



Interim Report

April 2025

Good to Go Interim Report

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Introduction

The Good to Go programme

Good to Go is a two-year National Lottery Reaching Communities funded programme delivered by Humber Learning Consortium (HLC) from April 2024. The project aims to reduce social isolation and improve health and wellbeing for young people aged 18 – 29 with disabilities, learning disabilities and long-term health conditions (including mental health) in Hull and the East Riding of Yorkshire.

The programme grew out of the previous National Lottery Community Funded This-Ability programme, which itself was a continuation of the five-year National Lottery Talent Match programme. When the This-Ability programme ended in December 2023 there was, unfortunately, no funding available to continue the project in full. By looking at what funding was available at the time, and what had been most impactful on the This-Ability programme, Good to Go was developed.

The This-Ability programme aimed solely to move young people into employment. However, it was recognised that some young people were not ready for work and volunteering was a valuable outcome for young people in these cases (Bashir et al., 2024).

Taking on board these lessons, Good to Go is a ‘first steps’ volunteering programme. Based around an allotment, it aims to increase wellbeing and develop ten soft skills called Core Capabilities: Communication, Motivation, Reliability, Teamwork, Responsibility, Adaptability, Problem Solving, Resilience, Awareness of the labour market and Openness.



Marketing signage at a volunteering recipient's allotment

Project participants spend time working on the Good to Go allotment and volunteering for other plot holders. The project also sources further volunteering opportunities based on the needs and interests of the participants. Half of the programme contact hours are spent on the allotment and half in a dedicated classroom. Participants may progress into education, employment, further volunteering or training opportunities.

The programme works with other stakeholders such as the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP), Special Educational Needs (SEN) teams, Connexions at both Hull City Council and East Riding City Council, social workers and local NHS services as referral sources. It also engages with local voluntary and community organisations as sources of volunteering opportunities and

progression routes for learners, leveraging existing relationships within HLC's partner network and making new connections where opportunities present themselves.

Evaluation Aims

The aim of this evaluation was to find out:

- What have been the challenges in the first year of delivery?
- How has the programme changed in response to these challenges, and how might future delivery be improved?
- What are the barriers faced by young people accessing the programme?
- What have been the outcomes and impacts so far?

Methodology

This evaluation was conducted by staff of Humber Learning Consortium working on the Good to Go project.

The following qualitative data were collected using methods described below:

- Focus group discussion with two Good to Go senior project leaders (SPL).
- Focus group discussion with three Good to Go programme mentors.
- Two focus group discussions with five learners in total.
- Semi-structured interviews with three allotment plot holders that have been involved with the programme.
- Three longitudinal case studies with learners conducted over the first year of delivery.

As with previous research conducted for the This-Ability programme, pictorial consent forms and study information sheets were provided, for both interviews and focus groups, to aid gaining informed consent from programme participants (Bashir & Richards, 2022).

With permission, focus groups and interviews were recorded using a password protected digital recorder and transcribed to accurately represent the views of those taking part in the study and pseudonymised to protect anonymity. Focus group data were analysed using a thematic approach, to identify themes and draw insights from the data. Case studies were written up after each completed interview.

Participants taking part in the longitudinal case studies were incentivised with £20 gift vouchers to show appreciation for taking the time to speak to us. After the initial interview, short catchups interviews took place very six weeks. Participants had the opportunity to validate the completed drafts and add personal touches (i.e. illustrations and graphics). However, none of the participants chose to do so.

Quantitative data were collected from an evaluation survey completed by learners. A baseline questionnaire is completed at the initial IAG and enrolment session, designed to measure distance from the labour market, wellbeing and a self-assessment of the ten Core

Capabilities. An exit questionnaire is then completed on leaving the programme. These data were analysed using R Studio and the Tidyverse packages.

The terms learners, young people and participants are used interchangeably throughout this report.

Methodical challenges

Due to the low number of referrals into the programme initially, the sample sizes are very small. Of the 10 learners that were participating in the programme at the time the focus groups took place, only five chose to take part.

The small number of starts on the programme also meant that few young people had exited at the time of writing, and of those that had, not all of them had completed an exit questionnaire. As a result of this, there was not enough data to perform statistical tests (such a proportion significance tests). The data analysis for this report will be limited to descriptive charts.

Case Studies

In this section of the report, we present three case studies from young people involved with the programme. They provide detailed information about their disabilities and health conditions, educational background and home life, giving insights into the barriers they faced in moving forward with their lives. In particular, the support offered by the programme and the progress made by young people is drawn to the reader's attention.

Lynn

Lynn is a 25-year-old trans-female from Hull. She has been married to her wife (an undergraduate student) for approximately four months. Since marrying, she has been unable to claim Universal Credit due to her wife's savings. The couple currently live with Lynn's parents. While this "*can be a struggle sometimes*", they are unable to move into a place of their own as they have no regular income.

Lynn achieved good grades at GCSE and A-level, and a BTEC in Computer Science. After college she wanted to take a gap year and figure out what she wanted to do in life, but she recalled a number of factors that made her feel pressured to attend university: Her parent's expected it due to her academic performance at school and college; she felt peer pressure to continue studying Computer Science, as everyone she knew at the time was doing so; her parents were concerned that if Lynn took a year off, she would 'slack off'. However, at the time they "*didn't know exactly what was going on, the troubles I was facing.*"

Lynn **struggled with gender identity** at University "*I was on the cusp of beginning my transition. I didn't fully know myself at that point*" and began transitioning in her third year. Although her parents were very supportive of her decision, she was abandoned by all her friends at the time. Lynn also entered a period of **severe depression and anxiety** at this time which led to her dropping out of her degree:

At the worst it was, I wouldn't get out of bed at all. I would go weeks without bathing or self-care... I wouldn't make food or drink or anything or brush my teeth. They [my parents] would have to make food for me and make sure I was actually, just keeping myself alive. There was feelings of, like, these suicidal thoughts. At the worst it definitely felt like I just didn't want to exist.

Lynn received mental health support through a local employability programme, accessing Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) sessions. Although this helped a bit, she more credits her recovery to meeting her wife and having "*someone that I could share things with and confide in*".

At the current time Lynn has been on the Good to Go programme for six weeks. She joined the programme to **improve her communications skills and motivation**. She related the course has been good for her, getting her out of the house and creating a consistent schedule:

one of my biggest struggles was just getting out of bed and doing daily routine tasks. Since I'm on this course, I'm motivated to get up, get a bath, get out for the day. Since I was deemed incapable for work all of the days kind of just merge together.

She went on to describe **improvement in her reliability**, attending sessions regularly and on time, and **communication skills**. Although she still struggles to maintain eye-contact, and find the right words, "*it's definitely helped being able to talk to people better, I think, being on this course*". She described the volunteering activities she has been undertaking as 'rewarding' and enjoys eating the crops harvested at the allotment and seeing the other plot-holders they work with happy with the work the volunteers do for them.

Lynn's long-term ambition is to gain employment so she can support her wife. She has identified Mixology as a potential career but recognises that lack of experience may be a barrier. However, she is hopeful that the Good to Go programme can help her gain some experience over the coming weeks.

Six weeks later Lynn reported that she had **moved on from the Good to Go programme** to another HLC programme to **start looking for paid employment**. She became aware of the new provision from a visit to possible progression options with the Good to Go mentors. She described the transition to the new programme as "*really easy*", as a Good to Go mentor went with her to the new provider to handover and help with the enrolment process. Although she has been on the new programme a short time, she had already updated her CV and was exploring, with her new mentor, options for work experience placements at local bars.

Lynn recalled that during her last few weeks on the Good to Go programme she had the opportunity to experience a mocktail session at a local bar, learning to mix a non-alcoholic drink "*That was cool to be able to experience what it would actually be like to do the job that I want to do*". She also completed a volunteering qualification (Level 1 Award in Volunteering). Although she described the qualification as beneficial to show employers the volunteering experience she has, she felt the coursework itself was more of a "*formal thing*" that failed to challenge her, and she found the practical aspects of the programme were more helpful.

She recounted how the Good to Go programme had enabled her to **build her confidence and skills** to a point where she felt able to move on "*I definitely would haven't been able to do [the new] course without this Good to Go one.*" However, she went on to recall how arguments with her parents had made her feel pressured to find work so she and her wife can move into their own home:

We have recovered from the argument, but it was pretty serious at the time, and it definitely gave me like the feeling of urgency that I need to get out of that house... Basically, it just made me realise that I really want a job because I want an income to support me and my wife to get our own place and live independently.

At our next catch-up Lynn was still engaging with the employability programme she progressed to and had already been **offered a job** at a local bar. Although she learned a lot from the experience, she turned the position down as the environment was too hectic for a first job – *“I want it to be more like a, more of a chill pub or club, not like a nightclub.”* Lynn was waiting to start a ten-week paid placement at another local bar, with the possibility of paid employment at the end. She was excited about this opportunity as there would be *“no pressure for me to know everything and do everything right the first time”*.

Lynn relayed that her situation at home has settled down since her last interview. Although she and her wife still wanted to find their own place, she did not feel the same sense of urgency that she previously had. At the same time, Lynn’s motivation for wanting employment had moved away from the need to provide for her wife, and more towards gaining a sense of purpose:

I have been unemployed for so long that I just want to have a job to feel like... it just gives your life a little bit of purpose, when you have a job and there’s a consistent routine... so I feel like I’m doing something, rather than just sat there at home not contributing.

At our final catch up, **Lynn had started a ten-week paid work placement** at a local bar, sourced through the employability programme she was attending. After a full day induction learning to operate the till system and make the cocktails offered by the bar, she began working three 8-hour shifts per week. She described the environment as *“really welcoming”*:

I’ve made friends with all of them [the staff]. I’m in a group chat with everyone and stuff, and everyone’s just very accepting of me... When there’s like down time and there’s no customers in, I’m able to just talk to them and stuff.

Lynn hoped to stay on after her placement ended. In the short time she had been there, she came second in an employee of the month competition (based on sales per hour) and was planning to talk to the manager about the possibility a permanent position. *“It is a complete 180 from before I was on Good to Go, I wouldn’t have even dreamed about starting a conversation with anyone about a job or anything”*. Even if she did not get taken on, Lynn was confident in her ability to apply for other jobs independently and transfer the skills gained during her placement.

Although her situation at home remained settled, she still planned to move out of her parents’ home when her wife’s university course finished at the end of the academic year. She hoped a permanent job would give them the chance to save and plan a budget.

Although our regular catchups had come to an end, Lynn sent a text some weeks later to inform the research team that she had been **given a permanent position at the end of her work placement**. She reported that she was one of a handful of staff with guaranteed minimum weekly hours, rather than the usual zero-hours contract, as the management did not want her to go elsewhere.

Derek

Derek is 21 and has diagnoses of autism, ADHD and IED (Intermittent Explosive Disorder). He does not take any medication to control the IED, but regulates through loud music, vaping and energy drinks, as he finds the caffeine has a stabilizing effect on his moods and energy levels. He related a history of family breakdown and difficult family relationships, particularly between the males in the family. Violent outbursts towards his father led to him being placed with a succession of foster homes. These placements broke down due to allegations of threatening and inappropriate behaviour made against him and this led to him moving into supported accommodation until age 18, since when he has lived independently.

Derek relayed a **history of mental ill-health**, having experienced depression since a very young age. He recalled how this worsened after the death of his grandparent, although he could not recall any details of what this experience was like for him as “*most of the time, I erase memories to put in better ones*”. Throughout his interview, Derek seemingly struggled to place events chronologically, unsure of when or at what age events had taken place, possibly as a result of his repressing memories.

In addition to his own mental health issues, he also revealed that his best friend had committed suicide while at secondary school. He conveyed how these experiences motivated him to try and help other people, reaching out through social media to people contemplating suicide. However, he recounted having to take a break from this emotionally draining work as it was becoming too much for him.

He related having been **severely bullied throughout his time at school** because “*The people at my school didn't like the fact I had autism*”. His account revealed the severe physical consequences of the bullying, although he explained that it had little emotional impact on him as he as “*never really done the whole emotions thing*”.

I did get quite a few concussions, because about two of the bullies used to hit bricks over my head... he used to throw us onto the ground and basically beat the crap out of me. Until I had broken ribs, arms, fractured legs.

He went on to recall having moved school several times throughout secondary school as a result of the bullying he experienced, and the impact it had on his behaviour. He remembered one of his bullies eventually taught him how to fight, and although this did not result in an end to the bullying, it did lead to Derek becoming “*addicted to fighting*”.

When I started fighting, I loved the feeling of it. That's why I refuse to fight now, because, well I'm actually terrified in case I end up going back to that stage... In school I used to have anger blackouts, so I was unaware of what was happening, but I knew that I enjoyed it.

Although Derek studied mechanics at college, he is interested in finding opportunities in the field of animal care. His dream would be to be a vet, but he realised that some aspects of the job, such a euthanising animals, were at odds with his religious convictions.

At the time of our first conversation, Derek has been attending the Good to Go programme for approximately two weeks. He described his peer group on the programme as “*not judgemental*” and relayed that this was helping him to **improve his interpersonal skills and confidence**. He went on to relate that he can find classroom environments ‘triggering’, and benefits from being outdoors at the allotment where it is ‘calmer’. He recounted developing practical skills, such as learning to grow vegetables and how to run an allotment “*which is actually amazing... [I’m] thinking about renting one.*”

At our first catch-up, six weeks later, Derek’s mood was markedly different. In his initial interview he had been relaxed and expansive in his answers, whilst during the catch-up he seemed closed-off, irritable and showed increased sensitivity to environmental sounds. On the topic of what activities, he had been taking part in on the Good to Go programme over the previous weeks, his answers were brief - often one word and with frequent bad language.

Derek disclosed his brother had contacted him for the first time in several years and was talking about coming back to the city. He related an incident when his brother had made violent threats against his mother, describing him as “*a massive sociopath*” who “*used to do a lot of drugs, but I don’t know if he still does it*”.

By the end of the interview, Derek’s mood had lifted somewhat, and he expressed interest in exploring a referral for **anger management**. He explained that the Good to Go programme was helping him to manage his feelings around his brother’s visit. “*Coming here is the reason why I still got a flat... I would have punched my entire flat to pieces [without the programme]*”

Despite the seemingly positive effect the programme was having, after this catchup Derek disengaged from the programme. As a result of this, we were unable to continue the case study. Information provided by Good to Go mentors revealed they had made a referral to mental health services for anger management and that Derek had been placed on a waiting list with local NHS services, as he chose not to use the services available from Good to Go mental health partner.

James

James is 22 years old and lives with his father and three siblings in Hull, having moved there eight years previously. He has several long-term health conditions, including a vasovagal syncope, allergies, and other health conditions, which he conveyed as restricting his job options.

James’s education was significantly impacted by his family’s **financial situation**. He recalled how during his last year of schooling, the school changed the uniform rules, requiring students to wear expensive logoed trousers. As his parents could not afford to buy these, they withdrew him from school and he instead completed his last year through homeschooling alongside his siblings.

His studies were further interrupted by the **COVID-19 pandemic**. Having achieved Level 2 in applied sciences he failed to complete Level 3 due to a lack of support. He remembered **feeling overlooked** at this difficult time, as his parents focussed on the needs and education of his siblings:

The other family members sort of needed help and so my parents were a bit distracted with them, for a bit... so for the moment I was sort of pushed to the side... there was not as much help then.

The family's income comes from James's benefits, his father's wages, and child tax credits for a younger sibling. James shared that the limited household budget had left him with inadequate clothing at times, and impacted his dietary options at home as his father could not buy different foods to please all his siblings' picky eating habits. He recalled that his parents' separation resulted in a significant loss of income, necessitating that he take on a disproportionate amount of the **household and caring responsibilities** such as feeding pets, caring for his siblings and cooking:

but I have also recently had to add my father to the care list because he has been forgetting to do things, like lock the door, do washing up.

He went on to describe how the **competing needs of different family members prevented him from moving on with his own aspirations**. At the same time, he conveyed feeling pressured by his family to find employment, yet emphasised the necessity of balancing the family's needs with his own goals:

I've got to get the rest of my family pulling their weight and going a bit faster without overburdening them before I can go on and do what I want to do.

At this point James has been attending the Good to Programme for seven weeks. James was referred to the Good to Go project from another HLC employability programme, while he awaits a start date for a teacher training course.

He related that the Good to Go programme has been beneficial, **improving his mental health** and giving him a chance to engage in activities without the constant worry of his siblings. The mentors have provided **personalised support**, allowing him to think about his future. James hopes to explore volunteering and start looking for part-time work. His goal is to reduce his sibling's reliance on him, hoping that they will be encouraged to be more independent if he is around less.

Six weeks later, James still seems to be **taking on a lot of household responsibility** for his father and siblings, although the programme has given him "*the opportunity to organise some of the tasks I've had to do in order of importance*". His narrative revealed worries, not just about his family, but other programme participants as well, and a strong tendency to **put other people's needs before his own**:

I think it's because I've been sort of forced into an authority position in the household and as an authority person, I have to sort of care for everyone.

Even in considering what his next steps might be after completing the Good to Go programme James was looking out for “*things useful to my family*”, while at the same time he conveyed feeling held back by his caring responsibilities:

The things that I want to do go a path different from the things that ensure there's stability in the household... but that means I can't go onto as many things as I want to go through, because otherwise I would have jumped on to those things quite a while ago.

At this point, James was considering a phased transition to another volunteering programme, also run by HLC. His time on the programme had enabled him **to socialise** with the other volunteers and **build his confidence** – “*I feel I've definitely progressed as a person*”. However, a referral to a local foodbank had not moved forward amid concerns about travel to access it and the paperwork becoming damaged when he took it home to discuss with his father.

Our next catch-up is eight weeks later. James has progressed from the Good to Go provider to another volunteering programme run by HLC. He related learning how to repair and reinstall computers, describing how he repaired a laptop which he could then take home for the family to use. He expected to **begin volunteering** with the provider soon, helping other people use computers in the centre. He has continued to develop social skills and confidence and has begun to make friends by sharing his skills with other young people.

James's account again focussed on his caring responsibilities. When asked why he had chosen to attend the IT programme he stated, “*it was something I was interested in, plus it had skills that were useful to my brother*”. Throughout the interview he spoke about his siblings' needs, and related feeling caught between different parts of the family, and having to mediate between them.

And our **final catch-up** James's account was, again, very focussed on the needs of his family. When asked if he was any closer to his goal of reducing his siblings' reliance on him, he responded that his father was considering early retirement. He worried about the financial implications of this it and also felt added **pressure from family members** to find employment.

I wanted to move onto a job that I wanted to, though, but they're just saying get a job now... not really helping and then just continuously adding to the pressure that I've already got.

James has been attending a course the Job Centre referred him to develop skills such as self-confidence, resilience and self-awareness. At the same time, he is still attending the HLC volunteering programme as well as a computer games-based social group at the same provider. He related **difficulties in making friends** there, unsure if his friendly approaches had been received as they were intended, describing the interactions as “*friendly one way but at least neutral the other way*”.

In the following sections we present the findings from the focus groups conducted with programme staff and participants. Where possible, verbatim quotes are used to present young people's experiences in their own words.

What were the challenges?

All the project staff interviewed identified that **recruitment** had been a major challenge in the first year of delivery, leading to low numbers of referrals into the programme. Several factors appeared to be behind this, perhaps starting with the **change of the project name** from This-Ability to Good to Go. A lot of goodwill that had been built up over the five years of This-Ability's delivery was lost during the three-month hiatus between the end of that programme and the start of Good to Go. As Mentor 1 explained, referring agencies (such as the job centres) did not, perhaps, understand the relationship between the two programmes:

We was This-Ability before and we was really well known and then, I think people didn't really know that we, Good to Go, was still This-Ability.

This lack of continuity meant the project was starting from the beginning, making referring agencies aware of the programme again and the support it offered. Despite this, recruitment through other channels, such as word of mouth was at first **strong due to early marketing** such as leaflet drops and social media. However, as project delivery began efforts focussed more on this aspect, perhaps contributing to declining recruitment numbers.

Changes in staffing, both at the Good to Go project and the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) also meant key contacts built up throughout the previous This-Ability programme were lost:

The likes of [former Good to Go staff] had a lot of contacts. Even though she passed them over when she left, it's still she'd built them relationships. She knew who to phone straight away. (SPL 2)

And there was a lot of changes in the job centre and people moving around that we lost our key contacts that we had in This-Ability. And it took us a bit too long to find them. (SPL 1)

In addition to this, there was initially **miscommunication** as to what the project offer was with the local job centres, leading to the misconception it was *"an open all age project, and not a very youth focussed project"* (SPL 1). This resulted in difficulties in reaching the right people at the job centres at the start of the programme - *"We didn't get to the right people straight away, in terms of those dedicated DEAs [Disability Employment Advisors]"* (SPL 1).

Although the overall staffing level of the Good to Go project had dropped from 16 (during This-Ability) to 6, this was not identified as an issue, although it was something that required careful resource management. Job centre recruitment sessions were changed to by appointment only

in order to focus staff time “*on people that are going to be there rather than just sat around aimlessly.*” (SPL 1).

Having identified the right people and the right places to focus recruitment efforts at the job centres, referrals began to improve, to the point where the project was in danger of becoming over-subscribed, as SPL 2 related:

I think, we might have some challenges going forward with the amount of referrals we’re getting in. Like, fitting everybody in. And you know, working out a system.

The programme’s **change in focus from employment to volunteering may have impacted its appeal to young people**. Mentors agreed that This-Ability’s focus on employment outputs was its “*biggest hook*” (Mentor 2). Testimony from Mentor 3 revealed that many young people seemed to be financially motivated to join the programme:

A lot of them do say do I get a job at the end of it... they’re all saying well I need to get money and things like that.

Although the programme was attractive for young people engaged through health and wellbeing events, for those who were actively job searching the mentors changed the way in which they explained the programme, focussing on skills development and experience needed for work, rather than the volunteering aspect:

When I speak to people obviously, I don’t say we’re going to help you into employment, but it’s selling it as these are the skills that you’re going to get and move you closer to employment, rather than it’s just a volunteering programme and you’re working for free, as people see it as. (Mentor 1)

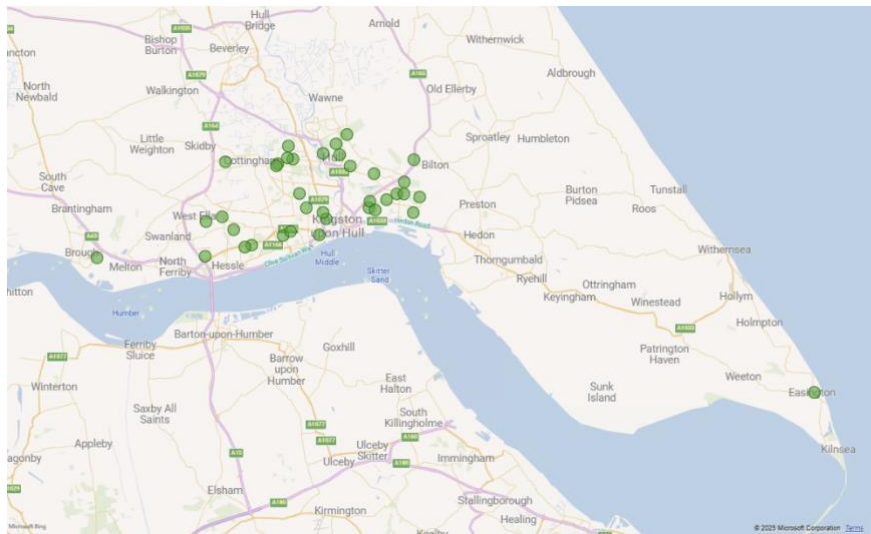
Sourcing **good quality volunteer placements aligned with learners’ interests** also emerged as a challenge. Although the Good to Go mentors were able to use their network of contacts in other community organisations and training providers to some extent, the types of placements learners were looking for proved to be a barrier in some cases. For instance, placements in animal care and graphic design were both highly sought after and difficult to find. A provider that had been a source of regular horticultural activities closed suddenly, with nothing else available locally to take its place.

An initial plan had been to have a small bank of placements that could easily be referred to. However, due to the wide variety of learners’ aspirations sourcing placements became reactive, rather than proactive, as it was impossible to know what placements would be needed until participants joined the programme.

Challenges in supporting young emerged in the testimony from the mentors, who reported that **the young people being referred to the programme were much further from the labour market** than had been the case during This-Ability. Learners needed a higher level of support

than those that had been closer to the labour market, and specific challenges around safeguarding measures, travel support and group behaviour were reported.

The **widespread geography of the East Riding of Yorkshire** may have affected how willing referring agencies were to refer young people from further away due to **poor transport links** in the region. Data collected by the programme showed that most of the referrals from the East Riding were from areas that bordered the city of Hull. As the programme budget did not allow for dedicated provision within the East Riding itself, presumably other provision may have been more attractive and accessible.



Geographical spread of applications to the Good to Go programme

Sourcing outreach venues that could accommodate Good to Go's provision within the East Riding may potentially overcome this issue. However, due to the challenging nature of the East Riding's geography and poor transport links, the programme would have to source several venues to be accessible across the entire region.

How has the programme changed?

Since delivery began in April 2024, the Good to Go team has made several changes to the programme. The programme gained a **second allotment** which has expanded the outdoors offer. The new plot has enabled the purchase of a second shed, with an attached summer house, which, although new, is planned to be used as an adaptable space that can fulfil several needs: a place to shelter in bad weather, a safe space where learners can take time out from the group, and a private space where mentors can conduct reviews with learners. The second plot is planned to have a **wellbeing focus**, with sensory plants and accessories, while the original plot will remain as a more 'practical area' for growing fruit and vegetables.



The new outdoor learning room at the Good to Go allotment

The programme has **expanded its days of delivery** from three to four, splitting participants into two delivery cohorts attending two days each. This was to accommodate the increased number of referrals, after the initial slow start. Other minor changes to programme content include the purchase of games learners can play if they choose to stay in the classroom over lunch. *“Before they was just sat here on their phones, wasn’t they, with headphones on. Whereas now, they are, you know, working together and stuff”* (Mentor 3)

Accounts from the mentors revealed adaptability in their roles, as they responded to **changes in staffing** and the needs of the project. After one mentor left the project, responsibilities were shared between the remaining members of staff with everyone ‘mucking in’ to ensure vital tasks such as IAGs (Information, Advice and Guidance) and recruitment activities continued. For example, the MIS & Information officer undertook IAG sessions to allow the mentors to concentrate on programme delivery.

A more significant change has been the introduction of **Portable Educational Escape Rooms (PEERs)**, through the Independent People 2.0 Erasmus project the Good to Go team is

people. Whether someone's communication wasn't that good, whether someone needed help with teamwork. So, it's given us that sort of, you can see straight away and have that insight onto what they need. (Mentor 1)

This allowed mentors to assess which skills learners may need to develop and plan appropriate support.

How might the programme be improved?

Planned changes to the programme included the **re-introduction of the Employability Passport**. This had been an integral part of the This-Ability project but was not initially included in Good to Go because the new programme did not have the same employment focus. However, due to work being done with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) and the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) stating “*passports are a big part of their strategy going forward*” (SPL 1) they were to be brought back into delivery.

The delivery of the passport in This-Ability was not without challenges. Evaluation of the programme found that understanding of the passport and its uses among learners was weak, possibly because they received the finished document at the end of the programme and did not see it develop and build throughout their journey. This was attributed to two main factors: the learners’ journey included several weeks at a partner provider who did not have access to the physical passport document, and the physical document took substantial time to verify and print (Bashir et al., 2024).

The evaluation recommended an electronic version be developed, to enable learners to take more ownership. It was for this reason Good to Go initially **trials an online CV and portfolio tool** “*where you can apply for volunteering, work, where you send your profile to employers or potential placements*” (Mentor 1). Learners could complete an individual profile and upload evidence, such as photos or video, of what they had done to achieve the Core Capabilities. However, the online tool was not well received by the learners who perhaps saw it as a duplication of existing tools, were reluctant to complete profiles during the sessions or failed to see the relevance of the system to themselves:

I don’t know if they just seen it as I’ve already got a CV kind of thing, I already use Indeed, I don’t need another thing. For us it’s been quite difficult to get going with it... when the learners are just saying, no I don’t want to do it in the classroom... I’ll do it when I get home... when people search say, like [learner], and there’s no animal placements on there. Straight away he’s like, no it’s useless to me. (Mentor 1)

A further recommendation from the evaluation of This-Ability was that the passport be more embedded in programme delivery to ensure learners developed the understanding required for it to be useful to them. In discussing how this could be achieved mentors suggested viewing the Employability Passport as a portfolio, making time during each session to reflect on what learners had achieved and adding this information to the passport.

Other possible changes put forward included adapting the times that learners attend at the allotment to **increase inter-generational activities**, “*Because a lot of the older generation go early... By time our learners come on [they’re] leaving*” (SPL 1). This was identified to have other potential benefits in preparing learners for further education and work, where starting at ten o’clock would be a luxury in many circumstances. However, it was recognised that dark

mornings would be a barrier to travel for many learners and this would not be a suitable option during shorter daylight periods.

Project leaders also put forward the possibility of joining the two cohorts of learners together on some days at the allotment, provided there was enough work for all the learners to do. Potential benefits identified were freeing staff time for other activities such as recruitment and administration jobs or introducing a third cohort of learners.

As with previous evaluation of the This-Ability programme leaders emphasised the importance of the **flexibility** that National Lottery funding afforded the project, giving the ability to adapt quickly to changing needs (Bashir et al., 2024). As an example, SPL 1 related how the programme has responded to support the needs of learners who presented with poor personal hygiene:

For example, on This-Ability we provided toiletries and stuff like that. When we started Good to Go, we didn't do it. We said no, there's wasn't enough money in the budget. However, we quickly realised due to the nature of the learners coming in they needed that. So, it wasn't a case of, oh let's look at it in six months, it was the following day we need it, and we went out and bought it.

In response to the question of whether any lessons had been learned in the first year of delivery, SPL 1 stated *"I think it's too early to see if there's any major lessons we would need to take away from this. At the minute it's just really small adaptations that we're making as we go along"*. This again highlighted the flexibility of programme delivery as staff respond to the needs of the learners and the project.

What support does the programme offer?

Mentors related providing highly **individualised support** based upon getting to know each learner as an individual. Mentors spoke often of the need to build rapport with learners quickly and engaged them in their interests. Flexibility within the provision for learners to attend fewer hours and one-to-one support enabled less confident learners to progress. Relevant information was shared between mentors to ensure that staff were all aware of specific support needs:

What works for one person, what someone responds positively to, might not be for the next person. But it's just getting to know them as each individual. (Mentor 1)

And we're forever, aren't we, having conversations... Does this person need to do half a day because they're struggling... about what's been happening in the class, what they've done well, what we could do differently, or if that could help them a bit more. (Mentor 3)

maybe if one of the learners is a bit more withdrawn and a bit more quiet, I'll maybe take that learner on and take them away and we'll go do a job... I've found out on the past when I've done that, I've got more out of them, you know. Because they're distracted by the job of what they're doing... So, they tend to open up a little bit easier. (Mentor 2)

The data revealed a **range of activities** that learners took part in while on the Good to Go programme, such as classroom activities, Escape Rooms (including developing Portable Educational Escape Rooms), and allotment activities on both the Good to Go plots and with other plot holders at the allotment site. Learners also received support with individual aims and goals beyond the general programme content. Ben, for example, was getting help to build an online portfolio of his photography, while Mike received support with an application to volunteer with a local sports club. In other instances, where possible, mentors sourced external volunteering placements such as a one-week placement on a film set.

While the range of allotment activities the learners reported was limited due to the time of year, they recalled weeding, generally tidying the site, preparing soil and building a storage box - *"Yeah, it was real fun I got to use a big boy power drill. I was real excited"* (Mike). Plot holders with whom the learners had worked recalled spending time with learners and **sharing skills and knowledge**:

So, to be honest the kids that came across really didn't know what bluebell bulbs were. So, I had to identify the bulbs... I made sure that they dug the right ones up. And we just talked about how they grow through everything... I showed them how to split up the bulbs and then when they moved the shrubs, I told them what the different shrubs were called. (Plot holder 1)

Some of them was quiet, but after chatting with them for a couple of minutes they started talking back to me. Which I quite liked, I quite enjoyed that. They asked me one or two questions and I answered the best I could. (Plot holder 2)

Arthur recognised the **high support/high challenge** environment of the programme as learners are stretched to develop the core capabilities. He acknowledged the skills of the mentors who gently push the learners while scaffolding the learning:

I think there's a lot they've got to be able to, kind of, read the situation of like, pushing them enough to here, they're doing something but also like to not be making said person uncomfortable. (Arthur)

Importantly, the testimonies revealed mentors **regarded learners as adults**. The relationship as mentors, rather than teachers, was seen as a key element of 'what worked' in terms of supporting learners. Mentor 2 described how he approaches assigning tasks at the allotment, explaining to learners that he is not asking them to do anything he could not do himself. *"It's something that I'm able to do. But I also think that you're able to do it as well... I don't think there's any use of babying them"* (Mentor 2)

Added Value

The narratives from programme staff revealed added value from the **UK Shared Prosperity Fund** (UKSPF) programmes that were being delivered by HLC and their partner network. SPL 1 relayed that the various options offered by the programme was a 'nice easy progression route' that could be monitored by the Good to Go team:

I think it's a nice transition for our young people to know we're still here. We're still about. And like I say, we can just pop in at any time and see them. (SPL 1)

This was reinforced by Mentor 1 who stated that the range of options offered by the different strands of the programme meant there was 'something for everyone'. *"They've got the employment, the volunteering and the opportunities aspect... it's been quite easy to make referrals now."* (Mentor 1)

In addition to expanding the range of volunteering and employability options available to learners, UKSPF providers within HLC's network also offered a range of enrichment activities which could be accessed by Good to Go learners for free. These included wheelchair rugby and Learning Disability Rugby League, art, music and wellbeing activities.

What were the barriers faced by young people accessing the programme?

The accounts from learners revealed a range of disabilities and health conditions such as **mental ill-health, ADHD, autism, learning disabilities and communication issues** such as speaking, reading and writing. Mentors also reported issues around personal hygiene, appropriate behaviour and boundaries.

Learners recounted having joined the programme to build **confidence**, for help with finding employment or because they were having difficulty managing their conditions. Arthur described his ADHD and anxiety as a 'personal roadblock' that was getting in the way of job searching. For Ben, his autism and lack of confidence affected his job searching and led to a level of perfectionism that prevented him from actually completing applications:

All the applications and everything was, basically like overwhelmed me way too much. I was like, I don't know exactly how I'm meant to do it, but if it's not perfect, if it's not exactly how it says I need to do it, then I probably won't send it off anyway.

Mike's account revealed how ADHD affected him in multiple ways as he struggled with executive functions such as prioritising tasks and planning. This, in turn, led to increased **anxiety and lack of motivation**:

Because if I feel like, if I ponder too much on what's going to happen, it stresses me out and then my ADHD might kick in and think, well there's no point in doing anything. If it's just going to end up like that. And then I'll just be real demotivated. I try just to take each day as it comes. (Mike)

He went on to describe how a need to feel productive in his job search led him to apply a scattergun approach, applying for as many jobs as he could even if they were not appropriate:

I was applying for jobs that was miles away, like unrealistic to get to, just to apply. Cos in my head it's the more jobs I apply for the better chance I have. It should be quality over quantity instead of just applying for all of them. (Mike)

While some learners had previous volunteering or work experience, in many instances **lack of experience** was highlighted in the testimonies, as learners hoped that the programme would help them to build their CVs and provide different opportunities that would help them to narrow down their options:

Just to, like get out there and experience what it's like volunteering. (George)

it was I needed something that would like, at least, I don't know give me the ability to put something on the CV.... I was hoping that, like, the group would kind of open me up to a

multitude of experience. Because I didn't come into this with one specific type of volunteering, you now, experience in mind. (Arthur)

Several learners recalled having been **socially isolated** prior to starting on the programme. Both George and Dan stated that if they were not at Good to Go, they would have been 'doing nothing' or 'just gaming'. The **continuing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic** was evident in learners' narratives. Arthur described his university education as having been 'tarnished' by the experience of lockdown. This was reinforced by Ben, who recalled the enforced period of isolation while he was at college led to him becoming a '*very lonesome person*'. Social anxiety that made it difficult to approach people meant he had had difficulty making friends – "*it was just me myself and I, and I had no one at the time*" (Ben)

Several learners related they had supportive parents who helped them navigate getting diagnoses for their condition and managing day to day. However, mentors conveyed that sometimes parents' understandable need to support and protect their child could perhaps, lead to a **lack of agency** - "*Some [learners] come with parents so that restricts their communication a bit, because sometimes they talk on their behalf*" (Mentor 3). In other instances, learners appeared to have **little parental support**, such as Ben who revealed that he '*never really got along*' with his parents.

The mentors revealed that in some instances learners did not like the classroom environment, and this presented a significant barrier. Mentor 3 reported that some learners felt **confined by the classroom space** or "*they have that automatic response of I don't feel comfortable in here. I didn't like it when I was at school, or I didn't go to school*". Mike stated the classroom reminded him of school, which he found boring, "*and I don't like thing that are boring. Always looking for stimulation*" (Mike). Previous evaluation of the This-Ability programme revealed many learners had experienced bullying while at school (Bashir et al., 2024; Bashir & Richards, 2023), presumably this may have been a reason for any such discomfort, as they found the classroom reminded them of these experiences.

Learners provided examples of how **mainstream education impacted on their self-confidence**. While Mike tried to mask behaviour related to his ADHD at school, Ben described how he was left socially isolated due to autistic behaviours and getting a diagnosis:

You know when you get like, and they just teach you all in the special class, as they put it, it's a bad thing. So, in secondary I would try and like not hide, but not really show as much my things that happened as much as I could to not be ridiculed. It didn't mess me up but just made me less confident in the long run. (Mike)

Mainstream education just taught me that, basically, the way I act is basically weird and not normal... I was sort of a late diagnosis either way... But yeah, it did kill my confidence to have an explanation about why I was being described as weird by other peers back in secondary. (Ben)

Changes to the classroom necessitated by the end of the This-Ability programme may have impacted on the classroom environment. What had previously been the This-Ability classroom was divided in half, with the other half been used for office space, meaning there was no longer room for enrichment activities that had been available for This-Ability:

When we had the full office, it didn't feel like a classroom. Because we had the side that was like the ping-pong table, the darts. It didn't feel like a classroom setting. (Mentor 1)

The smaller space also impacted on increased noise levels in the classroom, which may cause difficulties for learners with sensory processing disorders. Mentor 1 relayed that different learning styles also contributed to issues around the classroom as many participants are practical learners for whom "*sitting in a classroom and sitting round a table's not the most ideal*". This point was balanced by SPL 1, who stated that realistically, learners need to be able to cope in a variety of spaces in order to progress:

it's about the real world, about giving them I suppose half and half. They need to be able to be in some kind of classroom to potentially progress on if they want to go into employment in later life. They've got to have both sides; it can't be permanently outside, and it can't be permanently inside. So, it's a bit of both.

The evidence suggested the programme aimed to provide a range of experiences, in a variety of supported environments, to prepare learners for progression into education, employment or further volunteering.

Impact and Outcomes

For learners

Although evidence of impact and outcomes was limited due to the small number of learners that took part in the focus groups, what impact we did find was positive. Learners reported that the programme had helped to build the Core Capabilities such as **teamwork** and **motivation**. Awareness of the Core Capabilities and their meaning among the learners was strong as they identified key skills they were building through each aspect of the programme:

Without this programme I probably still would be scrounging for a lack of ideas, a lack of inspiration. So, it's given me the motivation as well. (Ben)

Like, every other thing's been kind of just cultivating an environment where you can kind of learn to work as team. (Arthur)

In one instance, Ben was able to describe how working at the allotment was helping him to develop awareness of the **workplace environment** through being given individual **responsibility** for certain tasks:

It helps me to really understand, like, similarities to a workplace in some way I'd say. Since in a way you get assigned tasks and you, kind of, are showing willingness to help as well. (Ben)

In another example, Mike identified how **time-management** and **communication** were an essential part of teamwork in creating a Portable Educational Escape Room:

"communication's a big one as well. Because we've all got to know what part we're up to, what needs to be done." Ben also related how the structured activities helped him to communicate with other learners, as social anxiety meant he found it very difficult to approach people: *"here it just, gives me a reason to approach someone."*

Evidently, the Good to Go programme enabled learners to **increase in confidence**. The mentors provided examples of how they had seen learners grow and flourish while on programme:

She said she'd gained a lot more confidence, which you can tell she did, like when you see her outside now and she's coming to [training provider]. You'll see her outside and she'll sit and chat to you, whereas before she'd be quite quiet and reserved. (Mentor 1)

At the beginning... she was just one-word answers. But towards the end, you know, you was having full blown conversations with her. (Mentor 2)

Plot holder 2 remembered an instance at the allotment when a learner, who had been largely non-verbal while attending the programme, had found the confidence to speak and thank him for helping her with a task:

And we just got chatting and she never spoke a word... As she walked away, she just turned round to me, she said 'thank you'. And I mentioned that to Mentor 2, and [he] said, 'gosh we hardly get anything out of her. She hardly says anything'.

Learners expressed newfound confidence linked to skills such as using public transport, applying for jobs, communication and talking to people:

R: So, can you give me an example of something you'd be confident to do now, that you wouldn't have done before?

Dan: Probably talking as much as I am now.

George: Like talking to more people and stuff.

No, I don't think I'd be more confident on the bus no more if I didn't have the programme. The programme's helped me out a lot, like getting good at transport and stuff like that. (Mike)

I feel like it does make me, like a bit more employable when I apply to places because I've got, I look proactive in, like, work search and stuff. (Arthur)

The accounts revealed that, in some instances, learners had **improved their wellbeing** through being gently pushed outside of their comfort zone. Arthur described how he had challenged himself, through the programme, to get out of the house and meet new people:

I think it's done my wellbeing a world of good... I think it's good to, not just be stuck in all the time and expose yourself to people. Because there's just something about being around people. Getting outside of your comfort zone a little bit. It's like, you don't just stagnate... it challenges you to, kind of, to be better in certain ways.

The mentors noted that even for learners for whom wellbeing had not been a primary goal in attending the programme, this had been where the most significant impact was made:

A lot of people that haven't even realised that they've wanted that health and wellbeing side. Like, for example, [learner], when he first come. It wasn't because he wanted to get out of the house, he wanted to find a job. But now, when you speak to him about his time with us the biggest thing he's got from it is the fact he's been able to get out of the house and have a break from his home life and he's enjoyed the allotment because it is that... nice relaxing space. (Mentor 1)

In some instances, the learners reported having developed a **better understanding of their disabilities** or health conditions and having developed coping mechanisms to help them manage in their daily lives. Mike explained how, with the help of his parents, he was now able to break down household chores, such as cleaning the kitchen, into a more manageable to-do list of smaller tasks which gave him the motivation to complete the chores. He went on to say he was starting to feel more accepting of having ADHD:

It's less of a, like, I don't like it. It's more of I'm starting to understand it and I know that I can't get rid of it, so I have to learn how to live with it instead of just trying to go against [it].
(Mike)

This sense of acceptance was reiterated by Ben, who described how spending time in Good to Go sessions with other young people who are neurodiverse or have learning disabilities had helped him to feel **less isolated**:

just being with people who have basically like, other disabilities... It, kind of, just opens your mind a lot more to say, like, you're not the only one that has those things. Other people have other things as well. And they're also not as confident as well.

The mentors relayed that the programme had "*helped people to make friends and get out the house*" (Mentor 1). They provided numerous examples of learners on the programme getting together for **social activities** outside of programme delivery hours such as using social media for group chats on an evening, trips to the cinema, bowling, wheelchair rugby and birthday celebrations.

Strategic impact

Programme managers described how the programme engaged with stakeholders, such as local SEN teams and the DWP, so they understood the programme and the impact of the individualised support offered. SPL 1 gave an example of a learner, aged 16, who had disengaged with mainstream education and was "*very within herself. She came to us and we put her back into mainstream provision*".

The programme worked to position itself, and any future delivery, within SEN provision in Hull and the East Riding of Yorkshire. NEET (Not in Educational, Employment or Training) numbers had increased steadily over the previous year and there is an increased risk of being NEET associated with having been identified as SEN or having a limiting disability (Crowley et al., 2023). Working with local SEN teams and the DWP the Good to Go staff were attempting to identify possible causes for this increase, gaps in current provision and how the programme could be adapted to meet the needs of NEET young people with disabilities/learning disabilities or long-term health conditions.

Evaluation Survey Analysis

Here we present a summary of key information drawn from the evaluation survey completed by programme participants. The demographic profile, labour market experiences and wellbeing measures at the start of the programme may be compared to similar measures taken at programme exit.

Exit data is presented as a value count, rather than percentages due to the small sample size.

Of note:

- A high percentage (78%) of learners that attended for an IAG session from were from Hull, supporting the claim that the programme is less accessible or attractive to learners in the East Riding.
- 43% of learners joining the programme reported autism spectrum disorder as their primary disability, however qualitative data suggests learners may have multiple conditions and complex needs.
- Over 50% of learners that joined the programme were actively looking for work.
- 72% of learners that have left the programme went on to volunteering, education or paid employment.
- Two young people joining the Good to Go programme this year were in the 16-18 age bracket. Against a background of increasing NEET figures nationally (Office for National Statistics, 2025) widening the target cohort to include young people aged 16-29, rather than the current 18-29 would enable wider recruitment and allow the programme to support young people who may otherwise not be accessing any provision.

41

Learners attended an IAG session

*up to 31st March 2025



Hull
78%

East Riding
22%

95%

White British –
English/Welsh/Scottish/Northern Irish/British

95%

Aged between 18 – 29

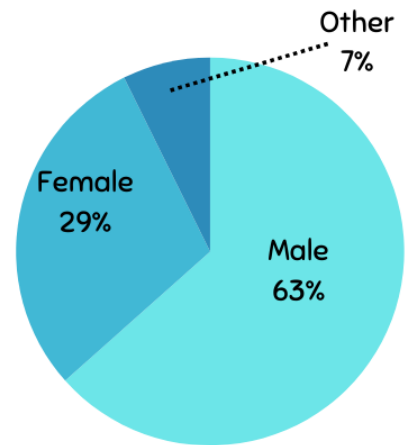
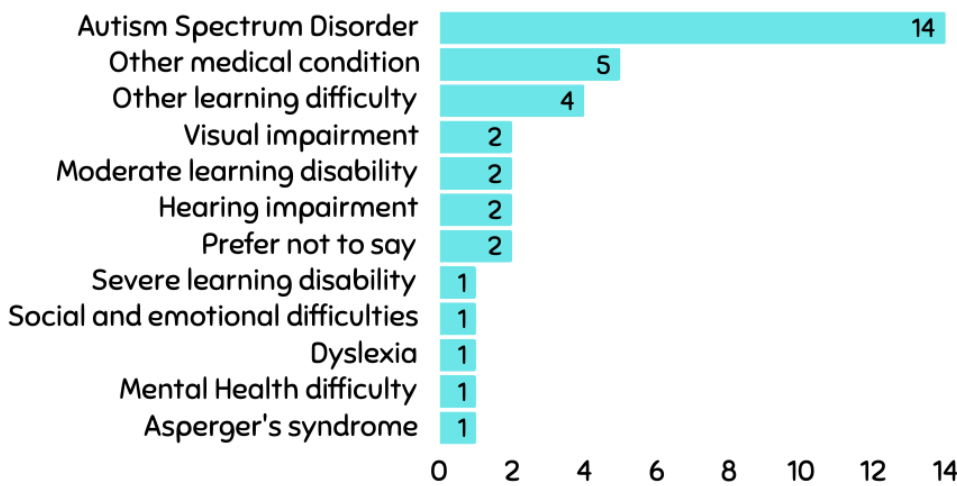
61%

Have a disability which limits their daily activities

63%

Lived in a disadvantaged postcode

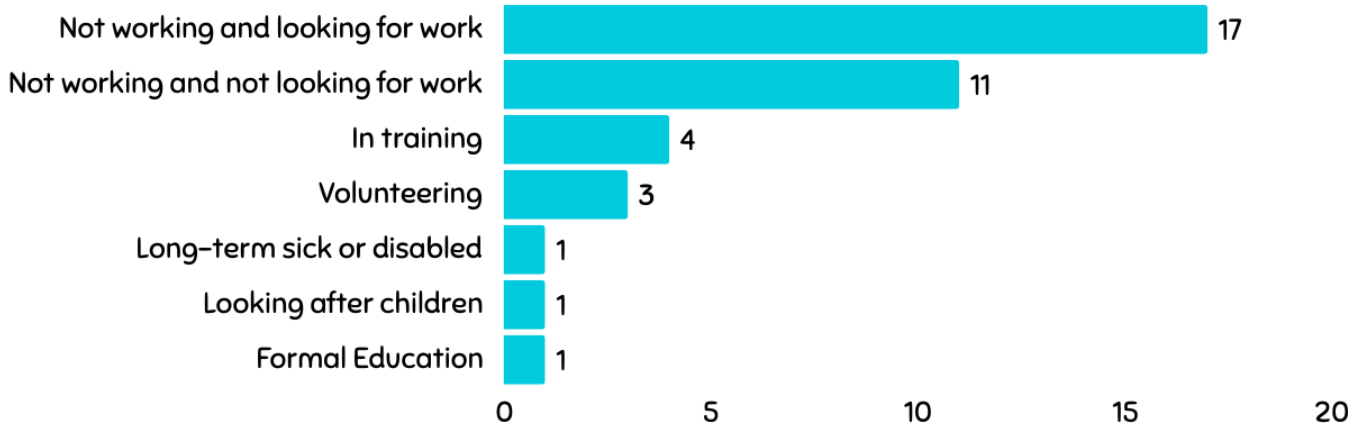
What was their primary disability or health issue?



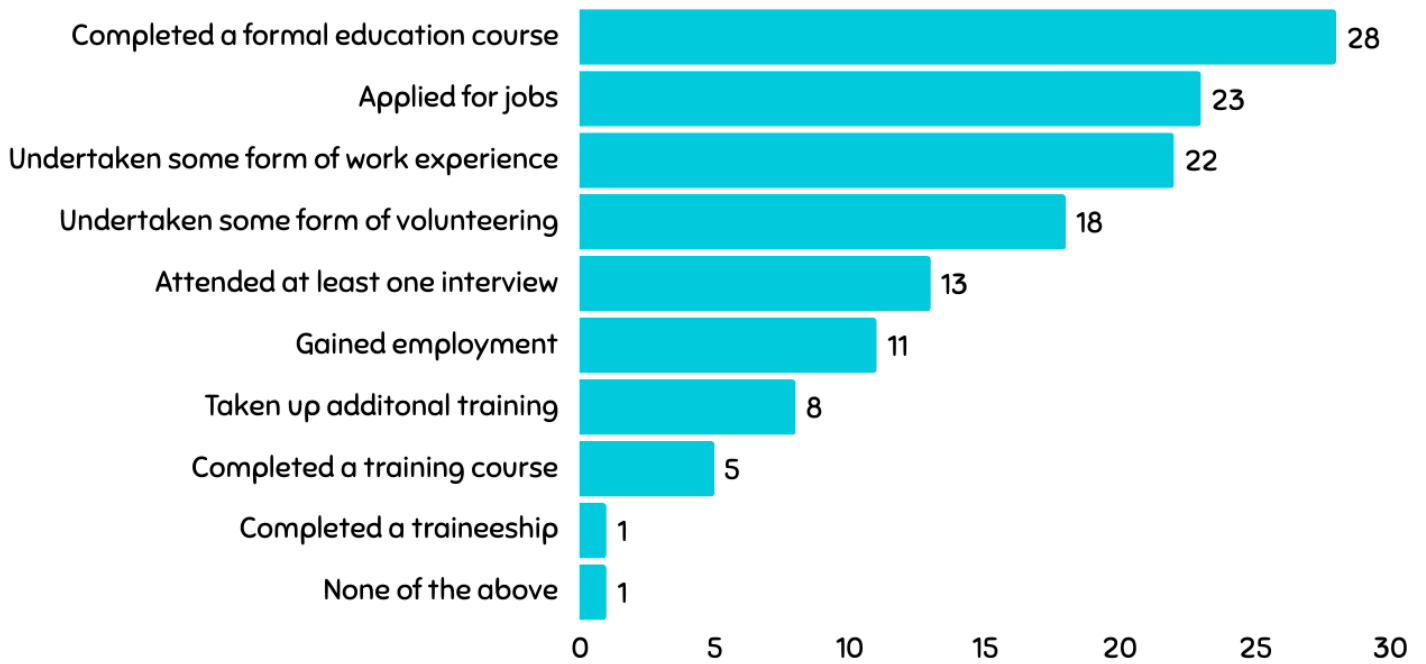
32

Joined the programme

What were young people doing before joining?

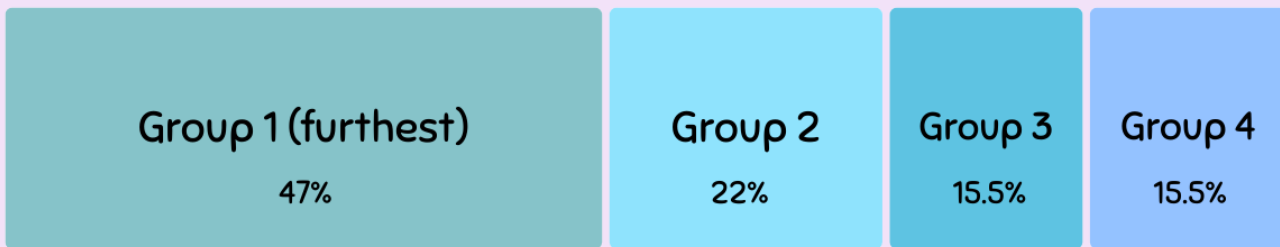


What previous labour market experience did they have?

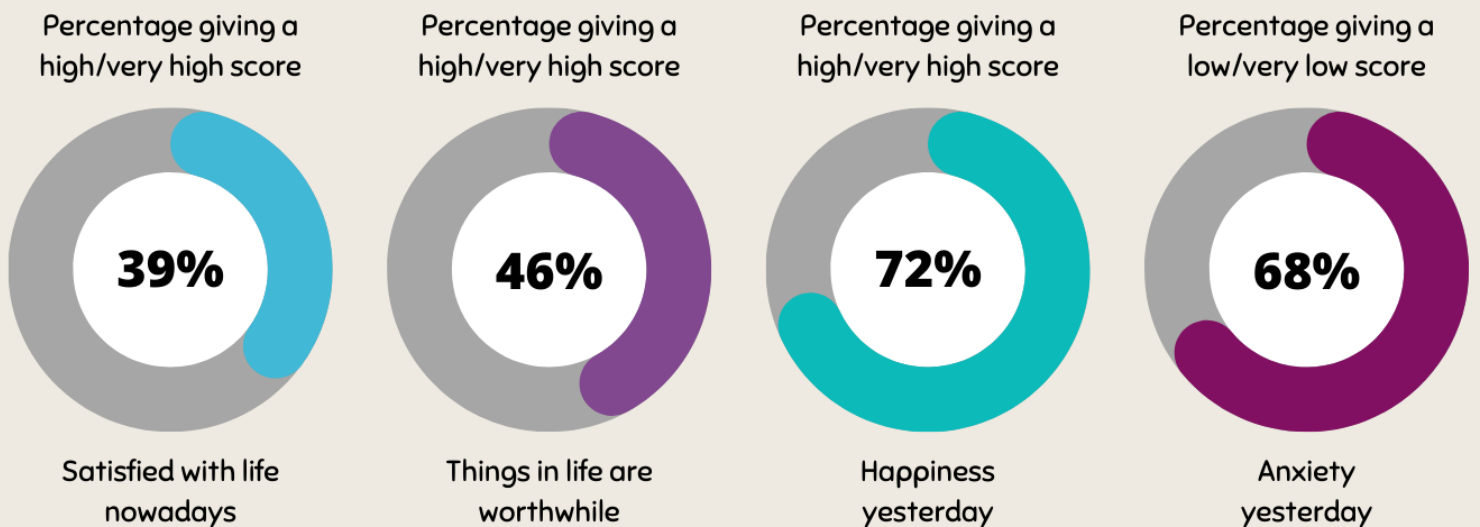


How far were young people from the labour market?

Distance from the labour market measures were drawn from the evaluation of the Talent Match programme undertaken by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University (Damm et al., 2020)



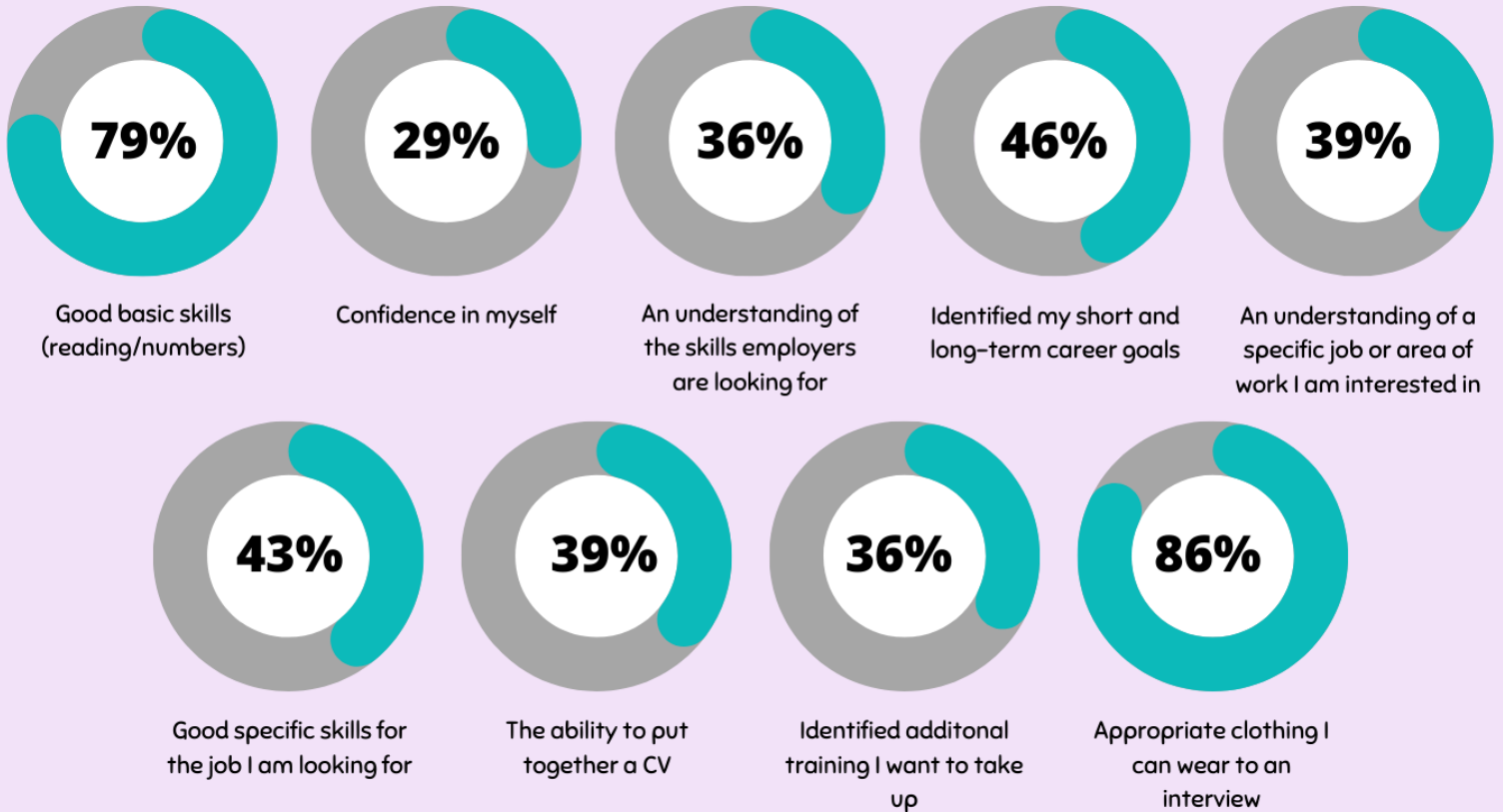
How did young people feel about their lives when they joined?



How did young people feel about their skills when they joined?

Percentage agreeing with the following statements.

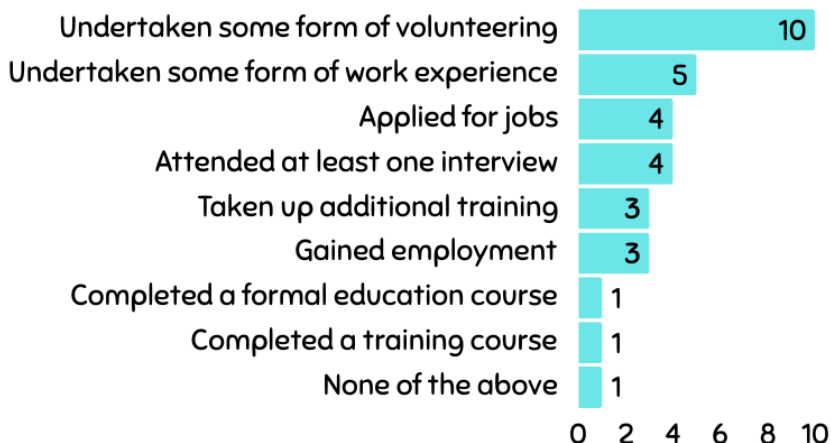
I have...



Out of 18 young people that have left the programme, 13 have completed an exit survey

12 weeks average on programme

What have young people done since joining?



Where did they progress?



How have young people progressed?



How far were young people from the labour market on exit?



How did young people feel about their lives on exit?



4 young people did not complete the survey at the time they left the programme. The largest gap between leaving the programme and completing the survey was 35 weeks, and the shortest was 4 weeks.

Conclusions

1. The research found the lack of continuity between the end of the This-Ability programme and the beginning of Good to Go had a negative effect on the recruitment at the start of the project. Changes in staffing at both HLC and the DWP meant the programme lost key referral contacts, while the change in the project's name led to confusion about what the offer was. However, having reached the right people (DEAs) referral rates quickly improved.
2. The data suggests the young people accessing the programme were a significant distance from the labour market, with multiple and sometimes complex needs. Although only one learner identified mental health issues as their primary condition in the baseline survey, the qualitative data suggests in several instances mental health conditions, such as anxiety and depression, occurred alongside other conditions. The case studies presented illustrate the complexity of young people's lives and the barriers these present. In some cases, such as that of Derek, this led them to disengage from the programme.
3. The ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on learners was evidenced in the narratives. In some instances, young people experienced interruptions to their school, college or university education due to lockdowns. Ben's difficult family relationships and lack of friends left him extremely isolated. For James, the needs of his siblings overshadowed his own and left him feeling overlooked, impacting on his confidence and wellbeing.
4. The influence of family emerged as a strong theme in the narratives. While some learners had supportive parents who helped them manage their conditions and navigate daily life, for others, family relationships seemingly presented a barrier. From the strained relationships Ben, Lynne and Derek had with their parents and siblings, to the significant caring responsibilities James experienced. While the barriers presented by parents, especially, have been explored in previous evaluation of This-Ability (Bashir & Richards, 2022; Bashir et al., 20204), future evaluation of the Good to Go project might explore how the programme leverages positive parental relationships to support learners.
5. Our research found the project responded quickly, adapting to meet learners' needs. The out-of-doors offer of allotment activities was expanded to support learners who found the classroom environment challenging; the days of delivery were expanded so the project could support more young people; Portable Educational Escape Rooms provided fun and hands-on activities for when delivery at the allotment was not possible; money was found within the budget to purchase toiletries for young people that needed them.
6. The flexibility of the funding and project staff allowed the project to give highly individualised support to young people. Opportunities were sourced in line with learners' interests and aspirations in a wide variety of areas including photography, mixology, horticulture and IT. HLC's network of delivery partners and provision added value to the

programme in terms of an increased range of activities available to young people, progression routes and enrichment.

7. The reintroduction of the Employability Passport must learn from the lessons of This-Ability and fully embed the passport into programme delivery, enabling young people to understand and value it, not just as a record of achievement, but a useful tool for job searching.
8. Learners reported developing the Core Capability skills through hands-on activities. The accounts evidenced a high awareness of the skills and the links between them, as well as the importance of practical learning activities to develop them. Initial data from the evaluation surveys appears to support this increase, but due to the small sample size, we cannot say if this is statistically significant.
9. The available data suggests learners are moving closer to the labour market - progressing into employment, education or further volunteering. However, due to the small number of exit surveys available at this time, it is too early to tell whether the numbers are statistically significant.
10. Learners improved their wellbeing through participation in the programme, developing confidence and experiencing decreased social isolation. In some cases, learners had developed friendships which extended into social activities outside of the programme delivery time. Again, while there is not enough to say if the numbers are statistically significant, the evaluation surveys suggest learners feel more satisfied with life, and that things in life are more worthwhile on exiting the programme.

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