

SHIFT

THE SHIFT DIFFERENCE



Initial findings from SHiFT's Research and Evaluation Lead

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Banquo Junior was 13 years old when he was arrested for being in possession of a machete. He'd been hanging out with an older crowd and been drawn into the world of street violence. This was his third knife offence within four months.

Banquo received a 12-month community order and was permanently excluded from school. Having never had contact with any of the Local Authority services before, the severity of Banquo's crimes caused alarm across the partnership.

That alarm coincided with a new and ambitious programme being piloted in Banquo's area - SHiFT.

Banquo was invited to work with Holly, a SHiFT Guide. With only four other children to work with and a full 18 months to work together, Holly was able to get alongside Banquo, get to know him, his mother, and his community, and provide the essential support he needed.

Banquo is now on a very different path.

Setting the scene

Holly is one of ten Guides working across two SHiFT Practices based in Greenwich and Kingston and Richmond. With two further SHiFT Practices launching imminently and plans for a further five across the country by this time next year, SHiFT is beginning to scale.

As SHiFT's Research and Evaluation Lead, my role is to strengthen and deepen SHiFT's understanding of its practice, its impacts, and the mechanisms through which SHiFT is making a difference.

I conducted an in-depth process evaluation of SHiFT's two pilot Practices. This involved gathering stories of some of the children SHiFT has worked with so far. In this document I focus primarily on Rob, Jaimie, and Banquo – children whose stories offer insight into the destructive cycle of crime (and behaviour that puts children at risk of crime), which SHiFT seeks to break.

In the UK, violent knife crime, county lines, and gang issues are on the rise. Children are getting caught in destructive cycles of harmful behaviour – becoming exploited, exploiting others or both, and causing serious, sometimes devastating damage, to themselves and or the people around them. SHiFT exists to break these cycles.



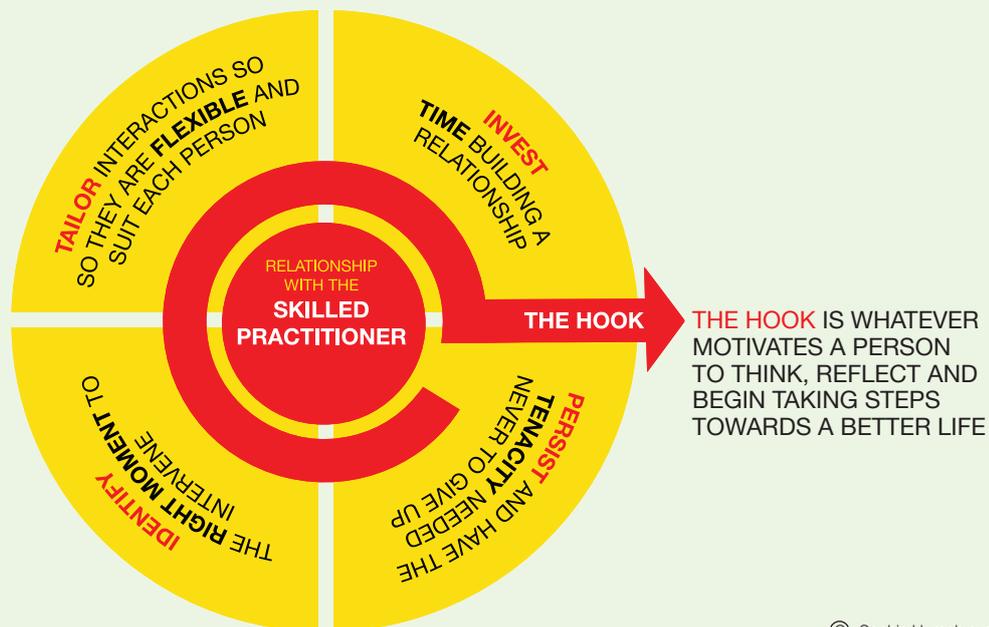
What is SHiFT?

SHiFT exists to break the destructive cycle of children and young people caught up in or at risk of crime, causing great harm to themselves and everyone around them.

Now into its second year of practice, SHiFT Guides have worked with 43 children and young people so far (6 girls and 37 boys, aged between 12 and 19).

Each SHiFT Practice consists of five Guides, one of whom is the Lead. They are supported by a Practice Coordinator and the national SHiFT team. SHiFT Guides are highly experienced practitioners from a range of professional backgrounds who use the ingredients of Breaking Cycles™ to guide the child to navigate their world differently.

BREAKING CYCLES: 'THE CORE INGREDIENTS'



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They work with everybody in their lives, including family, friends, and any professionals they are in contact with. Guides work to understand what is working well, and what less so. Together with each child they make a plan, and work with the child to follow the plan through. SHiFT Guides can be there, to do whatever it takes, to provide the support needed to ensure that children are successful.

SHiFT is committed to building strong foundations through research and evaluation. This is not simply about tracking and observing outcomes but understanding how and why these outcomes have occurred and, specifically, the **contribution** SHiFT has made.

The research approach

Findings presented in this report have resulted from my use of a methodology called contribution analysis. This is a relatively new and innovative method of understanding impact that provides some ‘causal certainty’ (i.e. some confidence that SHiFT is the thing that’s had the impact).

Data collection involved theory of change workshops with SHiFT Guides, interviews with children and Guides, telephone interviews with parents, focus groups with professionals, and examination of administrative data and SHiFT’s ‘exploration tools’ (completed by Guides and children together to monitor progress). Full details of the methodology and the findings can be found in the technical report on our website.

Data gathered in this way enabled me to develop a range of ‘contribution stories’ which describe children’s journeys since working with SHiFT. I have systematically gathered seven stories in addition to Banquo Junior’s. These eight stories represent around a fifth of children who have received support from SHiFT to date.

I began developing the contribution stories by constructing timelines with each child and their Guide. We worked together to build a picture of what has happened since they first started working with SHiFT. The aim was to understand the child’s story first – centring their voice in narrating their own life experiences.

I followed this with telephone interviews with parents, family members, and other professionals to develop a rich understanding of the child’s broader context. These, along with the exploration tools used by Guides with children to set goals and track progress, provided a range of evidence about the role of SHiFT and the contribution the Guide’s work was making.

Finally, I triangulated the stories with administrative data looking at criminal justice outcomes, number of missing episodes, and the involvement of other professionals in each child's life as well education and employment status. Following the methods of contribution analysis, I used the workshops with practitioners alongside the children's stories and outcomes observed to develop a deeper understanding of how SHiFT has contributed to the lives of the children. This also provided insight into practice, the experience of children and their families, and the perspective of the broader network of professionals alongside whom SHiFT Guides work.

Following this, an external researcher built on these stories to develop 'potential alternative narratives'. This has allowed us to consider what might have happened to children like Banquo if Holly hadn't started working with him and the potential costs to him, and the public purse.

The stories offer some evidence of how SHiFT is different and what sort of impact SHiFT is having.

Breaking cycles with the children who keep professionals awake at night

SHiFT works work with children caught in or at risk of the destructive cycle of crime – children for whom *things are getting worse not better*.

SHiFT identifies the children who will be offered SHiFT support by asking professionals across the local area to talk to them about the ‘children who keep them awake at night’ – children like Banquo.

When Banquo started working with Holly, professionals believed he was at high risk of seriously harming someone else and going to prison or being seriously hurt himself. He was gaining a reputation for being a habitual knife carrier, associating with older gang-connected males with links to organised crime in surrounding counties, and engaging in damaging behaviour in the community.

Banquo’s mum, Grace, felt that she had lost control of her son and feared that he would be killed. Professionals expected his offending behaviour to escalate.

When SHiFT talks to professionals within Youth Justice Services, the Police, Children’s Social Care, schools, the voluntary and community sector, mental health providers and Community Safety, many of the same children and young people begin to emerge.

These are the children who, despite repeated plans, interventions and best efforts - and often many professionals already involved in their lives - continue to be on a downward spiral of behaviour, unable to move to a place of safety and strength from a place of crisis, harm and vulnerability. The children SHiFT works with are often involved in county lines, regularly go missing, have been excluded from school, and are in repeated conflict with the law.

SHiFT exists because the current system isn't working.

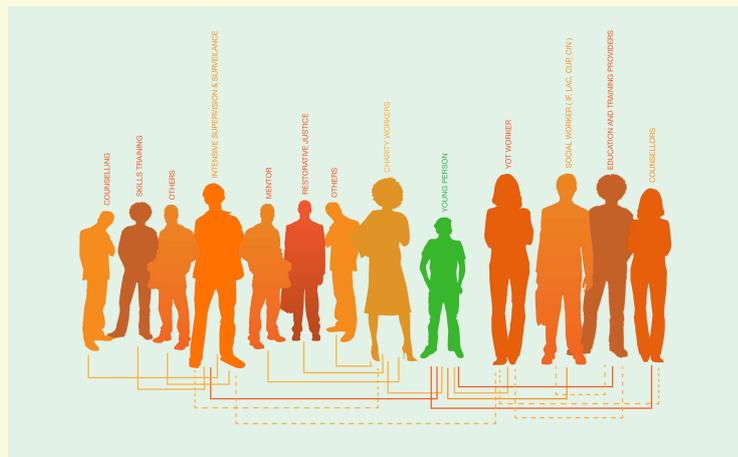
Existing services and systems are often experienced by the children and families SHiFT works with as piecemeal and uncoordinated, with artificial thresholds that create cracks, gaps, and cliff edges. The system has been designed through the lens of disconnected problems rather than the interconnected needs of people and their communities.

Working systemically with children and their families

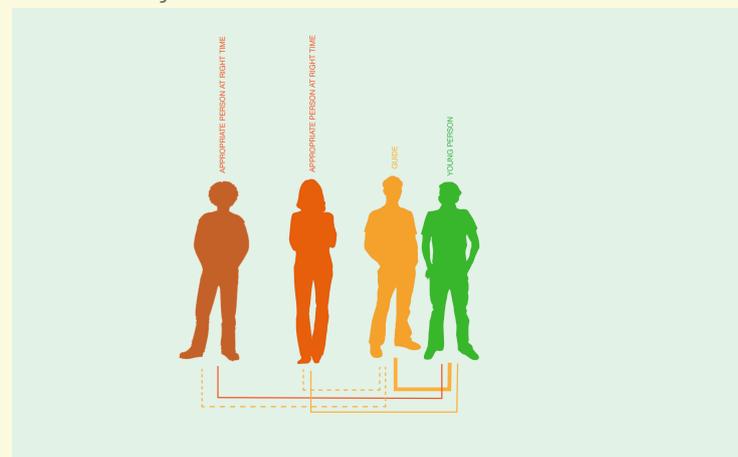
Current responses to children caught in cycles of crime often involve many different professionals who each look at the child through their own particular service's lens. There are different practitioners for different problems – gang workers, drug and substance misuse workers, sexual exploitation teams, and education and training specialists. The list goes on.

Children in need of support are often moved from service to service, pushed through different interventions targeted at different problems according to what's available and the thresholds they happen to meet.

SHiFT strives to do things differently, and this evaluation has provided promising evidence of these ambitions being realised in practice.



The old way



The SHiFT way

A first key finding is that children supported by SHiFT described feeling held as an individual (rather than a problem) by their Guide.

Guides are working flexibly and tenaciously according to the situation and individual needs of the child, and are working systematically across every aspect of their lives. Unconstrained by artificial barriers such as age limits, service thresholds or Local Authority borders, and unlike other services children had experienced, SHiFT Guides could follow the child and stay with them, wherever they go and whatever they do.

Holly started working with Banquo at a critical moment. Excluded from school, Banquo was adrift. The sense of loss that can go with a permanent exclusion – the expulsion from a community of peers, the rejection from what ought to be a safe space, the loss of friendships – can go hand in hand with an escalation in antisocial and criminal behaviour. Exclusion shrinks children's worlds and undermines their self-worth and confidence – the opposite of what a child needs when they are in crisis.

Being part of SHiFT meant that Banquo, and his mother Grace, had a different type of support. Holly was able to get alongside Banquo to understand his world and start to unpick what had happened.

Holly spent intensive time with Banquo and his mother, together, and separately, in numerous settings, including at home, in the park, and alongside him in the classroom. From early on, Holly identified Banquo's ability to reflect and be insightful about what he perceives as 'the mistakes' he has made in the past. Banquo said no one had ever asked him before why he thought those things had happened.

SHiFT Guides are able to do this because of their different way of working.

The SHiFT difference

The children SHiFT works with are often described by other professionals as ‘hard to reach’ or ‘refusing to engage’. SHiFT Guides see it as *their* responsibility to find ways to engage children – if they don’t, then they aren’t finding the right hook.



My research suggests that this success in engaging and continuing to work with children is, in part, due to the flexibility of SHiFT’s Guides. They can go where the child goes, find the ‘hook’ to engage and build a relationship, and then support them to raise their aspirations, tackle the challenges they face and achieve their goals.

Breaking Cycles puts the relationship between highly experienced practitioners and children at the heart of effective practice. Central to many of the stories I collected, was the time and space Guides enjoyed to keep turning up and trying new things, until they found a way to connect and build a relationship. Many children (and their wider families) described feeling let down by professionals in the past. SHiFT Guides recognised this and worked creatively and persistently to find a way to build trust and ensure the child felt comfortable and heard.

Most of the children I spoke with said – in some form – that their Guide, ‘gets them’.

Guides' work varies each day. Holly helped to build bridges and repair trust between Banquo and his mother, advocated for his return to mainstream education, and took him to football practice to build confidence and an avenue for achievement, and keep him busy as part of a new social network.

Other Guides have driven children to music clubs, using car journeys to talk about emotions and how to regulate them, or acted as an emergency contact, vouching for the child when they wanted to go back to college and get their education back on track. Guides have turned up at the police station when children got arrested day or night, speaking in support of them and working with their families through court processes, and, continuing to work with them if they go into custody, are moved to a placement out of the borough, and after they turn 18.

Guides can work flexibly, tailoring their work with children and families to fit the circumstances. They can pivot to different challenges and opportunities as they emerge.

Goals and purpose

Guides set goals with the children they're supporting, starting from a place of high aspiration, and working with them to build the steps towards achieving them.

Two key areas of strength emerged from my interviews: 1) education and employment, and 2) stabilising home lives and developing positive peer groups.

Of the eight children and young people involved in this research, seven had been directly assisted by SHiFT to improve their engagement with education and employment with the eighth being supported in maintaining their work placement. For some, this meant improved attendance and gaining qualifications, and for others it meant increased aspiration. Children and young people felt that their Guide had been with them each step of the way, providing support and encouragement to increase self-esteem so that engaging in work or school is seen as something they can do. Many of the children I interviewed described how work with their SHiFT Guide had led them

to feel better about themselves and have increased aspiration about what is possible for their future.

In relation to home lives and positive peer groups, the children and young people who participated in the research discussed gaining new skills in cooking and budgeting, increased self-understanding, finding ways to improve their wellbeing, and feeling more confident in their own skills and abilities. For many, this also involved thinking about their peer network and finding ways to move away from negative influence and focus on positive friendships.

The 'insider-outsider' positioning of SHiFT Guides emerged as a critical factor. Guides talked about the power of working both as insiders, employed directly by the Local Authority within the system of practitioners who sit around the child, and as outsiders as part of the SHiFT team, collaborating and sharing learning between Practices and supported by the national SHiFT team.

Insider-outsider status was seen as giving Guides the ability to work within the network of practitioners and from within the system, advocating effectively for the child and their family in ways that were beginning to have ripple effects for how other practitioners were doing their work. At the same time, Guides felt freed and enabled to work closely and creatively within the child's context, spending time with them in their communities, places and spaces, developing a strong relationship and a clear plan of action.

SHiFT Guides are there, in the heart of the system, advocating and supporting children and society to SHiFT the narrative, change perceptions, and find the right path forward.

SHiFT in action: meet Rob and Jaimie

Rob and Jaimie are both 17 years old and are in the care of the Local Authority. Both have been known to services for most of their lives. Rob has experienced violence within his home and there have been experiences of sexual abuse within Jaimie's family. Rob and Jaimie have both been in conflict with the law, having been arrested and received cautions and youth orders.

Rob's story:

Rob identifies himself as Mixed Heritage. Polite and gentle when he talks to professionals, he is well-liked. Rob has, however, been caught in a deeply destructive cycle of crime. When out on the streets, Rob has been violent towards others and involved in gang initiations. He has convictions for robbery, theft, and sexual assault, and has engaged in drug dealing. He was deeply involved in what he calls 'the roads' lifestyle. His family moved boroughs in the hope this would keep him safe. It didn't.

Rob's story highlights some of the well-known problems of life on 'the roads' in the UK. The issues of county lines (a term used to describe gangs who export drugs from one part of the UK to another, usually from a large conurbation like London, out to smaller towns) has become more prevalent with Crest Advisory reporting that some 27,000 children are involved (June 2021).

Many of the children being supported by SHiFT have been caught up in the county lines system. They carry drugs on trains, stay in 'cuckooed' houses (a house that's been taken over by a drug dealing network to replenish and dispense drugs), prepare the substances they have carried, and then spend time on the streets selling in the local area. Some children go missing for days and weeks on end when doing this kind of work.

Being involved in these activities has deeply damaging impacts on children and the lives of people around them. Children being supported by SHiFT talked to me in interview about being trapped in vans, being threatened with knives and gun, and being expected to get up and leave their classrooms at a moment's notice if there was work to be done. Exploited by older people – sometimes from within their own family – many end up in debt.

For some children SHiFT works with, being involved in county lines has led to criminal convictions (including, for some, custodial sentences); for others, there have been social and educational consequences; and for many, there have been both. All of the children I interviewed who had been involved in drug dealing had also been permanently excluded from education, their opportunities and life chances drastically narrowed as they struggled to find alternative educational provision and did not achieve their full academic potential.

For Rob, the lifestyle took a toll on his mental health. After he finished school (having been excluded he was enrolled in a Pupil Referral Unit to sit his GCSEs) he went into a pit of depression. He was overdosing on various tranquilisers and his mum described him as being completely 'out of it'.

One day, he left the house in a haze and was badly beaten. He ended up in hospital and the team of professionals around him decided that he ought to be taken into Local Authority care instead of going home. For Rob, home had been a place of domestic violence and, although the perpetrator of this violence was no longer living there, professionals still felt that he needed a break – a place to recover and recuperate.

It was at this point that Shakira, Rob's SHiFT Guide, began working with him.

Jaimie's story:

Jaimie has a similar background to Rob in some ways – also 17, also in the care of the Local Authority, and also having been permanently excluded – but her story is in other ways starkly different. Jaimie's life has been characterised by constant moves, highly disrupted schooling, and too many changes in professionals involved in her life. Without access to a stable home life or schooling, Jaimie's social network is limited.

Jaimie identifies as White and has been in the care of the Local Authority since she was ten years old. Jaimie's home life has been highly fractured - she is currently in her eighth placement in five years. She's never been in one placement long enough to develop meaningful and trusted relationships with the people who are there to care for her.

Jaimie's moves to new placements have often been a result of her displaying aggressive and sometimes physically violent behaviour which staff were not being able to manage. Constant moving has meant that Jaimie has missed huge amounts of school and is without the social networks that most 17-year-olds enjoy.

Jaimie's Guide, Azaria, describes her as being highly vulnerable. With few reliable adults in her life, Jaimie is an easy target for both sexual and criminal exploitation.

Lost in the system?

Despite many years of different professionals from different services being involved in each of their lives, both Rob and Jaimie did not feel supported or heard.

In Shakira's first professional's meeting as Rob's Guide, 15 other professionals were around the table. I asked Rob, 'How does that make you feel, hearing that so many people were talking about you?' He said, 'It's confusing cos like, why is no one helping me?'

Whereas Rob arguably had too many people involved, who were not making the impact needed, Jaimie had too few. Despite Jaimie's background and high level of vulnerability she did not meet the thresholds of support for most of the programmes in her area (and others she refused to take part in) which meant she had a single Social Worker to depend upon.

Jaimie told me that she felt her voice wasn't being heard in the system because there wasn't anyone who wanted to listen. I asked her, 'What needs to change in the system?' She responded by saying, 'I needed someone to listen to me and what I actually wanted.'

Reflecting on their experiences with SHiFT, by contrast, both Rob and Jaimie talked about how SHiFT had worked with them within the context of their own communities and networks, holding them, rather than a 'problem', and forming a plan to strengthen their foundations that centred their own voices and started from a place of aspiration and strength.

How does SHiFT get alongside?

Banquo needed to get back on track. In Holly's early contact with other professionals who were working with Banquo, she was met with a plethora of negative stories, including the likelihood that Banquo would 'kill or be killed', which was sometimes said in Banquo's presence. Holly purposefully focused on the need to shift this narrative and to help other professionals in Banquo's life to join with her, Banquo, and his mum, Grace, to put in place a plan that ensured his success.

Banquo got his head down. He was at a Pupil Referral Unit – a place of alternative provision for children who had been permanently excluded – and he knew he wanted to get back to mainstream school. He said, 'I feel like I needed another chance. I understand why I had to go there, but [...] I didn't want to get used to being at the centre'.

Holly, his Guide, was determined to enable this. She canvassed the Education Panel with a tenacity that Banquo described to me as 'magic'. She set challenges for Banquo, stretching him with extra homework. She talked about this at the Panel alongside the evidence she collated about Banquo's positive behaviour since the incident that had led to his exclusion, and the letter to the Panel that she had supported Banquo to write. She worked closely with Banquo's mum, attending meetings with her to ensure her voice was heard.

As for Rob, he said he was lost when he first started working with Shakira. He needed the support to 'get me back to me'. He wanted to get away from his old lifestyle. He had a place to live, and an apprenticeship that was going well. Outside of work though, he didn't know how to keep himself safe or how to manage his new home life. He told me, 'Since I met Shakira, my life's changed so much [...] if I have a situation and I am stressing out or I need someone to talk to, Shakira is there.' Slowly, Shakira and Rob have built a strong relationship.

During the first few months of working with Jamie, Azaria has had to pivot the focus of their work together several times. Early on, Jaimie had a serious health concern and rang Azaria in the middle of the night asking for help. Azaria talked through the issue with Jaimie,

helped her to stay calm, and made a plan. Azaria accompanied Jaimie to the subsequent hospital appointments, helped her find a more suitable doctor so she didn't have to travel for over an hour for treatment, and provided the emotional support she needed to navigate services. When asked what she would have done if Azaria hadn't been with her, Jaimie told me that she would have 'just left it'.

SHiFT's approach seems to have provided the support Rob, Jaimie, and Banquo needed to reset the foundations of their lives and start to thrive.

My research indicated that the Guides' persistence in understanding what would work for their children has been a key part of the success. This, in combination with the systemic lens and 'insider-outsider' positioning of the Guides, has meant they can meaningfully advocate, support, and create the conditions for change.

What has been SHiFT's impact?

Overall, both Kingston & Richmond and Greenwich Practices have had high rates of success in engaging children invited for SHiFT support.

Out of 48 children, only five chose not to take part (two in Kingston and Richmond, three in Greenwich) and of the remaining 43 children, only one has asked to stop working with their Guide (after their Guide persevered for nearly nine months to find a 'hook' to engage the child). For the 42 children receiving SHiFT support at the time of this research, Guides have been successful in forming relationships with the children, setting goals, and working with them towards a more positive future. Some clear positive outcomes are starting to emerge – green shoots of progress.

The stories include that of Oscar, who first got involved in working for local drug dealers at the age of 8. Now 14, and identifying as White European, Oscar has seen huge amounts of violence and once ran his own country line. He is now trying to move away from this damaging cycle which also includes eight managed moves and a permanent exclusion from school. After a year of not being in education at all because no one would accept him, SHiFT has prioritised his education, provided a tutor whilst also seeking out a suitable place at an alternative provision that would ensure Oscar can continue his education whilst staying safe.

And then there's Archie, who identifies as White and has turned 18 since working with SHiFT. Professionals described Archie in stark terms – he was said to be exploiting others and had a reputation as one of the more notorious drug dealers in the area despite being only a child when he started working with his Guide. Archie needed SHiFT's support to 'go legit'. He has recently taken the initiative to register himself as self-employed after being supported by his Guide to go to college and complete a course.

And there are people like Jaimie, James, and Kieran that lack support from anywhere else, who fall through the cracks of broader support and whose self-esteem are at rock bottom.

In Banquo's case, Holly's promise to find a suitable local football team was key. Although there were many difficult moments throughout this time, Banquo's contact with the gang in which he was involved dissipated fast – they were not able to deliver what he now had – new passions, in learning and football, bolstered by someone who really believes in him. Banquo carried knives partly because of the 'thrill'. 'So where do you get your thrills from now?', I asked him. 'Football', Banquo answered.

Azaria spends lots of time with Jaimie. 'She gets me out of bed', says Jaimie. She helps Jamie get on with what she needs to do. Slowly, Azaria has forged a trusting relationship with Jaimie and is starting to take her out of her comfort zone so she can experience things that will boost her confidence and self-esteem. For Jaimie, this can be as little as going to a different place to eat and helping her understand that she has got a right to be there. Azaria has also started taking Jaimie horse riding, something they can do together to bond and talk; a shared experience to strengthen their relationship and take Jaimie out of her situation.

Rob has stopped being involved in 'the roads': 'The roads ain't for me fam, it's not for me', he said. Rob has also significantly reduced his cannabis intake, begun to take better care of himself by learning key independent living skills and engaging with mental health services. He now also has a child and is learning to be a dad and take responsibility for his child's care.

What might have happened without SHiFT?

Building on the contribution stories developed through this research, SHiFT commissioned an independent evaluator (Cornish & Grey) to undertake an economic analysis to allow SHiFT to estimate potential future costs avoided. This work has involved developing possible alternative trajectories for some of the children SHiFT is working with. The costs that have come out of this work are speculative but are based on evidence and the views of experienced professionals about the potential futures children who are being supported by SHiFT might experience without the opportunity to break the cycle of crime in which they are caught.

SHiFT is too early in its journey to be able to attribute causation, but there is some strong evidence of SHiFT's contribution, and, from an evaluation perspective, it has been useful to think further – including through an economic lens – about what costs might be incurred without SHiFT support.

Cornish and Grey's work involved developing three possible future scenarios. As a starting point, they took three of the contribution stories from my research and used a broadly accepted academic understanding of the common trajectory of the age crime curve (which led to costing future trajectories until the age of 40), together with details gained through conversations with highly experienced professionals within Children's Services and Youth Justice Services (full report available on request). This has ensured that the alternative narratives are realistic and tailored to the specific situations of the children and young people working with SHiFT.

Costings were calculated primarily using the Manchester Cost Calculator (using inflation and nominal pricing from appropriate sources). They then conducted a break even analysis which allowed them to estimate what percentage of these future costs avoided need to be attributed to SHiFT to break even.

Thinking of the children we have focused on in this research summary, if the cycles in which a child like Banquo was caught had continued unbroken, characterised by further serious violence and a long custodial sentence, Cornish & Grey estimated a cost to the taxpayer of

£2.5 million until Banquo reaches the age of 40, or £1.8 million in the next five years. For Rob, if there was a future involving continued cycles of crime in the home (such as domestic violence) and engagement in ‘the roads’ lifestyle, there is an estimated cost of around £700,000 until the age of 40, or £164,000 in the next five years.

Finally, for Jaimie, whose cycles of crime and experiences of exploitation are intergenerational, breaking the cycle of dependency on Children’s Services for future generations could translate into a cost saving of just over a million by the time she is 40 and £417,000 in the next five years.

For each child, break-even analysis indicated that the cost of SHiFT amounted to no more than 3% of costs avoided until the age of 40 and no more than 13% of costs avoided in the next five years. In other words, whilst we have estimated costs avoided based on a particular life-course trajectory, even the avoidance of a small part of this makes SHiFT worthwhile from an economic perspective.



COST: Cost to taxpayer of child like Banquo continuing in cycles of crime over 40 years



INVEST: For each child, break-even analysis indicated that the cost of SHiFT amounted to no more than 3% of costs avoided until the age of 40

Brighter SHiFTed futures

For Banquo, Rob and Jaimie, things are looking up.

With Azaria by her side, Jaimie has been building her confidence to enter new spaces and try new things. Azaria's ability to be flexible and provide support to Jaimie as and when she needs it has been an essential part of their relationship building. Azaria has delivered on her promise to be present in Jaimie's life – to be available and ready to help her in the way that Jaimie needs. These are the first stepping stones to her realising her aspirations for a life without the problems she has had so far. Jaimie's currently working on her CV.

Shakira's relationship with Rob has allowed her to challenge him and make him think about his choices in a different way. He has begun to take responsibility for his child, enjoying building a relationship with him, taking care of him at weekends, and providing financial support.

Other professionals told me that they would have expected to see someone like Rob move placements several times. Instead, he has settled and built a routine. He can budget and cook for himself, has an apprenticeship, and is slowly working towards a more positive peer network. Shakira has been with him every step of the way. Other professionals have, over time, been able to step back from their involvement with Rob, enabling Shakira to provide coherent and focused support and freeing other professionals to support other children. With Rob's father in prison and Rob's criminal record, there were good reasons to believe that the cycle of crime in which he was caught would be especially difficult to break. But there's promising evidence to date that Rob is well on the way to breaking the cycle for his child and future generations.

As for Banquo Junior, his request to return to mainstream school was received positively. He has just finished his first term back in mainstream school where he is studying for eight GCSEs and is a member of the school football team. The six-week review meeting has just been held and the school praised Banquo highly for how he has settled in.

Banquo's positive trajectory has also led to changes in the way professionals in other services are engaging with him. When Holly started working with Banquo, he was assessed as a Child In Need. Now colleagues have concluded there is no role for them because

SHiFT and the Youth Offending Service are fulfilling those needs. The intensity of support from the Youth Offending Service has also decreased, initially to twice a week and now to once a week, some of which are virtual meetings or calls, because of Banquo's progress.

Banquo's work with Holly is helping him to feel more empowered to advocate for his rights as a child and communicate through official processes to challenge authority status quo. He has gained confidence with a renewed sense that with the right support and attitude, he can achieve anything. Most importantly, this work between Banquo and Holly is helping him to reset the foundations of his life. He doesn't need to be defined by his mistakes and can build a better and positive future.

SHiFT is making a difference

As SHiFT moves into its next stage with an aim of launching further Practices, this research has helped to strengthen its foundations by helping to understand how and why SHiFT is working.

So far, there have been some impressive outcomes – not least for children like Banquo whose return to mainstream education is described by professionals as a rare feat. Instead of following a far-too-common trajectory of escalating criminal behaviour, he can move to a place of strength and responsibility where his knife crime, fighting, and convictions are not repeated and his capacity to aspire, achieve and contribute to society is realised.

More broadly, children supported by SHiFT feel seen and heard. Children I spoke with were all clear that SHiFT is supporting them in a way that feels meaningful to them. At this early stage, data is starting to reveal some good evidence of positive outcomes – a reduction in missing episodes (which professionals report often relate to drug dealing and county lines), a reduction in severity and number of arrests and conviction, and an increase in engagement in education, employment or training including some returning to school or training after a period with little or no provision, some improving attendance and behaviour, and others finding more suitable educational placements.

It is not a clear picture though. The cycles of crime in which the children SHiFT works with are caught are deep, destructive and worsening. Children's journeys are not all linear – there are setbacks, changes in circumstances and feelings, and periods where they lean out of the relationship with their Guide and want to prioritise other aspects of their lives – but what is clear from this research is that SHiFT Guides stay with them, looking every day for opportunities to help them refocus, reframe, and reconsider options and choices. Children see SHiFT Guides as the ear they need in times of crisis. It takes time – and, it seems, all the ingredients of Breaking Cycles of tenacity, perseverance, flexibility, and finding the right hook day by day, minute by minute – to break these cycles.

SHiFT does not exist in a vacuum – there are other people in the lives of children supported by SHiFT, and other activities and professionals that will make a difference. Some of these will be negative, some positive.

Throughout this research I have been conscious of the need to be clear on the contribution SHiFT has made to the child's life. Though there are limitations with every research methodology - and there remains a long journey to go with respect to evaluation - the use of contribution methods to gather evidence from a range of sources helps me to be confident that SHiFT is making a critical difference. And we are seeing some of those changes reflected within the system and responses by other professionals. Professionals surrounding these children are beginning to use a different language, and to talk in terms of strengths and positive futures. Services are confidently stepping back as SHiFT steps forward alongside each child.

As for Rob, Jaimie, and Banquo, there is more to do, and many more steps to take. But Jaimie has been in the same placement now for xx months and Rob has taken clear steps to move away from negative peers.

The latest reports from Banquo are that he is thriving, his choice of a Shakespearean character as a pseudonym an indication of his enthusiasm for the new-found opportunities he is relishing at school.