

The Dreadnought Centre:

*An assessment of the impact of the 12-week
intervention programme for children & young
people experiencing domestic violence*

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Contents

1	Executive Summary	3
2	The Dreadnought Centre	8
3	This programme	8
4	The purpose.....	9
5	Methodology.....	10
6	The hypotheses.....	16
7	Further Observations on Resilience.....	32
	Appendix 1: Dreadnought Entry & Exit Questionnaire data	41

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1 Executive Summary

1.1 Purpose of report

In 2008 the Director of the Dreadnought Centre identified the need for an independent evaluation of the Children's and young people's domestic violence programme.

1.2 Dreadnought programmes

Dreadnought provides a wide range of support programmes for children and young people who are facing emotional or behavioural problems. They operate both one-to-one and group work for children and young people who have been affected in some way by domestic violence

The programmes have been designed to work with children, young people and women in a safe environment, where they can express themselves within a group or one-to-one setting.

1.3 Number of people identified for case-study research

The initial aim was to identify 10 children and young people who had been, or were, living with domestic abuse.

Initially it was hoped to take a random sample by simply including in the study a sequential block of 10 children or young people referred to the programme because of behaviour resulting from domestic violence. However this proved unworkable due to the fact that many of the children and young people were *not* identified by the referrer as living or having lived with domestic violence but it was actually being disclosed by the child or young person as the work with Dreadnought progressed. It was agreed therefore that these children and young people (the *disclosers*) should be added into the evaluation.

Ten children/young people were identified as fitting the profile for this study, but two did not complete due to difficulties at home. The very nature of the children referred to Dreadnought centre is that they may be living in families with chaotic and difficult lifestyles and may be in accommodation that is changing: for example, temporary accommodation with parents, foster care etc.

1.4 Methodology

The detail of the methodology was agreed with Dreadnought staff in a series of meetings with Sue Penna Associates and Perfect Moment between 19th May 2009 and 7th August 2009 and is documented in the separate *Dreadnought Case Study Framework*.¹ Seven tools and questionnaires formed the data 'framework' of each case study.

- Dreadnought Confidential Referral Form
- Dreadnought Entry & Exit Questionnaires
- Case Study Start Interview Questionnaire
- Case Study Exit Interview Questionnaire
- Diary/Blog
- The Dreadnought Case Report
- Questionnaire to Significant Other/Referrer or to Key Worker

¹ Perfect Moment, July 2009. *Dreadnought Case Study Framework*, 15pp.

A combination of self reporting and observational qualitative data was collected for analysis. Where it was possible, before and after intervention data was collected for comparison.

We have already alluded to some of the issues surrounding the particular cohort being studied (e.g. difficult and chaotic lifestyles) and there were some initial problems with data collection. For example, as highlighted in the report, anything written may seem too much like 'school' for the young person. The Dreadnought team did try a blog or diary to engage the children and young people, but this was not successful.

Credit must therefore be given to the staff for what they did manage to get the young people to commit to paper across the seven tools and questionnaires mentioned above.

The experiences of the young person undoubtedly would have affected their willingness to co-operate in the study. They are quite likely to be mistrustful and possibly suspicious of adults wanting them to record anything about their feelings and emotions. Some of those being studied therefore dipped in and out at various times, leaving the evaluators with some gaps in the data. In order to remedy this, a decision was taken to collect data from a significant other and key worker.

Another attempt to collect more information via interviews with a member of the evaluation team with significant experience of working with children and young people who have experienced abuse was also unsuccessful as the young people did not want to take part.

1.5 The 5 aims of the evaluation

1. Show how the work contributes to 'breaking-the-link' (i.e., stopping children/young people continuing as 'victims' and/or becoming perpetrators of domestic abuse and violence)
2. Show how the work improves safety
3. Demonstrate how the programme educates and brings about behaviour change on rights and roles
4. Show how the programme helps the individual begin to make healthy relationships
5. Look at factors that may have increased the young person's resilience to adverse situations.

1.6 Summary findings

1. Breaking the Link

The hypothesis was that by engaging children/ young people in this work they would be enabled to find coping strategies and behaviours that meant that they would not repeat the behaviour they had learned by living in an abusive family.

The indications are that Dreadnought's package can help 'break-the-link'. However it would be fair to say that Dreadnought is one part of the package and there is a huge need for partner agencies and workers to understand the impact domestic abuse has had on these children and young people so that the positive work undertaken at Dreadnought is reinforced in the other settings that the children and young people are engaged in e.g. schools, foster homes etc.

2. Safety – both for themselves and others

The starting point was that young people living in families where there is domestic violence not only feel unsafe (scared and/or vulnerable), but are actually at risk of emotional and physical injury. The hypothesis was that, by engaging in this programme, young people would be able to identify where they feel unsafe and how they might employ strategies to make themselves safer.

The evaluation evidence thus far suggests that the programme has helped children/young people do just this.

Perhaps, as importantly however, the programme seems also to have been working at a step *before this by helping children/young people to first identify that what they considered 'safe' was probably not* and, therefore, identifying the need to devise strategies to make themselves safer.

3. Rights and Roles

The hypothesis was that young people living with domestic violence witness adult relationships based on the misuse of power and control and, typically, these are based on gender stereotypes of men controlling women. This can result in young people being unable to understand peer and future intimate relationships that do not mimic this dynamic.

By engaging in this project, it was thought that the young person would be given an opportunity to learn about the individual rights, responsibilities and adult roles that are possible in non-abusive relationships and so would be empowered to change any of their existing behaviour, or avert any future behaviour by them, based on abusive dynamics.

As might be expected, the children/young people arrived with very different levels of understanding of their rights and responsibilities. Many expressly said that their understanding had improved by the time they came to leave, suggesting that the Dreadnought intervention is successful in this respect.

4. Healthy relationships

The hypothesis was that children/young people in families where there is domestic violence experience difficulties making healthy relationships due to a range of factors:

- the need to 'keep the secret,'
- the inability to have peers in their own home,
- the inability to socialize (as they need to be in the home to protect other family members), and
- the fear of repercussions from the perpetrator.

By engaging in the project, the idea was that children/young people would be given the opportunity to learn about healthy relationships and how to develop these for themselves.

Dreadnought provides a 'safe' space for children/young people to work through issues and one area is their understanding of healthy relationships. Their degree of understanding at programme entry of what makes for healthy relationships clearly varies enormously. However, nearly all the children/young people reported an improved understanding and said that they had made some degree of use of this new knowledge beyond Dreadnought.

5. Developing Resilience

The hypothesis was that domestic abuse can adversely affect children and young people and can result in them developing symptoms of mental distress and poor resilience to adverse situations. Making connections to supportive adults and networks was thought to enable a young person to develop their resilience and so enable them to positively adapt and develop in the context of significant adversity.

By developing a relationship with Dreadnought and a mentor, the children and young people were expected to develop a more positive response to stress and become more hopeful and optimistic about their lives.

In terms of optimism about their lives, the Dreadnought intervention generally seems to have enhanced the clients' positivity. Of six children/young people who provided a score at exit, four (67%) showed *improved* scores. Of the others, one remained with a quite positive score of five out of a possible seven throughout.

One, however, was unique in seemingly being slightly *less* positive about the future at the point of leaving. However, this participant registered a maximum score at point of entry and so one is tempted to wonder whether the Dreadnought support may, in fact, have introduced some realism into his perceptions.

1.7 Conclusions & Recommendations

The young people looked at in this study are typical of the young people Dreadnought support, and are some of the most vulnerable children and young people in our society. This is evidenced throughout the report and we urge you to read the full document to better understand the complexity of the young people's distress.

This report (albeit on a small cohort of children) shows that Dreadnought makes a difference in these children's and young people's lives. This is extremely positive considering in the majority of cases the staff only have contact with the young person for 12 weeks.

As following up these children beyond their engagement at Dreadnought was not part of the study, it would be interesting for Dreadnought to set up a more longitudinal study at some point to see how well the children sustain their development.

It would also be interesting to monitor and compare the impact of a further 12 weeks support being made available to these vulnerable individuals. Staff at Dreadnought would welcome some flexibility about the numbers of sessions available but recognise that the current economic climate is potentially constraining for any proposed expansion in the length of support commissioned by their referring agencies.

One of the more striking issues observed was not directly about the children and young people.

The communication between the referring agencies and Dreadnought is an area that needs continuing attention. The staff and management at Dreadnought recognise that huge improvements have been made over recent years but are still aware of gaps where they receive poor information from referrers and children are removed from interventions without consultation with their Dreadnought workers. Again this is evidenced in the report.

As the project continues to move forward, the Dreadnought team believe that the importance of multi agency working that has the child or young person at the centre of its focus is vital and they hope to continue to be a valued and integral part of this.

This report therefore provides some evidence about the vital role Dreadnought plays in supporting children and young people who have experienced directly, or as witnesses, domestic violence and abuse and highlights some suggestions for future action and improvements to the service.

The recommendations contained within the report (in blue highlighted boxes) are:

Recommendation 1: Evaluators should further explore with key workers and clients the barriers to children/young people keeping diaries and/or blogs and what might be done to overcome them.

Recommendation 2: Dreadnought may need to consider how to challenge partner agencies when they do not seem to be making any link between the CYP's behaviour/attitudes and the impact domestic violence may be having on them.

Recommendation 3: Dreadnought should consider ways that support can be provided for its clients beyond its own remit and boundaries (while being careful not to be 'over-sheltering' and, therefore, inhibiting the children's/young people's own coping mechanisms).

Recommendation 4: Dreadnought should seek to track the children/young people with whom it has worked to establish whether and to what degree in the medium- to long-term they become perpetrators and/or victims of the types of behaviours that they learned in abusive families. This may need to be done in partnership with an academic institution/study.

Recommendation 5: it may be worth asking the referring agency/agent to assess the child before they actually make first contact with Dreadnought to ensure that the first contact is not biasing the child's response to their current situation and feelings (e.g. over-reporting confidence and optimism).

Recommendation 6: Dreadnought should consider undertaking a longitudinal study of the client children/young people to track future behaviour to establish Dreadnought's contribution to their resilience. Again this may best be done in partnership with an academic study.

2 The Dreadnought Centre

The Dreadnought Centre - 'Dreadnought' for short - is a registered UK Charity² established in 1976. It works with children and young people aged eight to nineteen years.

It provides a wide range of support programmes for children and young people who are facing emotional or behavioural problems.

Dreadnought has a centre in Pool – in central western Cornwall - and operates an outreach service in over twenty locations in the north, east and west of the county.

It is presently funded by Cornwall Council, the Youth Offending Team (YOT), The Big Lottery, Children in Need, Lloyds TSB Foundation, Our Money Your Dream, and the Children's Fund.

Dreadnought operates a child centred philosophy in all its work, endeavouring to provide an environment of unconditional acceptance to all its service users.

Their ethos encompasses all the five 'Every Child Matters' criteria (Be Healthy, Stay Safe, Enjoy and Achieve, Making a Positive Contribution and Achieve Economic Wellbeing)

Dreadnought provide a wide range of positive role models using many trusted volunteers and staff to deliver the work, offering a positive adult/ child relationship through which attitudes and behaviour can be challenged in a non confrontational way.

Dreadnought seek to provide an environment where children and young people are empowered to make informed decisions in their lives if they so wish in the knowledge that they will be supported through that process.

3 The Dreadnought domestic abuse intervention programme

Dreadnought provides a wide range of support programmes for children and young people who are facing emotional or behavioural problems. They operate both one-to-one and group work for children and young people who have been affected in some way by domestic violence. They engage children and young people in activities within their centre and in the community.

The programmes have been designed to work with children, young people and women in a safe environment, where they can express themselves within a group or one-to-one setting.

The programmes aim to enable participants to understand more about themselves and the world around them. They gain a better understanding of relationships, society and their rights and responsibilities.

Every person undertaking the programme learns how to put a safety plan together and to recognise potential risks and to keep themselves safe.

² Number 270486; www.thedreadnought.co.uk .

Dreadnought's Domestic Violence programmes are focused on people who are living with, or have lived with, Domestic Violence. These aims correlate with the universal Aims of Every Child Matters (ECM) (2003). The aims of the programme are:

- To give people a safe place to talk: provision of clear information, and support to enable them to make informed choices. (ECM Be Healthy, Make a positive contribution)
- To facilitate individual safety: By putting an action plan together and discouraging individuals from placing themselves in potentially harmful situations. (ECM Stay safe, Be Healthy)
- To support individuals to bring about the changes they want for themselves now and in the future. (ECM Enjoy and Achieve)
- To provide individuals with a chance to become responsible adults and to make a positive contribution to the society they live in. (ECM Achieve economic well being)

4 The purpose of this report

The purpose of this study is to examine the impact of Dreadnought's twelve-week intervention programme for participants.

Specifically this aims to:

- Show how the work contributes to 'breaking-the-link' (i.e., stopping children/young people continuing as 'victims' and/or becoming perpetrators of domestic abuse and violence)
- Show how the work improves safety
- Demonstrate how the programme educates and brings about behaviour change on rights and roles
- Show how the programme helps the individual begin to make healthy relationships
- Look at factors that may have increased the young person's resilience to adverse situations.

Please note that the names of the children in the report are fictional and have been changed to provide anonymity.

5 Methodology

5.1 Detailed methodology

The proposed method was to sample systematically and look at the cases of ten young people, gathering evidence from them, their case workers, other professionals/interested parties, documents and reports.

The detail of the methodology was agreed with Dreadnought staff in a series of meetings with Sue Penna Associates and Perfect Moment between 19th May 2009 and 7th August 2009 and is documented in the separate *Dreadnought Case Study Framework*.³

5.2 Summary of method

In practice, the following key sources of evidence were employed.

Dreadnought Confidential Referral Form

When clients were referred to Dreadnought, their basic information was captured on a one-page **Dreadnought Confidential Referral Form**. This was completed and:

- Provided a profile of each child/young person
- Captured some basic demographic and contextual information
- Allowed some observations to be made on the degree of risk the child/young person faced at the point of entry to the programme.

Dreadnought Entry & Exit Questionnaires

Designed by Dreadnought, this graphic-rich, user-friendly single-sided questionnaire asked the child/young person to score six key questions on a scale of one ('Unhappy') to seven ('Happy') and to provide some narrative answers to three other questions.

The form was used twice. First, marked '**Entry**', it was used with the client when they joined Dreadnought. Marked '**Exit**', it was then used again when they left. Comparison of the responses identified any change in the child's/ young person's perception of their circumstances.

Case Study Start Interview Questionnaire

Sue Penna Associates devised the **Case Study Start Interview Questionnaire** to be used by the key worker with the child/young person (or by the child/young person) as close to their start on the programme as practicable. Its purpose was to establish a baseline around the child's/young person's:

- Understanding of their behaviour and its possible consequences (to show whether and how the programme contributed to 'breaking the link')
- Perception of safety (to show whether and how the programme improved safety)
- Understanding and perception of rights, responsibilities and the effect of gender on people's roles in life (to demonstrate whether the programme educated and brought about a change in understanding and behaviour in these areas)

³ Perfect Moment, July 2009. *Dreadnought Case Study Framework*, 15pp.

- Understanding of healthy and unhealthy relationships (to establish whether the programme helped children and young people begin to make healthier relationships)
- Perceptions of the levels of stress that they felt, whether or not they knew what made them stressed and how they usually coped with stress (to look at factors that may have increased the child's or young person's resilience to adverse situations).

Case Study Exit Interview Questionnaire

Devised by Sue Penna Associates, the **Case Study Exit Interview Questionnaire** was used by the key worker with the child/young person – or by the child/young person themselves – at the end of the Dreadnought intervention. Its purpose was to establish the child's/young person's change in understanding and/or perception in the areas investigated in the **Case Study Start Interview Questionnaire** and explore the role of the intervention in this process.

Diary/Blog

The children/young people were asked to keep a diary or blog.

The Dreadnought Report

The **Dreadnought Report**, completed at the end of the intervention by the Key Worker, summarized the sessions with the client and Dreadnought's recommendations for the future. As such, it provided text and descriptive information on the client's progress through the intervention.

Questionnaire to Significant Other/Referrer or to Key Worker

This Questionnaire was devised by Sue Penna Associates to allow **'Significant Others'** and those who referred the clients to the Dreadnought service in the first place (**'Referrers'**) to make observations on any changes that they saw in the client as a result of the intervention.

The same form was provided to **Key Workers** to make observations on any changes that they saw in the client as a result of the intervention.

This provided evidence to compare and contrast with the findings of the **Dreadnought Report**, detailed above.

5.3 Acknowledgements

We thank the staff and children and young people at Dreadnought for their contributions to the data collection and this report. As evaluators, we were impressed by the commitment of all those involved at this project.

We were also constantly struck by the very difficult lives that the young people were experiencing and the lack of support that they had previously received in their young lives. Dreadnought is working with some of the most vulnerable young people in society, and provides an oasis during difficult and turbulent times.

5.4 The sample

Ten children/young people were identified as fitting the profile for this study, but two did not attend.⁴

This provided a sample of eight children/young people of which one did not engage in the evaluation and one completed her initial 12 weeks but again declined to continue with the evaluation as issues at home became too difficult.⁵ These young people completed their intervention at Dreadnought but only provided limited data for the evaluation

The remaining six all completed the twelve-week intervention (though brothers **Brian** and **Callum** continued to be supported by Dreadnought beyond the intervention).

Amongst the participants, there were just two girls (**Adele** and **Breanne**) of widely different ages (7 and nearly 14) and six boys aged 10 to 15. Within these, two (**Brian** and **Callum**) were brothers. While not the domain of this study it would be interesting to understand this gender representation. If boys display more outward disturbance as a result of witnessing abuse therefore generating referrals for interventions, is there a concern that girls may be internalising their experience to a greater degree and potentially adopting other unhelpful coping strategies (early inappropriate sexual relationships) through which they remain hidden from agencies that could support them?

All the children/ young people were **White British** with the exception of **Eric**, whose ethnicity is recorded as British/Jamaican, and aged between **7 (Adele)** and **15 (Eric)** at entry.

Chloe – **Gary's** mother - also engaged with Dreadnought.

It was agreed with evaluators and Dreadnought staff that the evaluation should be completed with the data collected at the end of August 2010, amidst concerns that while the initial brief was to examine case studies on 10 children, due to some difficulties in engaging the young people in the study the need for completion had become paramount.

It is worth looking at the information that Dreadnought received on these children and young people (CYP) to put into context the difficult circumstances and lifestyles these vulnerable young people were in.

ADELE age 7 ½ - When referred to Dreadnought Adele was living with her aunt and uncle and was considered a '**Looked after child**' by the local Authority. This means she had been removed from the care of her parents, In fact her father is serving a custodial sentence in Prison and her mother is currently in treatment for substance misuse.

BREANNE age 13 ¾ - experiencing a range of mental health issues, including feeling very low in mood and had been expressing suicidal ideation. She had experienced bullying at school but has retaliated and become aggressive when pushed.

⁴ One (**MBAA7**) through choice; one (**Francis**) (=JP) through being moved to foster care.

⁵ One (**Gary**) (=AS4) attended but did not engage with the evaluation. One (**Breanne**) (=MBH) attended significantly but pulled out of the evaluation as issues at home became too difficult.

ALAN 13 ½ - Subject of an **Interim Supervision Order** due to serious neglect Alan has been moved around constantly in his short life. This instability seems to have resulted in victimisation and he has also been excluded. He has witnessed domestic violence and demonstrates false confidence and has difficulties understanding social skills of self and others.

GARY age 10 – At referral to Dreadnought Gary was staying with his aunt and uncle due to **Safeguarding issues**. His behaviour at school is such that the head teacher has considered excluding him.

DAVID age 12 ½ - having witnessed domestic violence David continues to be afraid of his father. He is beginning to have difficulties expressing his emotions and tending to get angry.

BRIAN age 12 – In foster care so classifies as a **Looked after Child** by the Local Authority. Brian experiences difficulties with his behaviour.

CALLUM age 10 ½ (brother of Brian) is also a **Looked after Child** and in the same foster placement as his brother. He has difficulties with aggression and racist and homophobic language. He also has difficulty in understanding why he can't be with one of his parents.

ERIC age 15 ½ - when referred was living in a **women's refuge** with his mother after they fled domestic violence. He has developed carers /parental role with his younger brother who has suspected Autism and is missing school to care for him. His mother uses substances regularly.

Of the **EIGHT** CYP who were discussed in this report **FIVE** were either subject to care orders due to safeguarding children's issues and **ONE** was living in a refuge with his mother (we can postulate that if they weren't in a refuge they would be subject to a 'child in need of protection plan').

These children, therefore, represent some of the most vulnerable children in society.

5.5 The evidence

The degree of engagement and evidence from Dreadnought's twelve-week intervention programme is summarized for the eight children/young people in **Table 1**, below.

Dreadnought Confidential Referral Forms are held for all eight children/young people.

While **Dreadnought Entry Questionnaires** are held for all eight children/young people, only six **Dreadnought Exit Questionnaires** were obtained. (One client actually declined to complete one, illustrating the sensitivity of such evaluation.)

Case Study Start & Exit Interview Questionnaires

Only four **Case Study Start Interview Questionnaires** were completed to provide baselines for the children/young people being studied. While the results were slightly better for **Case Study Exit Interview Questionnaires** (five), only two related to children/young people who had completed a 'Start' questionnaires (meaning that there are 'before-and-after views' from only two clients).

Diary/Blog

Only **Adele** kept a diary, though some notes exist to show that **Alan** at least attempted to do the same.

It is not unreasonable to imagine that the written medium (especially for any client experiencing difficulties with literacy) and an association with 'school work' (which other evidence indicates as one of the least happy aspects of the children's/young people's lives at entry to the programme) - plus the risk of writing down personal information in uncertain times and insecure places - might all inhibit children's /young people's use of such a tool.

Given the richness of insight that these tools can provide, however, and their practical usefulness in cognitive restructuring, the barriers to their adoption should perhaps be explored.

Recommendation 1: Evaluators should further explore with Key Workers and clients the barriers to children/young people keeping diaries and/or blogs and what might be done to overcome them.

The Dreadnought Report

Dreadnought Reports were completed for all clients.

Questionnaire to Significant Other/Referrer or to Key Worker

Three questionnaires were completed by two **Significant Others/Referrers**. One respondent was a representative of the refuge accommodating **Eric** and his mother.

The other respondent, who completed two questionnaires, was a representative of South West Children in Care (i.e., managing the foster care placements).

In contrast, Dreadnought Key Workers completed a **Questionnaire to Key Workers** for all clients.

While in an excellent position to make observations on any changes in the client after the intervention, this does mean that Dreadnought Key Workers were commenting on the efficiency and effectiveness of their own programme. This is, of course, not necessarily objective.

However, this imbalance may suggest that - for a variety of reasons such as parental neglect or preoccupation, pressure on both statutory services and voluntary provision and so on - the Dreadnought Key Workers are – albeit fleetingly – in effect *the* consistent feature in the lives of these children.

As considered later, academic research highlights the importance of such informal sources of consistency in building resilience in children/young people exposed to domestic abuse and violence.

Table 1: Summary of engagement and evidence from Dreadnought's twelve-week intervention programme

Case name	Adele	Alan	Brian	Callum	David	Eric	Breanne	Gary
Gender	Female	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	Female	Male
Age	7.5	13.5	12	10.5	12.5	15.5	13.75	10
Status	Completed	Completed	Ongoing	Ongoing	Completed	Completed	Early leaver (Pulled out)	Early leaver (Did not engage)
Confidential Referral form	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Dreadnought Entry Questionnaire	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Dreadnought Exit Questionnaire	Y	Y	Y	Y	Declined	Y	Y	
Case Study Start Interview Questionnaire	Y	Y			Y		Y	
Case Study End Interview Questionnaire	Y	Y	Y	Y		Y		
Diary/blog	Y	Y						Declined
Dreadnought Report	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Questionnaire to Significant Others/ Referrers			Y	Y		Y		
Questionnaire to Key Workers	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

5.6 Observations on methodology

This research project set out to study the children/young people amongst Dreadnought's clients who were affected by domestic abuse and violence.

The assumption was that they could be identified as such at the point of referral.

In practice, however, domestic abuse and violence was not necessarily the main reason for a child's/young person's referral to Dreadnought, or even known about at that point.

Domestic abuse and violence in the family environment may only be disclosed *after* the children/young people have engaged with Dreadnought for a significant period.

This raised some interest points concerning partner agencies and referrals. There may be different factors at play here:

- The referring agent does not know that the child/young person is living in a household where there is domestic abuse?
- The referring agent does not link the significance of the impact of domestic abuse on a child / young person.

Whatever is happening at Dreadnought, whether that be the way they are working with young people or the questions they ask them or the environment they provide, it is only when getting to Dreadnought that the child/ young person has felt safe/ confident enough to disclose the life behind the abuse.

Recommendation 2: Dreadnought may need to consider how to challenge partner agencies when they do not seem to be making any link between the CYP's behaviour/ attitudes and the impact domestic violence may be having on them.

6 The hypotheses being tested

The hypotheses, associated research questions, findings and conclusions are each considered in turn.

6.1 How the work contributes to 'breaking-the-link'

Hypothesis

The hypothesis was that by engaging children/ young people in this work they would be enabled to find coping strategies and behaviours that meant that they would not repeat the behaviour they had learned by living in an abusive family: that is, they do not go on to become either a perpetrator or a victim.

Findings

Adele (7 ½) had little or no understanding on joining Dreadnought of the effects of her emotion on her behaviour and whether this was causing difficulties. She had no understanding of what might need to change or the consequences of not changing, though she hoped the project would help her.⁶ By the time of leaving, however, she had recognized how her emotions - being '*a bit scared*' - had affected her behaviour, and how Dreadnought had helped her become more confident, averting things getting worse. She felt that Dreadnought had helped her by giving her time for herself.⁷ At exit, Adele's social inclusion skills were judged to be better and she was '*less of a victim*'.⁸

At the time at which she started with Dreadnought, **Breanne (13 ¾)** recognized a link between her feelings and her negative behaviours and that changes needed to be made. She acknowledged the potential outcome if her behaviour or emotions did not change (causing '*unnecessary arguments*') and hoped that the project would help her deal better with her feelings.⁹ Her Key Worker noted at exit that Breanne had become more aware of how her behaviour could affect others and had started putting this knowledge into practice.¹⁰

At the start of his time with Dreadnought, **Alan (13 ½)** identified both behaviour that caused him difficulties (*'taking things home'*) and that his attitude to others' hurtful comments needed to change - without which, he recognized, the negativity in his life would continue. He hoped that the Dreadnought intervention would change his attitude and how he dealt with uncomfortable situations.¹¹ His Key Worker noted his initial habit

⁶ Case Study Start Interview Questionnaire

⁷ Case Study End Interview Questionnaire.

⁸ Questionnaire to Key Worker.

⁹ Case Study Start Interview Questionnaire.

¹⁰ Questionnaire to Key Worker.

¹¹ Case Study Start Interview Questionnaire.

of repeatedly apologizing and his apparent belief that he was always in the way.¹² By the end of his time with Dreadnought, while Alan was still having difficulties, they were fewer and he felt things had changed. He considered that he had become more confident – which he attributed to the project - and could *'let things go over [his] head'*. His Key Worker confirmed that he was more assertive and that his confidence and self-esteem had grown considerably.¹³

Gary (10) was referred to Dreadnought for issues around self-esteem and difficulties with communication. While his behaviour at school had been mostly manageable, his head teacher had considered exclusion.¹⁴ There are no Case Study Entry Questionnaire data for Gary, but his Key Worker noted at exit that progress had been slow. While Gary could be very aware of his actions - and often 'performed' to get a reaction - he had a *'don't care'* attitude over some issues and could be obstructive.¹⁵

David (12 ½) was referred because, having witnessed many incidents of domestic violence, he was afraid of his father, beginning to get angry and showing protective instincts for himself, his mother and his sisters. He felt at entry that his anger caused him difficulties and that change was needed in order not to get so angry. He saw the consequences of continuing unchanged as risking going to prison like his brother - which he did not want.¹⁶ Despite recognizing the benefit of some change, David seemed to have difficulty in *'hold[ing] on to the information'*.¹⁷

Brian (12) was referred to Dreadnought for work around boundaries and understanding the consequences of his behaviour as well as building up his self-esteem and learning that he need not get embarrassed for getting things wrong.¹⁸ He was in a generally very low state and noted on joining that he couldn't *'be bothered to change anything'*.¹⁹ Looking back at the time of leaving, Brian recognized that his behaviour had been *'really bad'* and that he had *'been able to change slowly'* and he realized *'that if it had continued, I would have been expelled from school.'* He considered that Dreadnought had allowed him to work on behavioural change so that he ended by understanding what acceptable behaviour was. He also noted that he was much happier at the end. External observation was that Brian had shown *'some improvement'* in behaviour.²⁰ His Key Worker noted at exit that Brian had made changes to his bullying behaviour with the result that he no longer frightened peers and therefore had acquired a handful of friends.²¹

Callum (10 ½) was referred for work on identity and aggression.²² Part of Callum's learned behaviour was to use highly abusive language when worried, upset or frustrated, which increased his risk of getting into trouble, especially at school.²³ He used Dreadnought to work on his use of inappropriate language. He also found being in foster care difficult, but ended up caring a great deal for his foster family. He recognized the changes in himself and that, without the intervention of social services, he might have got himself into serious trouble and not attended school on any regular basis.²⁴ By

¹² Questionnaire to Key Worker.

¹³ Questionnaire to Key Worker.

¹⁴ Confidential Referral Form.

¹⁵ Questionnaire to Key Worker.

¹⁶ Case Study Start Interview Questionnaire.

¹⁷ Questionnaire to Key Worker.

¹⁸ Confidential Referral Form.

¹⁹ Dreadnought Entry Questionnaire.

²⁰ Questionnaire to Significant Other/Referrer.

²¹ Questionnaire to Key Worker.

²² Confidential Referral Form.

²³ Dreadnought Report.

²⁴ Dreadnought Report.

exit, his behaviour was noted as having '*improved immensely*'. He was working well within boundaries, was happy, prepared to take responsibility for his actions, enjoying school and felt a great sense of achievement in his accomplishments.²⁵ While external observers noted that Callum had demonstrated a better *understanding* of the behavioural changes he needed to make to be able to cope and/or fit better with his peers and others, he still got into situations where he was accused of bullying (e.g., his brother and a girl via Facebook) and making racist comments.²⁶

Eric (15 ½) had suffered emotional and physical abuse from the perpetrator of domestic abuse and violence in his family. His mother, with whom he lived in a refuge at the point of joining Dreadnought, had issues resulting from regular use of cannabis. Eric had assumed a caring role for his younger brother (suspected autism spectrum disorder) which had affected his school attendance. He had been referred to Dreadnought in order to give him 'time out' from caring, to build his self-esteem and to help him acclimatize to the move out of the refuge. Eric opted into the case study group part-way through. As a result, there are no Case Study Start Interview data for him. Looking back, however, Eric considered that his behaviour/emotions had been causing him 'a *little*' difficulty at the point at which he joined Dreadnought. He considered that he had needed to talk, without which he would have internalized the issues, and that taking part in the project had helped him talk confidently.²⁷ External feedback at exit was that Eric, had gained in self-esteem and confidence as a consequence of the Dreadnought work and was more aware of the need to take time out for himself, but that this had proved difficult due to family demands, and that he still adopted the role of a carer.²⁸ His behaviour at home and school was in general good.²⁹

Conclusions

The hypothesis was that by engaging children/ young people in this work they would be enabled to find coping strategies and behaviours that meant that they would not repeat the behaviour they had learned by living in an abusive family.

The indications from the case studies are that Dreadnought's package can help 'break-the-link'.

In terms of helping children/young people develop and try **cop**ing strategies, this has not been straightforward for either Dreadnought or the children/young people. **Alan** noted, for example, that his strategy for dealing with bullies' comments worked some of the time; **Breanne**, sadly, noted that she had been discouraged from using her coping strategies after her mother made fun of her when she tried one of her techniques at home. Nonetheless, it is quite clear that the majority of children/young people left Dreadnought equipped with an understanding of the concept, some specific things to try and some degree of belief in the worth of the techniques. In terms of 'breaking-the-link', this, therefore, seems very positive.

Dreadnought has specifically helped children/young people identify **behaviours** that do not help them and there is evidence of children/young people both modifying their behaviour and recognizing some benefits. Sometimes the effect is explicit - by exit, for example, **Adele** had shown less tendency to being a victim.³⁰ Dreadnought, however, works in the real world and progress is by no means certain, steady or quick.

²⁵ Dreadnought Report.

²⁶ Questionnaire to Significant Other/Referrer.

²⁷ Case Study End Interview Questionnaire.

²⁸ Questionnaire to Key Worker.

²⁹ Questionnaire to Key Worker.

³⁰ Dreadnought Questionnaire to Key Workers

Despite recognizing the benefit of some change, **David** seemed, for example, to have difficulty 'hold[ing] on to the information'.³¹ And it is not clear, for instance, that any significant progress was made with **Gary** in terms of 'breaking-the-link' - but there are two points of interest here. First, he was very much in the minority (i.e., Dreadnought seems to facilitate positive change – albeit to different degrees – in the majority of individuals studied). Second, as we consider in the discussion of resilience later, it would be wrong to judge Dreadnought on only what it achieved within the lifetime of a twelve-week intervention, especially where it seeks to tackle such serious issues.

Research has shown that resilience can emerge at any point in the human life-cycle and, while it might be difficult to see how Dreadnought has had any effect on Gary at the point of his leaving early (he was recommended for further support but was removed back to family), it may well have opened (or, indeed, closed) his mind to the value of such interventions, which, in turn, might have a profound effect on how he behaves – and perpetuates or 'breaks the link' – in future.

It is interesting that opinions on the *degree* of improvement in clients seem to diverge, with Dreadnought Key Workers seeming more positive than outside observers (e.g., around **Callum's** degree of improvement in behaviour). This theme will emerge again and again as we consider the case studies.

One observer may be more 'right' than another, of course - or it could even be straightforward observer bias. However, it might also be a reflection of the observations being made in different *environments*. The Key Worker is observing the child/young person in the 'safe' environment of Dreadnought where, presumably, mutual trust, friendship, confidence and enjoyment is growing, and support - and intervention – is immediately available in high staff-to-client ratios. External observers (who may be reporting 'second hand' anyway, based on feedback from school) are, in contrast, presumably commenting on the child's/young person's behaviour 'in action' in the 'real' (and perhaps rather unwanted) world of refuges and classrooms where the child/young person is relatively unsupported in trying to practice their newfound skills and management is anyway 'by exception' (i.e., the child/young person may only come to notice because something negative happens). It may also be that external observers unaware of the impact and stress on a CYP living or having lived with domestic abuse, simply see difficult behaviour that needs to be better managed whereas Dreadnought sees an individual who needs to be understood. If this is the case, it highlights the need for assistance to help make changes 'stick' beyond the supportive world of Dreadnought, but in a way that avoids 'over-sheltering' which might inhibit the children's/young people's own coping mechanisms but also includes better educated referrers.

Recommendation 3: Dreadnought should consider ways that support can be provided for its clients beyond its own remit and boundaries (while being careful not to be 'over-sheltering' and, therefore, inhibiting the children's/young people's own coping mechanisms).

Clearly, only longitudinal tracking will actually show whether or not the children/young people with whom Dreadnought has worked manage in the medium- to long-term to avoid becoming perpetrators and/or victims of the types of behaviours that they have learned in abusive families.

Recommendation 4: Dreadnought should seek to track the children/young people with whom it has worked to establish whether and to what degree in the medium- to long-

³¹ Questionnaire to Key Worker.

term they become perpetrators and/or victims of the types of behaviours that they learned in abusive families.

This may need to be done in partnership with an academic institution/study.

6.2 How the work improves safety

The hypothesis

Young people living in families where there is domestic violence not only feel unsafe (scared and/or vulnerable), but are actually at risk of emotional and physical injury. The hypothesis was that, by engaging in this programme, young people would be able to identify where they feel unsafe and how they might employ strategies to make themselves safer.

Findings

Participating children/young people were explicitly asked how safe they felt in both the **Case Study Start** and **Case Study End Interview Questionnaires**, allowing any change to be tracked.

Unfortunately, while there are four completed **Case Study Start** and five completed **Case Study End Interview Questionnaires** for children/young people, only two are for the same individuals (**Adele** and **Alan**).³²

Adele felt safe at entry and at exit, but had nonetheless identified a strategy for feeling still safer.

There were mixed signals around **Alan** and safety. On joining Dreadnought, he reported feeling safe except at school (through bullying and people *'trying to cause problems'* for him)³³, but it was noted that he *'easily misinterpret[ed] normal childhood banter for bullying'*.³⁴ Meanwhile, he was subject to an Interim Supervision Order as a result of serious neglect and suffered peer comments about his mother's gay relationship - which on one occasion resulted in him punching another student in the classroom.³⁵ Combined, this suggests a less than safe situation for this young man. By exit, however, Dreadnought's intervention had addressed Alan's initial nervousness about *'most situations at school and at home'* by helping him develop strategies and become more able to approach people for help.³⁶ This was reflected in his notes about approaching school staff about being bullied.³⁷

Breanne reported that she felt safe at entry to Dreadnought³⁸ and, although we have no Case Study End Interview Questionnaire data for her, her Key Worker reported that she was *'already aware [of] how to keep safe, but ... opened up to asking for help'*.³⁹ It is worth noting, however, that Breanne was reported as having suicidal thoughts at the point of joining Dreadnought and was referred to the programme because she was not only the victim of bullying but had the ability to respond very angrily.

³² There are **Case Study Start Interview Questionnaires** for **David** and **Breanne**; and **Case Study End Interview Questionnaires** for **Brian**, **Callum** and **Eric**.

³³ **Case Study Start Interview Questionnaire**.

³⁴ **Confidential Referral Form**

³⁵ **Diary**.

³⁶ **Questionnaire to Key Worker**.

³⁷ **Diary**.

³⁸ **Case Study Start Interview Questionnaire**.

³⁹ **Questionnaire to Key Worker**.

At referral **Gary** was living with his aunt and uncle due to Child Protection issues. He was referred for reasons of self-esteem and difficulties with communication. While his behaviour at school was mostly manageable, his head teacher had considered exclusion. While *'progress was slow'* with Gary, it was considered by the time he left the intervention early that he knew when to take himself away from unsafe situations and would usually ask for help when he felt he could.⁴⁰

David reported feeling safe on entry to Dreadnought,⁴¹ but this contrasts with other evidence. Reasons for his referral to the programme included his fear of his father and his *'beginning to get angry and show protective instincts for himself, his mother and his sisters. He hasn't yet shown unhealthy interest in fire, but ... this project ... could be a useful preventative measure.'* By the end of the intervention, it was noted that David could *'find himself in some situations with peers that lead to trouble and [was] becoming more aware of the need to remove himself from them but [found] it very difficult.'*⁴²

At entry to Dreadnought, **Brian** implied that he felt safe – his comments were all about how the high quality of his foster care had helped him overcome his former fear of bed time and the night. His Key Worker felt that he was *'much more confident about being able to ask for help in general as well as when he feels unsafe'*. The feedback at exit from his foster care manager was that he had *'occasional blips [in his awareness of how to keep himself safe when with others], but [was] beginning to improve'*.

Although we lack information on **Callum's** original views on his safety when he joined Dreadnought, we know that at exit he considered that he was not safe because he had then been *'with unsafe people'*; that Dreadnought and his foster carers represented *'nicer people'*; that he felt that he had contributed to this improvement in safety by maturing; and that the consequences of his improved safety was better behaviour and relationships in school and with his foster carers.⁴³ This is supported by feedback from his foster care manager (Callum *'usually takes time out'*)⁴⁴ and his Key Worker (Callum *'has a greater awareness [of how to keep himself safe when with others] and accepts the consequences should he push his boundaries too far. [He] can still have trouble with [his] choice of friends, but will ask for help and talk about things.'*⁴⁵

Eric had suffered emotional and physical abuse from the perpetrator of domestic abuse and violence in his family. His mother, with whom he lived in a refuge at the point of joining Dreadnought, had issues resulting from regular use of cannabis. Although we lack information on Eric's original views of his safety when he joined Dreadnought, he reported later that he did not really feel safe at the outset because he was *'scared'*; that the project had helped him *'by listening'* and that being safer altered his behaviour *'a little'*.⁴⁶ The refuge reported that, at the end of the intervention, Eric was *'more aware of his own personal safety and [was] not easily influenced by peers – he knows when he feels uncomfortable and makes safe choices'*. His Key Worker reported that Eric had *'good, clear awareness of staying safe and not placing [himself] in dangerous situations ... [he] seems not to feel any pressure to follow peers in risky behaviour (i.e., smoking and drinking).'*⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Questionnaire to Key Worker.

⁴¹ Case Study Start Interview Questionnaire.

⁴² Questionnaire to Key Worker.

⁴³ Case Study End Interview Questionnaire.

⁴⁴ Questionnaire to Significant Other/Referrer.

⁴⁵ Questionnaire to Key Worker.

⁴⁶ Case Study End Interview Questionnaire.

⁴⁷ Questionnaire to Key Worker.

Conclusions

Safety is a complex construct and a relative situation – both to the children involved and others.

These children/young people have all witnessed domestic abuse and/or violence. In addition, some have themselves been victims of it (e.g., **Eric**).

It is striking, therefore, that five of the children/young people considered themselves safe at the point of entry to Dreadnought.

Looking at the starting hypothesis: yes, children/young people living in families where there is domestic violence *are*, logically, at risk of emotional and physical injury. It is also logical that they should feel unsafe (scared and/or vulnerable). However, at the point of entry to Dreadnought - if the responses to the questionnaires are anything to go by – this does not appear to be the case for the majority of them. There are many possible reasons for this. Safety is a relative condition and it may be that, by the time of Dreadnought's intervention, the children – removed in many cases to the care of fosterers, refuges and relatives - genuinely felt relatively safe. After all, the abnormal is normal for those who experience nothing else.

The hypothesis also assumed that safety in the *home* would be the preoccupation of such children/young people, but it is notable that **Alan** cited school as the place where he felt unsafe (through bullying) and school bullying appears to have been a major issue for **Breanne** who - having suicidal thoughts – may also have been her own greatest risk to her safety.

The hypothesis also focused on the safety of the children/young people *themselves*. From **Alan**'s punching a classmate, **David**'s anger and protective instincts causing enough concern for him to be referred to Dreadnought, **Brian**'s frightening his peers, and concern about **Breanne**'s angry retaliation to bullying, there is a case that these children/young people may themselves pose a hazard to the safety and well-being of others.

The starting hypothesis was that, by engaging in this programme, children/young people would be able to identify where they feel unsafe and how they might employ strategies to make themselves safer. There certainly seems to be evidence that the programme has helped children/young people do just this. Perhaps as importantly, however, the programme seems also to have been working at a step *before* this *by helping children/young people to first identify that what they considered 'safe' was probably not* and, therefore, identifying the *need* to devise strategies to make themselves safer.

6.3 How the programme educates & brings about change in behaviour on rights & roles

Hypothesis

The hypothesis was that young people living with domestic violence witness adult relationships based on the misuse of power and control and, typically, these are based on gender stereotypes of men controlling women. This can result in young people being unable to understand peer and future intimate relationships that do not mimic this dynamic. By engaging in this project, it was thought that the young person would be given an opportunity to learn about the individual rights, responsibilities and adult roles that are possible in non-abusive relationships and so would be empowered to change any of their existing behaviour, or avert any future behaviour by them, based on abusive dynamics.

Findings

Adele had little or no understanding at entry of her rights and responsibilities when interacting with other people. She identified that male/female roles in life were different – ‘*Mums wash up and Dads sit down.*’⁴⁸ By exit, she felt that the project had made a difference in how she felt about rights and responsibilities; that since attending the project she had noticed ‘*a bit*’ of a difference in her relationships; and that attending Dreadnought had changed her views on the roles of males and females ‘*a bit*’.⁴⁹ This change had arguably been demonstrated by her ‘*quite good empathy skills towards others*’.⁵⁰

Breanne had some understanding of her rights when interacting with others (e.g., to privacy and confidentiality) and a clear understanding of her responsibility to not upset others with comments (to which she was prone). While she appeared at entry not to understand the question about whether she believed that the genders had difference roles in life, her Key Worker felt that Breanne had a better understanding after the intervention.⁵¹

Alan had quite an advanced sense of rights and roles at the point at which he joined Dreadnought. He recognized that he had the same rights as others (though this seemed to be rather hypothetical due to his lack of assertiveness) and that he was responsible for his own actions and attitudes. His perception was that the genders should be treated equally and with equal respect. By the end of the intervention, however, he felt that he was more assertive and knew *what* his rights and responsibilities were (rather than just knowing that he should have some); and that his relationships with others were ‘*more cheerful and relaxed*’ since attending the project. While he felt that the project had changed the way he felt about boys/girls and men’s women’s roles, his explanation did not really suggest that his initial - very positive – understanding was actually much enhanced.⁵²

Alan’s Key Worker reported that they had had quite in-depth discussions regarding his rights and responsibilities, trying to establish that he had as much right to be at Dreadnought as anyone else and it was felt that he had more awareness of what his rights were by the end and *how* he should respect those of others.

By his early exit, some progress seems to have been made with **Gary** who was reported as still being ‘*a little insensitive and not bothered with other people’s feelings at times*’, but ‘*gradually taking on board his responsibilities and [the ability to] express himself more*’.⁵³

David struggled ‘*to take on board responsibility for some of his actions when with some peers ... [and could] find himself easily led, which can put him in bad situations*’.⁵⁴

At the end of the intervention, **Brian** acknowledged that he had new knowledge of his basic rights and responsibilities and that he had acquired friends whilst at Dreadnought

⁴⁸ Case Study Start Interview Questionnaire.

⁴⁹ Case Study End Interview Questionnaire.

⁵⁰ Questionnaire to Key Worker.

⁵¹ Questionnaire to Key Worker.

⁵² Case Study End Interview Questionnaire.

⁵³ Questionnaire to Key Worker.

⁵⁴ Questionnaire to Key Worker.

(he had specifically noted on entry that he did not really play with others).⁵⁵ While he considered that his mother still let him down, he knew that she had *'problems'*. Brian had also become *'particularly mindful of younger children'* by the time he ended the first intervention with Dreadnought, had been elected to the School Council⁵⁶ and was *'much more responsible about his actions and the consequences when with others (e.g., saying he is sorry and meaning it has helped him keep his new friends).'*⁵⁷

Although *'generally ... a polite and caring young man,'* **Callum's** language at entry to the programme was at times very inappropriate – including racist and homophobic comments – but he worked on this and it was clear that he understood the consequences.⁵⁸ At the end of Dreadnought's first intervention, he felt that he knew more than he did at the outset about his rights and responsibilities; that his relationships had improved; and that he had acquired lots of good friends. For all this, he still got into situations where he was accused of bullying (e.g., his brother and a girl via Facebook) and making racist comments and was considered to have had very mixed understanding/practice of rights and responsibilities.⁵⁹ This contrasts somewhat with his Key Worker's feedback that he had *'a far greater grasp of his own responsibilities ... than when [he] first attended ... and takes other people's feelings into account in a positive way and with good understanding.'*

Eric noted at exit that the project had made no difference to his understanding of his rights and responsibilities,⁶⁰ which had generally seem advanced at the point at which he joined. His Key Worker considered at his exit that he was an *'intelligent young man aware of his responsibilities ... [who] listens well to his peers, recognizing his own and their feelings.'*⁶¹

Conclusions

The hypothesis was that young people living with domestic violence witness adult relationships based on the misuse of power and control and, typically, these are based on gender stereotypes of men controlling women. The truth of this in this case study group is probably borne out by **Adele's** observations at entry on the role of the genders. Likewise, the change in her views after the intervention demonstrates that, yes, Dreadnought can clearly help some children/young people broaden their understanding of gender roles.

Even in this small sample, there is some evidence to support the worry of the hypothesis that young people, as a result of their skewed experience, may be unable to understand peer and future intimate relationships that do not mimic the unequal dynamics of abuse. **Alan's** reported *'over sensitivity'* to *'normal childhood banter'* may, for example, be indicative of this. In his experience of relationships, what others consider *'banter'* may be the precursor to worse. Or it may be that, on top of issues around his family, his tolerance of *'banter'* is simply low. Whatever the reason, Alan's family experience seems undoubtedly to have affected his other relationships. **Callum's** abusive verbal outbursts when anxious or frustrated are also attributed by a Key Worker at one point to *'learned behaviour'*.

The hypothesis further argued that, by engaging in this project, the child/young person would be given an opportunity to learn about the individual rights, responsibilities and

⁵⁵ **Dreadnought Entry Questionnaire.**

⁵⁶ **Questionnaire to Significant Other/Referrer.**

⁵⁷ **Questionnaire to Key Worker.**

⁵⁸ **Dreadnought Report.**

⁵⁹ **Questionnaire to Significant Other/Referrer.**

⁶⁰ **Case Study End Interview Questionnaire.**

⁶¹ **Questionnaire to Key Worker.**

adult roles that are possible in non-abusive relationships and so be empowered to change any of their existing behaviour, or avert any future behaviour by them, based on abusive dynamics.

As might be expected, the children/young people arrived with very different levels of understanding of their rights and responsibilities. Many expressly said that their understanding had improved by the time they came to leave, suggesting that the Dreadnought intervention is successful in this respect. Some, however – such as **Alan** and **Eric** – had quite developed egalitarian views from the outset, and it should perhaps be remembered, when focusing on the potential of these children/young people to be perpetrators of abusive dynamics, that their own experiences may actually be a powerful ‘deterrent’ to such behaviour. Feedback from his Key Worker stated that **Brian**, for example, regularly expressed the desire to *not* be like his own parents when he had a family. So while the Dreadnought intervention may have bolstered **Eric**’s pre-existing views – which is good, of course - it is not really clear from the records that it did much more than that for him. But while the same could be suggested for **Alan**, it is interesting to note that Dreadnought empowered him to begin to make his slightly theoretical understanding of personal rights a bit more practical – not least by helping him internalize his own rights and be a bit more assertive in getting them – and in giving him a practical understanding of *how* to respect the rights of others.

That the Dreadnought intervention works in ameliorating the behaviour of children/young people is well evidenced (e.g., **Brian**’s noted improved mindfulness of younger children). That a twelve-week intervention may not necessarily be enough to make a great deal of progress is shown by the continuing problems with **Gary**’s and **Callum**’s behaviour.

As noted earlier, once again, opinions on the *degree* of improvement of clients’ behaviour seem to diverge, with Dreadnought Key Workers seeming consistently more positive than outside observers (e.g., around **Callum**’s degree of improvement in behaviour towards others).

6.4 How the programme helps the individual begin to make healthy relationships

Hypothesis

The hypothesis was that children/young people in families where there is domestic violence experience difficulties making healthy relationships due to the need to keep the secret, the inability to have peers in their own home, the inability to socialize (as they need to be in the home to protect other family members), and the fear of repercussions from the perpetrator. By engaging in the project, the idea was that children/young people would be given the opportunity to learn about healthy relationships and how to develop these for themselves.

Findings

Adele’s primary concerns on entering the Dreadnought programme were not her relationships with friends, but her burdens around family (her father was in prison and her mother trying to combat substance abuse).⁶² It is noticeable, however, that after the Dreadnought experience she felt much happier, rated her happiness with friends more positively and included her aunty and people at school amongst her sources of support.⁶³ At the outset, Adele was reported as not knowing the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships. By the end of her time with Dreadnought, she was

⁶² Dreadnought Confidential Referral Form and Dreadnought Entry Questionnaire.

⁶³ Dreadnought Exit Questionnaire.

reported as having had developed some understanding of the difference (*'kind of'*, in her words) and had applied this in relationships with others, including better relationships within her family.⁶⁴ She no longer believed *'all women do housework and men sit around and do nothing'* and understood, and was *'working on tolerance'*, in relationships.⁶⁵

Breanne's relationships were very unhealthy at the point of entry to the Dreadnought programme. She was *'very low'*, with suicidal thoughts, the victim of bullying and given to angry retaliation when pushed too far.⁶⁶ Her specific aims were to be able to deal with her anger and to socialize better. When she joined, she reported falling out with her family, falling out a lot with her friends and having few close friends.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, she felt that mutual respect was important in relationships.⁶⁸ By the time of leaving, although Breanne felt less happy overall about her family, she reported getting on better with them; and she recorded a two-point improvement in her rating of her happiness with her friends (i.e., from below average to above average).⁶⁹ Her Key Worker reported that she *'had worked'* on relationships.⁷⁰

At entry, **Alan** was recorded as having experienced victimization and exclusion for many years and to be lacking many social skills expected at his age. He also seemed unable to define friendships.⁷¹ He recorded feeling happy about his family (scoring this the maximum of seven) and friends (scoring four out of seven),⁷² but it is also noted that he showed false confidence. By the time Alan left, his happiness around friends had increased (six out of the maximum of seven) and he noted feeling *'a lot better about myself – more confidence, and can cope easier with troublemakers.'*⁷³ At entry to the programme, Alan recognized the difference between unhealthy relationships (based on control) and healthy ones (based on respect). When asked if he had noticed any change in his family since the Dreadnought experience, he noted that his mother considered that he had become *'more upbeat and assertive.'*⁷⁴ In discussing how he felt about the domestic violence he had witnessed, Alan said that he had felt guilty, but had been helped to recognize that he was not responsible for the choices the adults in his life made for themselves. An indication of Dreadnought's success lies in the fact that Alan began to apologize less and accept that he was not *'in the way'* and had a right to be at Dreadnought. While his Key Worker reported that he finished the intervention with *'a much better understanding of what makes a healthy relationship'*, it is not clear from the records that this *understanding* varied much from his view at entry; what was clearly different was that he had *acquired the techniques to implement practical changes* based on this theoretical understanding.

At referral, **Gary's** behaviour at school, while *'mostly manageable'* had caused his head teacher to consider exclusion.⁷⁵ While he considered he was happy about his family, he considered friendships just *'alright'* (scoring his happiness in this respect just above average at four out of seven). He needed support with communication so that he could engage with those around him, but was reluctant to engage with this aspect of the

⁶⁴ **Dreadnought Exit Questionnaire.**

⁶⁵ **Questionnaire to Key Worker.**

⁶⁶ **Confidential Referral Form.**

⁶⁷ **Dreadnought Entry Questionnaire.**

⁶⁸ **Case Study Start Interview Questionnaire.**

⁶⁹ **Dreadnought Exit Questionnaire.**

⁷⁰ **Questionnaire to Key Worker.**

⁷¹ **Confidential Referral Form.**

⁷² **Dreadnought Entry Questionnaire.**

⁷³ **Dreadnought Exit Questionnaire.**

⁷⁴ **Dreadnought Exit Questionnaire.**

⁷⁵ **Confidential Referral Form.**

programme.⁷⁶ Gary's understanding of healthy and unhealthy relationships at entry is not known. At his early exit it was noted that he had *understanding* of what was required for healthy relationships, but found *putting it into practice* difficult at times.⁷⁷

Reasons for **David's** referral to the programme included his continuing *'to be afraid of his father, and ... beginning to get angry and show protective instincts for himself, his mother and his sisters. He hasn't yet shown unhealthy interest in fire, but ... this project ... could be a useful preventative measure.'*⁷⁸ David recognized that his anger got him into trouble – as it had done his brother - and wanted to avoid ending up in prison like him. By the end of the intervention, it was noted that **David** could understand *'the need to respect others and be aware of his own behaviour'*, but that he could *'fail to put [this] into practice at times'*.⁷⁹

Part of the reason for **Brian's** referral to Dreadnought was the need to help him set boundaries on, and identify the consequences of, his behaviour.⁸⁰ He scored himself just one out of a possible seven for his feelings about friends, noting that he did not have any and, elsewhere, that he did not really play with others.⁸¹ By exit, he scored a maximum seven for feelings about friends⁸² and was noted to be happy in his foster placement, getting on well with his foster brother but having some difficulties with his feelings for his brother, Callum. He had mixed feelings about visiting his mother at Christmas; he worried about the risk of his parents abusing multiple substances; and he became very angry at being let down by her on prearranged visits. Brian respected the boundaries set for him.⁸³ By exit, Brian had noticed that he had changed, even though he considered that his mother and father had not. Outside parties considered that Brian had shown *'some improvement'* in understanding healthy and unhealthy relationships.⁸⁴ Feedback from his Key Worker stated that Brian regularly expressed the desire not to be like his own parents when he had a family, always exhibiting compassion on the subject.

Brian's younger brother **Callum** was referred to Dreadnought for work around identity and aggression.⁸⁵ He felt *'OK'* about friends, scoring his happiness with this at six out of a possible seven.⁸⁶ This dropped a little to five at his first exit from the programme, but picked up again at his second exit. Callum struggled with divided loyalties between his mother and his foster carers and at times took his frustration out on his brother. When he was upset, his use of abusive language increased. Callum felt that his understanding of what made healthy and unhealthy relationships had changed over his time on the programme and that he had managed to put this into practice outside the project. He could not really comment on any change in his family since attending the project as he had not seen much of them. External observers noted some change in this area;⁸⁷ his Key Worker recorded at the end of the intervention that Callum was *'positive in his relationships with others, [had a] good circle of friends and seems popular with peers.'*

Eric was positive about friends at start and finish of the programme. He reported that there had been a change in the way he understood healthy and unhealthy relationships since he attended the Dreadnought programme; that he had applied this knowledge

⁷⁶ Dreadnought Report.

⁷⁷ Questionnaire to Key Worker.

⁷⁸ Dreadnought Confidential Referral Form.

⁷⁹ Questionnaire to Key Worker.

⁸⁰ Dreadnought Confidential Referral Form.

⁸¹ Dreadnought Entry Questionnaire.

⁸² Dreadnought Exit Questionnaire.

⁸³ Dreadnought Report.

⁸⁴ Questionnaire to Significant Other/Referrer.

⁸⁵ Dreadnought Confidential Referral Form.

⁸⁶ Dreadnought Entry Questionnaire.

⁸⁷ Questionnaire to Significant Other/Referrer.

beyond Dreadnought ;and that he had noticed ‘a little’ change in his family since attending the project.⁸⁸ While appreciating the refuge and making the most of its opportunities, he found the enforced close proximity with his family stifling and the inability to live a normal teenage life frustrating.⁸⁹ The external observation was that Eric was more aware at exit of ‘*what makes healthy relationships – open communication, honesty, respectfulness ... has done more work on anger management and talks things through more.*’⁹⁰ This was reinforced by his Key Worker’s observations that Eric had ‘a good grasp of *what is needed for a healthy relationship ... [he] will talk of respect and understanding.*’⁹¹

Conclusions

Dreadnought provides ‘safe’ space for children/young people to work through issues and one area is their understanding of healthy relationships. Their degree of understanding at entry of what makes for healthy relationships clearly varies enormously, but nearly all children/young people reported an improved understanding and that they had made some degree of use of this new knowledge beyond Dreadnought. The transformative effect was sometimes startling: **Brian**, for example, going from no friends to a group of good friends during the programme; for others, such as **Callum**, the opportunity to influence family dynamics was constrained by the relative scarcity of contact.

As with other factors, some of the external judgements of change are less positive than those of Key Workers. This, again, may be bias or it may reflect the observations being made in different environments. Either way, while there might be disagreement on the *degree*, all observations agree that *positive change took place* amongst those clients reported on. So, by engaging in the project, children/young people have been given the opportunity to learn about healthy relationships and how to develop these for themselves – and they have clearly done so with some effect.

The hypothesis was that children/young people in families where there is domestic violence experience difficulties making healthy relationships due to the need to keep the secret, the inability to have peers in their own home, the inability to socialize (as they need to be in the home to protect other family members), and the fear of repercussions from the perpetrator. While not contesting this basic hypothesis, this study perhaps qualifies it. Yes, it is probable that children/young people in families where there is domestic violence experience difficulties making healthy relationships for the reasons stated. However, these case studies suggest that some of the *solutions* to living with domestic abuse and violence may also contribute to causing similar problems.

For example, while **Eric** – ‘a bright’ and ‘very caring young man’⁹² clearly appreciated the value and support of the women’s refuge, he nonetheless found it very difficult not having a room of his own, not being able to have friends to stay over, etc. Even when this changed after his family relocated, he found it difficult to relinquish his ‘parental/caring’ role and become an unencumbered teenager. In a similar way, foster care ‘solved’ the needs of brothers **Brian** and **Callum** at one level, but triggered feelings of disloyalty and contributed to sibling tension at another level.

Supporting the hypothesis, Dreadnought seems to afford these children/young people valuable recuperation time by providing supported, protected ‘time out’ from the abusive domestic situation. However, it does more. It provides just the same supported ‘time

⁸⁸ Case Study End Interview Questionnaire.

⁸⁹ Dreadnought Report.

⁹⁰ Questionnaire to Significant Other/Referrer.

⁹¹ Questionnaire to Key Worker.

⁹² Confidential Referral Form and Dreadnought Report.

out' from the 'solutions' which appear very challenging to many of these children/young people.

On a methodological note, it seems very challenging - however skilfully done – to ask quite young children (e.g., seven-year-old **Adele**) if they understand the difference between healthy and an unhealthy relationships and, if so, to explain the difference.

6.5 Factors that may have increased the young person's resilience to adverse situations

Hypothesis

The hypothesis was that domestic abuse can adversely affect children and young people and can result in them developing symptoms of mental distress and poor resilience to adverse situations. Making connections to supportive adults and networks was thought to enable a young person to develop their resilience and so enable them to positively adapt and develop in the context of significant adversity. By developing a relationship with Dreadnought and a mentor, children and young people were expected to develop a more positive response to stress and become more hopeful and optimistic about their lives.

In this project, improved resilience in children/young people was defined as their being positively affected by their connection to supportive adults, networks and community resources. However, this study has delved a bit deeper than this and has been able to qualify it further.

Findings

Adele was referred to Dreadnought specifically to support her emotional wellbeing. She was being looked after by her aunt and uncle while her father was in prison and her mother trying to combat substance abuse.⁹³ She was burdened and worried about her family and confused by the loss of her home and family.⁹⁴ At entry, she was worried about the future (she scored just three out of a possible seven on her happiness about the future).⁹⁵ Feelings about family and friends improved markedly after the intervention and she reported being generally much happier.⁹⁶ She used her time at Dreadnought to build up a support network, a 'first aid kit' of things to make her feel better when needed and some good coping strategies.⁹⁷ Adele had no apparent understanding of stress at entry.⁹⁸ By exit, however, she identified that her stress levels were lower (indicating that she had acquired some understanding of the issue). She seems to have developed an understanding of stressors (e.g., her mother turning up late, or not at all, for visits), identified an improvement (*'not getting so annoyed'*) and clear coping strategies (having people with whom she could talk) to deal with stress or frustration. Adele's feelings about the future improved (her score rising from three to four out of seven) over the duration of the intervention.

Although **Breanne** did not comment on stress levels at the beginning of her time with Dreadnought, she identified others' *'rude, mean behaviour'* as a stressor and listed strategies for coping, some of which were fairly unconstructive (such as *'taking it out on*

⁹³ Confidential Referral Form.

⁹⁴ Dreadnought Report.

⁹⁵ Dreadnought Entry Questionnaire.

⁹⁶ Dreadnought Exit Questionnaire.

⁹⁷ Dreadnought Report.

⁹⁸ Dreadnought Entry Questionnaire.

other people' and 'shouting a lot'). At exit, it was noted that Breanne realized, felt and understood her feelings better and was, sometimes, better able to put coping strategies into place. Breanne scored her feelings about the future as a consistent and positive five out of seven throughout the Dreadnought intervention.

Alan scored his feelings about the future at the maximum seven at the beginning of the intervention and this dropped back to six (he was 'a bit nervous') at exit. This apparently negative trend may not, however, be as bad as it first appears as he was characterized as having an initial unrealistic bravado. At the end of the intervention, he specifically commented that he felt better about himself, more confident and more able to deal with troublemakers.⁹⁹ At entry to the programme, Alan identified stress in and after school and some active coping strategies (e.g., he sought to distract himself, try to have fun and put it out of his mind, but sometimes needed someone with whom to talk).¹⁰⁰ At exit, he felt that he was far less inclined to stress, had a better idea of what made him stressed and had changed his strategies for coping with stress 'by taking things as they come' with the result that he felt 'good' about the future.¹⁰¹

Gary was relatively positive about the future when he arrived with Dreadnought, rating it six out of the possible seven. We do not, however, have a score for this aspect at his early exit and it was noted that he had trouble both identifying his triggers and stopping himself from reacting negatively – but he understood that this needed more work.¹⁰²

David was relatively optimistic about the future when he joined Dreadnought, scoring it four out of a possible seven and commenting 'OK'.¹⁰³ As with Gary, we do not have a score for this aspect at exit. At entry, he identified school as a cause of stress, and his strategies for dealing with stress included 'punching the walls' and going to his room.¹⁰⁴ By exit, David was noted as being able to identify his stressors, but struggled at times to put into practice things that he knew would help him. It was noted that he was better in some situations than others.¹⁰⁵

Brian's progress was remarkable. His feelings about the future improved from six to a maximum seven over the course of the intervention.¹⁰⁶ While on the face of it just a small positive shift, this needs to be seen in context. At entry, Brian's optimism for the future seemed to hinge on his ambitions to be a fire-fighter and are notable for their positivity in an array of otherwise bleak scores (on entry, he scored his feelings about himself at the minimum possible of one, noting 'I'm useless'; his feelings about his family scored just two out of seven; and feelings about school and friends - 'I don't have any' - scored the minimum of one). He progressed from not being bothered about changing anything to wanting to do better at school. He felt a lot calmer at the end of the programme, but attributed this in part to 'all the things that were bad' having 'melted away'. He considered that he no longer lashed out uncontrollably at others as he valued their friendship. He recognized that he was 'not always nice though' and sometimes wanted to punch, but usually coped by crying instead, something which he had never done much of before but had found himself sometimes unable to stop.¹⁰⁷ External observation was that he had shown 'some improvements' in understanding his stressors

⁹⁹ Dreadnought Exit Questionnaire.

¹⁰⁰ Case Study Start Interview Questionnaire.

¹⁰¹ Case Study End Interview Questionnaire.

¹⁰² Questionnaire to Key Worker.

¹⁰³ Dreadnought Entry Questionnaire.

¹⁰⁴ Case Study Start Interview Questionnaire.

¹⁰⁵ Questionnaire to Key Worker.

¹⁰⁶ Dreadnought Start Questionnaire and Dreadnought Exit Questionnaire.

¹⁰⁷ Case Study End Interview Questionnaire.

and how to cope with them.¹⁰⁸ Key Worker feedback at exit noted that Brian had always found it hard to recognize his stressors and that while he still lashed out now and again, latterly he more usually cried.

Callum was fairly positive about the future when he joined Dreadnought, scoring his feelings at five out of seven. This view held steady at his first exit from the programme, but rose to a very positive six out of seven at his second exit (because, he considered, he was doing well in school).¹⁰⁹ At exit, he was *'much happier and settled'*.¹¹⁰ He considered himself less stressed at the end of the intervention, recognized that the home situation was a stressor and that he coped much better with the stress since attending the programme, by walking or running somewhere and by getting away from the situation. He felt *'good'* and *'positive'* about the future.¹¹¹ The external feedback was that he still tended to internalize things and then had outbursts (e.g., of racist comments in class). His Key Worker noted that at exit Callum was using Dreadnought to talk openly about issues that might affect him and *took on board what he heard back*. He had become a lot calmer now that boundaries had been put in place for him.¹¹²

Eric's feeling about the future grew from a positive score of five to a still more positive six out of seven over the lifetime of the Dreadnought intervention. He did not feel stressed at the end of the programme and felt that he had a better idea of his stressors and had changed the ways he coped with stress *'a little'* since attending the programme. He felt *'positive'* about the future.¹¹³ External feedback was that Eric had not made much progress at realizing that he needed sleep, but had recognized that he needed space and free time away from his family to think - but had not acted on it. The move to a home that offered him his own room and the opportunity to revert to being a normal teenager resulted in him having to relinquish the role of 'man of the house', which Eric had found difficult.

Conclusions

The hypothesis was that, by developing a relationship with Dreadnought and a mentor, children/young people would develop a more positive response to stress and become more hopeful and optimistic about their lives.

In these terms, Dreadnought has clearly been successful.

There is plenty of evidence that the children/young people who did not recognize stress at the outset did so by the end of the intervention. Most were able to identify their stressors, though for some (e.g., **Brian**) this was more difficult than for others. Most children/young people reported being less stressed at exit and having developed some specific strategies for dealing with stress (e.g., **Callum's** walking or running and **Alan's** *'taking things as they come'*). However, recognizing stressors and knowing what they should do about them did not always translate into action (e.g., **David's** and **Eric's** struggles to put into practice things that they knew would help them).

The **Dreadnought Start** and **Exit Questionnaires** asked the children/young people to attach a score to how they felt about themselves and their futures.

¹⁰⁸ Questionnaire to Significant Other/Referrer.

¹⁰⁹ Dreadnought Entry Questionnaire and Dreadnought Exit Questionnaires.

¹¹⁰ Dreadnought Report.

¹¹¹ Case Study End Interview Questionnaire.

¹¹² Questionnaire to Key Worker.

¹¹³ Case Study End Interview Questionnaire.

In support of Dreadnought succeeding in helping make children/young people more positive about themselves, four of the six children (67%) for whom we have 'start' and 'end' scores for their feelings about themselves showed improvements. Of the two who did not, they registered an unchanged score on entry and at exit. **Alan** – noted by Dreadnought workers for his bravado - registered a debatable maximum seven at both start and exit; and **Eric** rated his happiness with himself at exit at five, unchanged from that on entry. So, to Dreadnought's credit, no-one appears to have left feeling *less* happy about him- or herself than at their entry to the programme. Even if this positive trend is interpreted as an element of wishing to please, the fact that users wanted to reward the programme with good feedback might suggest that they recognise its intentions, itself an accolade.

In some cases the improvement was striking. The deeply unhappy **Breanne** (scoring two-and-half at entry) and **Brian** (scoring one at entry) showed dramatic improvements. Breanne scored three-and-a-half at exit, while Brian scored the maximum of seven. The latter suggests a remarkable turnaround in this young person's life – an effect mirrored in other domains, too.

In terms of optimism about their lives, the Dreadnought intervention likewise generally seems to have enhanced the clients' positivity. Of six children/young people who provided a score at exit, four (67%) showed *improved* scores. Of the others, **Breanne** remained a quite positive five out of a possible seven throughout. **Alan**, however, was unique in being *less* positive about the future at the point of leaving. It was only a one-point drop from the maximum possible to a still very positive six, so one is tempted to wonder whether the Dreadnought support may, in fact, have introduced some realism into his perceptions.

7 Further Observations on Resilience

7.1 Does Dreadnought attract resilient children/young people?

The feelings that the participating children/young people had about themselves and their futures both improved, generally speaking, over the period of the Dreadnought intervention. What is striking, however, is the baseline from which they improved.

One might have expected that children at the point of entry to Dreadnought would have a low rating of themselves. In fact, quite the opposite seems true. Of the eight children scoring their feelings about themselves, six (75%) rated themselves above the 'neutral' score of 3.5. (The other two, **Breanne** and **Brian** - who scored less than averagely happy about themselves at entry -registered very low scores. This suggests deep unhappiness at that stage of their lives – which one might have expected - as was corroborated by some very negative comments that they made about themselves in that section of the questionnaire, e.g., *'I am useless'*.)

In a similar way, when asked at entry to Dreadnought to score their feelings about the future, only one of eight responding children/young people scored *less* than an average 3.5 (and then, at three, only just).

Taking these findings together, and without wishing to detract from Dreadnought's clear ability to improve its clients' optimism, it is striking how many children/young people *were* positive about both themselves and their future on arrival (even though some were simultaneously recording low scores for other aspects of their lives).

These questions were posed to obtain snapshots of the children's/young people's overall 'mood' at entry, but, of course, such scoring might be heavily influenced at the moment of reporting. Did the very fact of starting at Dreadnought, for example, give them a 'lift', making them appear happier than one might have expected from the circumstances of their referrals. Or does Dreadnought have some other sort of immediate effect? Or are the children/young people who make it to, and stay on, the programme naturally positive? If so, what 'selection' mechanism is working?

As positivity is a feature of resilience, do these findings suggest that these children/young people are actually particularly resilient *on arrival*? In contrast, are those children/young people – such as **Gary** - who elected not to continue perhaps less resilient? Is there a suggestion that one needs to be fairly resilient to stick with the Dreadnought programme - which will then make one more resilient?

Much of the emphasis of Dreadnought's work is on 'resilience' – at least part of which is showing optimism in the face of adversity. These generally positive starting scores suggest that the children may already be exhibiting resilience and/or that engagement with Dreadnought immediately increased their sense of happiness with themselves and their future. It would be interesting to explore the possibility that children engage with Dreadnought *because* they already possess a degree of resilience at that point.

Recommendation 5: it may be worth asking the referring agency/agent to assess the child before they actually make first contact with Dreadnought to ensure that the first contact is not biasing their response to their current situation and feelings.

Before considering Dreadnought's mechanisms for, and effectiveness at, building resilience in children/young people, we should perhaps consider precisely what we mean by the term.

7.2 What do we mean by resilience?

Resilience is positive adaptation in the face of severe adversities.¹¹⁴

It refers to the positive ability of people to respond to stress, but also to show 'hope and optimism in the face of adversity'.¹¹⁵ Resilience is broadly understood as positive adaptation in circumstances where difficulties – personal, emotional or environmental – are so extreme that we would expect a person's cognitive or functional abilities to be impaired.^{116 117 118 119 120} As a concept, it appears to cross national and cultural

¹¹⁴ Newman, T., Yates, T. M., Masten, A. S. 2004. *What works in building resilience?* Barnardo's ISBN 1 904659 02 0, p3.

¹¹⁵ Rutter, M (1987) Psychosocial resilience and protective mechanisms, *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry* 57: pp316-331.

¹¹⁶ Rutter, M. 1985. *Resilience in the face of adversity: protective factors and resistance to psychiatric disorders*, *British Journal of Psychiatry* 147: pp589-611.

¹¹⁷ Garmezy, N. 1983. Stressors of childhood. In Garmezy, N. and Rutter, M. (eds) *Stress, coping and development in children*. McGraw-Hill, New York.

¹¹⁸ Garmezy, N. 1985. Stress-resistant children: the search for protective factors. In Stevenson, J (ed) *Recent research in developmental psychology, Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry (suppl 4)*. Pergamon Press, Oxford.

¹¹⁹ Garmezy, N. 1991. Resilience in children's adaptation to negative life events and control stressed environments, *Paediatric Annals* 20: 459-466.

¹²⁰ Masten, A.S., Coatsworth, J.D. 1998. The development of competence in favorable and unfavorable environments. *American Psychologist* 53(2): pp205-220.

boundaries¹²¹ being understood as the capacity to resist or 'bounce back' from adversity (as in the Latin, *resiliens*, referring to the elasticity or pliability of a substance).

The International Resilience Project, which surveyed over 600 children aged eleven years from 30 countries described resilience as 'a universal capacity which allows a young person, group or community to prevent, minimize or overcome the damaging effects of adversity.'¹²²

So we can expect a resilient child to **resist adversity, cope with uncertainty and recover more successfully from traumatic events or episodes**. However, it is important to understand that resilience is not just an individual character trait which children may or may not be lucky enough to have.¹²³

Further, in appraising interventions, we need to be realistic in our expectations - no child is, or can be made, invulnerable to emotional or physiological stress. Where adversities are continuous and extreme, and not moderated by factors external to the child, resilience will be very rare.^{124 125}

Moreover, while it seems intuitive that a resilient child should be recognizable by being well-adjusted and happy, this is not the case. Resilience is complex – children and young people may, for example, be behaviourally competent but not emotionally so. 'Stress resistant' children may, in fact, still be troubled. For some people, resilience may be evidenced by the absence of delinquent and/or anti-social behaviour. A socially withdrawn, non-offending youth might, therefore, be described as resilient by a youth justice worker. A psychiatrist, however, might well regard exactly the same person as emotionally disturbed.¹²⁶

So we can see immediately that external observers' reports that there are sometimes only slight improvements in clients' behaviour – far from suggesting that Dreadnought is not making much progress – may actually have very little, if anything, to do with whether or not the intervention is improving their *resilience*. Put simply, 'survivors' may not necessarily be pleasant.

Given the short time span of this study, it is difficult to see how improved resilience might actually be demonstrated. 'Success' is often measured in terms of subjects meeting expected developmental tasks, or by symptom relief and problem reduction. Assessments tend to address developmentally appropriate comments on competence

¹²¹ Hunter, A.J. 2001. A cross-cultural comparison of resilience in adolescents, *Journal of Pediatric Nursing* 16(3): pp172-179.

¹²² Grotberg, E. 1997. *A guide to promoting resilience in children: strengthening the human spirit*. Bernard van Leer Foundation, The Hague.

¹²³ Luthar, S.S. (ed) 2003. *Resilience and vulnerability: adaptation in the context of childhood adversities*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

¹²⁴ Cicchetti, D., Rogosch, F. 1997. The role of self-organisation in the promotion of resilience in maltreated children, *Development and Psychopathology* 9:pp 797-815.

¹²⁵ Runyan, D., Hunter, W., Socolar, R., Amaya-Jackson, L., English, D., Landsverk, J., Dubowitz, H., Browne, D., Bangdiwala, S., Mathew, R. 1998. Children who prosper in unfavourable environments: the relationship to social capital, *Pediatrics*, 101 (1, Pt. 1): pp12-18.

¹²⁶ Rayner, M., Montague, M. 2000. *Resilient children and young people. a discussion paper based on a review of the international research literature*. Policy and Practice Research Unit, Children's Welfare Association of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia.

(e.g., school achievement or positive peer relationships), assets and adaptive capacities, along with symptoms, risks and deficits.¹²⁷

In appraising the effect of Dreadnought's intervention, it is also important to note that, while children's experiences in early years are crucial, it seems that *resilience can emerge at any period in the life cycle*, given the necessary encouragement¹²⁸ - so Dreadnought's intervention is not a 'one shot' opportunity (though this is obviously not a reason *not* to seek maximum positive impact as early as possible). So, even if the Dreadnought experience initially may have 'failed' some children/young people, it may well have planted the seeds of success (e.g., an understanding of the need for change or an understanding of the worth of 'odd' techniques) later in their lives.

In order to establish its contribution to their resilience, Dreadnought should, therefore, consider undertaking a longitudinal study of the client children/young people to track their future behaviour and outcomes.

Recommendation 6: Dreadnought should consider undertaking a longitudinal study of the client children/young people to track future behaviour to establish its contribution to their resilience. Again this may best be done in partnership with an academic study.

Until the evidence of these children's/young people's later lives can be examined, what clues are there as to how well Dreadnought's intervention is doing in building resilience?

7.3 What works in building resilience?

While academic research has struggled to identify more than a handful of repeatable 'recipes' for building resilience, quite a lot is known of the elements that are important.

The first thing to note is that people experience the world very differently. Some children/young people resist and overcome stressful episodes while others appear to suffer long-term damage from similar experiences. These differing abilities of individuals to cope with stressful situations can be attributed to a variety of factors. These include personal characteristics inherited or acquired in the early years of life; the timing, duration, sequence and frequency of stressful events; and the reliability and availability of peer, family and community support. The personal, family and environmental features that are associated with resilient behaviour in individuals are well explored. Some are absolutely or relatively fixed (e.g., gender, IQ or a sense of humour) while others may be hard to affect (e.g., parental support or a secure neighbourhood).

'Protective factors' may be related to the individual or to the situational context. Those associated with individuals are problem-solving abilities, attractiveness to adults and peers, perceived competence and efficacy, identification with valued role models, and a desire and capacity to exert control over the immediate environment.¹²⁹ The ability to sustain intimate friendships, and the availability of support networks of friends, siblings and other important social contacts have been associated with resilience, both in childhood and in later life.¹³⁰ From this, it can be seen that while the Dreadnought

¹²⁷ Newman, T., Yates, T. M., Masten, A. S. 2004. *What works in building resilience?* Barnardo's ISBN 1 904659 02 0, p13.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Masten, A.S., Best, K.M., Garmezy, N. 1990. Resilience and development: contributions from the study of children who overcame adversity, *Development and Psychopathology 2*: pp425-444.

¹³⁰ Beardslee, W.R., Schultz, L., Selman, R. 1987. Level of social cognitive development, adaptive functioning and DSM-111 diagnoses in adolescent offspring of parents with affective

intervention has a broad canvas over which to work in terms of developing protective factors, there remain many influential components over which it has little or no control (e.g., the timing, duration, sequence and frequency of stressful events that its clients face).

It is also important to note that Dreadnought is working in a changing - and arguably worsening - social context. Somewhat surprisingly, compared with earlier generations, children today appear *less* able to cope with stresses and obstacles. This is thought to be due in part to them being more sheltered from challenging opportunities.^{131 132} Over the past few decades, children's psychosocial health has *declined in all developed countries* as child welfare services have focused more on risk factors than on those factors that keep children healthy and safe.

It is also very interesting to note that while – just as one might expect - acute life events may damage children, relatively minor but distressing and long-lasting adversities appear to be *more strongly* associated with risk.^{133 134} Dreadnought's success or failure, therefore, may lie not in addressing the 'obvious' dramatic issues, but more with *alleviating persistent low-level adversities*.

Considering the literature overall, then, factors that promote resilience in:

- Adolescence and early adulthood include:
 - Programmes that encourage emotional literacy
 - Inclusive philosophies that promote positive motivational styles and problems-solving coping, and discourage 'learned helplessness'
 - Programmes that encourage peer co-operation and collaboration
 - Social support for parents and enhancement of children's problem-solving capacity
 - Stable accommodation and reduction of moves in care
 - Positive peer relationships
 - Opportunities for young people to influence their environments
 - Supportive social networks, prevention of social isolation
 - Where family support is weak, the involvement of supportive adults or mentors throughout and beyond the transitional period

- All phases of the lifecycle include:
 - Strong social support networks
 - A committed mentor or other person outside the family
 - A sense of mastery that one's own efforts can make a difference

disorder: implications of the development of capacity for mutuality, *Developmental Psychology* 23: pp807-815.

¹³¹ Mental Health Foundation. 1999. *Bright Futures: promoting children and young People's mental health*. Mental Health Foundation, London.

¹³² Guldberg, H. 2000. Child protection and the precautionary principle. In Morris, J. (ed) *Rethinking risk and the precautionary principle*. Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford.

¹³³ Sandberg, S., Rutter, M., Giles, S., Owen, A. Champion, L., Nicholls, J., Prior, V., McGuinness, D., Drinnan, D. 1993. Assessment of psycho-social experiences in childhood: methodological issues and some illustrative findings, *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 34: pp879-897.

¹³⁴ Rutter, M. 1994. Stress research: accomplishments and tasks ahead. In Haggerty, R., Sherrod, L., Garmezy, N. and Rutter, M. (eds). *Stress, risk, and resilience in children and adolescents*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

- Participation in a range of extracurricular activities
- The capacity to re-frame adversities so that the beneficial as well as damaging effects are recognised
- Not to be excessively sheltered from challenging situations that provide opportunities to develop coping skills.

7.4 How does the Dreadnought intervention work?

In this project, improved resilience in children was originally fairly narrowly defined as the children/young people being positively affected by their connection to supportive adults, networks and community resources. In these terms, the Dreadnought experience can be judged a success in that, across-the-board, improvements (albeit sometimes small, but always positive) have been noted by clients, Key Workers and external observers alike. But how does it work in terms of delivering the factors known to promote resilience?

Encouragement of emotional literacy

It is notable that many of the children/young people coming to Dreadnought are specifically lacking in emotional literacy - the ability to recognize, understand and appropriately express emotions. **Alan**, for example, was noted as lacking the social skills expected at his age; **Breanne** specifically wanted to control her anger and be able to socialize better; **Callum** tended to internalize things, resulting in inappropriate outbursts of abuse; and **Gary** had difficulties with communication generally. Some seemed to recognize the issues and their consequences and actively sought change (e.g., **Breanne**); others needed to recognize the issues and their consequences. Despite this variety of needs, progress to some degree was reported in all cases and the Dreadnought intervention seems therefore to have a significant role in imparting emotional literacy.

Promotion of problem-solving coping, & discouragement of 'learned helplessness'

Research has shown the particular value during the middle years of childhood (5 to 13 years of age) of encouraging the development or adoption of positive styles of thinking and providing active support from external sources where children are at risk of developing patterns of antisocial behaviour.

It is also known that children's latent resilience can be stimulated by interventions aimed at promoting 'learned optimism' through cognitive restructuring (considered below).¹³⁵

Consistent improvements in the Dreadnought children's/young people's scores for their feelings about the future suggest that the intervention helped increase their optimism. The diary/blog tool might have offered a more systematic path to cognitive restructuring, of course, but, unfortunately, failed to take off.

Social support for parents

Dreadnought was not in a position to provide social support for the parents of most of the children/young people in the case studies (e.g., **Adele's** father was in prison), but it did provide support for **Chloe**, **Gary's** mother. Chloe's feedback clearly suggested that this benefitted her. Theoretically, some benefits should, therefore, accrue for Gary, but the degree to which this was the case is difficult to assess. However it is generally recognised that supporting the non abusive parent in families where there is domestic

¹³⁵ Seligman, M. 1998. *Learned optimism*. Pocket Books, New York.

abuse has a powerful positive impact for the children in the long term. While this may not be Dreadnought's main domain, the existing partnerships they have with at least one of the local women's refuges may be a model they could emulate in other areas of the county.

Stable accommodation & reduction of moves in care

Dreadnought had little influence on the accommodation and care of the children/young people with which it worked and it is notable that around half the clients lost from the case study group were lost due to care and accommodation rearrangements. In some situations Dreadnought were not informed of decisions until after they were made and were certainly not asked about their opinion on the potential impact on the CYP. As already highlighted at the beginning of this report, the young people that engaged in this programme are from some of the most vulnerable young people in society. Dreadnought is maybe the only agency that is engaging these young people in a constructive and positive manner, they are also the agency that actually has the deeper relationship with the young people and would seem best placed to advocate on behalf of the young person and advise the partner agencies.

Dreadnought is an extremely valuable and informed member of the multi agency teams that support these young people and should be consulted where there are going to be changes in a young person's accommodation or support status. Without consultation with Dreadnought, young people were taken away from programmes where they had begun to trust adults and where they were engaging in addressing their more difficult behaviour. It is difficult to see how these young individuals can be expected to have trust, and belief in a system that treats them as though they have no agency.

Opportunities for young people to influence their environments & a sense of mastery that one's own efforts can make a difference

Children who carry conduct and psychological disorders forward into adulthood are likely to have been exposed to continually adverse circumstances and not just to episodic periods of distressing events. While risk derives mainly from adverse events that are chronic in nature, resilience is located not just in sources external to the child, but in the extent to which the child can interact with its environment in a way that reduces helplessness and promotes control. In terms of promoting overall health and well-being, the experience of being able to exert a measure of power and control over one's environment appears to be as important for children as for adults.¹³⁶

Clearly, Dreadnought cannot be expected to have any significant control over the environments in which its clients find themselves most of the time, but it is playing a valuable role in introducing them to an environment in which they can, and do, have some say. The young person has complete choice over the activities they engage in and in fact for the purpose of the evaluation, it could be said that this worked against us, as no individual was coerced or tricked into taking part or staying engaged and as a result contributed to some of the data collection problems. Dreadnought also offers temporary, recuperative 'time out' from disempowering contexts. More importantly, Dreadnought is equipping its children/young people with skills (e.g., assertiveness in **Alan's** case) with which they can re-enter the environment they find challenging and try to gain some control. These do not always work, of course - as Alan's diary attests - but the evidence for increased resilience lies not in that observation *but in his preparedness to keep trying*.

¹³⁶ Prilleltensky, I., Nelson, G., Peirson, L. 2001. The role of power and control in children's lives: an ecological analysis of pathways towards wellness, resilience and problems, *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology* 11: pp143-158.

Positive peer relationships & encouragement of peer co-operation & collaboration

There is clear evidence that the Dreadnought intervention promoted positive peer relations and encouraged peer co-operation and collaboration. This ranged from **Brian**, for example, going from a situation with no friends to acquiring a group of good friends during the programme to **Callum** who used Dreadnought to talk openly about issues that might affect him and *took on board* what he heard back.

In addition to clients reporting that they valued these friendships, there is the corroborating evidence of behaviour having been modified in order to maintain these relationships, e.g., **Brian** being '*much more responsible about his actions and the consequences when with others (e.g., saying he is sorry and meaning it has helped him keep his new friends)*.'¹³⁷

Some of the strongest positive (and negative) peer influences are outside Dreadnought, of course. **Brian's** and **Callum's** foster brother, for example, proved a strong positive influence, but the fostering experience was accompanied by a deep sense of loyalties being divided between foster family and family, and by sibling tensions. Dreadnought clearly helped them navigate this experience to a positive outcome, seeming to provide a kind of 'gearing' to help optimize the foster family's good influence.

Strong social support networks & prevention of social isolation

Many of the children/young people arriving at Dreadnought had faced or were facing degrees of social exclusion and isolation. This was especially pronounced in the cases of **Alan**, who had faced years of exclusion and victimization,¹³⁸ and **Breanne**, who was having suicidal thoughts as a consequence of being bullied.¹³⁹ Others were trying to come to terms with change and dislocation (e.g., **Adele**, whose father's imprisonment and mother's substance abuse had robbed her of both family and home; and brothers **Brian** and **Callum** who were to come to value their new foster home, but faced divided loyalties and sibling fallouts in the process). In addition to providing mentors, considered below, Dreadnought clearly helped clients extend their support networks in a variety of ways including adding people at school to approach if feeling bullied (e.g., Alan); using the group for feedback (e.g., Callum).

Involvement of committed, supportive adults, mentors or others outside the family

When children themselves are asked in research what helped them to 'succeed against the odds', the most frequently mentioned factors are help from other members of their extended families, peers, neighbours or informal mentors rather than the activities of paid professionals.^{140 141 142 143} In abusive circumstances, the opportunity to maintain or develop attachments to reliable unrelated adults is known to help with resolving chronic stresses and acute adversities. Dreadnought is characterized by consistent contact between a Key Worker and the child/young person to whom they are assigned. While

¹³⁷ Questionnaire to Key Worker.

¹³⁸ Confidential Referral Form.

¹³⁹ Confidential Referral Form.

¹⁴⁰ Werner, E., Johnson, J. 1999. Can we apply resilience? In Glantz, M., and Johnson, J.,(eds) *Resilience and development: positive life adaptations*. Kluwer Academic/ Plenum Publishers, New York.

¹⁴¹ Werner, E. 1990. Protective factors and individual resilience. In Meisels, S.M., and Shonkoff, J.P. (eds) *Handbook of early child intervention*. Cambridge University Press, New York.

¹⁴² Werner, E., Smith, R. 1992. *Overcoming the odds: high risk children from birth to adulthood*. Cornell University Press, New York.

¹⁴³ Schaeffer, C.M., Stolbach, A., Tashman, N.A., Acosta, O.M., Weist, M.D. 2001. Why did they graduate? A pilot study considering resilience among inner-city youth, *International Journal of Mental Health Promotion* 3(2): pp8-14.

not exclusive (foster carers clearly ended up being highly valued in **Brian's** and **Callum's** case) - and not without practical difficulties (e.g., **Gary's** case) – Dreadnought's mentors are clearly valued (e.g., **Callum's** high rating of the Dreadnought experience included the qualifying reason of '*being able to speak with Steve about what I want*').¹⁴⁴ Such direct tributes to the Key Workers suggest that Dreadnought provides exactly this support to its clients.

Participation in a range of extracurricular activities

It is noticeable that many of the children/young people specifically mentioned their enjoyment of various 'extracurricular' activities provided by Dreadnought (e.g., swimming in **Adele's** case) while it Key Workers commented on the associated pride of achievement (e.g., **Alan's** enjoyment and satisfaction with his woodwork).

The capacity to re-frame adversities so that the beneficial as well as damaging effects are recognized

Dreadnought's work includes a significant amount of discussion that allows issues, and approaches to them, to be explored, though it is not clear to what extent this reveals to the children/young people the 'silver lining' in their particular clouds.

It is clear, however, that the diary/blog tool had the potential to assist with cognitive restructuring, but, unfortunately, it failed to take off.

Avoidance of excessive sheltering from challenging situations that provide opportunities to develop coping skills

Dreadnought generally appears to place more emphasis on factors that promote well-being (rather than simply identifying and eliminating risk) and, therefore, exhibits best practice in building resilience.¹⁴⁵

The programme provides space for the children/young people to take 'time out' from the stressors that they have identified. That this is very much valued is shown by both the high ratings that the children/young people give the Dreadnought experience and the number of children/young people that mention that they want to continue their association with the programme.¹⁴⁶

It does not, however, offer them a complete withdrawal from their challenges. In terms of helping its clients build resilience, therefore, it avoids the pitfall of insulating them from the type of 'managed exposure' to risks that will enhance their competence in dealing with adversity.

As the academic literature notes, if children possess adequate coping skills, are in environments that protect against excessive demands, but also have opportunities to learn and adapt through being exposed to reasonable levels of risk, then a successful response to episodes of crisis is more likely.

¹⁴⁴ **Dreadnought Exit Questionnaire.**

¹⁴⁵ Rayner, M., Montague, M. 2000. *Resilient children and young people. a discussion paper based on a review of the international research literature.* Policy and Practice Research Unit, Children's Welfare Association of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia.

¹⁴⁶ It is not clear from the data whether the high scores that children/young people give Dreadnought on arrival is because it is an instant 'hit' or because their expectations have been built or – perhaps more interestingly – because many of the children are innately positive.

Appendix 1: Dreadnought Entry & Exit Questionnaire data

Dreadnought Entry & Exit Questionnaires

Designed by Dreadnought, this graphic-rich, user-friendly single-sided questionnaire asked the child/young person to score six key questions on a scale of 1 ('Unhappy') to 7 ('Happy'). These were:

1. How do I feel about me?
2. How do I feel about the future? And what does it hold for me?
3. How do I feel about attending Dreadnought?
4. How are you feeling about family?
5. How are you feeling about friends?
6. How are you feeling about school?

In addition, the questionnaire asked children/young people to provide some narrative answers to three other questions:

- Changes?
- Would you recommend Dreadnought to a friend?
- Things I do or people I see elsewhere

The form was used twice. First, marked '**Entry**', it was used with the client when they joined Dreadnought. Marked '**Exit**', it was then used again when they left. Comparison of the responses identified any change in the child's/ young person's perception of their circumstances.

Results

The following charts summarize the results obtained from the **Dreadnought Entry** and **Exit Questionnaires**:

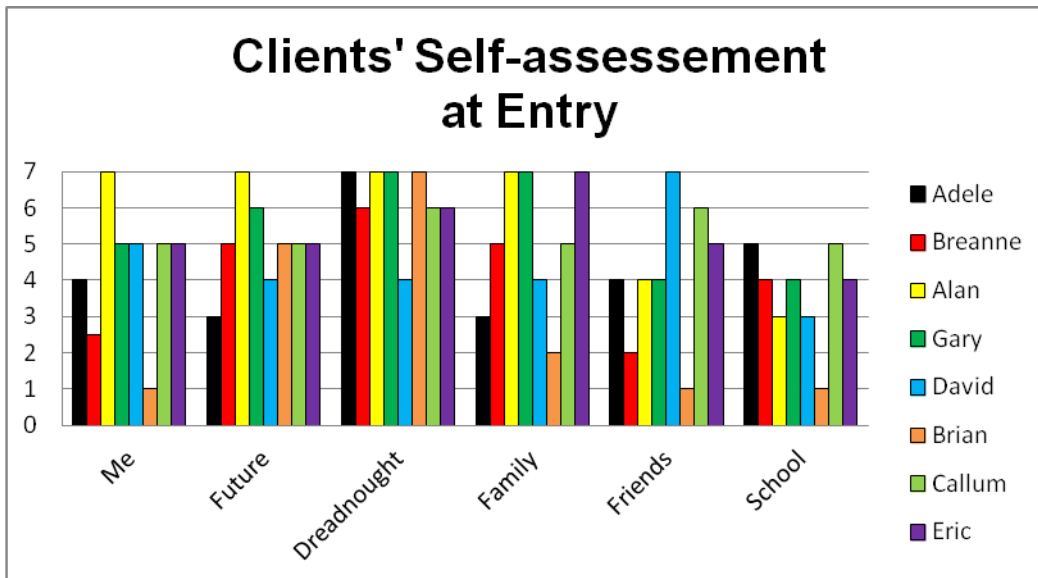


Figure 1: The scores that children/young people gave on starting at Dreadnought (from 1= 'Unhappy' to 7 = 'Happy') about their feelings in six key areas



Figure 2: The scores that children/young people gave on leaving Dreadnought (from 1= 'Unhappy' to 7 = 'Happy') about their feelings in six key areas

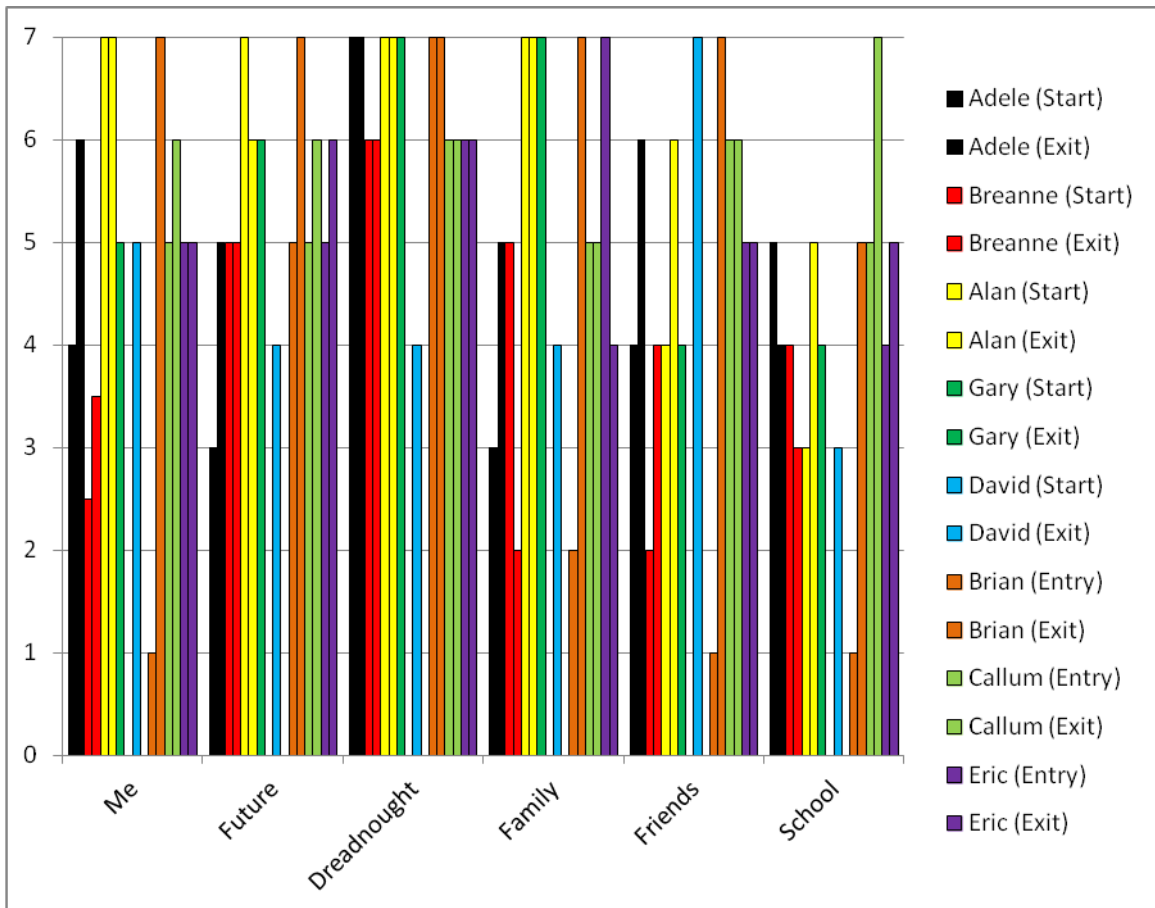


Figure 3: Comparison of the scores that children/young people gave on starting at & leaving Dreadnought (from 1= 'Unhappy' to 7 = 'Happy') about their feelings in six key areas

Analysis

Feelings about themselves

One might expect that children/young people at the point of entry to Dreadnought would have a low rating of themselves. In fact, the opposite seems true. Of the eight children scoring their feelings about themselves, six (75%) rated themselves above the 'neutral' score of 3.5. The question was intended as a snapshot of their overall 'mood' at entry, but, of course, such scoring might be heavily influenced at the moment of reporting. Just attending Dreadnought might, for example, give them a 'lift', making them appear happier than one might expect from the circumstances of their referrals.

Much of the emphasis of Dreadnought's work is about 'resilience' – at least part of which is optimism in the face of adversity. These generally positive scores suggest that the children may already be exhibiting resilience and/or that engagement with Dreadnought has increased that sense of happiness with themselves. It would be interesting to explore the possibility that children engage with Dreadnought *because* they already possess a degree of resilience at that point.

Breanne and **Brian**, however – who scored less than averagely happy about themselves at entry - registered very low scores, suggesting deep unhappiness at that

stage of their lives. Furthermore, this was reinforced by some very negative comments that they made about themselves in that section of the questionnaire (such as, '*I am useless*').

Four of the six children (67%) for whom we have 'start' and 'end' scores for their feelings about themselves showed improvements. Two did not, but registered an unchanged score on entry and at exit. **Alan** – noted by Dreadnought workers for his bravado - registered a debatable maximum seven at both start and exit; and **Eric** rated his happiness with himself at exit at five, unchanged from that on entry.

So, to Dreadnought's credit, no-one left feeling *less* happy about themselves than they did at their entry to the programme. This positive trend might, however, be interpreted as an element of wishing to please. Even if this is the case, the fact that users could be seeking to please and 'reward' the programme might suggest that clients recognise Dreadnought's good intentions; itself an accolade.

Strikingly, the deeply unhappy **Breanne** (two-and-a-half at entry) and **Brian** (one at entry), showed improvements. **Breanne** scored three-and-a-half at exit, while **Brian** scored the maximum of seven. The latter suggests a remarkable turnaround in this young person's life – an effect noted in other domains, too, as considered below.

The future

Of 8 children responding at entry, it is striking that only one scored their feelings about the future as *less* than an average 3.5 (and then, at 3, only just). Of 6 children who provided a score at exit, 4 (67%) showed *improved* scores. Of the others, **Breanne** remained a quite positive 5 out of a possible 7 throughout. **Alan**, however, was unique in being *less* positive about the future at the point of leaving. One is tempted to wonder whether the Dreadnought support may, in fact, have introduced some perspective into his situation.

In line with the results for 'feelings about me', above, the positivity of these young people at the point of joining Dreadnought's programme is striking. Similarly, the Dreadnought intervention generally seems only to enhance this positivity.

Feelings about Dreadnought

We have eight scores for the children's perception of Dreadnought at entry, but only six scores at their exit. The exit scores were consistently high, averaging 6.5. This would seem to reflect a high degree of user satisfaction with the service.

Perhaps more interesting is the high rating – an average of 6.25 out of a maximum seven - given by children at the *start* of their experience with Dreadnought. Only **David** (scoring four) rated Dreadnought less than six or a maximum seven at entry. What persuaded these children so early on that Dreadnought was so good? Indeed, is there a risk that expectations may be raised too high? Or, as some of the other data seem to suggest, are these children inherently optimistic in their approach, despite their circumstances, from the outset?

Feelings about Family

Scorings around perceptions of family appear fairly complex.

Surprisingly, only two of eight children (25%) provided scores on entry to Dreadnought that rated family as *less* than the average 3.5. In fact, three of the eight (37%) rated family a maximum seven at the outset.

Of six children for whom we have both start and exit scores, two (**Adele** and **Brian**) showed strong improvements from below-average starting points (+2 in **Adele's** case and a remarkable +5 to achieve a maximum score of seven in **Brian's** case). Two showed significant deterioration (**Breanne** and **Eric**, both -3). For two – **Alan** and **Gary** – scores remained the same from entry to exit.

This initial positivity around their families at entry, coupled with a mixture of negative, static and positive scores later, hints at a complex picture. It is possible that the surprising initial positivity might relate to the children scoring their families *as they hoped they might be*. And certainly, some of the deterioration in scores relates to events that are known to have subsequently knocked some optimism out of the children and young people (e.g., **Eric** is known to have difficulty after losing his 'man of the house' role in the new family arrangements).

The family circumstances seem very fluid for all the children considered. And while Dreadnought may well be a reassuring 'constant' in that fluidity, it is probably unrealistic to expect Dreadnought to be *able* to significantly ameliorate the effect of something quite so profound for the children/young people - and out of its direct control – as their family.

While a good percentage of the children clearly feel that their family situations have deteriorated, we cannot say how much worse they might have considered (and scored) that change if Dreadnought had not been there to provide support.

The biggest change in this domain is in **Brian's** start and exit score: an increase of five to a maximum of seven, demonstrating again the fundamental change in his circumstances after the Dreadnought intervention.

Feelings about friends

On leaving Dreadnought, those children for whom we have both entry and exit scores felt that either the situation with friends was unchanged but good (at five or six out of seven in **Callum's** and **Eric's** views, respectively) or much improved (+2 for **Adele**, **Breanne** and **Alan** and a monumental +6 for **Brian**).

Feelings about school

Adele and **Breanne** were slightly *less* happy about school on leaving than they were on entry (-1). In contrast, **Alan** (+2), **Brian** (+4), **Callum** (+2) and **Eric** (+1) all scored school much higher at exit. It is noteworthy that the average increase of 2.25 was much higher than the average decrease of -1.

General observations

The numbers of clients studied are low, which naturally reduces the confidence one can have in drawing conclusions from the data. Nonetheless, it is interesting to compare the average scores given by children in each domain at entry to, and exit from, the Dreadnought intervention (**Figure 4**, below).

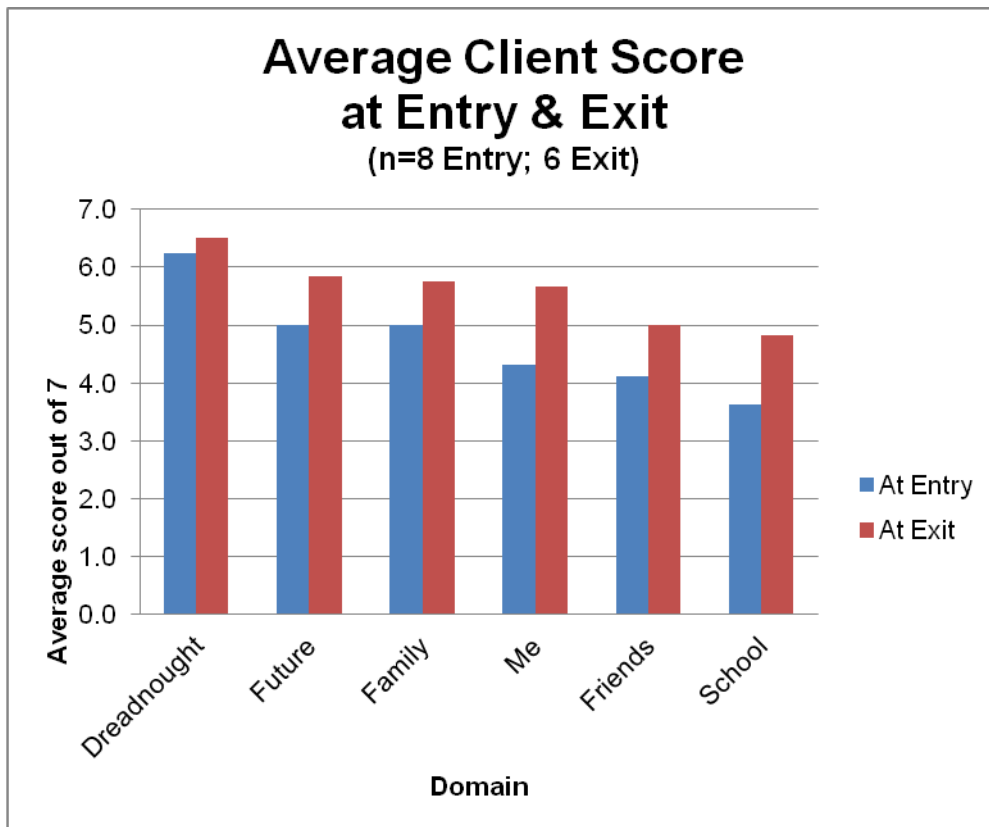


Figure 4: Average score amongst clients by domain on entry to, and exit from, the Dreadnought intervention.

At entry, children are happiest about **Dreadnought**, then progressively less so with their **future**, their **family**, **themselves**, their **friends** and, finally, **school**.

Average scores at exit are all better than those on entry – suggesting that the Dreadnought intervention ‘works’. Interestingly, the biggest improvements appear to be in the areas where children were *least* happy at entry – **friends** (+0.9), **school** (+1.2) and **themselves** (+1.4). Dreadnought, therefore, not only appears to be effective, but especially so in the areas in which children need most help.