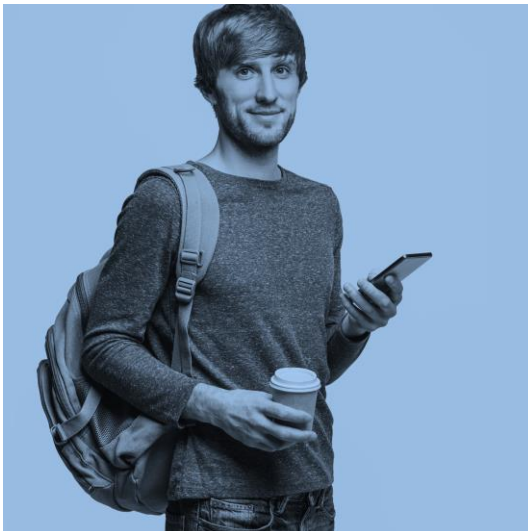
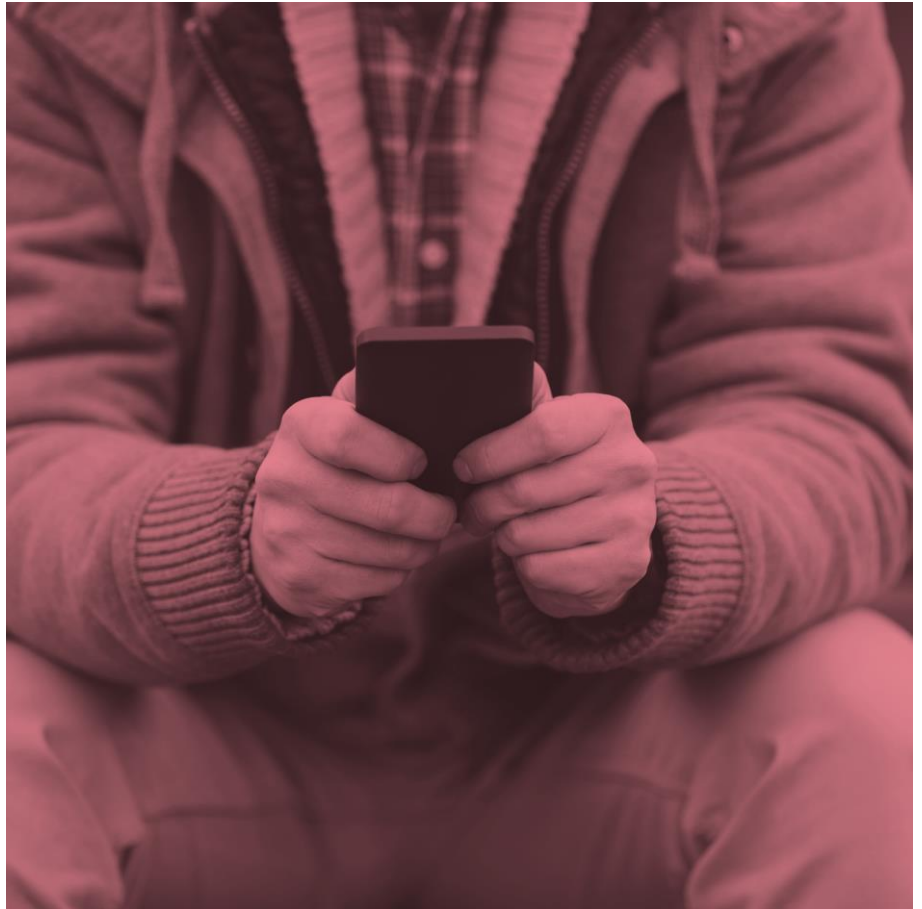


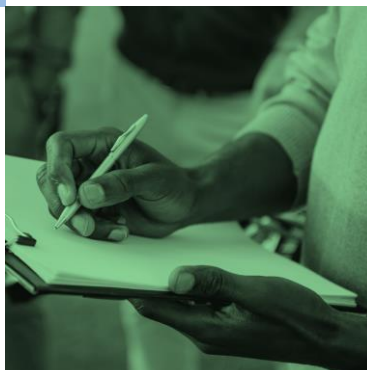
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Step Forward Tees Valley: Final Evaluation Report

June 2023



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Contents

1	About This Report	4
2	SFTV Programme and Context	5
3	SFTV Delivery Model	9
4	Outputs and Outcomes	12
5	Participant Views of Delivery	15
6	Employer Engagement, Placements and Volunteering	19
7	Mental Health across Tees Valley	24
8	Economic and Social Impact	34
9	Cross-Cutting Themes	46
10	Key Findings	47

1 About This Report

- 1.1 In August 2021, ERS was commissioned by the Humankind Charity to evaluate the Step Forward Tees Valley (SFTV) Programme. It formed part of the national Building Better Opportunities (BBO) programme, jointly funded by The European Social Fund (ESF) and the National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF), and via the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TCVA).
- 1.2 This is the final evaluation report covering the main aspects of delivery, the impact the programme has generated and recommendations for future delivery of participant-centred employment and skills support. It includes a comprehensive assessment of the approach adopted to addressing mental health issues and outlines priorities for support to continue to meet those needs. It also covers SFTV's approach to employer engagement, work placements and volunteering, identifying what works and how future support for the BBO-type cohort should be configured.
- 1.3 This report has been informed by a desk-based review of project documentation and data supplied by Humankind Charity as lead partner, complemented by interviews with key individuals and small groups of programme management, delivery partners and frontline staff. Across the duration of the evaluation, we have gathered primary data from 120 individual participants via face to face and telephone interviews. We have interviewed many of the same participants on multiple occasions, during their time on the programme and again once they have exited the programme. Such insights have been valuable in distilling the programme's real and sustained impact, helping to understand what works (and what doesn't) and priorities for services post-BBO.
- 1.4 Overview of the structure of this report:

- Section 2 provides an introduction to SFTV, covering the programme's context, management and governance and fit within the wider strategy and landscape of employment support across Tees Valley.
- Section 3 details the delivery model, identifying the different strands of delivery providing a participant-centred approach to support.
- Section 4, drawn from the analysis of programme data, summarises progress in relation to output, results and outcome targets.
- Section 5 includes key findings from participant interviews across the duration of programme delivery.
- Section 6 examines the approach to and impact of SFTV's employer engagement, work placements and volunteering.
- Section 7 discusses the scale of mental health issues, the programme's response over time and potential future needs.
- Section 8 summarises the economic and social impact generated by the SFTV programme.
- Section 9 identifies cross-cutting themes, including environmental sustainability, diversity and gender equality.
- Section 10 summarises key findings and recommendations.

2 SFTV Programme and Context

Context of Delivery

- 2.1 The overall objective of SFTV is to support people with multiple and complex barriers to move closer to employment or training. Support was to be delivered by bringing local organisations together to provide a joined-up approach, optimising the strengths of individual partners.
- 2.2 At a strategic level this aspiration persisted, to create more opportunities and achieve greater consistency across the whole programme, operational staff and partners, by working together and sharing best practice – and there are some really good examples.
- 2.3 At the outset of SFTV a mapping exercise was commissioned to fully understand the competing and complementary services across Tees Valley. This highlighted opportunities for SFTV to address gaps and add value.
- 2.4 SFTV aimed to engage the hardest to reach, supporting people with multiple and complex barriers to move closer to employment or training. The voluntary programme was to provide help to address multiple barriers, including digital exclusion, the lack of financial skills, mental health and well-being, and social isolation. There was a clear emphasis at the outset that the support was to be person-centred, and that support would not be removed once a participant had been supported for 12 months. SFTV recognised that for some people, the journey would take longer.
- 2.5 Delivery commenced in October 2016 and continued until March 2023. Across the delivery period a number of extensions were provided.

Programme Delivery Partners

- 2.6 When SFTV commenced in 2016 there were 28 delivery partners. Over time, the offer became more targeted, leading to a rationalisation of partners. Once the programme had become established and brand awareness was established there was limited benefit in retaining several partners that had a role in generating referrals. It was also evident that in some localities the Navigators were well placed (and trusted by participants) to deliver support directly e.g. digital skills, meaning that the need for specialist provision was discontinued from the mid-point of delivery.
- 2.7 While it is not unusual on BBO programmes for partner numbers to reduce over time it did adversely impact on the SFTV offer for periods of time, especially in relation to mental health support and the training offer in some localities. The main reason given by partners for disengaging from the programme was the level of administration and bureaucracy required to take part, considered to require too much time and resource away from frontline delivery.

2.8 In the final year of its operation, SFTV has been delivered by 12 partners: Humankind and Groundwork teams operated locality-based Navigator teams; health support coming from Let's Connect and the Pioneering Care Partnership; training and skills via WM Morrisons Trust, and Changing Lives; financial advice was provided by Citizens Advice throughout; employer engagement by Humankind and Changing Lives; and volunteering opportunities by Changing Lives, Middlesbrough Voluntary Development Agency (MVDA) and Redcar & Cleveland Voluntary Development Agency (RCVDA).

Management and Governance

- 2.9 There has been a strong commitment throughout to the person-centred nature of SFTV, from both management and operational staff. The approach to managing delivery partners and the focus on achieving targets evolved across the programme and the overall consensus is that the programme has been well managed by Humankind.
- 2.10 Staff conferences have helped to establish shared understanding of roles and priorities for delivery, fostering a culture of openness and transparency, around both management and delivery perspectives.
- 2.11 The management approach since 2021 enabled a strong network of partners delivering wider, complementary support that enabled Navigators to identify appropriate services and build sustainability for the longer term, in line with SFTV's original vision and intentions.
- 2.12 The programme was successful at the ESRA Awards in November 2022¹

“SFTV has impacted the lives of more than 4,240 people; 370 unemployed participants have gained employment and 627 people who were previously economically inactive moved into searching for work, while 709 participants progressed into training/education. Some 2,410 are stated to have made positive changes to their lives, 2,218 developed financial/digital skills, and 2,188 are considered work ready. The programme has also helped 421 people overcome substance and alcohol misuse and has helped 2,274 people with mental health barriers and to reduce the risk of re-offending and homelessness”

- 2.13 Previous interim evaluation reports have included considerable real time learning; SFTV has been receptive and responded positively to the recommendations suggested throughout, ensuring programme activity remains efficient and effective in delivering for participants.



¹ <https://ersa.org.uk/news/ersaawards22-hardest-hit-shortlist/>

Impact of Covid-19

- 2.14 The Covid-19 pandemic impacted the labour market across the Tees Valley. The programme has faced challenges in providing support through several lockdown periods, although half of the participants we interviewed stated that the quality of the support they received from SFTV during the pandemic was not affected adversely in any way. Humankind continued to offer face to face delivery, within the parameters of national lockdown rules, and Citizens Advice remained open throughout the pandemic. Other key deliver partners, such as Groundwork and Changing Lives, continued to focus on virtual delivery for a longer period of time before restarting face to face engagement.
- 2.15 Navigators worked hard to stay in touch with participants during lockdowns, reducing isolation and supporting mental health. Receiving support virtually was challenging for some, especially those with mental and physical health conditions that make it hard to accept help via Zoom and/or phone calls.
- 2.16 Digital exclusion was an issue for some participants and the SFTV team sought to address this by arranging laptops, access to data packages or delivering support by phone. Participants also referenced the impact of the pandemic on their job search activities, mentioning several factors including:
- Negative impacts on mental health and confidence affecting ability to make contact and leave homes to search for work.
 - Reduced access to transport made job hunting more difficult.
 - Sectors with entry level jobs were particularly hard hit by the pandemic, with fewer jobs available as a result (e.g., hospitality).
 - Employers ceasing operations during the pandemic and therefore terminating employment contracts.
- 2.17 Finding placements and/or volunteering opportunities to provide experience was also a challenge during the pandemic. The reduction in the range of jobs available during lockdown periods meant that many participants who were keen to take up a voluntary role or work placement were put on hold, stalling their progress and losing momentum.
- 2.18 The Programme Management Team was committed to ensuring that participants took an active role in the development of the programme, co-designing their own pathways and providing an opportunity to connect the involvement and evaluation aspects.
- 2.19 Across the duration of the programme, six Ambassadors were employed to support programme delivery. The Ambassador approach generated significant added value by supporting marketing activity, engaging with possible participants at events, assisting Navigators and wider delivery staff with direct delivery at job clubs, etc. and adding value to the evaluation process by engaging with participants. They were strong advocates for the programme and their involvement at public-facing events encouraged people to engage.

- 2.20 The Ambassador approach has benefitted those participants who secured the roles. They developed new skills and confidence, and a number progressed into new jobs once their Ambassador contract ceased. Given the added value generated, we would recommend that future employment and skill programmes explore the options of resourcing an Ambassador-type approach.

Referrals

- 2.21 The SFTV Programme has benefitted from a relatively consistent pipeline of potential participants seeking support, despite the pandemic-related issues already covered. The approach to marketing and publicity was a strength. A coordinated programme-wide approach to publicity via a single SFTV account across social media platforms enabled consistency of messaging, aligned to the overall strategy.
- 2.22 Success in engaging was also driven by effective referral networks. This often involved reaching into communities and establishing links to community centres and wider partnerships, such as Roseworth Big Local Project in Stockton. Whilst the flow of referrals via Jobcentre Plus has varied across years and across localities, it continued to be a valuable source of referrals. Access to potential participants was hindered during the pandemic and, in some areas, proved difficult to reinstate when restrictions were lifted.
- 2.23 Most delivery partners offered other services within their own organisations, drawing people in and thereby identify further individuals who could benefit from SFTV support. For existing programme participants, SFTV's relationships with its delivery partners helped to fast track them into these complementary in-house services, providing holistic, wraparound support.
- 2.24 Referrals slowed during the pandemic and those joining the programme in the 18 months from April 2020 onwards generally had fewer barriers than participants in previous years. Many of those joining in the 12 months after April 2020 were closer to the labour market, often having been made redundant recently, due to the impact of Covid-19 on their employers' businesses. At the same time, the engagement of more vulnerable participants stalled, due to increased levels of anxiety, proportions in the 'Extremely clinically vulnerable group', plus a lack of capability and/or willingness to engage remotely. However, in the final 18 months of programme delivery there has been a noticeable increase in the number of participants joining with more significant, ingrained barriers, often exacerbated by their experiences of the pandemic.
- 2.25 Referrals also came from other partners, including the Probation Service and increasingly from social prescribers. Once the programme ceased to accept further referrals in late-2022, the impact of non-continuation was recognised by many referral partners that have since cited a lack of alternative, quality, participant-focussed employability services across the Tees Valley.

3 SFTV Delivery Model

Introduction

- 3.1 The progress made by participants is influenced by the scale and scope of Navigator provision alongside the availability and quality of wider specialist support services, commissioned and funded as part of the SFTV delivery model. This section highlights the individual elements funded and contribution made to the overall impact achieved.

Navigators

- 3.2 The Navigator model operating across the five localities (Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland, Stockton) worked well. A single point of contact throughout the participant journey built trust and generated understanding of the potential for support and next steps.
- 3.3 Navigators took pride in listening to participants and ensuring a tailored, individualised response. They knew what worked, in terms of engaging, supporting and ultimately getting people who are most distant from the labour market into work, education or training. Navigator teams knew their local communities, local partners, employers and other providers well. It is unfortunate that this knowledge and learning will be lost, due to the gap in time between the cessation of the BBO programme and any future employability support activity coordinated across the Tees Valley.
- 3.4 Navigator Leads continued to evolve their processes across the duration of the programme to better understand and respond to the needs of participants. In Darlington, Navigators worked creatively to nurture and develop groups with, for example, walks and talks, table tennis and metal detector sessions. Stockton Navigators worked with a cohort of Asian women, recruiting them at an all-women's gym and offering creative opportunities to train and develop financial skills. There was a clear recognition of the need to build confidence of participants.



- 3.5 We also observed positive examples of how co-locating services generated added value, developing relationships across staff teams and organisations, leading to improvements in delivery, e.g., where Middlesbrough Navigators shared office space with Mental Health Concern. Limitations on the physical space available in some offices restricted opportunities for permanent co-location. It is recommended in future BBO-type interventions that opportunities for co-location are considered at the design stage.

Employer Engagement, Work Placements and Volunteering

- 3.6 Changing Lives provided the employer engagement for the programme and managed the work placement function. Staff turnover within Changing Lives across the duration of programme delivery, involving an inevitable loss of valuable experience, impacted upon the consistency of this element of the SFTV offer at certain times.
- 3.7 Volunteering can be a valuable step for participants to gain confidence and move closer to paid employment, education or training. At the outset of delivery, volunteering support was managed by several different organisations, including Changing Lives, Hartlepool Volunteer Centre (HVDA), MVDA and RCVDA.
- 3.8 Inevitably, the volunteering element of the programme was limited during the pandemic; host organisations could not provide opportunities and participants were increasingly reluctant to engage. Nevertheless, SFTV staff continued to provide support, sending out activity packs, offering online craft sessions and keeping in touch with participants by phone. Section 6 of this report provides more detail on delivery across these strands of programme activity.

Health Support

- 3.9 The Health Link Worker role provided additional capacity to support participants with health issues, predominantly their mental health. Navigators regarded access to a fast track to mental health support as critical for participants.
- 3.10 The Pioneering Care Partnership (PCP) delivered short courses to small groups, helping participants to support each other, make life changes and improve their wellbeing, promoting confidence and self-esteem, and helping to develop emotional resilience and time management skills. This regular and careful communication between a joined-up network of participant support was considered helpful and to have enabled some significant breakthroughs for participants.
- 3.11 Given the incidence and severity of mental health issues which prevails, amongst programme participants and on a continuing and growing basis amongst communities post-BBO, Section 7 of the report covers this in greater depth.



Financial Inclusion

- 3.12 Programme resource was allocated to fund external financial and money management advice in each locality through the Citizens Advice network. The level of resource attached to this is regarded as appropriate, given the scale of referrals from Navigators and the support from Citizens Advice was regarded extremely positively by Navigators.
- 3.13 Data is held separately by each Citizens Advice, but in Stockton alone the support provided has led to over £1.5m of participant debt being written off and some £50,000 of additional benefits gained from recalculations and appeal support. Section 7 of the report includes further analysis of the link between financial inclusion and mental health.

Training

- 3.14 Resourcing training was critical to the success of the SFTV Programme. It enabled group sessions to be arranged, alongside bespoke training in response to participant action plans. Programme data shows that most participants have completed some training and that 901 of participants moved into education or training on leaving the programme. The confidence gained from their reintroduction to learning and taking part offers considerable value to participants, alongside the actual content of the training.
- 3.15 The service provided in Darlington by WM Morrison Trust was especially well regarded. During lockdowns they trialled new approaches to support and maintain participant contact, including Zoom sessions and short online courses to be completed in participants' own time. This high quality of service was not replicated in all localities in the early stages of programme delivery.
- 3.16 There was definite appetite in the latter stages of programme delivery to provide further accredited training. We recommend that this receives serious consideration when scoping future programmes of employability support activity.



4 Outputs and Outcomes

Programme Participants

- 4.1 Table 4.1 below summarises the final position in relation to participant barriers. Almost half (49 per cent) of participants joined the programme with four or more separate barriers. This indicates the challenging natures of the SFTV cohort, setting the context for the progress made in relation to outputs, outcomes and results.

	No. Participants	% of Participants
Mental-ill Health	3,653	82%
Financial Inclusion	2,564	58%
Digital Inclusion	2,251	51%
Substance/Alcohol Misuse	702	16%
Homelessness	596	13%
Offending/Re-offending	474	11%
Domestic Abuse	319	7%
Disability	708	16%
Long Term Health Issues	1,712	38%
Isolation	2,501	56%
Lacks Basic Skills	893	20%

Measuring Progress

- 4.2 At the outset of the programme in 2017, targets were not attributed to individual delivery partners, but across the programme as a whole. The process was formalised to provide individual targets in 2018 and from late 2019, programme management emphasised and reinforced the requirement to prioritise targets. Whilst the achievement of contracted output, outcome and result targets is important, there has always been an appreciation that success for many participants can't be achieved or assessed by such measures.
- 4.3 The SFTV Programme has achieved the majority of its targets; this is impressive, particularly in light of the challenge presented by the pandemic and the emergence of other programmes, including Routes to Work and Restart, which sought to support a similar cohort.
- 4.4 There has been some underachievement in relation to the number of economically inactive participants supported, numbers of women and of people from ethnic minorities. The pandemic had a clear adverse impact on achievement for these cohorts.

Headline Output Data

4.5 Table 4.2 provides outlines the progress made in achieving contracted output targets.

	Lifetime Target	Lifetime Actual	Performance vs Target
No. of participants	4,421	4,448	100.6%
No. of men	2,211	2,260	102.3%
No. of women	2,210	2,182	98.7%
No. unemployed	2,210	2,532	114.6%
No. economically inactive	2,211	1,916	86.7%
No. aged over 50	1,161	1,169	100.7%
No. with disabilities	2,552	2,617	102.5%
No. from ethnic minorities	473	382	80.8%

Programme Results

4.6 Table 4.3 provides outlines the progress made in achieving contracted result targets.

	Lifetime Target	Lifetime Actual	Performance vs Target
No. moving into education or training on leaving	574	901	157.0%
No. unemployed moving into employment on leaving	445	451	101.1%
No. economically inactive moving into employment or job search	698	930	133.2%

4.7 The programme has overachieved in relation to the number of participants moving into education or training on leaving; the number of unemployed people moving into employment on leaving; and the number of unemployed moving into employment on leaving the number of economically inactive moving into employment or job search.

4.8 Progress in the final 18 months of delivery was impressive, driven by effective guidance by the Programme Management Team and management by individual delivery partners. It is also worth referencing that our interviews with participants who had already exited the programme identified that many had progressed into work, despite not leaving the programme to directly enter employment. The majority were positive about the added value provided by SFTV in helping them achieve this.

Programme Outcomes

- 4.9 At the outset of delivery, the SFTV Programme was tasked with delivering four outcomes, measured via several indicators. Progress is summarised in Tables 4.4 and 4.5.

Table 4.4: Progress against Programme Outcomes 1-3			
	Lifetime Target	Lifetime Actual	Performance vs Target
Outcome 1: Participants with 2+ complex needs will make a positive change	2,885	3,087	107.0%
Outcome 2: Participants will improve their ability to access and benefit from work-related services by developing financial and digital skills	2,529	2,708	107.1%
Outcome 3 - Participants will improve their job readiness and progress closer to the labour	2,622	2,814	107.3%

- 4.10 The programme overachieved in regard to Outcomes 1, 2 and 3. Targets in relation to participants with 2+ complex needs making a positive change; participants with improved ability to access and benefit from work-related services by developing financial and digital skills; and participants improving their job readiness and progressing closer to the labour market were all achieved. This is positive, especially given that 49 per cent of all participants had 4+ barriers and the impact of the pandemic on delivery.
- 4.11 Table 4.5 summarises the progress made across indicators for Outcome 4.

Table 4.5: Progress against programme outcome 4			
Outcome 4: Local employers will better understand how to support people with complex needs to sustain employment, by recognising and addressing early signs of distress	Lifetime Target	Lifetime Actual	Performance vs Target
Participants supported into work related volunteering	546	576	105.5%
No. of employers engaged with the programme	334	349	104.5%
No. of employers reporting improved perceptions of unemployed / economically inactive people with complex needs or reporting a better understanding of how to support people with complex needs sustain employment	18	63	350.0%

- 4.12 The programme made good progress in achieving indicators related to Outcome 4, overachieving on the number of participants supported into work-related volunteering and the number of employees engaged with the programme. It significantly overachieved in terms of shifting the perceptions of employers to regard unemployed and economically inactive people more positively and/or to better understand how to help those with complex needs to sustain employment.

5 Participant Views of Delivery

Introduction

- 5.1 This section of the report focuses on the findings from interviews with SFTV programme participants. Across the duration of our evaluation of the programme we have interviewed 120 separate participants, many on multiple occasions, tracking their progress over time. In 2022 we undertook 66 telephone interviews of current and previous SFTV participants, following this up with 21 interviews in 2023. We also interviewed other participants who had accessed work placement or volunteering opportunities, and findings from these interviews are included in Section 6.

Motivation to engage with the programme

- 5.2 We asked participants about why they had chosen to engage with SFTV and what they hoped to achieve at the outset. The most frequently cited reason was to gain support with a mental health condition. Over three quarters of participants wanted help building their confidence ahead of returning to work, training or education (or a combination of all three). Another common area of support attracting people was help to manage their finances. Wider questioning showed that two in five participants had concerns that their benefits would stop if they moved into work. SFTV's capacity to offer dedicated support with debt and money management via Citizens Advice was extremely beneficial.
- 5.3 Other common areas of interest (expressed by over 50 per cent of participants) included: seeking career advice to find an appropriate job; help to apply for courses/training; and assistance with application forms and CV writing. All these requirements were covered in the Navigator role.

Benefits of the Comprehensive Support Offer

- 5.4 We asked participants about their experience of receiving support from separate, specialist organisations as part of the programme. Of the participants who accessed support from multiple organisations, 80 per cent reported this as being useful. Participants particularly commended the training courses and mental health support. Fewer participants referenced the value of the financial support from their Citizens Advice but this activity was more targeted and we know from interviews that the impact on many participants was significant in relation to improving their finances and enabling them to progress on their employability journey.
- 5.5 Information sharing between organisations was also highly regarded, demonstrating effective management processes and procedures. Navigator support was highly praised, with some 62 per cent of participants stating that their Navigator helped their understanding of the employment opportunities available to them "a great deal".
- 5.6 For most participants, SFTV was their first employment programme. Many participants who had received other support previously stated how much they appreciated the patience and care of SFTV staff compared to other support.

Outcomes of Programme Support

5.7 The data highlights the impact of the programme on identified barriers to employment and/or training. Participants reported positive outcomes from their SFTV participation, such as completing a training course (33 per cent), starting job search (28 per cent), and/or becoming more active in their local community (28 per cent). One in four had also undertaken volunteering (25 per cent). Participants were also asked about their skills development and how the programme had contributed. Not all participants required assistance with some elements, but overall:

- 73% felt supported with communication skills.
- 76% felt supported with social skills.
- 53% felt supported with money management.
- 50% felt supported with CV writing.
- 47% felt supported with interview skills.
- 39% felt supported with IT and internet searching skills.

5.8 After receiving support from SFTV, four out of five participants (81 per cent) reported that they had improved understanding of their barriers to employment and how to overcome them.

5.9 All participants who had moved into work following their engagement with the programme stated that SFTV support had been very useful in helping them to do so. Participants emphasised the importance of having the support of someone who listened and understood their situation, as well as the confidence-building element of the support.

5.10 Asked what was most useful in helping to access training, volunteering or a work placement, several participants said that the motivation and confidence building from SFTV contributed most. The range of courses available was varied, offering counselling, computer skills and social care.

5.11 Levels of attribution differed from participant to participant, with 70 per cent stating that the programme had been very useful in helping them to move into training or volunteering; one explicitly commented on gaining access to courses they would not have been aware of without SFTV. Others said that the training/work experience they had received made a positive difference in helping them move closer to work.

“It’s been a massive help in helping me choose which way I’d go forward in getting employment”

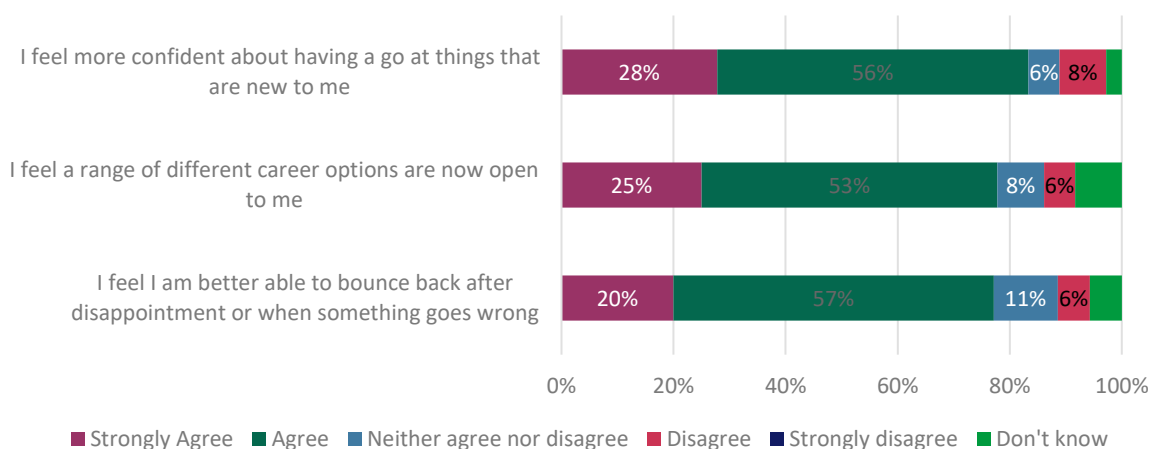
“The CV and interview training really helped me to overcome the difficulties I was having mentally, especially considering I’d just come out of CBT and was feeling low on confidence”

“Every other course felt as if it was just there to collect the government money. But I’m a big cheerleader for Step Forward Tees Valley as they care about you as an individual a lot more”

“[I would] 100% [recommend] – don’t think there’s any other organisation that is as dedicated to supporting those in the community”

- 5.12 While many participants were yet to move into employment, some had progressed into job searching following SFTV support. All stated that the SFTV programme had been useful in helping them to do this. In particular, aspects such as CV writing and application form completion were cited, as well as becoming more aware of the job search websites available and how best to use them to find appropriate, relevant employment opportunities. This is testament to the success of SFTV in providing the tools to support independent job search, enabling people to advance their careers on their own terms.
- 5.13 Most participants attributed a range of positive outcomes to the support that they had received from their Navigators, with the majority reporting feeling more confident in taking on new activities and more positive about the opportunities available (see Figure 5.1).

Figure 5.1: How far do you agree with the following statements after receiving support from your SFTV Navigator?



- 5.14 It is positive that 84 per cent of participants interviewed reported feeling more confident at having a go at new things; 78 per cent felt that a range of career options were open to them; and 77 per cent were better able to bounce back after disappointment or when things went wrong. These responses all indicate greater resilience attributed to SFTV support and participants feeling better able to respond to disappointment or hardship.
- 5.15 Many participants had faced (and continue to face) issues with low self-esteem and feeling isolated; Navigators’ support is shown to have gone beyond exploring employment opportunities, and for many SFTV participants it has acted as a mechanism for confidence building and greater independence and self-efficacy in the long term.
- 5.16 SFTV programme staff were regarded as willing to go above and beyond their remit to help participants move towards employment; many provided direct support with housing, healthcare, and in forming social connections.
- 5.17 Positive outcomes areas reported included gaining knowledge about the job market, gaining a sense of purpose, improved self-esteem and focus, friendships, and help integrating into their local community.

“[I’ve gained] a little more self-esteem and confidence. I feel like I have a purpose now which I didn’t have before, so it’s given me a focus and more determination”

“[My Navigator] was particularly helpful – especially with my mental health. She put me in touch with Mind and went above and beyond to make sure I was well supported”

“The support was great...they helped me look into going into self-employment but support they gave was amazing, I was never pushed.”

6 Employer Engagement, Placements and Volunteering

Introduction

- 6.1 This section of the report covers the process and impact of employer engagement, work placements and volunteering.
- 6.2 The pandemic impacted delivery adversely. Navigator caseloads reduced significantly and, as a consequence, the volume of referrals to work placement and volunteer placements reduced. Covid-19 led to some employers closing permanently or temporarily, including many in retail and hospitality sectors. This impacted placement opportunities. Despite these setbacks, much has been achieved by the programme for participants.

Context of Employer Engagement and Work Placement Activity

- 6.3 Changing Lives was commissioned to engage employers and identify work placement opportunities. Their Employer Engagement Team had a role in supporting both the participant and employer by generating an appropriate match. The approach was to source potential placement opportunities, on the basis of participants' career priorities and aspirations. In total, an impressive total of 180 employers were engaged.
- 6.4 Navigators forwarded suitable participants to the Employer Engagement Team which then undertook an initial interview. If deemed suitable, participants progressed to pre-placement training to prepare them for the experience. Those assessed to not be ready were diverted towards volunteering as a stepping-stone and preparation for a work placement.
- 6.5 An onsite informal meeting was arranged with participants to meet the employer and undertake a tour of the workplace. At this point the working arrangements were agreed. Work placements were typically four weeks in duration, but could be extended for a further two weeks if there was a benefit to this. The Employer Engagement Team subsequently made weekly site visits to the employer to review progress.



- 6.6 Once a placement was complete, the Navigator then resumed responsibility for the participant and continued to support them on their journey into work. The Employer Engagement Team also provided post-placement support for six months, as added value beyond the scope of their activity. There was the risk of an overlap with the role of Navigators, but this did not prove an issue in practice.

6.7 The Employer Engagement Team were successful in identifying and supporting participants into a diverse range of roles, including:

- Retail Assistant (16 placements)
- Administration, including accounts/finance (x13)
- Hospitality roles including Barista, catering and kitchen porter (x10)
- Customer Service (x7)
- Working with children including Classroom Assistant, Play Assistant and Lunchtime Assistant (x3)
- Gardening (x3)
- Cleaner (x3)
- Support Staff (x3)

6.8 A range of other work placements provided for one or two participants. The majority of all work placements were with private sector employers (67 per cent). It is positive that such a variety of private sector employers was engaged. Of the 34 separate private sector employers, 20 only took a single work placement. The remainder accepted multiple placements over the duration of the programme including: The Fork in the Road and Poundstretcher (four placements each); Cleveland Housing and The TAD Centre (three placements). The service was bespoke and there was no reliance on filling numerous 'high volume' roles within a single employer.

6.9 National businesses engaged included: Costa Coffee, Darlington Building Society, Marks & Spencer, Premier Inn, Sainsbury's, Specsavers, Tesco and The Range. The existing links to such large employers is an attractive feature of any future work placement-type intervention.

Work Placement Participant and Employer Insights

6.10 Interviews were undertaken with participants and employers to inform understanding of effectiveness of the process and impacts generated. Work placement participants were largely positive about the support received, with many noting that it had helped them to progress in their chosen career path.

6.11 The pre-placement sessions were regarded as informative and educational, helping participants to know what to expect and prepare in practical ways for their placements. This included guidance on how to plan travel, how to dress, and what the work would involve. Several participants praised the moral and emotional support that members of the Employer Engagement Team provided, particularly noteworthy as many participants had recently received or were receiving mental health support at the time of their engagement with SFTV.

"The focus on a therapeutic approach was positive, they understood I needed to be in a good place with my mental health before going out there into society – I always felt valued and respected by them; like everything I said mattered"

"It was rewarding – it built my confidence and gave me experience in the field I wanted to go into."

- 6.12 In general participants were positive about their work placements; they provided a much-needed sense of routine and exposure to the workplace for those who had either been out of work for a long period or who were looking to move into a new area of work. The placements also provided a valuable opportunity for participants to gain experience and skills to build up their CVs and support future job applications.
- 6.13 Several participants reported positive outcomes and impacts following their work placements. One stated that they had been offered a job by their placement employer, following completion, highlighting how placements also allow employers to take a closer look at individuals and possibly change their perceptions.
- 6.14 Other wider outcomes centred around improvements to mental health and wellbeing, and reflecting progress towards a central programme objective. They described improvements following work placements, such as:
- Reduction in stress and anxiety about being in a workplace.
 - Increased confidence in (workplace) communication.
 - Feeling more resilient to difficult situations.
 - Greater independence and autonomy.
 - Improved work readiness.
 - Use of workplace lead as a reference for future job applications.

Context of Volunteering Offer

- 6.15 The volunteering offer across the duration of SFTV has flexed considerably, due to the pandemic and the scope of activity of different delivery partners operating across different localities.
- 6.16 There has been relatively consistent delivery across Middlesbrough. MVDA engaged with 45 organisations to provide volunteering placements across a range of roles including: Activities Coordinator; Admin Assistant; Befriender; Café Cook; Cleaner; Conservation Volunteer; Delivery Driver; Furniture Restorer; Gardener; Group Assistant; IT support; Kids Club Helper; Photographer; Retail Assistant; Social Media Officer; Upcycler; Waiting Staff; Walk Leader; and Warehouse Operative. Other roles have been created across other localities.
- 6.17 The approach was to match participants to potential roles and, if no roles were available, volunteering staff proactively sought to establish opportunities. The level of support has often been intensive, based on the starting point of individual participants.
- 6.18 Table 6.1 outlines the number of volunteers who have progressed into employment and education or training. This is based upon the volunteers that progressed into a volunteer placement, rather than engaging in Community Heroes activity.

Table 6.1: Numbers of volunteers and progression into training or employment					
	2019	2020	2021	2022 (to Oct 2022)	Total
No. volunteers	76	76	53	58	263
No. went into employment	7	9	13	3	32
No. went into education or training	28	32	24	14	98

- 6.19 Between Jan 2019 and October 2022 some 263 participants had taken part in volunteering. Of these, 98 (37 per cent) progressed into education or training and 32 (12 per cent) into employment.

“I know of at least three participants this year who have got jobs working for the charity they started volunteering for. One who has started working for the first time after never having left the house for eight years without her husband until she was supported into volunteering”

Volunteer and Host Insights

- 6.20 Interviews were conducted with volunteer host organisations and volunteers. Participants were largely positive about their volunteering experiences, noting that they had helped them to progress with their job search or career path, whilst also improving their confidence. For many participants, taking part in the programme was a way to support their wider wellbeing, enabling them to progress into education, training or employment.
- 6.21 Participants were positive about volunteer support staff; one highlighted how staff had played a key part in boosting their confidence, particularly through the Community Heroes group, giving them a greater sense of being connected and part of a community.
- 6.22 Participants appreciated how staff would ask what they needed, rather than telling them what support they would receive. This helped to empower people to take ownership of their own journey. Participants were also appreciative of logistical support, such as help with completing the forms and paperwork necessary to undertake their volunteering roles.

“It has been built around me as an individual. It is not a one size fits all thing”

- 6.23 Our research found that staff went above and beyond to support participants, particularly those accessing support during lockdowns. One described meeting programme staff in public places during the pandemic, allowing them to stay in touch despite lockdown restrictions. They reported positive effects on their mental health, enabling them being able to pursue their career journey despite the pandemic.

“Because I was not getting a job, the best thing that was done was building my self-esteem, mental health and wellbeing. Attending the courses suggested by the Volunteer Coordinator really helped me”

- 6.24 Several participants reported that their volunteering roles were curtailed due to the pandemic, resulting in having to secure other opportunities that added to the length of their employability journey.
- 6.25 Most participants highlighted that their career aspirations had progressed through their volunteering experiences. One stated how the support gave them the confidence to make the career change and research the steps needed to achieve this. Another described earlier struggles with making telephone calls but involvement with volunteering had helped them overcome this.
- 6.26 Volunteer hosts expressed a high degree of satisfaction with their SFTV experience. The volunteers made useful contributions to their organisations, particularly in hard-to-fill roles. One host noted how this was a mutually beneficial situation, as they were able to see the positive effects of the volunteering on programme participants.

“It felt like we were a good fit for Step Forward Tees Valley because they were working with people with long gaps in their employment and who had gaps in their skills”

7 Mental Health across Tees Valley

Introduction

- 7.1 This section of the report focuses specifically on mental health. It covers the context and scale of the challenge across Tees Valley and the emerging picture moving forward. It outlines how the design and delivery of SFTV has contributed to positive results and outcomes and establishes evidence for the resources needed to continue to provide appropriate mental health support. It also illustrates how well delivered employability support, such as SFTV, can help to reduce the need for mental health services.

Context

- 7.2 In 2021 almost 1,000 people in Tees Valley took part in an extensive consultation exercise, exploring experiences of accessing mental health and well-being services. The Healthwatch Network's report², provided insights from Darlington, Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland, and Stockton-on-Tees communities.
- 7.3 The top 'themes' reported, impacting negatively on mental health and wellbeing, were:
- Money/debt – problems with the benefit system, cost of living, unexpected expenses.
 - Work/unemployment-related stress, with debt the most significant contributory factor.
 - Uncertainty intensified by the Covid pandemic.
 - Pre-existing physical health problems.
 - Family, friends and relationships.
 - Living circumstances, including uncertainties about housing or anti-social behaviour.
- 7.4 Lengthy waiting times were regarded as a key issue to accessing treatment and moving forward and almost half of the respondents (45 per cent) wanted to access services in a local community venue. It also found that NHS services were not able to offer prolonged support, due to restricted numbers of sessions, and that people were offered medication too readily.
- 7.5 Longer support and fewer changes in support workers featured highly amongst recommendations for change. Many of these points are addressed directly by the SFTV model of mental health support, including reviewing medication, tackling financial barriers, and consistent contact with Navigators and Health Link Workers (where relevant), often in locally accessible venues.
- 7.6 While good mental health is a key factor in finding and retaining a job, unemployment in turn intensifies stress, causing depression, anxiety and lower self-esteem, making it more difficult than ever to find and retain work.

² TEWW Community Transformation Report, September 2021

https://www.healthwatchmiddlesbrough.co.uk/sites/healthwatchmiddlesbrough.co.uk/files/TV%20Healthwatch%20Report%20TEWV%20Community%20Transformation%202021_0.pdf

- 7.7 Research in January 2021³ found that 43 per cent of unemployed people had poor mental health, greater than for people in work (27 per cent) and for those on furlough (34 per cent). Findings indicated that the relationship between mental health and unemployment is bi-directional, both aspects tackled explicitly by the design and delivery of SFTV.
- 7.8 Being on benefits can also impact on mental health, as the claims process, work capability testing and job search requirements are found to exacerbate problems. Duration matters too; the length of time someone has been out of work affects their mental health and life satisfaction, as well as for their physical health.

Link between Financial Difficulties and Mental Health

- 7.9 Table 7.1 shows the proportions with mental health and financial barriers by SFTV area, with reported barriers broadly similar across localities.

	% Participants with mental health as a barrier	% Participant with both mental health and financial barriers
Middlesbrough	79	34
Redcar & Cleveland	86	53
Darlington	82	29
Hartlepool	80	34
Stockton	75	36

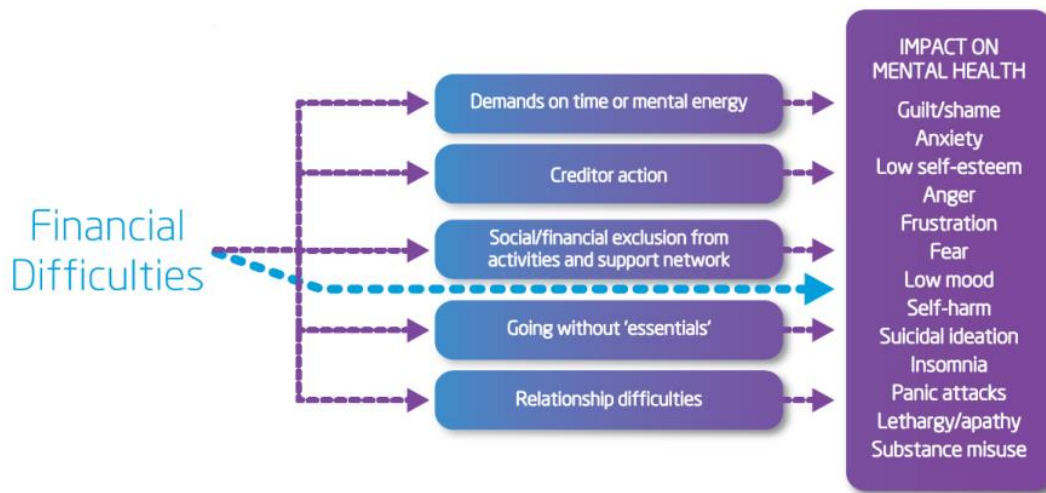
- 7.10 The link between poor mental health and financial problems is well established. The Money and Mental Health Policy Institute (2017)⁴ found a strong correlation between financial stress and mental health issues: 46 per cent of those with debt had mental health problems, and almost 40 per cent of those with mental health problems reported that their poor financial situation had worsened their mental health. The cost-of-living crisis is exacerbating mental health problems further and likely to continue to do so.

³ *Unemployment and mental health Why both require action for our COVID-19 recovery* Wilson H & Finch D (2021) The Health Foundation

<https://www.health.org.uk/publications/long-reads/unemployment-and-mental-health>

⁴ <https://www.moneyandmentalhealth.org/money-and-mental-health-facts/>

Figure 7.1: Mental health & wellbeing issues caused by financial difficulties⁵



- 7.11 In addition to the increase in anxiety and hardship caused by lockdown restrictions and social isolation, costs are rising steeply, with food prices estimated to have risen by 15-20 per cent and energy bills having increased significantly. In December 2022 the Money & Mental Health Policy Institute found that more than half of UK adults (54 per cent) reported having felt anxious, depressed, filled with dread or unable to cope, due to concerns about their finances.
- 7.12 Evidence shows⁶ that good quality labour market programmes provide social support, reduce loneliness and help to get someone back into a structured routine. Key to sustainable mental health improvement is a focus on self-efficacy, such as that provided by SFTV, and fostering the psychological resources to cope with the stresses of unemployment, as well as helping people into work. Put simply, there is more to come: growing levels of personal debt add to a worsening crisis for already overstretched mental health services, increasing the need for support and constraining recovery rates.
- 7.13 Indicative of the scale of demand in Tees Valley for mental health and employability support is the concomitant uptake of Routes to Work support, (RtW) operated by TVCA between 2018 and 2022 across the same geography as SFTV. The number of participants RtW worked with (almost 4,000), and the key problems encountered, including mental health, signal the scale of need across Tees Valley.
- 7.14 RtW was different from SFTV in a number of ways, including their focus on those closer to the labour market and a maximum duration of participant support. The level of administration was lower, reducing the resources required to deliver across management and frontline services. Although covering the same geography, the two programmes seemed to have operated, perhaps implicitly, in a complementary way. Fewer RtW participants reported mental health issues, certainly at the outset, with just over 19 per cent reporting poor mental health as a barrier to finding and sustaining work, compared to over 80 per cent of SFTV participants.

⁵ Source: Money and Mental Health Policy Institute (2016)

⁶ The JOBS Program: Impact on Job Seeker Motivation, Reemployment, and Mental Health, Oxford Academic, 2014

- 7.15 In terms of future demand, Health Foundation analysis found that, on average over the next three years, there could be 11 per cent more mental health referrals every year, at a cost of between £1.1bn and £1.4bn extra each year. Rather than relying on already overstretched NHS mental health services to meet this excess demand, it would be wise to help stem the root causes of these issues by using upstream policy and systems more effectively.
- 7.16 Understanding the mental health needs of different groups is important in ensuring that provision is targeted and tailored for groups at greatest risk. The fundamental link between mental health and financial difficulties is clear, highlighted by national research and amply demonstrated by SFTV participants and partners and likely to be exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis.

“The problems people have now are very different. Some have longstanding mental health problems, exacerbated by the pandemic. The Navigator network really helps, knowing we can refer vulnerable people. The ability of SFTV to tailor [services] around the participant, provide a truly holistic tailored service leads to the greatest impact. It gives a message of hope that people can move on in their journey and that ultimately there is a way out of poverty” Citizens Advice.

SFTV Mental Health Support Offer

- 7.17 The SFTV service model was developed in consultation with service-users, commissioners and professionals. The Health Link Workers provided one-to-one intensive support, based on a bespoke action plan informed by participants’ interests, aspirations and needs. The intention was to work with individuals to understand and overcome barriers standing in the way of their progression towards employment, education, training and job search.
- 7.18 The initial programme design was appropriate for achieving this bespoke approach, in that it resourced capacity internally to react quickly to the mental health issues faced by participants. It enabled a degree of control in responding to participant needs, rather than resorting to the long waiting lists for mainstream NHS mental health services or other community services.
- 7.19 The level of mental health support provided through the SFTV programme has not been consistent over time. Concerns about the mental health support Navigators were able to offer were raised in 2021 during an earlier phase of the evaluation.

“We’ve seen a decline in people’s general wellbeing. People have been less active and less mobile - not getting out into community. We’ve set up online groups to try and bring people together, support groups and a calendar of tasks to support mental health and wellbeing”

- 7.20 Redcar & Cleveland Mind were active on SFTV from the programme’s outset but decided not to continue delivery from September 2021, largely due to what they considered to be too much bureaucracy and paperwork associated with taking part. Redcar & Cleveland Mind now offers their own Recovery Service, which includes employability support.
- 7.21 The demand for mental health support from programme participants and more generally increased over several months, at the same time as SFTV’s capacity to respond was reduced. East Durham and Hartlepool Mind then established an independent charity – Let’s Connect - which started delivery in March 2022.

7.22 Health Link Workers had a clear appreciation that improving employability was the ultimate goal of the programme and provided:

- Wraparound support, specifically focused on meeting the needs of the individual participant, working in partnership with friends, family, and relevant agencies and service providers.
- A bespoke package of support designed to help tackle all the challenges associated with living with a long term mental or physical health condition, whilst looking to return to the labour market and/or to become economically active.
- Co-created action plans to identify and address mental and physical health barriers, as an enhancement to participants' main action plans, and developed in partnership with their Navigator (i.e., via three-way collaboration).
- Focus on developing participants' self-confidence and skills to take on new challenges and build confidence, ultimately directed towards addressing longer term employment goals and aspirations, including access to short 'employment ready' training courses to develop social skills and prepare participants for the early days of employment.
- Engagement with other partners and community groups to build awareness and referral pathways and may accompany people to groups and sessions.

Mental Health Support Pathways

7.23 The SFTV pathway involved an initial conversation with a Navigator to establish the reason(s) for referral and had to involve at least one of the following: mental ill-health, financial inclusion or digital inclusion. Navigators operated flexibly and used informal meeting spaces in the early stages of engagement e.g. in coffee shops, community hubs and libraries.

7.24 In some cases, mental health issues were reported openly by participants, in others the need for support was established through sensitive questioning by a Navigator, asking about difficulties sleeping, etc.

7.25 Navigators then developed an action plan, prioritising mental health issues and other barriers first (and sensitively) before progress can be made towards job search. It is also worth noting that the programme did not offer only one opportunity to access mental health support: if a problem was disclosed later, an internal referral could still be made to a Health Link Worker.

7.26 The Health Link Workers then triaged the participant, using a Patient Health Questionnaire and completing a short version of the Warwick and Edinburgh Mental Health and Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) to provide a baseline. The support needs identified were often resource intensive and holistic. Health Link Workers were not trained to provide a medical diagnosis, although the initial assessment tried to identify perceived mental health issues.

7.27 The first stage often involved linking participants with a GP. Some had never been to a GP before; for others, the priority was to review their medication. Health Link Workers estimated that over half of the participants supported required this but that it could take up to four GP visits to get medication resolved. Health Link Workers arranged appointments and often accompanied people to support and advocate on their behalf. Most GPs were reported to welcome the support patients received from SFTV.

- 7.28 Health Link Workers also checked for other possible issues or needs, such as optician, dentist, or hearing problems, or an Occupational Therapist appointment if someone needed aids in their home. They also organised learning disability assessments – e.g., an autism diagnosis, therefore securing social work support for people.



- 7.29 Initial assessments often identified a need for more specialist support. Serious issues were referred back to GPs but there persists a long waiting list for many treatments to resolve issues. Referrals were also made to the NHS Early Intervention in Psychosis Service, the community mental health service for people aged 14-65, and by Navigators to local bereavement services (CRUSE and local hospices), alongside support for associated issues such as housing and financial problems⁷.
- 7.30 Progress was reviewed at least every 12 weeks but for the majority much more frequently. Navigators maintained fortnightly contact with participants, providing a sense of wraparound support. Our research found that Navigators and Health Link Workers aimed to avoid creating participant dependency but that this was often difficult. The typical duration of Let's Connect support was between six and eight months, with some participants receiving up to 12 months' support. This was well regarded by staff and participants interviewed as part of the evaluation.
- 7.31 At the end of the Health Link Workers support, a further SWEMWBS assessment was completed to confirm progress. This served to build participant confidence by shining a light on the progress achieved. Some participants had not yet finished their journey and progress could often be difficult to discern. Another three-way meeting was then held with Navigator, Health Link Worker and participant, which could lead to an increased focus on employment-related activities.
- 7.32 Structured support delivered by Navigators or other partners served to reduce isolation, build confidence and improve social skills. The Community Heroes initiative delivered by SFTV was well regarded for providing supported social opportunities whilst building experience via volunteering.

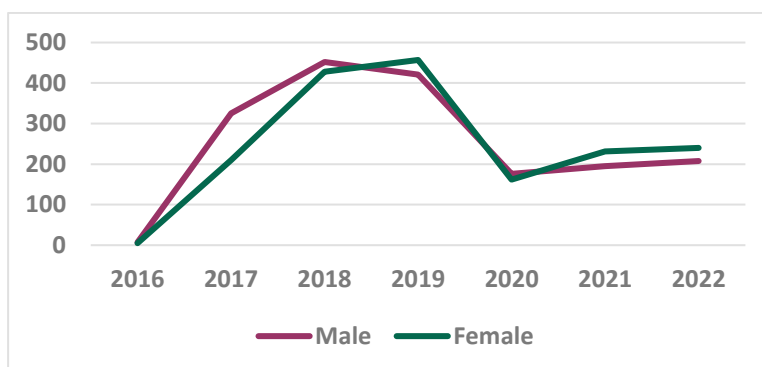
Levels of Support Need

- 7.33 The original business plan (2016-2019) assumed 40 per cent of all participants would have two or more complex needs. The world that delivery encountered and has sought to address has been more complex, and participants have presented with more numerous and intense barriers than expected – indicating a potential strain on resources.

⁷ There is also the Rapid Response Suicide Prevention Service, offering counselling and recovery work, originally piloted in Durham to combat high suicide rates and mindful that waiting lists are long and MH often deteriorates further.

7.34 Figure 7.2 shows that the numbers of men and women⁸ with mental health barriers have been relatively consistent, at around 80-82 per cent of total numbers engaged.

Figure 7.2: Recruitment of participants with MH issues by gender, 2016-2022



7.35 Total numbers engaged across the five SFTV hubs followed a broadly similar pattern (Table 7.2), with significant growth peaking in 2018 and 2019, prior to COVID.

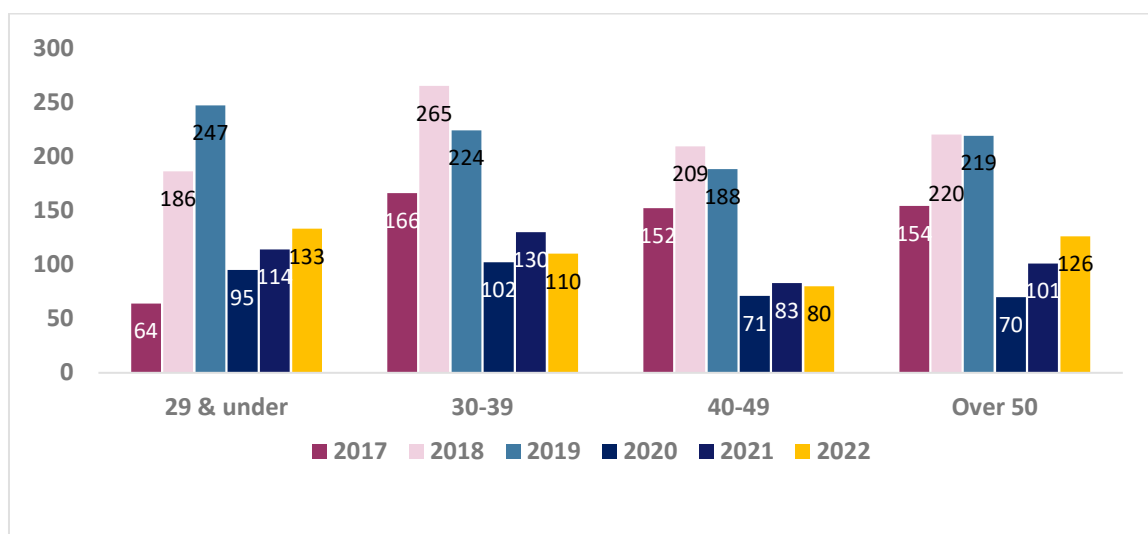
Table 7.2: SFTV Participants with mental health problems									
SFTV Hub	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total	Mental Health % of total
Darlington	1	102	157	170	78	74	55	637	82
Hartlepool	1	68	149	173	66	85	90	632	80
Stockton	9	124	100	164	66	63	77	603	76
Middlesbrough	1	76	154	158	57	91	77	614	79
Redcar & Cleveland	0	166	320	213	71	115	150	1035	86
Total	12	536	880	878	338	428	449	3521	81

7.36 Numbers for both men and women requiring mental health support peaked in 2018. The decline in numbers for both during the pandemic was almost identical but post-Covid the recruitment rate for women was higher and the total rate exceeded that for men.

7.37 Figure 7.3 shows the engagement of participants with mental health issues by age cohort.

⁸ 'Gender unknown' participants not included as numbers too small for analysis

Figure 7.3: Engagement of SFTV participants with mental health barriers by age cohort 2017-2022

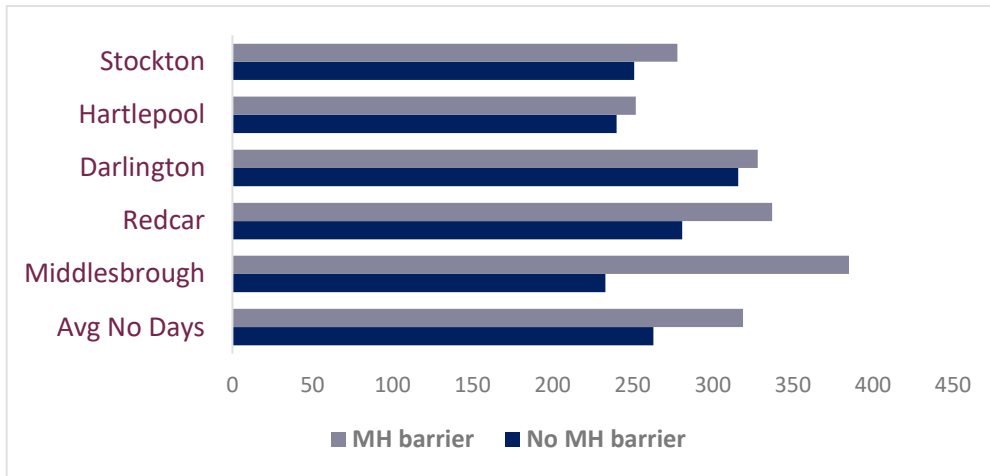


- 7.38 The proportions vary slightly, from 86 per cent for those under 30, to 78 per cent for participants aged 50 and above, suggesting broad consistency across the programme in engaging and supporting participants with mental health issues, irrespective of gender or age.
- 7.39 Across all age groups recruitment climbed quickly from 2016-2017 but peaked earlier in 2018 for those aged 30-39 and 40-49. The growth in numbers of younger people recruited (29 and under) also grew but peaked later, in 2019. As might be expected, in 2020 Covid resulted in a significant decrease in numbers with mental health barriers engaged across all age cohorts, followed by a very modest recovery, with numbers continuing to rise slightly at both extremes – i.e., 29 and under and over 50's, while the number of those aged 30-49 declined slightly further.

Duration of Support and Resource Implications

- 7.40 The 2016-2019 business plan for SFTV assumed participants would be on the programme for six months (183 days). Across the six-year period of SFTV delivery the number of days spent by all participants on the programme ranged from 233 days to 316 by locality, averaging 263 or 44 per cent more than anticipated.
- 7.41 Figure 7.4 looks at the average number of days participants with a mental health barrier spent on the programme compared to all participants by SFTV locality. For those with mental health as an identified barrier, the number of days was inevitably higher, from 252 days to 385, with an average of 319 days.
- 7.42 In Darlington and Hartlepool there was only a marginal difference in the duration of support for those with a mental health issue. A bigger difference was evident for Redcar & Cleveland and Middlesbrough localities, in the number of days that participants with mental health barriers were supported.

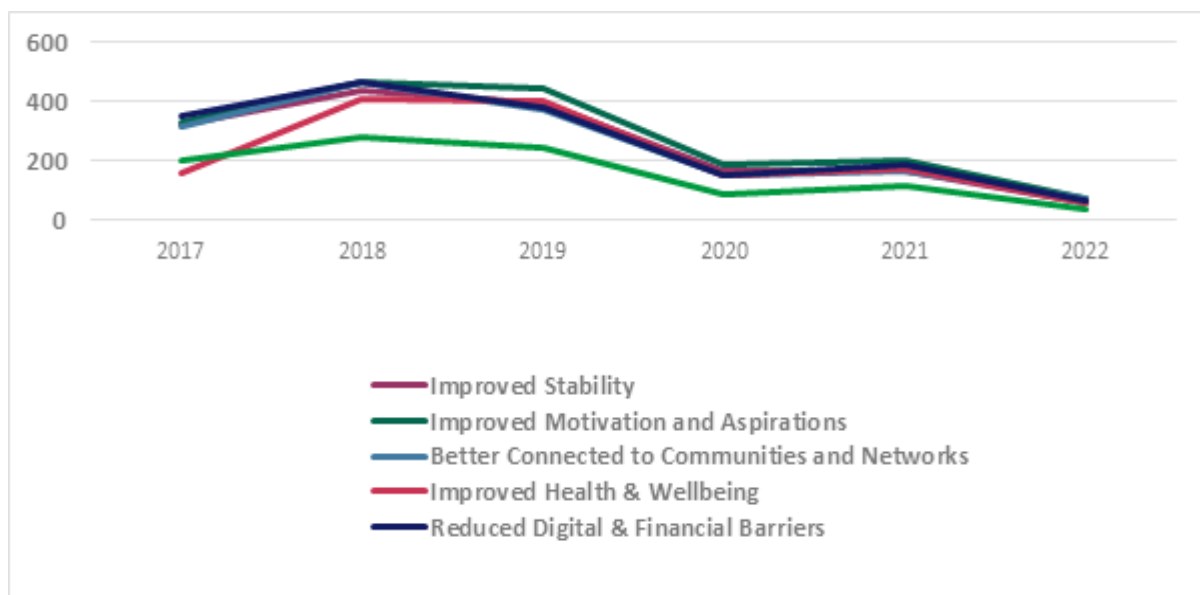
Figure 7.4: Average number of days on SFTV, with and without mental health as a barrier (June 2016 - June 2022)



Outcomes

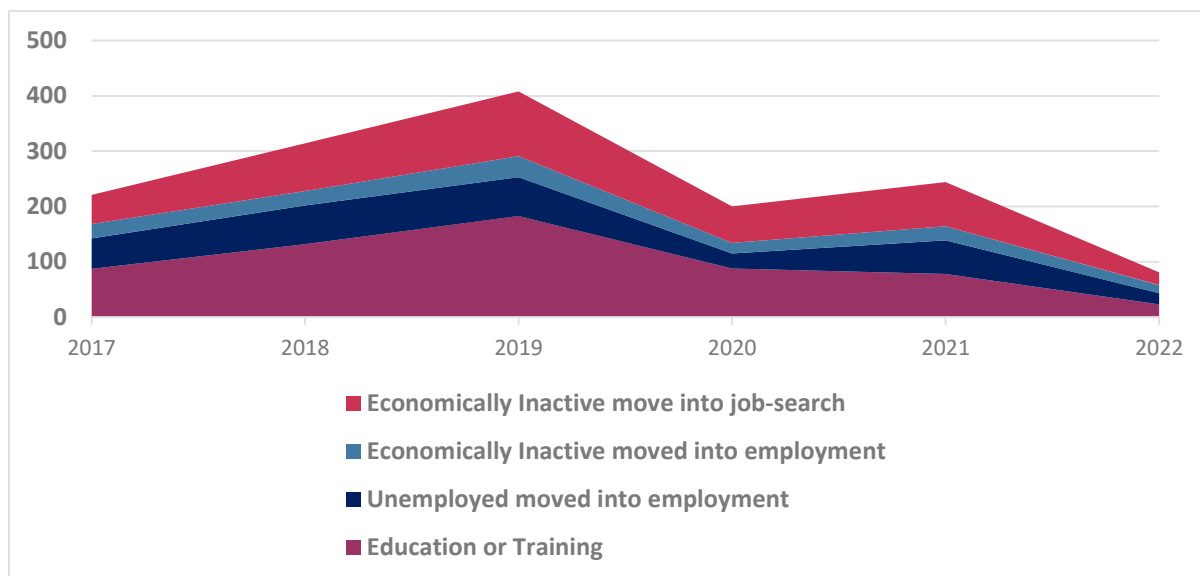
- 7.43 At the end of their engagement with the programme, participants engaged with Navigators to assess their own progress and to identify and recognise improvement using the SFTV Workstar outcome measurement tool. Figure 7.5 shows their perceived progress.
- 7.44 At the outset of participation people with mental health issues had poor perceptions of their health and wellbeing and, while not achieving the same high rates as other support, improvements to health and wellbeing showed the steepest rate of increase. Participants reported improvements in their motivations and aspirations and sense of connectedness, though all areas showed a steep decline in 2019-2020, reflecting the impact of the pandemic and the inability to offer face to face support.

Figure 7.5: SFTV Participants with mental health barriers perceived gains



7.45 Figure 7.6 shows that outcomes on completing participation for participants with mental health barriers were very promising pre-Covid.

Figure 7.6 Outcomes for SFTV participants with mental health barriers



7.46 Post 2020 the rates of economically inactive participants with mental health as a barrier moving into job search improved more strongly than other outcomes, while progression into education and training remained low when compared to other possible outcomes.

7.47 Our research with key SFTV staff and partners identified several priorities for the future delivery of mental health support:

- Training to improve ‘sensitive questioning’ skills – identify triggers, ask open questions and interpret body language.
- In house mental health training covering early intervention/awareness including: Mental Health First Aid, suicide prevention, CBT awareness, psychological awareness, safeguarding, etc.
- Dedicated mental health support workers trained to delivery counselling and CBT.
- More specialised drug and alcohol treatment to tackle addiction
- Training for working with people who are neurologically diverse.
- More sessions and more locations for Changing Lives ‘Stepping Stones’ group work on confidence, self-esteem, assertiveness and motivation.

8 Economic and Social Impact

Economic Impact

- 8.1 In this section we estimate the economic impact of the Step Forwards Tees Valley (SFTV) programme. Given that the scheme supports adults with complex barriers to work into employment or education/training, the primary outcomes are achieved jobs, and the completion of training courses. Consequently, these two metrics have been measured as part of the scheme. Currently, 901 participants have either completed and are engaged in education or training, and 610 participants have secured employment measured over a six-month period.
- 8.2 There are numerous social and economic benefits associated with a job outcome. Typically, presently monetisable benefits include reduction in benefit payments, additional tax revenues, crime reductions, healthcare cost reductions and an increase in GVA contribution to the local economy. There are other benefits of the scheme such as educational benefits and mental health benefits, although monetisable, they can only be monetised over a longer period and are therefore included in its own section.
- 8.3 Any intervention also raises economic costs, which we will also assess. The scheme expenditure is the starting point for economic costs but there are other associated expenses generated for both central government and the participants themselves. These include additional travel expenditure for participants to commute to, and from, work and the Social Cost of Exchequer Finance.
- 8.4 We present each cost and benefit in turn, in which we will outline the gross cost or benefit. The gross figures will then be subject to detailed additionality factors that will deliver the net impact of the SFTV scheme. This will reveal the costs and benefits that are directly attributable to SFTV.
- 8.5 Participants employment sustainability has been modelled at 6 months in line with Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) standard employment sustainability measurement. We have therefore modelled benefits at six months employment sustainability as a base case, and we also perform a sensitivity analysis to show the potential impact of participants retaining employment past this six-month base case.

Methodology

- 8.6 Overall, our approach to this estimation, is to make a bottom-up assessment, based on the primary evidence we have of the assisted client group. We first show a series of estimated gross benefits for those beneficiaries finding work and then apply additionality measures to respond to the question of what is happening in the local economy, as a consequence of jobs being filled and participants completing training courses.
- 8.7 Throughout, we use best practice guidance such as HM Treasury Green Book, HCA Additionality Guide and BIS Additionality Guide. These guides provide useful advice, in terms of setting out method and best practice, as well as outlining the process of taking gross impacts and recognising the additionality factors to arrive at net impacts.
- 8.8 In lay terms the process moves from considering the project itself, to a wider consideration of exploring how the project outputs causes change in the local economy. These additionality factors

include deadweight (would outcomes have occurred without the intervention?), displacement (Is the host company expanding at the expense of a local competitor?) and leakage (are the jobs local or once training is completed will the trained recipient leave the region?).

- 8.9 Where possible we employ primary data provided by the SFTV programme, but in many instances secondary proxies are used from trusted sources, including ONS and government additionality guidance already mentioned.

Economic Benefits

Taxpayer Savings

- 8.10 The primary taxpayer saving is the reduction in benefits expenditure. The savings arise from the movement of a participant from unemployed or economically inactive to employment. Data provided by the SFTV team indicates that 610 participants moved into work.
- 8.11 Utilising Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) data⁹, we can estimate both the cost and frequency of benefits received by those classified as economically inactive or unemployed. Using this national data, we estimate the proportion of participants who would be receiving Job Seekers Allowance (JSA), Universal Credit (UC), Council Tax benefits, Housing benefits and the Employment Support Allowance (ESA).
- 8.12 We also estimate the weekly cost to the taxpayer, based on the value of benefits claimants would receive weekly. The listed benefits are summarised in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1: Average weekly costs of benefits to the taxpayer

Benefit Type	Cost
Job Seekers Allowance	£73.10
Universal Credit	£66.33
Council Tax Benefit	£6.55
Housing Benefit	£0.49
Employment Support Allowance	£77.00

- 8.13 Based on the number of participants who secured employment and our estimation of the proportion of those classified as NEET or unemployed who receive benefits by type, we calculate the number of participants who receive the listed benefits.

⁹ DWP benefit statistics tools, gov.uk, 2019

Table 8.2: Numbers of unemployed and NEETs receiving respective benefits

Benefit Type	Proportion	Number of scheme recipients
Job Seekers Allowance	29.3%	179
Universal Credit	48.9%	298
Council Tax Benefit	15.5%	94
Housing Benefit	16.2%	99
Employment Support Allowance	5.2%	32

8.14 Utilising Table 8.1 and 8.2, we estimate a gross taxpayer saving of £935k over the modelled six month employment period.

Tax Generation

8.15 Whilst in work, participants earn a wage that can be taxed to raise tax revenues. Here, we only assess the direct taxes generated by the participant moving into work, including income tax and national insurance. We assume that those who secure employment are paid the National Living Wage of £8.91 (active from April 2021 to April 2022) to account for a conservative estimate, although we are aware that some participants may earn a greater wage.

8.16 Due to the low employment sustainability criteria of six months, we have only measured the wages earned across this period. As such, employees would not have earned enough to meet the personal allowance threshold, as such no income related tax will have been generated during this period. However, a gross figure of £125k in National Insurance contributions would have been generated by the scheme.

Gross GVA Output

8.17 Whilst not participating in the labour market, participants would have been unlikely to generate any sort of output for the local economy. But once in employment, participants are generating an economic output. We assess this output in the form of Gross Value Added (GVA) which is the value generated by any person engaged in the production of goods and services.

8.18 To estimate gross GVA, we have utilised ONS estimates for average GVA per filled job worked in the Tees Valley LEP area¹⁰ which is assessed at £54k per annum. We also implement a productivity measure to adjust for participants entering their job as a new employee. New employees' productivity will be lower than established employees due to training deficiencies in their new role. As such, data shows that a new employee operates at around 25% of average employee capacity for their first month in a role. In fact, Gallup finds that it takes on average 12 months for a new employee to reach full capacity in a new role¹¹.

¹⁰ ONS Subregional Productivity July 2022 release.

¹¹ 8 Practical tips for leaders for a better onboarding process, Gallup, 2021

- 8.19 Consequently, we apply a 25 per cent reduction to the GVA per filled job of employees for the first month in their role, and a 67.5 per cent reduction up until six months to account for this productivity deficiency.
- 8.20 To gauge the proportion of participants who move into work as either FTE or PTE we employ the TVCA wide PTE to FTE ratio of 0.35:0.65¹². Consequently, we estimate that 401 participants secured full time employment and 209 participants secured part time employment.
- 8.21 Next, we apply these GVA per year worked estimates to the timeframe allocated to the six-month employment sustainability of participants who secured work. Once we apply these employment sustainability timeframes, working patterns and productivity factor, we estimate that participants who secured sustained employment generated £5.4m of gross GVA.

Health Benefits

- 8.22 There is strong evidence of a positive causal effect of employment on individual health outcomes. Robust quantitative evidence comes from studies that look at the effect of employment on medical service usage rates. This is used as evidence to estimate National Health Service (NHS) savings per additional person employed. Utilising the latest data within the above methodology we predict that the NHS saves £1,152 per person who moves from unemployment to employment¹³. We also predict that for participants living with a disability, this cost saving increases further to £2,304.
- 8.23 SFTV provided us with the number of participants who secured employment living with a disability, 66. In addition, a further 544 participants secured employment. When we apply the health cost saving proxies above to these figures, cumulatively this generates a gross benefit of £427k during the six month's modelled employment of those participants.

Crime Reduction Benefits

- 8.24 The Department for Work & Pensions (DWP) find that increases in income have a negative effect on the propensity to commit acquisitive crime¹⁴. Helping someone into work will, therefore, reduce crime rates as the participant benefits from an increase in income.
- 8.25 DWP utilise a US study by Grogger that finds a ten per cent increase in income is correlated with a six per cent reduction in crime¹⁵. However, this is likely to be an understatement for the UK as there is evidence to suggest that the initial probabilities for committing a crime in the UK are lower than the US.
- 8.26 Consequently, we look at the increase in income generated by employment, which consists of the difference between benefits and earned income in this programme and accordingly adjust the finding that a 'ten per cent increase in income is correlated with a six per cent reduction in crime'.

¹² Harvested from Annual Business Register and Employment Survey data (ONS), 2021

¹³ How does the UK healthcare spending compare with other countries, Office for National Statistics (ONS), 2019

¹⁴ Methodologies for estimating and incorporating the wider social and economic impacts of work in Cost-Benefit Analysis of employment programmes, Fujiwara. D, 2010

¹⁵ Market Wages and Youth Crime, Grogger. J, 1997

- 8.27 Data is primarily available for males who commit crimes within property including burglary, assault, and armed robbery. This data has sub-strata's of employed vs unemployed costs. The average of cost of these crimes, accounting for frequency of the types of crime, equates to £3.5k. Utilising the above we can estimate that participants moving into employment will save the government a gross cost of £1.1m.

Economic Costs

Introduction

- 8.28 This section assesses the economic costs of the scheme that not only accounts for the project costs, but wider economic costs incurred by clients and the wider stakeholder area. The wider costs that will be assessed are transport costs and the Social Cost of Exchequer Finance (SOCEF).

Project Costs

- 8.29 The overall contract value for the SFTV programme was £16.8m. This is considered solely to be the project costs.

Social Cost of Exchequer Finance (SOCEF)

- 8.30 SOCEF is a cost that DWP have listed as a key cost of employment support programmes. SOCEF is the expected reduction in economic efficiency that arises from the transfer of resources from the private to the public sector. The efficiency loss stems primarily from taxation where costs are involved in collecting taxes.
- 8.31 Additionally, there are negative implications of reducing taxpayers' incomes. Microeconomic theory suggests that by reducing net pay, taxpayers are disincentivised to work. Instead, they will use more leisure time due to the decreased marginal cost of their leisure time. As such, productive capacity reduces and causes negative economic consequences.
- 8.32 DWP assess this to equate to approximately 20 per cent of project cost, which in this case leverages a gross cost of £3.4m.

Transport Costs

- 8.33 We include transport costs an additional expense borne by the participants who must travel into work who would not have otherwise done so due to economic inactivity. We utilise the latest National Travel Survey data from 2021 to assess average transport modes of individuals daily commutes¹⁶, or their non-requirement for a commute due to work from home trends. We use these as a proxy to estimate the mode of transport we would expect participants who secured employment to have to undertake as part of their commute. We also utilise the most up to date estimates of transport mode costs using sources including regional studies into commuting fares¹⁷.

¹⁶ National Travel Survey, Department for Transport Statistics, 2021

¹⁷ Regional commuter fares and ticketing comparisons in Great Britain, 2009

8.34 Cumulatively, we can multiply the number of trips by transport mode and their cost for the individuals to generate a gross total commuter cost generated by the scheme which we outline in Table 8.3.

Table 8.3: Cost and frequency of participant commutes

Mode of Transport	Number of participants using transport mode per day	Cost per mode of transport per day	Total Cost across scheme lifetime
Bicycle	27	£0.09	£298.25
Car/Van (inc passengers)	422	£12.76	£565,381.24
Motorcycle	7	£2.74	£2,130.36
Bus	34	£3.30	£5,132.04
Rail	47	£4.89	£26,852.72
Walking/ Working from Home/ other free modes of transport	74	£0	£0
Total	610		£599,794.61

8.35 As such, we expect there to be a gross transport cost of £600k that would not have been borne without the SFTV programme.

Other Benefits

8.36 Up until this section, all benefits have been generated in accordance with the one-month employment persistence timeframe associated with employment outcomes. However, there are other benefits associated with the intervention that can only be measured outside of the employment persistence timeframe but are nonetheless important.

Educational Outcomes

8.37 In total participants are recorded to have completed or entered their education or training from the SFTV programme. We assess their economic impact based upon the Department of Education's study into the net present value of further education in the UK. They assess the impact of further education based on three facets, wage premia, employment premia and productivity spill over, which is delivered over a three to five year period.

8.38 An individual's wage premia are assessed by comparing earnings of individuals who completed a qualification against another control group of individuals who started a given course but did not finish the course. Wages increase through the utilisation of skills learnt during their learning for a given qualification.

- 8.39 An individual gaining a qualification will also experience a greater employment rate due to their more attractive productivity. As such, over the three-to-five-year period, they will spend less time in unemployment. The individuals' wages, as generated by the data used to assess an individuals' wage premia, is multiplied by the individuals additional time spent in employment. This causes an additional uplift in wages and output for the local economy.
- 8.40 Finally, the skills gained during their learning increases their productivity. Based on numerous sources, the Department for Education estimates this to be a 35% value uplift in addition to the productivity gains captured by the wage and employment premia.
- 8.41 The cumulative of the above is generated as the economic benefits of the training intervention, whilst the costs of the course is accounted for to generate a monetised net present value.
- 8.42 We have cautiously assumed that SFTV participants will obtain a level 2 or below qualification from their time in education/training. Using the methodology above, the Department for Education estimate a net present value of £13,575 per individual completing a level 2 course at current prices. 901 participants are recorded to have engaged in education or training. Consequently, the cumulative gross value generated equates to £13.8m. However, based on other national BBO programmes we assume 70% of SFTV participants undertaking their training will complete their course. As such, we apply this completion rate to generate a more accurate gross impact measure of £9.6m in present value benefits.
- 8.43 As such, the 901 participants who have been estimated to be engaged in their education/training are estimated to have generated a gross benefit of £9.6m over a three-to-five-year period.

Mental Health Outcomes

- 8.44 Additionally, there are significant mental health benefits associated with the SFTV programme, The scheme typically supports socially excluded individuals who may lack confidence and motivation. As such, the scheme often supports individuals with these challenges to improve mental health and wellbeing. 1942 participants reported improved health and wellbeing according to monitoring data.
- 8.45 To monetise this, we follow HM Treasury guidance who report that a one-point change in WELLBY¹⁸ is worth £13,000. This is based on a linear conversion from wellbeing to money, using a range of values rather than a single point estimate. The lower bound of this range is set to be as consistent as possible with the existing Green Book recommended QALY value, while the upper bound is based on direct academic evidence on the estimated willingness to pay for changes in life satisfaction per annum.
- 8.46 Monitoring information indicates that 1942 participants have felt an improvement in their health and wellbeing, as such we estimate they will experience a 0.5 increase in their WELLBY mental wellbeing score. This 0.5 increase is worth £6,893 when converted to current prices. When we apply this to the 1942 beneficiary participants who have experienced increased wellbeing, we value this at approximately £13.3m in gross value, accrued across one year.

¹⁸ The "Wellbeing-adjusted Life Year" (WELLBY) is defined as a one-point change in life satisfaction on a likert scale between 0 to 10, for an individual for one year

Additionality

8.47 In the above sections we have generated a gross cost or benefit that does not represent the true impact of the scheme. The net impact demonstrates the costs and benefits that genuinely accrue to the local area solely because of the intervention. To arrive at the net impact, additionality factors are applied including leakage, displacement, deadweight, and substitution. Below, we provide a definition of the additionality factor, how the additionality factor is relevant to the scheme and how we estimate them.

Leakage

- **Definition:** The proportion of outputs that benefit those outside of the interventions target area.
- **How leakage is relevant to the scheme:** the number of scheme participants who secure work, who reside outside of the Tees Valley LEP. As such, their economic benefits would accrue to another authority.
- **Leakage estimation:** we understand that 0% reside outside the target areas. We have therefore applied a **0** leakage value.

Displacement

- **Definition:** the proportion of outputs accounted for by reduced outputs elsewhere.
- **How displacement is relevant to the scheme:** the firms that benefit from employing the participants will help improve their competitiveness at the expense of other firms.
- **Displacement estimation:** We have HM Treasury approved Additionality guidance case studies that indicates a displacement of **0.23**¹⁹

Deadweight

- **Definition:** the proportion of outputs that would have occurred even without the intervention going ahead.
- **How deadweight is relevant to the scheme:** due to other economics forces, how many of the participants would have found employment even without the programme.
- **Deadweight estimation:** using ONS data²⁰ we have been able to assess the average period of unemployment for different characteristics including, age, ethnicity, length of unemployment and health. The SFTV programme team has provided us with data on all the listed characteristics. Using these two data sources, we have assessed the likelihood of participants returning to work in the absence of SFTV by weighting and averaging the various characteristics to generate a deadweight value. In this case, we estimate that 16.2 per cent of participants would have found work without the programme. As such, we attribute a deadweight value of 0.2.

¹⁹ Additionality Guide Fourth Edition, Homes & Communities Agency, 2014

²⁰ Which groups find it hardest to find a job following a period out of work? Office for National Statistics , 2021

Substitution

- **Definition:** the effect that arises from a firm substituting one activity for another to take advantage of public assistance.
- **How is substitution relevant to the scheme:** supporting participants are putting other non-participants at a disadvantage by not receiving specialist support.
- **Substitution estimation:** we use case study evidence that estimates supply side interventions such as this scheme. This figure equates to **0.2**.

Multiplier

- **Definition:** Further economic activity associated with additional local income, local supplier purchases and longer-term development effects.
- **How is the multiplier relevant to this scheme:** the multiplier effect is solely relevant to the GVA output of the scheme. This is primarily because the additional supply chain effect will account for other beneficial elements such as wages. As such, if we were to apply a multiplier effect to other economic benefits this would be double counting.
- **Multiplier estimation:** we use an ONS database of regional multipliers, the North East's multiplier is **1.7**.

Value for Money Assessment

- 8.48 Employing the additionality factors as listed above, we can estimate the net costs and benefits of the scheme to develop a Net Present Value (NPV) and Benefit Cost Ratio (BCR). We adopt Green Book compliance, by separating BCR values into an initial BCR value and adjusted BCR value. The initial BCR represents the value of the benefits already come to fruition by participants who secured employment as described in the economic benefits section whilst the adjusted BCR includes other longer-term benefits as described in the other benefits section.

Table 8.4: Gross and Net Values

Element	Gross Value	Net Value
Costs		
Project Expenditure	£16,863,998.36	£16,863,998.36
SOCEF	£3,372,799.67	£3,372,799.67
Transport Costs	£82,237.52	£42,309.97
Total	£20,319,035.55	£20,279,108.00
Benefits		
Taxpayer savings	£935,155.75	£481,123.57
Tax generation	£125,762.28	£64,702.80
GVA output	£5,342,311.92	£4,669,726.41
Health Cost Saving	£427,395.86	£219,888.74
Crime Reduction Saving	£1,126,251.21	£579,439.31

Other Benefits		
Mental Health Benefits	£13,386,206.00	£6,887,001.65
Educational Outcomes	£9,685,482.52	£4,983,035.08
Initial BCR Total	£7,956,877.03	£6,014,880.83
Adjusted BCR Total	£31,028,565.54	£17,884,917.56

8.49 The net values are next utilised to generate a Net Present Value and BCR.

Table 8.5: NPV and BCR Estimates

Element	Value
Present Value Benefits (A)	£6,014,880.83
Present Value Other Benefits (B)	£11,870,036.73
Present Value Economic Costs (C)	£20,279,108.00
NPV (A+B-C)	-£2,394,190.44
Initial BCR (A/C)	0.30
Adjusted BCR (A+B/C)	0.88

8.50 The scheme, until April 2023, has delivered 30p for every £1 in economic costs. As such this is a low return on investment. However, as already noted, employment sustainability criteria is low and modelled at six months, leading to a valuation of only six months' worth of economic benefits.

8.51 When other economic benefits are included that come into fruition over a longer timescale, we see a greater picture of the true value of unemployment support programmes in generating long term outcomes. To generate a further understanding of what economic benefits the scheme could have with a longer measurement of employment sustainability, that in turn reflects more time spent in employment, we perform a sensitivity analysis below.

Sensitivity Analysis

8.52 To illustrate the potential further impact of the scheme, we model the economic benefits based on the scenarios where participants securing sustained employment remain in a job for one, two and three years.

8.53 As Table 8.6 illustrates, the economic benefits increase significantly after only a year in employment. This is partially because participants start earning enough to start paying tax over and above the personal allowance threshold. For example, with one year employment sustainability participants generate £750k in net additional taxes that significantly contributes to the Value for Money Assessment.

Table 8.6: Sensitivity Analysis

Element	Base case: 6 month employment sustainability	1 year employment sustainability	2-year employment sustainability	3-year employment sustainability
NPV	-£3,059,464.20	£4,783,805.00	£19,518,742.77	£33,461,494.81
Initial BCR	0.03	0.65	1.37	2.05
Adjusted BCR	0.60	1.24	1.96	2.63

- 8.54 Additionally, as the participants stays in the role or gains experience contributing to other roles that significantly improves the productivity proxy from 0.25 to 0.6. As such, this illustrates the potential long lasting effects of the SFTV programme if participants ensure they remain in employment for a significant period.
- 8.55 Participants remaining in employment for three years could generate £33m in net economic benefits and a return on investment of £2.63 per £1 in economic costs. It is worth referencing again at this point that the SFTV supported people with significant barriers i.e. 49% of all participants joined the programme with four or more barriers to employment.

Social Impact

- 8.56 The SFTV Programme has been successful in improving the lives of many people across the Tees Valley area. Through direct action - advice, support, advocating - often in areas 'between the cracks' of mainstream service provision, they have generated significant added value, in the form of:
- Reduction in: social isolation; worklessness and associated benefits to DWP and NHS, substance misuse alleviated; reoffending; homelessness and failed tenancies; debt and improved money management.
 - Improvements in: skill levels; active citizenship and volunteering; confidence; mental health; physical health; and digital inclusion.

Calculating Social Impact

- 8.57 In some areas we have been able to access management information to identify the scale of the impact across the participant caseload. Where this hasn't been possible, we have sought proxy values based on comparative programmes or gathered primary data. For each type of presenting issue, we asked for three key pieces of information: (i) prevalence among a sample of participants across Navigator caseloads; (ii) numbers of participants from sample changing their behaviour; and (iii) attribution of this change to the SFTV Programme. Given these frequency counts, we extrapolated against the number of participants that report back that at least one barrier has been reduced or resolved.

Impact Generated

- 8.58 Table 8.7 shows the changes attributable to different types of social outcome, as well as the associated monetised value. Monetised values for each social outcome have been drawn from a number of sources including government departments (HM Treasury, DWP and Ministry of Justice, amongst others).
- 8.59 The evidence is that the SFTV Programme is delivering a significant social benefit in relation to Improved mental and physical wellbeing; improved confidence and reduced isolation; and improved basic skills. Such issues underpin the capability for people to move into work and progress with their career.
- 8.60 The overall social value of the SFTV Programme is calculated at £84,991,691

Table 8.7: Social Impact Generated

Impact	Number of Participants Benefitting	Value per outcome	Total value
Alcohol addiction alleviated	321	£12,355	£3,960,714
Drug addiction alleviated	82	£12,355	£1,011,059
Reoffending	472	£9,587	£4,525,064
Homelessness and housing security	585	£3,000	£1,755,000
Debt free/relief from debt	46	£3,484.75	£1,641,857
Money management	301	£2,747	£826,847
Digital inclusion	1,170	£1,246	£1,457,215
Improved wellbeing (mental health)	1,039	£2,272	£2,360,462
Improved confidence	1,998	£13,996	£27,961,446
Reduced Isolation	1,027	£2,571	£2,640,417
Improved wellbeing (physical)	286	£6,492	£1,859,432
Healthier lifestyles	316	£20,570	£6,506,419
Active citizenship or Volunteering	523	£15,933	£8,332,959
Economic benefits of basic skills	622	£32,400	£20,152,800
Total			£84,991,691

9 Cross-Cutting Themes

Equal Opportunities and Gender Equality

- 9.1 From the outset there was a commitment to instilling good practice, ensuring that opportunities to ensure delivery was as inclusive as possible.
- 9.2 All new staff benefit from an induction, covering the importance of gender equality and diversity. Our research has also identified that all delivery partners include equality and diversity as part of their corporate staff induction, organise regular (largely annual) training and have relevant policies and procedures in place to ensure operations align with current legislation.
- 9.3 There has been a focus throughout delivery in engaging with women who are looking to get back in to work or ready to progress towards work. The programme ensured that equal opportunity and gender equality was appropriately reflected in all areas of marketing and recruitment.
- 9.4 A number of staff completed a Trans-Awareness course to develop skills in engaging with a wider variety of participants. Participants were asked for their preferred gender/pronouns for inclusivity. All premises complied with the Equalities Act, ensuring open access for all participants.

Environmental Sustainability

- 9.5 The SFTV Programme considered the opportunities for delivering in a way that was environmentally sustainable. A comprehensive training programme was delivered to ensure that programme staff understood the importance of environmental sustainability and equality and diversity.
- 9.6 The original model was based around geographical hubs, ensuring that central bases were accessible to participants and staff travel was minimised around manageable localities. This has ensured that the carbon footprint from travel (staff and participant) was minimised.
- 9.7 Across the programme, staff were encouraged to plan diaries to minimise travel time/distance by private car by clustering participant meetings. All staff were encouraged to travel sustainably by using public transport or car sharing. The pandemic was the catalyst for virtual engagement and this has enabled the programme to become much more sustainable since April 2020. At the job search stage, staff worked with participants to consider locations accessible by public transport, in part due to environmental considerations, but also for practical and economic reasons.
- 9.8 The requirement to print hard copy evidence, in colour, and with direct participant signatures Annex H, I , J) for validation limited opportunities to work to a paperless system. It would have been beneficial has this been permitted from the start of the programme.
- 9.9 Across partners, energy efficiency measures are followed such as turning computers off when not needed, switching off lights and using natural light where possible, re-using scrap paper, reducing water usage, recycling waste and ink cartridges; only printing in colour when it was a contractual requirement; printing double sided; and using office printers for larger amounts of printing rather than portable printers which are less economic.

10 Key Findings

Introduction

- 10.1 Complex, longstanding economic and social issues face communities in Tees Valley. Lack of employment opportunities and the state of the wider economy are significant, though there are some emerging employment opportunities. Rather than a lack of jobs, the real issues often seem associated with a lack of aspiration, confidence and the debilitating effect of living in communities with a poor reputation. These factors can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy of low social mobility, affecting people's mental health and self-belief, with adults lacking confidence in their ability to make career plans and feeling destined to employment or unemployment on the margins, dependent on the state or the grey economy for survival²¹.
- 10.2 SFTV has engaged the hardest to reach, supporting people with multiple and complex barriers to move into (and closer to) employment, education and training. The programme provided help to address multiple barriers, including mental health and well-being, isolation, digital exclusion, the lack of financial skills and more.
- 10.3 The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the labour market across the Tees Valley. The programme faced challenges in providing support through several lockdown periods, although half of the participants we interviewed stated that the quality of the support they received from SFTV during the pandemic was not affected adversely. Navigators worked hard to stay in touch with participants during lockdowns, reducing isolation and supporting mental health. Some partners provided face to face support as standard, whereas other continued delivering on a virtual basis for longer. Receiving support virtually was challenging for some, especially those with mental and physical health conditions that make it hard to accept help via Zoom and/or phone calls.
- 10.4 The programme has been well managed. There has been a strong commitment throughout to the person-centred nature of SFTV, from both management and operational staff. The programme was successful at the ESRA Awards in November 2022 having demonstrated the transformation of lives of those hardest hit during the pandemic, and having empowered people to find motivation, achieve goals and gain stability in difficult times.
- 10.5 A strong network of partners delivering wider, complementary support enabled Navigators to identify appropriate support and build sustainability for the longer term, in line with SFTV's original vision and intentions. When SFTV started in 2016 there were 28 delivery partners. Over time, the offer became more targeted, leading to a rationalisation of partners. While it is not unusual on BBO programmes for partner numbers to reduce over time it did lead to some adverse impact on the SFTV offer for periods of time, especially in relation to mental health support and the training offer in some localities.
- 10.6 Co-locating services generated added value, developing relationships across staff teams and organisations, leading to improvements in delivery.

²¹ See Swimming against the Tide, Local Economy, May 2012

- 10.7 It is positive that 11 of the 12 delivery partners agreed to jointly submit a tender proposal to deliver a future employability programme being procured by the Tees Valley Combined Authority.
- 10.8 The original business plan (2016-2019) assumed 40 per cent of all participants would have two or more complex needs. The world that delivery encountered and has sought to address has been more complex, and participants have presented with more numerous and intense barriers than expected – indicating a potential strain on resources. The original business plan for SFTV assumed participants would be on the programme for 6 months (183 days). Across the six-year period of SFTV delivery the number of days spent by all participants averaged 263 days.



Identifying Participants

- 10.9 The SFTV Programme benefitted from a consistent pipeline of potential participants seeking support. Success in engaging was also driven by effective referral networks, particularly with local community-based partners. Whilst the flow of referrals via Jobcentre Plus has varied across years and across localities, it has continued to be a valuable source of referrals. Referrals also came from other partners, including the Probation Service and increasingly from social prescribers.
- 10.10 The approach to marketing was well advanced with a coordinated programme-wide approach to publicity. A single SFTV account across social media platforms enabled consistency of messaging, aligned to the overall strategy.
- 10.11 Most of the programme’s delivery partners offered other services within their own organisations, drawing people in and thereby identify further individuals who could benefit from SFTV support. For existing programme participants, SFTV’s relationships with its delivery partners helped to fast track them into these complementary in-house services, providing the possibility of more holistic, wrap around support.

Delivery Model

- 10.12 The Navigator model operating across SFTV’s different localities worked well. Navigators ensured a tailored, individualised response. A single point of contact throughout the participant journey built trust and generated understanding of the potential for support and next steps. They knew what worked, in terms of engaging, supporting and ultimately getting people who are most distant from the labour market into work, education or training. Navigator teams knew their local communities, local partners, employers and other providers well. SFTV programme staff have consistently shown themselves willing to go above and beyond their remit to help participants move towards employment; many provided direct support with housing, healthcare, and in forming social connections. It is unfortunate that this knowledge and learning will be lost, due to the gap in time between the cessation of the BBO programme and any future employability support activity coordinated across the Tees Valley.

- 10.13 The Health Link Worker role provided additional capacity to support participants with health issues, predominantly their mental health. Navigators regarded access to a fast track to mental health support as critical for participants, and to be able to offer a service which is quick and responsive and goes above and beyond the ordinary.
- 10.14 As Health Link Worker support ceased, participants were often directed towards wider health and wellbeing activities, though this could also take place while still working with Health Link Workers. Pioneering Care Partnership (PCP) delivered short courses to small groups, helping participants to support each other, make life changes and improve their wellbeing, promoting confidence and self-esteem, and helping to develop emotional resilience and time management skills.
- 10.15 PCP facilitated group sessions on behalf of SFTV on a local basis, allowing participants to share experiences and support each other in a focused way. Sessions provided holistic support, including confidence-building, managing anxiety and making good choices. SFTV staff and participants alike expressed a wish for more PCP sessions across more locations.
- 10.16 Our research identified that too many participants were capable of work but simply lacked the confidence to make the leap into meaningful job search. Supported work and volunteer placements were designed to provide a safe environment to aid this transition.
- 10.17 Employer engagement was successful in identifying and supporting participants into a diverse range of roles. The work required to source and deliver this should be celebrated. The majority of all work placements were with private sector employers (67 per cent). It is positive that such a variety of private sector employers was engaged. National businesses engaged included: Costa Coffee, Darlington Building Society, Marks & Spencer, Premier Inn, Sainsbury's, Specsavers, Tesco and The Range.
- 10.18 The service was bespoke and there was no reliance on filling numerous 'high volume' roles within a single employer. As SFTV commences legacy planning, the existing links to such large employers is a very positive and attractive feature of any continued work placement type intervention.
- 10.19 Work placements provided a much-needed sense of routine and exposure to the workplace for those who had either been out of work for a long period or who were looking to move into a new area of work. The placements also provided a valuable opportunity for participants to gain experience and skills to build up their CVs and support future job applications.



- 10.20 The volunteering offer across the duration of SFTV has flexed considerably, due to the pandemic and the scope of activity of different delivery partners operating across different localities. The level of support has often been intensive, based on the starting point of individual participants. The Community Heroes initiative delivered by SFTV was well regarded for providing supported social opportunities whilst building experience via volunteering.

- 10.21 Participants were largely positive about their volunteering experiences, noting that they had helped them to progress with their job search or career path, whilst also improving their confidence. For many participants, taking part in the programme was a way to support their wider wellbeing, enabling them to progress into education, training or employment.
- 10.22 Most participants highlighted that their career aspirations had progressed through their volunteering experiences. While the majority of participants were satisfied with their experiences, several areas for improvement were suggested. One was a greater focus on wellbeing improvement courses, focusing solely on mental health, providing guidance around navigating volunteering and/or employment if someone had mental health issues to take account of. Volunteer hosts expressed a high degree of satisfaction with their SFTV experience. The volunteers made useful contributions to their organisations, particularly in hard-to-fill roles.
- 10.23 Programme resource was allocated to fund external financial and money management advice in each locality through the Citizens Advice. The level of resource attached to this is regarded as appropriate, given the scale of referrals from Navigators and the support from Citizens Advice was regarded extremely positively by Navigators. Data is held separately by each Citizens Advice, but in Stockton alone the support provided has led to over £1.5m of participant debt being written off and some £50,000 of additional benefits gained from recalculations and appeal support.
- 10.24 Resourcing training was a key part of the SFTV Programme. It enabled a range of group sessions to be arranged, alongside bespoke training in response to participant action plans developed by Navigators. Most participants completed some training and a total of 901 of participants moved into education or training on leaving the programme. The confidence gained from their reintroduction to learning and taking part offers considerable value to participants, alongside the actual content of the training. There was definite appetite in the latter stages of programme delivery to provide resource further accredited training. We recommend that this receives serious consideration when scoping future programmes of employability support activity.

Impact Generated

- 10.25 The programme has supported 4,448 participants over the duration of delivery. In total, 610 participants were recorded as having progressed into employment. Participants remaining in employment for three years could generate £33m in net economic benefits and a return on investment of £2.63 per £1 in economic costs.
- 10.26 The evidence is that the SFTV Programme is delivering a significant social benefit in relation to Improved mental and physical wellbeing; improved confidence and reduced isolation; and improved basic skills. Such issues underpin the capability for people to move into work and progress with their career. The overall social value of the SFTV Programme is calculated at £84,991,691.
- 10.27 The SFTV Programme has achieved the majority of its targets; this is impressive, particularly in light of the challenge presented by the pandemic and the emergence of other programmes, including Routes to Work and Restart, which sought to support a similar cohort, albeit with different offerings. There has been some underachievement in relation to the number of economically inactive participants supported, numbers of women and of people from ethnic minorities.

- 10.28 Targets in relation to participants with 2+ complex needs making a positive change; participants with improved ability to access and benefit from work-related services by developing financial and digital skills; and participants improving their job readiness and progressing closer to the labour market were all achieved
- 10.29 There has been some underachievement in relation to the number of economically inactive participants supported, women and of people from ethnic minorities. Our evaluation has identified that specific activities were undertaken to increase numbers from the mid-point of delivery. The pandemic had a clear adverse impact on achievement for these cohorts.
- 10.30 Participants who accessed support from multiple organisations valued opportunity to access complementary support from SFTV to tackle their wider barriers, with training courses and mental health support highly commended. Information sharing between organisations was also highly regarded, demonstrating effective management and procedures.
- 10.31 After receiving support from SFTV, four out of five participants (81 per cent) reported that they had improved understanding of their barriers to employment and how to overcome them. In total, 73 per cent felt supported with communication skills and 76 per cent felt supported with developing social skills.
- 10.32 Asked what was most useful in helping to access training, volunteering or a work placement, several participants said that the motivation and confidence building from SFTV contributed most. The range of courses available was varied, offering counselling, computer skills and social care.
- 10.33 While many participants were yet to move into employment, some had progressed into job searching following SFTV support. All participants interviewed stated that the SFTV programme had been useful in helping them to do this. In particular, aspects such as CV writing and application form completion were cited, as well as becoming more aware of the job search websites available and how best to use them to find appropriate, relevant employment opportunities. This is testament to the success of SFTV in providing the tools to support independent job search, enabling people to advance their careers on their own terms.
- 10.34 It is positive that 84 per cent of participants interviewed reported feeling more confident at having a go at new things; 78 per cent now feel a range of career options are open to them; and 77 per cent feel better able to bounce back after disappointment or when things go wrong. These responses all indicate greater resilience attributed to SFTV support and participants feeling better able to respond to disappointment or hardship. Several wider outcomes reported by participants provide an indication of the programme's extended impact, beyond employment-related targets:
- 10.35 This confidence building aspect mentioned in feedback is key. Many participants had low self-esteem and feelings of isolation. Over 40 per cent of participants reported a positive difference to their confidence in accessing local services, travelling independently and engaging in group activities.
- 10.36 More than 30 per cent reported a significant difference to their mental health, their confidence in managing money and in using IT – helping to address financial and digital exclusion. Navigators' support is shown to have gone beyond exploring employment opportunities, and for many SFTV participants it has acted as a mechanism for confidence building and greater independence and self-efficacy in the long term.

Mental Health across Tees Valley

- 10.37 The cost-of-living crisis is exacerbating mental health problems further and likely to continue to do so. On top of the increases in anxiety and hardship caused by lockdown restrictions and social isolation, costs are rising steeply, with food prices estimated to have risen by 15-20 per cent and energy bills having increased significantly. Good quality labour market programmes provide social support, reduce loneliness and help to get someone back into a structured routine. Key to sustainable mental health improvement is a focus on self-efficacy, such as that provided by SFTV, and fostering the psychological resources to cope with the stresses of unemployment, as well as helping people into work.
- 10.38 Understanding the mental health needs of different groups is important in ensuring that future provision is targeted and tailored for groups at greatest risk. The fundamental link between mental health and financial difficulties is clear, highlighted by national research and amply demonstrated by SFTV participants and partners and likely to be exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis.

