Project proposal

What is the current situation?

Government statistics indicate that from March 2019 - March 2020, there were 80080 ‘looked-after’ children in the UK (Department for Education, 2020). The government defines ‘looked-after’ as children who are accommodated by a local authority or children who are subject to either a care order or a placement order (i.e. are seeking adoption) (Department for Education, 2021). The National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children helpfully clarifies this as those living with foster parents, those living in residential children’s homes and those living in ‘residential settings’ such as boarding schools and ‘secure units’ (NSPCC, 2021). Though ‘looked-after’ children are housed, fed and clothed, in many cases they lack the (emotional and moral) support and role models traditionally provided by parents.

What are the problems with the current situation?

These children possess the potential to excel academically, socially and in career terms and to lead fulfilling lives, but they need support and guidance to realise this potential. Often, they have nobody who can help them with their homework, nobody to attend parent’s evenings or to liaise with teachers, they have few opportunities to observe their guardians’ interactions with other people and limited access to hobbies or extra-curricular activities where they interact with others.

What is the effect of these problems you have identified?

These children often struggle academically and may disengage from - or completely abandon – formal education before age eighteen. Absence of formal qualifications hinders employment prospects, negatively affecting self-esteem and personal fulfilment. Without anybody to encourage them to persist and to maintain aspirations, academic failure will demoralize children and may foster pessimism.

Such failures may foster feelings of exclusion and resentment. Furthermore, observing parents’ social interactions and navigating the social aspect of school are integral to children’s development. The children may mature more slowly than their peers mentally and emotionally, disadvantaging them in young adulthood.

People who feel excluded are more likely to commit crime, less likely to be employed and therefore more likely to claim state benefits. This has social and economic implications for wider society. Furthermore, there will always be shortages of skills and labour in some economic sectors, so it is in the interests of society to minimise loss/waste of human potential.

What is your proposed solution?

A web application to connect children – who have nobody to help them with their homework – with undergraduates who can tutor them, perhaps also inspiring assumption of positive habits and behaviours.

School children register as clients and their registration must be validated by a guardian before they can use the application. They request help with homework, posting a brief description of the subject and topic of the homework.

Undergraduates register (using an ‘.ac.uk’ email address) as tutors and their registration must be validated by their personal tutor at university. Tutors browse requests for help, respond to those they feel able to assist with, arrange an appointment with the client, generate a Zoom link and send it to the client as a QR code.

What will be the benefit of your proposed solutions?

A higher proportion of disadvantaged children are supported to achieve academic success. They mature – mentally and emotionally – and progress academically at a similar rate to their peers, averting the risk of falling behind and its associated disadvantages in adulthood.

Consequently, a higher proportion of children in compulsory education have better mental and emotional health, higher self-esteem and confidence, they finish compulsory education with higher quality qualifications and are better prepared for adult life.

Bibliography

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