



Harnessing the power of positive online mentoring

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I can definitively say that my Brightside mentor altered the course of my life and that I wouldn't be where I am today without his support.

- MATTHEW

2024 in numbers

87 mentoring projects launched

44 partners

8 schools took part in our Spotlight programme

104,471 messages sent by mentees

6,796 mentees matched to a mentor

Listening to Young People: What the Research Revealed

Last year, we analysed comments from over 8,000 young people aged 11 to 19 to understand how they see their future. The findings were concerning and inspired us to launch our [Generation Worry](#) campaign:

51%
told us they are worried about their future

24%
struggle to make decisions about what's next

14%
identified money as a major concern

Over 4,000 young people feel unsupported and unsure. We simply cannot ignore this.

We are not the only ones seeing these worrying trends. An extensive report from the OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) concludes that anxiety around decision making and career pathways is global. One in three 15-year olds is unsure of their career expectations.¹

The report went on to say that "young people who express clear job plans around the age of 15 can expect to do better ten years later than comparable peers who are uncertain about their ambitions".

Young people need guides. They need mentors.

For over 20 years, we've been using technology to connect young people with mentors who help them build confidence and make informed decisions about their futures. Our programmes are proven to deliver impact where it matters most.

In the past year, we've made bold investments in our technology, delivered high-quality, personalised mentoring experiences, and continued to meet young people where they are—with empathy, insight, and action.

We're looking for partners who share our vision: a generation of young people who are not just less worried-but who feel more empowered, more informed, and more ready than ever to take on the world.

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It was really convenient to do online mentoring all on my phone. I didn't have a lot of free time alongside college, so it was great to be able to text my mentor on the bus.

- ELISHA

Harnessing tech for good

At Brightside, it's our mission to support young people by harnessing the positive power of technology.

Access to opportunities is still limited by where young people live and their parents' jobs. **Technology offers a great way to level the playing field.** The Sutton Trust's report, *The Opportunity Index: The Geography of Opportunity and Social Mobility*, highlights this stark reality: social mobility is unevenly distributed across the country.² A young person's local area clearly influences their access to education, career pathways, and future earnings.

Online mentoring meets young people where they are. It removes geography, time, and travel barriers for young people to access career and education opportunities.

In 2024, our mentees sent 104,471 to mentors across the UK. Online mentoring fits into young people's lives naturally, allowing for authentic and focused interactions even in short bursts of conversation. We know that young people likely spend a lot of time on their phones so, why not spend that screen time with a mentor?

We sometimes face scepticism about the long-term impact of mentoring that may only last about 12 weeks.

While it's true that long-term support can deepen relationships and mentorship outcomes, dismissing the value of short-term online mentoring overlooks the proven fact that young people are gaining confidence and building decision-making skills.

A conversation with a mentor boosts confidence and aspiration for young people. For many, it is their first exposure to someone who is from outside their world – who is markedly different to the types of people our mentees communicate with in their everyday lives. This connection, through a few months of online mentoring, can be pivotal for a young person, particularly someone from an underserved background without access to mentors in their chosen field.

The impact is clear in our data.

Long-term analysis of Key Stage 5 results shows that **Brightside mentees achieve one full A-level grade higher than their school average.**³

+19
% points

In 2024 alone, mentees reported a 19 percentage point **increase in their understanding of apprenticeships.**⁴

This isn't just about advice—it's about belief, validation, and expanding horizons. A mentor who believes in a young person, who helps them see a future they hadn't considered, can change the trajectory of a life. Confidence doesn't always build slowly—it can be sparked quickly with the right encouragement.

Brightside equips young people not just with decisions, but with the tools to make them—skills like finding trustworthy information, developing self-awareness, and building confidence in professional spaces.

These are lifelong tools. They don't expire when the programme ends—they stay with our mentees and continue to open doors to opportunity.

Closing the gap with Spotlight

Spotlight is Brightside's in-school careers programme designed around the Gatsby Benchmarks. It gives schools critical data on students' aspirations and provides one-to-one mentoring for students most in need of help with their next steps. In 2024, we worked with schools in London, Leeds, Sheffield, Doncaster, and Glasgow, matching 457 mentees to 105 mentors.

Spotlight supports schools in making tangible impacts on pupil aspirations and outcomes. 100% of mentees reported an increase in knowledge of all pathways after secondary school, and felt more equipped to make informed post-school choices.⁵

In 2024, we put our Career Game sessions into 13 classrooms, and 78% of students said they knew more about the different kind of jobs available to them as a result.

The Spotlight programme focuses on students from underrepresented backgrounds, offering tailored mentoring, industry exposure, and one-to-one support to close gaps in opportunity and access.

Teachers, parents, and students consistently praised the programme's impact, with all eight schools wanting to participate again.

Spotlight doesn't just support young people and educators to help close the skills gap in our economy –



The kids love the ease of it being online, especially the shy ones. There's a real mix of students who ask a lot of questions... it gives them a taster of having a mentor, an experience of thinking what to ask and being obliged to reply. The ones who ask loads learn a lot about what they might want to do in the future, and it's often something they've never thought of doing.



ANDY HAMMOND
Career Lead at St Thomas the Apostle School

it brings flexible and accessible mentoring to organisations who pride themselves on giving back.

Spotlight mentees tell us that the programme feels like, "a place where you can improve your understanding about your own needs and your own future, a place where you can get all the help you need for academic and personal life."

It's personalised, online and for everyone. In 2025, we aim to offer more schools the Spotlight programme for their students. With schools under-resourced, we are looking to local businesses to sponsor participation in return for flexible, impactful volunteering opportunities for their staff.

We would like to thank Warburtons, Nationwide, Thales, and The 29th May 1961 Charitable Trust for their support to date.



BIANCA
Brightside mentor

What makes Brightside different is the flexibility. I've mentored before at other companies and through work. I have never had the flexibility I have here... I mentor while I'm on the bus, travelling, on a break from work or having a coffee...it's just amazing!

The reciprocal power of mentoring



I've been lucky enough to be mentored by some of the greats, and I see what they gave me as a gift. By volunteering for Brightside, I'm passing on that gift to the next generation and I can't wait to see what they achieve.

- **ANGELA** Brightside Mentor

In 2024, Brightside matched 6,796 mentees to mentors. We could not have done that without the work of all our exceptional volunteers. And, it's not just young people who benefit from mentoring. A survey of Brightside mentors found⁶:

89%

felt more confident tailoring their communication to different audiences – a critical skill in any workplace, especially in management, client-facing roles, and cross-functional collaboration.



88%

said they feel more able to give feedback that helps others improve – a cornerstone of effective leadership and team development.



84%

reported a deeper understanding of the barriers young people face in education and careers – enriching their awareness of equity and inclusion, which many employers now value as a core competency.



78%

said their mentoring experience has enriched their own personal or professional growth – from enhanced emotional intelligence to a renewed sense of purpose in their work.



As we launch the new version of our tech platform, Brightside 7.0, we are excited to work with more mentors in the coming year. Mentors using the new Brightside platform can look forward to optional video calling, in-app support, and tailored tasks that support mentors and mentees to unlock their potential.

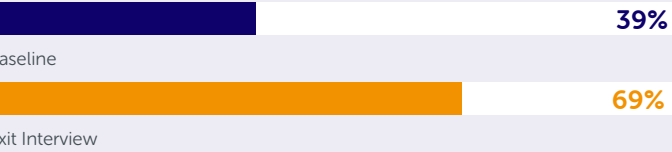
STEM Learning

Our STEM Learning programme provides mentoring opportunities to help young people to consider and pursue careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

STEM Learning works in collaboration with the UK government, educational bodies, funding partners and other organisations to deliver positive STEM interactions for young people, teachers and employers.

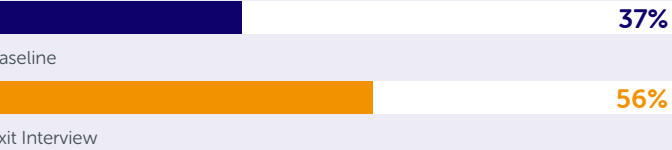
The overall aim of the STEM Learning project is to work with 400 young people aged 13-19. This project focuses in targeted regional areas where there is a higher percentage of deprivation. The project aims to support mentees through online one-to-one mentoring so they can gain insight into sectors and specific careers and be guided to make informed decisions about their next steps.

I understand what it's like to work in the STEM sector



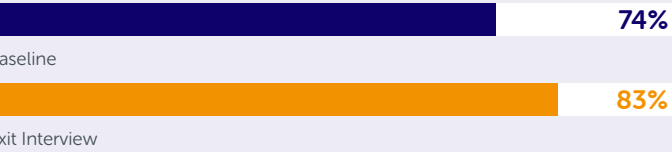
+30
% points

I understand apprenticeships as an option available to me after 18



+19
% points

I understand university as an option available to me after 18



+9
% points

GEOFF
STEM Learning mentor

I became a mentor because I wanted to give something back... Mentoring reminds me why I got into engineering in the first place. It's not just about machines. It's about people. About helping someone realise their potential. About passing it on.

Targeted Mentoring, Tangible Impact

Empowering mentees to make informed decisions about their careers contributes to their overall wellbeing, and ensures that they are better prepared for long-term success in an ever-changing society.

When we asked mentees to reflect on how much mentoring contributed to their increased confidence in knowledge and decision-making, they said:⁷

It made a strong impact (A lot + Almost all)

45.9%

47.5%

It made a moderate impact (Some)

These outcomes demonstrate the power of early, targeted support in helping young people make informed, confident decisions about their futures.



Be part of the solution in 2025

In today's climate of rising living costs and stretched public services, many individuals and families are facing unprecedented challenges. **Inequality is widening, and the need for targeted, meaningful support has never been more urgent.** Our work is focused on meeting people where they are – providing opportunities, support, and connections that can make a real difference.

In the UK, regional inequality remains among the worst in the developed world. A 2019 report by IPPR North found that only the US and South Korea had greater regional disparities.⁸

Geography is just one barrier. **When young people face additional barriers – such as class or ethnicity – their social mobility is negatively impacted.** The Sutton Trust highlights that “free school meals pupils are furthest behind” and emphasizes that child poverty in certain areas of the UK creates additional obstacles, making it harder for young people to access education and career opportunities. This limits social mobility.⁹ These patterns point to a national skills shortage that affects not just London, but communities across the country.

Impetus' Youth Jobs Gap research shows that multiple layers of disadvantage—economic, educational, and geographical—are making it increasingly difficult for young people to stay in education, employment, and/or training.¹⁰

This cannot be the legacy we leave for young people. At Brightside, we've spent over 20 years working at the intersection of social mobility, informed decision-making,

and online mentoring. We understand how to support young people through different complexities, and we remain deeply committed to helping them thrive—wherever they're starting from.

That's why we're continuing to invest in mentoring—because we've seen the difference it makes. Online mentoring provides personalised, flexible support that meets young people where they are, helping them build the confidence and skills they need to succeed. Our data shows that this approach works: Brightside mentees are twice as likely to enter higher education and twice as likely to complete their degrees.¹¹ With our next-generation platform, we're taking this impact even further—scaling what works and strengthening the support we offer.

In 2025, we're launching Brightside 7.0—our next-generation mentoring platform. It reflects our core values and our belief in using technology as a force for good. With enhanced personalisation, Brightside 7.0 offer tailored support that meets young people where they are—giving them the tools, confidence, and connections to shape their futures.

Join us in shaping a fairer future—where every young person has the support they need to succeed, no matter their background or postcode.

Glossary and references

1. The State of Global Teenage Career Preparation, OECD 2025, <https://doi.org/10.1787/d5f8e3f2-en>.
 2. The Opportunity Index: The Geography of Opportunity and Social Mobility in England, May 2025. <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/the-opportunity-index/>.
 3. These results come from the analysis of the education trajectory of students who engaged (sent three or more messages) on a Brightside mentoring programme, and who were 'HE-ready' (at least 18 years of age) during the academic year 2021-22. Data is provided each year by the Higher Education Access Tracker (HEAT) and the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA). These results are based on 1,400 mentees. HEAT rounding and suppression rules have been applied to prevent the disclosure of personal information about any individual. This strategy includes rounding all numbers to the nearest multiple of five and percentages are suppressed if based on fewer than 22.5 individuals.
 4. Theory of Change data is based on the 2023/2024 academic year. Mentee feedback comes from response data of 890 surveyed mentees.
 5. Our Spotlight engagement data is based on baseline and exit surveys from 96 mentees.
 6. These responses are from 240 mentor surveys, conducted from 2023-2024.
 7. Our outcomes data for this programme is based on the answers of 147 mentee respondents.
 8. Divided and Connected: Regional Inequalities in the North, the UK and the Developed World – State of the North 2019, November 2019. <https://www.ippr.org/articles/state-of-the-north-2019>
 9. The Opportunity Index: The Geography of Opportunity and Social Mobility in England, May 2025. <https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/the-opportunity-index/>.
 10. Youth Jobs Gap: Exploring Compound Disadvantage, May 2025. <https://www.impetus.org.uk/policy/youth-jobs-gap>
 11. See footnote 4

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LAURA GRAY
Brightside CEO

This report does two things. Firstly, it brings to the fore the very real decision-making crisis facing young people right now. Secondly, and crucially, it offers a proposed solution: tailored, targeted support. We see this crisis highlighted through in-depth research, and hear it through the words of young people themselves. We must recognise the consistent recommendation (from the likes of Impetus and the OECD) that those young people who are more knowledgeable about career pathways and workplace expectations are more likely to thrive. We must also recognise the growing evidence base that mentoring is an antidote. Mentoring works. With your support, we can expand this impact—reaching more students, deepening our engagement, and ensuring that no young person is left behind when it comes to planning their paths forward.

Join us in shaping brighter futures for all.

Let's talk: laura.gray@brightside.org.uk



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