

AllChild Evaluation Midterm Summary Report

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Background and Approach

In September 2024, AllChild launched its Impact Programme in Wigan, marking the first expansion of its model outside London. The AllChild intervention aims to improve social, emotional, and academic outcomes for children aged 5 to 14 years who face risk factors such as poor attendance, exclusion, mental health challenges, and low family income. The programme provides a tailored two-year model of support from Link Workers (based in schools), and brings together schools, families, local services, and Voluntary, Community, Faith, and Social Enterprise (VCFSE) organisations to develop an integrated, child-centred support network.

Coram is leading a two-year, theory-based evaluation, co-produced with peer researchers (local young people aged 16–18 years), to assess the programme’s setup, implementation and delivery in Wigan and to examine its emerging impacts on children and young people, their families, and the wider system.

This midterm summary presents year 1 findings from AllChild’s work with 250 children across 7 schools, drawing on qualitative and quantitative methods, including surveys, interviews, and focus groups as well as creative sessions co-developed and co-facilitated with 7 peer researchers, using engaging, age-appropriate techniques to explore children and young people’s experiences.

Implementation and Process Evaluation (IPE)

Findings from the Implementation and Process Evaluation (IPE) explore the enablers and barriers to the successful set-up and delivery of the programme in the new context of Wigan, including the six-month scoping and feasibility phase, the twelve-month set-up phase, as well as the first year of delivery.

Feasibility

The six-month feasibility phase was essential for AllChild to explore and understand the Wigan context and for establishing the crucial alignment in values and ways of working between the Local Authority and AllChild. This process led to key adaptations in AllChild's model and approach, including changes in planned outcomes and the decision to integrate the AllChild programme with Wigan's Early Help system. Across our research, stakeholders generally viewed the feasibility phase as successful, crediting AllChild's organisation and commitment to listening and to understanding the community through high-quality workshops.

From AllChild's perspective, success was supported by clear leadership, joined-up working and internal alignment within the Local Authority, alongside the Local Authority's strong commitment to early intervention and community-based working, which facilitated a trusting partnership and a collective will to get behind and deliver the programme.

"[The Local Authority] took a lead in corraling, championing this amongst stakeholders at their end, they got relevant people in the room. They made the right connections."

AllChild Staff, Interview

In interviews with the evaluation team, AllChild noted that an appetite for change in Wigan and the absence of competing, largescale transformation initiatives created favourable conditions for the programme. The Local Authority were transparent about their existing strengths, challenges and strategic priorities, and directed AllChild's focus towards the communities of Leigh and Atherton. Whilst this transparency was pivotal for forming a trusting partnership, a key barrier was that AllChild's early community engagement remained largely channelled through Local Authority contacts, meaning that some smaller and harder-to-reach VCFSE partners were initially missed. Subsequent outreach addressed many of these gaps and led to a positive shift toward Delivery Partners more rooted in the local context.

"AllChild have begun to engage on a more real level with the VCFSE... That's helped as well because then they've got VCFSE champions."

Local Authority Staff, Interviews

Co-design and Community Engagement

Extensive co-design work, initiated in the feasibility phase and then continued into the set-up phase. This established trust and secured buy-in from the Local Authority, schools and the VCFSE sector, building the relationships that laid the foundations for successful implementation.

"I do think [AllChild] listen, adapt and are flexible... [there is] a clear vested interest in children and they wanted to come to the North-West."

Local Authority Staff, Interview

Schools similarly credited a strong sense of partnership and that AllChild had taken time to understand the locality and to listen to their needs:

"They really seem to get it and our area, and I think they spent a lot of time thinking about that and planning for that. So I would like them to know that that was really felt and was noticed."

Secondary School Head Teacher, Focus Group

Adaptations

As a result of the co-design process, AllChild introduced several context-specific adaptations in Wigan based on local needs: notably, AllChild expanded its focus to include school exclusions and family work. In addition, practical changes included Link Workers taking on a direct Early Help role, a stronger emphasis on family engagement, and a more phased approach to delivery. While important for meeting Wigan's needs and building relationships, these adaptations prompted internal concerns within AllChild about scope and deliverability, particularly regarding the model's ability to robustly address school exclusions. This highlighted the need for clearer internal agreement within AllChild on what is appropriate and achievable before expanding to new areas, and for regular review of any programme adaptations during future setup and co-design to ensure they remain deliverable.

Cohort Selection

Stakeholders interviewed as part of the evaluation expressed mixed views on cohort selection. Most agreed the programme generally targeted the right children and young people, but some Link Workers felt that the needs of certain participants exceeded what the AllChild model is designed to support. By contrast, some members of the Local Authority noted that pupils chosen for the programme had higher-than-expected school attendance levels.

Selection processes during setup were generally smooth and well-coordinated, supported by relationships and contextual insight developed during feasibility and co-design. However, gaps in coordination between phases meant some adaptations were not fully implemented. Ambiguity about the appropriate threshold of need for the programme within the new context produced inconsistent views across AllChild Staff, the Local Authority and schools: in particular, there were concerns about whether certain pupils were a good fit for AllChild's Early-Help focused offer, a situation made more complex by the programme pursuing outcomes that were new in Wigan. Selection criteria for the year 2 cohort have already been revised to better align participants with the programme's attendance objectives.

Link Worker Delivery in Schools

Delivery in schools was widely viewed by stakeholders as progressing well. Both schools and AllChild staff (including Link Workers) felt Link Workers have integrated into school teams and are engaging effectively with AllChild's participants. This success was attributed to a highly-skilled delivery team and strong leadership from the Regional Director. Schools emphasised that, beyond technical skills, the right personality matters for Link Worker roles, highlighting that proactive individuals who know how to connect with children and young people are particularly effective.

Practical factors in primary school settings have also supported integration. The higher ratio of Link Workers to AllChild participants, compared with the wider pupil population, has likely increased primary school Link Workers' ability to integrate and to influence the broader school community. A primary school head explained:

"Children don't have great relationships with their teachers... [so] this special relationship with the link worker when the children see the link worker working in partnership with their teacher for the benefit of the child, I think that's been really powerful. Them seeing that relationship that the person that they're really trusting and love working with really responds and respects the teacher and that they want to work together. I think that's been a really powerful message to the children".

Primary School Head Teacher, Focus Group

By contrast, Link Workers reported that full integration is more difficult in secondary schools because of their larger size, and the programme's benefits are therefore less visible across the wider school.

Link Workers emphasised the importance of prioritising relationship-building in early delivery, focusing on establishing trust through one-to-one work, offering creative sessions when a child is in need or in crisis, and using active, engaging approaches. They stressed allowing sufficient time for Link Workers to develop relationships and fully understand participants so they can effectively coordinate and refer to wider support (e.g. appropriate Delivery Partners).

Operational challenges have limited some Link Workers' capacity to deliver one-to-one sessions and to complete Early Help assessments. These include: limited access to private, quiet spaces for sessions; scheduling difficulties within the school day; and high workloads for Link Workers. Such constraints have been particularly apparent in larger secondary schools.

Communication gaps between schools and AllChild also presented challenges for some Link Workers. It was reported that the roles and responsibilities of Link Workers were not always clear to schools or disseminated effectively across school staff, leading to instances of Link Workers providing support outside their intended role. Similarly, communication challenges resulted in some duplication of support, whereby children and young people participating in AllChild were also receiving overlapping support from other school staff or existing interventions. These issues were most evident during early delivery, when Link Workers were still establishing themselves within their schools, and in secondary schools, where the larger size and number of pupils made integration and communication with school staff more challenging. Clearer, consistent communication with school staff about roles, responsibilities, and existing provision prior to implementation was highlighted as essential, and AllChild is already addressing this in its delivery in the six new Wigan schools onboarded in Year 2.

Link Workers Early Help Role

Link Workers reported mixed experiences with Early Help responsibilities. Some found Early Help assessments valuable for understanding and supporting families, while others questioned their usefulness alongside other duties. Several Link Workers described difficulties engaging some parents and families and, in some cases, a lack of confidence in making referrals leading to both Link Workers and Local Authority concerns over quality.

A common concern among Link Workers was the additional capacity pressure created by Early Help duties. This highlighted the need for clearer expectations for both schools and Link Workers, time-management support, practical training on referral processes, and a user-friendly directory of local services. Strengthened collaboration with emerging Family Hubs was also seen by Link Workers as a way to improve the quality of Early Help assessments.

AllChild has already begun responding to these challenges and have facilitated a full-day training session delivered by Wigan Safeguarding Children Partnership to strengthen the team's understanding of whole-family working and Early Help. In addition, AllChild is working closely with the Local Authority to quality assure the AllChild team's Early Help assessments, many of which have been found to be of a high standard. This process is helping to identify further training opportunities that would be beneficial.

Delivery Partner Activity

It was recognised by the Local Authority that it was important for Delivery Partners to *"come in with a bang"* (LA staff) to ensure buy-in and engagement from both children and young people, and schools. This goal was largely met due to close collaboration between Link Workers and Delivery Partners to coordinate, adapt, and improve support for children and young people. However, stakeholders agreed that a slight delay to Delivery Partner start-times could strengthen alignment, allowing Link Workers more time to build relationships with participants to help ensure the right young people are referred to the most appropriate activities. Delivery Partners also called for earlier and clearer communication with schools, children and young people, and for a clearer articulation of programme objectives to support smoother delivery.

It was generally believed that most Delivery Partners and schools are working well together, with many on both sides describing the relationship as mutually beneficial. At the time of interviewing, several Delivery Partners said they would welcome more opportunities to network with similar organisations involved in the programme and to receive timelier communications about those opportunities - something AllChild has already begun to address.

School staff were largely positive about the different Delivery Partners and noted that AllChild's approach to ensuring Delivery Partner sessions were high-quality helped boost their confidence in the intervention overall:

"[AllChild] weren't afraid to have difficult conversations, is what I'm trying to say, really, but in a supportive way because it was for the benefit of our children. And I found that quite, you know... it boosted my confidence in them that they weren't just going to accept, you know, any provider. The provider had to deliver a quality provision and that gave me a lot of confidence."

Secondary School Head Teacher, Focus Group

In creative sessions, several children and young people reflected on how much they enjoyed Delivery Partner activities, as they provided exciting opportunities to try new things and broaden their experiences and develop skills. When discussing a question in the creative session about if AllChild has helped them make new friends, one participant explained why they ticked 'a lot':

Peer Researcher: "So how would you say it's helped you to make new friends?"

Participant: "So we've been doing friendships... so it's been helping me with my confidence to talk to more people and then when I went on the Jamie's Farm trip, because [there were] a lot of people there, they helped me talk."

Secondary School Student, Creative Sessions

Emerging Impacts

As part of the theory-based approach to this evaluation, we have identified five 'causal pathways' - key pathways within the programme's theory of change that we are investigating to build understanding and confidence in the contributory impact, and mechanisms of change, within AllChild's model. At this stage of the evaluation, findings around impact should be considered provisional, offering early indications and laying the foundations for further exploration in Year 2.

The first three causal pathways examine the role of trusted adult relationships, whilst the fourth and fifth explore the role of parental engagement and stakeholder connections as part of the wider system:

- **1a. Trusted relationships:** Regular sessions with Link Workers contribute to the development of a trusted relationship between the child/young person and Link Worker.
- **1b. Personalised support and wellbeing:** Personalised support from a trusted Link Worker contributes significantly to improved social and emotional well-being for the child/young person.
- **1c. Delivery Partner sessions and wellbeing:** Regular participation in sessions with local Delivery Partner organisations contribute to improved social and emotional well-being for the child/young person.
- **2a. Parental engagement:** Support from a Link Worker contributes to parents/carers being more engaged with wider opportunities and support within the Early Action ecosystem (e.g. Delivery Partners, wider VCFSE organisations, schools and local-authority early-intervention services).
- **2b. System connections and collaboration:** Participation in the AllChild programme contributes significantly to better connections and collaboration within the Early Action ecosystem (including Delivery Partners, wider VCFSE organisations, schools and local-authority early-intervention services)

Causal Pathway 1a: Trusted Relationships

Year 1 data offers strong emerging evidence that both the short-term and intermediate outcomes for causal pathway 1a are being achieved. The majority of young people who participated in the creative sessions and completed feedback surveys reported feeling able to express their feelings and needs to their Link Workers, feeling supported and safe, and having developed trust in them. At the same time, the data highlights some variation in how consistently these outcomes are being realised, particularly regarding young people’s confidence in expressing their feelings and needs to Link Workers.

Creative sessions found that most children reported positive feelings when with their Link Worker: for example, 15 of 17 participants said they liked seeing their Link Worker “a lot” (the remaining 2 responses were positive, and neutral). Moreover, several children and young people talked directly about trusting their link workers in terms of being able to talk to them about their challenges, or relying on them for help if they need it. For example, one young person chose ‘calm’, ‘focused’ and ‘happy’ from a ‘feelings wheel’ activity as the main emotions that they experience with their Link Worker and, when asked why, they replied *“Because I can trust her...with any problems that I have”*. This young person also told us that this trust had developed over several months, commenting that while they felt *“scared”* when they first met their Link Worker, they can now *“trust them much more”*. There is also good broader evidence from the qualitative research that many children have developed trust in their Link Workers and feel supported, as suggested by these quotes:

- “I do have problems talking about my emotions and that, but I do talk to [my Link Worker] if I want or need to. I feel really comfortable with her.”*

Secondary School Student, Creative Sessions
- “I didn’t really like talking to people before...[but] I just prefer telling people what I’m feeling now instead of keeping it in”.*

Secondary School Student, Creative Sessions
- “Ultimately I think it’s that link with the Link Worker with those vulnerable children that’s making a real difference. They feel.... that they’ve really got a strong partnership with the Link Worker and somebody to go to and somebody that cares.”*

Primary School Head Teacher, Focus Group



The 'Word Cloud' above shows the overwhelmingly positive feelings that children and young people selected from the 'Feelings Wheel' activity when asked; 'how do you feel when you are with your link worker?' as part of the creative sessions.

Data from the CYP Feedback Survey (n=94) further supports indications of the development of trust:

- **91%** of respondents agreed with the statement "I can trust my Link Worker".
- **86%** of respondents agreed with the statement "I can talk to my Link Worker about things that I am finding difficult".

Causal Pathway 1b: Personalised Support and Wellbeing

There is provisional evidence that some children are experiencing improved self-regulation and confidence as a result of the AllChild programme. Link Workers reported observing improvements in self-regulation and communication around challenging behaviour for some children and young people. Confidence gains were also a recurring theme, with children and young people reporting increased willingness to talk to new people and improved attitudes to learning. Some children also reported higher attendance on days they had Link Worker sessions.

"[AllChild has] made me more confident at school...I started to have more confidence, helping me talk to new people...I was really shy but now I can talk to people without being really scared."

Secondary School Student, Creative Sessions

Additionally, in the creative sessions, some children and young people related improvements in their social confidence and friendships to an increased willingness to attend school. This was also reflected by Link Workers and school heads that similarly reported seeing some improvements in attitudes and classroom engagement and in children and young people's overall wellbeing. There is more limited evidence for outcomes such as self-worth, problem-solving, and coping skills, and there is variation in how widely these benefits are experienced across the cohort with the existing data.

I've seen the biggest impact [with] attitudes to learning, [which is] where the teachers will take measures against well-being in class, engagement in class, involvement. And I would say that there's where we are seeing more impact.

Primary School Head Teacher, Focus Group

Causal Pathway 1c: Delivery Partner Sessions and Wellbeing

Early indications suggest children enjoy VCFSE sessions and benefit from trying new activities and positive interactions with trusted adults. School and AllChild staff emphasised that the quality of delivery staff, and their nurturing approach as role models, was central to building confidence and aspirations:

"The activities are great and engaging, but what I found is the people who deliver them have been excellent and they are just the kind of person that you would want our vulnerable children to be working with. Extremely nurturing, caring, encouraging...So it's not just the activity, it's the people. When it's all about relationships and building somebody's confidence and building their aspirations, whether you're doing art, or drama, or music, it doesn't matter. It's about being with the right people, isn't it?"

Primary School Head Teacher, Focus Group

However, at this stage there is no robust evidence on wider outcomes relating to Delivery Partners beyond positive signs of participant engagement and enjoyment, suggesting the need for further exploration in year 2.

Causal Pathway 2a: Parental Engagement

Findings on parent and carer impacts are encouraging but mixed. Parent Feedback Survey data (n=80) suggested most parents have a positive view on their child's Link Worker, with 95% of parent/carers respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that they feel comfortable talking to their child's Link Worker. Qualitative evidence reinforces this positivity with parents'/carers' responses focusing mainly on their children's experiences of the programme, such as their enjoyment of activities, their engagement in class, and their improved willingness to attend school. Some examples include:

"Before my child was on the AllChild programme it was a struggle to get her to school and often I had to come out of work to take her to school. Since she has been with AllChild all of that struggle has stopped."

Secondary School Parent/Carer, Feedback Survey

"My child has received good support and is more enthusiastic about coming to school on the days she has sessions with AllChild."

Primary School Parent/Carer, Feedback Survey

Some Link Workers reported that Early Help assessments can help build positive relationships with families by deepening understanding and enabling practical trust-building support, such as helping find housing, attending school meetings, or making referrals to additional services. However, several Link Workers also noted that many families remain difficult to engage, and that these are typically the same families that schools already struggle to reach. It should be acknowledged that this feedback was gathered in the spring, when the programme was still at a relatively early stage. Link Workers and Community Team Managers reported that some parental/carers attitudes appear to be improving. They credited approaches such as using WhatsApp to share positive feedback, progress updates, and photos from activities as particularly effective in fostering positive relationships. This was especially prominent with parents/carers who are often accustomed to receiving mainly negative communications from schools about challenges, such as with attendance and behaviour.

"The parents really rely on [the Link Workers] now, as well. I think that's been such a strength: we've had a lot of parents who don't engage in school, who have their own fears around school and who will have no communication with them whatsoever [but] who will get the point across via the Link Worker."

Community Team Manager, Paired Interview

Key data from the Parent Feedback Survey (n=80) further supports indications of improved attitudes and relations between parents/carers and schools, as well as improved knowledge and understanding and positivity regarding wider support:

- **83%** agreed with the statement: "The AllChild programme has helped me feel more positive about my child's school and the support my child gets."
- **73%** agreed with the statement: "The AllChild programme has strengthened my connection to my child's school."
- **74%** agreed with the statement: "Since my child has been working with AllChild, I am more aware of the information, services, support and opportunities available locally to me and my child"
- **74%** agreed with the statement: "The AllChild programme has helped me feel more positive about the support available from the council and Early Help."

Causal Pathway 2b: System Connections and Collaboration

Evidence of system-level change is limited so far, which is expected given the long-term nature of these objectives. However, early signs point to increased mutual awareness and improved connectivity between schools, VCFSE organisations and the Local Authority. Several Head Teachers reported that AllChild has improved their knowledge of and links to local organisations which can deliver support in schools, with one noting:

“I think there was a real lack of, or a lack of awareness of, those third sector organisations who could come in and help. Or, we'd not been put in contact with them, especially the ones for SEN students. So I think what AllChild are doing in making those links is building a real kind of bank of those organisations who can come and work with our young people and grow those and give them a bit of sustainability.”

Secondary School Head Teacher, Focus Group

Perspectives among VCFSE organisations are mixed: some saw little change because they were already working with schools, while others reported that AllChild enabled them to work in more schools and reach more children, helped by funding and increased school awareness. Participating Delivery Partner organisations did not report major gains in connectivity with the Local Authority or with peer organisations, though many had not yet attended AllChild networking events at the point of engagement and these opportunities are set to increase in year 2. From the Local Authority's perspective, however, AllChild has strengthened collaborative working, notably the relationship between Early Help and schools and partnership working with VCFSE organisations, as seen in recent Family Hubs design work.

Conclusions and Recommendations

AllChild's work to establish themselves in the new context of Wigan - from feasibility and scoping, through to co-design, set-up, implementation, and delivery - has been largely successful from most perspectives, including those of key stakeholders, AllChild's strategic and operational staff, and the children and young people participating in the programme.

The **feasibility and co-design** phases are widely regarded as having gone very well, with stakeholders particularly valuing AllChild's commitment to listening and community engagement. A key strength was AllChild's close collaboration and alignment with a strong and innovative Local Authority who provided clear strategic leadership and were committed to the partnership and to community-based working. Ensuring similar strategic alignment will be key to the success of AllChild's expansion to new places. Key recommendations for the future include:

- recruiting a Regional Director earlier in the co-design and set-up process;
- strengthening VCFSE engagement with organisations outside of the Local Authority's network;
- improving internal communications across different AllChild teams involved in programme setup.

These recommendations are already informing AllChild's current plans for co-design and setup in new places from September 2026.

The operational setup, including **school and cohort selection**, was generally smooth and well-coordinated, supported by relationships and contextual insight developed during feasibility and co-design. There was strong engagement and buy-in from schools, with the Local Authority and AllChild adopting a data-driven approach to onboard appropriate sites. School leaders have highlighted a strong sense of partnership and recognised that AllChild had taken time to understand local needs and listen to them. A key learning for the future is the need to ensure greater specificity around the cohort profile and the appropriate thresholds of need for the programme. The cohort selection process has been adapted for year 2 in Wigan and, in potential new places, AllChild have had more focused conversations about the specific cohort profile during the feasibility phase.

Delivery has been led by an experienced and largely local Link Worker team, and a strong network of high-quality Delivery Partners. Link Workers are fully embedded as part of school teams, with headteachers actively involved in Link Worker recruitment. Recommendations from this research include prioritising hyperlocal VCFSE partners to promote local engagement, and more clearly communicating the parameters of the Link Worker role with all stakeholders within schools, particularly in larger secondaries.

The **integration with Early Help** was a key programme adaptation for Wigan, and some Link Workers have reported that completing Early Help Assessments has helped them effectively support families' broader needs. Link Workers have also raised concerns about workload, reporting that more time needs to be built into their schedules for Early Help responsibilities and requesting more training on conducting effective assessments and making referrals. AllChild and the Local Authority have acted on this feedback, providing additional training and deepening links with local statutory and VCFSE-led services.

Whilst the **impact evaluation** is in early stages, there is good emerging evidence that many children have developed trust in their Link Workers and feel increasingly able to discuss emotions and feelings with them. For some children, there is provisional evidence that this trusted relationship is already leading to improvements, particularly in self-regulation and confidence. There is evidence that children enjoy the sessions led by Delivery Partners, but as yet no evidence that these sessions have led to improved social and emotional outcomes. Further research will take place during the second year of the programme looking at outcomes for children and which activities may be driving these.

Families have responded largely positively to the programme, with 95% of parents feeling positive talking to their child's Link Worker. This relationship has resulted in improved parent/carer perceptions of schools and improved awareness of the local support offer. Family engagement with the Early Help offer is mixed, with some families engaging positively while others have been more difficult to engage. Evidence of **system-level change** is limited so far, which is expected given the long-term nature of these objectives. However, early signs point to increased mutual awareness and improved connectivity between schools, VCFSE organisations and the Local Authority.