CONNECT: IMPACT REPORT 2024-2026

IN YOUR CORNER

INTRODUCTION

Connect is a partnership between In Your Corner and London Community Boxing, which started in 2017 and is our largest and longest-running project. Since its inception, we have reached 220 young people in Southwark.

Connect aims to engage young people aged 12-15 who might experience barriers to accessing support for their emotional wellbeing or struggle to sustain engagement with clinic-based services. We work in partnership with targeted services in Southwark (e.g. CAMHS, Youth Justice Service, Social Services, Early Help) who refer young people to the project.

The programme aims to support young people's emotional wellbeing by providing an accessible route to developing emotion regulation skills, confidence in a group setting, peer relationships, and physical fitness. In Your Corner's clinical model combines evidence-based psychological approaches (e.g. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Dialectical Behaviour Therapy, attachment- and trauma-informed models, with non-contact boxing skills (e.g. boxing techniques, skipping, shadowboxing, pad and bag work, strength and conditioning work), adapting to the needs of each group and participant.

Each group ran for two hours a week across 7-12 weeks, and was co-delivered by a clinical specialist, an assistant psychologist from In Your Corner, and an England Accredited Boxing Coach from London Community Boxing. Group graduates were able to join an hour-long weekly session during term time. In December 2025, we paused the graduate offer to review and improve the impact of the model. Young people can also join London Community Boxing's junior development group or amateur club and work towards competing.

This report presents the data and feedback collected from the six Connect groups (Connect 17-22) held between September 2024 and July 2026. It aims to reflect on our learning and suggest ideas for future implementation.



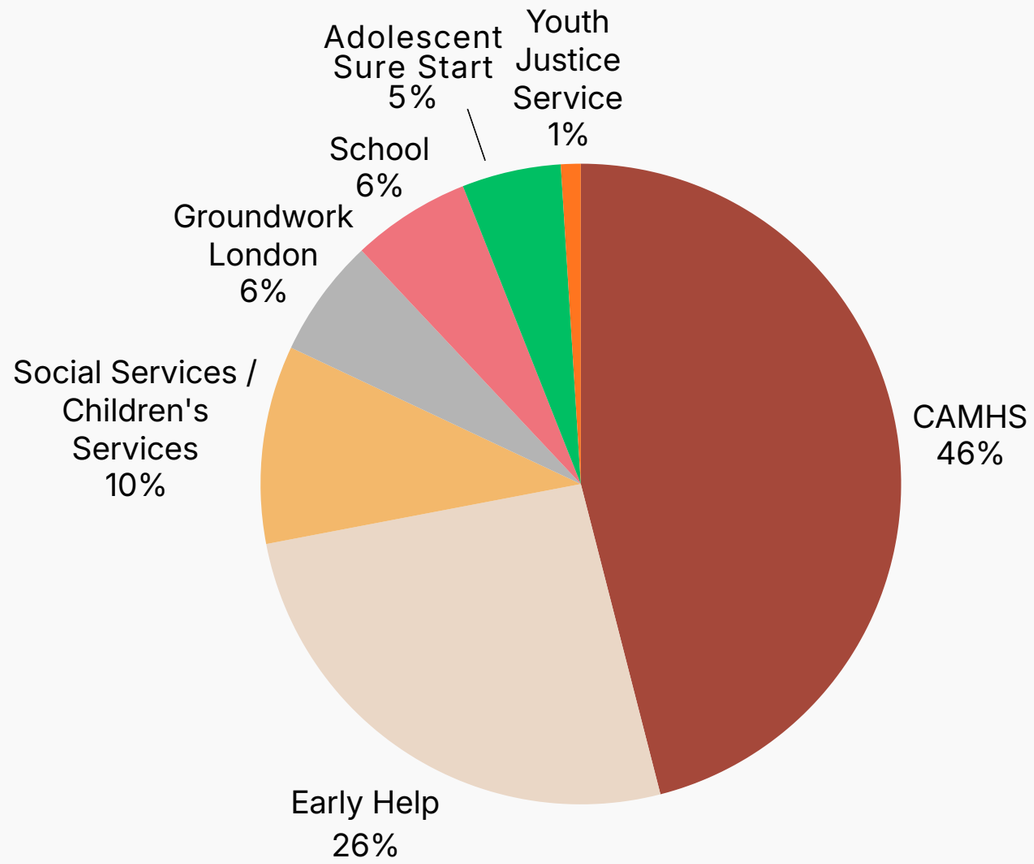
WHO WE REACHED

Between September 2024 and July 2026, Connect worked with: **67** young people

Their demographics are summarised below.



REFERRAL SERVICES





70%

had experienced trauma or adverse childhood experiences

38%

had a diagnosis or traits of ADHD

23%

were at risk of exclusion or not in mainstream education

13
mean age (years)

21%

had a diagnosis or traits of ASD

67%
from minoritised ethnic backgrounds

20%

had a learning difficulty

18%

were a Child in Need or on a Child Protection Plan

18%

had ongoing Early Help involvement

4%

were Looked After or under a Special Guardianship Order

OUR IMPACT

39 young people (58%) successfully graduated from Connect between September 2024 and July 2026.

We collected pre- and post-intervention data from 34 out of the 39 young people who graduated. Two standardised measures were used to assess our impact for all six cohorts: Goal Based Outcomes (GBO) and the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS). An additional measure was introduced in April 2026 measuring overall Life Satisfaction (ONS Personal Wellbeing Question); it was applied only to the Connect 22 cohort and is now being used across projects.

GOAL BASED OUTCOMES (GBO)

Young people set personalised goals for what they wanted to achieve through Connect. Each person set **Boxing Goals** for their boxing skills, and **Feeling Better Goals** for their emotional wellbeing. Participants rated goals on a ten-point scale before and after the project, where 1 represented “goal far away” and 10 represented “goal achieved”.

Example Boxing Goals:

- “Improve my stance in boxing and to learn new punches”
- “I want to get stronger, improve general fitness, improve reflexes”

Example Feeling Better Goals:

- “To feel more confident, particularly in new situations”
- “To get better at regulating emotions, particularly anger, to contain anger”

They also rated their **Fitness** and **Confidence**, pre- and post-group.

	Average rating pre-group	Average rating post-group	Average pre-post change	Clinically meaningful change (>2.45)*
Boxing Goals	3.6	7.6	+4.0	Yes
Feeling Better Goals	3.6	6.5	+2.9	Yes
Fitness	5.2	7.4	+2.2	No
Confidence	5.4	8.1	+2.7	Yes

Young people made clinically meaningful progress in three of the four goal areas. Boxing Goals showed the largest improvement, with average ratings more than doubling from 3.6 to 7.6. Boxing Goals consistently show the biggest change across all In Your Corner projects, which we think reflects how tangible progress in boxing is. For example, a young person who could not throw a jab in the first session might be demonstrating a full combination of punches by the last, and that change is clear to them, their peers and their coaches.

Feeling Better Goals improved from 3.6 to 6.5. These goals focus on emotional wellbeing, such as managing anger, coping with anxiety and feeling confident in new situations, and they made up the largest set of goals (74). These findings suggest that emotional change is central to what young people hope to gain from Connect, and that the programme appears to support it, even though progress of this kind is typically harder for young people to recognise and rate in themselves. Fitness goals also improved, from 5.2 to 7.4. This increase fell just below the threshold for clinically meaningful change, partly because young people started with higher ratings; therefore had less room to improve.

Furthermore, Confidence ratings rose from 5.4 to 8.1, the highest post-group rating of any goal type. This suggests that visible success in the gym may also matter therapeutically, as it could give young people early, concrete evidence that they can learn, improve and achieve, which may in turn strengthen the self-belief that supports their wellbeing goals.

**Changes greater than +2.45 indicate clinically meaningful change.*





SHORT WARWICK-EDINBURGH MENTAL WELLBEING SCALE (SWEMWBS)

Young people also answered questions on their mental wellbeing on a five-point scale before and after the project, where 1 indicated “none of the time” and 5 indicated “all of the time”.

Note: The raw score of the SWEMWBS must be converted into a metric score to allow reliable comparison, therefore the converted scores are shown here.

Average total score rating pre-group	Average total score rating post-group	Average pre-post change	Sample size (number of YP)
19.98	21.54	+1.56	34

Improvement was found in the post-group average metric score, which is within the threshold of statistically meaningful change (*between 1-3), suggesting that, on average, young people mental wellbeing improved.

Because average ratings describe the group as a whole and can mask differences between individuals, we also looked at changes in individual ratings to see how many young people showed meaningful change. Of the 34 young people who completed the SWEMWBS before and after the programme, 22 (65%) reported an improvement in their total score, 2 (6%) showed no change, and 10 (29%) recorded a lower score at the end of the group. This shows that almost two in three young people reported feeling better after Connect.

It is important to note that many of the young people referred to Connect are dealing with ongoing difficulties outside the group, including family breakdown, placement changes, safeguarding concerns and pressure at school, which can affect how they feel when they complete the questionnaire. Clinicians also note that as young people learn to name and notice their emotions through the group programme, their emotional awareness grows, which can lower self-reported scores in the short term as they become more attuned to difficulties they previously overlooked. To support young people whose wellbeing has not improved, the team will continue working closely with referrers to arrange suitable onward support.

LIFE SATISFACTION (ONS PERSONAL WELLBEING QUESTION)

The ONS Life Satisfaction Measure was introduced in April across all In Your Corner interventions. As a standardised national metric, it enables us to capture a clearer picture of our overall impact and benchmark our outcomes against national standards.

Young people rated how satisfied they were with their current lives on an eleven-point scale before and after the project, where 0 represented “not at all satisfied” and 10 represented “completely satisfied”.

Average rating pre-group	Average rating post-group	Average pre-post change	Sample size (number of YP)
7.0	8.5	+1.5	4*

**Note: small sample as only Connect 22 completed this measure*

The average post-group rating was higher than the pre-group rating, although the sample was very small. Of the four young people who completed the measure before and after the intervention, three reported greater satisfaction with their lives at the end of the programme. With so few responses, we cannot draw firm conclusions or attribute this change to Connect, but it may suggest that some participants noticed positive changes in their lives during the programme. Since we have started using this measure across all In Your Corner interventions, we expect it to give us a larger dataset over time, which should allow us to compare our outcomes with national figures.



WHAT DO YOUNG PEOPLE SAY ABOUT CONNECT?

After the intervention, we gathered feedback from young people, parents/carers and referrers, asking about their experience of the group and about any improvements they would suggest to the programme.

Themes from young people's feedback reflected positive changes in:

- Emotional wellbeing and emotional regulation
- Confidence, self-esteem and self-belief
- Social connection and communication
- Physical wellbeing and boxing ability
- Building a routine
- Behaviour and functioning at school and at home

Selected comments from young people are shown below (family comments are on page 12).

"Feel like I am able to stay calmer for longer and am better at processing my emotions... Feel comfortable using boxing as a way to release anger when I feel like things are too much."

"Yeah my attendance and punctuality at school are better, my mum says I'm doing better around the house."

"More confident standing up for myself, more confident meeting new people."

"Teachers think I'm more focused... mum thinks I'm more calm... sister thinks I'm more sociable."

"I feel more relaxed and that I would get less anxious starting something new."

"I feel less anxious within a group and like I can be more myself... I feel like I can share my opinion and not worry so much about what others think."

"Better at relaxing myself...able to control anger more often... Better at dealing with things."

Young people also shared which activities they enjoyed most. These included cone games, the Jenga block activity, boxing activities such as drills, circuits, bag work and pad work, and the chill skills they learned, such as box breathing and body scan. This mix of playful, physical and calming activities suggests that young people value variety within sessions, and it gives us useful guidance on which elements to keep.

Because co-production is central to Connect, we will continue to review our session delivery in light of young people's feedback, so that the programme continues to reflect what they find engaging and helpful.





WHAT DO PARENTS/CARERS AND REFERRERS SAY ABOUT CONNECT?

Parents and carers also described changes they had noticed in young people after the programme. These echoed the themes that young people themselves reported, including emotional wellbeing, behaviour at home and at school, confidence and self-belief, and building social connections. Identifying similar themes from both young people and the adults around them suggests that these changes were noticeable beyond the group itself.

"There are coping mechanisms she didn't have before... Confidence shot up... belief in herself... (there was) self-doubt and second-guessing (before)... doesn't anymore... Now takes a step back and uses (her) coping mechanisms..."

"She wants to go back to school and meet new people... couldn't even mention school (in front of her before). I'm really proud of her."

"He's been calmer, less reactive, more at peace... He's been more in control of emotions. He agrees that he stresses a lot less."

"Everyone has noticed an improvement... Sad it's all come to an end... He loves Coach Henry."

"Made lots of new friends... when he came home after the group he was very excited about it."

"Since he's been coming here he's been really good at home and seems to be more positive and less complaining."

"Language skills improving... interacting more... practising in groups... developing confidence..."

Referrer:
"This whole year she has talked so positively of the impact of boxing, how it helps manage her feelings of anger, how it helps her feel settled, how she looks forward to it in the week!"



REFLECTIONS FROM THE CONNECT TEAM AND OUR COMMUNITY PARTNER

ROBB SUMMERSKILL LEAHY - LONDON COMMUNITY BOXING COACH:

England Level 1 Boxing Coach and martial arts expert, skilled in helping young people step into their own sense of empowerment.



“For the past four years, I have helped deliver a therapeutic outreach programme combining boxing, mindfulness and emotional wellbeing support for young people, alongside a clinical specialist and an assistant psychologist. We help participants develop confidence, emotional regulation, resilience and positive coping strategies, while providing a safe space to challenge themselves and recognise their strengths. It has been incredibly rewarding to see their growth over the years, particularly in their confidence, engagement and ability to manage emotions. Following the programme’s success, we have recently expanded the provision to include young people aged 16–17.”

HENRY KER - CONNECT PROJECT LEAD:

Specialist Mental Health Practitioner with a special interest in neurodevelopmental difficulties.



“Over almost ten years and more than twenty cohorts, we have built on our roots in Southwark. Referrers now trust us with young people who have a wide range of experiences and needs, the gym has become a familiar and safe place for them, and the pathway has grown to include junior groups, mentoring, AQA accreditation and employment after the programme. Graduates keep in touch by text, ask proactively about future sessions, and some now help shape the groups they once attended.

The project has not always been straightforward. Girls tend to disengage in a male-dominated space, and some young people arrive with needs beyond what a termly programme can hold. Learning from previous groups, we have updated our referral criteria to reflect this. We have also, on occasion, had to withdraw a young person who used the skills we teach inappropriately outside of sessions, because keeping the group safe and the skills used as intended has to come first.

Despite these challenges, the project continues to meet a clear need in Southwark, and we keep adapting it in response to what each group teaches us.”

LEIGH BRUCE - EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN AT LONDON COMMUNITY BOXING:

“In the nine years since In Your Corner was born in the LCB gym, it has been the closest, strongest and most productive partnership for us, advancing LCB’s mission of helping people from all backgrounds improve their mental and physical health and strengthen their ability to be productive members of the community.

It has been an inspiration to work with the IYC team over the years and to see so many young people benefit from their evidence-based methodology, overcoming the many obstacles life has thrown in their paths, learning emotional regulation skills, gaining the ability to form productive relationships and moving ahead into education, training and employment. A number of IYC graduates have earned paid work with LCB over the years and have become trusted team members. It has been wonderful to watch IYC grow and diversify, spreading its ground-breaking work across London to benefit more young people.”

CASE STUDY 1

SAMUEL'S STORY

BACKGROUND

Samuel (pseudonym) is a 14-year-old boy referred to the Connect therapeutic group jointly by his Social Worker and CAMHS team. He had been receiving ongoing support from Children's Services and had recently experienced significant family difficulties, which had further impacted his home environment.

His presenting needs at the time of referral included emotional dysregulation, particularly around anger, low confidence, experiences of bullying, trauma-related difficulties, and limited engagement with traditional support services.



GROUP ENGAGEMENT

Samuel participated fully in all the sessions and engaged well with therapeutic content. From the outset, he was keen to impress staff with his physical and mental abilities, and he natually took a leading role in the group.

Samuel appeared to enjoy the chill skills as well as getting to know other young people through games and warm-up exercises. Alongside boxing and "Thinking Tasks", we played games like Pictionary and Jenga during breaks to encourage the group to relax, support age-appropriate play and curiosity, and build trust among peers.

Throughout the programme, Samuel encountered logistical challenges attending the gym, alongside indicators of difficulties with basic care at home. These were raised with his mother and social worker, who supported Samuel in engaging with the programme, though family communication remained difficult.

GRADUATION

Samuel rated his pre-intervention goals out of 10:

- Feeling Less Angry (5/10)
- Making Friends (5/10)
- Learning Boxing Skills (4/10)

Samuel graduated from the group with perfect attendance, and demonstrated a boxing combination at the graduation ceremony to those supporting him. Due to challenging family circumstances, Samuel was unable to formally review his goals after graduation.

POST-GROUP ENGAGEMENT

Samuel continues to engage with boxing at LCB since graduating from Connect. His coaches have shared that he is very consistent and appears to have made some new friends in the group. Samuel is still receiving support from the social care team.

*Photos are not of the young people described in Case Study 1 and Case Study 2

CASE STUDY 2

TYLER'S STORY

BACKGROUND

Tyler (pseudonym) is a 14-year-old boy with mild learning difficulties and autism. He was referred jointly by his CAMHS Care Coordinator and Social Worker due to a marked escalation in challenging behaviours over the previous six months. Both professionals were concerned about emerging paranoid ideas and out-of-control behaviours at home and in the community.

The onset of difficulties appeared to be linked to intense social anxiety. Tyler began expressing a preoccupation with how others perceived him, alongside fears of being judged and of losing control. Behavioural episodes became increasingly unpredictable, and incidents at school escalated to a serious point, culminating in an external incident that resulted in a fixed-term exclusion. Tyler seemed to struggle particularly with perceived disrespect from peers, heightened sensitivity to social situations, and difficulty coping when things did not go as expected.

At home, the picture was similarly concerning. His family described growing exhaustion and a household that had become increasingly hard to manage. Agitation escalated over time, and a further serious incident led to police involvement.

During the first meeting, Tyler presented as very quiet. The early formulation was that he was under-stimulated (spending a lot of time online), lonely, and had low insight into his behaviours; but a heightened sense of being “not normal”, for example, feeling disconnected from adolescent peers. Tyler set two goals with support: to calm down when angry, and to be happier. At the start of the project, he rated both goals 1 out of 10.

GROUP ENGAGEMENT

Tyler attended Connect with 80% attendance. He had some difficulties with punctuality but maintained good overall attendance. Initially, Tyler was very shy and largely uncommunicative within the group. It was notable that his coordination was poorer than that of his peers, and struggled with skipping, basic combinations, and footwork. The boxing coach was patient and adjusted expectations so that Tyler could still benefit from the physical activities.

Over the course of the programme, Tyler appeared to grow more comfortable. Staff supported him to contribute verbally, and he gradually began talking more with peers and coaches. He enjoyed the games and seemed increasingly willing to take part in the boxing elements. Tyler was noted to have exceptional strength, and staff praised him for his effort, consistency, natural gifts, and having a great memory for learning combinations. By the later sessions, he was visibly more at ease within the group environment. As part of the boxing coaching, Tyler was given some physical support, with consent, to guide his stance and guard. The team felt that this was clinically meaningful as he was not used to physical contact from adults (especially from men).

GRADUATION

By the end of the programme, Tyler made clear progress on both self-rated Feeling Better Goals. He rated his first goal to "calm down when I am angry" 8/10 and his second goal to "be happier" 8/10, both of which are a marked improvement from his initial ratings of 1 out of 10.

At the final interview, Tyler’s mother commented that during the ten weeks of the project, Tyler had been sleeping well, seemed happier, and had not presented with any challenging behaviours at all. Tyler shared that he liked the discussion-based activities, the games, and spending time with other young people. He said, "the coaches are nice to me" and reported that he was proud of learning some boxing skills. It was notable how much he had improved at verbalising his challenges, including stating that he felt like he was the worst in the group at boxing, an observation that showed growing reflective capacity.

POST-GROUP ENGAGEMENT

Tyler expressed interest in continuing with boxing to build on the progress he had made during the programme. His mother was supportive of this, noting the benefits of ongoing structured activity and peer contact. Follow-up with CAMHS and social care remained in place, with the community boxing project seen as a complementary and stabilising intervention during a period of significant difficulty.

REFLECTIONS, LEARNING AND THE FUTURE

Between September 2024 and July 2026, we delivered six psychologically informed boxing groups (Connect 17–22) with 67 young people in Southwark. Now in its ninth year, Connect is our largest and longest-running project. It continues to reach young people from diverse backgrounds whom clinic-based services often struggle to engage, supporting them to take part in boxing and to improve their emotional wellbeing.

Impact was measured using standardised measures and post-intervention feedback. Young people showed improvement in all four areas measured by Goal Based Outcomes, with clinically meaningful progress on Boxing Goals, Feeling Better Goals and Confidence. Average SWEMWBS mental wellbeing scores rose by 1.56, which falls within the range recognised as meaningful change, and 65% of young people improved their individual score. Our newly introduced ONS Life Satisfaction Measure also showed early positive results, although the sample was very small. Taken together, these findings suggest that Connect supports both physical and emotional change in the young people it reaches.

These findings align closely with feedback shared by young people, parents/carers, and referrers. In their own words, many participants reported feeling calmer, coping better with anger and anxiety, and experiencing greater confidence both at home and at school. This suggests that the positive habits developed in the gym can successfully transfer to their wider lives.

The opportunities created by Connect extend beyond the core programme. Graduates can join LCB's junior groups and amateur club, take part in peer mentoring, gain AQA accreditation and, in some cases, move into paid employment at the gym. Several have gone on to mentor the cohorts that followed them. Until December 2025, graduates could also attend a weekly graduate session; we have paused this while we review the model, but the other routes remain open.

The biggest challenges we face are engaging girls and drop-out rates caused by circumstances outside the programme's control, as well as the difficulty of holding a wide range of needs in a single group. These have been addressed by, for example, adapting our induction and taster session process and amending our referral criteria to protect participants' experience.

Ideas for future improvements include a dedicated project and referral coordinator, updated referral process, new referral pathways, and improving engagement and retention of girls.

In April 2026, we launched Connect+ for 16- to-17-year-olds, delivered at London Community Boxing and Connect AMBIT Peer Mentoring, in partnership with Anna Freud, for Connect graduates. In 2027, we will introduce Connect UASC for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children.

Our projects depend on our close partnership with LCB, a continuously growing collaboration. This relationship is directly integrated into our day-to-day delivery, as we now have two dedicated, trauma-informed boxing coaches from the LCB gym working as intregal members of our team. Together, we work toward a shared goal: to reach young people in the community and provide them with the support and guidance needed to build connections, improve their emotional wellbeing, and secure better opportunities for the future.

Ultimately, Connect goes beyond a typical boxing gym by bringing evidence-based psychological support into a space where young people feel comfortable. Each session is co-delivered by a clinical specialist, an assistant psychologist and a trauma-informed boxing coach, combining non-contact boxing with emotion regulation skills, mindfulness and reflection alongside peers. This offers an alternative to clinic-based settings for young people who might not otherwise access support. The results are encouraging: young people made clinically meaningful progress on their boxing, emotional wellbeing and confidence goals, and average mental wellbeing scores improved within the range recognised as meaningful change. We look forward to building on this learning and reaching more young people across Southwark in the years ahead.



THANK YOU!

Partnership working is at the heart of everything we do at In Your Corner, and Connect is a powerful example of what can be achieved when organisations come together with a shared commitment to young people. We would like to thank London Community Boxing for their continuing partnership: their trauma-informed coaches, welcoming space and belief in the programme have been central to Connect's success.

We are also deeply grateful to Maudsley Charity for their generous support of Connect. Their Building Brighter Futures funding has enabled us to grow the programme and reach more of the young people in the borough who need it most.

We would also like to thank our referral partners, and the parents and carers of the young people who take part, for their commitment to Connect and to improving outcomes for young people across Southwark. We look forward to continuing this work together.



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