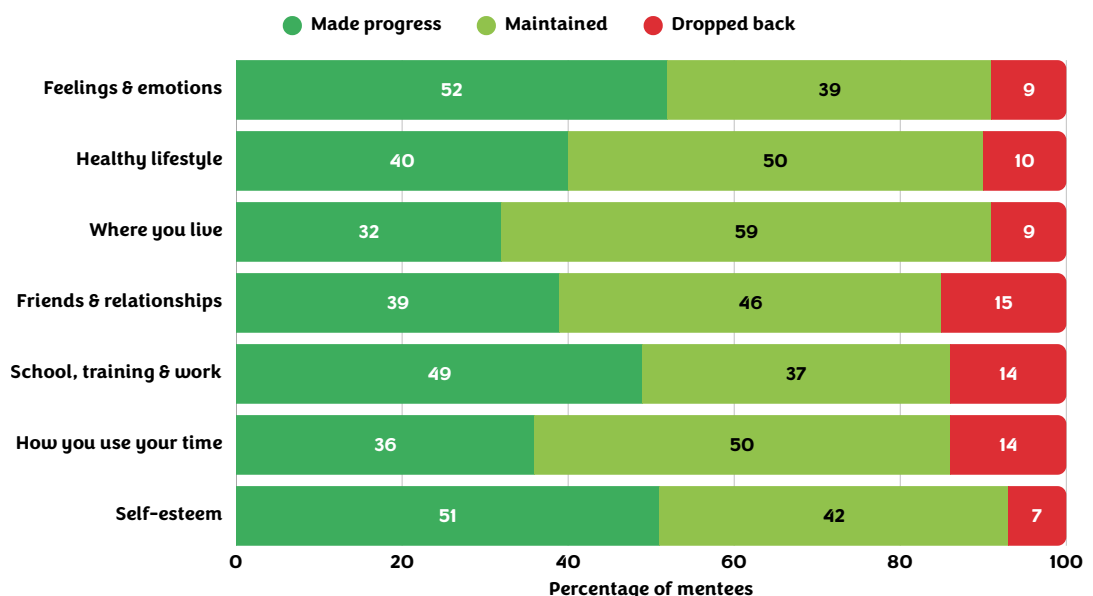
School (training & work)

49%

made progress

37% maintained

How much progress are mentees making in each outcome area?



Progress data is drawn from the 148 mentees with two Stars.
The other 141 had only completed one Star, most likely as they were still mid-mentoring.

Mentee Voice 2025-2026

What children
and young
people
told us...



100%

said the mentor
understood
them



99%

said
mentoring
was fun!



98%

said mentoring
increased their
confidence



95%

said mentoring
helped them get
on better at school



93%

said mentoring
helped them
identify/express
feelings &
emotions



95%

said mentoring
helped them feel
less anxious
and worried



93%

said mentoring
helped them
understand
themselves
better



83%

said mentoring
helped them get
on better at
home

Data gathered from 82 end of mentoring review forms.



**'Every child
deserves to have a
Starfish mentor
in their life!'**

(School)

Building on Impact

Key considerations for strengthening Starfish

The following points highlight opportunities to further strengthen Starfish (listed in no particular order). While the report demonstrates strong impact across many areas, continued learning and reflection will remain important in ensuring Starfish continues to respond effectively to the needs of mentees, schools, communities and local corps.

1. Capacity and Sustainability

- Prioritise coordinator and mentor recruitment to meet demand and support sustainability.
- Increase male mentor recruitment to aid mentee-mentor matching.

2. Evidence and Reporting

- Improve consistency of monitoring and evaluation data collection.
- Include evidence of quality assurance (supervision, training, mentor support) in future reporting.

3. Learning and Development

- Explore subgroup differences (eg, age/gender) and use these insights to shape mentor training, support and future programme development.
- Explore if/how mentor-mentee gender pairing shapes mentoring outcomes.

4. Wrap-Around Support and Local Mission

- Encourage and strengthen wrap-around support.
- Strengthen the understanding of Starfish as an integral part of local mission.

5. Strategic Alignment

- Align Starfish with the National Youth Strategy and its focus on trusted adults.
- Explore how Starfish can continue to contribute to wider early help, harm reduction and prevention strategies in corps, centres, communities and the youth sector.



‘Starfish has created opportunities for engagement within the local school and increased the visibility of the corps within the community.’

(Corps)



'A Year 11 student was struggling with anxiety and low self-esteem. After being referred to Starfish, her confidence grew, and so did her academic performance. She learned that it was OK to ask for help and that she didn't have to carry her struggles alone.'

(School)

'The weekly mentor sessions have enabled a child whose grandmother is terminally ill to have someone to talk to, to be able to express their emotions and let off steam, as well as engage in activities that are fun and tailored specifically to him.'

(School)

'After mentoring two children from the same family last year, the mother of the children sought support as she was struggling with her eldest child. Through supporting her children, we had supported the whole family and beyond the time the mentoring took place.'

(Corps)

'I can demonstrate God's love through my actions without having to use any words. I am able to live out the characteristics of Jesus by showing love, compassion, kindness and understanding. I hope one day the mentees come into contact with The Salvation Army again and think of how they were supported as a child, and know that they can be supported as adults too.'

(Starfish Mentor)

'We have been able to connect with families for the food bank and outreach camp, and the corps are providing prayer support.'

(Corps)

The benefits for the whole-child in self-esteem and confidence are notable. We have many additional needs/challenges but this has been nurturing, reassuring and supportive. The impact will hopefully have a life-long impact on our pupils.'

(School)

'A young child with poor behaviour in school was receiving fixed-term exclusions. Since having mentoring with Starfish along with school input, these have greatly reduced. It has given the child someone who is not a part of the school to confide and share concerns with.'

(School)

'One of my girls had her life turned upside down when a parent became suddenly ill and hospitalised. Hearing her talk things through and begin to open up has been amazing. She is now in a position where she has skills that will help her explore life and what that will look like moving forward. Thank you for Starfish - it's amazing!'

(School)



Children
& Youth

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