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# Wingman Schools Navigator Programme

## Final Impact Report (April 2024 – March 2025)

### Project Overview

The Wingman Schools Navigator Programme was commissioned to provide early intervention mentoring across six secondary schools in Central Bedfordshire, Bedford Borough, and Luton. Designed to reach 150 young people aged 12–18, the programme was structured around 8-week cycles of trauma-informed, relationship-based mentoring sessions. The programme was delivered by experienced Wingman mentors embedded within schools, offering 1:1 sessions with referred students identified as at risk of disengagement, behavioural concerns, or social and emotional difficulties.

Each school was expected to support a minimum of two cohorts of six students over the delivery year. The intended outcome was that 130 students would complete the full mentoring cycle, with 70% of participants showing increased engagement in education, training, or employment (ETE) through measurable improvements in attendance, behaviour, and personal development.

Due to staggered onboarding across the six schools—with one beginning in May 2024 and the final starting in January 2025—outcome expectations were recalibrated accordingly. The final late-starting school received additional mentor hours in Q4 to maximise impact.

### Outcomes

- **115** young people supported through the programme
- **64** young people completed 8+ sessions (61.5%)
- **6** schools fully engaged across all three local authority areas
- **Over 700** mentoring sessions delivered
- **0** disengagements in Q4
- School staff began referring through **safeguarding teams**, embedding Wingman deeper into their support cultures
- Young people showed **increased attendance, more reflective behaviours**, and **decreased conflict** in and out of school

### With Feeling:

**"If this had been before I met you guys, I would have hit her." — Year 9 student who called her mentor at 11pm to share that she had walked away from an escalating fight**

The programme saw students form strong bonds with mentors, opening quickly and sharing personal experiences often unknown to their schools. Students felt heard, seen, and valued—with many displaying notable improvements in self-awareness, emotional regulation, and their ability to reflect on decisions and actions.

**"Thank you. I appreciate you. I will never forget you." — Year 8 female student**

Schools observed students expressing a sense of pride in being part of the programme. One staff member remarked:

**"Thank you. The impact you're having is noticeable amongst our students."**

A parent echoed this sentiment:

**"Things are much better, and without doors slamming. We're able to talk to each other. I can see the impact this is having on their younger sister too." — Parent**

## **Programme Delivery & Approach**

Wingman's approach focused on reflection, relational trust, and reducing impulsive behaviours through consistent mentorship. Students learned to reflect on actions, consider consequences, and slowly unpick the root of challenges. Over time, even the most disengaged young people became more self-aware, resilient, and hopeful.

Where students were often previously unseen or unheard, mentors provided a psychologically safe space to talk, vent, laugh, reflect honestly and make better decisions. Even those finished from the programme continued to check in, wanting to remain connected.

## **Culture & Community Shift**

Mentors observed students adopting the language and values of the programme—offering their peers advice, grounding conversations in empathy, and even mirroring Wingman approaches. In one school's referral unit, students could be heard redirecting each other using the kind of strategies shared during their mentoring sessions.

Students grew proud of their Wingman identity. Many didn't see it as intervention but belonging:

**"They don't feel 'othered'. They feel part of something positive."**

## Case Studies

### Case Study 1

**Anonymous**, Central Bedfordshire

**Male, Year 10**

Concerns: Involvement in negative community behaviour.

The young person had a history of arriving late or skipping school altogether. After mentoring began, he started coming in early on mentor days, building trust with staff and re-engaging. Despite two exclusions during the programme, attendance has improved, and parental involvement grew stronger. Mentors identified a return to a previously loved sport as a future goal, and this has been recommended as a positive next step. Ongoing support is advised.

### Case Study 2

**Anonymous**, Luton

**Female, Year 8**

Concerns: Behaviour, focus, internal absence, identity struggles.

This student transformed in how she spoke and presented herself. Swearing reduced significantly, and she began to wear her hijab at school after deeper discussions about identity. She still checks in with mentors and attends Wingman events beyond the programme. - "Thank you, I appreciate you, I will never forget you."

### Case Study 3

**Anonymous**, Central Bedfordshire

**Female, Year 9**

Concern: behaviour in school, Anger management, internal missing absences.

This young person was with us from the end of Year 8 to near the end of Year 9 with drop-in sessions for 9 months. After the Wingman programme ended, she called one evening to say she had walked away from a 6-week escalating conflict from a trivial matter:

**"If this had been before I met you guys, I would have hit her."**

She has been praised at school for her reactions to this situation and progress at school, there have been no internal absences and school is a pleasant space to be again. We are very proud of this young person as she is also proud of herself and how far she had come from before. This moment symbolises what Wingman aims to do—provide young people with a pause before the point of no return.

## Mentor Insights

Wingman mentors adopted a flexible and responsive approach to each young person's needs. While the original model proposed 8-week interventions, in practice, the length of engagement varied. Reasons included student absence, holidays, transitions, and more importantly, the deeper complexity of the issues raised.

*"Quick resets work for some, but most students need more time and space to process. We learned to prioritise the journey over the schedule."*

Mentors also highlighted the importance of embedding qualitative, relationship-led mentoring over rigid structures. The resource toolkit was well-received, allowing mentors to adapt sessions and support students' social and emotional development meaningfully.

## Shifting School Culture

Schools that initially engaged with individual referrals became more holistically involved over time. By Q4, mentors were receiving referrals from a broader range of staff, including teachers, year leads, and safeguarding teams.

*"Some students never miss a day when the mentors are in school."*

Students began showing ownership of the programme:

- Proud to be "part of Wingman"
- Speaking like their mentors to peers
- Choosing to check in even after sessions had formally ended

## Reflections & Lessons Learned

- Consistency builds trust: Students need predictable, empathetic relationships more than structured timeframes. Many students had lightbulb moments. They learned how to reflect, how to own their behaviour, and how to build a path forward. Some simply needed space to feel seen.
- Strict 8-week cycles proved unrealistic for most high-need students. Attendance patterns, emotional volatility, and exam or holiday periods made flexible, longer-term support far more impactful. Mentoring often ended more naturally rather than abruptly, which led to stronger outcomes.
- The shift from a document-based to an online data capture and referral system helped reduce admin strain. However, inconsistent data from schools (particularly around attendance) limited the ability to capture some outcomes quantitatively.

- Crucially, students' trauma and challenges do not vanish within a school term. What changes is how they carry them. Mentoring allowed students to learn to live with their circumstances differently—with more awareness, resilience, and support.

*"Their trauma doesn't disappear. But they are learning to live with it better."*

## Final Reflections

Despite a slow start due to delayed school onboarding, the Wingman team adapted quickly, adding capacity where needed to maximise outcomes. The programme not only supported students in crisis, but built connections and community around them.

The Wingman Schools Navigator Programme created safe, nurturing spaces in six schools, embedding a model of consistent, flexible, trauma-informed mentoring. Though the original target of 150 students was not reached, the impact was undeniable. With over 700 sessions delivered, 64 young people completing full cycles, and a visible culture shift in multiple settings, the programme left a legacy far beyond numbers

The schools want Wingman back. The students still check in. The mentors are still remembered.

And for many young people, this programme wasn't just a term-long intervention—it was the start of a new internal dialogue:

***"I get to choose how I show up in the world."***