

2021 - 2023

Empowering Enterprise



**EMPOWERING
ENTERPRISE
PETROC™**



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Initialisms & Acronyms

BBO	Building Better Opportunities
BAME	Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic
CCT	Cross Cutting Theme
CSCS	Construction Skills Certification Scheme
CSW	Careers South West
DCT	Devon Communities Together
DKHT	Dame Kelly Holmes Trust
DTQ	Distance Travelled Questionnaire
EE	Empowering Enterprise
ESF	European Social Fund
ESOL	English Speakers of Other Languages
GEEO	Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities
GWS	Groundwork South
HotSW	Heart of the South West Local Enterprise Partnership
ICDT!	I Can Do That!
IF	Innovation Funds
JCP	Job Centre Plus
LEP	Local Enterprise Partnership
LGBTQ+	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer +
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
ODILS	Open Doors International Language School
PDP	Personal Development Plan
PDRS	Participant Data Reporting System
SD	Sustainable Development
TAB	Talents, Aspirations and Barriers
TNLCF	The National Lottery Community Fund
WKUK	Whiz Kidz UK (Plymouth)



Introduction

Empowering Enterprise (EE) was a Building Better Opportunities project funded by the European Social Fund and The National Lottery Community Fund. The Building Better Opportunities programme was delivered in 38 Local Enterprise Partnership areas across England to facilitate investment in local projects 'tackling the root causes of poverty, promoting social inclusion and driving local jobs and growth, particularly for the hardest to reach groups'.

Empowering Enterprise was one of three BBO projects in the HotSW LEP area which received £4.4 million of funding over a period of 6 years in order to deliver a unique project for 18- to 24-year-olds. EE was delivered by 13 partners and led and managed by Petroc. Delivery of the project initially commenced in July 2017 and came to an end in July 2020. After receiving further funding the project recommenced in January 2021 and closed in May 2023. This report draws particular attention to the project during this recommencement period, whilst still providing an overview of the project as a whole. Several key themes continued in the recommencement period which are covered in detail in the 2017-2020 Impact Report, available at: <https://www.empoweringenterprise.org.uk>. Other interim reports with detail on specific delivery periods are also available on this website, , videos of participants and mentors can be seen at <https://www.youtube.com/@empoweringenterprise2484>.

Over this time, EE worked with 1072 young people in Devon, all of whom faced the biggest barriers to getting into work, education or training, to equip them with skills for life and work giving them the confidence to find a path to a brighter future.

EE was distinctive in its approach as the support of participants was holistic, 'wrap around' and non-time bound. Through one-to-one mentoring sessions and group work, participants were encouraged to identify and explore their talents, aspirations and barriers, and work towards a personal development plan. The format of support undertaken was tailored to the needs and interests of participants, and worked towards building confidence, tackling barriers, gaining skills, and encouraging pursuit of aspirations. 592 official results were achieved by 530 participants, with regards to moving into job search (177 results, of which 87 were not seeking at the start), education and training (216 results) or employment (including self-employment) (289 results). Beyond these official results the many skills, experiences and attitudes developed by participants have been life changing.

Equally important as the success achieved by the participants was the wider influence of the project. Delivery partners' successes were recorded against wider societal outcomes which developed support services, communities, businesses and partners themselves. Leaving a significant mark on the support services ecosystem of Devon.



Key Summary

- Empowering Enterprise (EE) provided wholistic, 'wrap around' and non-time bound support to 18- to 24-year-olds in Devon, all of whom faced the biggest barriers to getting into work, education or training. Funded by the European Social Fund and The National Lottery Community Fund, the project received £4.4 million funding over a period of 6 years (2017-2023) to provide one-to-one mentoring sessions and group sessions to equip young people with skills for life and work, giving them the confidence to find a path to a brighter future.
- A total 1072 participants went live on the project. 592 results were achieved by 530 participants, meaning 49.5% of participants exited with a formal result. 177 young people moved into job search (of which 87 were not job seeking at the start), 216 moved into education and training, and 289 young people moved into employment (of which 199 were seeking employment at the start, with the rest being economically inactive). Distance Travelled Questionnaire scores, completed by 775 participants, reported an average of 11.4% positive change. These numbers only tell a small part of the life changing impact of the project on individual participants lives.
- The characteristics of the participants were complex and varied, often on a scale unanticipated by delivery partners. For example, 49% self-identified as disabled, 41% were from jobless households, and 30% did not have entry level Maths.
- Over the life of the project, there were a number of unexpected challenges which the partnership had to manage, including the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent lockdowns, the cost of living crisis, housing crisis, stretched support services, and staff turnover issues.
- Core to the project's impact was the approach of mentors, who worked flexibly with each participant, fostering trust and understanding their individual needs. However, at times the level and complexity of participant needs was overwhelming for mentors, who needed close and supportive colleagues to manage and find solutions.
- A key factor in the success of the project was the partnership approach which, with diverse and localised partners, provided a mix of local knowledge, specialisms, and geographical coverage whilst working with a joined up approach and sharing best practice and resources.
- Existing support services were made more visible and accessible to young people and their communities, and were made more sustainable through direct involvement on participant level and by strategically influencing local networks. Mentors' ability to advocate on behalf of young people increased their access to services.
- EE encouraged positive views of young people in wider society. With communities, employers and businesses influenced through participant placements, relationships with partners, and by sharing of training and strategic materials.
- From project inception co-design with young people was a guiding principle, this was highly successful on a participant level in the development of personal development plans and group activities, including via Innovation Fund activities. Co-design on a strategic level was achieved through some dedicated co-design activities to inform employer engagement strategies, but could still have been further embedded.
- Key learnings from the project are numerous and relate to project set-up, management and ongoing support of a partnership, establishing data reporting systems, the value of Innovation Funds, involving young people in co-design on an individual and more strategic level, how to support young NEETs individually and in groups, what training and support mentors need, building relationships and working with support services, communities and employers.

Rory, 19

Rory was a participant of Empowering Enterprise in 2021-2022. The close relationship Rory developed with their mentor at delivery partner Eat that Frog (ETF) meant that they were able to work through life challenges together, giving Rory the confidence and skills to look forward and find the right employment .

Rory was referred to Eat That Frog by the Job Centre. When they joined they had been doing community service and drinking heavily and in their words was “a complete mess”. Rory was also dealing with an eating disorder.

However Rory was determined to not stay in that place forever, so upon meeting people at ETF Rory was put in touch with their mentor, Sue. The first thing Sue made sure to tell them was to remember that ‘you are enough just as you are’.

Instead of focusing on pushing towards education or employment as things Rory ‘should do’, Rory’s mentor focused on them as a person, their mental health and the things they love – always putting them first.

It was established very quickly when Rory and Sue met that they would get along. When they first met up they just went for coffees and walks and talked about anything and finding out about each other. Rory said “I just felt we were the perfect match! I wondered whether you had researched me and put us together”.

These meetings started to make Rory feel hopeful, and like they were worth something and could go somewhere with their life. Sue and Rory did vision boarding to get creative about their future and not just think about jobs but lifestyle and relationships – but their overall happiness. In Rory’s words:

“past mentors had been very money/job/education orientated, and Sue has always been ‘me orientated’ and I always looked forward to our meetings on a Monday so I could let go of everything with her... If it wasn’t for her I wouldn’t be ready to get back into work life or education ”



“Sue gave me a shove, not [as] in ‘you have to do it’, but ‘you can do it’ – and always asking me how she can help.”

2021/22 had been the worst year for Rory’s eating disorder, and they had always thought this would be the last aspect of their journey to address – but an opportunity with the college came up and things moved very quickly. Rory started a course at college and worked as an apprenticeship at The Cantina, in Goodrington – near Paignton. In Rory’s words:

“Sue was one of the only people I could talk openly with about my eating disorder. That was something I really struggled to talk about. Sue has helped me turn something that has so negatively impacted my life and could now become my life long career and helped me turn something I had such fear off into something I absolutely love, and I will spread love with. I absolutely can’t wait to start working as a chef here – it just seems like such a beautiful community, and something I would really like to do in the future”.

Will

Will describes below, in his own words, how the project helped him achieve his goals

"I live with my grandparents at the moment for the last 3 or 4 years. I did my first year of college, and then got to the second year of college and everything sort of fell apart through things that weren't really my fault. They messed up my timetables and I wasn't on the college's system and I didn't know what course I was on, I was following my mate's timetable and I was kicked out of college because I didn't have the work to be able to do. Which was really annoying because I'd been really enjoying the 1st year at the college at Bridgewater, doing music. So then someone mentioned Young Devon, although I've not a clue who recommended it. It might have been one of the youth centres in town, because I'd been asking them for bits and pieces.

I started the independent living skills course for a year which was good because I was meeting people from all over the gaff - Tiverton, Exeter, Plymouth. All with different circumstances and ages (from 16-20 something). That was just before lockdown, we were meeting at the YES center (Exeter) and that was good. We were just trying to work out standard living skills and how to get by with sort of sociability problems.

Once that wrapped up, we did the second part of the course which was work placed learning. But that's when Covid hit so there wasn't much work place learning to be done. So it was with Young Devon on Zoom with Kira and Ana. The work we were doing was good, but I hated the Zoom calls, because some people sound really distorted, there would be background noise and it would feel quite chaotic which I find very hard to deal with. So I did lots of the work offline afterwards, and the work itself was really valuable, but would have preferred it in a classroom setting and it would of flowed better.

After that, I was asked if I wanted to continue on, and start working with Bob in November 2020 and do employability modules to build off the basic knowledge from the previous course. To get you work ready.

I was really nervous at the beginning of it because of how the previous Zoom calls had gone. But it went really well, and I got on with Bob from the get go, which was great because I can be nervous meeting new people. But we got our teeth into things and really ploughed through chunks of it.



With the Covid thing, no one knew what to do, and how to use Zoom and all the admin. It was so much easier just having a chat in the coffee shop, but doing all the sharing the screen the paperwork was manic to begin with because the people running these things didn't have practice doing these things either.

Bob persuaded me to get a camera, because for the whole of the courses before that I didn't have a camera, because I didn't like having my face shown. But since then I've had to do Zoom interviews with Travis Perkins and make two 60 seconds videos for Kickstart – so the practice was so important.

Overall I'm doing a lot better mentally now, as I have stuff to work towards. Before I was just sat around doing nothing and was sad the entire time, looking for things to distract me.

But now I have something to do, and I'm able to put my skills that I had before this job into practice, but I'm also learning more from the job now in terms and tools and things... It's getting easier for me to interact with people I don't know because I'm working with customers and I'm seeing the different types of people. And I'm getting more confidence in myself.

I'm coming to the end of the Kickstart programme and I'm trying to prove that I am someone that should be hired and I'm good. Because I enjoy working there and I really do not want to go through more interviews again.

Overall doing Young Devon it's really worth doing if your struggling with college. A short course on employability skills can really help a lot more than you might think! I didn't think it would be that useful. But I wouldn't be working without it, my CV was atrocious. I recommend giving it ago, if you take on the help it will click." **5**

Theory of Change

In order to establish the change, and ultimately the impact, of the Empowering Enterprise project a Theory of Change has been employed throughout the life of the project. This Theory of Change demonstrates the process of change by indicating the links between actions, outputs and outcomes and, ultimately, allows us to track whether the desired impact of the project was being achieved.

An Impact Measurement Framework (Appendix 1) was designed at the beginning of the project, and reviewed as the project extension started. The Impact Measurement Framework uses data, both qualitative and quantitative, as reported by partners and participants, to establish whether change and impact has taken place. Specifically data sets pertaining to four desired outcomes which sit alongside the quantitative targets as equally important aims of the project.

Input

£4.4 million in funding provided from the ESF and National Lottery Community Fund.

Activity

A large range of creative and flexible activities delivered by partnership staff e.g. 1:1 sessions, referral routes developed, etc.

Outputs

Quantifiable targets and results figures related to the numbers of young people engaged and their 'exit status' (shown on page 10)

Outcomes

The cumulative result of the inputs, activities, outputs and outcomes.

Impact

4 project outcomes which relate to cumulative and system wide change (shown on page 18)



Partners

STRENGTH IN DIVERSITY

Integral to the design of Empowering Enterprise was the intention for “a strong partnership encompassing a variety of organisations, which provide a mix of local knowledge and delivery, expertise, specialisms and geographical coverage”. It was felt that this would allow the project to meet the diverse characteristics and barriers of participants, some of whom may “avoid engagement with organisations perceived as representing authority and the public sector” such as colleges or Jobcentre Plus. It was also thought that organisations embedded in their own communities would be able to draw on local contacts, which would not only increase recruitment but also help participants find suitable development opportunities, thereby supporting both participants and the wider community. This partnership approach was highly successful (as discussed in 'project management' on page 16, 'outcome 4' on page 26, and 'recommendations' on page 34). This pages provides an overview of each of the 7 delivery partners active from 2020-2023, as well as indicators of the geographical reach of the project.



Established in 2011, I Can Do That! is a small team of friendly mentors who support local residents that wish to progress towards work and improve their lives. Based in Torbay, I Can Do That! grew through the project to mentor in Torbay, South Devon, Exeter, and Okehampton.



Young Devon is the largest young people’s charity in the South West. Their mission is to make Devon a better place for all young people. Each year Young Devon work with over 2,000 young people, building quality relationships to help them thrive. Their mentors worked all across Devon.



ODILS (Open Doors International Language School) is a charity for refugees, asylum seekers and migrant groups. Located in easy reach from Plymouth city centre, it provides free English language education, skills development, and employment and community integration support. Their mentoring focused on Plymouth.



Groundwork South is part of Groundwork - a federation of charities working nationally to transform lives in the UK’s most disadvantaged communities. Groundwork help people gain confidence and skills, get into training and work, protect and improve green spaces and lead more active lives. Their mentors focus on Plymouth and West Devon.



Established 2012, Battling On is a multi-award winning CIC predominantly staffed by ex-forces members. It provides support for veterans and also trains them to become mentors and instructors, to deliver programmes to vulnerable young people. Their mentors focused on Plymouth and West Devon.

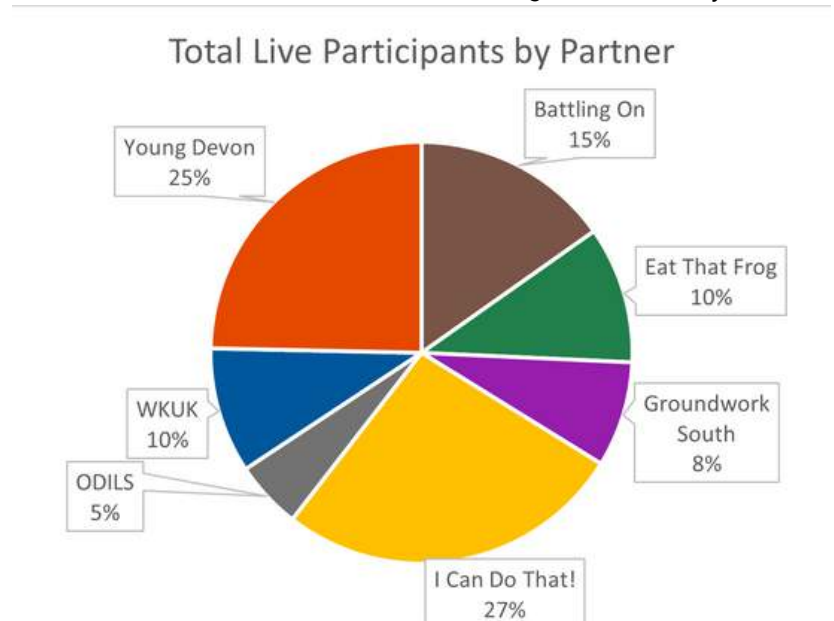
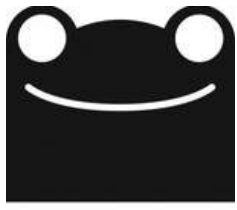


Figure 1: Total Live Participants by Partner

Please note, six additional partners were involved from 2017-20, details of whom are available in the 2017-20 Impact Report.



Eat That Frog

Established 2011, and operating eight centres in the South West, Eat That Frog support people to identify and overcome their barriers to live a more fulfilled life. They deliver courses in small groups for adults and young people (16+) who haven't thrived in mainstream education. Their mentors focused on Torbay and South Devon.



Whiz Kidz UK is a training and activities provider based in Plymouth. WKUK run careers workshops and holiday clubs that focus on work ethic, attitude and motivation, as well as weekly job clubs for adults, focused on supporting job-seekers. Their mentoring focused on Plymouth.

PETROC

Petroc is one of the South West's leading colleges, Petroc drives forward educational success in further and higher education and strives to raise the aspirations, knowledge and skills of individuals, communities and businesses in Devon and beyond. Petroc were managing partners for Empowering Enterprise, and their role is shown in detail on page 16.

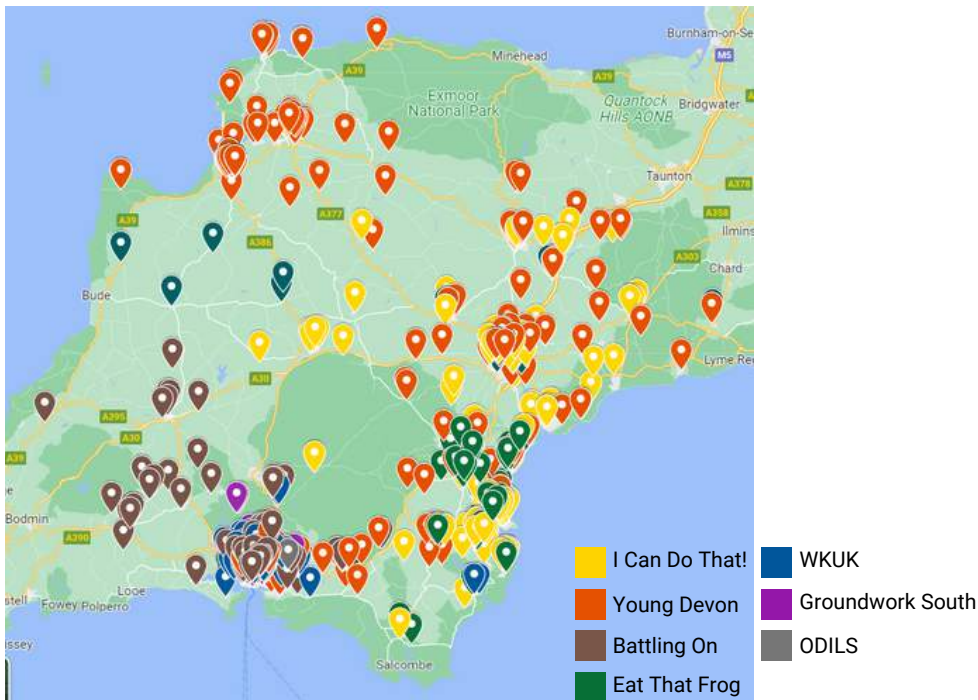
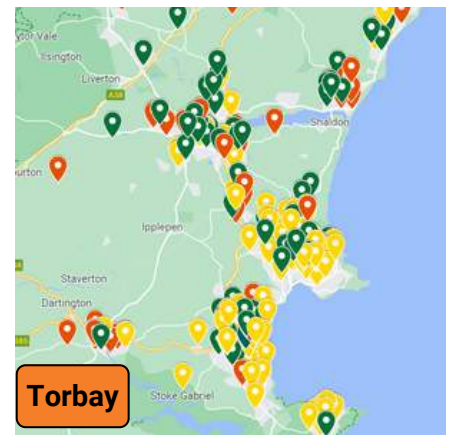
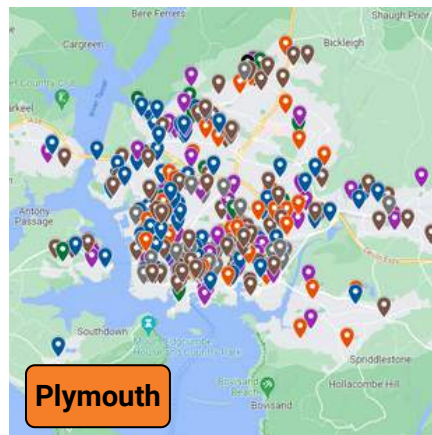


Figure 2: Participant Location by Partner



Devon Communities Together is an independent charity engaged in a wide range of projects and services that support Devon's communities to shape their own futures. Devon Communities Together were evaluation and support partners for Empowering Enterprise, supporting with employer and community engagement.



Timeline of key milestones

Empowering Enterprise was originally due to be delivered from July 2017 to July 2020, during which time **it exceeded its target of 630 participants, with a total of 657** 18-24-year olds who went live on the project. However, in late 2020, the partnership was offered a small increase in funding to deliver to end 2021, then in May 2021 EE was offered further funding with an extension of time for delivery until March 2023. The partnership's new target was to reach a further 332 eligible young people, and this target was also exceeded with final a total of 1072 participants.

Below is an outline of project events, for detail on events from 2017-20 please see the 2017-2020 Impact Report.

2015-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020 - 2023
Design Phase	Early Delivery	Reprofiling	Delivery and Covid	Delivery and Covid
<p>Stage 1 application was submitted in Q4 2015 followed by extensive co-design with young people and partners and Stage 2 application. Contract awarded in Q1 2017.</p>	<p>Delivery began in Q2 2017. Initial challenges, including the loss of 3 delivery partners, and a steep learning curve of delivery and paperwork meant struggles to meet profiled targets.</p>	<p>Petroc, having been quick to recognize the partnership's struggles met with partners to reprofile and complete a recovery plan. Petroc applied to the Lottery for an extension. Delivery had gained pace and in Q1 2019 a 6-month extension was granted into 2020 to allow for partners to reach targets.</p>	<p>By the start of 2019 only 200 participants had gone live, but recruitment and delivery increased dramatically with over 500 participants engaged by Q3 2019.</p> <p>Covid dramatically changed the needs and delivery approaches for the last 4 months of delivery from March to July 2020.</p>	<p>After the recontracting of partners, participants were recruited from Q1 2021. However, recruitment levels remained low until early 2022 as partners reestablished their teams.</p> <p>Covid remained a factor long beyond the official removal of restrictions in July 2021.</p>

Participant Starts per Quarter

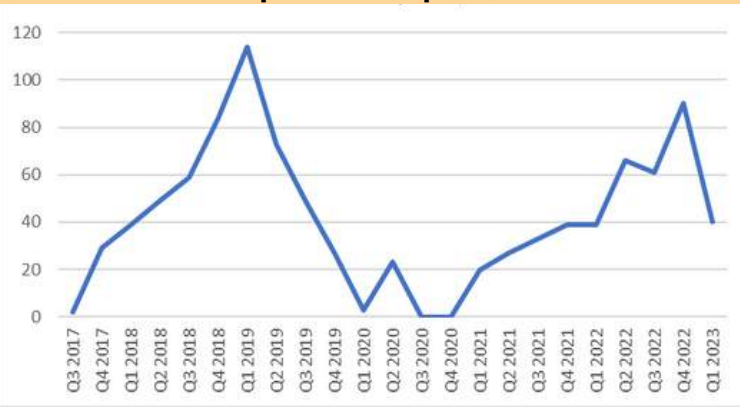


Figure 3: Participant Starts by Quarter

Cumulative Number of Live Participants

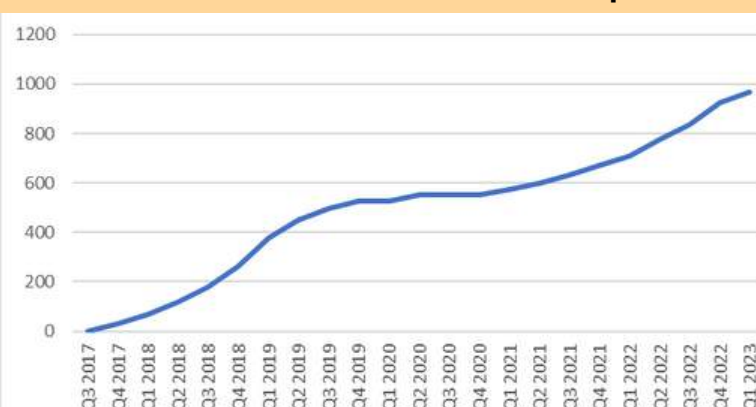
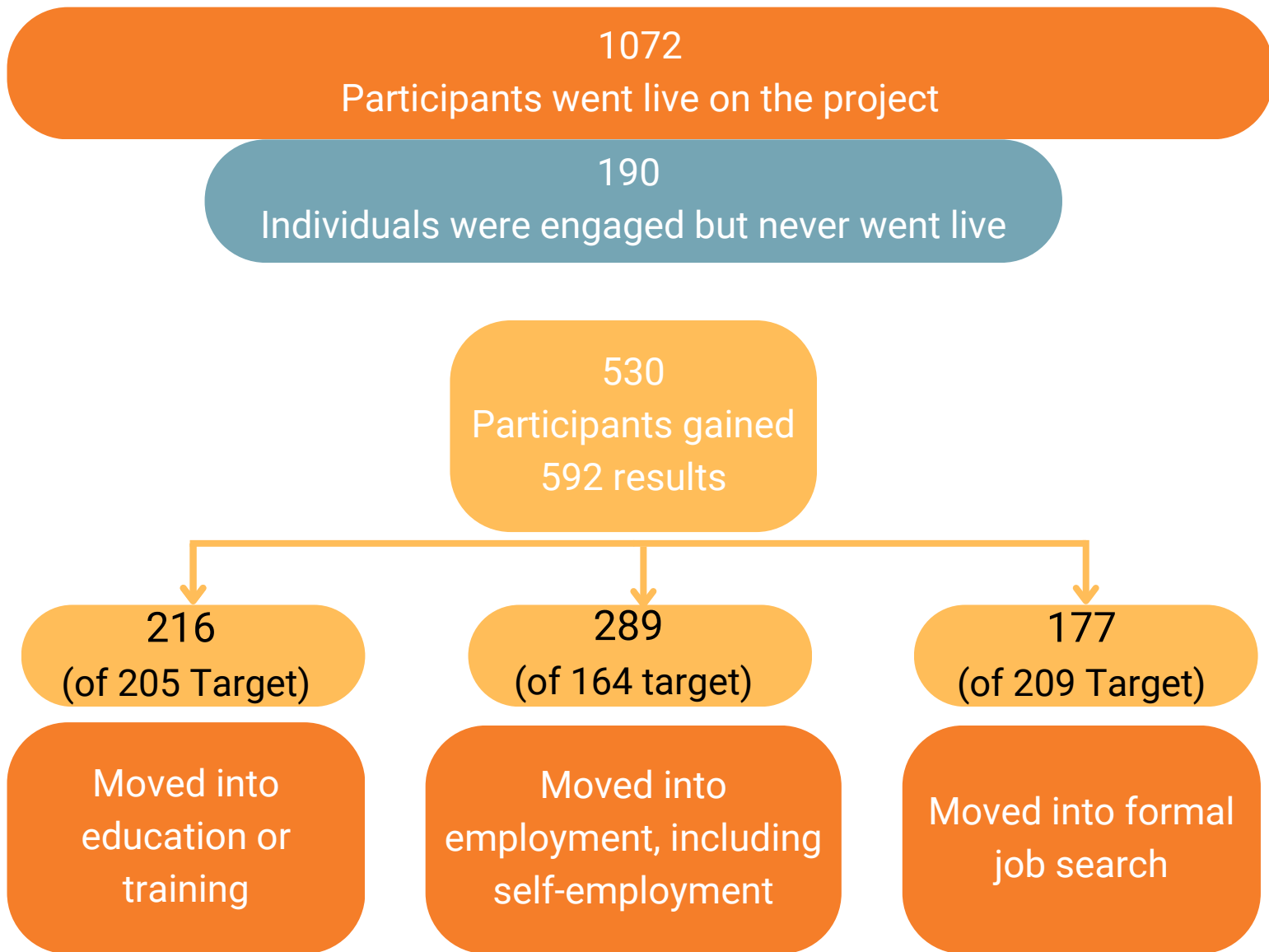


Figure 4: Cumulative Number of Live Participants

Targets and Results

A range of targets were agreed with the funders during the design phase of the project. They include targets for number of young people engaged on the project; their demographic characteristics; and the results with which they exit the project. These targets were tracked to fulfil ESF Programme requirements.

All the key project outputs targets, agreed with the funding bodies were met or exceeded.



Key Terminology:

LIVE participants were those who were working with a mentor and had all eligibility paperwork completed. They could then be counted towards the projects overall target of participants.

NEVER WENT LIVE participants were those who were engaged with a mentor and could potentially be working with them for several weeks/ months, but did not submit all eligibility paperwork and were subsequently withdrawn from the project.

COMPLETERS were the participants who fully completed the exit process moved into one of the project's designated results, or became 'Completers Without Result'.

If participants did not complete the exit process they were counted as **WITHDRAWN**.

Participant demographics and project statistics

These statistics pertain to the 1072 participants who went live on the project, representing their identity and circumstances at the time of their initial engagement with the project (excluding participants who choose 'prefer not to say'). Full demographic breakdown against targets can be found in Appendix 2.

26%
did not have
entry level
English

30%
did not have
entry level
maths

44%
had a work
limiting health
condition

49%
had a disability

7%
were an
ex/offender

41%
were from a
jobless
household

10%
were homeless

10%
were jobless
with dependants

21
was the average
age of a
participant

27%
held lower
secondary
education or less

8%
were from ethnic
minority groups

55%
of participants
identified as Male

43%
of participants
identified as Female

1%
of participants identified their gender as 'Other', and 1% preferred not to say.
Please note that significantly more than 2% of participants were managing factors around their gender identity. This is discussed further on page 33.

Mentors reported that the high numbers of young people self-identifying as having “work limiting health conditions” or “a disability” would do so as a way of indicating that they were really struggling, for example with anxiety, agoraphobia or fatigue. These demographic statistics, whilst helpful, do not tell the full story of the complex and overlapping challenges often presented by participants. For example, mentors could find it challenging helping young people understand the necessity for work against a backdrop of family and peer pressure not to work, or due to having a life that they didn't see a need to change. They don't tell of participants with extreme social anxiety, a reluctance to try new things, or no apparent interests or goals. They don't cover matters such as neurodivergence, substance abuse, traumatic pasts or home lives. The barriers that participants were facing were far more complex than partners anticipated and participants often presented more barriers as mentors got to know them, making working with them more complex and time consuming.

Facing challenges

Over the life of the project, as is to be expected, there were a number of unexpected challenges which the partnership had to manage. Some of these related to the partnership itself, while others were related to wider socio-economic factors. Challenges specifically related to engaging and working with the complex barriers of young people, and challenges related to the accessibility of support services are discussed further in Outcomes 1 and 2 respectively.

Partnership Changes, Reprofiles, and Extensions

Petroc approached the project “flexibly from the start”, anticipating that targets and budgets would move around and be reprofiled, and partners may ask for extra numbers. This adaptable approach was communicated to partners from the offset and has been a key strength. Petroc had an ‘Expression of Interest’ form available which partners were able to submit at any time to increase their target.

This anticipated flexibility first proved its worth as 4 partners exited the project in 2017/18, with their targets being distributed to other partners. This reshuffling continued throughout the project as some partners struggled with recruitment and others were able to expand their mentor teams and delivery areas.

In September 2018 Petroc recognised the need for action to engage more young people as the project was under target and underspending. The reasons behind this were challenging participant barriers, the loss of multiple delivery partners and difficulties navigating paperwork requirements. By recognizing the issue early and regularly discussing action plans with partners Petroc pre-empted the Big Lottery's own review of the project in Q4 2019, at which point partners were formally asked to re-profile their targets and finances as part of establishing a recovery plan.

In January 2019 a BBO panel met to discuss Petroc’s proposal for an extension into 2021 and it was agreed to grant the project an extension until end Q2 2020, six months beyond the original end date for delivery. This extension did not include any extra funding or targets, but rather was seen as providing time to use existing funding underspend to reach original targets. Throughout these periods of changing parameters Petroc conducted individual partner reviews and managed the recovery plan. Overall these actions can be deemed to have been successful, considering the partnership exceeded its initial engagement and results targets.

Subsequently, in late 2020, the partnership was offered a small increase in funding to deliver to the end of 2021. Then in May 2021 Empowering Enterprise was offered further funding with an extension of time until June 2023.

These decisions to extend the project, whilst welcome, were difficult to manage and as can be seen in the graphs on page 9, it took some time for the project to restabilise and to deliver at pace. This was due to delivery partners having to re-recruit, or newly form, delivery teams.



Covid-19 Pandemic

The first Covid-19 lockdown was introduced in March 2020, just four months before project delivery was due to finish. Various restrictions, whether full lockdowns, restrictions on social gatherings or the closure of venues came and went in 2020/21. Legal limits on social contact were removed in July 2021. Subsequent 'Plan B' restrictions were lifted in early 2022, which had included face mask wearing and work from home guidance. Restrictions had severely affected recruitment, delivery, the wider availability of education and employment opportunities, and capacity of support services.

Partners quickly had to adapt to the circumstances both to deliver provision and to understand the needs of participants. Some organisations felt they were already set up to facilitate remote mentoring sessions, whereas for other organisations, these were new territory and initially presented a challenge. Whether using phone, messenger platforms or video calls, mentors agreed the best approach was to 'just keep trying' - "to make sure they know you are there if and when they would like your support".

Despite mentor's best attempts many participants didn't engage remotely, despite usually engaging well, and this was for numerous reasons. The impact on wellbeing included growth in anxiety, depression, financial concerns, problematic home environments and drug and alcohol use. Many participants felt severely isolated and lonely. There was also an overall lack of motivation due to the wider crisis causing a 'lack of hope'.

Co-design activity with young people found that the use of video calls could cause anxiety in participants, who could prefer to use chat functions over video to remove pressure. Barriers to access related more to cost of data and broadband stability rather than access to suitable devices.

Restrictions also impacted on engagement with support services and community groups.

For much of this period, support services were closed or only remote, and waiting lists increased dramatically. Some participants preferred remote contact as it removed the anxiety of travelling and meeting face to face. For others engaging remotely was a challenge. Co-design activities, indicated that participants would be more comfortable engaging remotely if they knew what to expect from the interactions, and if there would not be pressure to have cameras or microphones on. Participants also advocated for text-based platforms such as WhatsApp or Discord.

Mentoring activity after lockdowns, but still under restrictions, continued to be tailored to participant needs. Having been inside for over a year motivations to become involved or pursue results were significantly affected. Young people were reported as seeing no reason to leave their comfort zone, often living in unproductive routines isolated from in-person contact and socialising through virtual worlds. As they had not had to engage with people for 18 months, some no longer saw the need. Those living in isolated ways have just become more isolated.

Mentors were increasingly sensitive to slowly pushing and developing individuals, rather than throwing them straight into activities. Mentors found that delivering activities outside, and the connection to nature, as well as casual walks or relaxed creative sessions positively impacted wellbeing. Group sessions particularly took a long time to recover to pre-pandemic frequency.

Overall the ongoing effects of the pandemic were clear. Mentors needing to work on barriers developed during the pandemic changed their normal expectations of young people moving closer to education or employment within 6 months of support, to seeing a need for 9-12 months of support. Mentors believe Covid's impact on young adults, in transition from childhood to adulthood, has been especially significant, as it has disrupted development when they should be developing their identities.

"We have noticed and reported that young people joining the project are perhaps 3-6 months further back than they were during Phase 1. This has resulted in mentors spending more time with participants whilst they work on the many barriers that developed during the pandemic. This caused delays on beginning group activity and presented difficulties for mentors such as navigating complex housing services as many participants came to us with issues around homelessness." Project Manager - Young Devon

Further societal challenges

Cost of Living Crisis

Since late 2021, the UK has experienced the 'cost of living crisis' - the fall in 'real' disposable incomes. Prices of basic goods have been rapidly increasing, meaning many people have been struggling to meet their basic needs. The cost of food, energy, and housing have been particularly impacted. Although the Government has responded with several packages of support, household incomes are not keeping up with living costs and are not expected to return to 2021 levels in real terms until 2027. On average, poorer households spend more of their income on these essentials, and therefore these households face a higher effective inflation rate because they spend a higher share of their income on energy and food.

Long-term unemployment remains higher than it was before the pandemic for young people aged 18-24, with the cost-of-living crisis further risking locking young people, who are facing the greatest disadvantages in the labour market, out of opportunities to access good work. It means it is even harder than ever for those young people to overcome barriers that they face, and prevents them from getting into, and keeping, good work. The pressures caused by poverty limit young people's ability to access opportunities to learn and train, and ultimately get into good work, and a higher risk of and exposure to unemployment. The crisis risks further locking young people into a cycle of low-quality work and unemployment, as immediate pressures can stop them from taking positive steps towards sustainable future work. In recent Office for National Statistics research, 1/3 of young people aged 16-24 reported that their household would not be able to afford an unexpected expense.

All partners delivered sessions to support their young people to manage in the current economic climate. This was done as a part of 1-2-1 sessions, with discussion around bills, budgeting and meal planning, helping participants claim payments they are entitled to, the location of food banks and referral process. Partners have also addressed the same topics through dedicated group activities.

Threats to young people's ability to meet their basic needs can harm their mental health and leads to a vicious cycle limiting their access to good work. The Youth Futures Foundation reports that "the cost-of-living crisis threatens to make the complex barriers facing young people looking for work.

Housing Crisis

The shortage of affordable and appropriate housing is a major issue across the country and housing issues have been a reoccurring issue on the project. Housing within the private rented sector has become more expensive and social housing is increasingly scarce. Housing issues are worsened by the cost of living crisis. In the reporting period July-Dec 2022, 14% of participants becoming live were homeless, this is double the 7% in the previous period. Over the course of the project 10% of all participants have been homeless upon enrolment. Youth homelessness is a complex issue that can often be a symptom of wider problems in young people's lives, such as the breakdown of family relationships, domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental health problems.

The effect of homelessness not only means the lack of a safe place to sleep, but it also affects young people's educational attainment, their employment prospects, and their mental and physical health, which can leave a lasting impact on the young people's lives, continuing to impact their prospects for many years beyond.

The housing issues faced by participants often needed resolving first, before it was possible to proceed with employability skills. The flexibility of the project allowed the mentors to spend the much needed time supporting participants to find housing solutions.

Covid-19, the cost of living crisis, and housing issues have increased other challenges for participants, with people feeling increased anxiety and isolation at a key stage of their life.

"The cost of living crisis is affecting everyone and mentors are using this as an opportunity to build budgeting into sessions, offer cooking sessions with food that is both affordable and nutritious, discuss sustainable fashion (buying from charity shops/upcycling/clothes swaps etc) Sue is also developing craft sessions to help young people prepare for the Christmas period." Project Manager, Young Devon

Further societal challenges

Stretched Support Services

Throughout the project, mentors have reported there was a lack of capacity and lengthy waiting times at external support services, and therefore lack of timely support from outside the partnership, most notably housing providers, mental health support, assessments and support for neurodivergence. Mentors have also reported that if you move local authority you can be moved to the bottom of a service's waitlist, causing further delays for those in the most unstable situations.

Mentors reporting the lengthy waiting times did say that the majority of support services staff, once engaged, wanted to support the participants. Although staff in these services were not always suitably informed to work with the EE demographic.

The lengthy wait times can lead to young people feeling intimidated and can cause anxiety to approach the service. The role of mentor subsequently had to walk the line between wrap around support, and determined advocate and mediator to help young people access support services.

Mentors, at times, felt both under-resourced and unqualified to provide this support themselves, whilst simultaneously feeling that it would be inappropriate to focus on employability with a participant, whilst other issues were present e.g. homelessness or drug issues.

Some of the delivery partners on the project were uniquely positioned to signpost to sister organisations or support services within their organisation, for example I Can Do That! had a counselling service and Young Devon a housing service. This could help young people feel more confident accessing a service and alleviated some of the issues around waiting times or miscommunications.

Staff Turnover

High staff turnover and difficulty in recruitment, both within delivery organisations and support services, was a significant challenge for the project.

Between 2017 - 2020, Groundwork South and I Can Do That! found staff changes particularly impacted their capacity. From 2021 to 2023, while all partners had to re-resource their delivery teams, Groundwork South and Eat That Frog disclosed that they had faced significant challenges around turnover. This they said was related to staff wellbeing, pay and challenging processes.

As a result of this Groundwork South, unfortunately, were unable to work with any 'Live' participants on the project from 2021. Several participants were engaged by different mentors, but did not go live before staff turnover. Petroc reprofiled Groundwork's targets as needed to other partners.

"[Turnover was due to] low pay, lots of paperwork and challenges with processes, [and meant] lack of cohesion and outcomes for participants" Manager, Groundwork South

The impact of mentor staff changes overall, can be seen in the signposting data (detailed on page 22), with fewer referrals being made as the project re-established itself.

Turnover within support partners also affected the consistency of partnership liaison.

Staff turnover and stability of service delivery in society as a whole was especially exaggerated by the Covid-19 pandemic. During this time, many support services were stretched, as staff were furloughed, and waves of Covid infections could affect entire teams. This impacted waiting times and overall quality access to services.

"The initial EE team left during COVID, this was for a mixture of reasons, some moved away and others progressed to other roles within ETF. We recruited a new team towards the end of COVID who again left due to fixed term positions till the end of the programme and also the increased mental health support needed for participants affecting their own health which was an impact of COVID." Manager, Eat That Frog

Project Management approaches

Petroc, as grant holder and managing body for Empowering Enterprise, tracked project progress. They developed and implemented strategies to ensure targets, results and outcomes were achieved, including how these targets related to budgets and resources. Close management was especially needed during 2018/19 to reprofiling extension applications (more detail on page 12) where Petroc increased insistence on transparency over potential participants and increased pressure on partners. This led to more accurate predictions around targets each quarter.

Close communication with partners continued via quarterly 1-2-1 meetings, partnership wide meetings, support sessions and newsflashes. These were key to the overall success of the project, as discussed in Outcome 4. Petroc's discussion of action plans accounted for each partner's unique structure and approach. Petroc was generally seen positively, with partner managers commenting on Petroc's communication being "extremely responsive to enquiries" and "very fair and transparent".

Other responsibilities included:

- Liaison with TNLCF, covering quarterly reporting; managing targets, expenditure and risk within the partnership; and managing changes in BBO or ESF Programme rules and disseminating guidance to the partnership.
- Developing and maintaining a bespoke reporting system to record all necessary participant data, and deliver changes in administrative processes where necessary, such as the development of participant paperwork.
- Supporting partners with the, often new and challenging, financial claim process and participant evidencing paperwork.
- Leading on the incorporation of the cross cutting themes (further information on page 32)
- Developing and managing the project website.
- Organising and hosting three conferences.
- Managing the Innovation Fund (considering partner applications, delegating funds, and supporting delivery where appropriate) (further information on page 28).

A note on paperwork

Paperwork was a key means of administering and evaluating the project but, at times, was a source of significant frustration for mentors and participants and a barrier to working relationships being effective. Paperwork requirements were determined by the funders and can be seen in Appendix 3.

Participants would have to provide their national insurance numbers and an original copy of ID to be successfully enrolled on the project. This paperwork was often difficult to obtain due to the circumstances of participants, and a significant amount of effort could be invested in a young person who would never go live. Once live, mentors used templates to support participants to identify and reflect on their talents, ambitions and barriers (or TABs) and to co-design a bespoke personal development plan (or PDP).

Additionally, each participant completed a 'Distance Travelled Questionnaire' (DTQ), with statements about personal development areas. The DTQ would serve as a baseline assessment on project entry and would be revisited upon exit. These pieces of paperwork were essential for running the project, and for participants to be empowered by self-awareness and exploration of their options and aspirations.

However, being presented with such a volume of paperwork and potentially sensitive questions could be triggering and lead to participants disengaging. Mentors had to find their own techniques for incorporating paperwork requirements whilst developing trusted safe relationships.

In addition, mentors would have to log all activity carried out with participants via session logs, and referral paperwork. Overall the paperwork requirements were a challenging learning curve for many mentors, and were often considered overly complex or a burdensome use of time.

Mentors had to find their own techniques for incorporating paperwork requirements whilst developing trusted safe relationships.

Outcomes

The four outcomes shown below, measured via a diverse range of quantitative and qualitative outputs, are not contractual targets for partners. However, they have been fundamental for project reporting and evaluation and allow us to develop an understanding of cumulative and system wide change.

1

Young people participating in the project have improved their employability, entrepreneurial and life skills.

2

Existing support services are more visible and accessible to young people and their communities, and are more sustainable.

3

Communities and businesses are more cohesive and resilient.

4

Project partner organisations have increased their capacity and capability to support young people through a more joined-up approach, sharing of best practice and access to training and resources.



Outcome 1

Young people participating in the project have improved their employability, entrepreneurial and life skills.

Whilst celebrating that the project's employment and education exit targets were exceeded (page 10), it must be remembered that, these quantifiable successes are only a fraction of the story. They do not tell of the barriers overcome, skills developed and personal progress made. For participants this project has been life changing.

Core to this impact was the approach of mentors. Mentors worked flexibly with each participant, fostering trust and understanding their individual needs. Participants often had complex challenges, and the bonds formed allowed mentors and young people to tackle issues together, building strengths beyond employability skills.

Group activities complemented the 1-2-1 delivery and, although regular group sessions were initially difficult to set up, they built important social confidence, and exposed young people to employability skills.

Exit Results

49.5% of participants exited the project with a result, 21.6% were 'completers without result', and 29% were withdrawn.

289 entered employment, **87** moved from being economically inactive to actively job searching, and **216** returned to education or training, upon leaving the project. The variety of sectors, roles and courses undertaken by participants is substantial.

Job roles were diverse, but most common in hospitality, retail and construction sectors, including:

- Care work, bar work, night shifts, shelf-stacking jobs, embroidery, cheese manufacturing, business start-ups, and animal care.

Education or training entered into ranged from:

- Base qualifications such as the retaking of GCSEs, or basic level English and Maths courses
- Vocational courses such as CSCS labourer, sports and fitness, and nail technician
- Higher level education via university or university access courses

Wider personal development

To achieve such results mentors and participants would usually have spent considerable time **developing the foundation skills** necessary to gain a result, with activities such as those named on page 20.

Prior to, or alongside this skill and personality development, mentors were often helping to **resolve crisis situations** related to housing, mental health issues, drugs or alcohol, disabilities and learning difficulties, often via advocacy and research.

Despite the variety in participant journeys, it was a common theme that life skill development, confidence building and crisis management were usually essential prior to any employability work.

>25,000 hours
were spent with participants

Participants spent, on average,
29 hours over 236 days
on the project.

Mentors' view on optimum time for participant support

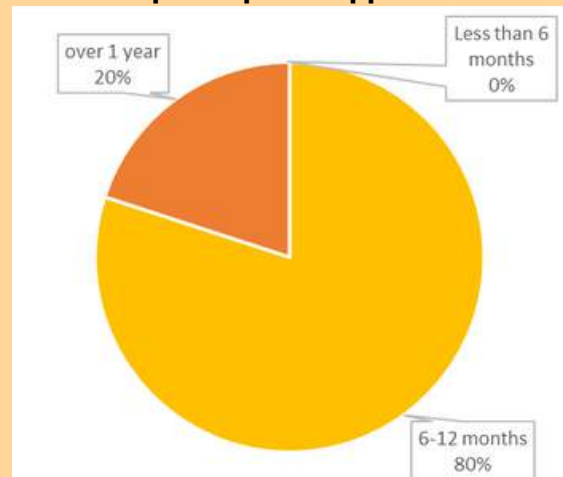


Figure 5: Optimum time for mentor support from mentor survey 2023

82%
of DTQs reported a
positive overall
change

11.4%
average DTQ score
increase (64.7 to
76.5)

NB. Distance Travelled Questionnaire (DTQ) scores should be considered subjectively. Mentors noted that participants reporting a negative score change could actually be improving self-awareness.

Common Barriers and Goals

Empowering Enterprise was established to reach the 'hardest to reach' and consistently demonstrated how its participant centred mentor support helped those who may have struggled with other provision.

A sense of these barriers is captured in the demographics shown on page 11. With 33% of participants not having basic level qualifications in maths and/or English; 41% from a jobless household; 49% self-identified as having a disability; 10% were homeless. Mentors reported that challenges are usually interlinked and complex, with issues such as past traumas and family relationships impacting on many participant lives.

Beyond demographic statistics the challenges most commonly presented to mentors were around participants' anxiety, very low confidence and motivation. Meaning 'everyday' activities such as socialising and travel by public transport were real tests.

As can be seen in the graph below, which shows the number of times words were used in participant PDP goal setting, terms related to confidence, socialising and wider wellbeing were common alongside employment goals.

£71,200
spent on participant
expenses

40
gym
memberships

99
birth certificates
bought for
participants

25
sets of
work/interview
clothes

An Adaptable Approach

EE understood that its participants' circumstances would be complex, and was designed to be flexible and responsive. For example, there was not be a maximum time limit placed on participation, participants could be withdrawn and later reenrolled and participants could have access to financial support to help break down practical barriers via participant expenses. Expenses covered by the project included support with childcare costs, transport costs, attaining ID or interview/work clothes.

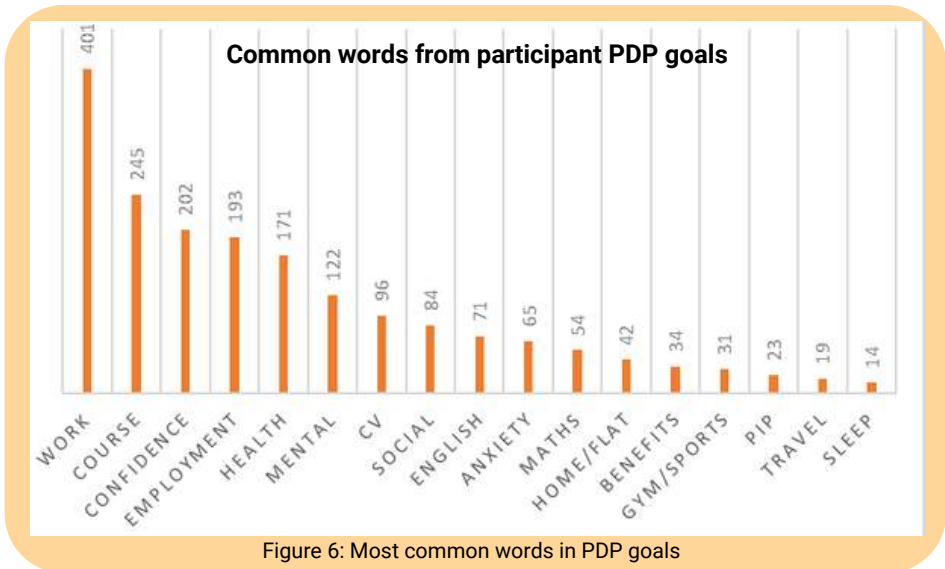


Figure 6: Most common words in PDP goals



Mentoring

The mentoring relationship was the core of project delivery, with the mentor delivering 1-2-1 and group sessions as well as advocacy and signposting work. Guided by individuals' PDP and TAB paperwork (page 16) each participant's journey would look very different to another as the mentor supported them in making progress.

The spectrum of activities undertaken was vast and included:

- Helping participants through eviction procedures
- Updating CVs and mock interview practice
- Establishing Google Drive accounts
- Supporting claims for cost of living payments
- Finding and supporting integration into parenting groups and social activities
- Travel training sessions.
- Budgeting and cooking sessions
- Aid with work placements and volunteering roles.

Mentors were only able to do their roles by having great strength of character, and their central contribution cannot be celebrated enough. Training needs are further discussed in Outcome 4, but in short mentors needed to be knowledgeable on many areas, be able to research support suitable for their participants, and have great patience, perseverance and empathy.

"Kerry is reliable and trustworthy and always there for me. She is a bit crazy and makes me smile"

"It felt like having a grounded friend/uncle who doesn't distract me with his own life/issues"

"Bob was very patient and encouraging, swapping food - I made cake, Bob made bolognese"

"Debt management, help in what order to do things, where to go. WKUK spoke to the companies over the debt, were not judgemental and were there to talk to"

"I really enjoyed Malcolm making me realise I am worth more and that i have the power to do anything in life. He restored my faith and confidence in life"

"Previously I've been in some tutoring roles and there is quite a big difference [when mentoring] you can really be yourself and the way that you connect with these young people on a deeper level, you can help them achieve so much more. It's not just about employability, you're helping them emotionally, you're helping them with all sorts of things - housing, support services, and some things they don't even realise that they needed. [Mentoring is] giving that full package of support to a young person and being able to tailor it in your own way."

Nessa, Eat That Frog Mentor.



Group work

From the project's outset, group work was intended to be a core part of participants' journeys, helping to build social confidence amongst other benefits. As discussed in the 2017-2020 Impact Report original plans involving a separate mentor for group activities did not work out. Group delivery varied widely across delivery partners and organising group activities was, for some partners, a challenge due to time consuming logistics, and due to participants' often chronic anxiety (not helped by the Covid pandemic).

However, 1075 group sessions (over 3,259 hours) did take place with 325 unique participants.

These included trips to the cinema, Plymouth lido, an escape room, as well as activities such as cooking and nutrition workshops, pumpkin carving for Halloween, craft activities for Christmas, and even a photography drone workshop. There were also Innovation Fund activities (page 28). The sessions built social confidence, and overall motivation for involvement which allowed faster progress with 1-2-1 sessions.

"Group sessions enable friendships to develop, horizons to broaden, and imaginations to grow"
Project Manager, Battling On



Outcome 2

Existing support services are more visible and accessible to young people and their communities, and are more sustainable.

While mentors support was of great value, it is important to remember that there is a threshold for specialist support where external services were needed. Unfortunately, these services, in many cases were overwhelmed.

The project helped make existing support services more visible, accessible and sustainable, through both direct involvement on participant level and by strategically influencing local networks. Mentors' ability to advocate on behalf of young people, often drawing on knowledge and relationships carefully built up with service providers, increased their access to services. Local services were also positively impacted by Empowering Enterprise's mentors, as they were trusted to meet the multiple needs of participants, alleviating some need for external support and freeing up other services' capacity.

Signposting:

The highest signposting routes were:

- **Education or Training: 24%**
(of which 20% of these, 5% of total referrals, were for basic functional skills in maths or English).
- **Mental Health Services: 18%**
- **Physical Health and Wellbeing: 10%**

The service areas most named as being signposted to can be seen in Figure 7. Further information on specific services most commonly used can be found in the useful resources Appendix 4.

Instances of signposting by support type

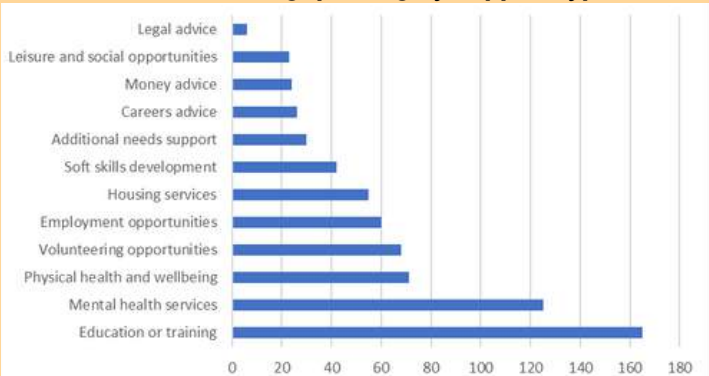


Figure 7: Most common signposting by support type

"The greatest challenge on the project for me was the lack of resources in areas such as mental health and housing, i.e. incredibly long waiting lists for mental health support and very little social or suitable housing. . . .the lack of talking therapy/counselling provision. The waiting lists are astronomical." - Empowering Enterprise Mentor

Visibility, Accessibility, and Sustainability

Petroc intended from the beginning that the package of support provided would consist of 'supported referrals to existing services' as well as through partner interventions. Furthermore, it was always an aspiration for participants to have a 'better knowledge and understanding of their local community, including local services. . . and be able to identify local challenges and gaps in provision.'

It is worth noting that although they are interrelated, the visibility, accessibility and sustainability of support services are also distinct. For example, a young person may be introduced to a service that they were not previously aware of (visibility). However, upon attempting to engage with that service, they are faced with a wait time of six months (accessibility), possibly due to the service's lack of funding or resources (sustainability). Empowering Enterprise played a role in improving all three of these areas.

Visibility

695
Instances of
signposting

With
311
participants

77.5%
related to
previously
unknown services

In reality, these figures don't tell the whole story, as mentors signposted so routinely, it wasn't always recorded. Signposting was to a broad range of big and small services. With common referral routes including well known organisations such as The Prince's Trust, local colleges, Young Devon's Counselling service, local councils housing services, GP services, Talkworks and Learn Devon. Numerous smaller services with bespoke solutions were also accessed, such as grief counselling, a hypnotherapist, an art therapy course, or a local digital upskilling service.

Participants' average DTQ self-assessment for:

"I know where I can go for help in life." increased on average 17% on exit.

"It has opened my eyes to the reality of a lot of young people today and how connecting the dots between different agencies is key to them accessing the most services possible, which is something near impossible for them to work out by themselves." - Empowering Enterprise Mentor

A Mentor's Role

Operating in a context where many of the services had a prohibitively large waiting lists and there was instability and changing provision (explored further on page 15), mentors played an essential role in aiding both access to, and capacity of, services.

Aiding access and advocacy

Knowledge of suitable support services and their referral processes is an essential need for mentors (and support service staff). However, navigation of services can feel an overwhelming task to know what help is out there and how to access it. Mentors relied on sharing knowledge within and across partner organisations, personal relationship development with service staff and a determination to search for and access the most suitable solution.

Although mentors were determined to develop individuals' life skills, there are certain tasks which are extra challenging without a determined person at your side. Mentors logged 1,784 advocacy sessions with participants. This included supporting on a variety of things, from resolving Universal Credit or utility bill troubles, to helping complete complex Personal Independence Payment (PIP) applications or supporting at court appearances.

>1,030 HOURS

of advocacy were logged by mentors

However, this number is likely a fraction of the total amount of advocacy time, and represents only what was logged separate to 1-2-1 mentoring sessions.

Mentors have told us advocacy was common in sessions which, as well as helping resolve a problem, also showed young people how they can do it for themselves. They can then mirror in the future what they see their mentor doing.

It is clear many participants would not have accessed services without mentor support as they were isolated or did not have the motivation. Even when a service like JCP or Talkworks is visible to a young person, it can feel intimidating and cause anxiety to approach them. 'Breaking the ice' with services will encourage future trust in 'the system'.

72

individuals mentioned PIP applications in their Personal Development Plan.

Building Service to Service Relationships

Once a service was known about, the mentors needed to build relationships with key contacts. For example, to gain referrals from work coaches at JCP, mentors found it was not enough to have a stall set up at the premises, but would have to be persistent and proactive in having conversations with the work coaches, building a personal connection and sharing the success stories of one referral to pave the way for further referrals.

WKUK reflected on how by building a long-term and close relationship with Plymouth City Council's housing service, via close liaison and ongoing two-way dialogue, WKUK were able to refer three different participants, who were in a period of crisis, to the service and receive same-day appointments for all of them.

As personal relationships were such a driving force for coordinating support for young people staff turnover, affecting both partners and wider services, and apparently exaggerated by the Covid-19 pandemic, was a challenge for the project.

The impact of inconsistent services or staff teams was seen in the signposting data, where signposting incidences were seen to drop significantly as the project closed and reestablished itself over 2020/21.

The number of participants signposted dropped to less than 20 per quarter, in each quarter for nearly 2 years, compared to an average of over 40 in the 'non-start up' periods of the project.

Temporary funding demonstrates the lack of overall support stability, and sustainability, in the sector and the challenge of services always adjusting to and finding available provision.

50% less.

There were approximately half the incidences of signposting in 'set-up' periods

Empowering Enterprise Enhancing Wider Capacity

Mentors supported wider support services' provision, either by taking work load off of them and freeing up capacity, or by being a helpful presence for the support worker to discuss participant challenges.

A number of external support services fed back that the 1-2-1 provision and all round support offered by Empowering Enterprise was of great value and complemented their service:

Plymouth JCP's management worked with several partners and found great value in working in collaboration with the project's provision, finding that it complemented and enhanced what they could do. They reflected that young people need a lot of support and appreciated that Empowering Enterprise offers bespoke packages of support for participants, particularly in terms of young people facing barriers relating to autism, mental health or previous criminal offences.

The manager of The Zone in Plymouth worked closely with Groundwork South and fed back that he trusted and valued the project. He liked that the project offered 1-2-1 support and considered each young person holistically. He explained that, as GWS focus on supporting young people with overcoming challenges pertaining to education and work, the Zone are able to shift some of their focus to supporting young people with other challenges. He felt that Empowering Enterprise complemented and enhanced their service, especially noting that the provision freed up his organisation's capacity and had a positive impact on their waiting list.

Mentors' threshold

Mentors in some ways were not reliant on external services. For example by providing budgeting and general life skill support, debt advice was only sought upon crisis point and for specific interventions. Similarly mentors aided with mental health challenges such as low confidence or chronic anxiety by providing a safe space and trusting, consistent relationships. However, mentors were not health professionals and the level of need and upsetting situations they saw in participants was difficult to cope with at times.

Young people relied on their mentors in a system with long waiting lists, when ideally mentoring relationships would be complementing clinical support.

Referrals into the Partnership

As partners were embedded in their local communities their ability to build referral relationships and their subsequent reach for recruiting participants was enhanced.

Partners named more than 100 different referral sources for the 1072 live participants on the project, as well as naming 401 (37%) simply as coming from 'Own engagement'. More than 20 referrals came from each of CSW, The Zone and PLUSS. Local authorities were also named as key referral routes for participants, but exactly which teams these came from is unclear (e.g. care leavers, housing teams, social care). 9 participants were named as being referred from an existing participant and 12 as coming from a family member. However, by far the largest source of referrals was from the Job Centre Plus who referred 381 participants.

36%
of participants on the project were referred by Job Centre Plus.

System-wide Development

As well as partners developing relationships for individual referrals (in and out of the partnership), systematic work was carried out to make services more accessible and inclusive in the long-term.

For example: Skills Sector Team at Plymouth JCP attended one of ODILS' Innovation Fund initiatives, the ESOL Careers Fair and the whole Employment Advisor team went and spent some time at ODILS to improve their understanding of the services that ODILS offer, and to develop their skills in supporting clients for whom English is an additional language.

To increase the visibility of existing services and to showcase the needs of young people on the project Petroc coordinated three Empowering Enterprise conferences, **Unlocking Potential** (2018) and **Positive Perspectives** (2020) and **Celebration Day** (2022). These hosted a wide range of support services from across Devon, as well as talks from delivery partners and participants and were very well received by partnership staff and the wider support services infrastructure. They were rich sources of inspiration and opportunities for sharing of best practice and networking. Further detail can be found in previous impact reports.

Outcome 3

Communities and businesses are more cohesive and resilient.

Empowering Enterprise has always sought to challenge preconceptions and break down barriers between young people, communities, and employers, believing that more understanding means more cohesion and resilience. EE encouraged positive views of young people and shared best practice with communities via the provision of group activities and by encouraging volunteering. Employers and businesses have been influenced through participant work placements, relationships with partners and by sharing of training and strategic materials.

Community Engagement

Interdependent engagement with communities has been fundamental to the success of Empowering Enterprise. Community links have been easier to establish due to delivery partners being small to medium sized organisations working on local scales, embedded in, and informed about, the social landscapes within which they work.

As with support services, mentors were determined to help find community groups for participants and their knowledge of the groups increased. To assist with finding opportunities, DCT shared 'Community Calendars' with links to groups and events quarterly.

In Signposting Data, **mentors logged 68 instances of volunteering and 66 instances of soft skills development** (although we know the incidence to be much higher than this).

These included **volunteering opportunities** with: local community music events; Exeter Deaf Academy; Child care groups; gardening projects; the local library, animal care, youth centres, art centres and theatres.

Soft skills development and leisure and social opportunities included: dance classes, choirs; amateur dramatics; carers and autism support groups; weekly craft groups; youth clubs and single parents groups.

Joining a club/team/social group to gain confidence or expand social circles was **mentioned more than 50 times in participant PDPs**.

Additionally, the simple acts of interaction and encouragement from mentors should not be underestimated. Especially for participants who, when considering their barriers and goals, often talked of social anxiety and loneliness.

Significant energy was invested by mentors in assisting participants, independently and as part of group activities, to leave the house, access public transport and visit local amenities (from coffee shops to libraries to sports centres). For example, delivery partner Inspiring Arts discussed how involvement with one participant meant accessing 15 community resources, and this would be common across partners.

These steps allowed young people to know their community and be more confident in their interactions, leading to increased overall cohesiveness.

DTQ scores showing participants' self-assessment relating to community facing statements increased significantly.

15%

increase re:
"I am an active member of my community"

13%

increase re:
"I am happy talking to older people/strangers /people I don't know"

11%

increase re:
"I am open to working with people I wouldn't normally"

Delivery partner Battling On, being embedded in their community, were aware of several deaths amongst young people in Plymouth which could have been prevented with better knowledge of the sea. They saw the need to promote basic understanding around water and beach safety, including issues such as rip-tides, tombstoning, weaver fish and beach flags, to the young people in Plymouth - and used Innovation Funds to do so.

A group of participants committed to the project and met several times to discuss the subject, the information needed and how to share information, before meeting with a graphic designer to create a logo, merchandise and pamphlets. The group attended summer events to share the materials, including National Forces Day, where they set up stalls and interacted with over 200 members of the public. The events were a great success, especially as the RNLI became aware of the project and requested the material to be shared with a wider audience at local schools and community programmes.

Safe in the Sound Innovation Fund



Employer Engagement

289 participants entered into employment and numerous work experience placements and taster sessions were also arranged. This exposure to young people in the workplace will have had an intrinsic impact on organisational cultures, especially when mentors had the scope to remain involved and to talk to employers when needed to broker support needs and best practice.

Several employers indicated how their involvement with EE staff and participants changed their practices, helping them be better equipped to recruit and support young people.

Partnership engagement with employers

All partners were embedded in their local areas, and in general partners now have better understanding of the employment ecosystem they are embedded in, including employer needs and which employers locally are sympathetic to and supportive of young peoples' needs. Working relationships have been developed which will remain as a legacy of the project.

However, there was variety across partners, with some mentors more comfortable than others approaching employers and creating opportunities, where as others focused on traditional job application routes.

iOutlet, a Plymouth based online retail company for refurbished tech and repairs are one employer who benefitted from EE.



Sales Director, Russell, feedback:

"Alan Jones, from WhizKids, has been very helpful [after he offered me 3 candidates for a role] we conversed to base some ground rules before taking these lads on - offering a 2 week work experience trial with a view to full-time employment."

One candidate was employed, and iOutlet have learnt a great deal about how there are other ways to approach candidates and vacancies.

"Through this I've learnt you've got to make it much more informal and open-ended. A CV isn't 100%, you just need to show you have the attitude to show that you want to learn and improve. We make sure we keep the interviews short and sharp and very informal."



In April 2022, DCT worked with Hospiscare, who have a network of charity shops in East Devon, a distribution and recycling centre,

eBay shop and house clearance operation. They rely on volunteers and were interested in learning more about NEET young people and how to give them opportunities. Face-to-face training sessions involved 18 members of staff, including shop managers and HR and volunteering teams. They were keen to hear more about NEET young people, the sorts of issues they face and how they could support them into work experience opportunities.

One consequence involved the organisation looking to change their recruitment process, for example, to introduce a Magna Vitae - an alternative CV format for candidates who overcome difficulties in their lives - to replace the existing CV and application form. Hospiscare also had interest from several EE partners to place young people in roles.

"I found it most helpful to know that so many young people are in need of help and that we should look more to the person as an individual and not what's on paper."

Inclusive Employment Outreach

Devon Communities Together was the projects employer engagement support partner and in 2018/19 provided mentors with resources and support to reach out to employers (2017 - 2020 Impact Report).

Since 2019 DCT took a strategic approach to spreading key messages about Inclusive Employment practices and the support needs of young people. Seeking to shift employer attitudes with resources and trainings, communicating that very often it is not the young person that presents a barrier, but societal and workplace structures. There is, therefore, an emphasis on the employer's examination on their workplace practices to dismantle any apparent barriers.

Co-design conversations with young people and employers informed these resources, indicating that for participants the 'first day of work'/induction period and an ongoing supportive environment was most important.

Trainings reached over 90 business representatives (online and in person) as well as an estimated several thousand reached via material and training videos distributed via chamber of commerce bulletins, social media and press releases and at events and fairs.

Outcome 4

Project partner organisations have increased their capacity and capability to support young people through a more joined-up approach, sharing of best practice and access to training and resources.

The communication and cohesion of the partnership has always been a significant strength. Good relationships aided with the sharing of 'on-the-job' learning and best practice.

Joined up approach

With an understanding that the delivery partners would be made up of small to medium size organisations, based in their localised areas, a joined up approach was always intended. The project structure allowed participants to be passed on to a different partner if they were better able to meet their needs.

Collaboration relied on familiarity, relationships and good communication, all facilitated by Petroc via distribution of news bulletins and quarterly partner meetings, usually in person, for project management teams. Meetings were seen as highly beneficial across the partnership. 70% of project managers agreed they were helpful for learning and networking. Meetings would often have dedicated support sessions topics incorporated, but even providing space for conversation allowed for cathartic sharing of challenges, and sharing of solutions and knowledge on topics, including:

- Project matters (e.g. paperwork requirements).
- Suitable support services and how to navigate them (e.g. Universal Credit's requirements).
- Ideas for group activities for participants.

In June 2021, all partners were asked to complete a questionnaire. This sought to understand how partnership delivery may look into 2023, reviewing targets, and identifying strengths, gaps and aspirations.

DCT's role in the regular production of Evaluation Reports and case studies, as well as surveys, and hosting of dedicated Mentor, Project Management and Impact Review conversations encouraged reflection and the sharing of information within the partnership.

Some anticipated areas of collaboration were not part of the project from 2021 including local meetings specifically for mentors which were successful from 2017 - 2020. Additionally, there were originally plans for online forums for information sharing by delivery staff, but these did not manifest. Although some mentors, for a period pre-2021, did share opportunities through self-organised WhatsApp chats.

Partners capacity building

Support sessions were provided by the partnership and by partners to their own teams but staff training was not a recoverable cost on the project. Most learning was developed 'on the job' and the knowledge mentors needed was wide from interpersonal and coaching skills, to familiarity with specific health conditions.

100% of project managers believed that working on Empowering Enterprise enabled them to develop and grow their organisation's capacity.

Over 95% of individual mentors believed that working on the project developed their professional skills and capacity (58% felt they had developed 'A lot'). With the largest area of development regarding personal networks and relationships with support services and community groups.

Additionally, mentors felt they had developed mentoring skills (empathy; goal setting; session planning) and personality skills (patience, problem solving and perseverance) and improved their personal understanding of the challenges young people are commonly facing such as mental health and navigating the benefits system and support services.

Other partners and capacity issues

The issue with capacity building was most apparent upon new staff starting, as there would be a steep learning curve for mentors to learn paperwork requirements, and understand the complexity of barriers they were seeing.

As discussed in Outcome 2, mentors in their role covered many areas of support, but as they were not specialists in topics such as mental health or housing external support was needed. In the original project design, it was intended that a number of 'support' partners would advise partners in specific areas and support individual participants with specialist needs, this however didn't happen, in part due to these organisations finding paperwork requirements onerous.

"The project has increased our network and skills. It has expanded our company profile and made more people aware of us." Mentor

How to be a mentor - training and support needed

Mentors all felt that working on this project enabled them to grow and develop, but most of this development came from 'on-the-job' learning. When surveying mentors about their experience, including their training needs, they shared that:

It was great to have freedom to try different approaches; able to support the young people on my caseload in a fun and engaging way

- All areas, ranging from mental health awareness to knowledge of key agencies are important for a mentor (see Figure 8), and indicated that it would be very hard to run a complete training course for mentors as each young person has different needs and different solutions, and the support service landscape is constantly changing. Trying to cover everything would be overwhelming.
- Where it is not possible to train mentors to be ready for every situation, core skills of coaching and empathy are essential, alongside a positive mindset and hunger to problem solve and learn on the go. Foundation mental health training, knowledge of equality and inclusion and knowledge of social systems (such as care leavers and Universal Credit) were also advised.
- It was suggested that initial inductions should focus on the complex paperwork requirements of the project, and that the best form of wider training may come from a couple of days 'shadowing' an experienced mentor, as well as ongoing peer-support from managers and fellow mentors, within the organisation or partnership.

The best part was getting young people to see they are capable and that there are possibilities in their life beyond what they have been told is possible.

- Peer-support was essential for mentors. It provided inspiration around specific challenges, and suitable approaches. Peer support was helpful to develop knowledge of signposting routes and bureaucratic systems such as care leavers and social services. An organised directory and resource sheets were particularly helpful.

The greatest challenge for me was feeling isolated and not having a base

- Team support also allows mentors to not feel alone. Mentors can, naturally, become invested in their participants' lives and the mentoring process can exert a high emotional toll on mentors. Having a place to get issues off their chest was important. It should be noted that even experienced youth workers were shocked, and at times overwhelmed, by the complex needs presented by participants.
- The learning curve of participant need was steep, but as mentors became more experienced on the project they became better at triaging, (i.e. identifying the areas of support needed and in which order to address these needs).
- The focus of mentors, understandably, relates to their one-to-one support of individual participants. However, surveys indicate that developing skills in employer engagement and group/activity planning could be welcome.

The greatest challenge was working with young people who have extreme social anxiety [and/or mental health challenges] and are reluctant to try new things ... also engaging learners with no interests... Sometimes the ones who need the help the most just don't engage.

Mentors views on training needs for new mentors



Figure 8: Mentors' assessment of training needs for new mentors (Mentor Survey 2023)

Innovation Funds

The Innovation Fund was set aside to provide opportunities for mentors and participants to come together to co-design activities and sub-projects that would tackle arising issues in an innovative and dynamic way. Throughout the lifetime of the project, 16 IF projects took place. More than 150 EE participants were involved directly with attending and/or co-designing these innovation fund projects, plus over 200 further participants directly receiving materials generated by the IF projects.

The partners that applied for and carried out IF projects, were Petroc (x1), I Can Do That! (x1), DCT (x2), Battling On (x3), ODILS (x3) and Young Devon (x7). Petroc and/or DCT would often play a role in IF projects, as well as other external parties. 12 of these projects took place pre 2021 (further details can be seen in Section 5 and Appendix 6 of the 2017-2020 project report). The four further projects are described in summary below. Whilst each of the projects were unique, all of them shared multiple characteristics. The 16 IF projects:

- **Stepped outside of the mainstream delivery of Empowering Enterprise;**
- **Sought to tackle an issue which had arisen and been identified either by a participant or mentor;**
- **Encouraged participants to look beyond their own challenges and work to dismantle societal barriers for young people and beyond;**
- **Facilitated excellent problem-solving and project planning opportunities for participants;**
- **Were designed and carried-out collaboratively by both participants and mentors;**
- **Offered considerable contributions to one or more of the four project outcomes.**

The IF projects can be viewed through the 4 evaluation outcomes to see their significance and success. The Innovation Funds reached at least 55 community groups or employers through activities such as the Careers and Social Fairs, and several hundred (non-participant) young people through outreach events. IF projects also significantly developed delivery organisations' capacity, for example by addressing gaps in delivery partners' abilities to meet participant needs via dedicated LGBTQ+ support sessions or by securing a CSCS card construction course which would have otherwise been inaccessible. Furthermore, several projects addressed fundamental system challenges through research and development, which will continue to impact into the future, such as ODILS development of audience appropriate employability resources. Unfortunately despite Petroc regularly pressing for more applications, the Innovation Fund had significant remaining budget which was unawarded. Possible reasons for this are discussed on page 35.

'Eco-activities' with DCT

Identified issue: a) Mentors lack of time to spend on administrative/logistical aspects of organising group activities. b) DCT struggled to consistently engage in meaningful co-design with participants due to indirect contact.

Proposal and objectives: A series of one day, and multi-day, cross-partnership activities and workshops would be organised by DCT. These would be fun and engaging, with an 'Eco' element. Activities would benefit participants' life and employability skills, free up mentor capacity and allow mentors to meet one another, and would allow DCT direct access to participants to host evaluation and co-design conversations.

What happened: 7 activities ranging from a 5 week course at Dartmoor Zoo, to a 1 day cooking workshop. 30 young people attended from 5 partner organisations, with several attending multiple events. 10 mentors attended. Logistics were organised by DCT, and travel was especially challenging due to the spread out nature of Devon.

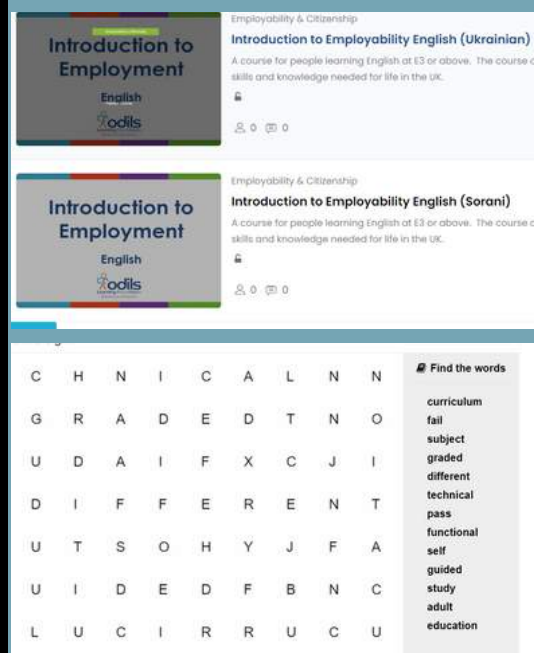
Impact, learning and moving forward: With a high attendance across partners the events were a success, building confidence in participants with one another and in employability and learning settings. Many of the different organisations involved in hosting the activities commented on how they had adapted and learnt to work with this demographic. Reattendance by participants shows the principle of the project was valid, to build direct access for co-design, however due to the projects happening in EE's final 6 months the main value was for evaluation.



Employability Videos with ODILS

Identified issue: Non-existence of lower level English language resources for developing employability and digital skills. Without these skills introduced early participants remain dependent on mentors/support services.

Proposal and objectives: By creating a course of short, accessible videos and accompanying digital learning resources participants could develop their skills faster. Ideally, learning in groups or independently, freeing up mentor time.



What happened: Only some of these resources were created in time to be used with participants on EE, as the process of developing and testing the videos unveiled the complexity of the challenge and resource creation. Ultimately, a course of 12, 2-5 minute videos were created, each one subtitled in the 7 most commonly needed languages for asylum seekers and refugees in the UK. Each video has accompanying Moodle courses with 9 resources/learning exercises

Impact, learning and moving forward: The project has been a learning process for ODILS, but they believe the framework they have developed for this course can be applied to create up to 20 further low level English courses. This will meet a need for refugees and asylum seekers in Devon and beyond, including via partnership, licensing and training opportunities with support services (e.g. JCP) and employers (e.g. construction and care sectors). This will also provide a necessary ongoing funding stream for ODILS's sustainability as an organisation.

'What do they know?' - Podcasts with Young Devon

Identified issue: a) Participants often struggle with social confidence and telling their stories. b) Digital industries are a significant part of the jobs market and one hard to access for EE participants.

Proposal and objectives: By having a 'portable studio' participants would meet one another and create podcasts where sharing their stories and views on contemporary issues would build confidence, as well as understanding of young people in communities and businesses. The project would also develop participant digital, marketing and communication employability skills.

What happened: Slightly delayed, the project ran weekly for 9 months from June 2022, based in Exeter. 15 Young Devon participants were involved. After some initial overwhelm of conversation and ideas a format and 3 week process was settled upon. One week to discuss and semi-script the topic, noting any potentially triggering issues, one week to record, and one week to listen back and edit. Young people wanted the podcast to be conversational and relatable, rather than an 'expert voice'. The participants were supported by a staff member to aid with technical aspects of sound editing and to, sometimes, keep conversations on track. The first podcast episodes were released in winter 2022/23 and are available here:



<https://www.youngdevon.org/podcast/>

Impact, learning and moving forward: Strong and meaningful relationships between participants were seen as the greatest success, with friendships maintained outside of the group. The regular group activity allowed for less 1-2-1 mentoring time, as it fulfilled many of the same functions including travel training. Young Devon as an organisation have learnt a great deal from the project and are applying for funding to continue it.



Co-design

What Happened:

From project inception co-design with young people and partners had been a guiding principle.

For partners, as mentioned on Page 12, reprofiling, regular check ins and project extensions, as well as dedicated points of evaluation were opportunities for co-design. Notably, in June 2021 as the project restarted all partners were surveyed and met with to gather their thoughts, ideas and feedback for delivery into 2023. Co-design conversations on the cross cutting themes were also common.

Partners were also involved in 2016, during the bid writing process and design phase. Significantly in this phase 90 young people were also part of conversations considering the following specific topics: Gender Equality & Equal Opportunities Action Plan; Sustainable Development Action Plan; Communications Plan; Participant Characteristics and Barriers; Geographical Hotspots; and Employer Engagement.

Three fundamental insights were gained by the partnership. Young People:

- felt that past projects had let them down due to a lack of continuity in support offered, and interventions being time limited and focusing on project outcomes, rather than the individual;
- expressed that their priority would be to gain and sustain employment as a result of the project. Some referred to a wish for employers to change the way they view young people;
- wanted their voices to be heard and to be involved in making decisions which affect them; they wanted to be listened to and not 'done to'.

Day to Day delivery

These insights have gone on to be central to delivery with the bid stating 'the principles of co-design and co-production would underpin every aspect of a young person's experience within the project'.

Each participant worked with their mentor to co-design their own bespoke package of support, to ensure that they led on their own development of skills and experience. Furthermore, there would be opportunities to co-design and co-produce project activities that would address local needs, foster community cohesion and influence policy.

As highlighted, in particular, in the discussions of Outcome 1, Outcome 3 and the Innovation Funds this has been achieved. The embedded approach of mentors as a coach or guide, using a PDP to centre their delivery on the individual, has meant young people have made their own decisions, rather having decisions made for them.

Specific project activities were regularly designed in collaboration with participants. These cases increased as the project went on, with both mentors and young people becoming more confident and enthusiastic about working in this way over time. Examples range from the design of the Welcome Bags, Safe in the Sound and Podcast Innovation Fund projects through to instigating group activities such as film nights and gaming events at Eat That Frog, and on to shaping resources, such as the LGBTQ+ language guide, which were available to help staff and other participants.

Strategic Input

Management and evaluation of the project were also identified during bid development as areas that participants would be involved in. However, as named in the 2017-2020 evaluation report, this did not happen as intended. For example, participants did not attend partner meetings or conferences to have direct contact with decision makers beyond their mentors.

Since 2021, there was a renewed effort to involve young people at a higher or thematic level. Notably, a group of 4 young people attended the 2022 celebration event and shared their experience with leadership from Petroc and other key stakeholders.

Devon Communities Together, especially, renewed the push for higher level input from participants with 3 co-design projects in 2021 reaching 49 participants. These covered, with varying levels of success, topics of:

- *Covid, young people and accessing employment, education, training and support services* (5 young people in a focus group; 16 survey responses).
- *Young people's support needs at work and the role of employers.* (10 young people survey responses, 8 mentor survey responses; 4 one-to-one interviews with young people; 7 worksheets completed).
- *On the potential of using a dedicated digital platform for intra-EE communication* (5 participants, and 4 mentors surveyed).

The insights gained from co-design informed the development of DCT's employer engagement trainings and wider strategy.

Insights included:

- Covid had an impact on aspirations, and interest in employment sectors, with young people inclined to prioritise job security.
- Video calling could cause anxiety, with a preference for chat functions/platforms, as these allow individuals to feel less pressure and for them to 'gather their thoughts', engage with conversations and resources at their pace (and not always by appointment). Participants felt more able to engage remotely if expectations around the format and feel of the interaction were clear.
- Employment support could be most helpful during the 'First days on the job', providing a non-pressurised environment where individuals were not expected to meet too many people at once. Allowing time for individuals to both meet new people and understand how to complete tasks to the employer's standards.
- Open conversations and understanding about mental health needs with employers, combined with flexibility, would allow for the best self-management of health.

Following these co-design projects 'Digital badges' were created to reflect the fact that involvement with evaluation conversations and case study development is a form of co-design. Digital Badges were made to celebrate and recognise the co-design contribution of participants. These were issued to 11 young people during case studies and the eco-activities innovation fund in 2022. <https://www.credly.com/org/badge-nation/badge/co-design-project-insight>

Badges are a simple, and visual way of recognising non-accredited learning, and are sharable on platforms like LinkedIn. Badge earners can remember their progress in future and communicate their skills, such as team working or expressing their opinions, to employers in suitable language.

In addition in Q2 2021 DCT delivered a training session on 'Design-led thinking' to share with partners some tools and techniques which could help with co-design with their participants.

Issued by: Badge Nation

Earners of this badge have engaged with a co-design activity delivered by DCT. They have worked with unfamiliar people and responded to questions about their background, experience on the programme and goals.

Skills

- Confident Communicator
- Employability
- Evaluate Information
- Feedback
- Information
- Interview
- Participate

Criteria

- Earner has participated in a co-design activity - report, case study filming or interview - in the process engaging with someone unfamiliar.



Cross Cutting Themes

Empowering Enterprise had two cross-cutting themes: 'Sustainable Development' and 'Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities'. Whilst there was some initial learning about to practically to incorporate these goals, they were successfully embedded in all aspects of the project's work, championing best practice and challenging assumptions and beliefs. The partnership committed to incorporating the CCTs into its own delivery with participants and in community engagement, and also through influencing delivery organisations' own policies and practices.

Sustainable Development

Learnings from 2017 - 2020 were carried forward into delivery from 2021. It was recognized that individual partners had to determine actions which were appropriate for their circumstances. Between March and June 2021 Petroc asked each partner to identify 3 simple goals for increasing sustainability, which would then be reviewed by Petroc via quarterly progress reporting.

Some delivery partners and mentors did not immediately know how to incorporate the sustainability goals into their work, but as they became more comfortable with the themes, they chose goals that complimented the work they were already doing. This included aligning with existing organisational projects, such as Eat That Frog's Community Fridge, or growing schemes.

These sustainability goals included:

- Encouraging participants to recycle more;
- Litter picking/clean up opportunities;
- Focusing on sustainable clothing and being aware of fast fashion;
- Purchasing of recycled furniture;
- Participating in local beach cleans;
- Encouraging participant bicycle use;
- Cookery sessions;
- Developing awareness of a Community Fridge; growing food;
- Renovating a local green space;
- Connecting with a local conservation and park restoration charity;
- Running bushcraft sessions;
- Visiting local woodland
- Increasing the number of activities held outdoors.

As well as these goals delivery partners' delivery activities brought in sustainability in routine ways, and overlapped with other areas of participant development such as via sessions on healthy cooking, food waste, second-hand shopping and energy usage relating to budgeting and the cost-of-living crisis.

The Covid pandemic, in particular, meant that many sessions took place outdoors and this cemented in mentors' minds how valuable outdoors sessions and nature connection can be for participant wellbeing.

Additionally, partner organisations embedded policies regarding video call or centrally located meetings which reduced miles travelled. Digital processes also reduced paper printing.

Collecting Sea Glass- Young Devon:

Zac, an EE participant, co-ran a group session - under the guidance of his mentor, Raquel - for other young people in the project to engage their creative sides. Zac ran a beach-themed craft session in Teignmouth using materials scavenged from the beach. The aim of the day was to raise awareness of how human behaviour impacts the coastal environment. The group combed the beach for materials, had lunch at a local volunteer-run tea room with a focus on regenerative energy, shopped at a fair-trade store, and went to a community workshop to create their beach crafts. Zac was able to co-design a session, positively impact other EE participants, raise awareness of sustainability, support local sustainable business, as well as build his confidence and improve his employability and life skills.

"[We'd] had an ongoing issue with sustainability actions/goals - and mentors not feeling able to deliver them. [So we] had a mentors meeting and agreed goals that mentors felt comfortable with and discussed what activities would assist in the delivery of the learning... [Since then] mentors have been advising on free water saving devices from South West Water and assisting participants to apply for them. They have been advising on the impact of eating less meat (Co2 and water) and have had sessions in vegan cafes. Advice and discussion has also focused on water used to produce clothing and use of charity shops. . . Participants have tried vegan foods and some have decided to eat less meat or try going vegan for a week. At least 5 participants have been assisted to order water saving devices for their homes."

Project Manager, ICDT!

Cross Cutting Themes

Gender Equality and Equal Opportunities

Gender equality was a key area of partnership focus after only 41% of participants being female from 2017-2020. Significant effort was put in by partners to recruit more women into the project and from 2021, 46% of participants identified as female, 51% male and 3% as other or preferred not to say. Subsequently, the overall project ratios were 43% female, 55% male, 2% other/prefer not to say.

This successful recruitment work included: partners networking with lone parent groups and domestic abuse organisations; attending parent and toddler classes; timing mentoring sessions around childcare responsibilities; providing of creche facilities; and the introduction of a beauty academy.

It should be noted that significantly more than 2% of participants were managing factors around their gender identity and conversations around identity and associated social confidence or other issues were common. As well as having access to guidance created for the partnership in 2019, all partners trained their mentors, and become familiar with resources on LGBTQ+ concerns and language. Partners either incorporated these conversations into regular sessions, or explicitly offered their participants sessions on identification and pronouns.

As with other needs of participants, EE partners developed a good understanding of support service pathways in this area and regularly worked with organisations including Proud2be, Torbay Council's Transfigurations and the Intercom Trust, as well as helping participants attend local LGBTQ+ social groups or Pride events.

Beyond gender, promoting inclusion and equal opportunities was intrinsic to all of the partnership's work. Partners also worked closely and consistently with participants with physical disabilities, learning difficulties, English as a second language, neurodiversity or other challenges and ensured they were supported in the ways they needed and had strong relationships with relevant support services. All partners referred to autism and additional needs groups, and ODILS are a Hate Crime Reporting Centre. Partners themselves continued to develop their internal resources and policies, for example, Young Devon have developed new menopause and transgender policies.

Andreea's Journey

Coming to live in the UK from Romania with her parents, Andreea was a resident for 2 1/2 years before she joined the Empowering Enterprise Programme. With English not being the family's first language, and with Andreea having some health issues, she had not made any social connections and her parents had no knowledge of how to access services. Andreea has a life-long condition that limited her mobility and she never left the house without one of her parents accompanying her. She was extremely isolated and had no registered GP and was not in receipt of any benefits.

Andreea started to regularly attend Eat That Frog workshops and courses that opened up her independent social skills. She was then registered with a GP and was able to access support from Adult Social Care and occupational therapy. Eat That Frog helped Andreea apply for Universal Credit and gathered evidence of her residency time in the UK. The GP diagnosed Cerebral Palsy and the OT made adaptations to the family home to enable Andreea to gain more independence. She also started attending physiotherapy.

As a result of EE, Andreea became active outside the home, attended weekly EE sessions and cooking workshops, volunteered at The Community Fridge project, along with assisting with an over 50's lunch club. She also was supported to apply for PIP and a bank account.

"Plymouth has several participants who are transitioning or questioning their gender. Christie has been supporting them in sessions with accessing services like Proud2Be and the Intercom Trust to ensure they have the physical and emotional support that they need. . . . There are good links from Proud2Be in the south of the county however in North Devon, Mid and East Devon it is much harder to find local charities." Project Manager, Young Devon

Recommendations - Project Set-up

This section is written with future projects in mind and blends what has been a success and where there are areas for improvement.

Project management should:

- Build in flexibility and anticipate that partners will actively want the opportunity to “move things around and ask for extra numbers” to respond to growth and challenges.
- Have close working relationships with partners, including via individual partner reviews and discussing action plans which account for each organisation’s unique structure and approach. A partnership formed of many partners can be effective, but it is necessary to have ‘a close eye’ to hold it together and understand realistic target progression.
- Ensure high levels of transparency and communication over potential participants to best predict recruitment against targets.
- Systematically receive all physical claim evidence, throughout the project ensuring the close down of the project is easily managed.
- Be readily available for demonstrating paperwork requirements, especially finance related. Consider further implementation of more formal staff onboarding structures such as a centralised induction process or mentor handbooks/welcome videos. This would ensure consistency in understanding, regardless of when staff join the project, ensure the understanding of the funding and caseload dynamics, and their implications for cross-partnership working.
- Organise both project management and local mentor meetings whilst balancing the time for meetings with time spent on travel. Chat channels or video meetings can allow for partnership meetings in less resource intensive ways. On EE, mentors and project managers found meetings valuable but commented on having no time to follow up, and some part-time mentors were aware of meetings monopolising their week. Project Managers indicated that earlier on in the project, and in periods of challenge, in-person meetings were especially helpful. However, once relationships and delivery were established, sessions could have been held online.

Process set-up and design should:

- Consider delivery staff's understanding of entry requirements, the possibility for reviewing individuals' entry status (e.g. as participants' circumstances are better understood), and expanding the entry and exit categories in order to ensure participants' progress is accurately recognised. A ‘Completer without Result’ category can be helpful, a greater range of exit categories (e.g. ‘into volunteering’, or recognition of the achievement of moving from low level education courses to higher levels), would be welcome.
- Have funding follow the participant, as opposed to the partner to make it much easier for staff to wholeheartedly focus on person-oriented delivery.
- Recognise that exit results from economically inactive ‘Into Jobsearch’ could be a complicated category. This is partially related to mentors logging participants incorrectly as ‘unemployed’ rather than ‘economically inactive’, and partially due to mentors and participants being more focused on achieving employment results.
- Recognise that completing participant paperwork can take significant resource, reducing mentor capacity to spend time with young people and deliver change in local communities. Paperwork can also be overwhelming for participants and stifle rapport in early 1-2-1 sessions. Digital sign offs, as instigated for Covid lockdown, show other approaches for evidencing are possible.
- Carefully consider definitions of certain demographics areas to understand participant need and assign targets. These could include care leavers, addiction, or neurodivergence, as well as targets to reach more rural areas. Targets would have to be considered carefully, acknowledging that developing relationships can take significant resource before gaining results.
- Design a PDRS reporting system with a test phase and which can adapt for real usage. For example in EE it emerged that having mutually exclusive session categories of ‘Advocacy’ and ‘Regular’ and not allowing tracking of work experience (by sector) were issues.

Recommendations - Innovation and co-design

'Innovation Fund mechanisms should understand:

- An IF mechanism can be a great success allowing for projects to respond to need and meet project outcomes.
- Having a deliberately simple and light touch form and management process allows for partners to deliver the intention of the application while refining in delivery.
- Partners may need strong encouragement to apply to the fund, especially if they do not have significant staff capacity and are focused on their core targets and delivery. Closer support could be built in to develop funding bids, via 'bid writing surgeries' during partner meetings.
- IFs are likely to spread into other areas of partner organisations' delivery and to directly reach non-participants who hold similar demographics to participants. In EE this was unemployed people aged over 24 and also other young people not on the project, for example, via ODILS' careers fairs and the North Devon Social Fair. There is potential that Innovation Funding regulations could be looser than standard delivery regulations to enable greater reach and benefits. For example, EE participants were hoping their family members could attend activities, but were declined despite small or no added cost.

Participant co-design should understand:

- Co-design successes in planning at 1-2-1 and group activity levels does not equate to the inclusion of young people at the highest strategic level.
- Deliberate efforts should be made to involve young people at a managerial level. This could be through: more considered design of partner meetings to encourage attendance; via unique activity such as an Innovation Fund project; or to pass messages on to future participants (such setting expectations around services).
- Any co-design activities should be kept informal, relaxed and injected with humour and lightness, helping to ease pressure and helping young people express themselves.

- Timing and expectations around young person co-design involvement should note that in the early stages of delivery partners are most likely to be focused on team formation and meeting recruitment targets before 'additional activities' such as co-design.
- It may commonly take many months for individual participants' confidence to be at a high enough level for wider involvement.
- Co-design support sessions with delivery staff could be embedded in the project. Equipping staff with the confidence and resources to co-design regularly, via techniques such as 'vision boarding' or 'dot voting'. These trainings would emphasise how co-design does not have to be an additional task to the core, busy work of mentoring but actually a complimentary, developmental activity similar to group work or thinking about cross-cutting themes.
- Co-design should be seen through the lens of participants' own development. For example, helping them gain project planning, team work, 'interview setting' and other employability skills. Activities should take into account participant competence and literacy levels to understand what might be accessible or overwhelming.
- Tangible benefits for the young person, such as digital badges, should be provided. It should be understood that the potential usefulness of the digital badges can be hampered by the need for participants to create a profile to accept a badge. Incorporating badges in longer term projects rather than in one-off sessions, giving supported time to create a profile, and allowing people to work towards larger goals perceived as greater value, may be more successful. There is potential for badges to work alongside other paperwork such as DTQs and PDPs and for them to be branded either as cross-partnership or as partner specific.

Recommendations - Supporting NEETS

Projects working with the 'hardest to reach' NEETs should understand:

- It is usually inappropriate to focus on employability with a young person whilst they are facing significant, overlapping, personal barriers. For example, if they are not well-housed, have relationship issues, are severely unwell, or reliant on drugs or alcohol.
- Stabilising underlying issues can take several months and it is common for more challenges to become apparent as a mentoring relationship builds.
- High numbers of participants are likely to 'self-identify' as having a disability or work-limiting health condition (on EE this was 49% and 44% of participants respectively). These declarations should be viewed seriously despite a lack of corresponding formal evidence of diagnosis or certifications. These declarations are a way for participants to disclose the challenges they are facing and say they are struggling. These declarations commonly relate to issues such as anxiety, agoraphobia, or fatigue.
- Even those experienced working with young people may feel immediately underprepared for the complexity of challenges presented by participants. There will be a steep learning curve where a supportive team is essential.
- The success of this project demonstrates the value of wrap-around and generalised support, where focus is on the individual and their particular circumstances rather than pre-determined strategies and outcomes. This includes the importance of flexible and open ended time frames, including allowing participants be withdrawn and later be re-enrolled, and also a significant and flexible participant expenses budget.
- Support for young people needs to be extend beyond exit results being achieved. For example, a participant entering a new job or educational situation can easily drop out of their new circumstances with the early challenges faced and benefit from continued support.

"All you can do is make sure they know that you are there if and when they would like your support, just keep letting them know that you are there for them"

- Relationship building and trust should be prioritised by mentors as this was consistently feedback by participants of being the greatest value.
- Mentoring is about connecting with a young person and this means freeing up a mentor to be able to bring themselves fully to the role.
- The best way to work with young people whose engagement decreased, have 'dropped off the radar' or those who are particularly struggling, is to "just keep trying". Mentors said to keep the contact up, keep doors open, keep positive messages flowing and hope the young people would re-engage.
- It is a sensible idea to be able to work with participants who do not eventually go live. This can feel like a disappointing or challenging situation, as partners can feel pressure to make them live. However, on EE only 2% of session time was spent with participants who never went live. Understanding which participants are likely to engage comes with experience and clear familiarity with eligibility and evidencing criteria.
- Mentors, if not experienced, can feel that participants would not be 'ready for group work' and may need to be strongly encouraged by management to pursue group activities. It is the case that many participants will be initially unconfident in, and resistant to, group activities. However, once participants do engage with group activities this often leads to excellent results.
- Delivery design should understand that 1-2-1 support is initially appropriate, but a formal goal for participants to engage with group work should be communicated from the start, for example, with pre-organised activities scheduled.
- While some mentors relish organising group activities, the logistics can be time consuming. Having support from external organisations to organise project wide courses/groups is helpful. **36**

Recommendations - Working with support services

Projects working with support services should:

- Understand participant needs and where mentors wrap-around, generalised support is effective and where thresholds of expertise are crossed and an external support service is needed.
- Mental health and wellbeing support, 'life skills', and accessing benefits and suitable housing are likely to be amongst the largest needs of participants. Mentors can support some of these 'in-house' through their activities, for example with confidence building and mental health support through being a trusted listening presence, or supporting with budgeting, shopping, cooking, and travel. This work of mentors greatly frees up capacity in specialist support services.
- However, when a support threshold is crossed easy access to external expertise is needed. For example, for managing significant debt or legal issues, accessing supported housing, or clinical mental health and counselling support.
- Mentors rely upon their experienced team and, ideally, internal directories, to navigate a complex support service landscape.
- There is a need to be persistent with systems which young people would commonly mistrust, be intimidated by, not know how to access, or give up on after not receiving timely responses.
- Mentors, as they know the individuals' details and are trusted, can act like a 'mediator' or advocate and co-ordinate between (multiple) services and the young person, supporting the young person to attend services by managing expectations and encouraging them. For example, undertaking CBT based counselling methodologies requires 'homework' and discipline, and can be supported by a mentor. Where appropriate it is valuable to allow mentors to attend appointments with participants.
- Recognise the value in mentors modelling advocacy and engagement with services. Mentors can showing young people processes which they could mirror and follow for themselves in the future. Initial exposure to, and 'breaking the ice' with services encourages future engagement - increasing trust in 'the system', and confidence in accessing services generally.

- Mentors need to be proactive and build personal relationships with key support service staff. Finding the right staff with whom to form a personal connection can ease the process of referrals in and out of the project. The success stories of one referral pave the way for further referrals.
- Close working relationships allow for discussing participant circumstances/progress and can be helpful for the young person and the staff member.
- As personal relationships were such a driving force for coordinating support for young people, high staff turnover can be a significant challenge and should be minimised. This includes minimising short term or unstable funding streams. On EE periods of project set up and instability significantly affected recruitment and signposting.

Specialist partner involvement should consider:

- Expectations regarding a timeline of involvement, with support partners not necessarily being required during early project stages. On EE specialist partners (e.g. addiction support) disconnected early on in the project as their need was not apparent while delivery partners struggled with initial recruitment and relationship building.
- Paperwork and administrative requirements may be seen as too complicated for a small number of referrals (and the associated funding).
- How to maximise specialist partners in a context of open ended participant support and high availability of participant expenses. On EE, the success of partners organising work placements and group activities, as well as a CSCS course, shows the viability of cross partnership referral mechanisms. However, the dispersed geography of the participants meant these were resource intensive to organise and required a critical mass of participants before being arranged.
- The specialist support mentioned through the project included trauma, addiction, mental health, and counselling services, as well as childcare.
- Delivery partners with a 'hub' or operating multiple services (e.g. toddlers groups, counselling, maths courses or a housing service), were highly effective at cross-referring within their own organisations.

Recommendations - Working with communities

Projects working with communities should:

- Be embedded within their local communities, or understand that when reaching out into a new area a partner must either have strong enough formal and informal existing networks or be given a significant lead-in time to allow for contacts in the area to be developed without expecting immediate participant recruitment.
- Encourage cross partnership support to aid with the location of social groups, volunteering and community events, as trailed in EE with the creation of community calendars.
- Think about the dual impact of project work on the resilience of communities by distinguishing between:
 - a) 'Passive/diffused' improvement (via an individual's personal development and daily interactions). Understanding that a socially confident individual is inherently more likely to interact with and influence those around him.
 - b) 'Active' community improvement (via dedicated volunteering and projects).
- Understand that, similar to group activities, mentors can commonly feel that participants aren't ready for active community involvement and overcoming fundamental barriers such as social anxiety must be first prioritised.
- Know that participant development and achievement of PDP goals can be achieved via exploration of the local community. This exploration of amenities (such as cafes, libraries or gyms), walking meetings and travel training within an individual's area are developmental for participants' confidence and create increased familiarity with communities.
- Move beyond interactions with mentors, by assisting participants to join clubs, classes and support groups.
- Encourage volunteering, and have this recorded as a tangible sign of progress, or potentially an exit result. Volunteering is a common developmental step for participants and meets the development needs of the individual and the community.
- Appreciate that focused community development projects are less common, and require the support of delivery organisations or support partners to organise these and ensure ongoing involvement.
- Understand that it is easier to track an individual's development, rather than a community development. DTQ questioning and PDP goal achievement can indicate, for example, an individual's confidence talking with strangers.
- Understand that partners may not initially be confident seeing their work as community development (rather than development of participants) and may need to be encouraged to reflect and see their work through this lens. Inspiration for community facing activities such as 'Treasure Hunts', walking tours, and monthly meet ups can be shared.
- Track the impact on communities via a PDRS or mentors' reporting system which includes clear and organised information about community groups and volunteering opportunities joined. Tracking impact may be easier with these areas being recognised as a formal result or form of progress, such as via Digital Badges or linked to PDP goals logging. A subsequent strategy to track the impact on community perceptions due to young people taking part in groups and volunteering could then also be developed.



Recommendations - Working with Employers

Projects working with employers should:

- Understand that there is a difference in influencing employers for employment opportunities and for securing work placements/tasters. Approaching employers on a case specific basis is complicated by many participants not wanting employers to know about any past issues or support, and wanting to be treated equally to other applicants.
- Know mentors are likely to be focused on the development of young people and approach job searching via traditional routes such as online job pages. The time for pro-actively engaging employers and building relationships which lead to jobs and/or for work experience placements is limited, and mentors do not feel they have the tools or confidence to do so.
- Decide, as a partnership, if individual mentors, organisations' managers or a separate support partner are best placed to secure work experience opportunities and build employer relationships.
- Understand that a dedicated employment support partner, such as DCT on EE, is a valuable but potentially resource intensive role. They are not easily able to reach the SMEs present in local areas and understand the specific needs of individual participants. Rather than brokering bespoke placements, time is best spent:
 - Building delivery staff's capacity to engage employers locally.
 - Networking and brokering relationships on a regional scale in order to pass on generalised placement opportunities to delivery staff.
 - Influencing employer/placement cultures via sharing of resources and trainings. Ideally designed to be bespoke and influence specific organisations and their teams.
- Target their influence at sectors which the majority of participants are likely to exit into such as hospitality, retail and construction industries.
- Understand employer interest is often in those who have the attitude to learn, rather than prioritising skills and experience. However, the willingness to invest in and support young people changes with the economic climate and need for staff.

- Develop a clear and organised reporting system which tracks work experience placements/mock interviews/taster days/etc. Tracking these may be easier with these areas being recognised as a formal form of progress, such as via Digital Badges or linked to PDP goals logging. A subsequent strategy to track the impact on employer perceptions due to young people taking part in placements could then also be developed.

Helpful messages to pass onto employers are:

- Some of the most effective methods for easily establishing inclusive work environments are to:
 - Have non-prohibitive, simple, and potentially less formal recruitment processes which prioritise looking at attitudes over previous skills and experience.
 - Invest in induction periods so that young people feel supported and two-way expectations are managed. Try not to overwhelm individuals, who are likely anxious, by introducing too many team members in the first day(s), rather assign key staff.
 - Provide an ongoing flexible and supportive environment, especially regarding mental health. Don't be afraid to understand the individual's wider circumstances. Checking in with an individual personally about performance rather than relying on KPIs. Providing, both positive and constructive, feedback casually rather than/as well as formal appraisals.
- Participants who have been on, or are on, a mentoring programme are supported in ways far beyond skills based learning. The ongoing personal development and support works to increase an individual's reliability, motivation to develop and ability to work as part of a team.
- Emphasising the generally underappreciated, but very valuable role of, 'bite size' work experience such as taster days and work place visits. These are highly beneficial for participants taking their first steps to overcome barriers and move towards work. They help to build confidence, explore interests and manage expectations – and require little risk or commitment from employers.

**THIS REPORT WAS PRODUCED BY DEVON COMMUNITIES TOGETHER, WHO HAVE WORKED THROUGHOUT EMPOWERING ENTERPRISE AS THE PROJECT'S EVALUATION AND IMPACT MEASUREMENT PARTNER.
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