

REPORT

Centre for  
Mental Health



# The power of the ordinary

Evaluating BBC Children in Need's A Million & Me programme

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A Million  
& Me



BBC  
Children  
in Need

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## Acknowledgments

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Centre for Mental Health would like to give our sincere thanks to all the partners we worked with on this evaluation; children and families, project staff, evaluators, interviewees, the BBC Children in Need team and Advisory Group.

## Foreword from BBC Children in Need

*When, as a Trustee of BBC Children in Need, I was asked to chair its mental health project A Million & Me, I posed a pretty basic question: why is the project called that?*

*The answer was very instructive. Every child in the UK with a mental health challenge should know they are in good company – there are, it's estimated, a million others.*

*It's quite a responsibility to try to help as many of those million as we can. They live in all corners of the UK, they may be rich or poor, boys or girls, they may crave conversation or silence. But all of them need support, so that a mental health challenge does not turn into a crisis.*

*I'm immensely proud to present this report on behalf of A Million and Me. We could not have done any of this work without the generosity of the donors to Children in Need, and I thank them all.*

*I'd also like to thank the many professionals who have given their time and expertise to this effort. I have learned an immense amount from them. Centre for Mental Health has been a valued learning partner, and here identifies important opportunities to create a positive environment for children to thrive, at a time when it is most needed.*

*In 2017, BBC Children in Need Trustees made a bold commitment of £10 million to support children's mental health. With the help of independent expert Miranda Wolpert, A Million & Me was designed to fund work that would lead to a progressive change in how children aged 8-13 are supported when they begin to struggle with their mental health and wellbeing.*

*The Covid-19 pandemic could not have been predicted, nor the current crisis in rising child poverty. However the impact of these on children who are already struggling renders the findings of this programme all the more important.*

*Funding work with children across the UK who are facing a range of disadvantages, BBC Children in Need has long recognised and valued community based activities and the*

*trusted relationships they deliver, as a way to support children through difficult times.*

*This report details the work of a diverse portfolio of funded partners, where there is common purpose in seeking better and simpler ways of supporting children to enjoy good mental health.*

*A circle of trust provided around children – the "ordinary magic" of everyday relationships – is enhanced by expert, accessible information, and building confidence among trusted adults and children themselves to identify and address their concerns.*

*The recent, rapid development of digital initiatives can offer access to expert information. We will continue to use our unique connection to the BBC as a platform to share curated resources reaching children, schools and families across the UK.*

*In addition to a powerful children's panel, an Advisory Group of sector experts was established to guide our approach. Since 2018 this group has committed their time and expertise for which we are very grateful. While A Million & Me as a programme is complete, the ongoing work will be integrated into the main portfolio of BBC Children in Need and the learning will be amplified through future funding and partnerships.*

*Please read the report, share the findings and reflect on the challenges and opportunities identified.*

*My thanks to all involved, and especially to my colleague Paddy Sloan who has led the project through these challenging times with enormous skill, determination and focus. The results could not have been achieved without her, and those who have been helped are – unbeknown to them – in her debt.*

*And this report is about them – the million whom we've tried to support.*

**Jonathan Munro**

**Chair, A Million & Me Advisory Group**

## Executive summary

In 2019, A Million & Me set out to construct and scale up a system or ‘scaffolding’ around children, developing people and resources that would promote their mental wellbeing. The programme set out to explore how ordinary, trusted relationships can help children who are beginning to struggle with their mental wellbeing. The programme took place against a backdrop of rising mental distress in children, and widespread concerns about the impact of high levels of inequality, trauma and stress affecting millions of children.

The programme was developed by BBC Children in Need in recognition that many children who go on to have mental health problems in later life have started to show signs of illness before the age of 14 (Kessler *et al.*, 2005), and that some of these problems could have been prevented. We know that most children with mental health problems do not get treatment at all, and for those that do get help, it often follows a long delay (Khan, 2016).

From its inception, A Million & Me has focused on two important concepts – wellbeing and resilience in children – learning how systems (or ‘scaffolding’) around children can be developed which maximise these factors, and prevent problems.

*“Resilience does not come from rare and special qualities, but from the everyday magic of ordinary, normative human resources in the minds, brains, and bodies of children, in their families and relationships, and in their communities.”* (Masten, 2001, p 235)

Therefore, unless we consider the concept of resilience, we are not considering how a child can respond to adversity – some children will need more or different scaffolding in order to maintain mental wellbeing.

A Million & Me has represented a fresh approach to grant giving; the various programme elements were proactively identified to fit into an ‘ecosystem’ of projects, where the individual projects worked together to enhance and amplify each other’s work.

Across the programme there has been a strong focus on learning and development, as well as a requirement for each project to have plans in place to scale up and sustain their work. As evaluation partner, Centre for Mental Health has been facilitating this learning approach, and this report represents our findings and reflections as A Million & Me draws to a close.

### The impact of A Million & Me

A Million & Me has achieved what it intended to do. Tens of thousands of children have seen an improvement in their mental wellbeing, important new digital assets have been created, and there is now a clearer understanding of how children aged 8-13 can be supported to enjoy better mental wellbeing.

Improvements in wellbeing tended to involve children feeling calmer, happier, more positive and more relaxed. Children improved their resilience by being more willing and able to reach out for effective help.

We found that the following approaches are particularly important:

- Fun and happiness – ensuring that children have access to play and positivity
- Easy and flexible access – support being safe and easy to find and use in a range of different ways and at different times, for example through digital models
- Creative self-expression – helping children recognise and express their emotions by providing them with tools and language
- Valuing relationships where children can share and learn about their mental wellbeing.

A Million & Me projects, taken together, present a ‘scaffolding’ model. This means that as well as tools and resources for children themselves, there have been resources aimed at parents/carers, adults working with children, wider communities and people who plan and commission services.

The role and importance of parents/carers and other trusted adults was particularly prominent. We found that parents/carers and other trusted adults were already interested in children's mental wellbeing and motivated to help, but lacked confidence and tools. It was important to validate the role of these adults as mental wellbeing resources, encouraging them to see themselves as part of the 'mental health system' and be empowered to act. A Million & Me promoted and demonstrated the importance of adults listening to children and offering them voice and agency.

A particular feature of A Million & Me was the prominence of digital tools and resources. Around half of the projects resulted in the development of some kind of digital resource, ranging from an online digital exhibition of girls' art to online videos for parents, bibliotherapy resources, podcasts and apps. Children valued these digital resources as tools with which to independently improve their mental wellbeing.

## Responding to mental health inequality

A Million & Me has been open to all children but has worked proactively and throughout to understand and address inequality. Many projects were particularly aimed at children facing multiple disadvantages, for example as a result of poverty, isolation, or gender or racial inequality. In relation to gender, we noted different patterns of accessing help, with girls and non-binary/trans children more likely to access the digital projects of A Million & Me than boys.

While the programme lacked explicit data about the experiences of children from racialised communities, two projects were aimed at children marginalised by racism, and they have helped the whole programme to be more responsive.

During the evaluation we noticed that children who self-reported as being disabled were accessing the digital projects in particular, and the whole programme responded by drawing in expert advice about how digital projects could respond appropriately, in particular to neurodiverse children.

A Million & Me had begun to consider the impact of isolation, in particular rural and coastal isolation, on children and on the systems of support around them (see Allwood, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic sharpened this focus and aligned the whole programme towards online and digital responses. Projects considered how to reach out to isolated children without compromising the quality of their experience.

## The programme approach

A high level of thought and planning went into ensuring that the programme operated as a system and maximum benefit could be gained from learning.

This effective programme approach featured:

- Adequate development and learning time for projects to consider and develop their models
- A proactive focus on enhancing the voice and influence of children, parents and carers in every element
- High levels of support for projects from BBC Children in Need and the evaluation team, particularly through facilitating cross-programme learning and sharing of ideas.

The Covid-19 pandemic hit the programme in its second year, and has had significant impacts, both negative and positive. While projects experienced delays and disruptions, for example in recruitment of staff or participation by children, there was an increased drive to the digital aspects, and this accelerated roll-out of some important new digital resources.

## Our recommendations

A Million & Me has successfully improved the wellbeing and resilience of children aged 8 to 13. This has been done by enhancing the 'scaffolding' that surrounds them, which then has the power to support mental wellbeing and so prevent mental ill health.

At the same time, a continuous and dynamic approach to development and learning in the programme has resulted in a better understanding of how this system can be optimised.

Based on this learning, we recommend:

### **For service providers:**

1. Children and their families must be afforded voice and influence in the design and implementation of projects to support their mental wellbeing
2. Digital provision should be developed as a tool to reduce health inequalities by reaching children that other approaches do not reach.

### **For funders and commissioners**

3. Charitable funders and statutory service commissioners should work towards systemic, multi-faceted programmes that seek to prevent mental health problems in children aged 8 to 13
4. Charitable funders and statutory service commissioners should take a longer-term and iterative approach to programmes promoting children's mental wellbeing, ensuring projects have time to learn, develop and change
5. Charitable funders and statutory service commissioners should offer a diversity of types of mental wellbeing support in order to help address emerging mental health inequalities
6. Funders need to make sustained investment, particularly in rural areas where projects can take longer to establish alongside more limited local infrastructure
7. Programmes aiming to prevent mental health problems should build the capacity of the people and projects who already have trusting relationships with children, crucially via better alignment between the voluntary sector and statutory sector provision.

### **For policy makers**

8. The Governments in each of the four nations of the UK should take systematic steps to improve the mental wellbeing of younger children. This should include strategic action to address mental health inequalities and investment in early intervention
9. It is important to validate the role of the wider children's workforce in supporting children's mental wellbeing and provide tools and resources for these trusted adults.

### **For communicators and influencers**

10. The BBC and other media organisations should promote and use the resources produced through A Million & Me to widen their availability and uptake in the longer term
11. Media and campaigners focused on children's mental health should communicate and promote the importance of early preventative work, based on a system of informed, trusted relationships and support for children aged 8 to 13.

# 1. Introduction

## In this chapter:

- A Million & Me worked with 8-13 year olds because it is during these years that many mental wellbeing concerns first emerge
- The programme aimed to improve children’s wellbeing and help them develop resources to cope with stress or other threats to their mental health
- A Million & Me has sought to create a blueprint for a system around children, where they are able to easily access help through the resources and relationships around them
- A Million & Me projects were very diverse – small and local to large and national, face-to-face and digital, universal and targeted
- However, the projects were encouraged to work systemically and in partnership, learning together and with each playing a specific role in a wider ‘ecosystem’ of support to children and families.

In 2017, BBC Children in Need set out to enhance their understanding of what more they could do to prevent escalation of mental ill health in children. This took place in response to a large proportion of projects within their portfolio that supported children’s mental wellbeing and their increasing awareness of a lack of capacity to meet the needs of children with mental health problems across the UK.

The resulting project, A Million & Me, spoke to the core message that BBC Children in Need wanted to project to children – that they are not alone. In this chapter we will share some of the context and history of A Million & Me and how the programme developed.

## Why focus on children’s mental health, prevention and early intervention?

Half of adults who have a mental health difficulty had experienced symptoms by the age of 14 (Kessler *et al.*, 2005). Many children struggle with their transitions to secondary school or are affected by exposure to risk factors such as poverty, disability, discrimination or trauma during their childhoods. Many of these problems are preventable.

In addition, many children’s mental health difficulties go unnoticed. One in four children

with a mental health problem had contact with a mental health specialist in the previous year (NHS Digital, 2017). Even so, in 2020/21, £881 million was spent on children’s mental health services, an increase from £791 million the previous year (Children’s Commissioner, 2022). For those who do get clinical help, evidence (Khan, 2016) suggests that there is a ten-year average delay from the time that children and young people experience first symptoms to the point that they receive help. This is despite most parents seeking help for their children.

A Million & Me is particularly focused on mental wellbeing and resilience in children. The programme has recognised:

- Wellbeing is “more than just the absence of mental illness. It is a positive state of mind and body, underpinned by social and psychological wellbeing” (Department of Health, n.d.). For A Million & Me, this was about children having positive feelings of calmness, happiness and relaxation
- Resilience is about children having good outcomes “in spite of serious threats to adaptation of development” (Masten, 2001). In A Million & Me we saw resilience as emerging from children’s interactions with others – at home, at school and in their community.

## About A Million & Me

In 2018, BBC Children in Need commissioned Professor Miranda Wolpert to provide rapid mental health expert advice in relation to the £10 million funding programme they were considering. In her report, she reviewed the evidence base and conducted an analysis of the national policy and delivery picture at the time, seeking to identify opportunities for the programme to add value, or fill gaps in delivery and understanding. Based on this, she recommended that the programme should:

- Focus on 8-13 year olds
- Focus on emerging mental health difficulties
- Focus on disadvantaged groups by considering their needs throughout, rather than limiting access to only these groups
- Focus on the importance of relationships – “strategies that do not rely heavily on mental health professional input but rather focus on developing individual and community resilience, including, but not limited to, positive relationships.” (Wolpert, 2019).

In her report, Wolpert drew attention to the work of Anna Masten, an American psychologist and academic known for her research on the development of resilience in children, especially those facing adversity. Masten’s ideas and language have since resonated for us as we reflect back on A Million & Me. She provides an optimistic perspective on children’s natural resilience and describes how this resilience can be enabled in children, families and communities:

*“Resilience does not come from rare and special qualities, but from the everyday magic of ordinary, normative human resources in the minds, brains, and bodies of children, in their families and relationships, and in their communities.”* (Masten, 2001, p 235)

For Masten, the logical conclusion of her findings was that efforts to promote resilience should “focus on strategies that protect or restore the efficacy of these basic systems” and that “programs will be most effective when they tap into these basic but powerful systems” (Masten, 2001, p 235).

Wolpert recommended three options; one to empower parents, one to enable children to review and test promising digital content, and one to develop local consortia that share best practice in prevention of mental ill health in children.

At the time of its inception, A Million & Me was one of only a few multi-faceted programmes focused on this age group.

It therefore set out to construct a system around all children, exploring how ordinary, trusted relationships can help children who are beginning to struggle with their mental wellbeing. In the emerging theory of change for the programme (an illustration of how and why a desired change is expected to happen) developed by Centre for Mental Health with the programme’s partners in the first year, the potential beneficiaries included children across the spectrum of mental health, their parents/carers, trusted adults in their lives, communities and the wider mental health system. The programme theory of change is shown in appendix 2. It maps out how each element was being enabled to play their role in the wider system that helped the “ordinary magic” to happen. In chapter 2 we explore the extent to which this ambition was achieved, and what worked best.

The projects that subsequently became part of A Million & Me were delivered by voluntary and community sector organisations that were concerned about the barriers to mental wellbeing for children. They saw that the children they worked with were facing rising stress and inequality and were lacking the resources to help themselves.

*“being curious and being motivated to just check in on a regular basis with the children that we come across... that will be really powerful if we could change that and create a whole kind of community around children”*

A Million & Me project lead



At the same time there are barriers to getting help such as stigma and a lack of resource in the mental health system. Services could be confusing and difficult to navigate. They understood that many of the adults that children did have regular support from felt ill-equipped to support their mental wellbeing.

An important principle of A Million & Me was to create an environment where the partnership elements worked together to enhance and amplify the work of each component. The partnership included children themselves, and A Million & Me was determined to embed and amplify the voice and influence of children throughout all aspects of the programme and beyond.

The programme ran from 2019 to 2022. It was supported by an Advisory Group (see appendix 5) comprising experts in children's mental health, with a commitment to supporting early action. The Advisory Group met quarterly to offer guidance on good practice, policy development and delivering scalable, systemic change.

An unusual element, compared to many other philanthropic funding programmes, was A Million & Me's range of project types. Intentionally, BBC Children in Need described an ecosystem around children. They recruited projects to fit into niches in the programme which would both ensure that the beneficiary groups were served and, crucially, that the whole programme could learn and develop symbiotically. The elements were:

**Children's Advisory Group:** The Centre for Children's Rights at Queen's University Belfast were appointed to develop a model of children's participation for A Million & Me which could be applied in other BBC Children in Need projects, to ensure that children's views would be at the core of initiatives developed for them. This did not replace children's participation in other programme elements, but rather drew together best practice, which the programme could learn from as a whole. The Children's Advisory Group consisted of 10 children aged 9-13 years old, recruited from various projects throughout Scotland.

**National projects:** UK-wide grants were envisioned to deliver support nationally, aiming to provide learning for the programme as a whole. The national projects were the Shout text line and the Trust Me capacity building programme by the Anna Freud Centre. A programme to deliver capacity to people working with children in spatially isolated rural, coastal and island communities is in development.

**Innovation projects:** Grants were allocated to develop innovative solutions to children and young people's emotional wellbeing and mental health. The projects were Ollee by Parent Zone and Parents Network by YoungMinds.

**Nations and regions projects:** Seven projects were planned at regional level to support children in ways that address their early mental health concerns and provide trusted relationships with friends and family. These were projects where good practice can contribute to changes in policy at both a local and regional level, and where children are actively engaged in setting priorities. The projects were:

- Central England: Positive Youth Foundation
- London and south east England: Black Thrive
- Northern England: Proud Connections by The Proud Trust and #BeeWell
- Northern Ireland: Well Read by Verbal
- Scotland: project did not progress
- South west England: Prescription Surf! by The Wave Project
- Wales: Voices from Care Cymru.

**Media and social marketing:** A Million & Me intended to improve public awareness of the mental health needs of 8-13 year olds, and their ability to recognise and support them, by using media content and social marketing. Your Mind Matters was a campaign launched by Immediate Media to help children look after their mental health. Boots, in their position as the corporate partner for A Million & Me, trained some 70% of their sales workforce in ways of wellbeing to support customers. SuperMoodMovers was

jointly created with BBC Education to encourage movement and fun among younger children.

**Covid responses:** As the first wave of Covid-19 hit the UK, A Million & Me responded by allocating funds to projects that were well placed to react quickly to emerging concerns about the mental wellbeing of children. These projects were Stormbreak and One Space.

Centre for Mental Health was appointed as the evaluation partner to A Million & Me in 2019 and worked alongside the programme until September 2022. The evaluation partner role was to track the development of the diverse programme elements, measure progress towards objectives, shape the monitoring requirements of individually funded projects, and share insights between delivery partners, project evaluators, sponsors and advisory groups. We also tracked and reviewed the process of design and delivery.

In the second year of the evaluation, we explored the mechanisms by which A Million & Me was functioning as a programme, and what could be learned from the approach. We observed the following features of the programme's approach:

- An iterative way of developing projects, with funded partners being offered time, flexibility and support to develop the best project, both for their own organisation and for the wider programme
- A developmental approach to devising the programme as a whole, with Centre for Mental Health as the evaluation and learning partner increasingly being used to identify areas of success and challenge, and to share this with the programme
- Projects being encouraged to have development, testing and learning phases. This openness to experimentation and learning continued after the project delivery started

- A focus on shared learning, with the Centre as evaluation and learning partner increasingly engaged to facilitate cross-programme learning, and a willingness to draw in expertise from the Advisory Group and others to enhance learning
- A consideration of projects' long-term futures from the start, driven by high demands of sustainability and scalability. There were a high number of digital innovations, and most projects developed assets or resources of some kind. This means that the programme is hopeful of a legacy and impact beyond its lifespan.

Centre for Mental Health's learning role has, like many elements of A Million & Me, evolved. Over time there has been an increased focus on feeding learning back into the programme, and proactively working to facilitate cross-project learning. We supported the development of a theory of change for the programme (see appendix 2), agreed and designed standard outcome measures, and increasingly created learning events for the partnership as a whole.

## A Million & Me's projects

In chapter 4 we discuss how projects were identified and brought into the programme. The initial plan in 2019 was for A Million & Me to bring most projects on board in the first year. In reality, a more iterative process emerged. The theory of change became a vehicle for a curation of projects, as gaps or new learning were identified. Projects were proactively sought out and supported to develop a proposal, using learning that had been gathered so far.

**This map** and the table in appendix 1 offer a thumbnail sketch of A Million & Me's projects. Some continue to operate and are in fact in their early phases.

## 2. The power of relationships and conversation

### In this chapter:

- A Million & Me successfully achieved good wellbeing and resilience outcomes for children
- Important to this success was:
  - Enabling children to have fun and be happy in the projects
  - Offering easy and flexible access so that children had agency and control over when they accessed help
  - Helping children learn to recognise and express feelings creatively
  - Focusing attention to validating and resourcing the relationships children had
- A Million & Me has described how ‘scaffolding’ can be constructed around children to support their mental wellbeing
- Parents and other trusted adults are crucial ingredients in this system
- Digital resources successfully supported both children and the adults around them.

In this chapter, we discuss the extent to which A Million & Me achieved its outcomes, and what evaluations told us about what was working, and why.

Each project occupied a different niche in a diverse programme, and therefore delivered in very different ways. As a result, comparable evaluation of impact and outcomes was an ongoing challenge.

We met this challenge by forming cooperative relationships with each project. Individual projects were tasked with developing their own evaluation plans, and as programme evaluators we focused our efforts on improving the robustness of every individual evaluation, while taking a rigorous approach to gathering and using learning. This chapter presents evaluation findings from individual project evaluations, plus thematic findings from our review of these and our interviews and focus groups.

The theory of change (see appendix 2) became a source of common language. We aimed to draw out some common denominators, and as a result asked every project to capture data about children’s wellbeing and resilience, wherever possible. To facilitate this, Centre for Mental Health reviewed potential routine

outcome measures, and coproduced with the projects and children two sets of standard outcome questions – one for children and one for parents/carers. While the resulting data submitted by projects was not used for comparing the efficacy of the projects (because of the aforementioned diversity of delivery and evaluation methods), it held all the project evaluations to a shared core purpose.

### Outcomes for children

Despite the variety of evaluation approaches, and despite some evidence being stronger than others, we conclude that A Million & Me successfully achieved good wellbeing and resilience outcomes for children. (See appendix 4 for the individual evaluation results of each project.)

### Wellbeing

Wellbeing as a mental health outcome tends to lack definition. The Department of Health defines mental wellbeing as “more than just the absence of mental illness. It is a positive state of mind and body, underpinned by social and psychological wellbeing” (Department of Health, n.d.).

In the first year we agreed that the programme evaluations would track the following elements of mental wellbeing:

- Feeling calm
- Feeling in a better mood
- Feeling happier
- Feeling more relaxed.

We received raw data about improvements in wellbeing for over 10,000 children across the projects, either as feedback after single contacts with projects, or demonstrated by “distance travelled” – the difference in wellbeing between two data capture points.

All projects showed an improvement in wellbeing for a significant number of the children they were in contact with. Overall, the strongest results were for changes in feelings of calmness, mood and positivity for both the single contact and the multiple contact projects. For example:

- After having text conversations with the Shout text line, 71% of children said that the chat had made them feel more calm
- Comparing responses from before and after accessing surf therapy in the Prescription Surf! pilot, the average score out of 5 for the question “I have been feeling relaxed” went from 2.8 to 3.3
- After accessing Proud Connections, 81% of young people said they felt more positive and 94% felt more hopeful.

*“I am happier at school, happier at home”*

Child accessing A Million & Me project

## Resilience

Resilience refers to “a class of phenomena characterized by good outcomes in spite of serious threats to adaptation or development” (Masten 2001). In other words, resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma or stress. Resilience is not a special quality located within a child or young person.

It is something that emerges through a child or young person’s interaction with others – at home, at school and in their communities. In other words, relationships are key to resilient outcomes. In the first year, we agreed that the programme evaluations would track the following elements of mental resilience:

- Being able to work out problems
- Knowing where to go for help
- Working out problems by talking about them.

A Million & Me projects achieved improved resilience in children. For example:

- Positive Youth Foundation showed that between their first and last session, the average score for children’s responses to the question “I know where to go for help when I have problems” rose from 3.0 to 4.4
- 68% of children said Stormbreak helped when they felt worried, and 69% said Stormbreak helped when they felt frustrated. 73% of children who accessed Stormbreak said the sessions helped them feel included. Stormbreak showed that children were finding it easier to name and manage emotions such as “worried” or “frustrated”
- Parent Zone observed that children used the resilience they developed when accessing Ollee (a digital friend, helping children explore feelings around school, family, friends and the world), and adapted their behaviour in response to their feelings.

We noticed a tendency for children to experience more improvements in confidence to seek help from others, than in being able to help themselves. For example, after having text conversations with the Shout text line, 45% of children agreed that “I can work out my problems better” while 76% agreed that “I know where to get help for my problems”.

## How children’s outcomes were achieved

We reviewed all of the available project evaluations (11 of 15 projects had completed evaluations at the time of writing) to explore what had been shown to be effective in improving the mental wellbeing and resilience of children.

## Fun and happiness

The Children’s Advisory Group introduced us to the importance of fun and happiness. They shared two important principles with the programme; “All children should enjoy what they are doing” and “Children should have fun and play games”. While this seems an obvious precursor to mental wellbeing, projects started to see that access to fun, happy times was an important engagement tool for children.

- Parent Zone noticed that when children first engaged with Ollee, they tended to report more positive emotions. They often opened the relationship by playing with Ollee, or first accessed it when in a good mood, and would then access later when they wanted to explore more difficult feelings
- Stormbreak hold an important ambition that children will choose Stormbreaks because they are fun and enjoyable
- Positive Youth Foundation developed relationships with and between children through the medium of positive activities such as arts, crafts and games.

*“The element of ‘fun’ was the one cited by most parents. This relates directly to the core philosophy of Stormbreak, which aims to develop a love for movement, to make movement and physical activity enjoyable, pleasurable and interesting for children.”*

A Million & Me project lead

## Easy and flexible access

In evaluations, projects learned that children appreciated simple projects that they could engage with easily and in their own time, with high levels of control and agency.

- Proud Connections used data about the peak times of access for their webchat services to adjust and extend their opening times
- One Space worked to create a single space where children and young people could move rapidly to clearly described support.

For some projects, creating simple, accessible pathways had been more challenging, especially if reliant on another partner such as GPs or voluntary sector colleagues. Projects found that directly marketing to children was the most effective, though trusted adults played an important role in facilitating children’s awareness of the services.

## Learning to recognise and express feelings creatively

While creative methods varied, many of the projects were trying to help children, through self-expression, to reflect on emotions. Children were being given space and tools to recognise their feelings, give them names and learn to observe them.

- Positive Youth Foundation, working with recently arrived refugees and asylum seekers, used online street views of children’s countries of origin to help them open up conversations about feelings and memories
- WellRead uses short stories accompanied by curated questions to help spark conversations and expand children’s communication tools about mental wellbeing.

## Relationships are the crucial ingredient

While A Million & Me had anticipated that the people surrounding children would be important for their mental health, we had not quite understood the extent to which relationships would be the crucial ingredient until the project evaluations started to show results. Children drew mental wellbeing and resilience from their relationships with themselves, each other, with parents/carers and trusted adults.

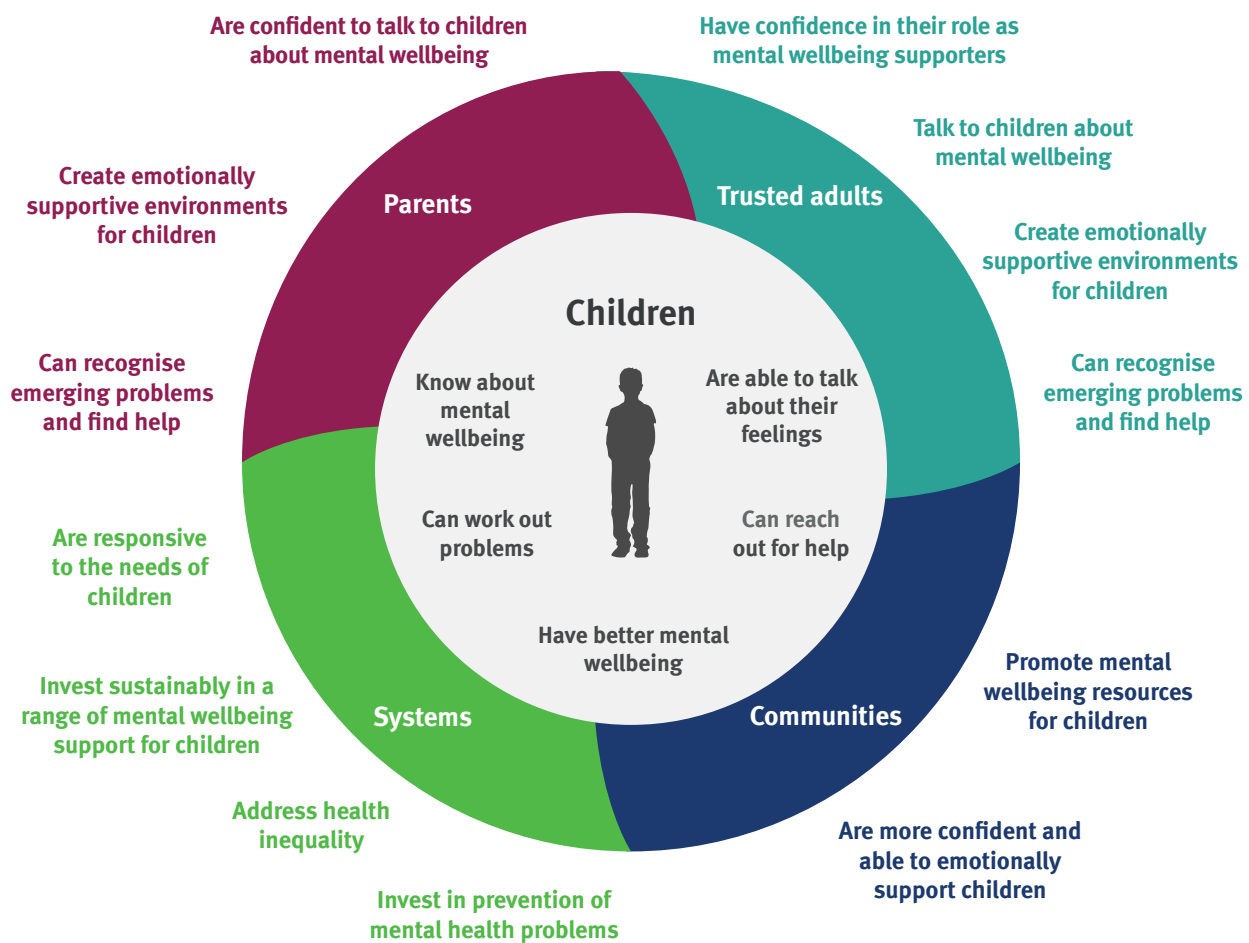
- Parent Zone observed that children were using Ollee to share advice and approaches with each other
- Stormbreak saw how their videos reduced inhibitions and made it easier for children to talk to their parents about their feelings
- WOWsers helped children form relationships with their wider community, forming connections and helping children feel “part of something”.

## Scaffolding around children

As well as working directly with children, the concept of ‘scaffolding’ around children – providing resources and capacity for the people and systems surrounding them – was central to the programme from the start. Our findings about the importance of relationships to children confirmed the central role of this idea. Articulating the outcomes that were envisaged for the people around children helped us to understand how the scaffolding would work (see figure 1 below).

We also started to recognise in year one how some parts of the scaffolding were gaining traction and focus, while others were not. This meant that in subsequent years, BBC Children in Need could review the programme as a whole and respond to gaps. For example, the year one review showed that there had been little focus on “trusted adults” – staff and volunteers in children’s worlds who might not consider themselves part of a mental health response. These were a target group from Wolpert’s foundational paper as having an important role to play in children’s mental wellbeing. This prompted the commissioning of the Trust Me project.

**Figure 1: How scaffolding around children can build their mental wellbeing**



## Parent/carer outcomes

Drawing on the work of Professor Miranda Wolpert, A Million & Me knew that parents/carers play a crucial role in children's mental wellbeing, especially between the ages of 8 and 13. The programme set out to build the capacity of parents/carers to fulfil this role better. The intended outcomes identified in the first year were:

- Parents/carers feeling more able to do things to support their children's wellbeing
- Parents/carers working out what to do if their child had a problem
- Parents/carers being able to find help and support for their children when they needed to
- Parents/carers feeling part of a community.

Projects that had direct contact with parents showed us that these outcomes were achieved, as well as demonstrating improved family relationships and improved parental mental health. For example, all parents accessing peer support in the YoungMinds Parents Network reported that they were more able to do things that supported their children's emotional wellbeing, and could now work out what to do if their child had a problem.

*“My child was able to explain sometimes the way she was feeling after reading these stories”*

Parent accessing A Million & Me project

Boots commissioned market research that found out about parents'/carers' level of motivation to look after children's mental wellbeing, and this was high before and after people saw the Boots campaign, meaning that there was little improvement from an already high baseline. However, the campaign was successful in increasing people's confidence to talk about mental wellbeing with children, and providing information on how to support them, from a lower baseline before the campaign to a higher level after parents/carers saw the campaign.

## How parent/carer outcomes were achieved

Evaluations explored how these outcomes had been achieved. Even those projects that had set out to offer parents/carers information and guidance tended to shift focus on to validation of the parental role. Parents were less in need of new information; rather, they needed encouragement to recognise the important role they already played in their children's mental wellbeing and the confidence to open up conversations.

- Stormbreak found that children had better outcomes when their parents joined in with the activities
- The YoungMinds Parents Network, amongst several other projects, found that parents valued time with each other, gaining a sense of community and providing mutual support
- WellRead found that it was important to integrate education and support into their bibliotherapy resource, to build parents'/carers' confidence
- Parent Zone found that parents were using Ollee as a way of starting conversations about emotions with their children, by being equipped with language and ideas
- Parents were being taught by Stormbreak to validate their children's feelings, rather than being too solutions-focused.

Resources such as WellRead and Stormbreak were providing a reason for families to come together, especially through the difficult period of the pandemic.

In terms of accessing information about where to get help, YoungMinds found that parents preferred to get human assistance when navigating help and were best engaged via existing personal connections such as networks in their own communities.

*“even though the advice might reinforce what [adults] already knew, it's not necessarily that the advice is groundbreaking, but it's validating their parenting approach... it's giving them that confidence.”*

A Million & Me project lead

## The role of trusted adults

A Million & Me set out to include trusted adults as important components of the ‘scaffolding’ that could enable children’s mental wellbeing. In year one, Centre for Mental Health worked with project partners to identify what mechanisms might enable trusted adults to step into this role. Our enquiries suggested that, much as with the approach with parents/carers, it would be important to validate the importance in children’s lives of people such as youth and play workers or sports coaches, and to offer them help to feel more confident and equipped.

Proud Connections found that, after accessing their online support, 75% of trusted adults felt more confident having conversations with children about LGBTQ+ identities, and 75% felt more aware of the positive impact they could have when supporting LGBTQ+ children. Overall, 94% of trusted adults felt more able to support the LGBTQ+ children they interacted with.

Across all the projects, the main resources trusted adults received were words, tools and activities they could use with children to enhance their relationships and enable conversations about mental wellbeing.

The Anna Freud National Centre for Children and Families delivered the Trust Me Project, which aimed to build the skills and knowledge of trusted adults working with 8-13 year olds through an interactive training programme. Over 950 individuals from 247 organisations participated in the training which was designed for those with little to no knowledge or experience around children’s mental health. The majority of those who responded to a feedback survey (91%) agreed that the training helped to build their knowledge; 88% agreed that it enabled them to feel more confident about talking to children and young people about difficult conversations.

*“The training helped me move from feeling overwhelmed by isolation towards a feeling of trust all around.”*

Training participant, A Million & Me project

## Digital assets and other tools

A particular feature of A Million & Me was the prominence of digital tools and resources. Around half of the projects resulted in the development of some kind of digital resource, ranging from an online digital exhibition of girls’ art and online videos for parents to bibliotherapy resources, podcasts and apps. In chapter 3 we discuss how these assets allowed the projects to scale up to reach more children, and in chapter 5 we explore how they will form a lasting legacy of the programme.

Children valued the digital assets too. The easy access to the Shout text line at any time of day or night was an important feature of its success. Tracking text conversations meant that we could see how children were turning to text support in response to media events such as announcements of Covid-19 lockdowns or the high-profile death of a celebrity.

More so than expected, children were forming relationships with the tools themselves – children perceived Ollee as their own digital friend, with the ability to customise and “own” Ollee.

Your Mind Matters was a campaign launched by Immediate Media's Youth & Children's editors, to help children look after their mental health. Content was distributed via 12 titles. Magazines featured confidence-building and mood-lifting advice, while pre-school titles emphasised the importance of fun, friendship and empathy, with activities aimed at giving busy, active minds a chance to relax. Over three million children were reached by more than 200 features.

## Discussion

A Million & Me set out to improve the wellbeing and resilience of children aged 8-13 by providing direct activities to children, but also by acting on their environment – the ‘scaffolding’ that surrounds each child – which has the power to support mental wellbeing and so prevent mental ill health. It succeeded in this primary aim, and also enabled us to learn and define what a successful system of support for children’s mental wellbeing would look like.



For services that reach out directly to children, this was best achieved by being:

- Positive – focused on fun and happiness, most often as an engagement tool, but also as a means to mental wellbeing in itself
- Easy to access for children – meaning that they had autonomy over where and how to access support and help
- Focused on helping children to recognise and express emotions – both for themselves and for others. This was often done through creative methods
- Relationship based – enhancing the relationships children already have, using tools, ideas and resources.

For the adults around children (parents/carers and other trusted adults alike) A Million & Me successfully improved their confidence to address the mental wellbeing of the children they know. We found that motivation to help children with their mental health was already high, but adults sometimes lacked confidence in this before they got help. From evaluations, we found that the most important mechanisms for this improved confidence were:

- Validating and recognising the important role these adults already have
- Encouraging adults to listen to children
- Encouraging adults to do things with children
- Equipping adults with simple words, ideas and tools to try with children
- Equipping adults with information and approaches to increase help-seeking
- Bringing adults together to support each other.

Finally, an important feature of A Million & Me was its successful blending of digital support into a multi-faceted programme. Digital assets improved the programme's reach in both size and diversity, and, crucially, offered children choice and autonomy over when and how to reach out for help.

### 3. Supporting children affected by mental health inequality

#### In this chapter:

- Children who are exposed to risk factors such as poverty, trauma, or exclusion experience poorer mental health and wellbeing, but are less likely to access support
- A Million & Me was open to all children, but took an active focus on tackling inequality
- This was done through a range of approaches, with some completely ‘universal’ projects that responded to children’s needs differently as they emerged, some projects using targeted marketing and promotion, and others specifically targeting some groups
- During the Covid-19 pandemic we noted in particular how some already marginalised children were further isolated, and that high quality digital resources were helpful in reaching out to children who were not getting help elsewhere.

A Million & Me was for all children. However, we must acknowledge and address the fact that some children experience poorer mental health and wellbeing because they are exposed to risk factors such as poverty, trauma, or exclusion, yet are less likely to access support. Some children with one or more protected characteristic are also likely to face mental health inequalities due to discrimination, which can further compound these risks. For example, a disabled child growing up in poverty in a rural area has a heightened risk of mental health problems because they may be isolated from systems of support that children in urban setting could access and may face financial difficulties overcoming these barriers. The Covid-19 pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities and brought additional pressures, such as increased financial uncertainty and the impact of bereavement.

In the early scoping stages of A Million & Me, there was some debate about whether to use a ‘universal’ or ‘targeted’ approach. Ultimately, the programme was designed to be open to all children, but to have an active focus on tackling inequality. In the programme evaluation, we asked every partner to comment about how they were addressing mental health inequality. We uncovered a range of approaches, with some completely “universal” projects that were responding to some children’s needs differently as they emerged, some projects using targeted marketing and promotion, and others targeting specific groups. For example:

- A third of the projects were specifically aimed at one community of children; girls, LGBTQ+ children, recently arrived asylum seekers, Black children, and care experienced children
- A fifth of projects were purposely delivering in geographical areas of higher health inequality such as financial hardship or deprivation
- One project was using targeted marketing to reach particular groups of children.

In this chapter we explore the main areas of mental health inequality that emerged from the project and programme evaluations.

#### Gender

The most prominent difference in access to A Million & Me projects was in relation to children’s gender. Not all projects offered non-binary categories in their project monitoring, and this is a limitation. In general, we observed girls and trans/non-binary children tending to access the online and other digital resources more, and boys tending to access the face-to-face projects more. However, this could be a result of the particular nature of the two face-to-face projects for which we had evaluation data (Prescription Surf! and Positive Youth Foundation). Positive Youth Foundation reflected in their evaluation that they were having particular issues engaging girls in their project. However, as the digitally based projects

had a far larger reach to children, we conclude that A Million & Me was accessed by more girls than boys, and that it had a good reach to trans/non-binary children.

Between the ages of five and ten, national prevalence data from NHS Digital (2018) shows a clear gender difference in experiences of mental health problems, though the national data capture method also does not offer non-binary categories. In 2017, 12% of boys aged 5-10 had a mental health problem, as opposed to 7% of girls. At some point in mid-adolescence this pattern reverses, and young women have the highest rates of mental health problems of any age and gender category (McManus *et al.*, 2016). The combination of a high prevalence of problems amongst 8-13 year old boys, and low reach of A Million & Me projects to boys of this age, suggests that more could be done to understand how boys access help with their mental wellbeing.

Considering individual projects' learning about gender and mental wellbeing:

- Interestingly, Parent Zone were able to show us how the gender profile of children accessing Ollee was different from the gender profile in the families of the parents who accessed. 35% of the children who used Ollee were boys, but of the parents who accessed, boys were 47% of their children. This may suggest that parents were more likely to recognise their son's need for help than the sons themselves.
- In March 2022 #BeeWell published a report about inequalities in wellbeing. Interestingly this report did not find evidence of inequality of wellbeing in most cases, with the exception of inequalities for gender identity, sexual orientation, and transgender status. They concluded there is a need to improve physical activity levels for girls.
- Shout text line reported high response rates from children under the age of 13 who were trans or non-binary (8% non-binary gender, 9% other gender from a sample of 2,839 children using the service). A sample of 1,788 users of Ollee showed 3% users said their gender was "other". Studies indicate

very high rates of mental health problems among transgender people, with 88% of respondents to an adult survey showing symptoms of depression and 75% of anxiety, compared with 20% of people in the UK general population (McNeil *et al.*, 2012). 96% of trans young people felt that they had experienced a mental health problem or associated behaviour, with high rates of anxiety (84%), stress (72%), and depression (74%) (Dennell *et al.*, 2018). This suggests that mental health projects should actively consider the needs of boys, girls and trans/non-binary children specifically.

- The Proud Trust's Proud Connections project provides online content such as factsheets, videos and training to skill up and inform trusted adults who are supporting children with queries or worries about gender and sexuality. The Proud Trust shared learning and expertise across A Million & Me.

## Disability

There are a wide range of conditions that fall under the disability category, including significant and long-term mental health problems, learning disabilities, and physical and long-term conditions. Evidence shows that disabled children can be at higher risk of developing mental health problems than those without disabilities. For example, children and young people with a learning disability are three times more likely than average to have a mental health problem (Lavis *et al.*, 2019). Research also finds that children with a long-term physical illness are twice as likely to suffer from emotional problems (Royal College of Psychiatrists, 2015).

A Million & Me had no projects that were exclusively for children who are disabled. All projects were asked to monitor self-reported disability, but limited monitoring space meant that children were not asked to give any detail, resulting in limited information about the types of disabilities children were experiencing. However, we noticed early that there were higher than expected rates of self-reporting of disability in three projects. In Shout text line's post-conversation survey, the disability

question was answered by 12% of children, and 58% of these children responded that they have a disability. This accounted for 7% of all survey responses, whether they answered the disability question or not. Anecdotally, the Shout text line team reported high levels of discussion about neurodiversity amongst texters. Parent Zone found that 7% of children said they had a disability, but also that 33% said they did not know whether they had a disability or not.

A Million & Me decided to respond to this by opening learning conversations about responding to disability and specifically neurodiversity, hoping to improve the experience of disabled children accessing these projects.

## Racialised communities

Research shows that children from racialised backgrounds face a number of barriers in accessing mental health support, yet they are much more likely to be overrepresented in acute mental health services compared to their white counterparts. Recent data released by *The Independent* suggests that Black and mixed-race children accounted for 36% of young people cared for in acute mental health services despite making up 11% of the population (based on unpublished data from NHS Benchmarking). Conversely, Black children made up just 5% of those accessing community-based child and adolescent mental health services (Thomas, 2022). There is a growing acknowledgment of the harmful effects of racial inequality on children's mental health and the need to address this through services.

Because there was limited space for monitoring questions in A Million & Me, it was decided not to ask children to self-report on their ethnicity, and so we are not able to report on engagement from racialised communities. This was a limitation in terms of our findings about how children from racialised communities engaged with the programme.

Two A Million & Me projects were particularly focused on the experiences of children from racialised communities. Positive Youth Foundation is working to improve the mental health and wellbeing of newly arrived young

refugees and asylum seekers alongside their host communities across the Midlands region, by providing safe environments with creative, innovative and meaningful engagement. As well as impacting the children they work with, they aim to secure a legacy of improved awareness and responsiveness to the needs of recently arrived children among commissioners and policy makers.

Black Thrive Lambeth is influencing local systems and developing a range of healing spaces and opportunities to enable children to thrive. Children are being enabled to undertake research in their communities and set priorities for a participatory fund. Children will be engaged in the evolution and implementation of Lambeth Council's anti-racist public health strategy and to influence the council's trauma-informed approach. The project is in its early stages, and so evaluations have not been completed.

*"[helping them] to better equip themselves in dealing with the situations that will inevitably happen at some point in their life because of things that they've seen that no eight to ten year old should have ever seen"*

A Million & Me project evaluation

## Isolation and the impact of Covid

In 2020, A Million & Me commissioned research to better understand the experiences of children who were spatially isolated. *The space between us* (Allwood, 2020) explores evidence about the mental health and wellbeing of children aged between 8 and 13 living in isolated communities across the UK. It found that children living in remote areas face isolation and struggle to get help for their mental health because of poor transport, a lack of safe spaces to meet in, and poor digital connectivity. Children living in poverty, disabled children, care experienced children, children from marginalised communities and trans/non-binary children face especial disadvantages in remote and rural areas. Rural poverty is less visible than in urban areas but can leave children especially isolated and excluded.

We also explored with the projects what the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic had been on children, and unsurprisingly, alongside anxiety and stress, isolation was also a feature of children's experiences.

Existing A Million & Me projects responded to the findings by considering how they were reaching out to more isolated areas, and how they were making digital access more equitable. The Proud Trust track access to Proud Connections from geographical locations and promote better awareness of their service in isolated areas by marketing through the organisations in those areas. Ollee was transferred from a web-based service to an app, partly to be available to children with less internet access.

*“we know that LGBT+ young people are at heightened risk of mental health issues, but then also that idea of isolation... of being slightly disconnected from peers, from activities and services... that dual risk. We wanted to reach out to those young people – find a way to the adults in those towns and areas so that there's a way of having at least at one point of contact for LGBT+ people and interested adults in those spaces, even if they've not got an LGBT+ youth group anywhere near them.”*

A Million & Me project evaluation

A new project in A Million & Me, Voices from Care Cymru is connecting care experienced children to each other through a wide range of activities which build positive relationships, resilience, self-care tools and community for children who are often isolated.

A capacity building project for people supporting children in rural, coastal and island communities is being planned, and will draw directly on the findings of *The space between us*.

## Discussion

A Million & Me has been a universal programme but has worked to understand and address mental health inequality. It did so in a range of ways, from including targeted approaches to providing a wider range of support, some of which (such as digital resources) appears to have been more appealing to some groups of children than others. We found that it was important to monitor how children who are affected by inequality are accessing a universal programme, so that individual elements and the programme as a whole can be supported and equipped to respond to additional or complex needs. For example, on finding that children accessing some of the digital projects were more likely to be disabled, we opened a discussion about what kinds of concerns were being raised by this group, and this resulted in a learning strand about working with neurodiverse children. This was also an example of how action learning fed into the programme. Targeted projects were well placed to improve the understanding, capacity and responsiveness of the whole programme by sharing their expertise and learning. This leads us to highlight the importance of good equalities monitoring data in programmes such as these.

In A Million & Me we were also aware of the particular impacts of gender, disability and racial inequality on children's mental health. Future programmes working with children's mental wellbeing should consider embedding a gendered approach which involves learning about how to meet the needs of trans/non-binary children. Across mental health inequalities, there is a need for a more trauma-informed approach that recognises the links between trauma, adversity and children's wellbeing and mental health. There is also a need to deliver accessible and flexible support which reaches children and communities regardless of their location, building on existing community assets.

## 4. Developing and learning in partnership

### In this chapter:

A Million & Me has represented a fresh approach to grant giving; the various programme elements were proactively identified to fit into an ‘ecosystem’ of projects, where the individual projects worked together to enhance and amplify each other’s work. Key success factors in this systemic approach were:

- Learning from children and parents/carers
- Projects having time, support and freedom to learn and develop
- Drawing on learning and drive from the Covid-19 pandemic
- A growing confidence in developing tech responses.

A core value of A Million & Me has been its ambition to learn. The projects were selected with a strong eye on their ability to enhance the whole programme’s knowledge about children’s mental wellbeing, and to develop better responses to children in partnership. In this chapter we will share our findings about the learning and development process.

### Learning from children and parents/carers

Projects were asked to consider how they were involving children. In most of the projects, children and parents/carers were orientated as experts with roles to play in the development of the project. The Children’s Advisory Group, convened by Queens University Belfast consisted of 10 children aged 9-13 years, recruited from various projects throughout Scotland. The group worked on core concepts of A Million & Me and thereby created an exemplar of best practice, which the programme could learn from as a whole. Their work provided BBC Children in Need with a toolkit on how to establish a children’s advisory panel, create a supportive environment for children and incorporate children’s views in planning and projects.

We reviewed the approaches to involving children and parents/carers in all the projects and identified these common methods, with most projects using more than one, and a few using all the methods:

- Offering choice and autonomy: For example, children are supported to choose the right Stormbreak for them, by recognising and naming the emotion they have. Children at Positive Youth Foundation were helped to consider which activities they found engaging and take an active role in project planning
- Creating feedback mechanisms: Most projects included evaluation surveys or similar, and used these together with insights from children to respond with service developments. The large volume of data about presenting needs and problems collected via the Shout text line allowed them to adapt the service to meet emerging needs
- Involving children, parents and carers in ‘test and learn’ phases of development: Some projects engaged children and parents as ‘experts by experience’ in development stages. For example, Ollee was designed and tested by focus groups of children who had profound impact on each iteration of the project
- Using advisory panels: Some projects placed children, parents and carers into formal advisory roles. In the case of children, this might be with slightly older young people who could support the project on behalf of younger peers. For example, Proud Connections sought guidance on the delivery and content of their digital support from young people within their services

- Involving children, parents and carers in delivery: Formally and informally, children, parents and carers were offering support to each other. An example of a formal model was the YoungMinds Parents Network, where parents were recruited into “Trusted Local Person” roles, and trained and supported to provide mentoring support to their peers. Less formally, several project evaluations observed that parents were valuing the experience of meeting each other to feel less alone and more connected to others facing similar challenges. For example, parents bringing their children to surf therapy at Prescription Surf! described a range of outcomes for themselves, including improved motivation to address their own mental wellbeing.

We noticed that only a minority of project evaluations reflected on how involvement and participation had gone, and so we approached each project team to discuss how effective involvement had been, and what they had learned. We found that projects which had used extensive, multi-faceted children’s involvement tended to see this as the most important mechanism for the success of their project. We saw clear evidence of children’s involvement changing and shaping the direction of projects. In general, the more different kinds of involvement a project used, the better.

## Having time, support and freedom to learn and develop

A Million & Me projects were proactively identified by BBC Children in Need and were offered substantial levels of support to coproduce a response that fitted well into the wider programme. We found that A Million & Me projects valued being given time and space to think, listen, learn from the wider programme, and innovate, before committing to a final delivery model.

Observation of the projects often showed slower development than initially planned at all stages, but this appeared to be a good thing: projects were escalating reach rapidly once operational and doing well in adapting to emerging learning. A good learning and development culture was establishing and

there was a growing sense of confidence in this measured pace (which had initially been seen as concerning).

The programme learned throughout, at a number of different levels. At individual project level, partners were encouraged to include coproduction, testing and improvement stages in their delivery. All projects were offered ongoing contact and support from the team at BBC Children in Need and from Centre for Mental Health.

As we moved into the second year, partners were encouraged to share findings, collaborate, offer support and work in closer partnership with one another. Learning events were held to facilitate shared learning in key areas of interest.

In our evaluation, A Million & Me partners were asked to comment about the experience of working within an impact theme, and what the programme’s approach had meant for their project. There was strong support from all interviewees. Below are some specific themes from this evaluation:

- The frequent contact with trusted and high-quality partner organisations was helpful to projects
- The focus on projects being scalable was welcome
- The theory of change work following funding approval was seen as helpful to develop thinking more, and to ensure evaluations were fit for purpose
- Some partners had a limited understanding of what the other partners were doing and felt if they had been brought together earlier and more often, they could have worked together more effectively. This finding in year two was acted on, and by year three partners were more engaged with each other and reported a stronger sense of cohesion across the programme
- Having a predictable subject focus for programme convenings helped projects plan their partnership working. The Covid-19 pandemic normalised online working and this in turn boosted the uptake of online contact across the programme

- Partners felt that they could have made more use of (and promoted) each other's assets more. This suggests that early planning of the sequence of information, learning and material assets, and how these passed between the programme's elements, could have maximised their usefulness
- The biggest impact of the partnership approach was on the potential sustainability of these projects, as they had time to develop and test ideas and then make a case for investment.

Allowing space for learning and development was the second most important feature of the success of the programme for funded partners. Because BBC Children in Need proactively identified projects based on the evolving theory of change, and because the director of A Million & Me offered extensive support and input as proposals were developed, she encouraged a culture of testing and learning in each project. This was highly valued by the funded partners, who felt empowered to explore and learn, and felt free to "not know all the answers" as their projects began.

*"[it's a] different relationship between a funder and deliverer. More collaborative, respectful approach – working together, less paternalistic... more mature exchange going on. There are clear benefits which other funders may learn from"*

A Million & Me project lead

This meant that important learning, for example from interacting with other partners in A Million & Me, or from children's advisory groups, or even from trying and failing, was highly influential in the eventual delivery model, and partners reflected that this approach had improved the quality of their projects, the level of "fit" to their organisation's overall mission, and the likelihood of sustaining the work after A Million & Me funding ended. The proposal development process allowed grantees to use their subject expertise but also challenged them to create better sustainability and scalability of their project.

## Learning and drive from the Covid-19 pandemic

With a wide range of ways to reach children and the people around them, A Million & Me was well placed to adapt to the challenges posed by the coronavirus pandemic and the resulting lockdowns. Most projects sustained their delivery, and those that were already operating online or remotely saw a rise in demand.

Projects that were based on face-to-face delivery encountered challenges, and some closed for a time. In common with mental health services across the country, many found that the pandemic highlighted existing inequalities, with families who had less digital access being disproportionately affected. However, reach to some communities improved. For example, A Million & Me noticed that projects working remotely (via text or website) tended to have better reach to disabled children.

In the final evaluation, we asked project teams to comment on the positive and negative impacts of the pandemic on their work.

Several positive impacts were identified:

- Projects were prompted to scale up more quickly, and this meant that they reached more children sooner
- Projects recognised that everyone became more confident in the digital sphere – children, parents/carers and the workforce. This meant that digital projects were more popular with beneficiaries, and also better used. Everyone was more open to mental health services being online
- As discussed in chapter 3, we noticed that some groups of children and parents/carers who may not have been as well reached by face-to-face services seemed to be more comfortable accessing online. Online projects saw better reach to girls, non-binary children, spatially isolated children and disabled children.

However, the pandemic also created problems in terms of project delivery:



- Most importantly, direct, face-to-face delivery was disrupted. Two projects had staff furloughed for some time, and others had to close part of their project for some months
- Some partnership working was inhibited. This was the most likely when projects were working with the NHS, local authorities and schools
- Projects found it less easy to connect with some children online. This might be because of lack of digital access, or “Zoom fatigue”, with children exhausted by long hours of accessing education and other services online
- Children’s participation and coproduction processes such as focus groups stalled, particularly if they were to be held in schools
- Project delivery was more unpredictable.

## Growing confidence in developing tech responses

Over two thirds of the projects had a significant technological aspect – such as websites, webchat, online libraries, text, videos or apps. Some funded partners were already well established as tech-based organisations, and some were developing technological assets for the first time.

When we evaluated the process of developing technological resources, we noted that whatever the starting point of the organisation, learning had to be done in order to move towards a high-quality asset. Organisations who did not have a background in technological development needed to learn about what was involved, while the more tech-based providers benefitted from learning and development in the “real world”, for example by engaging children or mental health experts as coproducers.

In both cases this could involve some adjustment in getting to grips with the development process in a different sphere. Recognising this, the Centre provided opportunities for shared learning by “buddying

up” projects within the programme, e.g. linking a direct delivery organisation trying to develop an app with an online based organisation.

Learning from evaluations about how to develop online or other tech assets included:

- Use agile project management techniques. Agile project management is an iterative approach to delivering a project throughout its life cycle. Iterative or agile life cycles are composed of several iterations or incremental steps towards the completion of a project. Iterative approaches are frequently used in software development projects to promote velocity and adaptability, since the benefit of iteration is that you can adjust as you go along rather than following a linear path
- Bring technical expertise such as software development in-house rather than outsourcing. Though this could be challenging if the organisation had not done this kind of work before, it meant there was a high level of control over adaptations to the asset
- Focus as much on content as you do on delivery method – it was effective to maintain a strong focus on the quality of content, drawing on evidence gained in “real world” delivery, and ensuring the same high-quality content was delivered online
- Make good use of data and analytics from the start.

## Discussion

Working alongside A Million & Me, Centre for Mental Health has observed an innovative programme approach, with a high level of thought and planning to ensure that the programme operates as a system and maximum benefit can be gained from learning.

Adequate development and learning times and a proactive focus on enhancing the voice and influence of children, parents and carers meant that, while projects may have taken time to establish their final model, those models were seen as good quality and highly effective.

Organisations in the programme also reported having expanded their learning and confidence about how to involve children, parents and carers in coproduction.

When reflecting on their mechanisms of success, individual projects, as well as Centre for Mental health's evaluation, showed that being offered substantial support throughout the project to develop an idea, hone a proposal, consider and develop potential partnerships, establish learning cycles, and adapt and change had been key.

The Covid-19 pandemic, coming as it did in the middle of the programme, had wide ranging impacts, both positive and negative. Digital projects in particular were accelerated by a motivation to act quickly, alongside growing tech confidence in children, parents and trusted adults, and digital projects in particular grew and changed rapidly.

Some projects were new to working in the digital sphere, and A Million & Me's focus on digital projects meant the overall technical confidence and knowledge of the partnership was enhanced. Several projects benefitted from learning from working practices in the tech sector.

## 5. Shifting the national conversation

### In this chapter:

- A Million & Me set out not only to test a systemic approach to improving children’s mental wellbeing, but also to be influential with their ideas and learning
- A Million & Me projects have showcased early intervention approaches, and provided intelligence for the wider children’s mental health and wellbeing system
- Children have been supported into leadership and influencer roles, and their voices and experiences have been amplified
- A Million & Me launched a wide range of digital and other assets that can now be shared at scale
- The importance of children’s mental wellbeing was promoted to the public, and this work will continue
- While we have some indications of an increased awareness of children’s mental wellbeing and increased motivation to intervene earlier, more needs to be done to promote the ideas A Million & Me has developed and to prompt action at scale.

A Million & Me’s ambition was to have a significant impact on how children’s mental wellbeing was viewed by the wider mental health system. In Centre for Mental Health’s 2019 review of A Million & Me, we conducted qualitative research across the programme partners and, with the assistance of the Advisory Group, clarified the systemic changes that were hoped for and what mechanisms of change were being trialled. Considering systemic change in the children’s mental health sphere cannot now, however, be done without considering the enormous impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children, families, communities, service providers, and local and national government. Running as it did from 2019 to 2022, every year of the A Million & Me programme operated in a drastically new and different strategic environment.

The NHS Five Year Forward View, published in 2014, presented a clear vision of a future where the sustainability of the UK’s health systems was dependent on “a radical upgrade in prevention and public health”. We recognised that A Million & Me had an ambition to leverage the power of its partnership approach to influence the wider system of mental health support for and around children. To understand

the extent to which the programme was achieving this ambition, we asked A Million & Me partners to define the issues they saw in the system’s response to children’s mental health and what role A Million & Me might play.

These were the problems identified in the system of mental health support for children:

- Resources and initiatives are clustered at the more severe end of mental health need and not enough money and energy is spent on prevention and protection of childhood mental health
- The voluntary sector is well placed to provide preventative and protective support but is affected by poor integration into the system
- Children and their families are not listened to when services are planned
- Projects working to prevent mental health problems or protect children are often short term or smaller scale compared to interventions for children with diagnosable mental ill health
- There is a lack of interest and focus on parents’ role in protecting children’s mental health

- Mental health services are under-resourced and overstretched
- Packages of support for children in mental distress are too slow to respond and too complex.

We learned about the extent to which A Million & Me had achieved systemic impact by reviewing project evaluations of impact and conducting interviews with stakeholders, and with 20 interviewees from A Million & Me projects and their stakeholder groups. Interviews included national commentators on children's mental health, policy makers, commissioners, people working in the voluntary sector, NHS and education. These interviews were done in 2022 and generally became focused on changes resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic, and so we cannot make distinctions between the impact of the pandemic on changes in the mental health system, and changes affected by A Million & Me. This chapter reviews some of the main mechanisms for creating systemic impact and learning at scale within A Million & Me.

## Showcasing the value of early intervention and prevention

In chapter 2 we described how A Million & Me had shown that children's wellbeing and resilience could be improved at scale, but also that the programme has mapped out a blueprint for ways in which this can be done systematically. The range of approaches, from bibliotherapy, surf therapy and youth work through to online and phone chats has been wide, but A Million & Me held all the projects in an overarching framework, where elements complimented and learned from each other.

*“the way in which it brings together a very interesting group of quite radically different interventions... all of which share a new or refreshing or just slightly ambitious way of talking about and addressing children's mental health... in and of itself is a really powerful statement.”*

Stakeholder

## Providing intelligence for the system

Some projects were purposefully generating data for the system. #BeeWell is a partnership delivering a longitudinal wellbeing survey, coproduced with young people, to participating secondary schools across all ten districts of Greater Manchester. The data from the surveys creates school and neighbourhood profiles with a view to inspiring the coalition of partners to deliver significant improvements to the wellbeing of young people.

The Shout text line is able to provide information about call volume and, from the post-conversation survey, information about issues raised against demographic profile at scale. In particular, as part of Mental Health Innovations' partnership with Imperial College London, the findings of an MSc student demonstrated the power of machine learning and Natural Language Processing to build models that can predict texter demographics and conversation topics.

## Putting children into leadership and influencer roles, and amplifying their voices

Several projects put children into roles where they could act as leaders and influencers. Some did this by taking the messages from children and amplifying them, and others promoted children into leadership roles.

The WOW Foundation, an independent charity celebrating women and girls, created a network of WOWsers, girls and young women under the age of 16, through a series of convening events. They used creative methods to examine the intersectionality of their exclusion and give them confidence, contacts and skills to share their concerns among themselves and with those who are in a position to effect change. Material from the events was used to compile a digital Lending Library of resources to help others engage.

A new project in A Million & Me, Voices from Care Cymru, will connect care experienced children to each other through a wide range of activities which build positive relationships,

resilience, self-care tools and community. The project will seek to learn about the impact of such opportunities and to influence local authorities, the NHS and the Welsh Government, calling for better support for the mental wellbeing of care experienced children.

Black Thrive will work to influence local systems and through their work, children will be engaged in the evolution and implementation of Lambeth Council's anti-racist public health strategy, and influence the council's trauma-informed approach.

Positive Youth Foundation is taking its learning from direct delivery projects to support the mental wellbeing of recently arrived asylum seekers, by creating a best practice toolkit and improving other services through regional networking.

*“the program's really given that age group a sense that they matter. And that they're valued, and that what they feel is important. And I really hope, I feel that will continue.”*

Stakeholder

## Developing assets that can be shared at scale

The majority of the projects resulted in some form of asset at the end of the funding. The types of assets created within A Million & Me were:

### Prototype or fully launched apps

- Ollee is a digital friend that helps children explore feelings around school, family, friends, the world and more. Ollee can be accessed in a web browser or be downloaded to a device. A subsequent version, Hollee, is in development which will offer children a safe and easy opportunity to be consulted on issues that affect them
- WellRead is a story therapy app. WellRead helps adults build children's emotional wellbeing by reading great stories together and having interesting conversations. WellRead contains a collection of short stories, each accompanied with a series of carefully designed, therapy-based questions that will help spark a conversation.

## Training programmes

- Trust Me is a flexible, interactive training programme for youth organisations to equip their teams working with children. The programme encourages open, honest discussion about the needs in each organisation, building on vision, values and existing expertise. A second phase of the training is being planned.

## Animations, videos and podcasts

- Positive Youth Foundation are creating an animated video about mental health services and young people who have recently arrived in the UK, to include real life situations, voices and stories. It will be shared across the local mental health system
- They are also developing a podcast series that opens dialogue about the gaps in services for newly arrived young people. A video version will also be available.

## Online libraries of resources

- WOWsers published a digital exhibition of artwork exploring children's views of mental health
- Proud Connections have created an online library of content for children, parents and trusted adults, supported by their webchat service
- #BeeWell has created a neighbourhood 'Data Hive' – an interactive and dynamic data dashboard that enables users to explore the domains and drivers of young people's wellbeing, gathered from the #BeeWell survey.

## Websites

- Boots have created a dedicated space on their website about children's mental wellbeing, giving advice and guidance on how to talk to children, spot warning signs and respond proactively to children with worries. This includes a downloadable guide and poster

- The One Space website links resources from three organisations into a single portal, making access to a wider range of services clearer and easier.

### Toolkits

- The Children’s Advisory Group were supported to test a model of children’s participation, resulting in a toolkit, which is now a resource to support future BBC Children in Need projects to meaningfully engage children, especially younger age groups, in projects.

These assets will continue to be available after the close of the A Million & Me programme, resulting in growing numbers of beneficiaries in the years to come.

## Promoting children’s mental wellbeing to the public

Two projects had a specific focus on promoting mental wellbeing messages to the general public. Boots worked with Young Minds to design a short e-learning module for Boots colleagues. The e-learning enables people working on Boots shopfloors to promote children’s mental wellbeing to customers. There are also printed materials that colleagues can use. 17,000 Boots colleagues accessed this learning. Immediate Media’s “Your Mind Matters” campaign provided messaging and resources to children through 12 magazines and brands, reaching over three million children. The campaign won the Periodical Publishers Association Reward for Campaign of the Year in 2020.

Our evaluation of the impact of the programme as a whole suggested it was not able to have as much influence as it hoped on the national conversation about children’s mental wellbeing. Learning emerged gradually, and opportunities to influence BBC content may have been rarer than initially hoped – in our final year’s qualitative evaluation, some stakeholders commented that this was an opportunity missed.

## Testing social prescribing models

Prescription Surf! took a test-and-learn approach to share best practice ideas with other social prescribing systems for children, and worked in partnership with other evidence based interventions to develop a child-friendly concept. #BeeWell uses the data it generates to initiate and guide social prescribing, peer mentoring and youth-led commissioning.

## Changing attitudes and approaches to children’s mental wellbeing

We used the stakeholder interviews in 2022 to enquire about any changing attitudes to children’s mental wellbeing, particularly in relation to early intervention and prevention, and to providing help to 8-13 year olds. We were interested to know whether any changes in attitude were prompting changes in the wider mental health system’s activities.

### Improved motivation to intervene early

In interviews we explored the way that the mental health system is considering children’s mental wellbeing. We found a strong and clear consensus that there had been a change over the last three years. The people we interviewed from across the system (clinical services, voluntary sector, commissioners, education sector) felt that there was more awareness of the importance of supporting mental health in the 8-13 age group since 2019. Specifically, it seems that there was an emerging acceptance that the system needs to think as much about the mental health of children as we have about adolescents, and that there is motivation to invest in early intervention and prevention.

*“I think given the pandemic, there has been a big push to support young people with their mental health, because I think it became quite apparent quite quickly that they weren't coping with the change.”*

Stakeholder

It was generally believed that this trend in opinion had been in place before 2020, but all the stakeholders we spoke to felt that the change was accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Lockdowns were recognised by the adult world as having adversely affected children’s mental health, and the role parents had played in taking over the education of their children had highlighted to them the mental wellbeing challenges they faced. There were reported widespread concerns that children’s mental health had been compromised and that an already stressed mental health system would at some point be overwhelmed by rising demand. The solution to this problem was seen as increased investment in early intervention and prevention. Our evaluations show, and the people we interviewed recognised, that A Million & Me had successfully demonstrated ways in which this could be achieved at scale.

### **Lack of action to prevent mental health problems in children**

Despite this improved motivation to intervene early in children’s mental wellbeing, our interviews with stakeholders suggested that they do not believe this motivation is being translated into action at scale. There are concerns that as the UK comes out of the pandemic, not enough is being done to help children recover. Worse, there are concerns that children are again being put under too much academic pressure and are being offered too little time and help to develop mental resilience. There were worries that rising financial inequality would exacerbate mental health inequalities.

Some noted that there are a generation of children who may have missed important developmental stages as a result of Covid-19 lockdowns. They might have missed the chance to learn social skills or to establish good mental health coping strategies. It was felt that not enough was being done to “go back” and help children recover these resilience factors.

## **Discussion**

A Million & Me has sought to influence attitudes and approaches to children’s mental wellbeing using a variety of methods, including showcasing the value of early intervention and prevention, providing intelligence for the system, putting children into leadership and influencer roles, and developing assets that can be shared at scale. It was clear that these approaches had been influential, though the impact is hard to attribute to A Million & Me, as opposed to other factors, not least the Covid-19 pandemic.

We found that, in the three years during which A Million & Me has been operating, the programme’s stakeholders felt there had been a significant shift in attitudes to children’s mental wellbeing. They believed there was a higher level of awareness that children’s mental wellbeing was important, and rising concerns that more children were becoming (or at risk of becoming) unwell.

Furthermore, we found that our interviewees believed there was a growing motivation to intervene early, both in terms of children’s age, and in terms of levels of mental health need. They told us that while these changes had been ongoing before 2020, they were significantly accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

However, at the point of our final evaluation, we witnessed growing concern that this awareness was not translating into enough action to prevent mental ill health in children at scale.

## 6. What we have learned and our recommendations

Concerns about children's mental health have been rising for several decades. We are seeing increasing rates of mental health problems affecting younger children, and referral rates to statutory mental health services far outstripping capacity.

A Million & Me has successfully improved the wellbeing and resilience of tens of thousands of children aged 8 to 13. This has been done by enhancing the 'scaffolding' that surrounds them, which has the power to support mental wellbeing and so prevent mental ill health.

At the same time, a continuous and dynamic approach to development and learning in the programme has resulted in a better understanding of how this system can be optimised.

For children, projects should be primarily focused on positivity and fun. Projects that are flexible and easily accessible, such as digital or online resources, have a particular potential to be reached by children who face structural barriers to getting help. Having autonomy and control over when and how they get help is of benefit to all children, however.

A Million & Me highlighted the importance of helping children to learn ways of recognising, understanding and expressing their emotions, and this was often done via trusting relationships with their peers and with the adults in their lives. It followed, then, that it was important to validate the importance of these relationships, and to equip the people who have this role with age-appropriate language and tools to help them. The important outcome for adults, parents/carers and professionals alike was having the confidence and ability to reach out to children with wellbeing and resilience-enhancing conversations and activities. In this way, A Million & Me demonstrated a version of the "ordinary magic" described by Anna Masten in 2001.

An important feature of A Million & Me was its successful blending of digital support into a multi-faceted programme. Digital assets

improved the programme's reach in both size and diversity, and crucially, offered children choice and autonomy over when and how to reach out for help.

A Million & Me set out to reach any and all children, regardless of their level of need or particular circumstances. However, rooted within BBC Children in Need and drawing on its portfolio of projects, it worked with a strong eye on health inequality. It did so in a range of ways, from targeted projects to more 'universal' types of support, some of which (such as digital resources) appeared to have been more appealing to some groups of children than others. In A Million & Me we were aware of a particular focus on gender, disability and racialisation.

The programme was distinct and different from many philanthropic funding programmes, in that it was a curated set of projects: identified, recruited, and then supported to develop and learn as an integral part of the delivery. Projects were tasked with maximising children's agency, control and influence through consultation, participation and coproduction.

Also, projects were expected to consider from their inception how their model would be scaled up and sustained. This has resulted in a wide array of resources and materials that will have a life well beyond the lifetime of the programme.

The Covid-19 pandemic was a central experience of almost all A Million & Me projects. It undoubtedly caused challenges and concerns, but also drove the acceleration of programme elements, and arguably skewed the programme towards digital elements. The workforce learned to operate differently, and delivery models became more flexible. We also learned that some children – girls, trans and non-binary children, disabled children and rurally isolated children – may find it easier to access help online.

A Million & Me has sought to influence attitudes and approaches to children's mental wellbeing. Overall, it was seen as being influential in



what appears to be a growing interest in children’s mental wellbeing and a motivation to help children develop better wellbeing and resilience. We found that more could have been done to capitalise on the learning in the programme, and use it to drive messaging to the general public and the mental health system about exactly how children could be helped.

## Recommendations

A Million & Me has successfully improved the wellbeing and resilience of children aged 8 to 13. This has been done by enhancing the “scaffolding” that surrounds them, which then has the power to support mental wellbeing and so prevent mental ill health.

At the same time, a continuous and dynamic approach to development and learning in the programme has resulted in a better understanding of how this system can be optimised.

Based on this learning, we recommend:

### For service providers:

1. Children and their families must be afforded voice and influence in the design and implementation of projects to support their mental wellbeing
2. Digital provision should be developed as a tool to reduce health inequalities by reaching children that other approaches do not reach.

### For funders and commissioners

3. Charitable funders and statutory service commissioners should work towards systemic, multi-faceted programmes that seek to prevent mental health problems in children aged 8 to 13
4. Charitable funders and statutory service commissioners should take a longer-term and iterative approach to programmes promoting children’s mental wellbeing, ensuring projects have time to learn, develop and change

5. Charitable funders and statutory service commissioners should offer a diversity of types of mental wellbeing support in order to help address emerging mental health inequalities
6. Funders need to make sustained investment, particularly in rural areas where projects can take longer to establish alongside more limited local infrastructure
7. Programmes aiming to prevent mental health problems should build the capacity of the people and projects who already have trusting relationships with children, crucially via better alignment between the voluntary sector and statutory sector provision.

### For policy makers

8. The Governments in each of the four nations of the UK should take systematic steps to improve the mental wellbeing of younger children. This should include strategic action to address mental health inequalities and investment in early intervention
9. It is important to validate the role of the wider children’s workforce in supporting children’s mental wellbeing and provide tools and resources for these trusted adults.

### For communicators and influencers

10. The BBC and other media organisations should promote and use the resources produced through A Million & Me to widen their availability and uptake in the longer term
11. Media and campaigners focused on children’s mental health should communicate and promote the importance of early preventative work, based on a system of informed, trusted relationships and support for children aged 8 to 13.

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## A Million &amp; Me's projects

Project name	Providing organisation	Date begun	Date ended	Months	Funding	Type	Location	Overview
Shout Text Line	Mental Health Innovations	Jun-18	Jun-21	36	£1,500,000	National	London	Shout text line is a 24/7 mental health support text line, which is delivered largely in partnership with charities who promote the service under their own brands. It set out to provide round the clock mental health support to children via text conversations, but also to demonstrate the role that digital innovation can and must have in meeting the national challenge of mental health. A Million & Me funding helped scale up the text line and drive learning about how children were using text support.
WellRead	Verbal	Nov-18	Mar-21	28	£221,160	Regional	Derry-Londonderry	WellRead is an app-based activity designed to help parents boost their children's emotional wellbeing with a combination of storytelling and targeted conversations. The WellRead app contains a curated collection of short stories for the caregiver to read to their child. Each story is accompanied with a series of questions that they can ask to spark conversations with their child about a range of wellbeing topics. The programme is created to provide support to caregivers to care for their children's emotional wellbeing.
Parents Network	YoungMinds	Jan-19	Jan-20	12	£118,000	National	London	YoungMinds set out to gather insights from parents and carers via parent engagement sessions before designing a training resource for parents. In response to coproduction messages from parents, the project that was developed was in fact a pilot programme where a "trusted local person" was trained to have conversations with parents, providing information and a listening ear, local directories of resources for families, and signposting to relevant digital/national resources. This pilot programme was then tested and evaluated in five areas.

Project name	Providing organisation	Date begun	Date ended	Months	Funding	Type	Location	Overview
Prescription Surfi	The Wave Project	May-19	Dec-22	43	£296,840	Regional	Newquay, Cornwall	The Wave Project developed a child-focused social prescribing model with an ambition that this could be replicated nationally. The existing evidence-based model which provides surf therapy was embedded in GP surgeries to enable direct referral, keep waiting times low and bureaucracy at a minimum. The aim was to also provide support networks for parents. Prescription Surfi took a test-and-learn approach to share best practice ideas with other social prescribing systems for children, and work in partnership with other evidence-based interventions to develop a child-friendly concept. A conference is planned to disseminate learning.
WOWsers: A Creative Explosion	Women of the World	Mar-21	Nov-21	8	£88,800	National	London	The WOW Foundation, a charity celebrating women and girls, created a network of WOWsers, girls and young women under the age of 16 from BBC Children In Need's portfolio organisations, through a series of convening events. They used creative methods to examine the intersectionality of their exclusion and give them confidence, contacts and skills to share their concerns among themselves and with those who are in a position to effect change. Material from the events was used to compile a digital lending library of resources to help others engage.

Project name	Providing organisation	Date begun	Date ended	Months	Funding	Type	Location	Overview
#BeWell	University of Manchester, the Greater Manchester Combined Authority and the Anna Freud Centre	Jan-22	Jan-25	36	£395,000	Regional	Manchester	#BeWell is a partnership delivering a wellbeing survey, coproduced with young people, to participating secondary schools across all ten districts of Greater Manchester. The data from the surveys creates school and neighbourhood profiles with a view to inspiring the coalition of partners to deliver significant improvements to the wellbeing of young people, both within schools and also in the community, through social prescribing, peer mentoring and youth-led commissioning. A Million & Me has funded a cocreation element, funding a specific post and facilitating teachers and young people in a social prescribing pilot to reflect on their peers' wellbeing and how to improve it.
A Million & Me Boots	Boots and Young Minds	Jan-19	Feb-21	25	£47,600 (YoungMinds only)	National	London	Boots, as a corporate partner, worked with A Million & Me to lay foundations for strong mental wellbeing and positive mental health in the community by giving Boots colleagues training and support to promote the mental wellbeing of children in stores (training developed by YoungMinds), providing information resources for parents and carers on their website and in store and using social marketing to raise awareness of mental health in childhood and offer information and tools to communities.
Proud Connections	The Proud Trust	Dec-20	Jul-25	55	£214,900	Regional	Manchester	Proud Connections is a pilot helpline for trusted adults who are supporting children with queries or worries about gender and sexuality, supported by online content such as factsheets and videos and training to skill-up and inform adults who have stable, trusted relationships with children. The aim of the project is to enable trusted adults to give better support to younger callers directly and to increase referrals of trusted adults to The Proud Trust's services and other appropriate local services.

Project name	Providing organisation	Date begun	Date ended	Months	Funding	Type	Location	Overview
Ollee	Parent Zone	Jun-19	Jul-23	49	£719,000	National	London	Ollee is a digital tool that has been designed as a 'virtual friend' for children aged 8-11 to help them through key moments when they might be struggling with their emotions. The project was designed to facilitate conversations between children and parents and provide each with expert advice, information and signposting to help. Ollee went through extensive discovery and design phases, which resulted in enhanced tools for children to develop their relationship with and use of Ollee.
One Space	The Mix, YoungMinds, Mental Health Innovations	Jul-20	Jan-21	6	£150,000	National	London	A coalition of three partners, YoungMinds, The Mix and lead partner MHI, combining resources to create One Space, a portal that offers wrap around support from crisis text line through to counselling and advice for children and young people, parents and key adults. This was a time limited response to the increased demand on services as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a view to establishing the enhanced effectiveness of easier access to support at all levels, through a single portal.
Stormbreak	Stormbreak	Jun-20	Apr-24	46	£632,150	Regional	Poole	Stormbreak is a programme of movement for mental health that has previously been delivered into primary schools. A Million & Me enabled the project to expand delivery via the development of a digital Stormbreak platform including a library of live streamed and recorded content and resources designed to facilitate online, preventative mentally healthy movement programmes for trusted adults and the children they support in education, health and social settings.

Project name	Providing organisation	Date begun	Date ended	Months	Funding	Type	Location	Overview
Positive Youth Foundation	Positive Youth Foundation	Jun-19	Aug-23	50	£300,722	Regional	Coventry	Positive Youth Foundation is working to improve the mental health and wellbeing of newly arrived young people and their host communities aged 8-13 across the Midlands region, by providing safe environments with creative, innovative and meaningful engagement. Strands include weekly activities, workshops and courses, youth involvement groups, digital platforms for social action, best practice toolkit and regional networking and support. The aim is to secure a legacy among commissioners and policy makers of an informed approach to providing an effective ecosystem of support that actively engages the third sector.
Trust Me	Anna Freud Centre, Body & Soul	Jan-21	Apr-22	16	£99,909	National	London	The Trust Me project is a flexible, interactive training programme for youth organisations to equip their teams working with children. The programme encourages open, honest discussion about the needs in each organisation, building on vision, values and existing expertise.
Black Thrive	Black Thrive	Oct-21	Oct-23	24	£350,000	Regional	London	Black Thrive will influence local systems and develop a range of healing spaces and opportunities to enable children to thrive. Children will be enabled to undertake research in their communities and set priorities for a participatory fund. Children will be engaged in the evolution and implementation of Lambeth Council's anti-racist public health strategy and to influence the council's trauma-informed approach. The project will test creative group-based therapy using creative methods.

Project name	Providing organisation	Date begun	Date ended	Months	Funding	Type	Location	Overview
Voices from Care Gymru	Voices from Care Gymru	Oct-21	Oct-24	36	£339,000	Regional	Cardiff	Voices from Care Gymru will connect care experienced children to each other through a wide range of positive activities which build positive relationships, resilience, self-care tools and community. The project will seek to learn about the impact of such projects and to influence local authorities, the NHS and Welsh Government, seeking to promote the need to support the mental wellbeing of care experienced children better.
Your Mind Matters	Immediate Media	Aug-19	Sept-20	13	N/A	National	London	Your Mind Matters was a campaign launched collectively by Immediate Media's Youth & Children's editors, to help children look after their mental health. Content was distributed via 12 titles. Magazines featured confidence-building and mood-lifting advice, while pre-school titles emphasised the importance of fun, friendship and empathy, with activities aimed at giving busy, active minds a chance to relax. Over 3 million children were reached by more than 200 features.
#AMillion&Me Squad	Queens University Belfast	May-19	May-20	13	£20,000	Regional	Scotland	The Centre for Children's Rights at Queen's University Belfast was appointed to develop a model of children's participation for A Million & Me. The project did this by appointing a Children's Advisory Group (CAG) that would work with participation experts to develop and pilot the model. An important output was a users' manual to clearly explain to BBC Children in Need staff and other facilitators how to implement the model to include children in the development of their initiatives and projects.



## The overarching programme theory of change



### The principles identified by the Children's Advisory Group

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The Children's Advisory Group for BBC Children in Need A Million & Me programme consisted of 10 children aged 9-13 years recruited from various projects throughout Scotland. The group advised on what matters to children in this age group and how best to identify, engage with and help them.

The advisory group considered the spectrum of mental health need and their understanding of the language used. They drew attention to the need to make sure all children are included and can access all information. Information must be provided in different formats with particular attention paid to the needs of children with literacy issues and disabilities.

They developed a set of 11 principles that projects in A Million & Me should comply with:

1. All children should be included, and everyone should get the support they need.
2. Adults should listen to children and all voices must be heard.
3. All children should be treated equally.
4. Everyone is kind and gets treated with respect.
5. All children should enjoy what they do.
6. Everyone should be happy and feel good about themselves.
7. Children should think, feel and know it is helping them.
8. Children should have lots of friendly people and helpers.
9. Children should feel safe and not afraid to do things.
10. Children should have fun and play games.
11. Adults need do what they say they are going to do.

## Summary of project evaluations

In the table below we have presented a summary of the evaluation findings of each project. Evaluation approaches varied. We have presented outcomes data wherever it was shared with us, and also have presented mechanisms of change where possible, based on evaluation reports submitted. We received reports from 13 of the 16 projects (3 projects had not reached that milestone at the time of writing).

Project name	Summary of evaluation and findings
<p><b>Shout text line</b></p>	<p><b>Evaluation method:</b> The Shout text line project was evaluated using monitoring of call volume and the numbers of volunteers recruited. A post-conversation survey is offered to all texters and the data from this was analysed. In a partnership with Imperial College London, students are exploring how machine learning and Natural Language Processing can build models that predict things about the texter.</p> <p><b>Information about beneficiaries reached:</b> Over the grant period daily call volume (all ages) rose from around 350 conversation a day to around 1200 a day. Analysis showed that call volume experiences spikes, often in response to events in the media. Possibly due to the Covid-19 pandemic, 13s and unders' share of this rising call rate also rose over the period, 7%-8% of texters over the grant period. 13 or unders were the age group of Shout text line users who were most likely to share issues of self-harm, bullying, or eating and body image, or gender identity/sexual orientation.</p> <p><b>Learning from evaluation:</b> Post-conversation survey showed improvements in all wellbeing and resilience areas, with the strongest improvement in calm feelings (70%), knowing where to go for help (76%) and willingness to talk about problems (76%). Findings of an MSc Student demonstrated the power of machine learning and Natural Language Processing to build models that can predict texter demographics and conversation topics.</p>
<p><b>WellRead by Verbal</b></p>	<p><b>Evaluation method:</b> WellRead was evaluated through a team reflection on the process of designing and scaling up the app, monitoring of users of the app in pilot phases and pre-and post-quizzes to families.</p> <p><b>Information about beneficiaries reached:</b> Project monitoring was not fully shared as the main focus of the evaluation was on the ability of the project to scale up. A Million &amp; Me data capture (from surveys) included 74 responses, 32% boys, 64% girls, 1% "other". The average age was 9 and the average number of contacts with WellRead was 4 (range 1 to 15).</p> <p><b>Learning from evaluation:</b> Quiz responses showed mixed results in terms of wellbeing and resilience improvements, with improvements in calm mood, good mood, positivity, feeling able to work out problems, knowing where to go for help with problems. In terms of the development of the app, the evaluation showed that a viable digital product was created. The literature review resulted in a "resilience curriculum" and measurement scales. At the time that A Million &amp; Me funding ended, the project was moving to scaling up, and appointing external evaluation. Key learning from the self-reflections included learning about the process of software development (better in-house, but challenging for a non-tech organisation), using agile project management techniques and using continuous testing.</p>

<p><b>Parents' Network by Young Minds</b></p>	<p><b>Evaluation method:</b> The Parents Network was evaluated using workshops with parents and the Young Minds youth panel, a post-interaction survey, and reflective journals by the parent volunteers.</p> <p><b>Information about beneficiaries reached:</b> Four “trusted local people” were trained to be peer advisors. 28 parents/carers were reached across four pilot sites, caring for 46 children.</p> <p><b>Learning from evaluation:</b> The evaluation showed that the training and support package was viewed positively, and the “Trusted Local Person” served to promote mental health, prevent mental health problems and offered mental health education and early intervention for families. Parents reported feeling more able to cope and work out what to do to help their children. All the parents completing the one-month follow-up survey said their child had improved and felt the service had been helpful.</p>
<p><b>Prescription Surf!</b></p>	<p><b>Evaluation method:</b> Prescription Surf! was evaluated using interviews, focus groups and pre- and post-intervention surveys. System partners were interviewed and there was a thematic analysis of the evaluation log of the project. The evaluation was conducted by external evaluators, Hannah Devine-Wright and Cath Godfrey.</p> <p><b>Information about beneficiaries reached:</b> Prescription Surf! shared data for 116 children with Centre for Mental Health, of whom 58% were male and 40% were female. No non-binary gender options were provided on the form, though 2% had no response. 3% of responses said they had a disability, while 5% said they did not know if they had a disability – though 60% of people did not respond to the disability question.</p> <p><b>Learning from evaluation:</b> From the 116 data sets there were 51 pairs of responses where there had been a baseline and a final session response. This shows an improvement in all wellbeing and resilience areas. The strongest improvements were in positive wellbeing areas related to relaxation and good mood.</p> <p>Clients spoke highly of the project and the positive impact on children and their families. Reported impacts included increased confidence, physical fitness/weight loss, reduced medication, better school attendance and a positive impact on family relationships. Parents reported better local engagement and higher activity levels.</p> <p>GPs did refer directly, however not through the predicted route (link workers). Referrals tended to be sought by parents who asked specifically for PS! through their GP. The client journey was not straightforward, with some bureaucratic barriers identified and overcome.</p> <p>It was important to involve the child at the point of referral – as this would encourage them to feel it would help – a key success factor.</p> <p>In terms of making a case for a social prescribing model, this was done, though the evaluators commented that this was not translated into health investment.</p>

<p><b>WOWsers: A Creative Explosion by Women of the World</b></p>	<p><b>Evaluation method:</b> WOWsers was evaluated using participant questionnaires, focus groups, interviews and team reflections.</p> <p><b>Information about beneficiaries reached:</b> 77 children signed up to WOWsers and 49 attended at least one session. 16 submitted creative work to the exhibition. The average age of these children was 14. The average number of sessions attended was 3.5. 19% of participants described themselves as disabled.</p> <p><b>Learning from evaluation:</b> While Centre for Mental Health received raw data, there were no pairs of baseline and time 2/3 data available for analysis. The evaluation of the project showed that there had been beneficiary recruitment challenges, which was helped by improving the project’s communication approach. There was better engagement in Scotland, and in more remote areas, and so the project reached children who may have limited access to other projects. This was done through strong networking. Outcomes were better achieved when time was taken to build confidence for the girls, especially the younger age groups.</p>
<p><b>#BeeWell</b></p>	<p><b>Evaluation method:</b> #BeeWell delivers an annual wellbeing survey, and this is the main vehicle for evaluation, alongside team’s reflections on the process of delivering the projects.</p> <p><b>Information about beneficiaries reached:</b> The first survey has coproduced with 150 young people across 14 schools. 93% of mainstream secondary schools in Greater Manchester participated and almost 40,000 young people completed the survey in 2021. Schools across Greater Manchester received their bespoke data dashboards and neighbourhood level dashboards were later published.</p> <p><b>Learning from evaluation:</b> In the first report, the survey showed 16% of young people reported high levels of emotional difficulties. Wellbeing inequalities were significant on the basis of gender (girls and non-binary young people faring worse) and sexuality. There was a need to improve physical activity levels, especially girls and some racialised communities, a need to address poor sleep, and discrimination is a feature for black children and LGBTQ+ children and SEND children. The evaluation showed that coproduction had been crucial to the success of the project, as had partnership buy-in.</p>
<p><b>A Million &amp; Me Boots</b></p>	<p><b>Evaluation method:</b> Boots work with A Million &amp; Me was evaluated by tracking the training of Boots colleagues, and by commissioning market research with people before and after accessing the online materials.</p> <p><b>Information about beneficiaries reached:</b> Boots recorded over 17,000 store colleagues accessing the training.</p> <p><b>Learning from evaluation:</b> The market research explored attitudes before and after viewing the campaign material. It showed that there were already high levels of motivation to look after mental wellbeing of children, with levels of motivation similar for mental wellbeing and physical wellbeing. However, only 63% of participants in the research said they had enough information about how to do this. After viewing the material, there was a 20% increase in people feeling confident to talk about mental wellbeing with children.</p>

<p><b>Proud Connections by The Proud Trust</b></p>	<p><b>Evaluation method:</b> Website activity is tracked, and webchat participants are offered a post-chat survey.</p> <p><b>Information about beneficiaries reached:</b> There were 1,616 clicks on the ‘Need to chat’ button, rising over time. This resulted in 237 actual chats, as 78% were outside of operating hours. 84% were from outside of Manchester. The ‘For Young People’ section of the website had a total of 126,307 page views since the launch (49,922 unique views). The ‘For Adults’ section of the website had a total of 33,414 page views since the launch (14,200 unique views). The volume of views is rising in both cases. Only 7% of young people and 13% of adults were from Manchester, suggesting significant geographical spread is taking place</p> <p><b>Learning from evaluation:</b> Post-chat surveys showed good outcomes for young people (more positive, hopeful, able to seek support, connectedness) and for adults (more able to support LGBTQ+ young people, knowledge of where to get help, more confident in conversations, more aware of positive impact they can have). The evaluation showed that young people’s involvement had been particularly important in the success of the project, and that growing tech-confidence during the pandemic helped accelerate the work. Access to peer learning within A Million &amp; Me was also seen as important to the project.</p>
<p><b>Ollee by Parent Zone</b></p>	<p><b>Evaluation method:</b> Ollee was evaluated using an in-app evaluation survey, plus some more in-depth evaluation surveys for some beneficiaries. Use of the app was analysed and there have been numerous focus groups. Two external evaluations have been completed.</p> <p><b>Information about beneficiaries reached:</b> There were 1,518 users in the most recent evaluation period, on average using Ollee 1.4 times. On average one user stays engaged for just over three minutes looking at approximately 6 pages. School, family and friends are the top three topics that users focus on, with 24%, 22% and 19% of all topic engagements respectively. The topics of body, world and internet accounted for 14%, 11% and 10% respectively.</p> <p><b>Learning from evaluation:</b> From the in-app survey questions, around 35-40% of responses reported an improvement in wellbeing and resilience outcomes for children, and similar proportions of adults feeling more able to do things to help their children and reach out for support. In focus groups evaluators noted that children were reporting adapting behaviour in response to challenges, valued having own strategies validated, and sharing advice and approaches. The external evaluation mapped user journeys and identified important stepping stones towards improved wellbeing for children, such as being able to customise Ollee, getting good advice and being able to self-assess your own strength of feeling. The project evaluation showed that children’s independent, positive relationship with Ollee was an important mechanism for change, as was children using Ollee for peer to peer advice, and Ollee’s role in improving parent/carers’ confidence.</p>

<p><b>One Space</b></p>	<p><b>Evaluation method:</b> Website use was tracked and analysed, though this was not possible in detail for under 18 year olds.</p> <p><b>Information about beneficiaries reached:</b> The estimated number of site users during the grant period (estimate based on over 18's data because under 18's was not possible on Google analytics) was 6,455. 2,117 young people were directed from the site to YoungMinds, and 170 were directed to Shout.</p> <p><b>Learning from evaluation:</b> As a portal website, there was no direct evaluation of One Space planned or delivered.</p>
<p><b>Stormbreak</b></p>	<p><b>Evaluation method:</b> Stormbreak has been evaluated by integrating an evaluation survey into the digital assets. An external evaluation is tracking the progress of the project.</p> <p><b>Information about beneficiaries reached:</b> 21,034 children have been reached since the launch of Stormbreak digital.</p> <p><b>Learning from evaluation:</b> The evaluation shows high rates of improvement in outcomes for children for wellbeing and resilience, as well as ability to maintain friendships and positive family relationships and seek help. Parents and carers saw improvements in ability to communicate with their children about emotions, respond to their children's needs and find support if needed. Stormbreak reduced inhibitions and made it easier for both parents and children to talk about their feelings. Stormbreak helped children to cultivate positive expectations. The evaluation showed that children experiencing fun and enjoyment on the project was important, as was good accessibility, families participating together and targeting communications for particular times. It was important to validate the role of parents and bring families together.</p>
<p><b>Positive Youth Foundation</b></p>	<p><b>Evaluation method:</b> The Positive Youth Foundation project was evaluated using project monitoring information, evaluation forms for children, case studies and team reflections.</p> <p><b>Information about beneficiaries reached:</b> PYF reported 192 children attending, of whom 66% were male. Non-binary options were not made available. The most common ages were 10 and 11. The project team report that girls are harder to engage, and they plan to begin a girls group. Around 50% of the project attendees are newly arrived. Positive Youth Foundation submitted data from 64 children to Centre for Mental Health. This showed that the average number of sessions was 15, and some young people had attended over 80 times.</p> <p><b>Learning from evaluation:</b> We were able to identify 36 pairs of evaluation questionnaires, and the average scores of these are shown below. There was average improvement in all wellbeing and resilience areas between first and second data capture, with the biggest improvements in resilience. Case studies show children engaging gradually with trusted adults in group and growing in confidence while taking part in positive activities. There is a pattern of disclosure of stressful factors such as bullying, loneliness and missing home. Rapport with staff is a key facilitator for this relationship, and it was important for staff to speak languages or be relatable in terms of children's experiences. The Positive Youth Foundations self-evaluation reflects on learning they have gained from learning from children themselves, and through the process of trial and error- especially during the pandemic.</p>

<p><b>Trust Me by Anna Freud Centre</b></p>	<p><b>Evaluation method:</b> Centre for Mental Health are acting as an external evaluator, and at the time of writing this evaluation is not complete. Alongside this evaluation, the AFC team conducted an appreciative enquiry and learning review.</p> <p><b>Information about beneficiaries reached:</b> Results from the external evaluation are pending.</p> <p><b>Learning from evaluation:</b> AFC’s enquiry shows that the course was widely accessed across the UK. The course was being accessed by organisations working with marginalised groups. Common themes for encouraging help-seeking in young people were identified: a friendly positive ethos, young people feeling a sense of belonging, shared natural curiosity, intentional conversation and familiarity.</p>
<p><b>Black Thrive</b></p>	<p>Evaluation methods have, as yet, not been finalised.</p>
<p><b>Voices from Care Cymru</b></p>	<p>Evaluation methods have, as yet, not been finalised.</p>
<p><b>Your Mind Matters</b></p>	<p><b>Evaluation method:</b> Output from Immediate Media and readership were tracked.</p> <p><b>Information about beneficiaries reached:</b> The campaign created more than 200 features, covering 337 pages across 12 magazines/brands. These features reached 3,841,051 children.</p> <p><b>Learning from evaluation:</b> While the impact of the campaign was not formally evaluated, it won a prestigious Periodical Publishers Association Award 2020 for Campaign Of The Year. The judges said: “We unanimously felt that this campaign was innovative, educational and most of all relevant with an important message about a very good cause. Almost certain to leave a brand legacy, which is an extraordinary achievement”.</p>



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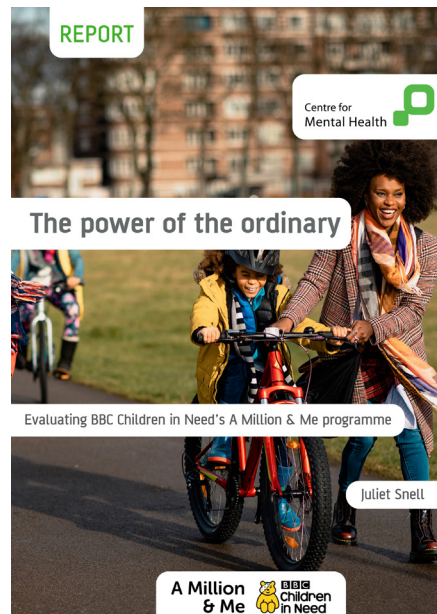
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## The power of the ordinary

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