



Building Better Opportunities: Working Progress – Final Report

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Introduction

This evaluation has been produced by the Institute for Social Innovation and Impact (ISII) to investigate the impact of BBO Working Progress, a programme that aims to help unemployed and economically inactive adults across Northamptonshire gain training, education, volunteering opportunities, and employment.

Northamptonshire has a mixture of rural and urban areas, with several issues that need attention, including:



Support for an ageing population

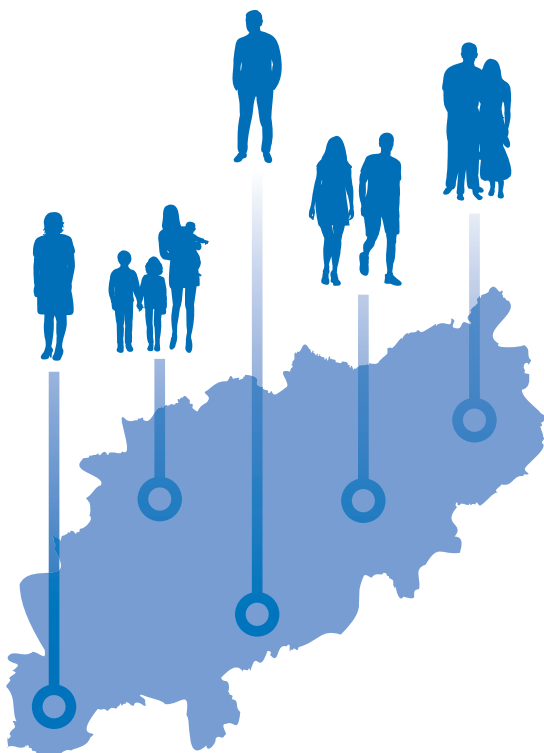


Poverty



Health and well-being

Paterson-Young, C., Hazenberg, R., Brylka, A. 2017. Hidden Needs: A Report to Northamptonshire Community Foundation on the needs and deprivation in Northamptonshire. Institute for Social Innovation and Impact, University of Northampton. <http://www.ncf.uk.com/about-us/hiddenneeds> (last accessed 16/06/2020)



Unemployment, especially long-term unemployment, significantly impacts on an individual's life.

This report presents the results from the Phase 2 research evaluating BBO Working Progress programme between August 2019 (the beginning of the evaluation) and January 2023 (the end of the evaluation).

Phase 1 of the evaluation was carried out between August 2016 and July 2019. BBO Working Progress aims to help unemployed and economically inactive adults across Northamptonshire gain training, education, volunteering opportunities, and employment.

Summary

Overall, the BBO Working Progress reduced social isolation and increased participants skills and ability to apply for employment opportunities.

Overall, BBO Working Progress programme produced positive outcomes for the programme participants, enabling them:



To live a better life

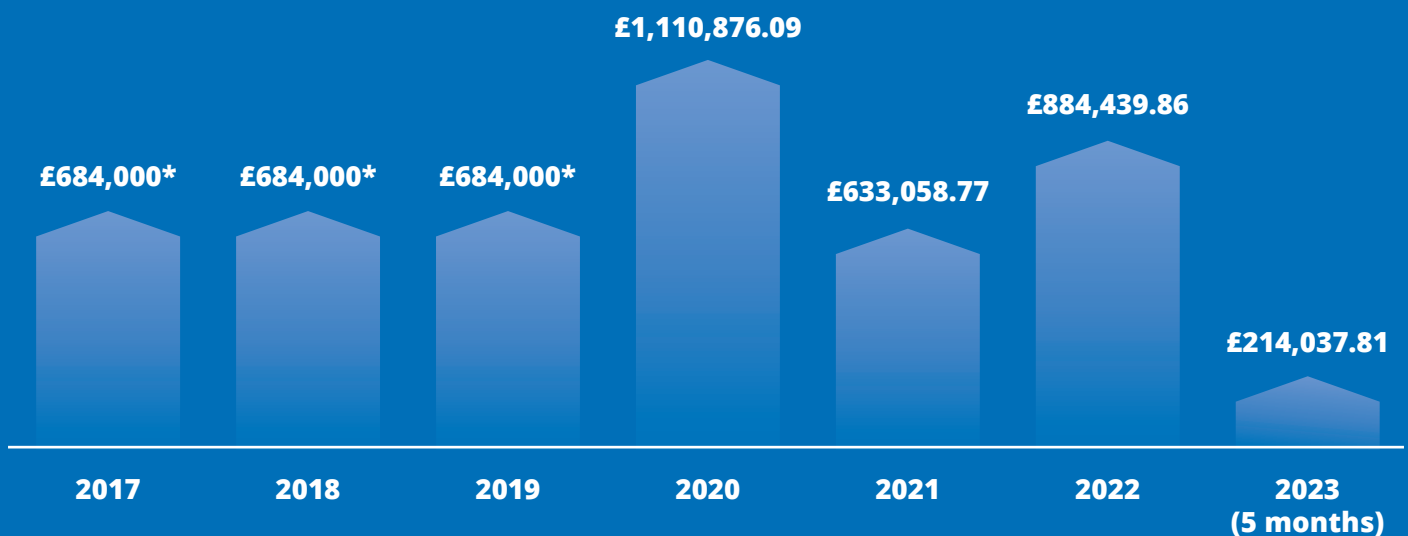


With increased self-
efficacy and well-being



Reduced social isolation

The Social Impact for BBO Working Progress has been calculated since 2019. The graph below shows the Social Impact through time.



*The figure was calculated over three years (2016-2019), the average is just an approximation to comply with the structure of the graph.

Value

Below are summarised the benefits of the programme and the opportunities for improvement captured through the evaluation:

Benefits



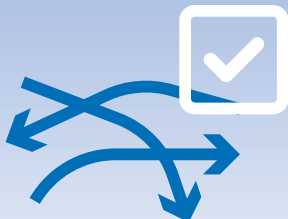
Improved Wellbeing



Stronger relationships



Improved Confidence

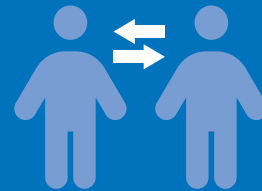


Flexible and Holistic Support

Opportunity for Improvement



Reduced Administrative Burden



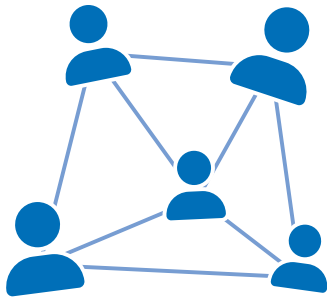
Partnership Working



Additional Resources

Outcomes

Both the interviews and questionnaires illustrated the value of BBO Working Progress programme in promoting well-being and self-efficacy. Specifically, the outcomes of the programme are:



Strong relationships

Strong relationships between delivery partners and programme participants were evident throughout the evaluation, which enabled programme participants to access support during the Covid-19 pandemic. These relationships were key in empowering programme participants and reducing social isolation.

Increased health and well-being

Support and positive relationships, which enable programme participants to feel empowered, led to increased well-being. The provision of well-being workshops, check-in sessions and flexible support during the Covid-19 pandemic was essential for programme delivery. This level of support endured after the Covid-19 pandemic to ensure programme participants were supported with post-pandemic challenges (i.e., cost of living crisis and limited employment opportunities).



Increased confidence and self-efficacy



Self-efficacy improves programme participants confidence and motivation which increases the chance of finding employment. The provisions of virtual support in C.V. writing, job search and interview skills were offered to programme participants throughout the Covid-19 pandemic to improve job readiness.

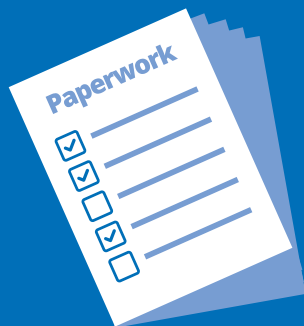
Increased abilities in job searching and general employability skills

Improved digital and technology skills, English language skills, knowledge of creating a curriculum vitae, and interview management increased programme participants employability.



Opportunities for improvement

Conversely, programme participants and delivery partners identified some opportunities for improvement:

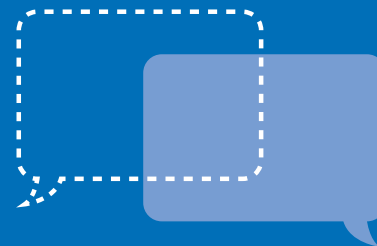


Paperwork

The paperwork required for BBO Working Progress was one of the main barriers to efficiency, with delivery partners commenting on the impact of the paperwork process on service delivery and workloads. This was a barrier identified by delivery partners throughout Phase One and Phase Two of BBO Working Progress.

Communication

Communication is essential in multi-partnership working, with delivery partners acknowledging the challenges in identifying those already participating in BBO Working Progress programme through other delivery partners.



Additional Resources



Opportunities for increasing courses, volunteering experiences and placements was mentioned by programme participants. Delivery partners introduced creative techniques for programme delivery during the pandemic which may have been useful to further develop post-pandemic to allow participants to access resources virtually (if required) and ensure resources are available once BBO Working Progress ends – promoting sustainability.

Impact(s) on the participants

Several aspects of the programme participants everyday life were impacted by BBO Working progress. Alongside boosting employment skills, the programme had a positive impact on individuals' strengths, housing conditions, and sense of community:

“ I’m able to go out on my own now. Everything’s changed, I’ve got food on the table; I’m able to manage my finances now. My whole life’s changed. And I’ve had support. ”

“ I used to think that a woman’s place is just in the home, in the kitchen, cooking, cleaning. I feel more confident now by coming here; it’s made me more independent and I’m able to do things by myself. ”

“ [Talking about the biggest change] It’s helped me go out and look for a job and actually get a job. I’m actually working, even if it’s part time I’m actually working and not just sitting at home doing nothing. ”

“ It’s helped me to - for instance, I’ve put a curriculum vitae together now that I’m happy with. I’m happy that when I apply for jobs, I can look at that and try to amend it myself so it’s suitable for the job that I’m applying for. So, it’s just given me that confidence that I can do that. ”

“ He’s picked up a lot of training that he wouldn’t have got. The environment that they teach at the [delivery organisation] that I’ve seen first-hand is it’s a very caring environment, they really look after the participants. ”

“ So they’ve gone along and done ESOL classes which have obviously improved their opportunities for learning the language and being able to go on and perhaps find work. Or we’ve had some ladies that have been quite lonely and then they’ve attended and they’ve made friendships through that, which then helps with their confidence and their self-esteem. ”

The data

The data collection for Phase 1 of the evaluation included:

- 337 questionnaires completed by programme participants
- Qualitative data consisted of 52 semi-structured interviews with participants and delivery partners

The data collection for Phase 2 of the evaluation included:

- 568 questionnaires collecting information on the psychological benefits, in particular self-efficacy and well-being, and employment benefits of the programme were completed by programme participants.
- 47 questionnaires completed by programme participants, delivery partners and other organisations on the consequences of Covid-19 on BBO Working Progress.
- Qualitative data consisted of 67 semi-structured interviews with participants, delivery partners, and external stakeholders focused on the needs of programme participants and the programme performance.



To capture the participants' changes overtime, the questionnaire respondents completed the questionnaires twice in the first phase (at the beginning and at the end of the participation in the BBO) and three times in the second phase (at the beginning, half way, and at the end of the participation in the BBO). Several areas were investigated (self-efficacy, life skills, work readiness, employability, and mental health and well-being), the two graphs below illustrate the changes over time for the scales applied in both phases. Notably, the data showed there were improvements in self-efficacy and employability showcasing the positive impact of the support they received.

Key: Phase 1 Phase 2

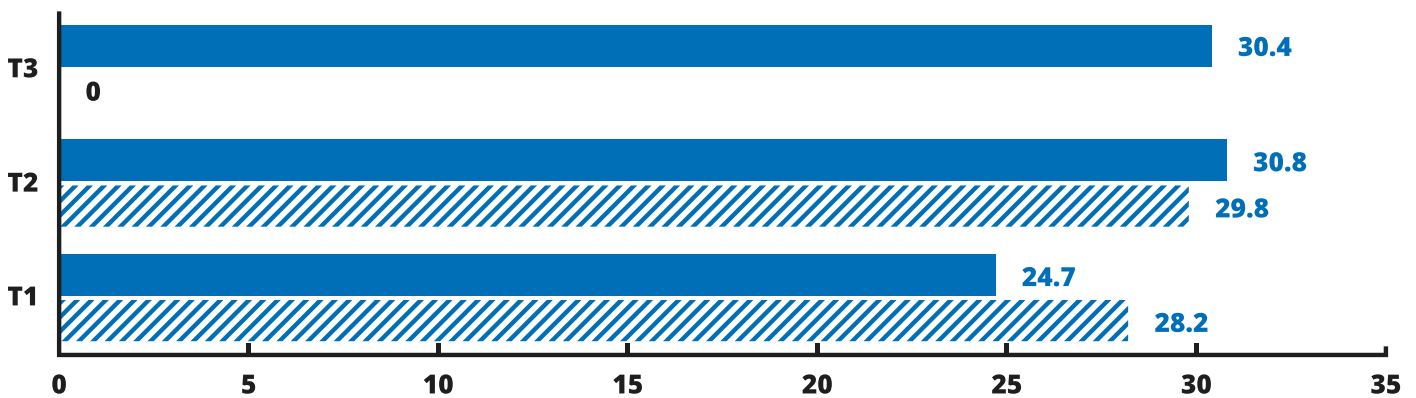


Figure 1: Self-efficacy

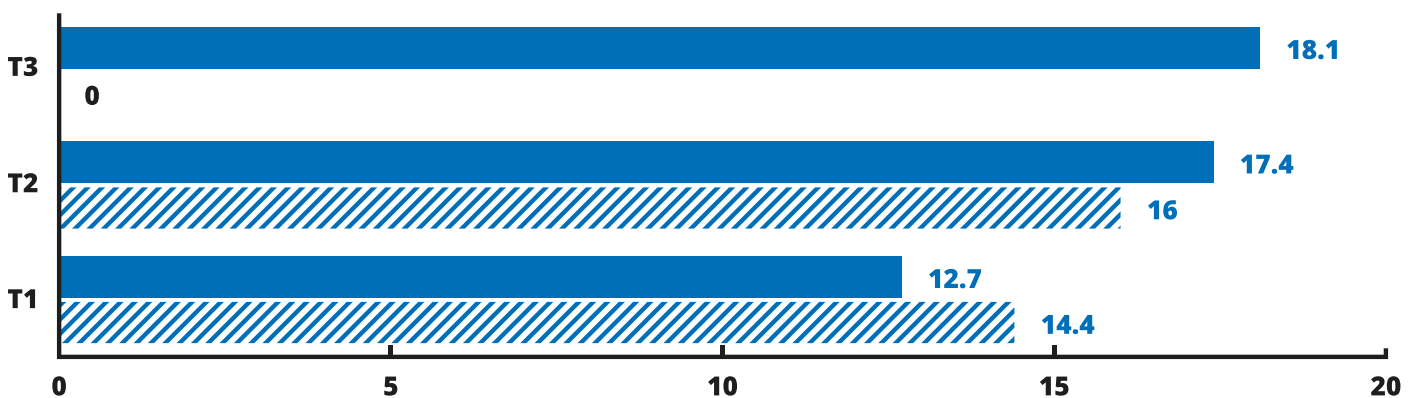


Figure 2: Employment

Recommendations

Overall, BBO Working Progress programme was viewed positively with some areas for improvement. Increase pressure was on delivery partners to resume normal service delivery post-pandemic; however, adopting a quasi-normal approach that combined the creative techniques introduced during the Covid-19 pandemic may have proven beneficial. The research team proposes the following three key recommendations for future iterations of BBO Working Progress:

1

Reduce Bureaucracy

There is a significant amount of paperwork for the delivery partners, mentioned in previous phases of BBO Working Progress evaluation. The paperwork requested by the funder including the necessary authorisations for claims, had an impact on the programme performances, especially at the beginning. Reducing this paperwork and/or introducing other methods of completing paperwork would enable staff to focus more on the needs of the programme participants. This could include a streamlined online claim process which allows delivery partners to request and receive funds immediately and the reduction in hardcopies of paperwork.

2

Increase development opportunities

Additional courses, volunteering experiences, and placements would help boost individual skills and the individuals' confidence and self-efficacy. Moreover, this would improve the chances for the programme participants to look for employment. Introducing opportunities across partners (i.e., collaborative opportunities) could improve access for programme participants.

3

Workshops and/or networking opportunities

Increasing opportunities for collaboration by introducing workshops with local employers (virtual and/or in-person workshops) would enable programme participants to network with employers. The program was effective in supporting participants in developing important skills such as IT proficiency and C.V. writing, which are crucial for finding employment. However, as these are emerging skills and the participants' confidence levels are still developing, it may be beneficial to supplement the program with face-to-face workshops and networking experiences. These activities could help participants develop additional skills and become more comfortable with the face-to-face interactions that are typically

4

Data collection and management

Improving data collection and management would allow BBO Working Progress partners to identify the social impact of support. For example, volunteering has a beneficial impact on health outcomes, with research evidencing the effects of volunteering on mental and physical health (McDougle et al., 2014; Piliavin and Siegel, 2007), life satisfaction (Thoits and Hewitt, 2001), self-esteem (Morrow-Howell et al., 2003) and functional ability (Greenfield et al., 2004). Capturing accurate information on volunteering (i.e., number of staff volunteering based on allocated volunteering hours) would enable BBO Working Progress to demonstrate value within volunteering.

