MCR Pathways - supporting young vulnerable individuals to be the best they can be through one to one mentoring.

SPIRU
SCOTTISH POVERTY & INEQUALITY RESEARCH UNIT

How-to Guide

This guide offers more detailed information and advice for those who may be interested in adopting or adapting the initiative in their local area.

This document comprises the following sections (click hyperlink to skip to that section)

- Initial Idea
- Early Development of the Project
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- Working with People with Lived Experience of Poverty
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- Funding
- Staffing and Resources
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Title	MCR Pathways - supporting young vulnerable individuals to be the best they can be through one to one mentoring.
Lead Organisation	MCR Pathways.
All Organisations	MCR Pathways. Local authorities. Local schools. Local Colleges. Community organisations. Public sector partners. Private sector partners. Third sector organisations.
Category	The pathway has been successful across Scotland and has expanded into England.
Poverty Impact	Prevention Mitigation Awareness

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Introduction to the Project

The MCR Pathways project provides support to young care experienced individuals and/or individuals facing, or who have faced instability in their lives. It achieves this though connecting them with trained volunteer, community-based mentors.

Working through partner organisations, traditionally schools, MCR Pathways matches young people with trusted adults who meet them regularly with the aim of building a supportive relationship based on life guidance, encouragement, and practical support.

The Project is grounded in a strengths-based approach around the principles of social capital. Aims are to improve confidence, attendance, attainment, wellbeing and future aspirations in the client group though consistent mentoring relationships. Such relationships are aimed at helping young people to recognise their strengths and abilities and progress into sustainable employment and educational pathways.

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Initial Idea

Who had the initial idea?	Dr. Iain McRitchie.
How did the idea for the project come about?	
The programme emerged in response to a gap identified by Dr Iain McRitchie related to the support available for young people in care or vulnerable young adults. The project was a response to try and fill that identified gap related to addressing the impact of trauma and adverse childhood experiences on educational achievement, confidence and self-esteem at a local level.	
Were plans informed by any published reports / papers / research evidence or practice from elsewhere?	Yes
Scottish Government – We Can and Must Do Better strategy Around 2007, care-experienced young people faced a significant attainment gap compared with their peers, with poorer qualifications and higher rates of disengagement and exclusion from school. The Scottish Government's We Can and Must Do Better strategy sought to address inequalities within the education system. This policy focus helped inform the development of MCR Pathways, particularly the introduction of school-based mentoring to address the inequalities experienced by care-experienced young people.	
Was anyone else involved in developing the initial idea of the project?	Yes
Two key individuals were instrumental in developing the MCR Pathways programme through the Glasgow City Council pilot: Donna Cunningham – Education Officer, Glasgow City Council. Bruce Malone – Headteacher, St Andrew's RC Secondary School, Glasgow.	

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Were those with lived experience of poverty involved in developing the initial idea of the project?	Yes
Care-experienced young people participated in the original 2007 pilot programme, helping to shape the development of MCR Pathways. Since then, the organisation has continued to embed young people's voices and experiences through its Young National Advisory Group (YNAB) and ongoing policy and public affairs engagement, ensuring the programme continues to be informed by lived experience.	
Was funding required to support the development of the initial idea of the project?	Yes
Which organisation provided funding?	Dr Iain McRitchie, founder of MCR Pathways.
How much was required?	Private & Personal Investment.
What was the specific source of funding?	Not specified.

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Were specific resources – other than funding - needed when developing the initial idea of the project?	Yes
Staff/Volunteer Time	Dedicated volunteer time was essential to providing mentoring support to young people. Delivery partners, including local authorities and schools, were needed to facilitate access to young people. Paid staff were also required to provide training, support, coordination and oversight for mentors, working partners, and young people.
Facilities / Workspace	Local Authorities and schools provided in-kind facilities, support and space for mentoring sessions to take place.
Equipment	N/A
Local Knowledge	Local knowledge provided by mentors and partners helped create the conditions for building supportive relationships, offering guidance and encouragement, and strengthening young people's sense of belonging. Practitioners' and managers' knowledge of local communities also supported the effective delivery of mentoring services, including safeguarding.
Food and Drink	N/A
Did any barriers have to be overcome when developing the initial idea of the project?	Yes

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Perceptions, attitudes and awareness: In the early days, there were barriers to overcome in terms of individual and organisational perceptions, attitudes and awareness of what mentoring actually involved. Trust and partnership working: Schools, traditionally territorial statutory education providers, had to work in partnership with and place their trust in an external organisation coming into schools to directly support the young people they were educating. This represented a notable change and required considerable trust and supportive partnership agreements to overcome.	
Did anything in particular enable development of the initial idea of the project?	Yes
The founders engagement with Children's Homes: This experience fuelled a passion to ensure every young person in care had the opportunity to realise their own potential with someone that was there for them, not a professional but a trusted adult who prioritised their dreams and wellbeing.	
How long did it take between having the initial idea and starting the project?	The project began at St Andrew's School in Glasgow in 2007. It took approximately seven years to expand to all 30 schools in Glasgow by 2014/15. In 2020, MCR Pathways expanded into other parts of Scotland, followed by Southeast England in 2022/23. The programme increased its presence across Scotland in 2024 and launched in Northeast England in 2025.
Who made the decision to introduce the project?	The decision to progress with the project was made by its founder, Dr Iain MacRitchie and its board of trustees.

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Early Development

Was there a pilot project or feasibility study or test of change?	Yes
What did the Pilot study. involve?	
The initial pilot involved providing mentoring support to young people through a school-based programme in Glasgow. The experiences and feedback of the first young mentees helped shape the programme's subsequent development.	
Who was responsible for the Pilot study.?	
The Founder, Dr. Iain MacRitchie	
Were those with lived experience of poverty among those involved in the design or delivery?	Yes
The mentoring programme was shaped by the first young mentees who participated in the original pilot. Since then, young people have been integral to the direction and development of MCR Pathways. Their voices are embedded in the organisation's governance structure, and they are regularly consulted on their experiences, views and ideas.	

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Was funding required to support the Pilot study.?	Yes
Which organisation provided funding?	Initial private and personal investment was provided by the founder, Dr Iain MacRitchie.
How much was required?	Following the initial investment, the Scottish Government increased its investment to support expansion beyond Glasgow City Council.
What was the specific source of funding?	Not specified.
Were specific resources – other than funding - needed for the Pilot study.?	Yes
Staff/Volunteer Time	Dedicated volunteer time was essential to providing mentoring support to young people. Delivery partners, including local authorities and schools, facilitated access to young people. Paid staff provided training, support, coordination and oversight for mentors, local partners, and young people.
Facilities / Workspace	Local authorities and schools provided in-kind facilities, support, and space for mentoring to take place.
Equipment	N/A
Local Knowledge	N/A
Food and Drink	N/A

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Was the Pilot study. evaluated?	Yes
https://www.therobertsontrust.org.uk/publications/mcr-pathways-evaluation https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-mentoring-leadership-programme-impact-value-money-evaluation/pages/9/	
Was there evidence from the Pilot study. that confirmed that it was working / it would work?	Yes
The evaluation evidence cited in the case study reported improvements in educational outcomes for care-experienced young people. Findings highlighted the importance of MCR Pathways' personalised mentoring approach and reported that the programme exceeded its financing targets.	
Who made the decision to continue with the project beyond the xxx?	
The decision to continue and expand the programme was made by the founder, Dr Iain MacRitchie, and its Board of Trustees with support from wider stakeholders.	
Was the design of the project proper modified following the Pilot study.?	Yes
The programme has expanded beyond the school setting to include mentoring support for young people disengaged from school through community mentoring. This is in addition to continuous one-on-one support for young people who are transitioning into college through post-school mentoring.	

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Accessing the Service and Engaging with Service Users

Are potential users referred to your Initiative.?	Yes
Partners including Schools, social work, college, third sector and the local community identify young people who are facing a range of barriers and challenges i.e.- a young person identified as at risk from school attrition, or a young person disengaged from normative educational practices.	
Are there ways, other than referral, that are used to make potential users aware of your Initiative.?	Yes
• Young people and families: • Word of mouth: Young people already engaging with MCR Pathways share their mentoring experiences with friends and family, helping other young people become aware of the programme. • Parents and carers: Parents and carers familiar with MCR Pathways promote the programme to other families, community groups and potential partners. • Social media: Young people and families can learn about the programme through social media. • Volunteer mentors: • Media campaigns: Social media, radio, Spotify and local press campaigns raise awareness of volunteering opportunities. • Community engagement: Information stalls at events, information sessions and engagement with community groups help attract potential mentors. • Partnerships: Initiatives with local employers and volunteering platforms promote mentoring opportunities. • Word of mouth: Existing mentors encourage friends, family and colleagues to become volunteers. • Online searches: Google searches direct potential mentors to the MCR Pathways website, where they can register their interest in volunteering.	

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What is the most common way through which users typically access your Initiative.?	
Social media, particularly Facebook and LinkedIn.	
Do you take steps to keep in touch / reach out to users?	Yes

We keep in touch with service users through:

- Weekly mentoring sessions. Young people meet with their mentors once a week, providing regular opportunities for communication and support.
- Events and activities such as term events, group activities, Youth Voice opportunities, mentor coffee conversations, and celebration events such as MCR Pathways' UK-wide event; The Summit.
- Young people can access the Hub after leaving the programme, providing ongoing access to opportunities and support.
- Mentor Hub's provide Mentors with access to regular communication avenues and up-to-date resources through the Mentor Hub.
- Each Mentor has a dedicated contact within the MCR Pathways, Mentor Services team which provides ongoing communication and support.
- Local coffee conversations, celebration events and national events provide additional opportunities for Mentor communication, support and engagement.

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Working with People with Lived Experience of Poverty

Are those with lived experience of poverty involved in <u>delivering</u> the project?	Yes
Many volunteer mentors come from the same communities as the young people they support and have lived experience of overcoming socio-economic barriers and poverty. They draw on these experiences to provide guidance and support. Some MCR Pathways' colleagues have experienced the challenges faced by the young people they support, enabling better empathic engagement. Young people have also helped to shape the delivery of the programme through feedback and advisory roles, including participation in the Young National Advisory Group (YNAB), which has enabled the programme to remain relevant to service users' needs and experiences.	
Are people with lived experience of poverty involved in <u>managing</u> the project or in project <u>governance</u>?	Yes
Two contributors with lived experience of poverty are involved in the delivery, leadership, and management of the project. Names are not provided to protect individual privacy and confidentiality.	
Are people with lived experience of poverty involved <u>in any other aspect</u> of the project?	Yes
The Young National Advisory Board and members of MCRP board of trustees have lived experience of poverty. Such insights have allowed for better guidance and feedback on the programmes direction, delivery and impact.	

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Leadership, Governance and Partnership Working

Who is responsible for managing the project?	
The CEO has the day to day responsibility of managing the project while the Board of Trustees have overall accountability for the Project's management.	
Is this the only responsibility of the person managing the project?	No
The CEO is also responsible for income generation, governance and regulatory compliance, risk management, strategic stakeholder leadership, workforce development, staff welfare, safeguarding, and fiscal stewardship. The Board of Trustees is jointly and legally responsible for the overall control, strategic direction and administration of MCR Pathways. Its responsibilities include ensuring compliance with governing documents and legislation, advancing the charity's purposes for public benefit, managing assets, and acting in the best interests of MCR Pathways.	
What proportion of the manager's overall workload is given over to this project?	
Not specified.	
Is there a Project Steering or Advisory Group?	Yes
Who is involved?	MCRP Board. YNAB (Young National Advisory Board). Mentor Ambassadors. Volunteer Trustees. Young People and Volunteer Mentors.

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How does it work?	Primarily, YNAB function as a sounding board, and shape ideas through the YP lens. The MCRP Board both challenges and supports the CEO/Organisation on the programme's direction, delivery, and development.
Are any other governance arrangements in place to review strategy and performance?	Yes

The Executive Team leads the strategic review process, producing an annual report to evidence progress towards strategic objectives and programme delivery impact.

The Senior Management Team oversees organisational performance through an organisation-wide operational performance plan.

Performance management processes are in place across the UK operation, with quarterly performance updates provided to the MCR Pathways Board of Trustees.

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Links to Wider Policies, Strategies and Statutory Requirements

To the best of your knowledge, is the project aligned with national and/or local anti-poverty strategies and priorities (e.g., local authority or health board priorities)?	Yes
The programme is aligned with national anti-poverty strategies in both Scotland and England. In Scotland, Bringing Hope, Building Futures supports the importance of relationship-based practice within communities. In England, MCR Pathways aligns with the Westminster Government's Our Children, Our Future Tackling Child Poverty Strategy.	
In your opinion, has the project benefitted from being part of this anti-poverty strategy?	Yes
MCR Pathways' alignment with national anti-poverty strategies and policies is vital to its work. These strategies provide an important framework and act as enablers in supporting the organisation's vision and mission across multiple sectors. Engagement with these strategies through public affairs work also provides opportunities for young people receiving mentoring to share their views and experiences, helping to influence how other young people are supported.	
Is the project part of any other strategy?	Yes
MCR Pathways' work aligns closely with 'The Promise' and Scotland's National Strategy for Economic Transformation. This in addition to national priorities for widening access to further and higher education and developing Scotland's Youth skills. The programme also supports the wider policy objectives reflected in the Children (Care, Care Experience and Services Planning) (Scotland) Act 2026, in particular, improving support and outcomes for care-experienced young people.	

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In your opinion, has the project benefitted from being part of this anti-poverty strategy?	Yes
Alignment with national policies and strategies is critical to ensuring that MCR Pathways' work remains relevant while also reflecting the future direction of national priorities. Aligning with these strategies has helped guide our service provision and helped us to adhere to the projects previously mentioned aims and objectives.	
Is the project delivering a service that is a statutory commitment?	No
N/A	
In your opinion, what has been the impact on the project of having this statutory commitment?	N/A
N/A	

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Funding

Is funding used to support the work?	Yes
Has external funding been secured to support the work?	Yes
Which organisation provided funding?	Scottish Government
What was the specific funding stream/source/scheme?	Place based social justice and Education and Skills directorates.
How much funding was secured?	Place based social justice and Education and Skills directorates.
For how long has funding been secured?	2.1 million sterling (staggered funding).
Is future funding from the same external source a possibility?	Yes
Is future funding dependent on achieving pre-agreed outcomes or outputs?	Yes
What are these conditions?	Future funding is dependent on meeting the terms and conditions of the grant award. It is a grant relationship, where MCRP provides progress and monitoring reports on the impact of service delivery on the target client group.
Has a specific sum been secured from your organisation to support this work?	Yes

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How much funding was secured?	£450,000.
For how long has funding been secured?	The fundraising amount has a variety of duration and end periods.
Is future funding from your organisation a possibility?	Yes
Is future funding dependent on achieving pre-agreed outcomes or outputs?	Dependent on project impact, mentor attraction, and partner engagement.
What are these conditions?	Future funding depends on the programmes ability to meet existing investment conditions.
What are the future - longer-term - prospects for this work if existing funding sources were no longer available?	
Cannot be answered at this time as funding has been secured.	

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Staffing and Resources

Do existing staff from your organisation contribute toward the work of this project?	Yes
Role: All 89 MCR Pathways staff contribute to the delivery and support of the programme. Their roles span Pathway Co-ordination, Mentor Services, Partnerships, Regional Management, Fundraising, Finance, Systems, Human Resources, Public Affairs and Policy, Marketing and Communications, Operational Leadership and Organisational Leadership.	
Are existing staff from the host organisation paid extra (for example, taking on extra hours) to contribute toward the work of this project?	N/A
Extra hours worked: N/A	
Have additional paid staff been employed to contribute toward the work of this project?	Yes
Role: Vacancies arise as demand increases. All staff focus on the programme; there is no separation of staff duties, everyone works as one team.	
Is the post permanent or fixed term?	N/A
Duration: N/A	
Are volunteers involved in delivering the project??	Yes
Role: 3,600+ Mentor volunteers provide their own time (usually one hour a week) to meet and support a young person at a local level.	
Are specific resources – other than staff/volunteer time and money - needed to support the delivery of the project?	Yes

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Facilities / Workspace	School, College, Community Settings.
Equipment	N/A.
Local Knowledge	Mentors are chosen for their common experiences and/or interests with the young person which makes them well placed to provide guidance.
Food and Drink	Breakfast clubs in some cases.
Are any of the resources needed to deliver the project provided in-kind, rather than budgeted from project funds?	Yes
Who provides: Schools, Colleges and Communities provide facilities for the mentoring to take place in.	
Were new IT systems, additional software, or upgrades existing software (databases, Apps) required to deliver this project?	Yes
Salesforce systems, fundraising database, and a new app is in development.	
Was additional training – for staff or volunteers - required to deliver this project?	Yes
All volunteers wishing to become mentors are required to complete a mandatory three-hour training session. This covers the role of the mentor, the young person, and the delivery partner, as well as child protection requirements. Ongoing training and support are also provided throughout the volunteering period.	

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Monitoring and Evaluation

Do you – or other organisations - collect data on the project for monitoring or evaluation purposes?	Yes
Is there baseline data to describe what things were like before the start of the project?	Yes
MCR Pathways does not collect baseline data on young people's or mentors' circumstances at the start of mentoring. Instead, the programme measures the mentoring relationship and the progress made by both the young person and the mentor over time.	
Is the difference that the project is making measured or monitored by the host organisation?	Yes
Who within the host organisation is responsible for monitoring the impact of the project	MCR Pathways.
How often is the impact of the project monitored or measured by the host organisation	Annually.
What methods, techniques or strategies are used by the host organisation to impact of the project	Annual Strategy Report.

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What information is collected by the host organisation about the project?	
Number of users	Yes
Profile of users	Yes
Experience of users	Yes
Outcomes for users	Yes
Anything else	No
Has the data that has been collected by the host organisation been used to adapt the way the project works?	No
Has an external organisation been employed to formally evaluate the project?	Yes

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Who conducted the evaluation	ScotCen and IPSOS Mori (link above 32b). Both funded by investors.
Details of the evaluation	Biggs, H., Reid, S., Attygalle, K., Wishart, R. & Shields, J. (2020) The project Social Bridging Finance Initiative for Educational Outcomes: Evaluation Report. ScotCen Social Research, prepared for The Robertson Trust. Public link unavailable at this time.
What were the key findings from the evaluation	The evaluation found that MCR Pathways significantly improved educational outcomes for care-experienced young people. It highlighted the importance of the programme's strong, personalised mentoring approach and reported that all financing targets had been exceeded.
Has the data that has been collected from this evaluation been used to adapt the way the project works?	Yes

The evaluation findings have informed improvements to the programme, including:

Updating mentor training to include the Curriculum for Excellence, numerous and varied examinations that young people may take, and accredited courses.

Developing a new communication system to streamline bookings and follow-ups.

Improving staff awareness and communication between the programme and schools.

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Is there an intention to employ an external organisation to evaluate the impact of the project in the future?	Yes
Is there an intention to undertake your own formal evaluation in the future to estimate the impact of the project?	Yes

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Impact

To what extent have the aims of the project been achieved?	Making progress towards meeting aims.
What difference has the project made?	
• The programme has supported 21,000 young people since 2015. • It has improved young people's wellbeing and confidence. • It has improved their life chances by encouraging and enabling them to progress into, and sustain, positive destinations in education, training and/or employment.	
Have conditions or demand changed since the project was introduced?	Yes
The external landscape has changed with increasing demand for young people mentors. Since COVID-19, levels of social and educational disengagement among young people have also risen, and MCR now plays a key role in helping service users reconnect with education and support systems.	
Has the project had the capacity to meet these changing conditions and demand?	Yes
The external landscape has changed with increasing demand for young people mentors. Since COVID-19, levels of social and educational disengagement among young people have also risen, and MCR now plays a key role in helping service users reconnect with education and support systems.	

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Has the project changed through time?	Yes
What changed	The programme has expanded its focus from supporting care-experienced young people to include a wider group of young people who need support. Following COVID-19, MCR Pathways has seen increased disengagement among young people and has responded by strengthening local partnerships to help address these challenges.
Why has it changed	These changes were introduced in response to the evolving needs of young people, including increasing challenges relating to mental health, poverty and disengagement from education. MCR Pathways recognises the importance of adapting to changing circumstances to ensure the programme continues to meet the needs of the young people it supports.
Has the project had any unexpected or unintended outcomes?	Yes
The initial goal of the programme was to improve educational outcomes. However, its impact has extended beyond education, leading to a more holistic outcomes framework. Young people have also demonstrated improvements in personal and life skills, greater clarity about their aspirations, and increased confidence in expressing their views and making their voices heard.	
In your opinion, is the project having an impact on tackling poverty?	Yes
The programme helps tackle poverty by supporting young people to progress into, and sustain, positive destinations including further education and employment. MCR Pathways views these outcomes as important long-term measures for preventing poverty. The programme also helps mitigate the immediate effects of poverty by providing practical support locally, including essential items for young people who need them.	

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Learning from Experience

What is working well?
• Maintaining a consistent mentoring approach that places young people at the centre, listening to their views and involving them in the process. • Providing young people with mentors who offer support tailored to their individual needs. • Regularly reviewing practice and encouraging collaboration between teams to support effective programme delivery. • Establishing a dedicated policy team to align the programme's work with the Scottish Government's poverty reduction goals.
What, if anything, is working less well?
Resources can be a challenge with growing demand, as MCR requires more than just money to deliver its aims. For example, the system that MCR is working within in the UK is vast and difficult to navigate due to systematic barriers.
What are the key learning points that you'd like to share with other practitioners?
Keep the vision and goal at the forefront of operations by asking questions such as: • Why are things done the way they are? • So what? • Now what? • What are the enablers we can apply (MCR Pathway goal enablers)?

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Are there plans to develop or expand the project in the future?	Yes
There are plans to continue expanding the programme until every young person has a mentor that needs one. Recently, MCR has expanded into the Southeast and Northeast of England. The goal is to be UK wide.	
How easily do you think this project could be replicated in another setting?	
The programme has effectively grown from one school in Glasgow to now over 140 schools, with expansion into local authorities in England. This is due to MCR having adopted a replicable model of delivery which has facilitated its expansion. This is in addition to having excellent partners and stakeholders that support its expansion model.	

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