



# 2021 Report of the Evaluation of the Work.Live.Leicestershire Programme

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## Authors:

KRISTA BLAIR\*, GEORGE MCGILL\*, DMITRA GKIONTSI  
KAY DE VRIES, JAYNE BROWN

## Contributors:

David Clayton, Dawn Coleby, Andrew Dunn,  
Osaretin Oviasu, Wendy Padley

Institute of Health, Health Policy and Social Care

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## 1 Information for readers on definitions and charts

### 1.1 Terms used in this report

**Disengaged participants** are defined as programme participants who have stopped participating in programme support without formally exiting the programme e.g. the programme has lost touch with the participant.

**Economically inactive** are defined as people who are not currently part of the labour force e.g. they are neither employed nor do they meet the definition of unemployed.

**Long-term unemployed** is defined as participants who are unemployed and have not worked for at least 12 months.

**Keyworkers** refers to programme workers whose job role or activities include providing holistic one-to-one support to programme participants. Frontline workers in the programme had varying job titles and job activity. Some delivered one-to-one support exclusively; some provided one-to-one support together with specialist support such as support to volunteer or specialist advice; some focussed on reaching and engaging potential participants and handed over to another worker early in the participant's journey. When we refer to keyworkers, we mean any frontline worker who provided holistic one-to-one support in the course of their work, regardless of their job title.

**ONS (Office for National Statistics) scores** refers to the scores for the ONS-recommended measures of loneliness that were administered to participants upon entry to and exit from the programme. The ONS measures include UCLA's three-item loneliness scale and a single question directly asking about loneliness 'How often do you feel lonely?' as used in the Community Life Survey.

**Programme participants/participants** refers to the users of the Work.Live.Leicestershire (WiLL) Programme.

**Programme workers** refers to frontline workers in the WiLL Programme with direct contact with programme participants. Where we are referring to managers supporting these staff or back office staff we specify this.

**Risk factors** indicate if the participant reports any of the following circumstances: offender or ex-offender; living in a jobless household or a jobless household with dependent children; homeless or affected by housing exclusion; or single adult household with dependent children. These are characteristics selected for monitoring by the European Social Fund.

**Stakeholders** refers to interviewees from organisations outside the WiLL partnership that interacted with the programme e.g. the WiLL programme referred participants to the organisation for support; the external organisation referred people to the WiLL programme for support; or information or resources moved from one to the other.

**Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (Swemwbs)** refers to a validated measure of mental wellbeing that has been used nationally, regionally, and locally.

**Unemployed** are people who are without work, available for work, and actively seeking work.

**The Work Star™** is a casework-based action planning and outcomes measurement tool developed by Triangle Consulting that allows participants and workers to rate seven areas of a participant's life on a scale. The areas are job skills and experience, aspiration and motivation, job-search skills, stability, basic skills, workplace and social skills, and health and well-being.

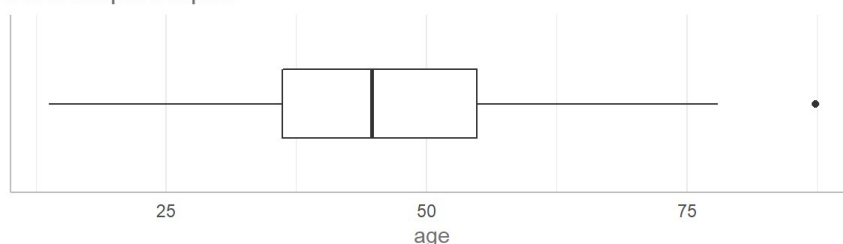
Definitions of Unemployed and Economically Inactive are taken from: *Output and Results Indicator Guidance for the European Social Fund. 2014-2020 European Growth Programme*. August 2018. European Union, European Structural and Investment Funds.

## 1.2 Types of charts used in this report

The main type of chart used in this report which may need some explanation is the 'boxplot'. This chart shows the distribution of a set of values and marks the points at which the interquartile ranges occur in the data. An example is given below with some explanatory notes that might be helpful.

The example boxplot below shows a distribution of ages of 100 cases with a mean age of 45.6 years. The plot represents the cases when they are sorted by age. The vertical bar in the middle of the box shows the median age at 45 years. The median is (for the sample here) the value for the cases between position 50 and 51, when the 100 cases are ordered by age.

An example boxplot



The minimum age is the leftmost point (at 14 years) and the maximum age in the group is the rightmost point, which in this case is also shown as a single dot, i.e. an outlier (at 87 years). The left side of the box shows the age at the '25th percentile point', in other words, when we line up our 100 cases by age, the cases at positions 25 to 26 have the age shown by this line which here is 37 years. Similarly, the right side of the box shows the age at the '75th percentile point', in this case 55 years. Hence the ages of half of the sample - when ordered like this - occur between the 25th and 75th percentile points.

## 2 Summary

The Work.Live.Leicestershire (WiLL) programme provided help to economically inactive or unemployed people in Leicestershire to move into job search, training, or employment. The programme aimed to help people into work or learning by improving their health and wellbeing, social engagement, and skills and work experience, and by supporting people as they volunteered, job searched or started a business.

The programme was open to residents of rural Leicestershire who were economically inactive or unemployed, and targeted the areas of Hinckley and Bosworth, North West Leicestershire, Melton, and Harborough. As of November 2020, the programme had registered details of 535 participants<sup>1</sup> (263 men and 266 women) across all age groups. 152 participants were 24 or under, and 158 participants were 51 or over. Of the participants registered, some will have just joined the programme, some will be part-way through the programme, and some will have left the programme at various points after their initial engagement with WiLL.

This report discusses findings from the second year of De Montfort University's evaluation, focussing on programme results and how the programme supported people to address barriers to moving into work or learning. The programme is ongoing, and this report draws on data from both participants who had left the programme and those whose support was in progress.

### 2.1 Participants' barriers to work

The summary below gives an overview of the data for 535 participants recorded as registered on the programme. Some of these will have been on the scheme for some months, some will have left and others will have recently joined the scheme and will not yet have participated in Star response sessions. Therefore, the information in the sections of this report following this summary will refer to the relevant subsets of the numbers reported here.

- 22 per cent (n = 119) of participants registered on the programme reported, on entry to the programme, being unemployed for over 12 months.
- 42 per cent (n=224) of participants reported having a disability or long-term health condition. Participants described mental health conditions as a barrier to finding or staying in work. At the same time, some participants described the negative impact of unemployment on their mental wellbeing.
- 78 per cent (n=410) were educated to GCSE-level or above.
- 50 per cent of participants reported one or more of the following: being a single parent, having a housing problem, having no one in the household in work or having a record as an offender.
- Rurality was a barrier to accessing job opportunities and support, particularly where health conditions/disability or finances hindered travel.

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<sup>1</sup> This figure includes some participants who began the process of joining the programme but who did not for various reasons proceed to participate in support.



- Types and levels of need amongst participants varied considerably. Of the participants who had taken an initial 'baseline' Star measure on entry to the programme, 62 per cent would be classified as having high support needs (scoring 6 or below on the Work Star™ scale), in the area of job search skills; 54 per cent reported high support needs in job skills and experience. In contrast, only 34 per cent reported high support needs for workplace and social skills.

## 2.2 Changes for programme participants

- Of the participants who went on to take at least two Star measures as they progressed through the programme, 45 per cent recorded improved 'motivation, confidence and aspiration'. Interviewees described gaining confidence either in their abilities generally or in their ability to manage in social situations. Participants and workers said gaining confidence enabled other changes for people such as participating in group activities or applying for work.
- 42 per cent of these had improvement in 'job search skills', that is, knowing how to find out about, apply for, and interview for jobs. Interviewees said that both participants without work experience and those with a long work history could lack these skills.
- 39 per cent of them reported improvement in managing their health and wellbeing.
- Whilst not included in quantitative measures, participants also reported gains in business start-up skills.
- By November 2020, 36 per cent of participants who had left the programme had exited to job search, training, or work.

## 2.3 Differences in participant journeys

- Both participants with lower and higher levels of support needs made progress on addressing barriers to work whilst on the programme. Moreover, people's level of need did not appear to affect how quickly they made progress.
- The overall rate of progress was slightly slowed during the COVID-19 period; nevertheless, participants continued to make progress before and during the COVID-19 period. Individual workers and participants described some disruption to programme participation and external work opportunities, as well as adopting different strategies for coping with COVID-19 restrictions.
- Participants who were out of work for longer than 12 months were more likely to exit without an outcome.
- 30 per cent of participants exiting to work had a disability or long-term health condition. The rate of entry to work for participants with a disability or health condition was about two-thirds the rate of non-disabled participants. For context, the national rate for disabled people overall is one-third the rate of workless non-disabled people.
- Participants with higher final Work Star™ scores were more likely to exit to work, training or job search, and even more so if they had had a greater amount of change in their Work Star™ scores during their time on the programme.



## 2.4 Aspects of support that were valued or enabled change

- Many participants described their relationship with a programme worker as a central and valued part of their support from the WiLL programme.
- Programme workers' ability to individually tailor support; to establish a collaborative, supportive and trusting relationship; and to draw on their experience and expertise were valued by participants.
- Programme workers deployed a range of WiLL and externally provided activities and services to support participants. To achieve this, they leveraged WiLL partners' existing community relationships and built new relationships.
- Programme workers supported participants' mental wellbeing by providing one-to-one support and activities that gave people a source of social/emotional support; provided people with a sense of purpose; and provided meaningful social interaction.
- Both workers and participants described how developing clearer, meaningful goals and having a sense of achievement boosted participants' confidence and motivation.
- Both participants and workers described how coaching and training on job search skills, clarifying goals, and increasing confidence helped improve participants' job searching.
- Interviewees from other organisations that worked with the programme valued several aspects of the WiLL programme offer: its breadth of support, its connections to other services, its inclusive eligibility, its voluntary nature, and its flexible, tailored support.

## 3 Introduction

### 3.1 Purpose and scope of report

This report discusses findings from the second year of De Montfort University's evaluation of the Work.Live.Leicestershire (WiLL) programme, a local partnership programme to support unemployed or economically inactive people in Leicestershire into work or learning. Its primary focus is to provide a summative assessment of the programme outcomes, and an examination of the possible processes that supported participant progress towards these outcomes.

More information on the programme evaluation findings is available from the 2019 Report of the Evaluation of the Work.Live.Leicestershire Programme, which looks in more detail at participant experiences whilst on the programme, and the implications of this for programme design and delivery. For information on ways in which the programme responded to the restrictions of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the impact of this on the programme's ability to equitably meet participant needs, please see the Work.Live.Leicestershire COVID Report Autumn 2020.

### 3.2 What was Work.Live.Leicestershire?

The Work.Live.Leicestershire (WiLL) programme provided help to economically inactive or unemployed people in Leicestershire to move into job search, training, or employment/self-employment. The programme was delivered by a partnership of voluntary and statutory sector organisations in Leicestershire and funded by the National Lottery Community Fund and the European Social Fund. It opened to the public in early 2019.

The programme aimed to help people into work or learning by improving their wellbeing, social engagement, skills, and work experience, and by supporting people to job search or start a business.

In order to break down the barriers to people entering work or learning, WiLL provided a range of activities and support to help people address health and wellbeing needs; gain skills, knowledge, and experience (basic skills, job search skills, work-related skills and knowledge); build social networks and social skills; and build confidence and motivation.

The programme was targeted at the smallest rural communities of Leicestershire, concentrating on the districts of Hinckley and Bosworth, North West Leicestershire, Melton and Harborough, but accepted participants from other parts of the county.

Programme support for people included

- Keyworker (one-to-one) support, including information, advice and guidance;
- Group support, including work clubs based in local libraries and other local venues, and support aimed at younger people;
- A range of learning courses;
- Events e.g. job fairs;

- Support to volunteer;
- Travel information and brokerage schemes;
- Reimbursement of childcare and travel expenses to participate in the programme;
- Vouchers to encourage physical activity;
- Linking people to other support e.g. benefits advice, housing advice, substance misuse;
- Business start-up advice and mentoring, training, and help with expenses; and,
- In-work support.

With the arrival of COVID-19 restrictions in the spring of 2020, the WiLL programme had to change in response to the pandemic restrictions. Restrictions on face-to-face support changed the programme offer, with activities moving to being delivered via telephone, email, or videoconferencing. Some activity, such as the work clubs, could not be successfully moved online, and changes in the external environment also affected the service offer. For example, volunteering support was affected by changes in the volunteering opportunities available. Nevertheless, the programme remained open and took on new participants during 2020.

### 3.3 Evaluation aims and questions

Following a series of consultation meetings with delivery partners, and discussion with the evaluation's Advisory Group, the DMU team identified the following evaluation questions for the summative evaluation:

#### **Effectiveness**

To what extent did the WiLL programme produce its intended outcomes? Were there unintended outcomes?

How much support was needed to achieve outcomes?

Where changes took place, how did these come about? What was effective for programme participants in the programme's outreach, assessment, partnership working, and one-to-one support activities?

Were there changes for providers, employers, or the wider community?

#### **Relevance**

How did what was offered fit what was needed by participants? Were there unaddressed needs?

What did participants and stakeholders value or not value about the programme? How well did the programme's aims match the aims of participants and other stakeholders?

#### **Equity**

How well did the WiLL programme reach and meet the needs of individuals in different circumstances, including men and women?

How well did the WiLL programme respond to rural circumstances?

### 3.4 Methodology

Our approach to the summative evaluation reflected the fact that the WiLL programme was likely to yield individualised outcomes e.g. the same activities could be used by participants in different ways and/or help participants differently (Patton, 2002). We therefore selected a mixed-methods design that would enable us to understand both the overall effects of the programme on the participant cohort, but also, how different individuals experienced and progressed through the programme.

The quantitative element of the study focussed on the overall effects of the programme and sought to identify possible determinants of the programme's planned outcomes. Data was collected on a range of intermediate outcomes relating to skills, social engagement, wellbeing, and confidence, and on whether participants entered job search, learning, or work on exit from the programme. Outcomes and their possible determinants were further explored in the qualitative component of our study, which collected information on the actions and experiences of programme participants and staff through both interviewing and observation.

We also involved programme stakeholders – both staff and programme users – in the conduct of the evaluation, in order to better support effective data collection and analysis. An Evaluation Advisory Group of programme staff, academics and a participant helped guide decision-making on the evaluation plan, including advising on recruiting interviewees, sampling, and reporting. Both WiLL staff and managers, and programme participants who joined our Participants' Forum, have discussed evaluation findings, helping to interpret these.

#### 3.4.1 Sampling and observations

This report draws on 51 individual interviews with 38 programme participants, as well as individual interviews with 21 programme workers. Thirteen participants completed a qualitative questionnaire on exiting the programme. In addition, five Participants' Forums have discussed keyworker support, support for people with mental health needs, the role of confidence, the COVID-19 crisis, and the evaluation's overall findings. In 2020, we held three focus groups with workers on their experience of the first few months of the COVID-19 crisis and interviewed seven managers and back office staff.

Observations of programme activity, which continued online after the COVID-19 restrictions, included observations of the WiLL work clubs at Desford, Hinckley, Coalville, and Market Harborough; courses offered for participants by the Workers' Educational Association (WEA); WiLL keyworker meetings; an Access Generation course for employers; and a Market Harborough event for programme stakeholders. Workers from the Prince's Trust, the Rural Community Council, and Voluntary Action Leicestershire were shadowed e.g. in contrast to observing a site or an event, a fieldworker travelled with and followed the work of a single worker. We also observed workshops held by WiLL's developmental evaluator, in which workers and managers reflected on their efforts to improve the programme's delivery and manage the impact of COVID-19. Emerging findings were discussed with programme managers and

frontline workers at Advisory Group meetings and in separate workshops. The types and numbers of qualitative data collection activities were as follows:

*Table 1 - Interview numbers*

<b>Individual participant interviews</b>	51
<b>Individual programme staff interviews</b>	28
<b>Stakeholder interviews</b>	7
<b>Qualitative exit questionnaire</b>	12
<b>Participants' Forum workshops</b>	5
<b>Advisory Group meetings and programme staff meetings to discuss emerging findings</b>	6
<b>Worker focus groups</b>	3
<b>Programme activity observations and staff shadowing/meeting observations</b>	30

For copies of the interview schedules and observation guidance used in the qualitative fieldwork, please see the 2019 Report of the Evaluation of the Work.Live.Leicestershire.

The names of interviewees, both workers and programme participants, have been redacted or changed in this report. Where necessary, details about places or participant circumstances have been altered to protect anonymity, but care has been taken to preserve details that may be pertinent to understanding the factors affecting participant outcomes.

All quantitative data was taken from an extract from the programme's Charity Log database, a casework management database used across the WiLL partnership, and was subsequently processed and analysed for the quantitative aspects of this report.

The basic counts for numbers of Star scores for participants, from this extract were<sup>2</sup>:

*Table 2 - Numbers of Star scores*

<b>Category</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>No Star score</b>	119	22%
<b>Exactly one Star score</b>	232	43%
<b>More than one Star score</b>	184	34%
<b>Total</b>	535	100%

### 3.4.2 Measures

Supported by the evaluation team, programme keyworkers collected measures of beneficiary needs and outcomes. The Work Star™ casework-based tool was used to assess participants' progress regularly as they progressed through the programme<sup>3</sup> in

<sup>2</sup> For explanation of the scores referred to in this table, please see section 2.4.2 on Measures.

<sup>3</sup> Recommended practice was to administer the Work Star™ at intervals of three months. However, some workers would administer this more or less frequently, depending on the intensity of contact with a participant.

the domains of job skills and experience; aspiration and motivation; job search skills; workplace and social skills, and health and well-being.

The Work Star™ enables workers and programme participants to give an area such as 'health and wellbeing' a score from 1 to 10. On this scale, a difference of two points or more corresponds to clear differences in the tool's descriptions of what a participant can do (Triangle Consulting, personal communication): for example, a change from only sometimes accepting help for health issues, and not really believing things can change, to actively taking steps to improve health e.g. attending a support group.

Additionally, a self-completion questionnaire incorporating the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale and the Office of National Statistics (ONS)-recommended measures of loneliness was administered upon entry to and exit from the programme. The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale is a validated measure of mental wellbeing that has been used nationally, regionally, and locally. The ONS-recommended measures include UCLA's 3-item loneliness scale and a direct question about loneliness as used in the Community Life Survey.

### 3.4.3 Analysis

Interviews and group discussions were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Together with fieldnotes from observation, these were analysed thematically e.g. each passage was examined for its relevance to a variety of questions and themes. At the same time, participant interviews were analysed case by case using causation coding, enabling us to see the connections interviewees made between their circumstances, their participation in the programme, and the changes they experienced (Saldana, 2016).

Within this report, use is made of descriptive, inferential and modelling approaches and generally details are included in appendices rather than having technical details in the body of the report. Some figures and views of the data are included as they are of interest in their own right, some are included because they illustrate the behaviour of factors that are shown to be important when a statistical model has been used to analyse the data; it will be made clear in the report where modelling is used to examine influences on specific outcomes.

Not all data fields are present for all participants, so in some cases the number of participants in a chart or table might be less than expected.

### 3.4.4 Study limitations and areas for future research

The participants we interviewed varied in terms of their length of time out of work, age, gender, parenting and caring responsibilities, and disabilities or health conditions; this was important as we know these factors can affect people's efforts to move into work. However, readers are cautioned that our qualitative research only included three participants aged 25 and under, a group which work programmes tend to help less than some other age groups (Card, Kluve, and Weber, 2015). Participation in the evaluation was not mandatory for programme participants: people who consented to participate may differ from those who refused; moreover, those who disengaged from the programme are not included in our qualitative sample.

As with the programme itself, the evaluation was affected by the COVID-19 restrictions. Face-to-face fieldwork was suspended, excluding participants who were uncomfortable or unable to participate in telephone or video interviews. Recruitment of interviewees was hampered as staff could no longer introduce participants to researchers in person. Co-analysis with Advisory Group attendees planned for 2020 was replaced with more limited checking of emerging findings in virtual sessions with staff and managers. At the same time, interviewing, Participant Forum meetings, and observation of scheduled activities such as online courses or staff meetings continued virtually.

As is often the case in evaluations, the evaluation team relied on programme monitoring data collected by programme staff, supplemented by questionnaires and interviews. This always entails a compromise between what data the evaluators would ideally wish to have, and the myriad constraints that programme staff are working within. In this evaluation, the lack of quantitative data on implementation, particularly on recruitment routes and the individual activities carried out with participants, hampered our ability to compare different recruitment strategies or different types or combinations of programme activities.

Whilst a proportion of all WiLL participants to date have exited to employment, education or job search, a similar number have disengaged. Whilst different interviewees speculated on the reasons for this, including speculating on the effects of how people were recruited, monitoring data did not allow us to investigate patterns relating to the retention of participants. Despite the laudable aspects of the increased emphasis in the voluntary sector on monitoring outcomes, this highlights the value of collecting programme monitoring data geared towards questions of implementation.

The timescales of this evaluation did not allow longer term follow-up of the participant cohort after they had exited the programme – indeed, at time of writing, a large proportion of the cohort were still on the programme. However, much of the WiLL programme's support focussed on improving participants' overall employability, including improving their wellbeing, their skills, and their social engagement. Green and Hasluck (2009) have argued that such an approach tends to yield benefits over the longer term; however, follow-up of participants is needed to test this.

Moreover, an aspiration expressed to us by some of the programme partners at the beginning of the evaluation was to help people move into quality jobs. Such an aspiration is linked to the aim of sustainable employment: low-paid, insecure jobs have been found to contribute to repeated unemployment and problems such as poor mental health (see, for example, Shildrick *et al.*, 2010). Programme staff spoke to us about the importance of providing support, such as in-work support, that would enable the move into employment to be sustained. Unfortunately, it was not possible within the study timescale to establish whether employment outcomes were sustained, or to understand exited participants' subsequent employment experiences. Future evaluation studies should examine these questions.



## 4 Participant Characteristics and Needs

### 4.1 WiLL participant characteristics and circumstances

The WiLL programme was open to any rural resident in the eligible areas who were economically inactive or unemployed. This contrasted with many of the other projects funded via the National Lottery Community Fund's Building Better Opportunities (BBO) initiative, which were focussed on specific groups, such as the long-term unemployed, young people not in education, employment or training (NEET), families, asylum seekers and refugees, or those with multiple and complex needs.

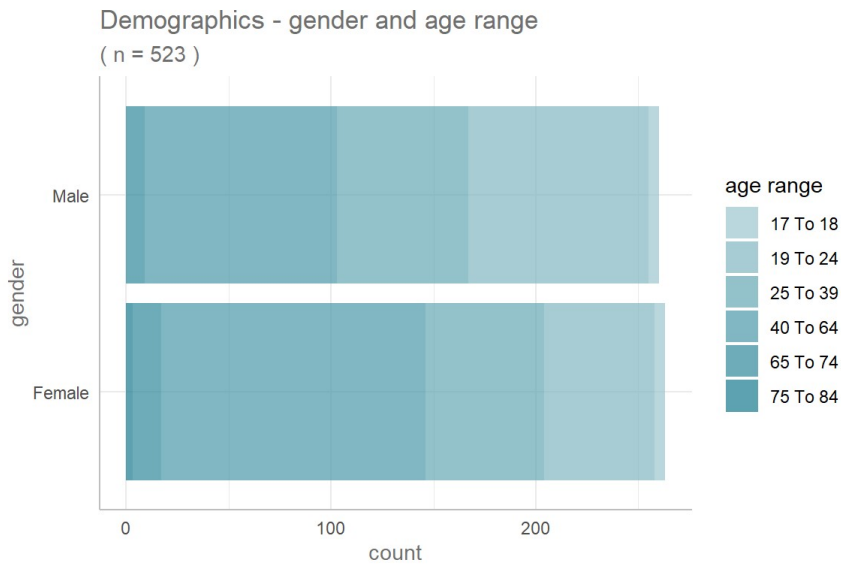
As of November 2020, using data extracted from Charity Log, the WiLL programme had registered 535 participants<sup>4</sup>. Of these, 263 were men and 266 women, providing a good gender balance. The programme had participants across all age groups, with 152 participants 24 or under, and 158 who were 51 or over. 224 participants had a disability or long-term health condition, and 24 were carers. (These counts are only available where the participant has provided the information)

The expectation of WiLL partners was that people using the programme would be experiencing different degrees of exclusion from the labour market, and the programme offer included both intensive one-to-one support, and services that partners described as either lighter touch or suitable for participants nearer to the labour market e.g. in the words of one worker, their support was suitable for participants who were '*quite heavily motivated*'. Whilst many participants had been out of work for less than 12 months, a substantial proportion (22 per cent) of participants had been without work for over 12 months – that is, they were long-term unemployed.

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<sup>4</sup> Not all of these individuals went on to participate in the programme's support.

The chart below shows the distribution of gender and age range amongst the participants.



**Figure 1 - Demographics - gender and age**

The counts for the chart above are:

*Table 3 - Demographics - gender and age range*

Age range	Female	Male	Total	Percentage
<b>17 to 18</b>	5	5	10	2%
<b>19 to 24</b>	54	88	142	27%
<b>25 to 39</b>	58	64	122	23%
<b>40 to 64</b>	129	94	223	43%
<b>65 to 74</b>	14	9	23	4%
<b>75 to 84</b>	3	0	3	1%
<b>Total</b>	263	260	523	100%

(Percentages for this and other tables do not necessarily add up to 100%, due to rounding, counts are only available where both age range and gender are available.)

The distribution of level of education amongst the participants is shown below:

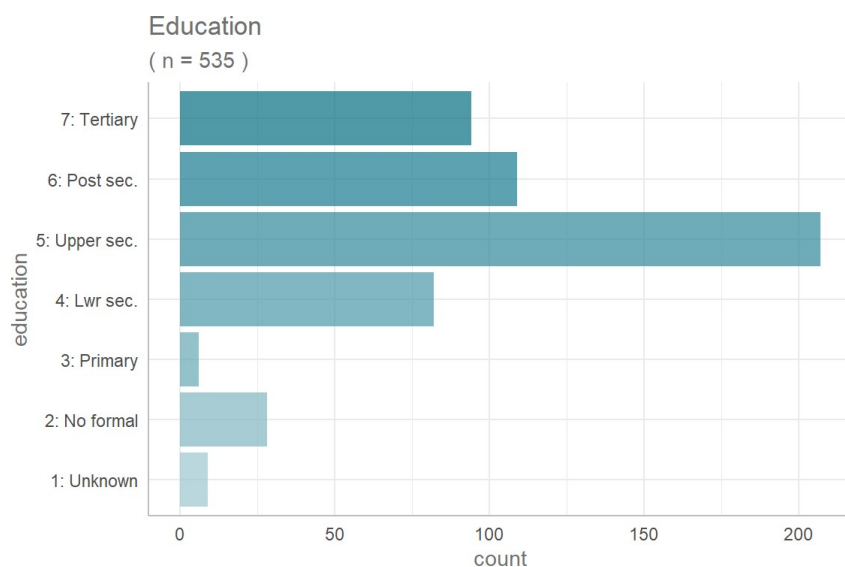


Figure 2 - Demographics - education levels

The numbers in each of the known categories are:

Table 4 - Demographics - education levels

Education level	Count	Percentage
<b>Tertiary</b> (e.g. NVQ level 4-5, degree or post-graduate diploma)	94	18%
<b>Post-secondary</b> (e.g. AS/A2/A levels, NVQ level 3)	109	21%
<b>Upper secondary</b> (e.g. NVQ Level 2, GCSE/CSE/GNVQ)	207	39%
<b>Lower secondary or equivalent</b>	82	16%
<b>Primary education or equivalent</b>	6	1%
<b>No formal education</b>	28	5%
<b>Total</b>	526	100%

In some of the analyses within the report the education levels are grouped into the top three levels (which we refer to as the upper level) and the bottom three levels of education (referred to as the lower level).

The tables following provide a detailed summary of the demographic profile of all the participant data received from Charity Log, and a summary of Star session activity.

Table 5 - Demographics – all fields

Demographic	Category	Count	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>	Female	266	50%
	Male	263	50%
	Data available for	529	100%
<b>Age range</b>	17 to 18	10	2%
	19 to 24	142	27%
	25 to 39	123	23%
	40 to 64	225	43%
	65 to 74	23	4%
	74 to 84	3	1%
	Data available for	526	100%
<b>Age at 51 or over</b>	51 or over	158	30%
	Under 51	369	70%
	Data available for <sup>5</sup>	527	100%
<b>Education</b>	No formal	28	5%
	Primary	6	1%
	Lower secondary	82	16%
	Upper secondary	207	39%
	Post-secondary	109	21%
	Tertiary	94	18%
	Data available for	526	100%
<b>Disability or health condition</b>	Yes	224	42%
	No	311	58%
	Data available for	535	100%
<b>Risk factor</b>	Yes	257	50
	No	255	50
	Data available for	512	100%
<b>Carer</b>	Yes	24	7%
	No	303	93%
	Data available for	327	100%
<b>Ethnic group</b>	White – British	458	89%
	Asian Or Asian British - Indian	15	3%
	White – Other White background	11	2%
	All other ethnic groups (less than 10 in each group)	31	6%
	Data available for	515	100%
<b>Out of work for &gt; 12 months</b>	Yes	119	22%
	No	416	78%
	Data available for	535	100%
<b>Eligibility confirmed</b>	Yes	506	95%
	No	29	5%
	Data available for	535	100%

<sup>5</sup> Data anomaly of one case here.

Table 6 - Status on entry and exit

<b>Employment status on entry to the programme</b>		
Unemployed	313	61%
Inactive	201	39%
Data available for	514	100%
<b>Employment status on exit from the programme</b>		
Exited as employed	81	15%
Exited to training	27	5%
Exited to job search	6	1%
Exited as unemployed	19	4%
Exited as inactive	12	2%
Exited as disengaged	130	24%
Exited (unknown status)	41	8%
Not exited	219	41%
Data available for		100%

Table 7 - Number of Star sessions

<b>Star sessions taken</b>		
Two to six Star sessions	182	34
More than 6 sessions	2	< 1
One Star session	232	43
No Star sessions	119	22
Number of participants registered	535	100%

When analysing baseline scores in this report there are, from the Table 7 above, 232 participants whose *baseline* Star score can be analysed. When examining *progress through the programme* at least two Star scores must be present for each client, hence the 184 participants having two or more Star scores can be used, however the two having more than six are often removed from the analysis as they are outliers, leaving 182 participants in that form of analysis.

## 4.2 The problems people needed help with

The participant outcomes to be measured by the programme were selected prior to programme implementation and reflected outcomes past practitioners (London Borough of Hounslow, 2015) and the WiLL partner organisations believed to be useful in moving people closer to employment. Validated scales were used to measure mental wellbeing and loneliness<sup>6</sup> on entry and exit, with additional measures being taken for those on the programme during the initial COVID-19 lockdown period. Aspiration and motivation, managing health and wellbeing, stability (e.g. finance, housing, alcohol or drug use) and skills (job-related, basic, social, and job search skills) were scored on the Work Star™ on entry and then every three months or more often.

In interview, workers and participants identified both these measured outcomes, as well as personal circumstances and factors in the external environment, as barriers to finding employment or achieving other goals such as starting their own business. In particular, interviewees provided many descriptions of the impact of mental wellbeing and confidence on their efforts. In chapters 5 and 6, we explore whether, and in what ways, changes in these outcomes contributed to participants achieving their goals.

Many participants had multiple barriers to work. Programme workers described finding what one called '*layers and layers of issues*', where a participant might initially seek help with a work-focussed need such as job search, but a worker might find underlying issues such as debt or health and wellbeing problems. In other cases, participants described having had long careers, when a crisis such as a decline in mental health, a family problem, or redundancy then led to additional or more acute problems.

### 4.2.1 Barriers to work

**Health.** Whilst our participant interviewees did report physical health conditions, such as limited mobility or chronic conditions, as a barrier to work, many interviewees focussed on the effects of mental health conditions or low mental wellbeing. Mental health needs were a barrier to both entering or re-entering work and getting help to enter work. At a practical level, mental health conditions prevented some participants from travelling or leaving their home, or otherwise taking the action needed to find work. One of our interviewees, for example, described deciding not to look for a job after being caught outside after dark and realising they would not be able to travel to work. Mental health conditions and autism disorders also hindered people from participating in situations with other people, including being able to speak with other people. Participants also described negative attitudes amongst employers towards mental health conditions.

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<sup>6</sup> Whilst loneliness differs from social isolation or the objective lack of social relationships, it is connected to this; loneliness may be defined as the subjective experience of not having the number or quality of social relationships that we want (de Jong Gierveld & Havens, 2004). In the context of the WiLL programme, measuring participants' loneliness helps tell us whether their existing social support meets their needs.

**Confidence and motivation.** Our interviewees used the term confidence to describe a number of things, including self-efficacy, or believing yourself capable of achieving something, and social confidence. Interviewees described – and our researchers observed – that either lack of confidence or anxiety stopped some participants from doing things that would enable them to move into work or learning; for example, they might decide not to pursue a job opportunity as they felt they had no chance of success, or their anxiety prevented them from attending a course. One interviewee eloquently described, for example, wishing to go to an activity, and making the decision to go, only to find themselves unable to leave the house.

**Goals.** Interviewees also described not knowing where to start, and the need for advice and guidance related to setting job goals or understanding how to achieve these goals.

**Social isolation.** Lack of social networks and social support could hamper participants' job search because of their effects on access to information about support services or job opportunities. On the other hand, the desire for more social interaction was also described by some interviewees as a reason for wanting to enter work or volunteering.

**Social skills.** Some participants described either social anxiety or a lack of social skills making it challenging for them to participate in social situations, including work situations.

**Job search skills.** A number of participants described a lack of job search skills, sometimes in part because they had not had to search for a job for a long time. Such participants could have either higher or lower levels of education.

**Basic skills.** A lack of basic skills could act as a barrier to participating in job search itself, because of the skills involved. Several participants described needing help with computer skills, which impacted not only on their job search, but their ability to sort out other issues, such as dealing with Universal Credit.

**Work-related skills and experience** were mostly described in relation to limiting the employment options open to people. However, workers also described challenges in relation to young people seeking to enter work for the first time.

**Stability and material circumstances.** Participants' circumstances included problems impinging on their basic needs, including alcohol abuse, homelessness, and severe financial hardship. Workers described how such problems could prevent people from engaging effectively in help to enter work or could interfere with a person's ability to stay in work. For example, participants described wanting to volunteer, but not being able to afford the cost of travel, or, when on Universal Credit, concerns that they would be worse off if they had any earned income.

**Social attitudes or practices.** Attitudes about personal characteristics and about work could act to limit available options for WiLL participants. For example, WiLL participants described how employer attitudes towards age, physical disability, or mental health made it difficult to get or keep a job.

**Availability of jobs that fit personal circumstances.** In some cases, the way a job had been designed (e.g. hours or times of work) clashed with the priorities or circumstances of



a participant; a number of participants identified '*finding the right job*' as a problem for them. For example, a couple of interviewees highlighted the difficulty of an employer wishing a job to be full-time when the participant wished to balance work with childcare or other caring responsibilities. Similarly, an interviewee with autism described needing jobs with limited social interaction. Employer practices, including both recruitment practices such as formal interviews, and practices such as requiring people to own a car as a condition of employment, were also identified by workers and participants as blocking access to employment.

Rurality. Whilst the programme's focus was on addressing barriers experienced by rural people, rurality affected participants differently. When geography was described as presenting a barrier, this was often in combination with other factors, such as travel anxiety, dependence on limited public transport links, or the cost of transport. In these cases, rurality became a barrier to accessing both job opportunities and a range of support services, including support to enter work.

In some instances, these barriers to work were exacerbated by COVID-19. For example, a worker described how COVID-19 had made some people more nervous about using public transport to reach volunteering opportunities, and that lockdown restrictions meant that there were fewer of these opportunities available. At the same time, changed circumstances could lessen the effects of some problems: participants who were anxious about travelling, for example, were able to participate in more activity as it moved online during the pandemic.

#### 4.2.2 Prevalence of barriers to work

As the programme was open to any resident in the programme's geographical area without paid work, the needs and circumstances of individual participants varied. As discussed, some participants could have longstanding and multiple barriers to entering work or training, whereas others wanted help with a more specific issue, such as job searching.

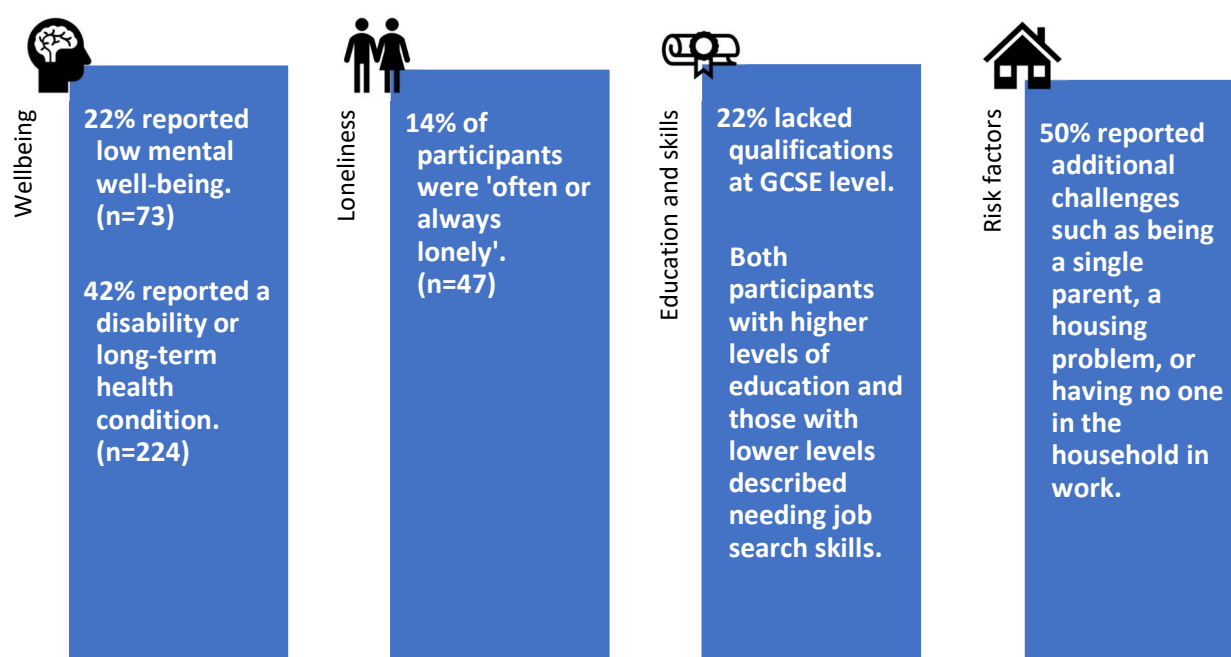


Figure 3 - Prevalence of barriers amongst WiLL participants

The programme used the Work Star™ tool to both undertake an initial needs assessment in discussion with participants, and thereafter, to track participant progress. The Star tool enables workers and programme participants to give an area such as 'health and wellbeing' or 'job search skills' a score from 1 to 10. For each outcome area, at the bottom of the scale (1 to 2), an individual does not believe they can or will work and doesn't accept any help; at the top of the scale (9 to 10), an individual has the skills and confidence to find and be in work on their own or with occasional support e.g. they are work ready. It is intended that a score of 10 corresponds to a participant not needing support (Triangle Consulting n.d.).

The tool is intended to support a form of assessment in which programme participants are active collaborators in the assessment (MacKeith, 2011). Whilst we have previously stated that participants reported some variability in the quality of these initial assessment sessions, they provide the most complete set of measures available of the needs of participants upon entering the programme.

The mean baseline Work Outcomes Star score for all participants at time of writing (both those exited and those still on the programme) was 6.6. The guidance for this case-work based tool suggests that at a score of 7, a participant is gaining confidence, developing realistic aspirations, starting to build job skills and job search skills, and starting to manage their health and wellbeing. In other words, at this level people are making progress but still need support.

However, in some outcome areas participants tended to have lower scores. This is examined in the following section.

#### 4.2.3 Distribution of baseline Work Star™ scores by outcome area

The figures below show the distribution of baseline scores for the individual question-level responses to the Star measures. Each figure also shows the percentage of participants scoring 6 or lower. (A score of 6 on the scale describes someone who is trying to address a problem, but it is still 'early days'.) Looking down the charts, the areas of greatest need are those where the scores are shifted to the lower end of the scale. The dotted line marks the threshold point of 6 on the scale.

We see that, on entry to the programme, the main area of need for most participants is in job-search skills, with 61.5% scoring 6 or lower on the Star scale. This is followed by job skills and experience with 53.7% scoring 6 or lower, and aspiration and motivation, with 49.8% scoring 6 or lower.

Basic skills and workplace and social skills appear as the strongest areas on entry with only 35.1% and 33.7% scoring 6 or less respectively.

These factors will be examined further in the discussion around participant progress, where scores on entry will be compared to those achieved on leaving the programme.

(Due to the discrete nature of the Star scale at the question level – for example, a score can be 1 or 2, but not 1.5 - the figures here can be rather unexpected. For 'Aspiration and motivation', for example, the percentage of scores at 6 or less is 49.8%, but the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile point is located within the scores achieving 7).

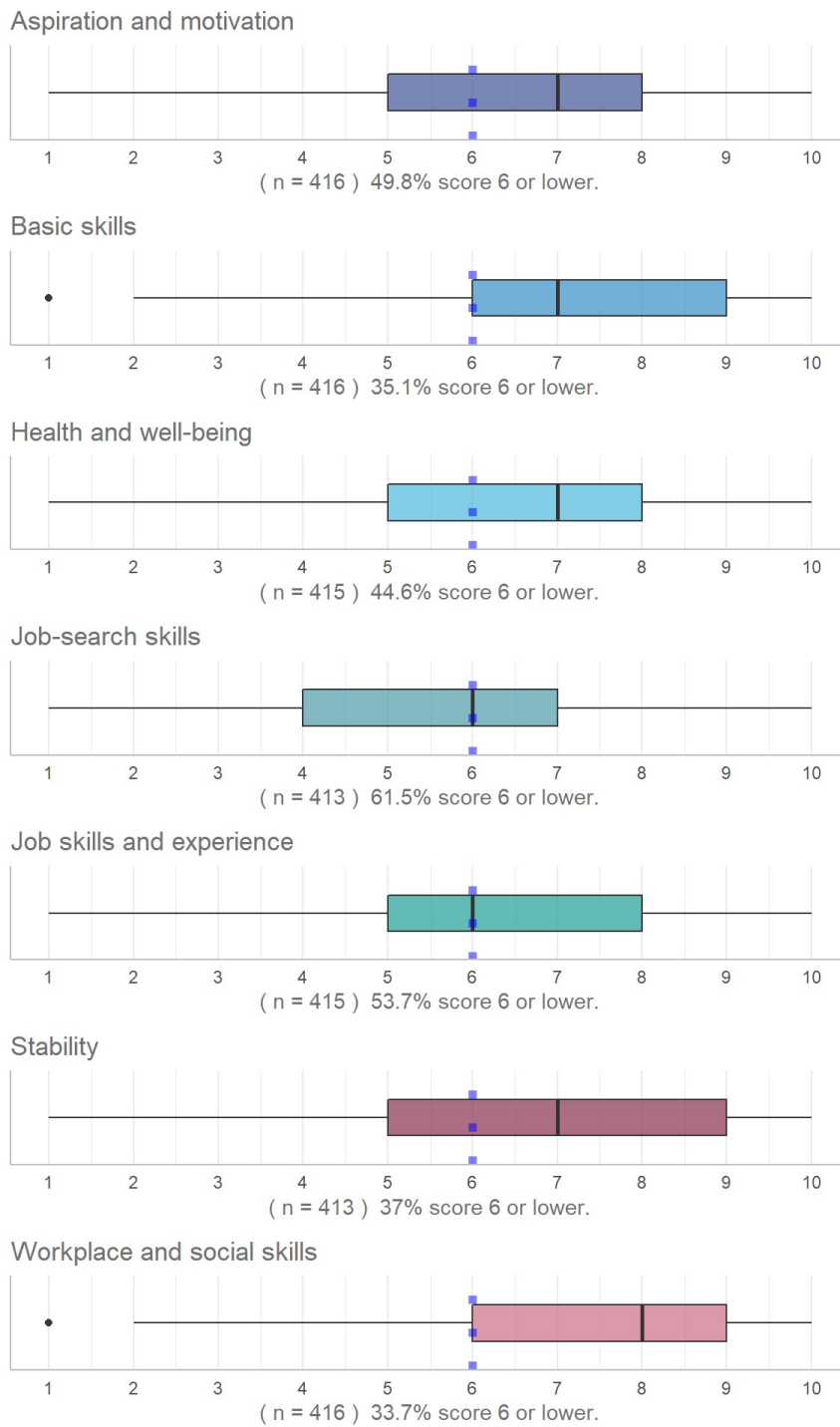


Figure 4 - Star baseline scores (question-level)

## 5 Participant progress

### 5.1 The progress made by participants overall

On average, participants made progress on outcomes intended to support employability (as measured by the Work Star™) between the time when they joined the programme and the time when they either exited the programme or last completed the Work Star™. The average change in participants' mean Star scores is just under 1, with 69 per cent of the participants for whom we have data achieving a mean score change of 0.5 or more (the lower bound of the 99% confidence interval is 0.79).

Figure 5 shows, for all participants, the difference between the baseline score for the Star measure and the last Star score before exit. The statistical analysis shows that we have strong evidence that the mean of the average change in the overall Work Star™ score is greater than 0.5.



**Figure 5 - Star mean scores - total distance travelled**

To what extent is this meaningful progress? The Star Tool enables workers and programme participants to give an area such as 'health and wellbeing' or 'job search skills' a score from 1 to 10. A difference of 2 points on the scale indicates clear changes in what people can do: for example, a change from someone only sometimes accepting help for their health issues, but not really believing things can change, to someone actively taking steps to improve their health, such as attending a support group.

*Table 8 - Star score distance summary*

<b>Mean (of the individual mean distance scores)</b>	0.94
<b>Variance</b>	1.36
<b>Number of cases</b>	182
<b>99% confidence interval</b>	(0.79,1.21)

Since a person's overall Star score is a mean score of seven outcome areas, an increase of one over any four of the seven outcomes would be a mean increase of 4/7 or 0.57. Alternatively, a participant making gains of two points in, for example, 'health and wellbeing' and 'aspiration and confidence', but not in other areas, would also have a mean increase of 0.57. Thus, those who gain an increase of 0.5 or more can have reported meaningful change in a number of the measures on the Star scale.

## 5.2 The most frequent changes reported by participants

The table below shows the percentage of the cohort reporting a change of 2 points or more on the Work Star™ scale in each of seven outcome areas. Figures are based on 184 participants<sup>7</sup> for whom monitoring data was available and includes both those who had already exited the programme and those who were still on the programme in November 2020.

Table 9 - Star outcomes - progress

<b>Motivation, confidence and aspiration</b>	45%
<b>Job search skills</b>	42%
<b>Managing health and wellbeing (e.g. feeling less stressed or feeling optimistic about the future)</b>	39%
<b>Job skills and experience</b>	37%
<b>Workplace and social skills (e.g. behaving appropriately, getting along with people)</b>	29%
<b>Stability (e.g. finances, housing, relationships, drug or alcohol misuse)</b>	28%
<b>Basic skills (e.g. literacy, numeracy, using computers)</b>	23%

As can be seen, the most commonly reported change of two points or more was in motivation, confidence, and aspiration. When we discussed these findings with WiLL keyworkers, they described participants coming onto the programme whose confidence had been damaged in some way:

*I think a lot of the people that I work with they've had some sort of health implications in their life all of a sudden which has, you know, sort of dropped their confidence, their well-being. They're isolated, and they come on the project, and month by month, week by week they start to build.*

Workers have discussed with us the importance of supporting changes in confidence, and how this supported other changes, as it enabled more independent action on the part of the participant. In the next chapter, we will explore how changes in confidence were supported by the programme.

Readers should bear in mind that some participants had lower levels of support needs when joining the programme than others. The most commonly reported areas of change tend to correspond to those Work Star™ areas where higher percentages of

<sup>7</sup> Percentage reporting a change of 2 points or more on the Work Star™ scale for job skills and experience is based on data for 183 participants. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

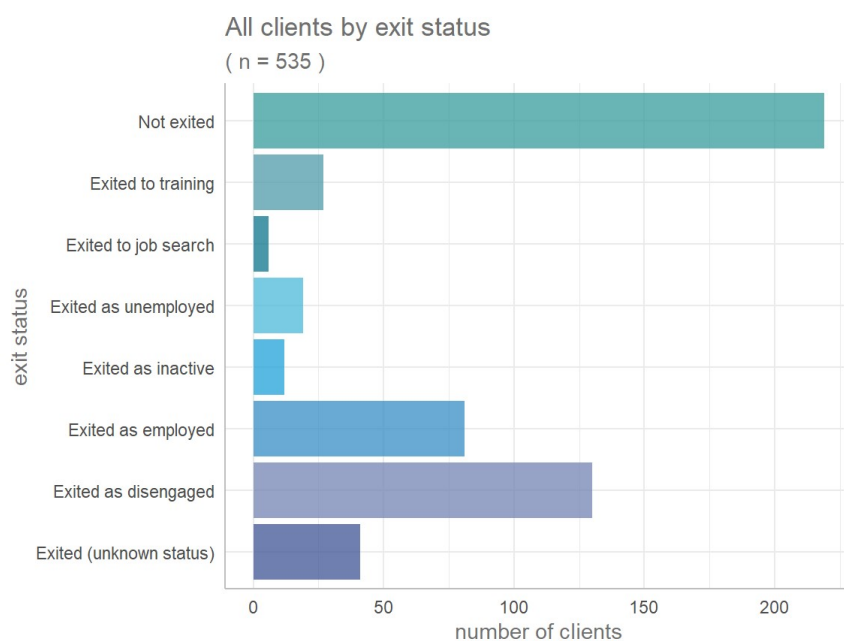
participants had low scores (6 or below) on entry to the programme. In relation to the relatively low percentage of participants reporting significant changes in the area of basic skills, for instance, both the baseline Star scores for basic skills, and the qualifications reported by participants (see 4.2) suggest that overall participants entered the programme needing less help in this area.

### 5.2.1 Leaving to employment and other outcomes

This section looks at the counts of participants who have exited to various outcomes such as employment or training or job search, or conversely, whose status after leaving the programme was unknown (e.g. an outcome was not recorded.) In some cases, only the economic status e.g. unemployed or economically inactive, is available. We also show, for completeness, the count of the number of participants who had not exited the programme, as the programme was ongoing at the time of writing.

We consider participants who exited to job search, training, or as employed as having exited with an outcome e.g. they have achieved a goal that the programme was intended to support them with. Other statuses are considered as having exited without an outcome, which may well underestimate the number of successful exits if a participant gained employment but did not report this.

This chart shows - for all the participants registered on the programme - the numbers who remain on the programme, those exited to a known employment status, those disengaged and those exited where the exit status is unknown.



**Figure 6 - All participants by exit status**



The numbers and the percentages for each category are shown below in Table 10. We see that, of those who exited the programme, 36% exited to job-search, training or work.

*Table 10 - Participant count by exit category*

Category	Number of participants	Percent
Not exited – still on programme	219	41%
Exited to training <sup>1</sup>	27	5%
Exited to job search <sup>1</sup>	6	1%
Exited as employed <sup>1</sup>	81	15%
Exited as inactive <sup>2</sup>	12	2%
Exited as unemployed <sup>2</sup>	19	4%
Exited as disengaged <sup>2</sup>	130	24%
Exited (unknown status)	41	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>535</b>	<b>100%</b>

<sup>1</sup> These exit statuses constitute 'exit with an outcome'.

<sup>2</sup> These exit statuses constitute 'exit without an outcome'.

### 5.3 Variations in participant journeys through the programme

During this evaluation, some worker and manager interviewees expressed concerns about participants who 'sat' on programmes such as WiLL, not making progress. A couple of people linked this to the idea of participants seeking to demonstrate work-related activity to Job Centre Plus, but not genuinely engaging with support.

Workers also expressed the view that some participants would need a longer duration of support than others due to the nature of their needs, with several interviewees commenting, for example, that low confidence and motivation or poor mental health affected how long someone might be on the programme. A couple of workers commented that the duration of support needed might exceed the duration of the programme. A number of participants also described to us periods when they were not progressing on the programme or had setbacks due to health conditions; these included both physical health conditions that prevented engagement with the programme, such as a hospital stay, or the recurrence of mental health problems such as anxiety or depression. For instance, one participant who made considerable progress whilst on the programme towards self-employment described not being able to continue a volunteering role that WiLL had arranged for her:

*...as we sort of got going with [the volunteering role] my health took a massive dip, 'cause my psychiatrist changed my medication, so, unfortunately, I had to step down. So, I was going in ...on a weekly basis and stuff like that, and it was going to be really, really good, but, unfortunately, I had to, I just couldn't do it, because I had three weeks of just not being able to, of not functioning, really, so I had to sort of step down from it.*

At the same time, workers emphasised the individual nature of people's circumstances; interviewees noted a number of additional reasons that participants

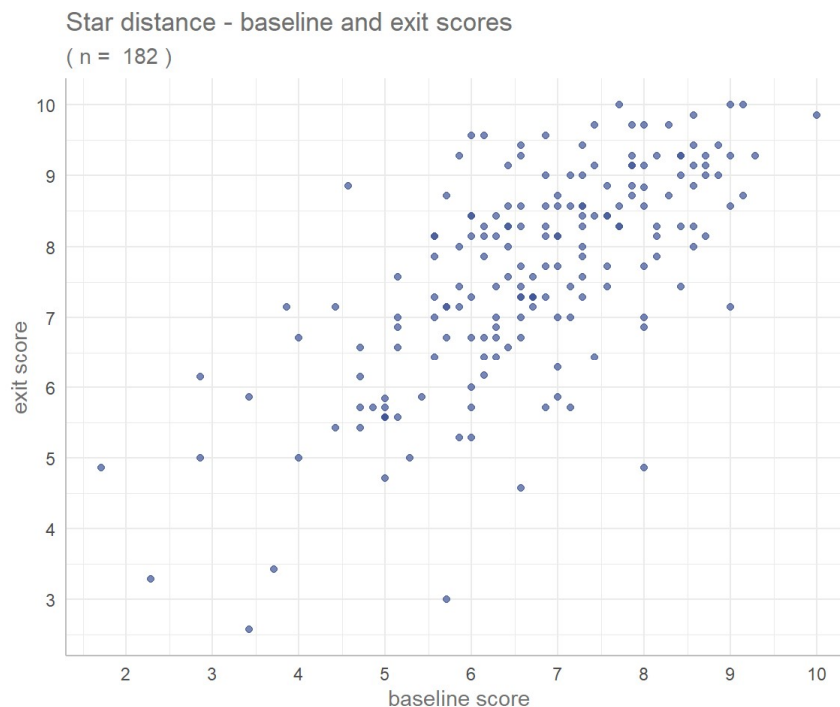
could be on the programme for longer. These included interruptions or delays to engaging with or receiving support; external factors such as recruiting practices; and changes in the participant's needs whilst on the programme.

Despite these concerns, we found that on average, there was progress in employability for both those who moved through the programme and to exit quickly, and those who stayed longer on the programme.

Moreover, participants tended to make progress throughout their journey at a steady pace i.e. they did not progress more quickly at the beginning or end of their journeys.

We did not find that baseline Work Star™ scores affected how quickly they progressed in relation to others e.g. participants who started with higher or lower scores did not progress at a faster rate, though naturally those with lower scores had further to travel. As we see in the graph below, if a participant entered with a higher or lower baseline Star score (relative to other participants) then their last score will be correspondingly relatively higher or lower.

The chart below shows the relationship between Star scores on entry and exit to the programme for each participant. There is a correlation between the two scores showing that participants tend to maintain their relative ranking – in Star score terms – as they move through the programme.



**Figure 7 - Star distance - baseline and exit scores**

In the discussion below, we demonstrate in more detail that the programme appears to have supported all types of participants to make progress, regardless of how long they were on the programme. For duration on the programme, we use the number of Star score sessions a participant had as a proxy measure of duration, as workers were asked to complete the Work Star™ with participants a minimum of every three months.

Below we see the distribution of mean Star scores as participants progress from baseline (shown as session 1 in the chart) to subsequent follow-up Star questionnaire sessions. As a proportion of participants leave the programme at different points, the demographic mix for each Star session differs from the first through to the fifth.

This change in the demographic mix for each Star session means that the score distributions reflect not just the changes in Star scores as participants progress, but the changes in the group being measured.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Statistical modelling of the impacts of various factors on the mean score at each stage (baseline and each follow-up Star score) shows the influence of: an increase in mean score at each session; a higher mean score (on each Star session) for those with the higher level of education; a lower mean score for those with a disability or health condition, and a higher mean score for those with a higher baseline SWEMWBS score. Thus we see that a change in demographic mix can change the score distributions at each stage in the chart above.

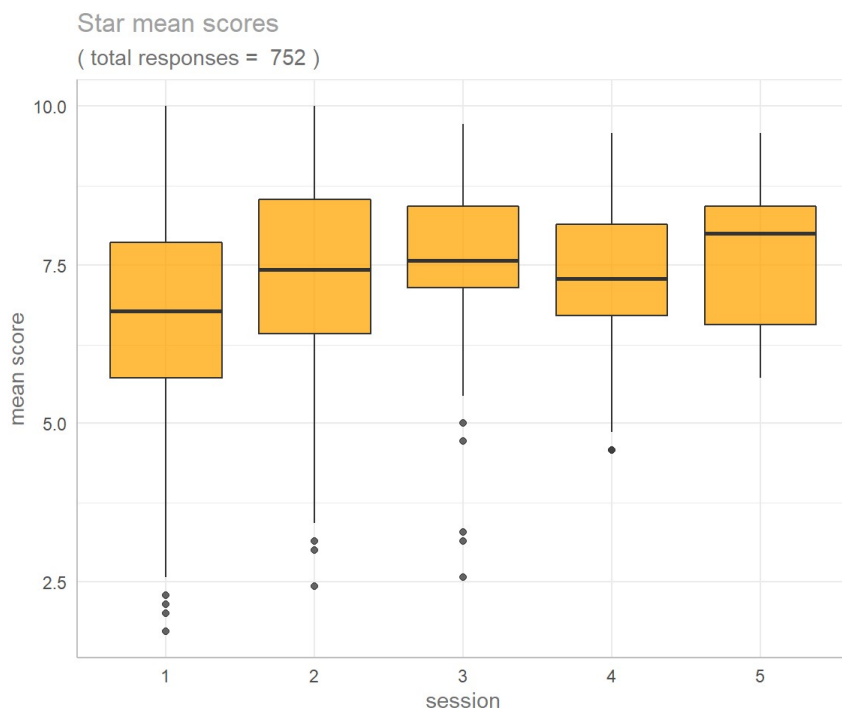


Figure 8 - Star scores by session

The averages for the means of participant scores at each session are:

Table 11 - Mean Star score by session

Session	Mean	Number of participants
1	6.6	414
2	7.3	182
3	7.5	102
4	7.3	41
5	7.5	13

(See 12 Appendix - Model used for Star progress For full details of the model)

According to the modelled predictions for scores, had the all the participants who completed a Star score at the baseline, gone through with all the follow-up sessions then the scores would be as shown below.

We see here that on average, participants made progress, regardless of when they left the programme. Here, the spread of scores at each stage is attributable to demographic and other score determinants, and progress, rather than the changing cohort mix who participated in a second, third, or fourth Star session.

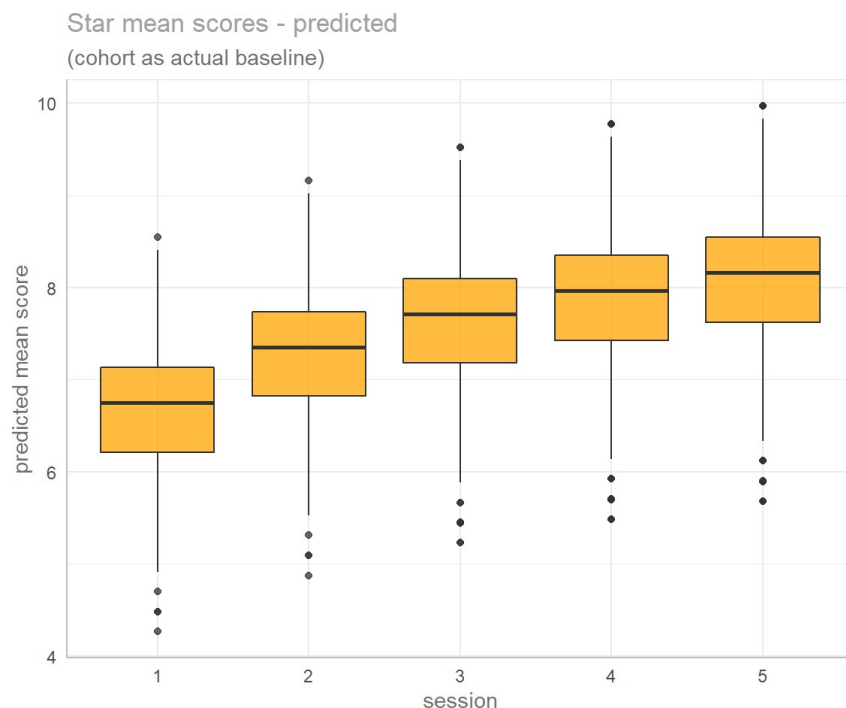


Figure 9 - Star score model predictions - baseline as cohort

#### 5.4 How did the COVID-19 crisis affect participants' rate of progress?

Stakeholders posed many questions to the evaluation team on the effects of COVID-19 on participants' progress through the programme. In most instances, we did not find any significant effects on change scores; however, we did find one interesting effect on how fast people were progressing.

Whilst we did not find that some types of participants e.g. with low or high scores, or particular characteristics, tended to progress at a faster or slower rate than those with other characteristics, one factor that did seem to slow the rate of progress, was if a participant was on the programme during the period that the COVID-19 crisis occurred.

Our statistical modelling looking at the influences on the rate of change in Work Star™ scores (i.e. the change in score *relative to the participant's previous score*) revealed that the only significant influence is whether the Star session took place during the COVID-19 crisis (23 March 2020 onwards). Figure 10 - Star changes, COVID-19 and Pre-COVID-19 below shows how the level of change in the Star score moves as participants progress to the first and subsequent follow-up sessions. A perfectly good outcome here (pre-COVID-19) would be that progress is consistent and there are no factors that increase or decrease participants' amount of change in Star score as they progress (i.e. they make steady progress). However, we see that the effect of the COVID-19 period has been to slightly undermine the *rate of progress* on these measures.

The chart below shows for the first to the third Star follow-up sessions (i.e. sessions two to four) the effect COVID-19 had on the extent to which scores improve on previous sessions.

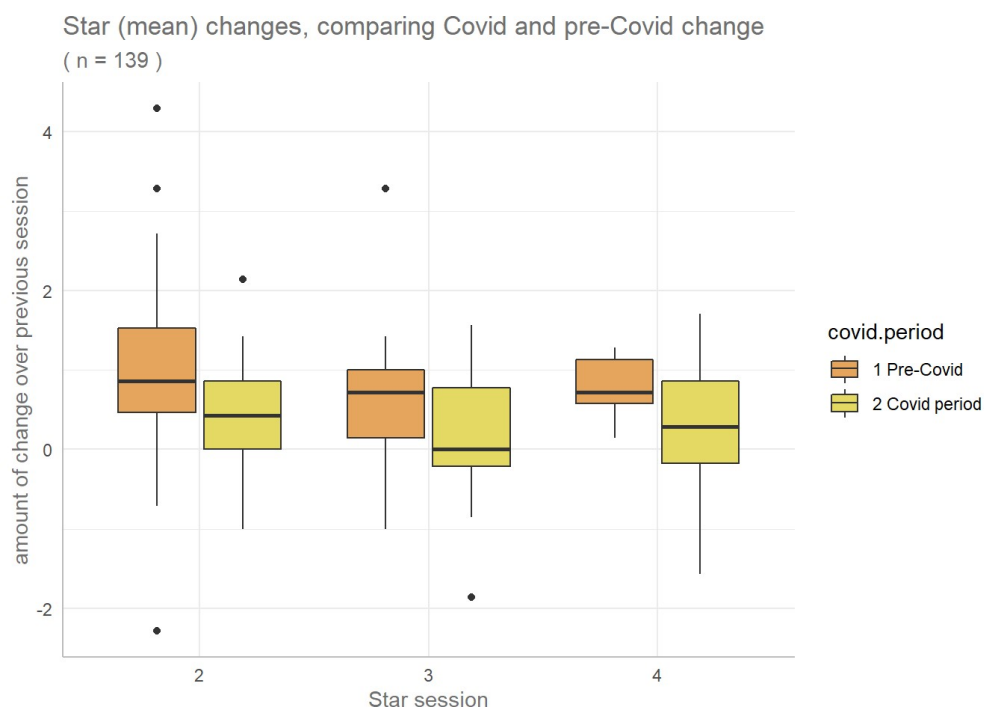


Figure 10 - Star changes, COVID-19 and Pre-COVID-19

See Appendix - Model used for Star rate of change for details of the model for the Star rate of change.

There is also some evidence that the pre-COVID period Star scores were slightly higher than those achieved during the COVID period. Further details can be found in Appendix - Model used for Star progress

In chapter 6, How WiLL supported participant progress, we present participant case studies; in several of these, participants describe the individual effects of COVID-19 restrictions on their wellbeing and efforts to progress.

### 5.5 Exit outcomes for participants with different characteristics or duration of support

As previously reported, some worker interviewees described significant variation in both the duration and intensity of support needed by different participants, with a few interviewees expressing some concern about the programme's ability to provide sufficient duration of support for participants with more complex needs. Similarly, during the first lockdown, keyworkers who were keeping in touch with participants to support their wellbeing and motivation described some participants needing more support than others.

Below we examine if participants with different characteristics, or who were on the programme for longer or shorter periods, tended to have differences in exit outcomes.

Of the various factors examined, the largest and most statistically significant association was with the mean Star score achieved just prior to exiting the programme. The other main factor was whether the participant had exceeded a threshold of 12 months of unemployment, as declared on joining the programme.

Details of the model derived for this analysis is in 14 Appendix - Model used for exit status. The following discussion looks at these factors, and some other aspects of the patterns seen for different categories of exit status.

#### 5.5.1 Time on the programme and exit status

Participants on the programme could leave the programme in several different ways: by disengaging with support, by being linked to more appropriate support, or by entering job search, work, or formal learning. As can be seen below, an analysis of all participant exits shows that exiting to employment was much more likely to occur within the first three administrations of the Work Star™. Of those participants who were marked as having left the programme as employed, unemployed or inactive, the numbers in each category are shown in the table below, after one to five Star questionnaire sessions and in total.

**Table 12 - Exits by Star session**

Exit status	Star session					Totals
	1	2	3	4	5	
<b>Employed</b>	33	29	14	2	0	78
<b>Unemployed</b>	11	4	3	1	0	19
<b>Inactive</b>	5	1	4	0	0	10
<b>Totals</b>	49	34	21	3	0	107

(Participants having less than one, or more than five, Star scores are not shown)

When we discussed the finding with WiLL workers and managers that, based on November 2020 data, most participants who exited to employment did so after a relatively small number of Star sessions, they described having a group of participants within the overall cohort who were further away from the labour market, and whose chances of exiting to employment they therefore expected to be less.

For the group considered here, the distribution of duration, in days, on the programme is shown below. With the bulk of participants being on the programme less than 300 days this reflects the table shown above where most participants in this group have exited after the third Star session.

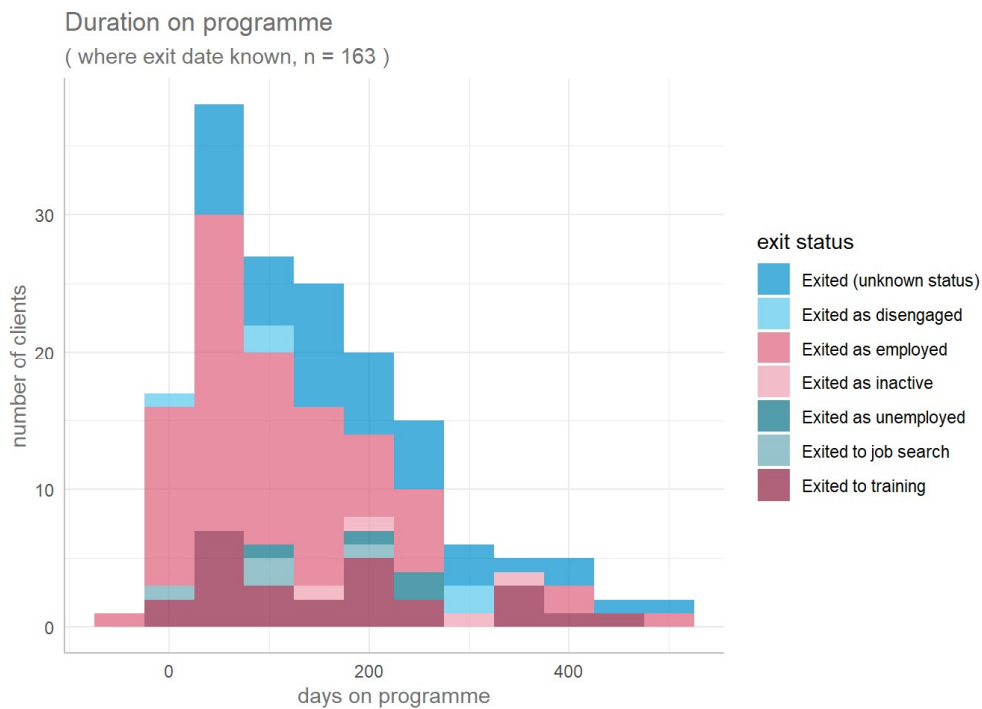


Figure 11 - Duration on program for exited participants

(Note that the chart above only includes participants where the exit date has been recorded)



### 5.5.2 Duration of unemployment and exit status

When we model the influences on whether participants will exit 'with an outcome' or 'without an outcome' then we find strong evidence for the effect of the number of months unemployed as declared when joining the programme. Where participants have a duration of unemployment of greater than 12 months, they are significantly more likely to exit without an outcome e.g. without moving into job search, work, or learning. This is in line with previous research, which suggests that a longer duration of unemployment makes it less likely people will find a new job (Krueger, Cramer and Cho, 2014; Abraham *et al.*, 2016). A higher Star score achieved at exit is also strongly associated with the chances of exiting with an outcome. (We will return to this in section 5.6 Intermediate outcomes and their relationship to Exit Status.)

Figure 12 shows the distribution of months unemployed for both the 'exited without an outcome' group, and the 'exited with an outcome' group. There are clearly some extended periods of unemployment recorded against a proportion of participants on the programme. We also see that those above the threshold are predominantly exiting without an outcome.

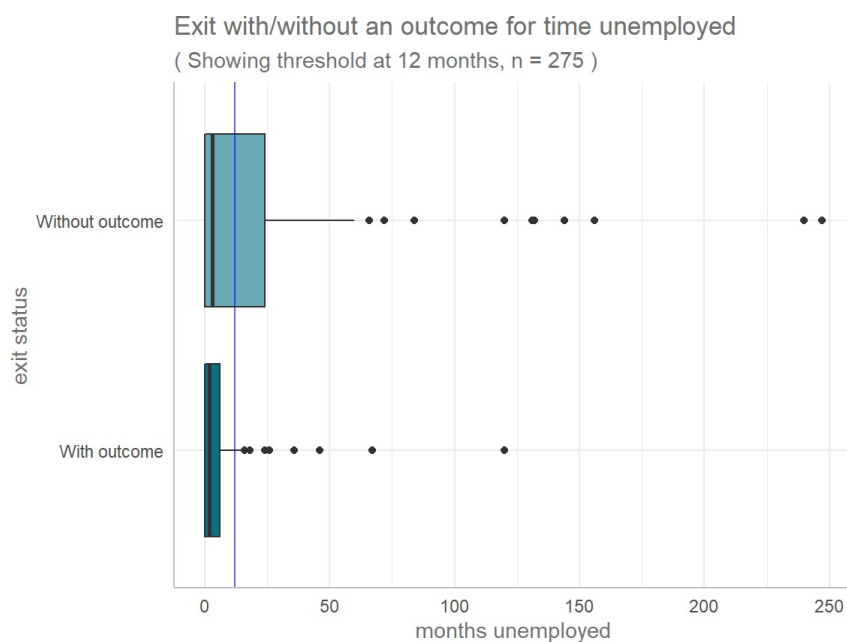


Figure 12 - Exit outcome by months unemployed

As an example, the tables below show two hypothetical participants with a comparison of the probability of exiting to an outcome given employment threshold, Star scores and ONS scores for each. These examples are based on the model described in - 14 Appendix - Model used for exit status.

<b>Case 1</b>	
<b>Employment threshold</b>	Over 12 months
<b>Star baseline score</b>	25 <sup>th</sup> percentile
<b>ONS baseline score</b>	Median
<b>Star exit score</b>	Median
<b>Probability of exit to outcome</b>	0.37

<b>Case 2</b>	
<b>Employment threshold</b>	Under 12 months
<b>Star baseline score</b>	25 <sup>th</sup> percentile
<b>ONS baseline score</b>	Median
<b>Star exit score</b>	Median
<b>Probability of exit to outcome</b>	0.52

For completeness, we show below, months unemployed for *all* exit statuses.

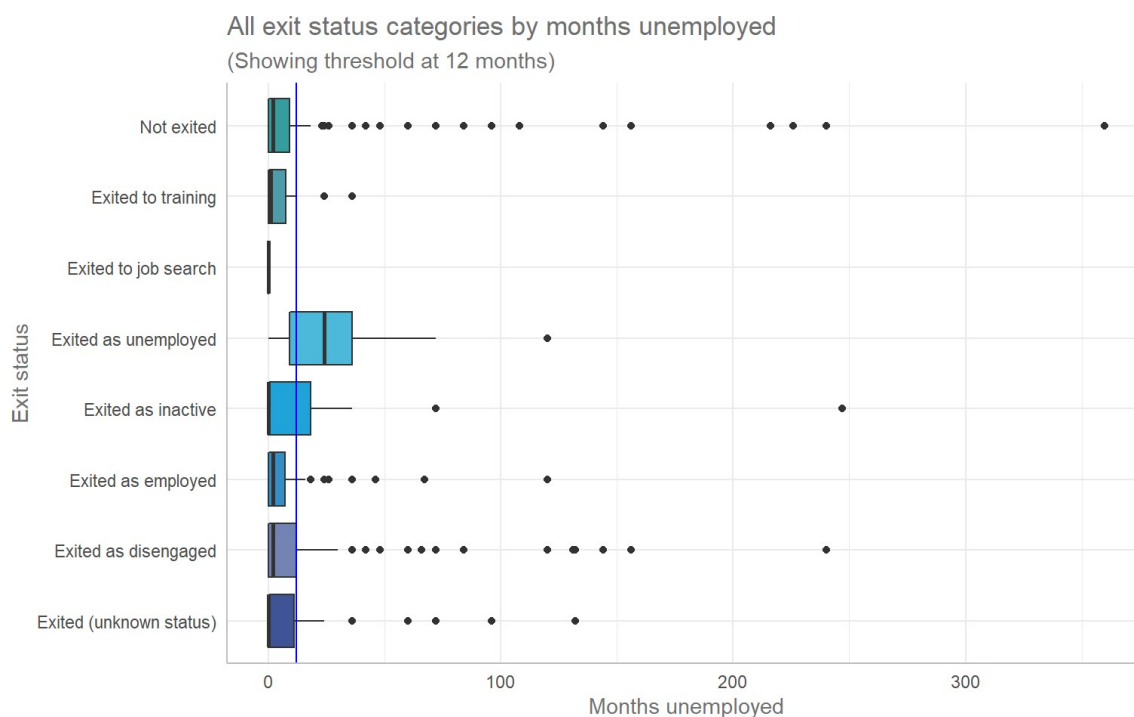


Figure 13 - Months unemployed for all exit categories

This shows the very wide range of months unemployed declared by participants on joining the WiLL programme. In particular we see a marked difference in the distributions of those exiting as employed and those exiting as unemployed.

Whilst time unemployed should not be used to predict an individual participant’s journey or outcomes, the proportion of participants on the programme who are long-term unemployed may be useful in estimating the overall demands on keyworkers, particularly if a programme is seeking to improve parity of exit outcomes for the long-term unemployed. Separately monitoring outcomes for longer-term unemployed participants could also be useful in avoiding an over-focus on participants with higher chances of job search success, sometimes discussed in the literature as ‘creaming and parking’ (see, for example, Carter and Whitworth [2015]).

There is, however, conflicting evidence on whether long-term unemployed participants will necessarily require more intensive support, and we should be cautious in treating such participants as a homogenous group. Whilst there is evidence that unemployment can negatively affect mental and physical health (Nichols, Mitchell and Linder, 2013; Norström *et al.*, 2014), there is a mixed picture of whether we can expect such problems to be worse for the long-term unemployed (Nichols, Mitchell and Linder, 2013). Some support needs may be different than for the recently unemployed: for example, some studies have found that people who are workless for longer periods may, after initial negative effects, also become used to being unemployed (Warr and Jackson, 1987 in Witte, Hoog and Vanbelle, 2010), or may use worklessness as a way to avoid rejection and failure (Witte, Hoog and Vanbelle, 2010).

### 5.5.3 Disability or health condition and exit status

Although disability did not emerge as a significant contributor to exit outcome, we examine it here as we consider the programme's contribution to positive outcomes for participants with a disability or health condition to be important. The table below shows the exit status for those with and those without a disability or health condition. It can be seen that of the 81 cases exiting as employed, 24 of them (30%) have a disability or health condition.

*Table 13 - Exit category counts*

Category	Disability or health condition		Total	Percent
	No	Yes		
<b>Not exited – still on programme</b>	128	91	219	41%
<b>Exited to training <sup>1</sup></b>	10	17	27	5%
<b>Exited to job search <sup>1</sup></b>	4	2	6	1%
<b>Exited as employed <sup>1</sup></b>	57	24	81	15%
<b>Exited as inactive <sup>2</sup></b>	5	7	12	2%
<b>Exited as unemployed <sup>2</sup></b>	11	8	19	4%
<b>Exited as disengaged <sup>2</sup></b>	76	54	130	24%
<b>Exited (unknown status)</b>	20	21	41	8%
<b>Total</b>	311	224	535	100%

<sup>1</sup> These exit statuses constitute 'exit with an outcome'.

<sup>2</sup> These exit statuses constitute 'exit without an outcome'.

National estimates using data from 2016 to 2018, suggest that in recent years, workless disabled people moved into work at around *one-third* of the rate of workless non-disabled people (10 per cent of workless disabled people versus 27 per cent of workless non-disabled people) (DWP 2020, p.4). As is shown in the figure below, in the WiLL programme, 18 per cent of disabled participants who exited the programme moved into work, compared to 31 per cent of those without a disability or health condition: the rate of entry to work for disabled participants is about *two-thirds* the rate of non-disabled participants.

These two ratios are not directly comparable, as the national data establishes entry to employment differently.<sup>9</sup> Moreover, WiLL's disabled and nondisabled participant cohorts may differ in important ways from the general population. However, it does provide some indication that the programme is likely providing good support for people with a disability or health condition.

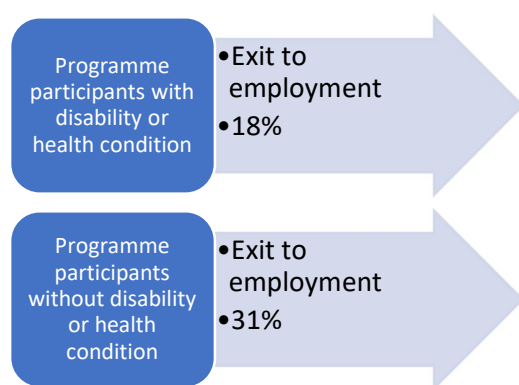


Figure 14 - Exit to employment and disability / health condition

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<sup>9</sup> The rate of moving into work was defined for national estimates as the proportion of working age disabled people who were not in employment, who were in employment when interviewed 12 months later, regardless of any change in disability.

## 5.6 Intermediate outcomes and their relationship to Exit Status

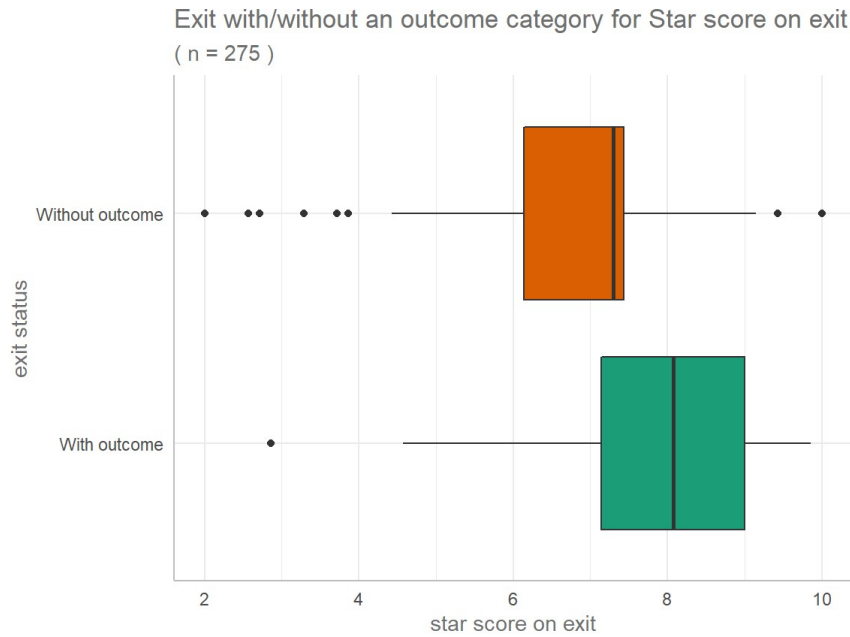
As described in 4.2, the changes measured by the Work Star™ correspond to issues that programme participants told us made it difficult for them to progress towards work. Whilst improvements in areas such as confidence and motivation, or well-being, are, of course, desirable in and of themselves, the programme's expectation was that making improvements in such outcomes would assist participants to move into job search, learning, or work.

What evidence is there that progress in these areas did in fact contribute to participants exiting with an outcome (e.g. into job search, learning, or employment/self-employment)? In other words, did the WiLL programme approach of supporting participants to address different barriers to work actually produce the intended programme results of getting people into work, learning or job search?

When we modelled possible factors influencing the likelihood of a participant exiting to an outcome, we found that the main influences were unemployment duration and last Star score, but the baseline Star score and the baseline single-question ONS score also have some influence. The details are in 14 Appendix - Model used for exit status.

The figure below shows the distribution of Star mean scores, on exit, for those who exit with and without an outcome. As can be seen, a Work Star™ score of around 8 tends to be associated with exiting to an outcome the most. In comparison, we see that exiting without an outcome is mostly associated with lower scores. And, in fact, the Work Star™ scale describes people scoring an 8 as being more self-reliant, and on the cusp of having addressed barriers well enough to be in work or work-related training (Triangle Consulting, n.d.)

Moreover, in our modelling, baseline Star scores have a slight influence on exit status: between two participants with the same final Star score, the person whose baseline Star score was lower has a greater chance of exiting with an outcome. This suggests that having a greater distance travelled increases a person's chances even more of exiting with an outcome.



*Figure 15 - Exits with/without an outcome by Star score*

In the next section, we explore workers' and participants' accounts of how changes in Star outcomes happened, in order to better understand the relationships between the programme's activities, the changes experienced by participants, and a successful exit from the programme.

## 6 How WiLL supported participant progress

As discussed in the previous section, participants with lower intermediate outcomes (e.g. Work Star™ scores) had a greater likelihood of exiting without entering work, training or job search. Whilst some workers described the importance of external factors, such as employer behaviour, as important to whether or not a participant found employment, most also emphasised the importance of making changes in participants' lives and capabilities, in many of the outcome areas measured by the Work Star.™

We turn now to look at the efforts of the programme to improve participants' intermediate outcomes through the provision of one-to-one support and a range of activities.

### 6.1 The role of the programme in participant progress

In order to better understand the role of the programme in supporting participant progress, we interviewed both workers and participants about the changes people experienced, and how these changes came about.

#### 6.1.1 The centrality of the keyworker

For many participant interviewees, their support from and relationship with their keyworker figured prominently in what they valued about the WiLL programme. Conversely, when interviewees described not having a dedicated keyworker or having a connection with the person supporting them, it was clear they would have preferred a stronger support relationship. Participants described valuing the worker's knowledge of them as an individual and their perception of emotional investment by the keyworker. In multiple participant accounts, the keyworker is what participants focus on when asked about how the programme has helped:

*Interviewer: Okay. I mean you said that the support you received has been really, really helpful and really significant for you. Could you imagine...what state would you have been if you hadn't had this support?*

*Participant: I think a lot worse, a lot, lot worse. Just on the whole, sort of like mentally, I would have been a lot worse, because I've had somebody professional there to help me and to chat with, just about anything I want. So, if I didn't have that in the lockdown I think I would have been a lot worse.*

The participant journey started, in most cases, with a keyworker conducting a conversation-based assessment of the participant's needs, and the drawing up of a plan of support. In many cases, the worker used the Work Star™ tool for this assessment, revisiting participants' progress at regular intervals.

Keyworkers provided a range of one-to-one support during a participants' time on the programme, which could include



- information, advice, and guidance;
- coaching support, such as helping someone to recognise their skills;
- subject-specific advice or training in areas ranging from benefits advice to job search skills to volunteering placements to business start-up training;
- referrals to activities and services;
- ‘hand-holding’ support, such as accompanying individuals to activities or appointments or assisting with tasks such as paperwork that a participant might struggle with;
- in some cases, and notably during lockdown, befriending support, e.g. emotional support and social contact.

In Figure 16 - Interviewee accounts of change we indicate these support activities in blue boxes. Participants described experiencing a number of different changes in their behaviour or their thinking in relation to receiving these types of keyworker support. (These changes in behaviour or thinking are indicated in the grey and green boxes). In Section 6.2, we will describe these changes in detail, with case studies to illustrate these.

Interviewees described keyworkers supporting their efforts towards their goals not only through the direct support they provided, but also by facilitating their engagement in new activities and social situations. During COVID-19 restrictions, for example, keyworkers made regular contact with participants to check on their wellbeing. At the same time, they also supported wellbeing by encouraging participants to engage in online learning sessions on wellbeing, work-related, and leisure topics, and/or to participate in other enjoyable activities, such as the programme’s Sunflower scheme, which encouraged participants to start gardening and share their experiences with others. Similarly, participants described experiencing gains in confidence both from keyworkers directly providing positive feedback to participants on their abilities, and also from keyworkers helping them to participate in volunteering or other activities.

If we look at participant accounts describing improvements in job search skills, it is clear that whilst keyworker support included very focussed activity such as coaching people on how to find out about job vacancies, and how to improve their CVs and interviewing, support could also be broader, addressing multiple outcomes; for instance, one participant described his worker arranging a confidence and assertiveness course as one of a range of courses, to not only address his dislike of interviews but also to get him out of the house and improve his mood. At the same time, participants described very tailored support; for instance, one participant described her keyworker helping her to rejig her CV: ‘...so it doesn’t look like, “Oh, well, she’s got mental health issues, de-de-de-da,” she’s going to help me word it in a way that, yes, I’ve got mental health issues but I can contribute.’

Participants and workers both described a number of characteristics of the support relationship that they thought to be important:

- *Responsive*. Participants and workers both described workers as able to tailor the intensity and frequency of their support to the individual participant. For

example, during the first COVID-19 lockdown, keyworkers regularly contacted participants to check on their welfare, but varied how often they did this depending on participants' circumstances and preferences. Related to this, a number of participants described the value of knowing they could access their keyworker as they needed: *'just knowing I could go and see them and talk to them, it, it is like a safety net'*.

- *Collaborative*. Participants and keyworkers both described valuing a collaborative, non-hierarchical relationship, in which participants were offered options and encouragement but could choose their course of action. The keyworker *'talked to me in a way that wasn't talking down to me,'* said one participant.
- *Committed or emotionally invested*. Both workers and participants described the need for keyworkers to be emotionally invested in participants: *'You'd be no good if you didn't care,'* said one worker.
- *Emotionally intelligent*. Workers described to us the importance of establishing rapport - many of our participant interviewees highlighted the importance of feeling listened to and supported, and feeling able to 'open up' to someone: *'I think the interaction, I think just having somebody to support you and talk to you.'*
- *Knowledgeable*. Whilst participants didn't think their keyworkers needed to know everything, several interviewees commented on workers who had experience and expertise helping people towards work:

*...it was a bit of an eye-opener, because it was evident that the correct people were in place to give me the correct advice to get started, so, my initial meeting was, I was over the moon. I was energised and ready to go, and ready to set sail after that.*  
(Participant)

Some of these characteristics correspond to previous findings on effective adviser or keyworker support, including tailoring support to an individual's needs (for example, Riley et al. 2013; Dudley et al., 2016; Whelan 2018); taking a holistic approach to support needs (UKCES, 2011) and the quality of the worker-participant relationship (e.g. Riley et al. 2013). As we will discuss further, the nature of the support relationship contributed to participant experiences that in turn supported changes in participant capacity or wellbeing.

The evaluators observed that a key enabler of the support relationship appeared to be the flexibility that workers themselves had in planning and delivering their support. During COVID-19, some workers described having increased flexibility and control over their time. In turn, workers and participants described valuing having time to spend with participants. Some workers described adding support activities on their own initiative: *'I started doing a newsletter every week [during the COVID-19 restrictions]. So, I'm on my fifteenth newsletter now.'* During the COVID-19 restrictions, WiLL keyworkers met on videocall every two weeks; some of these sessions included sharing with each other how they were responding to different delivery challenges and things they had tried.

### 6.1.2 The importance of support beyond the programme

Our conversations with interviewees indicated that at least some participants had additional support outside the WiLL programme that they thought had helped them to make progress towards their goals. Interviewees described receiving help from supportive family members, including parents, spouses, and adult children; participating in clubs or community projects; using online support, including for mental health needs; getting information or support from their Job Centre Plus work coach and Local Area Coordinators (<https://lacnetwork.org>); and getting support from both charities and self-help groups for problems such as drug or alcohol use, offending, housing need, and mental health. A number of interviewees described beginning their involvement with the WiLL programme concurrently with starting participation in another local project.

Participants described constructing the support they needed across projects and through time: for instance, one participant described accessing other support for mental health, with WiLL being the next stage in their road to recovery. *‘Because this is not the first time I’ve had anxiety problems. ...This time I’ve been trying to ... take opportunities of support at various stages and I think I’ve been quite lucky in that.’* In short, the total support offer that some WiLL participants were using to reach their goals was longer in duration and/or wider in scope than what they were receiving from WiLL.

WiLL workers also deliberately accessed support from other projects and services in order to provide participants with the support they needed: several workers described doing considerable work to identify and build relationships with other local groups and workers for this purpose. As we have previously reported, the WiLL partner organisations were also able to leverage their pre-existing local relationships to refer participants for specialist support. This collaboration, as we describe in the next chapter, could go as far as holding joint meetings with a participant and a professional from another service. Many of the WiLL partner organisations also delivered other projects to whom they could send a participant for support. In this respect, then, WiLL workers sometimes acted as navigators, helping to link people to other community resources.

At the same time, participants were sometimes reached because of WiLL workers’ presence in and contact with groups in the local community, including the other activities and projects of the WiLL partner organisations.

Despite the obvious value of this wider support ecosystem, there were key areas where there appeared to be shortages of services or support. At the time they were interviewed, participants described unmet needs for money/benefits advice, housing advice, mental health support, help with job-related training or qualifications, help with life skills, or help with social isolation. In some cases, these unmet needs were due to limited or inaccessible provision, though in other cases, as with help for social isolation, participants may have been waiting for support or have received support but didn’t find it helpful.

WiLL was able to put in place some mental health support, and one frontline worker was able to provide some help with money or benefits advice, when these services

could not be easily accessed outside the programme. In both cases, this provision had not been included in the original programme design as there was existing provision in the subregion. However, some participants could not access existing support due to their rural location and barriers to travel, or because the demand for services, notably mental health services, outstripped supply, leading to unrealistic waiting times. This highlights the importance of clearly identifying in future programmes what provision can be accessed in a timely manner from external sources, and what needs to be included in the core provision of the programme, based on the particular circumstances of the programme's target group.

In Chapter 7 we discuss further how the WiLL programme both assisted other local agencies and was assisted by them.

#### 6.1.3 Aspects of the programme offer that participants described as helping

There is some evidence to suggest that what mattered in achieving participant outcomes was not one particular type of activity or support e.g. short courses, business support, or volunteering, but rather, whether an activity provided a participant with a particular experience.

For instance, whilst some participant interviewees described volunteering as helpful for those wanting to increase their social contact, one did not, explaining how the particular volunteering role she was placed in did not help her to meet new people. Similar activities were also described by interviewees as providing different benefits to different participants e.g. volunteering was variously reported as providing participants with a better understanding of their options, with work experience or experience of work environments, or with increased social support.

The 'activities' that participants engaged in could be very individualised: for example, several keyworkers described giving participants tasks to accomplish at home, particularly during the COVID-19 restrictions. The focus on providing direct support to a participant versus helping them access other services varied. Some workers described providing as much support to participants within their own project as possible, rather than emphasising referring to different services:

*So, we work with a participant on a one-to-one basis and work out what they want to do, what their aspirations are, what might be holding them back, and ... make a plan on how we can guide them through to help them achieve their goals. Um, what I don't tend to do...is bombard them with every [WiLL partner service].*

The evaluators therefore looked at participants' experiences of activities and one-to-one support, in order to identify if there were common experiences that participants associated with making changes in their lives. An analysis of participant and worker interviewees' accounts of change revealed some common patterns, which we have summarised in the figure below. In this diagram, blue boxes indicate support activities delivered or facilitated by a keyworker; dark grey boxes indicate participant experiences of this support; and green boxes indicate changes in capacity (skills, knowledge, attitudes) or wellbeing.

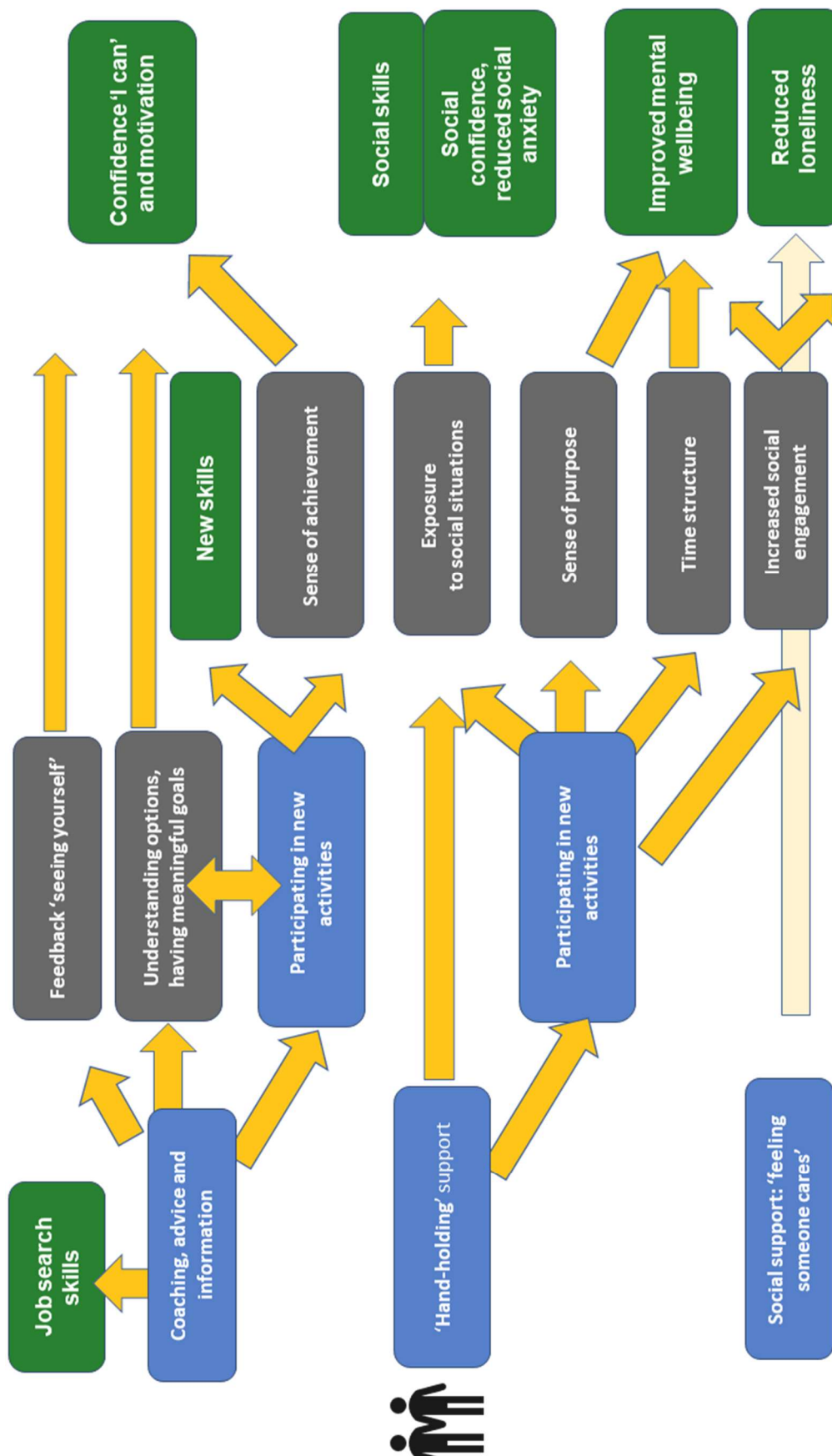


Figure 16 - Interviewee accounts of change

## 6.2 Common experiences, individual journeys

Below we examine some individual participant journeys in which participants described changes in confidence and aspiration, mental wellbeing and social engagement or social confidence, and skills.

Readers should note that case studies have not been selected to showcase ‘success’ stories e.g. stories where participants gained employment, started a business, or entered education. We interviewed participants who described all these things, just as others we spoke to had yet to achieve their aims. However, these cases were selected because the accounts participants gave of changes in their employability (Work Star outcomes) typified patterns of change described by other interviewees.

The cases exemplify the structure shown in Figure 16 - Interviewee accounts of change above: that is, that participating in the various activities of the WiLL programme could produce a number of common experiences for participants, for example, more time structure, more exposure to social situations, wider social networks, or a sense of purpose, that in turn supported improvements in areas such as mental wellbeing, confidence, reduced social anxiety, social skills, or less loneliness.

Community-based programmes may present some challenges for those seeking to replicate their successes, given that they draw on the particular resources and relationships of local organisations within a particular community. Our hope is that in describing the experiences that workers and participants thought supported change, future practitioners will gain a clearer idea of the participant experience they are aiming to create, whatever the resources and activities that are available to them.

Whilst interviewees’ individual experiences of change had commonalities with that of other interviewees, as will be seen, these commonalities existed within what were often very different individual journeys. These individual journeys also demonstrate the range of different circumstances that participants reported, as well as how external events, such as the arrival of a novel virus, can change or defer someone’s goals.

Not all common participant experiences are necessarily captured by these case studies; in particular, whilst we spoke with participants who exited without achieving job search, or entry into work or education, we have not interviewed any participants whom the programme lost contact with (disengagement).

In the cases that follow, pseudonyms are used and details that might make the person identifiable have been changed.

## 6.3 Supporting Mental Wellbeing and Reducing Loneliness

Some participants who joined the programme, were recovering from mental health conditions that pre-dated their unemployment. At the same time, a number of participants also described to us how unemployment had had a negative impact on their mental wellbeing and social connection. For instance, a participant described to us the loss of purpose and structure in their lives, *You know, I could get up at three*



*in the afternoon, who cares.*' Others described how the experience of unsuccessful job hunting was affecting their mood.

Participant loneliness was described by both worker and participant interviewees. Even when participants were in contact with family or other services, they could lack social support. Participants sometimes described not wanting to confide in family members, and workers described a lack of social support from existing services, either because there was little available locally, or because *'you only have ten minutes with your work coach or even with your GP. So, a lot of participants they don't know who they can turn to.'*

Such accounts resonate with some existing theories on worklessness, that argue that unemployment leads to psychological distress and poor mental wellbeing through the loss of the social contact, collective purpose, time structure, social identity/status, and activity that work provides (Jahoda, 1982; Zechmann and Paul, 2019).

Some participants we interviewed told us that finding meaningful or purposeful activity would improve their mental wellbeing, with others describing experiencing this via the WiLL project: one interviewee, for example, described getting out more because *'I feel like I have a purpose, and that's very important.'* A participant with a mental health condition described how having a 'focus' – in this case, working on tasks related to starting a business – helped him with his mental health:

*...it's really helped me personally with my mental health issues, it's like because even this morning it's a struggle, I mean I find it very hard to get up in the morning ...by the time I get to the end of the day I'm usually in a pretty good place. I've been creative, I've done, I've been proactive, I've done some social media for the business, I've done stuff I've written down some business plans this afternoon. ...it's given me a bit more of a focus, I need to have a bit of a focus for each day...*

Two participant interviewees described how helping other people through volunteering similarly provided a sense of purpose, which in turn helped with their self-esteem or their mental wellbeing. One described how volunteering gave her something else to focus on: *'So, yeah, I am very full-on with it. I'm not there to be, like, "Oh, I've had a bad day," you know what I mean?'* Another said,

*You just feel more useful, and a bit more part of society again.  
...And you do, it makes you feel worthy again, that you can actually help somebody else.*

Workers and participants also described how the social interaction and social support such activities provided, contributed to participants' wellbeing and confidence. In some cases, participants described this social support – feeling that someone cares – coming directly from their keyworker.

In the case studies that follow, we will see how the programme helped improve wellbeing for two programme participants by providing a sense of purpose, providing opportunities for meaningful social interaction, and helping people to feel supported.

### 6.3.1 Ellen: Social interaction and feeling supported

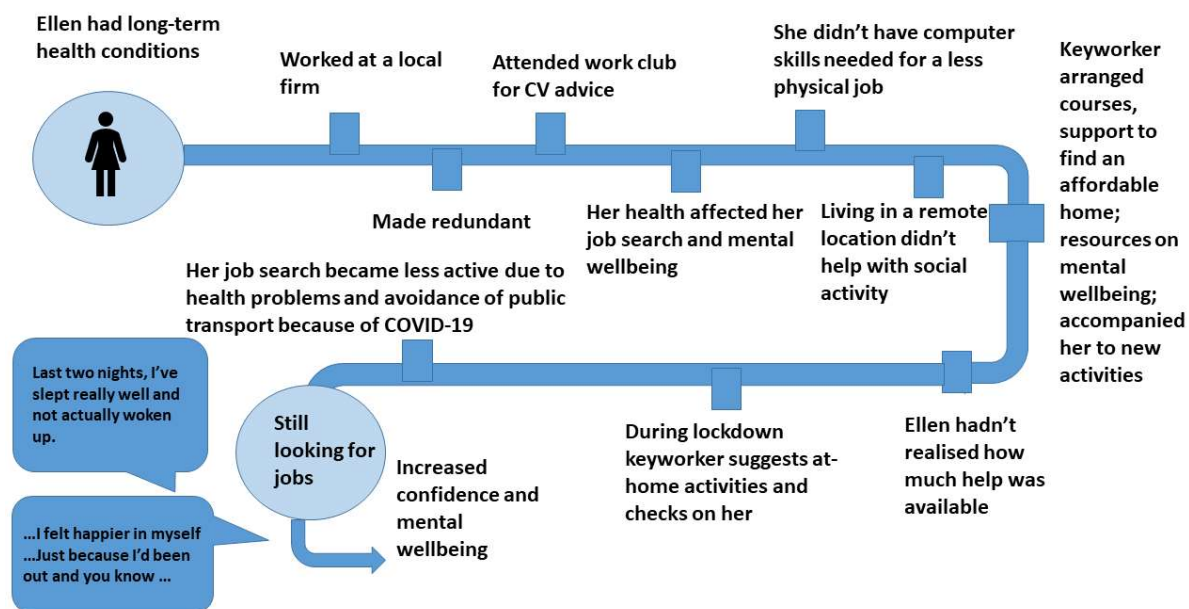


Figure 17 - Participant journey for Ellen

#### Joining the programme

Ellen had several long-term health conditions but had worked off and on over the years as her personal circumstances and childcare allowed. After several years working full-time for a local firm, she and other team members were made redundant. As she had known about the work club before it became part of the WiLL programme, she dropped into a work club session at the local library for CV advice.

At the work club, a WiLL keyworker talked to Ellen about her needs, and discovered that she could benefit from more than getting help with her CV. Ellen's health was affecting her job search and her mental wellbeing. She had been struggling with pain, and this, combined with *'getting rejected all the time'* during her job search, was causing worsening depression. At the same time, Ellen was trying to move into a different type of work, as she didn't think she could manage a very physical job anymore, but she felt she this needed computer skills that she didn't have.

Ellen described to us how, when she had lost her job, she had lost both a source of social interaction and meaningful activity, *'having something to come to and do'*.

Because she lived in a very rural area, her finances stopped her from being able to replace this lost social activity:

*... if I lived in [town] you know I could ...walk down into town and say hello to people you know ...I can't because I'd have to get the bus*



*into town and I'm like, well, I'm not spending money just to go and speak to people.*

As Ellen didn't drive, her location also stopped her from being able to reach many potential jobs.

#### Programme support

Ellen's keyworker arranged a package of support for her, both to widen her employment options but also to address how Ellen was feeling. He arranged for Ellen to attend courses in computing, confidence, and interview skills, and also investigated how Ellen could get affordable housing closer to town.

He also identified local social clubs and activities, such as coffee mornings, that Ellen could attend. Ellen hadn't realised what help was available: *'They told us all of the other ones [clubs] and I'm like, oh my God, how many things are available? And I don't know, you know.'* Ellen said that because of her confidence, her keyworker accompanied her to these meetings for the first time, to make sure Ellen felt settled, and would be able to go on her own. And, he showed her resources on mental wellbeing, such as an online app she began using.

This support continued during the first lockdown of the pandemic: Ellen's keyworker emailed her weekly, suggesting both at-home craft activities and online courses and wellbeing resources, as well as offering socially distanced meetings. As lockdown eased, he helped her look for volunteering opportunities.

Ellen's job search became less active for some time, both due to her health problems and because she didn't want to use public transport during the COVID-19 period. However, she says she is still looking, and if she saw something that was really suitable, she would apply. At time of writing, Ellen had been on the programme for just over a year.

#### What changed and how?

For Ellen, the most significant change was in her confidence and mental wellbeing. After joining WiLL, Ellen began going out and getting involved in activities, which she says led to her feeling less depressed:

*Last two nights, I've slept really well and not actually woken up. Now I don't know whether it's just coincidence or what. And meeting everybody last Wednesday I felt happier in myself ...Just because I'd been out and you know ...*

Having social interaction also reduced the burden on family members, she says, who used to be her only source of support – but whom she feared overburdening. Ellen described how social groups provided an opportunity to talk with others in similar situations to her own.

As well as improving her wellbeing, Ellen described how group interaction from both the courses she attended and the clubs she was introduced to helped her confidence.

Being able to support other members of a group increased her confidence in her own skills:

*Ellen: ...so I was like trying to help them more, you know, and to try and prove that I can talk to people and help, you know...*

*Interviewer: So, for you, then, actually in some ways that [group activity] might have helped you, would you say, because of that interaction ...*

*Ellen: Yeah, yeah, knowing that I could help and ... just to be able to reassure and ...helping that way.*

Ellen also felt more confident knowing that she had people to turn to, *'having somebody that is there to help, and answer questions that... other people, like family, might not be able to help me with.'*

This increased confidence extended not only to social situations, but to her job hunt, where Ellen described how having feedback from other people helped her. She told us that if it hadn't been for WiLL, she would still have done a basic job search, but would be a lot more alone, and would feel a lot less able to apply for some jobs: *'I'd be thinking, "Am I capable [of] doing that?"'*

How does Ellen's experience compare to other participants?

Ellen's experiences fit a pattern seen in other participants' stories, where unemployment had had a negative impact on both mental wellbeing and social connection. As with other interviewees, she made gains in her wellbeing and confidence from increased social interaction and from having more social support, both from her keyworker and from taking part in group activities. At the same time, as with other participants, Ellen's health conditions, coupled with the effects of COVID-19, affected her job search.

6.3.2 Anna: A sense of purpose and meaningful social interaction

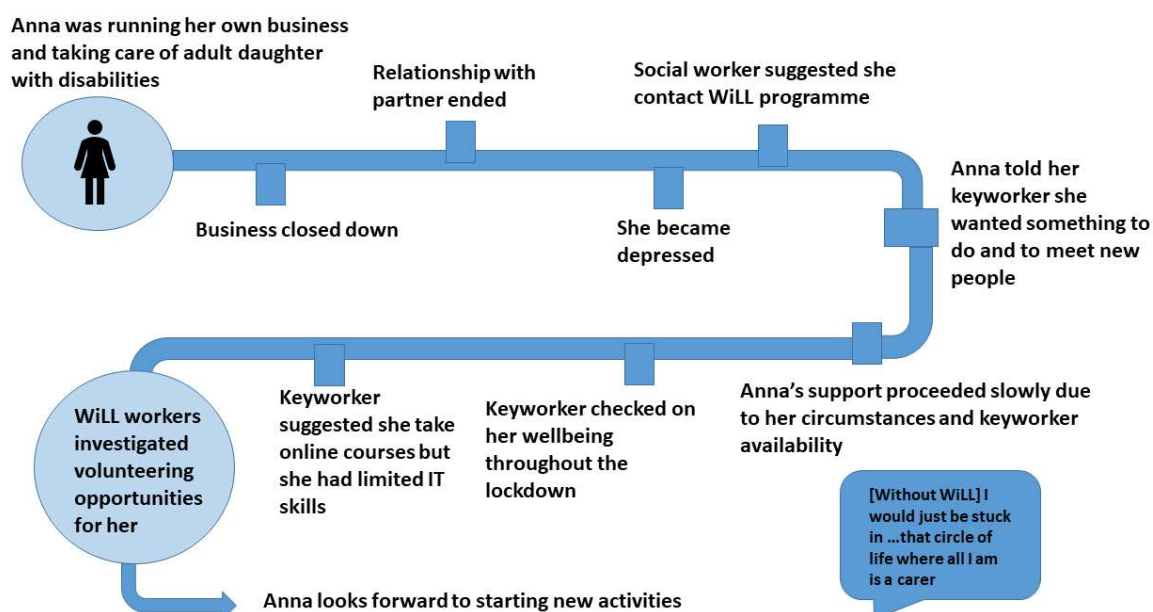


Figure 18 - Participant journey for Anna

Joining the programme

Anna had worked in her own business, running a handicrafts shop. At the same time, she was the primary carer for her adult daughter, who had multiple disabilities. Unfortunately, Anna's shop began losing money and she had to close the business. Anna's relationship with her partner also ended. She became depressed. A social worker suggested she contact the WiLL programme, and Anna met with a WiLL keyworker.

Anna was interested in finding something to do, either a volunteering role, a course, or possibly a job. Anna felt, however, that her caring responsibilities made paid work difficult, *'because it would be expected that if I say I'm there on a certain day that's where I need to be.'*

She felt that, despite her caring role, she needed to have something in her life to enable her mental wellbeing to improve. Although money was tight, she was not so much concerned about whether a role was paid or unpaid, but on finding, in her words, *'something that I can focus on, to learn or do, or whatever. So that my brain isn't constantly worrying about what's happening to [daughter] ... something to perhaps stretch me a bit.'*

Anna also hoped to meet new people. However, key for her was that this social interaction was meaningful and interesting. She said she didn't want to just go to coffee mornings: *'I want to learn,'* she told us, *'my brain needs to function'*. Although she attended a carers' support group, she says that this was not the same as having something in her life other than being a carer: *'...all the carers have similar problems with whoever they're looking after and although it's okay, it's not anything that's away from that.'*

## Programme support

Anna's keyworker looked at several different courses the WiLL training programme with her. Anna said her support proceeded somewhat slowly, due to factors such as staff absence and Anna's own limited availability: Anna would often have to cancel planned meetings at short notice, due to the demands of caring for her daughter. As well, after starting the programme, Anna herself found she had to go into hospital. Her keyworker helped her to manage this, by putting her in touch with some support whilst she recovered at home.

Anna's keyworker was looking into some volunteering opportunities that related to her interests in crafts, when the pandemic lockdown started. During lockdown, her keyworker stayed in touch with her, checking on her wellbeing, and as the pandemic continued, he let her know about different online courses she could do. However, Anna's low IT skills presented some barriers to this. Much of Anna's support therefore consisted of one-to-one interaction with and support from her keyworker.

At time of writing, WiLL workers were continuing to work with Anna to find her some volunteering opportunities.

### What changed and how?

When we last spoke with Anna, she still had very limited participation in new activities, but was looking forward to trying different things that she had been discussing with her keyworker. Anna was very positive about the support she had had: when asked how her life might be different without WiLL, she told us, *'I would just be stuck in ...that circle of life where all I am is a carer.'*

### How does Anna's experience compare to that of other participants?

The difficulties that slowed down Anna's support from the WiLL programme were also experienced by other participants whom we interviewed. Anna was not the only participant whose journey through the programme was affected by their health; and, as we've previously reported, participants who were digitally excluded could not make use of those parts of WiLL's programme offer that were moved online during the pandemic.

## 6.4 Supporting confidence and motivation

When participants or workers spoke to us about confidence, they meant one or all of several different but related ideas: feeling positive about themselves; believing in their ability to accomplish a task; or believing they could handle social situations.

For example, interviewees described not pursuing possibilities, because they did not recognise their own abilities. This could be because they saw themselves in terms of a specific job that had disappeared or had never had clear goals: as one participant said, she would just *'fall into jobs.'* Other participants described experiencing a loss of confidence since losing their job. As one worker explained:

*And I think once, especially if people are made redundant as well in this climate ...you know, the word is quite harsh when you apply it*

*to yourself. And I've had a few people really struggle with their confidence, and therefore their mental health, after being made redundant.*

Other participants mainly described a lack of social confidence: that is, participants described themselves as having difficulties talking to people or feeling uncomfortable in social situations. For instance, at a Participants' Forum, several attendees described needing confidence *'to go out and be in a social environment.'* In a number of interviews, lack of confidence was linked to a lack of social support; in the words of one worker:

*...when you've not got people to kind of talk to about your life and what you want to do, it's natural that your confidence would decline. ...they're not confident they're able to do things, they're not confident to travel by themselves, they're not confident to speak to people for the first time and it does kind of tie in with the anxiety thing.*

Workers described employing a range of strategies to support participants' confidence and motivation. These included helping people set and work towards goals; giving people a sense of achievement; providing initial hand-holding support and gradually introducing participants to new activities and social situations; and providing and maintaining a supportive, non-judgmental relationship.

Workers supported people to develop their goals by helping them explore options, but also, by helping them to see their own abilities. For example, one participant described going for interviews after WiLL workers had *'talked to me and what I had done and they said, "Well, you can do that, 'cause you've done it," but it's just seeing it from somebody else's viewpoint sometimes.'* After getting more feedback, she described looking at jobs in her preferred area, and feeling she had the confidence to pursue these.

The positive benefits to participants of having space to develop and pursue goals that were meaningful to them was particularly relevant during the first COVID-19 lockdown:

*...so my participant that's a painter, he's only started painting again now that it's lockdown...I think, um, there's definitely a template that people put on their lives, you know, that they think they should be doing something by a certain age or they think that they should be in a real job and all that kind of stuff.*

Goal exploration and clarity have been linked to more independent, motivated job searching (Hooft *et al.*, 2020); moreover, internalised goals and motivation have been associated with maintaining intensity in job search activity (Creed *et al.*, 2009). Goal-

related activity has been used to support motivation in previous work programmes (Liu, Huang, and Wang, 2014; Pohlan, 2019).

A strategy described by many keyworkers was a focus on getting people to do things, and recognising what people had done, thus generating a sense of achievement. Keyworkers would set people small tasks on a weekly basis, or if they were coming to the work club, provide them with something to do on each visit. They would recognise achievement by, for instance, helping them update their CVs with the activities they'd been doing, and valuing those things.

Both workers and participants described gaining a sense of achievement from undertaking various activities that the WiLL programme involved them in, such as volunteering or training:

*They've stayed and completed it [a course]. And you can really see a growth from them completing a programme which has required them to be there, you know, Monday to Friday. And how good their routine's got and everything... If you do The Star after that, you see such an improvement... (Worker)*

A participant described volunteering and thus feeling 'useful' as building his confidence; in this case, the achievement was 'helping others.'

When participants needed help being confident in social situations, keyworkers described providing a type of hand-holding support to enable participants to participate in activities and enter new social situation. For example, a worker might accompany a participant to a meeting with another professional, or accompany them when travelling to a new place. As one participant put it, 'they're there, and that gives you that bit of confidence to go and say what you want to say.'

Once this initial hurdle of entering a social situation was cleared, participants and workers believed that exposure to social situations would help people reduce their social anxiety and gain social confidence:

*For me, from my personal experience I suffer from social anxiety, so for me just to engage in anything is a, it's a big leap of confidence for me and I'm encouraged to do that... My confidence is gained from coming to places like this and interacting. (Participant)*

*...the purpose of doing volunteering was actually to go out and be in situations and confront the OCD problems [the participant described experiencing anxiety in social situations]. That was the motivation. (Participant)*

There is some evidence that the strategy described by WiLL participants and workers of gradually engaging with social situations to build confidence or overcome anxiety is helpful. In a recent meta-analysis of the effectiveness of pharmacological, psychological and self-help interventions for the acute treatment of social anxiety



disorder, interventions involving systematic exposure to social interactions were found to have some effect (Mayo-Wilson *et al.*, 2014).

In the case studies that follow, we look at two participants whose confidence improved through developing more meaningful goals and gaining a sense of achievement. For an example of how keyworkers boosted confidence by providing a supportive relationship and introducing participants to social situations, please see our case study of Ellen.

#### 6.4.1 Elaine: Understanding options, exploring meaningful goals

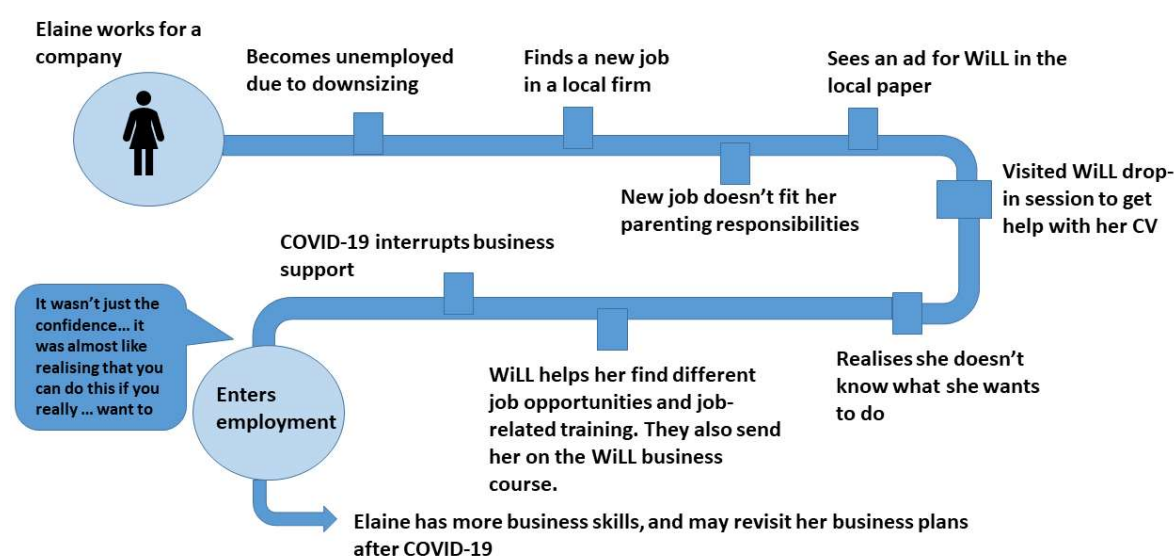


Figure 19 - Participant journey for Elaine

#### Joining the programme

Elaine had many years' experience working for a publishing company, a profession she originally entered because *'my parents were desperate to get me into something office based'*. After her firm downsized, she found a role as an administrator for a local firm. However, she found this new job did not fit well with her commitments as the parent of two young children.

Whilst Elaine was not in financial need, she did want to do something productive. At the same time, whilst she had commuted long distances before having a child, she now felt that, even with a car, her caring responsibilities limited her to more local opportunities.

Elaine had been watching the local advertisements for job openings that didn't involve a long commute from her village, and so would fit around school hours. After seeing an advertisement about the WiLL programme, Elaine visited a WiLL drop-in session to get some help revamping her CV.

## Programme support

When Elaine spoke to WiLL workers about her job search, however, it became clear that she *'really didn't know what [she] was going to do or how'*. She had thought about starting a business connected to her longstanding love of yoga and had also been thinking about volunteering.

Because Elaine wasn't sure what path she wanted to take, WiLL workers helped her explore several different options. They revamped her CV; helped her to search for the types of jobs that fit her current experience and circumstances; and found her some training related to jobs that she thought might suit her.

At the same time, when Elaine explained that she had been thinking about starting up a yoga studio for some time, workers referred her to the programme's business start-up course, which offered both one-to-one support and a series of group workshops.

Elaine completed the course, but realised she needed more help developing her business idea and in particular, that she needed to do more planning related to start-up costs. She had arranged a one-to-one support meeting to do this, but when we spoke to her she had not yet been able to pursue this. She explains this meeting was initially delayed as she had *'the January blues'*, and shortly after this, the COVID-19 crisis began. Not only did the COVID-19 restrictions disrupt the delivery of WiLL's business start-up support, they also made Elaine's business start-up plans less feasible.

### What changed and how?

Elaine remained interested in starting a yoga studio, but felt that with ongoing COVID-19 restrictions, her business plans would need to be put on hold for another day. She re-entered employment in autumn 2020.

For Elaine, the benefits of WiLL were its support in exploring whether she could have a different career, in her words, *'going in a different direction.'* Elaine described how having the guidance and support from WiLL workers, both at the work club and on the business start-up course, increased her understanding of what was possible and her confidence. Key to this was the expertise that she could draw on to guide her career change efforts: *'it's brilliant and she [the WiLL worker] knows so much about setting up your business and everything like that, so she's the perfect person to run that course, definitely.'*

Although she did not go on to launch her business, WiLL's business start-up support *'made me realise that I'd got... the qualities to move forward, in relation to the business, you know. ... it wasn't just the confidence... well it was almost like realising that you can do this if you really ... want to.'*

### How does Elaine's experience compare to other participants?

Other participants also needed help in figuring out what they wanted to do, and what they were capable of doing. Elaine's case demonstrates that participants can need this support despite having many years' experience in work. At the same time, her experience demonstrates the importance of understanding how external events can shape participants' outcomes.



6.4.2 Spencer: A sense of achievement and help entering social situations

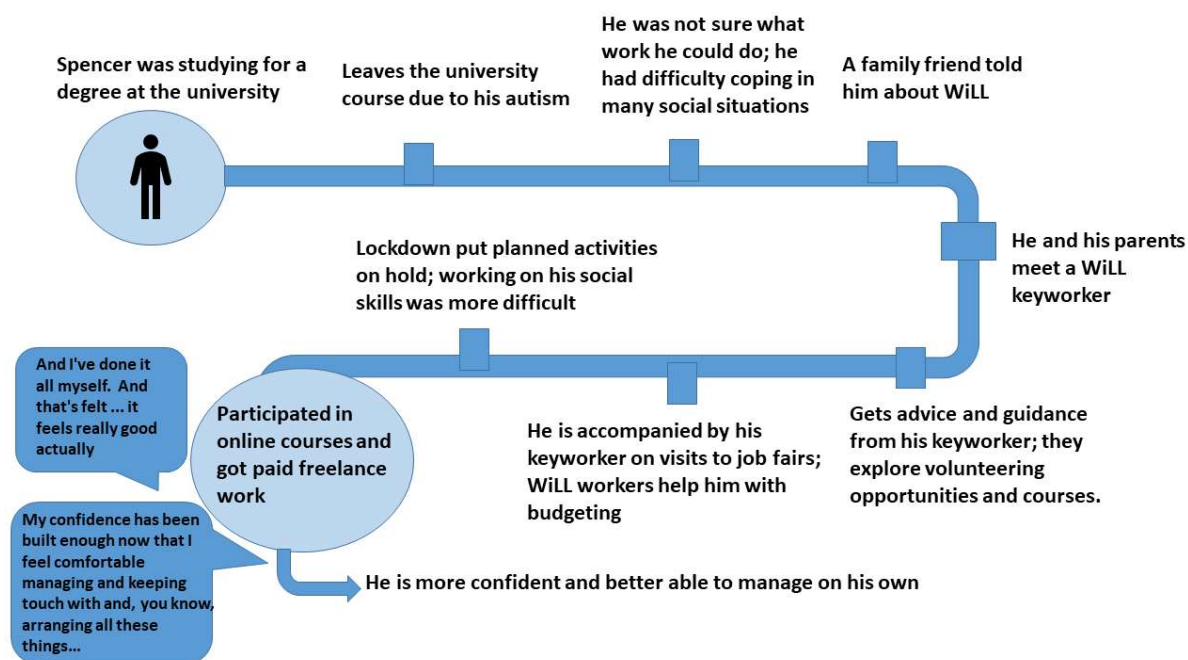


Figure 20 - Participant journey for Spencer

Joining the programme

Spencer had been studying for a degree, but left his university course as despite an aptitude for his chosen subject, he was struggling to cope with both his coursework and the university lifestyle because of his autism. He was not sure what work he could do, or if he was even ready for work, as he had difficulty coping in many social situations, including work. He decided he needed some help with his social skills and confidence and help to find out what work would be right for him. A family friend told him about WiLL.

Programme support

A WiLL keyworker met Spencer and his parents and talked to Spencer about his goals and where he could use some help. Together, Spencer and the keyworker wrote a plan to help Spencer with his social interaction and to help him explore what work would fit his skills and interests. The keyworker discussed volunteering opportunities and courses that Spencer could attend, and accompanied him on visits to job fairs and recruitment agencies. WiLL workers also helped him to develop his personal budgeting, as Spencer wanted to have better control over his spending.

One of the things Spencer valued was that his worker focussed on his overall wellbeing and on exploring career options that were meaningful to and suitable for him – personalised support he felt he would not have received at the Job Centre:

*...It was more like... "let's figure out first what you need in your life, and then we're going to find out how work can help you with that. And how we have opportunities that can help you find that work."*

Although Spencer initially expected to be immediately placed in volunteering positions, his keyworker took a gradual approach to this, doing some one-to-one work ahead of placing him in volunteering roles. Spencer didn't feel comfortable meeting people and dealing with new social situations, so his keyworker helped him by accompanying him to new activities, acting as 'a go-between person, [someone] ...that I know while I'm with someone that I don't know.'

As with other participants, the pandemic lockdown affected Spencer's support. Activities that his keyworker had arranged were put on hold, *'It was ... literally the last meeting before ...we had like three things [to start doing]. ...and it all just went kaput'*. Lockdown also made working on his social skills more difficult; as he says, *'There's nothing quite like talking to a person face-to-face... I still don't feel like I'm building up my social skills completely as I would have if I could meet people in person and go into different places and be in different situations'*.

As the pandemic continued, however, Spencer participated in online activities such as courses. His keyworker also introduced him to a WiLL project that was working with employers to make their recruitment processes more youth-friendly; Spencer was able to review employers' websites for them. Here, Spencer's autism was an asset, as he could advise on how employers could be more approachable for young people like himself. Later, this project also asked Spencer to do some freelance work for them.

What changed and how?

Much of Spencer's support focussed on helping him to complete tasks, and to participate in new activities, that would enable him to gain more confidence in dealing with work situations and make progress in finding meaningful work.

Spencer described how his confidence increased as a result of trying new things, and succeeding at them, despite his anxiety:

*And then I've reviewed a few websites [as a volunteer reviewer]. ...I got an email saying that they looked at what I did and it was really, I did a good job. So that felt good. And then I actually did some graphic design for them because I said I did graphic design, and they went, "Yeah. You do graphic designing? Here's some stuff." And I got paid for it and everything, and that felt, that felt really good.*

He describes how this sense of achievement, and of being able to manage on his own, were key to his increased confidence:

*...just the whole process of managing and keeping track of everything that's going on. I didn't think that I was capable of it before, and I definitely built my ... like my confidence has been built*

*enough now that I feel comfortable managing and keeping touch with and, you know, arranging all these things...*

*And I've done it all myself. And that's felt ... it feels really good actually.*

How does Spencer's experience compare to other participants?

Spencer was not alone in experiencing difficulties with social situations; other WiLL participants similarly described to our researchers having difficulty interacting with people, feeling anxious and uncomfortable in social situations, or being anxious travelling. As with Spencer, it became more difficult for workers to address these difficulties during lockdown, but online interaction was a solution for some. But, like Spencer, other participants described to us still making gains in confidence during this time.

## 6.5 Improving job searching

Some WiLL participants described needing help mainly with learning the mechanics of job searching – how to find out about, apply for, and interview for jobs. For instance, workers told us that older participants who may have been in a job for a long time prior to redundancy wouldn't know how to do a job search now. As one worker remarked, *'they are completely rusty with regards to finding jobs and how to do that using social media or whatever'*. Similarly, a worker commented that the long-term unemployed forget *'basic things'* about job searching. Participants described needing to know more about interviewing, including body language, how to answer different kinds of questions, and interview etiquette, such as what to wear.

When asked about the most important change that had happened for them whilst on the WiLL programme, some participants said it was this practical help: *'just getting that help with my CV, actually having somebody take the time to sit with me and help me.'* A number of workers told us a common reason for participants to first engage with the programme, particularly if they were referred via Job Centre Plus, was to get help with their CV.

Keyworkers supported participants in job searching primarily through a variety of coaching and teaching activity. For example, a participant described her worker showing her *'different websites, different ways of looking and different ways of writing'*; another participant described his worker sitting with him and teasing out his strengths for his CV, something he couldn't have done on his own. Workers would discuss jobs with participants and give participants feedback on their CVs and applications. In other cases, workers took on parts of job application tasks that participants were not yet able to do, for example, helping a participant recovering from mental illness to fill out forms.

In addition to one-to-one support, participants were also referred to short courses such as confidence and CV writing in order to help with their job search. Following the

start of COVID-19 restrictions, WiLL's training partner, WEA, offered participants courses on online job searching and LinkedIn.

At the same time, when participants described getting better at job searching, they talked about getting help with job search techniques, but also described changes in their goals and confidence.

As previously discussed, clarifying goals has been used by other work programmes to support motivation (Liu, Huang and Wag 2014), and has been associated with more motivated job seeking (Hooft et al. 2020). Both workers and participants themselves described people not knowing what they wanted to do or were capable of doing; this could include not knowing what type of job they were aiming for, or whether they should consider re-entering education or self-employment. This problem was reported both for participants trying to change careers and for those who had little work experience, and for both younger and older participants.

*Participants described workers helping them clarify goals both through coaching, and also by enabling them to try different things:*

*...I've got to look for work but I know I'm going to have to go into a job I've never done before, because I can't go back to what I did.  
...I've tried different [voluntary roles] and what I thought I would like, when I've done it I thought, "Oh no, actually I don't like this."*

Participants also described to us how lacking confidence, including social confidence, affected their ability to job search, from deciding to apply to doing well in the interview. For instance, a lack of confidence could stop people applying for jobs: as one of the members of our Participants' Forum commented:

*You can have all the qualifications but if you've got no confidence you can't use them. ...You can't see yourself, like, for jobs.*

The traditional job application process could be difficult for those suffering from social anxiety or who had difficulty with social situations. A Participants' Forum member described how 'nine times out of ten' in an interview his anxiety would kick in. Similarly, several WiLL staff and participants mentioned the interview process, describing the problems with the interview interaction:

*Worker: Because employers shouldn't be judgemental, but I think sometimes they are when, you know ...they don't give people a chance sometimes. You think, "They'd be really good at that job if you just let them do a trial day rather than have an interview."*

Job search support could also include social support alongside information. For example, a youth worker described doing a 'dry run' visit to employers with young participants:

*...they might never have handed a CV into a shop, so we go around with them and, you know, do a bit of like role play, handing out CVs and then they'll go and do it themselves...*

Another participant whose worker sat in on her interview for a volunteer role described its effect on her confidence in a job searching situation:

*Participant: I know it's only voluntary work, she really, really supported me, and that, that was a massive help to me. Rather than having to just go in on your own ...*

*Interviewer: How did it help having her in the interview with you?*

*Participant: ...she didn't say anything, but just, just her being there with me, and when we came out she goes, "Oh, you did really well, and that was really good what you said," and it's just having that, when you've lost your confidence, it's just having that bit of, like, support, and being told, "Yeah, you're okay."*

In the case study that follows, we will see how keyworkers helped participants to improve their job search skills by working alongside participants during their job search.

### 6.5.1 David: Building job search skills for now and the future

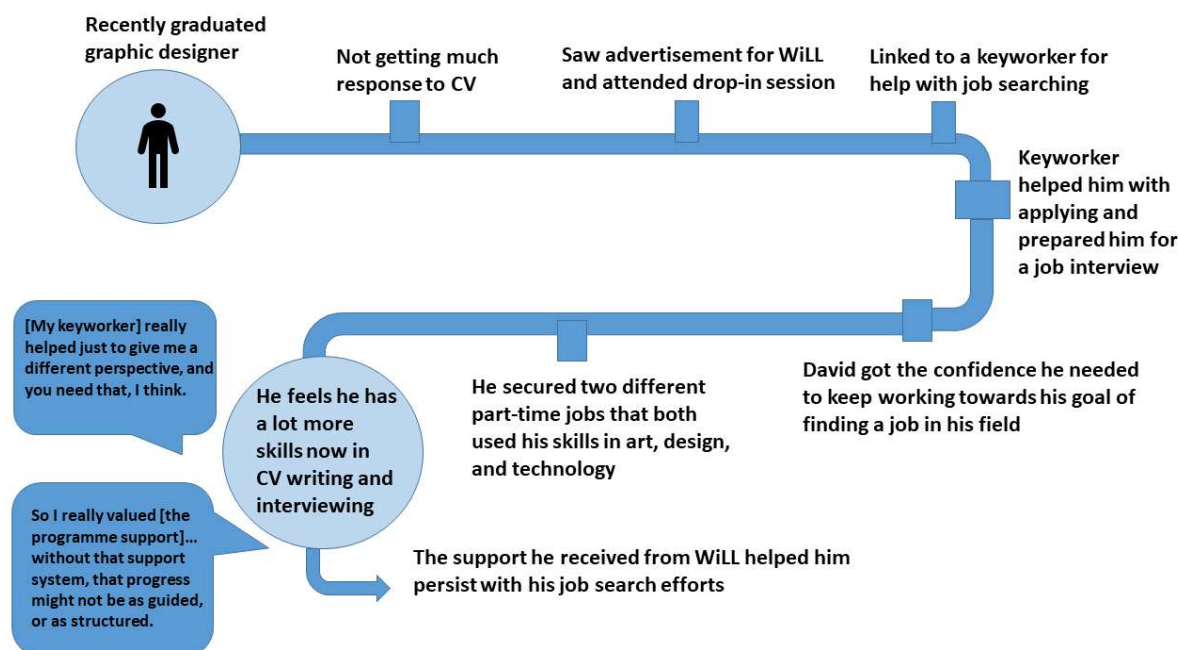


Figure 21 - Participant journey for David



## Joining the programme

David had recently graduated from university with a degree in graphic design and was looking for a job that would give him work experience in his chosen career. He had worked casual jobs during university, and prior to this, had worked as a freelance art teacher. But because his previous roles had been found through ‘word of mouth,’ these jobs hadn’t given him the job search skills he needed: *‘I didn’t really need to do a proper professional résumé until now.’*

When David saw an advertisement for WiLL in the local newspaper, he decided to go to its local drop-in session. The programme’s local presence was really helpful he said, as *‘I haven’t got much money at the moment, so having to commute a long way [to get support]... it’s difficult.’*

## Programme Support

When David contacted the WiLL programme, he had already identified a job that he wanted to apply for, so he was quickly introduced to a keyworker for help with his application. His keyworker helped him to improve his CV and cover letters. When David got an interview, she met with him and helped him to prepare for the interview, in his words, *‘she just helped to understand a good response, what kind of response they’re looking for’* for a particular role.

David says that before he met his keyworker, he wasn’t really confident about his CV, and although he had posted it on job boards, he ‘wasn’t really getting much response’.

*[My keyworker] really helped just to give me a different perspective, and you need that, I think. I mean, I’ve been to university, and you know, I’ve done all the dissertations, all that sort of stuff, you get used to writing stuff, but ...you come out, it’s a different world, and you don’t know what people are looking for.*

As with other participants, David found that having his keyworker working alongside him during his job search, providing feedback and support, helped him to stay on track:

*...when you’re unemployed, having goals and being accountable, and just moving forward is really important... So I really valued [the programme support]... because it was just, all right, you’ve got action points, I’m going to get this done, and I’ll have this done for next time. So, there was always consistent progress, and I think without that support system, that progress might not be as guided, or as structured.*

David told us this helped him to keep working towards his goal of finding work in his chosen field, rather than settling for something that would just pay the bills.

What changed and how?

David was on the programme for about two months: within this time, he secured two very different part-time jobs that both used his skills in art, design, and technology. David says his new jobs are both very interesting, and they will also help him to build up his transferable skills and give him more employment options in the future.

David also said that he feels he has a lot more skills now in CV writing and interviewing that will help him in the future.

How does David's experience compare to other participants?

In comparison to some other WiLL participants, David reported needing little help with his employability outside of help with his job search skills. The WiLL programme was open to rural residents out of work for four weeks or more, and as we saw in Section 4.2, WiLL participants entered the programme with different levels and types of needs.

David's experience is similar to that of other WiLL participants who found that their previous employment did not necessarily provide them with the job search skills they needed. And, his difficulties in travelling into an urban centre to access support was something other participants also reported.

As with other WiLL participants, David valued the support he had from his keyworker, and found that this support helped him persist with his job search efforts.

## 7 How did the programme affect the wider community?

In order to understand the wider impact of the WiLL programme on the work of other agencies and the local area, the evaluation team sought to gather feedback from personnel in other organisations who had had some form of interaction with the WiLL programme. We were interested in discussing whether the programme had contributed to the work or aims of their organisation, and how it had affected local groups or local people.

Unfortunately, the number of suggested interviewees provided by programme staff was lower than expected (12) and of these, we were only able to interview seven. Interviewees included staff from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and from other local voluntary sector services supporting economically or socially excluded people. They also included a staff member from Vista, the lead partner for the WiLL programme. Where possible, we have supplemented information from these stakeholder interviews with information from WiLL participants and workers.

### 7.1 How WiLL worked with local organisations

The WiLL programme both referred participants to other public and voluntary organisations for additional support, and had people referred to them by other organisations. Whilst there were no formal requirements to follow up the outcome of a referral, in some cases interviewees described WiLL and other organisations coordinating their support for a participant by sharing participant information (with their consent).

Where WiLL workers were placing WiLL participants as volunteers in other organisations, keyworkers described carrying out significant work with the organisation before placing a volunteer, as well as following up with the volunteer afterwards, in order to help make the volunteering placement successful.

WiLL keyworkers might also directly contact employers as part of their support to participants moving into employment. Certain WiLL partners also worked directly with employers to provide them with information and resources to improve the inclusiveness of their employment practices e.g. recruitment practices and employee travel arrangements.

#### 7.1.1 Referral relationships

Referral relationships both predated the WiLL programme – for example, Job Centre Plus staff had referred participants to Leicestershire County Council’s work clubs prior to the WiLL programme – and were developed during the life of the programme by WiLL workers.

In some instances, keyworkers leveraged pre-existing professional relationships and their knowledge of a local area to source support from other organisations for participants or to recruit participants. At the same time, some keyworkers described learning about other relevant organisations in their area over the life of the programme. The relationships were informal; that is, they were not supported by written agreements between the organisations. Referrals could consist of very informal



signposting or introductions; for instance, during field observation we observed WiLL workers at the work clubs introduce people both to other WiLL delivery partners and to other support services that had been invited to attend the work club.

Prior to the COVID-19 restrictions, work coaches at Job Centre Plus were a particularly important source of referrals into the programme. In areas of Leicestershire where there was no prior referral relationship with the local Job Centre workers, WiLL workers visited them and/or held launch events to inform them of the support they could offer Job Centre participants. A stakeholder reported that DWP was making sure its work coaches were aware of the support WiLL was offering so that they could refer participants. WiLL workers built links with a variety of organisations such as food banks, health and wellness charities and self-help groups, and colleges, in order to recruit participants. In some cases, this work was intensive: for example, a worker described visiting a hostel each week in order to reach hostel residents who might need WiLL support.

One interviewee described how WiLL workers attended their office at least once a week so that they were able to directly introduce their participant to a WiLL worker: ‘... it’s all about kind of building up that relationship to be able to refer to the project.’ The importance of relationships for recruiting WiLL participants was described by a number of WiLL workers, with one explaining that they had a better chance of recruiting participants from colleges if college staff, who already had a relationship with young people, were supportive of the WiLL programme.

#### 7.1.2 Working with employers

In addition to contact with employers that occurred in the course of supporting an individual participant into work, two of the WiLL programme’s partners, Go Travel Solutions and Access Generation, worked with employers to alter employment practices that could exclude some groups of people, and to facilitate contact between jobseekers and local employers. In addition, a member of the lead partner’s programme team had a remit for employer engagement.

Prior to the beginning of COVID-19 restrictions, WiLL organised job fairs that brought WiLL participants together with different local employers in fields as diverse as transport, social care, and defence. A stakeholder also described attending an open day event together with WiLL staff in order to fill vacancies for a local employer in Leicestershire.

Access Generation is a social enterprise that undertakes assessments of how youth-friendly employers are and runs training events and webinars for employers. During 2019, the project undertook research on local Leicestershire employers, and disseminated research findings and guidance on recruiting and employing young people via local events. An evaluator observed an Access Generation event in Market Harborough attended by around 20 participants, including recruiters and human resources professionals, which provided attendees with advice on recruiting young people, including the opportunity to hear directly from the young people themselves. In early 2020, Access Generation also published a wider national report (<https://accessgeneration.co.uk/app/uploads/2020/03/Employment-Accessibility->

[Report-final-online-version.pdf](#)) that included data from employers across Leicestershire.

As well as seeking to provide support to WiLL participants – for example, via travel discount schemes – Go Travel Solutions also undertook work to assist stakeholders outside the WiLL programme. They were undertaking a mapping of local transport provision, which they hoped would provide evidence of transport gaps to strategic decisionmakers. At the same time, they were available to advise local employers who wanted to develop transport assistance for employees such as a car share scheme. Employer support was aimed at encouraging employers to play a part in solving the difficulties people encountered in travelling to work: in some circumstances, employers could be the only solution to the transport barriers that participants faced. As we have previously reported, WiLL’s work on transport solutions was disrupted by COVID-19 restrictions, which discouraged public transport use and disrupted business.

## 7.2 How WiLL benefited stakeholders

Stakeholders described WiLL as benefiting them primarily by providing support to local people whom they were also aiming to help. Stakeholders described valuing the support to enter employment that WiLL provided, with interviewees mentioning WiLL’s wider support for employability e.g. giving people additional support in areas such as building up their skills, their confidence and their work skills.

At the same time, interviewees described WiLL as providing a source of local intelligence on other events and resources within the County. WiLL staff were described by interviewees as having up-to-date information about what was happening in local centres such as Coalville and Market Harborough. An interviewee said she often had keyworkers telling her, ‘*Oh, did you know about this event?*’ or, ‘*Did you know about this particular resource that we’ve been given?*’ which helped her stay connected with other agencies. Because WiLL brought together a large group of local partner organisations, this helped other agencies to make links with these partners. One stakeholder also said that WiLL’s community-based locations e.g. the local libraries, helped bring people in the community together.

## 7.3 How WiLL compared to other services

The WiLL programme was not the only support available in Leicestershire to help people into work; there were, for instance, other Building Better Opportunities projects, DWP-commissioned provision, and other voluntary sector projects. WiLL staff also identified that some of the services they provided – such as support with CVs – were also offered by other agencies.

However, when interviewees were asked about the benefits of WiLL, they tended to focus on the manner in which WiLL delivered support, sometimes contrasting WiLL’s offer to that of other agencies. In the words of one stakeholder:

*...I couldn’t say it’s the only one because there is an awful lot of provision out there at the moment, and an awful lot of it does*

*provide the same kind of help. But I think because it is local, it's in the library, it's a little bit more informal for people and it's got a good reputation and it's well-used, that's where I think it comes into its own.*

The local nature of WiLL mentioned by this stakeholder was also noted by participants. Local delivery meant that the programme was accessible to rural residents who could not travel into Leicester or across the County; at the same time, because the local organisations delivering WiLL had an established presence in the area, WiLL was able to build on its pre-existing local intelligence and relationships in the local area.

Stakeholders also valued the following aspects of WiLL's service offer:

Breadth of service offer and connections to other support. Stakeholders valued various elements of the WiLL service offer, including the provision of one-to-one support, the work clubs run at the libraries, and in-work support, with one commenting, *'the in-work support that they offer as well, that's something that will be missed ...because getting a job's not always the biggest issue but starting the job and holding down the job.'*

An interviewee also noted that WiLL provided a route into Prince's Trust programmes. A number of WiLL partners, including the Prince's Trust, delivered services and projects outside the WiLL programme, which facilitated access to these by participants. For example, WiLL staff described using the Rural Community Council's mobile coffee van – which was separately funded – to reach people during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Inclusivity. WiLL was open to any Leicestershire resident not in work; in contrast, DWP-contracted provision had eligibility criteria that meant not everyone could be referred to this for support e.g. a participant might need to have a health condition or to have been unemployed for a certain length of time, or be a certain age.

Voluntariness. One stakeholder described WiLL as offering a different experience for participants due to its voluntary nature:

*One of the things with the WiLL project is that it's voluntary ...so they're not under the pressure which makes it a different experience for them... say you've got somebody that had maybe been a carer, and sometimes it's a little bit more of a softly, softly approach to build up somebody's confidence.*

Participants have contrasted their experience with WiLL to their experience with other services, including Job Centre Plus, which one participant described as putting her in a 'hierarchy' e.g. talking down to her. It may be that the voluntary nature of the programme – in contrast to Job Centre Plus – enabled a better support relationship.

Flexibility and responsiveness. Stakeholders also valued WiLL's ability to deliver tailored support that responded to people's individual needs and preferences.

*...it feels more personalised... with the WiLL Project, whereas with the other providers it's kind of a bit more, you know structured.*

*So, it's more tailored to the customer's needs and it did feel more relaxed. It felt that the customer had more control in which direction the support went in, rather than just sort of saying, "Well this is what we provide, that's what you've got to have."*

Related to this, a stakeholder noted that participants could easily access support when they needed it:

*...for a lot of people it was once a week you could go along. You didn't have to go absolutely every week, but if you needed specific help or wanted to talk to someone about something, they were there and they could offer that.*

Stakeholders valued the programme's ability to work with young people: *'being able to introduce them to someone who understood where they were coming from'*; its informality, making people feel comfortable by seeing them in familiar or convenient locations; and WiLL workers' willingness to coordinate with other services, including allowing other professionals to jointly meet with the participant. One interviewee remarked they would miss having a provider who worked closely with them:

*...I'm not just passing them [a participant] over to the provider and saying, "Right well, you know, you're dealing with them now." I want to work with that provider as well so it's kind of, it's kind of that three-way relationship...*

#### 7.4 Supporting people into work after WiLL

When asked what they thought the impact of WiLL ending would be, stakeholders said this would have a negative effect on the links amongst organisations, as WiLL had relationships with so many different services.

As well, interviewees thought losing WiLL would have an impact on the community's access to support, as the WiLL programme had wider eligibility than other programmes, and its more informal, flexible approach *'does offer the opportunity to people that maybe wouldn't feel quite so happy or so at home in other places.'* As mentioned previously, stakeholders also noted that WiLL offered support that other work programmes did not.

One stakeholder commented:

*There are other programmes available, but this one has been particularly good, I would say, for a lot of people. I think on a personal level, and knowing the numbers of people that I've*

*referred in the past, I'd be quite devastated if it finished because it's helped so many people....*

At time of writing, the WiLL programme had secured funding to continue delivery into 2021.

## 8 Supporting people to tackle worklessness: key learning

The WiLL programme is ongoing, and the evidence so far is that WiLL is contributing to improvements in participants' lives in the areas of wellbeing, confidence and motivation, skills, and stability (measured as Work Star™ outcomes).

Whilst participants have different levels and types of needs, and tend to progress through the programme differently, the data suggests that WiLL has been helpful to those with both higher and lower levels of need. Moreover, whilst COVID-19 slowed participants' progress,<sup>10</sup> overall, participants continued to report improvement.

As we have seen, our analysis suggests that improvements in Work Star™ outcomes made it more likely that participants would move into active job search, learning or work. Moreover, participants and workers' accounts link achieving these changes to a number of participant experiences: having feedback and seeing yourself differently; understanding options and having meaningful goals; having a sense of purpose and time structure; having a sense of achievement; feeling supported; having more social engagement; and gaining skills. Both the support relationship with a key worker, as well as being involved in new activities, were described as contributing to these experiences. Whilst we cannot say if those participants we didn't interview would report similar experiences in relation to their support, it is clear that for at least some people, their support had these benefits, and that this in turn led to further changes for them.

Participants' and workers' accounts also tell us more about how keyworkers 'do' an effective support relationship: we see in people's stories how keyworkers collaborated with participants, working together to make progress on goals; the rapport that was established with participants; and how support was shaped around the individual's circumstances and aspirations.

The experience of the WiLL programme thus serves to reinforce but also build on the findings of previous evaluations and studies in terms of what works to increase employability or move people into work. Previous successful interventions have tended to exhibit the following characteristics: they tailor provision to meet individuals' needs (e.g. Riley *et al.*, 2013; Whelan, 2018); they treat the individuals' barriers to employment holistically (Dewson *et al.*, 2007); they address motivation and aspiration as well as more tangible barriers to work (Green and Hasluck, 2009); they facilitate good, positive relationships to develop between key workers and their participants (Riley *et al.* 2013); and they have good local knowledge and networks, use this and partnership working to better reach and support participants (Green and Hasluck, 2009; Dudley *et al.*, 2016).

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<sup>10</sup> For a description of how the WiLL programme adapted to Covid-19, please see *Work.Live.Leicestershire: Covid Report Autumn 2020*.



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## 10 Appendix - Text of questions and responses for Star, ONS and Swemwbs

This section shows the questions and response scores used for each of the instruments used within the programme.

Response scores are reversed when low numbers on the original scale are associated with better outcomes.

### 10.1 Star question set

Number	Question	Range	Reversed
1	Aspiration and motivation	1-10	No
2	Basic skills	1-10	No
3	Health and well-being	1-10	No
4	Job skills and experience	1-10	No
5	Job-search skills	1-10	No
6	Stability	1-10	No
7	Workplace and social skills	1-10	No

### 10.2 Star response scores

Stage	Level/score
Stuck	1
Stuck	2
Accepting Help	3
Accepting Help	4
Believing And Trying	5
Believing And Trying	6
Learning	7
Learning	8
Self-reliance	9
Self-reliance	10

### 10.3 SWEMWBS question set

Number	Question	Range	Reversed
1	I've been feeling optimistic about the future	1-5	No
2	I've been feeling useful	1-5	No
3	I've been feeling relaxed	1-5	No
4	I've been dealing with problems well	1-5	No
5	I've been thinking clearly	1-5	No
6	I've been feeling close to other people	1-5	No
7	I've been able to make up my own mind about things	1-5	No

#### 10.4 SWEMWBS response scores

Response	Score
None of the time	1
Rarely	2
Some of the time	3
Often	4
All of the time	5

#### 10.5 ONS question set – three questions

Number	Question	Range	Reversed
1	How often do you feel that you lack companionship?	1-3	Yes
2	How often do you feel left out?	1-3	Yes
3	How often do you feel isolated from others?	1-3	Yes

#### 10.6 ONS question set – three questions – response scores

Response	Score
Hardly Ever Or Never	1
Some Of The Time	2
Often	3

#### 10.7 ONS single question

Number	Question	Range	Reversed
1	How often do you feel lonely?	1-5	No

#### 10.8 ONS single question – response scores

Response	Score
Often/ Always	1
Some Of The Time	2
Occasionally	3
Hardly Ever	4
Never	5

## 11 Appendix - Derived fields

Some fields used in the analyses are derived from others, these are described below.

### **Risk factor**

This is an indicator set to 'Yes' when a client has one or more of the following fields set to 'Yes':

- Offender or ex-offender
- Jobless household
- Jobless household with dependent children
- Homeless or affected by housing exclusion
- Single adult household with dependent children

### **Education upper/lower**

This is a reduction of the education levels to two categories as follows:

The 'lower' level for those with education marked as:

- No formal
- Primary
- Lower secondary

The 'upper' level for those with education marked as:

- Upper secondary
- Post-secondary
- Tertiary

## 12 Appendix - Model used for Star progress

The model for the Star mean score – as participants progressed through the programme - considered the following influences on the mean Star score at each session:

- The log of the Star session number
- The participant age
- Gender
- Education upper/lower category
- Whether the participant was a carer
- The 'risk factor'
- Presence of a disability or health condition
- Baseline score for Swemwbs measure
- Baseline score for ONS (single question) measure
- Baseline score for ONS (three question) measure
- COVID-19 / pre-COVID-19 factor

Modelling 'user name' (which was a record of the name for the keyworker for the participant) as a random effect takes account of score variations that may be due to differences in the way keyworkers assign scores at each stage to participants.

After a 'stepwise' elimination, the main effects on the mean score are seen to be the items below, taken from the R modelling output:

	Value	Std. Er	DF	t-value	p-value
(Intercept)	3.61	0.32	720	11.31	0.00
log(qset.k)	0.88	0.11	720	8.02	0.00
gender is Male	0.17	0.10	720	1.79	0.07
education is upper	0.84	0.12	720	7.13	0.00
has risk.factor	-0.24	0.10	720	-2.46	0.01
has disab.or.hc	-0.32	0.10	720	-3.04	0.00
swem.score.mean	0.49	0.08	720	6.17	0.00
ons3q.score.mean	0.17	0.10	720	1.72	0.08
ons1q.score.mean	0.09	0.05	720	1.70	0.09
Pre-COVID period	0.28	0.12	720	2.36	0.02

(figures rounded as shown)

From this we see that the largest (absolute) effect sizes come from the 'qset.k' parameter which is the Star session number and the level of education. Referring to the p-value for each of these items we have  $p < 0.01$ , giving strong evidence of the association.

The model had adjusted (pseudo)  $R^2$  of 27.7% and so accounted for over 20% of the variance. (n=752)

The basic linear model (without random effects) gives:

**F-statistic: 32.76 on 9 and 742 DF, p-value: < 2.2e-16**



## 13 Appendix - Model used for Star rate of change

The model for the rate of change in Star scores – showing if there are any influences on progressing at a slower or faster rate – considered the following candidate variables:

- The log of the Star session
- Age
- Gender
- Level of education
- Months unemployed
- Carer
- Risk factor
- Disability or health condition
- Swemwbs baseline score
- ONS (three-question) baseline score
- ONS (single question) baseline score
- COVID-19 period

Modelling 'user name' (which was a record of the name for the keyworker for the participant) as a random effect takes account of score variations that may be due to differences in the way keyworkers assign scores at each stage to participants.

After a 'stepwise' elimination, the main effects on the mean score are seen to be the items below, taken from the R modelling output:

	Value	Std.Error	DF	t-value	p-value
(Intercept)	0.32	0.11	77	3.00	0.00
covid.periodPre-Covid	0.56	0.15	68	3.72	0.00

(figures rounded as shown)

From this output we see the influence of the COVID-19 period on the extent to which participant scores change, from one mean Star score to the next.

Overall adjusted (pseudo)  $R^2$  is 8.7%, hence the model accounts for less than 10% of the total variance. (n=147)

The basic linear model (without random effects) gives:

**F-statistic: 13.86 on 1 and 145 DF, p-value: 0.00**

## 14 Appendix - Model used for exit status

This is a logistic regression (where the outcome is the binary - exit with or without an outcome), considering the influences on participants exiting to an outcome of employment as opposed to any exit without an outcome.

Exits without an outcome, are any of:

- Exit to unemployment
- Exit to 'inactive'
- Exit as 'disengaged'

Exits with an outcome, are any of:

- Exit to employment
- Exit to training
- Exit to job search

The candidate explanatory variables were:

- Months unemployed greater than 12
- Age
- Gender
- Whether the participant was a carer
- The 'risk factor'
- Disability or health condition
- Education
- Star score on exit
- Star baseline score
- Swemwbs baseline score
- ONS (three question) baseline score
- ONS (single question) baseline score

Using a 'stepwise' regression resulted in the following model:

	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	Pr(> z )
(Intercept)	-3.29	0.89	-3.706	0.00
months.unemployed > threshold	-0.64	0.34	-1.913	0.06
star.score.mean.on.exit	1.08	0.20	5.495	0.00
star.baseline.mean	-0.61	0.19	-3.287	0.00
ons1q.baseline.mean	-0.26	0.16	-1.671	0.09

Number of cases: 275

(Parameter estimates are log-odds for the given variate)

Model deviance given as:

```
## Null deviance: 373.16 on 274 degrees of freedom
## Residual deviance: 320.94 on 270 degrees of freedom
```

Examining the predicted against actual outcomes gives an accuracy of 75% for this model.