



# KIDS COMPANY

## A DIAGNOSIS OF THE ORGANISATION AND ITS INTERVENTIONS

FINAL REPORT

Sandra Jovchelovitch  
Natalia Concha

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## PREFACE

I met Camila Batmanghelidjh in 2007 and was immediately struck by the beauty and profound truth of her simple message: children recover with unconditional and unrelenting love. Holding and listening, containing and never giving them up are practical solutions for all children, but all the more for those who have never experienced a stable and loving home. This is something that every field psychologist knows well. Positive attachment and supportive human communication are at the basis of healthy development for individuals and communities. Find a way of offering neglected children the experience of love and they will respond because love remains foundational for what we humans are.

I am delighted that we have been able to study the language of love that Kids Company makes available to some of the most vulnerable children and young people in the UK. This report systematises the work of the charity and pulls together a unique body of evidence about the experience of its staff and volunteers as they reach out and engage children and young people in need. The study has produced an outline of the principles, forms of delivery and interfaces established by Kids Company. We now understand what makes them unique and what makes them effective in meeting the needs of their clients. We understand in particular that focusing on the needs of deprived children requires a different institutional culture that privileges local realities over excessive managerial concerns.

I am grateful to Camila Batmanghelidjh for inviting us into Kids Company and opening the space for this research and to my co-author Natalia Concha, who managed the project with great professional acumen. Her work has been essential for its successful completion. Our work relied on the good will and insights of staff and volunteers at Kids Company, who generously gave us their time and participated in the research. Sarah Carson and Laurence Guinness, in particular, provided invaluable support and assistance during fieldwork and throughout the various stages of the research. Thank you to all for giving us the opportunity to experience this research collaboration. My colleagues and students at the Department of Social Psychology provided a collegial and inspiring research environment. I am equally grateful to Steve Bennett, Jacqueline Crane, Steve Gaskell and Daniel Linehan for their technical and administrative support. A very special thank you goes to my team of researchers Rochelle Burgess, Parisa Dashtipour, Jacqueline Priego-Hernández and Yvonne Whelan, who worked with tremendous dedication, intelligence and sensitivity.

More than one in four children live in poverty in the UK today. I very much hope that this report will emphasise the urgency of their situation as well as the lessons that can be learned from those who are working so hard and so effectively to support them.

**Sandra Jovchelovitch, September 2013**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This research studied the model of intervention of Kids Company, a third sector organisation in the UK funded in 1996 with the primary purpose of supporting vulnerable children, young people and their families. It reviewed available evidence on the impact of Kids Company on its clients and investigated the internal structure of the organisation and its interventions.

The research design was multi-methodological, psychosocial and ethnographic, combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Fieldwork took place between February and March 2013. The database comprises:

- 5 focus groups with Kids Company's staff and volunteers;
- 24 individual interviews (4 semi-structured and 20 unstructured) with Kids Company's staff and volunteers;
- 85 online questionnaires of staff and volunteers working across Kids Company's sites and programmes;
- Systematic observations based on a pre-designed observation template of 32 activities.

Statistical analysis using SPSS was conducted for the quantitative strand of the research. The qualitative thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo.

### CLIENTS, WORK AND IMPACT

- Kids Company works with the most vulnerable children and youth in the UK (mainly in London). Its services reach 36,000 children, young people and their families. Its clients experience severe developmental adversity, being exposed to food insecurity, poverty, poor housing, violence and social exclusion, abuse and substance misuse, low educational and employment aspirations, domestic maltreatment and unstable home environments.
- Developmental adversity is associated with changes in brain structure and function, genetic expression, behavioural and emotional dysregulation. The impact of adverse developmental conditions spans from the biology of the human body, to the psychology of the person to the cohesion and integration of communities and larger public spheres.

- Kids Company's model of intervention invests in the potential of neuroplasticity, providing actions and structures of support that can alter neural pathways and provide the opportunity for positive emotional and behavioural changes in vulnerable children and young people.
- Kids Company makes a substantial difference in the lives of its clients; its actions have positive impact on practical knowledge to deal with financial issues and access to services, housing and accommodation, engagement with family members, criminal involvement, substance misuse, educational attainment and overall physical and emotional well-being.
- Interventions and programmes based on attachment have a positive impact on the cognitive, emotional and social capacities of the self.
- Kids Company's services are heavily oversubscribed with demand outstripping capacity. The charity struggles to maintain its open-door policy.

### THE MODEL

- The model of work of Kids Company establishes interfaces at three levels: the children, their families and immediate environment, the statutory sector and the wider public sphere.
- Kids Company acts as mediators, facilitating communication between the interfaces sustained with clients, their social environment and the statutory sector.
- Kids Company works as brokers, translators and advocates giving visibility to the invisible, challenging dominant representations of children in need and demanding from authorities and statutory agencies that the needs of vulnerable children and young people are met.
- Kids Company acts as boundary crossers building bridges between their communities, corporate volunteers, the media and academia.
- Kids Company works with an absolute focus on the child and total commitment to the power of healthy attachment to change lives. They act as parents by proxy supporting the client unconditionally and providing nurturing and loving relationships.
- Kids Company's interventions aim to re-define the relational patterns experienced by children in need, offering positive attachment and

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unconditional support based on perseverance, the practice of love and long-term commitment to the relationship established.

- Kids Company is unafraid of using a language of emotions; it brings back to the debate about children in need the frequently absent language of emotional care and unconditional love as central for containment, healing and positive sociability.
- Kids Company uses cutting edge neurological and psychological evidence to inform its delivery and to design service provision. It integrates biological and psychosocial theories to better understand clients. It actively collaborates with researchers in academic institutions and its database is informing new research on developmental adversity and third sector interventions.
- Structures and actions of support operate internally and externally to facilitate dialogue and cross-fertilisation between the inside and the outside, between the charity, its clients and the wider environment.
- Structures of support for staff address practical and emotional dimensions and involve multiple procedures and levels of interaction, including managerial, technological, peer and group-based and one-to-one exchanges that take place formally and informally.
- Kids Company enjoys the presence of an exceptional leader whose charisma, open-door policy and strong presence in the British public sphere greatly contribute to the effectiveness of the charity.
- Kids Company presents an exemplary model of psychosocial scaffolding interconnecting the emotional and practical scaffolding of delivery with the scaffolding of relations between clients and their families. Looking after staff so that staff can look after vulnerable children and families is paramount for the model of Kids Company. These different chains of scaffolding hold together the overall vision of Kids Company.

## DELIVERY AND INTERFACES

- The charity provides flexible and in-depth tailored engagement, adjusting its practices to the needs of individual clients on the ground. It combines a bottom-up, situation-led approach to theoretical and empirical evidence on the behaviour of vulnerable children.
- Therapy and the creative arts play a substantial role in the work of Kids Company enabling vulnerable children to expand cognitive and emotional skills and develop non-verbal languages to elaborate their experiences.
- Kids Company works with public services in areas such as social services, schools and the NHS, including local GPs, hospitals and mental health centres. It bears witness to the level of services

delivered to vulnerable children and aims at holding the state accountable to children.

- Kids Company fills the gaps left open by the state and its services, welcoming and containing children and young people that are abandoned and excluded from school, from social services and other statutory institutions.
- Kids Company enjoys an internal environment where plurality of perspectives, multidisciplinary practice and openness to situations enhance bold decision-making, a doer's attitude and flexibility to accommodate the challenging and demanding realities of clients.
- Kids Company presents exceptionally high levels of satisfaction and motivation amongst staff and volunteers. Staff and volunteers are proud of their work and profoundly committed to the organisation and its aims. They identify with the goals of the charity and feel empowered and individually rewarded by the work they deliver.
- Horizontal communication and peer support enhance the shared intentionality of the organisation and the feelings of well-being that permeate the work of staff. There is a positive sociability and a light atmosphere despite the nature of the problems that the charity addresses. This is beneficial for staff as well as for the children who come into these spaces to experience group cohesion, a positive social identity and a strong sense of community.
- Social capital based on high levels of cohesion and staff morale remains an important asset that is daily utilised to nurture the internal working environment of the charity and provide a positive model for the children.
- From documents and paper work, which clients often have difficulty understanding, to help at school, therapy and parenting by proxy, Kids Company helps to construct a gateway through which children and young people can enter the social order, develop trust and form healthy attachments to adults.

## CHALLENGES

- Limited and unstable funding is a major source of stress and anxiety for staff and a massive challenge for the sustainability of Kids Company.
- The interface with the statutory sector is a complex and considerable challenge, involving collaboration as well as constant tension due to divergent organisational cultures, different approaches to theory and practice, prejudices and preconceptions.
- An increase in bureaucracy and excessive management can jeopardise the effectiveness of Kids Company and presents a challenge to its ability to sustain absolute focus on the needs of its clients.



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## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Key conclusions and broad recommendations arising from this study are:

**Kids Company works directly to counteract the effects of developmental adversity, which is a major threat to the future of healthy societies and cohesive public spheres.**

- Support and invest in organisations that are addressing developmental adversity;
- Develop research collaborations and knowledge exchange initiatives that integrate work on developmental adversity across different domains and fields of intervention;
- Raise awareness about the negative impact of developmental adversity on brain, mind and society;
- Recognise the expertise and experience of charities working on the ground for the development of research and policy.

**Kids Company combines flexibility and staff commitment to enable absolute focus on the needs of vulnerable children; they offer to the child the knowledge that someone cares, loves and will not give them up, irrespective of any challenging and unstable response that may come back from the child.**

- Disseminate the approach of Kids Company and raise awareness about its model of psychosocial scaffolding for re-writing fractured lives;
- Foster debate and reflection amongst care professionals, researchers, policy makers and government about the role of love and unconditional support in the management of developmental adversity;
- Recognise that challenging behaviour is an adaptive response of vulnerable children to developmental adversity; blaming children and young people is unproductive and pushes them further away from positive sociality;
- Adjust formal systems to bottom-up realities that do not conform to rigid managerial cultures; faceless bureaucracies are expensive and ineffective in delivering care for those in need.

**Collaborations between Kids Company and the statutory sector involve substantial challenges; addressing these challenges is imperative for supporting children and young people in need as dialogue and cooperation between sectors can be beneficial to all.**

- Develop spaces for dialogue and joint practice for staff working in Kids Company and the statutory sector;
- Create programmes for staff exchange and secondments between sectors;
- Share research and evaluations to minimise misconceptions and increase knowledge of how Kids Company works;
- Maximise the use of evidence produced by research partnerships to engage statutory services and raise awareness of Kids Company's work, strengthening the public sector's vision and strategy.

**Kids Company works as a border crosser and mediator between disadvantaged children and the wider public sphere; however, much work remains to be done to raise the visibility of vulnerable children and the work of the charity in the UK and internationally.**

- Foster partnerships with different sectors in society and commit the private sector to engage with children in need;
- Work with the media to raise awareness about the high levels of risk and marginalisation suffered by vulnerable children and other invisible populations living in the UK;
- Consider the development of international partnerships that can connect the experience of the third sector in the UK to that of other societies.



A vibrant mural painted on a brick wall. Two white swans with long, orange beaks are the central figures. They are positioned on a yellow ground area. The swan on the left has a pink and red circular pattern on its tail, while the swan on the right has a green and purple circular pattern. The background is a deep blue, and there are green leaves and a small brown animal (possibly a squirrel) visible in the upper right corner. The mural is painted over a blue brick wall, with some of the original bricks visible through the paint.

# 1 / THE RESEARCH: STUDYING KIDS COMPANY



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# 1 / THE RESEARCH: STUDYING KIDS COMPANY

## 1.1. OVERVIEW

The research reported here investigated the organisation and model of intervention of Kids Company, a third sector charity operating in the UK (mainly in London). Founded in 1996 with the primary purpose of supporting vulnerable children, young people and their families, the charity is committed to delivering flexible, long-term solutions tailored to meeting the needs of clients (Kids Company, 2011). The research examined available evidence on the work and impact of Kids Company and systematised its model of delivery, focusing on its practices and the representations, views and experiences of its staff and volunteers. Central to our research was to understand how Kids Company reaches out to its vulnerable target population and how it sustains its model of delivery. Supporting and working with the most vulnerable in society is a demanding and difficult task, which requires understanding and support.

Improving the quality of support for disadvantaged and vulnerable children is a challenge for policy and for a fairer British society. Supporting children and young people is essential for their overall development and well-being, as well as to mitigate the risks associated with poor outcomes in physical and mental health, educational attainment, crime and violence, future employment and security (Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi, et al., 2002; McNeil, Reeder & Rich, 2012; McVeigh, Hughes, Bellis, Ashton, et al., 2005; Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003; Wilkinson, 2005). An increasing body of evidence shows that developmental adversity is associated with negative impact on neurological, physiological and psychological mechanisms (Hart & Rubia, 2012; McCrory & Viding, 2010). When children's relational development is adverse, brain development is compromised and with it, the right of a child to fully achieve their biological and psychological potential, which are evolved assets of our species. Today, many children and young people in the UK are being deprived of realising their full human potential.

Third sector organisations are an important source of care for vulnerable children and young people,

supporting the statutory sector in the delivery of services and engaging local capacity (Dickinson, Allen, Alcock, Macmillan & Glasby, 2012). Such organisations draw on local and professional knowledge to offer services and interventions much needed by vulnerable populations. However, they largely rely on donations and fundraising to obtain resources. Securing funds for interventions is a considerable challenge, exacerbated by the current political and economic climate of cold policy and massive cuts (Lupton, Hills, Stewart & Vizard, 2013).

## **“CENTRAL TO OUR RESEARCH WAS TO UNDERSTAND HOW KIDS COMPANY REACHES OUT TO ITS VULNERABLE TARGET POPULATION AND HOW IT SUSTAINS ITS MODEL OF DELIVERY”**

Kids Company is an organisation that has been in this situation since its inception in 1996. Its model of social care aims to offer support to every single child that walks through its doors, while never charging them for their services. It seeks to involve communities in long-term, flexible solutions pertinent to their realities while striving to meet the practical and emotional needs of its vulnerable clients, 85% of whom self-refer (Gaskell, 2008). A more recent report from Kids Company indicates that another 10% of clients are referred by their peers (Kids Company, in press). While there is no local authority provision or funding for children who self-refer, once at Kids Company they will receive comprehensive assessment and full support. Yet, the organisation is facing the paradox of the current socioeconomic climate where cuts to public spending coexist with a call for ‘big society’: on the one hand, the third sector is expected to increase its contribution to action in local communities; on the other hand, funds to support the sector

are significantly diminishing (Evans, 2011). Charities have had their budgets cut but they are the ones accommodating the large increase in the number of individuals seeking help in a stalled economy. The consequence is that demand from vulnerable children at risk of harm and neglect threatens to outstrip capacity. As many other third sector organisations, Kids Company is at risk of being unable to best provide a safe space to its clients, with spill over effects at the level of self and collective efficacy for the children, their communities and the larger British public sphere.

Against this background, third sector organisations face the need to re-assess their organisational circumstances and potential avenues for further development. Kids Company and its model of intervention offer an exemplary case study for studying these conditions and assessing the voluntary-statutory interface in the delivery of care. To understand these processes we studied how Kids Company operates and engages clients, statutory services and society. We identified the challenges faced to meet the needs of clients as well as the resources used to overcome them. We explored how the work of Kids Company's staff matches its documented impact in academic research and discussed with staff and volunteers their perceptions, experiences and practices in sustaining the work of the charity and engaging the children, their communities and the wider British public sphere.

## 1.2. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

The research adopted a multi-method, psychosocial and ethnographic approach combining two methodological strands: one quantitative, including an online survey with staff and volunteers, and one qualitative, including focus groups, individual interviews and observations. The work took place between February

and March 2013 (see Figure 1.1) totalising 11 visits to the field and more than 100 hours of observations and field-related activities.

We asked:

- How do Kids Company's staff represent their present and future role?
- What are the main challenges for service delivery faced by Kids Company's staff? And what are the resources Kids Company's staff draw on to overcome these?
- What has been the impact of the work of Kids Company according to available evidence?
- How does the present state of Kids Company, as perceived by their staff, relate to its documented impact?

To answer these questions we conducted:

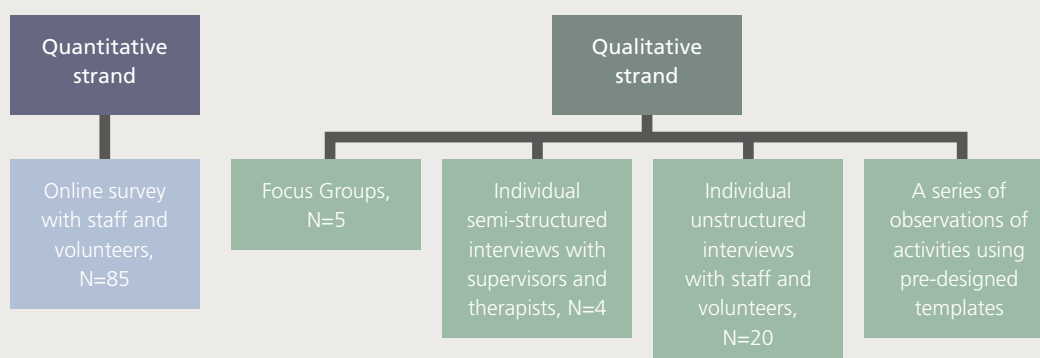
- 5 focus groups with Kids Company's staff and volunteers;
- 24 individual interviews (4 semi-structured and 20 unstructured) with Kids Company's staff and volunteers;
- An online survey, which was responded by 85 staff and volunteers;
- Systematic observations of 32 activities based on an observation template.

Full details of all instruments can be found in the appendices. An exercise of communicative validation of the findings was conducted (Gaskell & Bauer, 2000) and when relevant, the reactions of Kids Company's staff were incorporated as data and used to support the analysis.

The research did not include direct data collection with clients of Kids Company. Their perspectives, views and experiences were accessed indirectly, through the views of staff and volunteers and through

**FIGURE 1.1**

Research design: quantitative and qualitative strands



observation during fieldwork visits to centres and/or programmes of Kids Company. Their voice has been included in this report through the perspective of Urban Wisdom, a youth-led think tank supported by Kids Company. Their response to the current research can be found at the end of the report.

## “KIDS COMPANY AND ITS MODEL OF INTERVENTION OFFER AN EXEMPLARY CASE STUDY FOR ASSESSING THE VOLUNTARY-STATUTORY INTERFACE IN THE DELIVERY OF CARE”

### SAMPLE AND METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

The sample comprised staff working at the main sites and programmes of Kids Company: Treehouse, Arches II and Kenbury, Urban Academy, Head Office and The Heart Yard. We also sampled staff and volunteers working in the field, directly at clients' households, specifically those working in the programme *Colour a Child's Life* (CaCL). A detailed breakdown of the different modalities of data collection used in the different sites is provided in Table 1.1.

The quantitative measure comprised the Work Related Well-Being Questionnaire (WRWQ-19), a 19 item version of the Organisational Self Review

Measure (OSRM) (CIPD, 2007) adapted for the purpose of this study (see Appendix 2). In addition, qualitative instruments were designed to elicit the following key areas related to the work of staff and volunteers: role and motivation; clients' background and information; experiences of delivery and impact, views, challenges and resources; suggestions and views on the future and views on academic research in relation to practice (see Appendix 4). Observations were systematised through an observation template (Guest, Namey & Mitchell, 2013) presented in Appendix 5.

### DATA ANALYSIS

Statistical analysis using SPSS was conducted for the quantitative strand of the research (a detailed account of the analysis is described in chapter 3). Except for a few unstructured interviews, the qualitative data were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim for thematic analysis, an established and validated process for decoding qualitative data (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Data were analysed using NVivo, a regularly used software package for the analysis of qualitative data. The research team was involved in devising the analytical coding frame (see Appendix 6) and three researchers were involved in the coding. The data presented is based on the salience of themes and frequency of references coded. Quality indicators include internal meetings and intersubjective validation, collectively drafting

**TABLE 1.1**

Sample and modalities of data collection

SITE OR PROGRAMME	MODALITIES OF DATA COLLECTION
<b>Treehouse</b>	<b>1 Focus group with mixed staff, N=12 (Including 2 therapists)</b> Observations and 5 unstructured individual interviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff, N=3 (Keyworker, family support and therapist)</li> <li>• Volunteers, N=2</li> </ul>
<b>Arches II &amp; Kenbury</b>	<b>1 Focus group with mixed staff, N=14 (Including 2 therapists)</b> Observations and 7 unstructured individual interviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff, N=5 (Centre manager, safeguarding, keyworkers and therapists)</li> <li>• Volunteers, N=2</li> </ul>
<b>Urban Academy</b>	<b>1 Focus group with mixed staff, N=8</b> Observations and 7 unstructured individual interviews: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff, N=7 (Centre manager, keyworkers, teachers and therapists)</li> </ul>
<b>Colour a Child's Life</b>	<b>Observations and 3 unstructured individual interviews:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff, N=2 (Programme manager and corporate volunteer organiser)</li> <li>• Volunteer, N=1</li> </ul>
<b>Head Office</b>	<b>3 Individual semi-structured interviews with supervisors</b>
<b>Schools Programme</b>	<b>1 Focus group with mixed staff, N=7</b>
<b>Mentoring Programme</b>	<b>1 Focus group with mentors, N=8</b>
<b>The Heart Yard</b>	<b>1 Individual semi-structured interview</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Therapist</li> <li>• Views gathered from therapists in focus groups</li> </ul>



and revising of the coding frame and a collaborative coding process with checking and back-checking amongst the research team.

### 1.3. THE STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

This report comprises 7 chapters. Chapter 1 contains an introduction to the research aims and questions and provides an overview of the research design and methodology. Chapter 2 offers an integration of research evidence on the work of Kids Company, its approach to delivery and the background of its clients, its documented impact and on-going research collaborations. Evidence on developmental adversity and its biological and psychosocial consequences is discussed and the importance of intervention for the prospects of vulnerable children highlighted. Chapter 3 reports on the results from the online survey conducted with staff and volunteers. Chapter 4 outlines the general features of the Kids Company's model, describing how staff and volunteers understand the

principles that structure the organisation and guide its practices in addressing the needs of vulnerable children, young people and their families. The chapter presents the main elements of delivery and uses two examples – keyworking and the programme *Colour a Child's Life* – to illustrate how Kids Company meets the needs of clients and conceives the impact of its work. Chapter 5 presents a conceptual synthesis of the overall model of delivery of Kids Company, where it is suggested that the efficacy of Kids Company can be explained by the chains of scaffolding it enables, involving a combined architecture of support structures spanning from staff, to clients and back. Staff motivation, commitment and satisfaction are intrinsic to delivery and to the shared vision and intentionality that guides the model of Kids Company. Chapter 6 systematises the views of staff and volunteers about the challenges and future of Kids Company, presenting the main internal and external intersectorial issues identified by staff as having implications for the charity. Chapter 7 presents key findings and recommendations.





## 2 / THE WORK OF KIDS COMPANY: INTEGRATION OF EVIDENCE



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## 2 / THE WORK OF KIDS COMPANY: INTEGRATION OF EVIDENCE

### 2.1. OVERVIEW

A review of over 40 research documents was conducted. The search strategy targeted three parallel streams, which revealed cross-fertilisation and helped to expand the overall review. One main source of information included unpublished 'grey' literature produced primarily by Kids Company including Kids Company's annual reports and unpublished organisational manuscripts. In addition, independent research reports on the work of the charity, produced mainly by academics and the research and consultancy sector were reviewed. A second stream included peer reviewed research articles, particularly from the field of developmental neuroscience. To this end we searched the following electronic databases: Web of Knowledge, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, Scopus, PubMed and ScienceDirect. The third stream comprised ancestry searching (Conn, Isaramalai, Rath, Jantarakupt, et al., 2003) and included relevant articles and main studies referenced in the papers previously selected. The desk-review of the documents rendered the following main themes:

- **The Clients and their Backgrounds:** the social, economic and psychological background of clients and the associated educational and employment related difficulties faced by Kids Company's clients.
- **The Approach:** the distinctiveness of the Kids Company's model which aims to inform and be informed by research evidence.
- **Delivery of Services:** this encompasses the wide variety of joined-up services provided by Kids Company, which cross bureaucratic boundaries often located within statutory services.
- **Impact of Kids Company:** outlined here are findings from both Kids Company and independent research reports.

In addition, we provide an excursion on the issue of developmental adversity and its biological and social

psychological consequences, summarising recent research on adversity and brain development, as well as on neuroplasticity and epigenetics. This evidence is central to demonstrating the importance and role of social policy and early psychosocial support in healthy pathways of individual and community development. Finally we provide a summary of on-going and future research collaborations between Kids Company and a number of major UK academic institutions.

**"KIDS COMPANY'S CLIENTS  
ENCOUNTER ADVERSITY ON A  
DAILY BASIS: POVERTY, HOME  
INSECURITY, RELATIONAL  
INSTABILITY AND EXPOSURE TO  
VIOLENCE AND CRIME"**

### 2.2. THE CLIENTS: SOCIAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL BACKGROUNDS

Kids Company's manuscripts, annual report and evaluations report that in 2012 alone approximately 36,000 children, young people and their families have accessed their support (Gow, 2012; Guinness, 2012; Kids Company, 2012). This support is provided through street-level centres, educational centres for children over 16 years of age and early intervention programmes in 40 schools (Gaskell, 2008). The children and young people are from ethnically diverse backgrounds and range in age from birth to 26 years old.

Kids Company's clients encounter adversity on a daily basis. Over the long-term, multiple traumatic experiences act as risk factors which hold negative cumulative and interactive 'toxic stress' effects over the life course of the children and young people they attend (Hillman & Wainwright, 2012; Shonkoff & Garner, 2012). Such experiences include:



- Exposure to violence and crime, at home and in the community;
- Poverty in its different forms – including income and food poverty;
- Emotional and behavioural dysregulation;
- Educational and employment linked difficulties.

### EXPOSURE TO VIOLENCE AND CRIME, AT HOME AND IN THE COMMUNITY

Kids Company's clients are exposed to a serious degree of everyday violence and crime. This can occur proximally in the home or more distally in the young person's community, where acts of violence are so pervasive that they become normalised. Independent research on Kids Company's clients by Hillman and Wainwright (2012) found that:

- 40% of clients stated they had witnessed or experienced at least one traumatic event including stabbings, shootings and rape;
- 42% of clients reported exposure to domestic violence;
- 27% of the young people sampled were involved in criminal activities (e.g., violence, drug offences and theft);
- 23% of the sample had a history of substance misuse where 16% of young people used either alcohol or drugs with 5% using them the whole time. Only 1 participant had never taken any substances;
- 15% reported physical abuse, while 13% reported being involved in fighting or hurting others.

Of those engaged in criminal activities, 50% are 16 years old and under. Most striking is the link between abuse at home and having a known record of criminality, with 33% of clients experiencing both. Of those living in impoverished housing 31% also had engaged in criminal activities. Of all the young people sampled 13% had been imprisoned. These numbers become all the more compelling if we consider that children's experiences of violence are generally under-reported (McVeigh, et al., 2005).

In addition, Gillies & Robinson (2010) found experiences of street violence to be highly prevalent, with nearly all the young men in the study stating that they had been threatened or robbed. Some had been hospitalised with knife wounds. The journey to and from school was considered particularly dangerous and in order to protect themselves and avoid being perceived as victims, young people acted in ways that marked themselves out as 'troublemakers' and perpetrators, in this way creating a pathway towards a criminal identity.

Exposure to a criminal pathway can occur in different ways for youth living in Britain (McVeigh, et al., 2005). One common way of involvement in youth violence is engaging in gang membership, which can take on different meanings according to the environment and urban context in which gangs

operate (CSJ, 2009; UK Government, 2011). Gang membership is increasingly evident in the UK's main cities such as London (UK Government, 2011) and has recently been found to be significantly associated with high levels of psychiatric morbidity (Coid, Ullrich, Keers, Bebbington, DeStavola, et al., 2013). Recent evidence has shown how being a gang member leads to trauma and fear of further violence, with clear implications for mental health (Coid, et al., 2013).

### POVERTY

There are 3.5 million children living in poverty in the UK today (Department of Work and Pensions, 2013) and this is the population at the core of Kids Company's work. Clients face food insecurity, malnutrition and poor housing. They lack basic essentials and many cannot find what to eat in their fridge or cupboards. Numerous have never experienced a family meal at a table. Alcohol is frequently a food substitute.

A survey of Kids Company's clients (Kids Company, 2012) found that:

- 85% rely on Kids Company for their main meal of the day;
- 76% say that they don't manage to eat 5 fruit or vegetables a day;
- 70% mostly eat in their bedroom and 32% are given money by their parents/carers so that they can buy their own dinner;
- 64% stated that there is not always edible food in their fridge/cupboards;
- 50% of children reported that they often go to bed hungry;
- 33% never eat breakfast;
- 10% reported drinking alcohol daily.

Another study (Gow, 2012) among staff at Kids Company schools found that teachers hold high levels of concern about children's nutrition. Staff members at nearly half of these schools think that the majority of their students are experiencing food insecurity, with 88% of teachers considering that poor nutrition is having an impact on the children, mainly affecting their pupils' ability to concentrate. In addition, 79% reported poor nutrition is contributing to children's negative behaviours.

Hillman & Wainwright (2012) found that 53% of clients' families are on benefits and only 16% of parents had any form of employment (most of it casual and temporary). The same researchers conducted a Needs Analysis where:

- 51% of clients sampled reported housing related problems (e.g., overcrowding, temporary and unstable accommodation; severe problems of hygiene; sleeping on friends' floors);
- 31% of clients stated that they do not have enough of what they need in their rooms, with 1



in 5 children lacking a bed and blankets, a pillow (14%) and a towel (10%);

- 38% reported that they did not own school clothes;
- 34% stated that they did not own shirts; 31% reported that they lack essential clothing items, such as underwear or pants; 27% indicated that they did not own jumpers; 20% did not own a jacket; 16% did not own socks; those who felt they did not have enough clothes at home were less happy, had less fun, trusted others less and worried more.

These conditions compromise the subjective well-being of children and young people. Previous research has shown that children, in addition to having essential items, need to feel safe at home and to have a quiet space. We also know that food insecurity correlates with lower IQ, behavioural and emotional problems (Belsky, Moffitt, Arseneault, Melchior & Caspi, 2010). Malnutrition linked to poor diets and dysfunctional eating habits can have severe effects on children's physical health and brain development (Rosales, Reznick & Zeisel, 2009). Chronic deficiencies in essential vitamins and minerals often mean children feel lethargic, find it difficult to concentrate in the classroom, have a compromised immune system and poor general health. Poor nutrition is also damaging for young mothers and their unborn babies who require adequate daily nutrition for a good start to a healthy and happy life. Children deprived of food or consistently eating nutritionally poor quality food can be small for their age or paradoxically obese (Berridge, Ho, Richard & Difeliceantonio, 2010). These experiences may increase a young person's vulnerability towards developing impairments in neurophysiological, psychological and social domains.

## EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIOURAL DYSREGULATION

The prevalence of emotional and behavioural dysregulation is high in Kids Company's clients. Many have led problematic and difficult lives with a staggering 83% having had a history of complex trauma during childhood. Low self-esteem, eating disorders, suicidal ideation, phobias, withdrawn behaviours and behavioural difficulties are frequent (Gaskell, 2008). Hillman and Wainwright (2012) found that 40% of Kids Company's clients have witnessed or experienced at least one traumatic event in their lives, 30% have thought about running away from home and 25% do not feel safe with caregivers and household members. In addition, 10% of clients reported that they lived with a parent who is suffering from a severe psychiatric condition.

The home was not considered a safe place by many clients, with 49% having experienced significant distress at home (i.e., risk indicators such as neglect, physical abuse as a form of discipline, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, psychiatric conditions within the family and domestic violence between parents or within clients' own relationships). Relationships were often found to be inconsistent and fraught with difficulties. The Needs Analysis conducted by Hillman & Wainwright (2012) found that:

- 78% are separated from one or both of their parents at some time;
- 62% lost someone important in their lives;
- 49% are responsible for the care of someone else (e.g., parents and siblings).

Unstable relationships with adult caregivers exist not only in the family but also with adults in statutory agencies. Experiences of relational instability and violations of trust pose a threat to physical

and psychological development, in particular to the development of healthy attachment (Bowlby, 1969; Fonagy & Target, 1997; Rutter & O'Connor, 1999) with adults. Unsurprisingly, more than half of Kids Company's clients reported higher levels of anxiety relative to others of their age group, found it difficult to sleep at night and pay attention in class. In addition, the Needs Analysis (Hillman & Wainwright, 2012) found that:

- 56% have reported stress as being on-going;
- 38% have experienced general anxiety with 20% categorised as severely anxious;
- 37% have experienced anger issues, 21% have experienced depression and 7% reported self-harming (which is often under-reported);
- 27% reported often feeling scared or frightened in their everyday life;
- 24% found it difficult to play games.

## **"EARLY EXPERIENCE CAN HAVE LASTING EFFECTS ON BEHAVIOUR AND IS CRUCIAL TO UNDERSTAND HOW NURTURE SHAPES NATURE"**

Unhealthy forms of attachment are frequent amongst children and young people who are looked after by Kids Company. They are linked to a range of adjustment problems, where difficulties in perspective-taking and empathy often culminate in exhibitions of disrespect towards adults (Bowlby, 1969). Different forms of unhealthy attachment (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978) may emerge, which include:

- Avoidant attachment, where a caregiver will be treated as a stranger;
- Ambivalent/resistant attachment, where the young person vacillates between the need to have a very close connection and a very distant connection with a caregiver;
- Disorganised attachment, where disoriented behaviours such as rocking or freezing occur around a caregiver.

Relevant and effective forms of support to children and young people undergoing chronic exposure to relational instability and high levels of stress require a developmental perspective. Whilst these problematic interactional styles may appear entrenched, the brain continues to forge major new connections in regions implicated in social cognition (e.g., medial pre-frontal cortex) well into early adulthood (Blakemore, 2010; Gaskell, 2008; Hillman & Wainwright, 2012). Although these behaviours may superficially appear self-serving, this mode of reacting to the world stems from feelings of shame, worthlessness and self-hate (with massive

implications for socialisation and social cohesion). As we discuss later, young people who exhibit emotional dysregulation and antisocial behaviours in response to previous exposure to trauma can be supported to re-write their identities and make positive choices.

## **EDUCATIONAL AND EMPLOYMENT LINKED DIFFICULTIES**

Academic difficulties are more likely in populations that have suffered trauma and the threat of school exclusion is a constant feature in the lives of Kids Company's clients.

- More than 1 in 4 clients reported that they were worried about education, training and employment, i.e., not getting into college, while 1 in 5 were worried about the future, i.e., not having any direction in life (Hillman & Wainwright, 2012).

Despite these difficulties, education is an important value, even in the context of serious academic underachievement (Gillies & Robinson, 2010). However, many children feared that their chance of gaining an education had passed them by. The same study found that school exclusion was associated with eruptions of unmanageable anger and those who had been permanently excluded from school felt significantly less loved or cared for by others and the least happy. They had the least amount of fun, trusted others the least, felt least safe in their home at night and struggled most to make friends.

As can be seen from the evidence reviewed, Kids Company's clients present numerous practical and emotional needs which are mutually related. They are exposed to traumatic experiences and poverty that shapes their neurological, psychological and social development.

## **2.3. THE APPROACH OF KIDS COMPANY**

Kids Company's approach is based on a number of long-term, non-time framed and flexible core principles, which aim at ensuring that children's diverse needs and complex social and emotional backgrounds are met on an individual basis. Researchers (Briggs, Mulla, Lorraine & Linford, 2013; Gaskell, 2008; Lemma, 2010) have pointed to the following principles and assumptions guiding the vision and the interventions of the charity:

- A focus on the child as the primary client who has a voice in stating her needs and defining her support package, so that children and young people actively participate in their journey towards a positive life trajectory.
- A child first, human centred approach based on the theoretical assumptions of Bowlby's attachment model (Bowlby 1969; 1973; 1979; 1980) and

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Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs theory, which enables a combination of attention to the child's emotional, social, educational and practical needs.

- The recognition that every child has a talent, which can be supported and encouraged by a caring environment.
- A developmental, sustained and all inclusive approach that does not exclude any child.
- Provision of 'wrap-around' support that seeks to stabilise, nurture and reintegrate children and young people with their own lives and back into society.
- Emphasis on establishing a relationship between children and a trusted adult, so that empathy and healthy attachment can be fostered between children and adults (Bowlby 1969; 1973; 1979; 1980; Fonagy & Target, 1997; Rutter & O'Connor, 1999).
- Parenting by proxy and operating as an adoptive family where the 'three Ss' of parenting are provided: to strengthen, to supplement and to substitute so that young people are engaged and inspired to love and trust themselves as well as others.
- An understanding of the context of emotional hurt and recognition of children's vulnerabilities without the attribution of blame, responding to challenging behaviour with empathy and loving care.
- Commitment to an evidence-based, research-led understanding of the emotional and behavioural responses of clients that informs intervention and provides targeted, holistic, joined-up and child-focused services to vulnerable children and young people, often not available in schools and beyond.
- Active use of cutting-edge research combining areas that are usually apart and separated by rigid academic boundaries: interventions are informed by research on neurological and immunological changes linked to developmental adversity, psychotherapeutic theory and the social world of children and young people.
- A partnership approach that allows collaborations with academic institutions, media and business; for example, current academic collaborations between Kids Company and University College London, the University of Cambridge, the London School of Economics and King's College London amongst others aim to provide insights into biological (i.e., neurological, immunological, genetic and epigenetic factors), psychological (i.e., emotional and behavioural difficulties) and social factors (i.e., home and community violence, neglect, poverty and low educational or employment related aspirations), which shape the development of Kids Company's clients.

These key principles of the provision informed the work of Kids Company. They are guided by research findings and collaborations that provide an evidence-based approach to understanding the needs of clients. At the same time they bestow

Kids Company with the most effective intervention strategies presently available. Through academic research and hands-on knowledge gained at street level they work to create a replicable best practice model for the management of childhood trauma and the reduction of violence and abuse nationwide.

As we report later in chapters 4 and 5 these principles can be found in the views and practices of staff and enacted in the interventions and programmes of the charity.

## 2.4. THE DELIVERY OF SERVICES

Kids Company delivers a number of multifaceted services for clients with complex needs at street level centres and in schools. Guided by the principles of the charity's overall approach, services are holistic and seek to address the child's emotional, social, educational and practical needs through positive relationships fostering resilience, self-esteem and emotional well-being (Gaskell, 2008; Hillman & Wainwright, 2012). Given the dysregulation of the client population through repeated traumatic experiences, there is a strong sense that clients require intensive and consistent interventions to counter the huge instability and fragility of their home and emotional lives. Interventions include:

- Keyworking where daily socio-emotional and practical support are provided: keyworkers offer holding and constant support, helping to create a novel experience of being heard, cared for, valued and empowered.
- Therapy, offering intensive and reparative emotional intervention. An example is the development of an emotional and well-being syllabus at the Urban Academy where provision of psychological and alternative therapies seeks to address neurochemical self-management and life skills issues.
- Practical support including nutritious meals, financial, legal and immigration advice, help with becoming 'legit' and accessing benefits and health care.
- Education and training where help to clients is provided to attain qualifications and/or access employment.
- Activities related to the arts and the imagination providing clients with a creative outlet, which allows the traumatised child to animate the oppressive trauma, transforming it through the process of creative manipulation into a less persecutory experience. This is in line with research suggesting that, for children with emotional dysregulation, art therapies can be employed to engage the child in a task which gives them practice in communicating non-aggressively and engaging pro-socially (Bungay, Clift & Vella-Burrows, 2012).



- Mentoring, where support gives access to a relational engagement with positive role models.
- Health and fitness, where clients can channel aggressive energies by providing a safe and positive outlet.
- Social and recreational activities where children and young people can form positive peer relationships in a safe, fun environment.

Kids Company cuts through multiple barriers that emerge via statutory services (particularly social services, the NHS and schools) where gatekeeping practices (Gaskell, 2008) keep challenging children and families away. Many parents, as well as children and young people mistrust formal services, which can put children and young people at risk of further significant harm. Evidence indicates that it is necessary that parents and children feel that they are not stigmatised when seeking help and then retain an appropriate degree of control over subsequent stages of the support and protection process (Thoburn, 2010).

Kids Company combines a welcoming drop-in service with assertive outreach work by keyworkers and consequently has a very high rate of self-referral from

vulnerable young people (Gaskell, 2008). Referral occurs in various ways: self-referral, via schools, inter-agency referral (including immigration, housing, education, social services) and outreach. This is in line with research that has shown that combination of drop-in support with targeted outreach services is highly effective in tackling complex family problems (Berry, Brandon, Chaskin, Fernandez, et al., 2006; Tunstill, Aldgate & Hughes, 2006).

Depending on the context and present needs of the client, the range of targeted interventions is broken down into a range of specific outcomes. Broadly, outcomes include: a) improved emotional and physical well-being; b) reduced financial needs; c) engagement with a family member; d) engagement with education; and e) reduced criminal involvement and substance misuse.

Table 2.1. summarises our systematisation of the evidence in terms of interventions, support and outcomes.

Kids Company's interventions typically serve as a secure base, containing and supporting vulnerable and damaged lives and acting as mediators between excluded children and the wider social order.

**TABLE 2.1**

Kids Company: interventions, support provided and outcomes

INTERVENTIONS	SUPPORT PROVIDED	OUTCOMES
<b>Keyworking</b>	Daily emotional and practical support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relational engagement with an adult figure(s)</li> <li>• Re-building of self and emotional well-being</li> <li>• Reduced substance misuse</li> <li>• Reduced criminal involvement</li> <li>• Improved anger management</li> </ul>
<b>Therapy</b>	Intensive and reparative emotional work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reduced substance misuse</li> <li>• Reduced criminal involvement</li> <li>• Improved anger management</li> <li>• Re-building of self and emotional well-being</li> </ul>
<b>Practical knowledge</b>	Basic and practical: nutrition, financial, housing and accommodation, legal, immigration, access to health services and NHS health care	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safe accommodation</li> <li>• Access to benefits</li> <li>• Access to healthcare</li> <li>• Improved physical well-being</li> </ul>
<b>Education and training</b>	Engagement with education, training and employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitate re-integration into education and future employment</li> <li>• Broader cognitive and technical skills</li> </ul>
<b>Arts and the imagination</b>	Multiple activities engaging with the arts and creativity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creative outlets for expression of anger, trauma and aspirations</li> <li>• Broader horizons, expands cognitive, emotional and social capacities of self</li> </ul>
<b>Mentoring</b>	Positive adult role models	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relational engagement with an adult figure(s)</li> <li>• Improved social and communication skills</li> </ul>
<b>Health &amp; fitness</b>	Exercise and sports opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved fitness and health</li> <li>• Improved physical well-being</li> </ul>
<b>Social and recreational</b>	Social interaction and opportunities for leisure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved social and communication skills</li> </ul>

## 2.5. THE IMPACT OF KIDS COMPANY

The evidence shows that Kids Company's services continue to be over-subscribed. In 2011 alone, Kids Company assessed a further 1,100 young people who had self-referred for services at their centres. As each client is part of a broader familial network that needs to be supported much effort is placed into providing support for young people and their immediate environment (Kids Company, 2011). Research and evaluations show that a number of positive outcomes have emerged as a result of these interventions.

Gaskell's (2008) evaluation of the overall service of Kids Company demonstrated that the holistic nature of their interventions repairs much emotional damage associated with developmental adversity. She found that:

- 97% of children and young people studied reported Kids Company's street-level services to be effective at point of access in helping with their difficulties;
- 90% of Kids Company's clients reduced involvement in criminal activity;
- 94% of clients reduced levels of substance misuse;
- 89% of gang involvement stopped;
- Happiness and confidence gained as a result of accessing Kids Company's services were the most commonly reported outcomes, with 27% of children wanting services to be expanded.
- 69% of clients reported that without Kids Company's clients the impact of their circumstances on their lives would be negative.

In addition Lemma's (2010) study focusing on the relationship with keyworkers, demonstrated that Kids Company's clients were able to engage, trust

and claim their agency through attachment to a keyworker, who was described as having a transformational function by relating to traumatised youth without retaliating or repeating the frequent pattern of dysfunctional exchange. In this study, clients stated that the consistent and supportive relationship they had with their keyworkers was highly important in making them feel understood and valued. In addition, clients stated that their keyworkers acted as inspirations and that it was enjoyable spending time with a person who believed in them. Clients identify with their keyworkers over time and engage in a process of re-writing the self, allowing emotional reparation to occur, which helps them focus and achieve their life projects (Hillman & Wainwright, 2012; Lemma, 2010). As clients contribute to define their own needs and terms of engagement there is an increased sense of agency. Clients experience being 'worked with', rather than 'worked on' (Gaskell, 2008), which is a basic principle of active participation (Campbell & Jovchelovitch, 2000).

In regards to education and employment, Hillman & Wainwright (2012) highlighted that prior to accessing support from Kids Company, a striking percentage of 90% of over-16s did not attend full time education. Subsequently to accessing support from Kids Company and six months later, 80% of the entire sample was known to be in education. In Gaskell's (2008) evaluation report, teachers provided feedback on progress with noticeable improvements on concentration, communication, self-esteem and reduced classroom disruption. Young people provided accounts of how they had formulated realistic plans for themselves in conjunction with their keyworkers and were working on their personal and educational aspirations to participate in society, by 'living legit'. From the school's perspective, services



lower barriers to learning, decrease disruptiveness in classrooms, reduce exclusions and help build confidence and self-esteem. In 2011 a large number of Kids Company's young people went to university to study Medicine, Social Care, Arts, Languages, Business Studies and Accountancy, among other subjects (Kids Company, 2011).

## **“KIDS COMPANY INVESTS IN THE POTENTIAL OF NEUROPLASTICITY AND EPIGENETICS PROVIDING ACTIONS AND STRUCTURES OF SUPPORT THAT CAN ALTER NEURAL PATHWAYS AND GENETIC EXPRESSION”**

Kids Company's intervention *Colour a Child's Life* has been very successful in providing furniture, redecoration and clean up services to clients' homes. Research indicated that 25% of clients had made an application to CaCL, with 95% of these applicants having received some help from this service and with 27% having been, or being in the process, of being re-housed (Hillman & Wainwright, 2012). Gaskell's evaluation (2008) also found evidence that 90% of the clients sampled had had their accommodation improved.

Finally, through the *Child Poverty Busting Programme* Kids Company mobilises volunteers, mentors, goods and services in kind provided by the general public and business, which are utilised to meet the material, psychological and social needs of children in need and their families (Kids Company, 2012). This support is valued by Kids Company at 7.5 million pounds (Kids Company, in press).

### **2.6. DEVELOPMENTAL ADVERSITY: BIOLOGICAL AND PSYCHOSOCIAL CONSEQUENCES**

As shown in this chapter, Kids Company's clients are exposed to a number of risk factors which together constitute severe developmental adversity. Developmental adversity encompasses multiple forms of physical and psychological trauma originating from parental maltreatment and/or neglect, inconsistent and/or poor attachment to an adult figure, exposure to community violence, social exclusion and poverty (Essex, Shirtcliff, Burk, Ruttle, et al., 2011). Research has shown that major adversity compromises the developing architecture of the brain and the social and emotional capabilities of the self for developing healthy attachments and a healthy social life. The impact of adverse developmental conditions spans from the biology of the human body,

to the psychology of the person to the cohesion and integration of communities and larger public spheres. Adversity across a child or young person's lifespan has been linked to a variety of negative biopsychosocial consequences, which we outline below.

### **STRUCTURAL AND FUNCTIONAL CHANGES TO THE DEVELOPING BRAIN**

The cumulative effects of different forms of adversity experienced over the course of a child's life have been demonstrated to impact neurophysiological development in terms of brain structure. This relates to whether the brain has a healthy amount of tissue and is correctly 'wired' in a way that allows for normal development (McCory & Viding, 2010) and brain function, or how the developing brain processes incoming stimuli (Viding, Fontaine & McCrory, 2012). The well-known image presented by Perry (1997) of the brain of a 3 year old child who experienced extreme parental neglect shows decrease in brain size and enlarged ventricles (and therefore less brain tissue) when compared to a child of the same age who has not experienced neglect. Differences were also found in the lateral ventricle measures of an 11 year old maltreated boy with chronic post-traumatic stress disorder, compared with a healthy, non-maltreated matched control (De Bellis, Baum, Birmaher, Keshavan, et al., 1999).

More specifically, examples of brain regions impacted by developmental adversity include those that subserve cognitive control, emotion regulation and perspective-taking (Sterzer, Stadler, Krebs, Kleinschmidt & Poustka, 2005; Stadler, Sterzer, Schmeck, Krebs, et al., 2007) such as the anterior cingulate, the orbitofrontal cortex, the superior temporal lobes and underlying limbic structures. Behaviourally, deficits in these regions of the brain are likely to manifest as impulsivity and anti-social behaviour. For example, very callous displays of anti-social behaviour are associated with deficits in the orbitofrontal cortex region of the brain (Fallon, 2006). Evidence also suggests that this part of the brain is associated with processing ethical and moral decisions about the world. If some impairment exists it becomes more difficult to control violent and aggressive impulses.

Further evidence of neural pathways affected in individuals who have experienced developmental adversity include the medial prefrontal cortex, the orbitofrontal cortex, the anterior cingulate cortex, the hippocampus and the amygdala, all of which are involved in emotion and motivation processing (Amodio & Frith, 2006; Andersen, Morris, Amaral, Bliss & O'Keefe, 2007) alongside the control of aggression (Davidson, Putnam & Larson, 2000). It may be the case that disruptions to these pathways in children exposed to developmental adversity underlie observed deficits in emotion and reward processing as well as excessive aggression. These regions of

the brain may be particularly sensitive to exposure to trauma and chronic stress and there is a high density of glucocorticoid receptors and dopaminergic projections that are stress-susceptible, as evidenced in animal models (Brake, Sullivan & Gratton 2000). In addition, there is consistent evidence that developmental adversity is associated with deficits in neural pathways such as the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex and the inferior frontal cortex which has striatal, cerebellar and parieto-temporal connections. These deficits are associated with neuropsychological impairments in academic achievement, IQ, memory, emotion processing, working memory, attention and response inhibition (Christakou, Brammer, Giampietro & Rubia, 2009).

### BEHAVIOURAL IMPACT

Developmental adversity is not only associated with changes in brain structure and function; such adversity when experienced as abuse and fragmented attachment provokes physiological consequences which include long-term alterations in endocrine functioning (Thompson, Phillips, Komesaroff, Yuen, et al., 2007). For example, exposure to acute and chronic stress can provoke the secretion of stress hormones such as adrenaline, noradrenaline and cortisol into the bloodstream (Feder, Coplan, Goetz, Mathew, et al., 2004). These biochemicals prime the body for an emergency 'fight or flight' response, such that a person who is exposed to stress on a daily basis may display reactive, impulsive characteristics which may manifest as volatile, hostile behaviour even in reaction to a minor stressor (Lopez-Duran, Kovacs & George, 2009).

Exposure to chronic stress and stress hormones may alternatively be managed by young people disengaging empathically and emotionally from others, allowing them to engage in more proactive acts of aggression. These more callous or unemotional types of behaviour (Viding, Blair, Moffitt & Plomin, 2005) may serve a protective function for a young person undergoing forms of developmental adversity, as they may allow a young person to exist in a social context that appears to be within his or her control (Viding, Blair, Moffitt & Plomin, 2005). When children and young people grow up in environments characterised by developmental adversity, their behaviours – whilst considered antisocial and maligned by the wider society – may hold adaptive benefits for the child or young person's survival. It may therefore be difficult for a child or young person to understand the benefits of behaving more pro-socially.

Developmental adversity can therefore have a detrimental effect on the overall health of a developing child (Eldridge, 2012), raising the likelihood of children failing to develop appropriate self-monitoring abilities and agency over their own life. The quality of attachment to an adult caregiver is linked to healthy neuronal development, which facilitates the capacity for pro-social behaviour in children (Hart &

Rubia, 2012). Although there is evidence that children exposed to maltreatment acquire resilience over time and overcome the negative effects of abuse with the presence of alternative supportive caregivers and/or other actions and structures of support (Jovchelovitch & Priego-Hernández, 2013), aggressive behaviour may increase in association with a low stress threshold. Where there is limited ability to plan ahead and control anti-social behaviours, severe interpersonal difficulties and criminalization are more likely to occur.

### EPIGENETIC CHANGES

In addition to impact upon structural and functional aspects of brain development and behaviour, there is evidence of childhood adversity negatively affecting a child or young person's genes and genetic expression. Research shows that humans have evolved a mechanism for varied gene-expression. Although the underlying DNA sequence is constant, epigenetic changes that occur as modifications of DNA, can control the 'switching on' and 'switching off' of particular genes (Goldberg, Allis & Bernstein, 2007). Epigenetic mechanisms offer a potential inroad to look at how early experience can have lasting effects on behaviour and are crucial to understand how nurture shapes nature (Weaver, 2007). Both childhood abuse and maternal behaviour associate with epigenetic mechanisms (McGowan, Sasaki, D'Alessio, Dymov, et al., 2009) that control the expression of particular genes. Yet, despite the relative stability of epigenomic marks established in early life they are potentially reversible in the adult brain (Weaver, Champagne, Brown, Dymov, et al., 2005).

That environmental and psychosocial factors can change the epigenome is of particular importance for policy makers and organisations involved in the delivery of care and support for children living in adverse conditions. A child born in negative conditions has the potential to adapt in positive care environments (see Masterpasqua, 2009). Research shows that contextual experience gets 'under the skin' via a process of biological embedding which alters vital biological processes, with the potential to influence health, well-being, learning and behaviour over the life course (Hertzman & Boyce, 2010; Klengel, Mehta, Anacker, Rex-Haffner, et al., 2013).

### NEUROPLASTICITY

As discussed above, the potential for change throughout the lifespan is of crucial importance for social policy and for the work of Kids Company. Although maladaptive behaviours appear entrenched, evidence shows that a young person's brain undergoes continual re-wiring, known as neuroplasticity or plasticity (Davidson & McEwen, 2012; Pollak, 2005). This re-wiring acts to adapt the brain to the circumstances which surround it and behaviours emerge which are functional for current life circumstances. Social influences have been found to impact on brain structure



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and function, which induces plasticity (Davidson & McEwen, 2012).

There are complex pathways of exchange and influence between brain, environment and early psychosocial experiences. Adversity marks the brain, the epigenome and the psychology of children and yet the plasticity of neurological and psychological life makes it possible to change these marks through interventions from the environment. Kids Company's model of intervention invests in the potential of neuroplasticity, providing actions and structures of support that can alter neural pathways and provide the opportunity for positive emotional and behavioural changes in vulnerable children and young people.

## 2.7. RESEARCH COLLABORATIONS

Kids Company actively pursues research collaborations and the development of an evidence-base for its interventions and impact. It is also proactive in making its own internal data base accessible to researchers (see Appendix 1 for a complete list of studies). Research projects are addressing the following areas:

- Neurocognition, epigenetics and developmental adversity: researchers are examining neurocognition prior to and after Kids Company's intervention alongside an investigation of genotype and epigenetics to understand more about the effects of developmental adversity. This is particularly important as there is no dataset currently available to examine this degree of adversity. Additional studies look at neurocognitive and endocrine mechanisms in children diagnosed with conduct problems (i.e., serious violations of social norms, stealing and aggression), cognitive deficits among young offenders as well as psychiatric needs of young offenders. A further study seeks to examine neurodevelopmental markers of antisocial behaviours. In addition research is being conducted on whether nutritional supplementation is linked to behavioural and cognitive functioning over time. Also examined are risk factors for cannabis induced psychosis, as substance use as self-medication is prevalent amongst Kids Company's clients.
- Policy, resilience, therapy and attachment: projects are being conducted on maximising the impact of policy and practice in order to challenge ideas about disaffection alongside studies examining resilience, education, coping skills and therapeutic support. Further research is being conducted on Adolescent Mentalisation Based Integrative Therapy, an approach which aids perspective-taking and facilitates emotional control. In addition, studies looking at attachment and the inner worlds of Kids Company's

children and Kids Company's keyworking model are under way.

Children and young people at Kids Company are willing to participate in research because they are interested in learning more about the reasons why they often find it difficult to control their emotions and behaviours, as well as why it is challenging to sustain their engagement in education (Kids Company, 2011).

## 2.8. SUMMARY

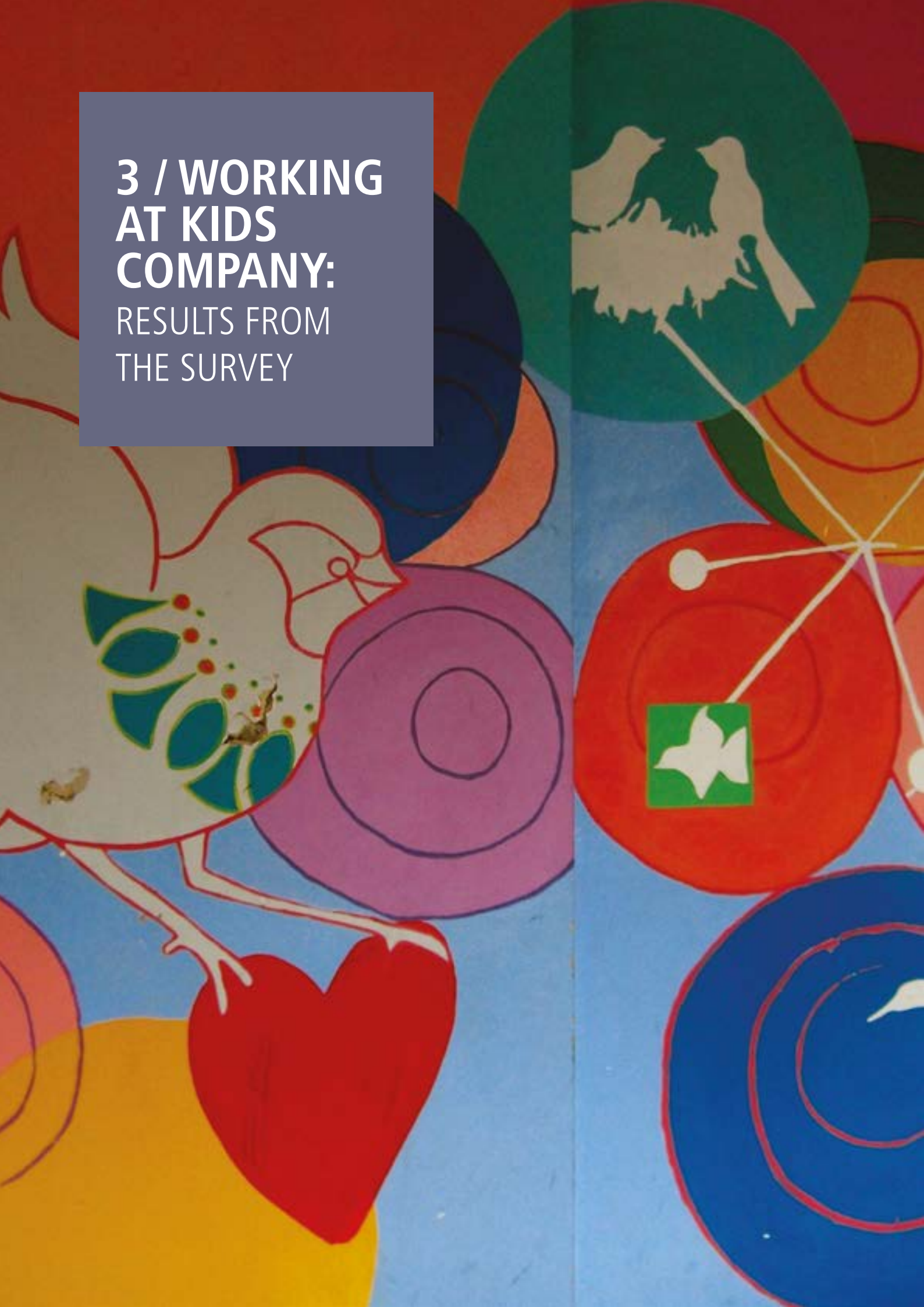
The difficulties that Kids Company's clients face include:

- Exposure to domestic maltreatment, violence and crime in the home and the community;
- High levels of poverty, with children and young people making do without everyday essentials, including food;
- Neurophysiological and psychological dysregulation;
- Low educational and employment aspirations.

Kids Company has developed an evidence-based approach, which seeks to provide clients with enough flexibility and interactivity to help them rebuild a healthy relationship and attachment with adults. Positive outcomes include:

- Supporting clients living in poverty by addressing basic and practical needs;
- Improved physical, social and emotional well-being, including a reduction in criminal activities and substance misuse;
- A rise in the number of young people who re-integrate into education and take up employment;
- Mobilising corporate volunteers and the public to support schemes such as *Colour a Child's Life*.

The evidence reviewed shows that Kids Company provides an effective and valuable service to its clients practically, emotionally and socially. Kids Company recognises the importance of investing in evidence-based research approaches to inform its work and interventions, while retaining a strong focus on the child and the needs of its clients.

The background is a vibrant, abstract collage. It features several large, overlapping circles in various colors: a large green circle at the top right containing a white silhouette of a bird; a large orange circle below it; a large red circle in the center right containing a small green square with a white bird silhouette; a large purple circle in the center left; and a large blue circle at the bottom right. A large red heart is positioned in the lower left. The background is divided into sections of red, blue, and yellow. Thin white lines connect some of the circles, and a small white dot is visible on the red circle.

# 3 / WORKING AT KIDS COMPANY: RESULTS FROM THE SURVEY

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# 3 / WORKING AT KIDS COMPANY:

## RESULTS FROM THE SURVEY

### 3.1. OVERVIEW

An online survey of staff and volunteers was conducted to assess work-related well-being. The concept of work-related well-being is taken from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), which defines it as “creating an environment to promote a state of contentment which allows an employee to flourish and achieve their full potential for the benefit of themselves and their organisation” (CIPD, 2007, p.4).

#### THE MEASURE

The Work Related Well-Being Questionnaire (WRWQ-19), a 19 item version of the Organisational Self Review Measure (OSRM) was adapted for the purpose of this study (see Appendix 2). The OSRM is a survey of staff perceptions comprising 72 statements grouped into eight sections which are broadly equivalent to the Health and Safety Executive’s Management Standards on work related stress and has previously been used nationally in the UK in school settings. We adapted the WRWQ-19 to consist of items which are present in six of the eight OSRM a priori identified sections:

- Culture;
- Job role – demands;
- Job role – role;
- Job role – support;
- Management responsibility – control;
- Management responsibility – relationships.

The WRWQ-19 offers for each statement a range of responses from 1 to 5 on a Likert scale. A rating of 5 shows strong agreement with a survey statement and a rating of 1 shows strong disagreement. As all the survey statements are framed positively, the higher the rating on this measure, the better the perception of well-being.

To test construct validity in the current sample an exploratory factor analysis was conducted and a unitary ‘Workplace Well-Being’ construct was found.

The WRWQ-19 demonstrated high internal reliability ( $\alpha=0.91$ ). Bivariate correlations were tested between all questionnaire items with strong significant positive associations found between levels of agreement for the questionnaire statements.

### “STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS ARE STRONGLY COMMITTED TO THE ORGANISATION AND TO THE WORK THEY DO”

#### THE SAMPLE

A total of 85 members of staff and volunteers of Kids Company distributed in the following sites and programmes responded to the questionnaire:

- Urban Academy (N=22)
- Treehouse (N=19)
- Arches II (N=16)
- Schools Programme (N=12)
- The Heart Yard (N=7)
- Head Office (N=4)
- Multiple sites (N=2)
- No specific site(s) (N=3)

#### THE ANALYSIS

Descriptive statistics including frequency, percentages, means and standard deviations were obtained. A mean cut off score of  $\geq 4.5$  was used to identify questionnaire statements that staff and volunteers on average agreed or strongly agreed with. A cut off score of  $< 4.0$  was used to identify answers other than agree or strongly agree.

### 3.2. FINDINGS

Results from the survey indicate that there is high job satisfaction amongst staff and volunteers. Staff and

volunteers are strongly committed to the organisation and to the work they do. Very high satisfaction was found in the following items, with respondents strongly agreeing or agreeing to:

- Pride at work;
- Job dynamism;
- Feelings of competency at work;
- Participatory approach;
- Being proactive.

Resources and managerial structures are the main challenges found in the survey. Staff and volunteers are aware of the limited resources and highlighted funding constraints faced on a daily basis by Kids Company. Kids Company faces challenges as it depends on receiving external funding to meet its daily demands and staff identified these issues as a challenge to their own work. Yet, overall levels of staff morale and satisfaction are very high and compensate for resource limitations. This was corroborated by survey results:

- 67% of respondents strongly agree or agree that they have enough resources for delivery;
- 25% have neutral views;
- 7% disagree.

Levels of identification between the goals of the organisation and the personal goals of staff and volunteers are high. Overall, results indicate that:

- Staff and volunteers take pride in the contribution they make;
- Feel stimulated by the dynamic demands of their work.

## STAFF MOTIVATION AND COMMITMENT

Staff motivation and commitment are high at Kids Company and a central component of the organisation's efficacy. There are very high levels of pride at work, with 97% of staff and volunteers feeling proud of their achievements and, as we discuss later, this is a key finding in both the quantitative and qualitative research strands and essential to understand the overall model of work of Kids Company.

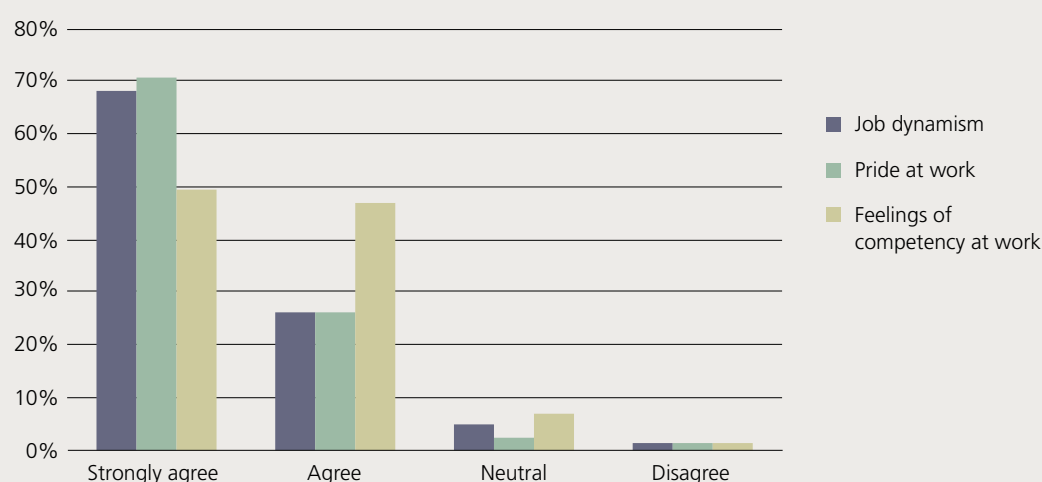
As shown in Figure 3.1, working at Kids Company is stimulating and exciting with 94% of staff and volunteers agreeing/strongly agreeing that their job is rarely dull or boring. Job dynamism coexists with high levels of pride in the work being done, with 97% of staff and volunteers agreeing/strongly agreeing that their achievements are a source of pride. In addition, staff feel confident about their skills and see themselves as competent workers who know how to perform their jobs, with 96% of staff and volunteers agreeing/strongly agreeing that they are doing a good job.

In addition to feeling confident, Figure 3.2 shows that staff feel proactive, with 92% of staff and volunteers agreeing/strongly agreeing that they have the opportunity to use their skills and initiative at work. Finally, staff at Kids Company feel that they contribute to the success of the organisation, with 95% of respondents stating that they agree/strongly agree that their participation is valuable.

These results are corroborated by statements from the open-ended comments included in the questionnaire. These reveal the extent to which working for Kids Company is considered an integral life experience, where professional and personal motivations come together. There is a view that Kids Company supports and values its staff, which in turn

**FIGURE 3.1**

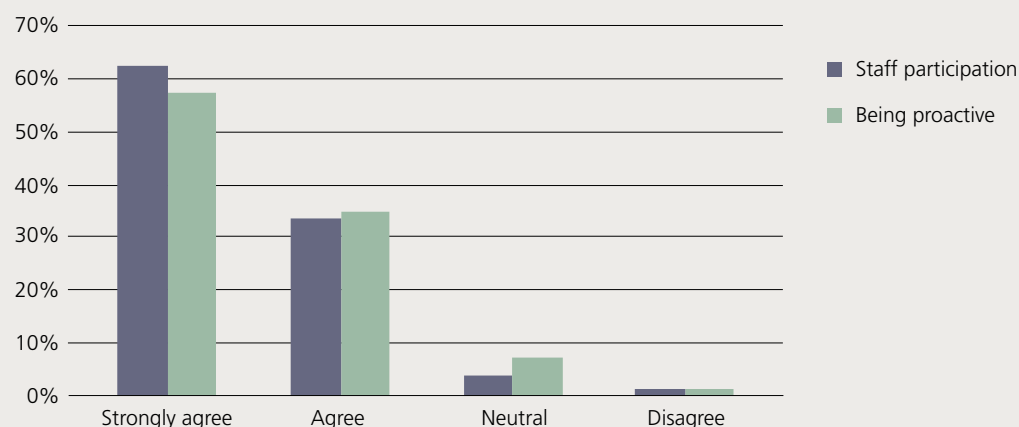
Staff motivation and commitment



Note: Percentage of responses to the statements 'It is rare for me to feel that my job is dull or boring,' 'Staff and volunteers are achieving things they can be proud of' and 'I feel I am doing a good job.' Source: Online survey. N=85.

**FIGURE 3.2**

Staff participation and proactivity



Note: Percentage of responses to the statement 'I feel that I contribute to the success of the organisation' and 'I have the opportunity to use my skills and initiative in my work.' Source: Online survey. N=85.

enables the high motivation and effort workers feel compelled to put forward:

*"Working for Kids Company for more than 4 years has been the most life-changing experience, both professionally and on [a] personal level" (Staff, Arches II).*

*"I feel supported, listened to and valued as a volunteer and I hugely estimate and value the work Kids Company is doing to support vulnerable kids" (Volunteer).*

*"This is the first organisation I have worked for where I feel truly valued" (Staff, Arches II).*

#### CHALLENGES: RESOURCES AND MANAGERIAL STRUCTURES

Kids Company depends on receiving external funding to meet its daily demands, which means that budget constraints impact on the daily life of the organisation and resources (or lack thereof) are a major issue to the charity. In this context, material resources were an important issue indicated by Kids Company's staff and volunteers.

As one member of staff put plainly:

*"I don't have the resources to do my job properly!" (Staff, Head Office)*

Others point to how lack of resources compromises delivery at all levels, taking up valuable time and creating an escalating spiral where scarce resources are further strained:

*"The lack of certain resources is due primarily to funding and sometimes*

*is not an issue at all. But not having a regular supply of paints, pens etc can mean that extra thought and time has to be put into art activities for groups [...] time that isn't always available" (Staff, Schools Programme).*

As Figure 3.3 shows this is an area where staff holds more neutral views, with only 67% agreeing/strongly agreeing that they have enough resources for delivery, 25% holding neutral views and 7% disagreeing.

However, it should be noted that almost 70% of staff feel that they have resources to do their job well. This is corroborated by open ended comments that indicate how Kids Company's staff circumvents the challenge of insecure resources.

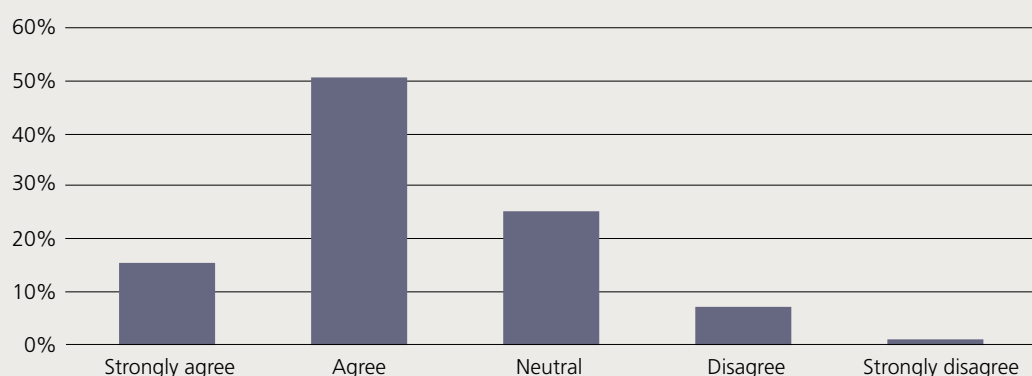
*"Often issues come down to lack of material resources e.g. computers and work phones for staff at the centres, or time pressures due to the ever flowing nature of the organisation. This is best combatted by staff support for each other, and management's understanding of the demands on staff" (Staff, Arches II).*

Group-based support at the managerial and peer levels point towards the support structures we have found to be distinctive of Kids Company, which will be presented in the following chapters.

Views remain positive albeit more neutral in relation to managerial structures, including the monitoring and management of performance and the promptness of response by senior staff. Around a quarter of staff and volunteers felt neutral about the monitoring and management of their performance, while 1 in 5

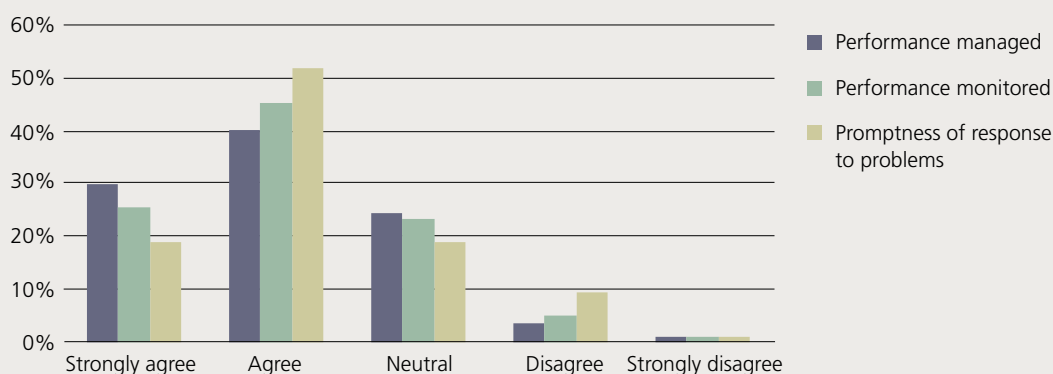


**FIGURE 3.3**  
Resources for delivery



Note: Percentage of responses to the statement 'I have the resources to do my job well.' Source: Online survey. N=85.

**FIGURE 3.4**  
Managerial structures



Note: Percentage of responses to the statements 'My performance is appropriately managed', 'My performance is appropriately monitored', and 'When problems arise and leaders are made aware of them, they are addressed promptly.' Source: Online survey. N=85.

felt neutral about the promptness with which senior management addresses issues that they are made aware of. However, it is worth noting that some 70% of respondents felt positively about these issues (see Figure 3.4). These results are only worth of attention in so far as they deviate from the very high levels of satisfaction found in other items of the questionnaire.

Overall survey data suggests that staff morale at Kids Company is exceptionally high, which indicates that staff motivation and commitment is a central component of its model of delivery and the efficacy of its outcomes.

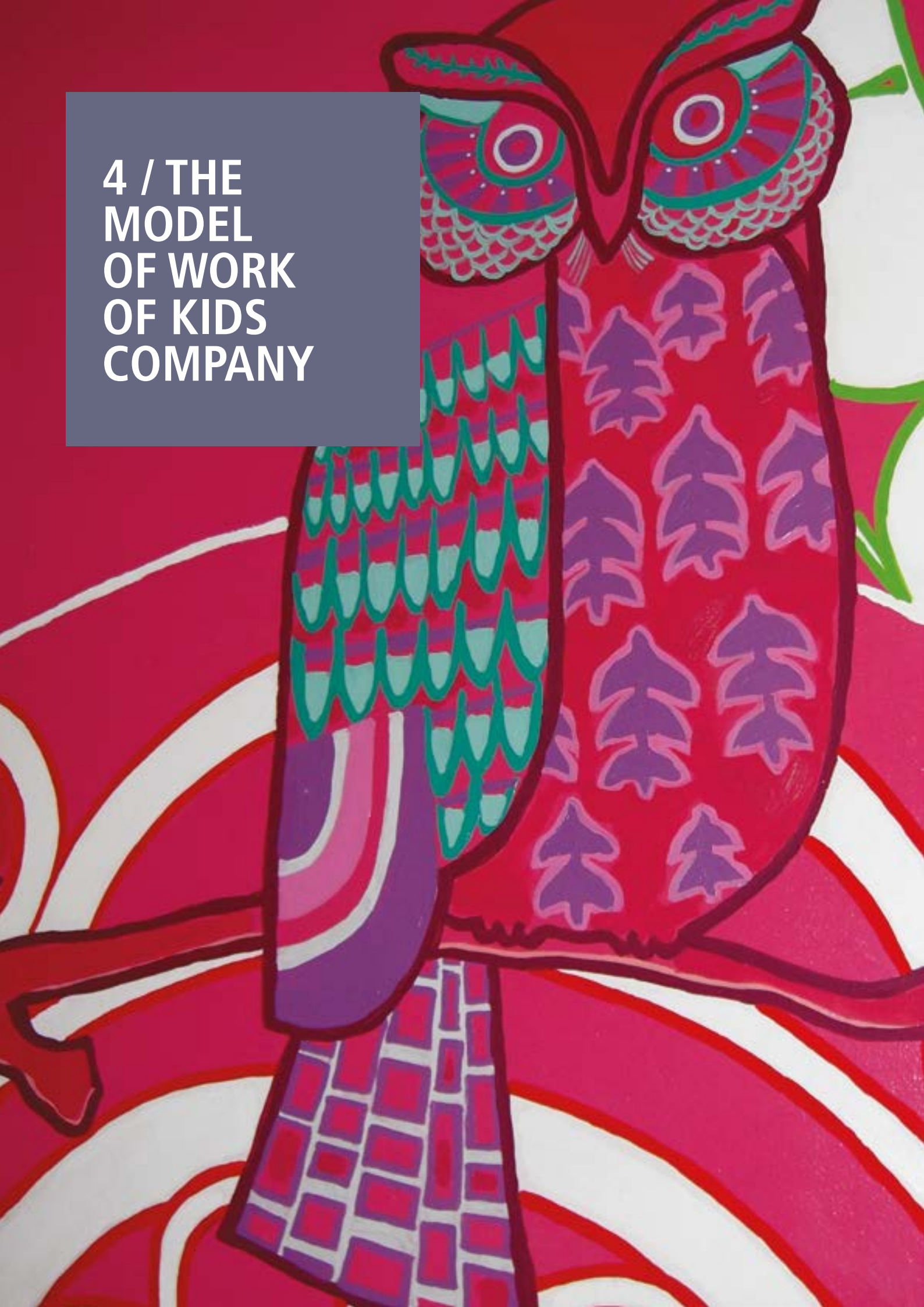
### 3.3. SUMMARY

Results suggest that Kids Company's staff and volunteers take pride in the important contribution they make and feel stimulated by the dynamic demands of their work. This is in the face of being met with

daily resource challenges and a neutral perception of the managerial structures at the charity, in particular of those related to performance, monitoring and promptness of response by senior staff.

Kids Company works with restricted financial resources to fit in the volume and demands of their clients and this can be a burden for staff, deviating precious energy and time from the core business and goals of the charity. Although responses were still very positive, more neutral and even some negative views were reported in relation to managerial structures. As it will be seen in the following chapters, this has not been found in the qualitative findings, where no major issues were reported in terms of performance, monitoring and promptness of response by senior staff. We suggest that the few cases found in the survey may express the experiencing of a divergence between Kids Company's flexible organisational culture and the more structured managerial style typical of conventional organisations.

4 / THE  
MODEL  
OF WORK  
OF KIDS  
COMPANY



# 4 / THE MODEL OF WORK OF KIDS COMPANY

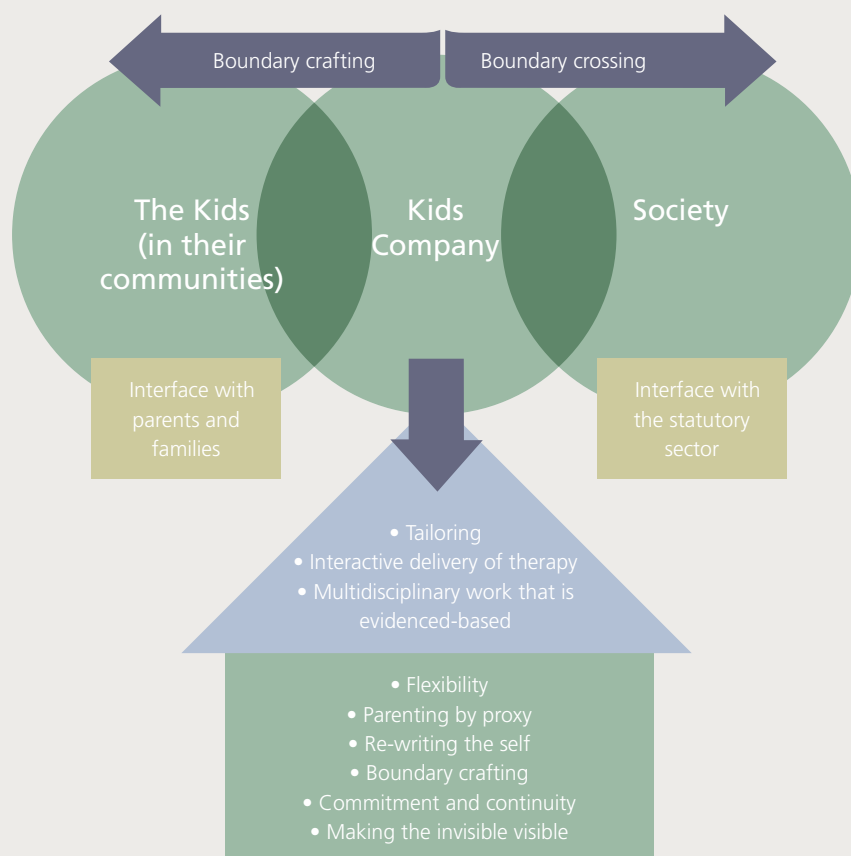
## 4.1. THE MODEL

The model of work of Kids Company establishes interfaces at three levels: the children, their families and immediate environment, the statutory sector and the wider public sphere. The charity stands at the cross-roads between vulnerable children/youth and the procedures, services and institutional framework of British society. The charity's work engages all of these domains while establishing bridges and mediating

the complex relations between them. Towards the children and their context, they act by constructing a secure relational framework and crafting an all-encompassing environment of supportive containment and guidance that can treat and recuperate damaged life trajectories. Towards society, they act by enabling the children to cross the boundary of exclusion, to understand the rules and regulations of the wider public sphere and stabilise access to resources and services, such as education, health and housing.

**FIGURE 4.1**

The model of work of Kids Company





Kids Company acts as mediators, facilitating communication between the interfaces sustained with clients, their social environment and the statutory sector. They work as *brokers*, *translators* and *advocates*, raising awareness about the conditions of invisible populations and demanding from authorities and statutory agencies that the needs of vulnerable children and young people are met. Kids Company understands the backdrop of social vulnerability stemming out of difficult life histories and its approach is grounded on the awareness that individuals are psychological beings who cannot be considered apart from the social context. They see past the behavioural manifestations of vulnerability and adversity to bring about positive change for their clients and society as a whole. Figure 4.1 summarises the model of work presented in the following pages.

#### 4.2. THE PRINCIPLES OF THE MODEL

The research found six main principles underlying the general model of work of Kids Company:

- Flexibility;
- Parenting by proxy;
- Re-writing the self;
- Boundary crafting;
- Commitment and continuity;
- Making the invisible visible.

These principles combine a vision, a *modus operandi* and desired outcomes. Figure 4.2 presents the

frequency of each in the perceptions and views of staff and volunteers at Kids Company. Together they encompass a general model of *psychosocial scaffolding*, defined as actions and structures of support that provide stability to the self in contexts of adversity (Jovchelovitch & Priego-Hernández, 2013). In the following pages we report on how each one of the principles are understood and guide the practices of staff and volunteers.

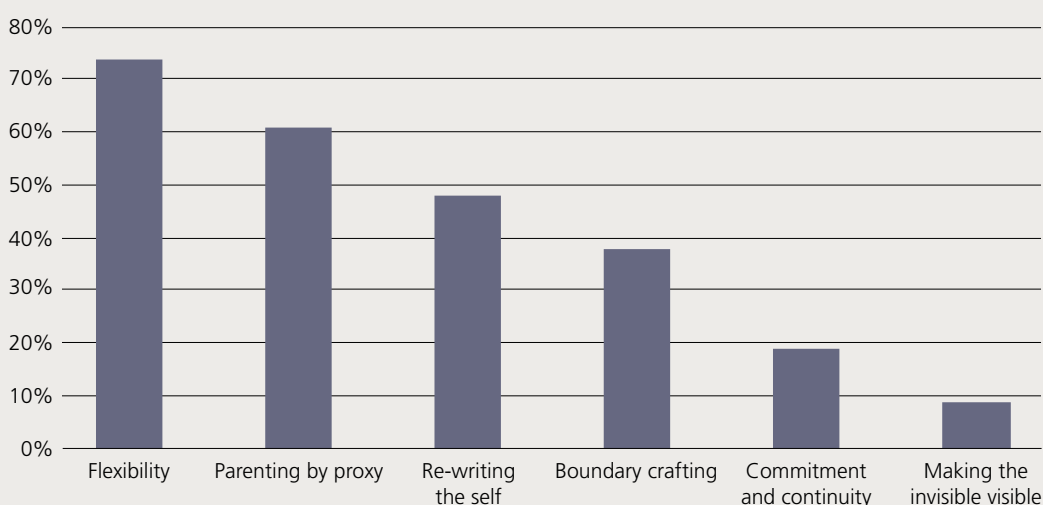
#### FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility as a guiding principle has enabled Kids Company to establish a sound system to conform to the needs of its clients and to keep them coming back. Flexibility is the basis for a highly interactive delivery system whose long-term engagement strategy reduces attrition rates. The flexibility of the system works with clients as well as staff, supporting a sense of ownership in the organisation, which is vital to maintain the high levels of staff satisfaction and job dynamism reported in the previous chapter. According to staff, flexibility and pragmatism allow a focus on what is essential so that they can put the needs and demands of clients above all.

***“Nothing is rigid because the kids require flexibility” (Staff, Head Office).***

A flexible and pragmatic approach empowers staff to take the lead from the situation and think outside the box to absorb, cope and respond to the many situations of chaos and indiscipline that are typical of the social world in which vulnerable children grow up and develop.

**FIGURE 4.2**  
General principles of the Kids Company model



Note: Reported principles of the model of work of Kids Company, ranked by frequency. Multiple coding allowed.  
Source: Focus groups, semi-structured, unstructured interviews and observations.

*"The more high risk ones, you could say the ones that need us the most, if you weren't flexible in your approach you'd lose them, you wouldn't have any contact" (Staff, Urban Academy).*

Participants underline the following components:

- **Plurality of perspectives driven by exceptional leadership:** multiple approaches guide work with children and the inter-relations between staff. Staff work together and share knowledge horizontally. They are led by a strong leader, who applies an 'open-door' policy. Staff strongly emphasise the openness to different perspectives encouraged by Kids Company's exceptional leader, who has received the respect and love of the organisation's staff, volunteers and the community the charity supports.

*"I think some people might criticise the practice in that it doesn't fit the boundaries of their training, but I would say 'Pfft!' to that, basically [...] I feel the flexibility of our approach is what it's all about really, in terms of engaging people that are potentially not engageable in other services" (Staff, The Heart Yard).*

*"I would like to have Camila as our captain all the time, forever, because she's the one who whenever we get stuck, she says, 'Stuck? There's no stuck. Let's move!' and she generates the next solution. She hears everything, she pays attention to everything" (Staff, Head Office).*

*"Camila's door is always here to be knocked on to come up with an idea to offer help and support" (Staff, Treehouse).*

- **Creativity and innovation:** flexibility empowers staff to be open to situations, think in different directions and devise alternatives for client engagement. It helps staff to feel that they can influence the direction of service provision, be listened to and taken into account, which reflects the participatory approach of the organisation and the sense of ownership it cultivates amongst its personnel.

*"You are allowed to be creative in your thinking, allowed to kind of dream about what something might be or what you might like to do" (Staff, Treehouse).*

*"We do have a lot of freedom; you work with your personality really" (Staff, Urban Academy).*

- **Bold decision-making and a doer's attitude:** through a pragmatic approach, staff feel encouraged to be proactive and adopt a 'let's make it happen' attitude to meet clients' needs. Improvisation becomes possible because it is not impeded by heavy legislation or regulation, which points to the importance of recognising the specific contribution of the third sector. This is supported by survey data, which found that staff and volunteers feel they can be proactive in using their skills and initiative to work (see chapter 3).

*"That's what impressed me, the ability to make things happen. If something needs to happen the answer was 'Well, how are we going to do it?' Rather than 'Oh that's not possible'" (Staff, Schools Programme).*

## **"KIDS COMPANY WORKS WITH TOTAL FOCUS ON THE CHILD AND COMMITMENT TO THE POWER OF HEALTHY ATTACHMENT TO CHANGE LIVES"**

### **PARENTING BY PROXY**

A key principle of the model found is the high value placed on nurturing relationships and unconditional love as foundations for the relational engagement with clients and for the social environment instituted in each one of Kids Company's sites. Every centre aims to have a reception where a person stands with a welcoming, smiling and loving attitude. Staff actively act as family members, adopting the role of parents, aunts, uncles, brothers or sisters. Parenting by proxy is achieved through a concerted effort to build nurturing relationships characterised by positive attachment and trust, being authentic and 'real' with the children, constructing positive socio-emotional dimensions in the environment and being able to see past 'bad' behaviour, not giving up the child and just as loving parents do, supporting the child unconditionally.

*"It's about having an open door, about being there, about offering contact to someone, about being the mum that wasn't there or the father that wasn't there, listening, responding, being able to buy, provide the basic things, that's what our clients need" (Staff, The Heart Yard).*

- **Building nurturing relationships through love, touch and trust:** nurturing, loving relationships underlie healthy brain development (see Chapter 2). Kids Company's clients particularly

need loving relationships that offer the opportunity of developing positive modalities of attachment and trust. For some children, the first time that this is experienced in their lives is when they come into contact with Kids Company. Provision is based on the understanding that love and positive physical contact are central to human development and allow children and young people to slowly recover from fractured attachments and social relations (see Carlson & Earls, 2000; 2011; Earls & Carlson, 1999; 2001). Staff at Kids Company deliver the level of physical contact required for interventions to benefit children who are desperately in need of parents and a family by proxy (see Field, 2001). Developing trust is also critical for continuous and stable relations. Trust enables social relations in the Kids Company community and importantly, facilitates the relational engagement that staff cultivate with clients to re-build a healthy pathway for psychosocial development that may have been fractured by pain, abandonment and suffering.

*"It's the trust, the attachment; it's the love I think!" (Staff, Schools Programme).*

*"What I think does help is having somebody who can make a connection, who, dare I say, loves them [...] I genuinely feel that kind of openheartedness for people and I think that experience is invaluable for somebody to feel valuable" (Staff, Arches II).*

*"I think what I love about working in Kids Company is its compassion for the other.*

*And I think if we experience compassion and we're compassionate with others, then that gets spread out into the larger community and larger society" (Staff, Head Office).*

- **Emotional leadership:** the constant presence of Kids Company's leader as a mother figure and role model is actively drawn upon by staff and clients alike. Kids Company is unafraid of using a language of emotions and bringing back to the care professions the discourse and practice of love, which has been advocated by its leader as the mark of the charity and all its actions. The significance of having an emotional, highly capable leader is key for this approach to be embraced across the organisational interfaces and internal teams. Staff report that the charity's leadership is paramount for enabling their work and for supporting their motivation, satisfaction and strong sense of vocation.
- **Authenticity:** we found that having an authentic connection to communities and a deep understanding of the conditions of marginalised children, young people and families allows Kids Company's staff to be regarded as 'real', which constitutes a major asset for sustaining nurturing and continuous relationships with clients and local communities. Having staff reflecting a range of diverse backgrounds and from both genders helps to break down barriers between the organisation and the local community. The data show that this helps to counteract potential views that Kids Company are 'other' – too distant from 'me' – and to undercut a potential 'us versus them' group perception between clients and Kids Company



(Duveen, 2001; Tajfel, 1981; Winnicott, 1971). Staff indicate instead that they are regarded as 'one of us' by their clients, which is another major strength of Kids Company's provision. As shown in Chapter 2, it is vital that children and their parents feel that they are not otherised when seeking help, which supports the maintenance of a degree of ownership over the support received (Thoburn, 2010).

*"They don't see me as a title [...] some of them have started calling me 'Uncle' recently" (Staff, Treehouse).*

*"We're human and we're real and that's why I prefer being here than being a therapist somewhere else" (Staff, Treehouse).*

- **Socio-emotional dimensions of the environment:** Kids Company's sites offer an embracing environment, from an inviting physical infrastructure and space to a friendly and familial atmosphere where love is routinely expressed and staff interact with children and young people in a welcoming manner. Systematic observation found that clients naturally approach staff and receive appropriate and positive human touch in the form of hugging, lifting and carrying of smaller children, all of which is essential for the emotional and physical maturation of children. Equally, Kids Company sites display a high degree of sociability (Simmel, 1950), which constitutes another tool for coping with distress and providing social and emotional support. At Kids Company, children and young people exposed to adverse contexts are able to experience positive social interaction and the delight of playful modalities of social life, relearning and recovering the joy and pleasure of being with others as the environment offers a full of life, joyful and relaxed atmosphere.

*"We create a big fun house, it is very much like a family" (Staff, Arches II).*

- **Seeing past 'bad' behaviour:** rather than just reprimanding the child or young person for expressing a specific behaviour, Kids Company explores the root causes of the manifestation of challenging behaviour and stays with the child. Service provision in the charity is based on the understanding that aggressive, chaotic, unstable behaviour is a language that expresses a 'cry for help', a cry to be made visible, to receive guidance as the client tries — through the limited languages that have been made available to them — to face a world they do not know or understand. This provides a suspension of judgement, acceptance and holding, which are essential for containment

and precursors of full communication and ego-relatedness (Winnicott, 1971).

*"When a child is behaving badly, it would be very easy to slap on a diagnosis or reprimand them and think that they're bad, but if we are able to be interested enough to wonder why and just go a bit beyond the child and see what influences them [...] that starts with Kids Company" (Staff, Arches II).*

*"If they had got things going on in their lives, that means they're not attending classes, the keyworkers will come and say, 'This young person has particular issues in housing at the moment' or 'They are particularly low at the moment' [...] So we understand why they're not there and don't chase them up when they've got other issues on their plate" (Staff, Urban Academy).*

## RE-WRITING THE SELF

Re-writing the self is one of the desired outcomes of the model of work of Kids Company. It is conceived as a process to empower and heal the self-understanding of children and young people experiencing adversity and exclusion. It aims to promote future survival and psychological resilience (Ungar, 2004; 2012) by enhancing self-esteem, teaching the practice of reciprocity and working with families and the local environment. Staff refer to the psychological processes of attachment, containment (Bion, 1959; Douglas, 2007), holding and handling (Winnicott, 1965; 1971) as central to restore a healthy sense of self and help to heal and empower children.

These processes detail the human need to be held and contained, which is provided by Kids Company through different avenues for vulnerable clients to express and face their profound difficult emotions and painful experiences. It commences by building relationships through reciprocity so that clients re-establish the social need for the other in a positive light. The relational engagement that takes place between staff and clients gives children the opportunity to experience a holding environment, which enhances self-awareness and the discovery of positive control over one's actions and ultimately one's life project. This is reinforced by a stream of provision of supporting and empowering families, since the context and environment in which children live cannot be separated from their self-understanding.

*"There's a holding community within which you have opportunity to grow [...] When the client grows and goes out into the community, they've got resources to hold themselves" (Staff, Head Office).*



*"The more I work the more I realise that a safe place, however we might define it, whether, you know, there's something about safety both in order to express deep emotions in a way that's contained, as well as to be able to feel loved in a way that's contained" (Staff, Treehouse).*

*"Mak[ing] them feel more empowered and doing something small can make them realise that they can actually do something else and then they end up being able to do a lot more, whereas if they're not given that little nudge, why would they? And it's about us helping them to do that little bit" (Staff, Treehouse).*

## "KIDS COMPANY USES THE LANGUAGE OF EMOTIONS TO BRING BACK TO THE CARE PROFESSIONS THE DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE OF LOVE"

### BOUNDARY CRAFTING

Crafting boundaries that enable children to restore their own sense of self and equip them to engage in healthy social exchange is seen by staff as a pillar of the work they do. Kids Company's clients come from painful and often chaotic trajectories which compromise the self and require psychological care for mending, re-building and creating unity.

*"We're working with young people that have existed in a very unboundaried, unstructured environment for an extremely long time [...] what we need to do, we provide it in a flexible way, is put these boundaries in place and then support the young person to move gently into those" (Staff, Treehouse).*

- **Boundary setting:** Kids Company's staff help children to understand boundaries and the rules of social life that have escaped them so far, enabling the self to start situating itself in order to find a position in society. They act as role models, teaching clients formally and by vicarious learning based on social learning theory – a theory that states that individuals learn through observing and modelling behaviour enacted by models within their social context (Bandura, 1977). At Kids Company, boundary setting is enacted by giving clients the structure of what their role and positioning should be in a given situation and by slowly building the tools to enable

them to finally grasp cognitive, emotional and practical skills to carry out the task themselves. Staff are acutely aware of the tension between flexibility and structure and in particular of the need to manage this tension, in order to allow attention to remain unstructured when required and to bring structure when the client is ready. This is a difficult process that is carried out thanks to principles such as flexibility, parenting by proxy and the high levels of motivation and commitment to clients found in the overall work of Kids Company.

*"I make sure they hear me on the phone calling an organisation, not necessarily for them but just so they can hear that, and then when they say, 'Oh can you ring college for me?' I will say, 'No, let's do it together' and one particular guy said, 'Are you serious? We're going to do a role-play on that, yeah?' (Laughter). And then immediately after he's got that, he's, 'Alright' and he'll say it almost perfectly already and I say, 'Well you could say that or you could phrase it this way' and he'll be 'Alright; and I'll say 'Yeah, go on then!' And he'll do it but you just have to be brave. Obviously I've judged that I think he's capable and I wouldn't start pushing if I didn't think he was ready. So you can say, 'Well done, that was great! So you can do it on your own' and you see them stand tall and proud" (Staff, Urban Academy).*

- **Crossing boundaries:** crossing boundaries requires confidence and skills to navigate different contexts and environments and is related to the right to come and go in the social context. Staff are flexible in accepting client's attempts to cross boundaries in their relationships because this flexibility allows for closeness and exchange. At the same time it provides an experimental ground that empowers clients to cross the wider boundaries of the social context, frequently closed by poverty and exclusionary barriers.

*"It's boundaried in a way which is containing, not repressive and restricting, that allows the child to grow and understand and to interact and learn skills that take them out into the community, so they can enjoy life [...] Children, throughout Kids Company, have grown immensely. And to see them change and develop and actually embrace the world is priceless" (Staff, Head Office).*

## COMMITMENT AND CONTINUITY

Long-term commitment and continuity of care are another key principle of the Kids Company's model of work. This is corroborated by previous research that shows that Kids Company is clear about implementing a strategy to ensure continuity of support (Lemma, 2010). Children and young people who are at risk are more likely to need long-term intervention for a considerable period of time before they are ready to cross boundaries and participate in society. Time is needed to build trust; intrinsic to the model of care is the assumption of not giving up the child, of sustaining care overtime despite missed appointments and challenging behaviour. Here perseverance and persistence are crucial to enable attachment and dispel clients' fear of abandonment. To the vulnerable child, it conveys a profound and necessary psychological message of continuity and holding (Winnicott, 1971).

*"It's the unconditional love, which they are testing; these children by virtue of not having had secure attachments when they were younger, will test you, the new person that enters into their life. Okay, 'Will you be here for me no matter what, no matter how challengingly I behave?'" (Staff, Head Office).*

*"The girl I mentor will often make me feel like she doesn't give two hoots whether I am there or not, in fact sometimes she makes me feel that she rather I wasn't. It's very much like three steps forward, four steps back, but you just have to trust, you have to meet, you have to continue [...] That's the main thing about Kids Company: sticking by that person" (Staff, Schools Programme).*

This level of continuity in delivery requires solid commitment from staff and volunteers, which is enabled by a sense of vocation where work is more than 'just a job'. This is fostered by the culture of support that permeates the organisation and enhanced by high levels of satisfaction and of pride in the work that is delivered.

*"A vocation, rather than a job. I mean, having worked at charities for years before, and always been committed to what I did, what I find different about being here is that I don't see it as a job" (Staff, Schools Programme).*

*"I worked in charities before where you had to have a Masters in this or whatever, and they are more international charities, but they ended*

*up being populated by quite selfish people, careerists" (Staff, Treehouse).*

## MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE

Staff are highly conscious that central to the work they do is to make visible the plight of vulnerable children and contribute to the overall awareness of British society of the conditions of living of its excluded youth. Kids Company seeks to give visibility to the invisible by raising the profile of those who are at the margins of society and challenging social representations (Moscovici, 1961/2008) that tend to otherise vulnerable children and young people (Howarth, 2002). Kids Company focuses on its internal work with clients while at the same time disseminating and making known its model of support and the reality of its clients. This is done through wide partnerships across sectors, mainly with:

- The state, through public services and government;
- The private sector, through a pool of volunteers and private funders that participate and support their programmes;
- Local communities, which keep them grounded and connected to local realities;
- Academia and research centres, which support their evidence-based approach and draw from their databanks to develop further knowledge;
- The media, which helps to raise awareness and increase public consciousness of the challenges involved in caring for vulnerable children and young people.

## 4.3. THE MODEL IN PRACTICE: DELIVERY AND INTERFACES

The principles discussed above are embedded in services delivered through specific practices and interfaces. Essential components of Kids Company's delivery include tailoring care to the needs of clients, working the interface with state services, delivery of therapy, sustaining multidisciplinary care and supporting families. Figure 4.3 presents the frequency with which staff emphasised each central aspect of delivery.

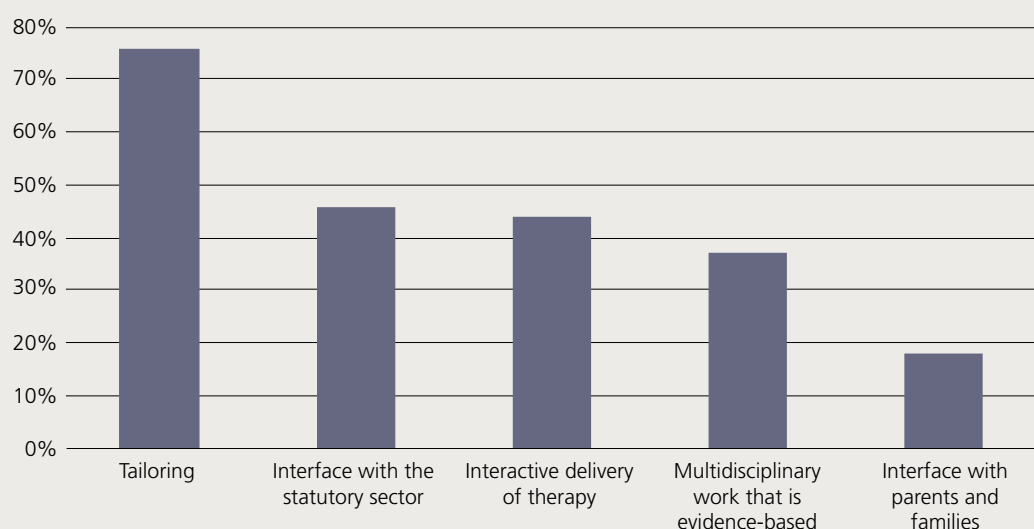
### TAILORING

Kids Company has an understanding of the need to constantly tailor their delivery to adapt and adjust to individual clients' needs on the ground. This is done by:

- **Individualised long-term support through keyworking:** individualised long-term support through keyworking shows how the features of the model, in particular parenting by proxy and commitment and continuity are enacted in practice. Each client is assigned a keyworker that will

**FIGURE 4.3**

Delivery and interfaces



Note: Aspects and interfaces of delivery as reported by staff and volunteers, ranked by frequency. Multiple coding allowed.  
Source: Focus groups, semi-structured and unstructured interviews.

be their main point of contact and that will connect them with the range of services and support provided across the organisation. Kids Company conducts an initial assessment to establish the client's history and to enable a positive match between client and keyworker.

*"The goal is always the same, it's the kids. You never come before the kids" (Staff, Head Office).*

*"So you are to your child what they need you to be and you will support them in whatever way they need you to support them" (Staff, Arches II).*

- **'On-going assessment':** results show that the organisation has an established system of on-going assessment pertaining to each client, which includes their case history, educational background, the family situation, their physical and mental health and their aims for the future. This is periodically revised depending on the development of the client.

*"Once you get allocated a keyworker you sit down and do the care plan, it's an extension of the initial assessment where you discuss more about what the immediate needs are and how you can support them, who's responsible? [...] is it something you're going to do together or you need to refer on to something else? So then we go into a*

*whole realm of different things across Kids Company and what's going to be offered" (Staff, Urban Academy).*

#### INTERACTIVE DELIVERY OF THERAPY

The needs of Kids Company's clients are multifaceted and many of the obstacles they face cannot be treated with an isolated course of psychotherapy (Hillman & Wainwright, 2012; Lemma, 2010). Thus service provision includes a diversity of therapies, including an interactive long-term provision of therapy 'on the go'. Mainstream therapy has a set of established rules and structures; in traditional clinical settings the client has to commit to the treatment and return to a specific space established by the professional provider, which often does not work with vulnerable excluded children and young people. Instead, Kids Company tailors its therapeutic approach to the needs of the child. Centred on their experience, rules are flexible and responsive to the situation of children. Staff adapt different styles of therapy depending on what is effective for each individual child.

*"I don't wish to dampen down what [therapy] is, but in the daily world the keyworking thing is like 'What's up? How are you feeling?'" (Staff, Treehouse).*

*"When you're based in the centre it's just more of a chat. We don't have a huge amount of space here so it might even be that we go to the coffee shop and just have that chat there, which can be*

*difficult in terms of confidentiality and the client talking about past experiences, but it's about you being aware of that for the young person. If you feel there is any risk, then you address that, there and then. But it could be an activity, it could be many things really, the way it's done"* (Staff, The Heart Yard).

#### MULTIDISCIPLINARY WORK THAT IS EVIDENCE-BASED

Services delivered by Kids Company have been developed around a strong internal multidisciplinary interface that provides a pool of internal resources across centres and programmes. The complexity and diversity of clients' needs are tackled by a range of expertise and perspectives that are flexible, creative and situation-led. This is described as a 'salad bar' where different resources are on offer to compose the ideal plate of services tailored to the needs of every individual child. New issues and success stories of overcoming challenges are fed back by staff to the multidisciplinary team through various spaces so that learning is constantly updated. Flexible multidisciplinary work gives the organisation capacity to develop services aligned to its principles and to respond to the needs of its clients.

*"The Kids Company model bridges the gap, makes it smaller, because of such a variety. So it's not that the social workers from social services come in and say, 'Oh well, you're all psychotherapists here' No, they will meet everybody. And in that, there's an exchange of principles, ideas, of behaviour that tends to unify because the goal is the welfare and well-being of the kids"* (Staff, Head Office).

*"I think from the expertise within the company, so when I worked in Safeguarding I got trained up on how to do child protection and referrals to social services [...] and then in Head Office there's a legal team so they can advise us about immigration difficulties and they've had legal backgrounds [...] and then there's a housing advisor there and there's a child protection advisor. There are social workers in the team [...] So they are a hub of people to go to for advice"* (Staff, Treehouse).

*"I think we're all different, we've all got slightly different ideas about things [...] and also we've got different skills, so we'd be thinking about things in different ways"* (Staff, Arches II).

A multidisciplinary perspective brings together different empirical approaches and areas of research. Kids Company is constantly seeking foundations to its theoretical model, basing its delivery on research evidence and commissioning evaluations to reflect and strengthen their service provision. Kids Company appreciate that there is a vital link between their clients' social and psychological reality, the frameworks that they use to understand it and the interventions that can provide adequate and relevant solutions.

*"That's where all the goals and outcomes come into play, because [evidence] shows what difference we make, Kids Company, to these clients, and the changes that we make"* (Staff, Arches II).

#### INTERFACE WITH THE STATUTORY SECTOR

The interface with the statutory sector is a central element of Kids Company delivery. It is a very strong and multifaceted interface that involves constant tension, collaboration and role crossing. Kids Company works with public services in areas such as social services, schools and the NHS, including local GPs, hospitals and mental health centres. This interface presents some of the main challenges faced by the charity, which we discuss in more detail in the next chapter.

### "KIDS COMPANY WORKS AS BROKERS, TRANSLATORS AND ADVOCATES GIVING VISIBILITY TO THE INVISIBLE"

#### INTERFACE WITH PARENTS AND FAMILIES

Parental guidance and family support are a second important interface established by Kids Company. The charity works with families in need, providing a range of support-based activities to encourage positive parenting.

*"Often a lot of the work is to do with the parents or parent, because the children are still being held by the parent, and because, especially if they're younger, to help the parent is inevitably going to help the child and so it's kind of working together with the parent"* (Staff, Treehouse).

#### 4.4. MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE CHILD

Clients arrive at Kids Company with a variety of needs that need to be addressed at different levels. These needs are layered and nested where at times the loudest needs obscure other, not less important, needs. Meeting educational needs, for instance, can



be challenging when other issues that are ‘invisible’ compromise educational achievement. Staff work to unpack layers and assess through different levels of expression what is the full reality of the child. Here we present two examples of how the model of Kids Company meets clients’ needs in daily practice and how staff understands what constitutes impact in their line of work.

#### KEYWORKING

Keyworking is a central routine in the delivery of the overall model of Kids Company. It comprises all principles of the model and offers a comprehensive example of the work of the charity. Members of staff are involved in keyworking regardless of their role, particularly if they are based at a centre. Keyworking comprises addressing clients’ practical and emotional needs, developing a nurturing, stable and committed relationship that is unconditionally supportive and engaging multiple therapeutic practices that can help clients to mend the fractures of experiencing social and other types of violence, abuse and neglect.

Keyworking starts first and foremost with meeting basic socio-economic necessities: food, housing, benefits and legal support. It continues by supporting communication and helping the child to manage relations with its immediate environment and the wider society. At the same time, the keyworker builds trust and relational engagement with the client through the constancy of ‘being there’ for the child. In doing so they empower clients to reconstruct self-esteem and engage positively with the wider society. By helping children practically, keyworking lays foundations for a deeper psychological engagement that eventually contributes to reposition the child from victim to hero, from perpetrator to survivor. Participants report that much of their work at the present is supporting

one particularly invisible population comprising recent migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

Kids Company’s multidisciplinary team has been tailoring provision to address immigration issues, thanks to its flexible, situation-led, open-door model that allows the charity to move swiftly to support populations which are invisible to – and therefore unsupported – by statutory services.

*“I work with immigration because I work with adults and I’m wondering whether they’ve always been about, but we’re one of the few organisations that work with them so they can be more visible. It’s difficult to get numbers for people who don’t have their papers. So in theory, no benefits, nothing. They are not entitled to anything. So you can imagine how vulnerable these women are” (Staff, Arches II).*

*“People fleeing from war-torn countries, I’ve seen that quite a lot, and with that, trauma, or experiencing trauma, so you might be dealing with PTSD [post-traumatic stress disorder] clients there. There’s just so much that they bring. If a client hasn’t had those issues, say, maybe they have been raised in this country or have status here, they are often coming from quite deprived backgrounds, low education, lack of schooling, lack of parenting and I think that’s what I’m faced with most” (Staff, The Heart Yard).*

#### COLOUR A CHILD’S LIFE (CaCL)

Colour a Child’s Life is a programme that targets

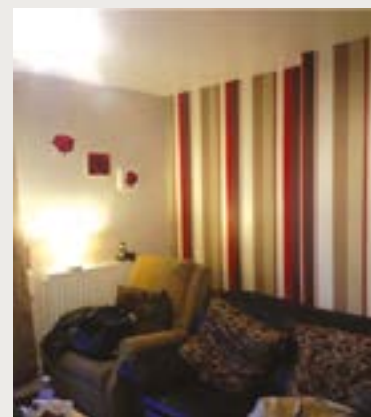
**FIGURE 4.4**

CaCL programme, before and after

**Pre intervention**



**Post intervention**



directly improvements in children's home environments. Its dimensions are practical, aesthetic and emotional. The programme organises and better equips homes while ensuring that they look nice and are arranged in a warm and welcoming way. It brings the wider society – through corporate volunteering – into the intimate environment of Kids Company's clients, enhancing societal knowledge about vulnerable populations, decreasing invisibility and facilitating border crossing. Figure 4.4 illustrates how the programme makes a difference in children's homes.

*"Colour a Child's Life is about empowering children and young people, giving them the colour schemes they've always wanted, but haven't had the means to have [...] it's about empowering the young people, their parents and letting them decide" (Staff, CaCL Programme).*

## **"FLEXIBILITY EMPOWERS STAFF TO BE OPEN TO SITUATIONS, THINK IN DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS AND DEVISE ALTERNATIVES FOR CLIENT ENGAGEMENT"**

### **A GROUNDED VISION OF IMPACT**

One important aspect of the research has been to investigate how staff assess the impact of their work with clients. The concept of impact generally defines the expected outcomes of an intervention and the main building blocks that are required to achieve them. Clearly, engaging and supporting clients can take on many different forms in the organisation. At Kids Company, the meaning of impact is extended to take into account the concrete situation of the client and what they experience. The key impact is the distance the client travels from abandonment, pain, neglect and chaos to the possibility of gradually experiencing the support and holding that enables social and individual transformation. These pockets of experience are developmental and require time to consolidate, which in turn requires commitment to a long-term approach.

On the whole Kids Company's staff share a common understanding of the vision underlying the model and what is required to achieve the expected outcomes for clients. However, outcomes such as increase in educational achievement and attainment, decreased rate of unemployment and reduced contact with the criminal justice system are difficult to be evidenced in the short-term because interventions with vulnerable populations take time to achieve results and it is difficult to isolate the influence of external factors. Outcomes may be less tangible when they relate to psychological and social

improvements that are not easily measurable, such as positive interactions between clients and their families, peers and significant adults.

*"We do define success in various different ways, and it's not just about the measure of going to University, it's the fact that some can communicate now, they're not throwing things around the space" (Staff, Arches II).*

It is in this context that staff at Kids Company prioritise the trajectory of the client and the gradual learning and change that takes place in a child's life. At Kids Company what counts as real impact includes:

- The daily positive interactions and practices that staff experience with their clients;
- The need to re-define the notion of targets and "ticking the box" mentality that serves institutions more than the communities in need.

*"It just seemed really nice to be able to work from the client's point of view and not from trying to achieve something really tangibly straight away that you can put into your report, and doing something that's right for them, not for the organisation necessarily" (Staff, Schools Programme).*

## **4.5. SUMMARY**

Kids Company works at the interface between vulnerable children, their communities, the statutory sector and the wider British public sphere. They work as mediators, advocates and service providers, looking after children exposed to developmental adversity, raising awareness about their conditions and lifting the veils of denial that tend to make their clients invisible for the wider society. The model of work of Kids Company includes principles and practices of delivery that are based on a solid understanding of the latest evidence about developmental adversity and a strong ethos and motivation.

The principles of the model are:

- Flexibility;
- Parenting by proxy;
- Re-writing the self;
- Boundary crafting;
- Commitment and continuity;
- Making the invisible visible.

These principles are embedded in services delivered through specific practices and interfaces which include:

- 
- Tailoring;
  - Interactive delivery of therapy;
  - Multidisciplinary work that is evidence-based;
  - Interface with the statutory sector;
  - Interface with parents and families.

Keyworking and the programme *Colour a Child's Life* offer an exemplary demonstration of how this model is enacted and meets clients' needs. These examples also demonstrate the conception of impact for staff at Kids Company, where the concrete situation of clients and their experience is the ultimate criteria for evaluating results. The research found a vision where the main focus is on the gradual development of a trajectory that moves from abandonment and pain to the experience of support and holding.

As highlighted in chapter 3, staff vocation, motivation and satisfaction are crucial for the model of Kids Company and a key factor for understanding how the charity works. This is discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

5 / CHAINS OF  
SCAFFOLDING  
FOR EFFICACY  
OF DELIVERY

Greetings

Dia Dhuit



IRISH

გამარჯობა

gamar joba - Georgian

Здравей

Zdravei / Zdrasti  
- BULGARIAN

今日は

Kon-nichiwa - Japanese

สวัสดี

Sawatdi - Thai

SALEM

لوورد / مآل سى



# 5 / CHAINS OF SCAFFOLDING FOR EFFICACY OF DELIVERY

## 5.1. STAFF ENABLING PRACTICES AND DELIVERY

Commitment, dedication and persistence are intrinsic to the work of Kids Company because the scaffolding of vulnerable children – a task that involves considerable stress – receives itself solid internal scaffolding through enabling and empowering procedures for staff. Working with limited resources and engaging daily with the consequences of contextual adversity in the lives of children is inherently challenging and requires sound support and attention. Building positive attachment with vulnerable children is a developmental process that takes time and entails contradictory experiences for the professionals involved. The process is challenging, rewarding but can also prove stressful and upsetting.

*because in the end if we can't look after ourselves we can't look after someone else' and I think that's quite rare in a business, to look after the staff as well as Kids Company does" (Staff, Head Office).*

Structures and actions of support operate internally and externally to facilitate dialogue and cross-fertilisation between the inside and the outside, or between the problems being addressed and the problem of addressing them, between the charity, its clients and the wider environment. This enables Kids Company to have an organisational structure that remains flexible, pragmatic and tailored to clients' needs while offering a participatory and communal working environment that motivates and inspires staff.

*"Kids Company really looks after the staff. When I first met Camilla she said, you know, 'You need to look after yourselves*

*"I have found that Kids Company has been the most amazing learning curve and I've been in the business 32 years.*

**FIGURE 5.1**  
General principles of the Kids Company model



Note: Levels of scaffolding as reported by staff and volunteers, ranked by frequency. Multiple coding allowed.  
Source: Focus groups, semi-structured, unstructured interviews and observations.

*[Applause]. And I am inspired and amazed at how much I didn't know. Incredible experience"* (Staff, Treehouse).

Three interconnected levels of scaffolding can be identified in Kids Company: two levels relate to scaffolding the practical and emotional needs of staff and the third refers to scaffolding relations between clients and their families. Frequencies are depicted in Figure 5.1.

## **"CHAINS OF SCAFFOLDING BETWEEN STAFF, CLIENTS AND FAMILIES ARE THE BASIS OF EFFICACY AND MOTIVATION"**

### **5.2. SCAFFOLDING STAFF**

Structures of support for staff address practical and emotional dimensions and strongly emphasised by staff. At present the charity is working towards professionalisation and to some extent formalisation of its procedures; however informal social capital based on its high levels of cohesion and staff morale remain an important asset that is daily utilised to nurture the internal working environment of the charity. While staff emphasise the two levels of practical and emotional support, it is clear that these appear intertwined in the structures and activities of support of the charity. As mentioned in chapter 4, Kids Company works towards reclaiming a language of love as foundational for the care professions. This is evident in their own internal structures and the shared mentality of staff about the work they do, the clients and themselves.

Structures of support involve multiple procedures and levels of interaction including managerial, technological, peer and group-based and one-to-one exchanges that take place formally and informally. These include multiple activities such as supervision, training, multidisciplinary teams, meetings and the recently developed AURORA<sup>1</sup> software, as well as informal daily interaction and sociability through conversation and communication in meetings, yards and hubs of Kids Company. These are presented in more detail below.

#### **MANAGERIAL SUPPORT**

Managerial support draws on case management, multidisciplinary team work and training sessions in order to mobilise different domains of expertise to support keyworking in its delivery. Systematic and varied training sessions are delivered for staff and volunteers in conjunction with informal 'training on the go', as daily work takes place. This is facilitated by the diversity of multidisciplinary resources available

and the flexibility and interactivity that characterise the model of the organisation. The AURORA database enables formal sharing of information and experience, which also occurs when a cause for concern about a child is raised. On these occasions, the structures of the charity enable widespread communication through different spaces and levels of activity.

*"It's not just the keyworker holding the whole thing. The support here is very interconnected, so we hold it in a very mindful way"* (Staff, Head Office).

Results indicate that formal managerial support, coexisting with informal activities, is experienced by everyone, as consensually reported by participants.

*"It's more that in-house there's a lot of experience and people willing to train you up and explain how to help service users, and also there's in-house training usually on Wednesdays at Head Office, on a variety of themes and they bring external advisors in to train up the team on how to do it, so different people in a team go, then come back and share the information [...] So it is that you learn as you go along because something comes up"* (Staff, Treehouse).

*"I think the bigger problem is when, particularly with teenagers, maybe there's been a longstanding kind of emotional abuse or high levels of neglectful parenting, a bad home set up, for want of a better way of phrasing it, that can be really difficult to get through the door and that can feel very much like your wrangling with social workers a lot, and again, having our team is really helpful for keyworkers because, if you like, we've got a bit more experience and a bit more of that level of expertise, so [...] we can just bring something a bit different to the table"* (Staff, Arches II).

#### **PEER AND GROUP-BASED SUPPORT**

Peer and group-based support takes place through formal and informal activities such as meetings and access to spaces of conviviality and communication in yards and hubs. Staff meetings allow the cross-section and sharing of experiences, raising concerns and producing plans of action. Accessibility becomes possible through a case management approach where each centre acts as hub and the circulation of expertise and different forms of knowledge are actively decentralised, avoiding rigid and bureaucratic protocols that block response rates.

1. AURORA is a programme developed by Kids Company. It enables systematic storage and sharing of information between staff and is consolidating a large data base that can be potentially shared with researchers studying third sector interventions and developmental adversity.

*“You do have a brilliant support structure here. I don’t know any other organisation where you have such a good support structure. There are so many people, you have your team, you have your manager who was probably a psychotherapist, you’ve got lots of people who are very into listening” (Staff, Schools Programme).*

Horizontal communication and peer support enhance the shared intentionality of the organisation and the feelings of well-being that permeate the work of staff. Observations and focus group data show that staff enjoy their working environment and have a good time at work. There is a positive sociability and a light atmosphere despite the nature of the problems the charity addresses. This is beneficial for staff as well as for the children who come into these spaces to experience group cohesion, a positive social identity and a strong sense of community.

*“Offering staff the space for emotional well-being, which is really important here at Kids Company. We’re all part of an organisation that is looking at the well-being of the person, or the child, or whether you are a staff member, in whatever department here, whether you’re a front line keyworker or if you are in accounts, it doesn’t matter, you’re part of this organisation, you’re part of the whole organism” (Staff, Head Office).*

An example frequently mentioned is how having a safeguarding team on site offers to staff at the sharp end of the delivery process immediate access to expertise, which results in prompt responses to high

risk cases. It enables the sharing of knowledge and information, collective problem solving and an immediate containment of the stress and anxiety associated with the task. Staff feel the scaffolding provided by colleagues and at the same time can rely on sound multidisciplinary expertise to perform their job.

*“I think that sort of approach is made concrete by the fact that there’s always an opportunity to open up a question or have a curiosity about an individual where you’ve seen something that may need some more understanding and then we report it. We spend a lot of time with kids, but also with colleagues, co-facilitators, debriefing on what happened and not trying to judge but just report what happened. That’s shared now, quite well I think, through the electronic system, suddenly it will be picked up somewhere else or in our daily contact meetings and hopefully picked up where it really needs to” (Staff, Archers II).*

*“There’s an awful lot we can tap into, on our doorstep” (Staff, Treehouse).*

## ONE-TO-ONE SUPPORT

One-to-one support is provided mainly through supervision. At Kids Company supervision involves private and confidential support delivered to staff by trained psychotherapists. Clinicians help staff to develop reflective capacity and think about their working practices, their boundaries and the emotional and practical challenges involved in working with vulnerable children. The well-being of staff is paramount for safe practice and supervision is

**FIGURE 5.2**  
Scaffolding of staff at Kids Company

Structures	Activities	Outcomes
Managerial	FORMAL: Supervision Training Meetings AURORA	Collective intelligence Emotional and social support Cohesion and sense of community Social learning Sharing of information Shared intentionality Cooperation
Peer and group-based	INFORMAL: Conversation Access to shared spaces Conviviality Flexible communication	
One-to-one		



needed to enable staff to reach out to clients and absorb the challenges and at times chaos that they bring, to deal with the emotional demands of the job and to address issues of reciprocity in the development of positive attachment with the children.

*"I am a fully qualified psychotherapist, UKCP registered, and my role here at Kids Company is to give supervision to staff, and they are welcome to bring things which are personal or within the clinical aspect of what they do here or a mixture of the two" (Staff, Head Office).*

*"A most unique and effective and wonderful thing about Kids Company, I don't know of any other organisation in the UK that does that, this one-to-one supervision" (Staff, Treehouse).*

Supervision provides clarification, reassurance, validation and recognition of the demands of the role. Supervision ultimately scaffolds the identity of staff while maintaining the high quality of delivery and the high levels of satisfaction found amongst members of staff.

*"You need it! I think the clients we're presented with on a daily basis and what they bring with them and what's projected onto you, you need to go and make sense of that, definitely, sometimes you can think, 'Oh I've been a bit overkill,' but no, I'm all for supervision and especially in this type*

*of work because I think what happens is it gets under your skin and otherwise it starts taking over a bit. So for me as a therapist I need to be there for the client and not overwhelm myself" (Staff, The Heart Yard).*

### 5.3. SCAFFOLDING RELATIONSHIPS

Kids Company understands that clients do not live in isolation. Engaging and supporting the multiple relationships which the children experience in their environment is reported as central to the provision and practice of the charity. This involves working with families and supporting parents who are themselves vulnerable, frequently experiencing poverty and multiple levels of exclusion. Staff are aware that they need to provide support for clients' immediate home environment:

*"If you look after the parents, the parents will (hopefully) look after the children better because you've raised their living conditions and hopefully their sense of self-worth [...] it's my observation in four plus years in the role" (Staff, CaCL Programme).*

*"You can be a mediator between the child and the parents, because the parents may not always be able or not always want or can talk to the child, like they don't always have a good relationship with them" (Volunteer, Mentoring Programme).*

### "HORIZONTAL COMMUNICATION AND PEER SUPPORT ENHANCE THE SHARED INTENTIONALITY OF THE ORGANISATION"

At times, support is directly targeted to parents who are listened to and offered practical parenting skills. This is part of the chain of scaffolding that aims to envelop the child in positive relationships, spanning from the development of healthy attachment with staff to re-building attachment inside the family home.

*"I think it's about enabling the families as well, so if you're working with the parents it's enabling them to bring about change for themselves, so you can assist but we wouldn't want them to become too dependent on it as well" (Staff, Arches II).*



These skills are equally directed at future parents, given the high incidence of teenage pregnancy amongst the charity's clients:

*"We've got a lot of teenage pregnancy here as well so we're trying to teach them more successful parenting skills really, I think that's a large part of the centre as well, in terms of hoping that we can stop this kind of cycle" (Staff, Treehouse).*

**FIGURE 5.3**

Chains of scaffolding at Kids Company



#### 5.4. CHAINS OF SCAFFOLDING: FROM STAFF TO CLIENTS AND BACK

The interconnection between the scaffolding of staff, clients and families is central to the effectiveness of Kids Company and is at the basis of its striking levels of staff morale and efficacy of delivery. Findings show that its vision works because it is delivered by people who have a strong vocation, are deeply motivated and committed to the aims of the organisation. At all levels, findings show a profound identification between staff and the organisation, which is sustained by chains of psychosocial scaffolding between staff, from staff to clients and back to the organisation.

The research reviewed in chapter 2 and the results of the well-being questionnaire with staff are corroborated by the interviews, focus group discussions and observations that reveal a very high congruence

between research findings and the views and experience of staff. Multiple levels of support involving management, peer and group-based activities and one-to-one supervision sustain the principles and practices of delivery. Staff are supported at emotional and practical levels which enables the delivery of a demanding and challenging model of support to clients and their families.

These chains of mutual support are inspired by, and in turn inspire, the vision and overall model of Kids Company. Together they enable shared intentionality and cooperation (Tomasello, Carpenter, Call, Behne & Moll, 2005) to guide the internal sociability and sense of community of the organisation. These explain the striking levels of cohesion and dedication of staff as well as the reach of the charity and its capacity to engage children and vulnerable youth who have been 'given up' by almost everyone else.

#### 5.5. SUMMARY

This chapter presented the different levels of scaffolding at the basis of Kids Company's model of work. It shows that the motivation and commitment of staff, which is intrinsic to the work of the charity, is sustained by solid internal support structures. Looking after staff so that staff can look after vulnerable children is paramount for the model of Kids Company. Three interconnected levels of scaffolding were found:

- The practical scaffolding of staff;
- The emotional scaffolding of staff;
- The scaffolding of relations between clients and their families.

Scaffolding of staff occurs through multiple formal and informal activities delivered by different interactive structures including management, peer and group-based and one-to-one support. These enable collective intelligence, social learning, cohesion and sense of community, sharing information, cooperation and shared intentionality. The scaffolding of children and their families takes place through all the principles and services of the charity and aims to envelop the child in positive relationships that can re-write trajectories and self-understanding. These different chains of scaffolding hold together the overall vision of Kids Company and explain its effectiveness in delivering care for vulnerable children and young people.

# 6 / CHALLENGES FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW



# 6 / CHALLENGES FOR TODAY AND TOMORROW

## 6.1. THE CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTATION

The complexity of the model of work of Kids Company and its position as mediator between the needs of vulnerable children, families, the statutory sector and the wider British public sphere undoubtedly presents challenges to implementation and to the charity's ability of relating effectively across different spheres and institutional cultures. There is acute awareness of these challenges inside the charity and a great deal of its work is directed towards addressing them. Such challenges include internal and external interfaces related to staff and clients, the statutory sector and the funding context. The last two in particular are the most emphasised by staff as can be seen in Figure 6.1.

### INTERFACE WITH THE STATE

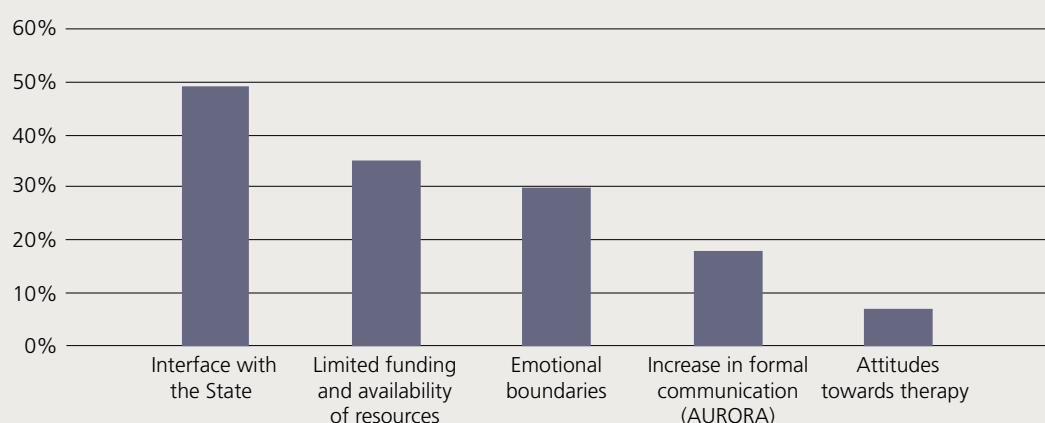
Staff at Kids Company consider the interface with statutory services (mainly social services and schools, as well as the NHS) strong and multifaceted, involving collaboration and role crossing as well as constant tension. This interface is considered extremely necessary and, at the same time, the most challenging

aspect of the work of the charity. Dimensions of the interface that are singled out include:

- Constant tension between the sectors;
- Divergent approaches to the balance between theory and practice;
- Disparate organisational cultures with different constraints and regulations;
- Preconceptions and prejudice.

Kids Company appreciates the benefits of working with the statutory sector, which include maximising capacity, resources as well as added credibility. However, the data show that the differences in the model of work developed by Kids Company and the public sector produce daily difficulties that undermine both sides of the partnership. For instance, some of the principles intrinsic to the practice of Kids Company – flexibility, tailoring and commitment to the continuity of care – clearly add tension to the engagement, given the constraints in the manner in which social services must relate to children and young people. Public sector stakeholders may regard

**FIGURE 6.1**  
Challenges to implementation



Kids Company's staff as being more aware, connected and capable of working for each individual child whereas they, in contrast, may feel that their conditions to offer a similar service are limited. This comparison can produce positive results when Kids Company's staff are considered assets and important contributors to the partnership, but it can also cause tension and an ambiguous relationship.

*"The philosophy is that we can do anything that we can and we can do anything that it takes to protect our kids, and one of those things is keeping the social worker at the table because we know our limit, so we're going to advocate with everything we have in order to bring whomever we need around the table to make sure that the child is safe" (Staff, Treehouse).*

*"Often we know the child best because we've had that longevity with them and the child trusts and talks to us, where the social worker might be new, or the child might have been moved over the 'looked after child' team, hence the social worker has changed. So in my multi-agency meeting, I am considered a real, they will reschedule a meeting if I can't make it, because they know in terms of advocating for the child that I am probably best placed to know what's going on with them and their state of mind. So I think we offer something different because we've got the freedom" (Staff, Schools Programme).*

At the most negative end of the spectrum are situations in which Kids Company's staff are unwelcomed and intimidated by the statutory sector. Staff report that they have suffered active blockages of information sharing and at times limited willingness from statutory services to engage and make the partnership work. There is a strong sense that raising issues and enhancing the visibility of a specific population places burdens in the system and adds work to already overstretched and underfunded social services. This in turn can reinforce unrealistic views that Kids Company has more capacity to engage children and can 'make it all happen', as opposed to the statutory sector.

These issues are exacerbated by divergent capacity to harmonise theory and practice and very different organisational cultures, with different constraints, regulations and principles. The data indicate that staff at Kids Company deal with these differences on a daily basis and recognise the problems inherent to the approach and internal culture of the statutory sector. In particular, they note that the fear of making

mistakes or deviating from regulations compromises the overall focus of the statutory sector, as attention is directed to the internal rules of the institution rather than to the situation at hand. Equally, Kids Company's staff perceive social services lacking the internal support and scaffolding that they themselves enjoy. In their views, this constrains social services' ability of responding creatively to situations. Staff report that, whereas the statutory sector knows the theory, they have limitations to implement it in practice:

*"Too often social services are too scared to make mistakes and so they don't make any decisions and then people fall through the hole" (Staff, Treehouse).*

*"We're involved for 8 weeks, 'are you going to be here after that?' and I say, 'Why? Are you going to be here after that? You give us the money and we'll be here as long as we can.' And you get that, you go to these meetings with the professionals and they're all busy looking for the exit door. Camila has this great 'can do' attitude and so the world thinks we can do everything, and in fact we're restricted by resources as well. It is frustrating when you go to meetings and we're the only people doing stuff, and you think, 'Well, when are you going to do something?' It is frustrating but we need to work really closely, we need to have good relationships with social workers because sometimes that good relationship can mean that they'll make a bit more of an effort when they see the sincerity of what we do" (Staff, Treehouse).*

Disparate organisational cultures, with different constraints and regulations, are aspects strongly emphasised. Staff and volunteers think that the state prioritises an administrative approach, expressed in a target-driven public sector culture that has deviated from the core aim of meeting the needs of their clients. Working practices suffer from excessive administration, paperwork and bureaucracy, which increase workload and leave little time to establish an in-depth engagement with clients. In the views of Kids Company, the focus on quantity rather than quality misses the point and is in danger of further excluding children and young people. These issues, as we discuss later in the chapter, are mentioned by staff as a challenge to their own work, albeit in a much lesser degree.

*"With [x] Academies there's a certain kind of 'ticking boxes' and they want results, the meritocracy of their form of teaching*



*is enforced on Kids Company so they are like, 'Well we want to see results, we want that kid mended' and it's like, there's a difference, we say 'Okay, it's going to probably take until they are 16 for us to be able to do any work through the whole period' and they're like, 'No, 6 weeks and we want them mended' (Staff, Schools Programme).*

*"A lot of the p's and q's of what happens in statutory services and NHS are artificial, they are what someone thinks should be the appropriate way to deal with something, and actually it's breaking down what we actually need to help these young people and what it's doing is just kind of fluffing it up and covering it up" (Staff, Urban Academy).*

## **"THE INTERFACE WITH THE STATUTORY SECTOR IS BOTH NECESSARY AND CHALLENGING"**

Joint work is also undermined by preconceptions and prejudice. There is a view amongst staff that the statutory sector sees the charity and the third sector more generally, as ineffective and unstructured in its ways of working. Staff also admit that they see the other side as lacking in flexibility and detached from the main goal of caring for vulnerable children:

*"Two of the main challenges are communication and assumptions, on both parts, on anyone's part, and social services or whether it's immigration, housing, whether it's Kids Company, I think it is communication and the assumptions that we have about each other" (Staff, Treehouse).*

These perceptions raise important questions regarding the nature of the relations between the third sector and the statutory sector, in particular how to maximise the benefits that can emerge precisely from combining the different assets and strategies utilised by each sector.

### **LIMITED FUNDING AND AVAILABILITY OF RESOURCES**

Kids Company's staff and volunteers feel strongly about the challenges they face as a third sector organisation working with limited and uncertain funding. The pressures on daily practice are many and there are specific difficulties in obtaining funding for putting in place management structures. Most of the government and other funding provided to the

charity focus on delivery, which has an impact on the sustainability of the organisation.

As a result, staff work with restricted resources ranging from spatial limitations to insufficient tools and materials to work with the children. Material limitations include staff lacking working stations and scarcity of private areas for conducting one-to-one support sessions. Communication and information technology rooms are small, with few working stations that do not match demand and leave many children unable to experience the benefits of the educational support provided.

*"At ours [school] we've got an office for therapy but we've also got some sheds out in the playground that are used for therapy, I'm not sure it's the best environment really, because they are like B&Q sheds, so you couldn't really bring professionals or parents down there because it's too small, and some children find it too restrictive as a space" (Staff, Schools Programme).*

*"Hot-desking appears to be a necessary evil of our work environment; I think it would benefit us if more staff were able to feel anchored to a particular work area" (Staff, Treehouse).*

*"I have my own resources at the centre at the Heart Yard, I used to keep them in the room then realised that it probably wasn't a good idea so now I keep them in one of the cupboards ... It's very important as an art therapist that you've got the same things each week, so it's not that I don't want to share, (laughter), I'm quite happy to share, but it's quite important that those things are all there, so if your client uses something, for example, and they want to use it again. So I just keep my things. But yes, I do find myself probably keeping my materials to a minimum, so maybe that is a bit of a challenge. I don't have clay, for example, which normally I'd have in the room" (Staff, The Heart Yard).*

Despite these limitations, systematic observation of the centres reveals that staff make the most of the limited resources available. Using creativity and improvisation, staff and children work together to create rich environments for conducting daily activities.

### **EMOTIONAL BOUNDARIES**

Reaching out to clients to address their complex needs and absorb the adversity of their lives is a daily emotional challenge that can put staff under stress

and work-related anxiety. Staff and volunteers report the need to be active in processes of sustaining emotional well-being at work and crafting their own boundaries in relation to the difficult existence of their clients. Monitoring the self and 'letting go' are important daily challenges for staff, notwithstanding the structures of support embedded in the charity's model of work. Emotional support is considered paramount for safe delivery given the scope and intensity of clients' needs.

*"It is hard sometimes not to take it home, there have been times when I'm just like thinking about stuff, but there are others when I can just leave work and knock it off. I realise there needs to be time for me and I need to be strong because if I get weak I'm not going to be able to help any of these clients, I'm going to fail them" (Staff, Arches II).*

#### INCREASE IN FORMAL COMMUNICATION (AURORA)

Staff express the challenge of adjusting to new systems of formal communication while sustaining their heavy workload. Workload in itself is not a concern; however heavy the workload, it is always referred to as acceptable, understandable, which is in line with the high levels of staff motivation found. Staff refer rather to the problem of combining the workload and the new requirements of the structures of formal communication introduced by AURORA. There is a sense that administrative procedures and emphasis on formal communication shift the focus from the client to procedures, challenging the aims and model of work of the charity. However, staff also highlight that processes have been put in place to speed up formal communications.

*"As much as I'm in favour of record-keeping, I need to rush upstairs to put all my stuff on the computer and all the time I spend doing that is less time I can actually spend with the child" (Staff, Schools Programme).*

*"I think writing up meeting records is harder [...] But I think we're getting much better, much, much better, and it's being built into our day, so we have a couple of hours of admin time every morning for everyone to use as they wish; Wednesdays we don't have clients on-site so we can catch up on our admin. When I first started, I really couldn't work that out, but I really understand it now, it is because you just need some catch-up time" (Staff, Arches II).*

#### ATTITUDES TOWARDS THERAPY

There are negative representations of therapy amongst many of the communities and clients served by Kids Company, which can be a challenge when it comes to the delivery of support. Although this is not as significant as other issues, many staff face this problem daily as they tailor care for children in need. Staff work around this issue by re-presenting the concept of therapy to reach out to clients, being flexible in how therapy is named and concentrating on the substantive aspect of seeing therapy as a private space for the child to be heard:

*"The relationship I develop with the children is developing in that sort of therapeutic space where some of the children know that there is a space that*



*they go with me. But it's up for grabs because the different children I work with, 'Hmm, I'm not doing therapy' and it's not a good word for a lot of the children and so we need to rehabilitate the word or the 'being fit'. I work with some of the education kids and when they start we don't use the word 'therapy', so it's okay, but the minute it gets round that you're doing therapy then nobody wants to do it" (Staff, Treehouse).*

## 6.2. MAKING THINGS BETTER: LOOKING INTO THE FUTURE

The research also explored which areas and/or issues need to be addressed to improve the work of Kids Company and make things better in the future. Staff and volunteers identified a number of areas which they consider in need of reflection and constant thinking:

- Communication and consistency in the guidance provided for volunteers;
- Participation of parents and families;
- Sustainable leadership;
- Expansion while sustaining the vision.

### IMPROVE COMMUNICATION AND CONSISTENCY IN GUIDANCE PROVIDED FOR VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers in the sample would like to see better communications and more consistency in the guidance they receive to participate in the programmes of the charity. Some volunteers who act as mentors for children are interested in strengthening their links with the charity but do not have enough opportunities to know more about events and how to increase participation. In particular, they would like to receive clear guidance about their roles, with some reporting confusion about what the role entails and the degree of flexibility they can apply to the duration and level of engagement with their mentees. A few expressed that they would benefit from having more contact with their mentees' keyworker.

*"I'd been seeing her [mentee] every week, and because she goes to the centres and stuff she talks about me, and her keyworker has got my number, so I always thought if there was an issue or concern they would tell me. And obviously, I did hear her talking about [school], and I was like, 'What are you talking about?' and then the keyworker did finally say to me, 'Oh, by the way, she's going to [school] and I was like, 'Is she?' I had no idea because no one [told*

*me], that's how far removed I am from it all, but in a good way" (Volunteer, Mentoring Programme).*

### PARTICIPATION: INCREASE ENGAGEMENT WITH PARENTS AND THE FAMILY

Although engaging with parents and family is one of the main chains of the scaffolding provided by the model of Kids Company, a proportion of staff consider that more work can be done to increase engagement with parents and families. Engaging high risk parents with complex needs requires substantial resources and presents a particular challenge in terms of crafting boundaries, as in many occasions Kids Company's staff stand between children and their families acting and advocating on behalf of the child. Yet, they feel that a balance and sensitivity to parental and familial needs is required. The nature of the engagement with parents is highly varied as it is tailored to the diverse practical, emotional and social needs encountered in the family context. Achieving sustained and continuous engagement with parents and families of clients remains a challenge and work in progress for the charity.

## "ENGAGING HIGH RISK PARENTS WITH COMPLEX NEEDS REQUIRES SUBSTANTIAL RESOURCES"

### SUSTAINABLE LEADERSHIP

The research found robust evidence that Kids Company is driven and sustained by a highly capable, committed and charismatic leader who is deeply connected to her staff and the communities they serve. This has been a vital strength for the charity, from its design and conception to the high levels of organisational capacity, which are evident today. As well as recognising the exceptional leadership enjoyed by Kids Company, staff identify this very strength as a potential issue for the sustainability of the charity: can it survive without its leader? In dialogue meetings Kids Company's founder and Chief Executive has shown awareness of the need to maintain sustainable leadership and is actively working with staff towards the production of leadership resources based on research evidence, partnerships and training. A senior management team has been established so that the skills and unique qualities of the Chief Executive can be distributed and amplified throughout the organisational structures. Committed to the long-term, the goal is that the care professions can adopt a different kind of leadership, characterised as "emotional leadership" (Batmanghelidj, 2013).

### REFLECT ON EXPANSION; SUSTAIN THE VISION

One aspect that requires reflection for a sustainable future is that Kids Company's plans for expansion

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should not divert the charity from its ethos and the essence of its distinctive vision and approach. Support for growth goes hand in hand with concerns that Kids Company is becoming more managerial and administrative. Kids Company's founder and Chief Executive has indicated that both of these approaches are not mutually exclusive; current developments in the charity seek to institute a system of accountability, systematisation and evidence-based intervention that is not in contradiction with nurturing relationships and the language and practice of love that Kids Company put at the centre of their work and vision.

*"Kids Company will grow but I also think the problem is, how do you stop the mentoring programme from growing to a point where actually it doesn't retain its integrity and the good values it has for being a smaller programme?"*  
(Volunteer, Mentoring Programme)

*"I hope we do not move too far from the ethos of being a loving and supportive organisation for our client group whilst we build new structures around behaviour management that are necessary"* (Staff, Treehouse).

### 6.3. SUMMARY

This chapter has presented the main challenges experienced by staff and volunteers at Kids Company, which include:

- The interface with the state;
- Limited funding and resources;
- Sustaining the emotional well-being of staff while addressing clients' needs;
- Finding a balance between the demands of formal communication and giving priority to work with clients;
- Overcoming negative representations about therapy amongst clients and their communities.

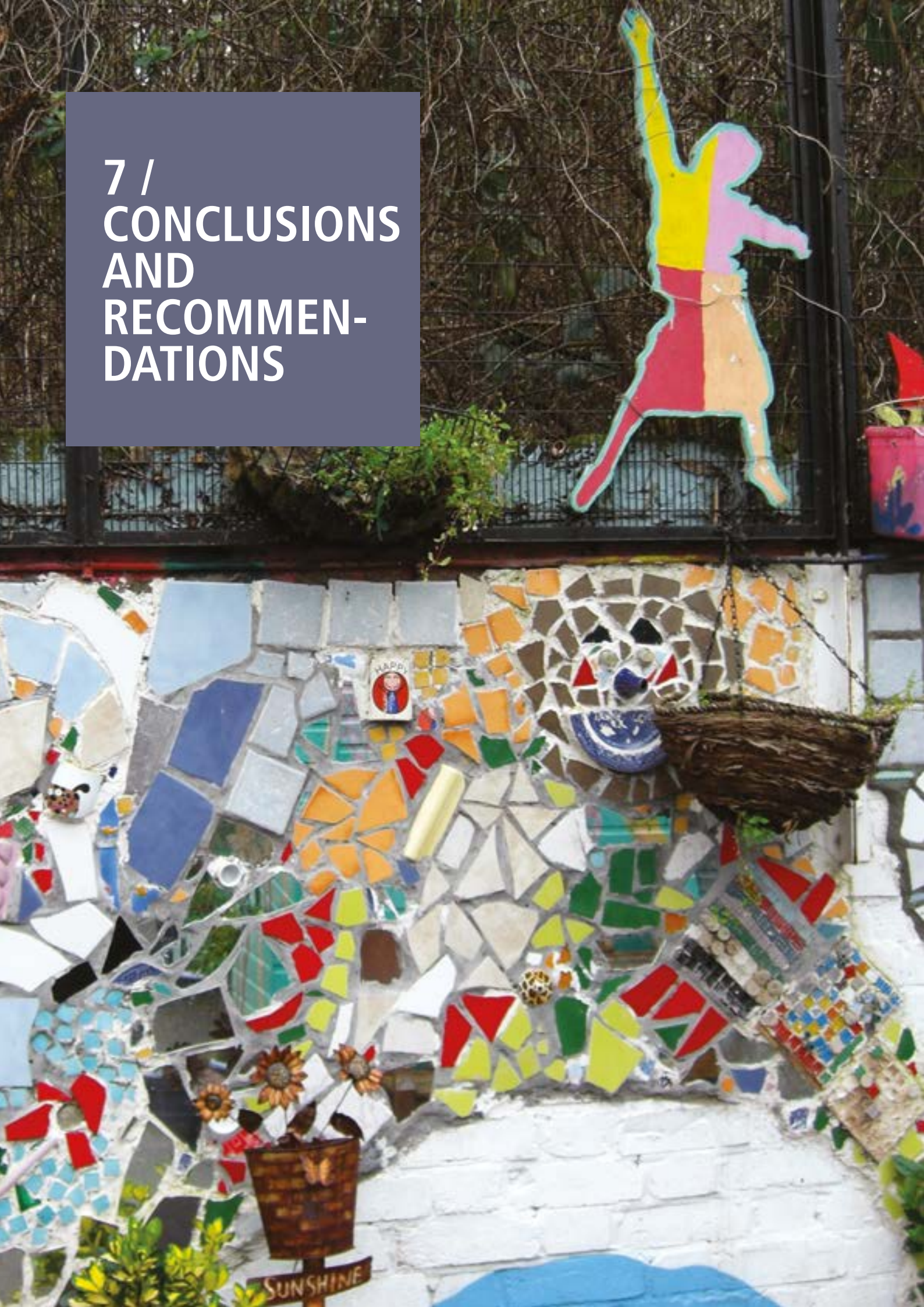
In particular, these challenges reveal the tensions, discrepancies and different approaches between the statutory and the third sector. Kids Company are able to retain flexibility, tailor care to the needs of the individual child and meet volume and complex demands thanks to their absolute focus on the child and their internal culture of commitment, motivation and shared intentionality towards children in need. Kids Company can model itself after the needs of the child, which is a challenge to the statutory sector, where constraints, regulations and administrative procedures tend to be central to the concerns of staff. The relations between the sectors are tense but necessary and important for delivering the best possible care for vulnerable children.

Considerations about the future point to a number of issues which staff and volunteers see as requiring reflection and constant attention:

- Communication and provision of guidance and information to volunteers of the charity;
- Increasing participation of families and parents in the work of the charity;
- Continuous development of leaders who can match Kids Company's exceptional leadership;
- To develop accountability and procedures without losing what is distinctive and unique about the charity: an absolute focus on the child and on the relational scaffolding.



# 7 / CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMEN- DATIONS





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# 7 / CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

## 7.1. KEY FINDINGS

The research presented in this report has investigated the organisation and model of intervention of Kids Company, a third sector charity based in the UK (mainly in London). The study adopted a multi-methodological design comprising a desk review of available research on the work of Kids Company, a survey, semi-structured interviews, focus groups discussions and observations. The research focused on the views, perceptions and experiences of staff and volunteers of Kids Company as they talk about their work and engage in daily activities. The key findings of the study are presented below.

### CLIENTS, WORK AND IMPACT

- Kids Company works with the most vulnerable children and youth. Its services reach 36,000 children, young people and their families. Its clients experience severe developmental adversity, being exposed to multiple risk factors that include food insecurity, poverty, poor housing, violence and social exclusion, abuse and substance misuse, low educational and employment aspirations, domestic maltreatment and unstable home environments.
- Developmental adversity is associated with changes in brain structure and function, genetic expression, behavioural, emotional and social dysregulation. The impact of adverse developmental conditions spans from the biology of the human body, to the psychology of the person to the cohesion and integration of communities and larger public spheres.
- Kids Company's model of intervention invests in the potential of neuroplasticity, providing actions and structures of support that can alter neural pathways and provide the opportunity for positive emotional and behavioural changes in vulnerable children and young people.
- Kids Company makes a substantial difference in the lives of its clients; its actions have positive impact

on multiple areas including practical knowledge to deal with financial issues and access to services, housing and accommodation, engagement with family members, criminal involvement, substance misuse, educational attainment and overall physical and emotional well-being.

- Interventions and programmes based on attachment have a positive impact on the cognitive, emotional and social capacities of the self. Research is underway to assess impact on neuro-cognitive development.
- Kids Company's services are heavily oversubscribed with demand outstripping capacity. The charity struggles to maintain its open-door policy.

### THE MODEL

- The model of work of Kids Company establishes interfaces at three levels: the children, their families and immediate environment, the statutory sector and the wider public sphere. The charity stands at the crossroads between vulnerable children/youth and the procedures, services and institutional framework of British society.
- Kids Company acts as mediators, facilitating communication between the interfaces sustained with clients, their social environment and the statutory sector.
- Kids Company works as brokers, translators and advocates giving visibility to the invisible, challenging dominant representations of children in need and demanding from authorities and statutory agencies that the needs of vulnerable children and young people are met.
- Kids Company acts as boundary crossers building bridges between their communities, corporate volunteers, the media and academia.
- Kids Company works with an absolute focus on the child and total commitment to the power of healthy attachment to change lives. They act as parents by proxy supporting the client unconditionally and providing nurturing and loving relationships.

- Kids Company's interventions aim to redefine the relational patterns experienced by children in need, offering positive attachment and unconditional support based on perseverance, the practice of love and long-term commitment to the relationship established.
- Kids Company is unafraid of using a language of emotions; it brings back to the debate about children in need the frequently absent language of emotional care and unconditional love as central for containment, healing and positive sociability.
- Kids Company uses cutting edge neurological and psychological evidence to inform its delivery and to design service provision. It integrates biological and psychosocial theories to better understand clients. It actively collaborates with researchers in academic institutions and its database is informing new research on developmental adversity and third sector interventions.
- Structures and actions of support operate internally and externally to facilitate dialogue and cross-fertilisation between the inside and the outside, or between the problems being addressed and the problem of addressing them, between the charity, its clients and the wider environment.
- Structures of support for staff address practical and emotional dimensions and involve multiple procedures and levels of interaction, including managerial, technological, peer and group-based and one-to-one exchanges that take place formally and informally.
- Kids Company enjoys the presence of an exceptional leader whose charisma, open-door policy and strong presence in the British public sphere greatly contribute to the effectiveness of the charity.
- Kids Company presents an exemplary model of psychosocial scaffolding interconnecting the emotional and practical scaffolding of delivery with the scaffolding of relations between clients and their families. Looking after staff so that staff can look after vulnerable children and families is paramount for the model of Kids Company. These different chains of scaffolding hold together the overall vision of Kids Company.
- Kids Company works with public services in areas such as social services, schools and the NHS, including local GPs, hospitals and mental health centres. It bears witness to the level of services delivered to vulnerable children and aims at holding the state accountable to children.
- Kids Company fills the gaps left open by the state and its services, welcoming and containing children and young people that are abandoned and excluded from school, from social services and other statutory institutions.
- Kids Company enjoys an internal environment where plurality of perspectives, multidisciplinary practice and openness to situations enhance bold decision making, a doer's attitude and flexibility to accommodate the challenging and demanding realities of clients.
- Kids Company presents exceptionally high levels of satisfaction and motivation amongst staff and volunteers. Staff and volunteers are proud of their work and profoundly committed to the organisation and its aims. They identify with the goals of the charity and feel empowered and individually rewarded by the work they deliver.
- Horizontal communication and peer support enhance the shared intentionality of the organisation and the feelings of well-being that permeate the work of staff. There is a positive sociability and a light atmosphere despite the nature of the problems that the charity addresses. This is beneficial for staff as well as for the children who come into these spaces to experience group cohesion, a positive social identity and a strong sense of community.
- Social capital based on high levels of cohesion and staff morale remains an important asset that is daily utilised to nurture the internal working environment of the charity and provide a positive model for the children.
- From documents and paper work, which clients often have difficulty understanding, to help at school, therapy and parenting by proxy, Kids Company helps to construct a gateway through which children and young people can enter the social order, develop trust and form healthy attachments to adults.

## DELIVERY AND INTERFACES

- The charity provides flexible and in-depth tailored engagement, adjusting its practices to the needs of individual clients on the ground. It combines a bottom-up, situation-led approach to theoretical and empirical evidence on the behaviour of vulnerable children.
- Therapy and the creative arts play a substantial role in the work of Kids Company enabling vulnerable children to expand cognitive and emotional skills and develop non-verbal languages to elaborate their experiences.

## CHALLENGES

- Limited and unstable funding is a major source of stress and anxiety for staff and a massive challenge for the sustainability of Kids Company.
- The interface with the statutory sector is a complex and considerable challenge, involving collaboration as well as constant tension due to divergent organisational cultures, different approaches to theory and practice, prejudices and preconceptions.
- An increase in bureaucracy and excessive

management can jeopardise the effectiveness of Kids Company and presents a challenge to its ability to sustain absolute focus on the needs of its clients.

## 7.2. LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The effectiveness of Kids Company lies on a combination of factors that include the evidence-based, theoretical foundations of its model, its flexibility and capacity to prioritise and sustain absolute focus on the needs of clients and the intertwining of delivery to staff motivation, dedication and commitment. These factors are held together by reciprocal chains of scaffolding fostered by strong leadership and enacted by staff and volunteers at multiple levels and interfaces in everyday practice.

A strong shared intentionality inside Kids Company – based on a vision that love and positive attachment are the pillars of healthy individuals and societies – motivates its total focus on the needs of vulnerable children and enables its actions towards the children, their communities, the statutory sector and society as a whole. Kids Company's staff identifies with the goals of the charity and feels empowered and individually rewarded by the work they contribute to deliver.

Acting as role models and crafting boundaries that teach clients the rules as well as the rewards of a positive social life, Kids Company is a boundary crosser and a multi-function mediator between vulnerable children and the wider public sphere. They give visibility to the invisible and work in-between the gaps left by the state, responding to the scarcity and inadequacy of services available to some of the most vulnerable children in the UK.

Future research should include other actors who contribute to the overall activities of Kids Company: the clients and their communities and the wider British public sphere, whose representations and policies towards vulnerable children are integral to the environment in which Kids Company operates and responds to.

Key conclusions and broad recommendations arising from this study are:

**Kids Company works directly to counteract the effects of developmental adversity, which is a major threat to the future of healthy societies and cohesive public spheres.**

- Support and invest in organisations that are addressing developmental adversity;
- Develop research collaborations and knowledge exchange initiatives that integrate work on developmental adversity across different domains and fields of intervention;
- Raise awareness about the negative impact of

developmental adversity on brain, mind and society;

- Recognise the expertise and experience of charities working on the ground for the development of research and policy.

**Kids Company combines flexibility and staff commitment to enable absolute focus on the needs of vulnerable children; its engagement offers to the child the knowledge that someone cares, loves and will not give them up, irrespective of any challenging and unstable response that may come back from the child.**

- Disseminate the approach of Kids Company and raise awareness about its model of psychosocial scaffolding for re-writing fractured lives;
- Foster debate and reflection amongst care professionals, researchers, policy makers and government about the role of love and unconditional support in the management of developmental adversity;
- Recognise that challenging behaviour is an adaptive response of vulnerable children to developmental adversity; blaming children and young people is unproductive and pushes them further away from positive sociality;
- Adjust formal systems to bottom-up realities that do not conform to rigid managerial cultures; faceless bureaucracies are expensive and ineffective in delivering care for those in need.

**Collaborations between Kids Company and the statutory sector involve substantial challenges; addressing these challenges is imperative for supporting children and young people in need, as dialogue and cooperation between sectors can be beneficial to all.**

- Develop spaces for dialogue and joint practice for staff working in Kids Company and the statutory sector;
- Create programmes for staff exchange and secondments between sectors;
- Share research and evaluations to minimise misconceptions and increase knowledge of how Kids Company works;
- Maximise the use of evidence produced by research partnerships to engage statutory services and raise awareness of Kids Company's work, strengthening the public sector's vision and strategy.

**Kids Company works as a border crosser and mediator between disadvantaged children and the wider public sphere; however, much work remains to be done to raise the visibility of vulnerable children and the work of the charity in the UK and internationally.**



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- Foster partnerships with different sectors in society and commit the private sector to engage with children in need;
  - Work with the media to raise awareness about the high levels of risk and marginalisation suffered by vulnerable children and other invisible populations living in the UK;
  - Consider the development of international partnerships that can connect the experience of the third sector in the UK to that of other societies.

In conclusion, this research has found that the model of work of Kids Company achieves much for some of the most vulnerable and invisible populations of London. Its commitment and open-door policy have guaranteed provision and support for thousands of children who are denied basic services and rights. But much remains to be done, in particular in the current economic and policy climate. Kids Company requires support from society and from the state to continue developing the excellence of its overall model of work. What they do shows that people in need respond to structures of support and their vision, practices and experience offer directions to society and government. Social policy and an ethics of care can and do change individual lives and communities.

The impact of broader structural factors on vulnerable children and young people cannot be ignored by statutory service provision. The practices, expertise and experience of Kids Company impact directly and positively on this future and offer a pool of resources and lessons for policy-makers, the statutory sector and society in general. Supporting children and young people is an active engagement with the future of society.

# A RESPONSE TO THE REPORT FROM URBAN WISDOM

Urban Wisdom is a platform for the young people of Kids Company to have their opinions heard. We have been supported by Kids Company with issues such as our housing, immigration statuses and accessing education, and now we serve to inform and educate society.

After having read the report, we at Urban Wisdom can hands up agree that the keyworking model in place at Kids Company does work and is being lived up to by its members of staff. The understanding of the model being used by the staff members is on the money, and it's good to see that this report has shown that.

*"Having a keyworker really helped me keep focus and on track with my goals. I was also able gain more confidence to take on independent tasks. It was good to have someone by my side helping to jump all my hurdles in life, may they be physical, emotional or mental."*

The blurred boundaries topic mentioned in the report is an issue that we all felt important to bring up, as we ourselves at Urban Wisdom are a direct result of it. We have all had our own keyworkers in the past, some of us still do. Kids Company has allowed us to evolve, develop and go through this metamorphosis with the utmost care and support, and now we stand as Urban Wisdom; a spear head for young people.

*"At first I had a lot of resistance towards my keyworker and there was also a lot of misunderstanding. However, once we both found our 'foot' so to speak I felt supported and encouraged, something that I never have before."*

We have come to think of our keyworkers as friends, mentors and positive adult role models. They have given us space for our minds and our surroundings to grow.

*"My keyworker gave me the space to flourish and grow while he watched from the side-line, motivating me to carry on by saying things such as 'you're doing good' and 'keep it up'."*

The support given by keyworkers ranges anywhere from practical to emotional support and this is something we have experienced as being quite lacking in statutory services. Keyworkers go that extra mile because it is so personalised. They also in some cases take on an almost parental role, which can be quite nice ... sometimes!

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S QUOTES

*"The Oxford English dictionary definition for mother is: 'Woman in relation to a child to whom she has given birth' Everyone has one of those. But what about after birth? What does it mean to be a mother? The relationship between mother and child is crucial to the child's successful development, yet some mothers think their role ends at the definition above. The definition for mothering is: 'To bring up (a child) with care and affection.'"*  
(Freya, aged 22)

*"This is my heaven, art, cooking, gardening. It's like a family and I feel looked after."*  
(Tyler, aged 10)

*"This is the only place I come where adults are nice to me. I get to do loads of different activities and eat nice dinners."*  
(Dannyella, aged 9)

*"It's exciting to be picked up by Kids Company, because they always ask how my day at school was and they speak to my teachers for me and come to my parents evening too."*  
(JJ, aged 8)

*"Kids Company is a lifeline for a lot of people. If there was no Kids Company a lot of people would be on the street with nowhere to go for help. There should be a Kids Company in every city."*  
(Kane, aged 13)

*"I always do homework club because my mum can't read or write so can't help me."*  
(Jonny, aged 8)

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# APPENDIX 1

## Kids Company's Research Project List

KIDS COMPANY'S RESEARCH PROJECT LIST	RESEARCH PARTNERS
1. Neurocognitive correlates of abuse and neglect: baseline neurocognitive profile, response to therapeutic intervention and the role of genotype	University College London/Developmental Risk and Resilience Unit
2. Neurophysiological and genetic markers of childhood maltreatment	King's College London, Institute of Psychiatry
3. Three year research fellowship in child and adolescent mental health and social policy/epigenetics research program	University of Cambridge, Department of Developmental Psychiatry
4. A community-based concept study of neurocognitive mechanisms associated with behavioural change in children with conduct problems who are offered services by Kids Company	Anna Freud Centre
5. Cognitive deficit among young offenders	University of Portsmouth
6. Neurodevelopmental markers of antisocial behaviours – a pilot study	GOSH/Institute of Child Health
7. Challenging ideas about disaffection: maximising policy and practice impact	South Bank University
8. Building psychological resilience through bio-feedback psycho-education and coping skills training in a selected sample of socially and emotionally deprived adolescents in London	University of Bristol
9. Resilience and Empathy in a sample of Kids Company's vulnerable population of adolescents	Kids Company/Anna Freud Centre
10. Mentalisation based integrative multimodel practice, now called AMBIT (Adolescent Mentalisation Based Integrative Therapy)	Anna Freud Centre
11. Attachment and the inner world of Kids Company children	Kids Company Anna Freud Centre
12. Kids Company key working model analysis	Tavistock Clinic/University of East London
13. Integrating neurobiology into the understanding management and prevention of antisocial behaviour an ethnography of policy and practice	London School of Economics
14. Need Analysis on a sample of high-risk clients (ITsOK). Study includes supplementary information from an analysis of Dial Assessments, the PedsQL assessments and the generalized anxiety disorder scale for those over 18.	University College London
15. Against the odds: a case study of developing community participation with vulnerable inner city children	Sussex University
16. Evaluation of Kids Company's 'Legit Living' programme	Centre for Social Work Research University of East London and Tavistock Clinic
17. 'U-Design-it' Ultra-large scale participatory design with social media tools: in collaboration with Kids Company	Lancaster University
18. Using dynamic stimuli and eye movement techniques to develop an emotion training programme: can emotion recognition and empathy be enhanced in adolescents with conduct disorder?	Southampton University
19. An exploration of food poverty and energy and nutrient deficiencies in London primary school children	University of Leeds

## APPENDIX 2

### Online Survey

#### THE WORK RELATED WELL-BEING QUESTIONNAIRE

HOW TO FILL IN THIS QUESTIONNAIRE:

- There are no **right or wrong** answers to any of the questions we ask.
- Each member of staff/volunteer may hold a number of different opinions and this is a big part of what interests us.
- **Everything you tell us will be kept strictly confidential.**

Please **try to answer all the questions asked**. It is very important that the questionnaire is completed as fully as possible, so we can get a full picture of your work related well-being.

Kids Company Centre:

Are you a member of staff or a volunteer? ☒ Staff ☐ Volunteer

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
1. There is a real interest in the welfare and well-being of the people who work here.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2. When problems arise and leaders are made aware of them, they are addressed promptly.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3. Overall, staff and volunteers have a clear and shared understanding of what we are trying to achieve.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4. Staff and volunteers are achieving things we can be proud of.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5. I have the resources to do my job well.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6. I have the skills and training to do my job well.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7. It is rare for me to feel that my job is dull or boring.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8. I am clear about my role and responsibilities.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9. I feel that I contribute to the success of the organisation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10. When my work becomes emotionally demanding, I know that I can get support from the organisation.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. I feel I am doing a good job.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. I feel my contribution is valued.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13. My performance is appropriately monitored.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. My performance is appropriately managed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15. If the pressure of work is ever too great, I feel I can go to others for support and help.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16. I have the opportunity to use my skills and initiative in my work.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
17. All staff and volunteers help to create a friendly, caring atmosphere.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
18. Staff and volunteers support and value one another.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
19. Under pressure, staff and volunteers all pull together.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Additional comments:

Thank you. Now please click once on the button below to send us your completed survey.

**Submit**



## APPENDIX 3

Table of Descriptive Variables

The table below shows frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations for the Work Related Well-Being Questionnaire (N=85). A mean cut off score of  $\geq 4.5$  was used to identify questionnaire statements that staff and volunteers on average agreed/strongly agreed with and frequencies for each of these statements are displayed below.

QUESTIONNAIRE ITEM	STRONGLY DISAGREE N %	DISAGREE N %	NEUTRAL N %	AGREE N %	STRONGLY AGREE N %	RESPONSE MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION
1. There is a real interest in the welfare and well-being of the people who work here.	1 (1)	2 (2)	11 (13)	36 (43)	34 (40)	4.19 (.84)
2. When problems arise and leaders are made aware of them, they are addressed promptly.	1 (1)	8 (9)	16 (19)	44 (52)	16 (19)	3.78 (.90)
3. Overall, staff and volunteers have a clear and shared understanding of what we are trying to achieve.	1 (1)	3 (4)	10 (12)	41 (48)	30 (35)	4.13 (.84)
4. Staff and volunteers are achieving things we can be proud of.	0 (0)	1 (1)	2 (2)	22 (26)	60 (71)	4.66 (.59)
5. I have the resources to do my job well.	1 (1)	6 (7)	21 (25)	42 (51)	13 (16)	3.72 (.86)
6. I have the skills and training to do my job well.	1 (1)	1 (1)	5 (6)	37 (44)	40 (48)	4.36 (.75)
7. It is rare for me to feel that my job is dull or boring.	0 (0)	1 (1)	4 (5)	22 (26)	57 (68)	4.61 (.64)
8. I am clear about my role and responsibilities.	0 (0)	3 (4)	13 (15)	31 (36)	38 (45)	4.22 (.84)
9. I feel that I contribute to the success of the organisation.	0 (0)	1 (1)	3 (4)	28 (33)	52 (62)	4.56 (.63)
10. When my work becomes emotionally demanding, I know that I can get support from the organisation.	0 (0)	1 (1)	8 (10)	32 (39)	41 (50)	4.38 (.71)
11. I feel I am doing a good job.	0 (0)	0 (0)	3 (4)	38 (47)	40 (49)	4.46 (.57)
12. I feel my contribution is valued.	0 (0)	5 (6)	10 (12)	34 (40)	36 (42)	4.19 (.87)
13. My performance is appropriately monitored.	1 (1)	4 (5)	19 (22)	37 (45)	21 (26)	3.89 (.89)
14. My performance is appropriately managed.	1 (1)	3 (4)	20 (24)	33 (40)	25 (30)	3.95 (.90)
15. If the pressure of work is ever too great, I feel I can go to others for support and help.	0 (0)	2 (3)	7 (9)	32 (40)	39 (49)	4.35 (.75)
16. I have the opportunity to use my skills and initiative in my work.	1 (1)	0 (0)	6 (7)	29 (35)	48 (57)	4.46 (.74)
17. All staff and volunteers help to create a friendly, caring atmosphere.	0 (0)	0 (0)	11 (13)	31 (37)	41 (49)	4.36 (.71)
18. Staff and volunteers support and value one another.	0 (0)	2 (2)	8 (10)	33 (39)	41 (49)	4.35 (.75)
19. Under pressure, staff and volunteers all pull together.	0 (0)	1 (1)	9 (11)	34 (41)	38 (46)	4.33 (.72)

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## APPENDIX 4

### Topic Guide for Interviews and Focus Groups

#### AIMS

- To gather the perceptions and experiences of service delivery from the perspective of KC staff, specifically:
  - To share understandings of how KC staff operate and impact clients;
  - To discuss the challenges KC staff face to meet their profound and complex clients' needs;
  - To highlight the resources KC staff draw on to overcome challenges, particularly how they are being supported in their line of work;
  - To explore how KC staff relate to the impact of KC work according to academic research;
  - To collectively think about the future of KC.

#### GUIDANCE

- This Topic Guide is intended to be flexible: moderators will use it to provide a framework for discussions – it is not to be interpreted as a question-by-question structured checklist; issues will therefore be explored or ignored according to relevance/importance to specific participants and tailored to the specific centre, context and dynamics.

#### INTRODUCTION

##### **Why are we here? Research and evaluation role**

- Gathering people's views and experiences: we are interested in your collective experiences, in the cross-cutting issues you faced as KC staff who are doing in-depth and complex child & youth engagement work, so that your views can better inform KC and wider audiences about KC's model of service delivery.
- Will cover 4 areas in our discussion today
- Discussion led by our independent research LSE team
- Confidentiality and anonymity (emphasize that all information given in these discussions will be treated in complete confidence – no individuals will be identified in any reporting and their views will remain confidential, all transcriptions and extracts will be anonymised)
- Consent for audio-recording
- Duration: 1.5 hours

##### **1. DESCRIPTION OF ROLE AND MOTIVATION**

- "Round table" introductions: staff's position & time spent at KC
- I would like to begin by asking you to please describe in more detail your role here at KC.

(Collectively map out the nature of the roles identified in the group)

- What motivated you to join KC?

##### **2. THE CLIENT: BACKGROUND AND INFORMATION**

- Who are the children & YP that come to your centre?
- What are some of their backgrounds and life trajectories?
- What are the unmet needs that children & YP have?
- What are the personal resources and skills that children & YP have?

##### **3. THE WORK: EXPERIENCES OF DELIVERY AND IMPACT, VIEWS, CHALLENGES AND RESOURCES**

##### **Mapping exercise**

**Moderator (with aid of observer):** Please set-up the flip chart for the mapping exercise. Invite participants to think about visualizing the following: "What type of support do your clients receive through KC?" by picturing one client's case as they navigate through KC services. Ask participants to give you suggestions on how to visualize this journey into the flip chart. Then, use the questions and diagram to explore the following four areas:

##### **Delivery**

- Can we start by talking about your experience of delivery and impact? How is KC delivery carried out in your daily practice? *Probe:* tell us about your experiences in any way you want really, what matters to you, how it is, what you like, dislike, etc.
- What would you say are the key strengths of KC's delivery model?
- *Evaluation:* Is it working? Why/Why not?
- How has this support made a difference to their life circumstances?
- What is it about the support you give them that leads to (any) improvements in their lives?
- What do you think would have happened if this service did not exist? What would these children & YP do?

##### **Challenges**

- On a daily basis, what are the main difficulties you have faced in your work?

##### **Resources to overcome challenges**

- Given the challenges you described, how do you overcome them?
- What type of support do you receive? How do you see the role of regular supervision?

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### **The Future**

- Five years down the road, what would you like to see KC become? *Probe:*
  - Roles it would play in children's lives
  - What would be different about the role you currently play in KC now
  - Plans for KC rolling out services to reach a wider audience
- Is KC sustainable? Why/Why not?
- Are there any suggestions you would like to make for improving your delivery?

### **4. VIEWS OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH IN RELATION TO PRACTICE**

- Let me read a short description extracted from a journal article about the KC model (source: Lemma, 2010 – Journal of Social Work Practice)

*“Kids Company provides an impressive model of continuity of care that cuts across the unhelpful and artificial divisions that exist in many areas between services for young people and adults” (Lemma, 2010, p. 424).*

- What are your views about this?
- How does this match/line up your experience on the ground? *Probe:* to what extent does this relate to your experience?
- Let me read another short description about the neurobiology of maltreatment (based on: McCrory & Viding, 2010 – The Lancet)

- We still know very little about the role of adversity in psychological distress. However, research shows that it is likely that the nature of the environment (i.e, quality of care and nurture, vs. maltreatment) that interacts with the child's individual makeup to shape the development of the brain as well as the child's psychological and emotional development.
- What are your views about this?
- How does this match/line up your experience on the ground? *Probe:* to what extent does this relate to your experience?

### **Closing questions:**

- What are KC main successes?
- What are the key lessons which you think could be identified to new KC staff ahead of embarking on KC work? *Probe:* what advice would you give to a new staff member just starting out?

### **Thanks and conclusions**

- Is there anything else any of you would like to add that we haven't covered?
- Thanks, enriching experience for LSE research team and best wishes.

## APPENDIX 5

### Observation Template

**Date of observation:**

**Kids Company Centre:**

**Title of activity:**

**Observer:**

**Duration of activity observed:**

**Kids Company delivery staff:**

**Aims of observation:**

- To document observations of delivery activities at Kids Company Centre(s) *in practice*: by identifying how Kids Company's staff operate, their priorities and impact on clients. Specifically:
- To report actions and behavioural patterns as explicitly as possible (i.e., staff approaches child warmly and touches, embraces child, no psychical contact, child recoils, child embraces back, etc);
- To document strengths and good practice;
- To identify the main challenges for the delivery of activity(ies);
- To find out what resources Kids Company staff draw on to overcome challenges;
- If applicable to activity: to gather level of engagement with Kids Company's academic research.

**Description of Kids Company Centre/venue (mapping of environment and use of space):**

**Clients (and/or other audiences):**

- ~Numbers attending or reached (note where possible):
- Gender (male/ female or mixed):
- Age groups:
  - <11 years old
  - 11–14 years-old
  - 15–23 years-old
  - 24+
- Mixed ages/non-specific
- Ethnic backgrounds:

**Observation of activity (nature of support):**

**Sensitive assessment interview:**

Targeting practical support		Details on context of delivery
Nature of support (check all that apply)		
Food		
Clothing		
Housing		
Welfare		
Benefits		
Physical health		
Play materials		
Legal support		
Other (relevant to activity/context):		



<b>Targeting Emotional support</b>		<b>Details on context of delivery</b>
<b>Nature of support (check all that apply)</b>		
Compassion		
Empathy		
Commitment		
Nurturing		
Social Pedagogy/Pro-social modelling		
Stabilising child's needs		
Other (relevant to activity/context):		
<b>Targeting Educational support</b>		<b>Details on context of delivery</b>
<b>Nature of support (check all that apply)</b>		
Instructional support		
Special needs support		
A-level/GSCE preparation		
Initial assessment and lesson planning		
Other (relevant to activity/context):		
<b>Challenges/barriers faced</b>		<b>Details on situational context</b>
<b>Nature of barrier (check all that apply)</b>		
Workload		
Resources (material)		
Staff capacity (emotional)		
Staff capacity (task/functional)		
Staff/beneficiary ratio		
Peer-peer staff relations		
Client-related challenges		
External capacity		
Other (relevant to activity/context):		

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# APPENDIX 6

## Coding Frame (NVivo)

### 1. General features of the model

- 1.1. Flexibility
  - 1.1.1. Client-centred
  - 1.1.1. Pragmatism
- 1.2. Parenting by proxy
  - 1.2.1. Building nurturing relationships
  - 1.2.2. Authenticity
  - 1.2.3. Socio-emotional dimensions of the environment
  - 1.2.4. Seeing past 'bad' behaviour
- 1.3. Re-writing the self
- 1.4. Boundary crafting
  - 1.4.1. Boundary setting
  - 1.4.2. Crossing boundaries
- 1.5. Commitment and continuity
  - 1.5.1. Staff satisfaction and motivation
- 1.6. Making the invisible visible

### 2. Chains of scaffolding for efficacy of delivery

- 2.1. Staff enabling practices
  - 2.1.1. One-to-one support
  - 2.1.2. Peer & group-based support
  - 2.1.3. Sharing information
  - 2.1.4. Managerial support
- 2.2. Facets of delivery
  - 2.2.1. Child-centred and tailoring
  - 2.2.2. Interactive and therapeutic approach
  - 2.2.3. Multidisciplinary work
  - 2.2.4. Evidence-based approach
  - 2.2.5. Building interfaces
    - 2.2.5.1. Interfaces with the statutory sector
    - 2.2.5.2. Interfaces with families
- 2.3. Chains of scaffolding
  - 2.3.1. Scaffolding staff
    - 2.3.1.1. Delivery support
    - 2.3.1.2. Emotional support
  - 2.3.2. Scaffolding relations between children and their families

### 3. Meeting clients needs

- 3.1. Keyworking
  - 3.1.1. Practical
  - 3.1.2. Emotional
  - 3.1.3. Educational
  - 3.1.4. Social/recreational
  - 3.1.5. Imaginative
- 3.2. Colour a Child's Life
- 3.3. Mentoring
- 3.4. Perspective on impact
  - 3.4.1. Clients
  - 3.4.2. Staff

### 4. Challenges

- 4.1. Interface with the state
- 4.2. Limited funding and availability of resources
- 4.3. Emotional resources
  - 4.3.1. Boundaries
- 4.4. Workload
- 4.5. Formal communications
- 4.6. Management
- 4.7. Attitudes towards therapy

### 5. The future

- 5.1. Suggestions









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Final Report  
Kids Company: A Diagnosis of the Organisation and its  
Interventions

This report can be downloaded from the LSE website at  
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