Investing in trusted relationships: The economic value of Football Beyond Borders' impact on children's wellbeing

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PRO BONO ECONOMICS

Pro Bono Economics uses economics to empower the social sector and to increase wellbeing across the UK. We combine project work for individual charities and social enterprises with policy research that can drive systemic change. Working with almost 500 volunteer economists, we have supported over 500 charities since our inception in 2009.

Football Beyond Borders works with young people from areas of socio-economic disadvantage who are passionate about football but disengaged at school, helping them finish school with the skills and grades to make a successful transition into adulthood. They do this by providing long-term, intensive support, built around relationships and young people's passions, in the classroom and beyond.

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Summary

The UK is facing a crisis in children's wellbeing. The life satisfaction of our children has been declining since 2011/12 and an international survey from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development ranked the wellbeing of the UK's children 71st out of 74 participating countries. The UK needs to find solutions that can help reverse this trend and improve outcomes for young people.

Having a relationship with a trusted adult has been shown to be one possible solution. Evidence has shown that having an adult who can listen without judgement and support a young person in a positive way helps to reduce the impact that adverse childhood experiences have on young people's lives. It can reduce the risk of low mental wellbeing as well as other negative health outcomes such as smoking, high alcohol consumption and poor diet.

Young people can find trusted adults in a range of settings, including in their local youth club, at school, in their extended family or in places of worship. However, they cannot simply be "assigned" to a young person - it is essential that young people have independently chosen to trust them. They are defined by their characteristics rather than their role. Young people have highlighted that they typically come with no expectations of what young people will achieve or how they will behave, they are non-judgemental and refrain from trying to "fix" a young person. They are good listeners – allowing young people the space to open up, helping young people to work through issues in their own way. Importantly, they need to be reliable – a consistent presence that the young person can rely on.

Yet many of the children who need this support most do not have access to a trusted adult. Data from a representative sample of people in Wales suggested that around 20% of people did not have a trusted adult during childhood. This problem was greatest amongst those children who experienced more adversity. If this is representative of the rest of the UK, it would imply that there are more than 800,000 children in secondary school today who do not have a trusted adult to support them. This leaves these children without the support they need to help navigate the challenging years before adulthood.

This report evaluates the impact of an intervention from Football Beyond Borders (FBB) to provide a trusted adult for young people who may not otherwise have one. The intervention provides support within secondary schools, particularly targeted towards those at risk of exclusion, such as those with poor behaviour records, who have suffered adverse childhood

experiences or who have Special Educational Needs. The programme uses sport to build trust, combining this with one-to-one mentoring and group work to help develop children's socio-emotional awareness. Students involved in the programme highlight the impact this experience can have on helping them better manage their emotions, improve their confidence and have a more positive outlook towards education. Furthermore, a study from the University of Manchester using data from the #BeeWell programme has demonstrated that the FBB programme protects "at risk" young people from declines in wellbeing. The difference in wellbeing between those supported and a comparison group was substantial - roughly the same as a UK adult experiences when they go from being unemployed to employed.

These wellbeing improvements delivered by FBB are estimated to have significant value to society. The average student involved in the programme in 2022/23 benefited from improvements in wellbeing worth around £2,300, based on HM Treasury's approach to valuing wellbeing improvements. This means that the programme as a whole delivered more than £5.5 million of benefits to society from the 2,401 students who participated in that year. This is the equivalent of around £150,000 of benefits per trusted adult practitioner.

The FBB programme is likely to offer good value for money. Based on the short-term wellbeing impacts alone, the FBB programme is estimated to deliver £2.20 of benefits for every £1 spent. And this is likely to be an underestimate of the true scale of benefits from the programme. Sensitivity tests that include plausible impacts on academic outcomes highlight that the return could be closer to £4 of benefits per £1 spent. In addition, some estimates for the economic costs of permanent exclusion are so high that FBB would only need to prevent seven young people per year, out of a total cohort of 2,401, from being excluded for the benefits of the programme to outweigh its costs.

Investing in new solutions to improve UK children's wellbeing will be critical to tackling the current crisis. The FBB programme provides a great example of this – highlighting the role that social sector organisations can play in providing trusted adults to make a difference within schools.

It is also a great example of the importance of having the right data and infrastructure in place to measure and compare wellbeing outcomes for children. While this is partly about good data collection practices from charities like FBB, without #BeeWell's investment in high-quality wellbeing data for the Greater Manchester area it would not have been possible to deliver the same quality of analysis. An expansion of wellbeing data

collection for children across the country would have a profound impact on the potential evidence base available to inform future policy decisions.

Ultimately, this is about improving the lives of individual children – helping them to flourish in school environments that care as much about the child's wellbeing as their academic outcomes. As the analysis of the FBB programme shows, more consistently understanding and incorporating the economic benefits of wellbeing improvements in the appraisal and evaluation of interventions for children could make a material difference to which policy options are prioritised in the future.

The UK ranked

71st

out of 74 countries for children's wellbeing in a recent Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development survey

The typical Football Beyond Borders trusted adult practitioner supported improvements in children's wellbeing worth around

£150,000

in 2022/23

The Football Beyond Borders programme delivers

£2.20

of wellbeing benefits for every £1 spent

The Football Beyond Borders programme delivered

£5.5 million

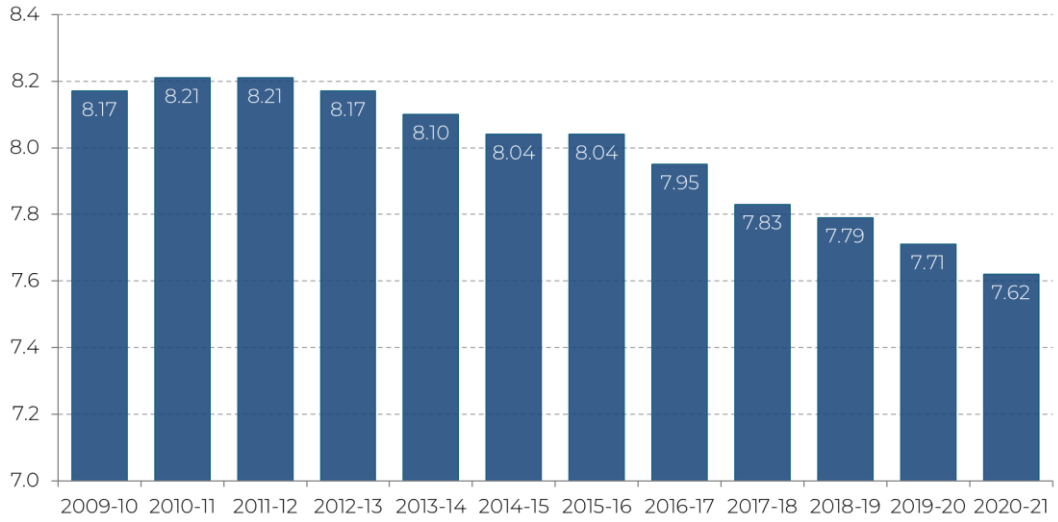
of wellbeing benefits to society in 2022/23

Introduction

The wellbeing of the UK's children is low by international standards and falling over time. In a 2022 survey by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the UK ranked 71st out of 74 countries for the average wellbeing of its 15-year-old children. This was 12 places behind Ireland, 24 places behind France and 51 places behind the Netherlands. This is unsurprising given the sustained falls in life satisfaction that children in the UK have experienced over the last 10 years. In 2010/11, children in the UK scored their average satisfaction with life as a whole as 8.2 out of 10, but by 2020/21 this had dropped to 7.6 – a drop twice the size of that experienced by UK adults during the Covid pandemic.[1]

Figure 1: Average life satisfaction among the UK's children is declining

Mean score for satisfaction with life as a whole (0 to 10)



Source: The Children's Society (2023): The Good Childhood Report 2023, Figure 2. Note the axis has been truncated to make it easier to see the changes over time.

Reversing this trend will require additional support for those most at risk. Work by The Children's Society has highlighted that children from families with financial difficulties, with parents that had mental health difficulties and those who had less support from their families were disproportionately likely to experience low levels of overall life satisfaction.[2] Other studies have highlighted the impact that adverse childhood experiences - such as physical, verbal and sexual abuse, exposure to domestic violence, parental break-up or growing up in a household with mental illness, alcohol or drug abuse – can have on mental wellbeing. One study of more than 7,000

[1] The Children's Society (2023): The good childhood report, p16, and ONS (2023): Personal well-being in the UK: April 2022 to March 2023

[2] The Children's Society (2023): The good childhood report, p25-30

people in Wales and England suggested that being exposed to four or more adverse experiences during childhood more than tripled the risk of later suffering from low mental wellbeing.[3]

However, having a trusted relationship as a child – an adult who can listen without judgement and support a young person positively - has been consistently highlighted as an important way of reducing the risks of low mental wellbeing.[4] Evidence suggests that the risks of low mental wellbeing - as well as a host of other negative outcomes including smoking, heavier alcohol consumption and poor diet – were significantly reduced where a child had a trusted adult available to them.[5]

Yet many children do not have access to a trusted adult. Data from a representative sample of people in Wales suggested that around 20% of people did not have a trusted adult during childhood.[6] If this is representative of the rest of the UK then it would imply that there are more than 800,000 children in secondary school today who do not have a trusted adult to support them.[7] More worrying still, those children who have been exposed to the most adverse childhood experiences are least likely to have access to a trusted adult, despite being most likely to need the support. The picture could be even worse in a school environment where one survey suggested that just a third of pupils feel that they often have an adult at school they can trust and talk to.[8]

What do we mean by a trusted adult?

A trusted adult is chosen by the young person as a safe figure that listens without judgement, agenda or expectation, with the sole purpose of supporting and encouraging positivity within a young person's life.

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[3] Bellis M, Hardcastle K, Ford K, Hughes K, Ashton K, Quigg Z, Butler N (2017): Does continuous trusted adult support in childhood impart life-course resilience against adverse childhood experiences – a retrospective study on adult health-harming behaviours and mental well-being, BMC Psychiatry, 17:110

[4] See for, for example, Frederick J, Spratt T, Devaney J (2023): Supportive Relationships with Trusted Adults for Children and Young People Who Have Experienced Adversities: Implications for Social Work Service Provision, The British Journal of Social Work, 53(6), pp3129-3145 or Evidence Based Practice Unit (2023): HeadStart national evaluation final report.

[5] Bellis et al. (2017)

[6] Ashton K, Davies A, Hughes K, Ford k ,Cotter-Roberts A, Bellis M (2021): Adult support during childhood: a retrospective study of trusted adult relationships, sources of personal adult support and their association with childhood resilience resources, BMC Psychology, 9(101). Additional information file suggest that 80% of 19-29 year olds reported having a trusted adult. This age group is used rather than the overall estimate as they are closest to the current generation of children.

[7] ONS population pyramid data suggests there are 4,154,474 children that would be aged between 11 and 16 in 2024. 20% of this figure is used.

[8] Meiksane, E and Jackson I (2023): Pupil Wellbeing in Schools

Young people can find trusted adults in a range of settings, including their local youth club, pastoral teams in schools, extended family or places of worship. However, they cannot simply be assigned to a young person - it is essential that young people have independently chosen to trust them.

A trusted adult is defined by their characteristics rather than their role. They typically come with no expectations of what young people will achieve or how they will behave. They are non-judgemental and refrain from trying to "fix" a young person, helping young people to work through issues in their own way. They are good listeners – allowing young people the space to open up and prioritise honesty – asking hard questions when they need to. Importantly, they need to be reliable – a consistent presence that the young person can rely on.

Interventions that aim to provide a trusted adult to support children at risk of low wellbeing could play a valuable protective role. This is not easy – studies highlight the need for those in a trusted adult role to be "trustworthy, empathetic, reliable and genuine". Additionally, they highlight that this cannot happen overnight – it takes "consistent, long-term engagement" to forge that trust.[9]

Football Beyond Borders (FBB) provide a powerful example of an intervention to provide a trusted adult for students that may not otherwise have one. Their programme provides long-term, intensive support aimed at helping young people at "risk of exclusion" re-engage with their education. They specifically target young people who have adverse childhood experiences, Special Educational Needs, a history of poor behaviour or prior exclusions – groups that are known to have lower levels of wellbeing. FBB practitioners work with the children in school, using sport as a tool to build relationships with the young people and then accompany this with one-to-one mentoring and group work to help address the challenges they face. They will work with many of these students from Year 7 (age 11 or 12) through to Year 11 (age 15 or 16), providing the continuity and stability required to build authentic, trusting relationships.

Unfortunately, despite growing evidence of the long-term impact of trusted adults, it can still be challenging to build a compelling business case for policies to support young people in this way. The long-term and uncertain nature of many of the negative outcomes can make it difficult to specifically link a particular policy or intervention to improvements over

[9] Frederick et al. (2023)

time. In addition, many negative outcomes, such as school exclusions, are still relatively rare events – affecting just four pupils in every 10,000 – making it difficult in practice to assess and quantify the impact on exclusion risks for all but the largest programmes.[10]

However, guidance from HM Treasury (HMT) offers a potential new approach to assessing the economic case for these interventions based on wellbeing outcomes.[11] If programmes working with children at risk of low wellbeing are able to demonstrate that they can help to close this wellbeing gap then the new HMT guidance can be used to build a stronger economic case for taking action.

This report explores this wellbeing-focused approach to economic evaluation using evidence from FBB's programme. It aims to highlight the feasibility of this type of economic evaluation and that the conclusions could make a meaningful difference to the type of interventions that are prioritised by policymakers.

The FBB intervention

In the academic year 2022/23 FBB worked with 2,401 students across England, made up of three key groups:

- Children at risk of exclusion: these are the key target group for the intervention, making up 26% of participants. They are students who the school deem to be at risk of exclusion over the next three years. They are typically students who have a history of behavioural issues, adverse childhood experiences or Special Educational Needs. [12]
- Passive learners: these are students who are disengaged in the classroom and appear to have little motivation or for learning. They made up 47% of participants in 2022/23. The programme aims to help re-engage these young people in school and protect their wellbeing, avoiding things getting worse over time.
- Role models: these are students who are passionate about sport and are achieving well at school, making up 20% of those involved in the programme.[13] They help to provide positive role models for other pupils involved in the programme. While their involvement in the programme should provide protective support, these children are

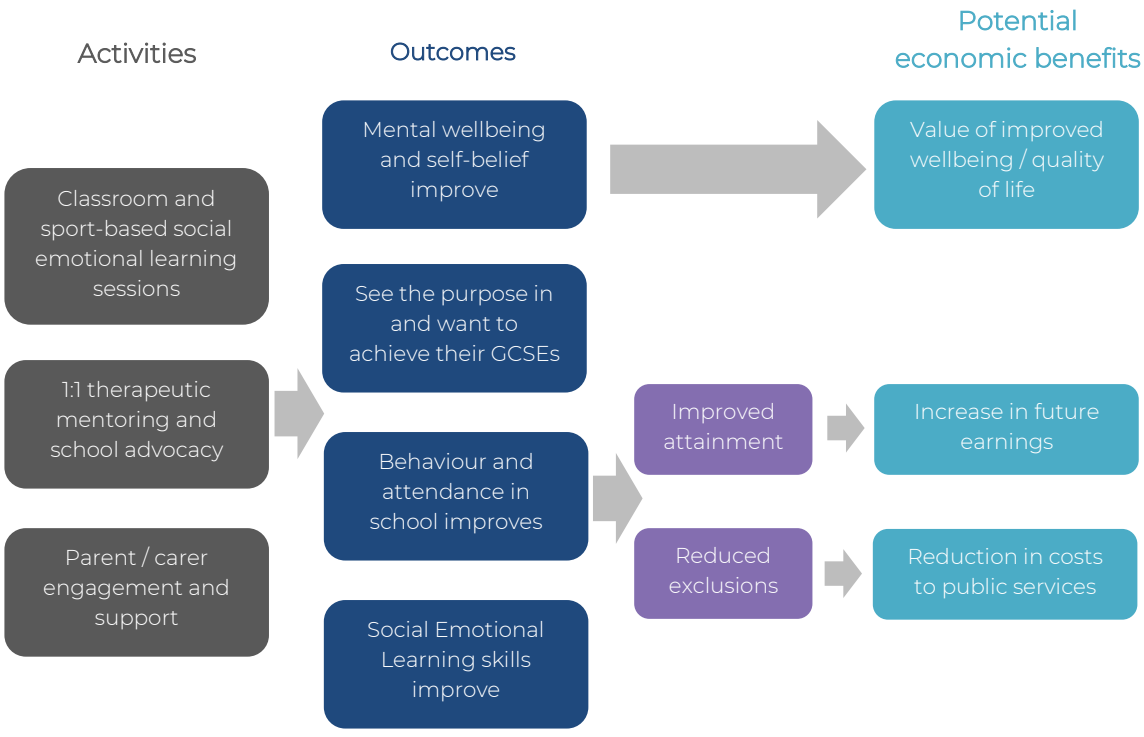
[10] Even those programmes that target young people with the highest risks of exclusion will need to work with 10 children for every exclusion that they hope to prevent, based on analysis by FFT identifying that the highest risk groups of children are likely to have around a 10% probability of being excluded, based on known data at the start of secondary school.
[11] HMT (2021): Green Book supplementary guidance; wellbeing
[12] Students in this area meet one or more criteria including: top 10% of behaviour points in Year 7, history of fixed-term or permanent exclusions, three or more adverse childhood experiences, Special Educational Needs or involvement in children's services.
[13] There are a small proportion of children involved in the programme (6%) that have not formally been placed in one of these groups.

unlikely to benefit from substantial positive improvements in wellbeing as they typically start from a stronger position.

Once involved in the programme the young people will take part in classroom and sport-based socio-emotional learning sessions that aim to tap into young people's passion to create new learning experiences and develop key social and emotional skills. Alongside this, practitioners will reach out to parents and carers to understand what is happening at home and inform them of their child's progress at FBB. During the school day young people will also receive one-to-one support from their FBB practitioner who is trained to provide therapeutic support to help them work through their experiences. This is accompanied by reward trips including visits, end-of-year residentials and work experience to help excite and inspire the young people involved.

Students involved in the programme highlight the value of having a non-judgemental adult to talk to. Case studies often highlight how this support helps them to manage their temper and channel their energies into more positive outcomes. They also highlight how the programme has given them belief that they can achieve personal goals both inside and outside school.[14]

Figure 2: Logic model for FBB's intervention



[14] FBB (2022): Impact Report 2021/22

Darcy, 15, Bolton

Darcy is a confident, honest and ambitious young person from Bolton. Pro Bono Economics spoke with her and her mum, Nicola, to find out what her experience was like at school and with FBB. Darcy was one of the young people who was initially identified to be at risk of exclusion by her school and referred to the FBB programme. She is now in Year 11 and projected to finish school with her English and Maths GCSEs.

"When FBB started, I knew that I had to do well through the week because to get the most time for football you had to do well and achieving something was important. On Thursdays when Nuh [a FBB practitioner] was in school, he'd come to my lessons and sometimes he'd take me out for a bit and we'd just talk about me as a person. It was just getting to know each other. I always enjoyed football, but I also enjoyed the lessons before we played. We had to make presentations and work on our confidence, learn about each other, we did lots on our ethnicities and identities and how we're different but also shared lots of things. My highlight moment was when we went… to the NIKE factory and made football kits and saw how they made the designs.

"Everyone who was in FBB was my friend - we were one big friendship group. Now I play on Saturdays and Sundays for the under 18's. They pushed me because I was capable and I can play at that standard.

"I've always been confident at school. Sport is my favourite subject, and I like maths. But if you don't like the teacher, then you can't do the lesson because you're sitting there thinking I'm not going to listen. Teachers shouldn't be so quick to judge. I could go in and have a bad day and be moody. After that, they would have a barrier up against me without knowing me. If you like the teacher, that motivates you. Most teachers know how to speak to you - they do notice when something's changed, and they ask if you're alright. But it depends on the teacher. If I am angry and it's a teacher I like I would speak to them, but if I was sad because of something not in school, I wouldn't tell them. [On bad days], I'd go to speak privately with a different teacher from RISE or FBB. Schools think that things like FBB and RISE you just go there to have fun, but you learn loads of new things, how to build and cook, and you get therapy lessons."*

*RISE is a provision offered by Darcy's school to focus on creating relationships which help to cultivate a sense of belonging, enjoy successful experiences and improve social and emotional wellbeing for students.

Darcy's mum, Nicola said:

"[About Nuh] He knows how to talk to the kids and is on their level. When you're on their level, they will respect you. He was fantastic with them. I'm glad she's got FBB and RISE, and I don't think she would have gotten through school without FBB and RISE. It's a fantastic association for school, and I think every school should have them.

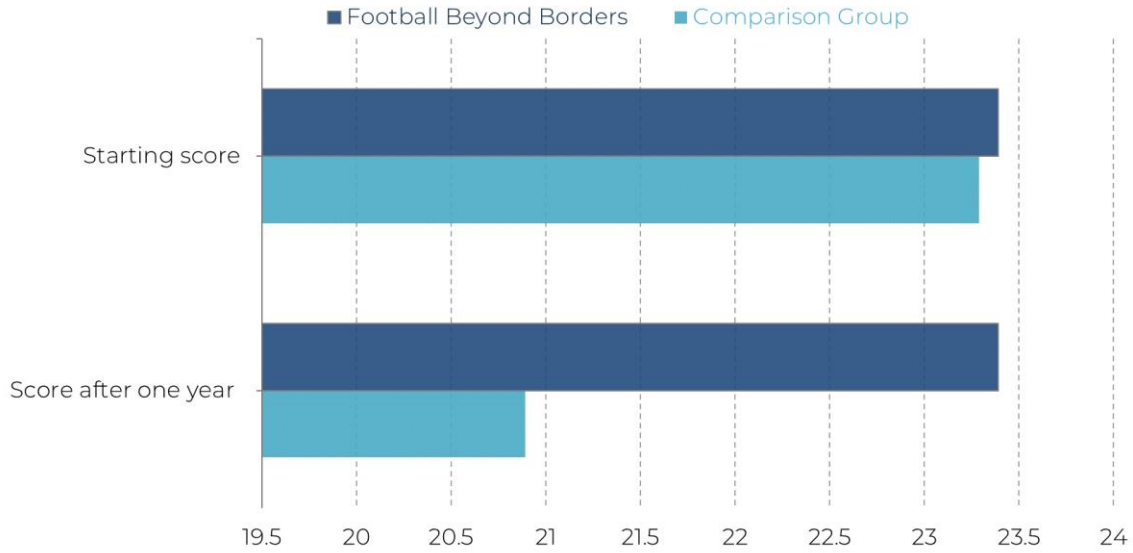
"She's gotta be able to go to school and focus even when she's got a lot going on outside of school. She's taken on board every bit of advice. I'm extremely proud, she doesn't understand how amazing she is."

The FBB programme has been shown to improve pupil wellbeing. A forthcoming report from the University of Manchester, in partnership with the #BeeWell programme, compares wellbeing outcomes for FBB participants in the Greater Manchester area with a group of similar students from the #BeeWell dataset.[15] The study shows that the target "at risk" group of participants maintain their levels of wellbeing while individuals in the comparison group experience a decline over time. The difference one year later is around 2.4 points on the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS).[16] While this is an observational study, rather than a causal estimate based on a randomised control trial, the use of a comparison group and the analytical procedures used provides us with a reasonably high level of confidence in the findings.

[15] Cheng Q & Humphrey N (2024): Preliminary Evaluation of a Targeted, School-Based Social and Emotional Learning Intervention for At Risk Youth: FBB, forthcoming.
[16] The study used difference-in-differences (DiD) estimation and propensity score matching (PSM). DiD is a framework for analysis that can be used to test the effects of an intervention when it is not possible to conduct a randomised trial. PSM is a statistical technique that can be used to ensure that an intervention and comparison group in an evaluation are well matched. Pupils were matched on starting levels of wellbeing and personal characteristics including: gender, eligibility for free school meals, Special Educational Needs status and age

Figure 3: FBB participants are protected against reductions in wellbeing experienced by others

Average SWEMWBS wellbeing score for at risk participants



Note: The axis on the chart has been truncated to make it easier to see the difference in outcomes.
Source: Supporting tables to Cheng and Humphries (2024)

This report uses the University of Manchester evaluation and the latest HMT guidance for valuing wellbeing to put a monetary value to the outcomes delivered by FBB. As Figure 2 shows, there are likely to be a range of economic benefits beyond the wellbeing improvements analysed in this report, including increased future earnings for participants and reduced costs of public services from supporting those that get excluded from school.

Unfortunately it is difficult for charities to demonstrate their impact on exclusions and academic outcomes where they are working with groups with relatively low levels of mental wellbeing. There are no nationally available datasets that allow a comparison group to be developed that can control for wellbeing whilst measuring impacts on academic or exclusion outcomes.[17] Without the same quality of evidence, it is not currently possible to incorporate these other potential economic benefits in this central analysis of this paper, although they are explored as part of the sensitivity analysis.

[17] Although this may be possible in the future if the #BeeWell dataset is further linked to academic outcomes in the National Pupil Database.

Approach

The economic benefits of the wellbeing improvements delivered by the FBB programme are estimated in three key steps:

Figure 4: Three key steps to estimating the economic value of wellbeing improvements delivered by the FBB programme

These steps are outlined in more detail below:

1. **Estimate impact of the programme on the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) life satisfaction measure of wellbeing:** HMT guidance provides a methodology for putting an economic value on improvements in wellbeing measured using the ONS life satisfaction measure of wellbeing.[18] The estimated impact of FBB's programme on the SWEMWBS measure of mental wellbeing is translated into life satisfaction impacts assuming that a one point improvement in SWEMWBS equates to a 0.24 point improvement in life satisfaction. This is based on an analysis of the typical relationship between the two measures of wellbeing seen in #BeeWell data, with more details provided in Annex A.

   The 2.4 point improvement in SWEMWBS for FBB's "at risk" student group from the University of Manchester evaluation translates to a 0.6 point improvement in ONS life satisfaction. This is a substantial increase – roughly the same as UK adults experience when they go from being unemployed to employed.

[18] The ONS life satisfaction measure of wellbeing is one of the four standardised personal wellbeing questions used by the ONS. Individuals are asked "Overall, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?" with responses provided on a 0-10 scale where 0 is "not satisfied at all" and 10 is "completely satisfied". For more detail please see the ONS website.

Given that the "at risk" group accounted for 26% of all participants in the FBB programme in 2022/23, this means that the average beneficiary of the FBB programme is estimated to experience a 0.15 point improvement in life satisfaction during that year.

2. Place an economic value on this improvement in wellbeing: HMT guidance places a central value on a one point improvement in life satisfaction that persists for one year of £13,000 in 2019 prices. This is uprated to a value of £15,253 in 2023 prices using the methodology outlined in the guidance.

   The wellbeing impact in life satisfaction points from Step 1 is multiplied by the value above to estimate that the average wellbeing improvement experienced by an FBB participant has an economic value of £2,309.[19] This is the equivalent of £8,771 per at risk student.

3. Compare the wellbeing benefits to the costs of the programme: FBB provided details of the costs of delivering their work. In 2022/23 they spent £3.1 million, of which £2.0 million was on direct delivery, £0.5 million was on external campaigning activity (not directly related to delivery of the programme) and £0.6 million was on central costs. To capture the full costs of programme delivery, core costs were allocated between programme delivery and external campaigning in proportion to the direct spend on each, meaning that 80% of core costs are allocated to the direct programme. This equates to a total cost for delivery in 2022/23 of £2.5m. When split across the 2,401 students supported in 2022/23, this equates to an average delivery cost of £1,038 per child.

   This report compares the wellbeing benefits of the FBB programme to the costs using a Benefit Cost Ratio which is calculated by dividing total benefits by total costs. This provides the benefits generated per £1 spent and is an indication of the value for money of a programme – a value of greater than one suggests that benefits are greater than the costs.

Key assumptions of the analysis

There are a number of important assumptions that underpin the analysis:

- The impacts on wellbeing found in the University of Manchester study are assumed to be representative of effects of the FBB programme for all students. The University of Manchester study was based on a sample of 153 students in the Greater Manchester area, the majority of whom were in Year 8 (aged 12 or 13). In addition, the

[19] £15,253 * 0.15 = £2,309

study was not designed specifically to measure a causal relationship, but used an "observational design". This means it cannot be established with certainty that the estimated impacts are representative of the true effects of the programme. However, the approach controlled for a number of important individual characteristics that might impact on wellbeing and compared outcomes against a well-matched comparison group of children with similar characteristics. As such it represents a relatively high quality of evidence that should be indicative of the likely impact of the programme across other geographic areas and school years.[20] The impact of this assumption is explored in Sensitivity Test 1.

- This report has not included any benefits for the "passive learner" or "role model" learners within the FBB programme. The University of Manchester study did not identify statistically significant reductions in wellbeing for these groups. However, it is possible that there are impacts that couldn't be detected due to the relatively small sample size available for the study. The impact of including benefits for these groups is explored in Sensitivity Test 2.
- Wellbeing effects are assumed to last one year. The University of Manchester estimates the difference in wellbeing one year after the initial baseline measure. This report assumes that these effects persist for one year but has not incorporated longer-term impacts. This is likely to be a conservative assumption as there is evidence that socio-emotional outcomes at age 15 are predictive of wellbeing outcomes in adulthood.[21] The impact of this assumption is explored in Sensitivity Test 3.
- The central monetary value for improvements in wellbeing from HMT guidance is used in the core estimates presented in this report. The impact of using the high or low monetary values for improvements in wellbeing is explored in Sensitivity Test 4.
- This study only incorporates the economic value of improved wellbeing and does not include other potential impacts. This is likely to mean that the estimates presented in this paper are conservative and underestimate the true, long-term economic value of the programme. The potential impact of these other benefits is explored in Sensitivity Tests 5 and 6.

[20] It would be classed as Level 3 out of 5 on the NESTA Standards of Evidence framework.
[21] Clark A, Fleche S, Layard R, Powdthavee N, Ward G (2018): The origins of happiness, Princeton & Oxford, p22

Results

The FBB programme is estimated to deliver significant benefits to society through improved wellbeing of the students involved. The average student involved in the programme in 2022/23 benefited from wellbeing improvements worth around £2,300. This is the equivalent of £8,800 per at risk student.

This means that the programme as a whole delivered more than £5.5 million of wellbeing benefits to society from the 2,401 students who participated in that year. Given that these benefits were delivered by 37 full-time equivalent practitioners across 51 schools, the typical trusted adult practitioner delivered almost £150,000 of benefits or £109,000 of benefits per school.

Figure 5: The FBB programme delivered £5.5 million of wellbeing benefits in 2022/23

This means that the FBB programme is likely to offer good value for money. The programme is estimated to have cost £2.5 million to deliver in 2022/23, or around £1,000 per child. This means that the programme delivers £2.20 of wellbeing benefits for every £1 spent.

However, this should be considered a conservative estimate that captures just a fraction of the total long-term economic benefits of the programme. While it focuses on the value of short-term improvements in wellbeing alone, a lack of quantitative evidence meant that it was not possible to include other potential longer-term benefits from other outcomes. These include improved academic attainment, better labour market outcomes, improved mental health outcomes or reduced risks of involvement in the criminal justice system. Sensitivity tests that include plausible impacts on academic outcomes highlight that the return could be closer to £4 of benefits per £1 spent. In addition, some estimates for the economic costs of permanent exclusion are so high that FBB would only need to prevent seven young people per year, out of a total cohort of 2,401 young people,

from being excluded for the benefits of the programme to outweigh its costs.[22]

Sensitivity analysis

The core conclusion of this study – that the FBB programme is likely to offer good value for money - remains robust to a range of alternative assumptions. A set of sensitivity analyses are used to explore the impact of key assumptions – these are outlined in detail in Annex B. For most scenarios the benefits per £1 spent fall in the range of £1.70 - £4.00, suggesting the short-term wellbeing benefits outweigh the costs of the programme.

However, the results are sensitive to assumptions about the impact of FBB on wellbeing. Using the low end of the range of results estimated by the University of Manchester suggests that the short-term wellbeing benefits could be lower than the costs. However, the upper end of the range suggests that it is equally possible that benefits could be far higher than the core scenario, with £4.20 of benefits for every £1 spent. Further analysis with a larger sample of data from FBB will increase the confidence in this assumption over time and reduce levels of uncertainty in the analysis. On balance, however, this report remains confident in its broad assessment that the FBB programme offers value for money.

[22] See Annex B.

Conclusion

The country needs new ideas and creative approaches if it is going to solve the current crisis in children's wellbeing. Ensuring that more children faced with adversity have a trusted adult they can talk to could make an important contribution towards this goal.

The FBB programme provides a great example. By building authentic, trusted relationships between adult practitioners and young people it has a protective effect on the wellbeing of the children at highest risk of low wellbeing. This impact on wellbeing is substantial – roughly the same as UK adults experience when they go from being unemployed to employed. HMT methodologies suggest that this wellbeing improvement has a substantial social value. The FBB programme looks to be good value for money, even without including wider potential benefits through improved academic attainment and reduced exclusions.

A better understanding of the wellbeing impacts of programmes providing trusted adults to work with children and young people could help ensure that policies and interventions to improve children's wellbeing are prioritised in the future. All too often, if impacts are not measured, they are overlooked. However, the new HMT guidance provides the framework to ensure that this is not the case.

It is also essential to invest in the collection of high-quality data about children's wellbeing which provides the foundation for this work. Data collection approaches, like the one pioneered by #BeeWell, provide the platform for building an evidence base of what works in tackling low wellbeing levels amongst the UK's children.

In addition, the investments made by social sector organisations such as FBB to measure and understand their impact are critical. Developing robust evidence of FBB's impact on academic and exclusion outcomes would further strengthen the economic case for support.

Ultimately, this work is about improving the lives of children to ensure they can flourish and reach their full potential. Supporting interventions such as FBB's to demonstrate how they do this can hopefully lead to greater investment in young people's lives.

Annex A – Methodology for translating SWEMWBS to life satisfaction

Qiqi Cheng and Professor Neil Humphrey from the University of Manchester team responsible for analysing the #BeeWell data estimated the relationship between SWEMWBS and life satisfaction measures of wellbeing. The #BeeWell data is uniquely positioned to estimate this relationship as it captured both measures at two points in time for a large sample of children.

In line with the approach widely used in health economic mapping studies, The University of Manchester used standardised methods to construct and identify appropriate predictive regression models linking SWEMWBS scores to ONS life satisfaction scores. The analysis included a range of techniques spanning fixed effect ordinary least squares (OLS), fixed effect Tobit, generalised linear models and robust OLS models.

These models are applied to two data sets for the matched comparison group used in the original evaluation of the FBB programme. It uses two forms of SWEMWBS data (aggregate or item level) in two scenarios, one with and one without covariates. Model selection was based on various evaluation metrics such as absolute error, mean squared error (MSE), mean absolute error (MAE) and coefficient of determination R^2, using a cross-validated framework. The equivalent life satisfaction increase that corresponds to a 2.4 unit SWEMWBS increase is estimated on the basis of this range of models.[23]

Tables A1 presents estimated ONS life satisfaction increases associated with SWEMWBS increasing from 21 to 23.4 in FBB. Highlighted (bold) values are those from the best fitting models, namely 0.58 (fixed effect OLS) to 0.64 (robust OLS). This report adopts the low end of this range in order to be conservative in its estimate.

[23] Further details are available at: https://osf.io/z5d6r/

Table A1: Estimated ONS life satisfaction increase as SWEMWBS increasing from 21 to 23.39 in FBB.

	Raw	Fixed Effect OLS		Fixed Effect Tobit		GLM ST3		Robust OLS		Mean
	overall	overall	items	overall	items	overall	items	overall	items	
Method 1	0.85	0.77	0.69	0.77	0.77	0.78	0.70	0.80	0.71	0.76
Method 2	0.59	**0.58**	**0.58**	0.68	0.68	0.61	0.60	**0.64**	**0.64**	0.62

Note: Predicted by selected models (2 and 4) after re-estimation from the 20% validation data.

Annex B – Sensitivity analysis

Sensitivity tests are used to explore the impact of key assumptions on the core conclusions of this report. The sensitivity tests explored are as follows:

- Uncertainty over the impact of FBB on the wellbeing of at risk pupils: sensitivity 1a and 1b explore the impact of varying the estimated impact of FBB on the wellbeing of at risk pupils. This is done using the 95% confidence interval from the original University of Manchester analysis. Giving a range of wellbeing impacts from 0.06 to 1.1 life satisfaction points.
- Incorporating some benefits for passive learners: the core analysis only includes benefits for the "at risk of exclusion" group of beneficiaries. The original University of Manchester evaluation identified a statistically-insignificant point estimate for the impact of FBB on the wellbeing of the passive learner group equivalent to around 0.1 life satisfaction points. Sensitivity 2 treats this result as if it was statistically significant and incorporated into the full economic analysis.
- Persistence of wellbeing impacts: in the core scenario it is assumed that the wellbeing improvements experienced by at risk participants are assumed to last for the current year of support and would fade out if support was ceased. Sensitivity 3 assumes that effects last for one year after the current support stops.[24]
- Alternative monetary values for wellbeing: HMT guidance provides a range of values for wellbeing around the central estimate, from £11,733 to £18,773 (in 2023 prices). Sensitivities 4a and 4b show the impact of using these alternative wellbeing valuations.
- Including potential impacts on improved GCSE results: while there is no formal evaluation available to measure the impact of FBB on academic attainment, comparisons made against national benchmarks suggest that in 2020/21 58% of FBB participants obtained a pass for GCSE English and Maths compared to 47% for young people who are eligible for free school meals – a difference of 11 percentage points.[25] Sensitivity 5 assumes that 11% of the FBB group pass an additional Maths or English GCSE and values the long-term earnings benefit of this using evidence from the Department for Education.[26] This works out as an average additional benefit of £1,419 per young person.

[24] This additional wellbeing benefit is discounted at a rate of 1.5%, in line with HMT guidance, leaving a wellbeing impact of 0.57 life satisfaction points rather than 0.58 for the second year of impact.
[25] FBB (2022), page 14
[26] Hodge L, Little A, Weldon M (2021): GCSE attainment and lifetime earnings, Department for Education, average of English and Maths contributions to lifetime incomes from page 35, uprated to 2023 prices is £12,902 impact of one additional grade.

- **Potential impact of reducing exclusions:** there is no estimate of the number of permanent exclusions prevented by FBB so Sensitivity 6 explores the number of exclusions that need to be prevented in order for the economic benefits to outweigh the costs of the programmes, based on The Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR)'s estimate that a single exclusion has an economic cost of £370,000.[27]

Table A2: Summary of results from key sensitivity tests

	Benefit per student	Total benefits	Benefits per £1 spent
Core scenario	£2,309	£5.5m	£2.20
Sensitivity 1a – apply lower confidence interval from University of Manchester study	£844	£0.5m	£0.20
Sensitivity 1b – apply upper confidence interval from University of Manchester study	£4,405	£10.6m	£4.20
Sensitivity 2 – include benefits for passive learners	£3,160	£7.6m	£3.00
Sensitivity 3 – assume wellbeing impacts last for an additional year	£4,583	£11m	£4.40
Sensitivity 4a – low HMT value for wellbeing	£1,776	£4.3m	£1.70
Sensitivity 4b – high HMT value for wellbeing	£2,842	£6.8m	£2.70
Sensitivity 5 – incorporating potential academic impacts	£3,728	£9.0m	£3.60
Sensitivity 6 – break-even number exclusions	FBB would need to prevent just seven exclusions for the benefits to offset the costs, based on IPPR's estimated cost of exclusion.		

[27] Gill K, Quilter-Pinner H, Swift D (2017): Making the difference, IPPR, p22

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