

Becoming A Man (BAM)

Feasibility study report

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About the Youth Endowment Fund

The Youth Endowment Fund (YEF) is a charity with a mission that matters. We exist to prevent children and

young people becoming involved in violence. We do this by finding out what works and building a

movement to put this knowledge into practice.

Children and young people at risk of becoming involved in violence deserve services that give them the

best chance of a positive future. To make sure that happens, we'll fund promising projects and then use

the very best evaluation to find out what works. Just as we benefit from robust trials in medicine, young

people deserve support grounded in the evidence. We'll build that knowledge through our various grant

rounds and funding activity.

And just as important is understanding children and young people's lives. Through our Youth Advisory

Board and national network of peer researchers, we'll ensure they influence our work and we understand

and are addressing their needs. But none of this will make a difference if all we do is produce reports that

stay on a shelf.

Together, we need to look at the evidence, agree what works, and then build a movement to make sure

that young people get the very best support possible. Our strategy sets out how we'll do this. At its heart,

it says that we will fund good work, find what works, and work for change. You can read it here.

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About the evaluator

This evaluation was conducted by researchers from the Dartington Service Design Lab (Dartington), the University of Plymouth (Plymouth), and the University of Exeter, with support from Black Thrive.

Dartington is an independent research and design charity that is committed to improving outcomes for children, young people, and families. The organisation's expertise in evidence generation in the social sciences stems from a 60-year history of leading evaluations of varying design and complexity from formative to experimental.

The Community and Primary Care Research Group at the University of Plymouth has a strong track record of health and social care research, including prevention and early intervention to improve child and youth psychosocial outcomes.

The Children and Young People's Mental Health (ChYMe) research collaboration at the University of Exeter researches the mental health and well-being of children and young people with the aim of developing evidence-based policy and practice to improve the lives of children/young people and the communities around them.

Black Thrive Global evolved from the work of the Black Thrive Lambeth partnership, which was established in 2016 to address the inequalities that negatively impact the mental health and well-being of Black people in Lambeth. The Black Thrive Partnership brings together individuals, local communities, statutory agencies, and voluntary organisations to address the structural barriers that prevent Black people from thriving.

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Executive summary



The project

Becoming a Man (BAM) aims to support 12- to 16-year-old boys to improve their social and emotional skills, self-awareness, relationships with peers and adults and engagement in school and reduce their likelihood of offending. BAM was developed by Youth Guidance (YG), a Chicago-based non-profit, and has demonstrated positive impacts on reducing arrests in robust, US-based evaluations. It is currently being delivered in the UK by the Mental Health Foundation (MHF). The central component of BAM is the BAM Circle, a weekly group session delivered in school to 8-12 young people. Fifty of these sessions are delivered over two years of BAM, and they are led by a BAM counsellor (who is recruited from the communities where the young people live). BAM Circles include a range of activities featured in the BAM Manual, including check-ins, role plays, group missions, videos, lectures, and stories, and these activities promote BAM's core values, including Integrity, Accountability, and Positive Anger Expression. Alongside BAM Circles, the intervention also provides special activities (group activities outside of school property and time), brief encounters (quick informal check-ins between the BAM counsellor and young person), and one-to-one support (individualised support for those with greater levels of need). In this project, BAM was targeted at 12-14-year-olds (who became BAM scholars) in two South London secondary schools and one Pupil Referral Unit (PRU). The boys targeted were all facing at least one of three challenges relating to their social and emotional development, including resiliencies, relationships, and school engagement. Ninety-five young people were recruited to become BAM scholars in this study.

YEF funded a feasibility study of BAM, the first evaluation of the programme in a UK context. The evaluation aimed to ascertain whether BAM was successfully implemented; whether successful implementation may have led to improved social and emotional, behavioural, and academic outcomes; and whether there were any unintended consequences. To explore these questions, the evaluation analysed routinely collected programme delivery data alongside conducting interviews and focus groups. Fifty-two interviews were carried out by the evaluation team, including 13 scholar interviews, 15 with parents/carers, four with school staff, 16 with BAM counsellors, and four with YG and MHF professionals. The feasibility study ran from March 2020 to November 2022. The study took place during the coronavirus pandemic, requiring both the delivery and evaluation teams to adapt to challenging circumstances.

Key conclusions

The evaluator judged the quality of delivery to be generally successful. BAM counsellors were perceived to be proficient and skilled in several areas of delivery, and counsellors praised the implementation support received from MHF and YG. Several adaptations were made to the programme to improve programme implementation, including changes to how the programme was presented to schools and how the curriculum was delivered.

School context and COVID-19 posed scholar recruitment challenges, meaning that there was a higher level of need amongst BAM scholars than originally intended. Ninety-five scholars were enrolled at the start of the programme; 62 (65%) remained enrolled after two years. Scholars that remained enrolled were all from the two secondary schools. All PRU children were withdrawn at the end of year one due to a lack of support from PRU staff, the severity of scholars' needs, and mixed attendance.

Ninety-eight percent of scholars attended at least one session. These scholars attended an average of 15 sessions in year one and 14 in year two (compared to a target of c.21 annually). Counsellors faced challenges in progressing through the curriculum, including schools cancelling sessions to focus on GCSEs and maintaining the group conditions required to complete sessions.

The small number of young people interviewed perceived that they had fostered three of BAM's values: Integrity, Accountability, and Positive Anger Expression. While they suggested that other influences (such as family, friends, faith, or football) had contributed to their development, BAM scholars did reflect that BAM made an important contribution to the development of their values.

Young people perceived that following BAM, they were applying themselves more at school and making more prosocial choices in risky situations. The greater presence in some BAM groups of children with serious behavioural concerns may have led to a minority of scholars perceiving BAM as an intervention for those with high levels of need rather than something to be celebrated.

Interpretation

The evaluator judged the quality of delivery to be generally successful. BAM counsellors were perceived to be proficient in several elements of practice, including clinical listening, modelling, group work, and youth engagement. The small number of parents, carers, and scholars interviewed perceived BAM practitioners to be empathetic, kind, and wise, while the lived experience they shared made them more relatable.

BAM counsellors praised the support provided by MHF and YG, which one counsellor termed 'backbone support'. The provision of training, coaching, peer supervision, and project management support was appreciated by counsellors. Several adaptations were made to the programme to improve programme implementation. This included changes to how the programme was presented to schools with a more collaborative, accessible language being adopted to convince schools to sign up (given that BAM does not have the same profile in England as it does in the US). Adaptations were also made to the curriculum. A diverse group of experts (comprising professionals from YG, MHF, Black Thrive, and BAM counsellors) made both surface and deep changes to the programme, amending several aspects including cultural references, language changes, timing, and session structure.

The context of schools and the impact of COVID-19 posed scholar recruitment challenges. BAM aims to construct balanced groups where 15% of children are thriving (exhibiting primarily strengths and few challenges), 70% have a balance of strengths and challenges, and 15% are approaching (or are in) crisis. The two schools had already identified potential scholars before the recruitment process began, and their selected children had slightly greater needs than MHF intended. MHF refrained from pushing back in order to retain a positive relationship with schools (especially in the context of the highly pressurised COVID-19 school restrictions). The PRU used an alternative recruitment process, selecting scholars with the highest level of need.

Ninety-five scholars were enrolled at the start of the programme; 62 (65%) remained enrolled after two years. Scholars that remained enrolled were all from the two secondary schools. All PRU children were withdrawn at the end of year one due to a lack of support from PRU staff (who often prioritised other activities over BAM sessions), the severity of scholars' needs (which limited the ability of the BAM counsellor to progress through the curriculum), and mixed attendance (largely due to the transient nature of the student population, internal exclusions, and other services competing for students' time). Ninety-eight percent of the scholars (all but one) recruited to BAM attended at least one BAM Circle. Every scholar that attended at least one session in years one and two attended an average of 15 sessions in year one and 14 in year two. The delivery team had hoped that children would attend on average c.21 sessions annually. Counsellors did face challenges in progressing through the full curriculum and were unable to deliver the full programme. Two core programme values (Respect for Womanhood and Visionary Goal Setting) were not delivered. Lesson progression was limited by scheduling challenges (where schools cancelled sessions to focus on GCSEs), scholar absence, and challenges in establishing and maintaining the group conditions required to complete sessions.

The small number of young people interviewed perceived that they had fostered three of BAM's values: Integrity, Accountability, and Positive Anger Expression. While they suggested that other influences (such as family, friends, faith, or football) had contributed to their development, BAM scholars did reflect that BAM made an important contribution to the development of their values.

Young people also perceived that, following BAM, they were applying themselves more at school and making more pro-social choices in risky situations. The greater presence in some BAM groups of children with serious behavioural concerns may have led to a minority of scholars perceiving BAM as an intervention for those with high levels of need rather than something to be celebrated. This was exacerbated by negative expectations scholars were already contending with, including racist stereotypes and school reputations.

To build on the findings of this feasibility study, YEF funded a pilot study. The pilot study aims to establish whether BAM has promise and to test aspects of evaluation design to inform a next-stage evaluation.

Introduction

Background

Reducing the number of young people involved in violence and offending continues to be a public health priority in the UK (GOV.UK., 2019). In a recent UK survey, 19% of young people reported committing an act of violence in the last 12 months (YEF, 2022). Involvement in violence is associated with an increased risk of poorer life outcomes, including problems related to both mental health (Miliauskas et al., 2022) and physical health (Wright et al., 2017).

The available academic literature identifies a range of risk factors that may be associated with violence and offending among young people, including those at the level of: the young person (e.g. self-esteem, poor self-regulation, social-cognitive deficits); the family (e.g. poor parental attachment); the peer group (e.g. relationships with peers engaged in anti-social behaviour); the community (e.g. living in socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods, disengagement from school); and society (e.g. belonging to a racially minoritised ethnic group) (EIF and Cordis Bright, 2015; Lammy, 2017).

Recent reviews highlight a range of interventions that have been shown to help address these risk factors and reduce offending behaviour among young people (O'Connor and Waddell, 2017; Hendriks et al., 2018). Becoming A Man (BAM) is one such intervention.

BAM is a selective, school-based, social-emotional learning intervention for 12-to-16-year-old boys¹. It has Level 4 evidence rating in the Early Intervention Foundation Guidebook, meaning that it has evidence of a long-term positive impact on child outcomes through multiple rigorous evaluations². Two randomised controlled trials (RCTs) have shown positive impacts on the number of arrests (for violent/all crime) and school performance for students with a mean age of 15 years living in racially segregated and deprived communities in Chicago (Heller et al., 2013, 2017).

Evidence of the effectiveness of BAM comes exclusively from the US, and this is the first time the programme has been delivered in the UK. Several other school-, family- and community-based interventions concerned with preventing or addressing poor youth psychosocial outcomes (including crime and violence) and originating in the US have struggled to replicate positive effects when trialled in Europe (Baldus et al., 2016; Fonagy et al., 2018; Humayun et al., 2017; Segrott et al., 2022; Skärstrand et al., 2013; Sundell et al., 2008). There are numerous theories for why this occurs, including the possibilities that (i) incoming interventions inadequately fit the local service systems and culture, and (ii) adaptations to the intervention for the purposes of ensuring a better fit remove or dilute active ingredients and thereby nullify the theory of change (Burkhart et al., 2019).

Therefore, it is necessary to (i) gather evidence on whether, how, for whom, and under what conditions BAM can feasibly be implemented in the UK³ and (ii) advance our collective understanding of how BAM

¹ In this project, BAM was implemented with young people in Years 8 to 11 (ages 12–16 years).

² https://guidebook.eif.org.uk/programme/becoming-a-man

³ Feasibility criteria are discussed in depth on page 14.

works, for whom, and under what conditions, to establish whether and how BAM can be adapted for delivery in the UK.

Intervention

Introduction

BAM aims to support social-emotional learning and positive youth development to improve targeted pupils' school engagement and prevent or reduce interactions with the criminal justice system. It comprises of four key activities: BAM Circles, special activities (group activities outside of school property/time), brief encounters (informal check-ins)⁴, and one-to-one support. Practitioners – known as BAM counsellors – deliver the intervention in schools with groups of 8–12 participants, called BAM scholars, over two school years.

BAM was developed and is supported by Youth Guidance (YG), a non-profit organisation based in Chicago, US. The programme is being delivered in the UK by the Mental Health Foundation (MHF), a London-based charity working in the UK to promote good mental health for all.

Target group

BAM primarily supports adolescent boys living in areas of high need who are experiencing challenges with their social-emotional development. In this evaluation, scholars aged 12–14 years are eligible if they identify as being on the journey to becoming men in one of three secondary schools in the South London borough of Lambeth and experiencing challenges in at least one of three areas of their social-emotional development: resiliencies (internal and external), relationships, and learning and school engagement.

Children were recruited to the intervention by each of the three secondary schools involved in the project. Counsellors worked with senior leadership, heads of year, and the pastoral team to identify scholars about whom they have concerns regarding their social-emotional development⁵. Counsellors also supported school staff to recruit a range of scholars with different types and levels of need to prevent negative labelling of the intervention as a programme for bad students and to try to create a mix of young people who would work together, such that the group dynamic modelled a range of behaviour and needs. Specifically, all groups and school cohorts aimed for approximately a 15%/70%/15% split across three respective tiers of need, which was then assessed via the Holistic Student Assessment (HSA) at the end of the recruitment period in early 2021:

- Tier 1: Students who are thriving and who exhibit primarily strengths and few challenges
- Tier 2: Students who have a balanced combination of strengths and challenges
- Tier 3: Students who are approaching crisis or are in crisis

⁴ Brief encounters are any ad hoc, individualised engagements between young people and counsellors that involve more than a simple greeting but last less than 15 minutes. They usually (but not always) occur in a communal space within the school, such as the playground or the hallway in between classes.

⁵ Counsellors explain that this could be owing to issues such as risk of exclusion, history of exclusion, poor educational attainment, and mental health issues.

Young people were ineligible for BAM if they were chronically absent or if they were a risk to themselves or others in a group setting. Some schools also imposed their own eligibility rules. For example, one school only permitted students to take part in one additional support programme, which meant prospective scholars had to choose between BAM and alternative offers. The needs of ineligible young people continued to be supported by each school independently of BAM.

Activities

BAM is made up of four activities:

- The BAM Circle (group sessions delivered in a school setting with eight to 12 scholars)
- Special activities (group activities outside of school property or school time)
- Brief encounters (quick, informal check-ins in public school spaces like the hallway or playground)
- One-to-one support (individualised support for those with greater levels of need)

BAM Circles constitute the central element and are delivered over two years (50 one-hour sessions in total, around 25 per year). They are delivered by a prosocial male counsellor with QCF-6 level qualifications⁶. Counsellors are required to have experience working with young people in a therapeutic or mentoring capacity. To ensure they are relatable, counsellors are recruited from the communities in which scholars live and share some of their lived experiences. Sessions occur during school hours, substituting for a lesson. Activities in BAM Circles are delivered in line with a 30-lesson curriculum called the BAMual. One lesson takes one-to-three sessions to complete, with each lesson covering a range of activities, including check-ins and check-outs to open and close sessions, role plays, group missions, video education, lectures, stories, and homework.

The first two-to-three months of BAM represent an orientation period, during which membership of and attendance at groups is flexible. Young people are invited to take part based on the selection process outlined above. Some attend and continue to do so beyond orientation. Some attend and decide it is not for them. Others do not accept the invitation at all. The counsellors respond to this fluctuation in collaboration with schools by inviting others to fill vacancies who also meet the selection criteria and who enable the balance in groups to be maintained.

This gives young people the chance to see if BAM really is for them, which supports engagement and gives the counsellors and schools time to adjust group membership depending on who commits and who leaves. The goal is to arrive in months three or four with a group of eight to ten highly engaged scholars who want to be there, who have each demonstrated that support would be helpful in at least one area of their social-emotional development, and who represent a range of levels and types of need.

⁶ Qualifications and Credit Framework: https://www.accreditedqualifications.org.uk/qualifications-and-credit-framework-qcf.html

Training and support

Counsellors receive 300 hours of programme training. They are recruited, trained, coached, and supervised by the MHF alongside YG to support their development across a series of core competencies (see Appendix 1)⁷.

Community partners in Lambeth include Black Thrive, a partnership of Black communities and service providers for Black well-being⁸, and Colourful Minds, a partnership of South London and Maudsley (SLAM) employed psychiatrists and psychologists⁹.

Theory of change

A detailed version of the theory of change, developed and adapted in collaboration with the MHF and YG during the feasibility phase of this evaluation, can be found in Appendix 2. It can be summarised as follows:

- In the long term, BAM aims to help scholars engage in responsible decision-making, including improved educational attainment and the avoidance of/reduced involvement in youth violence.
- In the short term, it does this by helping scholars to internalise BAM's six core values (Integrity, Self-Determination, Positive Anger Expression, Accountability, Respect for Womanhood, and Visionary Goal Setting). These act as positive assets, which help to buffer scholars from risks while empowering them to take advantage of opportunities and resources in their environment. Whether they do so depends on wider influences in scholars' lives and whether these influences reinforce or limit scholars' efforts to apply the core values.
- BAM helps scholars to internalise the core values through successful implementation (i.e. BAM is
 delivered with quality and fidelity to the intended target population who attend activities
 regularly). This is because of the different ways in which scholars actively experience each value
 before collectively reflecting on these experiences. Whether they engage in action and reflection
 depends on whether scholars are sufficiently ready and able to establish and maintain healthy
 groups those that are fun, safe spaces in which scholars challenge themselves and each other to
 be open, honest, and vulnerable.

Further information on the theory of change is provided in the Methods section.

⁷ Counsellors are trained and coached by the replication specialist. Training refers to the support counsellors receive as a group to understand and implement the curriculum as intended and to a high standard. Coaching concerns the individual support provided by the replication specialist to help counsellors develop their competencies.

⁸ www.blackthrive.org

⁹ www.colourful-minds.org.uk

Research questions

This feasibility study has three aims.

- **1. To establish whether BAM can be implemented successfully.** This means providing insight on not just whether BAM can be delivered but also for whom, under what circumstances, and why, to help us develop our understanding of the contextual conditions and wider support necessary for implementation success (Bonell et al., 2016; Moore et al., 2015).
- 2. To develop BAM's programme theory. This means exploring and refining explanations about for whom BAM is expected to work, under what circumstances, and why. This will enable the study to guide improvements to the design of BAM by offering insight into what programme resources should do to facilitate the desired changes in the way scholars think and feel. This includes offering guidance on which elements can be adapted to support an optimal intervention-context fit, and which should remain intact to ensure BAM's underlying mechanisms of change continue to function as intended. Developing the programme theory will also help to advance our understanding of the optimal conditions for BAM, which will support ongoing plans to scale the programme in the UK and beyond.
- **3.** To inform the focus and design of future evaluations. Developing the programme theory and the methods and measures used for testing it will support future evaluators to decide what to gather evidence on and how.

BAM's theory of change is made up of four sub-theories: implementation, intermediate outcomes, ultimate outcomes, and unintended consequences. Each sub-theory is captured in a hypothesis statement as follows:

Implementation: If counsellors receive high-quality support from the backbone team¹⁰, then this will help them to implement BAM successfully. This is because counsellors will feel their development is being nurtured in a positive learning environment. This will be influenced by how enabling the school context is and how engaged young people are in action and reflection.

Intermediate outcomes: If counsellors implement BAM successfully, then this will help young people to internalise the core values. This is because of the way in which young people will actively experience each value before reflecting on their experiences. This will be influenced by how ready and motivated young people are to adhere to the group conditions.

Ultimate outcomes: If young people internalise the core values, then this will help them to engage in responsible decision-making, including improved educational attainment and reduced involvement in youth violence. This is because the core values will help to protect and empower them. This will be influenced by the wider social determinants of health influences in young people's lives.

Unintended consequences: If BAM experiences challenges with recruitment, then this will motivate young people to engage in irresponsible decision-making. This is because negative labelling and fractious BAM groups will motivate young people to engage in anti-social behaviour. This will be influenced by whether wider influences in young people's lives reinforce or limit these labels and hierarchies.

¹⁰ The term 'backbone support' was selected by counsellors themselves as the best way to describe the suite of implementation support activities provided by MHF and YG.

These sub-theories give rise to the research questions that have guided the feasibility study.

- **1.** To what extent is BAM being successfully implemented, with whom, under what circumstances, and why?
- **2a.** How has implementation contributed to any reported changes in scholars' social-emotional and identity development, for whom, under what circumstances, and why?
- **2b.** How has social-emotional development contributed to any reported changes in scholars' academic performance and behaviour and the avoidance of, or reduced involvement in crime/anti-social behaviour, for whom, under what circumstances, and why?
- **2c**. How has implementation contributed to any reported unintended consequences, for whom, under what circumstances, and why?

Answering research question 1 will help us to meet aim 1 (establishing whether BAM can be successfully implemented).

Answering research questions 2a–2c will help us meet aim 2 (developing the programme theory). For this reason, 2a to 2c are framed differently from 1. Rather than being focused on the extent to which these subtheories are realised across the cohort, they are more concerned with fully understanding the causal processes underlying any changes reported. Focusing on the former would be premature given these subtheories, and the latter stages of the theory of change more generally are untested in this context and, therefore, warrant further attention before BAM is evaluated against this theory. Doing so would risk BAM being held accountable to an imperfect model that does not fully or accurately reflect the way it works. Instead, research questions 2a–2c are focused on exploring and refining explanations about for whom BAM is expected to work, under what circumstances, and why – in other words, the central focus of aim 2.

It should be acknowledged that the evidence regarding research questions 2a–2c is largely drawn from a relatively small sample of qualitative interviews and focus groups (further detail on which is provided in the data collection section below). The findings regarding these questions should be understood in this context.

Gathering evidence on all research questions will help us to meet the study's third aim (informing the focus and design of future evaluations).

Targets

All targets for the feasibility study concern research question 1 only (To what extent is BAM being successfully implemented, with whom, under what circumstances, and why?). Research questions 2a–2c are more concerned with advancing our understanding of BAM's programme theory and less with confirming the degree to which certain thresholds are met.

Table 1: Implementation targets

Implementation area

area **Target** 1. Recruitment a. Each counsellor is delivering two groups of 8–12 scholars by 1 January 2021. **b.** All scholars who take part in BAM are experiencing challenges in at least one area of their social-emotional development according to the HAS (Allen et al., 2017). c. All three tiers of need are represented in each group and in each school according to the HSA with a split of roughly 15%/70%/15% for tiers 1, 2 and 3, respectively. 2. Exposure a. Scholars attend 13 BAM Circle sessions on average every school year. **b.** Counsellors deliver 45 BAM Circle sessions over both years with each group. c. 80% of scholars receive a brief encounter (see page 8) once a month during term time. 3. Fidelity a. Counsellors deliver all lessons from the 30-lesson BAM Manual (one-to-three sessions per lesson) with each of their groups

Target 1a concerns the degree to which BAM reaches sufficient scholars early enough to give them the best chance of benefiting from BAM. While counsellors usually aim to deliver at least five groups, YG and MHF decided to stagger their caseload in the first year to give counsellors enough time and space to learn and grow at an appropriate pace.

The first two months of BAM are characterised as orientation. During this period, scholars may join at any point as awareness of BAM grows in the school and scholars volunteer to take part (or teachers put them forward). At the same time, those scholars who feel that BAM is not for them may leave. What is important is that by the time the group closes (which happens at the end of the calendar year, in the first year – in our case, the end of December 2020), each group has the appropriate number of scholars (8–12).

Targets 1b and 1c concern BAM's aim to only work with young people who will benefit from their services (i.e. those with social-emotional needs), while ensuring that the spread of need is varied to prevent negative labelling in groups and in schools.

Targets 2a (the target for the number of sessions attended on average) and 2b (the target for the number of sessions delivered) are informed by the two RCTs in the US. During the first RCT (RCT 1), BAM was only delivered for one year, but in the second RCT (RCT 2) the full two-year programme was delivered. During RCT 2, scholars were offered 45 sessions in total, which has informed target 2b. Target 2a was based on

attendance data from RCT 1 and RCT 2. This is captured in Table 2, which outlines RCT 1 and RCT 2 (with attendance for years one and two of RCT 2 both combined and described separately):

- Ever attended: The proportion of scholars randomised to the intervention arm who participated in at least one session of BAM
- **Total sessions attended:** The mean number of sessions attended by all those in the intervention arm (i.e. those considered as part of Intention To Treat (ITT) analysis)
- **Total sessions | ever attended:** The mean attendance for all scholars who participated in at least one BAM Circle session

The relatively low means for 'Total sessions attended' were due to the low take-up rate, which stemmed from the process of randomisation – something that will have to be factored in if a decision is made to escalate the programme to an efficacy study in the UK. Therefore, a decision was made with YG and MHF to consider the 'Total sessions | ever attended' data to arrive at an appropriate benchmark. Thirteen sessions were selected as an appropriate target for attendance, as 13.47 was the lowest figure in a single year in either RCT (both of which identified positive impacts on primary outcomes) among all those who participated in BAM (Heller et al., 2013, 2017).

Table 2: Sessions attended by BAM scholars who participated in the two US RCTs

	RCT 1	RCT 2 (Year 1)	RCT 2 (Year 2)	RCT 2 (Total)
Ever attended	0.49	0.51	0.31	0.52
Total sessions attended	6.64	8.61	6.71	15.32
Total sessions ever attended	13.47	16.79	21.07	29.08

Targets 2c (the target for participation in brief encounters) and 3a (the target for fidelity) are two of YG's standard targets that form part of their own internal monitoring and evaluation processes.

These thresholds were treated as targets rather than success criteria during this study. While some are informed by the two US RCTs and represent appropriate standards for BAM in Lambeth (e.g. 2a), those set by YG to encourage learning and improvement are more stretching (e.g. 3a – counsellors rarely surpass lesson 20 in the US). Therefore, whether BAM met these targets was considered alongside other sources of evidence to reach a conclusion on whether BAM was successfully implemented, with whom, under what circumstances, and why.

Ethical review

The Warren House Group Ethics Committee approved the ethics submission for the feasibility phase of the evaluation (Ref: 19/20-1301, dated 17 December 2020).

Consent from scholars and their parents/carers

Routinely collected data

At the point of entry to the intervention, BAM counsellors sought written and informed consent from scholars and their parents/carers (Appendices 3 and 4) for MHF to share the following with the evaluation team: (i) data collected by the school on academic attainment, attendance, and grades; and (ii) programme data collected routinely by counsellors. Parents/carers were notified why this was (to help with learning more about how BAM works in the UK and how programmes like BAM help scholars) and that parents'/carers' permission for sharing this would be sought separately. Subsequently, for all consenting parents/carers, the evaluation team provided an information sheet with additional information about the evaluation, together with an opt-out consent form (Appendix 5). Parents/carers who did not wish for routinely collected data on their children to be shared with the evaluation team were invited to let the MHF know. Correspondence was sent from the MHF via email to parents/carers for whom there are email contact details.

Primary data collection

Informed consent was also sought prior to primary data collection. Interviews were conducted via telephone, a digital platform (Zoom or Microsoft Teams), or in person depending on what was possible given COVID-19 restrictions and what was convenient for the participant. Potential participants were provided with either hard or digital (emailed) copies of the information sheets and consent forms, as well as invitation sheets for scholars (Appendix 6), and could either provide written consent (if consent was taken in person) or audio-recorded consent (if consent was taken via telephone, Microsoft Teams, or Zoom [which was recorded by the researcher on the consent form]). Compensation was offered in the form of shopping vouchers to all qualitative data collection participants.

Contact with parents/carers was made via phone or email. Contact with scholars was made through the BAM counsellor or other MHF staff or parents/carers. No arrangements were made with a young person directly by the evaluation team for data collection. In the case of collecting data from scholars, the information sheet and consent form described above were used, meaning that data could only be collected from a young person if the young person and their parent/carer consented. In the case of collecting data from parents/carers, the parent/carer was asked to provide consent for the evaluation team to interview them. Audio-recorded consent was stored separately from the data.

Counsellors, MHF and YG programme staff, and school staff

These participants were approached via email or telephone at the relevant point to ask if they would be interested in taking part in a semi-structured interview or focus group. Written or audio-recorded informed consent was provided by all participants using the informed consent form (Appendices 7 and 8¹¹). Audio-recorded consent was collected separately from the interview or focus group.

¹¹ For interviews with staff from MHF, YG, and schools, it was possible to anonymise findings shared with the YEF, wider stakeholders, the general public, young people, and their families. However, it was difficult to guarantee anonymity for findings shared with the project team responsible for implementation (the counsellors and other programme staff from MHF and YG).

Data protection

Legal basis

The legal basis to collect, share, and process data for this project was 'Legitimate Interest'. The legitimate interests identified were the broader societal benefits of the study's results through advancing our collective understanding of whether, how, for whom, and under what conditions BAM may be feasible to deliver in Lambeth. A Legitimate Interests Balancing Test was carried out that confirmed that programme data routinely collected by MHF on the background and participation of scholars in BAM was necessary for the evaluation to fulfil its aims.

Special category data were processed in accordance with General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) Article 9(2)(j) (for research and statistical purposes which may be in the public interest) and in accordance with UK law, and in particular, the Data Protection Act 2018 Schedule 1, Part 1, paragraph 4(a), Research etc.; the processing is necessary for research purposes, is carried out in accordance with UK GDPR Article 89(1), and is in the public interest.

Data processing roles

Routinely collected programme data were shared by MHF with (removed for anonymity) on the basis of a data-sharing agreement in which both parties were data controllers. This programme data, as well as primary qualitative data collected by (removed for anonymity), were then shared by (removed for anonymity) with (removed for anonymity) on the basis of two separate data sharing agreements, in which (removed for anonymity) was a data controller and (removed for anonymity) a data processor. Coaching data collected by YG on counsellors was shared with (removed for anonymity) on the basis of a data sharing agreement in which all parties were data controllers.

Anonymity

For scholars and their parents/carers, no real names, other identifiers, or distinguishing features of participants have been or will be used in any reports, presentations, or papers.

Confidentiality

No names or personal identifiers were attached to the evaluation data. All routinely collected data that the MHF shared with the evaluation team were pseudonymised before it was sent.

Transfer of data

All data were transferred from MHF and YG to the evaluation team via a secure platform (Microsoft OneDrive).

This is due to the likelihood of deductive disclosure. Two separate information sheets and consent forms (Appendices 7 and 8) were drafted for wider stakeholders, with the latter making this issue clear for the interviewees to whom this would apply.

Project team/stakeholders

Delivery team

Jane Caro (Associate Director of Programmes, MHF)

Ntale Eastmond (Project Manager, MHF, from January 2022)

Ismael Hayden (Project Manager, MHF, May 2020 –June 2021)

Mariyam Farooq (Programme Advisor, MHF)

Victoria Zamperoni (Senior Research Officer, MHF)

Catherine Negus (Research Officer, MHF)

Dean Idoniboye-Obu (BAM Counsellor)

Hugh Mayers (BAM Counsellor)

Kohliah Roberts (BAM Counsellor)

Antony Di Vittorio (Programme Founder, YG)

A. J. Watson (BAM National Director, YG)

Wendy Fine (Director of BAM Research and Evaluation, YG)

Jason Story (Replication Specialist, YG)

Christopher Jaffe (Senior Manager, Partnerships and Operations, YG)

Michelle Morrison (CEO, YG)

Michael Bergstrom (Director of New Site Development, YG)

Rebecca Clarkin (COO, YG)

Roles

Recruitment to BAM: BAM counsellors

Delivery in schools (BAM Circles, one-to-one, etc.): BAM counsellors

Routine data collection: BAM counsellors

Data management and quality: VZ, CN

Counsellor training and support: JC, NE, MF, VZ, JS, AV

Evaluation team

Dr Tim Hobbs, Dartington Service Design Lab (until June 2022)

Dr Julie Harris, Dartington Service Design Lab (from July 2022)

Dr Nick Axford, University of Plymouth

Finlay Green, Dartington Service Design Lab

Cristina Preece, Dartington Service Design Lab

Julia Mannes, Dartington Service Design Lab

Ediane Santana De Lima, Dartington Service Design Lab

Amy Woodburn, Black Thrive

Dr Lynne Callaghan, University of Plymouth

Kate Allen, University of Exeter

Professor Vashti Berry, University of Exeter

Roles

Co-Principal Investigators (responsible for oversight of study): TH (until June 2022), JH (from July 2022), NA

Project Manager (responsible for day-to-day running of the project): FG

Study design and planning: FG, JH, NA, VB

Recruitment and data collection: FG, JM, KA, LC, NA, ESL, AW

Quantitative analysis: FG

Qualitative analysis: FG, CP, JM, LC, KA, ESL, NA

Report-writing and dissemination: FG, JH, NA, CP, VB

Methods

This feasibility study represents the first part of a staggered, two-phase evaluation. It was agreed that should BAM show strong feasibility with the first cohort by the end of the first year of delivery (July 2021), the evaluation of the second cohort (September 2021–July 2023) would advance to a pilot outcomes evaluation. As outlined in the interim report of the feasibility study (Appendix 9), this criterion was met. This report is the final report for the feasibility study, covering the entire two-year period of delivery for BAM's first cohort in the UK (September 2020–July 2022).

Participant selection

There are broadly four sets of participants in the evaluation: young people taking part in BAM (scholars); parents of those young people; BAM counsellors delivering BAM; and other stakeholders (from MHF, YG, and schools).

All young people participating in the intervention were eligible to participate in the evaluation. At the point of entry to BAM, all scholars provided active, informed consent for the sharing of routine programme data and data on academic attainment, attendance, and grades. All parents and carers provided informed consent.

Two rounds of primary qualitative data collection were conducted, one in March–July 2021 and the other in May–June 2022, with the former providing a preliminary assessment of feasibility and shaping improvements to the theory of change and data collection tools in advance of the latter. Only scholars and parents or carers from the two mainstream schools were invited to participate due to problems accessing both stakeholder groups at the PRU. Our sampling approach involved two steps during both rounds: step one involved purposive sampling to identify which stakeholder was deemed best placed to speak to a particular element of our theory of change; step two involved maximum variation sampling to incorporate as wide a range of perspectives as possible. The number of interviews conducted at each stage was arrived at through a decision based on data saturation, resource management, research burden on MHF, and challenges regarding access.

During the first round of primary qualitative data collection, the evaluation team collaborated with MHF to host two online workshops for parents and carers, during which we invited parents and carers to participate in interviews. Researchers also followed up via telephone with other contacts who had expressed interest, including both those who were and were not able to attend the online workshops. This included texting first and then finding a suitable time to talk about what would be involved in taking part in an interview before arranging a time for the interview itself. For those parents and carers who agreed to be interviewed, consent was then sought to interview their child. Where that consent was gained, informed consent was then sought from the scholar before an interview took place. All interviews with parents, carers, and scholars were carried out over the phone or online via Microsoft Teams or Zoom due to the COVID-19 restrictions in place at that time.

During the second round of primary qualitative data collection, the evaluation team prepared text messages that were sent to parents and carers by MHF to invite them to take part in an interview and to gain consent for the same for their child, each of which contained a link to the relevant information sheet. In the interest of pursuing the most convenient location for either stakeholder group, all interviews with parents and carers were carried out over the phone or online via Microsoft Teams or Zoom, while all those with scholars were conducted in person at their respective schools.

During both rounds of qualitative data collection, interviews with staff at MHF, YG, and schools were conducted online or over the phone with active, informed consent obtained from all interviewees.

Theory of change development

Evaluations based on theories of change have been criticised for failing to develop and test the causal logic of interventions in sufficient depth (Breuer et al., 2016). Realist evaluation is well placed to address this challenge (Blamey and Mackenzie, 2007; Rolfe, 2019). Realist evaluations begin by generating hypotheses regarding how programme mechanisms (M) lead to certain outcomes (O) in particular contexts (C) (Pawson and Tilley, 1997). These context-mechanism-outcome configurations, or CMOs, act as the fundamental building block of realist research helping evaluators to establish what works, for whom, under what circumstances, and why.

Theories of change can also address some of the shortcomings of realist evaluation. This includes retaining a focus on the whole intervention, providing a visual and more accessible format for engaging stakeholders in the evaluation and supporting the identification and prioritisation of those elements of the theory deemed most important to test (Blamey and Mackenzie, 2007; Rolfe, 2019).

For these reasons, this study combined theories of change and realist evaluation to develop and test the programme theory underpinning the BAM model.

Learning from year one of the feasibility study

Combining both approaches during the feasibility study helped us to strengthen the reasoning underpinning the theory of change. The version that shaped year one of the study combined evidence and theory from academic literature selected by BAM with local stakeholder expertise to articulate high-level predictions regarding how BAM is supposed to work, for whom, under what circumstances, and why (see Appendix 10). This included:

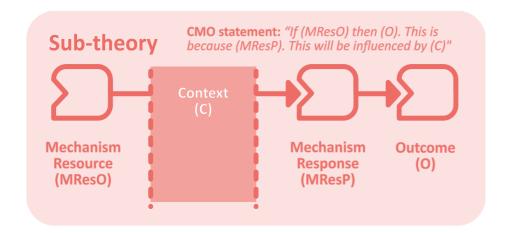
- Published research on BAM, including both qualitative research (Lansing et al., 2016) and the results of the two RCTs (Heller et al., 2017; Heller et al., 2013)
- Theoretical frameworks for group therapy (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005), psychotherapy (Jung, 1969), youth development (Nagaoka et al., 2015), and behaviour change (Michie et al., 2014), which together form the foundations of BAM's approach to action and reflection within the intermediate outcomes sub-theory
- Systematic reviews of community-based positive youth development interventions, which are similar in their theoretical foundations to BAM, as well as reviews of process evaluations and theories of change for these interventions (Bonell et al., 2016)
- Reviews of programme documents, including the BAM Circle curriculum
- The observation of BAM Circles in Chicago
- Workshops and interviews with staff from YG and MHF.

We then used the CMO heuristic to generate hypotheses that captured the causal links between implementation, mechanisms, outcomes, context, and BAM's implementation teams (staff from MHF and YG focused on creating an enabling environment for delivery). Building on Jackson and Kolla's concept of CMO dyads (2012), we used each hypothesis to articulate the relationship between two items within these five categories (for example, between a mechanism and an outcome, or between an implementation team activity and an aspect of implementation, e.g. "If counsellors receive high-quality training and coaching, then they'll be able to perform strongly across the core competencies"). We generated 86 hypotheses in total.

The findings from the first round of data collection in March–April 2021 informed amendments to the theory of change designed in collaboration with MHF and YG. The latest version can be found in Appendix 2.

Some changes were made to the content of the theory of change, the most important of which was the addition of the group conditions as a contextual factor shaping scholars' engagement in action and reflection. However, most changes were structural. A summary of these changes is illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Revised structure of the theory of change



In the initial theory of change, mechanisms were used solely in aid of understanding the interaction between implementation and intermediate outcomes. However, it was clear that mechanistic explanations were a useful analytic tool across the entire programme theory, which would help us to capture and gather evidence on how resources introduced in one part of the theory of change led to responses in other parts. To account for this, the revised theory of change is divided into sub-theories – implementation, intermediate outcomes, and ultimate outcomes – with mechanisms and contextual factors articulated at each stage. Each sub-theory sets the conditions for the one to follow; a common feature in realist evaluations of complex interventions (Shaw et al., 2018).

Since 86 hypotheses were too many and too specific to explore meaningfully, each of the sub-theories within the revised theory of change is structured as a realist matrix, in a similar fashion to those developed by Ebenso et al. (2019) and as endorsed by the most recent UK Medical Research Council guidance (Skivington et al., 2021). Thus, each sub-theory constitutes one candidate theory, summarised through a CMO statement based on the 'if-then' format typical of realist evaluations (Pawson and Manzano, 2012).

The underlying structure of each sub-theory is based on the amended CMO framework proposed by Dalkin et al. (2015), which constitutes four components: mechanism resource, context, mechanism response, and outcome. By separating out resource from response – the two defining features of mechanisms within realist methodology alongside an explanation of the relationship between the two – Dalkin et al.'s (2015) framework helps evaluators to avoid conflating programme strategy with mechanisms: a common issue in realist evaluations (Pawson and Manzano, 2012).

To use an example from the 'Activities' (i.e. implementation) sub-theory below, it is not high-quality backbone support (the mechanism resource) that causes the implementation to be successful (the outcome). Instead, it is the positive learning environment (the mechanism response) created by high-quality backbone support that enables the implementation to be successful. By separating the resources introduced by different programme strategies from the responses they lead to, Dalkin et al.'s (2015) framework helps evaluators to avoid conflating one with the other or missing one or the other out entirely.

BAMTheory of Change

This theory of change explains how BAM is expected to make a difference in young people's lives. By clarifying the model, guiding our decisions for the evaluation, and giving us a reference point from which to build, the theory of change will help us to deliver and study BAM.



Activities

Counsellors deliver four activities with young people. The most important is the BAM Circle, a group of 8-to-12 members that meets once a week in school.

If counsellors receive high quality backbone support, this will create a positive learning environment to help them implement the BAM Circle and other activities successfully.

This will be influenced by how enabling the school context is and how engaged young people are in action and reflection.



Intermediate Outcomes

These activities support young people to internalise the six core values: integrity, self-determination, positive anger expression, accountability, respect for womanhood, and visionary goal-setting.

They do this by helping them to: actively experience each value and reflect on these experiences.

This will be influenced by how ready and motivated young people are to adhere to the group conditions.



Ultimate Outcomes

These core values help young people to engage in responsible decision-making. This includes improvements in educational attainment and reduced involvement in youth violence.

They do this by **protecting** young people from risks and **empowering** them to capitalise on opportunities.

This will be influenced by the wider social determinants of health in young people's lives.

Activities

If counsellors receive high quality support from the "backbone team", then this will help them to implement BAM successfully. This is because counsellors will feel their development is being nurtured in a positive learning environment. This will be influenced by how enabling the school context is and how engaged young people are in action and reflection



Backbone support

Counsellors receive training and coaching support to implement the curriculum and develop their competencies. This builds on the foundations put in place by the ManKind Project's New Warrior Training Adventure. They also receive project management support and peer supervision from MHF, who must have a proactive and supportive organisational culture that is aligned with BAM's core values.

The advisory council help to liaise with communities and stakeholders alongside Black Thrive and Colourful Minds, who also help counsellors to apply an anti-racist ethos and respond to participants' mental health needs

School context

An enabling school culture and supportive staff help to create an environment in which counsellors feel able to deliver BAM well. This depends on:

- Whether counsellors show "systemic leadership", which involves actively nurturing relationships with school staff.
- The school implementation team. This is a formal, problem-solving partnership between school leadership and BAM.
- Support from Colourful Minds to help schools respond to young people's mental health needs

Engagement in action and reflection

Young people that engage more in action and reflection, which drives internalisation of the core values, are more likely to attend activities. They also make it easier for counsellors to deliver with quality and fidelity.

This creates a reinforcing feedback loop: good delivery supports engagement, which supports better delivery.



Positive learning environment

Given these conditions, backbone support helps counsellors to feel their development is being nurtured within a positive learning environment. This means they feel that:

- They are essential and knowledgeable partners
- They are psychologically safe to try new methods
- There is sufficient time and space for reflective thinking
- Leaders express their own fallibility and need for counsellors' input



Successful implementation

A positive learning environment helps counsellors to implement BAM successfully:

- Adaptation: Counsellors adapt activities to London while retaining their underlying function
- Recruitment: Participants present with social-emotional challenges on entry but have different levels of need, to prevent negative labelling.
- Quality: Counsellors demonstrate effective clinical work, group work, modelling, youth engagement and men's work (their own internalisation of the core values).
- Fidelity and attendance: Activities are delivered as intended to enough young people.

Intermediate Outcomes

If counsellors implement BAM successfully, then this will help young people to internalise the core values. This is because of the way in which young people will actively experience each value, before reflecting on their experiences. This will be influenced by how capable and motivated young people are to adhere to the group conditions.



Successful implementation

A positive learning environment helps counsellors to implement BAM successfully:

- Adaptation: Counsellors adapt activities to London while retaining their underlying function
- Recruitment: Participants present with social-emotional challenges on entry but have different levels of need, to prevent negative labelling.
- Quality: Counsellors demonstrate effective clinical work, group work, modelling, youth engagement and men's work (their own internalisation of the core values).
- Fidelity and attendance: Activities are delivered as intended

to enough young people.

Group conditions

Young people in BAM circles must learn to follow three rules: "Have fun, be safe and respectful, and challenge yourself and others to be open and honest". Only then can consistent, trusting relationships develop that create the foundations for action and reflection.

To follow these rules, young people must be sufficiently ready. This is influenced by their developmental stage, and whether their relationships (e.g. at home) and experiences (e.g. of trauma or of other services) have equipped them with the ability to form close bonds with others.

They must also be **motivated** to follow the three conditions. This depends on:

- Their fear of failure or humiliation
- Whether being open, vulnerable and respectful aligns with their preferred image of themselves, or the expectations and pressures placed on them by others
- Pre-existing relationships with others in group



Action and reflection

Successful implementation, given adherence to the group conditions, helps young people to engage in action and reflection. There are three action processes:

- Experiential learning: Young people learn actively, not passively
- Archetypes: They receive clear models of behaviour to aim for.
- Goals: The activities help them to set, track, and celebrate goals.

During reflection, young people internalise the core values through Irvin Yalom's 11 therapeutic factors. These capture how 'hereand-now' learning facilitates hope, emotional expression, relational awareness, and social learning.

Internalise the core values

Through action and reflection in the context of consistent, trusting relationships with the counsellor and group, young people experience social-emotional and identity development.

This happens through internalising the six core values: integrity, self-determination, positive anger expression, accountability, respect for womanhood, and visionary goal-setting.

Integrity is the first value, and the one upon which all the others build: young people know what kind of men they want to be, and can articulate and act in alignment with this vision of themselves.

Ultimate Outcomes

If young people internalise the core values, then this will help them to engage in responsible decision-making, including improved educational attainment and reduced involvement in youth violence. This is because the core values will help to protect and empower them. This will be influenced by the wider social determinants of health influences in young people's lives.



Internalise the core values

Through action and reflection in the context of consistent, trusting relationships with the counsellor and group, young people experience social-emotional and identity development.

This happens through internalising the six core values: integrity, self-determination, positive anger expression, accountability, respect for womanhood, and visionary goal-setting.

Integrity is the first value, and the one upon which all the others build: young people know what kind of men they want to be, and can articulate and act in alignment with this vision of themselves.

Wider influences

Wider social determinants of health in young people's lives influence how much the core values protect and empower them, through their influence on:

- The expectations young people perceive others to have of them.
- Pressure to conform to pro-social or anti-social norms.
- Relationships with positive or negative role models
- Exposure to positive or negative developmental experiences

Stronger, more positive influences reinforce young people's efforts to apply the core values. Stronger, more negative influences may limit their efforts.

These influences include other services, such as the community partners, Black
Thrive and Colourful Minds, who will advocate for young people in the wider system, deliver mental health interventions to young people, and support interactions with partner services.



Protecting and empowering

The core values act as coping mechanisms and positive assets, helping to:

- Protect young people against risks in their environment that might facilitate involvement in anti-social behaviour, including violence.
- Empower young people to thrive, by taking advantage of opportunities and resources to develop these assets further. This includes BAM and other interests and activities, as well as relationships with family, friends, and professionals.



Responsible decision-making

By protecting and empowering them, the core values help young people to engage in responsible decision-making. This concerns the ability to make caring and constructive choices about personal behaviour and social interactions across diverse situations.

These choices help young people to stay in alignment with the core values and their sense of who they are. They also contribute to:

- Improvements in educational attainment
- Reduced involvement in youth violence

Unintended Consequences

If young feel that BAM is for 'bad kids', then this will motivate them to engage in irresponsible decision-making. This is because negative labelling and fractious BAM groups will motivate young people to engage in anti-social behaviour. This will be influenced by whether wider influences in young people's lives reinforce or limit these labels and hierarchies.



Recruitment challenges

Young people develop a perception that BAM is for 'bad kids'. This message could be delivered through:

- Conversations with counsellors, teachers, family and/or peers
- Communications materials shared by MHF about BAM
- Evaluation activities, including surveys, which ask targeted, deficit-based questions
- The weighting of BAM groups towards young people with behavioural challenges.

BAM groups contain **factions** of young people with clear social hierarchies

Wider influences

- Participants are already battling negative expectations in other relationships with family/peers/school/ wider community
- Participants lack relationships that will help them to reframe their selection as something positive (e.g. an opportunity).



Labelling and negotiating

- Recruitment for BAM may be experienced as negative labelling resulting in rejection of the school
- The label of 'bad kid' may serve as a powerful form of intervention capital, being employed to enhance students' status amongst peers.
- Groups containing factions may lead to the construction of group 'outsiders' as students seek safety by strengthening pre-existing relationships
- Students may seek to renegotiate positioning within group hierarchies by 'bragging' about and reinforcing anti-school activities, supporting further engagement in anti-social behaviour.

Irresponsible decision-making

Both negative labelling and internal negotiation of positions within BAM Group hierarchies motivate young people to engage in irresponsible decision-making, including disengagement from school, while undermining their motivation to engage in pro-social behaviour.

Data collection

To guide the data collection process in year two of the feasibility study, the theory of change was broken down into individual elements and entered into a data collection table. This table sets out the attributes of each element in further detail alongside the associated methods, sources of data, targets, and participants, building on the approach proposed by Funnell and Rogers (2011). Table 3 provides a high-level summary. Multiple sources of data were collected for most elements in our programme theory, facilitating a comprehensive degree of triangulation across the theory of change. Triangulation is an important feature of contribution analysis – a systematic, mixed method and collaborative approach to measuring the impact that informed the collection, analysis, and synthesis of data in this study (discussed further in the 'Analysis' section below). Further details on the use of qualitative and quantitative data collection methods are provided in what follows.

Quantitative data

All quantitative data analysed during year one were collected as part of MHF's routine monitoring and evaluation processes. This included the HSA, which is a 61-item self-report tool that provides a portrait of a young person's long-term social-emotional development (Allen et al., 2017). Through a process of trial and error, YG has identified the HSA as their favoured assessment tool for social-emotional development for BAM. This is due to its alignment with BAM's core values, as well as the useful and usable insights that it can provide both counsellors and schools.

We drew on existing YG and MHF systems and measures to track implementation. This included: exposure (number of BAM Circles/brief encounters/one-to-one sessions delivered/attended, length of sessions); adherence to content (counsellor-completed implementation checklists after each session, formal assessments of counsellors by the replication specialist); quality (including counsellors' core competencies, assessed by the YG replication specialist)¹²; and recruitment (proportion of scholars, groups and schools meeting eligibility criteria, retention). These implementation outcomes were drawn from existing frameworks, including Education Endowment Fund's Implementation and Process Evaluation (IPE) handbook (Humphrey et al., 2019) and others (Carroll et al., 2007) recommended in the latest UK MRC guidance for evaluations of complex interventions (Skivington et al., 2021).

MHF also shared socio-demographic data on the backgrounds of students and counsellors, including age (and year group of students) and ethnicity.

¹² There are five core counsellor competencies: systemic leadership (how counsellors engage school staff and parents); clinical skills; modelling; group work; and youth engagement. Counsellors are also assessed on curriculum fidelity and 'men's work'. YG developed a six-step coaching model in partnership with the National Implementation Research Network at the University of North Carolina. Counsellors are given a score for each competency against a five-point metric by the replication specialist via observation of BAM Circles at the beginning and end of the school year. The five points are: basic knowledge; novice; intermediate; advanced; and expert.

Qualitative data

Qualitative data were used to gather evidence on the remaining two dimensions of implementation in EEF's handbook (participant responsiveness and adaptation). In line with standard realist evaluation practice, we used purposive sampling based on which stakeholder was deemed best placed to speak to a particular part of the theory of change (Manzano, 2016). For interviews with scholars, maximum variation sampling was also applied. Counsellors were invited to recommend scholars who, together, captured a range of perspectives to ensure a diversity of experience among interviewees.

Regarding primary data collection, during the first round in 2021, we conducted 21 interviews, including with scholars (two), caregivers (six), counsellors (nine), school staff (two – the BAM lead in each of the two mainstream secondary schools), the replication specialist at YG (one), and the project manager at MHF (one), as well as one focus group with the three counsellors. We also carried out an analysis of group case notes and counsellor reflections. The former are short written reports recorded by counsellors following every BAM Circle session describing what was covered and how they felt the session went. The latter are ad hoc reflections recorded by counsellors on their practice more generally to help them take stock of what they are finding easier or more challenging and why. All group case notes and counsellor reflections from March through to July 2021 were analysed.

In the second round in 2022, we conducted 31 interviews, including with scholars (11 – one of whom was interviewed during the first round), parents (nine – three of whom were interviewed during the first round), as well as school staff (two), counsellors (seven), the replication specialist at YG (one), and the project manager at MHF (one). As with the first round, we conducted one focus group with the three counsellors. All interviews and focus groups during both rounds were carried out by members of the evaluation team.

We built on Manzano's (2016) realist interview principles across all interviews and focus groups by grounding each topic guide in the relevant elements of the theory of change as set out in the data collection table. For counsellors, the replication specialist, and the project manager, this included orientating them to the theory being evaluated and asking them to speak to that theory, based on their experience. For scholars, parents, carers and school staff, a less direct approach was taken given their unfamiliarity with some of the more complex and abstract elements of BAM's theory. In all interviews, we inquired about and remained open to signs of unintended consequences that had not been anticipated.

Based on learning from the first round of data collection, interviews with scholars in the second round aimed to yield similar insights but centred on an activity, rather than a conversation, building on resources developed by others (Macedo, 2022). Scholars were invited to think of their journey over the last two years (the period covering their participation in BAM) as a hot air balloon journey. They were asked how they felt at the start of the journey, at the end, what were the sources of wind pushing them along, who was with them in their basket helping them, what stormy weather was getting in the way, and what sunny weather was making things easier. Emoji cards and other prompts were provided to stimulate reflection. Their engagement with BAM was then discussed at the end.

This approach had several benefits, including (i) creating a fun and engaging activity for scholars, (ii) helping us to consider alternative influences to BAM in their journey (an important part of contribution analysis), and (iii) helping us to simplify our reflections with scholars on mechanisms (the wind) and context (the basket, the stormy weather, and the sunny weather). Further detail on the lessons learnt regarding qualitative data collection with scholars from the first round of data collection is provided in the 'Changes to methods after the start of delivery' section.

Each young person interviewed in the second round of data collection was treated as an embedded case study (Yin, 2018). This means they were each treated as sub-cases within the higher-level case under investigation (i.e. the programme). Embedded case studies are recommended tools for those conducting contribution analysis (Delahais and Toulemonde, 2012) due to the way in which they focus data collection and analysis on the journey of each sub-case through the programme. A common pitfall of theory-driven evaluations is that individual elements within programme theory can become unconfigured from one another as the evaluation becomes more focused on the elements themselves and less so on the relationships between them (Pawson and Manzano, 2012). This can set evaluations on a misguided course, promoting the idea that "it is the variable rather than the cases that are causal" (Blackman et al., 2013).

To borrow from an example offered by Pawson (2006), welfare-to-work programmes are often more successful with men than women (Ashworth et al., 2004), but it is not gender that causes these differential outcomes. Instead, it is the choices women make, given the resources offered by the programme that are different from those made by men. For example, Edin and Lein (1997) found that women place greater value on the loss in family income incurred through losing some benefits if they take up low-paid work, which discourages their entry into the workforce. Studies like this, which shed light on these choices, can support a greater understanding of the mechanisms and contextual factors that generate partial correlations between variables. By protecting the integrity of sub-cases, embedded case studies enabled us to capture the dynamism and complexity that shaped how BAM worked for different scholars, under what circumstances, and why.

Embedded case studies are also built on the same understanding of rigour as contribution analysis – a conceptualisation that focuses on the degree to which triangulated sources converge or diverge. To maximise the amount of data collected on each sub-case, counsellors and, where possible, parents and carers were also asked in their interviews about the journey of each young person we interviewed. Further detail on the way in which their perspectives were triangulated is provided in the 'Analysis' section below.

The issue of adaptation was also discussed in the interview with YG's replication specialist. In advance of delivery, adaptations were made both to the BAM curriculum and BAM's implementation teams to increase the likelihood that the programme would align with local services, systems, and cultures (Stirman et al., 2019). These adaptations were documented by MHF using a framework developed by the evaluation team, which allowed them to document which adaptations to the curriculum were surface and which were deep – depending on whether they were likely to affect core elements of the theory of change. Both surface and deep adaptations were discussed with the replication specialist during their interview to gauge whether and how these adaptations contributed to the implementation and scholars' experiences.

Changes to methods after the start of delivery

Much stayed the same in terms of focus and methodological approach throughout the study due to the level of continuity in the content of theory of change. However, some improvements were made based on learning from the first round of data collection and in response to data collection challenges encountered as the study progressed.

Quantitative data collection methods

MHF found it difficult to communicate with and engage BAM scholars' parents and carers. This was a particular issue at the PRU, where there were delays in obtaining informed consent for counsellors to collect

and record data for internal monitoring and evaluation. As a result, no baseline HSA data were collected from scholars at the PRU.

BAM counsellors experienced challenges in recording and entering data related to brief encounters. Given their duration (up to 15 minutes and usually less than five) and their frequency (counsellors can sometimes hold 20–30 brief encounters a day), counsellors had difficulties with data completeness. Therefore, the evaluation did not consider routinely collected data regarding brief encounters.

Qualitative data collection methods

An important step within contribution analysis involves strengthening the evidence over time by inviting stakeholders to identify strengths and weaknesses in findings as the evaluation progresses (Mayne, 2001). To facilitate this, following the first round of data collection in May 2021, we held a reflection session with MHF and community partners. Several priority areas for improvement were identified concerning qualitative data collection with scholars, including:

- A lack of interviewees (only two scholars attended interviews). This was driven largely by difficulties
 with holding the interviews remotely by phone or video call. While remote methods were necessary
 due to COVID-19 restrictions, the evaluation team faced challenges with agreeing dates and times
 for interviews and with interviewees attending at the pre-agreed date and time.
- A need for more creative methods to help scholars express themselves when sharing their thoughts and feelings on experiences related to the theory of change.
- The fact the two interviews were conducted by White female researchers based in Southwest England may have inadvertently limited our access to particular insights (for example, by discouraging scholars from sharing information that they would have more readily shared with someone they felt was more like them in terms of lived experience).

These insights were reinforced by scholars themselves in two consultation sessions with scholars to explore what activities would help them to share their perspective and the profile of their preferred facilitator.

In response, the in-person hot air balloon activity was introduced during the second round of data collection, and nine of the 11 interviews with scholars during this round were carried out by two female researchers from racial minority backgrounds.

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, the replication specialist – who works for YG and is responsible for BAM training and coaching – could not travel to London from Chicago to observe and assess counsellors during year one. At the same time, counsellors needed intensive support to understand and deliver the online curriculum for the first time. As a result, while the replication specialist was able to identify areas of development with counsellors, the formal assessment of counsellor competencies normally used by YG could not take place until year two. This meant that no coaching data were analysed from year one. However, the subsequent relaxing of COVID-19 restrictions allowed the coaching model to resume as planned, which enabled the collection and analysis of coaching data in year two.

Advisory Council

Given the amount of time and energy required to support counsellors and schools to navigate their response to COVID-19, MHF postponed establishing the Advisory Council until after the evaluation period (the council is yet to be set up). Given that the Advisory Council was not one of the forums likely to have

the greatest influence on delivery in Lambeth - an important guide for evaluators when prioritising (Renger et al., 2015) - we decided not to collect or analyse data on the impact of the absence of the Advisory Council on implementation.

Table 3: Methods overview

Theory of change element	Data collection methods	Participants/data sources
Research Question	1: To what extent is BAM being successfully implem	ented, with whom, under what circumstances, and why?
1A) Backbone support	Qualitative interviews, coaching data	Replication specialist, counsellors, project managers (MHF), and school staff
1B) Positive learning environment	Focus groups, qualitative interviews, coaching data	Parents, carers, counsellors, replication specialist, project managers (MHF), and school staff
1C) Successful implementation	Qualitative interviews (years one and two), HSA data, routinely collected programme data, coaching data, focus groups	Replication specialist, counsellors, school staff, project managers (MHF), scholars, parents, and carers
1 – Context) School context	Qualitative interviews, focus groups, coaching data	Counsellors, school staff, project managers (MHF), parents, carers, replication specialist, scholars
	2a: How has implementation contributed to any reports of the contributed to any report of the contributed to any report of the contributed to any reports of the contributed to any report of the contributed to a	Scholars, counsellors, parents, and carers
2B) Internalise	Qualitative interviews	Scholars, counsellors, parents, and carers
the core values 2 – Context) Group conditions	Qualitative interviews	Scholars, counsellors, parents, and carers
	the avoidance of or reduced involvement in crime/o	uted to any reported changes in academic performance anti-social behaviour, for whom, under what
3A) Protecting and empowering	Qualitative interviews	Parents, carers, counsellors, scholars
3B) Responsible decision-making	Qualitative interviews	Parents, carers, counsellors, scholars
3 – Context) Wider influences	Qualitative interviews	Parents, carers, counsellors, scholars

Research Question 2c: How has implementation contributed to any reported unintended consequences, for whom, under what circumstances, and why?				
4A) Recruitment challenges	Qualitative interviews, HSA data, routinely collected data	School staff, parents, carers, counsellors, scholars, replication specialist		
4B) Labelling and negotiating	Qualitative interviews	School staff, parents, carers, counsellors, scholars		
4C) Irresponsible decision-making	Qualitative interviews	School staff, parents, carers, counsellors, scholars		
4 – Context) Wider influences	Qualitative interviews	School staff, parents, carers, counsellors, scholars		

Analysis

The overarching method of analysis for this study was contribution analysis (Mayne, 2001). While more commonly used in policy and system change evaluations, contribution analysis has several strengths that justify its inclusion in this study:

- Its systematic approach to improving confidence about the relative contribution of interventions and associated mechanisms and contextual factors to results (Lemire et al., 2012) a challenge observed in both realist evaluations (Marchal et al., 2018) and those based on theories of change (Breuer et al., 2016)
- Its attention to rival influences on impact, which theory-based evaluations sometimes overlook (Breuer et al., 2016)
- Its suitability for evaluations with ambitions of gathering evidence of an intervention's promise, but which lack comparison groups and large sample sizes (Lemire et al., 2012). Given that this is the format of the pilot outcomes study currently underway, exploring the application of contribution analysis within the feasibility study helps to develop the methods and measures for the pilot an important aim of this study.

Contribution analysis draws on the analysis and synthesis of qualitative and quantitative data. The details of what this involved in this study are described below.

Contribution analysis: Constructing 'contribution claims'

Contribution analysis is a collaborative, systematic approach to establishing the extent to which a particular intervention contributed to change in a specific set of outcomes (Mayne, 2001). It can support evaluators to collect and analyse data related to impact in projects that lack comparison groups and large samples. In contribution analysis, rigour is understood in terms of triangulation (i.e. the degree to which different sources of data converge or diverge) and the inclusion of multiple perspectives. Different types of data are collected from different sources at different levels to support the accumulation of sound – plausible evidence at each stage of the theory of change. This evidence is interrogated iteratively by a broad collection of stakeholders to establish areas of weakness that can be addressed through further data collection and analysis.

The aim is to arrive at a "plausible contribution story" – that is, one that enables "a reasonable person" to "agree from the evidence and argument that the program has made an important contribution to the observed result" (Mayne, 2012, p.273).

We applied this approach across each of our sub-theories by constructing four contribution claims – one per sub-theory (implementation, intermediate outcomes, ultimate outcomes, and unintended consequences – each associated with research questions 1, 2a, 2b, and 2c, respectively) to answer the associated research question. Contribution claims summarise the degree to which some or all the theory of change was verified, accounting for other key influencing factors (Mayne, 2012).

Put simply: from start to finish, the way we approached both analysis and synthesis was led by the aim of arriving at clear yet comprehensive summaries of the evidential picture behind each sub-theory, each in the form of a short paragraph, each built systematically and transparently. These contribution claims directly address each of the associated research questions. They form the summaries in the tables that capture the findings in both the Executive summary and the Conclusion. They are also reported and highlighted at the beginning of each of the relevant parts in the findings section itself.

We adapted Delahais and Toulemonde's (2012) approach to constructing contribution claims to account for the four components within each sub-theory (mechanism resource, context, mechanism response, and outcome). Each contribution claim was assembled by compiling evidence on the extent to which:

- 1. The outcome happened...
- 2. ... due to the mechanism response...
- 3. ... which was due to the mechanism resource...
- 4. ... the link between which was mediated by context...
- 5. ... with rival influences having been considered.

The contribution claims constructed for the sub-theories related to intermediate outcomes, ultimate outcomes, and unintended consequences, focused on the internal validity of the evidence concerning those interviewed (i.e. whether the evidence captured the experiences and causal pathways associated with interviewees specifically) with implications for the wider cohort considered only tentatively. As reported in the introduction section, the research questions associated with these sub-theories (2a–2c) address this study's second aim – to develop BAM's programme theory. Therefore, they are more concerned with fully understanding the causal processes underlying any changes reported, and less with examining the extent to which these sub-theories are realised across the cohort. This is due to the tentative nature of these sub-theories and the need to develop and test them before the programme is held up against them. Considerations at the cohort level form a core part of the pilot study, which began in autumn 2021 and runs until summer 2023.

The contribution claim built for the implementation sub-theory was able to focus on the internal validity of the evidence associated with all scholars in the evaluation cohort. This was due to the availability of cohort-level data across implementation outcomes, including fidelity, exposure, and reach. In doing so, and despite it being a method more commonly associated with measuring impact on outcomes, the application of contribution analysis in this study facilitated a thorough assessment of the extent to which BAM could feasibly be delivered in Lambeth.

Qualitative data analysis

Our approach to qualitative data analysis was grounded in framework analysis (Ritchie and Spencer, 1994). We used a form of framework analysis similar to that applied by Brand and colleagues during their realist formative process evaluation of an intervention to support prison leavers (2019, pp.155–156). We also built on the approach outlined in Gale et al. (2013), particularly their guidance for evaluation teams on best practice for the collective and consistent charting of data into a framework.

Framework analysis is a deductive method for analysing qualitative data. In other words, it is suitable for researchers (like us) who already have a sense prior to analysis of how they will interpret and draw meaning from the data they have collected (captured in this evaluation by the theory of change). The core feature of framework analysis is a table that supports the analysis called a 'framework matrix'. In this table, the columns represent the individual elements of the analytical framework (in our case, the elements of our theory of change which are aligned with the data collection table), while the rows represent one type of data for one participant (e.g. one interview with a parent or carer). Every transcript is then coded against this framework with each cell representing "relevant evidence from one type of data for one participant in relation to one piece of programme theory" (Brand et al., 2019).

In this evaluation, the information entered in each cell considered 'certainty' (Lemire et al., 2012), i.e. the degree of alignment between the evidence and our programme theory (i.e. the extent to which the evidence did or did not follow the pattern predicted in the relevant part of the theory of change). The framework matrix was reviewed by a second researcher for each transcript coded to ensure consistency.

Quantitative data analysis

Summary statistics were used to describe the implementation in terms of recruitment, attendance, fidelity, and quality, as well as the number and socio-demographic characteristics of the scholars recruited to BAM. Insights from these analyses were added to the framework matrix to enable us to apply an integrated, mixed-methods approach during synthesis.

Synthesis

According to Delahais and Toulemonde (2012), "the robustness of a contribution claim depends on the supporting items of evidence that may or may not be strong, convergent, and triangulated" (p.287). Therefore, to synthesise our analysis, we developed a triangulation assessment. Building on the approach of Campbell et al. (2020), this involved establishing the degree of convergence at three levels: between individuals (e.g. between caregivers); across stakeholders (e.g. between caregivers and scholars); and across methods (e.g. between routinely collected programme data and interviews). The level of convergence at each level was described consistently using the framework developed by Farmer et al. (2006), which includes four categories: (1) full convergence, (2) partial convergence, (3) silence, and (4) divergence.

In practice, full convergence was only identified for the evidence collated against the first research question concerning implementation, which is largely concerned with counsellors' experience of delivery. The unique nature of each young person's individual journey (the core focus of the latter part of the theory of change and research questions 2a–2c) rendered full convergence at any level regarding their trajectory through BAM extremely unlikely. This challenge – the impact of complex and diverse data sources and experiences on the likelihood of full convergence – is a common one (Farmer et al., 2016; McDermott et al., 2022).

Therefore, rather than only full convergence, where there was either full or fundamental convergence (i.e. convergence on core concepts) at two or more levels, this is described as 'strong' evidence in the findings (e.g. the majority of the scholars we interviewed reported applying themselves more at school and making more pro-social choices in risky situations — a view shared by the majority of parents and by counsellors, despite some variation in the degree and nature of change observed among interviewees).

Preliminary findings were shared with MHF and YG in November 2022 to identify weaknesses in the contribution story assembled by the evaluation team. Their feedback has been incorporated into this report.

Timeline

Table 4: Project timeline (2020–2022)

Date	Activity		
MHF/YG activitie	s		
Apr-May 2020	Project manager and counsellors at Oak and Birch ¹³ are recruited		
Jul-Oct 2020	Adaptation of curriculum and implementation teams		
Sep-Nov 2020	Recruitment of scholars		
Oct 2020	Counsellor at the PRU is recruited		
Oct-Dec 2020	Delivery of BAM Circles begins		
Mar 2021	Young person feedback survey collected and analysed at Oak and Birch		
Mar–Apr 2021	Baseline HSA collected and analysed at Oak and Birch		
Oct 2021	Delivery of BAM Circles recommences for year two		
Jul 2022	BAM finishes and school year ends		
Evaluator activiti	Evaluator activities – Preparation		
Mar 2020	Evaluator visits Chicago to gather insights to inform development of theory of change		
May 2020	First draft of theory of change completed		
Jul-Oct 2020	Support adaptation of curriculum and implementation teams		
Evaluator activiti	Evaluator activities – First round of data collection		
Mar–Apr 2021	Analysis of routinely collected service delivery data		
Mar–Apr 2021	Collection and analysis of qualitative data (21 interviews and one focus group)		
May 2021	Feedback and reflection sessions held with MHF and YG		
Jul 2021	Consultation sessions were held with BAM participants regarding qualitative data collection methods		
Jul-Aug 2021	Analysis of routinely collected service delivery data		
Jul-Aug 2021	Analysis of group case notes and counsellor reflections		
Evaluator activiti	es – Second round of data collection		
Sep-Nov 2021	Theory of change revised		
May–Jul 2022	Analysis of routinely collected service delivery data		
May–Jul 2022	Collection of qualitative data (31 interviews and one focus group)		
Aug-Oct 2022	Analysis of qualitative data		
Sep-Oct 2022	Analysis of routinely collected service delivery data		
Oct-Nov 2022	Analysis of coaching data		
Nov 2022	Synthesis, including triangulation assessment		
Nov 2022	Feedback and reflection session held with MHF		

¹³ Oak and Birch are the pseudonyms given to the two secondary schools throughout this study.

Findings

In this section, background information on scholars is provided before the findings related to each of the four research questions are shared. Findings related to the first aim of this study (to establish whether BAM can be successfully implemented) are discussed in relation to research question 1. Findings related to the second aim (to develop BAM's programme theory) are discussed in relation to research questions 2a–2c.

The findings related to each research question are grounded in the sub-theory in the theory of change related to that question. The contribution claim that summarises the findings for each question uses abbreviations to signal which component of the sub-theory is being referenced in the statement, including abbreviations for mechanism resources (MResO), contextual factors (C), mechanism responses (MResP), and outcomes (O). Rival or alternative explanations are also highlighted (R). This is to ensure that (i) the findings can be clearly linked back to the theory of change and (ii) the findings explicitly advance our understanding of the contexts, mechanisms, and outcomes that explain how BAM works. This approach adheres to the RAMESES guidelines for the reporting of realist evaluations (Wong et al., 2016).

As outlined above, references to the strength of evidence are built on the degree to which different sources of evidence converged. 'Strong' evidence is defined as full or fundamental convergence at two or more levels of triangulation, i.e. between individuals (e.g. between caregivers); across stakeholders (e.g. between caregivers and scholars); and across methods (e.g. between routinely collected programme data and interviews).

To ensure transparency while protecting readability, we use verbal markers of quantitative information to capture the number of scholars and parents or carers who shared a particular view in interviews as is common in the field of qualitative research (Maxwell et al., 2010; Sandelowski, 2001).

- 'Most' is used to describe views shared by a majority of interviewees (six or more out of 11 scholars interviewed and five or more out of nine parents and carers interviewed).
- 'A minority' is used to describe views shared by less than half of the interviewees (less than six of 11 scholars interviewed and less than five out of nine parents and carers interviewed).

Three case studies are included in the findings. Each of them brings together perspectives from both the counsellor and the young person regarding their journey over the last two years, with two of them including insights from the parent or carer of the young person.

The first round of data collection in 2021 provided a preliminary assessment of feasibility and informed improvements to the theory of change and data collection tools in advance of the second round of data collection in 2022. Most insights and quotations in the findings are drawn from interviews carried out during the second round. A minority come from the first round, and only where the time point was closer to the event or experience being described (e.g. the reflection of the first project manager on the context at the PRU). The quantitative data cover the entire two-year period.

Participants

Enrolment

At the start of the programme in October 2020, 95 scholars enrolled in BAM, with 62 (65%) still enrolled at the end of the second year (July 2022). All of these 62 students were enrolled in the two secondary schools,

Oak (29) and Birch (33), and none at the PRU (Figure 2). BAM was withdrawn from the PRU at the end of year one, for several reasons:

- A lack of support from school staff who often prioritised other activities over BAM (including cancelling BAM sessions so that the counsellor could support other lessons)
- The severity of scholars' needs, which limited the ability of the counsellor to progress through the curriculum – an issue compounded by the limited size of the groups, which were kept below the target range to ensure sessions remained safe and manageable, but which prohibited the counsellor from delivering some activities
- Mixed attendance, which was due to the transient nature of the student population, internal exclusions, and other services competing for students' time.

In particular, the combination of small groups and mixed attendance meant that group sessions were not viable in this setting:

"It just really can't really work at the PRU... it might end up having like two guys... because they have people that come and people that go." (Counsellor at the PRU)

Further detail on the reasons for attrition at Oak and Birch are provided in the findings section related to research question 1.

Year group

Across all three settings, most scholars were drawn from Year 9 (53%), followed by Years 10 (23%), 8 (17%), and 11 (5%). All groups at Birch were a mix of Years 8 and 9. At Oak, there were two Year 9 groups and one Year 10 group. At the PRU, there was one Year 9 group, one Year 10 group, and one group with special educational needs, drawn from multiple years (8 through 11) (Table 6).

Ethnicity

Over half of the scholars identified as 'Black/Black British' (56%), followed by 'Mixed Ethnicity' (18%), 'White/White British' (10%) and 'Other' (6%). There were no ethnicity data for 7% of scholars due to challenges faced by counsellors in collecting the information from all young people (Table 6). The latest demographic estimates for 10–19-year-olds in Lambeth (GLA, 2016) suggest that while those from a Black/Black British background were over-represented among BAM students (56% vs 41%), those from a White/White British background were under-represented (13% vs 32%). However, this comparison should be treated with caution; these data for Lambeth are six years old and capture demographic information for the borough as a whole rather than the neighbourhoods surrounding each school.

Figure 2: Flowchart depicting the number of scholars recruited, lost through attrition, and retained.

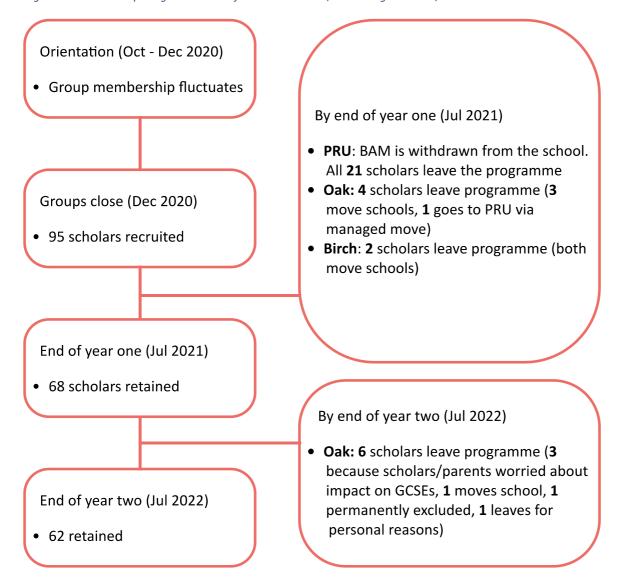


Table 5: Percentage of scholars participating in BAM by year group

Table 6: Percentage of scholars participating in BAM by ethnicity

Year	%
8	17
9	53
10	23
11	5

Ethnicity	% In BAM	% In Lambeth
Black/Black British	56	41
Mixed ethnicity	18	16
White/White British	13	32
Other	3	9
Missing	7	

Research question 1: To what extent is BAM being successfully implemented, with whom, under what circumstances, and why?

Evidence summary (contribution claim)

There is strong evidence that the implementation of BAM varied by implementation domain (O¹⁴). While adaptation and the quality of delivery were generally successful, recruitment and exposure experienced mixed results with particular challenges observed at the PRU. Evidence on the quality of counsellors' adherence to the manual was positive, but their ability to progress through the curriculum was limited. There is some evidence that counsellors' previous skills and experience supported the delivery effort (R). However, there is strong evidence that 'backbone support' provided by MHF and YG (MResO) made an important contribution to implementation by creating a positive learning environment for counsellors (MResP). The extent to which this environment enabled implementation was influenced by COVID-19, engagement from scholars, and school context, which was particularly incompatible at the PRU (C) to the extent that BAM was withdrawn from the PRU after one year.

Backbone support

All three counsellors felt that the support they received from MHF and YG – christened 'backbone support' by one of the counsellors – helped to create a positive learning environment. They felt supported, valued, and listened to and were granted enough time and space to learn and reflect.

"There's not been a time where there's something I need support on that I didn't think I could go to those spaces and receive that support. Knowing that you've got that strengthens you greatly... just being mindful that you're part of such a group is empowering within itself." (Counsellor at Oak)

Peer supervision

Two counsellors felt the weekly peer supervision sessions attended by them and their project manager contributed the most to this learning environment, while the third counsellor ranked it second. As well as offering unstructured emotional and practical support, the sessions recreated the dynamics of counsellors' BAM Circles, which helped them to transfer learning.

"It almost feels like we're doing check-ins, so it mirrors what we've been learning with BAM and our own personal experiences. So, there's this real, authentic love within that space... it's such a rarity." (Counsellor at Birch)

Training and coaching

At YG, training is more focused on supporting the counsellors to deliver the curriculum with fidelity, while coaching is more concerned with supporting the professional development of counsellors.

Due to COVID-19, training was conducted exclusively online during year one (via Zoom). While the sessions were shorter (two hours rather than a half or full day) and more frequent (once a week instead of once every four weeks) to prevent fatigue, YG attempted to mimic the BAM Circle as much as possible. In the

¹⁴ See page 42 for further explanation regarding the use of the abbreviations.

second half of each session, the three counsellors watched video run-throughs of the next lesson. This was accompanied by advice and explanation from the replication specialist, following which they had the opportunity to ask questions. In the first half of the following week's session, counsellors would each deliver the session to the group and receive feedback from each other and the replication specialist. This model continued during year two, albeit with moments of in-person training during the five-week-long visits the replication specialist made during the year.

As previously reported, YG's standard six-step coaching model could not be delivered as intended during the first year due to the impact of COVID-19. However, during year two, it was re-established, allowing the replication specialist to support counsellors through a comprehensive suite of coaching activities, including goal setting, observation, appraisal, and feedback.

The counsellor at the PRU felt training and coaching contributed most to his development because he "came in last, so I was always panicked about getting it right". The other two counsellors ranked training and coaching second (after peer supervision). They appreciated the flexibility of the sessions, which one felt had "given us space to ask questions, to reflect, to adapt… that's how I like to work, with fluidity within that."

Yet the replication specialist had concerns. He felt that while the quality of support had been high, COVID-19 and the distance between the US and the UK had limited counsellors' ability to:

- Practise large group activities due to the largely online and small group training format, which affected "the flow of the lesson" during delivery
- Be observed in BAM Circles (not at all during year one and only a limited amount in year two), which limited the scope of the replication specialist's feedback
- Attend the ManKind Project Weekend Adventure, which all new counsellors are invited to attend when they join BAM. This is a male-only retreat that supports relationship-building between counsellors and challenges them to be open, honest, and vulnerable with a group of other men, supporting them on their journey towards internalising the core values. This parallel process is one of the counsellor competencies 'men's work' and is important in helping counsellors model the core values and challenge scholars to remain in alignment with them. Combined with limited opportunities to meet in person more generally, the replication specialist felt this affected relationship building, the development of the Challenging and Confronting competency, and "the man's work that they need to do".

Project management

The next most important source of support cited by counsellors was project management. During year one, the project manager offered counsellors practical support, including developing a comprehensive guide for recruiting young people and helping them to respond to ongoing challenges within schools. This included advocating for the counsellor at Birch with school leadership to secure them a dedicated room for delivering BAM and working alongside counsellors at Oak and Birch to develop a process for incentivising scholar attendance during online delivery in early 2021. In year two, the project manager left and was replaced. Their replacement built on this valued work with a focus on "working with the counsellors to… support their well-being."

The replication specialist felt that the project management support offered by MHF was vital to supporting the implementation of BAM. The proactive and wide-ranging contribution of both project managers was emblematic of a broader cultural alignment between the two organisations (MHF and YG) – from positive

working relationships at a delivery level to buy-in from senior leadership. The replication specialist felt that the quality of this partnership helped to provide an enabling environment for delivery.

"I think, like, they understand... the values, you know, within BAM... there were a couple of times when [YG colleagues]... went to the MHF office... they just were talking about how profound that experience was in the meeting, and how [the CEO at MHF] really was very vulnerable and sharing around his personal feelings, but I think a lot of things that came out just around the thoughts of BAM and MHF for the future, you know. And... and so a lot of... of those relationships develop a transparency I would say, between Youth Guidance and... and Mental Health Foundation... Really, you know... really bridged something special." (Replication specialist)

Black Thrive and Colourful Minds

The second project manager felt that Black Thrive had supported BAM to understand "what the implications of race in BAM in the UK are", from both "a curriculum perspective and from an evaluative perspective."

However, he also highlighted that due to resource constraints, both Colourful Minds and Black Thrive had not yet been able to contribute as much as anticipated. This sentiment was shared by both school staff and counsellors. One counsellor felt they were "not really seeing the full weight of what they could do to collaborate for us to upskill and the young people to get the best of the programme."

Adaptation

The positive learning environment within which counsellors operated was also important in adapting BAM to the UK¹⁵. Adaptation took place through a twin-track process in the pre-implementation period. First, adaptations were made to the teams and individuals that comprised counsellors' 'backbone support' based on perceived differences in context to increase the likelihood of a good intervention-context fit. Counsellors and staff at MHF and YG and the evaluation team systematically identified discrepancies in context using both the BAM theory of change and through examining relevant features of context – identified by Craig et al. (2018) and Damschroder et al. (2022) – designing adaptations where necessary.

For example, BAM has a considerable profile in the US, which motivates schools, communities, and parents to support and promote its delivery in their neighbourhoods. No such profile exists in the UK. One of several responses to this discrepancy involved making a series of amendments to the school-level agreement that schools sign with MHF prior to the delivery of BAM, to make the language more collaborative, accessible, and based more on schools' needs and priorities.

The second set of adaptations concerned the curriculum. The team responsible for leading the adaptation process was a diverse group involving representatives from YG, MHF, and Black Thrive. Counsellors were placed at the heart of the effort given their experience of working with scholars and some of their shared lived experiences.

Adaptations to the BAM curriculum in advance of delivery were classified as either 'surface' or 'deep' by YG. Surface adaptations, which are summarised in Table 7, largely concerned amending language, symbols, and

¹⁵ The process and outcome of the adaptation effort are documented in detail in the evaluation team's report on adaptation submitted to the YEF in November 2020.

illustrative examples to better fit the context of Lambeth. Deep adaptations concerned those that affected core elements of the theory of change.

Table 7: Summary of surface adaptations

Nature of adaptation	Example(s)
Superficial changes to language, where the reference or meaning of the word(s) remains intact.	'City blocks' became 'streets'.
Changes to cultural references, where both language and reference change but the purpose and function of the reference remain the same.	Basketball references were replaced with football. The '\$10 role play' became the '£10 role play'. Films that may resonate more with a US audience were replaced with those deemed better suited to London youth Je.g. Pursuit of Happyness (2006) substituted for Miracle (2004)].
Amending the timing and structure of sessions on 'academic integrity' ¹⁶ to account for differences in the assessment processes between the two countries.	Aligning sessions with the release of grades throughout the school year.
Adapting to UK COVID-19 restrictions.	Ensuring students use hand sanitiser prior to group sessions.
Replacing the language used during check-ins with terms more commonly used by London youth (every session should include at least one check-in, where the group takes turns to describe how they are feeling and why).	Certain rituals occur during check-ins, the most important being the way the group responds to someone checking in by saying 'Asé', a Yoruban word used in the context of circles to affirm the person checking in. In London, this was replaced with 'safe', 'say less', or 'calm', colloquialisms common in London and used among other things as greetings.

Surface adaptations

While some pre-emptive surface adaptations worked well, others did not or were not made when they should have been. The replication specialist felt this varied from BAM Circle to BAM Circle, depending on the specific interests of those scholars present. Counsellors were empowered to respond reactively in these situations.

"I remember [the counsellor at the PRU] specifically saying that, you know, he had lost of one of his groups in the 'Jordan to the Max' video, and he ended up pivoting to, you know, this documentary around a football player...it's crazy because [the counsellor at Birch's] group was... was pretty receptive to it... I think it... it mattered about the particular population that you were working with." (Replication specialist)

This flexibility and the agency given to counsellors meant that the replication specialist, the second project manager, and the counsellors themselves all felt that the core content of BAM with these adaptations,

¹⁶ During academic integrity sessions, participants take turns to update the group on their most recent grades. The group then affirms those students who have passed all their classes and challenges those who have failed all or some of their classes.

ensured the programme "could work in Lambeth", and the materials were "relevant" overall (Counsellor at the PRU).

Deep adaptations

Deep adaptations to the curriculum covered BAM's use of three concepts: 'tribal societies'; the archetypes of 'savage' and 'warrior', which are covered in the section focused on the core values of Positive Anger Expression; and the archetypes of 'liberator' and 'oppressor' which are covered in the section focused on Respect for Womanhood. As counsellors did not reach the Respect for Womanhood core value in the curriculum with their groups (the reasons for which are outlined below), only findings related to the first two concepts will be discussed here.

BAM is a two-year rite of passage from boyhood to manhood. The concept is a spiritual one, in the sense of encouraging scholars to connect to something bigger than themselves. The BAM curriculum, particularly in its earlier stages, refers to the existence of rites of passage within ancient tribal societies to reinforce the significance and appeal of the journey to scholars. Upon review, MHF and YG felt that the phrase 'tribal' had problematic colonial and imperial associations, so changes were made to refer to ancestry more generally.

The replication specialist felt that this adaptation had no impact on the theory of change "at all":

"The overall message was just around people in ancestry had to go through a rite of passage... the story is still there." (Replication specialist)

In the original curriculum, 'savage' is used during sessions on Positive Anger Expression to conjure up images of destructive, uncontrolled anger that creates guilt and shame, while 'warrior' is associated with constructive, controlled anger that brings dignity and integrity.

MHF felt these concepts were problematic. First, both have violent connotations, which could unintentionally suggest that anger equates to violence. Second, 'savage' has been used historically as a derogatory term for indigenous peoples. Third, 'savage' is already used as a colloquialism among scholars in London, often as a compliment to imply strength. As a result, MHF and YG agreed to use the terms 'constructive' and 'destructive' instead.

The replication specialist felt that these replacements lacked the same weight with scholars. This is because 'savage' and 'warrior' were archetypes (Jung, 1969) – that is, symbols with universal meanings that naturally repel or attract scholars. 'Constructive' and 'destructive' are not archetypes.

"I just felt like savage was just cooler, and warrior were just cooler... it grasped them. You know, it was... it was attractive, and so... I don't think destructive and constructive... I think we lost... lost them a bit in... in that, just... just using those words." (Replication specialist)

Recruitment

The positive learning environment generated by counsellors' backbone support also supported them to recruit scholars. The first project manager helped to translate YG's high-level description regarding BAM's target population into a comprehensive recruitment guide for the counsellors at Oak and Birch, including guidance for conversations with heads of year and pastoral staff and templates for recording information on the needs of the selected scholars. Participation was mandatory at the PRU because the school wanted to select scholars themselves, which meant the guidance was not used by the counsellor in that setting.

School context

The context of schools and the impact on them of COVID-19 and associated lockdowns limited counsellors' efforts to recruit as intended. Oak and Birch had already identified prospective scholars before the recruitment process began based on those who had behavioural concerns at school (a narrower definition of the target population than YG's). MHF tried to accommodate these requests rather than impose strict boundaries on the process to ensure a positive start to their relationship with schools, the pressure on which was compounded by COVID-19:

"I didn't actively kind of chase counsellors in making sure their groups were balanced... It was something that we had as an ideal ... but we've also gone into schools during a pandemic, and we're asking them to buy into a programme." (Project Manager 1)

At the PRU, the school decided late into the pre-implementation period that participation would be mandatory and that they would select scholars unilaterally based on who had the most severe level of need contrary to the intended recruitment process.

Level and spread of need

Despite these challenges, support for counsellors from the wider team enabled them to recruit almost as planned at Oak and Birch. Of the 57 scholars who completed the HSA at Oak Birch, 55 had at least one challenge related to emotional wellbeing (the target for all participants).

Overall, both schools showed a spread of need across each of the HSA's three tiers, albeit with more representation from Tier 3 and less from Tier 2 than the intended 15/70/15 split (Figure 3). The same was true of the groups themselves, in which all but one – Group C at Oak – showed a spread of need (Figure 4).

No HSA data were collected at the PRU due to challenges with gaining consent from parents. However, evidence from qualitative interviews with the counsellor at the PRU suggests that scholars were skewed towards a Tier 3 level of need.

Figure 3: Percentage of scholars in each HSA tier at Oak and Birch

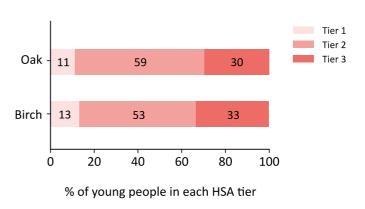
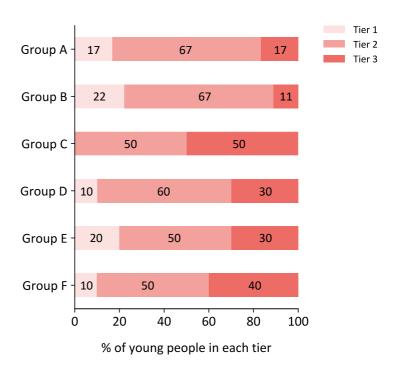


Figure 4: Percentage of scholars in each tier of the HSA within each of the six groups



"I think the comparison is our PRU kids are... they're really... they're really tough because you have some young people there with real behavioural problems, really emotional, psychological problems, and the kind of more acute level." (Counsellor at the PRU)

Group size

Support for counsellors also enabled them to achieve the target group size of eight to 12 in all but one group at Oak and Birch by the end of the orientation period (December 2020), at which point membership of BAM settles (Table 8). At the start of year two, Group C at Oak was split in two, to make it more manageable for the counsellor. As previously discussed, group sizes at the PRU were limited to ensure that sessions remained safe given the higher levels of need observed among scholars.

Table 8: Size of BAM groups as of December 2020

School	Group	Size by Dec 20
Oak	Group A	9
	Group B	10
	Group C	14
Birch	Group D	11
	Group E	11
	Group F	11
PRU	Group G	6
	Group H	7
	Group I	7

Case Study 1: Troy



- According to Troy's counsellor, he was referred to BAM because of "spats with other students... also that reactiveness to teachers... he will quickly react to something being said in a very, like, emotionally charged way."
- From Troy's perspective, he was "just going with the flow... doing school... I wouldn't say I took it seriously... most of the time I'd be getting detentions... I wouldn't really care because to me it would just be like, it's whatever, it's just homework."

Case Study 2: Josh



- When Josh joined BAM, the counsellor recalled his mum felt "he wasn't concentrating in lessons, he was continually getting into trouble... she had a great concern about the direction he was going."
- At the time, Josh was dealing with a lot of peer pressure and stress: "If somebody say talked about me behind my back, it wasn't nothing major, I used to get angry about it, but I didn't know how to control that anger, so I used that anger on somebody or an object."

Case Study 3: Keiron



- When he started BAM, Keiron was working hard and had friends at school. According to his counsellor, his school referred him because he found it hard to express himself.
- This limited him at school, but also left him feeling frustrated: "How he might speak, you know, some teachers might see it as... Keiron's someone that walks in the corridor, he's got his shirt tucked out, his trousers a bit low, he talks in slang... I think the misconception of who he is, I think he gets put in a box straight away."

Quality

Some alternative influences on counsellors' competencies (full definitions of which can be found in Appendix 1) besides the positive learning environment were offered, specifically around their previous skills and experience. Counsellors and the replication specialist felt this had given them a head start, particularly with listening, assessing, and engaging scholars. Yet, there is strong evidence that the positive learning environment generated by the MHF and YG made an important contribution to counsellors' development.

Table 9 shows the performance ratings¹⁷ given by the replication specialist for each counsellor at the end of the second year¹⁸. Each rating includes an associated statement by the replication specialist setting out the extent to which their performance is in line with their expected rate of development given their level of experience. For all competencies on which counsellors were rated 'Advanced', they were deemed to have exceeded expectations. Expectations were reported to have been met for all other competencies except 'Challenging and Confronting', where performance was deemed to be 'below expectation'.

Table 9: BAM counsellor skill competency level

Competency	Counsellor 1	Counsellor 2	Counsellor 3
Clinical skills – Assessing	Intermediate	Intermediate	Intermediate
Clinical skills – Listening	Intermediate	Intermediate	Intermediate
Clinical skills – Challenging and Confronting	Novice	Novice	Novice
Modelling	Intermediate	Advanced	Advanced
Group Work	Intermediate	Intermediate	Intermediate
Youth Engagement	Advanced	Advanced	Advanced
Systemic Leadership	Advanced	Advanced	Novice
Men's Work	Intermediate	Novice	Intermediate

Clinical listening and assessing

Clinical listening concerns counsellors' ability to listen actively and attentively to young people. Clinical assessing concerns their ability to conduct here-and-now processing (identifying actions or patterns of

¹⁷ The assessment uses the following scale: (1) Basic knowledge – is familiar with the competency, but no experience in that area; (2) Novice – limited experience in this competency – focus on skill development; (3) Intermediate – experienced to degree of being proficient – focus on skill enhancement; (4) Advanced – highly proficient with no further development needed – focus on nuances of competency; (5) Expert – highest degree of proficiency – able to coach and lead others in this area.

¹⁸ The counsellor at the PRU transferred to a mainstream secondary school at the end of the first year. The performance ratings in Table 10 were completed during his time at this school. They are included here to offer a complete account of the contribution of backbone support to implementation quality.

behaviour occurring in the BAM Circle and using these to stimulate discussion and reflection) (Yalom and Leszcz, 2005).

According to their coaching assessments, the counsellors were at an intermediate level for listening and assessing by the end of year two. Along with parents and carers, several BAM scholars shared this view; they felt counsellors were empathetic, kind, and wise.

"Someone that listens... that's [the counsellor]... he's listening, giving advice as well." (Scholar)

"With [the counsellor], just being able to talk and not being practically judged... That's good." (Scholar)

Youth engagement and modelling

Youth Engagement concerns counsellors' ability to be natural, relatable, and engaging with scholars. This helps to establish and maintain engagement and foster strong, positive relationships. Modelling concerns their ability to demonstrate authenticity and self-belief, to show how vulnerability can be associated with strength and respect, thereby offering scholars a different version of manhood to aim for – one aligned with BAM's core values.

For youth engagement and modelling, the counsellors were mostly at an advanced level. Along with BAM scholars and parents and carers, the replication specialist felt counsellors were able to demonstrate "unconditional positive regard," possessed "a wide range of skills and tools to increase engagement", and exuded "comfort, confidence and high energy." For BAM scholars, the lived experiences they felt counsellors shared with them made counsellors more relatable.

"I feel like [the counsellor] can relate to us... I feel like when he was younger... he went through the same experience. Like, he just has a sense of what we're going through." (Scholar)

Most parents and carers appreciated that counsellors were from a similar socio-economic, cultural, and ethnic background.

"Afro-Caribbean boys... they're stereotyped... they haven't got anyone... Whereas these boys go, "You know what? You haven't got these things... But if you exert yourself... you can achieve."" (Parent or carer)

This enabled BAM scholars to see counsellors as role models – people who modelled the core BAM values with authenticity, honesty, and vulnerability.

"So, he was stressed out because he was having a baby. Also, he had to prepare the house, kitchen, everything, and he was just stressed you know? And then talking about it, he said like, it relieved him a bit, you know?" (Scholar)

Curriculum Fidelity, Group Work, and Challenging and Confronting

While Curriculum Fidelity concerns how much counsellors adhere to the curriculum and deliver it as intended, Group Work concerns their ability to support scholars to adhere to the three group conditions (fun, safety/respect, and challenge). Challenging and Confronting refers to how much counsellors consistently identify and share discrepancies between scholars' stated values and behaviours.

All three counsellors were at an intermediate level for Curriculum Fidelity and Group Work by the end of year two, but development against these two competencies was slower; at the start of year two, they were at a novice level. For Curriculum Fidelity, the replication specialist felt the main factor driving counsellors' improvement was their level of preparedness. Counsellors agreed.

"In the second year... it was more of an awareness that, okay, this is a group that you need go into with a plan, rather than just go in with the anticipation that they're going to be taxing, and don't just move with a lower effort because I expect them to have lower effort." (Counsellor at Oak)

The replication specialist felt slower improvements in group work were driven by difficulties counsellors faced in challenging scholars around the group conditions – the only competency for which all counsellors were rated 'Novice'.

"When you're challenging you might see or hear things that are triggering to your experiences in life... that's difficult, especially for a counsellor coming in, and just around the fact of wanting to be liked, wanting to build those relationships." (Replication specialist)

Men's Work

Men's Work concerns counsellors' own processes of internalising the core values. This requires doing their own ruthless self-examination (deep personal reflection) in order to understand and be able to articulate their own story with authenticity and to mitigate countertransference.

Two counsellors were at intermediate level for Men's Work by the end of year two (the other was at novice level). However, as with Curriculum Fidelity and Group Work, progress was slower and more challenging; all counsellors were rated as having a 'basic knowledge' at the start of year two. As previously discussed, the replication specialist felt this was due to constraints on the training and coaching process, particularly their inability to attend the ManKind Project Weekend Adventure and the replication specialist not being able to travel to London as much as planned. The lack of these in-person experiences limited the degree to which the replication specialist could support counsellors through the ruthless self-examination deemed necessary to be able to understand what challenging scholars triggered for them and respond appropriately.

"I think it takes two years or so, or after your first year, to really understand the impact that BAM has on your life. Like I said, that parallel process of working through those values and doing that ruthless self-examination, making those changes... I think that's just really important, that counsellors have an opportunity to work on themselves throughout that time so that they're able to work better with the young scholars." (Replication specialist)

Systemic leadership

Systemic leadership refers to the ability of counsellors to create the conditions necessary for scholars to benefit from BAM, particularly through their relationship and communication with school staff. One counsellor was at novice level by the end of year two.

"I think that the [school] administration had a problem with the fact that he [the counsellor] was not as visible in certain spaces. Now, when I was with [the counsellor], I did see him on the playground interacting with... with scholars, but not as much staff... I'd share with him

maybe classroom visits, being a part of grade-level team meetings and that type of thing." (Replication specialist)

The other two counsellors ended year two at advanced level as they communicated regularly with school staff to establish and maintain an enabling context for delivery.

Case Study 1: Troy



• The way his counsellor had met challenges but come through them gave Troy the confidence that he could do the same: "He made the same mistakes as us, and then but he's actually reflected on... how he could have sorted out the situation better. So, it shows... he's not really hypocritical and like, he did still feel accountability that okay cool, we're all human, we make mistakes... it kind of encourages us to look at things from the way he looks at things since he's... he's showing basically if he can do it, we can do it."

Case Study 2: Josh



- Josh looked up to his counsellor. He admired his kindness, and the way he could talk about his feelings: "They know how to talk about their lives. They know how to express, they know how to help people in need, and they're good people."
- His counsellor felt Josh gained a lot from observing him model this vulnerability: "when I sort of disclose or... I share my experience... I can just see him... He's really, like, not only just watching and I guess just, yeah, understanding it... what it means to him."

Case Study 3: Keiron



- Keiron felt his counsellor was "the nicest guy, you know?"
- · His counsellor felt that sharing his experiences and modelling authenticity helped Keiron to feel less alone: "He felt like he was the only one that was having trouble with his dad... it allowed him to open up as well... to not feel isolated, you know, and to feel like it's something he can manage."
- · Keiron valued these moments too: "You were seeing something... like stuff happens in life, you know? You have to just be ready for it."

Exposure

As Table 10 shows, 98% of scholars (all but one) recruited to BAM attended at least one session (i.e. one BAM Circle session delivered over the length of one school lesson during school hours). Every scholar that attended at least one session in years one and two attended an average of 14.99 and 13.74 sessions, respectively¹⁹, which is above the target of 13 per year set jointly by the evaluation team and YG in light of the average for the first US-based RCT, RCT 1, of 13.47. At the PRU, participation was mandatory, which supported attendance. At Oak and Birch, where participation was voluntary, the counsellors felt that they were able to reach the target due to the level of engagement from most scholars. When sessions were on and scholars were able to attend, counsellors felt they normally did attend.

"I felt like students always wanted to go to BAM; every time I'd see students, they'd always ask me when it was happening, they would show up, and if there was anything outside of themselves where they couldn't attend, that's the reason they wouldn't attend, but it wouldn't be a choice for them to say, 'Oh, I'm not going to come this week." (Counsellor at Birch)

¹⁹ The figure for year two (13.74) does not include students from the PRU, as none of them attended a session that year.

Table 10: Scholar exposure to BAM (i.e. number of sessions) across both the RCTs and the feasibility study

	RCT 1	RCT 2 (Year 1)	RCT 2 (Year 2)	RCT 2 (Total)	Feasibility (Year 1)	Feasibility (Year 2)	Feasibility (Total)
Ever attended	0.49	0.51	0.31	0.52	0.98	0.68	0.98
Total sessions attended	6.64	8.61	6.71	15.32	14.67	9.4	24.07
Total sessions ever attended	13.47	16.79	21.07	29.08	14.99	13.74	24.59

The replication specialist agreed, particularly for Oak, where he felt the counsellor "always had a steady group of eight/ten... it was consistent... you knew guys wanted to be a part and be present, you know... in that space." For most of the scholars interviewed, this was partly because BAM offered them a reprieve from an intense school environment in which they rarely felt seen or heard.

"Some teachers... them got too much pride... I get they're trying to show authority, but I feel like they're showing it in the wrong way... they always use the phrase 'I don't like you,' and then they always use the phrase 'I'm not here to like you.' But then I'm not going to listen to someone that doesn't like me. Like, I'm not going to learn from them." (Scholar)

But overall, most scholars attended because it was fun and varied.

"I think what makes me go to sessions is that BAM is very fun and enjoyable, and I feel like it's a place where, like I can take my mind off like other things. It helps me with when I calm myself down and relaxing, I know I can put the pressure down on myself." (Scholar)

Nonetheless, while 13 sessions represented the minimum average attendance deemed acceptable, YG and MHF held ambitions for higher numbers of sessions attended at the start of the evaluation period – closer to the number reached in the second year of RCT 2 (21.07) – in order to maximise the amount of BAM scholars received. Limits to exposure were shaped by retention, scheduling, and attendance, which were influenced by four main contextual factors: COVID-19, the school context, counsellor absences, and engagement from BAM scholars. This is explored in what follows.

Retention

At Birch, two scholars left BAM. At Oak, 10 left (see Table 11). If they had stayed, all BAM scholars at Oak would have received 13 sessions or more in both years. Most left the programme because they left the school, mostly via exclusions, while some were withdrawn by their parents and carers due to concerns about the impact of BAM attendance on their GCSEs (scholars need to miss lessons to take part in BAM sessions).

Table 11: Number of scholars recruited into BAM for each school and group, number of scholars who left their group before the end of the programme year, and the overall final group size (i.e. 'in' minus 'out')

School	Group	In	Out	Final
Oak	Group A	11	3	8
	Group B	12	3	9
	Group C (1+2)	16	4	12 (6+6)
Birch	Group D	11	2	9
	Group E	13	0	13
	Group F	11	0	11
PRU	Group G	6	6	0
	Group H	7	7	0
	Group I	7	7	0

Table 12: Number of sessions delivered for each group across the two-year programme

School	Group	Year 1	Year 2	Total
Oak	Group A	24	24	48
	Group B	24	22	46
	Group C1	26	20	46
	Group C2	26	18	44
Birch	Group D	24	16	40
	Group E	28	14	42
	Group F	24	14	38
PRU	Group G	15	0	15
	Group H	16	0	16
	Group I	12	0	12

Group scheduling

Three groups at Oak met the target of 45 sessions across the two years (Table 11). At Birch, the main reason behind the sharp decline in the number of sessions delivered from years one to two was the school's decision to prevent all Year 10 students from leaving class for extra-curricular activities because they were starting their GCSEs. Sometimes, the counsellor was able to work directly with teaching staff to pick up Year 10 students from class and accompany them back to BAM, one by one. However, on many other occasions, this was not possible, which led to sessions being cancelled. This lack of sessions limited scholars' exposure to BAM at Birch in year two.

The replication specialist, the project manager and the counsellor at Birch all felt that their inability to overcome this issue, despite the counsellor's systemic leadership being rated as 'advanced', was due to the school's warm but passive approach to working with MHF. The school staff agreed.

"There was definitely an intention to make it work, but I don't think that it has been at the forefront or priority, if I'm completely honest." (School staff at Birch)

While Groups A, B, and C1 at Oak all met the target of delivering 45 sessions across two years despite some periods of counsellor absence, the counsellor at Oak also experienced challenges in year two with groups C1 and C2, who had other commitments due to their GCSEs, including mock exams, which led to sessions being cancelled. However, the associated disruption was less severe than that observed at Birch (scholars continued to be allowed out of class to support BAM at Oak). At the PRU, the counsellor's late start and the halting of BAM completely for three months due to COVID-19 at the start of 2021 limited the number of groups he could host.

Attendance

At Oak, attendance consistently surpassed YG's internal target of 80%, despite a period of online delivery in the first three months of 2021 in year one (Table 13)²⁰. The counsellor at Oak, the replication specialist, and both the first and second project managers all felt this was partly due to the enabling context within the school. The counsellor's direct contact at the school was proactive, supporting him to set up the BAM room, establish relationships with teachers to ensure scholars were let out of class, and embed BAM into students' timetables.

"They [Oak school] want us to do what we want to do and how we want to do it, with

Table 13: Percentage overall group attendance rate across the twoyear programme

School	Group	Year 1	Year 2	Total
Oak	Group A	88%	92%	90%
	Group B	81%	86%	84%
	Group C1	84%	83%	84%
Birch	Group D	66%	62%	64%
	Group E	75%	79%	77%
	Group F	65%	74%	68%
PRU	Group G	64%	N/A	64%
	Group H	67%	N/A	67%
	Group I	70%	N/A	70%
	Group H	67%	N/A	67%

²⁰ Arrived at by calculating the mean number of sessions attended by scholars in each group and dividing this figure by the mean number of sessions scholars were active for (i.e. the number of sessions held for their group after they joined BAM and before they left BAM [or before BAM ended if they completed the full programme]).

a level of kind of partnership and trust that is really, really enabling for the delivery of BAM." (Project Manager 1)

At Birch, attendance fell more sharply during BAM's period of online delivery (Figure 5). Weaker support from the school, including the absence of a dedicated BAM room, led to a slower start to delivery in year one than Oak. The counsellor's groups were yet to establish themselves before classes moved online, resulting in a negative feedback loop whereby low attendance discouraged those present from attending next time.

"It's almost inviting for others not to turn up, you know, but when you've got more people turning up, it then feels almost like, okay, this is something that I have to do because everyone else turns up, you know?" (Counsellor at Birch)

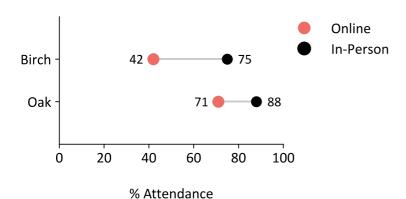


Figure 5: Percentage rate of attendance for online and in-person sessions for the two schools

In year two, persistent issues with Year 10 scholars being let out of class to attend BAM impacted attendance at Birch as well; Year 9 scholars attended 79% of sessions in year two, while those in Year 10 only attended 67%.

At the PRU, BAM was mandatory and treated as another lesson; when scholars were in school, they attended BAM. The counsellor felt that issues with attendance were driven primarily by internal exclusions, poor school attendance, and extra sources of support for students that placed additional demands on their time (making it harder for them to attend BAM sessions).

Brief encounters

While routinely collected data on brief encounters were not available, there is evidence from interviews with counsellors and the replication specialist, as well as coaching data that these were carried out frequently and consistently.

"[The Birch counsellor]'s done an excellent job. He's...he's rarely, rarely sitting down. That young man, he moves through the school. He's out on the playground, he's in the lunch area, he's in the hallways." (Replication specialist)

Fidelity

There are 30 lessons in the BAMual, each of which should take one-to-three sessions to deliver. Counsellors faced challenges in delivering all 30 (Table 14). This meant that the final two core values — Respect for Womanhood and Visionary Goal Setting — were not delivered. Lesson progression was limited by three main factors: group scheduling, attendance, and engagement from scholars.

Group scheduling

Constraints on counsellors' ability to host sessions limited their ability to move through lessons. The PRU halted delivery during the lockdown in early 2021, while Oak and Birch started the standard curriculum from the beginning once in-person sessions could resume in Spring. This meant that two months of the curriculum were repeated, which left less room for later material in year two.

At Oak, the difficulty of scheduling sessions with GCSE students due to other pressures on their time slowed down Group C1's progress in year two. The same is true of all groups at Birch in year two, due to the inability of Year 10 students to leave class for BAM.

Table 14: Number of sessions delivered per year

School	Group	Year 1	Year 2
Oak	Group A	8	17
	Group B	8	17
	Group C1	7.5	13
	Group C2	7.5	16
Birch	Group D	7.5	13
	Group E	7.5	13
	Group F	5	13
PRU	Group G	9	N/A
	Group H	9	N/A
	Group I	8	N/A

Attendance

Each lesson in the BAMual builds on the previous one. This makes it difficult to progress through the curriculum if scholars are absent – a particular issue at Birch.

"I lost momentum because there were points where I couldn't move along with the programme, so it had such a direct impact, and the Year 10s themselves felt it, they were upset and frustrated, and I had to do a lot of adapting; not in terms of changing the programme, but adapting to the pace of it." (Counsellor at Birch)

Lessons in the curriculum are tailored to group sizes of eight to 12. When scholars are absent from smaller groups, some activities within the curriculum are no longer viable. For example, one group mission invites students to pass a ball between them without letting it touch the floor. They pass the mission if everyone touches it before it falls – something that becomes easy to do when there are fewer than eight scholars, which limits the level of teamwork involved and the sense of reward upon completion. This was especially a limiting factor at the PRU, where the largest group had seven students (Table 9).

Engagement from scholars

The challenges counsellors faced in establishing and maintaining the group conditions limited curriculum progression. If they ignored violations and pressed on, scholars would fail to benefit from BAM, but addressing them took time.

"It was not only just one student, it was one student here, a second student over there, and then three students over there. So it was trying to corral... put out one fire whilst maintaining another one and I'm stamping out a third. So yeah, it... it... it got pretty difficult." (Counsellor at Oak)

Scholars would also bring issues to the group that counsellors had to respond to. If they hurried students along, they risked missing teachable moments and losing the group.

"I've had lessons... where some were checking in and then somebody mentions that somebody pulled a knife on them... that became the talking point... the lesson got ate up... you can't really say... 'That's good, but I don't know if we can... anybody else want to check in' ... it don't work like that." (Counsellor at the PRU)

Case Study 1: Troy



• Troy always looked forward to BAM: "Just because, you know, it's... there's something... there's always something new each session, like whether it's challenges or the type of talks we have, there's... it's just always something... something new every week, so yeah. It's really like that feeling of like, oh like, oh, what's going to happen this week?... it's not always like, ugh, it's still Monday or it's still Wednesday or whatever. There's always that, okay cool, I've got BAM today."

Case Study 2: Josh



• Overall, Josh felt his group engaged well with the programme - although they could be a little disruptive: "I feel like the other people are fine. They're good people. Sometimes they could be annoying, loud, but they're good people."

Case Study 3: Keiron



• His counsellor was frustrated that he didn't reach the last two values with Keiron: "I feel like there's so much more that Keiron could get out of it. Visionary Goal-Setting I think is one that he would really benefit from... He needs to sort of feel like he's working towards something. And even when we go back, I really want to... pick that back up with that group. I still want to go through those values, because I think it's so important to finish what we started."

Research question 2a: How has implementation contributed to any reported changes in social-emotional and identity development, for whom, under what circumstances, and why?

Evidence summary (contribution claim)

There is strong evidence that most of the scholars interviewed felt they had internalised three of the first four core values to some degree: Integrity, Accountability and Positive Anger Expression. There was less evidence regarding Self-Determination (O). There is strong evidence that BAM was not the most important contributor to scholars' development – scholars generally ranked it second or third below family, friends, faith, or football (R). Nonetheless, there is strong evidence that the counsellors and curriculum together (MResO) made an important contribution to the internalisation observed by supporting scholars to engage in action and reflection. This helped them to improve their emotional control and develop and value their sense of self (MResP). There is strong evidence that for most of the scholars interviewed, whether and how they engaged in action and reflection was influenced by their readiness and willingness to observe the three group conditions. Most also felt their ability to do so was shaped by wider influences in their lives (C).

Action and reflection: Enabling factors

There is strong evidence that the curriculum and the counsellors helped many of the scholars interviewed to engage in action and reflection. This depended on how ready they were to uphold the three group conditions: have fun, be safe and respectful, and challenge yourself and others to be open and honest.

Action

Counsellors, parents, and carers, and most of the scholars we interviewed felt the curriculum helped scholars to engage in experiential learning. The physicality and variety of activities and the freedom to be yourself encouraged scholars to get involved and have fun.

"We have boxing mitts, we have a group mission, using our muscles... so it was challenging, it was also active and fun... BAM is a good mixture of both." (Scholar)

Parents, carers, and counsellors agreed that most scholars felt these things were lacking at school, which meant that young people were particularly drawn to them in BAM.

"It's a bit of a break from being at school... I think it really makes a difference, especially because he's in Year 10 now... he has felt very pressured." (Parent or carer)

Most scholars, counsellors, parents, and carers also agreed that the setting, pursuit, and celebration of goals in BAM supported engagement – particularly for more competitive scholars.

"He also does like, a little challenge thing, that if you do three challenges you get to go to a trip, so that just makes everyone work harder as a team." (Scholar)

Reflection

Most of the scholars interviewed reported feeling more self-aware due to BAM. They felt better able to recognise their emotions and the situations that gave rise to them, which helped them to feel more in control, more empathic and more confident when socialising. BAM offered different opportunities for

nurturing these skills, from one-to-ones to check-ins, role plays, and group missions. Scholars' willingness to enter into and engage with these activities freely depended on the strength of the group conditions.

"I felt bad to the point where I feel like I don't have a purpose, where I'm not good enough... BAM helped me a lot... I can say how I feel, I can say it comfortably because I know I'm in a safe space." (Scholar)

Most scholars felt this introspection helped them to develop their sense of who they were. They reported that this helped them to think about the future; they better understood and valued the person they would become and were motivated to act in their own interest. BAM's use of the archetype of 'manhood' to frame identity motivated scholars to engage in this process, but it was counsellors' position as role models that brought this idea to life.

"[The counsellor]'s just a calm guy... It's kind of what I want to be... I just want to stay to myself and then just climb." (Scholar)

"It told me I'd become a man. It told me what I have to face in the future, about my feelings, my emotions, what I'm going to do in life." (Scholar)

Most of the scholars we interviewed were more ready to engage in reflection because BAM offered them things they had already been looking for, whether that was a safe space that had been lacking at school or consistent relationships with positive Black male role models. Others were in moments of transition following shocks in their lives, including bereavements, exclusions, and parents going to prison. For them, BAM had come at the right time.

"When my granddad passed, I always had a conversation with [Counsellor]. And yeah, that made me feel a lot better about the situation... It made me come back into my normal self again." (Scholar)

Case Study 1: Troy



- Troy's counsellor felt he was drawn to BAM because of "the separation between myself and the school staff." In contrast to school, in BAM, "they're listened to."
- Troy agreed: "He provides us with our own space, where... it's alright to voice our feelings... without us being judged."
- His counsellor felt he filled a gap in Troy's life: "There isn't that many male role models... who engage with him in the way that I'm allowed to through BAM... he's more encouraged to be present."

Case Study 2: Josh



- His counsellor felt one role play, which focused on the idea that "anger's a normal emotion," resonated with Josh: "He was one of the characters, and you could see that... it spoke to him... just in terms of seeing that there are other ways you can engage with your anger."
- His mum felt that this was an important realisation for Josh: "you're all basically going through the same emotions... and not being able to speak out. And you have this platform to be able to do that freely without being judged."

Case Study 3: Keiron



- According to his counsellor, Keiron didn't feel seen or heard at school. That drew him closer to BAM and the group condition of safety: "I think it goes back to what that space represents... He's able to have his shirt out and talk how he needs to and feel free... he's been able to, I don't know, connect with a better understanding of himself... to be accepted, you know."
- Keiron agreed: "I talk about how I feel, like I want to be heard, like. It gives me a bit of relief, innit."

Action and reflection: Limiting factors

There is also evidence that a minority of scholars were less able to uphold the group conditions and engage in action and reflection. This was driven by some of the challenges with delivery as well as the context surrounding scholars' lives.

Action

In contrast to parents, carers, counsellors, and most scholars, a minority of scholars felt the group sessions were not active enough.

"We sit too long and sometimes some of us, yeah, can't handle it... so we get carried away, we start talking or messing around." (Scholar)

Reflection

A minority of scholars felt they expressed themselves less freely during moments of reflection. This view was shared by counsellors. While these scholars felt BAM was fun, they found it harder to uphold the other conditions; they didn't feel able to challenge themselves to be completely open.

"In the circle, yeah, there's more people around that can hear, so you can share what you're actually thinking, but you can say some but not all of it." (Scholar)

This was partly due to issues with delivery. The difficulties counsellors faced in progressing with the Challenging and Confronting competency made it hard for them to re-establish the group conditions when scholars drifted. At the PRU, the counsellor felt that the school's insistence on making recruitment mandatory rather than voluntary inhibited full participation as scholars felt "subjected" to BAM.

School staff and counsellors at Oak and Birch agreed that scholars had been recruited largely for behavioural reasons. This meant that some scholars, at least initially, felt that BAM was for 'bad kids', which prevented their full engagement. This was particularly true of Group C at Oak, which had no Tier 1 students according to the HSA.

"They identified the group as a group for bad Black boys... these kids were the usual ones in the groups, interventions like this, and it was usually predominantly Black kids as well." (Counsellor at Oak)

The counsellor at Oak felt that splitting the group into two at the start of year two helped to improve their level of adherence to the group conditions because "there was less of a bravado... even though there was dominant characters, there weren't three of them in one space who could lord it over the rest."

For a minority of scholars at Oak and Birch (but for most scholars at the PRU), counsellors felt their adherence to the group conditions was limited by their personal context. These scholars found it hard to be vulnerable during sessions, whether due to difficult experiences they struggled to talk about, pre-conceived notions of masculinity, or other identities that didn't align with BAM.

"It was only so deep, especially when it came to him... He's not lost touch with the idea of, like, having to be the hyper masculine, alpha male." (Counsellor at Oak)

"The expectations that those boys... had of themselves made it, like, they didn't have that curiosity and want to get through it... And whether they're like that all the time or at home

or whatever, or the real them, there's a persona... This is a theatre. This is [the PRU]." (Counsellor at the PRU)

Case Study 1: Troy



- Delivery influenced Troy's engagement in reflection, particularly consistent attendance: "He's not missed a session... there's been a lot of contact with me, with his peers and we're constantly going over these kind of ideas... what was you feeling in that moment? Did you see things from the other person's perspective?... I think it just provides more scope for... Troy to be just like, okay, where is it at for me?"
- Troy agreed: "I'm more open minded...before...I would be very stubborn."

Case Study 2: Josh



- Josh's counsellor felt he engaged particularly well in the active parts of BAM: "He's more boisterous, the confidence is there, he's not as situated as he is with oneto-ones."
- For Josh, the group missions and trips acted as incentives: "We have to do activities, so get rewards... I get rewards if I put the work in."
- But his counsellor also felt some goal-based activities were harder for Josh, particularly where they involved homework: "He gets distracted a lot, and he's admitted that to me."

Case Study 3: Keiron



- Despite the safety of his group, his counsellor felt that Keiron shared "the least" because he enjoyed being a strong, wilful leader: "there's the audience... so it's easier for him to ... assert leadership."
- His mum had similar issues at home: "Keiron's an... intrinsic person... I struggle to engage with him."
- According to this counsellor, as with school, he felt like his parents were "always telling him off", so he "kept himself to himself in his bedroom."

Internalising the core values

As reported above, counsellors did not deliver curriculum material on the last two values. However, there is strong evidence that most of the scholars we interviewed felt they had internalised three of the first four (Integrity, Accountability, and Positive Anger Expression). While some alternative explanations were given, there is strong evidence that engaging in action and reflection in BAM made an important contribution.

Integrity and Accountability

During reflection, counsellors modelled self-awareness to an intermediate or advanced level. This means they modelled the core values as defining features of their identities; they consistently made strong connections between their own personal narrative and the BAM values by being honest, vulnerable, and authentic with scholars. The lived experiences counsellors shared with young people and the unconditional positive regard they conveyed enabled scholars to see these values as both accessible and desirable. This meant that scholars not only developed their sense of who they were but were also able to adopt the core values as essential parts of these identities. Evidence from counsellors, scholars, parents, and carers suggests that many scholars were able to internalise integrity and accountability through this process.

"[The counsellor's] told us a lot of stories about what he used to do when he was younger... And like it linked back to what I was doing, like going around being irresponsible... I've seen he's like matured a lot, so I kind of wanted to role model that as well... I just wanted to be a humble good person and be known for good things like, and not be known for like bad things." (Scholar)

Self-Determination and Positive Anger Expression

Developing and valuing their identities prompted scholars to protect them, too. Counsellors, parents/carers, and scholars themselves all saw evidence that scholars wanted to promote their growing sense of self externally; they wanted other people to see them in the way they were beginning to see themselves, which motivated them to act in alignment with the core values in difficult and testing situations.

"In school, I felt a lot of teachers... treat the girls differently... they'll be talking really loud... I would tell them to be quiet, and then I would get in trouble for it... because I'm known for better things, I don't really do that anymore. I just let them do their own thing... now I have more self-control." (Scholar)

Neither counsellors nor scholars spoke much about deep breathing or positive thought replacement (the core Cognitive Behavioural Therapy-based elements of Self-Determination). However, along with parents and carers, many did describe how a greater understanding of their emotions had given them more control over their anger.

"If someone gets in trouble... the first thing they do is like, they'll think, 'Oh yeah, let me go speak to [the counsellor].' So, they do, so instead of getting angry they just remembered what they learnt, how to control themselves and that." (Scholar)

The variety of active learning experiences in BAM compounded the effects of reflection. Counsellors described moments where scholars encountered an active learning experience that resonated with them, offering a fresh perspective, and facilitating lateral thinking – sometimes leading to step changes in their relationship with the core values.

"We got this anecdote, the travelling salesman... I recall [the scholar] just being able to just immediately latch on to the idea of thinking of the times where he's talked himself or worked himself up into a point where his response to a situation was not even reflective of the situation at hand." (Counsellor at Oak)

Alternative explanations

When asked to rank the most important influences in their journeys since joining BAM, scholars included BAM in all the rankings, but rarely at the top. Most placed it second or third below family, friends, faith, or football. For a minority of scholars, this was because BAM had only made a relatively recent entrance into their lives.

"I go to the church, it's like... it's like a youth church, I [inaudible] with my older sister. So yeah, I think they're helping me become a better person in general." (Scholar)

"Dad, football, BAM.... Because I'm always with my dad, so he's always helping me and talking to me about stuff. And then I'm always playing football with him... And then BAM only recently just like, started. But it has helped, but only recently. It's not been there forever." (Scholar)

Parents and carers also identified other influences, including the natural pace of development in adolescence and other important relationships, both within their families and beyond. It is unclear whether these influences rivalled BAM by reducing the need for it or complemented BAM by reinforcing its effect.

Case Study 1: Troy

- By gazing inwardly, Troy developed a clearer sense of who he was: "Nowadays... if I want to do something that maybe others may not see fit, I always try to do my best to do it because like... at the end of the day, it's my life, not theirs."
- At the same time, BAM acted as an outlet for his anger: "I feel like now I'm more at peace, calm and friendly... I've got a space where I know, cool, if something's on my mind, I can always come voice it out and then like, it's a weight off my shoulders will be... be released."

Case Study 2: Josh



- BAM helped Josh to develop his sense of himself and motivated him to act in alignment with that identity: "It told me I'd become a man. It told me what I have to face in the future, my feelings... what I'm going to do in life, How I'm going to do it."
- His mum felt Josh now had more control over his feelings "behaviour-wise, it's died down a lot... he's able to control his temper a bit more, so I'm able to sit down with him when he's able to try and explain to me what's going on."

Case Study 3: Keiron



to me. He still tells me, I don't know... I think he's still finding his identity."

 His mum felt this limited his ability to be understood, which made him frustrated: "You ask him, what is it that you are saying?... he starts moaning at...himself, like, under his tongue... you can see he's really annoyed."



Research question 2b: How has social-emotional development contributed to any reported changes in academic performance and behaviour, and the avoidance of, or reduced involvement in crime/anti-social behaviour, for whom, under what circumstances, and why?

Evidence summary (contribution claim)

There is strong evidence that most of the scholars interviewed were applying themselves more at school and making more pro-social choices in risky situations (O). There is some evidence that other sources of support or motivation beyond BAM influenced responsible decision-making (R). However, there is strong evidence that the core values made an important contribution to improvements in scholars' choices (MResO) because they empowered them to take advantage of opportunities and protected them from risks (MResP). In some cases, wider influences in scholars' lives reinforced their resolve. In others, they placed additional pressure on scholars' shoulders (C).

Responsible decision-making

Counsellors, parents, carers, and most scholars themselves felt the core values were empowering and protecting them, which helped them to make more responsible decisions. The extent to which scholars were empowered or protected depended on wider influences in their lives outside of BAM.

Empowered

There is strong evidence from scholars, counsellors, parents, and carers that most of the scholars we interviewed – like Troy – were empowered to take advantage of opportunities. For some, an understanding and valuing of their future self (an important part of integrity) motivated them to apply themselves at school, while for others, their burgeoning accountability, including their increased understanding and ability to control their emotions, was helping them to make new friends and improve relationships at home.

"It's... it's helped in the way that my mum and dad treat me. Obviously, I still get told off for the things that I do, but where... where... if I tell the truth the first time around, like from when they're asking, I'll still get told off but not as much as if I lied and then they found out the truth." (Scholar)

Case Study 1: Troy



- Troy is applying himself more in school and getting into fewer confrontations with teachers: "School is more of a priority... I would say I'm revising more... I think some... something must have like, had a wakeup call."
- Troy has applied the skills he's learned to diffuse difficult situations: "Me and my friends were... just sitting on a bench talking... then some other students... jump onto us, all of us get angry, then obviously there's a bit of a like, back and forth... I was thinking... this would kind of be a
- contradiction, the reason of us having BAM... So I... took the initiative to like, calm down the situation and like, tell them... ease off and that it's not really worth it."
- His counsellor reported he was also able to handle an encounter with the police that could have escalated: "he got stopped and searched. And throughout the time, he was asking questions of the police officers without getting too irate. So... it stayed at that level."

Protected

Reports from scholars, counsellors, parents, and carers suggest that many of the scholars making more responsible decisions were also protected from risks. Scholars like Josh were better able to stay calm when confronted by situations that might have escalated prior to BAM. These included provocations from teachers and peers, both in and outside of school, as well as encounters with the police.

"He was getting in trouble quite a lot at school, getting a lot of detentions... a lot of phone calls home, a lot more kind of fallouts with friends... I don't get phone calls home anymore. He rarely gets a detention... even in parents' evening they say how much he's matured and how much he's grown." (Parent or carer)

Case Study 2: Josh



- BAM helped Josh to figure out who he was. It also helped him to value this identity, because he felt seen, heard, valued and powerful: "I got comfortable showing my emotions, telling them about my life, and speaking about how I'm doing and what I'm going to do next. So I got really comfortable with BAM... now I get to express to people what I've been doing and change their lives."
- This helped him develop the desire, confidence and ability to stay in control of his anger lashing
- out was not a part of his new identity: "I used to punch like a wall, my table, all of that, but that's when I realised that I didn't really need to talk, I don't really need to care about those people, because in life there's going to be haters, so I realised that."
- His journey was supported by people outside of BAM, too, including friends and family, particularly his siblings and cousins: "Those people helped me and showed me what to do in my life, so I know what to do in the future now."

Wider context

For those scholars who reported that they were empowered and protected, the effect of the core values was often accompanied by other sources of support or motivation. These included ambitions to be role models for younger siblings, guidance from older family members or friends, and input from other services. There is insufficient evidence to determine whether these wider influences reinforced the contribution of the core values by strengthening scholars' resolve or undermined it by reducing scholars' need for them.

For those like Keiron, other issues limited the impact of the core values. These often stemmed from difficult relationships at home.

"My relationship with my dad... it got to a point where he just wasn't putting in any effort... I didn't know how to open up to anyone about anything, that started to build up anger... that situation was just like a trigger. So throughout the rest of that year, there was a few problems with my behaviour." (Scholar)

Case Study 3: Keiron

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- The stress, pressure and the frequency with which Keiron felt misunderstood wore him down: "My parents just talk to me about school, my life, and I'm just not bothered, you know?... I'm just tired of school... I can't be bothered to get out of bed."
- His counsellor felt this made him sensitive to perceptions of unfairness. He found it "very difficult to take accountability, to say, "You know what? I was wrong."
- This sensitivity grew during his time on BAM, making him prone to extreme reactions to provocations; towards the end of year two, he was disciplined for hitting another student in the face, but showed little reticence with his counsellor: "He felt it was unfair that he got in trouble and they didn't."
- Keiron was then temporarily excluded for a separate incident. He spoke to his mum about it; she thinks something has "clicked". His counsellor agrees: "I've never seen Keiron so reflective."

Research question 2c: How has implementation contributed to any reported unintended consequences, for whom, under what circumstances, and why?

Evidence summary (contribution claim)

There is mixed evidence on whether BAM inadvertently supported scholars to engage in irresponsible decision-making (O). There is a lack of data collected from scholars, parents, and carers in Group C at Oak and at the PRU – two groups for whom this might have been the case. There is strong evidence that most of the scholars interviewed did not experience negative labelling due to participating in BAM. However, there is some evidence to suggest that the weighting of some groups towards those with more serious behavioural concerns (MResO) led to a minority of scholars perceiving BAM as an intervention for scholars with these needs, rather than something to celebrate (MResP). This was exacerbated by negative expectations scholars were already contending with, including racist stereotypes and school reputations (C).

Irresponsible decision-making

As part of the evaluation, we sought to identify and explore possible unintended adverse effects. As will be seen, we were particularly alert to one possible adverse effect identified beforehand. While we remained open to and actively explored other possible issues during qualitative data collection, none were observed.

Negative labels

The main unintended consequence of interest concerned the identities of BAM groups. Based on their previous experience, YG feared that scholars may develop a perception that BAM is for bad kids, due to challenges with recruitment. This could inadvertently support further engagement by BAM scholars in irresponsible decision-making and anti-social behaviour due to further internalisation of these negative labels and their impact on group dynamics within BAM. This phenomenon has been observed in other UK-, school- and group-based social-emotional learning interventions (Evans et al., 2015).

The evidence regarding recruitment is mixed. As previously discussed, overall counsellors were able to achieve a balance of needs in both schools and groups. However, the counsellor and school staff at Birch felt that scholars were recruited largely for behavioural reasons, even if some attempt was made at achieving at least a minimal range of needs in each group. However, none of the scholars we interviewed raised this as a concern. On the contrary, all of those who spoke on the matter felt that BAM was something to be proud of and that other students were envious of their participation.

"People see BAM, they see it as a good thing. Like, they see it has a privilege to kind of have. Whenever like I see someone that's joined in BAM, I feel like happy for them because the way it's changed me it could change them as well. So yeah." (Scholar)

"[The counsellor]'s very liked within my year and I feel like there's a sense of jealousy slash dislike, because... with BAM, because I was getting all this... was getting attention... you can see like, in a way they're kind of like, envious, you know what I mean?" (Scholar)

Nonetheless, there is good evidence from counsellors and school staff at Oak that recruitment challenges precipitated the development of negative labels among scholars in the PRU and in Group C at Oak, specifically. This was exacerbated by contextual factors surrounding scholars.

At the PRU, the context of the setting and scholars' association with it left the counsellor unable to nurture a positive group identity.

"It's a bit stereotyped or a bit, like, self-fulfilling prophecy, like. [PRU] is, we're here because we're bad boys. [...] So it's harder for... for me to sort of challenge that narrative." (Counsellor at the PRU)

In Group C at Oak, the absence of Tier 1 students fuelled perceptions that BAM was for bad kids, an effect compounded by the ethnicity of those in the group; 11 of the 16 scholars recruited to this group identified as Black/Black British. The counsellor felt that the imbalance in this group, and the interaction between this imbalance and racist stereotypes surrounding young Black men, led to negative labels developing within the group – it became a group for 'bad Black boys', specifically. This limited scholars' sense of belonging to BAM and the development of group cohesion.

At the end of year one, when interviewed the counsellor said, "I can't be sure that they don't see it that way still." However, at the start of year two, Group C was split into two groups (Groups C1 and C2), which the counsellor felt made them more manageable, enabling him to revise the negative perceptions that had been set.

"In those smaller groups, we had a huge improvement in both groups [...] they've really started to excel in regards to how seriously they took the project, how seriously they started to take each other and themselves as individuals." (Counsellor at Oak)

Irresponsible decision-making

None of those interviewed, including scholars, parents, carers, counsellors, school staff, and staff at MHF and YG, felt that these perceptions of negative labels contributed to further motivation to engage in irresponsible decision-making. However, no scholars, parents, or carers were interviewed from the PRU or Group C at Oak. Given that these groups were those most likely to have experienced negative labelling, the evidence on the extent to which these contributed to irresponsible decision-making is limited.

Conclusion

Table 15: Summary of feasibility study findings

Research question	Finding
1. To what extent is BAM being successfully implemented, with whom, under what circumstances, and why?	There is strong evidence that implementation varied by implementation domain. While adaptation and the quality of delivery were generally successful, recruitment and exposure experienced mixed results with particular challenges observed at the PRU. Evidence on the quality of counsellors' adherence to the manual was positive, but their ability to progress through the curriculum was limited. There is some evidence that counsellors' previous skills and experience supported the delivery effort. However, there is strong evidence that backbone support provided by MHF and YG made an important contribution to implementation by creating a positive learning environment for counsellors. The degree to which this environment enabled delivery was influenced by COVID-19, scholars' engagement, and school context, which was particularly incompatible at the PRU to the extent that BAM was withdrawn from the PRU after one year.
2a. How has successful implementation contributed to any reported changes in social-emotional and identity development, for whom, under what circumstances, and why?	There is strong evidence that most of the scholars interviewed felt they had internalised three of the first four core values to some degree: Integrity, Accountability, and Positive Anger Expression. There was less evidence regarding Self-Determination. There is strong evidence that BAM was not the most important contributor to scholars' development – scholars generally ranked it second or third below family, friends, faith, or football. Nonetheless, there is strong evidence that the counsellors and curriculum together made an important contribution to the internalisation observed by supporting scholars to engage in action and reflection. This helped them to improve their emotional control and develop and value their sense of self. There is strong evidence that for most of the scholars interviewed, whether and how they engaged in action and reflection was influenced by their readiness and willingness to observe the three group conditions. Most also felt their ability to do so was shaped by wider influences in their lives.
2b. How has social-emotional development contributed to any reported changes in academic performance and behaviour and the avoidance of or reduced involvement in crime/anti-social behaviour, for whom, under what circumstances, and why?	There is strong evidence that most of the scholars interviewed were applying themselves more at school and making more pro-social choices in risky situations. There is some evidence that sources of support or motivation beyond BAM influenced responsible decision-making. However, there is strong evidence that the core values made an important contribution to improvements in scholars' choices because they empowered them to take advantage of opportunities and protected them from risks. In some cases, wider influences in scholars' lives reinforced their resolve. In others, they placed additional pressure on scholars' shoulders.
2c. How has implementation contributed to any reported unintended consequences, for whom, under what circumstances, and why?	There is mixed evidence on whether BAM inadvertently supported scholars to engage in irresponsible decision-making. There is a lack of data regarding scholars, parents, and carers in Group C at Oak and at the PRU – two groups for whom this might have been the case. There is strong evidence that most of the scholars interviewed did not experience negative labelling due to participating in BAM. However, there is some evidence to suggest that the greater presence in some groups of scholars with more serious behavioural concerns led to a minority of scholars perceiving BAM as an intervention for those with high levels of need, rather than something to celebrate. This was exacerbated by the negative expectations scholars were already contending with, including racist stereotypes and school reputations.

Evaluator judgement of intervention feasibility

At the end of year one of implementation (July 2021), a decision point was reached regarding whether BAM should progress to a pilot. Some implementation targets were met or nearly met. Where they were not, this was largely due to recruitment challenges, COVID-19, or the context of the PRU, but improvements were anticipated during year two:

- Given the easing of lockdown restrictions, the growing availability of vaccines, and the increasing ability of schools, MHF, and YG to cope with the pandemic, the impact of COVID-19 on BAM was predicted to fall.
- Given the incompatibility of BAM within the PRU, MHF decided to withdraw the programme from this setting. Another mainstream secondary school in Lambeth was engaged to take its place starting delivery in October 2021 in time for participation in the pilot.
- MHF also redesigned their approach to recruitment, comprising clearer communication and closer collaboration with schools to yield a greater spread of need among the pilot cohort.

On this basis, and informed by evaluation results to that point, a collective decision was made by the YEF and MHF to progress BAM to a pilot study.

The findings in this report suggest that some of these predictions came to fruition, while others did not. The impact of COVID-19 did lessen. No sessions needed to be delivered online during year two, and the replication specialist was able to travel to London to observe counsellors and re-establish YG's formal coaching model. All three counsellors have reported an improved spread of need within the pilot cohort because of the revised approach to recruitment.

However, the delivery environment within schools continued to pose challenges in year two. The driving issue was reduced exposure due to concern in schools about the potential adverse effect of BAM on scholars' GCSE performance with a large number of scholars at Oak and Birch entering either Years 10 or 11 during the second year of delivery. In response, counsellors are focusing recruitment of new cohorts on Year 8 students to reduce the impact of GCSEs on the amount of BAM scholars receive.

Overall, then, the evidence presented here builds on the findings from year one. One target was unambiguously met (mean sessions attended). Some were nearly met (group size and level and spread of need), while others were not met (sessions scheduled and curriculum progression). Others lacked the necessary data to reach a decision (brief encounters). For those areas of delivery for which targets were not set (adaptation and quality), the evidence suggests that they were implemented well. In terms of participant responsiveness, the overall picture is a positive one: there is strong, triangulated evidence that most of the scholars we interviewed moved through many of the core elements of the theory of change as hoped: they, their parents, carers, and their counsellors reported that many of them engaged in action and reflection, which enabled them to internalise the core values, which helped them to make better choices.

Where targets were not met or implementation was less successful, this was largely due to COVID-19, the context of the PRU, the pressures of GCSEs, or poor engagement from young people stemming from challenges with recruitment. Given that these influences have either subsided or been addressed, the evidence suggests that the context in which BAM is being delivered in South London is sufficiently conducive to render the intervention feasible.

Interpretation

Discussion

A long list of US-based interventions designed to improve child and youth psychosocial outcomes, including educational performance and participation in crime and violence, have failed to reproduce the positive effects seen in initial trials when transported to a European context (Baldus et al., 2016; Fonagy et al., 2018; Humayun et al., 2017; Segrott et al., 2022; Skärstrand et al., 2013; Sundell et al., 2008). At this stage, however, there is evidence of promise for BAM in the UK despite the pressures of COVID-19 and a challenging implementation context at the PRU.

Much is already known about the drivers of implementation success (Damschroder et al., 2022) and successful adaptation (Movsisyan et al., 2019). The evidence presented here suggests that YG and MHF got many of the important things right: The training and coaching function was intensive, grounded in clearly defined competencies and a well-thought-through curriculum; the approach to establishing and maintaining partnerships with schools was comprehensive, including school-level agreements that clearly set out the responsibilities of both parties alongside support from project managers to problem-solve on an ongoing basis; the leadership teams at both YG and MHF were able to learn as they went and adapted to unforeseen challenges — as demonstrated through the way they responded to the PRU, COVID-19, and recruitment issues; and the internal monitoring and evaluation functions at both YG and MHF were some of the most well run the evaluation team has encountered in delivery organisations.

However, why are there early signs that YG and MHF have succeeded where others have failed? There are four parts to that answer: money, time, people, and programme theory.

First, BAM is expensive relative to similar interventions²¹, but with this comes a comprehensive package of support from both the intervention developer and the delivery organisation. Moreover, it means that practitioners are based in schools all day, three to four days a week, with the time and space to interact regularly with students and staff, and in doing so, to reflect, learn and grow in their practice.

Second, BAM has been delivered in some form for nearly 20 years. The model and supporting infrastructure have grown iteratively over that time. YG's approach to training, coaching, school partnerships, leadership, and evaluation is based on nearly two decades of learning, including the experience of scaling BAM to new geographies in Boston and Los Angeles within the last five years.

Third, both YG and MHF are well-established third-sector organisations. YG has sought to supplement its experience with a conscious effort to build on best practices and evidence regarding implementation. Prior to its first foray into scaling, YG partnered with the US-based National Implementation Research Network (NIRN) to develop a strategy for expansion, based on NIRN's Active Implementation Framework (Metz et al., 2015). From refining their approach to leadership to consolidating their training and coaching offer for counsellors, YG was able to consolidate its experience into a package of support that MHF has been able to benefit from since the beginning of its partnership with YG. At the same time, the evidence presented here suggests that BAM is a high-profile project within MHF with proactive support at all levels of the organisation.

²¹ https://guidebook.eif.org.uk/programme/becoming-a-man

Fourth, the design and theory behind BAM is rich in evidence, formal scientific theory, practitioner insight, and young people's experiences with the core mechanisms of change carefully thought through. The evidence from this feasibility study suggests that some young people in Lambeth can benefit from BAM in the same way that they did in Chicago; specifically, boys looking for male role models who can empathise with their racialised experiences, offer unconditional positive regard, model pro-social values, and provide a safe space every week for them to develop strong relationships grounded in trust and mutual understanding and experiment with self-emotional and -relational awareness.

The richness and complexity of this theory posed challenges to the evaluation team in our efforts to capture it in a theory of change. By design, the first iteration (Appendix 10) leaned more on capturing everything that YG and MHF thought was relevant, while the relationships between these elements were held more lightly given that both organisations were clearer on the former than the latter. Following the first round of data collection and analysis at the end of year one, the evaluation team, MHF, and YG were able to identify the most important parts of the theory of change, remove the less important parts, and be clearer on the causal connections between the remaining elements (Appendix 2). This clarity was supported by the introduction of the realist matrix to structure the theory of change, as well as the amendments to that structure inspired by Dalkin et al. (2015). This version held up well following the second round of data collection at the end of year two – no changes were made based on the findings.

Limitations

The focus of this feasibility study was the BAM intervention. This meant that our time, energy, and resources were necessarily weighted towards gathering evidence on the contribution of BAM to scholars' lives. Despite our best efforts, this came at the expense of an exhaustive consideration of rival or alternative explanations for scholars' development. At the beginning of their interviews, it was made clear to scholars that the focus of the conversation would be their development generally with the contribution BAM may or may not have made considered within this broader context. Scholars were not asked directly about BAM for the first part of the interview. Yet, it was clear that we were there due to our connection to the intervention and to MHF, and that the role BAM may have played in their lives was our central focus. This may have inadvertently led scholars to privilege BAM's contribution during discussion, which was compounded by the difficulty of talking about abstract change processes with young people.

In contrast to conversations about alternative contributors to change, which generally began with open questions, BAM was a concrete and tangible influence for scholars to consider. During data collection for the pilot study, we will be more intentional in our approach. This will include, for example, following the recommendation of Delehais and Toulemonde (2012) by carrying out "a systematic search for potential alternative explanations before gathering evidence, rather than during the data collection stage" (p.284).

Similar issues affected our ability to explore unintended consequences. While the sub-theory regarding negative labelling was well established and could therefore form part of our topic guides with all relevant stakeholders, open questions during interviews yielded little in the way of possible negative outcomes. For the pilot study, we will work with partners to identify other tangible possibilities for unintended consequences for discussion during interviews, including the possibility of negative effects on academic attainment through taking scholars out of lessons to attend BAM sessions. The availability of school data on behaviour, attendance, and grades during the pilot will support this effort.

Finally, challenges with data collection limited our ability to generate evidence regarding certain experiences. This includes the lack of interviewees from the PRU, which limited our ability to learn about

the challenges in this setting directly from the scholars, and from Group C at Oak – some of whom their counsellor felt may have experienced negative labelling. It also includes the lack of coaching data from year one of delivery due to data collection and completeness issues associated with COVID-19.

Future research and publications

Considerations for the pilot study

This study includes a comprehensive assessment of the different dimensions of implementation across the first two years of BAM in Lambeth, covering both the extent to which delivery occurred as intended and the factors that limited and supported the implementation effort. For the remainder of the theory of change, including the sub-theories concerning intermediate outcomes, ultimate outcomes, and unintended consequences, while important insights related to influencing factors were generated, those related to the extent to which young people passed through these stages as intended are more limited.

To that end, cohort-level outcomes data related to all three sub-theories will be collected as part of the pilot study. This includes data related to social-emotional development, via the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ; Goodman, 1997), as well as school data on behaviour, attendance, and grades. The evaluation team is also working with YEF, MHF, YG, and community partners to design and deliver a suitable measure of offending behaviour during the pilot study.

To gather evidence of BAM's promise (a core aim of the pilot study), we need to capture both changes in target outcomes, as well as BAM's contribution to any changes. The evidence presented here suggests that the combination of realist-informed methods, theories of change, and contribution analysis applied in this study will support that effort, particularly the structure and content of the theory of change, the framework analysis method that shaped our qualitative analysis, and the triangulation assessment that informed our approach to contribution analysis. Their application in the pilot study will help us to advance our collective understanding of how BAM works, for whom, under what circumstances, and why.

Further publications

We anticipate producing the following publications:

- A report for the YEF reporting findings from the pilot outcomes evaluation (due in 2023)
- A journal article on the pre-delivery adaptation process (submitted to the *Journal of Prevention* in November 2022, with approval from the YEF)
- A journal article reporting on the methodological approach used here (combining realist-informed methods, theories of change, and contribution analysis; in 2023, following the publication of this report)
- A journal article reporting feasibility phase findings (in 2023, following the publication of this report)
- A journal article reporting pilot outcome phase findings (in 2024, following the publication of the pilot outcomes report)

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