

TeamForge Pilots 1 and 2: Final Impact and Delivery Report (Jan–July 2025)



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Executive Summary

- TeamForge successfully engaged nineteen 13–18 year-olds with SEND in two 12-week online pilots using the game Valheim and communication platform Discord.
 - The pilots achieved an overall 89% attendance and had a transformative effect on participants' confidence, communication, and emotional wellbeing.
 - The project embedded the Skills Builder Framework and achieved Impact Level 4, with measurable gains in teamwork skills.
 - Parents reported significant positive changes in their children's behaviour, mood, and social engagement.
 - Key lessons were learnt from TeamForge 1 and resulted in a number of improvements for TeamForge 2 including, smoother onboarding, implementing better team composition, and more regular parent communication.
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Project Overview

TeamForge was established through a partnership between the SEND Commissioning Team at West Sussex County Council and Quest Mentoring and was designed as a community initiative for 13-18 year olds with SEND.

Objective

The primary objective of TeamForge was to create a safe and inclusive online space where socially isolated young people with SEND could build friendships, feel part of a community, and experience positive peer connection through cooperative gaming. While embedded with structured support, the project prioritised fun, belonging, and emotional wellbeing as key pathways to helping participants reconnect with others.

Purpose & Theory of Change

- *Safe, structured co-op gaming → regular positive peer contact → improved confidence & essential skills → better engagement in life/learning.*

Scope of the Pilot

- Two cohorts delivered sequentially: TeamForge 1 and TeamForge 2.
- January to July 2025.

Cohorts at a Glance

Cohort		Participants (start)	Participants (end)	Age Range	Sessions delivered
	TeamForge 1	10	10	13 - 16	23
	TeamForge 2	9	9	13 - 18	23



Challenges Faced by Participants

Before TeamForge, parents reported a wide range of challenges faced by their children:

- **Neurodivergence**

Many participants are neurodivergent, having conditions such as Autism, Dyslexia, Functional Neurological Disorder (FND), and Obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). This can lead to difficulties processing social cues, needing clear instructions, impacting social participation, affecting engagement with traditional learning, and contributing to isolation.

- **Anxiety and Emotional Regulation**

High anxiety, especially in new or social situations, is a significant challenge. Teens struggle with staying calm under stress and managing difficult emotions and frustrations. Executive function and sleep difficulties also impact their energy and ability to participate.

- **Communication and Social Interaction**

Many find it challenging to build relationships, interpret social situations, and initiate conversations, particularly with new people. Some generally avoid social interaction or find it very difficult to try new things.

- **Social Isolation**

A common challenge is social isolation, often stemming from being out of school for extended periods (in some cases over a year), having limited social networks, experiencing Educational Based School Avoidance (EBSA), and withdrawing from engaging with family and activities outside the home. Some are desperate for friendship but cannot access it due to being unable to attend school.

- **Motivation, Confidence, and Self-Esteem**

Participants have sometimes disengaged from education and struggle with low self-belief or are unsure what success looks like. Building the confidence to express their opinion in a group environment can be a huge hurdle. They need positive and affirming experiences to feel safe to reconnect. Some may have had severe difficulty trusting people in authority roles.

Delivery Structure

Each Pilot ran for 12 weeks, TeamForge 1 January–April 2025 and TeamForge 2 April - July 2025, the programme included:

- Information and optional video calls to engage and inform parents and teens.
- Tech setup and support sessions to ensure a smooth start.
- Two mentor-facilitated evening sessions per week, using a private Discord server and private *Valheim* game servers.
- A final in-person celebration and feedback event to consolidate community building.
- A structured focus on teamwork development using the Skills Builder Framework, with benchmarking at the beginning and end of the pilot.



Member of
Skills Builder
PARTNERSHIP

Safety and Wellbeing

The programme's private online infrastructure, robust safeguarding protocols, and experienced mentors ensured a safe and supportive experience throughout the pilot.



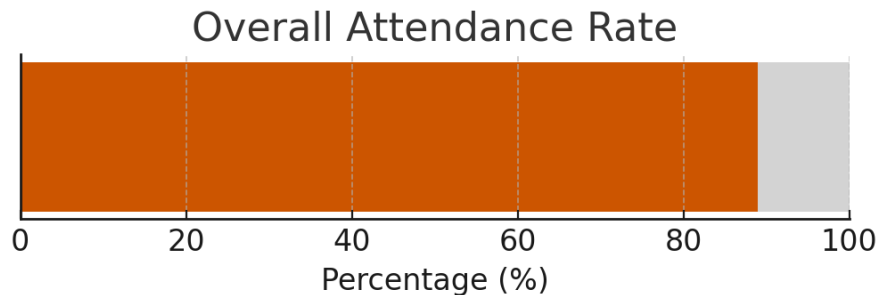
Boar clan resting in their longhouse



Outcomes & Impact

Engagement

The pilots achieved an **89% overall attendance rate**, reflecting strong participant motivation to engage.



Developing Community

Central to the premise of TeamForge was its aim to increase social connections among its participants. The online facilitated gaming promoted positive natural engagement and peer-to-peer interaction in a fun and collaborative environment.

Pre-pilot, the teens indicated the desire to engage in:

- "Team work with other children"
- "Social interaction skills"
- "Social engagement"
- "Make new friends"
- "Having company whilst gaming"

Post-pilot, parents consistently highlighted the transformative impact on their children:

"I remain super impressed that my son not only has engaged but is excited to! This is an absolutely huge success and I can't stress that enough when he has barely left his room or has any connection for months. The fact that you have been able to encourage and support him through his anxiety to connect with everyone is incredible."

One parent reported that her daughter "got more confident each week," and they heard her "chatting more and more and laughing more"

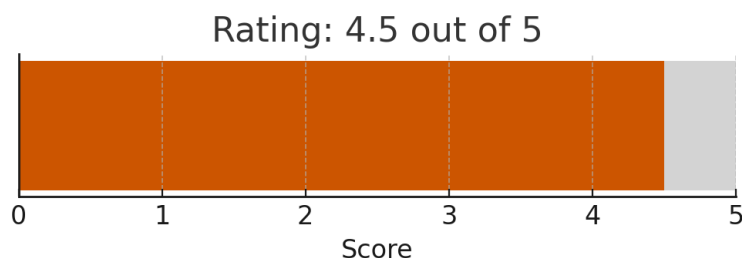
"Since joining TeamForge, we've seen a noticeable boost in our son's confidence, particularly in social situations, which have always been a challenge for him. The structured yet creative environment has given him a safe space to connect with others, build trust, and find his voice."

Skills Development

The successfully embedded the Skills Builder Framework into its programme structure, achieving an impact level 4. Weekly workshops and gameplay sessions had a primary focus on advancing teamwork skills. Participants were encouraged to reflect on their progress both during and after sessions, allowing skills to be consolidated. Benchmarking results showed a small overall increase in self-reported teamwork development over the course of the pilot.

One teen said that Valheim *“is a great game with many opportunities for me to learn to communicate and also learn more about other people and working with them.”*

Parents' feedback indicated significant advancement in a range of areas. The average score for 'Support for developing teamwork/communication skills?' was **4.5 out of 5**.



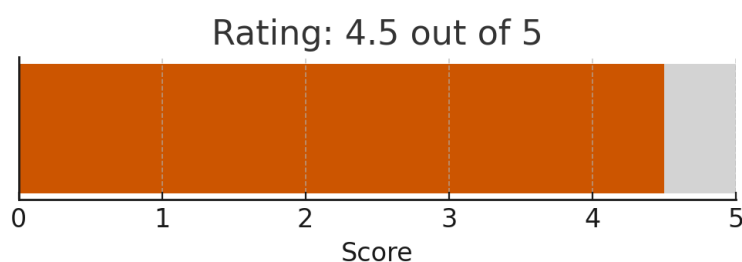
“The programme provided the perfect environment and support for my son to develop his communication and teamwork skills”

“A safe online gaming experience to help support with engaging new communication and social skills”

Supporting Emotional Wellbeing

The structure and ethos of TeamForge had a significant positive impact on participants' emotional wellbeing. The regular schedule, clear expectations, and supportive environment provided a stabilising influence, helping young people manage anxiety, build resilience, and improve self-regulation.

The teens gave the mentors an overall rating of **4.5 out of 5**.





Parental feedback reported improvements in emotional regulation, reduced anxiety, and increased happiness. The structured, enjoyable sessions positively impacted participants' routines and overall wellbeing, notably for those experiencing significant mental health challenges and social withdrawal.

"My son has really been enjoying TeamForge, he looks forward to the sessions and is always in a great mood afterwards. I think this has been really beneficial for him - I'm so glad that I found out about it in time to sign him up!"

One parent noted *"Better self-esteem and group participation"* as a key impact.

"I just wanted to say that my son has found the sessions challenging, but with your support, he is managing his emotions well, with no real meltdowns." and then went on to say that her son "has grown in confidence immensely" and it helped him with "his regulation, his emotions and feelings... how to overcome those big emotions"

Another parent stated that their son's confidence had *"grown massively"*.



Week 11 in-game gift giving ceremony



Lessons Learnt

Team Composition

Composition of the participant teams (clans) is important in creating a positive and appropriately challenging environment. In TeamForge 1 pilot, changes had to be made to one of the teams at the halfway point because of some friction and frustration. At the beginning of TeamForge 2 we had a specific session that allowed us to observe and assess participants prior to them being allocated to teams, this helped to ensure a suitable team mix.

Individual Support

Individual participants' support requirements varied widely. Balancing team activities with personalised attention is a dynamic and demanding process. Several participants required significantly more support than others which created issues. The mentor-to-participant ratio was 1:5 which in the end was about right, but in future projects would need reviewing depending on the needs of the participants.

Technical Issues

A few participants required more technical support for Xbox than anticipated, particularly around initial setup for Discord and Valheim. Although extra tech support sessions were provided and all issues were resolved, maintaining a robust and reliable onboarding process for all participants is vital in future projects.

Capturing Skills Builder Impact Data

While the programme captured strong qualitative feedback, the Skills Builder self-assessment benchmarking process did not seem to reflect the real improvements that participants experienced.

Parent Communication

Although the parents rated TeamForge 1 very highly, they did say that it would have been helpful to have more information on the workshop content and receive some progress updates. To accommodate this, more information was provided at the beginning of TeamForge 2 and parents were invited to a WhatsApp group where they received regular updates and were able to connect with each other. This change improved the parents rating of communication that they received from the TeamForge team.

Continuation of support

To continue the impact, Quest Mentoring is currently designing an online community gaming project for teens with SEND, that TeamForge participants could join.



Overall Participant Feedback

Question	Average Score (1–5)
How much did you look forward to the TeamForge sessions?	4
How much did you enjoy taking part in the TeamForge activities?	4.2
How well did TeamForge fit with your interests?	4.4
How easy did you find it to share your ideas with your teammates in the games?	4
How much did you feel like you were part of a team during the games?	3.9
How well do you think you worked together with other people to achieve goals in the games?	4
How much did you feel like your contributions were valued by your team?	3.9
How much did you feel like you supported your teammates during the games?	3.9
How much do you agree that TeamForge helped you improve your teamwork skills?	3.7
How much do you agree that TeamForge helped you improve your communication skills?	3.6
How much do you agree that TeamForge helped you feel more confident when working as part of a group?	3.7
How much did you feel understood by the TeamForge mentors?	4.2
How interested would you be in taking part in similar online group activities in the future?	4.2
How would you rate your overall experience with the TeamForge project?	4.3

Overall Parent Feedback

Question	Average Score (1–5)
How well informed about purpose & goals?	4.4
Usefulness of communications?	4.6
Confidence in understanding what your child was learning?	4.1
Child's enjoyment of TeamForge?	4.6
Support for developing teamwork/communication skills?	4.5
Increase in your child's confidence?	4.3
How well do you think the format suited your child?	5
Value of this project for other young people?	4.9
Interest of your child in another TeamForge in the future?	4.7
Would you recommend TeamForge to another parent/carer?	5

Participant testimonials

"These sessions are the thing I look forward to in the week"

"The game that TeamForge uses is a great game with many opportunities for me to learn to communicate and also learn more about other people and working with them, this experience has been really helpful to me making new friends and talking to people etc. I've had lots of fun whilst being with TeamForge"

"Playing Valheim, making new friends, it's been a blast"

"The game is really good and we are doing well with the team work. In order to advance my skills I need to face challenges and TeamForge has plenty of challenges"

"It's so much fun!"

"I think my communication has definitely improved"

"I love working on progressing various different things, I love the adventure and TeamForge is exactly that, especially with loads of other people making it even more fun and explorative"

"I found it a bit challenging to begin with but now I am really enjoying it. My facilitator is really respectful and helps calm me and helps me deal with difficult situations"

Parent testimonials



"TeamForge is a brilliant initiative for teens who are struggling through a difficult period in their lives. It gives them an opportunity to have fun with others their age while building their confidence in a safe and engaging way. Thanks so much to Mark and his team for making it happen!" Parent

"A great place to meet new people from outside your normal circles and learn new skills." Sinead, Parent

"My son has really been enjoying TeamForge, he looks forward to the sessions and is always in a great mood afterwards. I think this has been really beneficial for him - I'm so glad that I found out about it in time to sign him up!" Parent

"My Daughter has been really enjoying the team forge sessions." Parent

"A really good opportunity for young people who can find 'fitting in' tricky to learn new things and interact easily without pressure — very worthwhile!" Cliff, Parent

"Truly, wonderful programme. I wonder if there is scope for any future mentoring and if I could request that as part of his EHCP as most of the difficulty has come from him not being able to connect." Victoria, Parent

"A great tool for confidence building, using gaming — brilliant for teenagers these days!" Wendy, Parent

"My son shares very little with us, but the fact that he's been keen to do this every session since day 1 is a testament to what you must be achieving! Thank you for running such a beneficial program for the young people struggling out there and more importantly- making it fun!" Parent

"Congratulations on Team Forge, it has been a great success for my son! Really impressed by the set up and his engagement." Parent

"An online place where they can be themselves without pressure, encouraged to participate and share ideas." Heather, Parent

"His confidence has grown enormously and his positivity has come on leaps and bounds." Melissa, Parent

"Once past the first couple of sessions he just got on with it... it's become a reference point to try other physical activities." Dave, Parent

"My son is really enjoying Team Forge. He looks forward to the sessions and seems engaged." Parent

"I remain super impressed that my son not only has engaged but is excited to! This is an absolutely huge success and I can't stress that enough when he has barely left his room or has any connection for months. The fact that you have been able to encourage and support him through his anxiety to connect with everyone is incredible." Parent

Appendix



TeamForge webpage: www.questmentoring.com/teamforge

Parent testimonial video: <https://www.youtube.com/embed/QWrqpuZxLFk>

TeamForge Case Study of Jonah

The Struggle: A World Shrunk by Anxiety

Before joining TeamForge, 16-year-old Jonah's world had become severely limited by anxiety. For over a year, he experienced Emotionally Based School Avoidance (EBSA), spending most of his time in his bedroom, disconnected from the outside world and even his own family. His mother, Victoria, described him as "massively withdrawn from anything social or interactive", barely leaving his room, missing meals, and staying up all night.

Although he eventually started college, his challenges persisted. Social anxiety, difficulties with executive functioning, and disrupted sleep patterns made daily life overwhelming. Outside of his relationship with his girlfriend, Jonah had withdrawn from all forms of social connection. His mother noted that he had "struggled socially and had low confidence" and was facing significant mental health difficulties.

Facing the Challenge: Initial Hesitation and Breakthrough

Victoria discovered TeamForge through a special needs forum on Facebook and signed Jonah up, hopeful but realistic given his long-term withdrawal. The online, gaming-focused nature of the project, particularly appealing to teenagers, offered a glimmer of hope.

The first few weeks were tough. Jonah did not attend the first session, and after the second, he had a "wobble of confidence" and became emotional, showing how deeply his anxiety affected his ability to engage socially.

Victoria said that the turning point came through the support of lead mentor Mark, whose "brilliant skills" in connecting with Jonah helped him begin participating. Victoria shared, "Mark's willingness to connect with people made a difference. It felt like Mark was walking the journey with him," adding, "nobody at school seemed to get PDA like Mark does." This personalised, understanding approach was key in breaking through Jonah's initial resistance.

Progression: Connection and Confidence Through Shared Experience

With consistent support, Jonah's engagement with TeamForge transformed. He never missed a session, and it quickly became the "highlight of his week." He went to great lengths to ensure he could attend. The structured online gaming space created a low-pressure environment where Jonah could connect with peers who shared similar interests.

He described the game Valhiem, that was used in TeamForge, as "a great game with many opportunities for me to learn to communicate and also learn more about other people and



working with them.” Jonah expressed that he felt understood by the mentors, found it easy to share ideas with teammates, felt part of the team, and worked well with others towards shared goals.

Culmination: A Resurgence of Engagement and Future Aspirations

The impact of TeamForge extended far beyond the sessions. Jonah began engaging more with his family, even joining in activities like going to a football match. Victoria observed, “He’s much more happy, much more confident in himself and talking positively about the future instead of being fearful and low.” She described the change as “an absolutely huge success” and added, “You’ve worked miracles!”

Jonah echoed this, saying the “best part of TeamForge” was feeling “included in the group and heard for who I was,” and that it helped him develop his social skills more than any other activity. His increased confidence showed during the final in-person day, where he was “very chatty and energetic” and “unprompted helped pack away all of the tables and chairs.” Victoria shared, “He’s left the house, spent time with his dad, and gone to the park with friends he’s reconnected with – we are beginning to see a typical teenager.” She also described Mark as “amazing” for the role he played in Jonah’s transformation.

Future Potential: Continued Growth and Contribution

Jonah’s experience with TeamForge has sparked new aspirations. He proactively approached his mentors with ideas for future gaming sessions and expressed interest in doing work experience with Quest Mentoring, particularly in marketing. Jonah has now done 3 months work experience with Quest Mentoring and has just accepted a part time paid role to help with our social media. Jonah has demonstrated a newfound initiative and desire to contribute actively.

Victoria has also asked Quest Mentoring about continued support to help Jonah with his transition back into college. Jonah expressed strong interest in continuing online group activities and gaming with TeamForge peers, showing a clear desire for sustained engagement and social growth.

Conclusion

Jonah’s journey through TeamForge highlights the programme’s powerful impact on young people facing isolation and anxiety. His story of initial withdrawal, gradual engagement, and eventual transformation demonstrates the vital role that understanding mentorship and a shared-interest community can play.

TeamForge’s unique, gaming-based approach creates a safe, welcoming environment where young people can build social skills, develop confidence, and begin imagining a positive future. Jonah’s desire to stay involved and contribute further reinforces the programme’s lasting and empowering effect.