UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH
Research and Innovation

Adding to Life pluss

POSITIVE PEOPLE

Building Better Opportunities

Evaluation of the Positive People Devon programme

Final report
June 2023

COMMUNITY FUND

European Union
European Social Fund

SERIO
Informing Policy and Decision Makers

UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH
Research and Innovation

Contents summary

Introduction: 3
Evaluation methodology: 5
Section 1. Participant engagement and impact: 7
Section 2. Process learning: 19
Section 3. Best practice: Peer Mentoring project: 37
Section 4. Best practice: Empowering Women: 47
Section 5. Value for money: 61
Summary: 66
Appendices: 70

SERIO
Informing Policy and Decision Makers

Introduction

What was Positive People Devon?

The Positive People Devon project received £9,077,588 through the Building Better Opportunities Programme, which brought together funding from the Big Lottery Fund and the European Social Fund (ESF) and was managed by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP). It started as a partnership of community organisations, including Cosmic, Devon Community Foundation, POP+ and Torbay Community Development Trust, and was managed by Pluss CIC. The partnership worked together to engage and support disadvantaged people over the age of 25 who were out of work or most at risk of social exclusion.

The project aimed to move people away from benefit dependency, encouraging them back into or towards sustainable employment, employability activity, or learning. Tailored to individuals' needs, the Positive People offering included help with personal development; health and wellbeing; and the development of life-skills, including digital technology. Positive People ran between March 2017 and March 2023 with the aims of moving:

- ✓ 17% of participants into education or training on leaving;
- ✓ 14% of participants into employment, including self-employment on leaving; and,
- ✓ 27% of economically inactive participants into job searching or employment on leaving.

Positive People also aimed to achieve the following soft outcomes:

- ✓ Individuals will feel more positive and have the resilience to realise their personal goals and move towards a more positive future.
- ✓ Individuals will increase their use of local support services to help them improve their personal circumstances across a broad range of issues that are barriers to their personal progression.
- ✓ Individuals will establish and sustain an improved pattern of health and wellbeing.
- ✓ Individuals will become more empowered to participate in activities that will make their communities better places to live.

Introduction

Delivering Positive People Devon

Positive People Devon trialled innovative ways of working and engaging with target groups, promoting inclusive growth and prosperity for all in Devon. It did this through a provision of:

- **Change Coaches:** participant mentors who oversaw a personalised plan to facilitate social inclusion, and move some participants into education or sustained employment
- **Specialist partners:** providing specialised support (e.g. housing, finance, mental health) and engagement with hard-to-reach groups

Key to this delivery model was Pluss's Partnership Manager, alongside the collaboration of four core delivery organisations, including:

- **Cosmic** enhanced the digital inclusion element of the project, acknowledging that digital is a key enabler for local business growth. They used innovative means to engage participants and delivered 1:1 training and support to those who need it.
- **Devon Community Foundation** offered specialist local knowledge, working within communities to identify those who are furthest from the labour market.
- **POP+** added value to the project by means of their detailed knowledge of community groups, resources and networks across the region.
- **Torbay Community Development Trust** brought asset-based community development to the fore, encouraging local involvement in decision making, and supporting opportunities for volunteering.

Evaluation methodology

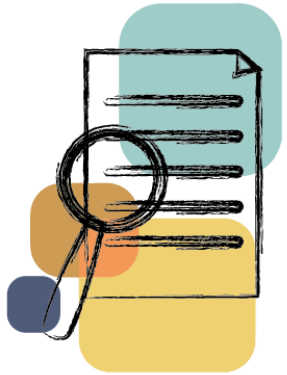
The following evaluation report has been produced by **SERIO, an applied research unit at the University of Plymouth** that specialises in evaluation services both regionally and nationally. SERIO was commissioned by Pluss CIC to undertake the final evaluation of Positive People Devon, which builds on the findings from the Participant Impact report produced in 2020, and includes the following elements:

Analysis of monitoring data

Key to the successful evaluation of the project, was the analysis of Positive People Devon's monitoring data which enabled key outputs and outcomes to be assessed as well as distance travelled and impact for participants. The available monitoring data was also used to calculate the social value of the project.

Participant survey

A short online survey was rolled out to all Positive People participants once delivery had ended. The survey explored their experiences and impact of the project, and views on how it could be improved. Participants responding to the survey were entered into a prize draw where they could win a £100 shopping voucher. A total of 116 participants responded to the survey.



Evaluation methodology

In-depth interviews with Change Coaches, management team, project partners, wider stakeholders, and participants

A total of 10 in depth interviews were conducted with the delivery team, project partners, and wider stakeholders. Delivery team and partner interviews explored how the project has grown and changed over the course of delivery, what difference this has made and for whom; the perceived impact of various interventions delivered; what barriers and challenges have been tackled and overcome; insight into lessons learned; and any strategic added value the project has given rise to. Interviews with key stakeholders reflected on themes such as, but not limited to: their views on the effectiveness of the delivery model; what impacts the project has had at a local level; and the strategic added value of the project. Bespoke evaluation interviews with delivery staff and stakeholders, and focus groups with participants, were also held to explore specific areas of best practice within the project, namely the Peer Mentoring project and Empowering Women programme. Interviews and focus groups were conducted via Zoom, Microsoft Teams or in person and took around an hour each to complete.

The following report draws together the findings from the analysis of monitoring and distance travelled data for participants, process learning from the in-depth interviews with key staff, partners and stakeholders, and shines a light on two areas of best practice identified by the Positive People Devon team; the Peer Mentoring project, and the Empowering Women programme.

Section 1: Participant engagement and impact

This section provides an overview of SERIO's analysis of the monitoring data pertaining to:

- Participant engagement; starts and demographics
- Participant outcomes; moving into education or training, employment or job searching
- Distanced travelled in terms of positive outlook, resilience, awareness and use of services and wellbeing
- Findings from the participant survey
- Digital impact

Positive People Devon: Participant engagement

The Aim:

Data was finalised in April 2023. At this final point of analysis, Positive People Devon had worked with a total of

2594 participants,

with the focus being on engaging those who were hardest to reach. This was against a target of 2619 participants; Devon has **achieved 99% of this target.**

Furthermore, of this figure:

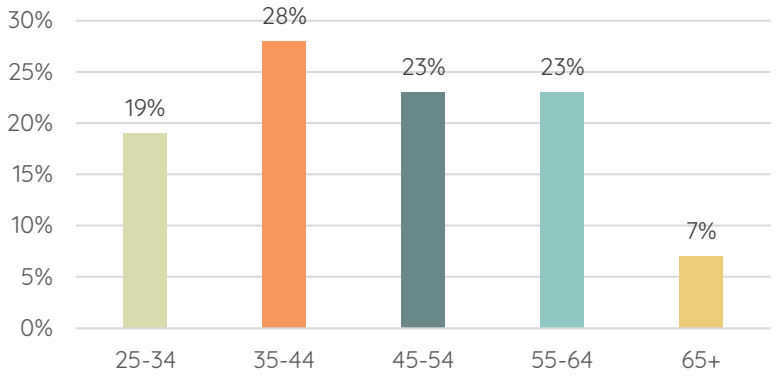
- **53% (1363) were unemployed; and,**
- **47% (1231) were economically inactive**

In terms of engagement demographics, the data shows that key target groups have been successfully reached and the programme supported those who were most disadvantaged and/or at high risk of social exclusion.

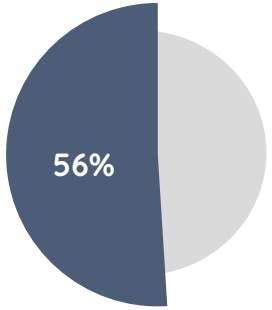
61% reported being male

38% reported being female

The remaining 1% reported as other or preferred not to say.



In terms of age, the majority of participants were aged 35-64 with fewer younger participants aged 25-34, and those aged 65+.



56% of unemployed participants were considered **long-term unemployed** (over 1 year)

48% reported having a **disability**

71% were from a **jobless household**

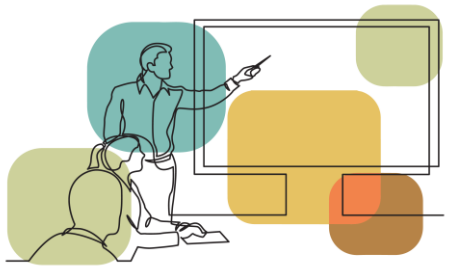
23% lacked basic skills; 19% lacked upper secondary level qualifications

5% were **homeless** or affected by **housing exclusion**

18% were an **offender or ex-offender**

Positive People Devon: Participant outcomes

At the end of delivery a total of 1974 participants had received a full package of support through Positive People. The proposed targets were to support 618 into education or training; 265 unemployed participants into employment; and 460 economically inactive participants into employment or job searching. The following outputs were achieved. These are based solely on those completing and exiting

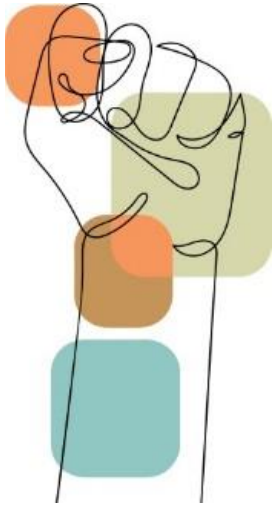


A total of **794 participants (40%) moved into education or training;** 392 were unemployed and 402 were economically inactive.

A total of **663 participants (34%) moved into employment;** 445 were unemployed, and 218 were economically inactive.

A total of **288 participants** (30% of those who were economically inactive, who exited) **moved into job searching.**

It should be noted, however, that **21% (307) of participants who moved into a positive outcome achieved more than one outcome**, i.e. moved into education or training as well as job searching, or even moved into employment as well as education or training. Therefore, it is important to calculate the success rate of the programme (moving into one or more positive outcomes):

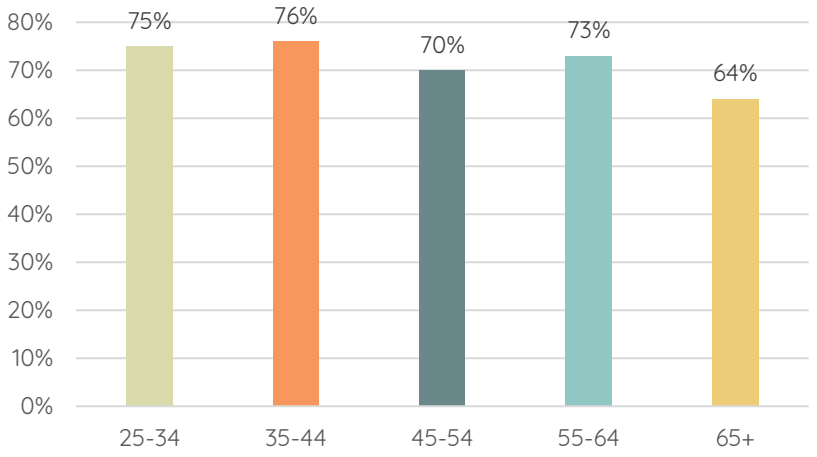


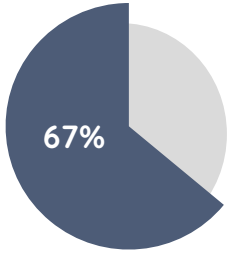
A total of **1438 participants (73%) achieved a positive outcome,** by either moving into education or training, securing employment, or starting job searching.

The success rate for both unemployed participants and economically inactive participants was the same at 73%.

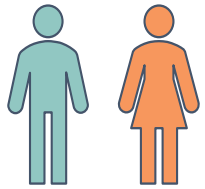
Positive People Devon: Participant outcomes

Age did not impact on the rate of success for Positive People Devon; although the data did show lower success rates for those aged 65+, however this can be explained due to the low engagement with those in this age bracket.

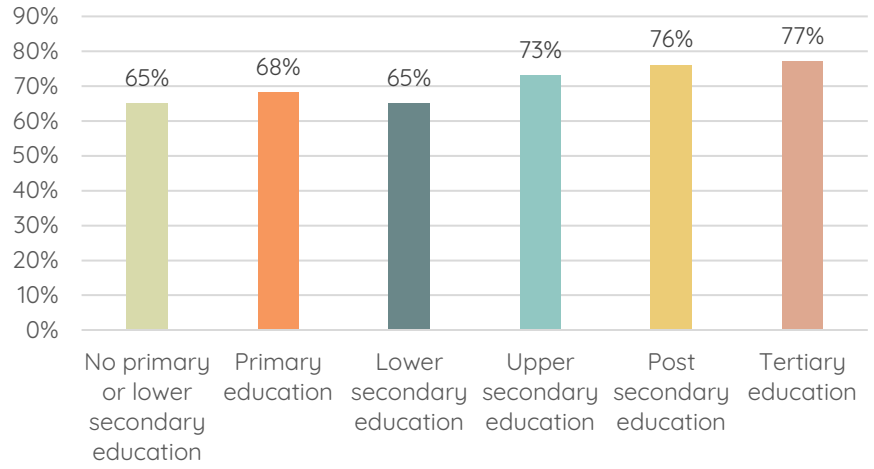




67% of the long-term unemployed (over 1 year) achieved a positive outcome, compared to 80% for those who had been unemployed up to one year.



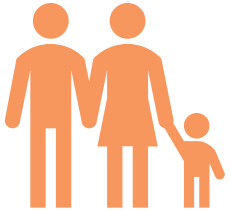
72% of female participants achieved a positive outcome compared to 73% of males.



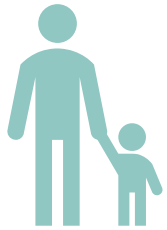
Success rates were relatively consistent regardless of educational attainment; however, there was a slightly lower success rate for those with lower levels or no education. This could, however, be explained by the low number of participants reporting this level of education compared to the proportion of those with upper secondary, post-secondary, and tertiary education (81% combined).

Positive People Devon: Participant outcomes

71% of those living in a jobless household achieved a positive outcome.



76% of those living in a jobless household with dependent children achieved a positive outcome.*



73% of those living in a single adult household with dependent children achieved a positive outcome.*

73% of those who were homeless or affected by housing exclusion achieved a positive outcome.

68% of those with a disability achieved a positive outcome.

67% of those who lacked basic skills achieved a positive outcome.

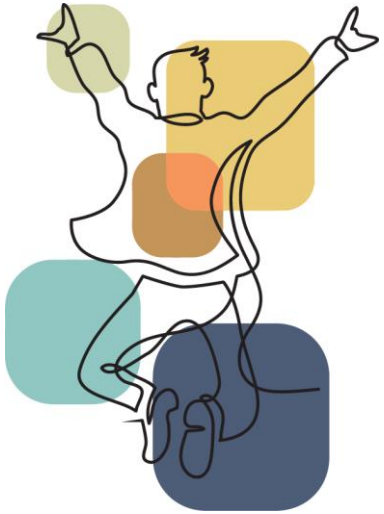
69% of those who were offenders or ex-offenders achieved a positive outcome.

Positive People Devon: Distance travelled

In addition to recording the hard outcomes achieved (moving into education or training, employment, or job searching), distance travelled on a number of soft outcomes was also measured. From July 2021, the programme's monitoring data system (CMS) incorporated four outcome measures* that were used at two time points (before and after support) to measure distance travelled;

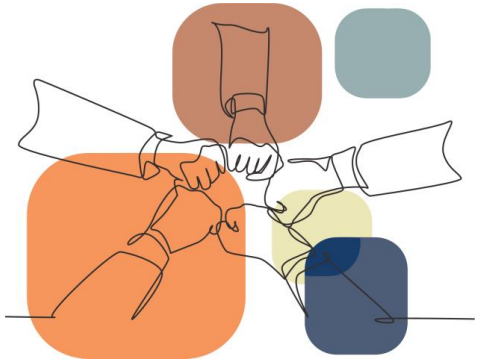
- **Improved positive outlook** was measured using the generalised self-efficacy scale
- **Improved resilience** was measured using the Brief Resilience Scale
- **Increased awareness and use of services** was measured using survey style questions
- **Improved health and wellbeing** was measured using the Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS).

Based on a sample of 497 participants who completed the distance travelled measures and exited Positive People Devon, the following outcomes were achieved:



63% (312) reported having an improved positive outlook after receiving support through Positive People.

48% (236) reported that their resilience has improved since receiving support through Positive People. Indeed, 33% (162) reported having 'low resilience' when starting, compared to 22% (111) on exit.



44% (220) reported that their awareness of services had increased since joining Positive People.

37% (184) reported that they has increased their use of services since starting the programme.

*Appendix 1 provides more detail around why these measures were chosen and their validity as well as references to the measures.

Positive People Devon: Impact on health and wellbeing

Using the Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS)

The Short Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS) was used to assess the mental wellbeing of participants. WEMWBS was developed by the Universities of Warwick, Edinburgh and Leeds in conjunction with NHS Health Scotland.

It requires participants to self-score 7 statements on a scale.

Participants are asked to complete SWEMWBS at the beginning and end of their involvement in the programme to enable any change in their individual mental wellbeing to be tracked, as well as to support evaluation of the effectiveness of the programme in improving mental wellbeing.

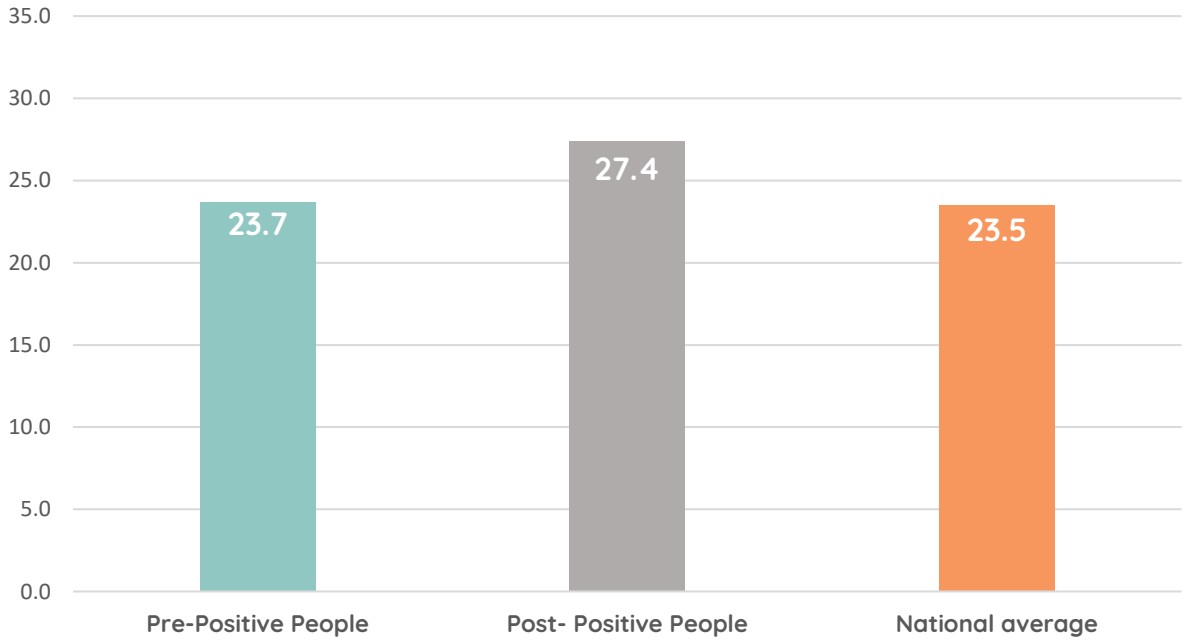
It should be noted, that the SWEMWBS measure is designed to be completed independently by participants, not together with a Change Coach; this may have introduced an element of bias in the responses, however, given the nature of the participants being supported by this project, it was felt most appropriate to administer the scale in this manner.

Moreover, only a sample of 501 participants completed the SWEMWBS, therefore the full impact of the project on participant wellbeing according to the SWEMWBS is limited to these individuals rather than the whole cohort.

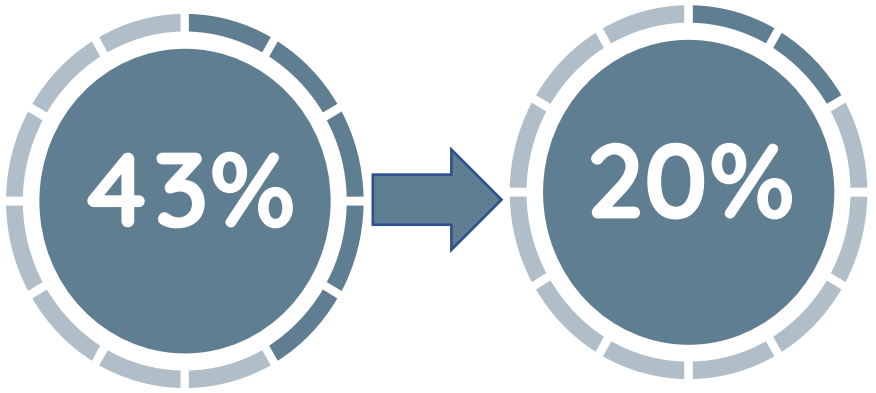
Positive People Devon: Impact on health and wellbeing

Evidence from the SWEMWBS for a sample of 501 participants demonstrates that their **mental wellbeing significantly improved after participating in Positive People Devon (p<0.05).**

Average SWEMWBS scores pre- and post- Positive People



Whilst the average SWEMWBS score for participants was very slightly above the UK average before accessing Positive People, on exit, participants' average scores were considerably higher than the UK average score.



Proportion of participants with 'low' mental wellbeing on entry

Proportion of participants with 'low' mental wellbeing on exit

The proportion of participants with 'low' mental wellbeing* dropped from 43% on entry to 20% on exit; the proportion of participants with 'moderate' mental wellbeing increased from 39% to 47%; and the proportion of participants with 'high' mental wellbeing increased from 18% to 34%.**

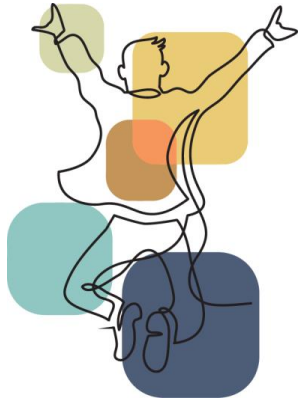
* defined by SWEMWBS scores of 19.5 or below ** defined by WEMWBS scores of 27.5 or above

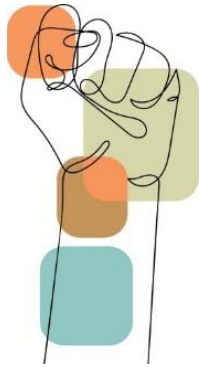
Positive People Devon: Participant Survey

In addition to the distance travelled measures, SERIO rolled out a survey to all participants. A total of 116 participants from Devon responded to the participant survey. Below are the headline findings from this survey.*

As a result of the support participants had received through Positive People in Devon:

86%* (92) said they enjoyed being involved and 85%* (94) strongly agreed or agreed that Positive People was worthwhile for them.





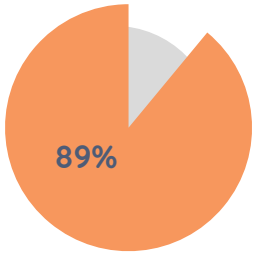
72%* (79) strongly agreed or agreed that it helped them feel more confident.

71%* (77) strongly agreed or agreed that it helped them improve their wellbeing.

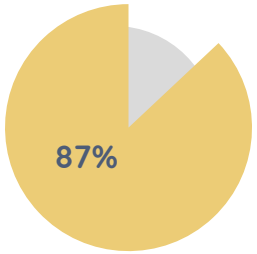
64%* (68) strongly agreed or agreed that it helped them feel able to deal with problems as they arise.

*Percentages may vary due to differing base numbers. Further details of the analysis are available on request.

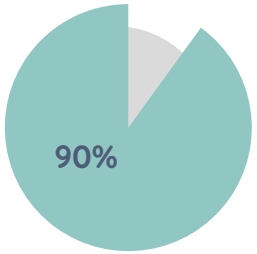
Positive People Devon: Participant Survey



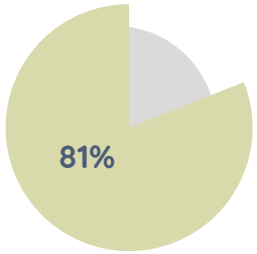
89% of participants surveyed said they were satisfied with the referral process.



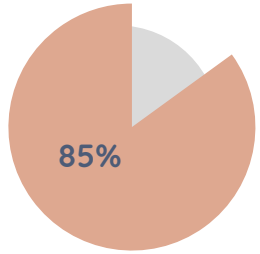
87% of participants surveyed said they were satisfied with the time spent with their Change Coach.



90% of participants surveyed said they were very or quite satisfied with the support they received.



81% of participants surveyed felt their Change Coach was effective at identifying appropriate areas of support for them.



85% of participants surveyed said they would be likely or extremely likely to recommend the programme to others.

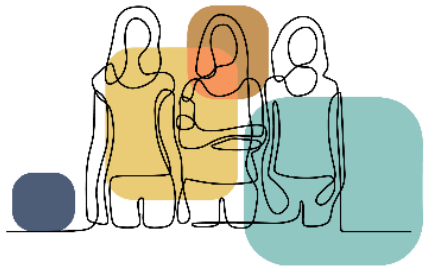
"Excellent scheme, I learnt a great deal, I had help getting a laptop so that I could learn more at home which I have done. I use it for more courses to learn. To date I've done over 19 courses during lockdown using the laptop they provided me with. I loved Positive People."

"I'd been through a lot and at times very overwhelmed, they have been there with support help hugs and promise that I'll get through. They built my confidence through allowing me to teach craft and encouraging me to get out and about with my dog."

Positive People Devon: Digital impact

Digital impact

One of Positive People Devon's core partners, Cosmic, collected their own data on digital impact. **Since March 2017:**



621 of these participants **received 1:1 sessions**

A total of **641 participants** engaged with Cosmic

Cosmic delivered 11,021 hours of Digital Inclusion to participants

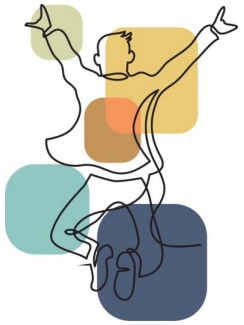
Positive People Devon: Digital impact

Digital impact

Additional data was collected by Cosmic since 2021:

Through refurbishing devices, Cosmic saved 6692kg of Co2 from being produced

69% of participants reported an increase in digital confidence and skills



Cosmic worked with 21 participants who were engaged in self-employment

Cosmic also provided 29 participants with devices

Cosmic provided 8 organisations with digital capability building capacity

Section 2: Process learning

This section draws together findings from 10 interviews that were conducted with delivery team members, specialist providers and external stakeholders. Interviews explored the need for Positive People in Devon; the strengths and challenges of the programme; and what future programmes can learn from Positive People.

Positive People Devon: Process learning

Strengths

Reaching the hardest to reach

It was highlighted that Devon is a very rural area, with many disconnected and smaller communities, many of which do not have access to a number of local services. It was felt that Positive People was able to target these communities, and deliver this information and support to these people, who would otherwise not be able to access this type of support due to the geographical nature of the area.

> ***"We were able to work with a vast amount of different people, with many different backgrounds, and different needs, whereas most sort of thing in this line would have been a DWP contract. So this isn't a DWP contract, so therefore, we can work with a lot more people who you can't work with on traditional contracts."***

Many of those who were interviewed suggested that one of Positive People's main strengths was that it was able to reach those furthest away from the job market. It was felt that unlike other programmes, which usually have strict guidelines on who they can work with, Positive People was much more open, and so were able to work with participants who ordinarily might not have the opportunity to engage with a programme like this.

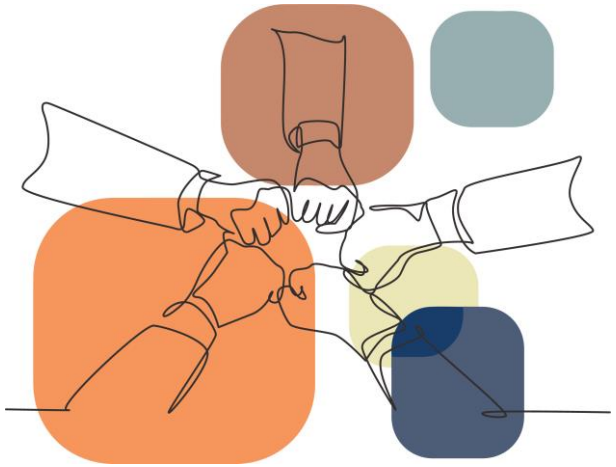
One partner highlighted how Positive People has helped those that are struggling to find employment. They suggested that many of those furthest from employment often are struggling with issues such as homelessness, addiction or anxiety, and so are unlikely to be in a position where they're able to work. Positive People, either directly, or indirectly through their network of local organisations and other BBO initiatives, are able to support the individual to tackle these issues, which then makes it easier for that person to engage with employment opportunities.

Positive People Devon: Process learning

Attracting referrals

Several interviewees also highlighted Positive People's ability to attract and engage participants. One interviewee indicated that as Pluss CIC was well established within Plymouth and had already built up many community partnerships, many people were already aware of them as an organisation and respected their reputation.

> ***"We are very lucky that we've got a lot of good contacts. Pluss is really sort of embedded in Plymouth, from a localised point of view, but it's very similar as well with other areas in their communities. We've been going quite a long while now and so word of mouth went round and people would refer friends and family. There was quite a lot of that actually."***



As a result, these partners frequently referred participants to Positive People, which meant engagement was less of an issue. Furthermore, it was suggested that as Positive People become more well-known over its duration, there was an increase in referrals from word of mouth, and those who had been involved in the programme would then refer their friends or family.

Positive People Devon: Process learning

Flexibility with Supporting Participants

A few coaches suggested that being able to work remotely was particularly effective considering the programme covered the whole of Devon. Therefore, by working from home, they didn't have to spend hours every week traveling around the county, which allowed them more time to support more participants and see to other parts of their role. They also suggested this was also beneficial for the participants. They indicated that many of their participants had challenges with social anxiety, and so may have been less likely to engage if the programme was face-to-face.

> ***"It's very time efficient for participants, particularly for people that have kids or who are caring because they don't have to go somewhere. Social anxiety is through the roof, and it's not just social anxiety, it's people with complex psychiatric and mental health conditions. It has enabled them to engage with the programme for 18 months in some cases, and some of these people would have never walked into a room"***

Furthermore, some participants had family responsibilities and required childcare, and so having the programme work remotely and flexibly was felt to suit many more people. It was also suggested by an interviewee that traveling took up many hours in their week, which was particularly challenging and meant they had less time to interact with the participants on the programme, and so instances where they could work remotely were beneficial in terms of having more time to support participants.

Positive People Devon: Process learning

Flexibility

Several of the coaches highlighted that a particular strength of this programme compared to others like it is that they're able to directly buy or fund things for the participants. They highlighted this might be something as simple as paying for identification for a participant, whereas in other cases it might be paying for a specific bit of training. They highlighted that once a participant saw that the programme was able to do these things, they were more likely to further engage, and they would expand on what their goals were.

In addition to this, coaches on the programme highlighted that the programme was flexible, and they were able to see people when and where they needed to. One coach highlighted that many potential participants may not feel comfortable in a traditional setting for this type of programme, such as the Job Centre, and so being able to meet in a coffee shop for example, might help to ease the participant into the process, allowing for better engagement. Furthermore, as this programme did not have a specific time commitment required by participants, it was ideal for people that needed to take that first step into employment but couldn't commit to something more rigid.

"People have dreams, but no ways of meeting them. The speed that we were able to pay for things and for them to be able to do the things that they wanted to do is incredible on this programme."

"When there's millions of pounds coming through for these contracts, some of that money goes more directly to the people you're working with, and less on everything else. I'd like to see more of that spent where it should be spent. Smaller, small things can make a big difference."

Positive People Devon: Process learning

Partnership working

Positive People's wide variety of strong partnerships were viewed as a key strength by many of those interviewed. In particular, it was felt that the programme was able to draw on the expertise of many different partners, who worked across a variety of different fields, which enabled the programme to meet the complex needs of many of those who were accessing the support. Furthermore, as these organisations covered a large geographical area, and were often very integrated in local communities, the programme was much more capable of engaging with those in rural areas, which were viewed as typically harder to reach.

> ***"Although we work for different parts of the company, or different companies within that partnership. We all work really, really well together in Devon."***

One interviewee highlighted that it was clear from the engagement from a wide range of partners that the programme was providing support for a range of different people. They highlighted having a wide variety of partners to fill these various niches meant that regardless of your background and the issues you may face, Positive People was likely to have partner within the programme that could help.

Positive People Devon: Process learning

Partnership working

In addition to providing an effective support network for the participants of Positive People, having a wide variety of partners across the programme meant a greater sharing of learning between organisations. For example, larger organisations were often able to help upskill smaller community-based organisations with things like health and safety or IT. One of the partners further highlighted that a strength of Positive People is that it allows for connections between organisations across Devon that might not otherwise work together. For example, it was noted that Torbay Community Development Trust worked closely with Plymouth Octopus Project in Plymouth, and they had been able to support each other and work collaboratively, thus improving their delivery. It was hoped that they would be able to continue these partnerships going forward, even after Positive People ends.

Several interviewees praised **Cosmic as a crucial partner in upskilling participants digitally.** They highlighted that many of the participants on the programme either lacked IT equipment, or the knowledge on how to use it effectively, and so Cosmic was particularly important in these participants' journeys. This was felt to be true even more so during the COVID period, where many aspects of life shifted more towards the digital space. It was also commented that Positive People's ability to bring new areas into focus and start to develop the partnerships and relationships in those areas that will be necessary for future projects. For example, they highlighted that digital is an area that is going to be very important moving forwards, and whilst they would have liked to have built on that more during the programme, they now have those partnerships going forward.

Positive People Devon: Process learning

Partnership working

Another coach highlighted that many of the partners were also a great source of information on how to better support participants that were on the programme. One example provided was that one of the participants the Change Coach was supporting was in a domestic abuse situation, and they were able to go directly to one of the partners who had experience supporting people in this area, and from there, they were able to signpost the Coach towards different sources of funding to help that individual, as well as different courses designed to help women leave abusive relationships.

One of the partners highlighted that the partnership work Positive People achieved was ***"great"*** and would like to see this work transition into mainstream delivery in some tangible way. They suggested that more collaborative work between major players in this space, for example, alongside the NHS, could be taken forwards and developed. It was highlighted that working in a collaborative manner allows for everyone to achieve much more than they would individually.

Positive People Devon: Process learning

Wider societal benefits

Several interviewees highlighted the wider societal benefits of the programme, in that it was able to prevent people from falling further into crisis. They suggested this would be beneficial to society more generally, as these individuals would be less reliant on services like the NHS or other mental health support, which in-turn would take some of the pressure off these already very stressed systems, allowing for other people to access the help they need. Furthermore, they highlighted that if the individuals supported are now at a better place in their life, they are more likely to have a positive impact on those around them, such as their family.

It was also suggested that participants go on to help others; ***"the capacity they have within themselves to change is then shared with others; inspiration, care and values."*** Moreover, stakeholders highlighted the economic benefits that could also arise from Positive People. They suggested that if the programme is able to support a person to a point where they are employed, they are then more likely to help contribute to the economy and engage with struggling industries such as retail or hospitality. They also suggested that this moves people away for relying solely on benefits.

"I think when you've got people who are on the point of falling into crisis, then there's a huge impact on society. They would end up on waiting lists for NHS or emergency services, or mental health support, you know, those sorts of things, and that creates a lot of pressure on the professional staff in those services."

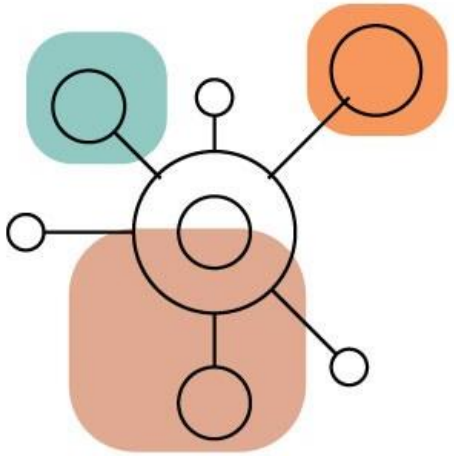
"Having these sorts of programmes where you're helping a core group of people who probably come from one of those deprived areas, it helps that person get better life. It also helps the city because we're actually trying to raise the aspiration of the city and raise the income of the city."

Positive People Devon: Process learning

Challenges

Partnership working

Whilst partnership working was seen as one of the key strengths of Positive People by the end of the programme, at the start, there were some challenges around working towards a collective goal. It was highlighted that initially, many of the partners were more focused on their individual areas of work, and there was a tendency to work in silos. However, it was felt that as the programme progressed, partners became less siloed, and began to work towards that collective goal of the programme.



It was also highlighted that there were some challenges around the disconnect between what the funder's aims were and how some community organisations involved in Positive People viewed the programme. They suggested that some of these community organisations felt as if the programme, and the funding they received, was primarily focused on building capacity and engaging the community; whilst Positive People did share this aim, it was also important to communicate the funder's specific requirements around outputs and outcomes.

Positive People Devon: Process learning

Partnership working

It was also highlighted that there were some additional challenges around managing the sustainability side of these relationships, as there were a few instances where these small community organisations began to rely on the funding provided by Positive People, rather than using it to further develop their organisation. Positive People were able to make adjustments to the model as the programme developed to accommodate for some of their partners additional strengths. It was also highlighted that the funder approved these changes, which made them possible. However, Positive People then had to plug that gap, to make sure that work was being done in the partners' area.

"I think sometimes the sustainability element was quite hard, because by giving a lot of the charities funding, they relied on the funding, rather than using it to upskill and develop themselves as an organisation further."

Positive People Devon: Process learning

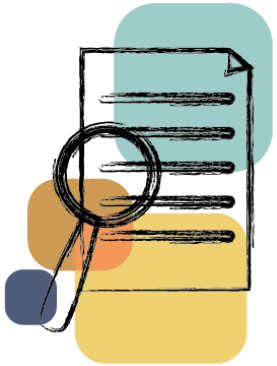
Administration challenges

Some of the challenges noted by interviewees focused on having different bodies to report to, those being National Lottery and DWP. This meant that the programme had two separate audits, which was testing at times, and meant that additional staff had to be brought in, such as finance experts and quality and compliance staff, in order to deal with those challenges.

A few individuals highlighted that balancing underspend and overspend was also tricky; this was felt to be particularly time consuming for some managers on the programme, as they were spending many hours on paperwork and making sure audits were being done properly.

One individual suggested this could have been improved by working closely with the LEP, and viewing them more as a partner, rather than regulating body, so that they could have helped to shape the programme model more, which would have improved the consistency of the work being done.

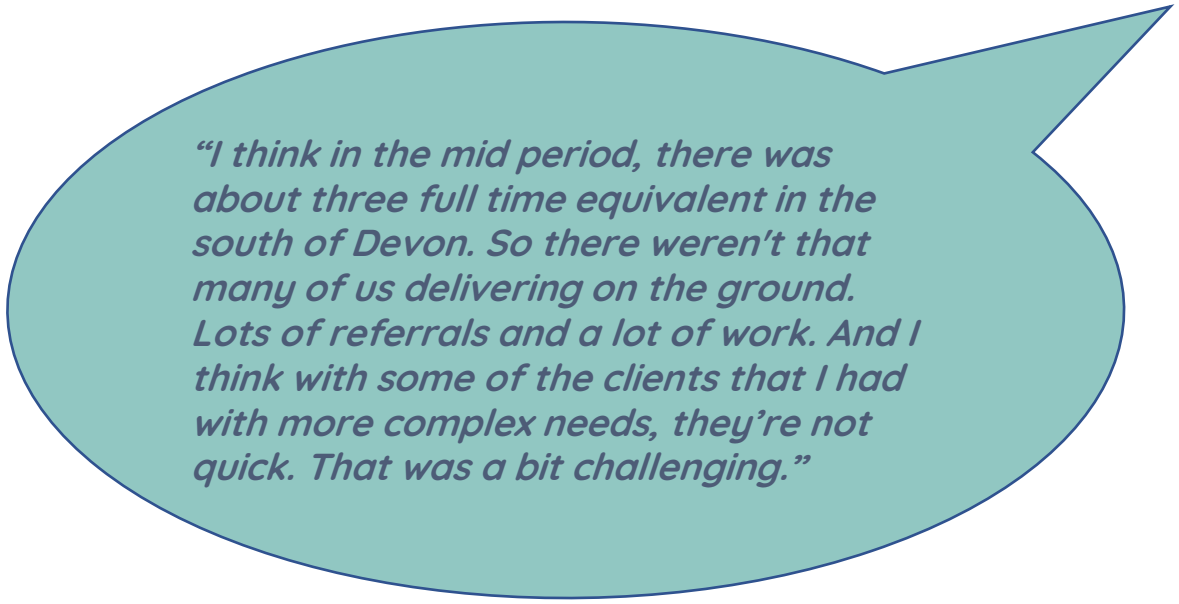
Change Coaches also felt that the amount of paperwork was often very time consuming, and as a result, potentially led to less people being supported, as they had less time to work with the participants. However, they recognised that paperwork is important in order for the programme to receive funding, and to continue supporting participants, but suggested streamlining this process so that it was less time consuming; it was widely felt that the requesting a signature on every piece of paper was particularly time consuming and questioned whether it was entirely necessary.



Positive People Devon: Process learning

Managing caseloads

One of the coaches interviewed suggested that due to the large caseload they had, they had to be very structured with the way they approached their appointments and other work, and as a result, they said their diary was often fully booked weeks in advance. This meant that they found it challenging if something were to pop-up at short notice, or if participants asked to reschedule, as they often had little time to do so. Therefore, whilst the coach felt comfortable managing a large caseload, it did present some challenges.



Another coach highlighted that as they were frequently working with individuals with complex needs, they often needed a lot of time to get to a place where an outcome could be recorded. In addition to this, they highlighted that at specific points in the programme, there were only a few coaches on the ground supporting participants. They suggested that both of these factors meant that sometimes, achieving outcomes was potentially slower than what they could have been. Another coach highlighted that whilst they understood targets had to be met, as that was needed to continue funding the programme, they felt that some management may have been too focused on these targets, and less so on the individuals that were being supported by the programme.

Positive People Devon: Process learning

Ensuring sufficient face-to-face time

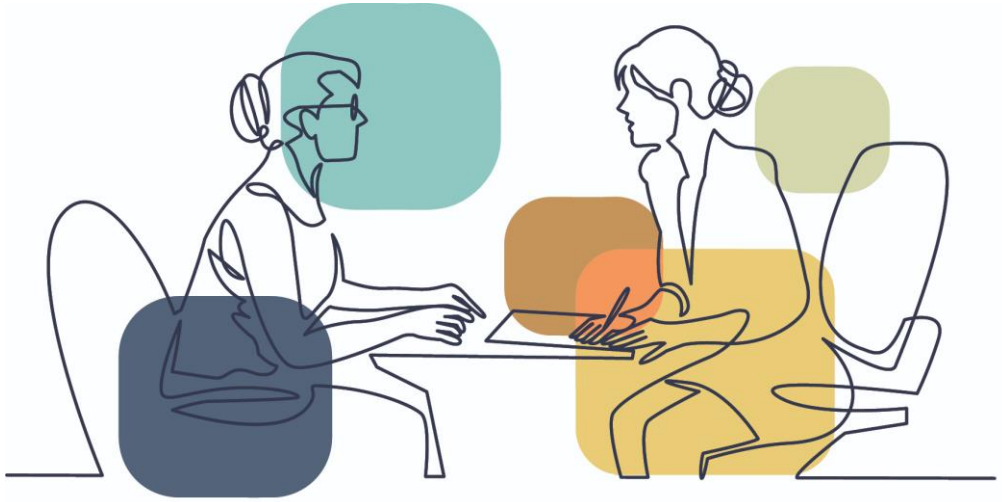
It was highlighted that participants had a minimum of one face-to-face meeting a month, which they felt was not enough contact for some individuals. They suggested that some of the individuals on the programme may have had better outcomes if they had more face-to-face contact with their coach.

Furthermore, they felt that some participants may have felt they were being handed over to third party services, and so having the consistent connection with the coaches would have allowed the participant to feel like they were still very much a part of Positive People. It was however noted that whilst this was an ideal scenario, there were points throughout the programme where caseload size meant that increasing to face-to-face contact may have been challenging. However, post-COVID, they suggested they would have liked to have seen all coaches return to a less remote style of work, as they felt this would better suit the participants they were trying to support through Positive People.

Positive People Devon: Process learning

Managing participant expectations

Whilst it was highlighted the programme was very flexible in how it worked with the participants, it was suggested that there were some challenges in managing realistic expectations with some participants; it was noted that many participants had complex issues, as well as little to no education and/or work experience, therefore, managing expectations on what was possible, particularly in the short term, was sometimes a challenge, as in many cases, the participants did not yet have the appropriate skills or experience to achieve what they wanted to. Smaller and achievable short-term goals were therefore required, which over time lead the participant closer to where they wanted to be.

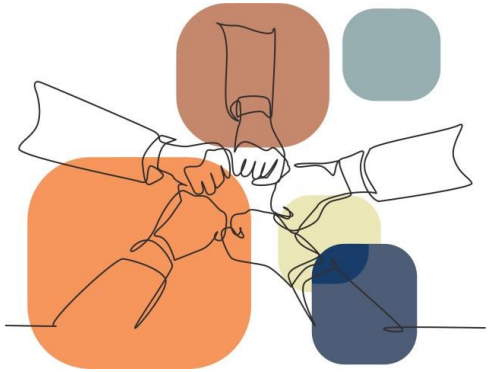


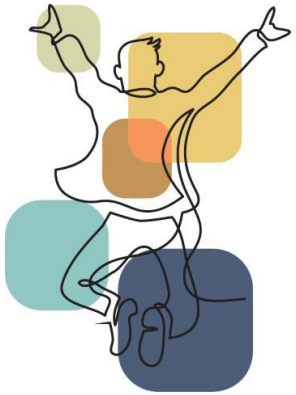
Furthermore, while the partnership work was generally felt to be effective throughout the programme, it was noted that there were some challenges around delays with what certain partners were able to deliver, which again, tied into managing participant expectations. For example, if a partner had to delay what they said they were going to deliver for a participant, the coach would then have to manage those expectations whilst they waited for the partner. This was felt to be frustrating both for the participant, as well as the coach. However, they indicated this was not a common occurrence, and many partners often worked with Positive People to put the participant at the centre and jointly support them the best they could.

What can future programmes learn from Positive People

More influencing and celebrating

Some interviewees highlighted that the programme should have had regular events throughout its lifetime, to help further influence decisions being made by government and other decision makers in this space. For future programmes, they suggested more work should be done to engage these decision makers. It was also highlighted that there should be more collaboration and sharing between all employability programmes within this space, as they are all working towards the same goal, even if they are using different models. It was felt that more steering groups with all of these organisations and programmes would help to shape and influence decisions in this space, which will in-turn help to engage those who are unemployed and economically inactive.





It was also suggested that having more events to celebrate the success of Positive People would have helped the coaches involved in the programme to feel valued for the work they were doing. Moreover, they felt more could have been done to highlight particular positive cases of individuals who had gone through the programme and come out the other side with a very positive outcome. They suggested that highlighting these specific cases would be beneficial not only for the promotion of the programme to other potential participants who need that support, but also internally to others at Pluss CIC, as well as their partners.

Positive People Devon: Process learning

Supporting complex individuals takes time

Several interviewees highlighted a key learning from this programme is that ***"time is everything".*** They stated that to successfully work with the demographic targeted by the programme, plenty of time is required to first build rapport and explore the issues or challenges the participant is facing, before they can even begin to tackle the persons plan and goals. They stressed that it is vital to first build confidence and self-belief, which can take time, rather than pushing to achieve the final outcome as soon as possible. Therefore, future programmes may wish to consider less strict timelines when it comes to supporting similar participants with complex needs.

> ***"Time is everything. You can't have a ticking clock. If you want to work with the demographic that BBO has targeted, you can't have a ticking clock, you need time."***

Positive People Devon: Process learning

Inclusivity and flexibility with spend

Finally, it was highlighted that one of the key learnings for future projects is that they should try to be as inclusive with engagement as possible. They suggested this was one of the key strengths of Positive People, as it allowed for a much wider range of people to engage with the programme, many of whom might not have been able to engage with other similar programmes because of stricter criteria.

Furthermore, they recommended that, as had been done with Positive People, more money should be spent directly on the beneficiaries of the programme, as it opens up new opportunities for them. In addition to this, it was felt that to reach those who are most isolated and hardest to engage, future programmes may wish to explore new and innovative methods of engagement to reach these individuals.

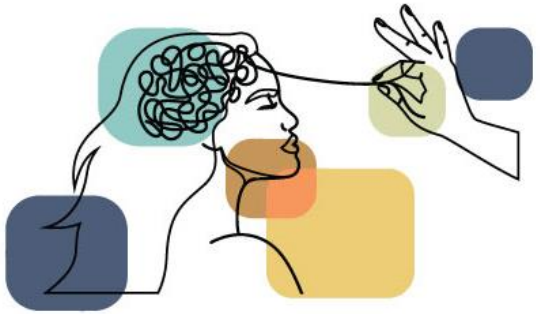
Section 3. Best practice: Peer mentoring project

This sections summarises findings from an interview with a member of the Peer Mentoring project delivery team; the interview explored the reasons for starting the Peer Mentoring project, what worked well and why; the barriers and challenges faced, and the impact that it had on participants. It also draws on the findings from a 2-hour focus group held with 8 peer mentors which explored their backgrounds, why they got involved, and the difference it made to them personally. A case study provided by Pluss CIC of one of the peer mentors is also presented.

Positive People Devon: Peer mentoring project

What was the Peer mentoring project?

The Peer mentoring project was designed to engage participants of, and *potential* participants to the Positive People programme who were furthest from the labour market and develop their confidence and skills. These individuals were often those who were particularly vulnerable and who had disengaged from society, The project was loosely based around developing participants to engage in one of three separate roles, those being 'Peer Supporters', 'Peer Mentoring Buddies', and 'Peer Trainer Facilitators'. Participants learnt of the project either through word of mouth, or through a referral into one of the courses or activities led by Positive People partners (TCDT or PoP Plus).



How it started

The Peer Mentoring project was initially developed through discussions with core partners within the Positive People programme, namely PoP Plus and Torbay Community Development Trust. As this work started to develop more within the Torbay area, another project called Steps Forward, was brought in to collaborate on the project, as well as local drug and alcohol services. In addition to this, Jane Eastwood, who previously led on a mental health Peer Support service in Torbay called Daybreak, was also brought in to help guide the project in its early development phase for the first six months or so. Jane and the Community Enabler for the Peer mentoring programme worked together to consult local professionals and service users in the area to ensure it was fit-for-purpose.

Positive People Devon: Peer mentoring project

What did it involve?

A multitude of courses for participants and potential participants were run through the project, which covered topics such as **emotional intelligence, understanding anger, self-esteem, motivation, dress for confidence, and creative writing,** amongst others. After attending, some participants then trained to become facilitators of the very same courses they first engaged with, but also designed and delivered some additional workshops, such as craft workshops. The peers that facilitated these courses and workshops highlighted that some of the delivery staff for the project helped to coach them initially, which ***"empowered them and gave them the confidence"*** they needed to deliver these sessions.

It was highlighted that many of the participants within the project struggled with their confidence, and as such needed encouragement to realise they were capable of doing what the roles required of them. It was felt that much of this uncertainty from the participants was likely due to the formality of the role, and them feeling responsible, even when they were more than capable of performing the role. It was suggested this was particularly challenging initially, as participants were at different levels of ability and confidence.

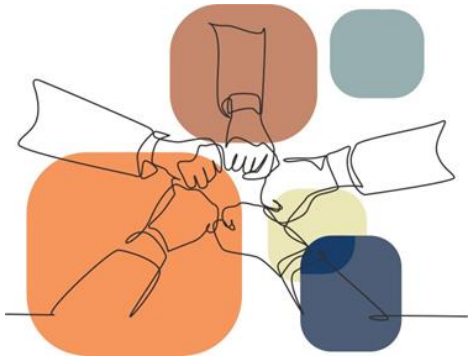
However, it was further noted that many of these individuals developed over time, and vastly improved in their confidence. Furthermore, it was felt that as individuals witnessed their peers with similar lived experiences develop, it helped them realise that they too were capable. It was however highlighted that this process was often slow, as the majority of these people were vulnerable with complex needs. It was suggested that because of this, if other programmes were to try to replicate this work it would likely take at least a couple of years starting from scratch if they wanted to develop something similar. They stressed it is ***"crucial that these programmes are truly peer led",*** and that the peers are at the heart of the operation.

Positive People Devon: Peer mentoring project

Why did it work?

It was felt by staff and participants alike that this project had been particularly effective at creating a safe and welcoming space, where people could feel a sense of belonging. In addition to this, the environment provided the peers with many opportunities, without forcing these on them. It was felt that understanding where each individual's boundaries lie and where their comforts zones are, is important as it allows those boundaries to be pushed and progress to be made beyond them, without the peer feeling pressured. One peer in the focus group indicated that the group sessions and activities they attended allowed them to build connections to the other peers in the group that they hadn't felt in a long time. Another suggested that they appreciated not having to explain everything to everybody else, they just felt accepted as who they are, and that they were able to talk about things with the other peers when they themselves felt comfortable doing so.

> ***"If we think about a plant, if you provide nutritional soil, give them some light, and water it, there's more chance of that growing and flourishing. If you put a potato in the basement with a crack of light, it will still grow roots and try and move towards that light, but it's not going to thrive as much."***



It was highlighted that funders often fund a project like this to the point where something begins to happens, but crucially, not past the point, for example, once the participants are ready to progress onto the next stage of their journey. It was also suggested that funding projects that encourage collaboration is also key, so that core partners can work together to develop and deliver a project like this, which both improves the experience for the peers, but also reduces overlap or duplication of very similar projects running in the same area.

Positive People Devon: Peer Mentoring Progamme

Impact on participants

Many of the peers in the focus group revealed the issues they faced prior to joining the programme. Several talked about how they were extremely isolated, and did not have any interactions with other people, or would seek out support. For many, confidence was at an all-time low, and several peers highlighted the negative thoughts they had about themselves. Others mentioned that they were a victim of abuse, and were often treated with little to no respect, which in turn meant they did not respect themselves. Indeed, one indicated they had a very troubled history and had attempted to take their life multiple times.

"I couldn't go out. I could not go out of the door. I wouldn't do anything. If it was a shopping day, it was 'we don't need any food today, we'll go tomorrow.' And then tomorrow will be another excuse. Even meeting people in a room, I thought they were looking at me and they thought I'm stupid. And I've got the wrong clothes on and all sorts of things."

The Community Enabler highlighted that the pandemic, whilst initially a fairly large barrier due to IT issues and individuals who were isolated, did actually have several key benefits for the project. Mainly, it was suggested that the pandemic allowed for more frequent peer meetings, as they were able to do these online. The frequency of meetings would not have been possible in a face-to-face setting, largely due to geographical, logistical or financial barriers. It was further suggested that the online courses acted as a lifeline for people, particularly those that would have been far less likely to engage with in-person courses, either due to mental health or mobility issues. In addition to this, it was highlighted that one of the peers took on the role of IT support for the other peers on the programme. The project had access to five loanable laptops, which peers could borrow and use if they did not have access to IT equipment. The IT support peer was able to link up with the individual in need, loan them the laptop, and then provided necessary instructions on how to get up and running, as well as how to access and use Zoom effectively, so that they could continue to engage in the programme.

Positive People Devon: Peer Mentoring Programme

It was highlighted that one of the main impacts from the mentoring project is that the peers have indeed progressed their lives, and they themselves are able to see this. Furthermore, it was highlighted that having the peers being able to work as a team and develop close relationships with one another has also been impactful. It was suggested that these people were often vulnerable, isolated, and had complex issues, and so to find and connect with a group of people who share similar experiences has been greatly empowering and has allowed them to develop and grow.

"So I went along that first time and I barely spoke, I introduced myself and that was about it. The whole two-hour session that was all that came out of my mouth. And I went on like that for the first few courses I did, but I got so much out of it. Hearing other people telling their stories inspired me so much to see that maybe there is hope for me, and that maybe I can get to a place where I can be productive in life again."

One peer highlighted that they joined during the pandemic, when all the courses were online. They suggested that had the courses not been online they would have never attended, as they were extremely anxious and could not interact with other people. They said that initially, they couldn't turn their camera on, and barely said anything other than a brief introduction. However, over time, as they heard other peers tell their stories, they began to feel more comfortable and felt inspired by the others in the group. This in turn helped them to realise that there was hope for them, and that they could get their life back on track.

Another peer highlighted that services often tried to 'fit them into a box', which wasn't the case with Positive People, as they created a safe space where everyone was accepted and welcome. Another also highlighted that the project's softer approach to support was more relaxed and allowed them to take a break from their usual day to day anxieties.

Positive People Devon: Peer Mentoring Programme

The peers who facilitated a series of workshops themselves highlighted the confidence boost this had given them. They suggested that they felt that they had achieved something significant, which had given them a self-esteem boost, and they are now planning to carry these forwards, and have a business plan in place. Furthermore, one of these peers suggested that hearing from people in the same position they were once in inspires them, empowers them to continue delivering courses to others in these positions, in hopes of improving others' lives.

One peer suggested that going into the programme, they were sceptical it would work. They stated that they had been going to different types of therapy for many years before the Peer Mentoring project and had not had any success. However, hearing everyone share experiences that were similar to their own, without any judgment, created a community that they felt a part of.

One of the peers highlighted that as a result of the Peer Mentoring project, they now have the confidence to look for further employment. They suggested that before getting involved, they thought they would never work again, and the DWP had told them that they were unfit for work. However, through the project, they had gained confidence, and developed the necessary skills to mentor and teach others, which is what they had always wanted to do. Another peer highlighted that they enjoyed facilitating through the project so much, that they're now about to start teacher courses to train to become a teacher.

"I realised myself that this is absolutely what I want to do with my future. And before that, before these last couple of years, I just didn't even care if I had a future. Now I'm like, oh, there's life to be lived, things to be done, and I want to give."

"Through Positive People, it saved my life because my life was going nowhere. And in fact, it's given me a whole new life. It's kind of like I've been asleep for a very long time, and just woken up. Every day I wake up and I'm just so grateful for this whole experience, this opportunity and everything that it's brought me. It's just amazing."

Positive People Devon: Peer Mentoring Programme

"I've facilitated lots of courses online and then eventually in person. So now I can go out in public and deliver things in person now and my life has flipped around. I'm happy to go to a place with big groups of people. I found me, the real me, and I actually like me now."

"They're accepted, people's experiences are shared and validated. They're treated as if they're wonderful people, even if they don't believe it themselves. And every one of those came on board as an isolated, vulnerable person and yet they're in the heart of a group where they can talk openly and freely about how it is."

"When I got asked to facilitate, I was terrified. Every fibre of my being was saying 'don't say yes, you're just going to cause yourself a lot of stress.' Actually, it was the total opposite, and it was so supportive. We had our meetings in between and, we had an extra meeting because I was having a bit of a wobble. And it was just so supportive."

"It's not the lecture-based thing, you know, they're not just trying to impart knowledge, it is that group dynamic that makes it special and makes it something that's changed all of our lives. We can go and sit and watch YouTube videos and you'll learn some stuff from it, but what you don't get is this [community]."

Positive People Devon: Peer Mentoring Case Study

How a local support programme changed my life – Nicola's story*

"When I came to Pluss Positive People I was feeling suicidal. I was feeling worthless. I was at a point where it was do something about it or I wouldn't be here anymore," she said. "I'd been in a 20-year marriage where I was mentally and physically tormented. Coming to Torbay, for the first time in a long time, I was listened to. I didn't know who I was, what my favourite colour was, I didn't know what I liked or didn't like, but I knew I liked craft. I knew I liked to create, and I knew I liked to show and share the things that I know."

Having been put in touch with this programme through the Torbay Community Development Trust, a Positive People partner, Nicola met with its staff who suggested a number of activities they provided to develop confidence, including craft activities.

"I was like, 'craft, this is going to be amazing!' This is it. This is what I've been looking for. I started going to the craft groups, and I absolutely loved them. I made friends, which I hadn't had since I left my old town.

"Positive People have just changed my life. I went to a Co-Create event in Exeter and made a wallet out of leather. I now carry that wallet everywhere. It reminds me of how far I've come, and it was one of the first things I made. I then did a woodwork workshop, they let me loose with tools, that was so much fun!"

*This case study was produced by Pluss CIC and shared with SERIO to include in this report.

Positive People Devon: Case Study

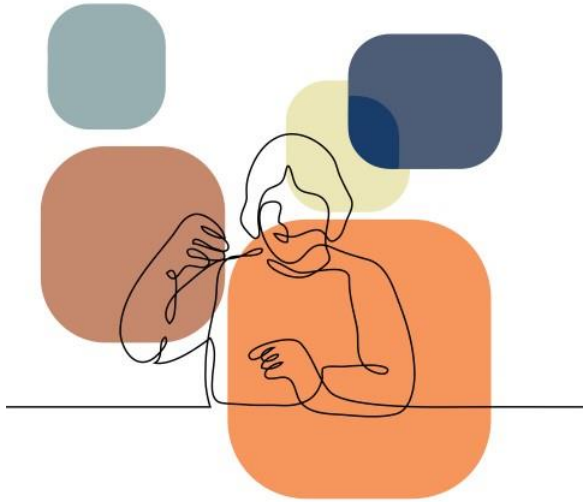
"I also took part in a 'Dress for Confidence' workshop, through Torbay Community Development Trust. Now I know how to dress. For my shape, I'm a petite apple, and I'm so proud to know that. I now walk down the street with my head held high and say hello to people, because I've met friends. Before I'd walk down the high street and my head would be down because I didn't know anybody."

"I didn't trust anybody because of my past. Now it's 'Hi Nicola, how are you?' and I reply, 'I'm fine, I'm doing amazing'. It was a very lonely place before."

Nicola has now trained as a peer, running her own craft groups and teaching and supporting others. She shares a secret that she's learned during her journey:

"The biggest thing is, you've got to say 'yes', and take that chance, because you never know where you'll be. Because where I was, I was ready to leave the world, and I'd been missing out, and now I've gained so much more that will see me to the next adventure."

Nicola is a beacon of what Positive People set out to achieve. Helping those furthest from the labour market, to provide sustained, bespoke support to help them move to a more positive place and ultimately closer to employment.



Section 4. Best practice: Empowering Women project

This sections summarises findings from three interviews with the Empowering Women delivery team and external facilitators. project delivery team; the interviews explored the reasons for starting the Empowering Women course, what worked well and why; the barriers and challenges faced, and the impact that it had on participants. A case study provided by Pluss CIC of one of the Empowering Women participants is also presented.

Positive People Devon: Empowering Women project

What was Empowering Women?

In 2019 Positive People established a need to better engage with women who were economically inactive. While exploring their options, they found that these women were in need of large amounts of support as they often suffered from mental ill health, had experienced violence or had lost their identities while caring for others. They also found that these women did not typically seek out help as they felt unable to admit that they were struggling or guilty for taking time for themselves. This inspired Positive People to create a course designed to empower women and better prepare them to engage in the main Positive People programme. This course aimed to not only empower women but create a dedicated space and time for them to come together with other women from similar backgrounds where they could share their experiences, take time for themselves, and allow them to make choices for themselves.

"I wanted to do a course that would empower females. To take time for themselves, allow them choice."

Before the Covid-19 pandemic, it was intended for this course to be run face-to-face and in the local communities. However, with the subsequent national lockdowns, the course was forced to be moved online. Some delivery staff felt that this improved the course, allowing for better engagement and accessibility. Each course lasted six weeks and had multiple facilitators to deliver bespoke workshops. By having the course online, participants simply had to click on a link and provide a name. There were no expectations around camera usage, microphone usage or chat usage allowing women to feel comfortable to engage at their own pace.

Positive People Devon: Empowering Women project

The participant journey

Participants could be referred into Empowering Women from several services for many different needs. Women who were suitable to engage with the course would then be sent a link to join each session.

"This is all about self-empowerment. So, I'm helping them to lift that out of themselves."

"I wanted to design a course that tapped into certain areas like employment, your mental and physical health. So, we looked at different areas of engagement. But the main thing for me was probably females getting together and it was almost sisterhood."

Once they had been accepted onto the course, the women would meet virtually every Thursday morning for an hour and a half over six weeks. They would have an initial introductory session where their expectations were set, followed by a workshop on shutting down the inner critic and then a workshop on transferable skills. The following workshop was on overcoming setbacks, the second to last workshop was on climbing out of your comfort zone, and then finally, the last workshop provided the women with a chance to reflect and plan their next steps.

"It looked at all areas, it was holistic in terms of what females needed to feel at whole with themselves."

These workshops were delivered by specialist partners of the Positive People programme. Empowering Women was designed to be a holistic service that would prepare the women to move on to the Positive People programme, thus allowing the women to achieve both soft and hard outcomes.

Positive People Devon: Empowering Women project

Why was Empowering Women successful?

The creators and delivery staff of Empowering Women credit its success to the fact that the course was adapted to suit each group of women. The women were able to be vulnerable and support each other within the safe space that was created by the facilitators. Women were able to share their experiences and find comfort and inspiration in the stories shared by others. Another key benefit identified by the delivery staff was the fact that Empowering Women was delivered online. This allowed women who were lacking the confidence or ability to leave their houses and physically meet in their local community to partake in the course as well. It also allowed the facilitators to engage from across a larger geographical area and reduced travel costs for all involved. Women were also able to engage in whatever way they were comfortable with, be th simply listening to the conversation, utilising the chat function or speaking with their cam or off.

"Once people feel that they can give to others. They feel worthy. Perhaps for the first time in ages."

"Every empowering women session, although it might have looked the same when we sent out the blurb it was completely different when it happened. And that is because as the facilitator, it worked, because everything was delivered in response to the people that were in the room, as individuals, and also how they interacted with each other."

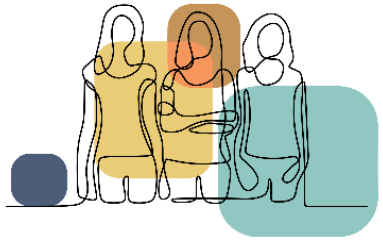
Positive People Devon: Empowering Women project

Participant Engagement

Initially, advertising and recruitment was going to be community based with staff actively spending time with potential participants. However, due to the pandemic, this had to be transitioned to a distanced approach which utilised posters and word of mouth. Posters were made in collaboration with women from the community and kept simple so as to be engaging to the correct audience. This method was successful as Empowering Women had consistent sign ups across the four years which also translated into consistent levels of women progressing on to the Positive People programme.

A total of **216 women** engaged across Devon

Of those who signed on to Positive People, **86%** (150) **achieved a job outcome**



81% (174) of these participants **signed on to Positive People**

17 women became **self-employed**

Positive People Devon: Empowering Women project

What was the impact of Empowering Women?

Delivery staff felt that Empowering Women provided the women it supported with a safe space where they were able to address their past. This then in turn provided women hope for their futures and delivery staff felt that the women would leave feeling confident, empowered and hopeful. Many of the women moved on to Positive People and successfully secured jobs, with some becoming self-employed. These women have also developed their local networks often forming friendships with other women on their courses and continue to support each other after Empowered Women has finished.

"It brought the people who had literally stopped engaging with people. That was the big thing actually, people coming together not just for Empowering Women, but actually seeing other faces was incredible. Honestly, I think it was a lifesaver for some because they were feeling lonely. Seeing other faces."

"I learned that actually, it's always best to try an idea than have an idea and not do anything with it."

Not only were the women who participated in Empowering Women impacted by the course, but so too were their facilitators. The facilitators felt that they grew alongside the women they supported and were just as inspired by their stories as everyone else. The project also gave its creators confidence to try new ideas and take calculated risks. It was also felt that the women who had participated in Empowering Women would then spread their learnings amongst their communities. Those who gained employment experienced those benefits for themselves but also for their families and the local economy.

Positive People Devon: Empowering Women project

"Every session within every series. I grew as a human because like I always share to people when I train or run a workshop or whatever. You never leave without learning something about the world. Or something about yourself." - Facilitator

"This was brilliant. I enjoyed this session so much, I took no notes, as I was too busy opening up to [the facilitator] and listening to everyone else. Her enthusiasm and empathy shine through - which enabled a very safe and open space and full and frank conversation. I came away fizzing with excitement." - Participant

"She helped me to open up about my feelings. I was able to admit that I needed help to improve my feeling of self-worth and she asked if I would like to join a six-week Empowering Women course via zoom. By the final session, I was a completely changed person. I was no longer the nervous, emotional person that I was at the outset." - Participant

"If it makes a difference to their lives, it makes difference to the lives that they then touch, doesn't it. So that makes a difference to the life of a family, difference in a community, then they go out and help other people. So, you can see it has a ripple effect. It is powerful beyond measure" - Facilitator

Positive People Devon: Empowering Women project

What barriers and challenges did Empowering Women face?

The largest challenge for Empowering Women was the Covid-19 pandemic. This caused the creators to rapidly change their advertisement style, their recruitment methods and their delivery model. These changes were often viewed as having a very positive impact on the project by the facilitators and creators. However, these rapid changes also created some barriers for participants and facilitators. Many people struggled with the technology as this was a new way of working for them. Some women also struggled to access appropriate technology and resources to engage in the course such as Wi-Fi and laptops.

"Wi-Fi was an issue because we're working with economically inactive females, so some of them would be logging on from their smartphones. And you have people that didn't have Wi-Fi, they were relying on going to the coffee shops to log on."

Another challenge that Empowering Women faced was the stigma around being a female-only course. Many people both within Positive People and the local community felt that a female-only group was not needed or that it was discriminatory. The creators, however, felt that a female-only group was needed to provide vulnerable women with a safe space especially those who had experienced domestic abuse or sexual violence. Finally, one facilitator wished that the sessions could have been longer so as to allow the women to go deeper and better understand themselves.

"The fact that these women got very close and didn't want it to end. So, by the eighth session, we've set up this group and it is a course and they kind of almost graduated at the end of it, but you know, some of them felt a little bit like okay, that supports gone."

Positive People Devon: Empowering Women project

How could Empowering Women be improved?

There were very few recommendations for improvements as the creators and delivery staff were happy with the delivery model they had developed. One facilitator wished that they had been able to run all of the sessions to provide the women with a sense of continuity. Another facilitator would have preferred it if they had been able to work with the women face-to-face rather than online and wanted to have longer with the women. This would have enabled them to have a better connection with the women and would have allowed them to explore deeper into each woman's past and future. It was also felt that the course could have been optimised if it had been available both online and face-to-face for different cohorts to better suit the needs of all those within the target community. They also thought the project still had room to grow and wished they had been able to work on it full-time.

"I would like to have run all the sessions because for the last few I was running five and it became perfectly clear that what made it powerful was the fact that you have one person, linking it all."

"It could have gone further; we could have gone deeper. So, I touched on what I could within the time frame that I had, but had it been say a day's thing. We've really gone deeper into what it is something somebody wants to do."

Positive People Devon: Empowering Women project

What were the key learnings from Empowering Women?

The delivery staff felt that there were several key learnings to be taken from the Empowering Women project. The first being that it is important to go out to the communities that a project is targeting and find out their needs from them. Then collect feedback from participants at every stage of the project. They felt that it was important to listen to the communities and participants to be able to best support them. Finally, they felt that it was important to realise the positive impact this project had and the fact that it is still needed for many women within these communities.

"The key learning is they're absolutely changing lives. There's no question about it. And they're giving not just hope, but they're giving new chances to people."

"I think sometimes it's best to take risk. Try an idea. If it doesn't work. That's fine. We'll try something else. We'll keep going till it does work"

"You've invested in something and you've absolute tangible results of the difference it has made in people's lives."

Participant case study: Jo*

Jo is an aircraft engineer by trade. After completing her training, she spent much of her time travelling around Europe working on passenger aircraft for commercial airlines. Then the 29-year-old's life was turned completely upside down. Jo was referred to **Pluss Positive People** by the *Devon Rape Crisis and Sexual Abuse Service*. After an initial chat with the Positive People Devon team, it was suggested she might find the Empowering Women course a useful way of meeting other people, sharing common interests and finding some strength and support.

Covid restrictions at the time meant the course was run online, with participants joining on their computer rather than face to face. Even so, chatting with a group of strangers can still feel quite daunting if you've not done it before:

"I remember being so nervous. I was nervous in case I was late. I was nervous about what the format would be. My heart was pounding when I introduced myself to the rest of the ladies. Actually, there was nothing scary about it at all – yet that didn't stop me feeling nervous. But after the initial ice-breaker – by the end of that first session – I was already feeling comfortable. Everyone was just so lovely and supportive. What was really lovely was that this was a group of people who'd never met before, there were people from different ethnicities and backgrounds, some that were younger, others who were retired. I wasn't expecting such a diverse group of people. But that made it really lovely. In fact, I made friends and I'm still in touch with one of the other women on the course even now. We've not actually met in person yet, but we send each other emails and there's something really quite nice about having that sort of 'distance relationship' where we've both really connected and share similar interests."

*This case study was produced by Pluss CIC and shared with SERIO to include in this report.

Participant case study: Jo

The Empowering Women course is held over a number of weeks and includes lots of guidance and support to help with wellbeing and practical issues.

"The segments of the course were not only emotionally supportive, some were really practical too. It helped me with things like knowing where to go to get information on supporting my financial situation and being directed to other sources of useful information. It was like a really good hub of knowledge. Topics like shutting down negativity, self-care and changing thought processes in order to be able to emphasise the positives."

Jo says one of the best things about the group sessions was that there was no pressure; everyone could go at their own pace:
"Because it was all done online, some people felt more comfortable with their microphone and camera switched off, some just sat and listened and occasionally made use of the chat room, others were happy with their camera and microphone turned on. We were just made to feel very, very comfortable. It revolved around the needs of the participants – one lady was even joining in whilst she did her ironing and that was fine – no pressure or expectation, we were all able to take things at our own speed."

"Every week there was a different topic and we often had guest speakers. One of those sessions was really valuable to me because I've never been on benefits before. I was working right up until the assault, and getting financial support was like having a whole new set of hoops to jump through and when you're going through a rough time, it's really good to have someone tell you what's available and how to go about claiming."

Participant case study: Jo

During the **Empowering Women** course, Jo's coach Jacqui picked up on the fact she'd always been interested in Yoga and wellbeing and that Jo had spoken about an idea for starting a business centre for women survivors. She wanted to create something that would include alternative, holistic therapies in a less clinical environment.

"My idea – my goal if you like – is to take all the basics and merge them with nature. Including woodland walk-and-talks and elements of yoga, reiki, counselling, and therapy. A plot of land rather than a surgery, where people can enjoy their surroundings and feel connected. J

"Jacqui told me that Positive People also offered support and guidance in becoming self-employed and that I qualified to enrol. I signed up, and Jacqui has worked hand-in-hand with me for seven months to move towards my dream. Because we had regular scheduled phone calls, it soon began to feel like I was stepping back towards employment – and that's really important at a time when everything's up in the air. Those regular calls helped me keep on track. I can't believe how much support and guidance I was given.

"I was helped with finding and enrolling on courses, filling in paperwork, getting DBS checks etc, and we did a lot of work, together, to create a business plan."

Participant case study: Jo

Now Jo is in the process of looking for some land. She's submitted her business plan to The Prince's Trust and has been accepted on to their Enterprise Programme.

"You know when you just feel like you were in the right place at the right time, well that's how I feel about Positive People – and in particular my coach, Jacqui. She was a real shining light. She's really inspiring and, business-wise, she just has so much experience to share. Although I've now moved on from Positive People to The Prince's Trust, I will always keep in contact with Jacqui and the team. And if I was talking to anyone thinking about contacting Positive People, I'd tell them to go for it without any hesitation."

"I can't recommend Positive People enough, they're a great hub, a source of information and they are there for EVERYONE – all walks of life, all situations – and I think that's brilliant!"

Jo's new business venture may be in its infancy, but this inspirational former participant has big plans for the future.

"It's called Aloha Wellness Centre: Alo – means love and compassion, ha is 'life-force' or 'breath'. I want to help women who've survived similar situations to mine. Wouldn't it be great if we could complete the circle; I was referred to Positive People due to my circumstances – perhaps, in the future, Positive People will be able to refer people to me. I would love that!"

Section 5: Value for money

This section draws together findings from the monitoring data and explores the social value of Positive People Devon.

Social value

A recent report (March 2022) by the Mental Health Foundation and London School of Economics* states that mental health problems cost the UK at least £117.9bn per year*, which includes the cost of treatment, social support, and losses to the economy due to lower employment. This is equivalent to around 5% of the UK's GDP.

As part of this evaluation, the social value (a measurement of the benefits that the project brings to people and communities) of Positive People Devon was calculated using methods developed by HACT (2022):**

Findings indicate that **for every £1 invested, £2.23 of social value is generated.*****

This figure is based the total social value of £6,581,035 (accrued between July 2021 and March 2023) after investment of £2,952,653 over the time period.

*https://www.lse.ac.uk/News/Latest-news-from-LSE/2022/c-Mar-22/Mental-health-problems-cost-UK-economy-at-least-118-billion-a-year-new research#:~:text=Mental%20health%20problems%20cost%20the,cent%20of%20the%20UK's%20GDP.
** https://hact.org.uk/tools-and-services/uk-social-value-bank/..
*** Full methodology available on request.

Social value

How is social value calculated?

The new UK Social Value Bank developed by HACT contains a suite of 88 outcomes that speak to the business of social housing. Each outcome has a defined financial metric, which incorporates a Direct Wellbeing value, a Wellbeing health top up value and, where applicable, an Exchequer value (savings to the state).

The outcomes in the new Bank have been developed using a consistent methodology, using eight more years of research and national data surveys. The Bank builds on person centred principles, using data on self-reported wellbeing and life circumstances measuring people's actual experiences. This means that the values for each outcome are based on how they impact people's lives as they live them.

How does the calculation work?

The Direct Wellbeing, Wellbeing health top up, and Exchequer values are taken directly from the HACT Social Value Bank and multiplied by the number of participants who achieve each outcome.

Total Wellbeing is the total of Direct Wellbeing and Wellbeing top up. Adjusted Wellbeing is this total, adjusted for the deadweight (the probability that this outcome would have happened anyway).

Total Social Value is Total Wellbeing and Exchequer incl. health top up. Adjusted Social Value is this total, adjusted for the deadweight.

The deadweight calculation is (1-deadwright) * total.

Social value

The total social value comprises values for the following outcomes. All but one (high confidence) have been calculated using the exact measurements recommended by HACT.

- **Job-related training** – non employer (participant outcome was 'education and training')
- **Self-employment** – (participant outcome was reported as 'self-employment')
- **Full-time employment** - (participant outcome was reported as 'full-time employment')
- **Part-time employment** – (participant outcome was reported as 'part-time employment')
- **High confidence (adult)** – (participant outcome was reported as a score of 4 (out of 4) for 'I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events', when baseline scores were 1-3)
- **Financial comfort*** - (participant indicates they have moved from less financial comfort to 'doing alright' or 'living comfortably')
- **House well decorated*** - (participant indicates they have enough money to keep their house in a decent state of repair, when previously they didn't)
- **Ability to save regularly*** – (participant indicates they save on a regular basis, when previously they didn't)
- **Able to insure home contents*** – (participant indicates that the contents of their home are insured against theft, when previously they weren't)
- **Relief from debt burden** – (participants indicate that financial burden of debts and interest payments is either only somewhat of a burden or not a burden, when previously the burden was greater)
- **Ability to pay for housing** – (participants report that in the last 12 months they have not found themselves behind with their rent or mortgage, when previously they were)
- **Access to the internet** – (participant indicates they have regular access to the internet, when previously they did not)
- **Member of a social group** – (participant indicates they regularly attend a voluntary group, when previously they did not)
- **Frequent moderate exercise** – (participant indicates they take part in any form of moderate sport at least once per week)
- **Frequent mild exercise** – (participant indicates they take part in any form of mild sport at least once per week)
- **Regular volunteering** – (participants indicate they regularly volunteer at least once per month)

Outcomes marked with a * indicate that only one outcome in this group can be counted per participant to avoid double counting.

Social value

	Direct Wellbeing	Wellbeing Health Top-up	Total Wellbeing	Exchequer incl. Health	Total Social Value (not adj.)	Adjusted Total Wellbeing	Adjusted Total Social Value
Total Social Value	£2,423,416	£4,686,029	£7,109,455	£1,860,903	£8,970,358	£5,275,847	£6,581,035

It should be noted that this is a conservative estimate of the total social value as there were many other values not included in the calculation as they were outside the scope of the evaluation. For example, the environmental impacts of reducing CO2, the indirect impacts on participants' family members and friends, and the impact of partnership working for partner organisations.

Furthermore, HACT only recognises an outcome if there is demonstration of moving in a positive direction; given the complex lives that many of the participants faced, it may well be that the programme has prevented them from declining further, even though a positive outcome has not been officially achieved.

Finally, the outcome 'job-related training – non employer' was used for all participants who moved into education or training on exit, however, if the data specifically recorded whether participants moved into apprenticeships, vocational training, or government training, these three outcomes would produce more social value for the project.

Summary

Participant engagement and impact

1

Positive People Devon supported a total of 2594 participants (99% of its goal) and **successfully engaged with the hardest to reach**;

- ✓ 56% of those unemployed were long-term unemployed
- ✓ 48% reported having a disability
- ✓ 23% lacked basic skills
- ✓ 71% were from a jobless household

2

The project successfully exceeded all three targets and moved:

- ✓ **794 participants (40%) into education or training**
- ✓ **663 participants (34%) into employment**
- ✓ **288 EI participants into job searching.**

A total of **1438 participants (73%) achieved a positive outcome.**

3

Participant distance travelled for **soft outcomes** was also measured:

- ✓ **63%** reported an **improved positive outlook**
- ✓ **48%** reported an **improvement in their resilience**
- ✓ **44%** reported an **increase in their awareness of local services**
- ✓ **37%** reported an **increase in their use of services**

4

Evidence from the SWEMWBS for a sample of 501 participants demonstrates that their **mental wellbeing significantly improved after participating in Positive People ($p<0.05$).**

5

A total of **116 participants** responded to the survey:

- ✓ **86% enjoyed being involved** in Positive People
- ✓ **72% felt more confident**
- ✓ **71%** said that it helped **improve their wellbeing**
- ✓ **64%** said that it **helped them deal with problems** as they arise

6

Cosmic, one of Positive People's core partners measured their digital impact:

- ✓ **641 participants engaged** with Cosmic
- ✓ **69%** of participants reported an **increase in digital confidence and skills**
- ✓ Cosmic **provided 29 participants with devices**
- ✓ By refurbishing devices, Cosmic **prevented 6692kg of CO_2 from being produced**

Process Learning

1. Delivery staff and stakeholders felt that a key strength of Positive People Devon was its ability to access those furthest away from the labour market through the use of their existing relationships and reputation in key areas.

2. The post Covid-19 pandemic working practices provided the participants and delivery staff with the flexibility to work around things like childcare responsibilities and social anxiety, thus allowing more participants to sign on to the project and remain engaged.

3. Stakeholders and delivery staff also felt that the project had a positive impact on the local community through the increased wellbeing of individuals, the reduction in a need to health services, a reduction in benefit dependency and an increase in the local economy as more people are filling empty job roles.

4. Positive People's partnership working was complimented by stakeholders and delivery staff who felt that the large variety of partners allowed for all participants to be supported regardless of their geographic location or their specific needs. However, it was noted that these relationships took time to build up.

5. Project administration was a challenge for delivery staff who felt that the amount of time they had to spend on paperwork prevented them from supporting more participants and that by having two governing bodies to report to, the dual auditing system was time consuming for both change coaches and managerial staff.

6. Large caseloads were sometimes felt to be challenging for delivery staff as they faced issues such as having full diaries which reduced their ability to adapt to participant needs at short notice. At times it was felt that there were not enough Change Coaches to support all of the participants and that managers focused on the outcomes rather than the participants.

7. It was also felt that participant expectations had to be managed as many of them presented with multiple or complex issues and therefore needed to break their goals down into many smaller, realistic targets and goals.

8. Findings indicate that for every £1 invested, £2.23 of social value is generated; this represents the value of the benefits that the project brings to people and communities.

Lessons learnt

1. Delivery staff felt that future projects would benefit from regular interactions with policymakers and funders as well as other education and employment support services to **share best practice and success stories**. This would enable more people who are unemployed and economically inactive to access support services that are effective and sufficiently funded as well as **increase staff knowledge** of different engagement methods and support services both locally and nationally.

2. It was highlighted that when working with those furthest from the labour market, **flexibility and time** are required. This allows delivery staff to **build trust and rapport** with the participants in order to fully understand the barriers and challenges each participant faces. Once that rapport has been built, delivery staff are then able to **personalise the support** they offer which produces better and more long-term outcomes for participants.

3. Positive People was felt to be successful in part due to how **inclusive** their **entry criteria** was. This inclusivity allowed them to support many participants who were ineligible to receive support from other similar programmes. These participants were just as in need as support as the others but had 'fallen through the cracks' from all the other support services. It was also felt that the flexibility of their budgets contributed to their success with **funds being spent directly on participants** for things such as educational courses they would have been unable to afford otherwise.

Appendices

UNIVERSITY OF PLYMOUTH
Research and Innovation

The New CMS Assessments

SERIO
Informing Policy and Decision Makers

The table below outlines each of the new assessments and the justification for choosing them:

OUTCOMES	MEASURE(S)	JUSTIFICATION
IMPROVED POSITIVE OUTLOOK	Generalised Self Efficacy Scale	This scale has been chosen as it measures a general sense of perceived self-efficacy and predicts how well participants cope with daily hassles as well as how they adapt after experiencing all kinds of stressful life events. The measure is validated and has been used internationally with success for two decades and is suitable for a broad range of applications. It can be taken to predict adaptation after life changes, but it is also suitable as an indicator of quality of life at any point in time.
IMPROVED RESILIENCE	Brief Resilience Scale	This measure is a widely used, reliable and validated tool that assesses the ability to bounce back or recover from stress (resilience). It is important that we incorporate a specific measure of resilience as this is one of BBO's soft outcomes.
INCREASE IN AWARENESS AND USE OF SERVICES	To what extent are you aware of the support services available to you? To what extent do you currently use support services? Please list services or service areas.	We have incorporated 2 survey style questions to evidence the level of awareness and use of services as this is another one of BBO's soft outcomes which needs to be evidenced. We felt this was much simpler and efficient than only recording the services participants were aware of and use, as participants may not remember all services. Each question is measured on a commonly used 5-point Likert scale, which provides participants with a neutral mid-point that can be chosen if they don't know. We have incorporated space to list services and/or service areas, to identify any gaps in awareness/provision.

The New CMS Assessments

The table below outlines each of the new assessments and the justification for choosing them:

OUTCOMES	MEASURE(S)	JUSTIFICATION
IMPROVED HEALTH AND WELLBEING	Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS)	This scale was developed to enable the monitoring of mental wellbeing in the general population and the evaluation of projects, programmes and policies which aim to improve mental wellbeing. It has been validated for use in a wide variety of different geographical locations, languages and cultural contexts, and in many different settings, including, the community wellbeing projects, health services, workplaces and schools. Using this measure will not only enable us to understand the impact of BBO on participants' wellbeing, but it also allows us to attach a financial value to this improvement, so we can demonstrate the cost-benefit of the programme.

References for scales:

Generalised self-efficacy scale: Schwarzer, R., & Jerusalem, M. (1995). General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE) [Database record]

Brief Resilience Scale: Smith, B. W., Dalen, J., Wiggins, K., Tooley, E., Christopher, P., & Bernard, J. (2008). The brief resilience scale: assessing the ability to bounce back. International journal of behavioral medicine, 15(3), 194-200.

Short Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (SWEMWBS): Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS) © University of Warwick 2006, all rights reserved.