

THE SCOUTS EARLY YEARS PROGRAMME EVALUATION

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
MARCH 2020

Scouts 



Report by:
Prof Chris Pascal
Prof Tony Bertram



Centre for
Research in
Early
Childhood

This executive summary report has been produced by the Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC) as part of its evaluation of The Scouts Early Years Programme which ran from April 2019 to February 2020. A full report is also available.

The piloting and the evaluation of this programme was funded by the Department for Education. All photographs reproduced by kind permission of The Scouts Association. Copyright © Scouts 2020.

The Scouts Theory of Change and the stated activities and outcomes for children are included for reference as an annex to this executive summary report.

We would like to thank all those who have helped to facilitate this evaluation, particularly the staff members from The Scouts who have been leading the roll out of the Early Years Programme.

Above all, we are indebted to the staff, parents, volunteers and children who gave of their time so generously and engaged so wholeheartedly and candidly in the focus group discussions and interviews. We much appreciate their intelligent and perceptive reflections on the crucial importance of developing a high quality, inclusive and sustainable programme for, and with, young children and their families.

For more information about CREC please visit: www.crec.co.uk

The report which follows is an independent assessment by the Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC) which has an international reputation for undertaking reviews and evaluations in the early years.

When we started our early years pilots in January 2019, we knew that we needed an independent expert eye to help us understand what was working, what was not and ultimately, if early years provision in Scouting was desirable or even possible. Over 15 months, the CREC team has followed the pilots, collected data, interviewed stakeholders and tracked our work with the committed rigour and insight of early childhood specialist researchers.

The final report is an unambiguous endorsement for early years Scouting. According to CREC: *“Participation in the Early Years Scout Programme, even over a relatively short period of time, has had a positive and sometimes transformative impact on the children's development, especially in the areas of communication and language skills and life skills. The Programme has also impacted positively on the adult volunteers and parents with key outcomes including the development of life skills and parenting skills”*.

CREC also provides very encouraging feedback in other critically important areas; for example, the recruitment of adult volunteers, the feasibility and viability of the models, and the developmental suitability of the programme for 4- and 5-year olds.

While this good news is welcome, even more important is the spotlight that CREC shines on areas that need to be developed or improved. For example, while the partner and family models we trialled have shown lots of promise, the report identifies important concerns that need to be addressed through further piloting before these models could be rolled out.

The report also points to areas with greater potential than we imagined. For example, Young Leaders have been much more engaged in our early years pilots than we previously understood – and CREC suggests that there is potential to develop this form of youth social action much further. Involving more Young Leaders appears to be a win-win-win: for young children, for the young leaders, and for Scouting overall. We will be exploring this opportunity further.

The report has been essential in helping the Early Years Programme Board to frame our final recommendations to The Scout Association Board of Trustees. We are very grateful to Professor Chris Pascal and the team at CREC and delighted to make their full report widely available to those who would like to better understand the potential and challenges of early years Scouting.

Andrew Bollington
Project Sponsor,
Early Years Programme Board

Liam Burns
Chief Programme Officer

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Scouting is currently available for young people aged 6 to 24 years of age but the 2018-2023 Scouting Strategic Plan (The Scout Association, 2018) recognised a growing need for more informal learning opportunities for younger children and committed The Scout Association to researching, piloting and evaluating different models of reaching young people under 6 years of age.

The plan also set out a clear commitment to grow Scouting in areas of deprivation and to focus on communities that are currently underrepresented in the movement. To support these priorities, The Scout Association successfully secured funding from the Department for Education via the Voluntary and Community Sector Early Years Disadvantage Grant to deliver and evaluate 20 early years pilots in areas of multiple deprivation from 2019-2020 (21 were actually opened) and explore their capacity to improve developmental outcomes for young children, particularly in the areas of communication and language skills and in life skills.

This commitment by The Scout Association is congruent with wider Government initiatives to improve early outcomes for young children and to support community services for young children and families which have significantly declined during the recent 'age of austerity'. Young children and families living below the average income have limited access to the community activities for young children, many of which were previously offered by children's centres, youth clubs, libraries, parks and museums, and so the potential for family and home learning in these public and community spaces has been reduced.



Furthermore, a large body of research shows that early experiences of informal or non-formal family learning offered within communities and the home can aid 'school readiness' and also have long-term implications for life chances and the social mobility of young citizens. The Scout Early Years Project has developed as part of this wider context of community and civic development.

The Early Years Scout section is provisionally called Hedgehogs and the pilot project has aimed to test three delivery models in which more active work with parents has been specifically sought:

1. Scout Led Model
2. Family Led Model
3. Partner Led Model

The Scout Association commissioned the Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC) to evaluate the impact, quality and feasibility of the Early Years Programme and to test out the viability and sustainability of the three delivery models.

Headline Findings

These headline findings are drawn from the main body of the Evaluation Report, covering the pilot phase from March 2019 to February 2020.

They are based on the evidence collected from a selected group of 6 of the 18 pilot Hedgehog groups, the collation of monitoring data from all 18 pilot settings, and interviews with strategic leads in the Scout Movement.

It should be noted that this learning is not intended to be presented only as research findings but to form part of a feedback process which has contributed to ongoing reflection and refinement of the project delivery since its launch and as it looks ahead to a possible wider roll out.

It is hoped that these findings and the emerging recommendations will inform the next phase of implementation as the Programme moves forward.



“ This evaluation documents the achievements of the pilot Early Years Programme and points to aspects of the Programme which require further development ”

These findings are grouped under the three dimensions set out in the evaluation brief:

- Impact
- Quality
- Feasibility

In addition, the findings on the viability and sustainability of the three delivery models are presented.



Impact

The Scout Association identified four objectives for Early Years Scouting and the evaluation provides strong early evidence that, with further investment, development and extension, the Early Years Project has the potential to realise these.

1 Improved outcomes for young people (and hence increased impact of Scouting on society)

Participation in the Early Years Scout Programme, even over a relatively short period of time, has had a positive and sometimes transformative impact on the children's development, especially in the areas of communication and language skills and life skills. The Programme has also impacted positively on the adult volunteers and parents with key outcomes including the development of life skills and parenting skills.

2 Increased numbers of young people joining Scouting

The Early Years pilots have successfully recruited a cohort of younger children with a significant majority being families new to Scouting and achieving mixed gender and inclusivity for children with special educational needs and disability (SEND). A number of the pilots have a waiting list of recruits and have applied to expand their numbers which indicates an unmet demand for this age group in Scouting.

3 Increased number of young people joining Scouting from currently underrepresented backgrounds

It is evident that it cannot be guaranteed that any one delivery model will automatically recruit children from underrepresented backgrounds as this depends on the strategies pursued by those leading the group and the particular locality in which it is located. All of the children in the pilot groups are living in areas of deprivation but the demographic data of children currently attending the pilot Early Years groups suggests a partial or mixed picture of their success in recruiting from demographics underrepresented in Scouting.

Although located in disadvantaged communities, most pilots have not yet recruited children from very low income families or from Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) families in significant numbers. Some of the pilots have successfully developed strategies which have enabled them to recruit underrepresented families and their success can be built upon.

4 Increased recruitment and retention of adult volunteers, avoiding detrimental impact to existing provision

The pilot Programme has been successful in recruiting a pool of both new and existing volunteers who wish to work with the younger children. The evaluation reveals a new pool of female volunteers are being drawn in through the Early Years Programme and a presently untapped potential for an important contribution to be made by Scout Young Leaders.



Quality

The evaluation has affirmed the **age appropriateness** of the Early Years Programme and its fit with **expert understanding** of early years practice.

“

The Programme
is of high quality
and meets the
developmental
needs of the young
children extremely
well

”



The Programme is closely aligned with the national Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum but has its own distinct and different goals, with more of an emphasis on adventure, practical skills, outdoor skills, physical activity and community engagement which emphasises its difference from schooling.

However, there is a need to incorporate more content on Scout heritage, ethos and values to ensure the Scout identity of the Programme is better secured.



The incorporation of strategies to work in **partnership with parents in sessions** and by offering **home activities** is a unique and very positively viewed element of the Early Years Programme which could lead to enhanced outcomes for the children. This aspect of the Programme could be usefully transferred to other Scout sections.

In all the study pilots, the children display a **high level of involvement** in the activities offered indicating that the activities offered are highly engaging for the children and that deep level learning is taking place. Irrespective of delivery model, the pilots are providing the children with **rich learning experiences** indicating the potential power of the Programme to enhance young children's learning in key areas of development.

Section leaders and volunteers are demonstrating high levels of skill and delivering the Programme in a motivating and engaging way which is **inspiring and energising the young children to thrive** and extend their potential, but there is a need to incorporate more child led activities within the Programme to fully realise its potential to enhance child outcomes.

Feasibility

The evaluation explored the feasibility of the Early Years Programme and its ability to attract and retain new adult volunteers, to generate support and understanding within the Scout Movement and to have sufficient resources and capacity to administer the new section.

The evidence indicates that volunteer recruitment to work with this age group is strong and that initial reticence has been largely dispelled and there is enthusiastic support more widely within the Scout Movement to extend Scouting to these younger children.

Key lessons from the pilot indicate several important issues which need to be addressed for the Programme to move forward successfully and sustainably, including:

- Funding and Investment
- Scout Organisational Structures
- Communications and Website
- Training and Induction
- Materials and Resources
- Uniform and Branding
- Ongoing Research and Evaluation

There is also an awareness of the system and personnel challenges in extending the programme more widely and a consensus that any further development should be phased and with continued evaluation to ensure organisational learning continues.



The Three Delivery Models

The evidence indicates that all three models are seen to be viable and sustainable given further time to embed and evolve but each of the models has strengths and limitations which should be carefully considered as the Programme is extended. There are particular issues in using families and partner organisations as delivery partners and any extension of these models need to be closely monitored as they develop. Despite early issues in implementation of these delivery models, they potentially provide a key strategy in extending the reach of Early Years Scouting to new communities and underrepresented groups.

There is a general view expressed that all three models should be continued in the next phase of development and possibly a further hybrid model might be explored, in which different delivery models are given as options to be contextualised locally according to circumstances and even delivered alongside each other within a District. It would therefore seem wise to continue to closely monitor and evaluate the implementation of alternative delivery models in the next phase of the Project.



RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE WAY AHEAD

A route map to inform future planning

Analysis of the evaluation evidence and reflection on the Programme achievements suggests some clear priorities for further action. These are presented as a list of 9 recommendations and collectively they stand together as a route map to inform future planning.



ONE

Obtain dedicated investment so that there are sufficient resources to fund the further development of the Early Years Programme and its wider implementation.

TWO

Generate positive and unreserved support for the Early Years Programme, both internally within Scouting and more widely within the public sphere, so that attitudes towards young children's participation reflect the powerful potential of including this age phase in the Scouting movement.

THREE

Continue to explore, develop and evaluate different delivery models to see how they can reach underrepresented groups in Scouting, with particular attention given to any extension of the Family led and Partner led delivery models.

FOUR

Develop Scout systems and infrastructure so that Early Years Scouting is fully embedded as a 'Foundation' section within the Scout Movement with equal visibility and support to that given to other sections.

FIVE

Develop and make available age specific training, induction and support for all Early Years leaders and volunteers to ensure they understand the developmental needs and capacities of these younger children.

Training also should include best practice early years pedagogic approaches so leaders and volunteers are better able to use age appropriate strategies, including more child led activities, which can engage, excite, motivate and extend children's capacities and more fully realise their potential. Training in effective strategies to engage a diverse community of children and parents, and to support home learning would also be desirable.

SEVEN

Agree and promote a designated uniform and branding for the Early Years Scout section.

NINE

Commission further research and evaluation of the Early Years Scout Programme, its functioning and long term impact to ensure the continuation of organisational learning.

SIX

Review and revise the Early Years Scout Programme and resources to ensure they reflect expert knowledge and best practice in early years, particularly in:

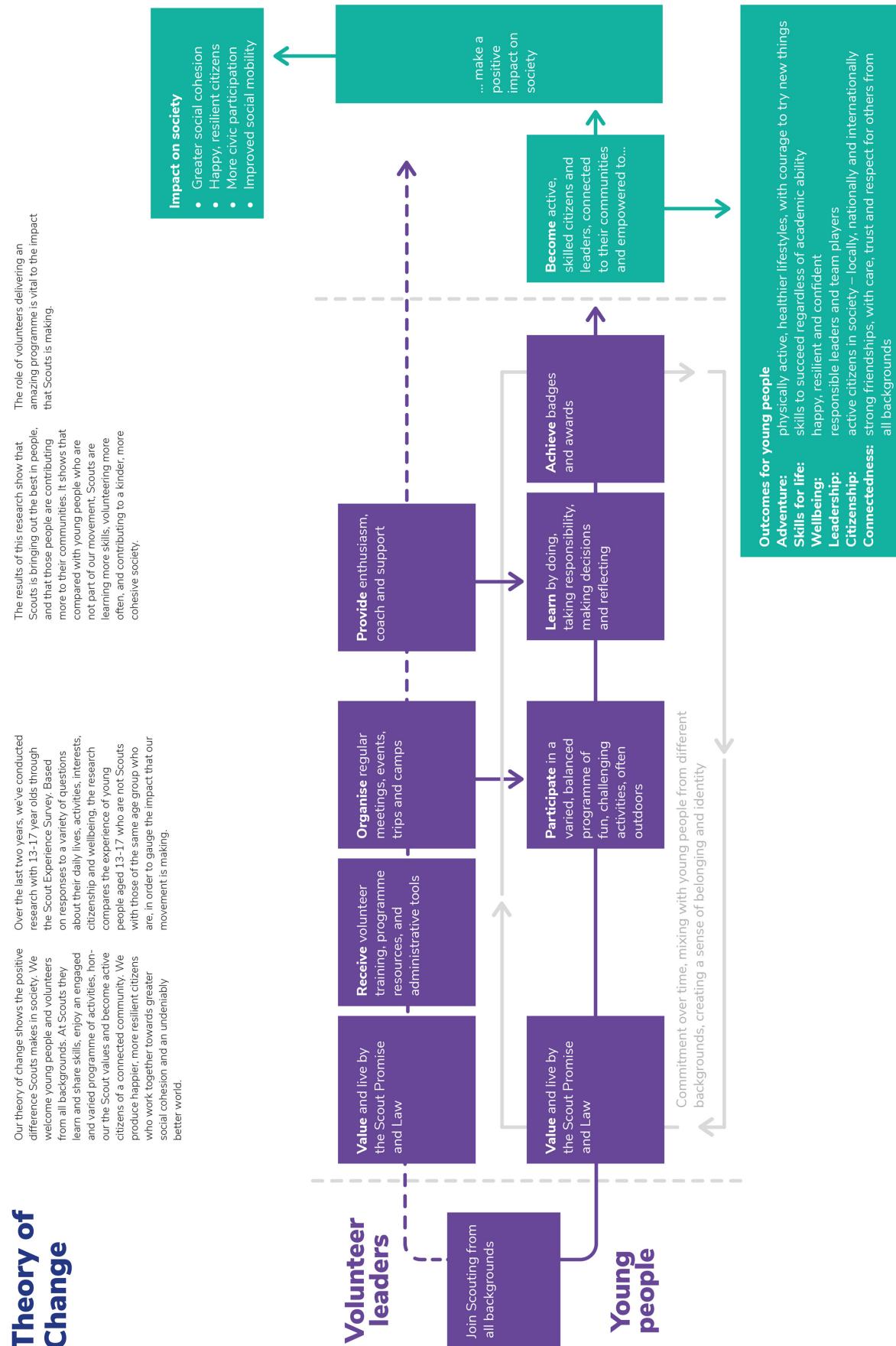
- a. the encouragement of child initiative and agency
- b. the use of small group and paired activities which encourage more sustained, shared dialogues
- c. more use of outdoors and encouragement of a wider range of physically active activities
- d. increased content on Scouting heritage, ethos and identity.

EIGHT

Develop a coherent and age appropriate communications and marketing strategy, including an updating of the Scout website, to make Early Years Scouting more visible and accessible.

For more information on The Scouts Early Years Programme, and to read the full evaluation report, please visit: www.scouts.org.uk

The Theory of Change for The Scout Association has been referenced within this report and is reproduced here for reference:



The stated activities that young people engaging with The Scouts take part in are:

- **Practical skills** - Learning practical skills which will be useful in my school, work or social life
- **Outdoor skills** - Learning skills and knowledge to spend time in the outdoors, such as navigation, camping, survival, backwoods cooking, knots/lashings and pioneering etc
- **Physical activity** - Taking part in physical, adventurous or sporting activities
- **Community engagement** - Learning about your community (such as people, places, services and democracy)
- **Social action** - volunteering to help other people, animals or the environment
- **International activities** - learning about other countries and cultures, either by visiting those countries or learning about them at home
- **Creative activities** - Taking part in drawing, painting, drama, sculpting, digital design, music or other creative activities
- **Spiritual activities** - Learning about the faith, beliefs or attitudes of others, or reflecting on my own

And the stated outcomes are:

Adventure: physically active, healthier lifestyles, with the courage to try new things

- More physically active
- Value the outdoors more
- Have increased knowledge of how to live a healthy lifestyle
- Are more likely to try new things
- Have increased courage to take risks and tackle challenging activities

Skills for Life: skills to succeed regardless of academic ability

- Have enhanced problem solving skills
- Are more independent
- Can communicate effectively
- Develop a range of practical and contemporary skills which are useful in their school, work and social life.

Wellbeing: Happy, resilient and confident

- Are happier
- Have enhanced personal wellbeing (measured by satisfaction, worthwhile, happiness and anxiety)
- Have increased perseverance and grit
- Have increased confidence and self-esteem
- Have a deeper understanding and confidence in their own beliefs and attitudes

Leadership: Responsible leaders and team players

- Are more responsible and trustworthy
- Are better at working in a team
- Show leadership by taking initiative and acting as a role model to help others make a positive difference

Citizenship: participate in society as active citizens – locally, nationally and internationally

- Are more likely to play an active role in their community
- Are more likely to consider themselves local, national and international citizens

Connectedness: respecting difference, with more and deeper friendships

- Have more meaningful friendships and relationships
- Care more about other people
- Have more respect and trust for others, including those from backgrounds different to their own