

Aspire Sussex: Building Better Opportunities (BBO8)

# **Local Learning Perspectives**

Annual Evaluation Report August 2020

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## Summary

Aspire Sussex is the lead partner for the Building Better Opportunities (BBO8) Local Learning Perspectives project, funded by the European Social Fund and the National Lottery Community Fund. The project aims to support participants into employment, education /training or progress into job search. It is delivered by 5 partners, who provide a range of different support across Sussex and Surrey. The project was designed to include a range of partners that would operate independently, and provide a different approach and/or work across a different geographical location.

The project started in August 2016 and was originally due to end on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2019 with the aim of engaging 216 participants. The project has now received an extension to July 2021, supporting an additional 119 participants.

### *Delivery*

To end June 2020 the project has supported 235 participants, which is 76% of the total target. Numbers of participants engaged in year 4 reduced in the first 6 months, but increased again in quarter 1 of 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in much fewer referrals since March 2020. Although referrals slowed considerably in the first few months of lockdown, as new working arrangements were established contact with referral partners has recently re-started, resulting in a small number of new referrals and processes have been set up to enable the sign-up process to be completed remotely.

It has been important to maintain contact with all referral partners as much as possible during lockdown; letting people know that BBO is still there to support people in need.

Partners have also started to use new methods for marketing the project; for example, leaving leaflets in food banks, talking to other local charities helping families during lockdown, and increased use of social media.

Going forward, the programme will continue to seek new referrals up until early 2021, in order to try and recover some of the momentum lost prior to, and as a result of lockdown. It is important that the partnership maintains the focus on engaging people who are eligible for BBO support; i.e. long term unemployed. Funders have acknowledged the unprecedented circumstances organisations are facing and whilst encouraging projects to make every effort to meet targets have prioritised supporting the most vulnerable.

The participant data shows that the project has continued to be successful at engaging people who are furthest from the labour market:

- On average, participants have been unemployed for 3.2 years, with nearly two-thirds (62%) unemployed for at least 12 months.
- 94% were not in education or training prior to starting the project
- Participants have low levels of educational attainment, with only a quarter (26%) having post-secondary or tertiary education or equivalent
- A third (32%) lack basic skills
- 56% live in jobless households
- 10% are offenders or ex-offenders

- 58% have a disability

All delivery partners have continued to deliver support throughout the COVID-19 crisis. Support has been delivered in a mix of different ways, including telephone, video conferencing using Zoom, WhatsApp, text messages, emails and online learning through cloud-based virtual classroom platforms. Through this, key workers have been able to maintain contact with the majority of participants. Moving from a focus on face to face support to remote support has been a challenge for both organisations and participants, but in some ways, the new ways of working have been beneficial, with remote support providing a more flexible and time-efficient way of delivering support.

In many ways, the challenges posed by COVID-19 have presented opportunities for the partnership; creating new ways of working that mean the support offer has diversified. Going forward, most partners plan to continue providing a blended offer of support, combining face to face meetings and workshop (once social distancing allows) with virtual support

All delivery partners agreed that the majority of support since March 2020 has been around addressing basic needs; ensuring people have enough food, medication, accommodation and access to other essential support services including Covid-19 response groups. In addition to this, the main areas of support have been around;

- **Health and wellbeing;** encouraging people to get out and exercise when it is safe to do so and providing support with wellbeing activities and keeping a healthy mindset
- **Providing structure and routine;** by setting people tasks and activities to do at home to stay positive

For many participants, the COVID-19 crisis has set them back on their journey into employment. However, for some people, the crisis has provided opportunities. Delivery partners also feel that participants who have been supported prior to COVID-19 have been able to build up some resilience as a result of the support.

Participants continue to report extremely high levels of satisfaction with the support they receive. 91% are very satisfied with the friendliness and approachability of the support workers and 85% very satisfied with the quality of the support. 97% of participants were overall satisfied or very satisfied with the project.

### **Impact**

To end June 2020, 59 have exited the project, with 42 finding work or becoming self-employed and 17 entering education. Participants finding work had been, on average, unemployed for 2.7 years (compared to 3.2 years for all participants), demonstrating that the project is both reaching and achieving positive outcomes for people furthest from the job market.

Year 4 saw good numbers achieving employment and education numbers in the first 6 months, however since the start of 2020 the numbers exiting the project have reduced significantly, with the coronavirus pandemic and lower number of new participants engaged in the second half of 2019 being the likely causes.

It is important to be realistic when considering what outcomes it is possible to achieve during the COVID-19 crisis. Many participants' barriers to employment have become greater as a result of lockdown, and most are expecting it to become even more challenging to find work as unemployment rates increase. That said, for many participants, progress is still being made, with:

- Group sessions focusing on building confidence and motivation,
- Key workers providing participants with specific tasks and activities are helping people realise they can achieve things and has given them the confidence to do more,
- Resolving day to day problems has helped people's mental health,
- Introducing routines has made a big difference to people's mental health and is helping get people ready for working life
- Getting outdoors is becoming more important to people – people are thinking differently and wanting to do more outdoor activities
- Lockdown has been a good time to challenge some self-beliefs and has given people opportunity to reflect on their goals
- Some participants have focused on developing their CVs
- Lockdown has helped provide people with tools for survival and dealing with crises in their lives, both now and in the future
- Group sessions and peer support through WhatsApp/Zoom/Teams/Aspire Sussex Cloud groups have helped to combat isolation
- Many participants have learned how to use new technology (e.g. Zoom) and be more comfortable communicating in different ways. As a result, more people are signing up for online courses.
- Sustainability training has provided people with new skills and ideas for activities they can do at home
- Some participants have started volunteering and helping out with local Covid-19 support groups. As a result, they are building skills, reducing loneliness and doing something positive for their community.

But for many, just surviving has been a significant achievement that should not go unrecognised.

The outcome survey, designed to ensure a consistent approach to measuring progress towards soft outcomes also demonstrates the impact the project is having;

- **Improved confidence and self-esteem:** 91% feel more confident overall, 85% feel more confident asking for help and 84% feel more confident accessing support. Partners are finding that group work is particularly useful at building confidence, particularly for people with anxiety or mental health problems, as the peer support combined with talking therapy can help people discuss their issues with others experiencing similar issues.
- **Greater Aspirations and Resilience:** 81% of participants feel more optimistic about the future, 76% feel their skills have improved and 76% feel better able to deal with setbacks. In particular, the support provided to people before the COVID-19 pandemic has helped participants to better cope with the challenges they faced

during lockdown. And during lockdown, the support has been a balance of crisis management alongside goal setting, in order to continue to help participants find a sense of direction.

- **Improved health and wellbeing:** 87% agree their overall quality of life has improved, 85% feeling happier and 70% feeling healthier. During lockdown much of the support provided has been related to improving participants' wellbeing, helping them maintain positive mindsets despite the significant life changes and fear caused by the pandemic.
- **Greater social inclusion:** 89% of participants feel less lonely and 81% feeling more connected to their communities. During lockdown, partners have helped to ensure that participants can stay connected and still benefit from peer support, for example by running courses over Zoom or creating WhatsApp groups.

The last 12 months have presented a number of challenges to the Local Learning Perspectives project, however the partnership has been successful in overcoming these challenges and has continued to support extremely vulnerable people during extremely difficult times. It is a testament to the strength and skills of the BBO8 delivery partners and the project management team that support has continued during lockdown and feedback from participants shows how valuable this support has been.

It is clear from the learning captured during the COVID-19 crisis that BBO projects are playing an essential role in supporting extremely vulnerable people during these challenging times; ensuring that people are safe and well and are accessing appropriate support as required.

However, BBO is providing more than just crisis management and survival support. It is also helping people to think about a future post lockdown, by providing participants with structure, support with setting goals and a focus on celebrating achievements and moving forwards with their lives.

## **Introduction**

Aspire Sussex is the lead partner for the Building Better Opportunities (BBO8) Local Learning Perspectives project, funded by ESF and the National Lottery Community Fund. The project aims to support participants into employment, education/training or progress into job search. It is delivered by 5 partners, who provide a range of different support across Sussex and Surrey.

The project started in August 2016 and was originally due to end on 31<sup>st</sup> July 2019 with the aim of engaging 216 participants. In 2019 the project was awarded extension funding and will be delivered for a further two years to July 2021, supporting an additional 119 participants.

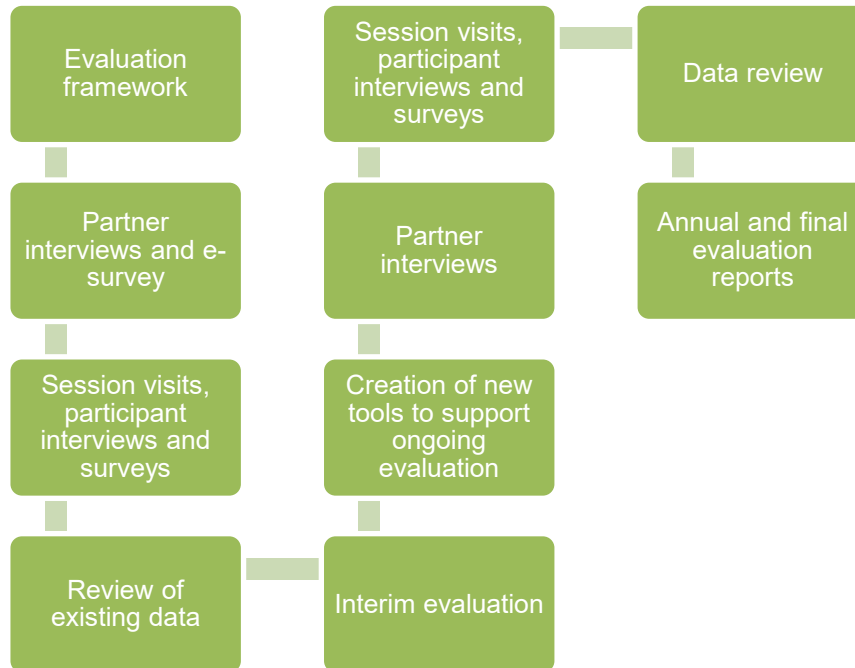
## **Evaluating Local Learning Perspectives**

Shephard & Moyes Ltd was appointed to evaluate the project; producing an interim report in August 2018 and annual reports to the end of the project. We combine self-evaluation support with independent evaluation to achieve the following objectives:

- Identify what has changed as a result of the project
- Consider wider social benefits and the impact on the wider sector
- Highlight achievements with individuals
- Identify what is working and support partners in mainstreaming the learning
- Consider the impact on small organisations and the value of delivery by grassroots organisations
- Consider the wider benefits of partnership working
- Demonstrate the challenges of the delivery model and funding constraints for small grassroots organisations – consider the real costs of delivery
- To provide evidence of the impact of the project, in order to support delivery partners to extend their reach in this field and securing further funding to do this

We developed an evaluation framework in 2018 following a workshop with staff from Aspire Sussex and 5 project partners. The purpose of the workshop was to explore with partners the desired outcomes for the project and consider what evaluation tools may be appropriate.

The evaluation framework resulted in a Theory of Change for the project, which were used to develop research questions, and are shown in Appendix 1. The research questions will guide our evaluation. Our approach to evaluating Local Learning Perspectives is shown in the diagram below.



For this annual evaluation report we have:

- Carried out telephone/Zoom interviews with all project partners
- Carried out telephone/Zoom interviews with 12 participants
- Facilitated a workshop with the partners in June 2020, which had a focus on capturing learning as a result of changes in delivery since the start of the COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020
- Produced a standalone COVID-19 learning paper
- Collated and analysed 93 participant evaluation surveys from all 6 partners
- Analysed participant data and funder reports collected by Aspire Sussex (as lead partner)

The report starts with an overview of the project and a description of what is being delivered by each partner. The next section considers the impact the project has made to date, drawing on survey data and qualitative feedback from the surveys and interviews. The following section considers the progress made to date and considers the strengths and challenges over the previous 12 months. The final section draws the findings together into conclusions and recommendations for the next 12 months of the project.

Much of year 4 has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting lockdown. A separate paper focusing on the learning from delivering BBO projects during lockdown has been produced, however content from this paper is also included in this report; demonstrating what has worked well and what challenges the partnership have faced during these difficult times.



## About Local Learning Perspectives

The Building Better Opportunities (BBO8) project 'Local Learning Perspectives' aims to deliver accessible community based support and engagement to those who are furthest from the workplace. The overarching aim is to strengthen communities and build safe and inclusive environments in which confidence and skills may be built. This will result in more people being motivated to progress into learning and ultimately work.

### Delivery model

The delivery model was designed on the basis of addressing a number of barriers to employment. A range of partners, working across thematic and geographical areas would provide the following types of support:

- **Training, education and employment support;** comprehensive needs assessment, 1-1 information and advice, employment related skills development, volunteering and work experience opportunities
- **Lack of confidence and self-esteem;** confidence building workshops, coaching and mentoring
- **Social isolation;** supporting over 50s who face fear of career change, new work patterns, and travel barriers, and supporting women who are victims of domestic violence
- **Childcare support, rural isolation, mobility restrictions;** childcare support, benefits support, using local community facilities, partnerships with Children and Families Centres
- **Learning disabilities/mental and physical impairments and disabilities;** wrap around support with a range of specialist support providers, practical sessions, referrals to specialist support, mental health training to providers
- **History of domestic abuse, offending and/or involvement with the Police;** peer support, confidence building, dedicated provider supporting women who are victims of domestic abuse, learning opportunities for ex-offenders
- **Overcoming substance abuse problems which act as a barrier to job readiness;** referrals to specialist support
- **Housing Support to ensure that participants and their families are in appropriate and safe housing;** housing support, benefits advice,
- **Budgeting and debt support:** money management advice, referrals to debt support and benefits advice through CAB
- **Participants facing cultural, family, faith or community barriers;** a training and support programme for BAME communities

The lead partner is Aspire Sussex, who provide the project management function as well as support and guidance to delivery partners. They are the main point of contact with the funders and are responsible for monitoring and reporting on progress. They carry out quarterly review meetings with each partner and those behind on targets will have more frequent progress meetings and additional support to get them back on track. They also facilitate a quarterly partners meeting which focuses on progress and changes to funder requirements that delivery partners need to be aware of.

Local Learning Perspectives is one of two BBO projects managed by Aspire Sussex. The main difference between the two is the type of beneficiary being supported; with Local Learning Perspectives (BBO8) working with individuals, whereas Working Together for Work (BBO3) works with families or individuals with dependent children.

The table below provides an overview of the different delivery models in use by each of the project partners, including any changes to the delivery models made *prior* to the COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020. Changes to the delivery models as a consequence of COVID-19 are discussed in the progress chapter.

<p><b>Albion in the Community</b></p>	<p>Local Learning Perspectives is part of the wider Albion Goals project, which consists of two ‘development’ sessions a week and 2 ‘progression’ sessions. The development sessions help people with the most complex needs (homeless, drug and alcohol, mental health); they play football or other sport, and also receive 1-1 support through the session. They then progress to the progression sessions, where there is more of an onus on doing things for themselves, instilling a work ethic. Alongside the sessions they run courses in nutrition, mental health, changing behaviour and Sports Leaders – all looking at transferable skills. In year 4 the delivery model was reviewed, resulting in an increase of 1-1 support and creation of new referral routes into the project, in addition to referrals from the Albion Goals project.</p>
<p><b>Aspire Sussex</b></p>	<p>The project delivers a series of 6-week courses for people who face common needs, including managing work, money management, communication and teamwork and planning their learning journey after the course. Following the course participants receive 1-1 support to achieve their goals. In year 4 the courses became more flexible than in previous years, with participants able to ‘pick and mix’ which sessions from the core programme they took part in. Aspire Sussex have also started to support BBO8 participants in addition to BBO3. Courses and publicity have also started to incorporate sustainability themes.</p>
<p><b>My Sisters’ House (MSH)</b></p>	<p>MSH is a women’s centre supporting vulnerable women who have experienced issues such as histories of physical, emotional and sexual abuse, drug and alcohol addiction, trauma, and mental health problems. The Local Learning Perspectives project provides a new strand of support for women who have received crisis support and are now ready to start thinking about their future. ‘Step Forward’ provides 1-1 development support, peer group support sessions and signposting to other organisations. In year 4, Step Forward also started to deliver more wellbeing and sustainability courses. The programme also became more structured, with Step Forward participants encouraged to join courses and make appointments for 1-1 support, rather than just using the centre as a drop-in.</p>
<p><b>Sussex Community Development Association (SCDA)</b></p>	<p>Sussex Community Development Association employ one key worker who provides 1-1 and group based support to participants. As well as 1-1 support, the key worker has established a number of group-based workshops; in IT, self-employment, confidence building and employability. The 1-1 support involves signposting to courses and sources of other support (such as CAB), handholding, attending appointments and practical support.</p>

**Surrey Care Trust  
(SCT)**

Surrey Care Trust was established 30 years ago and uses a mentoring model where volunteers provide mentoring support. Participants are referred by Job Centre Plus and other services and they will do a joint visit and then match them to an appropriate mentor. They have weekly meetings with their mentor, as well as opportunities to attend workshops around personal development, confidence etc. In addition to the mentoring support, Local Learning Perspectives participants are able to access the Gateway Allotment project, which provides people with the opportunity to develop practical gardening as well as social skills in a group setting.

In year 4 the project partnership reduced from 7 to 5 partners, following the extension of the project. A review of performance by each partner led to new funding and targets being agreed. The majority of partners had an increase in funding that related to an increase of between 18 to 23 participants engaged, with the exception of Aspire Sussex that has retained their original target. This was due to their late start as delivery partner and their lower than projected allocation in the first three years.

## Impact

This section considers what difference the project has made to participants, in terms of progress towards ‘hard’ outcomes, such as moving into employment or education, and ‘soft’ outcomes such as improved confidence, wellbeing and isolation.

Following the production of the interim evaluation report in 2018 we worked with partners to develop a standardised method of tracking progress towards outcomes. A simple two-page survey for all participants has been designed to ensure a consistent approach to measuring what has been achieved across the partnership. To date we have only received 48 completed surveys for Local Learning Perspectives, which is a low response rate of only 19% of participants. Although the results below give an indication of the project’s impact, more surveys are needed in the final year of the project in order to more effectively demonstrate what the project has achieved.

## Delivering outcomes during COVID-19

It is important to be realistic when considering what outcomes it is possible to achieve during the COVID-19 crisis. Many participants’ barriers to employment have become greater as a result of lockdown, and most are expecting it to become even more challenging to find work as unemployment rates increase.

That said, for many participants, progress is still being made, as demonstrated in the table below. For many, just surviving has been an achievement that should not go unrecognised.

Outcome	What has been achieved
<b>Confidence</b>	Sessions have been delivered that focus on building confidence and motivation Providing participants with specific tasks and activities has helped people realise they can achieve things and has given them the confidence to do more
<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>	Resolving day to day problems has helped people’s mental health Introducing routines has made a big difference to people’s mental health and is helping get people ready for working life Getting outdoors is becoming more important to people – people are thinking differently and wanting to do more outdoor activities (e.g. attending The Gateway at SCT).
<b>Aspirations</b>	Lockdown has been a good time to challenge some self-beliefs and has given people opportunity to reflect on their goals Some participants have focused on developing their CVs
<b>Resilience</b>	The support during lockdown has helped provide people with tools for survival and dealing with crises in their lives, both now and in the future. Some participants have felt they couldn’t cope with crises but lockdown has demonstrated to them that they can and has helped build resilience.
<b>Loneliness/isolation</b>	Group sessions and peer support through WhatsApp/Zoom /Teams/Aspire Sussex Cloud groups have helped to combat isolation

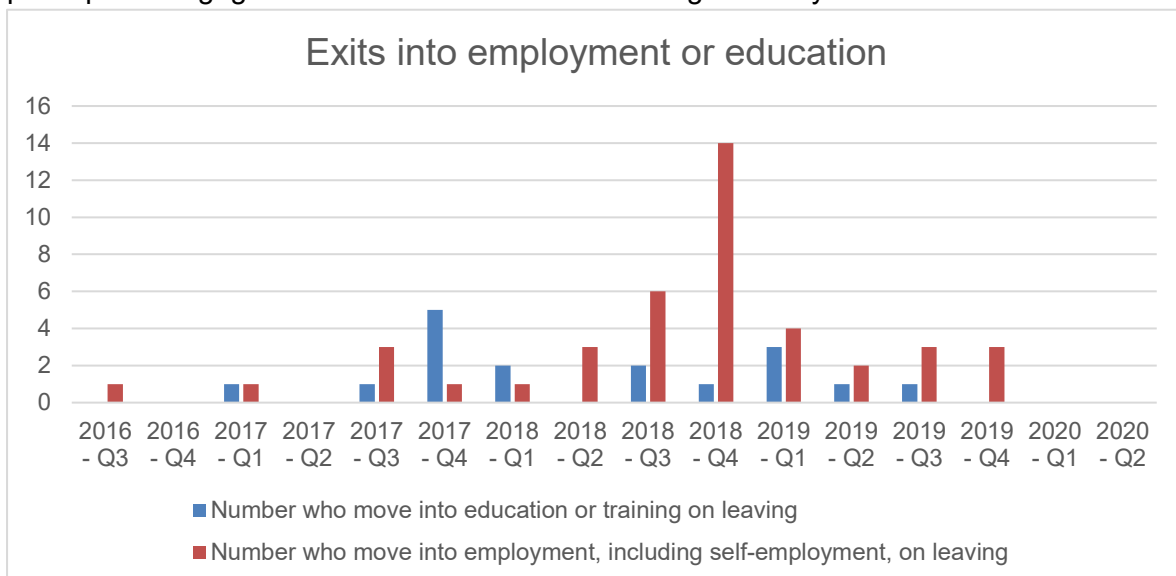
Outcome	What has been achieved
<b>Skills</b>	Many participants have learned how to use new technology (e.g. Zoom) and be more comfortable communicating in different ways. As a result more people are signing up for online courses. Sustainability training at My Sisters' House has provided people with new skills and ideas for activities they can do at home
<b>Connections with the community</b>	Some participants have started volunteering and helping out with local Covid-19 support groups. As a result they are building skills, reducing loneliness and doing something positive for their community.

***“It’s been a really good time to help support clients to understand themselves – developing their self-awareness, showing them how resilient they really are.”***

## Employment and education outcomes

To end June 2020, 59 people have exited the project, with 42 finding work or becoming self-employed and 17 entering education.

The chart below shows that the number of people achieving employment or education outcomes has increased steadily from the end of year 2 to the end of year 3. Year 4 saw lower numbers of exits than 2018/19, and since the start of 2020 the numbers exiting the project have reduced to zero, with the coronavirus pandemic and lower number of new participants engaged in the second half of 2019 being the likely causes.



Participants finding work were, on average, unemployed for 2.7 years, compared to 3.2 years for all participants. This demonstrates that as well as engaging people furthest from the job market, the project is also achieving successful outcomes for them.

***“Has provided me with so much support, I now feel in a position to return to work and feel less anxious when applying for jobs” (participant)***

***“One of our participants - when we first met he had an operation on his back and got addicted to pain killers and it all went downhill – he is now off them and is desperate to work. We had been working with him face to face to identify his skills and develop***

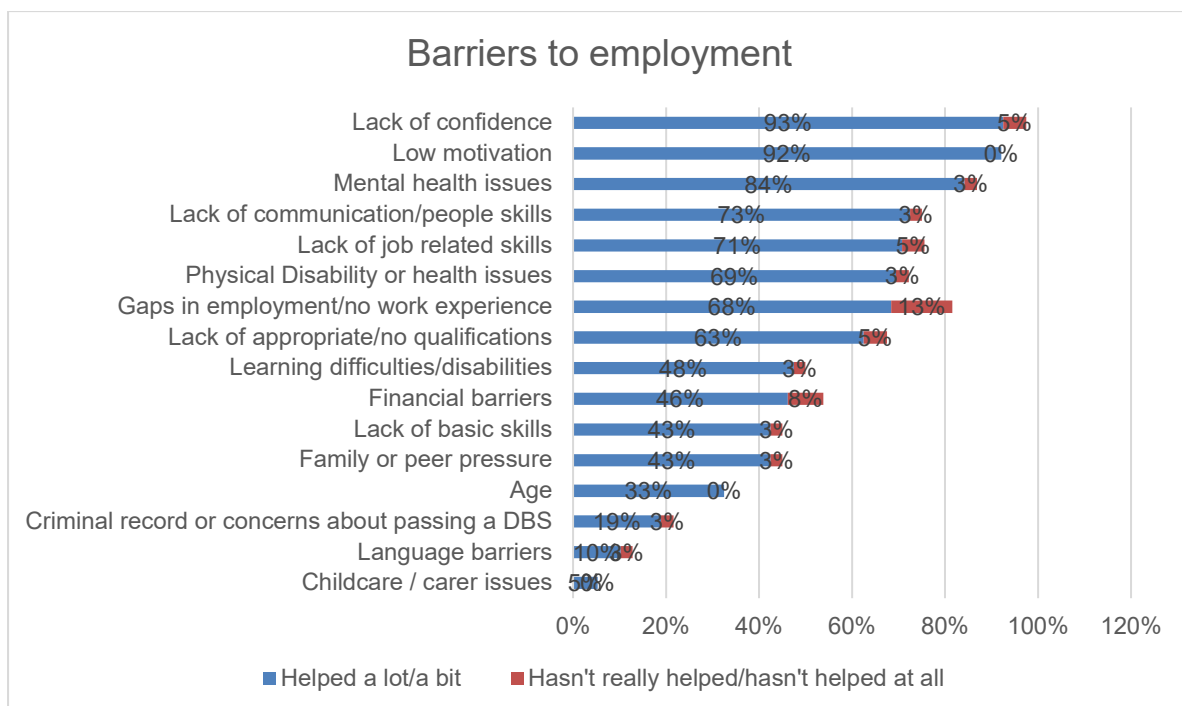
**his CV. We helped him find job search websites and explored new ways to job search. He hasn't got a laptop or Wi-Fi at home – so we got him a smart phone. And as a result he has found work as a delivery driver during lockdown” (Key Worker)**

**Reducing barriers to employment**

The chart below shows the extent to which participants feel the project is helping to reduce barriers to employment. It shows that the biggest impact has been on helping to reduce lack of confidence and motivation levels, with 93% of participants reporting that the project has helped a lot or a bit with lack of confidence and 92% reporting it has helped with low motivation.

**“I feel confident enough to know I am worth being here and getting a job. I am looking at courses to do also to get work”**

For most barriers, only a small percentage of participants are reporting that the project hasn't really helped or hasn't helped at all, however a fair proportion are reporting that the project hasn't helped reduce with gaps in employment (13%). It may be worth partners considering ways in which people experiencing these barriers can be further supported, for example by helping participants find work placements or volunteering.



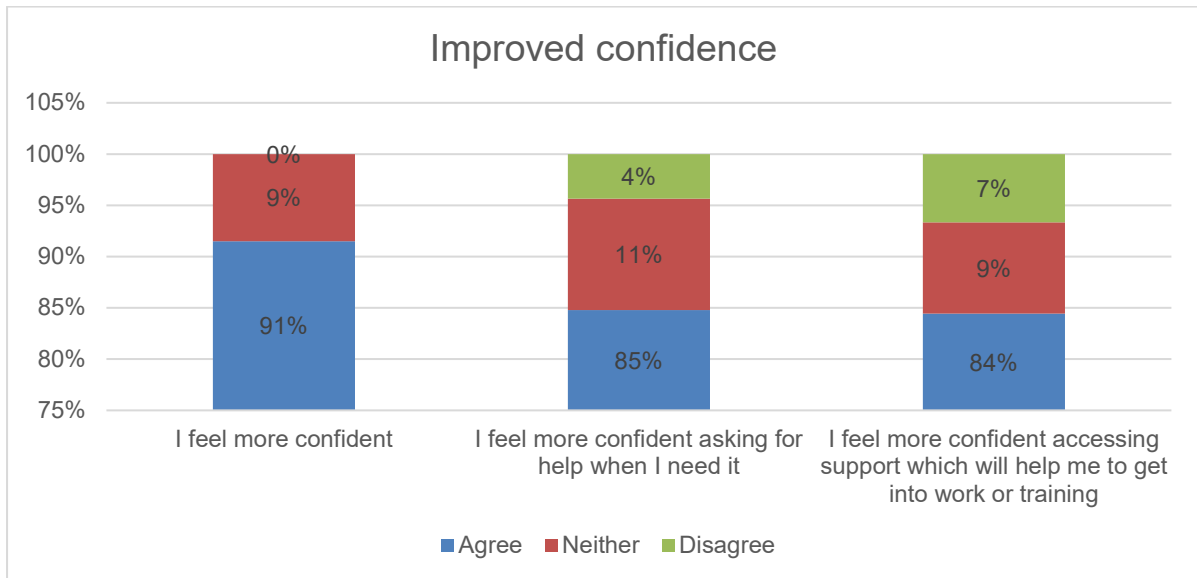
For many partners, the measure of success is around improving softer outcomes; the building blocks that need to be in place before someone is ready to start thinking about work.

The next sections consider what has been achieved around these ‘soft’ outcomes.

**Improved confidence and self-esteem**

The chart below shows that 91% of participants feel more confident as a result of Local Learning Perspectives, 85% feel more confident about asking for help and 84% feel more confident accessing support. Partners are finding that group work is particularly useful at

building confidence, particularly for people with anxiety or mental health problems, as the peer support combined with talking therapy can help people discuss their issues with others experiencing similar issues. A small percentage (7%) of participants disagree that they feel more confident accessing support that will help them find work or training; partners could consider ways to improve participants' confidence levels around accessing additional support beyond Local Learning Perspectives.



***“It’s given me a safe space to deal with my difficulties and helped me gain confidence. It is making a big positive impact on my life” (participant)***



***“The ...team has helped me with a lot of issues, both socially, psychologically and mentally. I have now much more confidence and am now able to challenge any problems that arise. The staff are brilliant” (participant)***

### **Case study**

I was going to Grandma’s Front Room and I found out about MSH, but it took me a year to go. It was a confidence thing. In the end I went with a friend for a meeting and I felt really settled and it was welcoming. I wanted help with my confidence – I have a lot of mental health issues. They have also supported me through two miscarriages and with anything else I’ve needed.

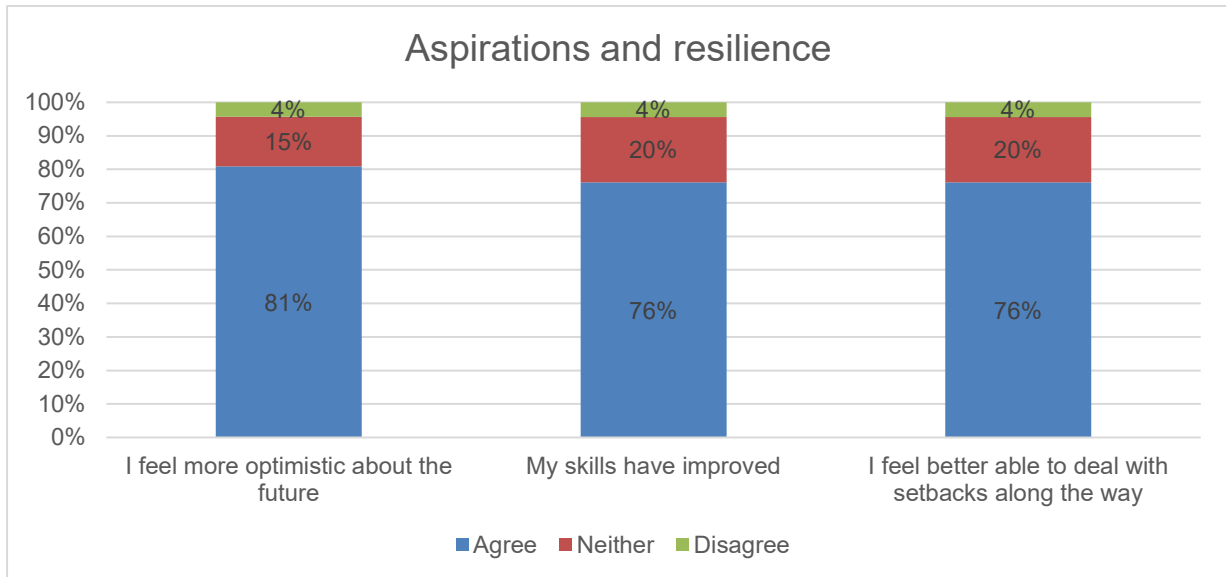
Since lockdown I’ve had weekly conversations with my Key Worker and before it was face to face. I prefer the phone calls and would prefer to do phone calls in future as I find it easier to open up. We talk about my personal life, any problems I’ve had and any successes I’ve had. I want to do a Business Management and HR course at uni, but my housing situation is difficult at the moment. I decided to work on improving myself before applying next year. I’m also looking into the Open University as an option as because of my mental health I can do it at home at my own pace.

My Key Worker has done exactly what I wanted – it’s given me so much confidence. Since March I’ve improved so much, my confidence and I feel I have the support to carry on myself. It makes things easier. I’m a lot more happy and have used lockdown to get back on my feet. I’m always helping other people and I’ve been able to focus on myself. I was bulimic and anorexic, but since the end of March I’m considered to be in recovery as I’ve not been sick. Lockdown has actually been a good opportunity to focus on myself – I can’t spend all my time helping and running around after others. But I don’t think if I’d not been supported by my Key Worker then I would have done so well. It’s been great to have someone to rant at”

### **Greater aspirations and resilience**

The chart below shows that 81% of Local Learning Perspectives participants feel more optimistic about the future, 76% feel their skills have improved and 76% feel better able to deal with setbacks. Local Learning Perspectives is helping participants to set themselves goals, realise what is achievable and develop the appropriate skills, as well as developing ways to cope with setbacks. In particular, the support provided to people before the COVID-19 pandemic has helped participants to better cope with the challenges they faced during lockdown. And during lockdown, the support has been a balance of crisis management alongside goal setting, in order to continue to help participants find a sense of direction.





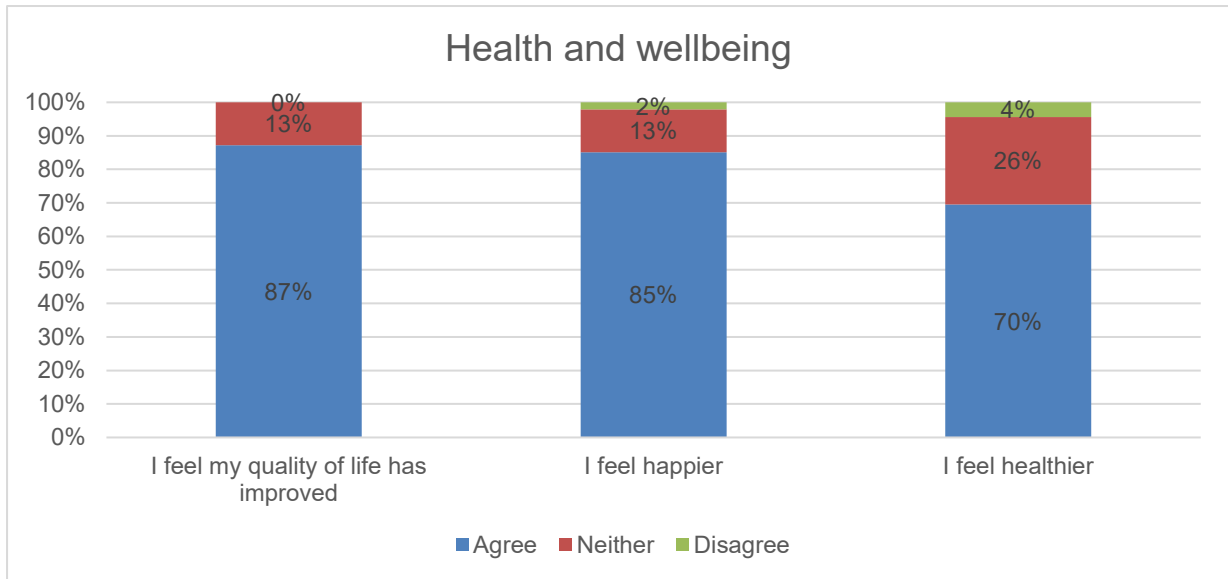
***“Felt more able to deal with the grief and provided support in navigating situations” (participant)***

***“Before the course I had trouble directing myself, it’s given me hope to get where I want to be and confident in myself. Lockdown gave me a weird time to think for myself and think about what I wanted to do with my life – the course has been immensely beneficial. I feel it’s given me direction. I had zero confidence before and now I feel more confident about achieving my goals” (participant)***

### **Improved health and wellbeing**

The chart below shows that 87% feel their overall quality of life has improved as a result of Local Learning Perspectives and 85% feel happier as a result. Although 70% feel healthier, partners may want to consider other ways in which they can build in support to improve healthy lifestyles.

During lockdown much of the support provided has been related to improving participants’ wellbeing, helping them maintain positive mindsets despite the significant life changes and fear caused by the pandemic.



**Case study:**

3 years ago I was attacked at work, and as a result have PTSD, anxiety and depression. A family member spoke to me about MSH and I went with my mum. It has been a godsend, I would be lost without it. My key worker is amazing, very accommodating. I struggle with going out. She helps me to set regular goals and it's like having an extension of your family.

Me and Mum had nowhere to turn to and without MSH I don't know where I'd be. They helped me sort my benefits. In the past I was always well paid and I didn't understand the benefits system. My Mum was financially supporting me, but now I get PIP. I'm not in a position to look for work at the moment – I still have significant mental health issues.

My goal is to go to MSH on my own. It's built up my confidence and I feel safe there. Going out and going for a walk is a big challenge for me, as I'm very reclusive. My confidence levels have improved – before I wouldn't go out and now I can go to the shop on my own. That's a massive achievement.

My Key Worker has adapted the sessions to suit me, we have started doing 'couch to 5k' together. I've learnt to trust my Key Worker and she looks after me. She has also supported me to attend appointments with the mental health team. I see my Key Worker weekly and she's a godsend.

MSH have also supported my Mum, as she has also been really affected by my mental health issues. It's been a huge change for her – I now live with my Mum and have taken 3 big overdoses since it happened. So MSH have supported my Mum through that.

During lockdown we've had weekly calls and some weeks my Key Worker would call every day. Lockdown has been really tough, as I'm used to going to the centre on my own. I couldn't see my CPN or Key Worker, but I still feel supported by the communication on the phone.

I'm trying to get out more – I went to the centre last week and had a meeting with my Key Worker on the local green. We are meeting outside so we are not at risk, as I'm petrified of the virus. And we are doing couch to 5k as the exercise is good for my mental health. It's great to get exercise and support at the same time. The sessions have been completely geared around me. We've done meditation, breathing exercises if I'm really struggling. It helps me feel more relaxed.

I know I can pick up the phone or send a message. I can't fault MSH and I dread to think where I'd be without them.

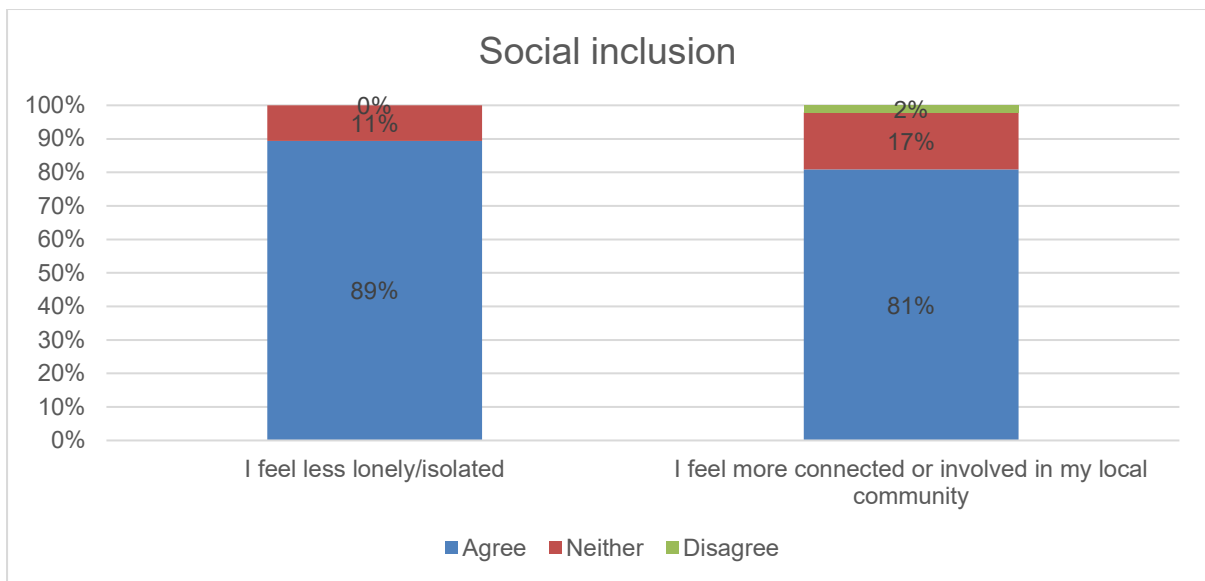
***“I feel like a totally different person and have grown so much within myself”  
(participant)***

***“Has provided me with so much support, I now feel in a position to return to work and feel less anxious when applying for jobs”(participant)***

***“This programme has helped me with my self-confidence and has lessened my anxiety” (participant)***

**Greater social inclusion**

The chart below shows that 89% of participants feel less lonely or isolated as a result of the project, and 81% feel more connected to their local community. In particular, group based activities where participants can share their stories, meet new people and develop social skills are helping to reduce the isolation that can come with unemployment. During lockdown, partners have helped to ensure that participants can stay connected and still benefit from peer support, for example by running courses over Zoom or creating WhatsApp groups.



***“It’s getting me out and about from the flat, making new friends” (participant)***

**Case study:**

I picked up a card about and [delivery partner] and was also recommended by health professionals. I did a taster session and workshops in March and I started the course before lockdown. It has given me something to focus on. It’s nice to know people are there who listen and will support you. I have gone through a lot – I have felt very alone and isolated and like no one understood. Your family don’t always understand – they try, but it’s better speaking to people with more experience.

I want to gain confidence with a view to get back to work. But I have physical and mental health issues – I want to do voluntary work in something I am able to do. The support has helped with confidence building, breathing exercises, mindfulness. I want the confidence to socialise and get my life back together.

It’s a shame lockdown has happened – lockdown is normal to me – I’d only just started going out. Zoom is good as I’m not always able to get out – if I’m not feeling up to it. But it’s important to see people face to face as it helps build confidence, getting out the house and facing people is important. But Zoom has taken me out of my comfort zone, which is good.

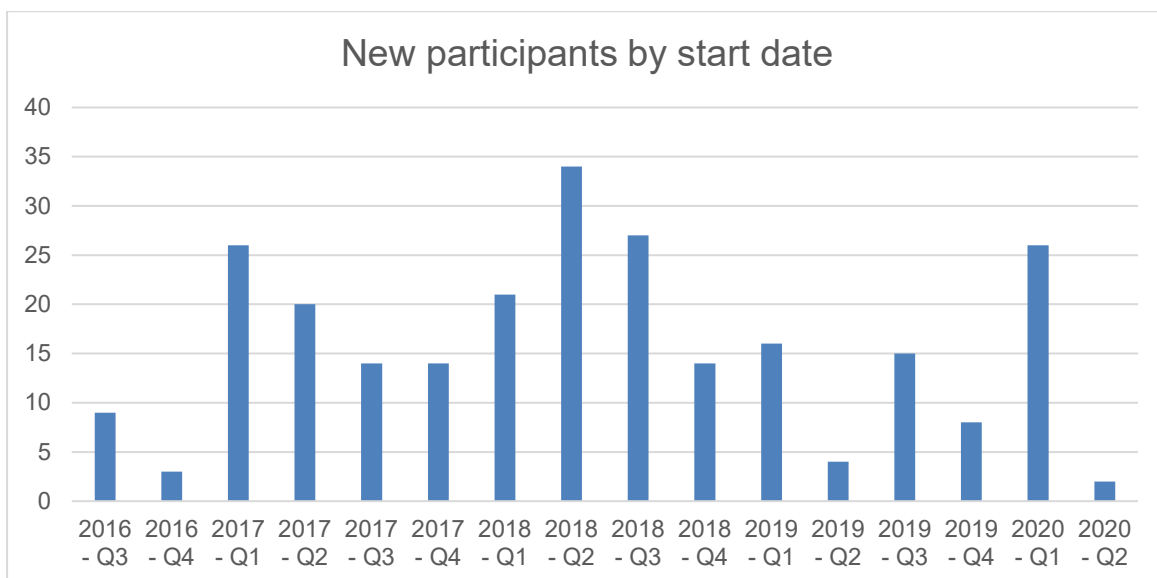
I’ve been on a crazy journey – before I was so strong and confident before I became ill. It’s been a massive change – we both had full time jobs, were foster carers etc. It was a massive step reaching out for help and support, so I was looking at different workshops and [delivery partner] has played a big part in helping. I’m continually trying, but it’s hard to lose motivation – it’s an incentive when there are people you can talk to – the support they provide would generally cost a lot of money.

## Progress

This section of the report considers who the project has supported to date, and what support has been delivered. It focuses on what successes and challenges the project has faced over the last 12 months and what has been learnt as a result. It includes details on how the delivery models have adapted since the COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020, and what the partnership have learnt as a result of these new ways of working.

### Engaging participants

To the end of June 2020, Local Learning Perspectives has engaged 253 participants which is 76% of the new target of 335 participants engaged by the end of the project. The chart below shows the project took a while to gain momentum in the first 6 months, however since then has seen a steady rate of referrals since the start of 2017. Numbers of participants engaged in year 4 reduced in the first 6 months, but increased again in quarter 1 of 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in much fewer referrals since March 2020.



There were a variety of reasons why referrals reduced in the first 6 months of year 4. They include changes in the way local referral partners were working, changes in the way some partners were delivering support or changes in personnel which resulted in a reduction in new referrals, and one partner reaching capacity which resulted in no new referrals for a few months. The learning from this period shows how difficult it is to regain momentum once referrals stop; it took almost a year between quarter 1 in 2019 to quarter 4 in 2019 for referrals to start increasing again. It demonstrates the importance of maintaining links and regular communication with referral partners, even if circumstances mean that new participants cannot be engaged at that time.

The table below shows that while most partners are making good progress to engage their project target of participants, some are behind target. Although some partners may not achieve their stretch targets, it is likely that the overall target for the project (335 participants engaged) will be achieved. In addition to the project target, partners agreed a stretch target however there is no requirement by the funders for this to be achieved.

Partner	Project target	Stretch target	Cumulative total as at Q2 20	Progress to date against Project Target
<b>A</b>	90	93	74	82%
<b>B</b>	34	35	16	47%
<b>C</b>	51	53	53	104%
<b>D</b>	42	43	20	48%
<b>E</b>	46	48	34	73%
<b>F*</b>	35	36	36	104%
<b>G*</b>	14	15	11	76%
<b>H*</b>	23	24	9	39%
<b>Total</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>347</b>	<b>253</b>	

*\*note that partners F, G and H stopped delivering on the project in 2019, however their participants still contribute towards the total engaged to date.*

### Engaging participants during COVID-19 lockdown

In the first few weeks of lockdown all organisations were focused on their own delivery and internal operational management arrangements. This resulted in a drastic reduction in new referrals. However, as new working arrangements were established contact with referral partners has recently re-started, resulting in a small number of new referrals. However, not all referrals are appropriate, with many people being made redundant as a result of Covid-19 but not fitting the eligibility criteria of BBO. It has also been impossible to hold introductory meetings with the referral partner, BBO key worker and participant, which helps to engage new participants and build trust and rapport.

It has been important to maintain contact with all referral partners as much as possible during lockdown; letting people know that BBO is still there to support people in need. In many cases this has been possible, however contact with the Job Centre has been extremely challenging as their roles have changed significantly.

Partners have also started to use new methods for marketing the project; for example, leaving leaflets in food banks, talking to other local charities helping families during lockdown, and increased use of social media.

Delivery Partners have been able to maintain contact with people who had not officially signed up to BBO support prior to lockdown, but in many cases it has been difficult to move forward with the support, with many people wanting to wait until after lockdown restrictions were lifted.

Since lockdown restrictions have been lifted, more new participants are starting to join the project, and processes have been set up to enable the sign-up process to be completed remotely.

### Looking forward

Going forward, the programme will continue to seek new referrals up until early 2021, in order to try and recover some of the momentum lost prior to, and as a result of lockdown. Partners are keen to work with COVID-19 response groups as they have been successful in identifying 'hidden' families who have not accessed support from agencies in the past. And the work done during lockdown to promote the project through social media will continue.

However, it is important that the partnership maintains the focus on engaging people who are eligible for BBO support; i.e. long term unemployed. Funders have indicated that the project should continue to support the most vulnerable people rather than purely focussing on targets.

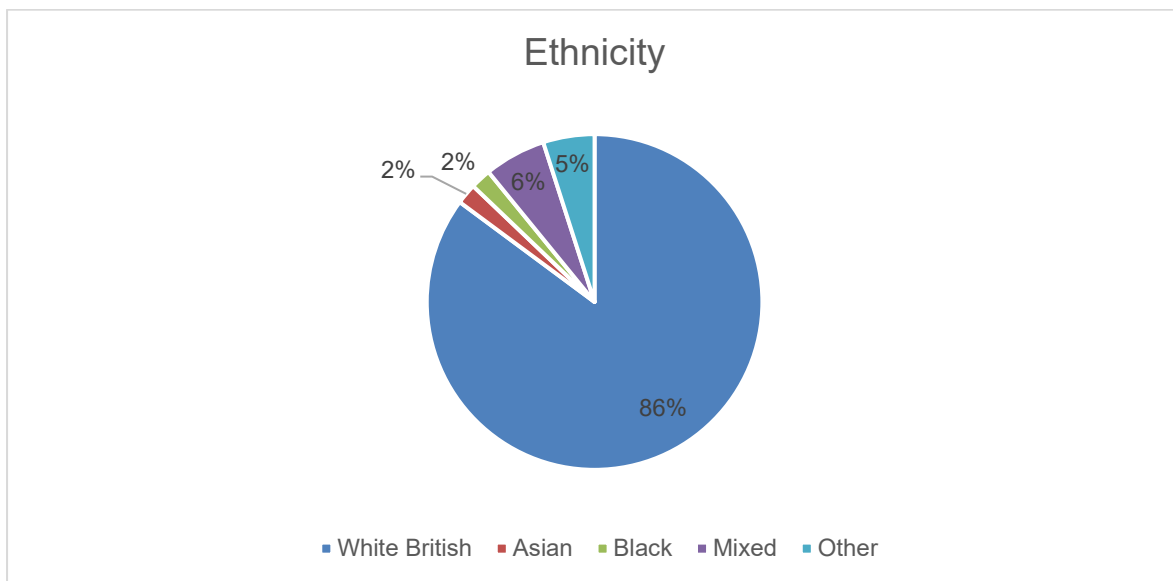
**Participant profile**

*Gender*

54% of participants are female and 46% are male, compared to a target of 50%:50%, which shows that Local Learning Perspectives continues to be effective at engaging both genders.

*Ethnicity*

The chart below shows that the project has engaged a range of people from different ethnic backgrounds, with 14% from Black Asian and Minority Ethnic communities (BAME).



*Employment status*

53% were unemployed on joining the project and 47% were economically inactive, against a target of 42%:58%. This compares to 59% unemployed and 41% economically inactive in 2018, showing that efforts by partners to target more economically inactive participants have helped improve the results, however more are needed in order to achieve the original target.

**Barriers to employment**

The participant data shows that the project has been successful at engaging people who are furthest from the labour market:

- On average, participants have been unemployed for 3.2 years, with nearly two-thirds (62%) unemployed for at least 12 months.
- 94% were not in education or training prior to starting the project
- Participants have low levels of educational attainment, with only a quarter (26%) having post-secondary or tertiary education or equivalent
- A third (32%) lack basic skills
- 56% live in jobless households
- 10% are offenders or ex-offenders



- 58% have a disability

## Delivering support

All delivery partners have continued to deliver support throughout the COVID-19 crisis. Support has been delivered in a mix of different ways, including:

- Telephone calls
- Video conferencing sessions (mainly using Zoom) – to individuals and small groups
- WhatsApp group discussions and WhatsApp videos
- Text messages
- Emails
- Online learning through cloud-based virtual classroom platforms

By using a range of different methods, key workers have been able to maintain contact with the majority of participants. Clearly, moving from a focus on face to face support to remote support has been a challenge for both organisations and participants. But in some ways, the new ways of working have been beneficial, with remote support providing a more flexible and time-efficient way of delivering support.

***“I miss not seeing clients, but in some ways it is working better”***

The table below summarises the strengths and challenges of remote working.

Strengths	Challenges
Ability to use apps or methods that participants are familiar with and comfortable using, such as WhatsApp	It can be difficult (without training) to read people’s body language over the phone or video conferencing
Some participants like telephone support as they don’t have to leave home – in some cases this has helped engage people who find face to face support/leaving the house difficult	The issues people are experiencing are complex and this is often difficult to discuss over the phone/remotely, resulting in sessions taking longer or more time needed to fully explore the problems people are facing
Group messaging (e.g. through WhatsApp) has worked well to engage people in group discussions and is a good way of delivering peer support	It is easier for people to not answer the phone – so there has been a greater proportion of people not attending meetings/sessions
Having time limited phone/Zoom sessions can help provide focus and structure	It is very challenging to build rapport and new relationships remotely; however where relationships (between key worker and participant) were there before lockdown, these have been relatively easy to maintain
More support can be provided as key worker’s travel time has reduced	Not everyone has appropriate equipment (e.g. laptops) or internet access to enable them to engage in remote support
More introverted people tend to be happier with telephone/remote support	More extroverted people are missing the face to face contact.

The type of support being delivered has varied between the different delivery partners. In addition to general 1-1 welfare support calls exploring issues and providing advice and guidance, other support has included:

- Structured coaching support, completing specific exercises and giving people actions to complete in their own time; for example WEA life coach has developed specific exercises that help people reflect on what they have lost and gained during lockdown and what things they would like to continue doing once restrictions are lifted
- Group 'talks' using WhatsApp
- Virtual learning and structured online courses
- Wellbeing Zoom sessions, e.g. mindfulness sessions at My Sister's House
- Regular emails providing guidance and links to wellbeing support and advice
- Providing parents with guidance on how to home school their children, activities they can do with their children and how to create a timetable/schedule
- Advice and support on how to cook low cost, healthy meals; for example the Recipe Club created by SCDA where the key worker shares recipe ideas and encourages participants to do the same
- Supporting people to consider the future beyond C-19
- Referrals to food banks, and at AITC, participants have been delivering food parcels
- Signposting to Covid-19 response groups
- Socially distanced dog walks between mentors and mentees at SCT
- Providing art and craft resource packs

In many ways, the challenges posed by COVID-19 have presented opportunities for the partnership; creating new ways of working that mean the support offer has diversified. Going forward, most partners plan to continue providing a blended offer of support, combining face to face meetings and workshop (once social distancing allows) with virtual support.

***“The changing offer means there are no limits on the geographical area – it opens up new opportunities. Blended delivery going forward also means we can cope with another national or local lockdown if they happen” (Partner)***

## **Support needs**

All delivery partners agreed that the majority of support has been around addressing basic needs; ensuring people have enough food, medication, accommodation and access to other essential support services including Covid-19 response groups. In addition to this, the main areas of support have been:

- **Health and wellbeing;** encouraging people to get out and exercise when it is safe to do so and providing support with wellbeing activities and keeping a healthy mindset
- **Providing structure and routine;** in particular for parents trying to home-school children, setting people tasks and activities to do at home to stay positive

***“Recognise the importance of giving people credit for keeping going – getting up and getting dressed is an achievement” (partner)***

Delivery partners also describe the changing needs throughout the crisis; at the start of lockdown there was a lot of fear, people feeling trapped, anxious and panicking. As people

started to get used to a new way of life, anxieties reduced and people were able to start thinking about the short-term future, with key workers able to help people with setting short-term goals. Then as lockdown started to be lifted, some fear and anxieties returned as participants had to consider whether to send their children back to school or start to leave the house more.

For many participants, the COVID-19 crisis has set them back on their journey into employment. People who were previously volunteering were now having problems getting out of bed and many people are concerned about going out to work whilst the virus is still in circulation. For many parents, uncertainty about when children would be returning to school meant they had to stop job searching and uncertainties over college courses re-starting has meant some people have delayed applying.

However, for some people, the crisis has provided opportunities. People experiencing severe social anxieties have benefited from lockdown and have been able to access support in ways that suit them, and some participants have been job searching, creating CVs and doing things they wouldn't have done before. Some participants have started to consider self-employment as an option to enable them to work from home whilst looking after children and some people have used the time to reflect on their goals and have changed their plans, resulting in people signing up for online courses etc.

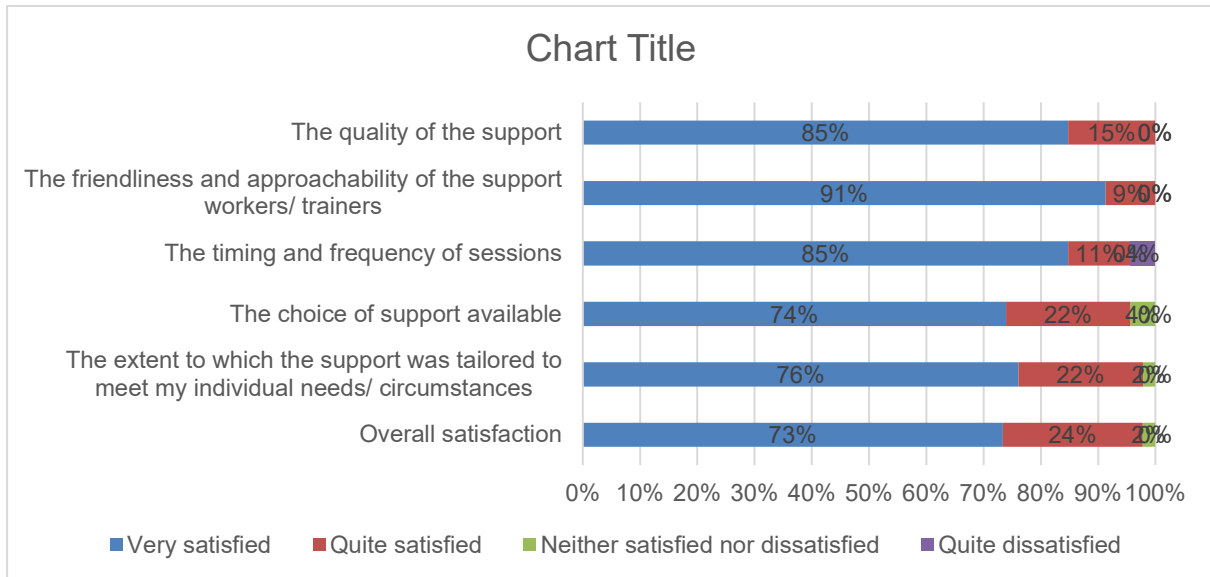
***“When life-changing events happen, people often reflect on their future and it gets people thinking about what they want to get out of their lives” (partner)***

Delivery partners also feel that participants who have been supported prior to COVID-19 have been able to build up some resilience as a result of the support; knock backs have not been as bad as they were before receiving BBO support and they are able to recover more quickly.

***“Some clients have really high anxiety levels – but now the worst has happened and they realise they can cope. And now they want to go out more!” (partner)***

## **Quality of support**

The chart below shows the levels of satisfaction with project delivery. It shows overwhelmingly high levels of satisfaction, with 91% very satisfied with the friendliness and approachability of the support workers and 85% very satisfied with the quality of the support. 97% of participants were overall satisfied or very satisfied with the project.



Feedback from participants shows they appreciate the friendliness and approachability of the Key Workers, reporting that they can trust them to ‘tell them anything’ and many feeling that their Key Worker ‘is part of the family’. This is excellent feedback as it demonstrates how Key Workers are able to build trust and rapport with often extremely vulnerable people, and allow this to support them in moving on with their lives. However, there is a risk that participants become too dependent on the support and find it difficult to move on. This will become even more of a challenge as the project nears the end of the BBO funding, as partners will need to find ways of exiting or signposting participants to other support agencies, if further funding cannot be found to sustain the current model.

***“There is a balance to be struck between providing holistic, person-centred support and ensuring that people can be supported to move on” (partner)***

## Conclusions and recommendations

The last 12 months have presented a number of challenges to the Local Learning Perspectives project, however the partnership has been successful in overcoming these challenges and has continued to support extremely vulnerable people during extremely difficult times. It is a testament to the strength and skills of the BBO8 delivery partners and the project management team that support has continued during lockdown and feedback from participants shows how valuable this support has been.

The first 6 months of the year did result in a reduction in new people engaged in the project and despite the impact of COVID-19 the project is on track to meet or be very close to meeting its engagement targets. More importantly, the project continues to reach those who are furthest from the job market and the number of people achieving positive outcomes into work or education is increasing. The project also continues to have a significant impact on participants' confidence and wellbeing, and is providing people with the skills they need to cope with current and future challenges, as well as helping them to improve their aspirations.

It is clear from the learning captured during the COVID-19 crisis that BBO projects are playing an essential role in supporting extremely vulnerable people during these challenging times; ensuring that people are safe and well and are accessing appropriate support as required.

However, BBO is providing more than just crisis management and survival support. It is also helping people to think about a future post lockdown, by providing participants with structure, support with setting goals and a focus on celebrating achievements and moving forwards with their lives.

## Learning

The main areas of learning that have arisen out the last 12 months of delivery are:

- It is difficult to regain momentum in referrals once lost; it is important to ensure that partners maintain relationships and ongoing dialogue with referral partners
- It is possible to deliver BBO support virtually, either over the phone or using online technology such as Zoom. Although this way of working will never entirely replace face to face support, a blended offer going forward provides the partners with new opportunities and greater ability to cope with future crises such as COVID-19
- The flexibility of the BBO model means that support can be adapted to cope with participants' changing needs, and the focus on supporting people's journeys back into work (rather than just 'finding a job') means that setbacks can be managed positively within the scope of the project
- Key Workers are very important people in participants' lives, however this does present challenges in terms of ensuring that people are supported to move on

## Recommendations

In the final year of the project, we recommend that partners:

- Consider strategies for engaging new participants
- Continue to build links with existing and new referrals partners

- Increase marketing in order to increase referrals and engagement
- Consider exit strategies for existing participants; either exiting into education or employment, or signposting to other support post-BBO
- Continue to provide a blended offer of support that meets the needs of participants
- More efforts made to incorporate environmental sustainability into delivery and project publicity
- Ensure that more participant surveys are completed in order to ensure the results are meaningful

## Appendix 1: Research questions

Project outcome	Research questions
<p><b>Stronger Families:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved quality of life</li> <li>Improved relationships</li> <li>Improved skills</li> <li>Improved aspirations</li> <li>Reduce barriers to employment</li> <li>Greater housing stability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are participants feeling more optimistic/ positive about their lives and the future?</li> <li>How has the project supported relationship building?</li> <li>How have relationships between family members improved?</li> <li>What skills have been gained and have they met participants needs?</li> <li>Was the training and skills development support delivered to a high quality?</li> <li>Did the training and support meet current gaps in skills?</li> <li>How many participants progressed into education or training?</li> <li>How many participants have gained basic skills?</li> <li>Is the project improving aspirations?</li> <li>Are participants showing improved ability to set and achieve goals?</li> <li>To what extent are participants effectively engaging in the project and how is the project supporting participants to effectively engage?</li> <li>How is the project building positive relationships with employers?</li> <li>What proportion of participants are attending interviews, carrying out job searches, undertaking volunteering or work experience?</li> <li>Have CVs improved?</li> <li>What proportion of participants found employment or self-employed and what proportion stayed employed?</li> <li>How did volunteering/work placements benefit participants?</li> <li>How did the project change attitudes and behaviours towards work?</li> <li>How many participants gained an improved understanding of the workplace?</li> <li>How has the project sought to break down barriers to employment and what barriers have been reduced?</li> <li>Do participants have greater housing security?</li> <li>Were training materials good quality and relevant?</li> <li>Was the support tailored to meet individual needs?</li> <li>Were staff skilled and experienced at working with vulnerable people?</li> </ul>



Project outcome	Research questions
<p>Greater Social Inclusion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Less socially isolated</li> <li>Improved prospects</li> <li>More self reliant and proactive in seeking external support when needed</li> <li>More positive about their economic prospects</li> <li>Improved communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What has worked well to strengthen families?</li> <li>Are participants making friends and developing improved social skills?</li> <li>Are participants reporting they feel less lonely?</li> <li>Do participants feel their prospects have improved?</li> <li>Are people now more aware of where they can access support?</li> <li>How has volunteering helped improve prospects? And reduce isolation?</li> <li>Have communication skills improved?</li> <li>What has worked to improve social incision?</li> </ul>
<p>Improved Health</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved confidence</li> <li>Improved resilience</li> <li>Increase in self-belief/self worth</li> <li>Healthier lifestyles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How has the project supported the development of self-esteem?</li> <li>How is the project motivating participants and supporting them to achieve their goals?</li> <li>Do participants have improved confidence and self-esteem?</li> <li>Are participants more confident about finding employment?</li> <li>Are participants self-reporting an improvement in wellbeing?</li> <li>Are participants more aware of how to lead a healthy life?</li> <li>How has the project created a safe trusting environment and built relationships with participants?</li> <li>How has the project improved health and wellbeing?</li> </ul>
<p>Stronger Voluntary &amp; Community Sector:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased networking</li> <li>Improved partnership working</li> <li>Increased contact with hardest to reach</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How did the project promote/support good communication between partners?</li> <li>How did the project support partners to share good practice?</li> <li>Were there sufficient opportunities for partners to work together?</li> <li>Do all partners have a good understanding of what each other does?</li> <li>To what extent were partners referring participants between themselves? Was there an increase in referrals?</li> <li>Did the project support collaboration and learning between partners, in this and other projects/programmes?</li> </ul>



Project outcome	Research questions
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li data-bbox="576 271 1241 327">• To what extent did partners value the project? Did it benefit the organisation?</li><li data-bbox="576 344 1257 400">• To what extent has the project changed or influenced how partners work?</li><li data-bbox="576 418 1018 452">• Have partners gained new skills?</li><li data-bbox="576 470 1273 526">• To what extent are partners committed to continuing to work together once the project finishes?</li><li data-bbox="576 544 1217 600">• To what extent was the project able to engage the target/hard to reach groups?</li><li data-bbox="576 618 1230 674">• How have partners sought to engage hard to reach people, and what has worked well?</li></ul>