

Impact Report

2026

Early support. Lasting change.
Building better futures.





FOREWORD

Edward Glover, Trustee

2025 has been a year that highlighted the importance of the InfraRed Charitable Foundation's role in supporting vulnerable children and families. Across the communities we support, many young people are growing up with pressures that extend far beyond the school gate, pressures that affect wellbeing, stability, and the ability to engage fully in education. Too often, it is young people who experience these challenges most directly.

What gives me confidence is the difference that early, compassionate intervention can make. By supporting Community Engagement Leads embedded within schools, the Foundation helps ensure that children and families receive the right support at the right time, whether that is access to essential services, safeguarding, mental health support, or practical help that enables children to feel safe, supported, and ready to learn.

These roles are built on trust, local understanding, and continuity, and they sit at the heart of our commitment to improving outcomes for children.

Jack Paris, Trustee and InfraRed CEO

I am proud of the role the Foundation plays in supporting children and families at times of real need.

By investing in early, community-based intervention, we help ensure that vulnerable young people are seen, supported, and given the stability they need to engage, learn, and thrive.

This work reflects the very best of InfraRed's values and our commitment to creating lasting value for society.

THE CHALLENGE



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Schools cannot do this alone.

1.28million

persistent absentees,
autumn 2024

64,446

suspensions in London
schools, 2022–23

>50%

of suspensions are children
living in poverty

Source: Department for Education;
Children's Commissioner for England;
London Councils.

Today, teachers and school leaders are managing pressures that extend far beyond the classroom. Safeguarding concerns, youth violence, cost of living increases, family instability, and a rising tide of mental health difficulties are shaping young people's relationship with education.

The consequences are visible in the data. More than one in five pupils across England now misses at least ten per cent of lessons. This sharp rise in persistent absence shows no sign of reversing. Suspensions are increasing. More and more young people are disengaging from education entirely.

Particularly in London, these pressures are acute. Schools in the capital serve some of the most diverse and complex communities in the country. For many of these young people, school is the most consistent and supportive environment in their lives. When that connection breaks down, the consequences can be serious and lasting.

Schools are not short of commitment. What they consistently lack is the dedicated capacity to act on it. To spot warning signs early. To build the kind of trusted, unhurried relationships that help young people open up. To coordinate support across school, family and community in a way that is coherent rather than fragmented.

That gap is where the InfraRed Charitable Foundation does its work. We do not seek to replace what schools do. We extend what they are able to do, by enabling the placement of a dedicated, skilled and deeply human presence at the heart of school life.

A close-up, slightly blurred photograph of a group of young people, likely students, laughing heartily. They are wearing blue and black hooded sweatshirts. The focus is on a young woman in the center, who is laughing with her mouth wide open. To her left, the side of another person's face is visible, also laughing. To her right, another person is partially visible, also laughing. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

IMPACT AT A GLANCE

IMPACT AT A GLANCE

2025 in numbers

Combined figures across Oasis Academy Southbank* and Oasis Academy Shirley Park.

“ Having a dedicated Community Engagement Lead has been a complete game changer for our family. Your role vital, and I hope many other children and families can benefit from this support in the future.

Parent of a student supported at Oasis Academy Southbank

2 Schools supported across London

2 Community Engagement Leads funded

294 Young people directly supported
20 at Oasis Academy Southbank;
274 at Oasis Academy Shirley Park

82 Families engaged
14 at Oasis Academy Southbank;
68 at Oasis Academy Shirley Park

22+ Community partners involved
At Oasis Academy Shirley Park;
Oasis Academy Southbank
partnerships in development

~275 Safeguarding cases supported
~35 at Oasis Academy Southbank;
240 at Oasis Academy Shirley Park

22 Group programmes, workshops and interventions delivered
At Oasis Academy Shirley Park;
Oasis Academy Southbank figure to be confirmed

*Oasis Academy Southbank Autumn Term Only



OUR APPROACH

The Community Engagement Lead.

At the heart of our work is a simple but powerful idea: place a dedicated, skilled person inside a school, someone whose entire focus is the young people most at risk of falling through the gaps. Not a visiting professional. Not a referral system. Someone who is there every day, who knows the students by name and the families by history.

The Community Engagement Lead (CEL) works alongside school leadership, safeguarding teams and pastoral staff. They identify early warning signs when a student may be at risk of disengaging. They build trusted relationships with students and families over time. And they coordinate the wider network of support, including youth organisations, mentoring programmes and specialist services, that schools often struggle to access alone.

Because the CEL is embedded within the school, they build a strong understanding of its specific community and culture. They respond quickly when concerns arise. And because they sit outside of the formal structures of teaching, they are able to offer young people something rare: a consistent, non-judgemental adult who is unambiguously on their side.

In the words of one of our CELs:



Through this role, I have become a dedicated key adult to young people who previously may have been lost in the shuffle. I have the space to explore and trial different methods of support, and to ensure that the voice of the young person shapes their own pathway.

Community Engagement Lead, Oasis Academy Southbank

CEL role at the heart of School System



Spots risk early

Working closely with school staff to identify students experiencing difficulty and ensuring that concerns are addressed before they escalate.

Builds trusted relationships

Providing mentoring and pastoral support that helps students build confidence, manage challenges and remain engaged in education.

Connects the right support

Coordinating with youth organisations, family services, safeguarding partners and specialist providers to ensure each young person receives the right help at the right time.

Works with families

Engaging directly with parents and carers through home visits, regular contact and joint planning, ensuring that support is consistent across school and home.

STORIES OF CHANGE

The difference a trusted adult makes.

The impact of our model is most clearly seen in the experiences of the young people and the families we support. Across both schools, the pattern is consistent: when a young person has a trusted, consistent adult in their corner, things begin to change. These stories illustrate the impact seen in schools where Community Engagement Leads are already in place.



A Year 10 Student: from an average of six exclusions per half term to none.

This student had struggled since joining in Year 7, with multiple exclusions for fighting and an inability to regulate his emotions in school. His instability was a mirror of his home life: social services involvement, difficult domestic relationships and ongoing concerns about his wellbeing. By Year 10, things had escalated further. His mother called the school to say she had found a knife under his bed. She did not know what to do.

The response was immediate and coordinated. The CEL brought together the Head of Year, his one-to-one mentor and the safeguarding lead from a youth

organisation he attended. Together they built a safety plan: clear, consistent expectations that every adult in his life agreed to uphold. His youth organisation agreed to notify his mother every time he arrived and left. His mentor took on direct liaison with her about incidents at home. The results were remarkable. In the final half term of Year 10, they did not receive a single internal or external exclusion, compared to an average of six per half term the previous year. There were no further concerns raised about community safety. He signed up to a music programme over the summer holidays and has expressed a desire to pursue it as a career.

A Year 10 Student: from unbreakable 'anti-school' to focused on her future.

They spent much of Year 8 and 9 with what her school described as a seemingly unbreakable anti-school attitude. Multiple internal and external exclusions. Frequent outbursts. A deep conviction that school was not for her and that teachers were against her. Through the lens of her Adverse Childhood Experiences, the Prevention Programme helped staff understand this behaviour rather than simply react to it. The persistent focus of her year team and a long-term one-to-one mentor unlocked

a gradual but profound shift. By the end of Year 10, her Head of Year reported having little to no concern about her behaviour. During a recent incident involving another student, she told staff: 'I have started Year 11 focused on my positive path and she is trying to take me away from it.' That kind of in-the-moment reflection, holding her own future in mind when under pressure, is the result of sustained mentoring and the slow, careful work of rebuilding her relationship with school.

A Year 11 Student: one day in two years, then qualifications, prom and college.

Her story sits at the far end of what is possible. When she was referred to the Prevention Programme in September 2024, her attendance across Year 9 and Year 10 combined had been one per cent. She had been in school for one day across two years. High levels of neglect, domestic violence, parental substance abuse and physical and emotional abuse meant that improved attendance was not even the immediate goal. The intended outcome, as the CEL recorded at the time, was simply to get her to engage with a professional in any meaningful way.

What followed was a long, careful and coordinated effort. Persistent work from the safeguarding team led to the student being moved into the care of a family friend

and given the chance of a fresh start. A personalised timetable was built around her, designed to fill the gaps in two years of missed learning and give her a realistic chance of leaving with qualifications. A one-to-one mentor from a local community hub met with her weekly.

She began coming to school every day. Her attendance for the year finished at 24%, which in isolation may seem modest but represented attending school consistently, every day, from January onwards. She left Year 11 with Maths and English functional skills qualifications. Her work experience placement at a primary school was extended because of the impression she made. She went to her Year 11 prom with her classmates. She is now at college, studying hair and beauty.



A Year 9 Student: from fewer than two days a week to nearly every day.

When this student came to the attention of the Community Engagement Lead, he was in Year 9 and coming to school fewer than two days a week. He had a history of unsafe behaviour in and around the community, going missing, coming home after dark, being dishonest with his mother about his whereabouts. His mother, a lone parent, presented at meetings exhausted and unable to cope. The relationship between them had broken down. She had all but given up on the idea that things could change.

What followed was not a single dramatic intervention, but a patient, sustained process. The CEL worked with the student across several sessions, exploring the reasons behind his behaviour and helping him to understand why it was placing him at risk. A series of agreed mediation sessions took place between mother and son, establishing clear and mutually agreed boundaries around his freedom in the community, what communication should look like, and why secrecy creates danger at his age. The three of them built a plan together. Then they trialled it.



The transformation was profound. In a message to the CEL, the mother wrote:

“Prior to your involvement, we were at a breaking point. I was genuinely concerned my son would disengage from school entirely. As a lone parent with a small support network, I feared he was at real risk of falling into antisocial or criminal behaviour. Today, he is in school nearly every single day.”

“By prioritising his mental wellbeing and our family stability first, the attendance followed naturally. Unlike previous suggestions of social services that felt like box-ticking exercises, you were extraordinarily reassuring and consistently responsive. You provided my son with a consistent safe person to talk to and acted as a impartial bridge between home and school.”

Parent of student, Oasis Academy Southbank

This story illustrates something the data alone cannot capture. The CEL’s role is not primarily about attendance. It is about trust. When trust is built with a young person and their family, the outcomes follow.



A Year 7 Student: building a foundation for progress.

This student arrived at secondary school already carrying a significant weight. At eleven years old, she had a history of anxiety-driven school refusal dating back to primary school, and her attendance on joining was at 66%. Her parents were separated with a difficult relationship between them. Her mother was managing her school refusal alongside caring for a younger sibling with ASD who was also refusing school, and a toddler with complex health needs.

From the outset, the CEL worked to build trust with the student directly, establishing regular check-ins and making space for her to speak about what made school feel so difficult. Home visits were conducted on days when her anxiety was at its highest, supporting her mother with the practical

and emotional challenge of getting her in. The student was referred to the school's educational psychologist and began cognitive behavioural therapy alongside her sessions with the CEL.

For her mother, the impact extended beyond her daughter. Being connected to the school's therapeutic parenting workshops gave her access to a wider support network and a greater sense that she was not navigating this alone.

Attendance rose from 66% to 70% during the period of support. In isolation, that figure may seem modest. In context, for a young person with deep-rooted anxiety about school, it represents a meaningful shift in the right direction, and a foundation on which further progress can be built.

PROGRAMME IMPACT



PROGRAMME IMPACT

Support beyond the individual.

The one-to-one support at the core of our model sits alongside a wider programme of group interventions, workshops and community partnerships that reach young people across the school community, not only those already identified as at risk.

At Oasis Academy Shirley Park, 274 students were engaged through CEL activities during the year, supported by 22 community partners. Across Prevention Programme students, attendance increased by 2.4% compared to the previous academic year. In-class disruption incidents, classroom removals and high-level behaviour consequences reduced from 6,059 to 4,197 across the same period, a reduction of 1.47 incidents per pupil and a fall of around 31%. The CEL led 240 safeguarding referrals on the school's case management system. Alongside direct casework, the CEL has strengthened the school's outward-facing safeguarding presence, convening regular Schools and Community Safeguarding meetings that have deepened communication between school staff and local partner organisations, making it easier for professionals to respond quickly and effectively to children's needs.

At Oasis Academy Southbank, the CEL supported 20 young people aged 11 to 18 through one-to-one mentoring, the Family Foundations early help initiative, targeted parent support and therapeutic parenting workshops. Fourteen families received direct engagement, with a safeguarding caseload of around 35 active cases at any one time.

Programmes delivered across both schools included:

- trauma-informed personal development
- music and creative arts
- sports mentoring
- knife crime awareness
- exploitation prevention
- sexual health and relationships education
- money management
- community safety
- work experience

Each was chosen on the basis of the specific risks and needs identified by the CEL, and evaluated for its impact on the young people involved.

The approach aligns directly with the Youth Endowment Fund's three key recommendations for reducing children's involvement in violence: keeping children in education, providing trusted adults through mentoring, and developing social and emotional skills. The InfraRed model does not simply fulfil these recommendations; it targets them at the young people most at risk.

What school leaders say:

“ Having a CEL at South Bank has been transformative for our approach to working with students and families. Our work on improving student attendance has been significantly supported by the existence of this role.

Associate Assistant Principal, Oasis Academy Southbank

“ We finally have a role that extends our reach into the wider family network, addressing societal barriers to education. The CEL balances integration as a member of our team with the neutrality to open doors to hard-to-reach families.

Acting Principal, Oasis Academy Southbank

“ Families are getting support with challenging behaviours including school refusal. Parents are not feeling alone and judged but supported. The role is transformational for our school.

DSL and Associate Assistant Principal, Oasis Academy Southbank

“ There is certainly a network of trusted adults and professionals wrapped around each young person, supporting and steering them in the right direction. Thanks to InfraRed, we are proud to be fulfilling all of the evidence-based recommendations to reduce risk and increase opportunity for our young people.

Sean Harling, Community Engagement Lead, Oasis Academy Shirley Park

LOOKING AHEAD

**A proven strategy of support.
Now we need your support to scale.**

The results of our early work give us genuine cause for optimism, not because the work has been easy, but because it has been effective.

Young people who were disengaging are re-engaging. Families who had lost trust in schools are rebuilding it. The schools we partner with are better equipped to identify and respond to vulnerability before it becomes a crisis.

We are under no illusion about the scale of the challenge. The pressures facing young people in London, and beyond the capital, are not diminishing. Persistent absence is rising. The demand for pastoral and safeguarding support in schools continues to outstrip the resources available to meet it. The need for what we do is greater now than when we started only three years ago.

Our ambition is to extend the Community Engagement Lead model to more schools and more young people. In the year ahead, we intend to deepen our existing partnerships, welcome new schools into the programme and continue to build the evidence base that demonstrates what sustained, embedded, human-centred support can achieve.

We are also committed to sharing what we learn. The CEL model is still relatively new. We believe it has the potential to become a significant and lasting part of how schools respond to vulnerability and promote inclusion. But realising that potential of the programme requires investment, partnership and a shared belief that every young person deserves a trusted adult in their corner.

If you share that belief, we would very much like to hear from you.

Get in touch

To find out more about the InfraRed Charitable Foundation, to support our work or to explore a school partnership:

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Our partners

We are grateful to the community organisations, mentors and youth workers whose commitment to young people makes our work possible. A full list of partners is available on our website.





InfraRed Charitable Foundation is a charity registered in England and Wales.

Charity Number 1191507. The Foundation operates independently from InfraRed Capital Partners.

The InfraRed Charitable Foundation would like to recognise Edward Glover and John Grumbar, Founding Trustees, for their longstanding leadership and contribution to the development of the Community Engagement Lead programme since its inception.

Names of students have been changed throughout this report to protect their identity.

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