



Centre for excellence  
for Children's Care and Protection

# Quarriers Coaching for Life

An Independent Evaluation: Executive Summary

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## Executive summary

Quarriers Coaching for Life service requested that CELCIS carry out an independent evaluation of the Coaching for Life project. We used a mixed-methods, realistic approach drawing on a wide range of perspectives and information. We captured the views from young people who had received the service, Lifecoaches and other workers who had knowledge of, or were involved with, the service. We gathered this information through an online survey and focus group activities. We also asked young people to complete a questionnaire at two time points: when they first met with their Lifecoach, and when they felt they were ready to finish working with the service. The data were collected and analysed deductively, using thematic analysis to answer four broad research questions:

1. What is the Coaching for life model?
2. What is the Coaching for Life experience?
3. What are the Coaching for Life service outcomes?
4. What is the key learning from the Coaching for Life Initiative?

Although the data from all sources was analysed and organised into four broad themes based on the research questions, a fifth central theme emerged relating to Young People's Needs. This theme seemed to interlink the Coaching for Life service's model, experience and outcomes.

### What are the key features of the Coaching for Life model?

Two key themes emerged from the evaluation describing Coaching for Life as a flexible but consistent service. Flexible in that they take a person-centred approach that is built around the needs of the young people they serve. As such, there is no strict remit that dictates what Lifecoaches must focus on when working with young people. This flexibility extends to the skills and professional backgrounds of the Lifecoaches themselves. Coaching for Life have produced a team of Lifecoaches with a repertoire of expertise from which to draw upon when supporting young people. This allows the Lifecoaches to utilise a range of adaptable approaches to meet the young people's needs. One of the unique features of the Coaching for Life service model was the long-term, consistent support provided to young people. The range of approaches used by Lifecoaches allows them to provide a service which is reflexive and responsive to the dynamic needs of the young person during the length of their engagement. For many young people, this aspect of the service is meeting a previously unmet need for a predictable and consistent relationship that promotes trust. These two elements of the service have emerged as key factors in promoting young people's engagement with Coaching for Life.

### What is the Coaching for Life experience?

Themes such as Choice, Acceptance and Wider Service Engagement emerged to describe the Coaching for Life experience. Choice and Acceptance particularly related to young

people's experience of the service. Promoting choice from the outset is a salient feature of young people's experience of the service. Lifecoaches encourage young people to choose their terms of engagement early as a means of relationship building. Young people are encouraged to make choices and decisions about the frequency and place of contact with Lifecoaches. This is a small but simple intervention that is developmentally appropriate, fostering decision-making skills and independence, which is crucial for the trajectory towards young adulthood. Choice and decision-making also emerged as the early steps towards helping the young person tap into their own values, strengths and future aspirations. The experience of a relationship with an adult that was built on the premise of unconditional acceptance was viewed to be a first for many of these young people. For this reason, timely access to the service was considered to be an asset to the young people's experience, helping them to feel comfortable and accepted. The Wider Service Engagement aspect of Coaching for Life is multi-dimensional and relates to the experience of young people working directly with Lifecoaches, working indirectly with other agencies, and accessing services through Lifecoaches. These processes become an internalised learning experience for the young people, enabling them to identify future needs and goals. The young people then know how to build relationships with services and work in partnership to meet their personal objectives. Working in partnership with other agencies helps the Lifecoaches extend their networks and build their knowledge of services to continue to provide young people with further opportunities. This dimension of Wider Service Engagement also highlights the Coaching for Life service to other agencies, further refining referral pathways.

## **Young People's Needs**

Improving opportunities for young people by engaging with their current Need and level of functioning was interwoven throughout the Coaching for Life service. Young people who took part in the evaluation indicated that the service helped them to address a broad range of tangible needs (e.g. housing, education, employment, etc.). By adopting a need led, young people-centred approach, the service has been described as having an immense impact on any area of importance to a young person's life. The young people received a bespoke package of care, tailored towards their specific needs and equipping them with functional skills across many areas of life. Young People's Needs are at the heart of process interlinking the Coaching for Life, Model and Outcomes.

## **What are the Coaching for Life outcomes?**

The evaluation revealed that there were two tiers of outcomes achieved by the Coaching for Life service. This consisted of non-tangible 'soft' outcomes, such as developing trusting relationships and nurturing emotional wellbeing, providing a platform for 'harder' outcomes, such as education or employment. Young people involved with the service also enjoyed wider benefits, such as enhanced engagement with education, employment and housing services, and developing life skills such as budgeting. These in turn led to longer-term benefits and goals, helping young people to recognise opportunities that are available to them and how to access help in the future.

## What is the key learning from delivering the Coaching for Life service?

Themes such as Successful Elements and Barriers/Challenges emerged as the key learning derived from delivering the Coaching for Life service. Flexibility emerged as a key ingredient for success if the service were to be recreated or extended. This refers to the model of service delivery and the funding remit. This has allowed Lifecoaches to really engage with young people in a manner that is meaningful to their personal life circumstances. Similarly, consistency was considered to be key element for replication, ensuring that young people always felt able to maintain contact with their Lifecoaches, even once they had achieved their original goals. Any future developments should seek to continue working in a way that provides continuous, flexible and young person-centred support. The main barriers and challenges identified suggest that it can be difficult to manage the specificities of the service alongside young people's expectations. This results in situations where some referrers and partner organisations struggle to understand the role of Lifecoaches in the lives of young people. Coaching for Life, then, is simultaneously responsible for maintaining flexibility while projecting a clear understanding of the service.

## Conclusions

The evaluation highlighted that the Coaching for Life service provides a flexible and consistent model of service delivery not previously experienced by this group of young people. Furthermore, these two elements are considered to be successful ingredients for engaging care experienced young people across the four localities, affording them better opportunities and improved outcomes. The experiences of choice, acceptance, and wider service engagement (across several tiers with coaches and other agencies) leads to improvements across a hierarchy of 'soft' and 'hard' outcomes. Data from the focus groups and the online questionnaire indicates that the service is responsive to young people's need, as well as that of local communities. The service has been considered by many involved to be essential and would be a loss if the service was discontinued.

In summary, this evaluation has found the Coaching for Life service to have a positive impact for care experienced young people who have previously disengaged from other services. The evaluation has offered insight and discussion around the current model of service delivery in relation to existing literature, with implications for practice and future models of service delivery highlighted throughout.

### **About CELCIS**

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