



Talent Match London

Learning and evaluation report

April 2019
Rosie Frost

About Gingerbread

Gingerbread is the leading national charity working with single parent families. Our mission is to champion and enable single parent families to live secure, happy and fulfilling lives.

Since 1918 we've been supporting, advising and campaigning with single parents to help them meet their family's needs and achieve their goals.

We want to create a world in which diverse families can thrive. We won't stop working until we achieve this vision. Whatever success means for a single parent – a healthy family, a flexible job, stable finances or a chance to study – we work with them to make it happen.

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Foreword from Rosie

We are delighted to share the learning from delivering Talent Match London Programme to support young single parent's journey to employment. During 2018/19 we have undertaken a significant review of Gingerbread's services, offer, and support for single parent families to inform the delivery of our new strategy. The evaluation of Talent Match London has significantly contributed to our understanding of single parent needs and specifically the role they want Gingerbread to play in supporting them to live happy, secure and fulfilling lives.

In 2018 we took the difficult decision to wind down our work delivering employment contracts to support single parent families re-enter employment. Through significant research and consultation with single parents we identified that as only national organisation focused on single parent families our focus must be on how we change systems and structures that can affect sustainable change. Currently we spend over 50% of our resources and energy on supporting around 1000 parents a year through employment contracts. While this work undoubtedly delivers value for those individual families, it is limited in achieving the change and ambition that Gingerbread has set out in its strategy.

The Talent Match evaluation highlights that young single parents require support to address additional areas of disadvantage as compared to older parents, build their confidence, and practical support to help them plan for the future. Gingerbread provides excellent tailored advice, a community of single parents, and sign posting to other services to begin their journey to employment. However, the evaluation also highlights that we are not best placed to provide the later stages of their journey into employment including careers advice, work placement, or in work support. The evaluation also highlights we must work more effectively in partnership to reach young single parents as they do not necessarily identify as single parents first and foremost.

Using our learning from the Talent Match evaluation, additional research, and ongoing evaluation activities we have developed a change framework that provides an overview of how Gingerbread will deliver its 2018 – 2021 strategy. It highlights shared short-term and long-term outcomes that we will work to deliver across our movement, services, policy, influencing and campaigns. We will focus on supporting single parents to enhance their financial well-being and personal confidence. We will support single parent families to improve their relational and emotional well-being. And our policy and campaigns work will improve the position for single parent families in society.

We are delighted to have had the opportunity to work closely with London Youth and the Talent Match London Programme. Their support to reach and understand young single parents has been invaluable and their open approach to learning has played a significant role in us developing our new strategy. We hope this evaluation report is useful to other agencies supporting young single parents.



Rosie Ferguson
Chief Executive

Executive summary

From 2014 – 2018, Gingerbread delivered Talent Match London to young single parents across 9 (revised to 7) boroughs in the capital. This report summarises the evaluation we conducted at the end of the project, to understand what was and wasn't successful with the delivery, and to capture wider learning about working with young single parents, specifically on employability programmes. We conducted 12 interviews for this project, with participants, and internal and external professionals with experience working with young single parents.

Context for young single parents

Young single parents operate in difficult context; the current social and political climate of welfare cuts, a housing crisis in London, mental health needs, and the lack of affordable childcare. Our research found that many of the parents we spoke to didn't identify as single parents. In some cases, this was due to being in more fluid and less clearly-defined relationships with their children's other parent. Some also felt that the definition of a single parent was someone who had no support from anyone, and so didn't identify as such because they had family help.

Young single parents are hard to identify for external organisations, particularly when they don't identify as single parents themselves, and were hard to recruit to Talent Match. There is no clear route to access them or straightforward referral path because they slip through gaps in the system. They leave education when they become parents and so are not served by educational providers; parents with young children receive benefits without the conditionality of job seeking and so aren't in contact with the Job Centre; and they receive health care up to and immediately after their child is born but this drops off as the child gets older.

Young single parents are also particularly at financial risk. They have limited experience of navigating the systems of social protection that are available to them, and of managing their lives, including their money. Few have a formal child maintenance agreement in place – this is likely due to their more fluid relationships, an expensive and difficult to challenge system, and because a young other parent is less likely to have income to give. Finally, young single parents also face a double support gap and so are more at risk of isolation. On one hand, they lose friendships with their non-parent peers as their different experiences become more pronounced, and they also feel stigmatised and excluded from parent spaces due to their youth.

What worked?

The programme worked best for parents who had stability in their lives and a strong support network, allowing them to focus on developing their employability. The intensive, 1-2-1 support available through the programme helped to guide them on their journey of change and the length of the project allowed for set-backs and genuine progress. Participants developed good relationships with the diligent and dedicated project officers. All participants could identify some personal development outcomes as a result of participating in the programme, regardless of whether they achieved a job outcome. The flexibility of the programme was important to engage and tailor to young single parent needs. The Marks & Starts work experience programmes gave participants a supportive first experience of work.

What didn't work?

There were challenges with reaching and recruiting young single parents and significant challenges with sustaining engagement and parents achieving positive pathways. In light of this, Gingerbread's targets were profiled at the start of the fifth year of delivery. Professionals working with young single parents said that their clients often had additional external challenges including housing and debt, which meant that they struggled to focus on the programme. These parents required intensive 1-2-1 support to engage them and help them reach stability, which the project officers delivered at the expense of time spent developing employability. Talent Match London's Journey of Change anticipated working in group settings to provide support to young people on their employment journey. For single parents, the amount of group support deliverable is very limited, with parents needing focused support and being unwilling to take on other parents' challenges alongside their own.

The need to access flexible, appropriate, and local childcare also limited participant opportunities to attend group work, training, work placements, and to move into work. We did not have a wide enough range of partnerships with employers, educational providers, and referral partners to be able to deliver all components of the programme at scale.

Learning for employability programmes working with young single parents

We have developed the Young Single Parents' Journey of Change, a recommended design template for future employability programmes working with young single parents. This builds on the Talent Match Journey of Change but we have added stages to help young parents stabilise their lives, and gain additional educational and work experience, and have adapted existing stages to better recruit and serve this group. The journey for young single parents is longer and highly likely to be subject to set-backs. Through the evaluation findings we question whether it is feasible to deliver the full journey at once. For many young single parents, the journey would be better and more successfully completed in stages. For example, the first stage could be reaching 'skill-up', identifying short and long-term goals and gaining education and work experience, and the remaining steps could be completed when the parent has more stability or their child is older. Moreover, career aspirations might differ in the short and long term. Our evaluation suggests that in the short term, many young single parents want a job to earn some extra money and gain some work experience, and will look at moving into a more 'skilled' and sustainable career as their children get older.

Learning for Gingerbread

For Gingerbread, this evaluation had provided learning to influence how we work with young single parents, who have needs that are specific and different from our main beneficiary group.

- Engagement – young single parents don't always identify as such and so research that considers messaging, channels, and routes to engagement is required to understand how we reach and engage this group in our wider offer of services.
- Advice - young single parents don't use our advice services, particularly the helpline. They often don't identify their need for support and wouldn't identify Gingerbread as a source of support if they don't identify as single parents themselves. We must consider how we can create routes to this service for young single parents and how to make the service relevant and accessible to them
- Campaigns and policy – the team has already successfully challenged the government on job seeking requirements for parents on universal credit with young children. Young single parents clearly face a specific set of challenges relating to their age and the age of their children, and there is further work to do in recognising and campaigning on these specific issues.
- Peer support – young single parents feel excluded from parent spaces and as such our current model of peer support will not be suitable for them. Gingerbread should consider what other models of peer support might better serve this group, for example trialling digital spaces, as this is a medium that young people are comfortable with and it combats the childcare challenges.
- Strategy - this evaluation supports Gingerbread's wider strategic review to wind down the delivery of employment contracts for single parents. This will allow Gingerbread to focus resources towards delivering more sustainable programmes for single parents that support sustainable work, in work progression, and allow us reach a larger number of single parents. Gingerbread is well positioned to work in partnership with other organisations on the 'stability' stage of the Young Single Parent Journey of Change, and to provide advice and information about young single parent needs, to those working with them.

Introduction

Design and commissioning process

Talent Match London was initially established as a five year programme to understand what works in supporting long term unemployed young people to progress into fulfilling careers, with a particular focus on young people not engaging with other services, or 'hidden'. It was funded through a £10m investment from the Big Lottery Fund, as part of a £100m investment in the issue nationally. The programme was co-designed with young people, statutory agencies, and employers and London Youth developed a Theory of Change, together with young people and partners.

Through a competitive process in 2012, Gingerbread were selected by London Youth to be a Core Partner of the London programme with a particular focus on understanding the barriers facing young single parents and the role that outreach, personalised support, and engagement with employers can play in delivering long term career outcomes. Gingerbread was also a delivery partner of Talent Match in Greater Manchester.

Through our strategy development process in 2018 we have identified significant areas of learning on our experience of contract design and delivery. Through evaluation across our contract delivery programmes we recognise that we need to do more to: design and fund effective outreach strategies to identify single parents; realistically assess our engagement and outcome targets to reflect the complex and sustained support many parents require to enter employment; and effectively build our internal infrastructure to track participants, measure outcomes, and evidence progress.

Structure and purpose of the programme

The programme is designed to outreach to young people aged 18-24 who are not in employment, education and training, and are hidden or not proactively seeking support. They are provided with one on one support to move them through the Journey of Change, as they work to identify aims, develop skills and move into employment.

The eight-stage Journey of Change provides a shared set of targets and outcomes for a project which is designed to be flexible and innovative as individual partners require.

Gingerbread programme targets

The programme went through several changes and adaptations across the five year contract. Gingerbread was initially commissioned to work in a consortium with Barnardo's and Working with Men, to deliver to Talent Match London for young single parents. At the end of year 3 Talent Match London de-commissioned Barnardo's and Working with Men from the consortium as it was not effective at reaching the target group.

Gingerbread's targets were first adapted after year two, as part of a programme wide reprofile for specialist partners, by London Youth. However, through years three and four, Gingerbread continued to struggle and fail to meet its targets. At the start of year five, the targets were reprofiled again, to focus on achieving outcomes for those young single parents who were already successfully engaged with the programme.

As Figure 1 shows, we had significantly more success in reaching our targets in year five, when the numbers were more realistic for the work we were able to deliver, and for our beneficiary group. A key motivation behind this evaluation is to learn from the challenges of meeting Talent Match targets, and to document this learning for future programmes.

Table 1	Year 1-2 target	Year 1 actual	Year 2 actual	Year 3 target revised	Year 3 actual	Year 4 target	Year 4 actual	Year 5 target revised	Year 5 actual
Engaged	184	49	No data available	80	26	110	29	61	61
Positive pathways	51	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Employment (full time, part-time or self-employment)	23	1	-	17	5	29	3	22	18
Sustained employment (at least 6 months)	No data available	-	-	2	1	15	0	11	7
Formal education, apprenticeships	No data available	-	-	9	3	15	2	17	13

Methodology

Objectives

As Talent Match comes to a close and we reflect on the successes and challenges of Gingerbread's delivery of the programme, this evaluation aims to record, unpack, and learn from Gingerbread's experience of working with young single parents. We want to apply learning to understand how we can engage more young single parents in Gingerbread's wider offer including information, advice, groups and campaigns, and other employability programmes working with this group.

Therefore the evaluation has three aims:

- Hear in-depth feedback of young single parents' experiences of Talent Match, including barriers to engagement and factors affecting success
- Analyse and understand the reasons for the challenges of this programme
- Learn about working with young single parents for Gingerbread's future work and service design

Methodology

- Internal evidence review – we reviewed all existing documents relating to Gingerbread's work on Talent Match. This included quarterly narrative reports, case studies, and engagement data for the five year programme.
- Qualitative interviews – we conducted 12 depth phone interviews that lasted between 30 minutes and an hour, in order to gain detailed insight into the experiences of participants and professionals.
- Discrepancies with the Learning Proposal – it was necessary to deviate slightly from the initial research proposal methods. We did not hold a learning workshop, but instead conducted individual interviews with relevant professionals at Gingerbread. For reasons that will be outlined in this report, organising group projects with young single parents is difficult and so for this reason, the 'ideas lab' with participants was replaced by asking the relevant questions in interviews.

Who we spoke to

We conducted 12 in-depth interviews for this evaluation. Interviews lasted one hour and were either conducted in person or via phone.

Seven of the interviews were with Talent Match participants; two of these were participants who had dropped out of the programme. They came from Enfield, Barnet, Hackney, Newham, Haringey, and Tower Hamlets. They had all been looking to get into work or education when they joined the programme. Two were now enrolled on a university course, two were in part-time employment in retail and three were not in education or training. For the two who had dropped out, one was because they felt they no longer needed the service, and one fell pregnant with her second child. There was also a participant who had dropped out due to mental health issues but had reengaged, and one who took a break while her child was receiving hospital treatment. All of our interview participants were female and were the sole or primary carer of their child(ren). This is representative of the high percentage of female participants on Talent Match and in the single parent population in general.¹

We also spoke to Gingerbread professionals from the policy and service delivery teams in London and Manchester, who had experience working on Talent Match or with young single parents. Finally, we interviewed an external professional with experience of working with young single parents, who was involved in the Talent Match referral process.

Why qualitative research?

Qualitative research was chosen as the main methodology for this learning project, due to its ability to capture rich,

descriptive data and a range of experiences, and then to explore these, unpacking the participants' responses in detail. Qualitative approaches aim to map the range of views that exist on an issue rather than the prevalence of those views (which would be measured by a quantitative study such as a survey). This method was particularly appropriate for this project, as we aimed to capture the specificities and nuances of working with young single parents, as well as evaluating the Talent Match programme.

Ethics and Safeguarding

The evaluation was completed in accordance with ethical research best practice. Participants were given:

- Information about the project and their data rights prior to the interview and were required to give their written and verbal consent to participate. They were free to remove their consent at any time.
- The opportunity to read the report before it was published.
- Aware that the research questions could cause some participants distress, a Safeguarding Plan was put in place, in line with Gingerbread's Safeguarding policy. Participants were informed that if they disclosed a threat of harm to themselves or others, this policy would be followed.

Limitations

- At its strongest, qualitative research is able to reach a 'saturation point', when most of the views and perceptions which may be relevant to the research are uncovered, and conducting further interviews is unlikely to yield any new discoveries. While we did find repetition of themes in the interviews, difficulty recruiting interview participants means that we were unable to reach saturation. Ideally, we would have liked to have interviewed more young single parents, particularly those who had dropped of the programme, to achieve this breadth, as well as more external professionals.
- To get a better understanding of the distance travelled for young single parents completing Talent Match London it would have been useful to conduct qualitative interviews at two points of the programme, during and towards the end. This was not possible due to the commissioning timeframe of the evaluation.

Context for young single parents

What we already know

In general, single parents face challenges from the need to balance their work and care responsibilities. Previous Gingerbread research has found that the lack of well-paid, secure, and sustainable work that is flexible to these needs means that many single parents often struggle financially.ⁱ But young single parents in London face additional or exaggerated challenges.

London is experiencing a housing crisis, with a shortage of social housing and private rents extremely highⁱⁱ. The unemployment rate for 18-24 year olds is the highest of any age groupⁱⁱⁱ, and parents with young children (the category that most young single parents fall into) are considered furthest from the job market.^{iv} Because they have the youngest children, young parents wanting to move into work are the most in need of childcare, of which there is a “chronic shortage” that is affordable and flexible to the needs of single parents.^v Welfare reform has seen the amount of time that a single parent can care for their children full time and receive benefits decrease. Currently on income support it is until their youngest child is five, and on Universal Credit, this is being reduced to three, with job preparation mandatory from the year before.

Finally, young parents are impacted by the high cost of living in London and the closure of services such as children’s centres, meaning that they suffer disproportionately with social isolation and loneliness^{vi}.

What we have learnt about the context for young single parents

The context for young single parents, and how they identify themselves, is particularly useful to understand some of the delivery challenges on Talent Match.

Identifying as single parents

Participants related to the label of ‘single parent’ in different ways. Some reject the title because the other parent plays a role in the child’s life, and others reject it because they feel that it means they have no support from anyone, including family and friends.

“For me single is like, you do everything on your own, you have no support, no one is helping me. We do get help; I wouldn’t class that as a single parent.” (Talent Match participant)

“His dad is here, so I don’t class myself as single, even though I do do everything on my own. He does have a father so I wouldn’t say I’m a single parent.” (Talent Match participant)

Others were ambivalent about the label, feeling that it was something that other people placed on them. On the other hand, some felt that the label accurately described them. There was also a range of emotional responses to the label, from comfort to rejection.

“I just see it as it says really, I was brought up in single parent household and it was the norm in a way.” (Talent Match participant)

“There’s like a stigma attached to it [the label of single parent] isn’t there?” (Talent Match participant)

Professionals are equally unclear and diverse in their understandings of young single parents’ attitudes to the label, suggesting that this trend extends to the wider young single parent population. This suggests that the programme may have been using terminology that our beneficiaries did not relate to or use. There appears to be a generational discrepancy in how parents relate to the ‘single parent’ terminology. It would be interesting to examine how differences in terminology impact the beneficiary engagement. From a psychology perspective, becoming a parent for the first time induces a significant transition in how you self-identify and how others identify you. If we fail to capture the varied range of labels that young, first time, single parents start to identify with as a

result of their transition, we are likely to neglect a large proportion of this population. For Gingerbread, this is an especially important learning for any future work that we might do with young single parents.

Fluid single parents

A reason for the diverse response to the label of single parent may be because in practical sense, young parent's single parent status is more fluid. Older single parents who make up the majority of the single parent population and who Gingerbread therefore works with most often are more likely to have cohabited and co-parented, and experienced a significant change in circumstances after separation. This was not the case for younger single parents.

We interviewed single parents who had always been a single parent, who were in a relationship with the child's other parent but weren't cohabiting, and those in on-off relationships. They had also re-partnered or had another child with a different parent, with ambiguity about the new partners' parenting responsibilities. For example, one of the parents we spoke to was in a relationship with the father of her child but he doesn't live with them and has full time care responsibilities for his mother, meaning that she does the majority of the care work for her children.

"No [I don't have a new partner], I'm still seeing [child's name's] father every now and again." (Talent Match participant)

"Yeah, [youngest child's name]'s dad's there. He basically supports both children, he's been a dad to both of them." (Talent Match participant)

"It's a typical young parent situation, on and off. He has got another child, but he sees my son as much as he can." (Talent Match participant)

Falling through the gaps

We found that young single parents tended to fall through the gaps in support provision, making them harder to identify and engage on Talent Match; there are no clear access or referral routes. They are not on the radar of education providers, having left school to become parents; they receive health care during and after pregnancy but this declines as the baby gets older; and parents with young children are not required to job seek as conditions for their benefits and so are not in regular contact with the Job Centre.

Financial risk

We found that many young single parents were financially at risk, although they didn't identify this themselves when asked about their biggest challenges. Participants tended to have less life experience to be able to navigate the benefits system to maximise their income, and to manage their money.

"I had no interaction with [benefits system], that's why it was so new to me. I didn't know what I was entitled to; I didn't know what I needed to sign up for or anything. I was just like what?!" (Talent Match Participant)

"Under universal credit, they're given all this money, £1600 a month, and they've got to be managing this. The young people I've come across – their money managing skills aren't great. But they've never had that, they've never had to manage their own money before." (Gingerbread professional)

In addition, none of the parents who we spoke to were in receipt of formal and sufficient child maintenance, and the professionals we spoke to said this was an accurate representation of what they see in their work. Less than 40% of single parents are in receipt of child maintenance^{viii}, but the fluidity of young single parents' relationships could be a contributing factor as to why the figure is so stark in this group, making it harder to set-up and chase payments. The cost of using the Child Maintenance Service to enforce payments could also exclude this option for more disadvantaged parents, as could the difficulties with using the service, and the fact that young parents are less likely to have income to share.

"People think I should go to CMS but it's just more headache for me, and then he might use it as a case to not see his son, he will use any excuse for stuff." (Talent Match participant)

Match participant)

**“I had to go down the child support route but I still got nothing. He stopped working so they couldn’t find him. At the moment he’s £900 in arrears with me.”
(Talent Match participant)**

**“None of my parents have been given any financial assistance from the father.”
(Gingerbread professional)**

Isolation

Young single parents often struggle with isolation. Many new parents find that life at home with a baby can be lonely, but young single parents face additional contributing factors. An external professional explained that many of the young parents they work with lose friends as the differences in their life experience and challenges widens after having a child. Indeed, none of the participants identified friends as a key component in their support network.

“If they [friends] don’t have kids, we’re kind of on two different levels.” (Talent Match participant)

Moreover, participants said that they often felt uncomfortable in ‘parent spaces’ such as stay and plays and children’s centres, because they are mostly used by older parents. One parent said that she felt that she couldn’t build friends with the older mum’s at her local children’s centre.

“Being young and going to stay and plays - you got older mums that you didn’t really have the same connection with. There would be a little chat, but nothing like you felt like you could make friends with or meet up outside.” (Talent Match participant)

There was a feeling of being judged and also a lack of understanding about each other’s challenges and difficulties; other than having young children, their lives didn’t have very much in common. This has implications for young single parents’ confidence, and something that contributes to their unwillingness to take part in group activities. This will be detailed below but has been a challenge on this programme.

**“Some of the parents I worked with did not attend mothers and babies play sessions, because they felt that they were looked down upon because of their age...they find it very difficult to engage with parents who have more experience than them or a career behind them. They feel out of place.”
(Gingerbread professional)**

Key findings

What works about Talent Match London for young single parents?

Through the research process, we have sought to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the Talent Match programme. The programme received overwhelming positive feedback from participants and this section summarises the specifics about what worked.

1-2-1 intensive support

The structure of the programme as Gingerbread ran it, offering 1-2-1 support with a trusted and consistent project officer was a hugely successful aspect of the programme. Talent Match participants said that they valued the service being personal and tailored to their specific goals and aims. Gingerbread professionals also said that the chance to provide this focused and individual support was something that excited them about the role and something that worked really well. The length of the programme was also extremely beneficial, allowing for setbacks and challenges, and genuine development. A couple of participants also said that their project officer had pushed them to aim beyond what was easily accessible, towards long term, sustainable careers.

Through this support, parents were able to build good relationships with their project officers. This really benefitted a group which might have complex needs or be involved with other agencies whose services they may have found somewhat hostile, intrusive, or impersonal.

“It was really helpful; you don’t really get that from anywhere else like the Job Centre.” (Talent Match Participant)

“She didn’t put me on edge; it was a really nice relationship.” (Talent Match Participant)

It was also clear that the project officers were diligent and dedicated to the role.

“You guys just give more support. There’s not been a day when I’ve seen [project officer’s name] and she hasn’t got new information for me. Some other charities, they’re just like ‘you should go and look this up and come back’. But with you guys, its 50/50 – you look with us.” (Talent Match Participant)

Work experience

For participants who completed it, the work experience component of the project was extremely well received and delivered a range of positive outcomes. Two participants interviewed had completed Marks & Spencers, Gingerbread’s work experience programme in partnership with retailer Marks & Spencers. One had completed a voluntary administration placement in the Gingerbread Head Office.

Participants reported that having never worked before, these placements were important to gain an understanding of what the working world was like, even if it showed them what they didn’t want to do.

“The experience of being in work, which was M&S, it was a nice experience cause I hadn’t been in work or anything before...it made me see that I do not want to do retail.” (Talent Match participant)

“I really learnt how it is, to be in the work environment... how to sort myself out and organise the kids the night before so I’m not late, which it would have to be when I do get a job. So it was good experience.” (Talent Match Participant)

Participants and professionals we spoke to also said that more broadly work placements helped to build young single parents’ confidence, showing them that they were capable of getting into work and helping to identify the employability skills that they already had. There was also a peer support aspect, as the M&S programmes are run with groups of single parents. Several participants said that this was an important way for them to connect with other people who have had the same experiences as them.

“It just made me realise that I wasn’t the only girl out there. I didn’t know there are a lot of young parents my age, going through the exact same thing.” (Talent Match Participant)

One participant who we spoke gained employment with M&S, as a result of the placement, as did several other parents during the course of Talent Match.

Holistic support

Many of the young parents on the programme had complex additional needs. These included housing, benefits, debt, and mental health. This meant that project officers had to offer holistic support on a range of issues in order to deliver the project. The problems with this will be outlined in the next section, but it is clear that participants really benefitted from it. They built close relationships with their project officers, and felt able to confide in them, learning that support was available for their difficulties. One said that the support was the thing she most appreciated from the programme, and another identified Gingerbread as part of her support network.

“I don’t know what would have happened in my situation without them.” (Talent Match Participant)

Personal development

In all of the interviews we held with young single parents, there was a persistent narrative of personal development as a result of the Talent Match programme. This includes those who did not achieve a job outcome or who dropped out. It appears that aside from job outcomes, the process of taking part in the programme had its own benefits. This isn’t an easily measurable impact but looking at ways to do so could be useful for similar projects in the future.

First, participants said that they felt they had improved their life skills:

“I’ve become stronger; I’ve started managing my time more.” (Talent Match participant)

“I was really influenced by the questions that were on paper [on the assessment questionnaires], the questions they were asking – I could see what a young person should be doing in terms of their lives with children.” (Talent Match participant)

“I didn’t even know if I can do it, because I’ve never been in that area before. But I did, and it made me feel much better, cause someone has actually forced me to come out of my own area, out of my comfort zone.” (Talent Match participant)

Second, there was a general narrative of being on the up, being on a path to a goal, and a sense of moving forwards.

“I’ve certainly made a lot of changes. I haven’t had any outcomes but I’ve made a lot of changes in terms of my life and the kids”. (Talent Match participant)

Finally, they reported improved confidence – to address challenges, in their personal abilities, and in their employment skills. For example, one parent attended a residential away-weekend, and appreciated the opportunity to hear everyone’s personal stories and feel connected and supported from this.

“We even had practice interviews as well, which has helped me a lot cause my confidence was really down. Practising helped me build my confidence up and made me realise what kind of skills I actually do have.” (Talent Match Participant)

Who did Talent Match London work for?

Talent Match London worked best for the people who had additional support, particularly childcare, and who had

few external challenges to be resolved.

“It works for the right type of single parent, but not for all....it’s very specific – it’s got to be a parent that has a support system in place...it has to be someone that has availability to take part.” (Gingerbread professional)

This is reflected in the fact that the two participants who achieved job outcomes were the two who had reliable childcare from parents or their child’s other parent.

“If her dad wasn’t so supportive and my mum wasn’t, then I would’ve found it a lot harder.” (Talent Match participant)

This support helped to remove a key barrier that differentiates young single parents from young people – availability.

In highlighting who Talent Match worked for, we are able to inform service design by highlighting what was different for those who the programme didn’t work for and what might be done to close the gap. The next section will now turn to the question of what didn’t work.

What doesn’t work about Talent Match London for young single parents?

Recruitment

Gingerbread failed to reach its engagement targets on Talent Match London, and a key factor in this has been the struggle to recruit young single parents. Gingerbread doesn’t have an embedded presence in communities and so needed support from other organisations to recruit and refer participants. Additionally, young single parents are a hidden and hard to identify group, and there are very few services working directly with them, making recruitment even more of a challenge as there are no clear access routes. Recruitment worked most successfully with the Family Nurse Partnership, whose nurses work with young parents under 25 for the first two years of their child’s life. Project officers also visited organisations in the community. The Job Centre was not a hugely successful route because most young single parents have young children and are therefore not required to work. Children’s centres were found to be used by older parents and so this was also a largely unsuccessful route.

“In terms of referrals, it’s quite difficult to get them.” (Gingerbread professional)

If participants are recruited via organisations working directly with young single parents, it is likely that they will refer parents who have multiple and complex needs which as we will see, can limit engagement and outcomes. This presents an additional challenge to getting young single parents onto employability programmes.

From our interviews, it is clear that this is not a unique challenge for Gingerbread and other organisations working with young people face similar problems. However, the Gingerbread North West Office also ran Talent Match in Manchester, and faced no difficulties with recruitment. It is not entirely clear why this occurred but it may be that there is something particularly challenging about working in London, both in geographic size and the scale of external challenges.

In our interviews, we discussed how we might improve outreach to young single parents. It was suggested that we might try social media, partnerships with social services, health visitors, midwives, and education establishments. The last two require an investment of time and resources for an outcome that is several years in the future and not at all guaranteed. It appears that there is no easy solution to the recruitment challenge and future programmes would need to build a strong recruitment component, including multiple partnerships with organisations who work directly with young single parents.

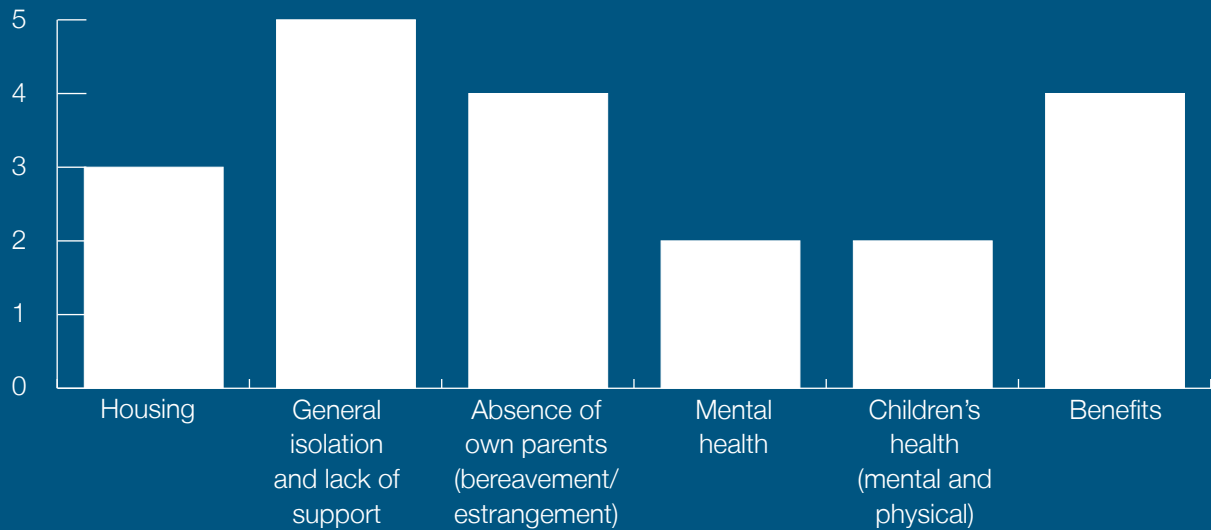
Supporting young single parents to achieve stability

An additional challenge for Gingerbread’s delivery of Talent Match London was that many participants faced multiple and complex external challenges. This presented a challenge to parents participating in the programme in the first instance, and meant that many were simply not ready to move into work.

These needs include housing, benefits, debt, relationships, and mental health. Figure 2 shows the external

challenges that participants discussed in the interviews.

Figure 1 External challenges faced by participants



The broader context for young people - of welfare changes, community and advice centre closures, and a housing and mental health crisis in London - aligns completely with these challenges, which are only exacerbated by the youth and inexperience of young parents and the challenges of raising a child alone.

These challenges make it difficult for parents to focus on self-development or give time to training or work experience, and make it far more likely that they will have to drop-out or disengage from the project.

“You’ve got to tackle those [needs] first before you can even dream of moving them on somewhere else.” (Gingerbread professional)

In addition, because many have only ever been single parents, they may not identify their needs and the challenges they face. They are therefore less likely to seek support and advice. We know that young single parents don’t call our helpline (19-24 year olds account for just 7% of callers) or use the website (6% of users) and there was a belief among the professionals we spoke to that it was for this reason.

“If you’ve always been a single parent, you see yourself as just a parent. So you don’t understand what support, or you’re not aware of what support you can get, or what it means for you. So they don’t call the Helpline until they identify an issue. It’s the parents that don’t identify their needs of support who need the most support.” (Gingerbread professional)

Therefore, Talent Match project officers delivered this support themselves, in order to get their participants to a level of stability from which they could begin working towards employment. Some were proud of this “holistic” support, while others felt that too much of their time was taken up with it, preventing them from focusing on the key components of the Talent Match London programme.

“Most of the time we were dealing with parents’ initial needs, it wasn’t focused on the employability side of it.” (Gingerbread professional)

Therefore, if this programme were to work for all young single parents and not just the ones who had additional support, it would build a ‘stability’ stage into the Journey of Change. This would enable parents to work with specialists to stabilise their lives, giving them space to focus on other areas, such as employability and moving into work.

“Those complexities have to be addressed first, because otherwise they will not move on.” (Gingerbread professional)

This support would also be needed throughout the programme as issues arose, and particularly during transitions

to work or education. Changes in circumstances can have significant and often detrimental effects on young single parents' benefits, leading to stress, financial hardship, and debt. One participant who we spoke to was unexpectedly removed from income support when she started work and left with an income that couldn't sustain her family.

“I was only earning £300-£500 a month. I don't know the reason why they kicked me off income support like that. I wasn't earning more than that, and my rent's like £600 a month...I didn't really tell no one, I had to deal with it.” (Talent Match Participant)

Work does not necessarily pay and participants need full and comprehensive advice and support to be sure that they are making the best decision for themselves, and not just to achieve a job outcome. With expertise on the issues facing single parents, Gingerbread is well positioned to deliver some of this support via its advice services.

Availability and access to childcare

For most parents on Talent Match, childcare was a major obstacle to their participation and ability to achieve outcomes. Notably, young single parents who had support from the other parent or their family to provide childcare, had some freedom and flexibility to take up opportunities.

As a Gingerbread professional explained, childcare for parents whose children are not yet in school, who tend to be young single parents, is particularly difficult. There is some support with costs; 15 hours for two year olds in disadvantaged families; 15 hours for all three – four year olds; and 30 hours for three – four year olds whose parent earns more than £118 a week if they are under 25. There may also be some additional support through benefits. However, the first two options are usually only available in term time, which does not fit with most jobs. It is also difficult to find work that fits exactly with 15 hours and the childcare schedule, or childcare that is available for flexible work times, especially in the context of a general shortage of childcare provision. Moreover, for parents looking to skill-up, train, or do work experience, the 30 hours is not available to them, and finding flexible childcare to cover short-term training or placements is hard and expensive.

“I think a lot of the system is designed around a model of people who have been working, and who've gone on maternity leave, and who have a job and go back to that job. If you're in that position, it's very different proposition than if you're looking for a job and don't know what childcare will look like because you haven't got the job yet.” (Gingerbread professional)

“The last interview I went on, she just assumed that I had help [with childcare]. She wanted someone 2pm-6pm and I said I couldn't do that. She wanted an immediate start – I won't be able to start immediately because my youngest isn't in a nursery yet.” (Talent Match participant)

For many, the cost of childcare is prohibitively expensive.^{xi} On average childcare costs are a third higher in London than the rest of the UK, and many London boroughs simply do not have the childcare provision to meet the demand. For those looking to set-up childcare, there is usually the added cost of an upfront deposit, which many just do not have. Therefore, parents with young children are limited in the work that they can take, and to the extent that they can participate in employability training. This can be seen with the fact that the two parents interviewed for this evaluation who had moved into work, were the two who had childcare support.

“Unless you've got that family network and support you're pretty much stuck. And I'm working with parents who are pretty much stuck.” (Gingerbread professional)

“[The limitations to moving into work are] basically the kids, because when you work, you have to work from 8am til 5pm. But if you don't have the family help that you're supposed to have...you can't really do it.” (Talent Match Participant)

Therefore, any employability programme working with young single parents must consider what childcare support they can provide to ensure that their participants can fully participate. This could involve offering taster childcare sessions to attend group work, working with other young single parents to understand how they found and used

childcare, and support from project officers to identify relevant local provision and access it. For some other Gingerbread programmes, this was found to be a useful way to develop parents' confidence and ability to use the system and demonstrate the utility of having time to focus on themselves.

Maintaining engagement with young single parents

Gingerbread also failed to reach its original targets for sustained engagement and outcomes. Complex needs and childcare challenges contribute to the struggle to maintain the engagement of young single parents on Talent Match London. Parents were often hard to contact, dropped off the project unexpectedly, and failed to attend/cancelled appointments.

“[My engagement with Gingerbread] was consistent at first, and then I was away for like a year.” (Talent Match Participant)

The external challenges that young single parents face meant that other issues arose that became a priority or prevented them from continuing on Talent Match. One participant we interviewed had to stop due to mental health problems, while another took a break while her son was receiving hospital treatment.

These challenges also mean that for some, getting into work is simply not a priority, especially when their welfare support is not dependent on them doing so.

“At that moment, finding work or going back into education isn't a priority.” (External professional)

It is also another indication of the project officer's role being overly stretched. One Gingerbread professional said that she didn't have the capacity to be regularly contacting all of her parents to keep them engaged. In addition, another Gingerbread professional said that the high number of boroughs they were working in meant they would often only visit each once a month.

An external professional told us that retaining participants is a challenge for all organisations working with young parents and is not unique to Gingerbread. There is no easy solution to this problem, but future employability programmes that work with young single parents must expect this and do their best to manage and mitigate this challenge.

Career aspirations

Talent Match London promotes a focus on building long term and sustainable careers. While this is admirable aspiration and in some cases really worked for young single parents, it is not appropriate for all. It must be recognised that for some young single parents, their career choices are impacted by more than just their aspirations and are not entirely straightforward. Some of the participants that we had spoken to had focused or altered their career aspirations to fit with their children's schedules, in large part because of the childcare challenges. For example, one parent had wanted to work in probation services or youth offending, but since having her second child, had chosen to pursue childcare.

“My career goals have changed a lot with having the young ones...just thinking about the children being at school, and their holidays, and the time I would have to take away from them if I chose the career I initially planned to go down.” (Talent Match Participant)

In addition, there were some participants who, while they might have career ambitions for the future, did not feel the need to put these into action until their child was older and in full-time education. Again, this links back to the childcare challenge.

“I won't stay in retail for ever. But when she's in school full time, then I'll probably go down either a health care route or a childcare route.” (Talent Match Participant)

A Gingerbread professional explained that many of her participants just wanted to work to be able to pay the bills and have a better life, and didn't want a stressful job to add to the challenges of raising a child on their own. For

these parents, it is useful to plan and look at future options, but these might not be achievable in the short term. Therefore, young single parents do not follow the same career trajectory as non-parents their age, and may take progress in stages, to fit with what is practically feasible.

Delivering employability support to young single parents

This section will analyse what didn't work about the delivery of the central employability model for Talent Match London.

- Group work - Talent Match London has an emphasis on beneficiary ownership through a youth board, and on group and peer support. This aspect didn't work for Gingerbread's Talent Match participants, and nearly all support was delivered on a 1-2-1 basis with their project officer. This is partly because of childcare. Without childcare, it is very hard for parents to attend these one-off workshops; they would usually bring their children to their 1-2-1s.

“I had 1-2-1s most of the time, and I think that was due to the kids. I couldn't really do much at that time.” (Talent Match participant)

In addition, 1-2-1s were suitable to deliver the intensive advice and support required to stabilise many of the participants. The narrative reports also explain that with so much going on in their lives, young single parents didn't want to take on additional work that didn't have a direct benefit for themselves. For this reason, the youth board wasn't an option for this project, despite many diligent efforts from the project officers to get it running consistently. Therefore, working with young single parents requires this intensive and resource heavy 1-2-1 support.

“We were supposed to have a youth board and we tried to start one but because they have complex needs, they need to be met before they can say yes, let me be an advocate for Gingerbread...but even then, we have to pay for their childcare, we have to support them a lot just to get them here. It's not something they can just go off and do.” (Gingerbread professional)

- Education - many parents needed to return to education as part of their journey to being job ready.

“What goals were you working towards?” “Going back to education – college. Cause I'd never been to college so that was basically my goal.” (Talent Match Participant)

However, there were barriers to getting into education in some cases. There was reluctance from some participants to return to education, as it was associated with school and learning as a child. In addition, in some cases the Job Centre wouldn't let parents take a course, instead pressuring them into poorly paid work. And in a few cases detailed in the narrative reports, parents were left confused and demotivated after miscommunication with colleges about fees and childcare provision prevented them from attending their course.

- Work experience and employment training – this was another aspect of Talent Match which didn't work as well. Gingerbread did not have the capacity to extend partnerships to provide work experience and training in a range of sectors. Work placements were limited to retail through our existing Marks & Starts programmes. We also hosted several volunteers in the Gingerbread Head Office. One of the participants we spoke to had volunteered in the office and found it extremely useful, being exposed to a working environment for the first time and learning how to adapt to a new routine. However, clearly this is not a scalable model of training.

A Gingerbread professional highlighted how important it was for young single parents to gain education and training as part of their steps towards being job ready.

“So imagine you're in your 30s and you've worked before and you have A-Levels or a degree. You're not going back into work from standing still, you've got work experience, you probably have a qualification. Go from that to having a really young child which is the most challenging thing to combine with work,

and you're not qualified, and you've not got work experience. You're journey to getting a job is going to be much more challenging." (Gingerbread professional)

This means that to provide the best service to beneficiaries, Gingerbread needed to offer participants a range of work experience options, so that they could really explore what career they'd like to pursue, which we were unable to do.

Learning and recommendations

Employability programmes working with young single parents

Young Single Parents' Journey of Change

The key learning for employability programmes working with young single parents is that this group's path to employment is longer, requires more support and greater numbers of partnerships, and is likely to have more set-backs, than other young people. The evaluation demonstrated clearly that young single parents face a range of additional barriers, challenges, and complications to getting into work, some as a result of their age and some as a result of having young children.

From the research conducted for this evaluation, we have mapped this path and incorporated it with Talent Match's Journey of Change. Table 2 provides a summary of the Young Single Parents' Journey of Change. This has four additional stages (stability, childcare, education needs, and getting to know the world of work), as well as adaptations to some of the existing stages (outreach, assess, explore, and achieve) to make them more appropriate for young single parents.

Talent Match journey	Young Single Parents' Journey	Why do young single parents need this?	Partners
<p>OUTREACH</p> <p>You meet staff from the Talent Match London programme near where you live, at a workshop or youth event.</p>	<p>OUTREACH</p> <p>You will be introduced to Talent Match through one of our specialist referral partners who may already support you on another issue.</p>	<p>Young single parents are particularly difficult to reach and Gingerbread does not have the capacity to do this alone. Thus partnerships with agencies that do reach them are vital for recruitment.</p> <p>We do need to consider when young parents are ready to go back to work. This complicates partnership work as most contact with young parents is during pregnancy and soon after the child is born.</p>	<p>Gingerbread partnered successfully with the Family Nurse Partnership for referrals but found that more partnerships are required to deliver on targets.</p> <p>Other potential partners could include health visitors, and also midwives and education providers but the latter would not reliably ensure future contact and would be unsuitable for most time-specific contract projects.</p>
<p>ASSESS</p> <p>A Talent Match London staff member will speak to you about the programme and get to know you and what you need to access opportunities.</p>	<p>ASSESS</p> <p>You will meet your project officer, who will get to know you and assess what barriers and challenges might prevent you from participating on the programme and later moving into employment.</p>	<p>Young single parents face a range of additional external challenges that might prevent them from effectively participating and getting into work.</p> <p>This might include housing instability, debt, or childcare. These need to be acknowledged as a core component of the journey and taken into account when working through later stages.</p>	

Talent Match journey	Young Single Parents' Journey	Why do young single parents need this?	Partners
	<p>ACHIEVING STABILITY</p> <p>Your support worker will assist you to access the specialist support available for any external challenges you are facing, in order to achieve stability so you can focus on the later stages of the programme.</p>	<p>Challenges identified in the assess stage will need to be dealt with to a degree, in order for the participant to move onto the next stages.</p>	<p>The project officer remains the key point of contact for the parent but works closely to refer parents to specialist advice, such as the Gingerbread helpline to provide specific advice on income maximisation, rights, and family law. They will also provide clear referrals to external partners who can provide expert advice on the other challenges such as housing, benefits, mental health and debt.</p>
<p>EXPLORE</p> <p>You will take part in short activities and workshops with other young people to discover what you like and what you might want to develop.</p>	<p>EXPLORE</p> <p>In your 1-2-1s with your support worker, you'll explore what you like, and what employment options you might want to and be able to, pursue and develop.</p>	<p>Young single parents generally won't engage with group activities. Partly this is due to the practical difficulties of childcare – they bring their children to 1-2-1s but it is more difficult to do so for workshops.</p> <p>The project has also found that while dealing with additional issues and challenges, young single parents don't want to take on other people's challenges via group work. However, when they were able to do group work, it had a positive impact on their confidence.</p>	
<p>TALENT PLAN</p> <p>You and your support worker will start your Talent Plan which you will continue to work on together throughout the programme. This will look at your personal development and what you want to do in the future.</p>	<p>This stage is the same for young single parents – however it will need to take into account young single parents' needs, by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying short and long term goals for work around children's needs • Building confidence to participate in different activities • Identifying gaps in education and skills 	<p>Young parents may be limited in the type of work that they can or want to do due to their caring responsibilities.</p> <p>They may have gaps in their education or lack confidence after time away from work or education.</p>	

Talent Match journey	Young Single Parents' Journey	Why do young single parents need this?	Partners
	<p>CHILDCARE</p> <p>Your project officer will work with you to identify what childcare needs you have and to resolve them, so that you are able to begin the active stages of the programme.</p>	<p>Childcare is essential for young single parents to participate and progress. Most of them do not have family support and are unable to access or afford childcare, especially flexible childcare for temporary or short-notice needs. Therefore, they need financial and practical support to arrange childcare to be able to attend courses, work experience, and job interviews.</p> <p>This could involve trying taster childcare sessions to attend group work, working with other young single parents to understand how they found and used childcare; support from project officers to identify relevant local provision and access this. Our aim is to build confidence to use and understand the system.</p>	<p>The project officer remains the key point of contact for the parent but works closely to refer parents to specialist advice, such as the Gingerbread helpline to provide specific advice on income maximisation, rights, and family law. They will also provide clear referrals to external partners who can provide expert advice on the other challenges such as housing, benefits, mental health and debt.</p>
	<p>EDUCATIONAL NEEDS</p> <p>You and your project officer will identify if you have gaps in your education history and how these could be addressed.</p>	<p>Many young single parents left education early to become parents and so this group can have particular educational needs that must be addressed to facilitate progressing through their journey.</p>	<p>Partnerships with education specialists and establishments can provide support in finding the best and most appropriate courses and qualifications for participants.</p>
	<p>GETTING TO KNOW THE WORLD OF WORK</p> <p>You and your project officer will identify if you have gaps in your work experience, and you will be given opportunities to learn about and experience different sectors to help you decide what you might want to do.</p>	<p>Young single parents have often never had any work experience so may need additional opportunities to do shadowing, work experience or volunteering to help them consider what type of work they want to focus on.</p>	<p>Partnerships with a wide number of volunteering and employment partners across a range of industries, who can provide shadowing and work experience placements.</p>
<p>SKILL UP</p> <p>You will start developing your employability skills and have the chance to visit an employer. You might also take part in more practical workshops on topics like money management.</p>	<p>This stage is the same for young single parents.</p>		<p>Partnerships with organisations who can deliver practical additional training and employment experiences.</p>

Talent Match journey	Young Single Parents' Journey	Why do young single parents need this?	Partners
<p>FOCUS</p> <p>The programme will become much more focussed on what your career goals are and developing job specific skills. You will have the opportunity to volunteer, shadow professionals, and learn about starting your own business. You will be supported to apply for work placements and training courses.</p>	<p>This stage is the same for young single parents.</p>	<p>The work experience component differs from the 'getting to know the world of work' stage as it is focused on getting experience for a specific role rather than exploring the world of work in general.</p>	<p>Partnerships with a wide range of employment partners to deliver this work.</p>
<p>ACHIEVE</p> <p>You will be supported into employment and training opportunities.</p>	<p>ACHIEVE AND TRANSITION SMOOTHLY</p> <p>You will be supported into employment and training opportunities, and will be supported to transition smoothly into working/training life.</p>	<p>Single parents require extra support to ensure that their benefits transition smoothly as their circumstances change, and that their work does make them better off. They may also require help to manage the challenges associated with setting up childcare, such as a deposit.</p>	<p>Gingerbread could deliver this via the advice service, if clear sign posting and engagement is in place.</p>
<p>SUSTAIN</p> <p>We will continue to keep in touch with you for a period of at least 6 months before you become a Talent Match London Alumni.</p>	<p>This stage is the same for young single parents.</p>	<p>With their additional time pressures and responsibilities, it must be acknowledged that many young parents may not maintain contact once they have achieved what they wanted to.</p>	

The journey in stages

The Single Parent Journey of Change is a long one, and we anticipate that only those with additional support and relative stability will be able to complete the full journey in one stretch. Therefore we suggest that this journey may need to be delivered in stages, which work around the practical challenges of being a young single parent.

An initial intervention could help young single parents to develop confidence, plan for short and long term goals, and gain valuable education or work experience, reaching the skill-up stage. They might then return to complete the rest of the programme at a later stage, perhaps when they have achieved more stability in their lives, or their children are older.

In addition, their career aspirations may also be a staged journey. Many young single parents don't want to focus on 'skilled', sustainable, and long-term careers when their children are very young, but would rather have the opportunity to simply earn to some extra money and focus on raising their children. This should be understood as a viable short-term goal, and parents should be supported to achieve this if it is what they want.

Through delivering Talent Match London we now better understand the multiple barriers young single parents face when trying to access support and move into employment. Our learning is to be more realistic about the number of young single parents one programme can effectively reach, support and progress into employment. We recognise that geographical targeting, with a specific focus on boroughs, would allow more effective local partnerships with referral agencies interacting with young single parents, is essential.

Learning and recommendations for Gingerbread

This evaluation has identified that young single parents are a group of Gingerbread beneficiaries with specific characteristics and needs, which differ from our main beneficiaries. By identifying and understanding these differences, we are able to consider how each of our services can better serve young single parents.

Reaching and engaging young single parents

We have found that young single parents don't necessarily identify as such, meaning they might not seek us out or recognise themselves as potential Gingerbread beneficiaries. This poses a challenge for recruiting this group to any of our services, including membership, campaigns, and information and advice. Communication channels, messaging, and engagement strategies need to be considered and tailored to ensure that we are able to extend our offer to this group, and we can begin by conducting further research on how we might do this.

Providing advice and information to young single parents

We know that young single parents don't use our advice services, and yet there is a clear need for some form of the service for young single parents navigating the challenges detailed in this report. We also know that young single parents want and benefit from intensive 1-2-1 support. We need to pilot new ways of reaching this group and making the helpline and website usable and relevant to them.

Campaigns and policy

The policy team at Gingerbread has already identified the specific needs of single parents with young children, in relation to benefits and returning to work. Young single parents tend to fall into this group, which has been identified as furthest from the job market. They have successfully challenged the government to allow parents on universal credit with children aged three, to spend a year in education and training, instead of job seeking. There is further work to do on policy that affects young single parents, and on campaigning that is relevant to these beneficiaries.

Peer support

Young single parents often experience isolation, and face a double exclusion; from their former friendships as their peers struggle to relate parents' new challenges; and from parent spaces which are frequented by older parents. However, we know that when parents do receive contact and support from their young parent peers, they really benefit from it. Gingerbread's current peer support groups are unlikely to be suitable for young single parents as they tend to be attended by older parents, but there is work for Gingerbread to do in terms of considering what a peer support offer for young single parents might look like. For example, there is a potential to trial digital channels as this is a medium that young people are comfortable with and it avoids childcare challenges.

Employment programmes for young single parents

Gingerbread is winding down its delivery of employment programmes for single parents as part of the decision of the wider strategic review. This will allow Gingerbread to focus resources towards delivering more sustainable programmes for single parents that support sustainable work, in-work progression, and allow us to reach to a larger number of single parents. However, Gingerbread is well positioned to work in partnership to deliver aspects of young single parents' Journey of Change, particularly the stability stage. We are also able to provide advice and information to organisations who are working with this group about how they can tailor their service and support appropriately.

Appendix

Discussion guide for Talent Match parent interviews

Introduction

- Introduce interviewer, stress independence and nature of relationship with Gingerbread.
- Brief overview of project and why we're doing it:
 - Gingerbread is carrying out a review of its services for young single parents and wants to understand what it can do in the future to support single parents.
 - We're speaking to single parents from a range of backgrounds to get different views, all views are equally important to Gingerbread.
 - The views that you share will help to inform Gingerbread's new strategy.

1. Consent, anonymity and data storage

Refer back to the information leaflet and talk them through it to make sure they're happy with it. Emphasise:

Voluntary nature of study, and right to change mind at any time

- Data from the interviews will be stored securely by the research team and used to write a series of outputs including a report which will be published on Gingerbread's website.
- Any personal data we hold on you will be deleted by December 2021.
- Quotes will be used but not attributed
- If we write up your story as a case study, we will check it back with you first
- Please be as honest and open as you can – no right or wrong answers.
- Interview will last around 1 hour
- Any questions?
- Are they happy for recorder to be turned on?
 - *Turn digital recorder on if respondent confirms consent.*

1. Introduction

- Can you tell me a bit about your family?
 - How old are you?
 - Number and ages/genders of children
 - Things children are interested in
 - School/nursery/childcare arrangements
 - Where they live and views on it
 - *Housing tenure (if appropriate)*
 - What area they live in (by borough)

2. Being a single parent

- Journey to becoming a single parent
 - *Did you expect to be a lone parent?*
 - *Did you ever co-parent/live together?*
- Length of time as a single parent
- Relationship with other parent (if relevant).
- What single parenthood looks like for them now
 - *Whether they have a new partner – is it important to you, from when if yes?*
 - *Role that partner plays in parenting if at all*
 - *Do you see yourself as a single parent*
 - *How do you feel about the label of SP?*

3. Experience of Talent Match

- How did you find out about Talent Match? Specifics.
- Did you know about GB before this?
- What did you hope to get from it?
- When they first got involved in Talent Match?
- How regular was the contact/activities? Where there times when you stopped? Why?
- What have you done as part of Talent Match – tell me about your TM journey, what happened? What activities did you do? What did you do first? Then what other activities? Progression through the process.
 - Prompt:
 - *Support – 121, group activities. Training, Careers advice, financial support, peer mentoring, personal development advice, counselling, other*
 - *Practical – work experience, volunteering, training/internship, applied for jobs, interviews, employed, self-employed.*
 - *Prompt for clarity on number of meetings, exactly what they did in the meetings or events. Why they did the meetings that they did – eg just 1-2-1.*
- What do feel they achieved – tools for life - through being involved in the programme?
 - *Practical: basic, confidence, focusing goals, understanding of skills employers are looking for, Id short and long term goals, specific job aim, skills for specific job, CV, ID training needed, set up own business, how to prepare for an interview*
 - *Skills: communication, working with others, setting/achieving goals, managing feelings, confidence, reliability.*
 - *Well-being – satisfaction with life/job, happiness, anxiety.*
 - *New knowledge?*
- Has anything changed – education or employment? What are you doing now?
- What worked well? Could you see the benefit before you did it?
- What do you most value about their talent match experience?

- What doesn't work well? Suggestions for improvement
- Prompt – issues covered, location, timing, childcare etc. What barriers were there to you participating.
- Support for personal issues?

4. Employment

- If not already discussed: What type of employment would you like to do?
- In terms of employment, where do you see yourself in five years' time? Probe – industry, role, job pattern
- What have you learnt from TM that will help you to get here?
- What else do you need to help you get there?
- At the moment, what are the most important factors when considering employment options you want to go for? Probe childcare, type of work, salary, location, opportunities to progress
- What limits your ability to move into employment?
 - i. Practical – childcare costs/provision, flexible working, local, hours/shift patterns, salary, negative impact on overall income, health.
 - ii. Personal – confidence, experience, bias against SPs/young parents, support to search for/apply for work.

5. Support used/needed by parent (prompt for Qs relating to being young)

- Gingerbread works with people who have really different backgrounds, different stages of their lives, different ages, but people go on a journey. If you think about a line where at one end things are really tough and you're really striving to get by and at the other end you and your family are thriving, how far along that line would you say that you are now?
 - *Why?*
 - *What support would you like in the future to get to next stage?*
- Could you describe your support network?
 - *Do you know other SPs? Is this important to you?*
- What challenges have you faced as a young single parent? Probe financial, emotional, practical. Short term or long term.
 - *Did these change from previously? Eg welfare and benefits – first interaction?*
- What support have you accessed to help you address the challenges (maybe long term/short term):
 - *Personal, social, peer, others' experiences etc.*
 - *Advice, information, legal, financial, housing, training/skills,*
 - *Job Centre, Social Services, Family Nurse Partnership, charities (including Princes Trust),*
 - *Have you accessed/do you need/look for - short-term (to address an immediate issue) or long-term support (to help them achieve longer-term aims)? IE at transition or longer term challenges of being a SP.*
 - *Do you look for that support actively?*
- Do they seek advice via phone helplines?

- b. Where do they find out about HLs?
- c. Which organisations have they contacted?
- d. What issues did/do they call about? What experience?

i. Are they useful?

6. Final questions – Gingerbread and reaching other young single parents

- I'm interested in how well we share the other work of GB and GB services to people on TM. Could you talk to me about what you understand GB aims to do?
- What services does GB provide? Have you used any others?
 - *i. If used, what experience and satisfaction.*
- What part of that do you think is relevant to you? Especially as a young person?
- What else could be done to be more relevant to you?
 - *i. What other services*
 - *ii. What do you think young SPs want from GB.*
- I'm going to name a few other GB services, can you tell me if you've heard of them?
- Finally – how can we get other young single parents like you involved?
- How do we reach other young single parents like you?

7. Closing

- Any questions? Address for vouchers. Further contact preferences for sharing report.

References

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- ^{iv} Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). Lone Parent Obligations: an impact assessment. 2013. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/211688/rrep845.pdf
- ^v Partnership for Young London. p4
- ^{vi} Partnership for Young London
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- ^{viii} Rabindrakumar p11
- ^{ix} Gingerbread. Advice and Information Evaluation Report 2017-2018
- ^x DWP 2013
- ^{xi} Gingerbread. Upfront – a childcare guarantee. 2016 <https://www.gingerbread.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Upfront.pdf>

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