Department for Education

Mockingbird programme

Evaluation report

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Key messages

The Mockingbird programme aims to replicate the support available through an extended family network. It creates a constellation of 6 to 10 satellite fostering families who are supported by 1 hub home that is operated by an experienced foster carer, offering planned and emergency sleepovers, advice, training and peer support. The Mockingbird programme worked to meet the need for continuity and support for children and young people in care and for additional support for foster carers.

Overall, the Mockingbird programme was seen as a promising model by all participants in the programme. Participants reported that it brought normality to children in care and their foster families, including kinship carers, through developing relationships, creating a sense of community and reducing experiences of bureaucracy. There was strong evidence from the administrative data analysis that Mockingbird improved foster carer retention. There was qualitative evidence that the programme may improve transitions and wellbeing for children and young people and improve placement stability (although there was no evidence of improved placement stability in our analysis of administrative data). Mockingbird also showed promising findings around improving wellbeing for foster carers, foster carer support, friendships for children and young people and relationships between siblings based on qualitative and quantitative evidence. With the available data for 6 monetisable outcomes, the return on investment was at the break-even point. More research is needed about Mockingbird to examine impact and value for money, including evaluation of outcomes over a longer follow-up period and among larger sample sizes.

The evaluation found that implementation of the Mockingbird programme requires time and careful consideration of decisions to be effective and sustainable. Facilitators for implementation included gaining buy-in from across a service, continuity from key staff and choosing hub home carers and a mixture of satellite carers that will allow for a supportive environment. Funding of innovative programmes such as Mockingbird should consider sustainability from the beginning.

It is not clear from the evaluation which aspects of Mockingbird have the greatest positive impact, and its success in terms of improved outcomes for foster carers, children and young people was attributed to the whole programme of activities, rather than replicating only specific aspects. Nonetheless, there are implications for fostering practice and policy more broadly. For example, fostering services should explore ways to provide greater networks and peer support for foster carers and children and young people in care, improve their sleepover or respite care availability and continuity, and support positive sibling contact in foster care.

Executive summary

Introduction

This report presents key findings from our independent evaluation of the Mockingbird programme. It includes 12 sites in England where the project was supported by the Department for Education's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme (Innovation Programme hereafter).

The project

The Fostering Network has delivered The Mockingbird Family Model in the UK since 2015 under licence from The Mockingbird Society USA who originated the model. The Mockingbird programme aims to replicate the support available through an extended family network. It creates a constellation of 6 to 10 satellite fostering families who are supported by a hub home that is operated by an experienced foster carer and offers advice, training, peer support and planned and emergency sleepovers (as a form of respite care). Mockingbird also facilitated positive relationships and visits for sibling groups who were in care, but not in the same placement, through constellation events and sleepovers at the hub home.

The evaluation

This evaluation of Mockingbird looks at its implementation and impact, including a cost benefit analysis, by addressing the following questions:

1. How has the Mockingbird programme been implemented?
2. What impact does the Mockingbird programme have on children, young people and foster carers, including placement stability and carer retention?
3. How do outcomes change over time for children, young people, foster carers and services participating in the Mockingbird programme?
4. What is the fiscal return on investment associated with the Mockingbird programme?

We explored these questions using a broad range of qualitative and quantitative methods, including interviews, surveys and analysis of foster carer and child-level routinely collected administrative data with matched comparison groups. The Rees Centre at the University of Oxford led the evaluation in partnership with the University of York and York Consulting.

Key findings

Experiences of implementing Mockingbird varied across the 12 sites. However, staff interviews consistently emphasised the importance of laying the groundwork including hiring a liaison worker, engaging stakeholders, recruiting a skilled hub carer and having the right mix of carers to form constellations, managing carers' expectations, maintaining model fidelity, gaining buy-in from across the service and leadership and building enthusiasm from staff and foster carers.

The Mockingbird programme was perceived to bring normality to children and young people in care and their foster families (including kinship carers) by creating an "extended family" environment and reducing experiences of bureaucracy. Mockingbird gave children and young people opportunities to take part in a broad range of social activities and to develop friendships with their peers and other adults. Time and again, foster carers, children and young people spoke in interviews about children and young people having the opportunity and encouragement to do activities that they would not have otherwise done. Mockingbird also facilitated visits for sibling groups who were in care, but not in the same placement, through constellation events and sleepovers at the hub home. In response to our surveys of children and young people participating in Mockingbird, a higher percentage of those who had siblings in their constellation rated the amount of contact they had with them as being "just right" in comparison to those with siblings in foster care, but not in their constellation. The wellbeing of children and young people who took part in Mockingbird (as measured by standardised tools via online surveys) was similar to that of children and young people in the community.

There was no difference in the placement stability of children and young people who took part in Mockingbird compared to a matched group of children and young people in our analysis of administrative data from the 9 sites that provided this data. However, there was evidence from interviews with foster carers and staff that Mockingbird improved continuity of care when placement changes did happen, as children and young people could move to a foster carer in their constellation whom they already knew. Similarly, there was no difference in the likelihood of children and young people going missing from their placement based on our analysis of administrative data, but in interviews foster carers and staff gave examples of young people staying with the hub home carer instead of going missing as there was a safe household to go to during times of disputes.

In our analysis of administrative data from 2016-2019 across the 11 sites that could provide this data, foster carers who were participating in Mockingbird were less likely to de-register than those who were not participating. In interviews with foster carers and staff, this improved retention of foster carers was attributed to the support, friendships and sense of community created through Mockingbird. There was also evidence that foster carers who participated in Mockingbird had higher levels of wellbeing than other foster carers (as measured by a standardised tool via online surveys).

Staff at the project sites and The Fostering Network perceived Mockingbird to have improved peer support for foster carers, foster carer satisfaction and the status of foster carers in the team around the child. The percentage of foster carers who rated the support they received from their fostering service (including respite care) as good or excellent was higher among the Mockingbird foster carers who participated in our survey than other comparable published surveys of foster carers. Mockingbird foster carers were also more likely to report that they felt that they were usually or always treated as an equal by their supervising social worker and their foster child's social worker than foster carers in other surveys. Mockingbird may also support foster carers to expand the type of placements they were willing to provide. In our analysis of administrative data, fostering households participating in Mockingbird were less likely to have an unavailable place than those who were not participating. In interviews, multiple foster carers mentioned transitioning placements from short-term to long-term because the support of Mockingbird allowed them to have the confidence to do so.

Based on a cost benefit analysis that included 6 monetisable benefits, the return on investment for the Mockingbird programme was shown to be 0.99. This indicates that for each £1 invested in the programme there was a saving of 99 pence.

Lessons and implications

Implementation of the Mockingbird programme requires time and careful consideration of key decisions, such as gaining buy-in from leadership within fostering services, providing clear expectations for satellite carers, and choosing hub home carers and a mixture of satellite carers that will allow for a supportive environment in constellations.

The success of Mockingbird in terms of improved outcomes for foster carers, children and young people was attributed to the whole programme of activities, rather than specific aspects. Nonetheless, there are implications for fostering practice and policy more broadly based on key elements of Mockingbird. Firstly, fostering services should explore ways to provide greater networks and peer support for foster carers and children and young people in care. In interviews, feeling well supported, like part of an extended family and connected to the community were frequently mentioned by staff and foster carers as having had a positive impact on the experiences and outcomes of Mockingbird participants. Fostering services should also consider how to better support contact for sibling groups in care who cannot be placed together. Children and young people in Mockingbird who had siblings in the constellation were more satisfied with the amount of contact they had with their siblings than those with siblings in foster care who were not in their constellation. Finally, fostering services should examine their use of delegated authority and whether the availability, continuity and policies and procedures related to sleepover and short break care can be improved, given that foster carers in Mockingbird were much more likely than other foster carers to rate it as good or excellent.

1. Overview of the project

Project context

The Fostering Network has delivered and implemented The Mockingbird Family Model in the UK since 2015 under licence from The Mockingbird Society USA who originated the model. The 'Mockingbird programme' is often just called Mockingbird by the families involved in the project.

Mockingbird is a model that aims to replicate the support available through an extended family network. It creates a constellation of 6-10 satellite fostering families who are supported by a hub home that is operated by an experienced foster carer, offering planned and emergency sleepovers, advice, training and peer support. The Fostering Network leads national implementation and fidelity and supports activities led by fostering agencies and hub homes. Fostering agency host services lead on local implementation, and hub home carers lead on the activities in their hub. The theory of change for the project is available in Appendix 1: Project theory of change.

Figure 1: Model of The Fostering Network's Mockingbird programme

Source: The Fostering Network

The Department for Education's Children's Social Care Innovation Programme (Innovation Programme hereafter) Round 2 Mockingbird project covered 12 fostering providers (sites) made up of 9 local authorities, 1 Children's Trust, and 2 independent fostering agencies. The project worked with 7 sites who participated in the previous round of the Innovation Programme Round 1 services to 'scale out' Mockingbird by initiating some innovative and targeted adaptations. The adaptations aimed to support specific groups of children and young people based on locally identified needs, such as young people in residential homes or adoptive families. The project also 'scaled up' the Mockingbird programme to a further 5 new providers. Innovation Programme Round 2 funding for the project ran from 2017 to 2020 with the independent evaluator (Rees Centre, University of Oxford) formally appointed in December 2017.

The Round 2 project worked with Barking and Dagenham, Doncaster Children's Trust, Fostering People, Greenwich, Heath Farm, Hertfordshire, Leeds, North Yorkshire, Oxfordshire, Stockport, Suffolk, and Tower Hamlets. Details of the problems the project seeks to address and the participating local authorities are show in Appendix 2: Context of the evaluation.

Building on previous evaluations

Our evaluation of the Mockingbird project funded by Round 2 of the Innovation Programme builds upon previous evaluations of Mockingbird to independently examine its implementation and impacts including matched comparison groups created from child-level and foster carer-level data from participating fostering services.

Existing evaluations have examined implementation of the Mockingbird programme and highlighted promising indicators for outcomes such as child safety, permanency, placement stability, sibling connections, fostering cultural identity, building strong community connections, and systems change (McDermid, Baker, Lawson, and Holmes, 2016; Northwest Institute for Children and Families, 2007; *Stockport Metropolitan Borough Council Mockingbird Family Model Evaluation Report,* 2017; The Mockingbird Society, 2010). Some of these evaluations focussed on aspects that are more important to the American context and implementation of the model. The limitations of existing evaluations include being conducted by or for the implementing agency, having short time frames that limit the examination of longer-term impacts, involving small sample sizes with no comparison groups that make it difficult to discern impacts, and not being built in from the launch of Mockingbird (for example, Northwest Institute for Children, 2017; McDermid et al., 2016; The Mockingbird Society, 2010; Stockport, 2017). This evaluation considered the existing evaluations and the current theory of change, and it used similar outcomes where sensible, such as placement stability, sibling connections, community connections, and foster carer retention, and aligned measures where

feasible, such as foster carer wellbeing with the evaluation of the Mockingbird project in Round 1 of the Innovation Programme by McDermid et al. (2016).

An American evaluation of the Mockingbird Family Model which included a comparison group and used propensity score matching (Goodvin and Miller, 2017) found that young people who participated in Mockingbird were more likely to have higher rates of placement stability, but on average take longer to achieve permanency. There was no effect on placement with siblings or rates of re-entry into care for those who had exited care. Young people who participated in Mockingbird were more likely than the comparison group to be missing from care. The young people included in this American evaluation often received a small dose of Mockingbird, as their placements in care and the follow-up period were short. No evaluation of Mockingbird in an English context, prior to this evaluation, has examined the impact of the programme using a comparison group. The evaluation in this report focussed on the English theory of change, and it examined impact from the administrative data on placement stability and children and young people going missing from care.

The previous English Innovation Programme Mockingbird project (Round 1) began in September 2015 and involved 8 fostering providers. The evaluation was undertaken by Loughborough University (McDermid et al., 2016) and the report, which was submitted in April 2016 shortly after hubs had launched, focused on early implementation. Our evaluation of the Round 2 Mockingbird project began 18 months later in December 2017. It sought to align measures and outcomes where sensible, while focussing more on impact, experiences, and understanding changes over time.

Project aims and intended outcomes

Mockingbird aims to improve placement stability and the stability of relationships for children and young people. The model intends to address issues such as a high incidence of unplanned placement moves, escalation of problems within a placement and low levels of wellbeing for looked after children and young people. It also aims to address poor retention of foster carers, low levels of confidence and motivation among foster carers, over-use of costly placement options and poorly planned and facilitated contact with birth families. Intended outcomes are also listed in Appendix 1.

As of March 2020, across the 12 fostering services that were part of this evaluation, there were 41 Mockingbird constellations involving 320 satellite homes, 673 adults, and 705 children and young people (CYP). This included 508 foster and kinship satellite carers, 67 hub fostering carers, 403 CYP in mainstream foster care, 51 CYP in kinship care, 40 adopted CYP or CYP placed for adoption, 22 CYP with special guardianship orders, 22 young people in staying put arrangements, and 9 CYP in residential care. This information is from returns available in July 2020.

Based on participation data collected by The Fostering Network, 467 foster carer households and 921 care-experienced children and young people took part in the project between April 2017 and March 2020. Based on this data, we estimate that 830 children and young people were under 18 years old and in care and can be used for the cost-benefit analysis. The evaluation did not seek to measure the impact on children and young people who were outside of mandatory administrative data returns during that time period, such as CYP with adoption orders, CYP with special guardianship orders, and young people who were care leavers or in staying put arrangements. Additionally, the participation records for the entire period of the project (April 2017 to March 2020) will be affected by the fact that records of participation were not routinely collected by sites before the evaluation began. As part of the evaluation, we asked sites to retrospectively provide data for all foster carers, children and young people who took part in Mockingbird from April 2016 so that we could link this participation data to existing administrative datasets.

Project activities

Project activities included, but were not limited to:

Activities led by The Fostering Network:

- providing guidance, resources and coaching to fostering services
- certifying new hub fidelity in phase 1 using the Fidelity Assessment Form; pre-launch, 3-, 6-, 9- and 12-month in phase 2 and moving to 6-monthly thereafter for the initial constellation
- delivering training for hub home carers and liaison workers
- holding national learning events; including leaders' workshops for services currently implementing forums for hub home carers and liaison workers
- collating monitoring data and providing support for site-level monitoring and evaluation activities

Activities led by the host fostering service (the site), supported by The Fostering Network:

- recruitment and hiring of the liaison worker, the primary point of contact between the constellation and the host service
- development of an implementation working group
- stakeholder engagement
- recruitment of hub home carers
- identifying satellite families and launching new constellations

- developing operational protocols, policies and procedures to support the running of Mockingbird in the host service

Activities led by the hub home, supported by the host service and The Fostering Network:

- providing emergency and planned sleepovers and short breaks
- monthly social activities taking place with foster carers and children and young people in the hub
- peer foster carer support
- foster carer training opportunities, either in a formal and regularised manner or on an as needed basis
- opportunities for birth family relationships to be sustained, such as birth family contact or sibling contact

Within the bounds of the fidelity of Mockingbird, the programme could be tailored to meet the needs of individual sites, foster carers, and young people, for example by:

- including 1-2 young people who are in residential homes
- including young people who have transitioned to permanency outside of foster care, for example have been adopted, are under Special Guardianship orders, or who have returned to birth parents
- including broader aspects of the fostering service, such as strength-based work, attachment work, or No Wrong Door
- targeting a small subset of young people within a broadly diverse constellation who are particularly vulnerable, such as those vulnerable to child sexual exploitation, vulnerable to county lines activities, or who have diagnosed conditions such as autism
- providing support to foster carers and children and young people in times of allegations
- providing support to foster carers and children and young people in times of bereavement

Project theory of change

In establishing the evaluation, the evaluation team worked with The Fostering Network to simplify their project theory of change. The simplified version (in Appendix 1) was developed before the evaluation began by discussing in an initial meeting the issues Mockingbird seeks to address, key activities, and anticipated outcomes. The theory of

changes was used as a basis for the evaluation team to understand what changes might be attributable to the programme and then examine what was measureable. As is usual, this theory of change was revisited and revised in small ways based on interviews with The Fostering Network and site staff at 2 time points and discussions in meetings with The Fostering Network during the course of the evaluation.

Project sustainability

The Fostering Network's Mockingbird programme has always had a sustainability plan past the Innovation Programme-funded period. The programme has included self-funded sites in addition to sites with funding from the Innovation Programme and beyond. The project's staff, including an internal monitoring and evaluation analyst, always had plans to continue beyond March 2020. Additionally, the project has received funding through the Supporting Families: Investing in Practice programme to expand the Mockingbird programme to 10 new local authorities in 7 sites.[1] The Rees Centre, University of Oxford has been appointed the independent evaluator for this programme by What Works for Children's Social Care. Individual Innovation Programme-funded sites also planned to continue at the time of the completion of data collection and received decreased levels of funding in the 2019-2020 fiscal year as part of the planning and transition to financial sustainability.

[1] One site is a regional partnership of 4 local authorities working together.

2. Overview of the evaluation

This section gives an overview of the evaluation. The evaluation received ethics approval through the Oxford Central University Research Ethics Committee (CUREC), completed any relevant site-level research governance procedures, and obtained data sharing agreements with all partners.

Evaluation questions

This evaluation addresses the following research questions:

1. How has the Mockingbird programme been implemented?
    a) How many people have participated (foster carers, children and young people)? What kind of activities have they participated in?
    b) What adaptations have been made to the programme by sites? How have these helped to meet the needs of different care populations?
    c) What factors seem to facilitate or inhibit the implementation of the programme and the achievement of the intended outcomes?
    d) What factors enable or limit longer-term sustainability of the programme?
    e) What are the experiences of staff, foster carers, children and young people who are involved in the programme? What effects do they think it has had?
2. What impact does the Mockingbird programme have on children, young people and foster carers, including placement stability and carer retention?
3. How do outcomes change over time for children, young people, foster carers and services participating in the Mockingbird programme?
4. What is the fiscal return on investment associated with the Mockingbird programme?

Evaluation methods

There are 3 parts to the evaluation of the Mockingbird programme. The first aims to understand how the programme has been implemented. We interviewed staff in each site at 2 time points a year apart about their experiences of implementation, the factors they perceived to be important for success and any barriers that were encountered. We also analysed participation data collected by sites for The Fostering Network. This participation data included when individuals and households joined Mockingbird, when they left and reasons, and detailed the support and activities that took place as part of the programme each month.

The second part of the evaluation aims to explore the impact of the programme. We analysed administrative data from all sites to explore the potential effects of Mockingbird on placement stability, incidents of children going missing and foster carer retention. We also asked children, young people and foster carers in all sites to complete 2 online surveys a year apart about their experiences of the programme. These were age-stratified surveys with different versions available to foster carers, children aged 8-10 years and young people aged 11-17 years and skip patterns to include only relevant questions available through the platform Qualtrics. We interviewed staff in each site about the impact of the programme and, in 4 case study sites, we also interviewed foster carers, children and young people and asked foster carers to complete an additional survey about their experiences of the programme.

The third part of the evaluation is a cost benefit analysis (CBA) of the Mockingbird programme. This CBA employed a fiscal return on investment methodology.

The plan for the evaluation of the Mockingbird programme was approved and formally began in December 2017 and included site visits by the evaluation team in early 2018. Data collection ended in January 2020. The evaluation included the following activities:

- 27 interviews with fostering agency site staff (14 at Time 1 (T1), 13 at Time 2 (T2))
- 14 interviews with The Fostering Network staff (7 at T1, 7 at T2)
- analysis of participation data from 2016/17 to 2019/20
- initial survey of foster carers in all sites (138 foster carers responded giving a response rate of 42%)
- initial survey of children and young people in all sites (61 children and young people responded giving a response rate of 28%)
- second survey of foster carers in all sites a year after the initial survey (172 foster carers responded giving a response rate of 39%)
- second survey of children and young people in all sites (68 children and young people responded giving a response rate of 31%)
- additional survey of foster carers in 4 case study sites (62 foster carers responded giving a response rate of 48%)
- survey of a closed constellation from 1 site at the time of the second survey (responses from 3 foster carers)
- 43 interviews with foster carers in the 4 case study sites (20 interviews at T1, 23 at T2, including 5 hub carers at T1 and 4 hub carers at T2; representing the viewpoints of 53 foster carer time-points as 10 interviews were with couples)

- 38 interviews with children and young people in 4 case study sites (15 at T1, 23 at T2)
- attending relevant national learning events and hub home meetings or social events at 3 case study sites
- analysis of SSDA903 child-level and Ofsted foster carer-level data from 2016/17 to 2018/19 matched with participation data to create comparator groups
- cost benefit analysis using administrative and financial data from 2016/17 to 2018/19 (data from 2016/17 to 2017/18 accessed from 8 out of 11 sites)

Interviews were transcribed and analysed using NVivo12. The 122 interviews were analysed using a thematic framework analysis to answer the research questions, using both deductive codes to examine the theory of change and pre-specified dimensions and inductive codes from the text. SPSS v26 was used to analyse administrative and survey data.

Changes to evaluation methods

We have had to reduce the time period for which we could analyse administrative data from 4 years to 3 years. Originally, we had planned to analyse data from 2016/17 to 2019/20. This would have required sites to provide provisional administrative data in April 2020 (ahead of submission of the final data to the Department for Education and Ofsted in June and July 2020, respectively). However, we received feedback from sites that they would not be willing and able to supply provisional data. This means that the most recent data that was available for analysis as part of the evaluation was 2018/19. We had originally intended to measure the impact of the programme on children and young people's wellbeing using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ), which is collected in the administrative data[2]; however, this data was often missing data. As a result, we explored children and young people's wellbeing via online surveys instead using standardised tools of the Outcome Rating Scale (ORS) and Child Outcome Rating Scale (CORS). It took more time than anticipated to set up the evaluation, negotiate data sharing agreements, and recruit participants for the surveys and interviews. We decreased the number time points for surveys at case study sites in order to reduce the burden of participation on staff, foster carers, children and young people based on feedback from sites and to improve response rates on the two main surveys a year apart. Although it was necessary to make these changes, the methods and sample sizes still facilitate a comprehensive evaluation.

[2] The SSDA903 data measures wellbeing with data collected using the Strength and Difficulties (SDQ) questionnaire. This data is collected for children who have been in care for over 12 months and who were aged between 4 years old and 16 years old (inclusive) on the date of their last questionnaire.

Limitations of the evaluation

The evaluation is limited by its timeframe. Firstly, it was not possible to establish a true baseline for exploring the potential impact of the programme as 7 of 12 participating sites continued from Round 1 of the Innovation Programme and Round 2 began before evaluators were appointed. Thus, evaluation activities began after the programme was already underway. Additionally, the end date of the evaluation meant that it was not possible to incorporate administrative data for 2019/20 into the findings, which limited the time period over which the potential effects of the programme could be explored. The findings on impact should be treated with caution and built upon in future evaluations.

There were also several limitations related to the different data sources analysed as part of the evaluation. For example, participating sites were not required to record participation data until May 2018. As part of the evaluation we requested retrospective data for the period April 2017 to May 2018; however, this may not be entirely accurate. To abide by data sharing agreements, we were dependent on site staff and evaluation leads to be an intermediary for recruitment. This may have affected who took part; for example, participants may have felt more or less likely to agree to an interview or complete a survey based on their relationship with the fostering agency or the staff member that was passing along the evaluation information. The survey data was also limited by its relatively low completion rates and the lack of a comparison group. However, where possible we have compared findings from our analysis of the survey data to existing published studies.

The evaluation is also limited in its attributions of differences in outcomes to the impact of the programme given that randomisation was not possible with this evaluation and the lack of clear parameters for who is eligible within a fostering agency to participate in Mockingbird. There was no strict demographic criterion for taking part in Mockingbird and the aim was to intentionally create a diverse group, which makes it difficult to select a comparison group. However, when analysing the administrative data, we used robust matching and statistical modelling techniques to control for observed covariates and baseline differences. These techniques are explained in more detail in Appendix 3 and Appendix 4.

This final evaluation represents a rigorous, real world evaluation of an established and expanding social care programme given its use of a broad range of qualitative and quantitative methods and the inclusion of perspectives of children, young people, foster carers, and staff implementing Mockingbird over multiple time points.

We worked closely with The Fostering Network and sites in the current evaluation to build capacity for future evaluations of Mockingbird. Importantly, we have worked closely with The Fostering Network's Mockingbird monitoring and evaluation analyst in establishing the evaluation and providing guidance to sites around the importance of monitoring and

understanding evaluation. This analyst position continues after the end of this evaluation and embeds capacity for internal evaluations and future research. Additionally, the Rees Centre at the University of Oxford has been appointed as the independent evaluator by What Works for Children's Social Care for an expansion of the Mockingbird programme under the Supporting Families: Investing in Practice programme.

3. Key findings

Summary of key findings

This report integrates the various research methods described above and discusses which evidence specific findings draw upon. Overall, the Mockingbird programme was seen by site staff, foster carers, and children and young people to bring normality to children in care and their foster families, including kinship carers, through creating a community similar to an extended family environment and reducing experiences of bureaucracy. Mockingbird improved foster carer retention and there was qualitative evidence that the programme may improve transitions and wellbeing for children and young people and improve placement stability (although there was no evidence of improved placement stability in our analysis of administrative data). Mockingbird also showed promising findings around improving wellbeing for foster carers, improving foster carer support, improving friendships for children and young people and improving relationships between siblings. As described by a fostering manager, Mockingbird was seen to "meet a genuine need" within fostering and was continuing past this Innovation-funded period.

Findings related to implementation

This section addresses the following research questions:

1. How has the Mockingbird programme been implemented?[3]
    a) How many people have participated (foster carers, children and young people)? What kind of activities have they participated in?
    b) What adaptations have been made to the programme by sites? How have these helped to meet the needs of different care populations?
    c) What factors seem to facilitate or inhibit the implementation of the programme and the achievement of the intended outcomes?
    d) What factors enable or limit longer-term sustainability of the programme?

The findings in this section are drawn mainly from analysis of participation data collected by sites, survey responses from foster carers and children and young people (see Appendix 5 and Appendix 6 for further details), and 27 interviews with site staff and 14 interviews with staff from The Fostering Network (including implementation and sustainability coaches). Where relevant, findings are supported by information from

[3] Q1(e) is included in the next section of this report which outlines findings related to impact.

interviews with foster carers, children and young people, analysis of documentation related to Mockingbird, and observations at The Fostering Network events.

Participation and satisfaction

Sites provided participation data for the period from April 2017 to March 2020. Based on the available data, 921 care-experienced children and young people took part, of whom 830 children and young people were classified as in care and under 18 years old, and 467 fostering households were involved in Mockingbird in the 12 project sites.

The 3 main types of activities that foster carers, children and young people took part in as part of Mockingbird were constellation meetings, social activities, and sleepovers.

Constellation meetings

Foster carers were satisfied overall with their constellation meetings. During the meetings, there was often training provided or a support group feel. In the initial survey in 2018, 94% of foster carers responded that they usually or always attended meetings in their constellation. 90% rated constellation meetings as good or excellent. In the second survey in 2019, 84% of foster carer responded that they usually or always attended the meetings and 87% rated them as good or excellent.

Social activities

Common social activities that constellations took part in included movie nights, walks, bowling, excursions such as to theme parks, and barbecues or picnics. Children and young people were satisfied with the Mockingbird social activities they took part in: 65% of children and young people in the initial 2018 survey reported that they attended Mockingbird social activities most or every month and 89% rated them as good or excellent. Similarly, in the second 2019 survey, 73% of children and young people reported that they attended Mockingbird social activities most or every month and 87% rated them as good or excellent. Foster carers were also engaged and satisfied with the programme's social activities: 90% rated them as good or excellent in both the 2018 and 2019 surveys.

Sleepovers

Children and young people were satisfied with their sleepovers when they took part: 34% of the 67 children and young people responding in the 2018 survey and 40% of the 65 children and young people responding in the 2019 survey reported that they had a sleepover at their hub home most months or every month. Some of the participation data returns noted about planned sleepovers happening quarterly rather than monthly at certain sites. Some children and young people had emergency sleepovers; participation data would record instances, such as one night of an emergency sleepover after a

dispute on the phone between the young person and foster carer. Of those who had sleepovers at the hub home and completed the survey, 89% of 56 children and young people rated sleepovers as good or excellent in 2018, which increased to 92% of 52 children and young people in the 2019 survey.

> "I love Mockingbird and my sleepovers." (Foster child, age 9)

Foster carers were also asked "How would you rate the respite or short break care on offer to you, including sleepovers available through the Mockingbird programme?" with 88% rating it as good or excellent in the 2018 survey and 87% rating it as good or excellent in the 2019 survey. As a comparison, in the most recent State of the Nation's Foster Care Report only 37% of foster carers rated the short break or respite care they received as good or excellent (Lawson and Cann, 2019).

Adaptations to the programme

Adaptations to the model included single-focussed constellations, such as those only with kinship satellite carers or only adoptive families. Adaptations also incorporated the inclusion of residential care within the constellation, the inclusion of adoptive families within a constellation, or practice-based emphasis in line with the broader agency such as a therapeutic approach. These adaptations were seen to meet the needs of different care-experienced populations and were seen as part of the ethos of the model with child-centred practice, maintaining relationships, emphasising an extended family network, and reducing bureaucracy.

There was a general acknowledgement by staff at sites and The Fostering Network that adaptations were often very positive for services and feasible while still maintaining fidelity to the model.

> "Because you've got a model that requires dexterity in terms of understanding whether it works, you kind of have that consistency but then at the same time, yeah, I think certainly has the capacity to work in these other modifications." (Staff member at The Fostering Network)

The adaptions of single-focussed constellations often ran into issues around fidelity and whether they had created a support network or a Mockingbird constellation with an extended family feel, but these stumbling blocks were often approached as critical learning.

> "And I suppose I don't know whether it's, whether you're going to look at success being, well we rolled the model out in its purest form or that we adapt it and make the most of the learning from it, is equally viewed as a success." (Fostering manager)

One site created and closed down a constellation where all the carers fostered young children under the age of 5, as they found it did not meet the model fidelity; foster carers did not need the same extent of support as other constellations, few children needed sleepovers or short breaks with the hub carer, no one needed emergency sleepovers and children moved on relatively quickly to permanency. Similarly, a constellation with all teenagers with complex needs was more difficult to implement with fidelity to the model at a different site as some young people were reluctant to take part in social activities, but it was still viewed as a success. The Fostering Network staff noted that there was still diversity within the teenage group and a diversity of experiences that led to the young people's complex histories while site staff noted:

> "… the reason that [it] works is because all those carers have got this very specific, quite narrow, shared experience, they've all got complex teenage children who have been in residential care or are coming out of residential care and it makes that shared experience quite unique." (Fostering manager)

Other sites were very proud of their thriving kinship carer-only constellations and felt that the kinship carers had more shared experience with and received more peer support from other kinship carers. An adoption-only constellation, whilst it had fewer sleepovers, was also viewed very positively by site staff in providing support to adoptive families that included care-experienced children with still quite complex needs but who were unable to access the same support as foster carers.

The inclusion of small numbers of children in other types of placement rather than kinship care and non-relative foster care was built in as perhaps a more natural adaptation to the model, and indeed The Fostering Network changed their diagram visualising the programme during the evaluation period to reflect this. The interviews with site staff discussed constellations that included families with special guardianship orders, adoptive families, children and their key workers from residential care, children who had moved to independent fostering agencies, parent and child placements, and young people under staying put arrangements with their foster carers. In 1 constellation where there was a girl who was primarily living in residential care, the hub home carer and other carers viewed it as positive that she got to live some of the time in a home setting and had more people advocating for her. They also felt that it was natural that she was included, and it didn't "really affect anything" in the constellation in a positive way. One site had identified children at 2 different children's homes where they wanted them to be in a fostering family in the long term and were using Mockingbird to help them transition.

Facilitators and barriers to implementation

Experiences of implementation were extremely varied across the 12 sites; however, from the 27 interviews with site staff leads and 14 interviews with The Fostering Network staff common facilitators and barriers to successful implementation were evident. The main

themes identified included staff turnover, initial and ongoing buy-in from across the service, the key role of hub home carer, the key role of liaison worker or project manager, mix and matching within the constellation, engagement of the foster carers, fidelity and fidelity reviews, the challenge of the shift in funding for sustainability, and initial and ongoing support from The Fostering Network. All these aspects were seen as facilitating implementation and sustainability if they were going well or inhibiting it if things were not going well. These aspects were also viewed as being very much interrelated.

> "So, I would say if those 3 things are there [a good liaison worker, staff buy-in from all levels, and hiring a good hub home carer], then you have got a very good chance of this whole implementation process working well and doing what it should do to fidelity, rather than dropping a bit of fidelity or cutting corners or trying to do things slightly [less] to the standard that we want to see as coaches." (Mockingbird implementation and sustainability coach)

Staff turnover

> "I think our biggest, biggest challenge is the vulnerability of the change programme in an environment where there's a lot of restructures and a lot of staff movement." (Staff member at The Fostering Network)

Staff turnover at all levels was seen as a barrier to implementation and as a facilitator where good staff had remained consistent. Site staff spoke about the challenges with Ofsted inspections triggering changes in the focus of fostering services and leadership. Foster carers spoke about challenges when their liaison worker or project manager left and when hub home carers retired or left with some constellations closing when hub home carers left. To overcome the challenge of staff leaving unexpectedly, staff at The Fostering Network recommended that services ensure they have succession plans in place as part of the implementation of the programme, for example, by identifying a successor to a hub carer with the necessary skills and the right space to avoid the closing or pausing of a constellation.

Initial and ongoing buy-in from across the service

The importance of laying the groundwork and gaining the buy-in for Mockingbird across the service was seen as critical to Mockingbird succeeding and also as a way to buffer against staff movement by maintaining the enthusiasm and momentum from other staff. Built into the programme was an extensive implementation stage including an implementation working group to help gain buy-in from across a service.

> "It needs to be embedded within the service and truly bought into by everybody who has a stake in what Mockingbird does." (Mockingbird implementation and sustainability coach)

> “I think there's just a lot of positivity about Mockingbird and that’s why it feels like it’s become an essential part of our service now and it just feels very normal to work this way now.” (Fostering manager)

One implementation and sustainability coach described buy-in from the service including not only believing in the model but also not being afraid to make mistakes.

Key role of hub home carer

The role of the hub home carer was seen as critical to the constellation. One satellite foster carer described it as “if you look after your hub carers, they look after your carers and your children will flourish” and another one described the hub carer as “the glue that keeps it all together.” The role was seen as a complex and difficult one. One coach discussed adding teaching around managing group dynamics as the hub carer role requires not only creating relationships with the children, but also managing the group dynamics of children together and of foster carers together (including more verbal and opinionated carers and quieter carers). There was much discussion about preventing burnout from hub home carers, often through creating a deputy carer or ensuring support from multiple directions, such as the satellite carers offering sleepovers and arranging social activities and offering support for hub home carers in times of grief or stress.

Key role of liaison worker or project manager

The exact staffing arrangement for Mockingbird differed by sites with various combinations of a project manager, liaison workers, supervising social workers, and supervising social workers who were also liaison workers. However, it was widely acknowledged in interviews that having the right staff was critical.

> “Having the right supervising social worker or liaison officer is key. We had a situation where the liaison officer was just not working with the foster carer to the point that […] the hub carer was very unhappy. And as soon as I sensed it, I thought no, I have to do something about it and I think the best thing was changing [the liaison worker] and that just lifted all of the anxiety and tension for the hub carer. But also, for the whole constellation actually because I could actually see then how the constellation started working so much better.” (Fostering manager)

Mix of children, young people, and foster carers and ‘matching’ in creating a constellation

The importance of a constellation having a mix of children and young people and foster carers was raised in interviews across all sites. Some found having the mix happened naturally and unintentionally while others were more intentional. The mix of children and young people was required to meet fidelity and included dimensions such as ages, types of needs, genders, and personalities. This was seen as important to prevent negative peer influence and build friendships. We asked in interviews about how the children and

young people got on and the message was overwhelmingly positive. Foster carers and children and young people rarely spoke about negative influences and were more likely to mention positive role models.

The mix of children and young people did create challenges for the constellation in finding activities that everyone would engage with, with acknowledgement that not everyone would engage with or like every activity. Older teenagers sometimes spoke about not attending many activities in interviews, and this was seen as well from the varied responses on participation in the survey data. One teenager we interviewed twice discussed how some of the activities are designed for younger children at the first interview, but then also discussed about enjoying helping younger children in the second interview. The mix of children and young people is an area for further research, given both the concern in the broader social intervention literature about negative peer influence (Dishion, McCord, and Poulin, 1999) and the emerging findings about positive friendships in Mockingbird and the potential for positive role models.

The challenges of the mix of foster carers were more often discussed in foster carer interviews than the challenges between children and young people.

> “Now there's four of us [hub carers], we’ve got, there's more chance of matching families better with their hub carers and with the other satellite families, and that reduces the storming and everything else that you get sometimes.” (Hub home foster carer)

Other matching criteria for creating a constellation included the geography and logistics. The viewpoint on what was a long distance and long time to travel depended on the individual’s perceptions and on the surrounding geography. For example, in the urban constellations, carers were often more closely located than in large ‘shire’ locations. Some foster carers cited geography and logistics as an obstacle for participation. However, a foster carer who does not drive and needed to take 2 buses to get to the hub home still felt that this was not a massive obstacle. This carer spoke about making what events they could and having to miss some events, but stated, “these aren’t massive things…. And that’s what families do.”

In the matching and joining process, site staff noted the importance of speaking to foster carers carefully beforehand so they didn’t feel they were being encouraged to join as a mark of failure. In the interviews with foster carers, they were asked about the process of joining Mockingbird. Most spoke positively about being told about Mockingbird or approaching their fostering agency about joining Mockingbird. However, a minority had wondered if they were if they were being encouraged to join as a negative sign that they were not good enough. Foster carers also noted the importance of time to let the constellation gel.

Engagement of foster carers in Mockingbird

In interviews, foster carers frequently described how they felt that the effectiveness of Mockingbird relied on carers not using it only for sleepovers. One satellite foster couple spoke about "not let[ting] it be one-sided as in they're just taking the sleepover or the activities. They need to give something back as well, if that makes sense, to make that commitment." They advised other families to "Go for it really. To make sure that they put in the same support in, if that makes sense?" This couple and other foster carers noted the importance of satellite carers showing up to satellite meetings and activities, engaging in them, and volunteering to help the hub carer and others in different ways from sleepovers during hub carer holidays to organising informal gatherings.

Likewise, with few exceptions, most felt that Mockingbird was not for all carers. One male satellite foster carer said, "Yeah, [I'd recommend Mockingbird]. I wouldn't make it mandatory, I'd make it optional." Multiple foster carers discussed how they had begun sceptical of the programme, but changed their minds after engaging with the model and felt that others should have the option of joining Mockingbird.

> "We just thought throwing together a group of people, well, is this really going to work, but it's really worked well so much so that we both think that every person that fosters should have the opportunity to be part of a Mockingbird group." (Satellite foster carer)

Initial and on-going support from The Fostering Network and coaches

Many site staff highlighted that The Fostering Network's on-going support and national and regional learning events have been successful in providing opportunities for individuals implementing the Mockingbird programme to come together to discuss their experiences and share learning. Site staff appreciated the support from The Fostering Network and mentioned individual names and roles. The coach was seen as a particularly important role.

> "So, you're on the outside, coming into that service, trying to effect some change with them, as a facilitator. As a critical friend." (Mockingbird implementation and sustainability coach)

In learning from the programme, The Fostering Network expanded the role of the coach to work with services not only around implementation, but also around sustainability. The Fostering Network found that services often ran into challenges not only in setting up the programme, but also in maintaining enthusiasm and as obstacles arose.

Fidelity and fidelity reviews

Maintaining fidelity was identified as a facilitator to successful implementation as it ensured adherence to the model and theory of change. It was also sometimes seen as a

barrier that made it harder to implement and sustain the programme. The fidelity criteria of the hub home needing to have 2 spare beds could hinder recruiting a hub home carer, particularly in urban sites, but it was also seen as a way to protect the resource of spare beds and an experienced foster carer from being used in other parts of the service.

> "And [senior managers wanting to place children in the hub home beds] was a very painful process for me actually and I'm feeling quite emotional talking about it […] to the point that I even contacted Fostering Network, and I said "Do you know what, what do I do? I'm really worried. We can't, you know, this is such a beautiful model, I believe in it, the carers believe in it, the children are benefitting from it, what do we do? How do we, you know, how do we sustain it when I've got senior managers saying 'No, we want to use those beds!'?" (Fostering manager)

Fidelity reviews themselves were generally seen as positive by staff, although laborious, and as helpful for sustainability. They were an essential part of the Fostering Network's accreditation and core to being the 'Mockingbird programme'. The Fostering Network was looking to streamline the fidelity reviews and make this process more of a useful conversation.

Fidelity issues were raised over single-focussed constellations, such as kinship-only and adopter-only constellations, and over foster carers wanting sleepovers for a week or more at a time. One fostering service manager discussed 2 constellations, one of which scored better on the fidelity review but had less of the feel of Mockingbird to her and the other constellation that scored lower, in part due to the inclusion of grandchildren and others who were not strictly part of the constellation in activities.

The closure of constellations that did not meet fidelity could be a difficult process. One site discussed a constellation that closed after conflicts around fidelity where the foster carers wanted sleepovers for more than a few days with the hub home given the relationship that had been built up and where they didn't want to commit to monthly activities given busy lives.

> "So, there was a few issues creeping in that the group felt that they'd moved beyond and that they'd developed their own community with their own set of norms that they liked and that didn't fit with fidelity, so it became quite difficult to manage that group. As it transpired, the hub carer who I think would have resigned before too very long anyway, just simply because of their age and their stage in their own personal lives, I think brought that forward and indicated that the reason they brought that forward is they felt they were forced into that position because they didn't like what was being asked of them [for fidelity]." (Fostering manager)

The evaluation team sent out a closed constellation survey to the foster carers who had been part of this constellation; from the 3 satellite carers who fully completed this survey,

all 3 noted that the group had not formally closed as they were still organising social events and respite with one and another without a hub carer. There were no longer emergency or planned sleepovers available from a hub carer. All 3 also expressed feeling much less satisfied with fostering since the hub carer retired. One foster carer noted that retirement of the hub carer was not appropriate wording for the situation, and one foster carer noted that they had a placement move on as a direct result of Mockingbird support being changed.

> "A number of our members are struggling without Mockingbird in difficult times. Emergency respite is much needed." (Satellite foster carer)

Many staff members expressed that fidelity was key to the model, and there was enough room in the model for any necessary adaptations as discussed in the previous section.

> "The model is brilliant; it doesn't need tinkering with. If you've got an issue with it, it's because you don't understand what's going on." (Liaison worker)

Factors affecting longer-term sustainability

Although lead staff at participating sites and The Fostering Network staff were optimistic about the longer-term sustainability of the programme at the time of the second interview (July 2019 and November 2019 respectively), staff at the Fostering Network and Innovation-funded sites discussed how the planned decrease in funding in 2019-20 had not been accounted for or incorporated into the transition to sustainability for some Innovation-funded sites. There was also much acknowledgement that further planning needed to happen and of the difficultly of making a business case when children's services budgets are tight. The concern around sustainability was contrasted to the approach from local authority and independent fostering agency self-funded sites by The Fostering Network staff:

> "Self-funded services right from the word go have understood what they've committed to. They've understood how much money has had to go into it. They haven't just had everything paid for with no understanding of what's been paid for, and they've done a longer term view on it. They've made a five year plan, sometimes even beyond that, but they've definitely done a five year around what this will mean to take this on board because they are responsible for it at the end of the day. With funding, it's a hand-out a lot of the time, isn't it? Unfortunately, a lot of services just think they can tell you all the right things about sustainability, perfectly devised project that shows that, but the reality isn't from our knowledge always the same." (Staff member at The Fostering Network)

Staff at the Fostering network saw the additional funding from the new Supporting Families: Investing in Practice programme both an opportunity and a threat. It was an

opportunity to expand the stretched national support team; however, the funding was also a threat to sustainability as some potential self-funded sites paused engagement in going forward to wait to see if they were funded under the new Supporting Families: Investing in Practice programme. This slowed down The Fostering Network's activity for new self-funded sites, which was an important source of revenue for sustainability and expansion for them. Any future sources of national funding should think carefully about how to best encourage both innovation and sustainability in the current fiscal context.

Findings related to impact

This section answers the following research questions:

1. How has the Mockingbird programme been implemented?

    (e) What are the experiences of staff, foster carers, children and young people who are involved in the programme? What effects do they think it has had?[4]

2. What impact does the Mockingbird programme have on children, young people and foster carers, including placement stability and carer retention?
3. How do outcomes change over time for children, young people, foster carers and services participating in the Mockingbird programme?

The findings in this section are drawn from analysis of administrative data, surveys of foster carers, children and young people across all sites, staff interviews and interviews with foster carers, children and young people in 4 case study sites.

The outcomes that we explored in this evaluation were informed by the programme's theory of change and included placement stability, foster carer retention, and wellbeing of foster carers, children and young people.

Impact on children and young people

Our evaluation explored the impact of Mockingbird on the children and young people who participated in the programme, with a particular focus on placement stability, incidents of going 'missing' and wellbeing, which were central to the theory of change. In this section, we draw primarily on findings from our analysis of SSDA903 data as well as survey responses from and interviews with children and young people. Relevant findings from interviews with foster carers and staff are also included.

[4] Q1 parts (a) to (d) were addressed in the previous section.

Placement stability

We explored the impact of Mockingbird on placement stability by analysing administrative SSDA903 data provided by 9 sites for the period 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2019.[5] This data included all looked after children in these sites, which allowed us to compare directly between those who did and did not take part in Mockingbird. However, because participation in Mockingbird is not randomised, children and young people who took part in the programme were not representative of the overall population of looked after children in the data. We used Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM) to select a fair comparator group of children and young people who were not participating in Mockingbird. CEM is a statistical method for achieving balance between intervention and comparator groups by selecting a subset of individuals who share the same pattern of key characteristics. In our analysis, we matched on local authority, gender, age, ethnicity, unaccompanied asylum seeking status, the reason a child was looked after, placement length, total time in care, previous unplanned endings and previous instances of being missing. Full details of the CEM criteria and sample created for this analysis are given in Appendix 3: Analysis of SSDA903 data. The final matched sample contained 336 children and young people who had participated in Mockingbird and 1,567 who had not. The methodology resulted in a rigorous quasi-experimental impact evaluation and equivalent groups on matched variables, but important unobserved differences may remain.

Overall, children and young people who had participated in Mockingbird had an average of 0.48 unplanned placement endings in a year compared to 0.36 for those who had not taken part (

Table 1). However, when differences in the length of time in care were accounted for there was no statistically significant difference in the number of unplanned endings between the groups (see Appendix 3: Analysis of SSDA903 data for details).

Table 1: Unplanned placement endings during follow-up year, by Mockingbird participation

	Comparison group	Mockingbird participants
Mean	0.3631	0.4821
Median	0	0
Range	0 - 8	0 - 8

Source: Analysis of SSDA903 data

[5] The 2 Independent Fostering Agencies could not provide SSDA903 data and 1 local authority did not launch Mockingbird until too close to the study end period to be included in the analysis.

This finding of no difference in unplanned endings is similar to an evaluation of the Mockingbird Model in the USA. Goodvin and Miller (2017) found that a higher percentage of children and young people who had taken part in Mockingbird had a new foster care placement within 1 year compared to the comparison group, but that this difference was not statistically significant.

Improving placement stability was generally described as the primary outcome of interest by the staff we interviewed at sites implementing Mockingbird and The Fostering Network. With few exceptions, staff noted that they did not expect Mockingbird to completely stop unplanned placement endings, but rather to decrease the number of unplanned placement endings that would otherwise have occurred. Given the complexities and nuances associated with children's social care practice and measurement of outcomes, we have drawn on our knowledge and understanding of the Mockingbird programme to provide some hypotheses for this finding of no statistically significant impact on unplanned endings in this analysis. Firstly, Mockingbird may be used to support placements that are close to disrupting. As there is no measure in SSDA903 data on how close a placement is to disruption, it is not possible to account for this potential difference when analysing administrative data. Services understandably wanted to use Mockingbird to help prevent disruption, but both The Fostering Network and fostering agency staff highlighted the benefits of a mixed constellation.

> "I think it's quite easy for services to pick the families that are all at crisis and say here you go. What we've found at [our fostering agency] is if they become part of Mockingbird at that point, it's too late. It's too late to be able to save them. So, you really need to match, look at where they are. So, there might be a couple that are struggling, but you've also got a mix of ones that are doing okay as well, because fostering families need change so much. I think really look at who's in those families and the matching of that. So, you know, is there children that are going to not be safe together, is there carers that are going to clash, and a mix of age group, not too many that have got the same kind of needs because that would become unmanageable for the hub home." (Fostering manager)

Secondly, participation in Mockingbird involves greater scrutiny of placements (via the liaison worker, hub home carer and other satellite foster carers), which may lead to safeguarding and other issues being more likely to be identified. Children and young people and foster carers in Mockingbird are also more likely to be exposed to other fostering families, which may cause them to request endings. This may be due to comparisons to other households or the availability of safe placements. One foster carer discussed a case where she felt foster carers used Mockingbird to justify an unplanned ending with an older teenage boy: "It was almost like, 'Well, we've got Mockingbird, you sort out the problem of where [he]'s going to go.'" (Deputy hub carer).

Another potential explanation may be that placement changes as part of the support provided by Mockingbird may be recorded as unplanned endings in the administrative data. For example, stays at the hub home for planned and emergency sleepovers, especially if they last for 7 days or more, may be recorded as unplanned endings.

> "I was at one [Implementation Working Group] meeting where there was a whole discussion about how, on the system, they define a sleepover because it was going to come up as a placement move. Imagine. […] To get that changed on their electronic system, I know it sounds ridiculous, it took a good deal of work between the person who ran the database and somebody from the placement team." (Mockingbird implementation and sustainability coach)

Finally, our analysis could be underpowered. Unplanned endings are a relatively rare occurrence, and it may be that the sample size was too small or the length of follow-up was insufficient to detect a difference. Different analytical approaches and a higher-powered study should be used to confirm these findings.

Placement transitions

Of the 398 children and young people who took part in Mockingbird and were included in our analysis of SSDA903 data, 17 had been in 2 different Mockingbird placements and 2 had been in 3 different Mockingbird placements. In interviews with hub home carers, there were numerous examples of children and young people transitioning to other placements within the constellation.

> "We've got a little girl, so she's not a little girl, she's 14 as well, who decided that she didn't want to live where she was living anymore, and her placement is ending. But she was very reluctant to get involved in Mockingbird because they were new carers, and we felt they needed the support. They came to an event, and she was just sitting on her phone, and it was really reluctantly that she came to things. When she decided she wanted to move placements, it was obviously quite awkward, because they were there, she wanted to move placements. So, we decided that she would come and stay with me for a couple of weeks to give them all that breathing space. From that we have now developed a really positive relationship, and now, she's moving to new carers and she wants them to be part of Mockingbird. So, I think that's been really positive." (Hub home foster carer)

> "This little [8 year old] boy that we've got at the moment … so since he came into care last May, he's had five placements break down. So, in less than a year he's had five placements break down. And he's been able to come back to us a couple of times when that has happened so that has given him some stability because he knew where he was coming to. He knows us. He knows the house. He knows the

> dog. He knows our routine. And so, for him that's been really, really helpful." (Hub home foster carer)

Other examples of children and young people moving placements within the constellation included where the child and young person initiated the move, where it was due to deteriorating health of the foster carer, where it was decided a sibling group should be split following an assessment, and where it was due to the bereavement of a foster carer. It was generally considered positive for the children and young people when they stayed within the hub in comparison to other options during a placement move. However, satellite foster carers home sometimes viewed extended stays at the hub as negatively affecting the constellation and the ability to have planned and emergency sleepovers.

Permanency

Multiple foster carers mentioned transitioning placements from short-term to long-term and feeling that the support of Mockingbird allowed them to have the confidence to do so, through improving their skills, self-efficacy, and support network.

> "If I didn't have Mockingbird, these children wouldn't be long-term with me. I'd have given up by now." (Satellite foster carer)

A certain amount of permanency around adoption and return to birth family was seen as outside the influence Mockingbird. Permanency within foster care and with Staying Put arrangements was seen as a later consequence of the programme beyond the timescales of this evaluation and not as an immediate outcome.

Going missing from placement

We explored the impact of Mockingbird on the number of times children and young people were recorded as missing from their placements and the total number of days they were recorded as being missing for, using administrative SSDA903 data. This data was provided by 9 sites for the period 1st April 2016 to 31st March 2019 and we analysed it using CEM as described in Appendix 3: Analysis of SSDA903 data. On average, children and young people who had participated in Mockingbird were recorded as missing from their placement 0.5 times in a year for a total of 0.3 days. Children and young people who had not participated in Mockingbird were also recorded as missing from their placement 0.5 times in a year, but for a longer amount of time (0.7 days). When children and young people's history of going missing was taken into account, this difference in the amount of time they were missing for was not statistically significant. Our analysis of a subsample of children and young people with a history of going missing or an unplanned ending (72 Mockingbird participants, 189 comparators) also found no statistically significant difference in the number of times they were recorded as missing or how long they were missing for.

In interviews, The Fostering Network staff discussed hoping that Mockingbird would decrease episodes of going missing, or make those episodes shorter, but it was not envisioned that it would completely stop young people from going missing. Foster carers discussed the difficult reality of including children who were already going missing in their constellation and placement. One hub carer discussed a new girl in the constellation:

> "She's still returning to the danger area. So, it's making it difficult to bond with her and for the constellation to know who she is."

Similarly, a foster carer couple discussed a boy who "was running off anyway, he was running to Dad, he said he wasn't there and Dad's saying he wasn't there, but we know he was there." The decision was made for him to return back to live with his father.

> "Not that it's the best situation for [him], but we were damaging his emotional state and he was running off anyway, so ..." (Satellite foster carer)

During interviews, staff also highlighted instances when they felt that Mockingbird prevented escalation around going missing.

> "A particular example where a teenage girl had a falling out with her foster carer and she'd gone off to school that day and then basically left school, absconded from school really, but just left early […] But the foster carer was quite concerned and it was getting to the point where they were going to start getting the police involved because she wasn't responding to text messages from the foster carer and they just had this big falling out. And actually, what happened was, was the hub carer had gone to bed and then at about 11:30, 12:00, there was a banging at the door. She went down and there was this young teenager and she said, 'Can I stay here tonight? Because I'm not going home.' She said, 'Yeah, of course you can, come on, in you come. Let's get your bed sorted out.' And this young person was able to stay at the hub home, and what was lovely was the hub carer could get in touch with the carer and say look, don't worry, she's here, there's no drama, and she's safe." (Mockingbird implementation and sustainability coach)

Wellbeing of children and young people

We explored the wellbeing of children and young people who participated in Mockingbird by including the validated Outcome Rating Scale (ORS) and Child Outcome Rating Scale (CORS) in the online surveys. The ORS is a simple 4 question tool that measures aspects of wellbeing on a scale of 0 to 10. The total possible score is 40 and higher scores indicate higher levels of wellbeing. The CORS uses more child friendly language and is suitable for use with 6 to 12 year olds.

All parts of the ORS or CORS were completed by 56 children and young people who responded to the survey in 2018 and 55 in 2019. The average overall total score for

these Mockingbird participants was 31.6 in 2018 and 32.8 in 2019 (**Error! Reference source not found.**). This was similar to the average score among a community sample of 7,609 children from 90 schools in England and higher than a clinical sample of 2,604 children accessing NHS mental health services (Casey et al., 2019).

Table 2: Mean score for Outcome Rating Scale and Child Outcome Rating Scale

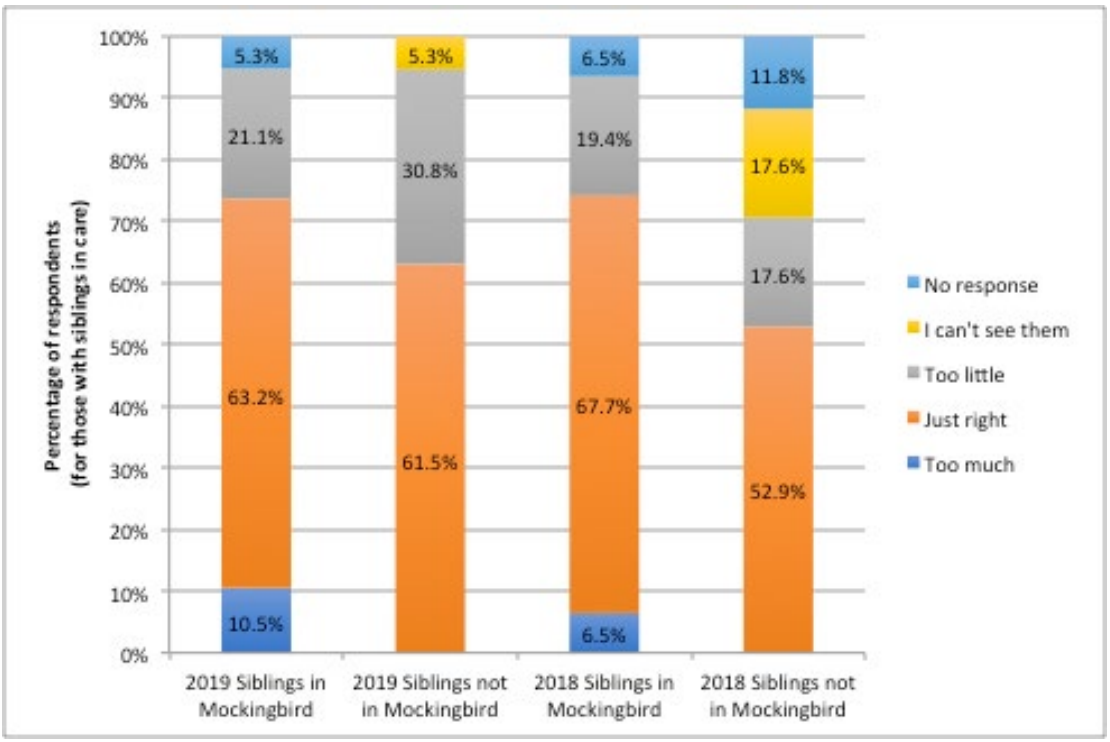
	Mockingbird survey		Comparator	
	2018	2019	Community	Clinical
How am I doing?	7.8	8.0	7.8	5.6
How are things in my family?	8.1	8.3	8.2	6.2
How am I doing in school?	7.6	8.1	7.5	5.4
How is everything going?	8.1	8.3	7.6	5.7
Total score	**31.6**	**32.8**	**31.4**	**22.7**

Source: 2018 and 2019 Mockingbird child and young person surveys and Casey et al. (2019)

Contact with birth family

In response to our surveys of children and young people participating in Mockingbird, a higher percentage of those who had siblings in their constellation rated the amount of contact they had with them as “just right” in comparison to those with siblings in foster care, but not in their constellation. A higher percentage of children and young people with siblings within their constellation rated the amount they saw their siblings as “too much” in comparison to those with siblings in foster care, but not in their constellation. Those who rated the amount they saw their siblings as “too much” were likely to be living in the same household as their siblings; foster carers and hub home carers discussed that Mockingbird gave these siblings a break through more one-on-one time with their foster carers and individual sleepovers at the hub home carer. A comparison of the responses for siblings in Mockingbird is presented in the graph below in Figure 2 with detailed numbers in Appendix 6: Responses to 2018 and 2019 child and young person surveys. These findings should be treated with caution given the small numbers and that satisfaction with the amount that children and young people see one another may also be related to factors other than Mockingbird, such as safeguarding.

Figure 2: Comparison of percentage responses on satisfaction with sibling contact



Source: 2018 and 2019 Mockingbird child and young person surveys

In interviews, children and young people, foster carers, and staff discussed Mockingbird as having improved the relationships for brothers and sisters placed in the same household by giving them a break from one another and some one-on-one time with their foster carer. For siblings placed in separate households within the same Mockingbird constellation, or where seeing one another could be facilitated within Mockingbird, there were also examples of improved relationships. One foster child usually saw his brother when vising his hub home carer as his brother lived close to the hub home in a foster care placement with an independent fostering agency.

There were numerous positive case studies about Mockingbird being used to facilitate and normalise birth family contact with other relatives, but there was less systematic evidence on this aspect, and it was not an integral part of all constellations or fostering services. Where there was birth family contact with other family members facilitated through the hub home carer, it was noted that there was less of a tension or sense of split loyalty for the children and young people between birth family and their foster carers.

> “[One] young person’s court-appointed contact time with their parent at the contact centre has shifted to the hub home carer. [They all] go out every month to have food and that's replaced the contact centre and has just become a far more normal experience of spending time with your parent.” (Staff member at The Fostering Network)

Opportunities to socialise and make friends

In interviews, staff, foster carers, and children and young people noted the broad range of social activities available as part of Mockingbird, and the positive experiences they provided for children and young people. One foster carer described the decision about being involved as:

> "It's a no brainer to me… It's for the kids as well because they get loads out of it. You wouldn't isolate your own kids, so why isolate the foster kids sort of thing? Especially a lot of our kids have got issues and stuff and they don't mix very well with other children, but in Mockingbird they just all seem to get on." (Satellite foster carer)

Others discussed how Mockingbird provided opportunities for children and young people in care to have typical social experiences that may not have been otherwise possible thereby avoiding different socialisation and stigma. One hub carer discussed having "a proper girly sleepover" with 3 of the girls in her constellation and that "we forget, these kids are looked after, but they still need to hit those milestones and to do those things that all their friends are doing at school."

Time and again, foster carers and children and young people spoke in interviews about children and young people having the opportunity and encouragement to do activities that they would not have otherwise done. These opportunities were seen in different small ways such as going to soft play for the first time, therapeutic play and regression for older children, or having the supervision to teach multiple children to swim.

> "It's not creating or replicating activities that most children have, it's actually kind of gone past that, and it's creating such a kind of rich environment for these children that it's significantly helping with overcoming the adversity that they've suffered in the past." (Fostering manager)

Expanded horizons were also seen in Mockingbird Nest, an enrichment programme run by The Fostering Network for selected Mockingbird children and young people from sites across the UK, and in residential events put on by The Fostering Network. Constellations also organised their own more elaborate constellation activities.

> "And like our hub carer's children have been on a flight for the first time, they went off to Spain and Turkey on holidays out of one constellation, and for the whole week." (Fostering manager)

The social activities were particularly important to the children and young people for making friends. The friendships were talked about on a level of different little interactions that clearly had significant meaning.

> “When you first meet them they’re not like rude to you saying “you can’t play with this” they’re really kind saying “you can join in this” “you can join in that”. It’s good. And they are also quite friendly because as soon as you get here, I just fit in because they’re asking me questions, what’s my name, do you want to play a game, do you want to come and do this” (Foster child, age 9)

Children and young people often talked about their friendships within Mockingbird and that the best part was getting to see their friends.

> “They feel like friends. Like Mockingbird is like a family. There are lots of different [children] that come together and are all friends.” (Foster child, age 11)

Support networks and connections to the community

The essence of Mockingbird was described by all categories of interviewees as an extended family, community, relationships, and person-centred.

> “Mockingbird is a place where you can belong. Mockingbird is a place where you will make new friends that you will have for life really […] You’d get opportunities. You’d become part of a family really.” (Foster child, age 15)

> “Success means that the children absolutely feel part of a family, an extended family. And they feel the benefits, not only whilst being part of a constellation, but also when they leave because not all children, we don’t want all children to remain in foster care. But when they leave, they still feel the benefits of it, having experienced what a good, healthy, happy family environment feels like. And they can take that into their relationships that they will go on to develop and grow, either in their personal lives but also in whatever else they do.” (Fostering manager)

This extended family model was also thought to create greater links to the community and trust in adults. More than three-quarters of children and young people who responded to our surveys agreed that they felt like an important part of their community (77% in 2018 and 88% in 2019). Overall, around 9 out of 10 children and young people agreed that there were adults in their community that they could go to for help if they needed (89% in 2018 and 93% in 2019). Almost all children and young people (98% in 2018 and 97% in 2019) said that they had an adult who they trusted, who helped them and who sticks by them no matter what.

> “All [of the foster carers in the constellation] care about us and I have so many aunties and uncles, LOL! Wish I had always had Mockingbird throughout my life in care.” (Foster child, age 14)

As part of the interview process, we asked children and young people to map out the people in their life, who they felt safe with and who they could go to if they needed help.

In this mapping activity, foster carers and the hub home carer were frequently included by children and young people, and they sometimes listed other satellite carers in their constellation. When discussing what helps her feel safe at the hub carer house, one foster child replied, "…sometimes she gives me hugs." (Foster child, age 10). One hub carer discussed hoping to always be a person for the children as they leave care, "I hope that I'll always be there, for them to knock on the door and come and say hello."

Educational wellbeing and behaviours

For 40% of children and young people who responded to our surveys, it was difficult to concentrate at school most or all of the time. However, despite challenges in school, 95% children and young people felt that their foster carers were interested in their school work and made sure that they did their school work most or all of the time. Foster carers talked at length about Mockingbird helping with understanding different educational resources through peer support and trainings and with providing positive environments for exclusions from school. More appropriate educational supports and environments were discussed as having improved child behaviour and wellbeing.

Although not a central part of the evaluation or theory of change, some participants highlighted improved child wellbeing coinciding with improved behaviour or educational wellbeing that was attributed in part to the Mockingbird programme. Foster carers talked at length about the support Mockingbird offered for dealing with challenging behaviours and issues at schools. When one young person was asked if Mockingbird had changed anything for them, they stated:

> "No. Well, I've started being good at home… because then I don't miss out on anything [with Mockingbird]." (Foster child, age 9)

Impact on foster carers

Our evaluation also explored the impact of Mockingbird on foster carers with a particular focus on retention and wellbeing, as per the theory of change. In this section, we draw primarily on findings from our analysis of Ofsted fostering household data, survey responses from foster carers and interviews with foster carers and staff. Because our survey was only sent to foster carers who were participating in Mockingbird, there was no direct comparison group. However, when designing the survey, we included questions that had been used in other published foster carer surveys and standardised tools that had been used with foster carers in other published studies so that we could make some indirect comparisons with our results.

Foster carer retention

To explore foster carer retention, we analysed Ofsted fostering dataset returns provided by 11 sites.[6] This data included all fostering households in the 11 sites, which allowed us to compare directly between those who had and had not participated in Mockingbird. The sample for this analysis included 3,256 fostering households in total, of which 288 (9%) were participating in Mockingbird. Key characteristics of the households in this sample and full details of the matching and modelling methods are given in Appendix 4: Analysis of Ofsted fostering data.

Overall, 705 (22%) fostering households deregistered during the study period (Table 3). Households participating in Mockingbird were less likely to de-register than those who were not participating (6% vs 23%). This difference was statistically significant using a z-test to compare the difference in proportions (p-value less than 0.001)[7].

There were some statistically significant differences in the characteristics of fostering households who did and did not participate in Mockingbird. For example, Mockingbird fostering households were less likely than other fostering households to have been approved for less than 12 months. A greater proportion of Mockingbird households were approved for 3 or more placements and had a permanent placement as their primary placement type. Mockingbird households were also statistically significantly more likely to have an exemption in place and less likely to have no children placed with them. Accounting for these differences and other factors known to be associated with de-registration, households that participated in Mockingbird were 82% less likely to de-register than households who did not participate (with an odds ratio of 0.18 and a p-value of less than 0.001[8]).

[6] One local authority did not launch Mockingbird until too close to the study end period to be included in the analysis.
[7] A z-test can test whether the difference in proportions between 2 groups is statistically significant accounting for the relative sizes of the 2 groups. A p-value can be interpreted as the likelihood that any observed difference between groups is due to random chance. A p-value that is less than 0.001 is considered strong evidence that any observed differences between groups are true and not due to random chance.
[8] An odds ratio that is less than 1 indicates an outcome is less likely to occur in a group compared to a reference group; more than 1 indicates an outcome is more likely to occur in a group compared to a reference group; and equal to 1 indicates there is no difference in the likelihood of an outcome between groups.

Table 3: De-registration of fostering households, by Mockingbird participation

	Overall		Comparison group		Mockingbird	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Total number of de-registrations	705	22	689	23	16	6
Reason for de-registration						
Transferred to another fostering service	23	3	23	3	0	0
Initiated by foster carer(s)	163	23	160	23	3	19
Initiated by fostering service	474	67	461	67	13	81
Unknown	45	7	45	7	0	0

Source: Analysis of Ofsted fostering data in 11 sites

Our finding of improved foster carer retention from analysis of administrative data was echoed in interviews with fostering providers and The Fostering Network staff. One implementation coach described, "the lovely thing is listening to foster carers say, 'I'd have jacked it in if it wasn't for me being in this.'"

Foster carer support

From our interviews with foster carers, retention was seen to have improved through the support, friendships, and community created through Mockingbird.

> "We found out that actually it's okay not to be okay. You don't always have to be okay all the time. I think often the difference between Mockingbird and [Local authority fostering agency] is, I think, I feel, this is just my view. I feel like there's an expectation for you to manage, and I feel like [Local authority fostering agency] don't actually care about their foster carers. They say they do, but […] our experience makes us feel like they don't. The difference with Mockingbird is that we actually do feel like we're cared about, and we do feel like we're appreciated. Therefore, I think because of Mockingbird, we're able to continue fostering." (Hub home foster carer)

Similarly, in thinking about the general foster carer population, one foster carer said:

> "It's very sad because I think a lot of the foster carers wouldn't leave like they are at the moment, if they had the support of Mockingbird behind them." (Satellite foster carer)

Feeling well supported is a key factor in retaining foster carers (McDermid et al., 2012), and foster carer peer support was seen as a fundamental part of the Mockingbird constellations. This support occurred at constellation meetings but also happened over the phone including WhatsApp groups, and more informally such as having a natter

during social activities. Support was described as being taken to another level when it was seen as reciprocal across the constellation with hub carers receiving support as well as giving it. Peer support was particularly appreciated in times of stress including difficult behaviours, bereavements, health issues, allegations, and when children had just had a planned or unplanned placement move. Of the foster carers who responded to our surveys, more than 90% rated the support they received from other foster carers and the hub home carers as good or excellent.

In the interviews, there were foster carers who appreciated support in different ways: foster carers who deeply appreciated the support throughout the programme, foster carers who felt that they were in crises at the first interview who had then transitioned to those placements being long-term a year later at the second interview, and foster carers who felt that Mockingbird was lovely but they did not need it that much at the first interview but who were using the sleepovers and support more at the second interview as children were presenting additional needs. Additionally, there were cases where hub home carers and others talked about carers who had left Mockingbird for various reasons.

When asked if the level of support had changed since becoming part of Mockingbird, one foster carer stated below:

> “Oh, God, yes. Yes, [the level of support has] changed beyond recognition. As I said to you, I know that there is a voice on the end of the phone now, and I don’t have to speak to a machine and wait hours for someone to get back to me, that’s the main difference. They’re foster carers and they’ve been through it, and they understand what it feels like. It’s changed beyond recognition. This is why we’re such big advocates for Mockingbird.” (Satellite foster carer)

Another foster carer noted that if you did call an emergency help line:

> “They don’t know your child; they don’t know what you’ve gone through. Whereas, your hub carer knows your family, knows you, knows your foster child and can relate to that.” (Satellite foster carer)

Numerous other foster carers noted that you could have the best supervising social worker in the world, but they still would not understand what it feels like to be a foster carer and have a child with you 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Many discussed the support as having improved feelings of isolation.

> “Prior to me being in the Mockingbird, my mum lived ten minutes up the road, so she was my main support if you like. When she moved in March of last year, my support went ta dah. As lovely as it is for her, I was alone. So, the Mockingbird has been a godsend for me.” (Satellite foster carer)

This support and friendship were particularly appreciated in times of stress for foster carers and children and young people, such as illnesses, injuries, bereavements of one of the carers, other bereavements, allegations, placement disruptions, and difficult interactions with birth family. At times, the stories discussed were complex and involved extended periods of support. At other times, they involved single meaningful actions of support.

> "One of my [satellite] carers, her little boy had to go to a family funeral, and the birth family are really quite hard work. She was like, I really don't want to go on my own, and I was able to go and support her by just being at the funeral with her, and then we went to the wake afterwards. Otherwise she would have to go on her own because the social worker wouldn't have been available to go." (Hub home foster carer)

Mockingbird was seen to provide support in a way that the standard fostering or other support networks could not. Both male and female foster carers noticed improved support. Some male foster carers appreciated being brought together in a group with other male carers, particularly if their female partner was the primary carer and had been the one undertaking most of the training and meetings or if they felt marginalised within fostering as a primary male carer. One male satellite carer noted the usefulness in participating in Mockingbird: "Well, it's the best thing since sliced bread actually."

The code of "feeling like a family" emerged prominently in our analysis of the interviews with foster carers.

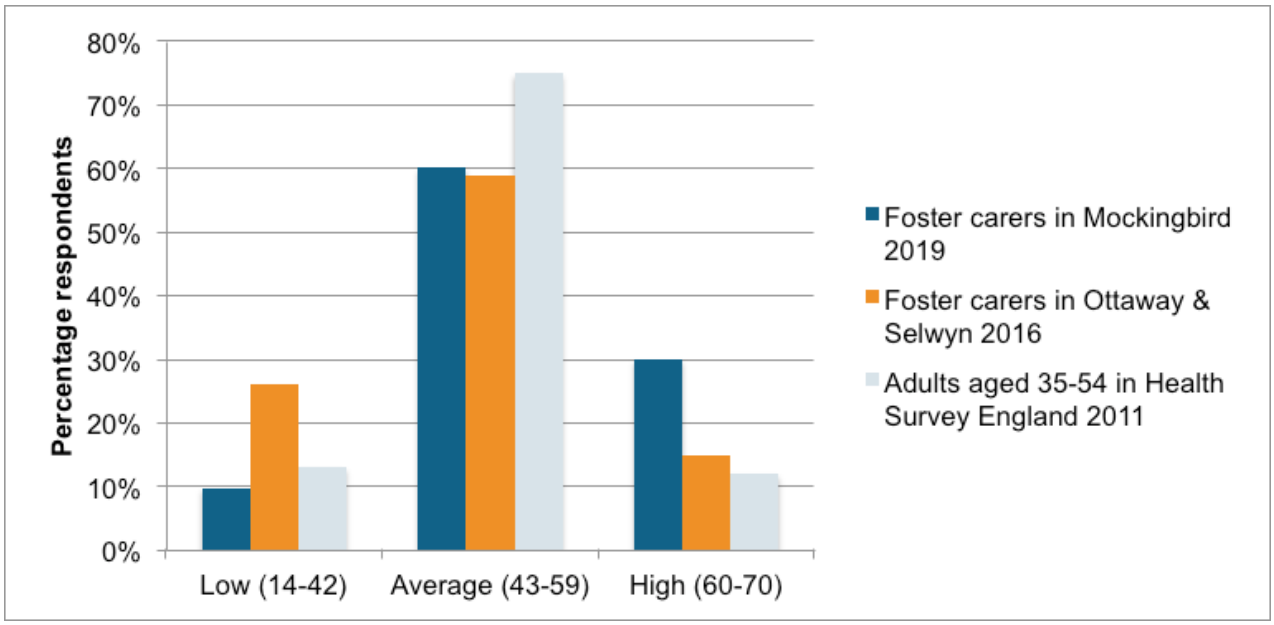
> "[I love] having all them extra grandchildren, and just one, big extended family, and just knowing that there's always somebody there." (Hub home foster carer)

Foster carer wellbeing

Our analysis of survey responses from Mockingbird foster carers showed that carers participating in Mockingbird had better mental wellbeing compared to other studies with the general population and foster carers, as measured by the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS). The 163 foster carers in the 2019 Mockingbird foster survey had a mean WEMWBS score of 54.9 compared to 49.9 among a national representative sample of 8,034 adults from Health Survey for England 2016 and 47.8 from the survey of 546 foster carers in England undertaken by Ottaway and Selwyn (2016). The mean WEMWBS score of Mockingbird foster carers who responded to our survey was also higher than the mean score of 50.4 from the 33 foster carers in Mockingbird in the 2016 evaluation and 53.8 from the 85 foster carers in their comparison group (McDermid et al., 2016). Using cut-offs that categorise the WEMWBS score into low, average, and high categories of mental wellbeing, the Mockingbird foster carers who responded to our survey were less likely to report low wellbeing and more likely to report

high wellbeing than other foster carers and adults in the general population (**Error! Reference source not found.**). It should be noted that because foster carers were not randomly assigned to take part in Mockingbird, there may have been underlying differences in wellbeing between carers who did and did not take part in the programme. This means that we cannot attribute the observed differences in wellbeing to their participation in the programme.

Figure 3: Categories of mental wellbeing from WEMWBS



Source: 2019 Mockingbird foster carer survey, Ottaway and Selwyn (2016), and Health Survey England (2011)

Foster carers in Mockingbird indicated a high level of resilience. We included the validated Parental Self-Agency Measure in an additional survey sent to foster carers in 4 case study sites. Of the 64 Mockingbird foster carers that completed it, 100% responded that “when things are going badly between my child and me, I keep trying until things begin to change” most or all of the time.

A common message emerged from the evaluation that you cannot separate the outcomes for children and young people from those of the carers and that “Mockingbird is as much about the carers as it is about the kids” (Mockingbird hub carer). Several foster carers, both male and female, noted that they wished the programme had been around previously. One hub carer expressed, “I wish I’d have had Mockingbird 30 years ago. I really ... it would’ve made such a difference.” When asked how it would have made a difference, the hub carer responded, “Just everything, what we’ve got now. I had no support. Do you know what? I seriously remember feeling a failure, and that’s awful.”

Perceived impact on fostering services and staff

Our evaluation also explored the impact of Mockingbird on fostering services and staff. In this section, we draw primarily on findings from our interviews with staff at the participating fostering providers as well as our analysis of Ofsted fostering data and survey responses from foster carers.

Professional standing of foster carers

In interviews with staff, some hoped that Mockingbird would help to change the ethos of fostering services. They discussed it allowing greater use of delegated authority and improving the professional standing of foster carers. In the surveys, 95% of Mockingbird foster carers in 2018 and 93% in 2019 felt that they were usually or always treated as an equal by their supervising social worker. As a comparison, in the most recent State of the Nation's Foster Care Report, 79% of foster carers agreed that they were treated as an equal by their supervising social worker (Lawson and Cann, 2019). The proportion of Mockingbird foster carers that felt that they were usually or always treated as an equal by their foster child's social worker was 82% in 2018 and 79% in 2019, compared to just 58% of foster carers in the most recent State of the Nation's Foster Care Report (Lawson and Cann, 2019).

Placement options

Mockingbird impacted on the placement options available to fostering services by decreasing the number of unavailable places. We analysed Ofsted fostering data, which contained information about the availability of fostering placements for 2,707 households (242 Mockingbird participants and 2,465 comparators). Of these households, 1,084 (40%) had at least 1 unavailable place (Table 4). The most common reasons for placements being unavailable were carers taking a break and other carer reasons. Households participating in Mockingbird were less likely to have an unavailable place than those who were not participating (34% vs 44%). This difference was statistically significant. Accounting for differences between the households, those who participated in Mockingbird were 48% less likely to have an unavailable placement than households who did not participate (with an odds ratio of 0.52). Further details of the logistic regression models can be found in Appendix 4: Analysis of Ofsted fostering data. The overall difference in unavailable placements may in part be due to fostering households who were participating in Mockingbird being less likely than other fostering households to have unavailable placements because Mockingbird carers may be less likely to have requested to take a break from fostering or be considering resignation.

Table 4: Unavailable fostering placements, by Mockingbird participation

	Overall		Comparison group		Mockingbird	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	**Number**	**%**
Households with unavailable places	1,167	40	1,084	44.0	16	34.3
Number of unavailable places						
1 placement	783	67	736	68	47	57
2 placements	291	25	269	25	22	27
3 placements	88	8	75	67	13	16
4 placements	3	0	2	0	1	1
5 placements	2	0	2	0	0	0

Source: Analysis of Ofsted fostering data

In interviews with staff, Mockingbird was seen to potentially encourage foster carers to take or maintain larger sibling groups and children with more complex needs due to additional training, respite support, and peer support on offer.

> "I think we've had two of our mainstream carers, because we've talked about Mockingbird, that have said 'Go on then, we'll take a specialist placement, if we can be in that Mockingbird and we can be supported in that way.'" (Liaison worker)

Mockingbird was also perceived to improve placement options through recruiting new foster carers.

> "So, we'd had quite a few carers come over from independent fostering agencies that would come in and say I want to foster for [us] because of Mockingbird." (Liaison worker)

Staff time

The perceived impacts on time usage of staff were mixed. In interviews, many staff discussed Mockingbird potentially resulting in cost savings by saving social workers' time due to the increased peer support available to foster carers in Mockingbird and their use of delegated authority. One satellite foster carer noted the support of other constellation members and that "I can do things without involving the social workers." However, other staff discussed how they felt that Mockingbird required more staff time; for example, by needing to employ more staff to implement the programme and that greater scrutiny of placements (via the liaison worker, hub home carer and other satellite foster carers) could raise concerns that may not have otherwise come to social workers' attention.

Mockingbird was seen to have an added benefit on key processes and concerns in fostering including safeguarding and assistance with sibling assessments and permanency plans through having additional input from the hub home carer and sometimes the liaison worker. This may potentially save staff time in the future. One hub home carer noted the benefit of being able to see siblings from a sibling group alone and in pairs at sleepovers to contribute to a sibling assessment.

Staff wellbeing

Much of the fostering service staff including management enjoyed working with Mockingbird. In interviews, some expressed feeling like they got back to the principles of social work in reducing bureaucracy and getting to know particular families and cases well which (although laborious) was important when setting up the constellations. The evaluation did not set out to measure site staff wellbeing, as it was not an integral part of the theory of change, nonetheless some staff raised it when discussing how the programme had affected them.

> "As a seasoned social worker, I really value this opportunity to work with Mockingbird. And it's the best part of doing my job for lots of years, this part of it." (Liaison worker)

Findings related to fiscal return on investment

This section addresses the question:

4. What is the fiscal return on investment associated with the Mockingbird programme?

This cost benefit analysis (CBA) was conducted by York Consulting based on the available participation and cost data provided by sites and the findings from our analysis of administrative data from the SSDA903 return and Ofsted fostering dataset. This CBA focuses on fiscal costs and benefits; there was neither scope nor the data to consider wider economic benefits such as income multiplier effects or social benefits such as wider community impacts. Hence, it is a fiscal return on investment (FROI). Further details relating to the methodology and assumptions of this CBA are set out in Appendix 7: Cost Benefit Analysis.

The costs

The costs included in this CBA reflect the resources required to deliver Mockingbird in the 12 project sites over the period April 2017 to March 2020 (Table 5). The adjusted cost of the project over the 3 year period was calculated to be £3,382,615. This estimation of costs was based on the level of project funding provided to sites through the Innovation

Programme with a deduction of an estimated 10% for one-off set up costs. These set up costs have been estimated in line with other Innovation Programme projects, since detailed financial information relating to one-off set up costs were not available.

Table 5: Project costs

Cost	Amount
Total cost	£3,758,461
Set-up costs	£375,846
Adjusted costs	£3,382,615

Source: York Consulting

The benefits

The benefits that can be included in this CBA are the estimated cost savings linked to improved outcomes for young people supported by Mockingbird during the programme period. Monetisable information was identified from analysis of administrative data for 6 outcome variables (

Table 6). For each outcome, the numbers of young people with monetisable benefits were calculated using outcome data from a matched analysis group of Mockingbird participants and non-participant comparator cases. This data was then applied to the 830 young people or 467 fostering households who participated in Mockingbird for at least 1 day between the funding period of April 2017 and March 2020, in order to calculate savings. Full detail on how the numbers and savings for each outcome were calculated can be found in Appendix 7, as can the unit costs used for each outcome.

In Table 6, the absolute change records the difference in the outcome variable between the baseline and the follow-up period, where applicable. The relative change compares outcomes among Mockingbird participants to that of a comparator group. Mockingbird outperformed the comparator group on all but one of the outcome variables, with the exception of unplanned placement endings.

Table 6: Programme benefits

Outcome	Absolute change	Relative change	Monetised benefit
Unplanned placement endings	129	28	£0
Days in residential care	6308	-3022	£1,819,244
Days recorded as missing from placement	235	-249	£677,031
Days in the justice system	-25	-81	£48,762
De-registration of a fostering household	Not applicable	-82	£257,644
Placements unavailable in a fostering household	Not applicable	-63	£560,674

Source: York Consulting

Return on investment

The return on investment is calculated by dividing programme costs by attributed benefits thus producing a benefit cost ratio (BCR). Details of the applied unit costs and calculation of the Mockingbird BCR are highlighted in Table 7.

Table 7: Return on investment

Outcome	Number	Unit cost	Monetised benefit
Unplanned placement endings avoided	0	£1,039	£0
Days in residential care avoided	3022	£602	£1,819,244
Days recorded as missing from placement avoided	249	£2,719	£677,031
Days in the justice system avoided	81	£602	£48,762
De-registrations of fostering households avoided	82	£3,142	£257,644
Placements unavailable in a fostering household avoided	63	£8,898	£560,574
Total benefits			£3,363,255
Total costs			£3,382,615
Return on investment			0.99

Source: York Consulting

The return on investment for the Mockingbird programme is shown to be 0.99. This indicates that for each £1 invested in the programme there has been a saving of 99 pence.

The approach to calculate return on investment made a number of assumptions clearly delineated in Appendix 7: Cost Benefit Analysis. Staff at the project sites and The Fostering Network expressed that they felt that there was a positive return on investment but that it is difficult to evidence what would have happened without Mockingbird or what the return on investment would be if the programme were scaled up further and over a longer time period.

4. Summary of key findings on 7 practice features and 7 outcomes

As reported in Sebba et al. (2017), evidence from the first round of the Innovation Programme led the DfE to identify 7 features of practice and 7 outcomes to explore further in subsequent rounds. Relevant features and outcomes are discussed below.

Practice features

Family focus

As evidenced in section 4, more children with siblings in their Mockingbird constellation said that the amount of contact they had with their brothers and sisters was “just right” compared to children with siblings in foster care but not in their Mockingbird constellation. Children and young people, foster carers and site staff discussed being able to support relationships between siblings who were cared for by different carers by ensuring they were part of the same constellation. Joint sleepovers at the hub carer’s home, in addition to the regular constellation social events, supported these children in maintaining and developing their relationships, which otherwise would not be possible to this extent. There was also some broader birth family contact supported through the hub.

Outcomes

Reducing risk for children

There were some instances where Mockingbird provided additional safeguarding described in interviews with foster carers and staff. This included providing additional trusted adults and instances where children and young people felt safe to discuss safeguarding concerns with their hub home carers. However, the Mockingbird programme does not aim to reduce risk for children as one of its core aims.

Creating greater stability for children

Based on our analysis of administrative data comparing placement stability for children and young people who did and did not take part in Mockingbird, Mockingbird appeared to make no difference to the number of unplanned placement endings. However, there were some weaknesses in the data that made this analysis inconclusive and qualitative evidence that pointed toward the programme contributing to at least some placements stabilising. Additionally, stability was provided to children and young people when placements needed to change by selecting the new carer from within (or including them in) the constellation. Additionally, some young people may have sought support from the

hub carer in times of crisis, which may have resulted in a reduction in instances of going missing for some of these children.

Increasing wellbeing for children and families

Young people reported positive wellbeing. All parts of the Outcome Rating Scale (ORS) or Child Outcome Rating Scale (CORS) were completed by 56 children and young people who responded to the survey in 2018 and 55 in 2019. The average overall total score for these Mockingbird participants was 31.6 in 2018 and 32.8 in 2019. This was similar to the average score among a community sample in England and higher than a clinical sample of 2,604 children accessing NHS mental health services (Casey et al., 2019). Children and young people also reported that Mockingbird improved their wellbeing.

Increasing workforce wellbeing

Mockingbird foster carers who completed the survey had better wellbeing as measured by the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (WEMWBS) than comparator groups. Mockingbird foster carers who completed the survey also reported greater satisfaction with their support than comparator groups. However, there may be confounding factors.

Increasing workforce stability

There was strong evidence that the Mockingbird programme improved foster carer retention. Fewer foster carers who took part in the Mockingbird programme de-registered compared to those of a similar background who did not take part in Mockingbird. Foster carer peer support was seen as a fundamental part of the Mockingbird constellations.

There was some discussion that the programme may improve social worker retention, but this was only anecdotal.

Generating better value for money

The programme was estimated to have a monetisable benefit of £3,363,255 for a cost of £3,382,615. Thus, in terms of monetisable outcomes, the programme did not show a positive return on investment, but it was just at the break-even point with a return on investment of 0.99. The assumptions of this analysis are outlined in Appendix 7: Cost Benefit Analysis.

5. Lessons and implications

The Mockingbird programme is a promising model of foster care. Staff, foster carers and children and young people report high enthusiasm and satisfaction with the Mockingbird programme and report feeling like an extended family and improved wellbeing. The Mockingbird programme improved foster carer retention, although it was not clear the impact that it had on placement disruption. In comparison with foster carers not in a Mockingbird constellation, carers in Mockingbird may be more satisfied with fostering and the support offered. Children and young people in Mockingbird reported strong social networks, support, and feeling part of a community. More research is needed about the programme, including longer follow-up and larger sample sizes.

Implementation of the Mockingbird programme requires time and careful consideration of decisions, such as gaining buy-in from across services, providing clear expectations for satellite carers and choosing hub home carers and mixture of satellite carers that will allow for a supportive environment. These findings were well-evidenced through the interim evaluation and through the evaluation at Round 1 of the Innovation Programme (McDermid et al., 2016).

Additionally, the evaluation raises the following implications for fostering policy and practice through key elements of the Mockingbird programme:

- fostering services should examine ways to provide greater networks and positive peer support for foster carers and children and young people. Staff commonly cited peer support and being part of a community as key elements of the Mockingbird programme. Individuals also perceived the peer support between the young people to improve outcomes, although further research is needed to examine this hypothesis.
- fostering services should examine their sleepovers or respite availability as well as procedures and policies in order to improve the satisfaction of foster carers. For foster carers in the Mockingbird programme, 87% rated the respite or short break care on offer as good or excellent in comparison to only 37% in the most recent State of the Nation's Foster Care Report (Lawson and Cann, 2019). Findings from implementation of the Mockingbird programme included procedural difficulties in establishing the levels of sleepovers to maintain the fidelity to the Mockingbird model, and difficulties gaining delegated authority for respite, needing to change systems of recording respite as a placement change, and changing payment policies for the hub home carer and other policies and procedures.
- fostering services should also examine more ways to support positive sibling contact in foster care. Young people with siblings in their constellation report being more satisfied with the amount of contact they have with their siblings than young people with siblings in foster care who are not in their constellation.

Appendix 1: Project theory of change

Figure 4: Simplified Mockingbird programme theory of change

Source: The evaluation team

Appendix 2: Context of the evaluation

This appendix addresses the context of the evaluation by first outlining the issues around foster care in England that the Mockingbird programme seeks to address and then summarising the number and rate of looked after children in the fostering services that took part in this evaluation.

Issues the project seeks to address

Poor outcomes for fostering services, children and young people in care, and foster carers are frequently documented. The outcomes at service-level go hand in hand with the individual-level experiences and outcomes for children, young people, and foster carers (La Valle, Hart, Holmes, and Pinto, 2019). At a service-level, concerns include multiple and expensive placements for children and young people, poor foster carer retention and the need to recruit new foster carers, and difficulties in recruiting foster carers (Education Committee, 2017).

Children in care often experience a lack of stability in caring adults, lack of support to permanency, inadequate contact with birth family, and low levels of wellbeing (Narey and Owers, 2018; Luke et al., 2014). Stability is a fundamental predictor of outcomes (Education Committee, 2017; Luke et al., 2014). For example, children in care have poorer outcomes than their peers in a number of educational outcomes (O'Higgins, Sebba, and Luke, 2015), but stability in placement and school setting is a predictor of better educational outcomes (Sebba et al., 2015). Children in care also have more prevalent mental health difficulties and externalising behaviours when compared to their peers (Ford, Vostanis, Meltzer, and Goodman, 2007), however, the relationship and bond that is developed between children in care and carers are key to children's outcomes (Linares et al., 2010) and to the placement stability (Oosterman, Schuengel, Slot, Bullens, and Doreleijers, 2007).

Poor foster carer retention is often linked to foster carers feeling unsupported, inadequate sleepover and short break (respite) care, and low levels of wellbeing (Lawson and Cann, 2019). A number of studies have identified being respected by supervising social workers, the child's social worker, and the fostering service as important factors in deciding whether to remain as a foster carer (Ottaway and Selwyn, 2016).

Mockingbird aims to address these problems through 4 key mechanisms. First, there is the importance of peer support for foster carers theorised to be a non-judgemental way of gaining help that improves foster carer wellbeing, satisfaction, respect, retention, and thus placement stability. A review of the international literature on foster carer peer support by the Rees Centre at the University of Oxford identified Mockingbird as a promising model of foster carer peer support (Luke and Sebba, 2013). Second, the

programme is underpinned by the idea of improving relationships, particularly between foster carers and their children, through the importance of shared activities (Gilligan, 2009; Wade et al., 2012). Third, underlying the programme is the idea of expanding social networks for both foster carers and children. There is evidence in the literature that social networks are positively associated with placement stability (Sinclair et al., 2007). Lastly, underpinning Mockingbird is an overarching theory of the importance of high standards of 'ordinary' foster care and of normalising care. These theoretical ideas can be seen in the theory of change that this evaluation and previous evaluations examine.

Number and rate of looked after children in the participating sites

Table 8 shows the total number of looked after children on the 31st March from 2015 to 2019 as reported in annual DfE statistics for the 10 local authorities and Children's Trusts that took part in Mockingbird. These figures are not available for the 2 independent fostering agencies who took part in the evaluation as they do not report SSDA903 data directly to the Department for Education. The number of looked after children in the 10 participating sites on 31st March 2019 ranged from 329 to 1,288.

Table 8: Number of looked after children in the Mockingbird sites 2015-2019

	Number of looked after children on 31st March				
Local Authority/ Children's Trust	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**
Barking and Dagenham	451	415	408	409	417
Doncaster	479	484	514	569	533
Greenwich	518	518	493	497	479
Hertfordshire	1,003	1,009	905	891	930
Leeds	1,256	1,239	1,252	1,268	1,288
North Yorkshire	446	411	424	436	428
Oxfordshire	510	593	666	684	779
Stockport	291	293	330	362	361
Suffolk	731	794	830	855	866
Tower Hamlets	274	304	333	286	329

Source: Department for Education (2020a)

Error! Not a valid bookmark self-reference. shows the rate of looked after children per 10,000 children in the 10 participating sites on the 31st March from 2015 to 2019 for which data was available. The unweighted average rate for the sites increased from 56 per 10,000 children in 2015 to 58 in 2019. This was similar to the national average of 60 children per 10,000 in 2015 and 65 in 2019.

Table 9: Rate of looked after children per 100,000 children in the Mockingbird sites 2015-2019

	Number of looked after children on 31st March				
Local Authority/ Children's Trust	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	**2018**	**2019**
Barking and Dagenham	77	69	66	65	66
Doncaster	73	74	78	86	80
Greenwich	80	78	73	73	70
Hertfordshire	38	38	34	33	34
Leeds	78	76	76	76	77
North Yorkshire	38	35	36	37	36
Oxfordshire	36	42	47	48	54
Stockport	47	47	53	58	57
Suffolk	48	52	55	56	57
Tower Hamlets	44	47	50	42	46
Unweighted site average	56	56	57	57	58
National average	60	60	62	64	65

Source: Department for Education (2020a)

Appendix 3: Analysis of SSDA903 data

To explore the impact of Mockingbird on children and young people, we requested administrative child-level SSDA903 from 2016/17 to 2018/19 from all sites. We analysed child-level SSDA903 data for 9 sites in total. SSDA903 was not available for the 2 independent fostering agencies who participated in the evaluation as they were not data controllers and did not have the authority to share this information with the evaluation team. One local authority only launched Mockingbird at the end of the data collection period, which meant that it would not have been possible to explore outcomes for children and young people participating in Mockingbird at this site using SSDA903 data.

Data preparation Matching participation and SSDA903 data

We collected participation data from the sites directly and from The Fostering Network who began routinely collecting information on Mockingbird participation in May 2018. We matched participation data and SSDA903 data deterministically using a unique child ID that was recorded in both datasets.

Based on the participation data we analysed, there were 517 children and young people who had participated in Mockingbird in the 9 sites between 1st April 2016 and 31st March 2019. Of these children and young people, 33 could not be matched to the SSDA903 data perhaps due to errors in their child ID. The matched SSDA903 dataset included 484 children and young people who had participated in Mockingbird and 12,120 who had not. As the aim of this analysis was to explore changes over time, we restricted our analysis to children and young people who appeared in at least 2 years of SSDA903 data. This left 398 children and young people who had participated in Mockingbird and 7,197 who had not. We identified the baseline (that is, the earliest available year) and follow up year for each individual.

Selecting a comparator group

There are many ways to produce statistically matched groups that can approximate a randomised controlled trial (RCT). Propensity Score Matching (PSM) is a method that is frequently used; however, it relies on the assumption that it is possible to account for the covariates that predict receiving the treatment. In the case of this evaluation, the primary inclusion criteria was where the foster carers lived relative to the hub home and how willing they were to take part in Mockingbird. Neither of these factors could be accounted for using PSM.

After a review of the literature, we felt that Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM) would be a more appropriate method than PSM for identifying a fair comparison group. CEM reduces differences in causal effects by reducing imbalances in covariates between intervention

and comparison groups. CEM stratifies data based on pre-specified groupings and cut-points for a number of variables to ensure that the intervention and comparison groups are similar before they are matched. Decisions about which variables to match on and how much they should be coarsened are the most crucial part of the matching process, and can be the most difficult.

The implementation message from The Fostering Network was that sites should create a constellation of children and young people who were mixed in terms of age, gender, behaviour, stability in their placement, permanency plans, and placement with or away from siblings, for example. To decide which variables to use for matching, we considered this guidance from The Fostering Network and explored the existing research literature (such as systematic reviews) related to outcomes for looked after children. This process tried to balance the need to match the comparison and Mockingbird group on relevant characteristics so that any comparison of outcomes between the groups was robust and meaningful with the desire to retain as many participants as possible in our analysis to ensure there was sufficient power to detect any differences in outcomes between the groups.

The variables that we included for matching, the level of coarsening we chose and our rationale for these decisions are presented in Table 10.

Table 10: Variables in SSDA903 data used for coarsened exact matching

Variable	Level of coarsening	Rationale for selection
Local Authority	Exact matching	To account for service differences (such as availability of support)
Gender	Exact matching	To account for gender differences
Age in baseline year	Cut-points: 0-4, 5-7, 8-11, 12-14, 15-17, 18+ years	To account for developmental differences; cut-points set at key stages of school
Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Child status	Exact matching	To account for differences in background
Ethnicity	Grouped: Asian, Black, Mixed, White, Other	To account for potential differences in experiences based
Total days missing in the baseline year	Cut-points: 0, 1-7, 8-14, 15-30, 31+ days	To account for baseline differences in outcome measure
Instances of being missing in the baseline year	Cut-points: 0, 1-7, 8-14, 15-30, 31+ instances	To account for baseline differences in outcome measure
Unplanned endings in the baseline year	Cut-points: 0, 1-3, 4-10, 11+ endings	To account for baseline differences in outcome measure
Reason looked after in the baseline year	Grouped: Abuse or neglect, Other	To account for reason of entry into care which is predictive of outcomes
Time in care in the baseline year	Cut-points: 0-60, 61-180, 181-365 days	To account for care history which is predictive of outcomes
Amount of time in most recent placement in the baseline year	Cut-points: 0-180, 181-365, 366- 730, 731+ days	To account for care history which is predictive of outcomes

Following CEM, the matched sample for our main analysis of outcomes for children and young people included 336 Mockingbird participants and 1,567 comparators. In this analysis, we took the most widely accepted approach to intervention evaluation - 'intention to treat.' Any child who participated in Mockingbird no matter the duration recorded was part of the 'participation group'. The earliest year available was used as baseline year and matched to a child or children with that year's data and the most recent year of data that was available was used as the follow-up year (to allow for the longest possible follow-up period) and compared to child or children with that year's data.

Outcome variables

The primary outcome for children and young people in our analysis of SSDA903 was the number of unplanned placement endings in the follow-up year. The secondary outcomes were the number of times a child or young person was recorded as missing from their placement in the follow-up year and the total number of days they were recorded as being missing for.

Analysis of impact

We used weighted least squares regression[9] to compare outcomes between the matched samples of children and young people who had and had not participated in Mockingbird. We also carried out sensitivity analyses on the following 4 subsamples of data to test our findings:

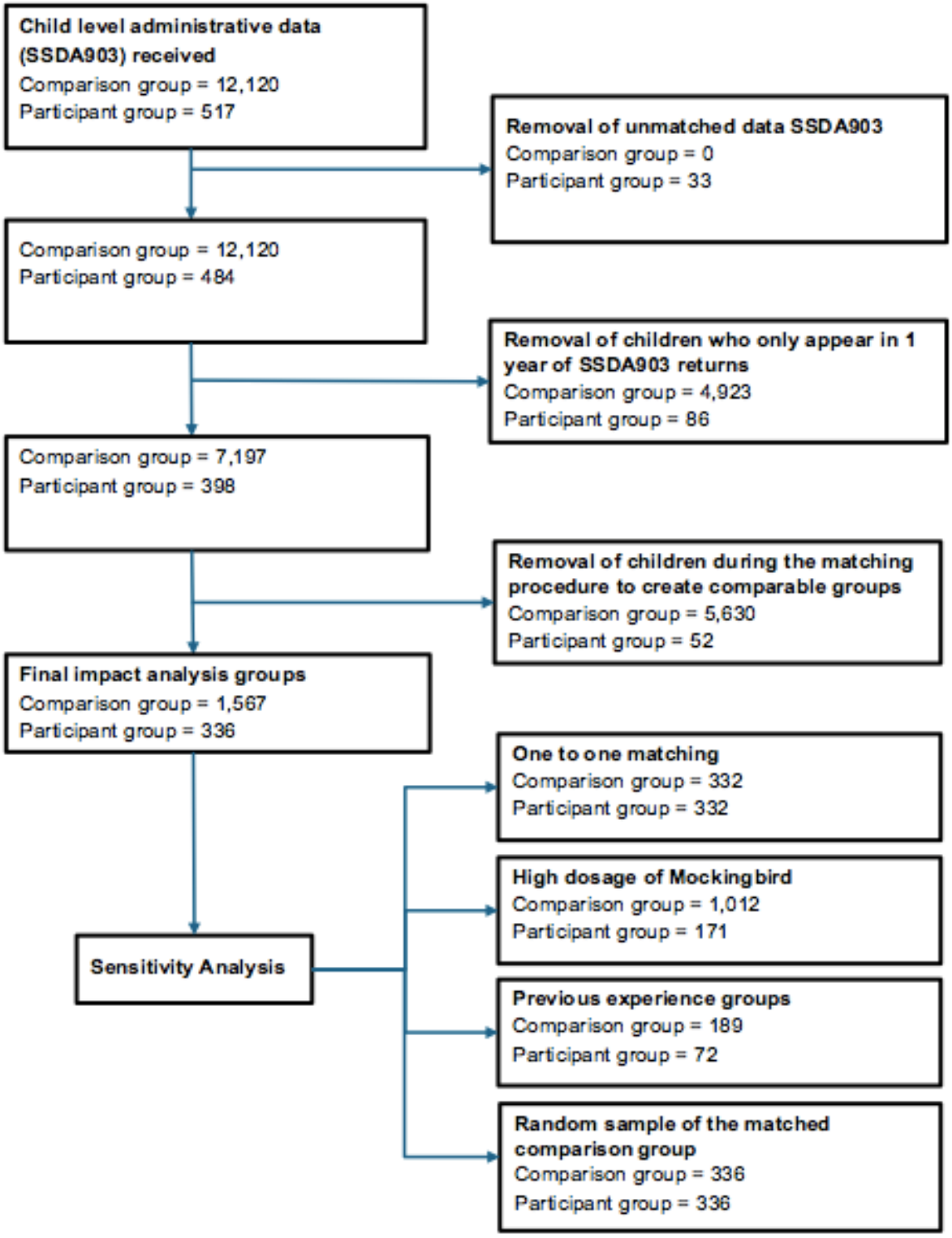
- randomly selected comparison subgroup: in our main analysis, the comparison group was almost 4 times the size the participation group. Many statistical analyses operate under the assumption that groups are approximately equally sized. In order to compensate for this a random sample of the comparison group was selected for a direct comparative analysis
- 1:1 matched comparison subgroup: we further restricted the comparison group to the single closest comparison case for each Mockingbird participant
- previous experience subsample: this analysis included children who met at least 1 of the following criteria; either, 1 instance of missing from placement or 1 unplanned placement, in the baseline year
- high dosage subsample: this analysis included children who were within a Mockingbird placement for at least 1 year. The participants needed to have

[9] We used weighted least squares regression because it can account for heteroscedasticity (differing dispersion) in data which was evident in the distribution of unplanned endings and instances of being recorded as missing from placement in the sample of SSDA903 data we analysed.

baseline data in 2016/17, follow-up data in 2018/19 and have started Mockingbird at some point within in 2017/18

Figure 5 summarises the steps we took to prepare the SSDA903 data for analysis.

Figure 5: Mockingbird flow chart of SSDA903 data



Source: Analysis of SSDA903 data

Appendix 4: Analysis of Ofsted fostering data

Data preparation

To explore foster carer retention, we analysed Ofsted fostering dataset returns provided by 11 sites. Data for a 3 year period (1st April 2016 to 31st March 2019) was provided by 6 sites, but 5 sites could only provide 2 years of data (from 1st April 2017 to 31st March 2019).[10] The data provided by sites included 4,977 approved fostering households in total. We excluded 1,701 households with only 1 year of data as when a fostering household de-registers no information about the terms of their approval or fostering placement(s) is recorded in that year.[11] We also excluded 20 households who were providing fostering for adoption placements, as they are likely to de-register as foster carers at the point of adoption. Following these exclusions, the sample for this analysis included 3,256 fostering households in total, of which 288 (8.8%) were participating in Mockingbird. There were no statistically significant differences between the households who did and did not participate in Mockingbird in terms of the number of foster carers in the household, the ethnicity of foster carers or the type of service they were fostering for. However, there was a statistically significant difference in time since approval. Mockingbird fostering households were less likely than other fostering households to have been approved for less than 12 months. There were also some statistically significant differences in the characteristics of placements provided by Mockingbird households compared to other fostering households. A greater proportion of Mockingbird households were approved for 3 or more placements and had a permanent placement as their primary placement type. Mockingbird households were also statistically significantly more likely to have an exemption in place and less likely to have no children placed with them.

Table 11 describes the key characteristics of fostering households in the sample. There were no statistically significant differences between the households who did and did not participate in Mockingbird in terms of the number of foster carers in the household, the ethnicity of foster carers or the type of service they were fostering for. However, there was a statistically significant difference in the time since approval. Mockingbird fostering households were less likely than other fostering households to have been approved for less than 12 months. There were also some statistically significant differences in the characteristics of placements provided by Mockingbird households compared to other fostering households. A greater proportion of Mockingbird households were approved for

[10] 5 sites were unable to provide Ofsted Annual Fostering Return data for the statistical year 2016/17 due to changes in local governance arrangements or the data being unavailable as it was submitted to Ofsted via a data portal and a copy was not kept locally.
[11] From 1st April 2019, the Ofsted Annual Fostering Collection will include information for households in the year they de-register which means future analyses would not need to be restricted to households with at least 2 years of data (Ofsted, 2020).

3 or more placements and had a permanent placement as their primary placement type. Mockingbird households were also statistically significantly more likely to have an exemption in place and less likely to have no children placed with them.

Table 11: Key characteristics of fostering households, by Mockingbird participation

	Overall		Comparison group		Mockingbird participants	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	**Number**	**%**
Total number of households	3,256	100.0	2,968	91.2	288	8.8
Households with 2 foster carers	2,124	65.2	1,934	65.2	190	66.0
Households with a BAME carer	498	15.3	446	15.0	52	18.1
Type of fostering household						
Local authority or children's trust	2,789	85.7	2,538	85.5	251	87.2
Independent fostering agency	467	14.3	430	14.5	37	12.8
Time since approval*						
Less than 1 year	318	9.8	309	10.4	9	3.1
1-4 years	1,335	41.0	1,190	40.1	143	50.3
5-9 years	833	25.6	758	25.5	75	26.0
10+ years	748	23.0	690	23.2	58	20.1
Type of primary placement offer*						
Permanent	1,099	33.8	959	32.3	140	48.6
Not permanent	1,142	35.1	1,065	35.9	77	26.7
Family and friends	582	17.9	531	17.9	51	17.7
Short breaks	248	7.6	238	8.0	10	3.5
Other	49	1.5	41	1.4	8	2.8
Maximum number of children*						
1 child	1,183	36.3	1,100	37.1	50	17.4
2 children	1,105	33.9	1,000	36.7	118	41.0
3+ children	875	26.9	767	20.3	86	29.9
Households with exemptions*	129	4.0	107	3.6	22	7.6
Number of children in placement*						
None	991	30.4	941	31.7	5	17.4
1 child	1,208	37.1	1,090	36.7	118	41.0

2 children	688	21.1	602	20.3	86	29.9
3+ children	269	8.3	239	8.1	30	10.4

Source: Analysis of Ofsted fostering data

Time since approval was calculated from date of approval (unknown for 22 households). Other primary placement category includes emergency, parent and child, multi-dimensional treatment and remand placements (unknown for 136 households). BAME = Black, Asian or minority ethnicity. The statistical significance of differences between the groups was tested using z-test for binary variables (having 2 foster carers or a BAME carer in a household) and chi2 tests for all other categorical variables. * = p<0.001.

Analysis of impact

We compared the number of de-registrations between households who did and did not participate in Mockingbird. We then used a series of logistic regression models to estimate the odds of a fostering household who participated in Mockingbird de-registering relative to a household who did not participate (Table 12).

Table 12: Odds ratios of de-registration of fostering household from logistic regression models[12]

Model 1: univariate logistic regression on full sample	**Odds ratio**	**95% confidence intervals**	**p-value**
Comparison group	(reference)		
Mockingbird participants	0.17	0.10 – 0.30	<0.001
Model 2: multivariate logistic regression on full sample	**Adjusted odds ratio**	**95% confidence intervals**	**p-value**
Comparison group	(reference)		
Mockingbird participants	0.18	0.10 – 0.33	<0.001
Model 3: multivariate logistic regression on matched subsample	**Adjusted odds ratio**	**95% confidence intervals**	**p-value**
Comparison group	(reference)		
Mockingbird participants	0.19	0.10 – 0.35	<0.001
Model 4: multivariate logistic regression on 1:1 matched subsample	**Adjusted odds ratio**	**95% confidence intervals**	**p-value**
Comparison group	(reference)		
Mockingbird participants	0.16	0.07 – 0.37	<0.001

Source: Analysis of Ofsted fostering data

[12] An odds ratio that is less than 1 indicates an outcome is less likely to occur in a group compared to a reference group; more than 1 indicates an outcome is more likely to occur in a group compared to a

In Model 1, we used univariate logistic regression to explore the relationship between participation in Mockingbird and the outcome of interest (de-registration). In Models 2, 3 and 4 we used multivariate logistic regression to explore the relationship between participation in Mockingbird and de-registration controlling for the following factors that were associated with participation and de-registration: study site, number of foster carers in household, ethnicity of foster carers, time since approval, number of approved places in household, number of children fostered in household, vacant placements in household, and exemptions in place in household.

For Model 1, we used the full dataset of 3,256 individuals. For Model 2, we used the full dataset, but 231 individuals who were missing information for the variables in the model could not be included. For Model 3, we used a subsample of 1,469 individuals selected using Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM). CEM is a method for achieving balance between intervention and control groups by selecting a subset of individuals who share the same pattern of key characteristics. In this analysis, we matched on the following factors: study site, number of foster carers in household, ethnicity of foster carers, time since approval, number of approved places in household, number of children fostered in household, vacant placements in household, and exemptions in place in household. The subsample of 1,469 matched individuals included 239 who participated in Mockingbird matched to 1,230 who did not participate. For Model 4, we further restricted the dataset so that each Mockingbird participant was matched to a single individual who did not participate. This dataset included 478 individuals in total, 239 Mockingbird participants and 239 controls.

Next, we used a series of logistic regression models to estimate the odds of a fostering household who participated in Mockingbird having at least 1 unavailable place relative to a household who did not participate (Table 13).

reference group; and equal to 1 indicates there is no difference in the likelihood of an outcome between groups. A p-value can be interpreted as the chance that an observed difference between groups is due to random chance. A p-value that is less than 0.001 is considered strong evidence that any observed differences between groups are true and not due to random chance.

Table 13: Odds ratios of unavailable placement from logistic regression models [13]

Model 5: univariate logistic regression on full sample	**Odds ratio**	**95% confidence intervals**	**p-value**
Comparison group	(reference)		
Mockingbird participants	0.67	0.50 – 0.88	0.004
Model 6: multivariate logistic regression on full sample	**Adjusted odds ratio**	**95% confidence intervals**	**p-value**
Comparison group	(reference)		
Mockingbird participants	0.51	0.28 – 0.93	0.03
Model 7: multivariate logistic regression on matched subsample	**Adjusted odds ratio**	**95% confidence intervals**	**p-value**
Comparison group	(reference)		
Mockingbird participants	0.66	0.32 – 1.36	0.26
Model 8: multivariate logistic regression on 1:1 matched subsample	**Adjusted odds ratio**	**95% confidence intervals**	**p-value**
Comparison group	(reference)		
Mockingbird participants	0.67	0.26-1.77	0.42

Source: Analysis of Ofsted fostering data

In Model 5, we used univariate logistic regression to explore the relationship between participation in Mockingbird and the outcome of interest (having an unavailable place). In Models 6, 7 and 8 we used multivariate logistic regression to explore the relationship between participation in Mockingbird and having an unavailable place controlling for the following factors that were associated with participation and de-registration: study site, fostering for an independent fostering agency, time since approval, number of approved places in household, number of children fostered in household, vacant placements in household, and exemptions in place in household.

For Model 1, we included all 2,707 individuals for whom information about unavailable places had been recorded in the dataset. For Model 2, we used the full available sample, but 149 individuals who were missing information for the variables in the model could not be included. For Model 3, we used a subsample of 1,498 individuals selected using Coarsened Exact Matching (CEM) matched on the following factors: study site, fostering for an independent fostering agency, time since approval, number of approved places in

[13] An odds ratio that is less than 1 indicates an outcome is less likely to occur in a group compared to a reference group; more than 1 indicates an outcome is more likely to occur in a group compared to a reference group; and equal to 1 indicates there is no difference in the likelihood of an outcome between groups. A p-value can be interpreted as the chance that an observed difference between groups is due to random chance. A p-value that is less than 0.001 is considered strong evidence that any observed differences between groups are true and not due to random chance.

household, number of children fostered in household, vacant placements in household, and exemptions in place in household. The subsample of 1,498 matched individuals included 209 who participated in Mockingbird matched to 1,289 who did not participate. For Model 4, we further restricted the dataset so that each Mockingbird participant was matched to a single individual who did not participate. This dataset included 418 individuals in total, 209 Mockingbird participants and 209 controls.

Appendix 5: Responses to 2018 and 2019 foster carer surveys

All Mockingbird foster carers in the 12 evaluation sites were invited to complete an annual survey in 2018 and 2019. In 2018, 41% (133 out of 329) responded and in 2019 39% responded (170 out of 440). We also invited foster carers in 4 case study sites to complete an additional survey in between these annual surveys. The response rate for this case study survey was 42% (62 out of 147 carers). The profile of respondents to our surveys was similar to those who responded to the 2019 State of the Nation's Foster Care survey in terms of gender, age and time fostering (Lawson and Cann, 2019).

Table 14: Gender of respondents

	2018		2019 case study survey		2019	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Female	112	84.2	46	74.2	137	80.6
Male	19	14.3	11	17.7	30	17.6
Transgender	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	0.6
Prefer not to say	2	1.5	5	8.1	2	1.2
Total responses	133	100.0	62	100.0	170	100.0

Source: 2018 and 2019 Mockingbird foster carer surveys

Table 15: Age of respondents

	2018		2019 case study survey		2019	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Less than 35 years	4	3.0	3	4.8	7	4.1
35-44 years	22	16.5	9	14.5	22	12.9
45-54 years	50	37.6	31	50.0	72	42.4
55-64 years	45	33.8	13	21.0	56	32.9
65-74 years	8	6.0	2	3.2	10	5.9
75+ years	1	0.8	0	0.0	0	0.0
Prefer not to say	3	2.3	4	6.5	3	1.8
Total responses	133	100.0	62	100.0	170	100.0

Source: 2018 and 2019 Mockingbird foster carer surveys

Table 16: Ethnicity of respondents

	2018		2019 case study survey		2019	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Asian or Asian British	6	4.5	1	1.6	5	2.9
Black or Black British	13	9.8	2	3.2	18	10.6
Mixed or multiple ethnicity	2	1.5	1	1.6	1	0.6
White or White British	107	80.5	51	82.3	137	80.6
Other ethnicity (including Chinese)	2	1.5	1	1.6	2	1.2
Prefer not to say	3	2.3	6	9.7	7	4.1
Total responses	133	100.0	62	100.0	170	100.0

Source: 2018 and 2019 Mockingbird foster carer surveys

Table 17: Type of service respondents foster for

	2018		2019 case study survey		2019	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Local authority or children's services trust	101	75.9	51	82.3	149	86.1
Independent fostering authority	32	24.1	11	17.7	24	13.9
Prefer not to say	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total responses	133	100.0	62	100.0	173	100.0

Source: 2018 and 2019 Mockingbird foster carer surveys

Table 18: Fostering experiences of respondents

	2018		2019 case study survey		2019	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	**Number**	**%**
Less than 1 year	6	4.5	7	11.3	15	9.0
1-2 years	9	6.8	6	9.7	20	12.0
3-5 years	46	34.6	18	29.0	38	22.8
6-10 years	31	23.3	21	33.9	45	26.9
More than 10 years	41	30.8	8	12.9	49	29.3
Prefer not to say	0	1.0	2	3.2	0	0.0
Total responses	133	100.0	62	100.0	167	100.0

Source: 2018 and 2019 Mockingbird foster carer surveys

Table 19: Participation by foster carers in Mockingbird constellation activities in 2018

	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Usually		Always		Total responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Meetings	0	0.0	1	1.0	5	5.1	44	44.4	49	49.5	99
Social activities	0	0.0	1	1.4	10	14.5	36	52.2	22	31.9	69

Source: 2018 Mockingbird foster carer survey

Table 20: Participation by foster carers in Mockingbird constellation activities in 2019

	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Usually		Always		Total responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Meetings	0	0.0%	6	5.2	13	11.2	44	37.9	53	45.7	116
Social activities	0	0.0%	4	3.5	17	14.8	46	40.0	48	41.7	115

Source: 2019 Mockingbird foster carer survey

Table 21: Rating of satisfaction by foster carers with Mockingbird constellation activities in 2018

	Terrible		Poor		Acceptable		Good		Excellent		Total responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Meetings	0	0.0	2	2.0	8	8.1	26	26.3	63	63.6	99
Social activities	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	10.4	24	35.8	36	53.7	67
Sleepovers	0	0.0	3	3.1	9	9.3	16	16.5	69	71.1	97

Source: 2018 Mockingbird foster carer survey

Table 22: Rating of satisfaction by foster carers with Mockingbird constellation activities in 2019

	Terrible		Poor		Acceptable		Good		Excellent		Total responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Meetings	0	0.0	0	0.0	12	10.3	30	25.9	71	61.2	116
Social activities	0	0.0	0	0.0	9	8.0	31	27.4	71	62.8	113
Sleepovers	2	1.9	2	1.9	10	9.4	20	18.9	72	67.9	106

Source: 2019 Mockingbird foster carer survey

Table 23: Rating of support received from professionals and services in 2018

	Terrible		Poor		Acceptable		Good		Excellent		Total responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Supervising social worker	0	0.0	1	0.8	8	6.0	36	27.1	88	66.2	133
Children's social worker	1	0.8	9	6.9	32	24.6	45	34.6	43	33.1	130
Independent reviewing officer	0	0.0	9	7.3	16	12.9	49	39.5	50	40.3	124
Liaison worker	0	0.0	2	1.8	9	8.0	35	31.0	67	59.3	113
Out-of-hours support services	1	1.0	7	6.7	17	16.2	47	44.8	33	31.4	105
Hub carer	0	0.0	2	2.1	5	5.2	14	14.6	75	78.1	96
Other foster carers	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	5.6	49	39.2	69	55.2	125
Fostering support group	1	0.9	1	0.9	15	13.2	51	44.7	46	40.4	114
Fostering buddy scheme	0	0.0	1	2.5	4	10.0	21	52.5	14	35.0	40
Foster carer association	0	0.0	1	1.1	15	16.9	44	49.4	29	32.6	89

Source: 2018 Mockingbird foster carer survey

Table 24: Rating of support received from professionals and services in 2019

	Terrible		Poor		Could be better		Acceptable		Good		Excellent		Total responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Supervising social worker	1	0.6	2	1.2	0	0.0	13	7.8	46	27.5	105	62.9	167
Children's social worker	2	1.2	11	6.5	9	5.4	36	21.4	63	37.5	47	28.0	168
Independent reviewing officer	2	1.3	4	2.6	1	0.7	25	16.3	58	37.9	63	41.2	153
Liaison worker	1	0.7	4	2.7	0	0.0	18	12.3	48	32.9	75	51.4	146
Out-of-hours support services	3	2.5	7	5.8	0	0.0	28	23.1	48	39.7	35	28.9	121
Hub carer	1	0.8	1	0.8	0	0.0	13	10.8	21	17.5	84	70.0	120
Other foster carers	1	0.6	0	0.0	1	0.6	12	7.1	71	42.0	84	49.7	169
Fostering support group	0	0.0	1	0.6	0	0.0	15	9.7	74	47.7	65	41.9	155
Fostering buddy scheme	1	1.8	3	5.3	0	0.0	9	15.8	24	42.1	20	35.1	57
Foster carer association	1	0.8	0	0.0	1	0.8	14	11.2	70	56.0	39	31.2	125

Source: 2019 Mockingbird foster carer survey

Table 25: Perception of being treated as an equal by other professionals in 2018

	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Usually		Always		Total responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Supervising social worker	0	0.0	1	0.8	6	4.5	18	13.6	107	81.1	132
Children's social worker	0	0.0	4	3.1	20	15.4	43	33.1	63	48.5	130
Liaison worker	0	0.0	0	0.0	7	6.2	26	23.0	80	70.8	113
Education professionals	0	0.0	8	6.3	19	15.0	34	26.8	66	52.0	127
Health professionals	1	0.8	2	1.6	9	7.1	50	39.7	64	50.8	126
Independent reviewing officer	2	1.5	3	2.3	12	9.2	39	30.0	74	56.9	130

Source: 2018 Mockingbird foster carer survey

Table 26: Perception of being treated as an equal by other professionals in 2019

	Never		Rarely		Sometimes		Usually		Always		Total responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Supervising social worker	3	1.8	2	1.2	8	4.8	35	20.8	120	71.4	168
Children's social worker	3	1.8	6	3.6	26	15.8	59	35.8	71	43.0	165
Liaison worker	2	1.4	2	1.4	13	9.2	34	23.9	91	64.1	142
Education professionals	1	0.6	3	1.9	21	13.0	64	39.8	72	44.7	161
Health professionals	1	0.6	2	1.3	16	10.2	61	38.9	77	49.0	157
Independent reviewing officer	1	0.6	0	0.0	16	10.2	51	32.5	89	56.7	157

Source: 2019 Mockingbird foster carer survey

Table 27: Parental self-agency measure

	Never		Sometimes		About half of the time		Most of the time		Always		Total responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
I feel sure of myself as a foster carer	0	0.0	6	10.3	3	5.2	24	41.4	25	43.1	58
No matter what I try, my child will not do what I want	15	26.3	34	59.6	6	10.5	0	0.0	2	3.5	57
When something goes wrong between me and my child, there is little I can do to correct it.	35	62.5	17	30.4	1	1.8	1	1.8	2	3.6	56
I know I am doing a good job as a foster carer.	0	0.0	4	7.1	2	3.6	26	46.4	24	42.9	56
I feel useless as a foster carer.	43	76.8	11	19.6	1	1.8	1	1.8	0	0.0	56
My child usually ends up getting their own way	20	36.4	28	50.9	4	7.3	3	5.5	0	0.0	55
I know things about being a foster carer that would be helpful to others.	2	3.5	12	21.1	14	24.6	13	22.8	16	28.1	57
When my child gets upset with me, I usually give in.	33	61.1	19	35.2	2	3.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	54
I can solve most problems between my child and me.	0	0.0	7	12.3	3	5.3	24	42.1	23	40.4	57
When things are going badly between my child and me, I keep trying until things begin to change.	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	13	23.2	43	76.8	56

Source: 2019 Mockingbird foster carer survey

Table 28: Overall satisfaction with fostering

	2018		2019	
	Number	%	Number	%
Satisfied	123	93.2	168	94.2
Unsatisfied	9	6.8	165	5.8
Prefer not to say	0	0.0	142	0.0
Total responses	132	100.0	161	100.0

Source: 2018 and 2019 Mockingbird foster carer surveys

Table 29: Time intending to continue fostering

	2018		2019	
	Number	%	Number	%
Less than 6 months	1	0.8	2	1.2
6-12 months	1	0.8	2	1.2
1-5 years	16	12.0	14	8.3
6-10 years	18	13.5	17	10.1
More than10 years	8	6.0	12	7.1
For as long as I'm able	89	66.9	121	72.0
Total responses	133	100.0	168	100.0

Source: 2018 and 2019 Mockingbird foster carer surveys

Appendix 6: Responses to 2018 and 2019 child and young person surveys

Children aged 8-10 years and young people aged 11-17 years in all 12 sites were invited to complete an annual survey. The surveys used skip patterns to include only relevant questions available through the platform Qualtrics. There was a response rate of 28% for the 2018 survey and 31% for the 2019 survey. The profile of respondents to our surveys was similar to the profile of children in care in England in terms of gender, proportion of relevant age brackets, and ethnicity (Department for Education, 2020a).

Table 30: Gender of respondents in the child and young person surveys

	2018		2019	
	Number	%	Number	%
Female	30	46.2	27	39.7
Male	35	53.8	31	45.6
Transgender	0	0.0	1	1.5
Prefer not to say	0	0.0	9	13.2
Total responses	65	100.0	68	100.0

Source: 2018 and 2019 Mockingbird child and young person surveys

Table 31: Age of respondents in the child and young person surveys

	2018		2019	
	Number	%	Number	%
8-10 years	23	37.1	19	27.9
11-15 years	27	43.5	26	38.2
16+ years	12	19.4	9	13.2
Prefer not to say	0	0.0	14	20.6
Total responses	62	100.0	68	100.0

Source: 2018 and 2019 Mockingbird child and young person surveys

Table 32: Ethnicity of respondents in the 2018 child and young person survey

	2018		2019	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**
Asian or Asian British	2	2.9	3	4.4
Black or Black British	9	13.2	3	4.4
Mixed or multiple ethnicity	5	7.4	6	8.8
White or White British	49	72.1	44	64.7
Other ethnicity (including Chinese)	0	0.0	3	4.4
Prefer not to say	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total responses	68	100.0	59	100.0

Source: 2018 and 2019 Mockingbird child and young person surveys

Table 33: Participation in Mockingbird constellation activities in 2018 child and young person survey

	Never		Some months		Most months		Every month		Total responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Sleepovers	8	11.9	36	53.7	9	13.4	14	20.9	67
Social activities	4	5.8	20	29.0	18	26.1	27	39.1	69

Source: 2018 Mockingbird child and young person survey

Table 34: Participation in Mockingbird constellation activities in 2019 child and young person survey

	Never		Some months		Most months		Every month		Total responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Sleepovers	10	15.4	29	44.6	7	10.8	19	29.2	65
Social activities	3	4.5	15	22.4	25	37.3	24	35.8	67

Source: 2019 Mockingbird child and young person survey

Table 35: Rating of satisfaction with Mockingbird constellation activities in 2018 child and young person survey

	Terrible		Poor		Acceptable		Good		Excellent		Total responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Sleepovers	0	0.0	0	1.8	3	8.9	27	44.6	32	44.6	56
Social activities	0	0.0	1	1.8	5	8.9	25	44.6	25	44.6	56

Source: 2018 Mockingbird child and young person survey

Table 36: Rating of satisfaction with Mockingbird constellation activities in 2019 child and young person survey

	Terrible		Poor		Acceptable		Good		Excellent		Total responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Sleepovers	1	1.9	1	1.9	2	3.8	19	36.5	29	55.8	52
Social activities	0	0.0	3	4.8	5	8.1	16	25.8	38	61.3	62

Source: 2019 Mockingbird child and young person survey

Table 37: Perception of relationship with foster carers

	Never		Sometimes		Usually		Always		Total responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
I trust my foster carer	0	0.0	3	4.6	10	15.4	52	80.0	65
My foster carer notices how I am feeling	0	0.0	3	4.6	24	36.9	38	58.5	65

Source: 2018 Mockingbird child and young person survey

Table 38: Birth siblings in foster care

	2018		2019	
	Number	%	Number	%
I have brothers or sisters in foster care	48	80.0	33	64.7
I do not have brothers or sisters in foster care	12	20.0	18	35.3
Total responses	60	100.0	51	100.0

Source: 2018 and 2019 Mockingbird child and young person surveys

Table 39: Placement of birth siblings who are in foster care

	2018		2019	
	Number	%	Number	%
My birth siblings live with me and my foster carer	18	37.5	16	50.0
My birth siblings live with another foster carer in my constellation	11	22.9	3	9.4
Some of my birth siblings live with my foster carer and some with another carer in my constellation	2	4.2	0	0.0
My birth siblings are not part of my constellation	17	35.4	13	40.6
Total responses	48	100.0	32	100.0

Source: 2018 Mockingbird child and young person survey

Table 40: Rating of contact with birth siblings who are in foster care by placement in 2018

	Siblings placed in Mockingbird constellation		Siblings not placed in Mockingbird constellation	
	Number	%	Number	%
Too much	2	6.9	0	0.0
Just right	21	72.4	9	52.9
Too little	6	20.7	3	17.6
I can’t see them	0	0.0	3	17.6
Total responses	29	100.0	15	100.0

Source: 2018 Mockingbird child and young person survey

Table 41: Rating of contact with birth siblings who are in foster care by placement in 2019

	Siblings placed in Mockingbird constellation		Siblings not placed in Mockingbird constellation	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**
Too much	2	11.1	0	0.0
Just right	12	66.7	8	61.5
Too little	4	22.2	4	30.8
I can’t see them	0	0.0	1	7.7
Total responses	18	100.0	13	100.0

Source: 2019 Mockingbird child and young person survey

Table 42: 2018 Perception of educational support from foster carers

	Never		Sometimes		Usually		Always		Total responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
My foster carer takes an interest in my school work	1	1.6	4	6.3	15	23.4	44	68.8	64
My foster carer makes sure I do my homework	0	0.0	1	1.6	16	25.4	46	73.0	63

Source: 2018 Mockingbird child and young person survey

Table 43: 2019 Perception of educational support from foster carers

	Never		Sometimes		Usually		Always		Total responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
My foster carer takes an interest in my school work	0	0.0	2	3.4	12	20.7	44	75.9	58
My foster carer makes sure I do my homework	2	3.5	2	3.5	8	14.0	45	78.9	57

Source: 2019 Mockingbird child and young person survey

Table 44: 2018 Perception of educational wellbeing

	Never		Sometimes		Usually		Always		Total responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
I try my best at school	0	0.0	15	23.8	25	39.7	23	36.5	63
I find it difficult to keep my mind on my work at school	7	11.3	30	48.4	15	24.2	10	16.1	62

Source: 2018 Mockingbird child and young person survey

Table 45: 2019 Perception of educational wellbeing

	Never		Sometimes		Usually		Always		Total responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
I try my best at school	0	0.0	9	15.8	22	38.6	26	45.6	57
I find it difficult to keep my mind on my work at school	5	8.8	28	49.1	11	19.3	13	22.8	57

Source: 2019 Mockingbird child and young person survey

Table 46: 2018 Rating of foster family and community connectedness[14]

	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		Total responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
I feel like I really belong to my foster family	0	0.0	1	1.6	4	6.3	26	41.3	32	50.8	63
I feel like I am an important part of my community	0	0.0	1	1.6	13	21.0	30	48.4	18	29.0	62
There are adults in my community that I could go to help if I needed it	1	1.6	1	1.6	5	7.9	28	44.4	28	44.4	63

Source: 2018 Mockingbird child and young person survey

[14] Measured using the Family and Community Connections Scale developed by Anderson-Butcher et al., (2020), a standardised survey tool.

Table 47: 2019 Rating of foster family and community connectedness[15]

	Strongly disagree		Disagree		Neither agree nor disagree		Agree		Strongly agree		Total responses
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
I feel like I really belong to my foster family	1	1.7	1	1.7	5	8.6	16	27.6	35	60.3	58
I feel like I am an important part of my community	0	0.0	1	1.8	6	10.5	24	42.1	26	45.6	57
There are adults in my community that I could go to help if I needed it	0	0.0	1	1.8	3	5.4	20	35.7	32	57.1	56

Source: 2019 Mockingbird child and young person survey

[15] Measured using the Family and Community Connections Scale developed by Anderson-Butcher et al., (2020), a standardised survey tool.

Appendix 7: Cost Benefit Analysis

The cost benefit analysis (CBA) methodology considers the relative savings made by the Mockingbird programme compared to what would have been spent based on the performance of the counterfactual comparison group. When compared to the comparator group, a positive benefit cost ratio can be seen, due to the programme outperforming the comparator group across 5 of 6 monetised outcomes. The method focuses on savings to key stakeholders over the period April 2017 to March 2020 and is a Fiscal Return on Investment (FROI).

Costs included

On the cost side, we have used the total grant allocation for the project from the Department for Education Innovation programme. We have assumed that 10% of the total allocation would be used for set-up, one-off costs. This assumption is based on other Innovation Programme projects, in the absence of detailed financial information pertaining to one-off set up costs. As such, the total cost used for the analyses is £3,382,615.

Benefit monetisation

Benefits are the monetised outcomes of the programme and reflect potential cost savings to key stakeholders. The monetised outcomes, their unit costs and sources of these costs are outlined in Table 48.

The counterfactual group was used to analyse relative performance of the participant group, allowing for an estimation of the savings made due to the Mockingbird programme. The benefits relate to the cost savings associated with improved outcomes for children and young people supported by the Mockingbird programme. Information was identified from project monitoring data for the following outcome variables:

- unplanned endings avoided
- days in residential care avoided
- days missing avoided
- days in justice system avoided
- de-registration of foster households avoided
- unavailable placements avoided

Table 48: Unit costs of monetised benefits

Outcome	Unit cost	Source
Unplanned placement ending	£1,039	Median of estimated cost of placement change per incident (Ward, Holmes and Soper, 2008), adjusted for inflation
Days missing from placement[16]	£2,719	Average total cost of a missing persons investigation (Shalev Greene and Pakes, 2012), adjusted for inflation
Days in a justice setting	£602.00	Average daily cost of residential minus average daily cost of foster care (Curtis and Burns, 2018), adjusted for inflation
Days in residential care	£602.00	Average daily cost of residential minus average daily cost of foster care (Curtis and Burns, 2018), adjusted for inflation
De-registration of a fostering household	£3,142	Average cost of recruitment and training per foster carer in England (Holmes and Soper, 2010), adjusted for inflation
Placement unavailable in a fostering household	£8,898	Average 3-month cost of a child in local authority foster care (Curtis and Burns, 2018), adjusted for inflation

Source: York Consulting

For each outcome, savings were calculated based on the 830 young people or 467 fostering households who participated in Mockingbird for at least 1 day between the funding period of April 2017 and March 2020. Detail on the ways in which savings were calculated for each outcome are described below.

Unplanned endings avoided

To calculate the number of unplanned endings avoided, the mean (average) unplanned endings of those in the matched analysis groups were multiplied by 830, for both base and follow up year. The change from base to follow up year for Mockingbird participants versus comparison group was used to calculate the number of unplanned endings avoided. In this case Mockingbird participants performed worse than the comparison group by 28 unplanned endings, leading to a zero-benefit calculation.

[16] An assumption has been made that every day missing counts as an individual incident, for the purposes of calculating the costs based on a missing persons investigation. The median number of days missing per incident according to Department for Education guidance is 1 day (Department for Education, 2020b).

Days in residential care avoided

To calculate the number of days in residential care avoided, the mean (average) number of days spent in residential care of those in the matched analysis groups were multiplied by 830, for both base and follow up year. The change from base to follow up year for Mockingbird participants versus comparison group was used to calculate the number of days in residential care that were avoided, which were then multiplied by the relevant unit cost. In this case Mockingbird participants outperformed the comparison group by 3022 days, generating £1,819,244 of benefit.

Days missing avoided

To calculate the number of days missing that were avoided, the mean (average) number of days missing of those in the matched analysis groups were multiplied by 830, for both base and follow up year. The change from base to follow up year for Mockingbird participants versus comparison group was used to calculate the number of days missing which were avoided, which were then multiplied by the relevant unit cost. In this case Mockingbird participants outperformed the comparison group by 249 days, generating £677,031 of benefit.

Days in justice system avoided

To calculate the number of days in the justice system avoided, the mean (average) number of days in the justice system for those in the matched analysis groups were multiplied by 830, for both base and follow up year. The change from base to follow up year for Mockingbird participants versus comparison group was used to calculate the number of days in justice system avoided. Data pertaining to the types of justice setting was then used to establish the rates of young people in different settings. Of 4 types, 3 related to being placed in local authority accommodation, which can be costed in the same way as days in residential care, for the purposes of this CBA. Only ‘Sentenced to Youth Rehabilitation Order’ was not included in the final count, which accounted for just 0.2% days avoided. In this case Mockingbird participants outperformed the comparison group by 81 days, generating £48,762 of benefit.

De-registrations avoided

Programme data was obtained for household level data on de-registrations for both Mockingbird and comparison groups. The proportion of households that de-registered as a percentage of the number of fostering households in both groups was applied to a multiplier of 467. This multiplier is the number of fostering households who were recorded as participating in Mockingbird in monthly monitoring forms returned by sites. Once the number of de-registered households in each group had been calculated, the difference

was identified. This showed that there had been 82 avoided de-registered households, which was multiplied by the relevant unit cost, generating a benefit of £257,644.

Unavailable placements avoided

Programme data was obtained for household level data on unavailable placements for both Mockingbird and comparison groups. The proportion of households with unavailable placements as a percentage of the total number of households with placement data available was calculated. This was then applied to the household multiplier (described above) of 467, for both groups. The difference was identified, showing that 45 unavailable placements were avoided. Because the average number of unavailable placements among households who had an unavailable placement was 1.4, 45 was inflated by 1.4 to reach the final estimation of unavailable placements avoided of 63. This generated a benefit of £560,574.

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