

A PATHWAY TO WORK

End of Project Report **June 2023**



Foreword

Richard Oskwarek
Programme Manager,
Opportunity and Change

I've been lucky enough to be involved in Opportunity and Change since very early on in the process - from helping write the bid, to implementation in autumn 2016 and then overseeing the project as the Programme Manager.

Over six and a half years, a total of 20 partner organisations, 238 members of staff, and over 1500 participants have been part of Opportunity and Change, which came to an end in March 2023.

When we were planning Opportunity and Change we set out two main aims:

- To enable and empower individuals to move from unemployment and economic inactivity, towards and into employment and economic activity
- To help individuals to 'resolve', or at least begin to recover from, one or more of the underlying multiple and complex issues which cause social and economic exclusion.



"I believe we have achieved what we set out to do by ensuring that participants were supported to explore employment and training opportunities alongside support to address their complex needs."

Richard Oskwarek

Our participants aren't the only people who have been on a journey: I'd like to thank all of our delivery partners, specialist services, stakeholder managers, and the project team for their dedication, hard work, and commitment to this programme.

We hope that we have created a legacy, and raised awareness of this important work and why we should continue to give people opportunities to change their lives.



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Executive Summary

This final evaluation report presents the key learning, performance, impact and legacy of the Opportunity and Change project, which delivered its services between October 2016 and March 2023.

Opportunity and Change, led by Framework, was an employability project for people facing severe and multiple disadvantage, delivered by a partnership of community-based organisations across Derby City, Derbyshire, Nottingham City, and Nottinghamshire (D2N2).

The project supported individuals (referred to as participants) experiencing multiple and complex issues, including homelessness, substance misuse, offending, mental ill health and domestic abuse.

The project was part of the Building Better Opportunities (BBO) programme, which was jointly funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) and the National Lottery Community Fund. The Department for Work and Pensions was the programme's Managing Authority.

There were three strands of BBO across D2N2. In addition to Opportunity and Change, Towards Work, led by Groundwork Greater Nottingham, was an employability programme, and Money Sorted, led by St Anns Advice Centre, was a financial inclusion programme. All three lead organisations worked together under the partnership People's First Alliance (PFA).

Four Local Authority-based Stakeholder Managers supported the Building Better Opportunities programme at a strategic level across the D2N2 region.

Opportunity and Change supported 1595 participants over six and a half years of project delivery; almost one quarter (300; 23.3%) more than the profiled target.

Most of the project's referrals from 2020 onwards came from organisations and services outside of the Opportunity and Change partnership, including Jobcentre Plus, Drug and Alcohol Recovery Services, and Homeless and Multiple Needs Services

In basic demographic terms, by the end of March 2023 the project had supported:

- 54.9% Men and 45.0% Women
- 60.1% economically inactive, and 39.9% unemployed, including long-term unemployed participants
- 15.2% participants over the age of 50
- 18.2% participants from ethnic minorities
- 71.7% participants stating they had a disability and/or persistent health condition limiting their capacity to work
- 25% participants were living in Nottingham City, 25% in Nottinghamshire, 29% in Derby City, and 21% in Derbyshire
- The majority of participants (65%) were educated to secondary level; 21% had post-secondary or tertiary education; and 14% had received primary level or no education.

87.8% participants were experiencing **at least three complex support needs** when they first accessed Opportunity and Change: 195 (12.2%) participants had two support needs, 594 (37.2%) had three, 550 (34.5%) had four, and 256 participants (16.1%) had five support needs at their initial assessment.



Opportunity and Change helped 921 (57.7%) participants to make significant progress in relation to addressing their complex needs. This included:

- 681 (44.4%) participants who improved their mental health and wellbeing
- 501 (45.6%) participants became more settled in their housing situation
- 300 (28.8%) participants accessed treatment and support in relation to substance misuse
- 309 (26.7%) participants accessed help and support in relation to domestic abuse
- 161 (20.8%) participants reduced their risk of reoffending.

Taking into consideration only those with more recent or repeated experiences of domestic abuse (n=719), the percentage of those seeking help and support looks more encouraging (43%). Similarly, amongst those with only a recent or prolific offending history (n=353), the proportion of those reducing their risk of re-offending became 45.6%.

As a result of engaging with the Opportunity and Change Care Act team, a total of 97 participants were allocated some form of provision under The Care Act (2014). Within this group, 33 individuals were awarded a Personal Budget to pay for their additional care and support.

451 (28.3%) participants left Opportunity and Change to start work, engage with training and education, or begin actively job searching.

Opportunity and Change supported a total of 159 participants into paid employment and self-employment, including:

- 59.7% participants with a disability or recurring health condition
- 54.7% participants who were economically inactive when they first accessed the project
- 16.4% participants over the age of 50
- 22% participants from ethnic minority groups
- 44% women, and 56% men.

More than three quarters (77.4%) participants who entered paid employment said they had three or four complex needs when they first accessed Opportunity and Change. Further analysis revealed that:

- 46.5% participants who started working had been homeless when they first accessed the project
- 79.2% had persistent, moderate to severe mental ill health
- 47.8% were at risk of abuse or were living in an abusive relationship
- 33.% were receiving treatment or at risk of relapse in relation to substance misuse
- 42.1% had an offending history.

These figures highlight those participants entering paid employment did so whilst dealing with complex problems and overcoming barriers to employment such as a criminal record, enduring mental ill health or living in a vulnerable housing situation.

By the end of March 2023, Opportunity and Change supported 176 economically inactive participants into paid employment (89; 9.3%) or active job searching (87; 9.1%).

Opportunity and Change supported 131 participants to engage with volunteering. 73% volunteering participants said their mental health had significantly improved since they started volunteering.

Participants who became volunteer peer mentors through the Loudspeaker Programme, benefitted from personal growth and achievement, co-production, and peer support.

In the Newark and Sherwood area, one Navigator supported 70% of her caseload into employment, training and education, and job searching. The majority of these were Syrian refugees. This has led to an ongoing partnership between Framework and the Newark and Sherwood District Council's Refugee Resettlement Team enabling this excellent work to continue.

203 participants left the project to start a formal education or training course, including Level 2 and 3 vocational courses, access to higher education training, apprenticeships, degrees, and functional skills courses.

Many more participants engaged with short courses or group-based learning, including Skills Plus for Change. 58% of those who went into work, training, or job searching had attended Skills Plus for Change.

Analysing data through the 'dual lens' of Individual Placement and Support, and Psychologically Informed Environments, Navigator-participant relationships were revealed as crucial; underpinning positive engagement, outcomes, and attainment of results. Good relationships were nurtured by Navigators who:

- Invested time developing trust and a good rapport with participants
- Adopted a person-centred approach whilst promoting personal accountability
- Encouraged and inspired participants to try or learn new things
- Demonstrated passion and commitment for their work, and an in-depth understanding of SMD and trauma
- Advocated for participants in a range of contexts.

The most effective aspects of the Opportunity and Change delivery model were seen as:

- Working with community-based organisations that created environments and meeting places that promoted a sense of safety and wellbeing for all
- Maintaining smaller caseloads (of up to 20), and supporting participants for longer
- Individualised, needs and preference-led support planning, empowering participants to explore, identify, and achieve their own goals
- Adopting a holistic view of employability; recognising that all aspects of engagement had an intrinsic value which contributed to the broader social and economic aims of the project
- The development of personal or 'soft' skills, often through engagement with group-based activities, was an important part of the participant recovery, resettlement and employment journey
- Navigator access to a participant budget provided opportunities to try new things and alleviated barriers to engagement.

Key challenges and 'lessons learned' that shaped wider thinking, included:

- The size and scale of the partnership
- Supporting complex needs services to deliver employability
- The COVID19 Pandemic
- Developing trauma-informed endings.

Good practice suggestions for future provision, include:

- Strengths-based coaching around employment-related outcomes
- Adopting a zero-exclusion policy
- Providing regular access to job clubs and other group-based activities
- Ensuring that all staff are equipped, confident, and invested to deliver the project's core aims
- Increasing visibility and presence
- Providing meaningful in-work support or 'time unlimited, follow on support'.

In a recent survey, participants who left the project to go into work, training, or job searching, were asked about their experiences, and the lasting impacts of engaging with Opportunity and Change. Our findings reveal that:

- 83% participants felt supported to achieve their employment and training goals
- Since leaving the project, 60% survey respondents had remained economically active, including 43% participants who were still in paid employment
- 38% had started volunteering since engaging with Opportunity and Change
- Three quarters (74%) former participants said they had increased self-esteem
- 70% said they had gained new knowledge or learned new skills
- 64% said they felt better in groups and interacting with other people.

Following the success of Opportunity and Change, Nottingham City and Newark and Sherwood District councils commissioned Framework through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, to develop a new service in these areas, called Grow, which was launched on 1st April 2023.

The Opportunity and Change Care Act Team, as well as supporting almost one hundred participants to access additional provision under the Care Act (2014), contributed to the development of good practice across Local Authority Adult Social Care departments and voluntary sector organisations. They were instrumental in the development and implementation of the Trusted Assessor role; with Social Workers now embedded across a number of Framework's complex needs services.

Through its evaluation, research, and sharing of good practice, Opportunity and Change has helped to establish a growing local network of like-minded organisations and individuals, committed to improving the employment-related outcomes of those facing SMD. Our final case study explores key barriers to employment for those living and working in supported accommodation settings, including: financial barriers, housing-related barriers, lack of consistent information, advice, and support, and perceptions of work-readiness.





Introduction

Opportunity and Change was a community-based partnership led by Framework¹. It provided ‘a pathway to work’ for unemployed and economically inactive people facing multiple and complex issues, also referred to as severe and multiple disadvantage (SMD)². Opportunity and Change was jointly funded by The National Lottery Community Fund (TNLCF) and European Social Fund (ESF) between October 2016 and March 2023. The project was part of the national Building Better Opportunities (BBO) programme, investing in local projects designed to tackle the root causes of poverty, promote social inclusion, and drive local jobs and growth³.

Opportunity and Change was one of three strands of BBO provision across the D2N2 LEP Region⁴, alongside Towards Work: an employability project, led by Groundwork Greater Nottingham, and Money Sorted: a financial inclusion project, led by St Ann’s Advice Centre. In addition, four Local Authority-based Stakeholder Managers supported the Building Better Opportunities programme at a strategic level⁵.

¹ For further information about Framework, visit: www.frameworkha.org

² In this report, the terms ‘multiple and complex needs’, and ‘SMD’ are used interchangeably. For further information about SMD, visit: www.meam.org.uk and www.lankellychase.org.uk

³ More information about the national BBO Programme and its evaluation can be found here: Home | Building Better Opportunities Evaluation

⁴ For more information, visit: D2N2 | Local Enterprise Partnership for Nottinghamshire & Derbyshire (d2n2lep.org)

⁵ The BBO D2N2 Local Authority Stakeholder Managers 2022 Impact Report can be accessed at: BBO in D2N2 Stakeholder Managers Impact Report 2022 (bbo-d2n2.org.uk)

Who We Supported, and Why

In 2019, in Nottingham City alone, it was estimated there were over 5,000 citizens experiencing severe, multiple disadvantage. In the context of this project SMD refers to those experiencing multiple (at least two) of the following complex problems at any given time: mental ill health, homelessness, substance misuse, involvement with the criminal justice system, and cycles of violence and abuse. Many people facing SMD experience adversity during childhood in the form of structural poverty and family difficulties, and are coping as adults with the aftermath of trauma⁶. The wider social and economic impacts of SMD are considerable and far-reaching for individuals, their family members, and surrounding communities. Impacts include chronic poverty and unemployment, social exclusion, and greater long-term health inequalities.

Wider research suggests the experience of SMD goes hand-in-hand with long-term unemployment and precarious, low paid work⁷, yet there continues to be a lack of employment-related provision available to those typically described by welfare-to-work providers as ‘the furthest from the labour market’. It appears that, when it comes to accessing employment-related support, people facing SMD are likely to encounter a double jeopardy of multiple exclusion. Firstly, the majority of complex needs services are commissioned to address one or perhaps two issues, and a person with complex issues will usually be granted access to support based on an assessment of their priority of need. Prioritising one issue over another can be problematic for an individual, yet if their needs are considered too many or too complex, they may be excluded from the service altogether.

Over 6.5 years, Opportunity and Change has demonstrated a continuous demand for its services, supporting a total of 1595 people; 60% of whom were ‘economically inactive’, and 71% were experiencing either three (37%) or four (34%) complex issues when they first accessed the project.

Secondly, most people accessing complex needs services such as hostels, drug and alcohol treatment providers, and mental health services will find that employment-related support tends to be delivered externally rather than in-house and embedded into service delivery models.

A lack of adequate employment-related provision is accompanied by societal misconceptions about the work-related capabilities of those facing SMD. It is often assumed that a person with multiple and complex needs is unlikely to be in a position to engage in paid work, so their work-related experiences, needs, and aspirations are not consistently explored or captured by service providers. Given that most complex needs services are not commissioned to prioritise employment-related outcomes, further systemic assumptions are made about who is responsible for delivering such interventions. This leads to conversations about work being delayed by support staff; employment is framed as something to consider further down the line - ‘after move on’, for example - rather than something that can potentially support the recovery or resettlement journey from the beginning. Opportunity and Change set out to address this gap in provision: offering holistic and individually tailored packages of support to help participants move closer to the labour market whilst overcoming complex issues and barriers.

⁶ Homeless Link offer a really useful webinar, introducing concepts of trauma and Trauma-informed Care: <https://homeless.org.uk/knowledge-hub/a-basic-introduction-to-trauma-informed-care/>

⁷ Bramley, G., Fitzpatrick, S., Edwards, J., Ford, D., Johnsen, S., Sosenko, F., & Watkins, D. (2015). Hard Edges: mapping severe and multiple disadvantage in England. Lankelly Chase Foundation, London.

Individual Placement and Support (IPS)

During the lifetime of Opportunity and Change, employment services implementing 'work first' approaches, namely the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) model⁸, have grown rapidly across the UK. Originating in the late 1990s in mental health settings, IPS is based on research showing that engaging in paid employment is good for a person's wellbeing and can therefore aid recovery or resettlement⁹. IPS is now being adapted for people with a range of complex issues, including those in treatment and recovery from substance use. There are currently an estimated 300 IPS services and centres of excellence across the UK, and this number is increasing¹⁰. Since 2021, Framework has been delivering IPS within its drug and alcohol treatment services¹¹. Although Opportunity and Change was not designed as an IPS service¹², this report draws our attention to the similarities and differences between Opportunity and Change and IPS, as an evidence-based model of good practice. Moreover, the contribution of IPS in challenging wider systemic and cultural misconceptions about 'work readiness' deserves recognition, as it has undoubtedly shaped our thinking and practice as an organisation.

Psychologically Informed Environments (PIEs)

Building on its wealth of existing knowledge and good practice, in recent years Framework has also committed to implementing the principles of Psychologically Informed Environments (PIEs) and Trauma informed Care (TIC)¹³ across its services. To support this aim Framework employed two clinical psychologists in 2018, who deliver: staff training, consultation, and ongoing support to help them to work in psychologically informed ways, Critical Incident Stress Management debriefings, policy and strategy development, 'system change' work, and a wide range of research activity including establishing a Research at Framework steering group, and providing clinical supervision, training and placement of MSc and DClinPsy students who also contribute, through research and practice, to the PIE and TIC related strategic aims of the organisation. As with IPS, although it was not a deliberate intention of Opportunity and Change to embed PIE and TIC across the partnership, since the project's launch these principles have become better known and adopted more widely across homeless and complex needs services. It is therefore pertinent to include PIC and TIC in the evaluation of our practice.



Opportunity and Change Partnership

Sixteen organisations have been involved in delivering end-to-end Navigator support to participants across the D2N2 region, as part of Opportunity and Change. These were:

- Acorn Training
- Awaaz
- Derventio Housing Trust
- Double Impact
- Emmanuel House
- Framework
- Improving Lives
- Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum (NNRF)
- Nottingham Women's Centre
- Nottinghamshire Women's Aid
- Nottinghamshire YMCA
- POW
- Riverside Care and Support
- Rural Community Action Nottinghamshire (RCAN)
- Women's Work Derbyshire
- YMCA Derbyshire

When asked about the benefits of working as part of a large-scale, regional partnership of organisations...

- 94.1% partners said their relationships and networks with other organisations had improved
- 82.3% Navigators had increased knowledge of local services and resources for participants
- 70.6% Navigators felt more confident supporting people with multiple and complex needs

To complement the one-to-one Navigator support, there were five additional services offering specialist provision to participants:

- The Care Act Team: delivered by Derbyshire YMCA, Derbyshire Law Centre, and Nottinghamshire YMCA
- Skills Plus for Change: delivered by Framework
- Counselling: provided by Improving Lives
- The Loudspeaker Programme: delivered by Nottingham Contemporary Art Gallery
- Advocacy, Inclusion, and Participation Services: provided by SEA

⁸ For more information, visit: <https://www.centreformentalhealth.org.uk/what-ips>

⁹ Drake, R.E., Bond, G.R., & Becker, D.R. (2012). Individual placement and support: An evidence-based approach to supported employment. Oxford University Press.

¹⁰ Social Finance UK: <https://www.socialfinance.org.uk/projects/building-englands-ips-sector-help-people-into-jobs>

¹¹ New Path to Employment: <https://online.flippingbook.com/view/615659423/2/>

¹² See Annex A: Principles of Individual Placement and Support (IPS).

¹³ See Annex B: Principles of Psychologically Informed Environments (PIEs) and Trauma Informed Care (TIC).

About the Evaluation¹⁴

The evaluation of Opportunity and Change began in January 2017. It was designed to help shape the management and delivery of the project; based on continued learning about 'what works' and 'what could be improved'. The evaluation had a mixed-methods (qualitative and quantitative) design, drawing upon a range of existing (secondary) data, whilst generating new (primary) data in the form of feedback and insights from partners, participants, and stakeholders.

The evaluation has also enhanced our understanding about the role (and impact) of delivering employment-related support to those facing severe and multiple disadvantage. The ultimate aim was to provide an evidence base that will inform how employability programmes of this kind are designed and delivered in the future.

This final report offers an overview of key learning and performance-related outcomes achieved by Opportunity and Change. Building on the findings of previous evaluations, it also examines the lasting impacts and legacy of the project, in relation to our thinking and practice, planning for future services, and the significant outcomes and achievements of those we have supported over the years.

To help illustrate this we have included three case studies focusing on our work with refugees, the role of peer mentors, and barriers to work encountered by people living in supported accommodation.

The following section of this report – Our Approach – showcases the most effective elements of the Opportunity and Change delivery model and support offered to participants, presents some key challenges and lessons learned, and offers good practice suggestions for future provision of this kind.

Project Performance focuses on the achievements of those who delivered and engaged with support from Opportunity and Change. It includes analyses of participant reach and engagement, complex needs-related outcomes, Care Act team outcomes, the positive benefits of engaging in group-based learning and therapeutic interventions, and of course, the employment-related outcomes achieved by participants.

The conclusion reflects on the impacts and legacy of the project: how we have used evidence from the evaluation to influence local service commissioning and development, incorporated our learning and good practice into service design and delivery, and used our findings to influence wider thinking and system change around the role of employability within complex needs services.

¹⁴ Jess Smith is Framework's Research and Evaluation Manager and the author of this report. She has been involved in the delivery, management and development of numerous employment and complex needs services for over fifteen years. Alongside the evaluation of Opportunity and Change, Jess is undertaking a PhD project through Nottingham Trent University, about the role of employment-related support within services for people facing severe and multiple disadvantage.



Our Approach

Through the 'dual lens' of the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) fidelity guidance, and literature on creating psychologically informed environments (PIEs), we analysed a range of feedback and data to identify the most effective aspects of the Opportunity and Change delivery model and support offered to participants, key challenges and lessons learned, and suggested good practice for future provision of this kind.

The Navigator-Participant Relationship

The relationship between navigators and participants was crucial. Positive relationships increased engagement, which in many cases, correlated with positive action and change, and the attainment of outcomes and results. According to qualitative feedback from participants, good relationships were based on:

- Navigators investing time developing trust and a good rapport with participants, offering regular one-to-one support, and being persistent, reliable, patient, and flexible (consistency is key)
- Navigators who are empowering and person-centred, yet not afraid to challenge - they encourage openness and transparency whilst maintaining clear professional boundaries (promoting personal autonomy and accountability)
- Navigators who encourage and inspire participants to go 'out of their comfort zone' and try new things. They are proactive; seeking out opportunities for participants to do this and eliminating barriers to attendance and engagement (adopting a strengths-based approach)
- Navigators with commitment and passion for the work they do; demonstrated through their knowledge and skills, resilience, empathy, and sensitivity (a 'human approach')
- Navigators showing an in-depth practice-based understanding of SMD and trauma, sometimes through their own lived experience¹⁵, previous work experience, and through ongoing learning and development¹⁶. This helped participants to feel listened to, understood, and respected.
- Advocacy: including supporting participants to attend meetings, consultations, assessments, and reviews. As well as helping them to feel more confident with someone 'on their side', participants also valued having someone there to 'remember what was said', 'take notes', and offer their informed, impartial advice
- Navigators were frequently described as 'a friend, with professional boundaries in place'. Many participants expressed considerable gratitude for the support they had received; attributing their own achievements and progression to the relationship they had built with their Navigator.

¹⁵ 64% staff involved with Opportunity and Change said they had lived experience of the complex issues encountered by those accessing the project.

¹⁶ The Nottingham Practice Development Unit offers a wide range of training and resources on SMD and trauma, available to access here: <https://www.pdunottingham.org/>

The Delivery Model

- Delivery partners endeavoured to create environments which promoted a sense of safety and wellbeing for all. Participants were offered flexibility and choice about meeting places, which ranged from parks and open spaces to specialist women's services with creche facilities. Some participants were only able to meet within their home, while others preferred to meet out in the community. During the pandemic, Navigators and participants made use of phone calls, postal communication, and online platforms such as MS Teams and Zoom to stay connected.
- In addition to regular one-to-one support from Navigators, group-based learning activities and therapeutic interventions became one of the most reputable and successful aspects of the project. Many participants over the years claimed their experience of engaging with a group-based intervention had been 'life changing' for them. Those who attended groups found opportunities to develop their self-esteem and confidence, engage in peer support, build social networks, and improve services¹⁷.
- Navigators worked with smaller caseloads (of up to 20 participants at any given time) and were able to support individuals for longer - in some cases, up to three years. This gave participants and their Navigators more time and flexibility to address multiple, complex needs, and respond to unexpected personal setbacks, periods of disengagement, and lengthy bureaucratic processes (such as applying for health services or social housing).
- Individualised, needs and preference-led support planning meant that participants were empowered to explore, identify, and achieve their own goals. For example, support to look for work was consistently found to be individualised, which is evident through an assessment of the project's employment outcomes. Participants left the project to work in a broad range of sectors, into jobs at all levels and with a variety of different employers, from small, family run businesses to large corporations and institutions.
- Furthermore, Navigators and participants were encouraged to adopt a holistic view of employability; recognising that all aspects of engagement had an intrinsic value which contributed, directly or indirectly, to the broader social and economic aims of the project. For the vast majority of participants, the development of personal or 'soft' skills was an important part of their 'journey'; relevant to their recovery, resettlement, and employment aims and goals.
- Navigators also had access to a budget, available to cover essential and 'one off' items for participants such as: specialist equipment, 'Right to Work' documents, travel expenses, interpreting and childcare services (to alleviate barriers to learning and engagement), mobile phones and other IT equipment, and interview clothing.

¹⁷ More about the benefits of engaging with group-based learning activities and therapeutic interventions, including a case study about Peer Support, is included in the Project Performance section of this report.

Key Challenges and Lessons Learned

With a grant-funded partnership the size and scale of Opportunity and Change, spanning almost seven years, there were naturally a few 'bumps in the road', which are well-documented within the previous five annual evaluation reports. The project team responded very well to challenges as they emerged, recognising the unique opportunity to improve working practices 'in real time', and generate new knowledge about employability and SMD. Community-based partner organisations embraced the opportunity to contribute to this wider learning whilst providing additional services to their new and existing clients.

There were a few challenges in particular, that gave rise to more significant and lasting developments in the project lead's thinking and practice during the life course of the project:

Size and Scale of the Partnership:

at its launch in October 2016, Opportunity and Change was working with twenty-one partner organisations across D2N2, including sixteen partners delivering end-to-end Navigator provision. By January 2023, there were six remaining delivery partners and four specialist partners. The geographical spread of the project, and differing structures and systems within each organisation, presented numerous challenges. In hindsight the project leads felt (and many partners have agreed) that implementing a smaller partnership would have been easier to manage and would have given selected partners more financial resources to deliver their services. Despite this, The Local Authority Stakeholder Managers played a significant role in ensuring that Opportunity and Change remained successfully 'on the map' of regional employment-related provision, and accessible to those who needed the project the most.

Supporting Complex Needs Services to Deliver Employability:

Navigators were well-equipped with a range of skills and experience, to respond to the diverse, complex needs of participants. This was considered a key strength of the partnership by the project leads, who recognised that a 'one size fits all' approach is ineffective and can exacerbate the circumstances that lead to multiple exclusion. However, it became increasingly evident that participants were not always receiving a consistent service, particularly in relation to employment-related support and interventions. Navigators with previous experience of delivering employment-related information, advice, and guidance, were more likely to embed this in their day-to-day practice. Navigators who included employability were also more effective with data recording and submitting monitoring outcomes. Participants supported by these Navigators tended to have increased engagement, both one-to-one and in group activities, and went onto to attain more complex needs and work-related outcomes. Navigators with less experience of delivering employability appeared less confident, and tended to 'shy away' from it and focus more intensively on addressing the multiple and complex needs of participants. They were also more likely to claim that participants were 'not work ready' or that their needs were 'too complex' for them to consider employment as a realistic, attainable outcome. In previous evaluation reports this was described as 'gatekeeping'. Good practice around employability, therefore, became visibly siloed.

Opportunity and Change leads made good progress in addressing this issue during 2018, by recruiting a full-time Performance Manager. They provided regular support to Navigators through caseload reviews, sourcing relevant training and development opportunities, and facilitating quarterly Navigator meetings (which eventually replaced the clinically led Navigator Group Supervisions). Navigators were frequently asked to consider and provide evidence of employment-related support taking place with participants, while engaging in their own continued professional development.

The COVID19 Pandemic:

the support needs of Opportunity and Change participants increased during the pandemic, and referrals remained consistently high. Opportunity and Change adapted its services to ensure that participants continued to receive care and support, often remotely - offering what was described as 'a lifeline' to hundreds of individuals and their families¹⁸. One of the most significant developments in practice to emerge from the pandemic witnessed through Opportunity and Change, was an increased use of online and digital communications. The pandemic raised awareness that many participants were experiencing digital exclusion in various forms. At the same time, community-based services were called to respond to increased demand for support and in doing so, provided additional resources to enable people to 'stay connected'. This subsequently increased the use of online and digital platforms amongst staff and many participants, accelerating the 'digital inclusion agenda' across many organisations, regionally and further afield.

Trauma-Informed Endings:

in-depth interviews with former participants during 2019, revealed that the timing and language used by Navigators in discussions about their support coming to end, was not inclusive and had left some participants feeling rejected and unprepared. Participants with previous experience of trauma found this particularly challenging. In response, the project leads provided Navigators with training about trauma-informed practice and encouraged them to think of appropriate ways to engage participants in conversations about the provision coming to an end. The project team developed a service directory to help Navigators signpost participants to other community-based provision. They also created a trauma-informed planning tool called a participant 'Passport', which included prompts about achievements, interests, aims and goals, needs, and communication preferences. This enabled the end of the project to be explored and reframed in a more positive light; providing an opportunity reflection and celebration.

¹⁸ A full feature about the impacts of the pandemic on the support needs of participants, and the response of Opportunity and Change was included in the Year Four Evaluation, published in July 2021.

Good Practice Suggestions for Future Provision

Both IPS and PIE are accompanied by a vast amount of supporting evidence and guidance, which appear to be relevant to the aims of Opportunity and Change. Exploring ways to strategically embed these models in the planning and delivery of future provision of this kind, could enhance the quality and consistency of support available to participants, and create better integrated services.

Taking a lead from the guiding principles of IPS and PIE, in addition to existing good practice previously outlined, participants with multiple and complex needs accessing future employment-related provision could benefit from these measures:

Strengths-based coaching around employment-related outcomes:

focusing on current interests, aims and goals, acknowledgement of pre-existing relationships to work, education and training, and assessment of needs and circumstances:

Opportunity and Change Participant:

"I wanted to do graphic design, so I got the books, I did some courses online, and then I had a very bad day and I went into Women's Work and said I don't feel that I should do that anymore, I feel too old, and my Navigator said hang on, that's not a thing - you can do whatever you want to do...and it made me think, you know? - why should I settle for something less than I want to do? And then she suggested to try and find some apprenticeships, and I found one in Digital Marketing, and I thought well that's a good step towards graphic design [...]"

Integration and embedding employability within services:

ensuring that all participants have access to employment-related support from the outset, alongside support to address other barriers and complex needs. Whilst no one can predict whether a participant will be able to sustain their employment, some research evidence suggests those who express motivation and willingness to work are more likely to succeed. However, we have learned through experience that many people with multiple, complex needs have low self-esteem and self-efficacy when they first access support, which can impact on their motivation and willingness to engage. Over time, many Opportunity and Change participants became more open to work-related support and activities. Excluding people from employability on the basis of how they felt at the beginning of their support could be a missed opportunity. Alternatively, 'embedding employability'; making it familiar and part of 'everyday conversations' with all service users from the outset, offers a more strengths-based and inclusive approach.

Regular access to job clubs and other group-based employment-related activities,

alongside one-to-one support. As well as being an efficient way to manage resources, bringing people together encourages individuals to grow their social networks and engage with peer support. Using IT for job searching also provides additional opportunities to develop functional skills. Ensuring that job searching takes place early in participant engagement, rather than delaying it, promotes the underpinning 'work first' ethos of IPS. Everyone can benefit from rapid job searching - including participants with multiple, complex barriers and those interested in pursuing other goals, such as training or volunteering.

Ensuring that all delivery staff are equipped, confident, and invested to deliver the aims of the project.

Although it may not be practicable to embed employment specialists across all complex needs services, alternatives should be considered, to enable 'employability' to be better integrated. All staff, for example, should receive training and support to feel confident delivering basic employability, including strength-based coaching, assessments and action planning, practical activities, information sharing, and signposting.

Most of these activities should align with existing work and be seen as 'part of' rather than 'in addition to'. Employability leads could also be recruited or identified within teams, to help embed more complex processes or to share more regularly updated specialist knowledge (such as advice about disclosing health conditions, or in-work benefits advice).

It is good practice to ensure delivery staff receive regular support and supervision from someone with an understanding of both SMD and employability. Staff would benefit from practice observations, and follow-up coaching to support their development. In addition, staff who engage with communities of practice, clinical group supervisions, and action learning sets, are likely to become more reflexive, resilient, and psychologically informed. This will help nurture positive, effective working environments and relationships.

Increasing visibility and presence:

by co-locating within other services where possible, attending regular team meetings, multi-disciplinary and partnership meetings, and case reviews. Sharing a working environment on a regular basis is a relatively easy and effective way to promote a service, share learning and good practice, and maintain referral pathways. It also creates opportunities to collaborate and explore new approaches to problem-solving.

Developing and implementing a marketing and promotional strategy as part of project planning, can help to identify and make the best use of all available channels to maximise project reach, and ensure its aims are clearly communicated and understood. By the end of 2019 Opportunity and Change leads had produced leaflets in multiple languages and a bi-monthly partnership bulletin. They were updating their website and social media pages fortnightly, and sharing regular case studies, evaluation findings, outcomes, testimonials, and videos across the partnership and beyond.

In-work support or 'time-unlimited, follow on support'

(including effective employer engagement¹⁹): service design and commissioning often limits the resources and capabilities of front-line workers to offer meaningful, time-unlimited follow-on support. Despite this, many services informally adopt 'open door' policies: recognising that participants often require more intensive support to help them cope with significant periods of change in their lives, such as moving into their own tenancy, or starting a new job. However, if 'good practice' is not effectively embedded into the design and planning of services, it becomes reliant on individual staff members who choose to go 'above and beyond', which creates inconsistencies in quality of service and is unsustainable. One Opportunity and Change participant explained the importance of in-work support:

Opportunity and Change Participant:

"Now I am in work, [my Navigator] is not allowed to support me anymore. Which I think is wrong 'cause you know, even for a year afterwards, when you've been out of work for as many years as me and had problems like I have...[my Navigator's] been a massive support to me and I'm really gonna miss that, and I think just because you've got a job doesn't mean you don't need that support anymore because that's the hardest time [...] everything's relying on you to go to work so you still need [support]."

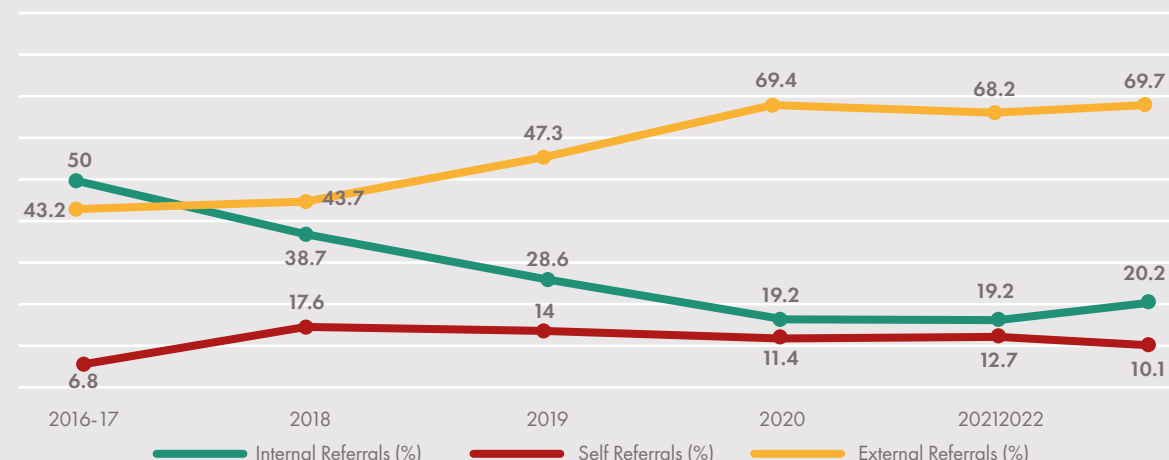
¹⁹ Building Better Opportunities published a learning paper about employer engagement (2019), which can be accessed here: <https://buildingbetteropportunities.org.uk/sites/default/files/2019-10/Employer%20Engagement%20Learning%20Paper.pdf>

Project Performance

Project Reach

- Opportunity and Change maintained a consistent flow of referrals between October 2016 and October 2022, supporting a total of 1595 participants
- With the exception of 2021²⁰, the number of participants accessing support for the first time decreased each year²¹. This coincides with a reduction in size of the partnership, from sixteen partners delivering Navigator support in 2017, to six by the end of 2022
- Navigators were encouraged to maintain smaller caseloads of up to 20 participants at any given time, enabling them to offer more intensive, longer-term support to those who needed it
- Demand for the project remained high throughout the pandemic. As many services closed their doors, Opportunity and Change continued to support participants remotely and in-person
- Most of the project's referrals from 2020 onwards came from external agencies²², including Jobcentre Plus, Drug and Alcohol Recovery Services, and Homeless and Multiple Needs Services

Opportunity and Change Referrals (2016 - 2021)

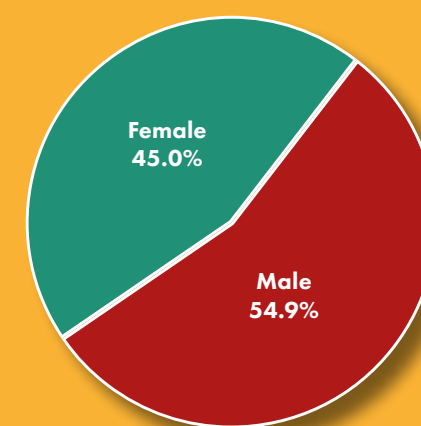


²⁰ In 2021, 26 more participants started receiving support than in 2020.

²¹ The number of participants who started receiving support in previous years were: 391 in 2016-17; 307 in 2018; 244 in 2019; 220 in 2020; 245 in 2021; and 188 in 2022.

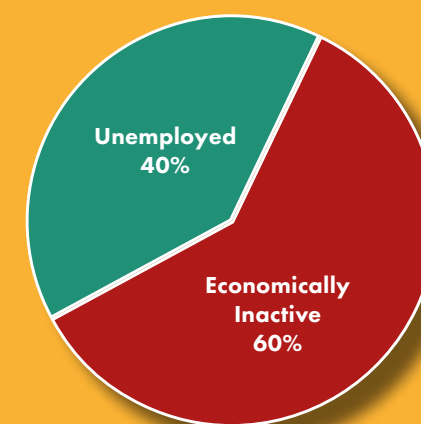
²² Organisations and services outside of the Opportunity and Change partnership.

By the end of March 2023, Opportunity and Change had supported...



➔ **876 men, 717 women and 2 non-binary individuals.**

➔ **243 (15.2%) participants over the age of 50**



➔ **959 economically inactive and 636 unemployed participants**

➔ **1144 (71.7%) participants said they had a disability or recurring health condition limiting their capacity for work**

➔ **290 (18.2%) participants from ethnic minority groups**

By the end of March 2023, a total of 1595 participants had accessed Opportunity and Change; almost one quarter (300; 23.3%) more than profiled. In the final stages of project delivery the partnership improved upon previous years' underperformance: supporting 717 women (10.8% more than profiled), and 243 participants over the age of 50 (6.6% more than profiled) and was 11 short of reaching its target number (647) of unemployed participants.

This is quite an achievement considering that during the lifetime of BBO, the Opportunity and Change delivery partnership halved in size (including the loss of two specialist women's services). Additional employment provision (in Nottingham City in particular) could have led to fewer unemployed participants accessing Opportunity and Change.

The project engaged with a high number of participants with disabilities and ongoing, work-limiting health conditions (1144); 21.1% more than profiled. It has also engaged with 290 people from ethnic minority groups; 15.1% more than profiled.

Opportunity and Change succeeded in engaging with 959 (48% more) economically inactive participants than it was profiled to achieve. Whilst other BBO projects struggled to engage with economically inactive individuals, it is reported that with the COVID19 pandemic came a general increase in engagement from economically inactive participants²³.

²³ Building Better Opportunities Evaluation: Delivery During the Covid-19 pandemic

Initial Support Needs of Participants

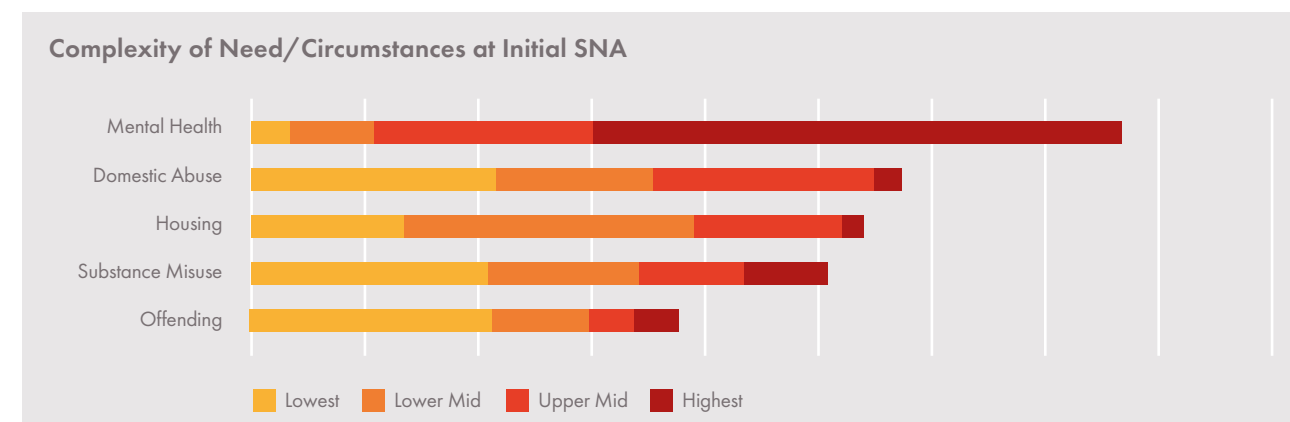
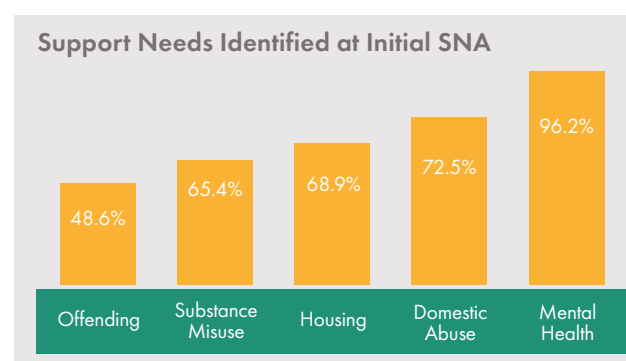
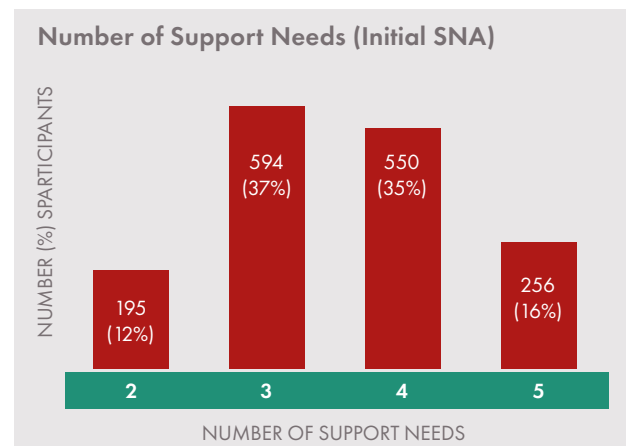
The majority of participants (71.7%) were experiencing either three (594; 37.2%) or four (550; 34.5%) support needs at the time of their initial assessment (SNA). Support needs were categorised as: housing, mental health, substance misuse, domestic abuse, and offending. 256 (16.1%) participants had five support needs, and 195 (12.2%) had two.

The next chart shows support needs disclosed by participants during their Initial SNA, by percentage. The assessment includes both present and historical needs and circumstances. In particular, this is relevant to:

- Offending history; the data includes 442 (54.5%) participants with a historical conviction but no recent offending
- Domestic abuse; includes 438 (37.9%) participants with previous experience of living in an abusive relationship
- Historical convictions, and previous abusive relationships, were included in the support needs assessments because they often have lasting negative impacts and can be linked to other problems, such as mental ill health.

Complexity of need was also captured through the initial SNA via weighted scoring, making it possible for two individuals to appear to be experiencing the same issue, but with the weighting we see varying degrees of severity or complexity. This is particularly relevant to note in relation to:

- Mental health issues: the data includes 79 (5.1%) participants who said their mental health issues were having a limited impact on their everyday lives
- Substance misuse issues: the data includes 412 (39.5%) participants who said they used drugs or alcohol occasionally, with limited impact
- Housing: including 290 (26.4%) participants requiring support to sustain a tenancy i.e. not considered to be 'homeless'



Mental Health

- The percentage of participants disclosing mental health-related needs at their initial assessment was 96.2%
- The majority of participants (1323; 82.9%) said they had a recurring or persistent mental health condition that was having either a significant (952 individuals) or moderate impact (391 individuals), on their day-to-day life
- The proportion of those reporting moderate to severe mental ill health has remained consistently high throughout the project.

Domestic Abuse

- The number of participants disclosing experience of domestic abuse (past or present) rose significantly during the pandemic; from 60.7% in 2020, to 79% in 2021
- One quarter (398; 24.9%) participants had experienced repeated abusive relationships, and 47 (2.9%) individuals were living in a refuge at the time of their initial support needs assessment
- Domestic abuse became the second most frequently cited support need overall; with 72.5% of all participants having experienced abuse, or being at risk of abuse from others²⁴.

Housing

- The total number of participants with housing-related support needs was 1099 (68.9%)
- Housing-related needs amongst new participants increased during the pandemic, from 60.3% in 2020, to 66.0% in 2021
- 50.7% (n=809) of all participants were homeless when they first accessed support, including:
 - 492 (44.8%) participants were living in supported accommodation at the time of their initial support needs assessment
 - 42 (2.6%) participants were rough sleeping
 - 275 (17.2%) were 'sofa surfing'
- 290 participants (18.2%) were living independently but faced difficulties sustaining their tenancy or mortgage.

Substance Misuse

- Two thirds (65.4%) of all participants said they used drugs or alcohol at the time of their initial needs assessment, and 39.6% (n=631) said their use of drugs or alcohol had a significant, detrimental impact on their daily lives. Within this group:
 - 137 (21.7%) participants were drug or alcohol dependent
 - 199 (31.5%) felt their substance misuse was having a significant impact on their functioning
 - Almost half (295; 46.8%) of these participants were in recovery and/or engaging with a drug or alcohol treatment programme upon accessing the project
- Around one third (552; 34.6%) of participants said they did not use alcohol or drugs at all, which may have included individuals remaining abstinent as part of their recovery.

Offending

- Around half of those who accessed Opportunity and Change (820; 51.4%), did not have any previous criminal convictions or offending history
- The proportion of those needing support in relation to recent offending or risk of re-offending, increased during the pandemic, from 22.4% in 2020 to 25% in 2021
- Overall, 22.1% participants (n=353) had support needs in relation to recent offending at the time of their initial needs assessment, including:
 - 91 individuals currently serving a sentence or awaiting sentencing
 - 93 individuals with a recent prolific record of offending behaviour
 - 169 individuals who considered themselves to be currently at risk of re-offending.

²⁴ The project's definition of 'others' was expanded from perpetrators of domestic abuse within the home environment, to anyone, including partners, family members, neighbours, and associates. Furthermore, 'abuse' meant all forms of abuse including financial exploitation, coercive control, sexual or emotional abuse, and physical violence.

Supporting Participants to Address Complex Needs

Opportunity and Change helped 921 (57.7%) participants to make significant progress in relation to addressing their complex needs. This included:

- 681 (44.4%) participants²⁵ who improved their mental health and wellbeing
- 501 (45.6%) participants became more settled in their housing situation
- 300 (28.8%) participants accessed treatment and support in relation to substance misuse
- 309 (26.7%) participants accessed help and support in relation to domestic abuse
- 161 (20.8%) participants reduced their risk of reoffending.

Taking into consideration only those with more recent or repeated experiences of domestic abuse (n=719), the percentage of those seeking help and support looks more encouraging (43%). Similarly, amongst those with only a recent or prolific offending history (n=353), the proportion of those reducing their risk of re-offending became 45.6%.

Care Act Outcomes

Since its launch in October 2016, the Opportunity and Change Care Act Team²⁶ screened 1297 individual participants to assess their eligibility for provision under the Care Act (2014)²⁷. Of this number:

- 263 participants (20.3%) completed a more in-depth assessment with the Care Act Team Social Workers
- 97 (36.9%) of these individuals were eligible for additional social care support, and were subsequently referred to Adult Social Care
- 33 (34.0%) participants received a Personal Budget which has helped them to:
 - Remain housed within their local community
 - Meet their day-to-day basic living needs
 - Gain access to a wider network of support service
 - Develop and maintain their confidence, skills and wellbeing.

The remaining 64 individuals (66.0%) received alternative support from their Local Authority, including:

- Specialist equipment or adaptations to their home
- Support from voluntary sector services
- A Carer's Assessment
- Re-enablement Services.

Group-based Learning, Activities and Therapeutic Interventions

Many participants embraced opportunities to meet and engage with others, through a range of group-based learning and therapeutic interventions. Those who participated in group-based activities were more likely to make positive progress, both in relation to addressing their complex needs, and achieving employment-related goals.

Feedback from participants included:

"The Loudspeaker Programme was amazing. It changed my outlook on art and gave me another purpose in life."

"I went on the Bush Craft day, which I thoroughly enjoyed and found extremely informative. I also accessed the [Framework] training centre and various courses."

"Attending Equine Assisted Therapy made me believe in myself again and take time for me."

"Frequent group activities at Growing Lives[] helped me with getting out, travelling, and being active."

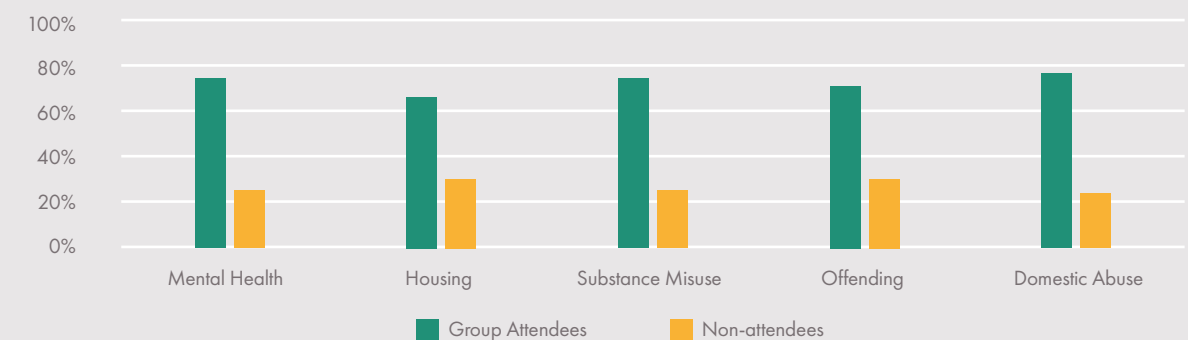
81% of all participants who left Opportunity and Change to start work, education and training, or active job searching, had also attended at least one group-based activity.

57% of participants who made significant progress in relation to housing, mental health, substance misuse, offending, or domestic abuse, had attended at least one group-based activity or programme during their engagement with Opportunity and Change. Not all participants wanted to engage with group-based activities, and some did not feel able to:

Opportunity and Change Participant:
"Emotional support and referrals to services worked best for me. I wanted to join groups, but my addiction took over."

In each of the five complex needs areas, the majority of those who made significant progress, had also attended at least one group-based activity or programme:

Support Needs-related Outcomes: Group-based Activity Attendees v Non-attendees



²⁵ With a need in this area at the time of their initial SNA.

²⁶ A dedicated team of Social Workers supporting Opportunity and Change participants across the D2N2 region, providing Care Act-related assessments, signposting and additional support. An in-depth review of the work of the Care Act Team was included in the Year Three (2019) evaluation of Opportunity and Change.

²⁷ For more information about The Care Act (2014), visit: Shelter Legal England - Care and support needs assessment - Shelter England

²⁸ Growing Lives - Building skills and confidence in Ilkeston - Derwentio (derventiohousing.com)



CASE STUDY:

The Loudspeaker Programme: Benefits of Peer Mentoring

The Loudspeaker Programme was designed and hosted by the Nottingham Contemporary²⁹; a specialist Opportunity and Change partner between October 2016 and December 2022. Seventeen, ten-week projects provided small groups of female participants with opportunities to develop their self-confidence, resilience, motivation, and routine, through exploring and making contemporary art.

The Loudspeaker Programme offered a safe, welcoming environment for women in which they were able to build trusting relationships, develop self-confidence, and try or learn new things.

Stephanie, Loudspeaker Peer Mentor,
“You all created a very supportive environment, but also challenging in the right way to have a go at things.”

Many participants engaging with Loudspeaker had been referred from other services for women, including Women’s Work Derbyshire and Nottingham Women’s Centre, and many had experienced domestic abuse. The Nottingham Contemporary recruited an all-female staff team to deliver Loudspeaker, and involved other female staff, such as technicians and a digital producer, to inspire participants when thinking about their future career goals. Activities were designed and delivered by an Associate Artist and inspired by the exhibitions at Nottingham Contemporary. Women were supported by a dedicated Support Worker and Peer Mentors who had taken part in previous Loudspeaker projects.

A total of 176 women, aged between 18 and 64 years accessed the Loudspeaker Programme. After completing Loudspeaker, 39.1% of these women left Opportunity and Change to go into employment, training, or job searching, and 82% overcome barriers in relation to mental health, housing, substance misuse, offending, or domestic abuse.

Bringing women together to explore and share their voices; to be heard and celebrated by other women, was described as crucial, rewarding, and empowering. Participants enjoyed being with other women, and over the weeks, formed strong group relationships as they became more familiar and shared personal and collective challenges and successes³⁰.

Peer Mentoring

Alongside naturally occurring peer support within each project, came opportunities to become a more formalised Peer Mentor for future Loudspeaker projects. A total of fifteen participants became Loudspeaker Peer Mentors, for up to one year. Several Peer Mentors volunteered for longer and became independent visitors of the gallery.

The benefits and impacts of engaging with peer mentoring were explored through in-depth interviews with four Loudspeaker Peer Mentors, completed by Nottingham Contemporary during Autumn 2022. The findings were written into a report³¹, and banners were created and displayed in the gallery, featuring quotes from the interviews and photographic portraits of the women who shared their insights and experiences. The core benefits of peer mentoring are summarised here from three perspectives of Co-production, Personal Growth and Achievement, and Peer Support.

Co-production

Staff delivering the programme highly valued the contributions of Peer Mentors, and felt their involvement - which included practical support, reassurance, and ideas - was crucial to the success of the Programme. Peer Mentors influenced the design of art activities, enabled staff to be better equipped in responding to participants’ complex needs, and ensured that participant views and experiences remained central to decision-making and planning. In two cases, Peer Mentors progressed on to volunteering and paid employment, diversifying the staff team at Nottingham Contemporary.

Personal Growth and Achievement

Peer Mentors benefitted personally from their role in several ways. Firstly, it offered them a renewed sense of purpose and identity:

Stephanie, Loudspeaker Peer Mentor,
“It made me determined to carry on doing something for myself that wasn’t anything to do with that stuff that was going on and try to rediscover a bit of myself that was like lost.”

Peer mentoring inspired and motivated participants to overcome personal fears in order to make positive, lasting changes:

Leah, Loudspeaker Peer Mentor,
“Worries I was anticipating didn’t materialise. This gave me a bunch of positive experiences for doing things on my own initiative and a pile of evidence that I can do this thing.”

Nikki, Loudspeaker Peer Mentor,
“I wasn’t going to shy away from it because by that point, I was like, I want to do something with my life. It put me back on track because it made me realise I wanted more.”

Women thrived in the Peer Mentor role despite initially questioning their own abilities or readiness. Success in the role, confirmed through positive feedback from others and their own observations and reflections, increased their self-efficacy:

Leah, Loudspeaker Peer Mentor,
“It was hugely validating because not only is this something I want, it seems like I’m a good fit.”

Through their experience of volunteering, Peer Mentors benefited from developing personal and professional skills and knowledge to support future training, learning, volunteering, and paid employment.

Peer Support

Participants had the support of other women in whom they could recognise aspects of themselves: other participants with lived experience who offered connection and familiarity. Peer Mentors acted as role models, demonstrating realistic possibilities for personal growth. Knowing that women were there for similar reasons added to a sense of safety and collective support:

Leah, Loudspeaker Peer Mentor,
“It was so rewarding being in women only spaces.”

Peer Mentors described helping others to help themselves. Over time, Peer Mentors grew in their abilities to see beyond their own circumstances and give something back by supporting others. It was a way of looking outwards that in turn enhanced their own self-confidence and self-esteem:

²⁹ For more information, visit: <https://www.nottinghamcontemporary.org/>

³⁰ Speaking of challenges and successes, a brilliant reflection on how Loudspeaker adapted from in-person to remote delivery during the pandemic can be accessed here: <https://www.nottinghamcontemporary.org/record/loudspeaker-through-letterbox-and-screen/>

³¹ The report can be accessed here: [Loudspeaker \(nottinghamcontemporary.org\)](https://www.nottinghamcontemporary.org/record/loudspeaker-through-letterbox-and-screen/)

Nikki, Loudspeaker Peer Mentor,
 “Helping other people, it just made me feel so much better about myself. Like I had something to offer people.”

Stephanie, Loudspeaker Peer Mentor,
 “In some ways it felt quite natural. I just kind of tried to look and listen and perceive what people needed. I felt very comfortable.”

Leah, Loudspeaker Peer Mentor,
 “I developed such a love for Loudspeaker that I wanted to help other women on that journey.”

Peer Mentors observed the impact of their work with the women in the group and described this as rewarding. It became a highlight of their own experiences and provided a sense of accomplishment:

Stephanie, Loudspeaker Peer Mentor,
 “[Reflecting on their favourite moments] seeing somebody easing into a situation or watching their confidence grow over the weeks.”

Employment and Job Searching

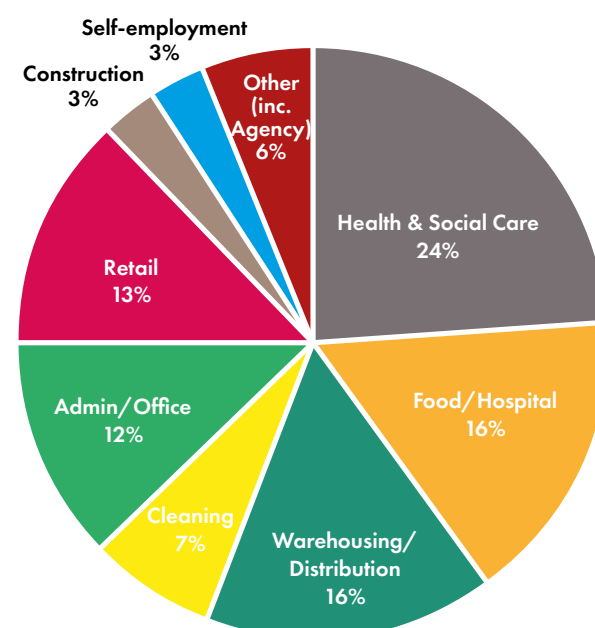
451 (28.3%) participants left Opportunity and Change to start work, engage with training and education, or begin actively job searching.

Employment

Opportunity and Change supported a total of 159 participants into paid employment and self-employment, including:

- 59.7% participants with a disability or recurring health condition
- 54.7% participants who were economically inactive when they first accessed the project
- 16.4% participants over the age of 50
- 22% participants from ethnic minority groups
- 44% women, and 56% men
- 10% participants who left Opportunity and Change to start working had not received any formal education above primary school level. 67% had attended secondary school, and 23% had received some form of post-secondary level education.

Participant Employment Results (by Sector)



- Of the 72 ‘unemployed’ participants who subsequently went into work, 31 (43.1%) had worked in the 12 months prior to accessing Opportunity and Change, and 28 participants (38.9%) had not worked for more than two years prior to accessing support.

More than three quarters (77.4%) participants who entered paid employment said they had three or four complex needs when they first accessed Opportunity and Change. Further analysis revealed that:

- 46.5% participants who started working had been homeless when they first accessed the project
- 79.2% had persistent, moderate to severe mental ill health
- 47.8% were at risk of abuse or were living in an abusive relationship
- 33.% were receiving treatment or at risk of relapse in relation to substance misuse
- 42.1% had an offending history.

These figures highlight those participants entering paid employment did so whilst dealing with complex problems and overcoming barriers to employment such as a criminal record, enduring mental ill health or living in a vulnerable housing situation.

Economically Inactive Participants Moving into Employment and Job Searching

By the end of March 2023, Opportunity and Change supported 176³² economically inactive participants into paid employment or active job searching:

- 89 (9.3%) economically inactive participants left the project to begin actively seeking work
- 87 (9.1%) economically inactive participants went into paid employment.

³² The project overall target was to support 180 economically inactive participants into work and therefore achieved 4 less than the target amount.

³³ More information about the experiences of asylum seekers and refugees can be found at: The Plight of Asylum Seekers | Nottingham Refugee Forum (nottsrefugeeforum.org.uk)

Volunteering

It is widely recognised that volunteering can help individuals to move closer to the labour market and employment. For some participants, the experience of voluntary work helped them to:

- Develop their ‘soft skills’ such as self-confidence, motivation, communication, and self-awareness
- Learn a range of job-specific and transferrable, practical skills
- Improve their overall health and wellbeing.

Opportunity and Change supported a total of 131 participants to engage with volunteering. Between January 2021 and March 2023, 69 participants started volunteering and 46% sustained their volunteering for a minimum of 3 months.

Opportunity and Change Participants:

“Since volunteering with us, the participant’s attitude, commitment and punctuality have been outstanding, and we will be moving forward in offering them a paid position.”

“The participant attends a volunteer placement at Brinsley Animal Rescue and really relaxes when caring for the animals. She is starting to feel more comfortable around the other volunteers too.”

73% volunteering participants said their mental health had significantly improved since they started volunteering.



CASE STUDY:

Supporting Refugees into Employment and Training

This case study highlights how Opportunity and Change helped to support asylum seekers and refugees throughout Nottingham and Nottinghamshire³³ to move closer towards employment, education, training, and job searching.

Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Refugee Forum (NNRF)

Founded in 2000, NNRF is a charity supporting asylum seekers and refugees in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire in 'gaining just outcomes, rebuilding their lives and integrating into society'. They offer a range of services, including: a welcoming, inclusive community centre, professional and legal advice, campaigning, training, education, and support services.

NNRF has been an Opportunity and Change delivery partner since October 2016. During this time, they have supported a total of 70 participants, with the vast majority requiring support in relation to housing and mental health.

Nuria's Story*

When Nuria was referred to Opportunity and Change, she had been living with her family in a privately rented property for two years. Nuria has very limited mobility as a result of debilitating injuries that were sustained from being tortured in Iran. She relied on her daughter for help to move around the house. Nuria was suffering from severe depression and anxiety.

Nuria's Navigator referred her to a local service that provides access to talking therapies and other mental health support. Opportunity and Change were able to pay for an interpreter, which enabled Nuria to access phone counselling for a period of six months. Nuria benefitted from this time to focus on herself without having to rely on her family.

In addition, Nuria's Navigator wrote to her GP to request a wheelchair. The GP was very responsive and within two weeks she was given an appointment to be measured. With her new wheelchair Nuria was able to move around her home more independently. Being less physically dependent on her children gave Nuria's mental wellbeing a significant boost.

The main focus was then helping the family find a new place to live. Nuria's family had already submitted a housing application to the Local Authority but had not disclosed crucial information about Nuria's medical needs, so they were placed in the wrong priority group. To rectify this, her Navigator completed a medical priority form and helped with a report from Occupational Health.

As well as accessibility issues, Nuria's family were facing a number of problems within the property itself that were not being adequately addressed by the landlord, including an upstairs toilet leaking into the kitchen through the ceiling. The relationship with the landlord had deteriorated to the extent that Nuria's husband was withholding rent until the problems were fixed. Despite the Navigator's intervention, the Landlord decided to evict the family and issued them with two months' notice to leave the property.

Under usual circumstances, the length of the notice period would prohibit the family from accessing emergency accommodation. However, due to Nuria's complex physical and mental health needs, her Navigator was able to persuade the Local Authority to find accommodation for the family before their eviction date. They were moved into a hotel in the first instance, and after two months were moved into a newly-built, accessible flat which provided the family with some stability while their application for more permanent social housing was processed.

At the start of her journey with Opportunity and Change, Nuria did not feel that she was ever going to be in a position to think about employment. However, she has recently started to discuss and plan her future, and has begun attending ESOL classes to improve her English.

* Participant's name has been changed to protect their anonymity.

Framework

Janet joined Framework as an Opportunity and Change Navigator in 2019 and soon developed a successful working partnership with the Newark and Sherwood District Council (NSDC) Refugee Resettlement Team. Following an initial referral for training and employment support for a member of the Syrian Refugee community, Janet began working with more and more Syrian Refugees and gained a positive reputation within the community through word of mouth.

One former participant reflected warmly on the support they had received:









"Janet was my biggest supporter when I arrived in England. I was so depressed and confused, I didn't know where to start. She gave me a lot of advice, helped me to set a plan, and gave me direction to move forward. The result was a new start, a new chapter in my life - a permanent job - thank you, from the bottom of my heart."

Janet successfully supported 70% of her caseload into employment and training, the majority of whom were Syrian refugees. This has led to an ongoing partnership between Framework and the NSDC Refugee Resettlement Team enabling Janet's excellent work to continue. Reflecting on her work with Opportunity and Change, she said:

Reflecting on her work with Opportunity and Change, she said:

"Although all participants were still dealing with worries about people left behind in Syria, personal injury, and emotional concerns, their drive to succeed and engage with work and training has been heart-warming."

Here are some of the outcomes achieved by the Syrian men and women supported by Janet through Opportunity and Change:

-  Ayman is a highly skilled Tailor and secured employment with a furniture production company as a machinist and pattern cutter
-  Fatima achieved her Level 2 qualification in Hairdressing and is now working towards her Level 3. She works part-time in a local salon, and also recently passed her driving test
-  Rola was supported to complete a Level 2 qualification in Information, Advice and Guidance, and now works as an Employment Advisor
-  Emad opened a phone sales and repair shop and is currently relocating his business to a larger, more centralised premises with better footfall
-  Lubna is continuing to study her Level 2 qualification in English whilst working as a freelance Interpreter through an agency
-  Bahaa is attending college full-time, studying a Level 2 qualification in Plumbing alongside a Functional Skills course. He has also secured a part-time job at a local takeaway
-  Mo worked as a skilled Stonemason with his own successful business in Syria but struggled to gain his CSCS card in the UK. With support, he achieved this and went on to work for a local construction company
-  Bachir was supported to obtain a qualification comparison and is currently working on his GCSE qualifications, in preparation for moving into Teacher Training in September 2023

Education and Training

Opportunity and Change supported a total of 203 participants into a formal education or training course³⁴.

The majority of training outcomes (57%) were associated with Level 2 and Level 3 vocational courses, such as Hairdressing, Business Administration, and Health and Social Care. 11% of those who left the project to commence training began ‘access to higher education’ courses, apprenticeships, and degrees. 32% participants left to attend functional skills courses.

Many more participants have engaged with short courses or were in the process of completing training when they first accessed Opportunity and Change. In these instances, although the training cannot be counted as ‘a result’, the project began documenting these activities as ‘achievements’ in recognition of their wider, holistic benefits. Examples of such training include online IT and digital skills, personal development, health and wellbeing, employability, and the completion of Skills Plus for Change modules.

Pip Morrison, the Service Manager of Skills Plus for Change, described some of the key benefits of attending the sessions:

“Coming to SP4C sessions helps to break down barriers of group-based learning in a number of ways. Many people are anxious about being in a group with others, whether virtually or in person. By attending SP4C sessions, participants realise they can cope and are able to do this [...]

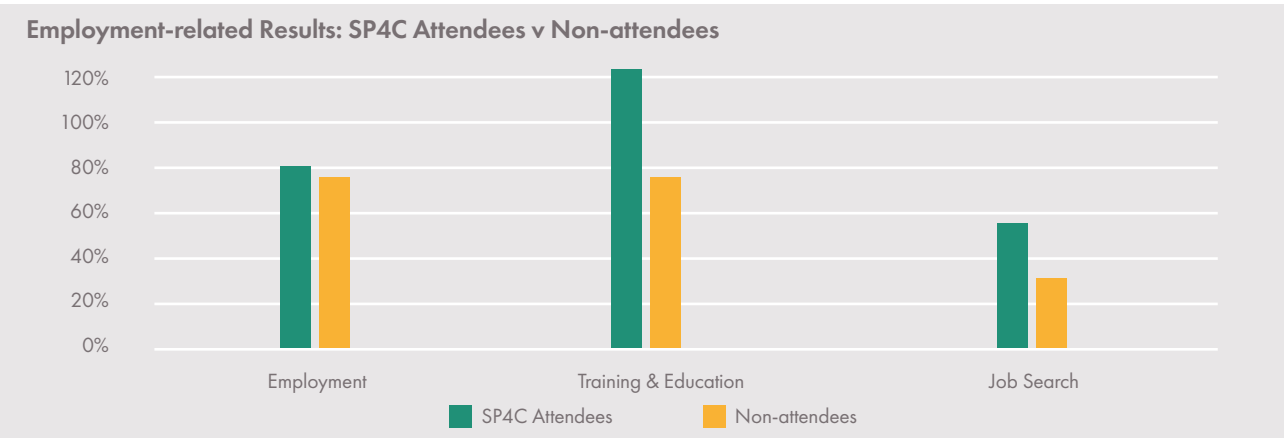
They may not have completed any kind of learning or education for some time, or, they may have had a previous bad experience at school. In SP4C sessions, participants develop confidence and realise that not all education is a scary prospect; it can actually be a positive experience where they not only learn, but also get to meet people and share their own experiences.”

Skills Plus for Change

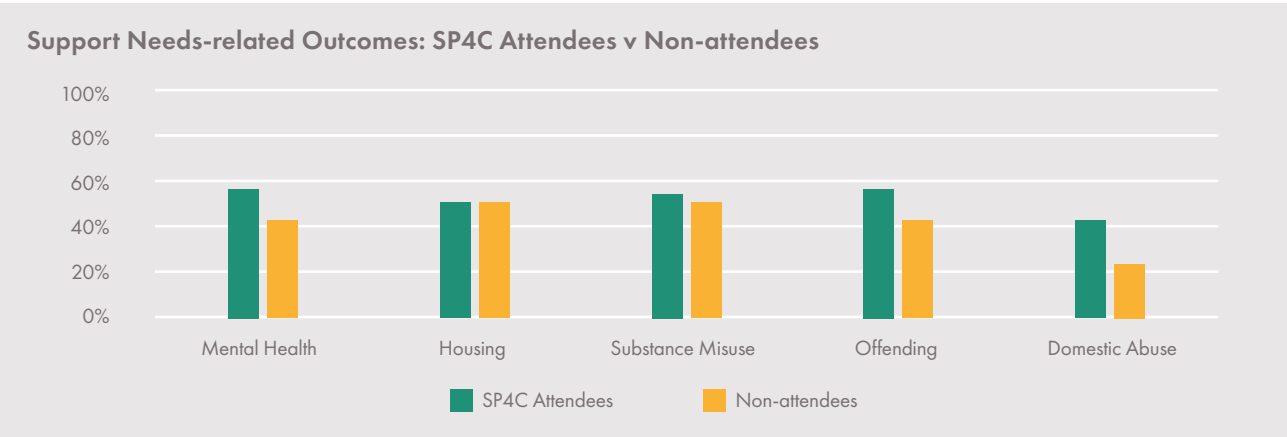
Skills Plus for Change (SP4C) was a specialist partner of Opportunity and Change, delivering a training package of bite-sized learning to participants around the topics of employment, personal development, wellbeing, financial literacy, and managing independent living. SP4C offered six modules, each containing five, two-hour sessions, designed to reduce social isolation and increase skills, knowledge, and confidence through learning.

Skills Plus for Change Outcomes

- In total, 58% participants who left Opportunity and Change to start work, education and training, or active job searching, had attended Skills Plus for Change
- Specifically, 82 (52%) participants who moved into paid employment, 127 (63%) who began training or education, and 56 (63%) of those who began actively seeking work, had engaged with SP4C:



- Amongst those who made significant progress in relation to their complex support needs, a greater proportion had attended Skills Plus for Change:



- This suggests that Skills Plus for Change had a significant role in helping many individuals to prepare for further training and employment, as well as helping them in relation to their recovery and resettlement.

Participant feedback about their experience of Skills Plus for Change included:

“Skills Plus encouraged me to apply for college courses.”
“Skills Plus for Change was very beneficial for me. It was my favourite because I got to interact with others, and I gained practical skills from what I had learned in the sessions.”
“I accessed Skills Plus, which helped my confidence massively.”

³⁴ Whilst participation in all types of training was encouraged by delivery partners, some courses were not included in the project’s performance monitoring as claimable results.

The Impact and Legacy of Opportunity and Change

In this final section of the report, we share findings from a recent participant impact survey and reflect on Opportunity and Change's wider success and legacy, including how the project has influenced local service commissioning, incorporated learning and good practice into service design, and used evaluation and research findings to inform wider thinking around the role of employability within complex needs services.

Opportunity and Change Participants:

"You helped me find who I am... Opportunity and Change totally helped me change my life for the better."

"I have a better understanding of things and can face challenges I have with a more positive outlook. I can't thank Opportunity and Change enough for the amazing work and help I received."

Participant Impact Survey

At the end of 2022, 47 of the former participants³⁵ who left the project to go into work, training, or job searching, took part in a survey about their experiences, and the lasting impacts of engaging with Opportunity and Change. Our findings revealed that:

- 83% participants who completed the survey felt supported to achieve their employment and training goals:

"Opportunity and Change helped me to realise the direction I would like to go with my career and the steps I needed to take to get there."

- Since leaving the project, 60% survey respondents had remained economically active, including 43% participants who were still in paid employment:

"I learned to have confidence in myself, which made me very proactive. I now have two jobs and I've found my happy place."

"I went on to complete a course in Information, Advice & Guidance, which I passed, and I intend to continue studying in 2023 and to find voluntary work."

- Respondents who were economically inactive said it was either due to personal ill health, disability, or caring responsibilities for others
- 38% had started volunteering since engaging with Opportunity and Change, in a range of settings and roles including peer mentoring, trustee of a charity, and working in schools/education
- Three quarters (74%) former participants said they had increased self-esteem:

"I regained my confidence and started to believe in myself. I had the opportunity to attend groups, programmes, and therapy to help with my mental health."

³⁵ The leaving dates of those who completed the survey, ranged from between one month and five years.

- 70% said they had gained new knowledge or learned new skills:

"[My Navigator] helped me to access training following a difficult time in my life, and empowered me to find the courage to begin learning again."

- 64% said they felt better in groups and interacting with other people:

"[They] provided space for me to experience education again after a long time out, and this improved my confidence."

When asked about their complex support needs, since engaging with Opportunity and Change:

- 77% participants said their housing situation had improved
- 96% said their mental health had improved
- 83% overcame a substance misuse issue or sustained their recovery
- 96% said they got the support they needed in relation to domestic abuse
- 83% participants with an offending history reduced their offending behaviour.

"My mental health was severe, and my worker slowly helped me get out more and got me back into doing daily things, from being stuck in my flat for two years...She was patient with me."

"The programme was of great benefit to me and has equipped me with so many skills to go forward with my life. I feel so grateful to have been able to access such a great project."

³⁶ The UKSPF Prospectus can be accessed here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus/uk-shared-prosperity-fund-prospectus>

³⁷ The Building Better Opportunities Programme, including Opportunity and Change was jointly funded by ESIF and The National Lottery Community Fund. Opportunity and Change funding was extended twice, delivering from October 2016 until the end of March 2023.

³⁸ A post-event summary can be accessed here: <https://bbo-d2n2.org.uk/resources/bboimpactsummary/>

Continuation of Provision Beyond Building Better Opportunities

In early 2022 the UK Government's Department of Housing, Levelling Up and Communities (DHLUC) announced its UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF)³⁶ as a central pillar of its Levelling Up agenda and replacement for The European Structural and Investment Fund (ESIF), which ends in 2023³⁷. The UKSPF is providing £2.6 billion of funding to Local Authorities until March 2025, to 'build pride in place and increase life chances', through three investment priorities: communities and place, supporting local business, and people and skills. Investment in the latter is defined as: 'measures to enable adults to join and progress within the labour market, boosting their core skills through support for qualifications, training and to overcome barriers to work', and is aimed at economically inactive people with additional needs and barriers to work.

Funding for people and skills was not due to start until January 2024. However, after widespread concerns about the significant gap in provision this would leave after the closure of EU funded provision like BBO, Local Authorities were permitted to consider bids early.

In June 2022, leads of the three strands of BBO D2N2: Towards Work, Money Sorted, and Opportunity and Change, held an impact event in Nottingham City. Introduced by Sue Ormiston, EU Programme Manager of The National Lottery Community Fund, the event included video case studies and live testimonials, presentations of evaluation findings and written reports, showcasing the successes of this unique provision whilst highlighting the gap left behind by the closure of BBO³⁸.

Following this event, Framework and other lead organisations of BBO D2N2 continued conversations with Local Authorities and submitted expressions of interest for UKSPF. Unlike BBO, which was funded at regional LEP level, UKSPF was allocated to Local Authorities. Some district councils have made the decision not to allocate their funding and resources to people and skills provision, meaning there is once again somewhat of a 'postcode lottery' of employment-related provision across D2N2. Thankfully, however, following the success of Opportunity and Change Nottingham City and Newark and Sherwood District councils commissioned Framework to develop a new service in these areas, called Grow, which was launched on 1st April 2023. Through Grow, Framework aims to build on the success of Opportunity and Change and continue supporting the ever-increasing population of economically inactive people facing SMD across Nottingham and Nottinghamshire.

The Opportunity and Change Care Act Team

The Opportunity and Change Care Team supported almost one hundred participants to access additional provision under the Care Act (2014), whilst increasing understanding of, and engagement with the Care Act assessment processes across voluntary sector organisations. As well as helping to develop awareness training for Adult Social Care staff about SMD, the team also helped to raise Navigator awareness and promote ongoing learning about some of the complex issues experienced by participants, including neuro-diversities such as autism and ADHD, undiagnosed brain injuries, Complex PTSD, adverse childhood experiences, hoarding, financial exploitation, and human trafficking.

In addition, in 2018-19 the Opportunity and Change Care Act Team contributed to a Community of Practice which was led by former

Fulfilling Lives project, Opportunity Nottingham, and to the development of Trusted Assessor roles, in partnership with Nottingham City Council Adult Social Care. Trusted Assessors are voluntary sector based Social Workers who have received training to enable them to carry out Care Act Assessments on behalf of the Local Authority, reducing time and money by making the process more streamlined. Since the implementation of the Trusted Assessor roles, Framework have created several embedded Social Worker posts across their complex needs services.

The role of Employability within Complex Needs Services

Through the evaluation of Opportunity and Change, we have explored the role and impact of employment-related support for those facing severe and multiple disadvantage, sharing a wide range of evidence of good practice and areas for improvement. We have challenged misconceptions about the work-related capabilities of participants and highlighted a need for better-integrated employment related provision across complex needs services in general. We have developed networks and successful working partnerships with like-minded organisations and individuals, including employers, academics, commissioners, volunteers with lived experience, front line delivery staff, and managers. Through the Nottingham Practice Development Unit³⁹, we have established an Employability and SMD Community of Practice, that meets bi-monthly to collaborate and share research and practice-based insights. The following study, which concludes this final report, shows that whilst there is plenty more work to be done, Opportunity and Change has given us a really good head start.

Working Residents? Barriers to Employment for people living in Supported Accommodation Services

Introduction

Despite growing evidence that work is beneficial for many individuals experiencing complex issues, such as mental ill health or substance misuse, it is still quite unusual for people in supported accommodation to prioritise looking for paid employment. Support plans tend to focus on housing resettlement, alongside additional needs including mental health, substance misuse, domestic abuse, or offending. Helping residents into work is generally considered as 'problematic' by staff and managers, with barriers that appear to be long-standing, complex, and systemic.

An assessment of the housing-related circumstances of former Opportunity and Change participants, shows that 16.4% (n=26) of the 159 individuals who left the project to start paid work were living in supported accommodation at the time of their last needs assessment. This small but significant figure demonstrates that people in supported housing can and do want to work. However, current systems do not effectively support employment as a realistic, attainable outcome for those in supported housing: there is no standardised approach to delivering employability in these settings and evidence of such interventions being delivered in-house is patchy. In response to a lack of research in this area, in Autumn 2022 a small-scale qualitative study was conducted, exploring the real and perceived barriers to employment for those living - and delivering support - in supported accommodation services.

What We Did

Initially we reached out to those directly involved in the Opportunity and Change project, including the project lead (management) team, Navigators, partner managers, and participants. Through a range of surveys, interviews, and focus groups, we asked them to reflect on experiences of supporting participants (or being supported), to look for work whilst living in supported housing. We asked about different attitudes and approaches to support, positive and negative outcomes, issues, and barriers.

Monitoring data and policy documentation was also analysed to explore housing provider's practices in relation to supporting their residents into work.

Following our initial analysis of findings, we interviewed key Framework personnel including managers of supported accommodation services and the organisation's Income Manager.

We also completed a focus group with members of an Employability and SMD Community of Practice, hosted by the Nottingham Practice Development Unit.

Findings

Analysis of feedback showed four main barriers to employment experienced by residents and staff in supported accommodation settings. These were: financial barriers, housing-related barriers, a lack of consistent information, advice, and support, and finally, perceptions of work-readiness.

³⁹ For access to The Nottingham Practice Development Unit, visit: <https://www.pdunottingham.org/>

1. Financial Barriers

Perception that work is unaffordable for people living in supported accommodation:

The benefits system is designed to incentivise employment. While most people moving off benefits into work will become financially 'better-off', there is a widely held belief that people living in supported accommodation cannot afford to work due to reductions in benefit entitlement, coupled with an increase in 'rent' and service charges payable. The vast majority of those who took part in the study expressed concerns about the affordability of work whilst living in supported accommodation:

"I think a lot more would take up employment if the rent would not be so high if they worked."

(Opportunity and Change Navigator)

"I'm in supported housing now, and I can't just walk out now and go and get a job, because the costs I would incur here would be detrimental to me."

(Opportunity and Change Participant)

"Supported accommodation is expensive - and this scares people."

(Opportunity and Change Navigator)

Because most welfare benefits are means-tested, earning wages from employment usually triggers a reduction, and the same can apply to Housing Benefit (HB). When there is a reduction in HB the resident or tenant is expected to pay the shortfall to their landlord, referred to as a 'personal contribution'. For those living in Supported Housing, rent costs are much higher; typically ranging between £200 and £300 per week.

The Housing Benefit shortfall, or personal contribution, depends on the amount earned each week; a higher earner will be expected to contribute more to their rent.

However, as Framework's Income Manager explained: **"Whilst it is true to say the 'ceiling' of rent someone would have to contribute towards is usually higher [in supported accommodation], the more the resident earns, the more they will keep in their back pocket."**

Supported Housing providers 'discouraging' work:

Supported housing providers across the D2N2 region and further afield adopt differing policy and practice in relation to working residents. A few organisations appeared to be actively discouraging residents from taking up paid employment, for financial reasons:

"[My Navigator] always supported me to get myself into a place where I can go back to work, but the [housing provider] side of it, they always discouraged you. I never got a job for the three years I was living there, and now I've moved out and literally got one straight away [...] Even if you get part-time work they say you'd have to pay massive amounts of money out, it's not gonna be worth your while, I wouldn't even bother [...]"

(Opportunity and Change Participant)

Furthermore, in one or two cases it was alleged that tenancies were being ended because residents had started working:

"A lot of the people [in the supported housing] had to move out because they got a job - they didn't want to give up their full-time job, they wanted to be in work [...] I think it would have helped a lot of people if they could have worked [and remained in supported housing]."

(Opportunity and Change Participant)

Financial uncertainty and lack of clarity:

One Opportunity and Change Navigator reported that the cost-of-living crisis and the COVID19 pandemic had increased fears about going into work, as employment was associated with greater financial uncertainty than being on benefits:

"The barriers to work are far more complex than getting a job. You would have thought that the [rises in] cost of living would be driving more people to work, but we are finding the opposite - with so much uncertainty they just cannot risk further financial instability"

Lack of clarity around benefits also created problems, as Framework's Income Manager explained: **"It can be difficult to know the precise HB shortfall a resident will owe to the landlord until several weeks, sometimes months after work has commenced. This is because HB awards are usually assessed on actual earnings. Universal Credit (UC) payment periods also impact on this - it is not always clear whether residents may be eligible for an element of UC (which would passport to full HB) until the end of the UC assessment period."**

Precarious work, including temporary, low-paid, and zero-hours, flexible contracts exacerbated this issue further, as the DWP, Housing Benefit Departments, and housing providers rely on evidence of income in the form of wage slips, to make their calculations:

"Not having a fixed hours contract would mean participants are certain to get into debt as the amount will keep changing and the delay [in Housing Benefit calculation] means that hours could be less when the bill arrives."

(Opportunity and Change Navigator)

Obtaining adequate and timely proof of earnings or income can be problematic and time consuming, not least because working residents have less availability and flexibility to meet during office hours. Miscalculations in Housing Benefit that need to be queried, and backdated payments take time to process and can create additional stress for working residents and housing providers: without accurate proof of income and rent statements, the risks of falling into debt increase.

2. Housing-related Barriers

For many people living in short-term supported accommodation, finding and moving into permanent housing can be a difficult and lengthy process. A shortage of available social housing in the UK is thought to be the main reason for this. According to a campaign published by Shelter⁴⁰, in 2021-22, 7,528 new homes were built, and the waiting list for social housing was 1.1 million. The process of applying for social housing typically takes many months, even for those living in short-term, 'emergency' supported accommodation.

The private-rented sector can be cost-prohibitive due to rising rent costs, even for many working individuals and families. Whilst Local Authority financial assistance such as bond schemes are available in some Local Authority areas, it is alleged that only a small number of private landlords accept 'higher risk' tenants through such schemes; with many landlords refusing to consider offering a tenancy to anyone unemployed or economically inactive.

Precarious work also presented issues in relation to renting in the private sector:

"Zero-hour contracts make it virtually impossible to rent anywhere in the private sector. Private sector landlords do not understand or know how to work out what is owed, when it is some Housing Benefit and then a participant contribution."

(Opportunity and Change Navigator)

Furthermore, it was reported that private landlords often ask for a guarantor, and many residents do not have anyone they can turn to for support with this. Other costs associated with moving into private rented accommodation include advanced rent payments, deposits, and basic furniture. These additional costs are difficult to save for whilst living in supported housing on a low income.

These limited housing options, coupled with the financial barriers, represent a system in which people facing multiple disadvantage appear to be stuck in cycles of poverty and homelessness. As one Navigator, with years of experience in supported housing, said: **"There are loads of people who want to work and start a new life, but they can't because they are just trapped in our homelessness systems for years."**

⁴⁰ For more information, visit: The story of social housing - Shelter England



3. Lack of consistent information, advice, and support

Employment-related support:

There are visible inconsistencies in the support and information available to residents and staff with an interest in pursuing employment-related outcomes. Although there is evidence of employment-related support taking place in some hostels, and an appetite for more training amongst many staff and managers, employability is currently not embedded into day-to-day practice as well as it could be.

The Opportunity and Change evaluation previously highlighted that unless they have received specific training, some staff can 'shy away' from delivering employability because they lack confidence:

"I know the basics of how you would look at getting a job, but I don't think I've got enough training or advice to then pass it on [...] and if you're not confident in delivering it, the participants can tell."

(Opportunity and Change Navigator)

"Living in supported accommodation, I was lucky that I had [my Navigator]. If I hadn't had her I wouldn't be living where I am now and back in work. I think all of them needed [employment-related] support there, and a lot them don't get it."

(Opportunity and Change Participant)

In addition, there is a perceived lack of specialist employment-related training and resources available for staff supporting those with multiple and complex needs:

"You can't look online and find employability resources that are tailored towards people with multiple and complex needs, say for example, someone who has been in prison for 10 years." *(Supported Housing Worker)*

Although the majority of Opportunity and Change participants interviewed were hopeful that, with ongoing support, they could maintain a job whilst managing and overcoming complex personal issues, sadly, most employment and housing-related services are not commissioned to offer any substantial in-work or 'move on' support.

Some participants expressed concerns about their ability to cope with multiple transitions of starting work and moving 'off benefits', whilst moving into and maintaining independent housing. A great deal of change, coinciding with a reduction in support, felt understandably overwhelming.

'In-work' benefits advice and guidance:

Benefits-related training for staff, and advice available to those living in supported accommodation, tends to focus on maximising income through benefits whilst being out of work, rather than exploring the full range of financial benefits (and other positive impacts) of working.

There appear to be several financial assistance schemes available to working people through Housing Associations, Local Authorities, and the DWP. However, these vary geographically and tend to be means-tested; making it a challenge to promote what is available more widely. The same applies to financial guidance that has been created to alleviate some of the financial uncertainty, such as HB shortfall or personal contribution calculators. It appears that not all housing providers have developed tools like this, and even when they are available, not all staff know about them or how to use them. Also, these tools can only offer estimated figures and must be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect ongoing changes occurring in the benefits system.

Without the ability to offer any concrete assurances, some staff felt reluctant to offer advice that could risk jeopardising the trust they had built up with residents:

"[Financial] uncertainty] doesn't help when trying to motivate someone in supported accommodation to gain employment."

(Opportunity and Change Navigator)

⁴¹ During 2021-22, Framework's Employment and Skills service group supported a total of 3,365 individuals.

4. Perceptions of Work-Readiness

Several participants shared their experiences of stigma, and described fears of being judged or rejected by potential employers:

“People think if you’ve got all them problems you’re not gonna be fit for work anyway, you know, just with the stigma that you can get if you’re out of work, and if you tell people you’ve got complex needs you just get...a lot of people judge you.”

(Former Opportunity and Change Participant)

A Community of Practice member and Supported Housing Planner, said that assumptions were frequently made by staff, about the ‘work-readiness’ of people accessing supported housing. They also pointed out that because employment-related advice generally sits outside of the current remit of supported housing, availability of this support is more variable across the staff team:

“In my team of twelve there are two, maybe three of us who share an interest in supporting residents into work [...] Often conversations around employment are overlooked, for example there are a lot of older male residents in their 50s, who have work experience but have faced very difficult life challenges. Some staff just assume these people haven’t worked or don’t want to, when this is mostly not the case.”

Negative assumptions about the work-related capabilities of others have been observed frequently through projects like Opportunity and Change. Many participants, including those living in supported accommodation, appear to internalise the stigma and systemic ‘deficit-based thinking’ surrounding homelessness they have been subjected to. It can take many months or years of strength-based coaching to help individuals to re-write their own personal narrative and start believing they can work, volunteer, or engage with education and training - if they want to.

5. Additional Barriers

Other common barriers to employment for those in supported accommodation included:

- Environmental factors, including excessive noise and anti-social behaviour, can lead to stress, lack of sleep and routine from living in shared accommodation.
- Some residents become institutionalised whilst living in supported accommodation and fear that working will force them to leave their familiar environment and perceived sense of security.
- Participants with English as an additional language can experience this as a barrier to employment. For example, long waiting lists for ESOL courses due to a lack of funding, and some online tests and qualifications being unavailable in certain languages.
- Whilst it was not the intended focus of this study, the personal complex needs and barriers of those living in supported housing obviously play a significant role in their relationships with work and must be included in any employment-related support interventions and action planning.

Impacts

The main impacts of these barriers are:

- ➔ People living in supported housing do not currently have equal access to good quality, consistent employment-related support, advice, and guidance
- ➔ Supported Housing providers might shy away from addressing the employment-related needs of service users because of a lack of knowledge, resources, or perceived ability to overcome the structural financial and housing-related barriers they encounter within homelessness systems
- ➔ Avoiding discussions and support around employment, volunteering, training, and education creates missed opportunities for individual personal development, recovery, and resettlement
- ➔ Working residents may accrue debt with their housing provider if they do not declare their earnings or provide relevant information in a timely manner, which can lead to eviction and may jeopardise some of their longer-term move-on options
- ➔ Some residents living in supported housing have been known to give up their employment or abandon their accommodation due to a lack of adequate advice and support about the financial implications of working and in-work benefits
- ➔ Some working residents engage in ‘cash in hand’ work, which could lead them into more vulnerable circumstances such as fraudulent benefit claims, illegal work, and modern slavery.

Next Steps

This small-scale study has reignited conversations about these long-standing issues and generated new ideas about how to tackle them. Within Framework, a strategic working group has been assembled which aims, through a commitment to continued research and collaboration, to:

- ➔ Increase the employment-related support available to people living in supported accommodation services
- ➔ Increase the number of Framework service users engaged in paid work, volunteering, training, and education
- ➔ Create an organisational culture that embraces work as a realistic and attainable option for all.

Annex A:

Principles of individual Placement and Support (IPS)⁴²

1. It aims to get people into competitive (paid) employment
2. It is open to all those who want to work – with no exclusions based on diagnosis, health condition or benefits claim
3. It tries to find jobs consistent with people's preferences
4. It works quickly – job search starts rapidly within four weeks, even if a client has been off work for years
5. It brings employment specialists into clinical teams – so that employment becomes a core part of treatment and recovery
6. Employment specialists develop relationships with employers based on a person's work preferences – not based on who happens to have jobs
7. It provides ongoing, individualised support for the person and their employer – helping people to keep their jobs at difficult times
8. Benefits counselling is included

⁴² Taken from IPS Grow: <https://ipsgrow.org.uk/about/what-is-ips/8-principles-of-ips/>



Principles of Psychologically Informed Environments (PIEs)

The PIEs approach was first developed in Nottingham by Robin Johnson and is recognised nationally and internationally as a useful approach to inform homelessness services. There is research evidence that working to develop psychologically informed environments improves the experience of services for both those using them and staff. The key principles are outlined briefly below⁴³:

Psychological awareness

Relationships should be given a central importance within services. Staff need to use emotional intelligence, empathy, and relationships in their work, and understand that an individual's early experiences (including trauma) impact on their ability to cope with social and emotional life. Where possible, services should use psychological theory to inform practice.

Staff training and support

Staff should have access to relevant and regular training, including that which supports staff to develop and maintain psychological awareness. Ongoing supervision and support should be provided, including opportunities for discussions of challenging aspects of work. Following serious untoward incidents there should be opportunities for discussion and debriefing.

Learning and inquiry

Overlapping with staff support, learning and inquiry includes opportunities to continually reflect on and develop practice, as individuals, teams, and the wider organisation. Reflective practice should be encouraged. Wherever possible, service users should be involved and consulted. All levels of the organisation should be open to learning, including from problems. There should be flexibility and creativity to respond to changing needs, rather than rigid adherence to contract delivery.

There should be engagement in sharing learning with other organisations, for example through communities of practice and conferences at a local or national level. This might include participation in and publication of formal evaluations and research.

Spaces of opportunity

Wherever possible, buildings should be adapted and used in ways that promote positive atmospheres, relationships, and social and practical opportunities. Personal space for service users should be provided and respected wherever possible.

The service should use surrounding community facilities and the network of local services to provide opportunities for service users.

The three Rs: Rules, roles, and responsiveness

The rules of the service should make sense and suit the needs of the service. Rules should ideally be co-produced with service users and should be written down and shared with the service users. There should be clear ways of addressing issues when rules are not adhered to, although this may include some flexibility to ensure individual circumstances are considered where appropriate.

There should be roles available for service users to take an active part in the service, e.g. through consultation meetings.

The service should be flexible enough to respond to individual needs, crises, or violations of the rules, in a manner that is psychologically informed and considers both the individual and the needs of others in the service. This may include some continuation of support for an individual after they leave a service.

Principles of Trauma Informed Care (TIC)

There are numerous published principles of Trauma Informed Care from homelessness, mental health and other services. The following are drawn from Hopper (2010)⁴⁴ and Sweeney (2016)⁴⁵.

- **Seeing individuals through a trauma lens** - understanding behaviour as coping, even where such behaviour appears to increase risk of further trauma
- **Appreciation of invisible trauma and intersectionality**, i.e. the impact of belonging to marginalised groups who may be subjected to discrimination as a result of their identities, e.g. their race, gender, sexuality, or socioeconomic status
- **Sensitive discussions about trauma**, with choice and control about whether to respond
- **Pathways to trauma-specific support** - when survivors are able to report trauma. This includes for staff
- **Preventing trauma in the system** - avoiding or mitigating sources of coercion and force, which may be experienced as disempowering and re-enacting past trauma
- **Trustworthiness and transparency** - between staff and service users
- **Collaboration and mutuality** - addressing the power imbalance
- **Empowerment, choice, and control**, including strengths-based approaches
- **Safety** - for staff and service users. This includes physical, psychological, emotional, social, gender and cultural safety
- **Survivor partnerships** - between staff and service users.

⁴³ For further information, visit: www.pielink.net

⁴⁴ Hopper, E., Bassuk, E., and Olivet, J. (2010). Shelter from the storm: Trauma-Informed Care in homelessness services. The Open Health Services and Policy Journal, 3, pp. 80-100.

⁴⁵ Sweeney, A., Clement, S., Filson, B., and Kennedy, A. (2016). Trauma-informed mental healthcare in the UK: what is it and how can we further its development? Mental Health Review Journal, 21 (3), pp. 174-192.

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www.opportunityandchange.org

email: opportunityandchange@frameworkha.org

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